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YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Building Sustainable Ministries . . . One Church at a Time
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Spanish Fort United Methodist Church
Spanish Fort, Alabama

July 9, 2015

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BACKGROUND

Spanish Fort United Methodist Church is a vibrant church located in the young community of Spanish Fort, Alabama. The campus is 30 minutes east of Mobile, Alabama, and many members come from neighborhoods surrounding the church. The youth ministry is creatively partitioned in The Warehouse, a shopping center adjacent to the church building. Focus group participants described their church as, “active,” “open,” and “welcoming.” The youth echoed similar sentiments as they described Spanish Fort UMC as “family,” “happy,” “inclusive,” “laid-back,” and “fun.”

There are around 1,700 members on the rolls a Spanish Fort UMC, and an average attendance in two worship services is 500. Traditional and contemporary worship services are offered at 8:45 AM and 11:00 AM in the church sanctuary. An additional worship service for high school youth is held on Sunday evenings.

The youth ministry is currently under the leadership of the director of family ministries during a leadership transition and has a 2015 budget of \$115,960, including staff salaries and the budget for supplies, resources, retreats, Confirmation, and special events. The church’s overall budget for 2015 is \$1,367,000.

A large staff supports the youth ministry. The full-time youth minister position is currently vacant. Additional positions include a part-time assistant director, two part-time ministry leaders, and a summer intern. The director of family ministries provides some support, and the pastors do as well.

Most of the students in the youth ministry come from two public and two private schools. Catapult is the name of the middle school ministry, and The Remedy is the name of the high school ministry.

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Youth ministry programs and activities happen primarily on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday nights. Additionally, there are small groups that take place on Monday evenings. Sunday school takes place at 10:00 AM and is divided into separate classes for males and females in 6th grade, 7th- 8th grades and 9th-12th grades. The youth have the option to attend Sunday morning worship services as well.

Sunday night worship is a high school gathering that is held at 6:00 PM that includes a praise band, singing, fellowship, and a lesson. Middle school youth have a similar event on Wednesday evenings during the school year. During Sunday nights in Confirmation season (during the school year), 6th grade students are engaged in preparation and instruction. Several special events happen during the year including camps, mission trips, fun outings, and seasonal events.

Nearly all youth ministry activities happen in the Warehouse. The Warehouse includes a worship space, game tables, and classrooms; it is a relaxed, inviting space that is dedicated to the youth ministry. This space is relatively new. The church recently sold a part of the main building, and the youth were given a new space at the opposite end of this building. This included new furnishing and equipment.

Without counting anyone twice, there are approximately 82 different youth in attendance at the various weekly youth ministry activities of Spanish Fort UMC. There are around 40 youth at the Remedy Sunday night worship, five youth who only attend Sunday school, and 30 middle school youth who participate in the Wednesday night Catapult ministry. In addition to these large groups there are two students who only participate in the Monday Night girls' small group and five students who only participate in the puppet ministry.

The Youth Leadership Team is comprised of parents and adult volunteers that support the youth ministry either through hands-on involvement or as a support to the youth ministry staff and the youth minister. The paid staff members serve as teachers and mentors to the youth and they provide leadership for events and programming in general. The Student Leadership Team is comprised of high school students who have the tasks of welcoming new students, and they have input in the decision-making and leadership of the Catapult Wednesday night ministry. The paid staff also provides leadership for special events and camps.

Ministry Architects was invited to Spanish Fort United Methodist Church by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to make recommendations about how the youth ministry might strategically move forward as a body, specifically in the hiring of a new youth minister, as there has been an inability to retain professional youth ministry leadership in recent years. We met with 51 individuals in 10 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. We also received four email submissions regarding youth ministry concerns. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens we like to use for understanding youth ministry is the idea of the "three rents." Youth ministries that "pay these rents" tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Those ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing and discouragement.

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These three rents, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, but they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff and the congregation at large.

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

The numbers rent is being paid at Spanish Fort UMC. The youth, parents, volunteers, and staff are all pleased that numbers have remained somewhat steady even during recent staff transitions.

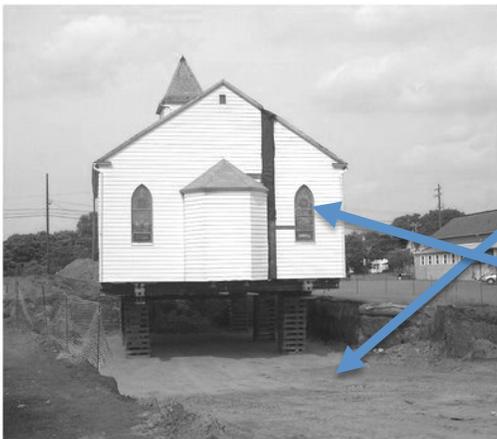
Rent #2: Programs—In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, staff and volunteer leadership will need to provide the church with a few visible, effective programs that give youth, parents, leaders and staff “something to talk about.”

Though the programming menu during the school year is full, the program rent is lacking due to minimal summer events. Revive camp seems to have the most momentum; however, weekly programming does not seem to sustain the “camp experience.”

