Late Adolescent Youth Ministers:
A Strategy for Integrating Community, Continuing Education and Practical
Theology

Michael A. Kipp
Northwest Nazarene University
INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen a professionalization and proliferation of undergraduate youth ministry programs in the United States. This vast expansion of programs onto the college and university campus implies the suitability of the late adolescent program graduate to work in vocational youth ministry. This project challenges such implied congruence based upon the developmental realities of the late adolescent. However, given that this trend seems to be widespread, a strategy will be suggested to provide the needed resources and social capital creating an environment of health for the late adolescent youth minister.
CHAPTER 1
WHAT IT TAKES – THE NECESSARY COMPETENCIES FOR YOUTH MINISTERS IN THE UNITED STATES

State of Undergraduate Youth Ministry Education

Before assessing the competency, content, and educational experiences needed for successful youth ministry, as well the developmental realities of late adolescents / emerging adults, it first seems helpful to examine the current state of undergraduate youth ministry education. In order to do this, a brief examination of the professionalization of youth ministry will be undertaken. Subsequent to this professionalization, or perhaps simultaneously to it, a proliferation of undergraduate programs in youth ministry began in the early 1990s in the United States. Although, to date, there has yet to be a systematic study of youth ministry, there have been attempts by various educators to address both this professionalization and proliferation of undergraduate programs. Some have written directly about these matters while others more tangentially. The selections below are not exhaustive but present a fair overview.

Professionalization of Youth Ministry

A profession can be defined as, “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation.”¹ Gaylord Noyce writes in Pastoral

¹Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "Profession."
that the following six elements are characteristic of most professions. Those elements are:

- an education in a body of knowledge
- a commitment to service
- belonging to a peer group that sets standards of practice
- being a part of an institutional matrix that claims allegiance
- serving immediate goals in the name of certain ultimate values
- specific to that profession.  

According to Noyce’s definition it would seem that youth ministry is undeniably a profession. It is perhaps a subset of the more general “ordained clergy” but nonetheless a profession.

Mark Lamport writes about the work of youth ministry in, “The State of the Profession of Youth Ministry.” In his article, Lamport declares that youth ministry has arrived as a “profession” due to three “professionalizing influences.” Those influences are:

1. the growth of youth organizations and denominations offering regional and national seminars, 2. publication of youth ministry journals and books, and 3. academic programs in colleges and seminaries offering degrees in youth ministry.

Given that Lamport’s article is from 1992 it seems reasonable that these “professionalizing influences” have only increased in the ensuing seventeen years. For


\(^3\)Ibid., 21. Noyce goes on to propose that these six elements are satisfied for the minister in the following ways. The “body of knowledge” is “divinity or theology;” the commitment to service is in one’s “ordination vows;” the source of standards is found in the “Church Court” or other judicatory body; the “institutional matrix” is the denomination or Church body; the immediate goals being either to “recruit the member or build the congregation” (or youth group); and finally the “ultimate values” would be “faith.”

example, the Church of the Nazarene (a small denomination founded in 1895) began an effort at “offering regional seminars” for youth ministry training in 1997. The Association for Youth Ministry Educators was established in 1994 and soon followed with their Journal of Youth Ministry. A search of the internet reveals over ninety undergraduate programs in youth ministry, many established since Lamport’s article was published. Thus, all three of Lamport’s professionalizing influences have continued to proliferate in this field.

As for the “location” of the profession of youth ministry in the academy, Lamport suggests that, since it is a theological discipline, it ought to be associated with practical theology. This is encouraging. At the same time, however, Lamport locates youth ministry as a subset of Christian Education, which is a subset of Practical Theology. This is objectionable because it is too narrow a focus for youth ministry. Although Christian Education is certainly a part of youth ministry, it is not the whole. Long gone

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9Ibid., 86.
are the days of “youth ministry being seen as a ‘skills’ subset of education.”\textsuperscript{10} The time to recognize youth ministry as practical theology has come.\textsuperscript{11}

Mark Senter’s \textit{The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry}\textsuperscript{12} takes on the status of “professional” youth ministry and levels an indictment of the youth ministry “professionals” who have “become conservators of treasured memories.”\textsuperscript{13} They have essentially become complacent with the “ownership of property, advanced degrees, and successful youth ministry business ventures (that) have minimized risk-taking and cultivated a desire for respectability.”\textsuperscript{14} As for conversions of adolescents, Senter writes, “though the church has increased its participation in responsible evangelization of adolescents, the evangelistic inroads to the current generation have produced a negative growth factor.”\textsuperscript{15} This evaluation leads him to characterize the health of ministries to high school students in the United States as “less than exciting.”\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 9.


\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
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In a similar vein, Jonathon Grenz writes in an article titled “Factors Influencing Vocational Changes among Youth Ministers,”\textsuperscript{17} that many youth ministers change churches after only a few years, and that a large portion’s careers are quite short.\textsuperscript{18} A noteworthy fact from Grenz’s study is that 63 percent began their work as youth ministers before the age of twenty-five, with the most frequent age at launch being twenty-one. In a summary statement of this national and interdenominational study of youth workers, Grenz writes that, although youth ministry is still quite young as a vocation, it has been plagued with a reputation for high stress, low status, inadequate pay, high job expectations, poor pastoral staff relations, and high staff turnover.\textsuperscript{19}

Chap Clark and Kara Powell in their book \textit{Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings about Youth Ministry},\textsuperscript{20} state that they wrote the entire book in order to “help you come up with a deeper design for your ministry.”\textsuperscript{21} Implicit here is that youth ministers need this sort of help, that they are not particularly “deep” and theologically astute. Given that a publishing giant like Zondervan printed this, it would seem to confirm the “market” for this notion.

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{17}Jonathon Grenz, "Factors Influencing Vocational Changes Among Youth Ministers," \textit{The Journal of Youth Ministry} 1, no. 1 (2002): 73-88.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 73.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{20}Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, \textit{Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings about Youth Ministry} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 19.\end{flushleft}
In an article based in Illinois that used phone surveys, Michael K. Severe writes that youth ministers typically exhibit a disconnect between their stated ministry philosophy and practice. Severe’s summary of the themes in his study of youth ministers is as follows:

- The subversion of ministry goals by methods and programs
- A confusion about the relationships between practice, philosophy, and effectiveness
- An improper application of method to accomplish goals
- The means and ends are sometimes switched or confused

It would seem that youth ministers, as a group, might not only be somewhat “shallow” but also may be so harried in their daily ministry responsibility that they are not taking the time to think clearly, or much at all.

The task here is to question, as Lamport has, “Is the profession of youth ministry developing properly? Is it growing with a healthy status and clear sense of direction?” Perhaps what is needed is simply a closer look at the way youth ministers are prepared and sustained once in their parish, as well as a look at the developmental realities of those who are frequently considered for youth ministry positions.

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23Ibid., 81.

Proliferation of Undergraduate Youth Ministry Programs

Documenting the significant growth in undergraduate youth ministry programs in the United States is not an easy task. Due to the lack of a wide body of empirical research in this field, this type of investigation must be undertaken by those immediately asking the question. The most helpful web resource is the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) website. The CCCU, “is an international association of intentionally Christian colleges and universities.” Their site houses direct links to all their member and affiliate schools.

In the Fall 2005 issue of the *Journal of Youth Ministry*, Andrew Jack and Barrett McRay published an article discussing the well-educated youth ministry graduate. In their study, they surveyed all schools that belonged to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities that had programs in youth ministry (major, minor, certificate, or emphasis). In 2004 the CCCU website listed 105 members and 67 affiliate institutions. That list of 172 institutions (both member and affiliate schools) yielded 75 colleges or universities that had an academic youth ministry program.

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27Ibid., 57.

28Ibid.
In the past five years, the CCCU membership has grown modestly. In 2009, my own investigation revealed the website reporting 111 members and 76 affiliates. This represents an overall growth in the CCCU of less than 9 percent. What is striking however, that of just their 111 members (no affiliates counted), 97 now have academic programs in youth ministry. This means that almost 88 percent of CCCU member schools offer an academic youth ministry program. This represents a nearly 30 percent growth from the 2004 survey, without considering affiliates. It seems safe to declare that there has been a significant increase in the number of youth ministry programs offered at the undergraduate level in the United States.

Literature Review of Necessary Competencies

Mark Lamport cautions that “Careful scrutiny must be given to how people are prepared for youth ministry.” From the literature available, it appears that many have attempted to do just that. For example, just a casual look through our small Christian university library’s card catalog shows that books published about youth ministry begin as early as the 1940s; with another in 1965, three in the 1970s and a veritable explosion

\[\text{29}^\text{Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.}\]

\[\text{30}^\text{This growth would potentially be larger if all the affiliates were surveyed as well. However, the CCCU website does not record information about youth ministry programs. Each member school’s website was individually visited to determine this information and so, in the interest of time, the 71 affiliates (actual correct number of affiliates) were not surveyed.}\]


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of publications beginning around 1990 and continuing to the present.\textsuperscript{32} A quick search for books on Amazon.com yields over seven thousand results for publications about youth ministry.\textsuperscript{33} One thing we can know for certain is that there are many different views about how to prepare for and carry out youth ministry.

Of course, the opinions vary widely about the necessary competencies for the youth minister as well. They range from the one extreme that asserts the superfluous nature of formal education,\textsuperscript{34} to the other, which emphasizes theory to the neglect of the local church in the youth minister’s process of preparation and, allegedly, engages the mind “as if the heart did not exist.”\textsuperscript{35} In the next section, a survey of the literature including books and journal articles, will be undertaken in order to uncover the necessary competencies, content, and experiences required for the vocation of youth ministry. In an attempt to construct an historical analysis, this survey will include both older and more contemporary resources.

\textsuperscript{32}There were thirteen references listed for “Youth Ministry” in the 1980s and in excess of fifty beginning in the 1990s and beyond. This did not include books about games, retreats, speaking etc.


\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 93.
In a publication dated 1965 and entitled, *Shaping the Church’s Ministry with Youth,* the American Baptist Church asserts that the role of the youth leader must be one who gives “competent, creative, and constructive leadership” and “answers” to students. Although this little book does not provide any suggested educational curriculum in order to properly prepare these leaders to give the necessary answers, it does mention something quite important about good youth ministry: simply stated “that good youth ministry will always be defeated by an unhealthy church, and in order for the youth ministry to achieve its hope of ministry with students the church must be engaged in transformative ministry with adults.” This is an important assertion. The fact that it comes from a book from the 1960s is instructive. Perhaps it was not until later that youth ministry had achieved its characterization as the “One Eared Mickey Mouse.” Whether or not that is accurate, Evans does well to point out the centrality of the local congregation to “good” youth ministry. Implicit here is that a youth minister must be able to relate to the other adult Christians, to minister to them, and to be involved in the church’s mission as well.

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36 David M. Evans, *Shaping the Church's Ministry with Youth* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1965).
37 Ibid., 79.
38 Ibid., 82.
In 1972 Zondervan published a work by Lawrence O. Richards entitled, *Youth Ministry: Its Renewal in the Local Church.*\(^{40}\) In it, Richards suggests that youth ministry is a process of adults and youth involved together in their growth toward Christian maturity.\(^{41}\) According to Richards this maturity and the goal of this process is found in Ephesians 4:13, “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”\(^{42}\) The adult working with students will be an authentic person who models “competence as a Christian.”\(^{43}\) This competence is basically understood as a person who practices an incarnational-relational approach to ministry with youth.\(^{44}\) An important addition to the adult leadership is that of youth who also serve in leadership roles. Richards characterizes these students as “servant leaders” and the “core” of the youth group.

