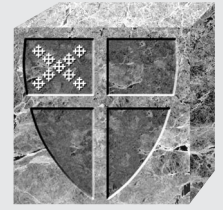


# VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations



**CORNERSTONE  
IS A MINISTRY OF  
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
FOUNDATION**

## Youth Minister vs. Youth Ministry

by Julie Graham

Inevitably, the call comes. "Do you have someone, fresh out of college, who could do our youth ministry for us? We can pay for seven hours a week. We'd prefer a male (so we can attract boys to our group) and if he plays the guitar that would be even better."

The dream for every congregation is a sizable youth group with a perky multi-talented adult youth leader who is theologically sound and sophisticated. Youth ministry is understood as a Wednesday night meeting of games, songs and praying teenagers who bring their friends and make plans for the annual ski trip and mission project. The success of youth ministry is measured by how many kids are coming to this Wednesday night gathering.

This is why the call comes seeking that one charismatic person. And this is why the

other call comes as well: "Please do not send us more information regarding youth. We do not have enough teenagers coming to our church to have a youth ministry."

Because this is the common understanding of youth ministry, most congregations feel grossly inadequate. For congregations who can't afford to hire staff or don't have needed adult volunteers, there is the belief, born out of a sense of failure, that youth ministry can't exist in their church.

Even those churches who are able to afford the attractive adult youth leader find themselves falling short of realizing the vision of success they have gathered their resources to achieve. Sometimes the kids don't flock to Wednesday night. Sometimes the youth

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*At baptism, the congregation promises to do all it can to support the new Christian in his or her life in Christ. What does that mean for vestries? We asked Bishop Tom Ely of Vermont to explore how vestries can make a difference in helping youth think about their Christian vocations.*

## FROM SPARK TO BLAZE: Vestries and Vocations

by Thomas C. Ely

*How can vestries make a difference in helping youth think about their vocations?* Our growing understanding of baptismal ministry is a timely incentive for faith communities and vestries in particular to focus on this challenging question. The fact that someone would even ask the question is a sign of health and hope for the Church.

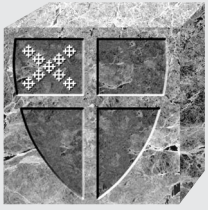
In over twenty-five years of youth ministry, I do not recall anyone ever asking me the question in quite this way. I recall lots of

questions about what vestries can do to help support young people, build stronger youth programs and encourage young people to stay connected to the church. And many individual vestry members have played significant roles in helping young people think about their vocations. At least half a dozen such people come to mind in terms of my own life. However, I think this question is asking something different.

*continued on page 2*

*Youth ministry at its best integrates adolescents into all aspects of church life, from worship to outreach to social events. Essential to that process are vestries, whose leadership bears fruit now and for generations to come. Ever grateful to those talented laity and clergy who make working with youth a high calling, Vestry Papers salutes the youth of our church, and thanks them for the many gifts they bring.*

**This Issue:  
Youth in the  
Episcopal Church**



# Vestries and Vocations

*continued from page 1*

## *How can vestries make a difference in helping youth think about their vocations?*

This is a leadership question, about how vestries might see it as part of their role and ministry, part of their “agenda,” to help young people think about their future and to think about it in terms of ministry. That is an exciting prospect! It is a good question for a bishop to ask when meeting with a vestry and I plan to start asking!

The best way to find an answer is for a vestry to own the question. Such ownership would send a powerful message of commitment to young people. It would also send a powerful message about 1) the connection among baptism, mission and ministry to the whole congregation and 2) the premise of baptism that ministry in daily life is the primary place of our human engagement in God’s mission.

Vestry members who own this question will more fully share leadership responsibility for the spiritual lives and journeys of the people they serve. They will help create and support a community of faith environment in which the lives, journeys and questions of young people are listened to, respected and valued. They will see faith questions in the context of life questions and will model a relational approach to youth ministry, not simply a programmatic approach. And, they will affirm young people and their ministries today as well as their ministries tomorrow.