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

Spanish Fort UMC is in danger of falling behind on the enthusiasm rent. Enthusiasm is waning due to full-time staffing transitions, and a whole group consensus that the spiritual direction of the youth ministry is at stake in the area of youth discipleship.

As the leadership of this youth ministry develops its long-range vision, it will simultaneously need to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, Spanish Fort UMC faces parallel challenges. We picture this parallel challenge this way:



- **Laying a New Foundation:** Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the youth ministry’s *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
- **Continuing to do Ministry:** Maintaining the *current* youth ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, families, staff and the church at large.

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As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, five rules of thumb will be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1) **10% of the Worshiping Congregation**—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshiping congregation. A church with an average worship attendance of 500 could, therefore, expect an average weekly attendance of around 50 youth per week. With an actual engagement of 82 youth each week, the youth ministry is experiencing above average attendance levels.
- 2) **20% Ceiling**—Ministry Architects has also discovered that in many churches, the youth ministry has difficulty growing beyond a level that equals 20% of the weekly worshiping congregation. Spanish Fort UMC needs to be aware of this and recognize that to reach this level – an estimated ceiling of around 100 youth involved in the ministry – an increase in some key resources will be needed.
- 3) **\$1,250 a Kid**—With a budget of approximately \$115,960 dedicated to the youth ministry (including program budget, staff salaries and benefits), Spanish Fort UMC has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly participation level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 92 youth in some aspect of the church’s life. With approximately 82 youth currently involved on a weekly basis, the youth ministry has capacity for some growth.
- 4) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth**— The ministry is currently supported by one full-time staff person working alongside three part-time staff people. Altogether 104 hours of staff support (2.6 FTE) are being provided for the youth ministry. According to this rule of thumb, Spanish Fort UMC will have the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 130 youth on a weekly basis once fully staffed, providing room for significant growth beyond the current attendance of 82 youth.
- 5) **1 Adult for Every 5 Youth**—We like to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five students on an ongoing basis. With 10-12 weekly volunteers, counting only the lay people who have made a weekly commitment to its major programs, Spanish Fort UMC has the capacity to sustain a ministry of 50-60 youth. Four or five additional weekly volunteers will need to be recruited right away to sustain current levels of attendance and more will be needed in order to achieve the growth some of the other resources will support.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE YOUTH STAFF

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

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan. (Ministry Architects, through this assessment report, has launched the architecting process).
- **The General Contractor:** A person or team that manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project.

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- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. (This would include a well-coordinated, non-overwhelmed team of volunteers, each of whom carries a bearable load to move the youth ministry toward accomplishing its vision.)

Each of these roles is important as Spanish Fort UMC pursues a more sustainable model of youth ministry. As the church moves forward, the following observations will be helpful to keep in mind:

- In many churches, there is no person or group playing the role of the architect. The ministry may simply be moving from one event to the next without a clear vision or stated outcomes.
- Sometimes paid staff are not given the time or training to do their important work as the “general contractor” of a complex ministry.
- The program director is even expected to lead/serve in all three of these areas. This is a recipe for congregational dissatisfaction and staff burnout.

Some churches hire a laborer who is skilled at leading worship, playing games or teaching a Bible lesson. These laborers often mature into an architect or a general contractor, but it is very unhealthy to expect them to manage all three roles.

ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

Trips and Retreats

It is evident that everyone wants to protect the community feel that youth have been enjoying for years. This is important, especially in a group of students who attend several different schools. The high school youth overwhelmingly affirmed that the Revive camp has sparked their excitement for God, and parents agreed that it should continue to be a mainstay on the youth ministry calendar. The middle school ministry attends Drench at Blue Lake, and fellowship trips seem to be well attended when the trip details and logistics are adequately communicated to the youth, parents, and to the church at-large. Additionally, overseas mission trip participation has increased among the youth.

Supportive Pastors

The senior pastor and associate pastor at Spanish Fort UMC are very supportive of the youth ministry; many of them have children who are highly involved. The pastors are concerned about continuity in leadership and overall consistency in the program, yet optimistic about the future of the program. They are preparing to conduct a thorough search for a new youth minister. The pastoral staff has built a collaborative working environment that is warm and non-threatening, which will become an attractive component of retaining a competent youth minister.

Resources and Staff Support

The staff structure and budget for the youth ministry indicates a high value for the spiritual lives of its youth with the ability to sponsor and support growth with new students. The church sees the need to honor the gifts and talents of the young people in their care. The Warehouse is a nice addition that has the possibility of being a catalyst for further growth and student ownership of the program. Youth who are “fringe kids” can feel welcome there without an overly “churchy” feel.

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Confirmation Program

Several parents commented that the Confirmation program was more successful since it has become more accessible to students, namely those who are involved in sports activities. A parent said, "I love the fact that Confirmation is on Sunday nights." Another shared, "I think Confirmation was really good this year." The students also had positive feedback. One new 7th grader shared, "I really enjoyed Confirmation, and the camp was fun." Although the bridge from Confirmation to further discipleship is not as secure as some desire, the overall sentiment is that the curriculum consistently has depth and is quality-filled.

