

A SPECIAL SEARCH INSTITUTE REPORT

YOUTH

IN

PROTESTANT CHURCHES



BY EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN AND DR. PETER L. BENSON

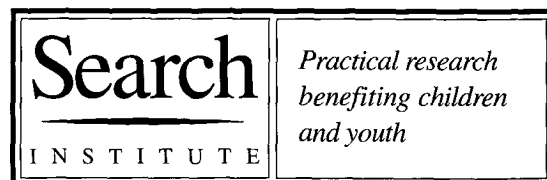
YOUTH IN PROTESTANT CHURCHES



A SPECIAL SEARCH INSTITUTE REPORT

EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN
AND PETER L. BENSON, PH.D.

1993



This report is based on youth data from a landmark Search Institute study titled *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*. The three-year study surveyed more than 11,000 adults and youth in 561 congregations in six U.S. denominations: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. Major funding for the project was provided by the Lilly Endowment, Indianapolis, and the participating denominations.

YOUTH IN PROTESTANT CHURCHES

By Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and Peter L. Benson, Ph.D.

Copyright © 1993 by Search Institute

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever, mechanical or electronic, without prior permission from the publisher except in brief quotations or summaries in articles or reviews, or as individual charts or graphs for educational use. For additional permission, write to Permissions at Search Institute.

First Printing

Special thanks to our colleagues Carolyn H. Eklin and Richard J. Gordon for their assistance in the research, preparation, and review of this report.



700 South Third Street, Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415
(612) 376-8955
(800) 888-7828

Printed on recycled paper in the United States of America



CONTENTS

1. CHURCH YOUTH TODAY	5
Two Merging Concerns • Key Findings	
2. PATTERNS OF FAITH	9
Influence of Faith in Life • Commitment to Jesus Christ • Teenagers' Faith Maturity • Marks of Faith Maturity • Growth in Faith • How Well Congregations Nurture Faith • Positive Faith Influences • Personal Religious Activities • Summary on the Shape of Faith	
3. RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL BELIEFS	33
Characteristics of God • Understanding of Scripture • Beliefs Regarding Individual and Communal Dimensions of Faith • Non-Traditional Religious Beliefs • Views on Hunger and Poverty • Views on Other Issues • How Well Churches Nurture Beliefs • Summary on Teens' Beliefs	
4. VIEWS OF THE CHURCH	53
Attitudes Toward Church • Warm Climate in Congregation • Thinking Climate in Congregation • Caring Church and Uplifting Worship • Service to Others • Evaluation of Christian Education Program • Congregational Loyalty • Denominational Loyalty • Summary on Views of the Church	
5. CHURCH PARTICIPATION	71
Levels of Involvement • Christian Education Involvement • Lifetime Involvement in Service and Justice • Recent Involvement in Service and Justice • Recent Involvement in Evangelism • Financial Contributions • Young People's Interests • Summary on Teens' Church Participation	
6. LIFE ISSUES AND AT-RISK BEHAVIORS	93
Media, Homework, and Work • Organized Activities • Overview of At-Risk Behaviors • Alcohol Use • School Trouble, Sexual Activity, and Illicit Drug Use • Depression and Suicidal Thoughts • Antisocial Behaviors • Sexuality-Related Attitudes and Behaviors • Dealing with Life Issues in Church • Evaluation of Church's Help with Life Issues • Summary on Life Issues and At-Risk Behaviors	
7. FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND OTHER SUPPORT	115
Family Composition • Parents' Education • Parents' Religiousness • Family Conversations About Faith • Family Religious Activities • Friends' Religiousness • Relationships with Church Adults • Sources of Advice • Summary on Family, Friends, and Sources of Support	

8. THREE EMERGING THEMES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY 135

A Renewed Emphasis on Christian Education • Integrating Service and Education • Positive Youth Development

NOTES 139

APPENDICES 143

A. Indicators of Faith Maturity

B. Growth in Faith Maturity Scale

C. Factors That Nurture Faith

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM SEARCH INSTITUTE 146



C H A P T E R O N E

CHURCH YOUTH TODAY

In a typical week, about 9 million teenagers attend religious services in a church or synagogue, according to Gallup Youth Polls.¹ And a 1988 Teenage Research Unlimited Syndicated Study found that the average teenager in the United States spends more than two hours per week in church or synagogue activities. Gallup surveys indicate that a greater percentage of youth attend religious services each week than do adults.²

In contrast to the seemingly optimistic picture of widespread involvement is the gnawing perception that more and more young people are leaving organized religion. Religious youth workers express concern and frustration at their inability to keep young people and their families involved through high school. And they perceive less and less commitment to and knowledge about religion and faith.