Although Richards claims that his book outlines a “model” of youth ministry, there is no explicit curriculum offered to prepare youth minister’s for their vocation. The one exception to this is the Bible, which is strongly and regularly emphasized throughout his book. Richards also references several studies about adolescent development and the


\(^{41}\)Ibid., 121.

\(^{42}\)All Scripture quotations will be taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

\(^{43}\)Richards, *Youth Ministry*, 121-123.

\(^{44}\)See Philippians 2:5-11 for this concept illustrated.
importance of understanding this stage in life. Taken together, the first hint is made at the interdisciplinary nature of youth ministry.

Wesley Black’s 1991 book, *An Introduction to Youth Ministry*, is the first in this survey that begins with an explicitly stated theology of youth ministry.\textsuperscript{45} (That is not to say that the previous referenced works did not present a theology of youth ministry, they simply did not state so explicitly.) This stated theology is important because it affirms that a youth minister ought to be theologically aware and conversant.

Black is also the first to speak of several other steps of preparation for the youth minister. Among these are:

- A call from God.
- A sincere love and sympathy for youth.
- Experience as a volunteer youth leader.
- Specific youth ministry training from workshops, seminars and conferences.
- A liberal arts undergraduate education.
- Seminary training.\textsuperscript{46}

Black’s mention of higher education and seminary is tremendously important. He is the first, here, to link youth ministry training to the academy. Black’s undergraduate curriculum suggests securing a broad (Liberal Arts) education with training in English, math, psychology, sciences, and history, along with the necessary courses to prepare one for seminary, such as Bible and religious education.\textsuperscript{47} Again here, the importance of a


\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 168-9.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 169.
broad foundation of education is emphasized. Black dedicates an entire chapter to the personal spiritual growth of the youth minister as well.48

Two final observations about Black’s book: he makes frequent references to adolescent development and the value placed upon ministry mentors. Although not presented in much depth or detail, over the course of six chapters, Black outlines some basics regarding adolescence such as developmental tasks and physical, social, cognitive, spiritual, and emotional development.49 He also explicitly mentions the importance of having, and being, a mentor in ministry and the significant value of younger youth ministers having seasoned models from whom to learn.50

What is compelling about Black’s emphasis on mentoring is the necessity of the youth minister to take an active role in the mentoring process. To say it differently, there is no guarantee that a mentor will manifest himself or herself. Black writes from experience and warns other would-be youth ministers of the deep importance of community in this vocation. This is particularly important where the stereotype of the “lone ranger” attempting to “save the teenage world” can be to the idealistic late adolescent youth minister romantic, persuasive, and yet wrongheaded. The phrase “we really do need each other”51 comes to mind and is supported in Black’s treatment of what it takes to succeed in youth ministry.

48Wesley Black, An Introduction to Youth Ministry, 170-173.
49Ibid., 7.
50Ibid., 185-7.
51Rueben Welch, who has served in numerous ministerial positions within the Church of the Nazarene including Pastor, College Chaplain, Evangelist etc., is well known for this statement.
John M. Dettoni in his book *Introduction to Youth Ministry*,\textsuperscript{52} begins on similar ground as Black, but develops the idea of a theology/philosophy of youth ministry more highly. In the first of three parts of this text, Dettoni discusses the foundations of youth ministry as dealing with: “1) Philosophy of youth ministry; 2) Understanding models of youth ministry; and 3) The youth worker.”\textsuperscript{53}

His summary of a youth ministry philosophy comes in three words, “incarnation, agapic, and developmental.”\textsuperscript{54} Among his thirteen elements of a youth ministry philosophy are a proper view of God, view of Scripture, metaphysic, view of humanity, understanding of adolescent development, and programming.\textsuperscript{55} From these, it seems clear the properly prepared youth minister will have training in both theology and philosophy.

Dettoni argues that a model of youth ministry ought to follow and seek to embody the stated philosophy of youth ministry.\textsuperscript{56} Dettoni advocates for what he characterizes as a “social system model” that ought to regard and relate to the entire church’s ministry, not only the youth ministry in isolation.\textsuperscript{57} This model of youth ministry must include a clear presentation of the relationship to the overall functioning of the church.

\textsuperscript{52}John M. Dettoni, *Introduction to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., 19-20.
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 38.
In the Chapter entitled, “The Youth Worker,” Dettoni lists a staggering number of characteristics (more than 115) and roles (more than 15) that the successful youth worker ought to exhibit and fulfill.58 Although too many to list here, a sample of the characteristics include being Christian, fulfilling one’s calling, demonstrating knowledge of the Bible, being genuine, honest, mature, psychologically and emotionally stable, wise, discerning, poised, having a proven ability in public speaking, exhibiting transparency, having the spirit of a learner, being intentional, good with names, displaying physical stamina, loving in an agapic manner, impartial, incarnational, just, a good listener, politically savvy, skilled, hospitable and owning their home, financially stable . . . just to name a few.59 A sample of the roles the successful youth worker must fulfill include, (role) model, counselor, facilitator, authority figure, pastor, ethnographer, friend, leader, manager, disciplinarian and teacher.60

Although Dettoni does not list specific courses a youth worker ought to take, his characteristics and roles explicate the necessity of a mature, grounded, and generally “renaissance” person needed for successful youth ministry. It seems almost laughable that Dettoni could author this book without even a hint of acknowledgement that these various roles, responsibilities, and characteristics are not found in any one person (with the exception of Jesus himself). It is no wonder that so few youth ministers survive in one particular context for many years; perhaps the expectations are just too unrealistic.

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58Dettoni, Youth Ministry, 43-59.

59Ibid., 44-49.

60Ibid., 49-57.
In 1997 Dean Borgman published *When Kumbaya is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry*. Explicit, for the first time in this short survey, is the central place of practical theology in youth ministry. Additionally, Borgman aligns youth ministry squarely with the academic discipline of practical theology – the kind espoused by noted contemporary theologians like Don Browning and Ray Anderson. Borgman does not set out to create a how-to-manual of youth ministry or even to talk about the tasks, characteristics, and roles of the youth minister. Instead, he espouses a theological framework that does not simply cites Scripture references to support his points, but instead, is grounded in practical theology that presupposes a youth minister’s immersion in biblical theology as central to the task of youth ministry. In doing this, he counters all of the traditional stereotypes of the youth worker and replaces them with that of practical theologian.

Two books important to the field and practice of youth ministry came out in 1998. The first was Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster’s *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*; the second was *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth*, by Doug Fields. These books were important because of their wide readership (undoubtedly *Purpose Driven* more so) and for their user friendly design that focused on a more popular treatment of youth ministry.

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for persons who were not necessarily formally trained theologians. In an interesting irony, however, they came to illuminate the vocation of youth ministry from nearly opposite approaches. In a word, *Godbearing* could be characterized as the “be” book on youth ministry, focused on the great importance of the youth minister’s own personal formation, while *Purpose Driven* is best described as the “do” book that outlines what a youth minister needs to do in order to create “healthy growth”.

The *Godbearing Life* concretely places youth ministry as a subset of classical pastoral ministry when it states, “Youth ministry is more about ministry than about youth, for Jesus Christ calls young people – like all of us – into ministry and not into a youth program.”

Most would agree that this is a positive development. Yet, while much of what is written in this book is very hopeful and helpful, it does not seem to be properly anchored in theological reflection. It could be classified as an ideology over solid faithful action. At the same time, there is much to be commended about this book. It certainly pushes the reader to think in terms of process and people over programs and numbers.

On the other hand, *Purpose Driven* offers a sensible, step-by-step approach to fulfilling the church’s “five purposes” in a youth ministry context. Noteworthy in *Purpose Driven* is the professionalism, excellence, and organization that comes across as expected from the youth minister. These are in some ways antithetical to what was once the popular view of the youth minister as the winsome, athletic, funny, male-friend to young people. For this reason, *Purpose Driven* has offered an important corrective to the

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64 Dean and Foster, *Godbearing Life*, 17.
domain of youth ministry. Undoubtedly, Fields’ approach has won countless converts and been tremendously helpful to thousands of youth workers. However, its emphasis on structure, process, organization, and management could have the effect of creating a “doing” mentality, which would counter what Fields sought to do in writing this book.66

Prior to the printing of these books, youth ministry books tended toward more of a “text book” format. Regardless if their content was easy to understand, their “look” made them less than friendly to the typical youth ministry practitioner. With new “packaging,” Godbearing helped to re-imagine what it meant to be a youth minister and equated this vocation with such classic spiritual roles as pastor and spiritual director. Purpose Driven helped to raise the professionalism level in the practice of youth ministry. It did this through offering a virtual (ministry) managerial degree.

Taken together, these two books had a noteworthy impact on the practice of youth ministry. They equated the youth minister to a ministry professional67 who was organized and able to cast vision for healthy spiritual and numerical growth in the youth ministry and church. Additionally, they suggested that all of this took place in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

In 2001, Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry was published.68 It was the first book in the “Zondervan / Youth Specialties Academic” line

66See Chapter 1 of Purpose Driven Youth Ministry by Fields.

67The term “professional” is sometimes disparaged when related to ministry as if it implies a less than caring, spiritual leader. It is used here to characterize Fields’ emphasis on organization, quality, and good practice of youth ministry.

68Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry, ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).
that seemed to truly be marketed as a serious textbook for both the undergraduate and
seminary classroom. The importance of this text is best summarized in Dean’s words
from the introduction. She writes:

Youth ministry has often been conceived as a junior partner in the Christian
education enterprise rather than a pastoral calling. Clearly, Christian
education is one component of our mission with young people – but not the
only component, nor is it the primary one. . . this book locates youth ministry
squarely within the broader theological enterprise called practical theology.69

If Borgman’s text left anything undone, then Starting Right ought to lay to rest any
further discussion of where youth ministry as a discipline is located, and what the job
of youth minister entails – both summed up in two words, “practical theology.”

While Starting Right is an important work for the field of youth ministry, its
model of practical theology deserves at least one critique. On page twenty-six of the
book, there is a graphic model of “The Tasks of Practical Theology.” That model
does not overtly require the use of biblical exegesis in order to function. This is a
troubling omission. Although not an uncommon occurrence in the “doing” of
theology, without the important anchor of the written revelation of God, one can be
blown by the winds of personal preference over the trajectory of the inbreaking
Kingdom of God. The reference in step 3 of the model “Detect and Evaluate” asks
the reader to examine how well he or she is doing it by God’s standards, which
tangentially could imply a study of Scripture but the lack of its overt use is troubling
and counter to genuinely Christian youth ministry.

69Kenda Creasy Dean et. al., Starting Right, 19.

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There are numerous other books written since 2001 about youth ministry. Among them: in 2004, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* by Tony Jones; in 2006, *Presence Centered Youth Ministry* by Mike King; in 2007, *A New Kind of Youth Ministry* by Chris Folmsbee; and *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry* by Rick Lawrence, just to name a few. With the risk of being reductionist, it seems fair to state that, generally, these books call for reforms in the practice of youth ministry. As a result, “reformer” can be added to the list of requirements needed for successful youth ministry.

**Journal Articles**

In 1996, the *Christian Education Journal* dedicated an entire issue to youth ministry, and, as Lamport’s introductory editorial stated, it was the journal’s aim to “advance the field.” Articles ranged from Rick Dunn’s “What Are the Necessary Competencies to Be an Effective Youth Worker?” to Kevin E. Lawson’s “The State of the Educational Ministry Profession in Evangelical Churches, Part 3: Advice for Future Staff and the Schools that Prepare Them.”

