



YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Building Sustainable Ministries . . . One Church at a Time

www.ministryarchitects.com

Ponte Vedra United Methodist Church, FL

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BACKGROUND

Ponte Vedra United Methodist Church (UMC) is located in its namesake Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, known for its beach resorts and PGA Tour golf courses. The church worships in a 15,000 square foot multipurpose building. The first floor comprises a multi-purpose sanctuary, several adjacent child-care rooms, and staff offices. The upstairs consists of additional staff offices and includes rooms for children, youth and adult ministry. Church members describe their church as “a family,” “retired,” “outreach oriented,” “giving,” “activity full,” “successful,” and “comfortable.”

Ponte Vedra traces its roots to the early 1990’s when Beach United Methodist Church sought to “take the beaches for Christ.” In 2001, worship services began at what was then called the South Campus of Beach UMC. Shortly after opening its doors, the vision of the South Campus to become a chartered United Methodist Church emerged. On January 26, 2003, Ponte Vedra United Methodist Church was launched. The church has had worship services in a leased space and an elementary school. In 2009, the church

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moved to its current location on Roscoe Boulevard. Ponte Vedra UMC officially became a chartered church September 2010.

Reverend Jeff Bennett has pastored the church since its inception in 2003. Other staff includes a teaching pastor, a spirituality and arts pastor, program, administrative, and custodial staff.

The membership of the church is around 440 and on an average week, 285 people attend one of the church's three Sunday worship services. A contemporary worship service is held at 9:30 AM and a traditional worship service is held at 11 AM. Twenty-two weeks a year, a Sunday evening worship service, mostly run by youth, called Connections is held Sundays at 6:30 PM. The church offers small group bible studies on Sundays and throughout the week for children, youth, and adults. Small groups are a major part of Ponte Vedra UMC. In addition to bible study small groups, the church offers multiple groups for serving, caring, and reaching.

It is unclear how many 6th – 12th graders are on the rolls of the church. However, during a typical week, about 27 of them participate in one of the following programs:

- Sunday school, 11 AM on Sundays
- Youth Group, 5 PM on Sundays
- Connections worship service, 6:30 PM on Sundays
- Youth Creative Arts Ministry, 6 PM on Wednesdays
- Confirmation (every other year)
- Service Events
- Ski Trips/Retreats
- Mission Trips

The church has a 2015 budget of \$836,420. For the year 2015, the youth ministry has a budget in the neighborhood of \$88,860, including the program budget and a portion of the salary and benefits of the full-time, part-time, and contract staff supporting the youth ministry.

Kelly Minter has led the youth ministry since 2007. Other youth staff includes a Youth Creative Arts Ministry (YCAM) leader and a YCAM contractor who operates sound and lights during the Sunday evening Connections worship service. There is a Youth Ministry Advisory Team that is a sounding board for the youth minister. There are six adult volunteers involved each week in one of the major youth programs. Others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

The dedicated youth room is equipped with tables, chairs, beanbags, and musical equipment. In addition to the youth room, youth also use multipurpose adjacent classrooms and the youth minister's office for small groups. The Connections worship service, primarily attended by youth, takes place in the main sanctuary.

Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the youth ministry and to make recommendations about how they might move strategically forward. Ministry Architects heard from 75 individuals from either their involvement in 11 focus groups or

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via absentee surveys. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

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

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

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

The consensus is that this rent is being paid. While some would like to see higher numbers during Sunday morning worship, there are a good number of teenagers involved in the church.

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

This rent appears to be paid. The weekly programming and special events such as retreats and mission trips have created excitement in the ministry.

Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the youth staff, volunteers, and the youth themselves are essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and with the parents.

This rent seems to be partially paid. While many are generally happy about what is taking place in the youth ministry, there are some who are not enthusiastic about the youth ministry and desire to see some changes take place.

As the leadership of the youth ministry develops its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, the youth ministry faces parallel challenges.

Ministry Architects pictures the parallel challenge this way:

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

As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, five rules of thumb – “youth ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind. These are not necessarily targets for success; they are simply what an average church typically experiences:

1) 10% of the Worshipping Congregation—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshipping congregation. A church with an average worship attendance of 285 could expect an average weekly attendance of around 29 youth per week. The current weekly attendance of 27 youth is right on target for a church this size.

2) 20% Ceiling—Ministry Architects has also discovered that in many churches, the youth ministry has difficulty growing beyond a level that equals 20% of the weekly worshipping congregation.

Very few youth ministries seem to be able to break beyond this 20% level. Ponte Vedra UMC might keep in mind, then, that the expected ceiling for this youth ministry is around 58 youth.

3) \$1,500 per Youth—With a budget of approximately \$88,860 (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits) dedicated to the youth ministry, Ponte Vedra UMC has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly participation level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 59 youth in some aspect of the church's life. With about 27 currently participating every week, the ministry is well funded for continued growth.

4) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth—Considering all the positions giving time to the youth ministry, including the YCAM Leader, Ponte Vedra UMC has the equivalent of 1.25 full time staff persons. According to this rule of thumb, Ponte Vedra UMC has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 62 youth on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration allows room for significant numerical growth.