In fact, both the positive and negative perceptions appear to be accurate. Many young people *do* attend church and *are* religious. But the percentages decline throughout high school, and may be declining over time. In a study of 47,000 6th-12th graders in the United States, Search Institute found that 57 percent of youth are involved in religious organizations, spending at least an hour a week attending services or activities. But the percentage slips by grade, with 62 percent of sixth graders indicating religious involvement, compared to 48 percent of 12th graders.³

Despite the widespread concerns, there is surprisingly little current research about what happens inside the church or synagogue doors.⁴ A handful of polls and studies have focused on some youth attitudes about the church, their beliefs, and their involvement.⁵ However, these have only begun addressing some of the many questions about the nature of young people's religious involvement.

A Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development working paper on religious youth programs summed up the situation this way: "Research expressly devoted to religious institutions and youth is relatively scarce, and studies concerning religiously affiliated programs for youth are even more so."⁶

TWO MERGING CONCERNS

Complicating the matter, research on religious youth and youth programs tends to have two distinct agendas that rarely intersect, according to the Carnegie report. On the one hand are those who approach the issue from a religious education perspective, seeking to understand how to nurture faith and commitment in young people. The goal of this research is to enhance the effectiveness of those in youth ministry. Yet,

as the Carnegie report notes, "Influential as some of this literature is to the practice of religious youth work, it is rarely quantifiable and does not provide much assistance in evaluating the effectiveness of such programs."⁷

The other body of research grows out of the social and behavioral sciences that focuses on adolescent "religiosity." In these studies, connections are made between religiousness and behavior. But rarely do these studies examine the dynamics of religious institutions that serve youth.

Youth in Protestant Churches seeks to begin blending these two concerns. On the one hand, the report explores issues related to congregations' effectiveness in religious socialization—nurturing in youth the faith that the congregation professes. At the same time, it examines congregations' effectiveness in promoting adolescent well-being—helping youth develop skills, values, perspectives, and commitments needed for healthy development. The latter issue is driven by the emerging national concern for communities and institutions that give young people positive structure and support.⁸

Youth in Protestant Churches breaks new ground in giving a wide range of detailed information based on a sample of 2,365 7th-12th grade youth in five of the six major U.S. denominations that were part of the Effective Christian Education study: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; United Methodist Church; Presbyterian Church (USA); and United Church of Christ. The young people were surveyed in 1988 and 1989.⁹ (See Figure 1.)

Each of the five samples is representative of all youth in these denominations. By weighting the five samples to account for differences in denomination size, the combined percentages reported in this report reasonably represent all youth in these mainline denominations.

F I G U R E 1

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

	NUMBER OF YOUTH	PERCENT OF SAMPLE
Total Sample	2,365	100%
GENDER¹⁰		
Males	1,014	43%
Females	1,365	57%
GRADE LEVEL		
7-8	789	35%
9-10	791	35%
11-12	658	29%
ACTIVITY LEVEL¹¹		
Inactive	454	20%
Moderately active	1,365	60%
Highly active	458	20%
CHURCH SIZE¹²		
1-200 members	737	31%
201-500 members	1,016	43%
501-999 members	378	16%
1,000+ members	262	11%
DENOMINATION [WITH ABBREVIATION]		
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) [CC(DOC)]	439	18%
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA]	656	27%
Presbyterian Church (USA) [PCUSA]	431	18%
United Church of Christ [UCC]	473	20%
United Methodist Church [UMC]	394	17%