Lawson’s article was based upon a 1993, interdenominational study in which ten denominational groups and 606 persons from the United States and Canada participated.

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The participants were current (463) and former (143) church educational ministry staff. In the final segment of the study was a section where participants were asked to offer their advice to educational institutions, denominations, pastors, and future educational ministry staff. The results were “overwhelming.” This advice from current and former veterans of staff ministry included:

- Pursue educational ministry with a sense of calling
- Prepare well both academically and experientially (gain hands-on experience while in school)
- Ensure personal philosophy of ministry is compatible with the senior pastor’s
- Once in a staff position, build solid foundations for ministry (enrich spiritual life, find a mentor, be a life-long learner, delegate)

Although Lawson’s study is sixteen years old, its advice for contemporary youth ministers is worth noting. There is nothing on this list of “advice” from former associate ministers that has become outdated. In fact, this advice is arguably timeless.

Rahn characterizes the critical educational needs of the youth minister in terms of “warehouses.” He offers three such warehouses as the “depositories” necessary for the youth worker. They are “Christian maturity, youth ministry understanding, and youth ministry competencies.” Rahn defines:

- Christian maturity as being able to “discern appropriate ministry responses by tapping into the heart and mind of Christ.

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74Ibid., 97-100.
75Ibid., 81.
Youth ministry understanding as theological foundations, biblical literacy, adolescent development and culture, along with the historical and contemporary practices of youth ministry.

Youth ministry competencies as relational skills and organizational skills, etc.77

Rahn’s instruction seems to be valuable despite the fact that it was written in the previous decade. The question that must be asked with regard to late adolescent youth ministers is how realistic is it for a twenty-two-year-old recent college graduate to display maturity? “Maturity,” argues Rahn is manifest when a person’s “accurate and personal relationship” with Jesus Christ becomes the “central filter for all of life.”78 What Rahn is describing is an integrated life, one that is centrally focused on Jesus Christ as the organizing principle and through whom all decisions flow. Although this is indeed an important characteristic for the youth minister, is a late adolescent developmentally capable of this sort of integration? This will be examined in the next section of this paper.

Dunn’s article presents what he considers the necessary “competencies” of a youth worker. Someone who is “competent,” could be defined as one with “suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience, etc., for some purpose.”79 These competencies include: “personal efficacy (age appropriate Christian maturity and personal responsibility), interpersonal effectiveness, ministry task proficiency, and integrative...
learning aptitude." Dunn calls for youth ministers who are “mature adults,” who both enter into the youth culture as adults and serve as guides for other adults to do likewise.

In many ways Dunn is echoing Rahn’s comments. An important nuance to Dunn’s article is his inclusion of the idea of “age appropriate” Christian faith. For the first time here a writer acknowledges that different youth ministers will display different levels of Christian faith or maturity. This is a vitally important point. It seems ironic that youth ministry educators and professionals who must be mindful of the various developmental levels of their students and congregants do not seem to apply these same standards to the youth minister. While Dunn shows sensitivity at this juncture, his next claim of “mature adults” would seem to patently dismiss the possibility of a typical college graduate fitting into his understanding of an “effective youth worker.”

David Livermore’s 2002 article exposes the often one-sided nature of youth ministry preparation – all theory or all practice. He argues for a “re-inventing” of formal youth ministry education that includes theory and practice, communal engagement, theological grounding, a strong personal inner-life, and ministry convictions.

Livermore offers a balanced corrective that is helpful for the youth ministry educator. However, he does not meaningfully address the developmental reality of youth

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80 Dunn, "Necessary Competencies," 27-35.
81 Ibid., 27.
82 Livermore, "Youth Ministry Education Debate," 90.
83 Ibid., 94-100.
ministry students. Although his article is persuasive and well-written, it infers that an undergraduate education is all that is needed for successful youth ministry. In his conclusion he calls for new models of youth ministry education that emphasize holistic personal and professional formation in the context of community. One addition would be helpful to that call. That addition is the continuing holistic formation after the youth minister graduates from college. It is not enough to assume that this will be the case unless integrated into the youth minister’s life and practice.

Andrew Jack and Barret McRay ask two important questions in their 2005 *Journal of Youth Ministry* article: “What is the picture of a well-trained graduate of a youth ministry program?” and “What type of training is done to achieve this outcome?”

Jack and McRay surveyed schools in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities that offered an undergraduate program in youth ministry (major, minor, certificate or emphasis). There were seventy-five schools that qualified, and thirty-eight participated in the study. The two main questions were each followed by three secondary questions that helped to flesh out the details required.

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84Jack and McRay, ”Tassel Flipping,” 57.

85The following information was found in Jack and McRay’s article:

1. *What knowledge will the graduate possess?*
   - Bible & Theology, Psychology, Sociology, Ministry, Educational Theory, Self (understanding)

2. *What qualities of character will be true of them?*
   - Integrity, Calling, Leadership, Love People/Relational, Love & Obey God

3. *What ministry skill will they have acquired?*
   - Biblical Interpretation, Teaching, Administration, Interpersonal skills, Cultural Awareness, Leadership/Vision, Ministry

The three secondary questions were:

1. *Curricular Design (courses, texts, assignments, etc.)*?
   - Bible & Theology, Psychology, Educational Theory, Leadership, Sociology, Ministry, Methods

2. *Non-curricular design (out of class experiences, internships, etc.)*?
Jack and McRay’s own summary statement says:

In general what we found was that “ideal” youth ministry education (according to these schools) would involve a broad knowledge base with special emphasis in Bible and Theology, both in class and out of class learning experiences designed to offer that knowledge and the skills to utilize that knowledge to the student, and an emphasis on the development of specific character qualities necessary for the work of youth ministry.86

Jack and McRay’s article is quite helpful in understanding what youth ministry programs are intending to transmit to their graduates and in understanding the curriculum with which it is done. Again, it seems that the “well-trained graduate” will be akin to a “renaissance” person who is properly integrated and trained in a variety of subjects. Again the question is posed, is this developmentally realistic given a typical twenty-two-year-old? A critique of this “broad knowledge base,” finds: the absence of anything to do with business, finance, or management. These are notorious weaknesses of many youth ministers, and this article further corroborates that reality by their glaring dearth from the curriculum of the schools surveyed.

The final article of this survey is by Chap Clark entitled, “Youth Ministry as Practical Theology.”87 Clark’s thesis is that youth ministry as a field needs an accessible model of practical theology for both the youth ministry student and practitioner that lead

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87Clark, "Practical Theology," 9.
Clark presents such a model for the reader’s consideration and argues that catechesis is not a sufficient core for the practice of youth ministry.

Clark’s model is quite helpful and a potential candidate for the field. However, the implication of the model is that its user would have substantial education in broad fields of knowledge. These fields would include psychology, sociology, family systems, Bible, theology, culture, and church history just to name a few. The successful youth minister must, once again, have a broad education that must continue after formal schooling in order to use Clark’s model faithfully. The new discoveries that come in the disciplines (mentioned above) would seem to necessitate the practical theologian is remaining current in terms of their own reading and research. In other words, Clark’s model seems to imply life-long learning to be characteristic of the youth minister.

Summary of the Necessary Competencies

What seems certain from the synopsis of this review is that there is a tremendous amount of content to be mastered, experiences to be had, and competencies to be achieved for the youth minister. It has been shown that the “successful” youth minister will be a prophetic leader, a mature Christian, someone able to lead both youth and adults, who is gifted, incarnational, a practical theologian, a manger, a spiritual director, a shepherd, an ethnographer, and a social scientist. Additionally, the youth minister will understand issues of adolescent development and faith formation, family systems, social

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88Clark, “Practical Theology,” 33.
systems, educational theory, finance, psychology, sociology, ministry, theology, and
the Bible. Lastly, the youth minister ought to display integrity, honesty, life-experience,
justice, hospitality, agapic love, a call, servant leadership, competency, knowledge,
wisdom, organization, vision, and good communication skills.

The question that quickly comes to mind when faced with a list of this import is
“Where would one find a worthy candidate to fulfill these expectations?” The next
chapter of this project will examine the developmental realities of late
adolescents/emerging adults and their developmental fitness to fulfill a role such as this.
Jeffery Jensen Arnett, arguably the leading contemporary scholar on late adolescence/emerging adulthood offers five distinctives of the “emerging adult” in his book, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*.\(^1\) Arnett names these as;

1. The age of identity explorations – trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
2. The age of instability.
3. The most self-focused age of life.
4. The age of feeling in-between, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. The age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.\(^2\)

Although Arnett argues that this period is a distinct stage of life\(^3\) that follows adolescence (ages ten-eighteen) and concludes in the mid-twenties,\(^4\) for the purposes of this paper

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\(^2\)Ibid., 8.

\(^3\)This assertion is corroborated by other scholars including; Gene Bocknek, *The Young Adult: Development After Adolescence* (New York: Gardner Press, 1986), and Friedrich L. Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). Not all are in agreement however. For example Hans Sebald, *Adolescence: A Social Psychological Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1992). Sebald seems to see this time simply as late adolescence as well as other authors. For this reason there may be mention of *emerging adulthood, young adulthood* (Bocknek) or *late adolescence* (Sebald and Blos) in this paper. All are meant to approximate the same period of development.

30 Michael A. Kipp
emerging adult and late adolescent are being used synonymously. In spite of Arnett’s findings, it seems wise to treat his study as a detailed nuance of the lengthening of late adolescence rather than a new stage in the life cycle. Arnett contrasts this understanding of emerging adulthood (EA) with the top three criteria for adulthood, which are accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, becoming financially independent.\(^5\)

This information about emerging adulthood is salient because it intersects with three vital statistics about former youth ministers reported in Jonathan Grenz’s national study.\(^6\) Those statistics are that the majority of former youth ministers were first employed before the age of twenty-five, many by age twenty-one, the mean total time in vocational youth ministry was 7.8 years, and nearly twenty-two percent of former youth workers surveyed left their vocation in their twenties (with another almost fifty-seven percent leaving in their thirties).\(^7\)

Implicit here is that something significant seemed to occur in the former youth minister’s lives between their beginning in vocational youth ministry, in their early to mid-twenties, and exiting the vocation, in their twenties and thirties. This begs


\(^5\)Ibid., 15.

\(^6\)Grenz’s study was based on and corroborated by Kevin E. Lawson, "The Current State of the Educational Ministry Profession Part One: Perspective from the Frontlines," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 1 (1995). Lawson’s study was larger, directed toward the more broadly defined “educational ministry” and actually presented a less encouraging report. For example; the median length of time in a staff position was only three years with careers ending, on average, in 5.5-7 years. Grenz’s report was used due to its focus on “youth ministers”.

\(^7\)Grenz, "Vocational Changes," 80.
investigation for those of us interested in the academic preparation of youth ministers. These statistics stand in stark contrast to the typical enthusiasm, determination, and reported sense of calling of the incoming freshman youth ministry major in the Christian university. To think that a majority of these that graduate and become youth ministers, might not be involved in youth ministry within ten years or so of graduation is startling.\(^8\)

Does Arnett’s “emerging adulthood” have something to teach us? Are the expectations for youth ministers simply too high? Is youth ministry simply for “younger” ministers? Or is there something developmentally at odds with vocational youth ministry for the late adolescent/emerging adult? The following section will use Arnett’s five features of emerging adulthood as a framework from which to investigate the developmental compatibility of the emerging adult to the vocation of youth ministry.

