



YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Building Sustainable Ministries . . . One Church at a Time

www.ministryarchitects.com

Yardley United Methodist Church Yardley, PA Sunday, March 13, 2016

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BACKGROUND

If you ask the members of Yardley United Methodist Church what they're known for in the community, they will tell you the church has a reputation for having a fabulous youth ministry! Church members describe their church as "loving," "welcoming," and "servant-hearted." Though some pointed back to painful days in the church's recent history, focus group members consistently pointed to the energy and momentum the church is now experiencing. Comments included:

- "We've been through a lot, but we're renewed and re-engaged."
- "These are exciting times at Yardley."
- "Our leadership is energized."
- "We're not using energy for conflict."
- "I think that the word is out there that we've re-committed to living our faith with intention instead of just coming to be a social club. We love each other. We're focused again on why we came together in the first place."

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Yardley United Methodist is a 182-year-old congregation, having built a brick church on Main Street, just a few years after forming. Up until 1952, the church shared a pastor who was in charge of multiple churches. In 1952 it became a separate pastoral charge in 1952 with 301 members.

The membership of the church is 362 and on an average week in 2016, 151 people (up from a recorded figure of 125 in 2015) attend one of the church's two worship services, the 9:00 AM Celebration Service and the 11:00 AM Traditional Service. The Rev. Cynthia E. Skripak was appointed in the summer of 2015. Denise Harris serves as Youth Director, having been on staff since 2002.

Currently, there are 66th through 12th graders on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, an average of 41 of them participate in either Sunday school, worship, Wednesday night youth group, or Confirmation. There are also many special events including: MS mission trip, HS mission trip, a ski trip, Confirmation Retreat, Relay for Life, Creation, Youth Rally, 30-Hour Famine, lock-ins, Big Picture Night (Fall Kick-off), Family Challenge, Pumpkin Patch, and so many more.

The youth ministry is described by youth and their parents as a "fun," "loving," and "exciting" ministry. When given the opportunity to offer constructive critique" of the youth ministry, focus groups could think of nothing but glowing reports.

The church has a 2016 budget of \$380,524. For the year 2016, the youth ministry has a budget in the neighborhood of \$57,900, including youth ministry program expenses and salaries/benefits for the youth director.

There are 7 adult volunteers involved each week in one of the major weekly youth programs. Others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year. There is not a formal Youth Ministry Council, but the adult volunteers often serve in this capacity. There is also a strong student leadership team in place, Student Table, which meets every month or so to plan and lead many of the pieces of the ministry.

The youth room is downstairs near the Fellowship Hall and set up with comfortable furniture and games. One youth gave a picture of how welcome they feel in this space, saying, "We have a mini-trampoline, and I like to jump off it into a pile of the couch cushions!" The youth also have two classrooms on the upper level, which has been redecorated by one young man's Eagle Scout project. Since the youth have outgrown their main room, they often spill over into the Fellowship Hall. With a smile, one person shared, "No room can really hold all us anymore!"

Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the youth ministry by the pastor and youth director and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. Ministry Architects met with 49 individuals in 9 focus groups or one-

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on-one meetings. 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 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. The overwhelming consensus is that this rent is being paid due, thanks to the significant number of teenagers who call Yardley United Methodist Church their home.

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.” Given the number of activities, events, and programs that focus group members are buzzing about, this rent too is being well paid!

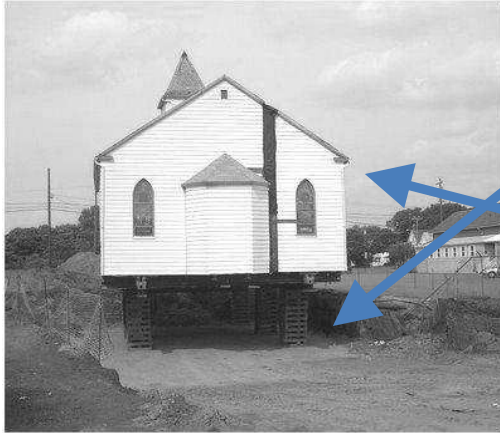
Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the youth staff, volunteers, and the youth themselves are essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and with the parents. There is an undeniable sense of satisfaction among youth, leaders, parents, and the church’s leadership. Paid in full!

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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Laying the Foundation:
Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the youth ministry's *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,

Continuing to Do Ministry:
Maintaining the *current* youth ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, their families, the staff and the church at large.

As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, four 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 151 would ordinarily expect an average weekly attendance of just 15 youth per week. The current weekly attendance of 41 youth is almost triple what normal churches are experiencing.