Small Groups

Several youth have had a chance to take part in a small group. Bonding and mentoring relationships between adults and students are established, and a climate of transparent safety and honesty takes place in small groups. The youth and adult leaders shared how much they have learned from one another and how the fellowship and mutual accountability have deepened their walk with the Lord. One of the adults said, "The girls in my group are wonderful. They are so thoughtful and kind to each other." One of the youth added, "I grow the most in my small group. It is where we go deeper with our questions and lessons."

VBS Leadership

Many parents and staff stated that they enjoyed watching the youth serve in this capacity. When teenagers lead and serve elementary students, it creates a positive framework for the expectations of elementary students who will be entering middle school. Some middle school students stated that they looked up to the high school students. There is also accountability for teens to live and act spiritually responsible as they are the examples and role models for elementary students. This also prepares those whom God is calling to the teaching ministry.

Community and Family Climate

The staff, parents, and students alike overwhelmingly stressed how they feel welcome and how everyone is close-knit. Many of the teens spend quality time with each other outside of church activities. One staff member stated, "I can tell that the kids are close and well-mannered." Another staff member stated, "The church has a good climate to soar." A youth said, "People are caring, willing to help you, and they always smile at you."

Youth Staff, Volunteers, and Parent Support

The youth are very impressed with the leadership and spiritual nurturing that they receive from their leaders despite not having a consistent youth minister. The high school girls stated that they really feel connected to Lauren and Kristen, and how Leigh has impacted their walk with God. One of the high school girls stated, "I feel like I am growing. I am nicer, and I read my Bible and pray more often."

CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the youth ministry strategically forward

Youth Minister Shuffle

Several concerns were expressed about the inability to keep a youth minister for any length of time. Some of these comments were:

- "I have had three youth ministers since I started coming."

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- “We have got to create some stability, and that starts with leadership.”
- “We are stuck in mediocrity because we can’t keep someone long enough to create something special.”
- “We have to break this pattern. We aren’t going anywhere without stable leadership.”
- “We are part of the problem. I am not sure that we’re giving people adequate time to get settled and find a rhythm.”

Everyone is ready for consistency, quality, and sustainability. Parents, leaders, and the youth are willing to step up and support the next youth minister. One father said, “We need to each do our part. If we aren’t willing to do that, then nothing is going to change.”

Blurry Vision

A focus group participant stated, “We don’t have a clear direction. People aren’t going to jump in if they don’t know what this is all about.” A volunteer added, “We’re focused on the small stuff. What is the big picture?” Spanish Fort UMC is lacking the clear plan, goal and objectives that drive a ministry forward. A busy program is a good thing, but busyness is not enough. A mission and goals can focus that busyness in a clear direction, and a set of core values helps a ministry stay true to itself. One participant added this comment, “We need to clarify our direction and expectations. We can’t continue down this road.”

Calendar Planning and Communication

The calendar for the 2015-2016 school year is pretty sparse. Some events are annual traditions, but the dates have not been chosen or promoted yet. The online calendar that parents are using only contains information on weekly meetings. One parent said, “We don’t get information soon enough. We’re lucky if we have 60 days notice. Most of the time it is less than that.” Another parent said, “If we expect people to participate we’re going to need to get our acts together. We don’t do a good job of planning and promoting events.” One of the youth shared, “I just found out about the water park, and it’s tomorrow.” Parents need the dates for major events 6-12 months in advance. The youth ministry is not providing the information in a manner that helps parents with their planning and budgeting.

Many of the focus group participants spoke of the need for more organization and better communication. There have been serious improvements to the church website and calendar, but parents and youth still feel uninformed at times. One parent said, “We’ve got some issues with planning and communicating. Things happen, and the turnout is poor. It is not always because of a lack of interest.” A repeatable, thorough set of communication practices will need to be developed and practiced.

Transitions, Milestones, and Rites of Passage

Thriving programs tend to do the big moments well. Milestones are a key ingredient to growing a vital youth ministry. Spanish Fort UMC is missing these milestone events and traditions. One parent said, “We do not bring the new kids in very well.” One of the youth added, “I remember my first night at youth group. It was terrifying!” Parents and volunteers also want to support graduates that are moving into careers, college and the military. One parent said, “We tend to drop the kids when they leave. There is nothing here for them, and we lose contact with them.” The transitions into middle school, into high school, and into adulthood must all be handled with care. Spanish Fort UMC is losing a few kids as they navigate each of these key moments.

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Welcoming Environment

The youth group at Spanish Fort UMC is very tight. Many of the youth described the programs as a “close family.” Yet, it can be tough for visiting youth to find a home in this kind of environment. The youth can be so close that they may not even notice the new student in the room. The youth are not being mean or cold; they are just enjoying time with their closest church friends. One of the youth leaders shared, “I’ll bet that it’s tough to break into this group. We could do a better job of welcoming new youth.” Another participant added, “We had a visitor last Sunday night. I looked around at one point, and they were gone. They left at some point.” The SLT (Student Leadership Team) youth want to fix this. They want to stay close, but add new kids into this big family each week.