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5) 1 Adult for Every 5 Youth— Ministry Architects likes to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five youth on an ongoing basis. With six weekly volunteers, Ponte Vedra UMC is currently at a ratio of 1 adult leader to every 4.5 youth, giving the ministry a capacity for 30 youth weekly. The current team seems to be the right size for the current ministry of 27 youth. However, if the church wants to expand its impact, it will need to recruit more volunteers to sustain that level of involvement.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE STAFF

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

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

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

- In many churches, there is no person or group playing the role of the architect. The ministry simply moves from one event to the next without a clear vision or stated outcomes.
- Sometimes paid staff are not given the time or training to do their important work as the “general contractor” of a complex ministry.
- The staff is often expected to serve in all three of these roles. This is a recipe for congregational dissatisfaction and staff burnout.
- Some churches hire a laborer who is skilled at leading singing, playing games or teaching a Bible lesson. These laborers often mature into an architect or a general contractor, but only if they are given permission, time, and training.

At Ponte Vedra UMC, the architect and general contractor roles are not being filled.

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ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

Awesome Duo

Across the board, Kelly and Scott are held in high esteem! Parents expressed that Kelly has impacted the lives of their youth in significant ways. Parents and youth shared how Kelly has made herself available to the youth by always responding to text messages, picking youth up when they need a ride, and being present at various school events. The youth resoundingly “love Kelly.” Some parents attribute their college students’ continued faith to the relationship their youth established with Kelly during their time in youth ministry. It was shared that “Kelly goes the extra mile,” is “hard working,” is a “dedicated woman,” and “loves those kids and wants what is best for them.”

Parents and youth spoke just as highly of Scott. He has also been present at youth events and has practically shown interest in the youth outside of band and choir practice. It was shared that Scott leads by example and makes each youth feel valued. One person said, “Scott finds talent in every child.” Scott was described as dedicated and a great leader. It was also expressed that he makes every youth feel welcomed and makes an effort to ensure that no youth he is connected with falls through the cracks. His commitment to be involved in the personal lives of the youth is a defining characteristic of his ministry.

The fact that the church is filled with fans of Kelly and Scott is a huge asset for the youth ministry.

Tons of Memory Makers

The youth calendar is full. Parents and youth could name several memorable events that are scattered throughout the calendar each year. Some of the highlights include gender based, middle school, and high school retreats, bake/lock-ins, Blue Ridge Mission Trip, Bush Gardens, mission blitz, Rock the Universe, Chicago Mission Trip, and the New Orleans mission trip. The youth look forward to these events and they invite their friends, too. Each of these events has an established reputation. Even busy youth and families can find several fun events to attend each year. “After the mission trip my daughter came back changed.” “We really get to bond and get to know each other during retreats,” a youth shared. “A majority of the youth that regularly attend here now, come because they were invited by their friends and attended one of our events and they have kept coming.”

It’s Not About Us

Missions, service, and outreach. Missions, service, and outreach. That seems to say it all. The youth, parents, volunteers, and staff all place a high value on missions, service, and outreach. Some even give credit to the youth for creating the church-wide emphasis on missions, service, and outreach. “The youth started doing outreach and now it has infused itself into the church,” said one staff person. The mission trips and service

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opportunities seem to be the highlight of each year. The youth are not picky about what they support. From Sandwich Handout to the Costa Rica mission trip, the youth love the local, regional, and international events equally. Some male youth have even started an informal mentoring relationship with youth in a disadvantaged neighborhood. The youth have truly learned the joy of service, and they've modeled this practice for the rest of the church. Parents particularly appreciate how the youth ministry is helping the teens not to avoid a "privileged and self-absorbed" attitude. Rather, the youth ministry is fostering a heart of service and sacrifice.

Shared Value in the Priority of Youth Ministry

We heard from 32 youth, 22 parents and 75 people overall! With an average weekly attendance of 27 youth, to have 32 participate in providing their thoughts, hopes, and dreams is extraordinary. Youth listening groups were bursting with energy and enthusiasm and, if we had not finally closed down the meetings, they could have easily enjoyed an extra hour sharing their opinions. These youth were clearly comfortable with each other, described more positive experiences with their youth group than we could document, and expressed confidence that they are participating in something important and meaningful. Over and over the youth echoed the same sentiment, "this is just an awesome group."

The fruit definitely does not fall far from the tree. The parent listening groups were equally well attended and the parents that could not make a listening group shared their hopes, love, and dreams by completing an absentee form. Additionally, following listening groups, parents emailed additional thoughts and comments about the youth ministry. It is clear that the parents at Ponte Vedra UMC expressively care about the present and future of the youth ministry.

In addition, the turnout and energy from members without youth was also a clear indication that the youth ministry is valued, and supported by a cross-section of stakeholders in the church.

Extraordinary Youth Counselors and Adult Volunteers

The youth ministry counselors and adult volunteers are dearly loved and appreciated by the youth and parents. The youth counselors and adult leaders were described as exceptional, wonderful, and as role models inside and outside of the church. During listening groups adults expressed their desire to recognize and thank the youth counselors and adult volunteers for all they do. Parents were intentional to mention the impact that the youth counselors were having in the lives of their youth. Parents expressed their gratitude about knowing that their youth had someone (other than their parents) to talk to about their life issues, faith, and spiritual things. During the listening group, the youth counselors and adult volunteers exhibited passion, excitement, commitment, and competence.