*What, then, are some practical ways for a vestry to make a difference in helping youth think about their future?*

**Pray!** Make a point at vestry meetings of praying for young people, their ministries and their vocational discernment. Include prayers for a myriad of vocations and occupations in the Sunday Prayers of the People and make the “ministry in daily life” connection to those vocations and occupations part of the prayer.

**Listen!** Find one on one, or small group opportunities to listen to young people tell you about what they are doing now and what they hope to be doing in the future. Listen for their dreams, their hopes, their uncertainties and their fears.

**Share!** Communicate some of those stories you have heard with others and tell some of

your own “vocational” stories to young people. As part of the vestry agenda from time to time, invite members to share with each other something about their own vocations and journeys. Write and encourage others to write about vocational journeys in the parish newsletter or Sunday bulletin. Include young people and young adults away at college among the writers. Find ways (pictures, movies, celebrations) to feature the vocational stories of notable people of faith.

**Encourage!** Help create a climate in which talking about vocation and career choices is the norm rather than the exception. Help create a climate in which all people (not just youth) talk about their ministries in daily life. Pay attention to, and express interest in, the questions, opportunities and concerns of young people.

**Report!** Make “reports from the field” during the Sunday morning liturgy. These are brief offerings of the personal connections between ministry and daily life and work that occur in people’s lives. Provide young people and other members of the congregation an opportunity to do this, as well.

**Offer!** Create opportunities for young people to hear about various occupations, including religious vocations. Try holding Sunday morning “ministry fairs” from time to time featuring members of the congregation and their daily work. Do not forget to include young people and those whose work is centered in the home. Draw on the daily work and vocations of people from all walks of life.

**Support!** When young people move out of the congregation to pursue further education, or a particular vocational choice, stay connected to them and offer support (moral, spiritual, financial) as a vestry and as a congregation. When they return “home” to the congregation, make a bit of a fuss over them, and continue to show interest and support for their journey.

*Bishop Tom Ely has a long history of working with youth and young people as bishop, parish priest, missionary and director of youth ministry programs. He credits many adults at his home parish of Grace Episcopal Church in Norwalk, Connecticut, for playing an important role in his formation.*

*At General Convention in July, delegates will vote on a resolution that calls for the presence of a children’s minister, youth minister, and young adult minister in every congregation as well as an Episcopal ministry on every college campus. Some \$4 million will be needed to train those ministers; General Convention will vote on that as well. Provinces and dioceses are encouraged to match those funds.*

# Let's Give Them a Reason to Stay

by Sharon Ely Pearson

My son no longer attends church. He is seventeen, believes in God, and is able to articulate his membership in the household of God by virtue of his baptism. He was regular in attendance through eighth grade in Sunday school and worship services. He was one of those kids you would find crawling under the pew and hiding in the coat closet. He also got booted out of the youth choir because he kept telling jokes.

He knows Bible stories inside and out and can answer any *Jeopardy!* question related to them. He acquiesces to his parents' request to attend worship as a family on Christmas and Easter, although will roll his eyes and fidget if the sermon is too theological.

I wouldn't say my son has "left the church," but he has certainly "checked out," as have a number of his former church school classmates. He was not always accepted for who he was, and he remembers that.

## A lack of integration

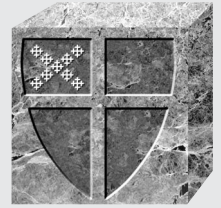
At a time when teenagers are traveling through the awkward phase of childhood and

adulthood, the church is often not open for their pointed questions, searching and incriminations. Adolescence is a time of physical, emotional, academic, social and spiritual change. Sometimes they act like they are four years old; an hour later they can seem like twenty-five, with a theology to match each. How can a church deal with such wild personalities that often don't fit anywhere? If the faith community is needed at any one time in a person's life — isn't this it?

In my role as a diocesan Christian educator, parish leadership often calls me in search of materials to attract and retain young people. They are often looking for a quick fix or snazzy program that will entice and engage their teens. There is a growing tension and concern that youth are "leaving the church."