Volunteer Development

Spanish Fort UMC will need to focus some attention on volunteers. A healthy ministry requires a supportive team of volunteers that feel appreciated and equipped for their work. Some strategic work will be needed in three key areas:

- **Recruiting** – Several people said there is a volunteer shortage. Others said, “We don’t ask people the right way.” There is not a relational, strategic plan for recruiting. Less effective methods such as email and announcements are used too frequently. One of the youth described Catapult as “loud, like total chaos.” The youth staff added, “We have a really hard time on Wednesday nights. It is difficult to find volunteers.” More volunteer support and tighter programming are needed at Catapult. New youth and rising 6th graders may be overwhelmed if the environment doesn’t improve.
- **Training** – One volunteer said, “I remember doing some training a long time ago, but we haven’t offered anything recently.” Volunteer training helps current volunteers feel more effective. It also helps new volunteers feel more comfortable as they consider stepping into the youth ministry. Volunteers need to spend more time with each other learning new skills and sharing ideas.
- **Deployment** – Volunteers aren’t always sure what is expected of them. One of them shared, “We show up sometimes, and we’re not sure how we can help.” Another added, “Some of the adults just stand around. Then we don’t see them after a few weeks.” Volunteers want to make a meaningful contribution. They don’t last very long if they feel unneeded.

Programming Imbalance

The high school youth of Spanish Fort UMC have more programming options than middle school youth. The high school youth have more retreats and camps, and the middle school Catapult program is canceled during the summer. One of the youth said, “I think the middle school kids need more activities.” Another added, “I do wonder why we don’t have youth while they’re out of school.” A manageable mix of purposeful activities will create some needed momentum in the middle school program.

Missing Pathway to Discipleship

There are several weekly programs offered for the youth of Spanish Fort UMC; the youth certainly have options. Parents and volunteers do wonder whether the youth are getting what they need. One leader shared, “We need to setup a system, a process that moves kids along in their faith.” Another

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added, “We ought to help each kid discover where they are in their faith. Then we need to provide options for them to keep growing.”

Parents shared lots of ideas when asked what is most important. This list included the following items: “morality,” “personal relationship with Christ,” “studying on their own,” “biblical familiarity,” “trust in God,” “strength under pressure,” “responsibility,” “decision making,” “interpersonal skills,” “study skills,” “compassion,” “acceptance,” “missions,” “spiritual gifts/shape and purpose,” and “loving one another.” There are no shortage of thoughts and ideas, but the youth ministry is lacking a coherent plan that will strategically address the discipleship needs of students.

Revived, and Revived Again

The Revive gatherings at the Blue Lake Retreat Center are a wonderful experience for the youth of Spanish Fort UMC. The youth make new commitments each time they visit Revive. However, there is a lot of time between these Revive gatherings, and there is a lot of growing to do. One adult said, “I think they feel the pressure to recreate Revive each week at youth. That is not realistic, and it’s not sustainable.” Another parent said, “They bring in these amazing speakers, and we expect our youth minister to be just as good as that every week.” It is ironic that the event is called Revive. Many of the youth would say that their faith drops in between the events and they need to be revived.

Control and Compliance Documents

Some deliberate attention will need to be given to a handful of systems that support a growing ministry. The ACS database will need to be updated. A system of roster-based attendance will need to be maintained. Volunteers will need job descriptions, and permission slips ought to be refreshed. Also, as new volunteers are added the church will need to continue their compliance with the Safe Sanctuaries policy.

Visitor Follow-Up and MIA Game Plan

New kids will hopefully pop into youth ministry activities from time to time. A systematic check-in process will ensure that they don’t slip in unnoticed. This same process will also create an opportunity to gather contact information from these visitors. Spanish Fort UMC will need to take the next step, too. A warm and authentic system of follow-up will be needed to make sure that these visitors come back.

Kids that have been coming regularly will sometimes stop coming, and an attendance tracking system will help the church monitor the individual attendance patterns of youth. There is not currently a system in place to follow up with these youth that have gone missing.

Small Group Options

While the current small groups are great for reaching some students, the programming options do not seem to be meeting enough of the needs of the whole group. More than one parent said, “Can we offer small groups on a different night?” One of them suggested, “Monday nights are okay for some, but my child will never be a part of a small group.” Parents and youth would like a few more options. They like the idea of a small group, but they would like more youth to have an opportunity to participate.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 17 months as a time of goal setting and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target January 2017 as the date for achieving sustainable structures for the youth ministry knowing that incremental successes will be seen throughout the renovation process.
- 2) Establish a Prayer Team to undergird this renovation process.
- 3) Present this report to the Church Council, requesting that they endorse a 17-month strategic renovation process for the youth ministry.
- 4) Establish a Youth Ministry Renovation Team, made up of four to five volunteers (in addition to the youth minister once hired) who report regularly to the Executive Pastor. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on exceptional day-to-day ministry, while the Renovation Team focuses on the recommendations below. These recommendations include two overarching responsibilities:
 - I. Work with the youth ministry leadership to **address the immediate pressure points** facing the ministry as they transition toward sustainability.
 - II. Establish a consensus for the direction of the ministry and take responsibility for **implementing the strategic, long-term changes** recommended in this report.
- 5) Engage the services of Ministry Architects to take responsibility for:
 - Working with the staff and volunteers to ensure the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this report's timeline.
 - Assisting the youth ministry leadership in overcoming the obstacles that are certain to arise in the process of restructuring and fine-tuning the youth ministry.
 - To assist the Staff-Parish Relations Committee with the search process to fill the Youth Minister position.