Relationship is King

Relationship is a key component of the youth ministry. Relationship is a dominant value that has infused the youth ministry and there are many special bonds that have been formed. The youth are a very close-knit group. Many of the youth share life together

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outside of the youth ministry and expressed care for one another. When asked to describe the youth ministry in one word, many youth chose the word, “family.” One youth shared, “I love all these people.” Another youth described the youth ministry as “super close-knit.” And yet another youth described the youth ministry as their “squad.” Youth feel that they are accepted and can be themselves with the other youth and youth counselors. The youth counselors expressed their intentionality in creating a ministry where relationships can flourish.

Not only do the youth share a “close-knit” bond, the youth counselors have developed deep relationships as well, sharing their lives together outside of youth ministry programming.

The relationships within the youth ministry are genuine, sincere, and authentic.

Financial Resources

Just a quick glance at the youth budget for the past several years will give you signs that this ministry is supported well financially. Although there has been some decrease in the youth budget, the youth ministry is positioned with a strong financial footing. One adult said, “The resources are there. There are no lack of resources when it comes to the youth ministry.” Another adult added, “We will write a check.” It was also expressed that some members of the church are intentional to support the youth ministry financially by allocating funds to the youth ministry on their giving envelopes. The youth ministry is positioned well for the sustainability and growth many would like to see.

Opportunities to Lead

There are multiple opportunities for youth to take leadership roles in the youth ministry and in the church. Youth mostly execute the Connections worship service on Sunday evenings. They read scripture, lead worship, pray, and even give short messages. Some high schoolers have led middle school groups and chaperoned middle school trips. The youth also plan and run Youth Sunday once a year. One adult shared, “I love it when YCAM leads us in worship. I wish we could see them more often.” There is also a youth that attends the church council meeting. These opportunities provide youth with the opportunity to use their gifts and make a contribution to their church. The youth ministry and church have created space for youth to get hands-on experience in multiple leadership opportunities.

Clarity of Need

There seemed to be an across-the-board consensus that the youth ministry is not all that the youth, the parents, the volunteers and the staff would like it to be. Though the theories as to the causes of this situation were varied, there was little disagreement that the youth ministry, particularly Connections worship service, was lacking the critical mass, excitement, and variety needed to be attractive to the typical teenager at Ponte Vedra UMC. It was generally acknowledged that though there are some wonderful aspects of the youth ministry, these aspects lack the kind of integration and structure, which would allow them to work together smoothly.

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CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the youth ministry strategically forward

Missing Roles

It is clear that two roles are not being filled to ensure a sustainable model for the youth ministry. The youth minister works hard filling the laborer role and trying to live into general contractor responsibilities. If all the time spent building and maintaining relationships was totaled, she would consistently be working 45+ hours a week. She's juggling a lot of balls at once, even dropping some along the way. The youth minister will need to transition more into a general contractor ensuring that all the components of the youth ministry are managed well and the workers are recruited, equipped, and supported. The role of the architect has been and is currently vacant.

Unintentional Casualties

The close-knit youth were named earlier in this report as an asset and they are, rightly so. At the same time, it was abundantly clear that there are youth who have not felt welcomed into the youth ministry. The end result is unintentional casualties. The sense is that the youth weren't intentionally exclusive or mean, but they are so comfortable with each other, it is leaving others feeling like they are on the outside. One parent shared, "my daughter had to fight her way in. There are some who won't bother to fight their way in."

While "friendly" was a word often used to describe the relational feel of the youth ministry programs, there was little evidence that there exists a *culture of friendship*. Friendship is among the strongest felt needs of teenagers and when it is not in the DNA of their experience in the Christian community, it matters in significant ways. The social disconnect between the youth hinders more than their social calendar; it undermines the way God ordained the church to journey in faith together. It is time to move from friendly to friendship.

Disconnected

While many listening group participants shared how much they love the Sunday night worship experience Connections, it is clear that it is struggling to maintain. The original intention was to have a youth-led service for families and church members on Sunday evenings. Its first year was successful with attendance around 60 people. This year, the attendance has dropped to consistently less than 30. The people attending the service are some youth, the Connections Praise Band, and the parents of youth who are leading music. It was not designed to be a service for youth but a service for the church that is led by youth.

But many of the youth are not staying – they come for small groups and dinner and then check out. So a service that is supposed to be youth-led isn't appealing to the youth right now. A lot of energy is being poured into this worship service. The church leadership needs to take this service off life-support and lovingly put it to rest gratefully acknowledging the gift it has been.

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Lack of Christian Formation Plan

There doesn't seem to be an overall plan for Christian formation in place for youth. The youth are losing interest in Sunday school and lessons are planned for small groups but there is no clear indication of how they are a part of a cohesive formation plan.

When an overall scope and sequence is not in place, Christian formation becomes haphazard at best. Another danger is that volunteers decide for themselves what should be taught and that could possibly lead the youth down a path that the church doesn't want to go. A clear, intentional plan of what Ponte Vedra UMC wants their youth to know, experience, and do with their faith is greatly needed. A comment from a parent was: "I have heard too many times that during youth meetings, time was spent discussing football games, current events or 'nothing really at all, just hanging out'." Part of that formation plan could be rites of passage or milestones in the lives of youth that the church recognizes and celebrates (i.e. graduating from middle school to high school).

Off Balance

There was a shared concern about the balance of programming. It's a challenge to find the right equilibrium between fun activities, which are formative components, and spiritual depth. One parent shared, "The material for the small groups is haphazard and not much time is spent in the Bible. Perhaps more Bible focus is present in Sunday school, but my family is in worship at that time so I'm unsure of that curriculum."