KEY FINDINGS

This report is packed with a wide range of information based on young people's responses to more than 300 items in the Effective Christian Education study. Some of the major themes that surface in the data include:

- **PATTERNS OF FAITH MATURITY**—Only a small minority of youth in Protestant congregations experience a life-transforming faith that is characterized by a strong relationship with God and a consistent concern for others and the world. Two-thirds of youth have a dormant or undeveloped faith.
- **THE GAP BETWEEN BELIEF AND ACTION**—Young people consistently express religious commitment, saying faith is an important influence in their lives. However, a much smaller percentage indicate that they actively engage their faith through prayer, Bible reading, service to others, or other spiritual growth activities.
- **PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONGREGATION**—Most

FIGURE 2

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

The findings in this report have important implications for congregations, youth ministry programs, curriculum and program developers, parents, and others who are concerned about today's church youth. This report is written in non-technical language and is designed for easy use. Here are some tips for how to use it.

REPORT FORMAT—*Youth in Protestant Churches* is arranged topically. Each chapter has a brief introduction followed by a series of text on the left-hand pages and tables on the right-hand pages. The text draws highlights from the adjacent chart, offers interpretation, and gives context. Implications and interpretations for ministry are noted where appropriate.

The tables on the right-hand pages give details on how different youth responded to the item. These numbers can be overwhelming if you try to digest them all at once. Thus, it is probably more appropriate to dip into the charts for particular reasons. On the text pages, we have tried to note some of the most significant issues you'll discover in the charts.

WHEN ARE DIFFERENCES IMPORTANT? As you look at each table, how do you determine the importance of differences between percentages? There are many sophisticated statistical methods for ascertaining these differences, but we have chosen not to report those analyses. A basic rule of thumb to follow might be:

- consider a difference of 10 percent or more as solid evidence of a meaningful difference;
- consider a 5 to 9 percent difference as suggestive of mean-

ingful difference; and

- differences below 5 percent may not be meaningful.

INTERPRETATION—In writing this report, we have noted what we think are key highlights from the data, and we have offered some interpretation. However, other things will likely catch your attention. These may be things that challenge what you've always heard or said about teenagers. Or—more likely—they will underscore and reaffirm your experience with your own youth group. Here are some questions you can use to help you—or a youth ministry planning group—interpret what you see:

- What things jump out at you as you scan the material? What do you find yourself drawn to mark or highlight? What is it about your own experiences or concerns that draws you to those findings?
- How do these findings fit with your presupposition about church youth? Do they confirm or challenge your thinking?
- How do you explain differences between your presuppositions and the survey's findings? Do you work with different types of youth? Or is there something you've inadvertently overlooked—a blind spot—in your work?
- What are the most pleasing and troubling findings you see in the charts? What do these things call you to do in response?
- What do the findings say about your goals or priorities in your work with youth?

young people in congregations feel that their congregation is a friendly, accepting place. However, fewer than half say their church challenges them to think, and few have meaningful relationships with adults in the congregations.

- **FAMILY RELIGIOUSNESS**—A family's religious life has a profound influence on the shape of faith of teenagers. Young people consistently indicate that their mothers (and, to a lesser extent, their fathers) are the most positive influence on their faith. Yet few families with teenagers are actively involved in family religious activities that nurture faith, including frequent conversations about faith, prayer and devotions, and family service projects for others.
- **GENDER DIFFERENCES**—Throughout the report are consistent differences between the responses of boys and girls. Girls tend to show higher levels of faith maturity, greater religious commitment and involvement, and more interest in religious activities and topics, and fewer problems with many of the at-risk behaviors.
- **GRADE TRENDS**—Much of the strength among young people in the church is in early grades. Interest, involvement, and commitment to the church and the faith tend to decline for older youth. Few older youth are actively involved in their congregation's youth program, and most indicate that the congregation does not effectively address the issues they face.
- **INACTIVE YOUTH**—One of the most dramatic

comparisons throughout the report examines the differences between inactive and highly active youth in the church. In comparing faith levels and commitment, interest in the church, family life, and perceptions of the congregation, the inactive youth consistently show dramatically lower scores than the highly active youth. Many of these inactive youth are not simply too busy for church; they have little interest in or connection to it.