2) \$1,500 per Youth: With a budget of approximately \$58,000 (including program budget, staff salaries, and staff benefits) dedicated to the youth ministry, YUMC has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly participation level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 39-40 youth in some aspect of the church's life. With 41 currently participating every week, the ministry is almost right on target for its current reach. However, it is not likely that the ministry will be able to do more to reach the other youth on its rolls without more of an investment.

3) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth: With 1 full-time staff person dedicated to youth ministry, the church has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 50 youth on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration is aligned well to the current needs of the ministry, however, does not allow room for much more growth.

4) 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 7 weekly volunteers, YUMC is currently at a ratio of 1 adult leader to every 6 youth, giving the ministry a capacity for 35 youth weekly. The volunteer pool will likely need to expand if the church wants to sustain its impact with youth.

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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 Yardley pursues a more sustainable model of youth ministry. As the church moves forward, the following observations will be helpful:

- 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. The youth director mostly fills this role since there is not a current youth ministry advisory council in place.
- Sometimes paid staff are not given the time or training to do their important work as the “general contractor” of a complex ministry. YUMC has been very supportive of this kind of training, and Denise has sought it out through experiences like the Princeton Seminary Certificate in Youth Ministry program and this assessment.
- 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.

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ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

“We’re Gonna Go Hang in Denise’s Office Now”

There is absolutely no doubt about it: Denise is much adored and beloved. Both parents and youth alike love “the magic” (as one parent named it) she brings to the youth ministry table. Students feel so comfortable about Denise that they wanted to go hang in Denise’s office after their listening group and Denise wasn’t even there. Yet, they knew they could and they would be welcomed. Here is a litany of praises from all corners of the church:

- “She’s a good listener.”
- “She’s chill.”
- “She’s a bro.”
- “She’s so good for the kids.”
- “I credit my children’s success partly to her involvement in their lives.”
- “She’s a peacemaker.”
- “She’s never grown up.”
- “She knows when to be a friend and when to be an adult.”
- “She’s magnetic.”
- “She’s super nice.”
- “She only gets upset when people aren’t listening and things are last minute.”
- “We could limp along without her for awhile but it wouldn’t be the same.”

The list could go on and on. Denise is treasured and a treasure to the ministry. One adult summed it up, “One of the things I think about for Denise is her feeling of satisfaction and keeping her energy. Having done this so long, is she being stretched? I’d say, ‘Jesus, be sure Denise enjoys her job as she goes through her life.’” The others around the table nodded because they want her to have a long and happy career. At Yardley!

Pastor with a Plus

Having a youth director that everyone adores is a powerful punch. Having a pastor that loves the youth ministry by showing hands-on support is an even more powerful one-two punch! Pastor Cyndi jumped into showing pastoral care for the youth by joining the Yardley team of adult volunteers in a year-long training cohort just two weeks after her appointment to YUMC began! Pastor Cyndi has brought a breath of fresh air to the church, giving them an exciting sense of renewal. She is creating a staffing “team” environment where the staff feel trusted and trust her in return.

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The Church That Cares

Any church that is willing to spend precious resources on conducting an assessment is one that's willing to put their money where the mouth is. YUMC goes above and beyond that to show their love for the youth in their community. Ways this care is shown is seen in having a full-time youth director, supporting the many fundraisers it takes to keep the youth going on so many summer trips, the number of adults directly working with youth or supporting the ministry behind the scenes, providing several rooms as dedicated youth space...the list goes on. "The church has always provided what we needed whenever we asked for it," said one participant. The members of YUMC show their love not only with their words, but with actions as well.

"Let's Go to Prom"

The favorite listening group award goes to (drum roll...): the students of Yardley! They are exceptional. They are smart, insightful, fun, and a joy to be around. They're looking to make deeper, more meaningful connections with their peers. The students are a huge asset to the church body and it is beyond blessed to have such great students in its midst.

They're so connected that several of them recently went to their prom together! Even though they all come from different schools, it doesn't seem to matter once they're at church. This is a group of students who want to be together and want to bring their friends. So, they do! The climate for students is very open; it's one of the key reasons the numbers for the youth ministry are so off-the-charts high.

Sticky Faith

Several church members connected to the Christian Education at the church read *Sticky Faith*, by Drs. Kara Powell and Chap Clark. From there, they began to implement its principles into the life of the ministry to children and youth. Evidence of this approach to integrating all age-levels into each others' lives is shown through the Family Challenge, the youth and children together on Wednesday nights, the active participation of youth at the 9:00 AM service, and the church's approach to VBS.

Can't Wait to Cross the Aisle

A joy repeatedly heard was about the 3 rows the youth take up on Sunday morning. "They bring so much energy to that service!" said one member and the same sentiment was repeated numerous times. Another adult shared that their child, "couldn't wait to cross the aisle to sit with the youth." This is exciting and a blessing that should be treasured!