Recently a Bible study for youth was added on Tuesdays after school and there is a small core group attending. The bigger issue is: what is the scriptural foundation the youth are getting that equips them for adulthood. A participant commented, "There also needs to be a greater biblical emphasis. I am constantly surprised by how many basic Bible stories the youth don't know."

Youth Programming

Teens and their families are beyond busy these days - it's a norm in our culture that produces great stress. Ponte Vedra UMC is living into that norm unintentionally. The church wants to provide something for everyone but the end result is the program, the staff, and the volunteers are over-stretched. Families have to pick and choose what they can manage. "There is too much going on. Between worship, Sunday school, making and handing out sandwiches, praise band practice, small groups, dinner, and Connections, my child could be here all day. That is not feasible for our family" one parent confessed. Another adult said, "Perhaps there are too many big ticket activities. I think the youth enjoy their time together and that can be accomplished with less travel events and more in church or local community centric events." To be sustainable, the youth ministry leadership might consider scaling back to do a few things very well and not a lot of things poorly.

There was another concern expressed across listening groups. While much of the programming is excellent, there is not a lot of variety from year to year. "The youth group does perform acts of service, such as the sandwich handout, but the activities never seem to change, so if serving the homeless population isn't a good fit for a student there

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isn't another type of service. The Wednesday evening program is good, but if a student is not musical or is a quiet kid, there is nothing for them to do," vented a parent.

Differences Too Great

Because attendance is low for youth Sunday school, the class has been combined with 6th through 12th graders in one group. While it is understandable to do this, the difference between a 6th grader and a sophomore is huge. Developmentally they are not in the same place, which makes it difficult to plan a lesson that will appeal to all ages. What ends up happening is the lesson is geared to one group at the expense of the other. What is happening at PVUMC is that the older youth are not getting spiritually fed and therefore, don't come on Sunday mornings. A high school parent said, "As a teacher, it is difficult to teach the middle and high school groups because of different learning styles. They (middle school youth) are highly rigid in their thinking, demonstrate egocentric thinking and freely share their opinions which do not typically match their peers." The combining of both groups to create critical mass has had the opposite effect and there is a decline in youth Sunday school attendance.

Volunteers

While it seems there are enough volunteers plugging into the youth ministry weekly, there is still a need for additional volunteers. The current six volunteers are present for the Sunday evening program. But there is so much more going on outside of Sunday night – Sunday school, special events, the new Monday outreach project, mission trips, and retreats. There is no intentional recruitment process in place to fill the behind-the-scenes needs as well as Sunday school teachers

Support, in the form of monthly meetings, and some training is being provided for the current volunteers but there aren't any formal volunteer trainings scheduled throughout the year. While the volunteers expressed that they feel equipped to do their job, there were instances shared around issues concerning group management and discipline. For example, the monitoring of cell phones or tablets during youth ministry programming isn't well-enforced. The volunteers need a refresher course on some basic expectations in the youth ministry.

Lack of a Shared Vision

Currently there is no common shared vision in the youth ministry. Without a common vision, there is no direction for how the youth can move forward. It's like going on a road trip and having no destination and no map to guide you on your way. You would be driving aimlessly for a long time.

When a ministry lacks a clearly stated vision, anxiousness is often a predictable result. In anxious settings, there is typically a good bit of triangulating happening, in which people don't talk directly to each other but instead talk to a third party about their concerns. In order to move the youth ministry forward, everyone needs to be on the same page with a shared vision and healthy habits of communication regarding that vision should be formed.

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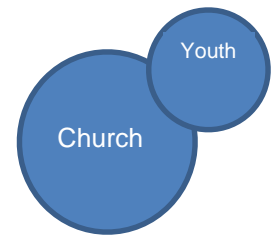
Control Documents

While many are in place already, there are several very important systems and documents that are missing from the youth ministry at Ponte Vedra UMC. Youth ministries struggle to grow when an adequate framework has not been provided to support that growth. The following items and systems are currently missing:

- **Database:** Ministry Tracker is the system currently used but could use some fine-tuning in how the information is interpreted. For example, there was not a clear picture of how many youth are on the current church rolls.
- **Major Event Notebooks** – Helpful information and data is not being gathered to enable new volunteers or staff to run major events in the future.
- **Youth Ministry Manual** – This is the operating manual for the youth ministry, collected in one location (both hard copy & digital) and contains the budget, game plans, calendars, job descriptions, curriculum plans, and visioning documents. This information is not currently centrally located for easy access.

The One-Eared Mickey Mouse

The youth ministry seems to be separated from the rest of the congregation, with adults often feeling uninformed and the youth, at times, feeling unsupported. Youth as a whole are not visible on Sunday mornings. A few attend the contemporary service or acolyte at the traditional service; Sunday school for the youth takes place during the 11AM service. Therefore, they are noticeably absent in both services. The youth that attend worship tend to come to Connections, although that number is dwindling.



This is like a one-eared Mickey Mouse in which the youth are attached or a part of the church but is separate from the life of the congregation. Ponte Vedra UMC has made some efforts to integrate the youth in the Sunday morning worship through Youth Sunday, which is a step in the right direction.