**The Age of Identity Explorations**

Historically, the most prominent theorist on identity formation is Erik Erickson. He proposed that adolescents\(^9\) who do not emerge with an integrated sense of self will experience “identity confusion.”\(^10\) Two of the vital components of Erickson’s identity

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\(^8\)To be clear, Grenz’s (2002) sample included 175 current and 72 former youth ministers who were registered with the national Network of Youth Ministries which yielded a combined total of 154 usable surveys. It is hoped that further research in this area will continue.

\(^9\)Given that the first point of Arnett’s five characteristics of the emerging adult involves identity formation seems to further support that this is indeed simply a highly specialized study of the late adolescent over an actual new stage in the life cycle.

formation theory are personality and role experimentation. In some ways these function as different suits of clothes one might try on. This is precisely why some adolescents can seem so different in personality from day to day. It is not simply due to the various physiological changes that are taking place, but perhaps due to an intentional shifting through the myriad personalities and roles they are trying until they find the one(s) that “fit.” The one that is chosen leads to a “stable sense of self.”

Arnett challenges the discrete nature of Erickson’s theory and the idea that identity issues are settled during adolescence. Although he agrees that the identity formation process begins in adolescence, he also affirms that “most identity exploration takes place in emerging adulthood rather than adolescence.” This is perhaps in part a result of lengthened adolescence and what Sebald describes as “teenagerism.” Sebald suggests that this adolescent period that can “stretch into the twenties” is counter to what many “traditionalists” might see as the purpose of the moratorium of adolescence, which is to prepare for adulthood. Instead, adolescents “behave as though they have arrived” and “continually postpone experimenting in the “world of jobs and professions.”

Author Jean Twenge, in her book *Generation Me*, quotes twenty-nine-

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12 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 375.
16 Ibid., 376.
year-old actor and screenwriter Zach Braff, “In the past, people got married and got a job and had kids, but now there’s a new ten year period that people are using to try and find out what kind of life they want to lead.”

Arnett argues that the world of work provides an ideal setting for the EA to “try and find out” just what that life might be like. Arnett proposes that what might appear as an undirected wandering from job to job is actually an intentional exploration of opportunities categorically different from the sort of searching that was done as an adolescent. Twenge says it like this, “Many young people don’t want to commit to a career and stay with it because they’d like to find exactly the right job for them.” This would seem to encourage a “shopping around” attitude when it comes to employment. Arnett comments on the “high expectations” EA’s have for work. They want a job that will be an expression of their “identity,” make them a “better person,” and “do some good for others.” It is not easy to find a job like that, and, for established adults who enjoy their work, it probably meant some job changes along the way. Twenge goes on to write that for this generation of young Americans the twenties are a time to “move around, try different things, and date different people.” Perhaps this moving around is the best recipe to find the work that fits. The question that quickly comes to the surface in this discussion is, “Who wants a youth minister who might be shopping around?”

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18 Ibid., 98 (emphasis mine).

19 Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 143.

20 Twenge, *Generation Me*, 97.
Hamilton and Hamilton’s study challenges this notion however. In fact, they argue that it is difficult to determine if these young workers are searching for the right vocation or simply floundering.\(^{21}\) They found that workers in their twenties are concentrated in low-wage, low-skill positions, and that they frequently change jobs.\(^{22}\) Some researchers saw these frequent changes as positive and intentional while others interpreted them just as part of a survival. The wider body of research seems to be mixed on exactly what is taking place in these situations. Hamilton and Hamilton suggest that both are likely taking place with some emerging adults searching while others are simply floundering. The challenge here lies in distinguishing between the two. Additionally challenging is creating the needed social capital to assist in a meaningful search for the emerging adult youth minister within the context of the Christian community.

Tim\(^{23}\) a former student comes to mind. Tim is in his early twenties, a fifth-year youth ministry major who recently turned down a valuable youth ministry opportunity in a solid local church where he had been working for the past three years. Instead of completing his formal internship (required for graduation) in this way while being compensated relatively well (small salary, housing, expense account, health insurance, and even retirement) he decided that he was not “called” to local church youth ministry and agreed to find another venue in which to complete his internship requirement. Why


\(^{22}\)Ibid.

\(^{23}\)Not his real name.
would he do such a thing potentially delaying graduation and turning down a chance to learn from an established youth minister? There was no obvious reason for Tim to move; his relationship with students, parents, and other church staff was good. Is Tim searching or floundering? It seems only God knows.

The Age of Instability

Arnett’s second characteristic of emerging adulthood is instability. This is a direct result of the identity explorations mentioned above. He illustrates this through the number of moves of physical residence a person makes. Arnett writes that rates of moving “spike upward beginning at age eighteen, reach their peak in the mid-twenties, and then sharply decline.” He goes on to state that of all the moves of the EA, one will typically be home with their parents for nearly fifty percent of the time. Instability is meant as a descriptor of the transitory nature of the life of an EA brought about due to the exploratory nature of the age.

Tanya graduated over a year ago with a degree in youth ministry from the university in which I teach. She is a bright, attractive, intelligent young woman. The first year she was out of college she decided she did not want to take a full-time ministry position, but would rather put herself into an intentional situation of mentoring with an

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24Given that this “instability” flows directly from the exploratory nature of this period, is this an actual discrete characteristic or just a consequence of the first attribute?

25Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 11.

26Ibid.

27Not her real name.
experienced youth minister while working part-time. She found an excellent situation with a seasoned and thoughtful youth minister who took her on as an apprentice in ministry. Although she enjoyed their relationship and being involved in ministry at that church, she decided it was not a good “fit” after a couple of months, and stopped attending there and any church regularly after that. She held down three part-time jobs to survive and felt generally “lost” as to what was next for her. Next summer she is plans on going to Taiwan to teach English for one year. When she returns she has no idea what she will do or where she will live.

Bocknek describes this behavior and it’s typically resulting “impulsivity and activism” as a “world consciousness” of the EA. Bocknek ascribes this behavior to the greater cognitive ability that comes as a result of the journey of earlier adolescence. The results of this new consciousness and the ensuring actions can be that the EA’s “behavior may seem almost identical to that of the adolescence.”

Schweitzer comments that it is at this stage of life when many “post-adolescents” drop out of the Church as the vignette of Tanya demonstrates. Two suggestions offered by Schweitzer for such change in the once faithful church attendee are the predictable: lack of openness to the “critical thinker” in some congregations, and the condemnation of

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28Bocknek, The Young Adult, 107-8.

29Ibid., 109.

30Schweitzer, The Postmodern Life Cycle, 65 (“Post-adolescent” is used extensively by this author but it not particularly helpful in actually describing what is actually taking place here. In fact, this paper does not support the notion that this person has finished that adolescent journey. It is for this reason that EA is a better choice.)
“experimental lifestyles” in many churches. Given the developmental realities and greater “consciousness” of the EA, Schweitzer argues that these issues must be engaged directly by adults to reverse the wide spread absence of EA’s in the Church. Perhaps these realities influence the once determined youth ministry graduate to rethink his/her vocational choice.

Whether Tanya left because she truly wanted to make a difference in the world or because she was not intellectually challenged is not clear. Regardless of the reasons for Tanya’s quick change of plans it seems clear that although very capable for the job, she was not ready to settle down into a situation of regular accountability, training, and ministry. This obviously presents a deficiency in her ability to fulfill her vocational calling as it does in the lives of other EAs.

What is of concern here for both Tanya and Tim is the lack of what J. S. Clausen describes as “planful competence,” essentially understood as being on a pathway toward a particular vocational goal. This is a vital part of finding a satisfying career choice according to numerous studies and corroborated in Hamilton and Hamilton’s work. Blos provides insight here in writing about the successful person’s move from late adolescence into adulthood. He suggests that the necessary phenomenological criteria

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33 Hamilton and Hamilton, "Emerging Adults in America," 273.

in-route to adulthood include “the emergence of a life plan, a life style, and a purposive striving toward reasonably attainable goals.” The point here is that Tanya and Tim are simply on their way to adulthood – they are not yet there. Whether the two EA’s are deliberately searching or floundering at this moment simply points to their struggle to develop these pathways and are, hopefully, these are steps in the development that Blos typifies as EA “experimentation.”

The Most Self-focused Age of Life

Mark was enamored with his new found freedom. During his first year of college he attended a community college not far from his home. Throughout that year he continued to live with his parents and work the same part time job he had during high school. Not much had changed from his senior year of high school.

This year however, Mark attended a four-year university five-hundred miles away from his family, and lived off campus. He relished that he could do anything he wanted. The only rules that existed were self-imposed. Although he loved and respected his parents, he was also very fond of late night gatherings at his apartment, discussing Nietzsche’s philosophy with his classmates, and German beer. Even better were the nights that these three intersected. None of these things would have met with his parents’ approvals who were extremely conservative people. However, Mark felt it was his

35 Blos, The Adolescent Passage, 410-1.


37 Not his real name.
“responsibility” to push his traditional boundaries a bit so that he could “grow up.”
After all, his parents had raised him in a sheltered environment and he mused, “Isn’t this college life is all about?”

In a similar vein, author Jean Twenge quotes two EA’s that make the following comments about marriage and their future: Marcus Jones, aged twenty-eight, says, “I’m too self involved. I don’t want to bring that into a relationship now,” and twenty-five year old Adam Levine states, “I’m all about getting married in my thirties, but right now I’m enjoying my selfish twenties!”

Arnett’s characterization of EA as “self-focused” is not to be equated as selfishness per se. Instead this time of being without the restraints of parents, siblings, mandatory schooling, and, generally speaking, “other” imposed regulations, enables the EA to make his or her own decisions, many for the first time. These decisions quickly become ubiquitous; What’s for dinner? What job will I take? Who will I date now? Move? Go to church? etc. Arnett argues that this period of self-focus gives way to “self-sufficiency” which many view as a necessary step toward being prepared for adult relationships.

Sharon Parks writes about this maturation in one’s relational ability in terms of “dependence.” Parks characterizes this idea of dependence as “affirming the relational

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38Twenge, *Generation Me*, 98.


40Ibid., 14.

41Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 73.
dimension of all life” and that we are all “interconnected” as living creatures. This comes as a welcome corrective to the all-pervasive myth of complete individual independence that seems to permeate the DNA of persons living in the United States. She differentiates the dependence of early and middle adolescents as “dependent/counter dependent” and that of the EA as exhibiting “fragile inner-dependence.” Clark is helpful here as he writes that, “Adolescence is a fifteen-year psychosocial journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance . . . no matter where adolescents are . . . they remain squarely situated between reliance on and connection with their family . . . and community.”

The adolescent in the place of “dependence” relies solely upon figures of authority to know what is right and true. For this person the “leader” (whoever it may be for them political leader, pastor, parent, celebrity etc.), is the trusted mediator of truth. The “counter dependent” adolescent, has come to the place to test this truth for himself or herself. It is this move in “opposition to authority” that can be a signal of growth and maturity in “expansion of self into the still unknown horizon.” Although it might be expressed as “rebelliousness” it can be an important marker of growth.

42 Daloz Parks, Big Questions, Worthy Dreams, 77.

43 Ibid., 74.


45 Parks, Big Questions, Worthy Dreams, 75.
Parks describes the “fragile inner-dependence” of the EA as, “a new consciousness of the authority of the self in the composing of truth and choice.” This is the first of a two-part movement, according to Parks, of a “correspondence between inner and outer realities” in which the person begins to assume a more discerning approach to determining what truth is. This is seen as moving from the early adolescent phase of trust in an assumed authority “out there” to dependence, as an EA, upon an assumed authority still out there but now of the EA’s choosing. This is due to the congruency with their personal observations and lived experience. The necessary exercise of these growing abilities and self-trust contribute to this time of self-focus.