As we bemoan the fact that teenagers are leaving the church, could it be that the church has abandoned them? Youth leave the church primarily because it is solely designed to meet the needs and interests of

*continued on page 5*



*Youth will have a dynamic presence at General Convention and are invited to meet with church leaders, participate in worship, track legislation and visit the exhibit hall. For more information:*

[www.episcopalchurch.org/myp](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/myp)

## Youth Ministry Resources

*For a more extensive list, see our website at [www.EpiscopalFoundation.org](http://www.EpiscopalFoundation.org)*

The Ministries with Youth People Cluster at the Episcopal Church Center, New York — Provides a range of services, networks, conferences and publications, also hosts a dynamic website. 800-334-7626 or [www.episcopalchurch.org/myp](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/myp)

The Journey to Adulthood, Leader Resources — Popular programs for ages 11-18 based on the concept that manhood and womanhood are gifts from God, but that adulthood is earned. 800-941-2218 or [www.leaderresources.org](http://www.leaderresources.org)

Friends of the Groom — Dramatic readings and theatrical productions for youth. [www.friendsofthegroom.org](http://www.friendsofthegroom.org)

*The Great Adventure: Exploring Christian Faith with Young People* by Patricia Bays

*When Kumbaya is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry* by Dean Borglund

*Leaving Home With Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth* by Elizabeth Caldwell

*Disorganized Religion: The Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults*, edited by Sheryl A. Kujawa

*Handbook for Ministries with Young Adolescents in the Episcopal Church*, edited by Sheryl A. Kujawa

*Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow up Healthy* by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

## EDITOR'S NOTE

# Ghosts of Youth Groups Past

by Lindsay Hardin Freeman

Tension, angst and anxiety are often the feelings of youth, as they grapple with the demands of the world and their own growing bodies and emotions.

In researching this issue, however, we found those feelings to belong to others as well — namely much of the larger church in its struggles with youth ministry over the years.

Some, like one priest in the Midwest, feel a sense of loss due to what seem like smaller numbers of youth in recent years. “It is like there are ghosts in our hallways,” she says, “ghosts of large youth groups past. You came to church, you had fun, you were confirmed, and there were just lots of kids. Are we doing something wrong today? Is that why we have fewer kids?”

### Atypical growth

Not necessarily, says C. Kirk Hadaway, director of research at the Episcopal Church Center, who points to the '50s and '60s as being somewhat atypical in terms of church growth. “All mainline and conservative denominations had proportionately more youth during the '50s and '60s than they do today, as a result of the baby boom.”

Hadaway says there are additional factors affecting the Episcopal Church — Episcopalians tend to be more educated and affluent than the general population, and they are mostly white (89%) — all of which points to having children at a later age, thus a lower birth rate. Also, many Episcopalians transfer into the church after their children are grown.

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### *Are we doing something wrong today? Is that why we have fewer kids?*

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And people seem to notice numbers more when it comes to youth, he says. “Memories of this aberrant period in American history [‘50s and ‘60s] have led churches to see the lack of youth as symptomatic of lack of vitality, and youth ministry as a way to fix our problems.”

Fixing problems with youth ministry is exactly where congregations run into trouble, says Lisa Kimball, coordinator of the national Episcopal Youth Event for 2002 and 2003.



“When I go into a congregation and they are missing kids, they tend to want to jump to a programmatic model to try to fix it. But the places that are the most successful with youth go away from an isolated church ministry program to an integrated youth and family model. To nurture the faith of young people we need to nurture the faith of the young person’s family.”

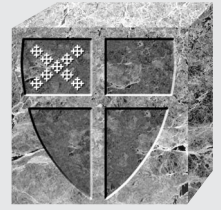
Kimball uses a concept popularized by John Westerhoff, a classic name in Christian formation: “Faith can’t be taught; it can only be caught.” And, she says, starts with the people at home, assuming they are reinforced in their faith at church. Pretty soon it becomes clear that the child has another family: his or her church family — made up of those people who care even in times of awkwardness or rebellion, or when the biological family is being cast aside by the youth.