Doling Out the Advice

The current Youth Ministry Advisory Team has not been as busy as it could be. It was shared that the committee serves more in the advisory role with the staff presenting ideas and the committee giving feedback. There doesn't seem to be any group casting the vision for the youth ministry, setting long-term goals, or building infrastructure. For youth ministry to last for the long haul at Ponte Vedra UMC, these things are necessary. Rather than reacting or rubber-stamping, this group could be serving in the role of the architect, which is missing right now.

Communication and Marketing

Communication issues are commonplace at Ponte Vedra UMC. Listening group participants spoke about the difficulty of finding out what is going on in the youth ministry. Sometimes communication is taking place only through one method of communication like an email or a text. In order to communicate effectively with parents, youth, volunteers, and the congregation, information needs to be timely, effective,

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accurate, and delivered in a variety of ways such as the church bulletin, Facebook page, text, email, website, phone calls, etc.

In addition, the youth ministry has not developed a strategy for capturing and maintaining the attention of the congregation. This can be done through marketing the youth ministry. Some storytelling is needed if youth are to be drawn into the ministry or if the congregation is to support the youth ministry. Many church members have no idea what the youth are doing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 18 months as a time of goal-setting and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target May 2017 as the date for achieving sustainable structures for the youth ministry knowing that incremental successes will be seen throughout the renovation.
- 2) Establish a Prayer Team to undergird this renovation process.
- 3) Present this report to the Council requesting that they endorse an 18-month strategic design process for the youth ministry.
- 4) Establish a Youth Ministry Renovation Team, made up of four to five volunteers who partner with the youth minister. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on exceptional day-to-day ministry, while the Renovation Team focuses on the recommendations below. These recommendations include two overarching responsibilities:
 - I. Work with the youth ministry leadership to **address the immediate pressure points** facing the ministry as they transition toward sustainability.
 - II. Establish a consensus for the direction of the ministry and take responsibility for **implementing the strategic, long-term changes** recommended in this report.
- 5) Engage the services of Ministry Architects to take responsibility for:
 - Working with the staff and volunteers to ensure the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this report's timeline,
 - Assisting the youth ministry in overcoming the obstacles that are certain to arise in the process of restructuring and fine-tuning the youth ministry.

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RENOVATION TEAM TASK #1: Address the Pressure Points

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

Pressure Point #1: Sunday School Separation

- Create a middle school Sunday school class and a separate high school Sunday school class.
- Recruit enough volunteers so that two adults are in each Sunday school class every Sunday.
- Determine which rooms will be used for each class.

Pressure Point #2: Calendar

- Create a major event calendar through August 2016 to be distributed in January 2016.
- Consider scaling back on the number of major events and determine the purpose of each major event.
- Map out the small group topics and Sunday school lesson plans through August 2016.

Pressure Point #3: Job Description Clarity

- Create clear, results-based job descriptions for each volunteer role so that volunteers understand what is expected of them.
- Revisit and possibly update the youth minister's job description to accurately reflect the role of a general contractor.
- Create a Rhythmic Week for the youth minister.
- Redefine the role of the Youth Ministry Advisory Team so that they are serving as the Renovation Team overseeing this 18-month plan.

Pressure Point #4: Equip the Team

- Research curriculum for the small groups and select those that will best teach the topics chosen.
- Schedule and implement a small group leader training event.
- Equip the Sunday school teachers and give them the materials needed in a timely manner.
- Meet with each Major Event Coordinator and give them a notebook that includes all the details to implement that particular event.

Pressure Point #5: Connections

- Set an end date for the Connections worship service.
- Recognize and celebrate the role that the Connections worship has served for the past 3 years.
- Incorporate the Connections Praise Band once a month in the 9:30 AM contemporary worship service.

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- Incorporate the YCAM musicians once a quarter in both Sunday morning services.

Pressure Point #6: Communication

- Create a game plan for communicating with youth, parents, and the congregation.
- Utilize a variety of means of communication (not depending on just one) that includes print, digital, and face-to-face communications.

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

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND STABILITY

- **Host a “Quick Start” Retreat:** Invite the Renovation Team, key volunteers, and youth staff to participate in a Quick Start Retreat in which the renovation process is launched and the pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report are addressed. The retreat tackles the items that need to be done first, and builds momentum for the youth ministry renovation process.
 - Meet with staff to review the report and identify current status of challenges and recommendations to create next steps for the Renovation Team.
 - Meet with staff to map out next steps to move into the general contractor role.
 - Renovation Team would become oriented to the job ahead.
 - Renovation Team would take the next steps from the staff and begin to assign who will supervise over what recommendations/pressure steps.
 - Calendar dates involving Renovation Team would be scheduled.
 - A plan for concrete communication between the Renovation Team and staff would be determined so that all parties feel they’re “in the know.”
 - The following documents are developed during the Quick Start Retreat, and within two weeks after the Quick Start Retreat, they are finalized:
 - There is a finalized version of the Calendar for all weekly programs and major special events through August 2016.
 - There are results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry. The job descriptions cover all current positions and also include additional, non-

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threatening opportunities for adult involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.