Perhaps contributing to the need for this self-focused period is what Lindholm portrays as the generally, “little attention paid in today’s secular colleges and universities to facilitating student development in the inner realm of self-understanding.” Instead, she found in her study that college and university environments were simply facilitators of the wider societal ethos of “individual achievement, competitiveness, materialism, and objective knowing.” Could it be that the “moratorium” once created by a four-year college education is simply no longer a reality? Instead, due to the reported “pressure

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46Daloz Parks, Big Questions, Worthy Dreams, 78.
47Ibid.
48Ibid., 80.
50Ibid., 78.
and stress” that seems intrinsic to this educational system, the necessary time and space to explore one’s inner dimension is not provided. Rather this system further delays this exploration, thus creating a need to turn “inward” later in one’s life, the obvious result is a lengthened adolescent period due to the lack of inner integration that has taken place. Arnett argues that this is not necessarily the case. As long as the college experience is taken advantage of and the EA does not get hung up in the “collegiate” subculture centered on, “fraternities, sororities, dating, drinking, big sports events, and campus fun,” college can be an emerging adult environment par excellence. However, it would seem to be the a-typical university student that Arnett references here. For what late adolescent does not get “hung up” in the college subculture at least for a time?

Blos explains this characteristic of self-focus as simply a time of “integration” of the various tasks of adolescence and that it serves a “bridging function” to adulthood. It is here that the “energetic system which tends to reach higher levels of differentiation” finally begins to settle into a pattern. This pattern, then, is part of what it means to

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51 Although Lindholm’s survey claims a “diverse” sample and significant size (3,700) she does not report if any Christian colleges were included. So questions remain in this inquiry. For example, “How might the student at a Christian college be different?” and, “Is the focus on Christian college campuses more conducive to this inner self understanding?” Although beyond the scope of this paper these remain vital questions to answer.

52 Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 140.

53 Lindholm’s 2006 report of 3,700 undergrad students from 46 colleges and universities alleges that by the third year of college only 19 percent of respondents abstain from wine or liquor while 74 percent do that are highly involved in religious activities (93). If Arnett were talking about “highly religious” college students he might have more data to back up his claim that the college environment was one “par excellence” for the EA.

54 Blos, On Adolescence, 158.

55 Ibid.
exhibit the consistency that is generally expected of the adult but has not yet taken hold in the late adolescent/emerging adult.

For the hopeful EA youth minister, it would seem that this period of “self-focus” would be at odds with their role. It is necessary for the youth minister to not only exhibit a strong inner life that is matched with an “outer” integrity but also to have come to a place of interdependence within the community of faith. It would seem that although these processes are underway they have not yet “settled” and would likely contribute to unnecessary struggle for the EA youth minister as well as the church in which they serve.

The Age of Feeling In-between

For the traditional college senior or recent graduate, the termination of a continuous seventeen to eighteen years of education can be quite disorienting. One such female student vocalized her feelings like this “Most of the time, I’m questioning myself like, ‘What’s the point of life?’ or ‘What is my mission in life?’ I’ve been raised that everybody has a mission in life. But most of the time, (I’m) like, ‘What is my mission?’” For nearly the past two decades her “mission” has been school, for many EA’s the question then becomes, “Now what?”

Arnett explains this period of feeling in-between is compounded, for the EA, by being free of the restraints of earlier adolescence (previously mentioned) and yet without

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the responsibilities of adulthood – marriage, parenthood, and career.\textsuperscript{57} It is a time of seeking to determine what their “mission” in life is.

Blos declares the transition between adolescence and adulthood to be an “intervening phase” where the EA “lacks harmony” in terms of their overall integration of the developmental tasks achieved earlier in adolescence.\textsuperscript{58} Their role at this point is to achieve assimilation of these successfully accomplished tasks into a meaningful unity. This unification would signal the developmental achievement of early adulthood. From Blos’ portrayal of the EA it is easy to understand how one might have feelings of being “in-between.”

When asked if they have reached “adulthood” the EA response is mixed. “About sixty percent of emerging adults, aged eighteen to twenty-five, report this ‘yes and no’ feeling in response to the question, ‘Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?’”\textsuperscript{59} Twenge’s research seems to confirm this sentiment. She reports that a large percentage of “GenMe” (persons born from 1970-90s) believe “adulthood” begins at “30” years of age.\textsuperscript{60} Given that for persons living in the United States, at age thirty, seventy-five percent are married and have one child or more, this seems like a reasonable opinion.\textsuperscript{61} Even the personologist Daniel Levinson places special significance on age thirty “as a

\textsuperscript{57}Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 14.

\textsuperscript{58}Blos, On Adolescence, 149.

\textsuperscript{59}Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 14.

\textsuperscript{60}Twenge, Generation Me, 97.

\textsuperscript{61}Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 12.
critical point” toward the next stage of “settling down.”\textsuperscript{62} So the EA seems to be officially “in-between.” This status can be wonderfully liberating and also quite disillusioning simultaneously. In fact Rappaport asserts “disillusionment to be endemic” of these years.\textsuperscript{63}

Perry’s research on the intellectual and cognitive development of college-age persons might help reveal some of the other developmental issues contributing to this state of feeling “in-between.” He found three major stages evident in the thinking process for college students. The stages are “dualism, relativism, and commitment.”\textsuperscript{64} In “dualism” the EA’s thinking is dichotomous and exhibits a strong link to the “rightness” of “us” and the “wrongness” of “others.” This is expressed in common terms of thinking that is “black and white” (perhaps more akin to the middle adolescent). The “relativistic” thinking EA “acknowledges degrees of correctness” and that more than a single opinion can be valid and “right.”\textsuperscript{65} This level is likely facilitated by the multifaceted views and opinions that are typical of general education requirements. The EA that has reached “commitment” makes a “conscious act or realization of identity and responsibility” that includes an understanding that “authority, in a pluralistic world, has no special access to

\textsuperscript{62}Daniel Levinson and others, The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York Knopf, 1978), as quoted in Bocknek, 92.

\textsuperscript{63}L. Rappaport, Personality Development (Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1972), as quoted in Bocknek, 94.

\textsuperscript{64}W. Perry, Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College years (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970). as found in Bocknek, 97.

\textsuperscript{65}Bocknek, The Young Adult, 97.
rightness.”66 A person reaching this level understands his or her own role and value in determining the worth they place upon the opinions of others.

Given that Perry acknowledges that “commitment-level” thinking typically does not occur until years after graduation from college, it would seem that the vast majority of third and fourth year college EA, as well as many post-college would exhibit “relativistic” thinking. This would seem to contribute to the “in-between” feeling that Arnett asserts is part and parcel of being in the late teens to mid-twenties. Without the grounding and centeredness that would undoubtedly accompany commitment-level thinking, it is easy to understand how a relativistic thinker could feel “in-between.” When all paths are equally valid it is difficult to determine which might be the right one for one’s self.

Tina67 graduated this past spring with a liberal arts degree with an emphasis in graphic arts. Although very capable and possessing a deep inner composure, Tina lives with her parents and does not know what she will do next. She is drawn to the larger cities of the Northwestern United States. She has been offered some significant positions by various organizations which are attractive to her but also “scary.” She is afraid she might pick the “wrong one.” She seems to enjoy both talking with and about work in the “adult world” while going home each night and sleeping in the bed, in the home, of her adolescence.

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66 Bocknek, The Young Adult, 97.
67 Not her real name.
Tina was initially very passionate about becoming a youth minister. However it seemed that as she moved to more mature stages of thinking, she allowed herself to consider other possibilities. It was fortunate this occurred prior to moving into a youth ministry position. Had it occurred later when Tina was working in a church, the fall-out for Tina, the youth group, and the church would have been much more thorny.

The Age of Possibilities

Alejandro\textsuperscript{68} was one of those students that was easy to like. He was smart, handsome, had a great sense of humor, exhibited respect, and loved playing baseball at the university level. Toward the end of his senior year I spoke with him about what was next for him. Although not a stand-out player, he commented with a large smile “I hope to be able to continue in baseball.” I inquired further to what that meant – had he been recruited by a professional scout? Was he going to try-out for a local minor league team? Neither had occurred. He just “hoped” something might work out.

Twenge comments that “the length of time GenMe has to pursue dreams” has become much longer than previous generations.\textsuperscript{69} She goes on to write “Many twenty-something’s struggle with the decision to keep pursuing their dream, or to cut their losses and go home. More and more young people are going to find themselves at thirty without a viable career, a house, or any semblance of stability.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68}Not his real name.

\textsuperscript{69}Twenge, Generation Me, 83.

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid.
Arnett contends this is the age of possibilities because of the unique nature of the EA life commitments. Again, being free from all that came before in terms of parental and structural constraints and yet still without the responsibilities normally associated with adulthood – spouse, family, career – the EA believes that “the fulfillment of all their hopes seems possible.”71 This situation is created by the wide range of choices that lie before the EA. That range Arnett asserts is “greater than it has ever been and greater than it will ever be again.”72

Bocknek suggests two distinctives, of the young adult, that seem to play into this age of possibilities. They are the; sens de pouvoir and the idealistic nature of this period.73 The “sens de pouvoir,” according to Bocknek, is a combination of a feeling of “strength and vigor” and even of “invulnerability” as though immune to failure or injury. He attributes these feelings to the mature physical “coherence” of EA’s as well as society’s implicit, although at times ambivalent, acceptance of the EA into the “club” as fully franchised members (at least those age twenty-one and older). It essentially leads the EA to a place of feeling that they can, ultimately, accomplish whatever it is they set out to and that they are developmentally “capable.”74 Bocknek writes “Whatever feelings of dismay one may have are largely overshadowed by a sense of excitement and

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71 Arnett, Emerging Adulthood, 16.
72 Ibid., 17.
73 Bocknek, The Young Adult, 106-113.
74 Ibid., 106-7.
readiness to encounter what lies ahead." This leads us to the idealistic nature of this time period.

Bocknek describes this idealism as “outrageous” and ascribes three characteristics of it “1) a commitment to humanitarian causes, 2) the impetus to act, 3) the courage or confidence to dare to believe that some of these beliefs can actually be brought to fruition.” He cites several historical accounts from the great power failure in the northeastern United States in November of 1968, and the young adults who intervened to keep traffic flowing and people from panicking, to the storm troopers of Adolph Hitler’s rise to power in the Third Reich, made up of mostly young people, to illustrate these observations and their “universal” nature.

Blos discusses this time as period of “consolidation of these essential constituent components of mental life which need to be integrated into a functioning whole.” This period follows the earlier adolescence phase when “integrative processes dominate.” It would seem that as this task of “consolidation” begins to take shape it would contribute to the person’s sense of well-being even providing a sense of “arrival” in terms of integrative accomplishment. In other words, from a developmental perspective, they “feel” much more “together” than they have since the onset of puberty. Blos would not grant that the “ego-integrative process” is quickly completed. In fact, he plainly states

75 Bocknek, The Young Adult, 107.
76 Ibid., 114.
77 Blos, On Adolescence, 149.
78 Ibid.
that it continues for some time beyond adolescence, but that a qualitatively new level of integration and “wholeness” is reached in EA that would seemingly contribute to a person feeling more prepared than ever to “take on the world.”