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Student-Led/Parent-Involved Ministry

The youth ministry has reached the pinnacle of what most ministries hope for: students who are leading other students and parents who are actively involved. “Our students lead our own middle school mission week each summer. How fabulous is that?” So many parents are connected that other parents wondered if there was enough room for other parents to get involved. This is a great problem to have!

Passionate People

Without a doubt the people of Yardley are fiercely passionate about faith and the youth. They long for deep connections and life-giving relationships. Truly, they desire to keep a thriving youth ministry. Many are ready and willing to get into the trenches. The church is ready and willing to do whatever it takes to make the youth ministry even better than it already is!

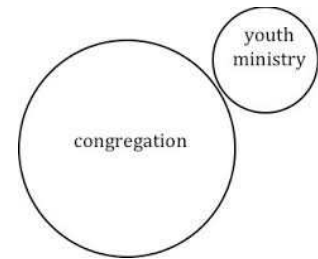
CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the youth ministry strategically forward

One-Eared Mickey Mouse

The youth ministry is glorious and the youth are a gift to ministry at YUMC. But 11:00 AM worshippers expressed a desire to figure out more connecting points to help eliminate a segregated mentality. A conversation from two members:

- “We understand why they want to go to 9:00 AM service. But we still want to see them. What can we do to have them at our service?” To which another person responded, “Shouldn’t we also go to them?”



Having dedicated space downstairs is a good thing. A youth program with so many wonderful moving parts is a blessing. The multiple worship services and Sunday school classes in between are wonderful opportunities for students to experience and worship God in ways that meet their needs. But without an intentional plan that brings everyone into the same room together on a consistent periodical basis, the youth ministry will grow metaphorically like a one-eared Mickey Mouse: touching the outside of congregation’s scope but never really on the inside. Strides have been made in this area, especially with Pastor Cyndi’s arrival, but more can be done to elevate a sense of connection.

The Discipleship Path Needs a Little Weeding

Kudos to the youth director for having a 4-year teaching plan! Still, it might be time for church members to speak into what the church body wants for its Christian formation plan. The youth director can’t plan much further until the church provides more direction. After all, it’s the church who takes vows at each child’s baptism, “to surround that child after the example of Christ.”

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Time well spent would be YUMC determining what it wants its youth to know, feel and do with their Christian faith upon high school graduation before sending them off into parts unknown. Without that, how can the youth ministry meet spiritual expectations reflecting the personality of the church?

Missing from the youth ministry is:

- A set of core Christian educational competencies
- Purposes for each program piece containing a spiritual formation component
- Intentional Rites of Passage beyond Baptism, 3rd grade Bibles, Confirmation and Graduation
- Memory Makers/Milestones
- Ages and Stages chart of a teenager's faith development
- Discipleship Path Plan (including the Rites of Passage & jumping off/on points)

Let's Program the GPS

Imagine this scenario: Yardley's youth ministry advertises a big trip. The buzz begins and everyone plans on going! Bags get packed, snacks are ready. The day arrives and everyone gathers around the church bus. They load up, get seated, and the driver says, "So, where are we going?" And that's where the trouble begins. Great people are ready, generous resources are onboard, but no one programmed the GPS. Everyone had a different destination in mind. Dissension ensues, folks get off the bus, conversations continue in the parking lot (which is never good), and the bus goes nowhere.

The youth ministry is much like this scenario. There are gifted staff and volunteers ready to do even more amazing things for the Kingdom. The missing piece is that there is a vacuum where consistently refreshed mission, target, values, three-year revolving goals, one-year benchmarks, and participation expectations should be. Without blueprints created for the youth ministry by the church together, staff members and volunteers get tired, the calendar continually repeats itself, "nothing new under the sun" happens, and staleness begins to creep in and take hold.

Tiny Cracks in the Foundation

As YUMC focuses its attention on the youth ministry, there are some foundational documents and structural framework that will lead toward greater sustainability and happy families.

Currently missing from the youth ministry systems:

- Attendance Tracking: Cloud-based system for tracking individual attendance records at each youth program. It was difficult to get the numbers needed for the assessment report. If there's no tracking system, then 1st time visitors and those

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missing-in-action may not be followed up on like they should be. Without this, growth doesn't happen; instead, decline begins.