RENOVATION TEAM TASK #1: Address the Pressure Points

(Accomplish these urgent tasks first to create a healthy climate conducive to change.)

Pressure Point #1: Major Events Calendar – Create a manageable calendar of major events from September 2015 to August 2016. Include retreats, offsite fun nights, local service projects, seasonal events, key Confirmation dates, and milestones. Publish this calendar online and in print. Distribute this calendar at the B2SB (Back to School Bash).

Pressure Point #2: Major Event Coordinators – Carefully select 6-8 appropriate events from the newly developed major events calendar. Recruit an individual coordinator for each of these events. Consider giving the YLT (Youth Leadership Team) an opportunity to take a few of these events. Appropriate events could include offsite fun nights, parties, local service projects and seasonal events. These coordinators should create a major event notebook for their event to ensure the sustainability of that event.

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Pressure Point #3: Search Rollout – Finalize the job description for the Youth Minister. Begin a thorough, nationwide search for a new Youth Minister. Consider utilizing the search services of Ministry Architects to build awareness about the opening. In addition to building relationships with students the new job description should include a renewed emphasis in the following areas:

- Staff supervision.
- Volunteer recruiting, training, deployment and retention.
- Parent engagement and support.

Pressure Point #4: Welcoming Environment – Train and equip the SLT (Student Leadership Team) members to become a welcome squad at all youth ministry activities. Consider using some of the principles outlined in Jeanne Mayo’s book, *Thriving Youth Groups*. Remember the following quote from Mark DeVries’ book, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, when working with the SLT.

“The most profound kind of student leadership programs happen not when students are asked to plan the calendar or evaluate the quality of this or that program, like a student council might. Traditional approaches to student leadership might give students power, but they fail at a more basic level. They fail to provide students with the kind of life-on-life, uncomfortable ministry experiences that allow them to “feel awkward” enough to inspire their growth and effectively catalyze a culture of welcome in their youth ministries.”

Pressure Point #5: Catapult Volunteers – Recruit four additional adult volunteers to support the Wednesday night middle school program in the fall.

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

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND STABILITY

- **Host a “Quick Start” Retreat:** Invite the Renovation Team, key volunteers, and youth staff to participate in a Quick Start Retreat in which the renovation process is launched and the pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report are addressed. The retreat tackles the items that need to be done first, and builds momentum for the youth ministry renovation process.
 - Meet with staff to review the report and identify current status of challenges and recommendations to create next steps for the Renovation Team.
 - Renovation Team would meet to orient themselves to the job ahead.
 - A plan for concrete communication between the Renovation Team and staff would be determined so that all parties feel they’re “in the know.”
 - The following documents are developed during the Quick Start Retreat, and within two weeks after the Quick Start Retreat, they are finalized:
 - There is a finalized version of the Calendar for all weekly programs and major special events from September 2015 through August 2016.
 - Events have been chosen that will ideally be run by a major event coordinator.
 - There are results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry. The job descriptions cover all current positions

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- and also include additional, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.
 - There is a clear and complete list of volunteer needs in the youth ministry, including relational and behind-the-scenes, weekly events and special event leaders.
- **Visioning:** Invite parents, volunteers, and leaders to participate in a multi-session, on-campus process of visioning a new future for the youth ministry with Ministry Architects, resulting in the following documents which will direct the ministry:
 - A ministry mission statement
 - A statement of values
 - A set of three-year revolving goals and one-year benchmarks
 - An organizational structure for the ministry
- **Christian Formation:** Gather a team for a Christian Formation Retreat to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
 - Evaluate any upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Develop a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.
 - Determine how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decide what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- **Control Document Development:** Complete and publish an 18-month calendar, create major event notebooks to help event planners succeed, and generate a preventative maintenance calendar that schedules behind-the-scenes activities for each month (like “September: nail down the date for next year’s Revive summer camp.”).
- **Attendance:** Use a roster to track attendance for all youth activities. Enter this attendance into the ACS database each week to allow for easy access to weekly participation numbers and names.
- **Marketing:** Establish clear internal story-telling processes that allow parents, youth, leaders, and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.
- **Communication:** Establish normative processes for effective and timely communication with parents, youth, and leaders utilizing as many forms of communication as possible including updating the youth pages of the church’s website, Facebook, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Develop a Youth Ministry Manual, including the most recent youth directory, a 12-18 month calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar, and notes for every major youth ministry event.
- **Fall Kick-Off/Parent Orientation:** Develop an intentional, family-based, incredibly fun Fall Kickoff event to launch the youth ministry in the fall of 2016. Use that event to cast the vision, share information, and build enthusiasm about the year ahead.
- **Enlist an Experienced, Professional Coach:** Invite Ministry Architects to play the “coach” role during this renovation period. Ministry Architects would offer experienced direction for the

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building of an infrastructure for the youth ministry and provide ongoing coaching for the youth ministry staff members as well as the Renovation Team.