### It’s not about numbers

That caring — which leads to successful youth ministry — is not about numbers, says Heidi Clark, coordinator of youth ministry for the Diocese of Missouri. “Kids can have those big group experiences, but unless they learn that someone in the congregation knows them and loves them and calls them by name, you are not providing youth ministry, you are doing something that the “Y” can provide.”

In those places where large youth groups do exist, the threads of success are the same. Janie Stevens, coordinator of Christian Education in the Diocese of Texas, where growth across all age groups has been explosive in the past ten years, says that it is “terribly scary being a kid” these days. If the church is offering something genuine, youth will know and will come — but if they perceive it is not genuine, they will go somewhere else.

*Next Issue:  
Roles and Responsibilities  
of Vestries*



*The biggest challenge facing youth in the church today is that they are unable to speak the language of the Christian people with depth, creativity and nuance. Learning to speak any language is best done in childhood. It is ironic that the best program for adolescents begins when they are about two years old, when language begins to be acquired by our species.*

*Jerome Berryman*

# Let's Give Them a Reason to Stay

*continued from page 3*

adults, and the adults in the community are often unwilling to share their lives and faith with them. While special days may be set aside for them, such as "Youth Sunday," there is no integration into the life and ongoing ministry of the church.

Recently meeting with a deanery's leadership, we shared particular events that were "life-giving" to parish youth ministry: retreats involving prayer, study and recreation, service, and worship participation.

Opportunities in which youth had a focus and worked toward a common goal led to community building, such as visiting nursing homes, working with preschool children and parish events. An overwhelming concern was that there are not enough adult leaders in parishes. A lack of rites of passage in our culture today was another concern, and how the church often does not help youth connect the biblical story with daily life.

## **Doing ministry elsewhere**

Teens hang out with friends on the internet, at coffee shops, in the mall and at work and school. They look for mentors who are seekers of justice, and more often than not, they find these types of mentors lacking in the faith community. Questions flow easily in challenges to adults: Why are there no black people in the congregation? Why are we spending \$50,000 on a new organ when there are homeless on the streets? Why is the church not talking about human sexuality, except to argue, label and judge?

As a voice of the prophet in a congregation, they work hard to change a system when the system is leaving somebody out or is unwilling to hear the voice of the oppressed. Too often, they are the ones who are not being heard and are being left out, and so they leave to do their ministry elsewhere.

## **Show a commitment**

Vestries can assist young people by welcoming their involvement in worship and community service, planning and decision-making. The vestry can show that the parish has a serious commitment to being a nurturing congregation by knowing youth by name and listening to what they are seeking from their parish community.

The entire faith community promises to do all in its power to support each candidate in

their life in Christ at baptism. How are our communities living this out with our youth — during worship, coffee hour, outreach, and its appropriation of funds when it comes to the budget? One way is for youth to be a part of decision-making in regard to parish life, since it often affects them. Are teenagers members of your altar guild, usher team, vestry or worship committee? This involves some risk-taking, but that is where transformation can happen!

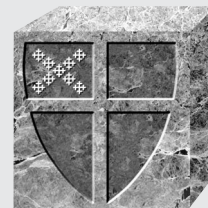
A new paradigm for ministry with youth moves from programmatic to relational. Today's youth leader becomes a spiritual director who instead of telling about God, points to the presence of God. The mission of youth ministry becomes formational — helping adolescents grow in intimacy with God, through heart and mind, as they search for their own identity. Instead of Bible study, games and "hot topics," mentors (a new role for vestry members?) are present in the faith community engaging with youth in spiritual practices, prayer, service, discussion, storytelling, journaling and retreats — just the stuff that the adults do.

## **An Episcopal door?**

Did my son worship with us this Easter? No. He was at another church with his friends. He was asked to sing in the choir there. Will he ever be confirmed? I hope so, but for the time being, he tells me, "Why? I already know what they'll teach me in those boring classes. I've been baptized. I can receive Eucharist. I'll never see the ones who will be coming to class when it's over anyway. What's the purpose? Why bother?"