This may be the one truly positive characteristic of this period for the youth minister. Having a sense of personal power and even idealism is a part of what every good youth minister must possess in order to impart these same characteristics to young people. Further, a youth minister that lacks a spirit of coherence and ability to accomplish what they set out to do is destined for struggle. Thus these distinctives of the EA will be valuable. At the same time, without the proper planning and organization, which according to Arnett are inherent blind spots during this period, the youth minister will likely not have long term success.

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CHAPTER 3
SYNERGY OR SELF DESTRUCTION: HOW THE COMPETENCIES AND DEVELOPMENTAL REALITIES INTERRELATE

As we refocus this discussion to the interaction between the proper competencies and preparation for youth ministers, and the developmental fitness of emerging adults as youth ministers, where do we find ourselves?

If we take as “given” the aforementioned developmental realities of the emerging adult, combined with the “renaissance” expectations of the incarnational-relational, spiritually grounded, practical theologian youth minister, it would seem that emerging adults, on the whole, exhibit developmental incongruence to fulfill these expectations.

This is in no way a condemnation of all EA as youth ministers; there are always individual exceptions. This is simply a general finding based on the research. But, it would seem a safe assertion that most parents, churches, and even adolescents themselves would rather not be a part of the “trial and exploration”\(^1\) of an emerging adult youth minister on his/her path to the best vocational “fit”.

So, given this realization along with the reality of the relatively large numbers of emerging adults studying youth ministry in Christian universities, what are some potential solutions? How can we properly direct them in their ministerial preparation?

The next part of this project will suggest possible solutions that address the

\(^1\)Bocknek, *The Young Adult*, 175.
developmental realities of the emerging adult while keeping in mind the necessary preparation and competencies of the youth minister. However this will be done more in way of an overview for these topics will be explored thoroughly in Part Three. To begin this task the five realities of the EA will be briefly revisited.

Revisiting the Five Realities

Although written specifically about American college students in a national study, Lindholm’s words seem fitting as a summary for the phase of life discussed here as emerging adulthood. Lindholm writes:

What am I going to do with my life?”. . . “What kind of person do I want to be?” “How is everything I’ve worked for up to this point going to contribute back to society?” . . . These were (among) the life questions noted most frequently by undergraduate students . . . for traditional-age college students, the undergraduate years are commonly characterized as an intensive period of cognitive, social, and affective development. As they refine their identities, formulate adult life goals and career paths, test their emerging sense of self-authority and interdependence, and make decisions that will significantly impact their own and others’ lives . . .

In the last chapter, Arnett’s five point description of emerging adulthood was used as a framework to explore the unique psychosocial and developmental issues in discussion with the process of vocational youth ministry preparedness. Those five points along with a short summary of the foregoing discussion are as follows;

The age of identity explorations – trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work. It was discovered that is it developmentally typical for the emerging adult to exhibit a “shopping around” attitude with regard to work – often changing jobs several times.

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2Lindholm, "Interior Lives of American College Students," 75.
times in a search for the “perfect job” – defined as “expressing their unique identity, helping make them a better person, and doing some good for others.” This behavior is sometimes described as “floundering” although Arnett claims it is an “intentional” search and exploration of their identity. Nevertheless, once hired, it is uncommon for an emerging adult to “stay put” in a particular job for more than a year or two.

The age of instability is the second characteristic. The primary expression of this was a relative high number of moves per year. The main contributor to this phenomenon is the exploratory nature of emerging adulthood. Although not previously stated, another way to express “instability” would seem to be “restlessness” or even “discontent.”

The most self-focused age of life. Not selfishness per se but rather a direct result of the freedom accompanying emerging adulthood and the requisite self-determination of this period. Emerging adults often exhibit, in the words of Sharon Parks, a “fragile inner-dependence” that expresses a growing self trust, but not one fully developed.

The age of feeling in-between where one is neither adolescent nor adult. When asked, most emerging adults see the age of 30 as the marker for adulthood. This is corroborated by other surveys as well as scholars like personologist Daniel Levinson. Relativistic thinking also contributes to this feeling where all choices and paths appear to be equally valid.

The age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, and when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. This distinctive is contributed to by the wide range of choices before the EA, “more than ever before or that ever will be again.” This is a time that EA can pursue their dreams, and many do throughout their third
decade of life. Arnett contrasts this understanding of emerging adulthood with the top three criteria of full adulthood, which are:

1. Accepting responsibility for one’s self.
2. Making independent decisions.
3. Becoming financially independent.\(^3\)

Next three important “scaffolding” resources will be introduced and offered as possible means to buttress the EA youth minister in their given developmental state. In other words these three aspects of “social capital”; continuing education, the mentoring community, and accountability are suggested together as a way forward for the college graduate to negotiate the first years of vocation youth ministry. These first several years being potentially the most difficult, the EA will draw particularly upon these resources for wisdom, strength, guidance and support. However these resources would seem to be vital in the life of any minister who desires to last in vocational ministry.

**Continuing Education**

A number of developmental issues presented by emerging adulthood, along with the many “requirements” of the youth minister, could be addressed with a required seminary education for all youth ministers. The normal duration of earning a Master’s of Divinity degree is approximately three to four years. This would take a twenty-two-year-old college graduate to the outer limit of Arnett’s eighteen to twenty-five years age band of emerging adulthood. Seminary training would also contribute the added value of

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\(^3\) Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 15.
significant theological grounding and personal spiritual formation that was called for by many scholars in the literature review above.

In *Youth Ministry That Transforms*, Strommen, Jones, and Rahn report that there are “astounding differences between groups of youth ministers when it comes to achieving . . . professional ministry goals . . .” The authors report that there is a marked difference between youth ministers who are seminary trained and those who are not, with those that are seminary trained faring generally much better in accomplishing ministry goals.

This ought not to be surprising based upon the foregoing discussion about emerging adulthood. An additional three to four years of life experience and time for exploration (not to mention the spiritual formation, theological grounding, and additional youth ministry experience that ought to come from a seminary education) would seem to do much for the typical, twenty-two-year-old college graduate planning to fulfill one’s call in vocational youth ministry. Additionally, a seminary education could help to instill an appreciation for life-long learning that is vital for the minister in the twenty-first century.

Although a mandatory seminary education seems like the best case scenario for the preparation of the EA youth minister, it may not be realistic in all cases. Therefore

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5Ibid., 23.

6Strommen et. al., *Youth Ministry That Transforms*, 238-246.
the next best approach could be that of the apprenticeship model. Simply defined, an
apprentice is “a person who works for another in order to learn a trade; a learner or
novice.” Implicit here is the knowledge, experience, and skill of the mentor with whom
the apprentice seeks to work. This type of model would seek to pair the EA wanting to
explore vocational youth ministry with “journeyman” youth ministers. Masten,
Obradovic, and Burt advocate the apprenticeship model (among others) as providing the
necessary “scaffolding” and “conjunctions” of the proper social resources in order to help
the young person transition to adulthood. Arnett summarizes studies by Hamilton and
Hamilton that also advocate, “work-based learning, including active mentoring” in order
to enable the EA to “experience” various vocations without taking on the full
responsibility of any particular role. The benefit of an apprenticeship for the EA is the
structured nature of “trying out” the role that an apprenticeship would allow. The
apprentice would be “protected” by their mentor from having all of the responsibility of
the youth ministry. This would allow the EA to continue to process developmentally
while furthering their level of in-depth experience in vocational youth work. The
timeline of the apprenticeship would vary, but a three to four year timeline could be a
good guideline to consider. This time period would allow the traditional twenty-two-

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8Ann S. Masten, Jelena Obradovic, and Keith B. Burt, "Resilience in Emerging Adulthood:
Developmental Perspectives on Continuity and Transformation," in Emerging Adults in America: Coming of
Age in the 21st Century, ed. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner (Washington, DC: America
Psychological Association, 2006).
9Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, eds., Emerging Adults in America: Coming of
year-old college graduate to reach the later twenties and thus toward the end of late adolescence.

An important addition to the apprenticeship would be the provision of resources, to continue one’s education. In comparing professional clergy with other professions (medicine or law) Gaylord Noyce proposes “Clergy competence is a matter more wide-ranging, but it entails the same kind of alertness to opportunities for continuing study and learning.”\textsuperscript{10} Given the necessity for continued education for clergy it would seem wise to model that in the apprenticeship.

\textbf{Relational Grounding: Introducing the Mentoring Community}

Parks writes that the mentoring community “is a network of belonging that constitutes a spacious home for the potential and vulnerability of the young adult imagination in practical, tangible terms.”\textsuperscript{11} This mentoring community serves as a relational “ground” for the EA. Too often, ministers experience a deep disconnection from persons even though they are with them every day. This is a great and unnecessary irony of ministry. Parks goes on to describe the essential character of the mentoring community “it is a combination of the emerging developmental stance of the young adult with the challenge and encouragement of the mentor, grounded in the experience of a

\textsuperscript{10}Noyce, Pastoral Ethics, 193.

\textsuperscript{11}Parks, Big Questions, Worthy Dreams, 135.
compatible social group that ignites the transforming power of the young adult era . . . this sense of having a viable network of belonging is key.”\(^\text{12}\)

A mentor, writes Walter C. Wright writes in *Mentoring*, is one who can “guide personal development by formulating questions that trigger responsive thought, that bring light of experience to the discussion and that encourage breadth rather than narrow focus.”\(^\text{13}\) Wright goes on to suggest that a mentor also has the opportunity to “move the interaction beyond job or career into family matters, other areas of service, or areas of study not connected to career.”\(^\text{14}\) This crossing of boundaries from professional matters into personal ones helps to create a much more robust “ecology of development” within the mentoring community and works against the typical compartmentalization of roles and subjects that often can accompany world views in the 21\(^{\text{st}}\) century.

An important group often overlooked in terms of mentoring is one’s peer group. Park’s takes this into account and specifically lists the “social group” in her description of the mentoring community. “Peer co-mentoring” is described in Stanley and Clinton’s book *Connecting*. They write that this kind of mentoring relationship is “the most available but the least developed.”\(^\text{15}\) Stanley and Clinton go on to define peers as “at the same stage of life – in development, age and situational pressures – and face many of the

\[^{12}\text{Ibid., 93.}\]

\[^{13}\text{Walter C. Wright, *Mentoring: The Promise of Relational Leadership* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2006), xi-xii.}\]

\[^{14}\text{Wright, *Mentoring*, xii.}\]

same decisions and challenges. These shared realities allow for a natural flow of conversation and a sense of being understood and accepted.”

The two-pronged approach (mentor and network of peers) of the mentoring community can be just what the EA requires to meaningfully explore the vocation of youth ministry while remaining relationally connected and “safe.” The “grounding” that would come through this sort of community connection would offer “stability” in the characteristic unstable period of the EA as well as a venue to test out one’s dreams among a trusted community in this “age of possibilities.”

**Accountability**

A final necessary ingredient in engaging an EA as youth minister is that of accountability. Structured accountability would help to reign in some of the “self focus” and “instability” that is characteristic of this period. Further it would seem to bring some important realism to the many “possibilities” and choices that can become paralyzing for the EA.

Of the many contributions of John Wesley, the eighteenth century evangelist, reformer and theologian, the structures of personal formation and accountability of his “societies” and “bands” are remarkable. The significance that Wesley placed upon all believers following the methods employed by these groups earned him and his followers the name “Methodists.” Among the questions that were to be addressed in the weekly

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16Ibid., 170.

meeting of the band were “What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?” and “What temptations have you met with?” Whether or not these specific questions are asked given the developmental realities, it is vital for accountability to be a part of the EA youth minister’s week.