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND SERVANTS

- **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff including coaching, reading and seminars.
- **Sustainable Pace:** Help each youth ministry staff member develop a “rhythmic week” including a Sabbath and “balcony” time (that is, time to look at the big picture and make strategic plans).
- **Leadership Development:** Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry and create a structure for the ongoing training of all volunteers at least quarterly.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Build a fortified volunteer leadership team, some of who will do relational ministry with youth while others work behind the scenes. Create a clear and complete list of the volunteer needs. Create a “fishing pond” list of at least 75 possible volunteers to call on for weekly volunteer positions.
- **Broaden Volunteer Definition and Opportunities:** Create additional, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in the program. Encourage volunteer involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers at the beginning of each school year.

DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- **Small Group Options:** Locate adult pairings to lead 4-5 new small groups. Allow them to pick the location and day/time for their new groups. Present this menu of small group options to the youth and their parents. Some groups may stay on Monday evenings, but others may choose to move to another night or time.
- **Programming Balance:** Extend Catapult through the summer. Invite the incoming 6th graders to participate throughout the summer leading up to their 6th grade year. Develop a new middle school retreat tradition in the fall of each year.
- **Parent Engagement:** Create a written process for engaging the majority of parents in the ministry in some way during the 2016-2017 school year.
- **Measurable Markers of Effectiveness:** Determine reasonable participation goals for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through December 2016 and take responsibility for filling those events.
- **Integration:** Develop a strategic plan for helping the youth become an integral part of the whole church, weaving the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church.
- **First-Timer Process:** Develop a process for welcoming new families, youth, and guests to the church so that they feel warmly welcomed. Document a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the church.

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- **MIA Game Plan:** Create a strategic, repeatable process for following up with youth that have gone missing from recent youth ministry gatherings.
- **Non-parent Recruitment:** Create a game plan to target specific demographics in the congregation when recruiting volunteers.
- **Rites of Passage (or Milestones):** Develop a written plan for the processes, events, and privileges that will:
 - Welcome and connect the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry
 - Welcome and connect the new 9th graders and their parents into the high school ministry.
 - Launch the church's high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they are surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.

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PROPOSED TIMELINE

The following provides Spanish Fort UMC with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a sustainable, long-term ministry with youth.

Many churches choose to use the services of Ministry Architects to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. If the church would like Ministry Architects to provide more specialized consulting in certain areas, particularly for the 17-month transition, we are available to help.

August 2015

Focus: Starting Right and Work Begins

Outcomes:

- This report has been presented to the Church Council for the strategic renovation of the youth ministry and the Church Council has given full support of this plan.
- A Quick Start Retreat has been scheduled for September.
- The Renovation Team for youth has been recruited and the first meeting has been scheduled to take place during the Quick Start Retreat.
- A volunteer has been recruited to work with the SLT (Student Leadership Team) as they kickoff a new welcoming initiative at youth ministry activities.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the youth ministry. They have received a copy of the assessment report and timeline.
- Any immediate volunteer needs for the youth ministry have been determined and slots are being filled.
- The Youth Minister job description has been finalized and approved by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
- A Leadership Launch has been scheduled for September for the volunteers in the youth ministry.
- A Visioning Retreat has been scheduled for November and a “save the date” email/postcard has been sent to all families.
- Work has begun on the 2015-2016 youth ministry calendar.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.

Ministry Architects Option: 1-day offsite

September 2015

Focus: Calendars, Volunteers, Quick Start Retreat, Fall Kick-off, Curriculum

Outcomes:

- A fishing pond of 75 potential volunteers in the youth ministry has been created.
- A Quick Start Retreat has taken place in which the renovation process was launched and pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report have been addressed. The retreat

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tackled the items that needed to be done first to initiate the youth ministry renovation process.

- The SLT (Student Leadership Team) has met to discuss options for creating a welcoming environment at all youth ministry activities.
- Promotion of the Visioning Retreat has begun.
- The Youth Minister job opening has been posted online. Marketing letters have been sent out to large churches and denominational contacts across the country. The search committee has been formed, and they have begun spreading the word across their own networks.
- Results-based job descriptions have been written and distributed to the appropriate volunteers for the youth ministry.
- All volunteer needs for the 2015-2016 school year for the youth ministry have been filled. This includes finding four new volunteers for Catapult.
- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours that clarified their roles, inspired them to grow in their own faith and equipped them to serve. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy was reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
- Curriculum has been chosen for the current school year and distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they are trained to implement the curriculum.
- The 2015-2016 youth ministry calendar has been completed and distributed to all youth and their families. The calendar has been publicized and major event dates are on the church's calendar. The calendar was distributed at the B2SB (Back to School Bash).