- Database: A cloud-based system so that busy adult volunteers can access student contact info at anytime for outreach and relationships building, like visits to school events, cards and notes, follow-up after key events, etc.
- 18-months-out Youth Calendar: An online calendar where events are always 12-months out "in pen" events with another 6-month "in pencil." This way, parents, youth, and volunteers can have the opportunity to say "no" to other things and "yes" to youth events. The farther out the calendar, the farther out the organizational process.
- Major Events Notebooks: For special events and programs that happen each year (Graduation Sunday, Big Picture Night, Confirmation, Middle School Mission Week, all the fundraisers, Relay for Life, etc.), information and data should be gathered to enable new volunteers to run these in the future. *These binders have been initiated and just need to be brought to completion.
- Volunteer Recruiting and Development System: A tighter system of ensuring that every one who wants to help gets to help in his/her area of giftedness will do nothing but make a great ministry even greater! So a clockwork system of volunteer needs, a fishing pond, job descriptions for every task, guidelines/expectations, training/resourcing, etc., all lead to a happy team where leaders feel they can meet ministry needs best when their needs are met.
- Leadership Team Meeting Schedule: a well-defined system of meeting frequency for the existing student leadership team, adult volunteers, and a yet-to-be established Youth Parent Council should be determined with clear-cut roles for each entity being determined.

New Parents/Old System

A dynamic that comes from any long-term staffing (as YUMC has been blessed with in it's 15+ year staffing tenure) is the problem of "new wine in old wine skins." In other words, do the well-oiled mechanisms and machinery of the youth ministry with long-term traditions allow for new people and new ideas? Listen to a conversation: "I found as a parent, the youth group hard to break into. Part of it is, "We've always done it this way." Largely, there are so many parents that have been involved for so long that there wasn't room for change. If I could get to Denise, then I could get in. We've been here for X years. It's been tough."

This is a good challenge to have and thanks to those that named this challenge. A youth ministry that has such a strong flow of events with loads of parent engagement is not a bad thing! It just means making sure there are systems in place for ensuring that there is room for people to bring new ideas or new ways of doing things to the planning table.

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Missing Older Children's Ministry

Numerous recent studies are coming out showing that as physical adolescence begins at an earlier age, those same 4th and 5th graders are becoming less engaged at church. Parents today are finding an increased difficulty in getting their children to participate in church. The old style of lumping all children's ministry together from K-5th grade no longer works. Some would say that a solid youth ministry today is won or lost in the ministry to 4th-5th graders.

Listening group participants shared about the church's painful pastoral transition before Pastor Cyndi was appointed to the church. One of the unfortunate by-products of this difficult period is the ministry to 3rd-5th graders. "God Squad" – a ministry outreach to children - was discontinued and children got out of the church habit. Although "God Squad" has been re-instated on Wednesday nights, there is still a very small "farm team" of older elementary age youth moving up into the youth ministry. This attrition has led to smaller Confirmation classes and less connected middle school youth (and parents) to the program. 5th graders are moving up into the middle school ministry before their time just to have someone to hang out with. Without a targeted ministry program to meet the needs of maturing older children, the youth ministry may suffer the consequences with decreasing numbers and excitement.

It was also noted in different listening groups that the children's ministry lesser focus and success than the youth ministry may be attributed to the fact that there is no children's ministry staff support. "We know that younger families are a prime focus of the church and although funds are tight, we may not be able to afford not to hire a children's person."

Middle School Malaise

It was expressed by some that the middle school parents seem less connected than the high school parents. It was difficult in the listening process to talk about the veracity of this since no parents came to their listening group. Other participants shared that they had concerns about how much less engaged the middle school youth themselves seemed than the high school students.

What's Next?

Whether the church likes it or not, there will someday be a youth ministry after Denise's tenure ends. The list of "what if's" has several possibilities on it: seminary, family, move for family or job, burnout, and so on. The reality is that Denise has wildly succeeded past all records of the typical church youth director at one church; the average stay for a FT youth worker is 4.1 years. The challenge to the church is several-fold: 1) To ensure an environment that keeps the staff from burnout 2) To provide opportunities for long-term staff to find "new and fresh" among the "tradition and familiar." 3) To have a solid system in place for the youth ministry that would function beyond one person's job tenure.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 18 months as a time of incremental infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target August 2016 as the date for achieving sustainable structures for the youth ministry.
- 2) Establish a Prayer Team to undergird the youth ministry, giving them a copy of this report as a prompt for prayer over the next 18 months.
- 3) Present this report to the Administrative 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 3-5 non-anxious, task oriented volunteers who report regularly to the pastor, working alongside the youth director. These 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 coaching 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.

RENOVATION TEAM TASK #1: Address the Pressure Points

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

Pressure Point #1: Leadership Team Clarification and Launch

- o Leadership Team Creation and Clarification: Gather the current youth ministry leadership teams (currently the Student Table, the adult volunteers, and a "to-be-created" Parent Planning Council into one place at one time on a semi-annual basis for a time of structural planning. At this event:
 - o Determine the separate jobs/function of each of the three teams.Possibilities could include: Student Table = Student-to-Student Outreach Events, Adult Volunteers = Teaching, facilitating, and pastoral care, Parent Council = Behind the Scenes Event Prep.