I am praying he will find a faith community that will embrace him for who he is and invite him to share his gifts. I hope the church of the future will do likewise for every young person who walks in the door. Until we can answer his questions, however, it might not be an Episcopal door.

*Sharon Ely Pearson is the consultant for Christian Education for the Diocese of Connecticut. She represents the dioceses of Province One on the Episcopal Council for Christian Education and graduated in May with a Master of Arts in Christian Education from Virginia Theological Seminary.*



*Good news! Vestry Papers won four Polly Bond awards at the Episcopal Communicators' conference this spring in Los Angeles. Named for the late Polly Bond, the awards honor those publications which reach particularly high standards in religious journalism. Subscriptions have increased by 69% in the last year, and we are grateful to our readers for their support, ideas and enthusiasm.*



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# Youth Minister vs. Youth Ministry

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leader leaves after a year and the kids go, too and the church has to start the ministry all over. Sometimes the teens — who were so involved with the Wednesday night youth ministry — are never seen again after high school graduation.

The church asks, "Why are we failing so miserably in youth ministry?" Inevitably, parishioners blame their size, their socio-economic status, their culture, their neighborhood, their age or their rector. All along, the fault lies in the vision.

## A new vision

It is time for a new vision of youth ministry. "Will you who witness these vows, do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?" People: "We will." (*Book of Common Prayer*, page 303.)

At baptism, the vision is cast of the relationship between the faith community and the newly baptized. The community in all its power is to support this person in his or her life in Christ. The community has pledged to be in relationship in such a way with this person as to increase this person's faith.

Each time this vow is made, the congregation makes itself the youth minister. Youth ministry is the carrying out of the congregation's vow made at its children's baptism.

The most practical model I know for a congregation to organize itself in order to fulfill its baptismal vow is "*The Contact Point Model*," published by the Ministries with Young People office at the Episcopal Church Center in New York (1996). This model sees the congregation seeking out and making contact with teenagers at many points in their lives:

- ✚ The ECW writes birthday cards for the teenagers associated with the parish.
- ✚ The parish prayer group divides up a list of teenagers and prays for them on a routine basis.
- ✚ The adult education team offers regular classes which include "Parenting Teens," "Talking about God and Sex with your Teenager" and "Praying as a Family."
- ✚ The outreach committee plans intergenerational opportunities for service in the community.

- ✚ The liturgy team asks a different group of teenagers each week to lead the congregation in their own version of "the peace." During Holy Week, teenagers are asked to perform their own interpretation of the Passion on Palm Sunday.
- ✚ The pastoral care committee organizes care packages to be made for the teenagers taking their SATS and for those in college.
- ✚ The clergy of four small churches organize a joint confirmation program for teenagers which includes various adults (not parents) being sponsors of the participants in this year of study, search and service and concludes with a mission trip after confirmation.
- ✚ A family who owns land in the mountains sponsors a two week long "family camp" in which all generations live in community, share the cooking, cleaning, and discipline of being together in fun and fellowship.
- ✚ The hospitality committee organizes a "Friday Night Live" once a month for teens to perform their talents to a live audience of the congregation and community.
- ✚ The Sunday School teachers and vestry team up to sponsor an after school program for the children in the housing projects surrounding the church, with the teenagers being trained as the tutors.
- ✚ The youth advocacy team of another church decides to call each youth (even the ones never seen) every month just to check in.

These are just a few examples of youth ministry that occur when a congregation understands its call to be the youth minister and seeks an integrated relationship with its young people. Youth groups remain part of this vision, but only in so far as they promote that dream of the congregation to support these persons in their life in Christ.

*The Rev. Julie Graham is the Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the Diocese of California. A youth minister for fifteen years, she is also working with the Church Divinity School of the Pacific to establish a new joint training program, the Youth Ministry Academy. She particularly likes helping teenagers to plan and lead worship.*

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