- o There is a clear and complete list of volunteer needs in the youth ministry, including relational and behind-the-scenes, weekly events and special event leaders.
- o There is a broad “fishing pond” list of at least 40 possible volunteers to call about volunteer positions. The list includes people we are sure will say yes, and it includes people we think will never say yes (but we hope they will one day).
- o Reasonable participation goals have been established for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through August 2016 and clear lines of responsibility for filling those events have been established.
- o **Visioning:** Invite parents and leaders to participate in a multi-session, on-campus process of visioning a new future for the youth ministry with Ministry Architects, resulting in the following documents which will direct the ministry:
 - o A ministry mission statement
 - o A statement of values
 - o A set of three-year revolving goals and one-year benchmarks
 - o An organizational structure for the ministry
- o **Christian Formation:** Gather a team for a Christian Formation Retreat to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
 - Evaluate the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Develop a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.
 - Assess the need for Sunday school and small groups to use an integrated curriculum plan that is coordinated with the Sunday school classes that follow.
 - Determine how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decide what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- o **Control Document Development:** Complete and publish an 18-month calendar, create major event notebooks to help event planners succeed, and generate a preventative maintenance calendar that schedules behind-the-scenes activities for each month (like “September: nail down the date for next year’s high school mission trip”).
- o **Marketing:** Establish clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders, and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.

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- o **Communication:** Establish normative processes for effective and timely communication with parents, youth, and leaders utilizing as many forms of communication as possible including updating the youth page of the church's website, Facebook, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
- o **Youth Ministry Manual:** Develop a Youth Ministry Manual, including the most recent youth directory, a 12-18-Month calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar, and notes for every major youth ministry event.
- o **Enlist an Experienced, Professional Coach:** Invite Ministry Architects to play the "coach" role during this renovation period. Ministry Architects would offer experienced direction for the building of an infrastructure for the youth ministry and provide ongoing coaching for the youth ministry staff members as well as the Renovation Team.

DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND SERVANTS

- o **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff including coaching, reading and seminars.
- o **Sustainable Pace:** Help each youth ministry staff member develop a "rhythmic week" including a Sabbath and "balcony" time (that is, time to look at the big picture and make strategic plans).
- o **Leadership Development:** Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry and create a structure for the ongoing training of all volunteers at least quarterly.
- o **Volunteer Recruitment:** Build a fortified volunteer leadership team, some of who will do relational ministry with youth while others work behind the scenes. Create a clear and complete list of the volunteer needs. Create a "fishing pond" list of at least 40 possible volunteers to call on for weekly volunteer positions.
- o **Broaden Volunteer Definition and Opportunities:** Create additional, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in the program. Encourage volunteer involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.
- o **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers at the beginning of each school year.
- o **Develop a Sustainable Staffing Model:** Keeping the Ministry Architects "architect," general contractor," and "laborer" analogy in mind, develop an appropriate long-term staffing model including the professional and volunteer components, for the youth ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth. Within this staffing model, determine which role is the best fit for the youth minister and

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develop volunteers around that person in the other roles. That is, the youth minister moves from being a “genius” to being the “genius maker.” Liz Wiseman’s book *Multipliers*, offers useful tips for making that shift.

DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- o **Parent and Non-parent Engagement:** Create a written process for engaging the majority of parents in the ministry in some way during the 2016-2017 school year. Create new, non-threatening ways non-parents can be engaged in the youth ministry.
- o **Measurable Markers of Effectiveness:** Determine reasonable participation goals for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through May 2017 and take responsibility for filling those events.
- o **Welcome Squad:** Recruit, train, and deploy 3-5 youth at each program with the task of creating a welcoming environment for new youth. Teach them how to meet new youth and to guide new youth into the program. Use this as an opportunity to help the welcome squad follow-up with new youth who come to programming and provide a relational engagement into the ministry.
- o **Integration:** Develop a strategic plan for helping the youth become an integral part of the whole church, weaving the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church.
- o **Spiritual Depth:** Develop a plan to intentionally take youth deeper in their faith through teaching and discipleship in varied environments.
- o **First-Timer Process:** Develop a process for welcoming new families, youth, and guests to the church so that they feel warmly welcomed. Document a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the church.
- o **Rites of Passage (or Milestones):** Develop a written plan for the processes, events, and privileges that will:
 - o Welcome and connect the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry
 - o Welcome and connect the new 9th graders and their parents into the high school ministry
 - o Launch the church’s high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they are surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults

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PROPOSED TIMELINE

AND OPTIONAL CONSULTING PROPOSAL

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

Many churches choose to use the services of Ministry Architects to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. If the church would like Ministry Architects to provide more specialized consulting in certain areas, particularly for the 18-month transition, we are available to help.

December 2015

Focus: Starting Right and Work Begins

Outcomes:

- This report has been presented to the Council for the strategic renovation of the youth ministry and the Council has given full support of this plan.
- A Quick Start Retreat has been scheduled for January.
- The Renovation Team for youth has been recruited and the first meeting has been scheduled to take place during the Quick Start Retreat.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the youth ministry. They have received a copy of the assessment report and timeline.
- A Visioning Retreat has been scheduled for April and a “save the date” email/postcard has been sent to all families.
- Work has begun on the calendars for major events, small groups, and Sunday school through August 2016.
- Mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry staff and key volunteers have been provided.
- The last Connections service has taken place. Volunteers and leaders for this ministry have been honored and thanked.
- Ministry Architects has been hired to serve in the architect role for the renovation process.