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- o Work on the calendar together determining which team walks away with what responsibility for the next 6, 12, and 18-months out. The first planning event will take longer; after that, the semi-annual events will always be: nailing down the details at 6-months out, determining people and places needed for 12-months out, and creating the event ideas and putting dates on the calendar at 18-months out.

Pressure Point #2: Middle School Task Force

Create a small task force, which will report to the Renovation Team, who will gather more information about what is currently the ebb and flow of ministry to middle school youth. The team will be looking for areas where middle school aren't connecting into the flow of youth things. Special attention will be given to Sunday mornings and Wednesday night. The report will make suggestions of the how and what leadership can do to give the middle schoolers a sense that their needs are as important as the needs of the high school youth.

Pressure Point #3: Older Elementary Task Force

Create a small task force, which will report to the Renovation Team, who will be charged into looking to gather more information about the ebb and flow of YUMC's 3rd-5th graders. Plans should include:

- o Creating a targeted ministry to this age where they meet at least monthly for fun outreach "bring your friends" event.
- o Create a data base of families in the community with 3rd-5th graders from those that attend outreach events like this new program or VBS, so that an intentional plan of reaching out can be implemented.
- o Consider hiring a highly organized 10-hour a week Children's Ministry Coordinator who could give structural support and focus to the start-up pre-teen ministry. This person could report to the Youth Director for ease of familial support or directly to the pastor.

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

- o **Host a "Quick Start" Summit:** Invite the Renovation Team, key volunteers, and youth staff to participate in a Quick Start Summit in which the renovation process is launched and the pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report are addressed. The Summit tackles the items that need to be done first, and builds momentum for the youth ministry renovation process.

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- Identify any progress in implementing the recommendations of this report.
- Orient the Renovation Team to their specific responsibilities.
- Assign Renovation Team members responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the report.
- Calendar dates involving Renovation Team.
- Create a plan for communication between the Renovation Team and staff to ensure that all parties feel they're "in the know."
- Draft the following documents, finalizing them within no more than two weeks after the Summit:
 - A finalized version of the calendar for all weekly programs and major special events through December 2016.
 - 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-threatening opportunities for adult involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes opportunities.
 - A clear and complete list of volunteer needs in the youth ministry, including relational and behind-the-scenes, weekly events and special event leaders.
 - 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).
 - Reasonable participation goals have been established for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through December 2016 and clear lines of responsibility for filling those events have been established.
- **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:
 - A ministry mission statement
 - A statement of values
 - A set of three-year revolving goals and one-year benchmarks
 - An organizational structure for the ministry

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- o **Christian Formation:** Gather a team for a Christian Formation Summit 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.
 - 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 **Attendance:** Track attendance for all youth activities and develop an attendance system that allows for easy access to weekly participation numbers.
- 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 **Sustainable Pace:** Help the youth director develop a “rhythmic week” including a Sabbath and “balcony” time (that is, time to look at the big picture and make strategic plans).

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- 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.

DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- 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 **Memory Milestones:** Develop a written plan for the processes, events, and privileges that will give families with youth frequent opportunities to celebrate life moments with the rest of the church (which in turn, provides better integration). Ideas include but aren’t limited to:
 - o Welcome and connect the new 6th graders and their parents into the youth ministry
 - o Engaging the entire church into the Confirmation process
 - o Celebrating things like: braces on/braces off, new drivers, Prom, first cell phone, first summer trip, first job, etc.
 - 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 - MARCH

The following provides Yardley United Methodist Church 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.

March 2016

Focus: Starting Right and Work Begins

Outcomes:

- This report has been presented to the Administrative Council for the strategic renovation of the youth ministry and the council has given full support of this plan.
- A Quick Start Summit has been scheduled for April.
- The Renovation Team for youth has been recruited and the first meeting has been scheduled to take place during the Quick Start Summit.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the youth ministry. They have received a copy of this report and timeline.
- Immediate volunteer needs for the youth ministry have been determined and slots have been filled.
- Mechanisms for monthly on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry key volunteers and staff have been provided.

April 2016

Focus: Renovation Underway, Calendars, Volunteers, Pressure Points

Outcomes:

- A Quick Start Summit has taken place in which the renovation process was launched and pressure points outlined in the Assessment Report have been addressed. The Summit tackled the items that needed to be done first to initiate the youth ministry renovation process.

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- A Visioning Summit has been scheduled for August and a “save the date” email/postcard has been sent to all families
- Work has begun on the 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar.
- A fishing pond of 40 potential volunteers in youth ministry has been created.
- Results-based job descriptions have been written and distributed to the appropriate volunteers for the youth ministry.
- Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators, and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2016-2017.