Ministry Architects Option: 2 days onsite, ½ day offsite

October 2015

Focus: Budget, Communications, Visioning Promotion, Compliance

Outcomes:

- Communication norms have been determined and those best practices are being implemented.
- All programs have adhered to the Safe Sanctuaries policy as laid out by the church.
- Resumes continue to come in for the Youth Minister position. The Search Committee is ranking each candidate and responding to each inquiry.
- Background checks have been done for all new weekly hands-on volunteers.
- Copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained. Permission slips for each offsite event in addition to standard medical release forms for the entire year have been created.
- Major event coordinators have been recruited for 6-8 events on the 2015-2016 major events calendar. They have been oriented on their event, and they have been given supplies to create a major event notebook for their event.
- A detailed 2016 budget for the youth ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.
- Visioning Retreat promotion has continued.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

November 2015

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Focus: Visioning Retreat, Pressure Points, Participation Goals, Attendance, Major Event Notebooks

Outcomes:

- A Visioning Retreat with all major stakeholders has occurred producing visioning documents for the youth ministry (mission statement, core values, goals and structure).
- One-year benchmarks have been assigned to each three-year, revolving goal developed in the visioning process.
- All pressure points have been addressed.
- The top five candidates for the Youth Minister position have been identified. Phone interviews have been conducted. References have been contacted.
- A Christian Formation Retreat has been scheduled for January of 2016. The retreat will facilitate a discussion of the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through August 2016 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- A process for tracking and recording attendance in all youth ministry programs has been created and implemented.
- Representatives from the SLT (Student Leadership Team) are working to create a welcoming environment at all youth ministry activities.
- Work has begun on major event notebooks – creating a template for the notebooks and collecting information on each youth event.

Ministry Architects Option: 3 days onsite, ½ day offsite

December 2015

Focus: Continuing Education, Summer Calendar, Communication

Outcomes:

- Work has begun on the summer calendar for 2016.
- Onsite interviews have been conducted with the top 3 candidates for the Youth Minister position.
- Invitations have gone out for the January Christian Formation Retreat.
- The Renovation Team has met monthly and decided how often they will meet for the remainder of the 17 months.
- Communication methods currently being used to promote the youth ministry and share the successes with the congregation have been evaluated and added to if necessary.
- Continuing education opportunities have been explored and calendared for the youth ministry staff.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

January 2016

Focus: Mid-Course Evaluation, Christian Formation Retreat, Calendar, Marketing, Volunteer Training

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team has completed a 6-month mid-course evaluation of the renovation process and made any adjustments necessary to improve the work being done.

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- The top Youth Minister candidate has been identified, and an offer has been extended.
- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns.
- Work has begun on the 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar.
- The summer 2016 calendar for the youth ministry has been completed and distributed.
- Interested staff, volunteers, and parents have gathered for a Christian Formation Retreat to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum. At the retreat, the team:
 - Evaluated the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Developed a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.
 - Determined how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decided what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.

Ministry Architects Option: 3 days onsite, ½ day offsite

February 2016

Focus: Volunteer Recruitment, Calendar, Christian Formation

Outcomes

- The 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar has been completed through August 2017 including a Fall Kick-off and a new middle school fall retreat.
- Volunteer recruiting seasons has opened.
 - Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.
 - Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
 - All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2016-2017 school year.
 - The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list has been merged.
 - Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to the youth ministry.
- Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2016-2017.
- Continuing education opportunities have been explored for the youth ministry staff.
- The new Youth Minister has begun working at Spanish Fort UMC. Ministry Architects has completed an orientation process with the new Youth Minister.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

March 2016

Focus: Marketing, Database

Outcomes:

- Clear, internal marketing processes have been established that allow all church members to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.
- New weekly small group options have been created. Leaders, locations, and meeting numbers have been chosen, and these options have been shared with the youth.
- Each youth staff member has created a Rhythmic Week including balcony time and has begun to live into their Rhythmic Week.

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- Work on the youth database has begun, collecting the most recent information for families and youth. All are categorized in a manner that will follow up on MIA families and youth. Each youth has been classified in the following categories:
 - **Active Youth** are the ones whose families are members and have attended at least once in the past year – plus visitors who have become a regular part of the group. They should show up in your printed youth ministry directory.
 - **Member Inactive (MIA)** are still a part of the flock. You may not need to send them a Facebook message every time the group gets together, but you'll want to regularly pursue these youth, whether they ever show up or not.
 - **Visitor Active** are those who regularly attend weekly programs and/or activities but are not an official member of the church.
 - **Visitor Inactive** are the ones who may have visited, but you are confident they will never become a regular part of the group. This group requires no follow up. But you'll want to keep their information for the occasional big event to which you'll want to invite everyone you know.
 - **First Timers** refer to visitors who have attended a program for the first time. You'll want to have a process for capturing their information on their first visit and follow up with them within one week of their visit.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

April 2016

Focus: MIA, Volunteer Thank You

Outcomes:

- A volunteer thank you event has been scheduled and promotional materials have gone out to all youth volunteers.
- Middle school Catapult meetings have been extended to meet throughout the summer. Current 5th graders have received an invitation to participate in summer youth ministry events and meetings.
- A game plan has been written and implemented for welcoming new families, youth, and guests to the church so that they feel warmly welcomed. The plan has included a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the church.
- New, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in the program have been created. Parent involvement has been encouraged, both visible and behind-the-scenes.
- MIA youth have been systematically contacted.
- Volunteer recruitment has continued.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

May 2016

Focus: Database, Benchmarks

Outcomes:

- A database of all youth and their families has been compiled and each person is “tagged” with a category.
- A new middle school fall retreat has been developed, scheduled, and promoted for 6th to 8th graders.
- 50% of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.

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- The collection of updated information from each youth and family has been completed and the database for youth ministry has been updated with that new information.
- A process for engaging the majority of parents in the ministry in some way during the 2016-2017 school year has been written and implemented.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

June 2016

Focus: Recruitment, Fall Kick-off, Volunteer Thank You, Curriculum

Outcomes:

- A volunteer thank you event has taken place.
- A Fall Kick-off team has been recruited to begin planning for the start of the fall youth ministry programs.
- All volunteer needs for the 2016-2017 school year for youth ministry have been filled.
- The effectiveness of this past year's curriculum has been reviewed and decisions have been made for any necessary changes for the upcoming school year.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

July 2016

Focus: Major Event Notebooks, Manual

Outcomes:

- All major event notebooks have been updated by the event coordinators and given back to the youth staff to pass along to the next year's coordinator.
- A written strategic plan for helping the youth become an integral part of the whole congregation, weaving the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church, has been created.
- The Youth Ministry Manuals (both hard copy and digital) have been completed, including
 - Visioning documents
 - Directories
 - Volunteer directory
 - Volunteer training agendas and notes
 - Attendance records
 - Annual calendar
 - Results-based job descriptions
 - Game plans and new initiatives
 - Meeting agendas and minutes for YLT/SLT/Renovation Team.
 - Christian Formation Plan and record of curriculum resources used for the current year
 - Budget and other financial documents
 - Recruiting template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year
 - Compliance documents

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

August 2016

Focus: Directory, Leadership Launch, Compliance

Outcomes:

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- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and is in compliance with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy. Background checks have been completed on each volunteer.
- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours that clarified their roles, inspired them to grow in their own faith and equipped them to serve. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy was reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
- With the most recent information on youth and their families, a directory of all families and a directory of all volunteers have been created to be distributed at the Fall Kick-off.
- All youth programs have adhered to the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

September 2016

Focus: Reflection and Re-Assessment, Curriculum, Fall Kick-off

Outcomes:

- A review of the renovation process has been completed.
- An online diagnostic has been completed to re-assess the youth ministry.
- Current pressure points have been named
- Curriculum has been distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they have been trained to implement the curriculum.
- A Fall Kick-off has taken place that welcomed youth and parents into a program they can get excited about, introduced parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about and provided a forum for receiving information from families. All participants feel energized and enthusiastic about the coming year's programs.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

October 2016

Focus: Major Event Notebooks, Participation Goals, Budget

Outcomes:

- Major event notebooks for each major event for the youth ministry have been handed out to this year's event coordinators.
- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through August 2017 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- A detailed 2017 budget for the youth ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.
- A written game plan for inviting specific, non-parent demographics in the congregation when recruiting volunteers has been implemented.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

November 2016

Focus: Benchmarks, Strategic Staffing

Outcomes:

- All one-year benchmarks have been achieved. Goals have been re-upped and new one-year benchmarks have been established.
- A game plan has been established for the Rites of Passage processes, events, and

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privileges that have:

- Welcomed and connected the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry.
 - Welcomed and connected the new 9th graders and their parents into the high school ministry.
 - Launched the church's high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they have been surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.
- With the changes in the youth ministry, the volunteer staffing to meet the size and scope of the youth ministry has been evaluated and a game plan to meet those needs has been created if necessary.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

December 2016

Focus: Preventative Maintenance Calendar, Summer Calendar, Sustainability

Outcomes:

- Work has begun on the 2017 summer calendar.
- A preventative maintenance calendar has been created for the youth ministry that will help regularly deal with on-going “behind the scenes” ministry maintenance.
- A timeline for the next 12 months has been created that included game plans for the current pressure points and items from the online diagnostic.
- Game plans have been put in place to sustain the processes and procedures during the renovation
- Ongoing coaching has been secured and a sustainability plan has been put in place.
- The staff and Renovation Team have celebrated what God has done with their 18-month investment.
- The Renovation Team has transitioned their role to providing support and accountability to the youth volunteers and focusing on strategic issues such as three-year goals and one-year benchmarks, curriculum selection, calendars, and volunteer recruitment.
- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns
- Work has begun on the 2017-2018 youth ministry calendar.
- The summer 2016 calendar for the youth ministry has been completed and distributed.

Ministry Architects Option: 2 days onsite, ½ day offsite

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