Ministry Architects Option: 1 day offsite

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January 2016

Focus: Volunteers, Quick Start Retreat, Calendars

Outcomes:

- A fishing pond of 40 potential volunteers in the youth ministry has been created.
- The youth Sunday school class has been divided into two – middle school and high school – and meeting rooms have been determined.
- Teachers have been recruited and equipped. Two adults have been in each class every Sunday.
- A Quick Start Retreat has taken place in which the renovation process was launched and pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report have been addressed. The retreat tackled the items that needed to be done first to initiate the youth ministry renovation process. The Renovation Team has been oriented to their new role.
- Work has begun on the 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar taking into consideration the scaling back of major events.
- The summer 2016 calendar for the youth ministry has been completed and distributed.
- Curriculum has been researched and selected for small groups and Sunday school.
- A training event has taken place in which all small group leaders and major event coordinators received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns.
- The youth minister has moved more fully into the role of general contractor. Her job description has been reviewed and updated.
- Results-based job descriptions have been created for each volunteer role and distributed to volunteers.

Ministry Architects Option: 2 days onsite, 2 day offsite

February 2016

Focus: Calendars, Volunteer Recruitment

Outcomes:

- The 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar has been completed through August 2017 including a Fall Kick-off.
- Volunteer recruiting seasons has opened.
 - Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.

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- o Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
- o All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2016-2017 school year.
- o The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list has been merged.
- o Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to the youth ministry.
- Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2016-2017.
- Ways in which the Connections Praise Band and YCAM can be incorporated into the two Sunday morning services have been explored, determined, and calendared.
- The youth minister has created a Rhythmic Week including balcony time and has begun to live into her Rhythmic Week.

Ministry Architects Option: 2 days offsite

March 2016

Focus: Compliance, Communication, Attendance Tracking, Participation Goals

Outcomes:

- Communication norms have been determined and those best practices have been implemented.
- A process for tracking and recording attendance in all youth ministry programs has been created and implemented.
- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through December 2016 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- All programs have adhered to the Child Protection Policy as laid out by the church.
- A volunteer application, an application process and a screening process for all weekly hands-on volunteers have been created and implemented
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and is in compliance with the safe church policy.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

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April 2016

Focus: Compliance, Visioning, Pressure Points, Volunteer Thank You

Outcomes:

- All pressure points have been addressed.
- A Visioning Retreat with all major stakeholders has occurred producing visioning documents for the youth ministry (mission statement, core values, goals and structure).
- One-year benchmarks have been assigned to each three-year, revolving goal developed in the visioning process.
- Copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained. Permission slips for each offsite event in addition to standard medical release forms for the entire year have been created.
- A volunteer thank you event has been scheduled and promotional materials have gone out to all youth volunteers.
- A group of 3-5 youth at each program have been recruited, trained, and charged with the task of creating a welcoming environment for new youth. They have been trained on how to meet new youth and to guide new youth into the program.

Ministry Architects Option: 3 days onsite, 1 day offsite

May 2016

Focus: Mid-Course Evaluation, Continuing Education, Communication, Marketing

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team has met monthly and decided how often they will meet for the remainder of the 18 months.
- The Renovation Team has completed a 6-month mid-course evaluation of the renovation process and made any adjustments necessary to improve the work being done.
- Continuing education opportunities have been explored and calendared for the youth ministry staff.
- Communication methods currently being used to promote the youth ministry and share the successes with the congregation have been evaluated and added to if necessary.
- Volunteer recruitment has continued.
- Clear, internal marketing processes have been established that allow all church members to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.

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Ministry Architects Option: 1 day offsite

June 2016

Focus: Christian Formation Retreat, Major Event Notebooks, Fall Kick-Off, Compliance, Integration

Outcomes

- A Christian Formation Retreat has been scheduled for January 2017. The retreat will facilitate a discussion of the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
- Work has begun on major event notebooks – creating a template for the notebooks and collecting information on each youth event.
- A Fall Kick-off team has been recruited to begin planning for the start of the fall youth ministry programs.
- Background checks have been done for all weekly hands-on volunteers.
- A written strategic plan for helping the youth become an integral part of the whole congregation, weaving the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church, has been created.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

July 2016

Focus: Database, Curriculum, Long-term Staffing

Outcomes:

- A volunteer thank you event has taken place.
- The effectiveness of this past year's curriculum has been reviewed and decisions have been made for any necessary changes for the upcoming school year.
- Work on the youth database has begun, collecting the most recent information for families and youth. All are categorized in a manner that will follow up on MIA families and youth. Each youth has been classified in the following categories:

Active Youth are the ones whose families are members and have attended at least once in the past year – plus visitors who have become a regular part of the group. They should show up in your printed youth ministry directory.

Member Inactive (MIA) are still a part of the flock. You may not need to send them a facebook message every time the group gets together, but you'll want to regularly pursue these youth, whether they ever show up or not.

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Visitor Active are those who regularly attend weekly programs and/or activities but are not an official member of the church.

Visitor Inactive are the ones who may have visited, but you are confident they will never become a regular part of the group. This group requires no follow up. But you'll want to keep their information for the occasional big event to which you'll want to invite everyone you know.

First Timers refer to visitors who have attended a program for the first time. You'll want to have a process for capturing their information on their first visit and follow up with them within one week of their visit.