“The ministry is one of the less structured of the professions” writes Gaylord Noyce. Thomas Oden suggests that “caring for souls” is fraught with difficulty due to “its highly nuanced, problematic character, its need for wisdom in crucial situations. . . Traditional pastoral wisdom has answered: Nobody can do it or should try to do it alone.” He goes on to state that “ineptitude in managing time” is probably among the most common associated with clergy. Perhaps for these reasons Noyce states that it is of utmost importance for ministers “to build a rhythm that integrates [their] lives through work and [their] leisure, through attending to both professional service and personal wholeness.” A weekly meeting to assess the direction and trajectory of the EA youth minister would serve to ensure a “rhythm” of their work and leisure was being found.

The source and structure for this accountability ought to come through a variety of places. The leadership of the local church, the denomination (if applicable) and the youth minister’s own personal network of accountability could be some of the sources.

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18 Ibid., 181.
19 Noyce, Pastoral Ethics, 188.
21 Noyce, Pastoral Ethics, 188.
22 Ibid., 189.
For example, the mentoring community suggested by Parks might be one such expression of this structure. More explicitly, the “mentor(s)” that Parks discusses within this community could be a primary player(s) in this accountability. This mentor is expected, according to Parks, to both “challenge” and “support.” Although this can become a complicated “two-step” it is this vital combination and provides needed “guardrails” for the EA as they explore their vocational aspirations.
CHAPTER 7
NECESSARY INPUT: CONTINUING EDUCATION

Given the considerable education required for successful youth ministry as seen in Part One’s literature review, this chapter will explicate a strategy of continuing education for the late adolescent youth minister. The “ideal” outlined below is the completion of a fully online and accredited Master of Divinity degree. However, the philosophy of this program as well as its core curriculum will be applicable whether or not the youth minister is degree seeking. The objective of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of both the explicit and implicit curricula to address the vast and varied knowledge base for the successful youth minister.

Explicit Curriculum: Program Design

As previously stated the ideal situation for every youth minister is to attain a Master’s of Divinity degree. Preferably this would happen prior to assuming primary responsibility as the youth minister in a local church or other ministry setting. However well intentioned this “ideal” is, it is not likely going to be followed in every case. In fact, based upon the patterns of recent graduates of Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, ID), it is common for youth ministry students to assume full-time responsibility upon graduation. This situation is potentially quite challenging for both the minister and the
church. However, when coupled with the reality of a growing reluctance of students to enter seminary and incur the debt that entails combined the need for continued education of youth ministers, it is even more difficult. As if these challenges were not enough, the growing critique of contemporary graduate theological education as not properly serving the Church (by those such as John H. Leith\(^1\)), has led to what is humbly offered here as one potential solution to these issues.

This prospective solution is an accredited and fully online Master of Divinity (MDiv) program with an emphasis in Youth, Church, and Culture (YCC) proposed to be offered through Northwest Nazarene University (NNU). NNU is uniquely positioned to offer this program because of its successful five year history of offering regionally accredited, fully online, Master’s degrees (www.nnu.edu/online). This MDiv program could be accomplished in about the same time frame as a traditional residential program. The four year program would consist of seventy-five semester credits. Those courses would be completed one at a time over a period of eight weeks. There would be a one week break between courses and students would have traditional breaks off such as that over Christmas as well the months of June - August.

There has been considerable growth in online programs in recent years. Robinson and Hullinger in a *Journal of Education for Business* article assert, “There is no change in higher education more sweeping than the transformation brought about by the advent of

\(^1\)John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997).
the Internet and Web.” Later they also claim that “developments in online learning are not ‘just a fad’ but ‘a sea of change.’” Mark Heinemann writes specifically about online theological education and asserts that “with the increase in the population of potential students trying to balance work, home, and school, it is hard to imagine that the number of men and women seeking this kind of theological education at a distance will wane.”

Heinemann goes on to urge theological educators to look seriously at this promising method of delivery “it is surely time for those engaged in equipping men and women for ministry to read and heed the reports of colleagues about the high-quality theological education being received over the Internet, even without a face to-face component.”

What fosters “high quality” in the online learning environment is interaction. “In the executive summary of her major review of online learning literature, Meyer writes: ‘Quality learning is largely the result of ample interaction with the faculty, other students, and content.’” In quantitative study encompassing nine ATS accredited seminaries and their students’ experiences of online learning, researcher Mark H. Heinemann found that “interaction with instructors, other students, and content” to be among the most important

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5Ibid.: 201.

6K.A. Meyer, *Quality in Distance Education: Focus on On-Line Learning* (San Francisco, 2002). (as found in Heinemann).
factors influencing both cognitive and affective learning. Further, Heinemann reports that the environment of the online learner is also a vital contributor to their learning. This environment is significantly influenced by both the online and on-ground sense of “community” of the student’s life and ATS surveys have confirmed this. The concepts of both a mentoring environment and loving accountability (to be covered in subsequent chapters) seem to be not only important for faithful action but also faithful learning.

The MDiv in YCC would be designed on a cohort or learning community approach of twelve to eighteen students. This group of students would journey through the entire program together. This is an important part of the philosophy on which this program is built. What is being proposed here is not a correspondence course system delivered online, but a true learning community that would be built. This structure would allow long term relationships and dialogue to be established among peers. The heart of online learning is the community that is established through this cohort approach.

High expectations of both students and faculty would be necessary in order to ensure the optimum learning environment. It is for this reason that the MDiv program proposed here would call for high expectations of both students and faculty. Some of those expectations for students would be as follows:

• Students are expected to log on and respond to notes five out of seven days. This attendance requirement is critical for group participation and community learning.
• The online learning ecology supports collaborative and community learning. Competition is discouraged since we are all working toward the same goals in a learning community.

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7Heinemann, “Teacher-Student Interaction,” 197.
8Ibid., 198.
Since online classes are only eight weeks long they are considered intensive courses. It is critical that a student not fall behind in the learning process. If extraordinary circumstances arise, exceptions can be made for the student to make up work but this is to be arranged with his or her current professor.

Students are to use inclusive language in all writing assignments. This is a policy of the School of Theology and Christian Ministries.9

And likewise below is a sampling of the expectations for faculty:

- The instructor log in to the class to check notes daily. It is recommended that the instructor do this a couple times a day (Sundays can be set aside as “non-working” days). It is very important that the instructor maintain his or her presence online.
- The instructor ought to respond to student questions within a twenty-four-hour period. There will be times when the instructor will need to be away for a day, and that is okay, but the instructor must communicate this to the students. Students will expect timely responses.
- Assignments need to be graded in a timely manner, usually within a week of submission. Since the online class is intensive, feedback on assignments are imperative.
- The role of the online instructor is to be a facilitator of learning, not someone who only provides transmissive education.
- The instructor needs to demonstrate flexibility, openness, diversity, concern, and sincerity in the online classroom. It is very important to create an ecology of learning that is supportive and respectful of each person.10

These requirements will help to ensure that both teacher and student are involved in the communal learning process, show respect for one another, and have ample opportunity for interaction and feedback. Further, the requirements on both parties in terms of frequency online will contribute to the finest online learning environment based upon the research.

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10Ibid.
Due to its online nature this program would allow the youth minister to remain engaged in local church ministry (and thus earn an income) or the prospective youth minister to continue working (in whatever field) while earning his or her Master of Divinity degree. Additionally, the asynchronous and flexible nature of the online environment would allow students and faculty from around the country, continent and globe to participate in this learning environment. This would help to address what, according to John Leith is one of the crises of current theological education: the frightening absence among seminary faculty of persons who had records of “distinguished achievement as (a) pastor.”

Something that is unique about this online learning environment is that it allows faculty to be selected not only from the available pool of PhD’s but from tried, tested, and successful practitioners “who are closely related to the church constituency.”

In 1999 E. J. Elliston challenged theological educators to examine the assumption that “the teacher and student must be together physically for the student to learn.” How much more so today? With the virtual explosion of the web as a resource from finding recipes to online banking, why not to educate ministers . . . particularly youth ministers whose constituency has grown up with the World Wide Web. A final word of testimony is offered from Richard W. Nysse, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, regarding his involvement with online courses:

11Leith, Crisis, 10.
12Ibid., 70.
The quality of the engagement with the biblical text and the depth of discussion among students matches anything I have witnessed as a teacher in face-to-face classroom settings. Computer-mediated learning is far more than a concession to students who have difficulty moving to a seminary campus for theological education. In fact, the work of the students involved has been the best I have seen in twenty years of teaching. Surely, the technology itself does not produce this improvement. Rather, the technology allows the practice of teaching to catch up with the active-learning rhetoric we have used for a long time.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Master of Divinity in Youth, Church and Culture}

Northwest Nazarene’s Master of Divinity in Youth, Church and Culture is designed to prepare students for ministry to young persons and families through the study of developmental, cultural, and spiritual formation in a practical theological framework. This degree will develop the student in the Wesleyan tradition to serve young people with a knowledge of, and commitment to, the family system. Along with studies in Bible, theology, philosophy and Church history, it will prepare the youth minister to do solid cultural exegesis in order to understand a constant-flux youth culture.

After a one credit introductory course of orientation to theological studies and the online delivery system, the Master of Divinity in Youth, Church and Culture is composed of a core theological curriculum of thirteen courses (three credits, each completed in six weeks) followed by an additional eight courses (four credits each with each course lasting

eight weeks) specifically focused on issues of youth ministry, adolescence, postmodernity, and cultural exegesis. Those courses and descriptions are listed below.\textsuperscript{15}

Foundational Studies (thirty-six semester credits+)

1. PRTH6100 Introduction to Ministry/Program Orientation (1): This course explores aspects of a vocational call to ministry. Also, the course will orient the student to the resources, procedures, electronic operations, and expectations of the program.

2. CHED 6160 Christian Educational Ministries (3): A study of the nature of the church community and the role of education in the development of congregational life. Particular attention is given to the overall educational ministries of congregations. Ministry structures for discipleship and Christian formation will be evaluated critically on the basis of integrated thinking from theology and the social sciences.

3. PRTH 6960 Missiology & Contextualization (3): This course provides a study of the challenge and complexity of mission within the cultural diversity of today's world. Students will review the historical dimensions of missiology, develop biblical and theological foundations for missional ecclesiology, and strategize for cross-cultural communication of the gospel.

4. PRTH 7560 Pastoral Leadership (3): This course will help to equip ministers to lead and manage churches and mission agencies. Special attention will be given to the student's ability to conceive and articulate purpose, mission, and vision for ministry and assist the student to develop the strategic means to realize that vision.

5. PRTH 6560 Ministry Formation (3): The personal and spiritual formation of the minister will be explored. Special attention will be given to personal and spiritual formation, the role of the family in ministry, pastoral care and counseling, and congregational care.

6. PRTH 7960 Preaching and Worship (3): An advanced study of the methods of homiletics as well as applying principles of biblical interpretation to worship and preaching. A major focus of the course will be on practical application to selected biblical passages through the writing and preaching of expository sermons as well as a study of the Christian practices of the Church including baptism, funerals, weddings, and the Eucharist.

7. BIBL 6560 Introduction to Biblical Studies (3): An in-depth study of the books of the Bible in their historical, cultural, and literary context. Matters of canon,

\textsuperscript{15}Note: these foundational courses are based upon the previous existing Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministries established in 2004 through NNU’s School of Theology and Christian Ministry Graduate Theological Online Education program. This core has already received accreditation from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and approval from the Church of the Nazarene Denominational leaders as meeting all education requirements toward ordination in the Church of the Nazarene.
text, content, structure, theology, chronology, geography, and archaeology will be dealt with.