May 2016

Focus: Database, Communications, Fall Kick-off, Calendar

Outcomes:

- Work on the youth databases 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 of Yardley 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 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 children, whether they ever show up or not.
 - **Visitor Active** are those who regularly attend weekly programs and/or activities but are not an official member of the church.
 - **Visitor Inactive** are the ones who may have visited, but you are confident they will never become a regular part of the group. This group requires no follow up. But you’ll want to keep their information for the occasional big event to which you’ll want to invite everyone you know.
 - **First Timers** refer to visitors who have attended a program for the first time. You’ll want to have a process for capturing their information on their first visit and follow up with them within one week of their visit.

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- Communication norms have been determined and those best practices have been implemented.
- Promotion of the Visioning Summit has begun.
- The 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar has been completed.
- A Fall Kick-off for the youth ministry has been scheduled for September. A team of parents has been recruited to implement the Fall Kick-off.

June 2016

Focus: Compliance, Database, Volunteers

Outcomes:

- A database of all youth and their families has been compiled and each person has been “tagged” with a category.
- An intentional strategy for recruiting and retaining the middle school youth and their parents has been established. Staff and the Renovation Team have considered a different middle school experience on Wednesday night that is more age-appropriate for those youth.
- A small task force has begun to brainstorm and develop a ministry specifically geared to 4th – 5th grades to build community among the children and ensure their transition into the youth ministry.
- A thank you event for all youth volunteers has taken place.
- A Leadership Launch has been scheduled for August for the volunteers in the youth ministry.
- All volunteer needs for the 2016-2017 school year for the youth ministry have been filled.

July 2016

Focus: Visioning Summit, Calendars, Compliance, Participation Goals, Curriculum

Outcomes:

- A Visioning Summit with all major stakeholders has occurred and produced visioning documents for the youth ministry (mission statement, core values, goals, and structure).

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- One-year benchmarks have been assigned to each three-year, revolving goal developed in the visioning process.
- All youth programs have adhered to the safe church policy.
- Reasonable participation goals have been determined for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through August 2017 and steps to accomplish those targets have begun to be implemented.
- 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
- The 2016-2017 youth ministry calendar has been distributed to all youth and their families. The calendar has been publicized and major event dates have been put on the church's calendar.

August 2016

Focus: Mid-Course Evaluation, Volunteers, Curriculum, Leadership Launch

Outcomes:

- The Renovation Team has completed a 6-month mid-course evaluation of the renovation process and made any adjustments that are necessary to improve the work being done.
- The Renovation Team has met monthly.
- A volunteer application, an application process, and a screening process for all weekly hands-on volunteers have been created and implemented
- Curriculum has been chosen for the upcoming school year and has been distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they have been trained to implement the curriculum
- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours, that clarifies their roles, inspires them to grow in their own faith and, equips them to serve the youth of Yardley. The Safe Sanctuary Policy has been reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
- Each youth staff member has created a Rhythmic Week including balcony time and has begun to live into their Rhythmic Week.

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September 2016

Focus: Directory, Communication, Fall Kick-off

Outcomes

- 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.
- The collection of updated information from each youth and family has been completed and the database for the youth ministry has been updated with that new information. Every youth has been “tagged” with a category.
- 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.
- A Fall Kick-off has taken place for the youth ministry 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 felt energized and enthusiastic about the coming year’s programs.

October 2016

Focus: Compliance, Major Event Notebooks, Budget

Outcomes

- Background checks have been done for all weekly hands-on volunteers.
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and in compliance with the safe church policy.
- 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 detailed 2017 budget for the youth ministry has been completed and submitted to the appropriate group.
- Work has begun on major event notebooks – a template has been created for the notebooks and information has been collected on each youth event.
- The new tween ministry geared to 4th - 5th grades has begun.

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November 2016

Focus: Christian Formation Summit, Attendance, MIA Children

Outcomes:

- Interested staff, volunteers, and parents have gathered for a Christian Formation Summit to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum. At the Summit, the team
 - Evaluated the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
 - Developed a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the youth ministry programming.
 - Determined how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
 - Decided what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- A Christian Formation Summit has been scheduled for the new year. The Summit will facilitate a discussion of the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
- A process for tracking and recording attendance in all youth programs has been created and implemented.
- MIA youth have been systematically contacted.
- All game plans that have been launched in last 12 months have been evaluated and tweaked as necessary for impact and sustainability.

December 2016

Focus: Marketing, Summer Calendar, Benchmarks, Catch Up

Outcomes:

- Relax...Breathe...Celebrate the Baby King...Avoid Fruitcake
- Work has begun on the summer calendar for 2017.
- The Renovation Team has met monthly and decided how often they will meet for the remainder of the 18 months.