- An appropriate long-term staffing model including the professional and volunteer components, for the youth ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth has been developed.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

August 2016

Focus: Leadership Launch, Database, Major Event Notebooks, Parent & Non-parent Engagement

Outcomes:

- A database of all youth and their families has been compiled and each person is "tagged" with a category
- The collection of updated information from each youth and family has been completed and the database for youth ministry has been updated with that new information.
- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours that clarified their roles, inspired them to grow in their own faith and equipped them to serve. The Child Protection Policy was reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
- All volunteer needs for the 2016-2017 school year for youth ministry have been filled.
- Major event notebooks for each major event for the youth ministry have been handed out to this year's event coordinators
- New, non-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in the program have been created. Parent involvement has been encouraged, both visible and behind-the-scenes.

Ministry Architects Option: 2 day onsite, ½ day offsite

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September 2016

Focus: Fall Kick-off, Directory, Curriculum

Outcomes:

- A Fall Kick-off has taken place that welcomed youth and parents into a program they can get excited about, introduced parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about and provided a forum for receiving information from families. All participants feel energized and enthusiastic about the coming year's programs.
- Curriculum has been distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they have been trained to implement the curriculum.
- With the most recent information on youth and their families, a directory of all families and a directory of all volunteers have been distributed at the Fall Kick-off.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

October 2016

Focus: Benchmarks, MIA, Budget, First-Timer Process

Outcomes:

- 50% of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.
- A detailed 2017 budget for the youth ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.
- MIA youth have been systematically contacted.
- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through May 2017 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- A game plan has been written and implemented for welcoming new families, youth, and guests to the church so that they feel warmly welcomed. The plan has included a timely follow up plan to ensure their return to the church.

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November 2016

Focus: Youth Ministry Manual

Outcomes:

- The Youth Ministry Manuals (both hard copy and digital) have been completed, including
 - Visioning documents
 - Directories
 - Volunteer directory
 - Volunteer training agendas and notes
 - Attendance records
 - Annual calendar
 - Results-based job descriptions
 - Game plans and new initiatives
 - Meeting agendas and minutes for Youth Ministry Committee/Renovation Team.
 - Christian Formation Plan and record of curriculum resources used for the current year
 - Budget and other financial documents
 - Recruiting template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year
 - Compliance documents

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

December 2016

Focus: Compliance, Game Plans, Summer Calendar, Preventative Maintenance Calendar

Outcomes:

- Relax.... Breathe....
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and is in compliance with the safe church policy. Background checks have been completed on each volunteer.
- All youth programs have adhered to the Child Protection Policy.
- All game plans that have been launched in last 12 months have been evaluated and tweaked as necessary for impact and sustainability.
- Work has begun on the 2017 summer calendar.
- A preventative maintenance calendar has been created for the youth ministry that will help regularly deal with on-going “behind the scenes” ministry maintenance.

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January 2017

Focus: Calendars, Volunteer Training, Christian Formation

Outcomes:

- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers received support and training in their specific roles. A “check-in” with each volunteer has taken place to evaluate how the volunteer has been doing in their role and addressed any concerns.
- Work has begun on the 2017-2018 youth ministry calendar.
- The summer 2017 calendar for the youth ministry has been completed and distributed.
- Interested staff, volunteers, and parents have gathered for a Christian Formation Retreat to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum. At the retreat, the team
 - Evaluated the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Developed a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.
 - Assessed the need for small groups and Sunday school to use an integrated curriculum plan that is coordinated with the Sunday school classes that follow.
 - Determined how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decided what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- A written plan to intentionally take youth deeper in their faith through teaching and discipleship in varied environments has been implemented.

Ministry Architects Option: 3 days onsite, 1 day offsite

February 2017

Focus: Volunteer Training, Calendars, Rites of Passage

Outcomes:

- The 2017-2018 youth ministry calendar has been completed through August 2018 including a Fall Kick-off.
- A game plan has been established for the Rites of Passage processes, events, and privileges that have:
 - Welcomed and connected the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry

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- o Welcomed and connected the new 9th graders and their parents into the high school ministry
- o Launched the church's high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they have been surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults
- Volunteer recruiting seasons has opened.
 - o Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.
 - o Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
 - o All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2017-2018 school year.
 - o The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list has been merged.
 - o Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to the youth ministry.

Ministry Architects Option: 1 day offsite

March 2017

Focus: Reflection and Re-Assessment, Participation Goals

Outcomes:

- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through August 2018 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- A review of the renovation process has been completed.
- An online diagnostic has been completed to re-assess the youth ministry.
- Current pressure points have been named

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

April 2017

Focus: Benchmarks, Strategic Staffing

Outcomes:

- With the changes in the youth ministry, volunteer staffing to meet the size and scope of the youth ministry has been evaluated and a game plan to meet those needs has been created.
- All one-year benchmarks have been achieved. Goals have been re-upped and new one-year benchmarks have been established.

Ministry Architects Option: ½ day offsite

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May 2017

Focus: Sustainability

Outcomes:

- A timeline for the next 12 months has been created that included game plans for the current pressure points and items from the online diagnostic.
- Game plans have been put in place to sustain the processes and procedures during the renovation
- Ongoing coaching has been secured and a sustainability plan has been put in place.
- The staff and Renovation Team have celebrated what God has done with their 18-month investment.
- The Renovation Team has transitioned their role to providing support and accountability to the youth volunteers and focusing on strategic issues such as three-year goals and one-year benchmarks, curriculum selection, calendars, and volunteer recruitment.

Ministry Architects Option: 2 days onsite, ½ day offsite

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