8. BIBL 7560 Biblical Theology (3): A survey of the historical and theological discipline and data of biblical theology. Some attention is given to its history, definition, methods, and challenges. The course will focus on the content of biblical theology: its major witnesses, themes, and theologically significant passages. Some consideration is given to the relationship between this synthesizing account of the religious and theological message of the Bible and responsible exegesis, hermeneutics, systematic theology, and preaching.

9. CHIS 6560 History of Christianity I (3): A study of the historical development of Christianity from 150-1500 C.E., from the Patristic period through pre-Reformation. The course will trace theological and doctrinal development as well as offer a general survey of the history of the Church in its ecclesiastical and cultural contexts. The student will have opportunity to read primary as well as secondary sources, and do research on a specified and focused area of interest.

10. CHIS 6960 History of Christianity II (3): A study of the historical development of Christianity from 1500-present, C.E., from the Reformation through the 20th century. The course will trace theological and doctrinal development as well as offer a general survey of the history of the Church in its ecclesiastical and cultural contexts. The student will have opportunity to read primary as well as secondary sources, and do research on a specified and focused area of interest.

11. THEO 7560 Christian Theology I: Central Issues (3): Students will explore the theological issues pertaining to the classical doctrines of the Wesleyan tradition. This exploration will focus upon the main characteristics of the nature of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the human person, sin, salvation, the Christian life, the Church and sacraments, and eschatology.

12. THEO 7960 Christian Theology II: Contemporary Theology (3): Students will reflect theologically on life and ministry by exploring various sources of theological reflection. In particular, dominant themes and figures in contemporary theology will be explored. In this exploration, students will compare and contrast distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan theology, including various understandings of holiness, with issues found in contemporary theology.

13. PHIL 7560 Philosophical Foundations of Ministry (3): This course will provide the fundamentals for logical reasoning, review the philosophical foundations of theology, explore contemporary issues in the philosophy of religion, and develop methods for making ethical decisions within the framework of Christian values.

14. Elective Class: PRTH 6990 Supervised Ministry (3-6): Under the direction of a ministry mentor, students will be involved in practical ministry experience in a local ministry context. Special attention will be given to preaching, counseling, teaching, education, evangelism, and administration. This experience will be under the direction of the instructor in cooperation with the supervising ministry mentor.
Youth, Church and Culture curriculum (thirty-three semester units)

1. PRTH XXXX - Foundations of Youth Ministry (4): This course focuses on developing one’s personal vision and practice of youth ministry and gives attention to the foundational and diverse elements of youth ministry. It will additionally serve as an introduction to the YCC program and the embedded curricula of the model of practical theology used, the mentoring environment and the need for professional and personal accountability to last as a youth minister. It will explore the biblical and theological foundations of ministry with young people, ranging from those in early to late adolescence. Attention will be given to the role faith plays in adolescent development and identity formation, and to the church’s responsibility to young people in and beyond congregations. This course emphasizes incarnational and missional approaches to the gospel, as well as young people’s own agency as participants in the total mission of the church.

2. PRTH XXXX - Leadership in Youth Ministry (4): This course explores recent literature written about both secular and ecclesiastic leadership. Students will be shepherded through a process of honing their own philosophy of leadership in the Church. Attention will be given to case studies and the formation of a practical theology of leadership.

3. PRTH XXXX - Outreach and Evangelism (4): This course explores the biblical mandate to follow the call to "go to all nations," especially as it relates to adolescents. Students will learn how to articulate and pass on to others the biblical and theological view of evangelism and outreach. Through readings, lecture, projects, and discussion, students will learn how to design an incarnational as well as relational ministry program which takes seriously Christian care and evangelism with unbelieving young people.16

4. PRTH XXXX – Developmental and Spiritual Formation of Youth and Families (4): Because adolescence has been a relatively new identifiable sociological phenomenon, how adolescents grow into adults as a unique process has received far less attention than the more traditional models and theories of child development. In a changing cultural environment, where even the definition, length, and “life task” of the adolescent is hotly debated by researchers and scholars, this course seeks to help the student to: (a) understand the issues that govern adolescent development, (b) recognize the points of discussion, (c) intersect the familial literature with the adolescent literature, and, most importantly, (d) create a ministerial response to the developing adolescent and her family.17

5. PHIL XXXX - Postmodern Culture and Families (4): This course will involve readings in Modern and Postmodern philosophers as well as in the field of family

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16Chap Clark, "Course Description for Individualized Distance Learning course - Outreach and Evangelism," (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009).

17Chap Clark, "Course Description - Adolescent Development and Spiritual Formation," in Doctor of Ministry Program in Youth, Family, and Culture (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006).
systems theory. Students will be expected to demonstrate how the shift to postmodernity has affected the traditional family and given rise to significant changes in the definition of family.

6. CHIS XXXX - History and Practice of Christian Formation and Education: from Early church to Emergent (4): This course will trace the history of how both the Ancient Greeks and the Church has attempted to shape individuals and communities from Ancient through Emergent catechesis.

7. THEO XXXX - God in the Everyday: Theological Interpretation of Popular Culture (4): This course will critically examine the recent explosion of social networking from a theological perspective. Students will be expected to form their own practical theology of social networking and its usefulness (or lack thereof) in the context of the Christian Church and youth group.

8. BIBL XXXX – Youth, Families, and Faith Throughout Scripture (4): This course will survey and exegete biblical literature from The Shema (Deuteronomy 6) through Paul’s treatise on the Body (I Corinthians 12). Attention will be given to periscopes addressing young persons, families, and faith formation throughout the Bible.

Master of Arts in Youth, Church and Culture

A second option for the youth minister would be to take only the Youth, Church and Culture curriculum. Although not the ideal of earning the Master of Divinity degree, the YCC core curriculum could be completed on its own. The student following this path could earn a Master of Arts in YCC in as little as twenty-one months.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{18}\text{Because of the structure of the online MDiv. Program: with essentially an MA in Pastoral Ministries being wedded with an MA in Youth, Church and Culture, some students may journey through this entire program together. However, new students may enter into the learning community at the transition into either of these discrete programs. This degree would still offer a significant curriculum in the field of youth ministry but would not represent the greater depth of learning of the more traditional seminary degree (MDiv). All this to say the MA in YCC would benefit the youth minister and the Church much more than had the youth minister not studied in this (or other similar) program.}\)
Certificate in Youth, Church and Culture

A final option for the youth minister would be a certificate in Youth, Church, and Culture that would be offered through NNU. This path would be the least academically rigorous (and obviously not the “ideal” view of education for the youth minister) but it would also represent a significant amount of exposure to important issues and concepts in the field of youth ministry, adolescent development, and cultural exegesis. For the student choosing this option there would be a significant reduction in tuition and no required tests or papers. All the assigned reading and online interaction would be required however. In order to balance both the income of this program as well as to maintain high academic standards of each cohort there would be no more than twenty percent of a given cohort choosing this option.19

Implicit Curriculum

There are three main elements proposed by this project to be embedded within the Youth, Church and Culture curriculum. These proposed elements will be required of all student enrolled at any academic level of this program (MDiv, MA, or certificate). It is proposed that these are of utmost importance for the late adolescent youth minister but will benefit a youth minister of any age. These three are a model of practical theology, a mentoring environment, and a plan of professional and personal accountability. The

19It may be possible to allow students initially choosing this option to convert a recently completed course to academic credit through a combination of a significant writing assignment and/or test as well as paying the proper tuition. However, this would not be available for past courses if a given student were in the middle of the YCC curriculum. This issue would potentially be one on which to consult with accreditors.
latter two will be treated in much greater depth in subsequent chapters and so will be addressed only cursorily here.

Model of Practical Theology

According to Clark, the goal of practical theology is to “discern God’s kingdom activity in the world in order to subsequently, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, serve in a way that honors the Creator and the in-breaking kingdom.”20 This definition also captures the ambition of the youth minister. For this reason a viable model of practical theology ought to be a part of any serious attempt to educate youth ministers.

During the Foundations of Youth Ministry course in the YCC program, the model of practical theology offered by Dr. Chap Clark in the Fall 2008 *Journal of Youth Ministry* would be introduced and explained. All additional courses in the YCC program would either contribute unique perspectives and depth to the various parts of the model or serve as “issues” courses. For example, the *Postmodern Culture and Families* course would provide help in understanding the “familial circumstance and history” portion of the “Internal Factors” of adolescence’s lives. Alternatively, the *Leadership in Youth Ministry* course could serve as an “issues” course in which to practice using the model. In this course a requirement for each student to write their own practical theology of leadership in youth ministry (student leaders, adult, volunteer etc.) could be embedded. All such papers would utilize this particular model of practical theology.

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20Clark, “Practical Theology,” 21.
The goal of using this model would be to train youth ministers to think through their practical theology systematically. We all make practical theological decisions each day. Most of us likely do not consider the relevant issues as much as this model requires.

Mentoring Environment

A second embedded requirement of the YCC program will be for each student to create or strengthen one’s “mentoring environment.” Chapter eight will cover the mentoring environment in much more detail. To summarize however, this requirement will be satisfied through a minimum of monthly meetings with a mentor and as a mentor to another. Further, it will require each student to construct a small group of same gender peers with whom to “share life together” as well as to join (or start) a more formal professional organization of colleagues such as those offered by the National Network of Youth Ministries.

Accountability

The third embedded requirement will be that of systematic accountability. This requirement will likewise be introduced in the first course in the YCC program. The accountability expected here will fall into two categories professional and personal.

In terms of professional accountability each student will be expected to assemble

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22This phrase to be defined and explained in Chapter 8 but it is intended to express a level of intimacy and familiarity that can only be built through time and intentional vulnerability and trust.
23www.youthworkers.net.
a board of constituent parents and other adults. This body will serve in an advisory role and assist with projects during the year. They will be apprised of all major events and decisions that affect the youth ministry and will submit two evaluations of the youth minister (at the mid-point of their program and end) as a portion of their grade.

Another aspect of this professional accountability will be for the student to request an annual review with their supervisor (if not presently practiced). The point of this is to not only create accountability with their supervisor but also to increase dialogue which may in turn have a mentoring affect on each participant.

Finally a plan for denominational oversight and accountability will be presented. Students will be asked to interact as a cohort about the process of licensure (toward ordination) and accountability in their particular denomination. A plan for ongoing follow-up for ordinands will be presented and used as a platform for discussion about issues of ecclesiology and accountability as ministers of the Gospel.

With regard to personal accountability, students will be required to write a Rule of Life\textsuperscript{24} that they will be expected to share with spouse or significant other, mentor, mentoree and small group. They will also be given instruction about group spiritual direction along with some exercises to practice with their small group. This will serve to increase the level of sharing and intimacy of their group and potentially enable this group to last much beyond the educational requirement.

Needless to say, follow-up with these embedded requirements is vital. It is for this reason that the services of the program manager providing oversight to the entire

\textsuperscript{24}This will be explained in detail in chapter nine and similar to the Rule of St. Benedict.

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online program at NNU will be enlisted. It will be the program manager’s duty to systematically track the fulfillment of these embedded requirements. Additionally each faculty person teaching in the YCC program will be apprised of the importance of his or her courses’ contribution to this philosophy through assignments and informal dialogue.


"Northwest Nazarene University Undergraduate Catalog." edited by Northwest Nazarene University. Nampa, ID: NNU, 2005-06.

"Northwest Nazarene University Undergraduate Catalog." edited by Northwest Nazarene University. Nampa, ID: NNU, 2006-08.