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- 50% of the one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.
- 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.

January 2017

Focus: Calendars, Major Event Notebooks, Volunteer Training

Outcomes:

- Major event notebooks for each major youth event have been completed.
- Work has begun on the 2017-2018 youth ministry calendar.
- The summer 2017 calendar has been completed.
- A mid-year training event has taken place in which all volunteers have 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.
- A game plan has been established for the Memory Milestones processes, events, and privileges.

February 2017

Focus: Volunteer Recruitment

Outcomes:

- The 2017-2018 youth ministry calendar has been completed through August 2018 including a Fall Kick-off.
- Volunteer recruiting seasons has opened.
 - Volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated as needed.
 - Names of potential volunteers have been added to the fishing pond.
 - All volunteer needs have been determined for the 2017-2018 school year.
 - The volunteer needs list and the potential volunteers list have been merged.

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- o Current volunteers have been asked to evaluate and possibly renew their commitment to the youth ministry.
- o Recruitment has begun for hands-on weekly volunteers, event coordinators, and behind-the-scenes volunteers for 2017-2018.

March 2017

Focus: Database

Outcomes:

- The collection of updated information from each youth and family has been completed and the database for youth has been updated with that new information.

April 2017

Focus: Volunteer Recruitment, Manual

Outcomes:

- Volunteer recruitment has continued.
- A manual for the youth ministry has been completed, including
 - o Visioning documents
 - o Directories
 - o Volunteer directory
 - o Volunteer training agendas and notes
 - o Attendance records
 - o Annual calendar
 - o Results-based job descriptions
 - o Game plans and new initiatives
 - o Meeting agendas and minutes for the Youth Committee.
 - o Christian Formation Plan and record of curriculum resources used for the current year
 - o Budget and other financial documents
 - o Recruiting template, with a record of all the volunteer needs for the year
 - o Compliance documents

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May 2017

Focus: Directory, Reflection and Re-assessment, Volunteer Thank You

Outcomes:

- With the most recent information on youth and their families, a directory of all families and a directory of all volunteers have been created to be distributed at the Fall Kick-off.
- A volunteer thank you event has taken place.
- 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.

June 2017

Focus: Compliance, Preventative Maintenance Calendar, Curriculum, Fall Kick-off

Outcomes:

- All youth programs have adhered to the safe church policy.
- A Fall Kick-off team has been recruited and has begun planning for the start of the fall youth programs.
- A preventative maintenance calendar has been created for the youth ministry that will help regularly deal with on-going “behind the scenes” ministry maintenance.
- Curriculum has been chosen for the upcoming school year.
- All paperwork for hands on, weekly volunteers has been updated and in compliance with the safe church policy. Background checks have been completed on each volunteer.

July 2017

Focus: Strategic Staffing, Benchmarks, Major Event Notebooks

Outcomes:

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- With the changes in the youth ministry, the staffing to meet the size and scope of the youth ministry has been evaluated and a game plan to meet those needs has been created if necessary.
- All one-year benchmarks have been achieved. Goals have been re-upped and new one-year benchmarks have been established.
- All volunteer needs for the 2017-2018 school year for the youth ministry have been filled.
- All major event notebooks have been updated by the event coordinators and given back to the youth staff to pass along to the next year's coordinator.

August 2017

Focus: Sustainability, Leadership Launch, Curriculum

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 Teams has transitioned their role to providing support and accountability to the youth volunteers and focused on strategic issues such as three-year goals and one-year benchmarks, curriculum selection, calendars, and volunteer recruitment.
- All volunteers have experienced a Leadership Launch, lasting 2-4 hours that clarified their roles, inspired them to grow in their own faith and equipped them to serve. The Safe-Sanctuary Policy was reviewed and adopted by all volunteers.
- Curriculum has been distributed to all teachers/volunteers and they have been trained to implement the curriculum.

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Your Ministry Architects Team **Serving Yardley United Methodist Church**

Stephanie Caro *Senior Consultant* stephanie@ministryarchitects.com



Stephanie Caro has been involved in ministry to children, youth, and adults in the local church since... a long time. Her humorous, straightforward style keeps her busy presenting and coaching at conferences, training events, camps, mission trips, retreats, churches, etc. She is Senior Consultant for Ministry Architects, which allows her to help churches assess, vision, and formulate their ministry game plan.

Her books, *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches* and *99 Thoughts for the Smaller Church Youth Worker*, were published by Group/Simply Youth Ministry. Her next book, "Ten Solutions (to 10 Common Mistakes in Churches)" comes out in 2016. Stephanie is a contributing author to several ministry resources like YouthWorker Journal in addition to her regular column "Smaller Church Youth Ministry" in Group Magazine. Check out Stephanie's blog, part of the #1 read youth ministry blog network, youthministry.com from Simply Youth Ministry/Group Publishing. She also blogs for youthspecialties.com, Princeton Theological Seminary, and others. Stephanie and her husband, Steve, live in Houston, TX. Their 7 children are all grown!

Jeff Dunn-Rankin *Vice President of Consulting* jeff@ministryarchitects.com



Jeff has been Director of Youth at Christ United Methodist Church in Venice, FL since 1998. He has consulted with large and small youth and children's ministries from California to Florida and is a frequent speaker at events from the Group/Simply Convention to KidMin.

He is a regular columnist for Group Magazine, and in 2011, Jeff wrote two books, *Before You Hire a Youth Pastor* and *The Indispensable Youth Pastor* (Group Publishing), both co-authored with YMA President & Founder, Mark DeVries.

Before beginning church ministry, Jeff was managing editor of the *Charlotte Sun* newspaper. Jeff is a graduate of the Sewanee: The University of the South and has a Masters in Business Administration from Vanderbilt University. He currently lives in Venice, Florida, with his wife Mary Lou, and two children, Matthew and Katie.



Mark DeVries *President/Founder* mark@ministryarchitects.com Mark served as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Their Families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee for 28 years. Though Mark resigned his position as youth pastor in 2014, after a year away, he plans to return to First Presbyterian as a volunteer associate pastor.

Mark has trained youth workers across the United States and Canada, as well as in Russia, Uganda, South Africa, Ecuador, Trinidad, Nicaragua, and Northern Ireland, working with a wide variety of denominations. He

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has taught courses or been a guest lecturer at a number of colleges and seminaries, including Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, NJ), Vanderbilt Divinity School (Nashville, TN), David Lipscomb University (Nashville, TN), Travecca Nazarene College (Nashville, TN), King College (Bristol, TN), Montreat College (Montreat, NC), William Tyndale College (Detroit, MI), Presbyterian College (Montreal, Quebec), Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte, NC), Tyndale Theological Seminary (Toronto, Canada) and Calvin College (Grand Rapids, MI).

Mark is the author of a number of books, including Sustainable Youth Ministry (IVP, 2008), Family-Based Youth Ministry (IVP, Revised and Expanded, 2004) and 2011 releases, Before You Hire a Youth Pastor and The Indispensable Youth Pastor (Group Publishing), both co-authored with YMA Vice-President, Jeff Dunn-Rankin. Mark served as the General Editor for the 2013 release, Letters to a Youth Worker (CYMT, 2013). Mark and his wife, Susan, co-authored a marriage book (with their good friends, Robert & Bobbie Wolgemuth) entitled The Most Important Year in a Woman's Life/ The Most Important Year in a Man's Life (Zondervan, 2003). Their marriage book has recently been re-released as two separate gift books, one for the bride and one for the groom, called What Every Bride Needs to Know, and What Every Groom Needs to Know. (Zondervan, 2013).

Mark's articles and reviews have been published in a variety of magazines and journals, including The Christian Century, Theology Today, Group, YouthWorker Journal, Preaching, and Lifelong Faith Journal.

Mark served as the general editor for The True Love Waits Bible. He has also contributed to a number of training manuals and textbooks, including Youth Ministry Handbook (Word, 2000), Starting Right (Zondervan, 2001), and Reaching A Generation for Christ (Moody, 1997), The New Interpreter's Bible Handbook for Preaching (Abingdon, 2007) and Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry (Group, 2007). Mark's writings have now been translated into Korean, Chinese, and Afrikaans.

Mark graduated Summa Cum Laude from Baylor University in Waco, Texas with a B.A. in English and Greek in 1980, and from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1986 with a senior concentration in Youth Evangelism. Throughout his years spent in Waco and Princeton, Mark was involved in youth ministry—working with Young Life in both Waco and Montgomery, New Jersey and serving on the youth staff at the First United Methodist Church in Waco. Upon graduation from Princeton, he was awarded the first Robert Boyd Munger Youth Ministry prize.

Mark serves as the chairman of the board for the Center for Youth Ministry Training, a two-year residential, masters-level, youth ministry training program based in Nashville. He also serves on the Alumni Board for Princeton Theological Seminary. Mark is a presenter for Homeward's "Understanding Your Teenager" seminars. And in addition to partnering occasionally with popular Christian musician, Mark Schultz, Mark is a frequent seminar speaker, training youth leaders at both the Youth Specialties' National Youth Workers Convention and the Simply Youth Ministry Youth Ministry Conference.

Mark lives in Nashville with Susan, his wife of over 30 years, and they have three grown children: Adam and his wife, Sara, Debbie and her husband, Trey, and Leigh. Mark and Susan have three grandchildren, Parish, Nealy and Liam.

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