- **THE ROLE OF CHURCH SIZE**—Church size does not have as much impact on the shape of young people's faith and commitment as some of the other factors examined. However, some interesting patterns emerge. Often, the smallest (under 200 members) and the largest (over 1,000 members) congregations exhibit the most strength. Large congregations are notable in young people's perception that they provide support, warmth, and meaningful relationships. Rarely do we see this kind of strength in the congregations with between 200 and 1,000 members.

Few readers will find it useful to examine every table in this report in detail. You are more likely to use it as a reference or to examine the data from a particular perspective or need (for example, if you want to reach inactive youth, the rows comparing inactive and highly active youth will be most useful). Whatever way you choose to use this report, we hope it gives you a new perspective on and understanding of the issues, needs, and concerns of youth in today's mainline congregations.



C H A P T E R T W O

PATTERNS OF FAITH

Depending what you read, today's teenagers may be either highly religious or completely unfaithful. On the one hand, Gallup Youth Surveys consistently show that about 95 percent of teens in the United States say they believe in God. That's not unlike the percentages of adult who hold such a view.¹ On the other hand, Barna Research Group polls find that only 34 percent of teens say religion is "very important" in their lives, compared to 53 percent of adults.² So, depending how you spin it, adolescence is a spiritual bastion or a slide into unfaithfulness.

These differences point to the developmental changes that occur in adolescence in the area of faith development. During these years, young people move from a strongly experiential faith through a process of trying to make sense of faith and then claiming it as their own.³ Our study of youth in Protestant churches examines the issue by looking at a variety of faith commitments and acts of faith among teenagers. The findings give new perspective on and depth to the shape of young people's faith.

Knowing the shape of faith is only the first step. It's also important to get a sense of the people and programs that have influenced that faith. Search Institute examined teens' perceptions of positive influences on their faith and their evaluations of how congregations nurture their faith. The result is a more in-depth understanding of the shape of young people's faith, including areas of strength as well as gaps in their understanding and commitment.

INFLUENCE OF FAITH IN LIFE

Virtually all Protestant teenagers (96 percent) say their faith influences their life. But they are often lukewarm in their assessment, with two-thirds indicating that faith has some influence, but other things are just as important.

Beginning with this table, we see patterns that will emerge repeatedly through this report. One of the most consistent pattern is the difference between boys and girls, with 25 percent of boys

and 35 percent of girls indicating that faith is the most or a very important influence. Girls consistently report higher levels of religious commitment and involvement, and that commitment translates into influence on other areas of their lives.

The comparisons between active and inactive youth show another trend. While virtually all active teens say faith has at least some influence, 14 percent of inactive youth say their faith is not an important influence for them. Many inactive youth simply haven't

"bought the product." They have not discovered or accepted that faith can or should have a meaningful role in their lives.

An interesting question is the source of meaning regarding the 22 percent of *inactive* youth who say their faith is the most or a very important influence for them. Is that faith being shaped by religious organizations other than their own congregations? Are they finding ongoing guidance and influence from childhood experiences in religious education? Or are they simply piecing together a faith to guide them outside the context of a faith community? Furthermore, if faith is important to them, as they indicate, why are they not active in a congregation? Knowing answers to those questions would provide valuable insights into youth ministry effectiveness.

This table on the influence of faith also highlights a theme that challenges common negative stereotypes of small congregations. Youth in the smallest congregations are most likely of any youth to see faith as the most or a very important influence in their life. Small congregations may have particular strength in providing role models and mentors in faith. These youth see faith in action "up close and personal" in the lives of the adults and peers in their more intimate community of faith.

Finally, there are interesting differences among denominations, with youth in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ reporting somewhat lower levels of influence than youth in the other three denominations.

AT A GLANCE

Here's how youth responded when asked how important their faith is in their life:

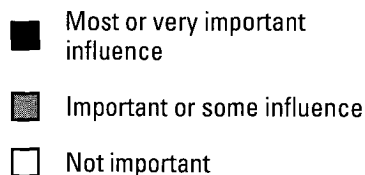
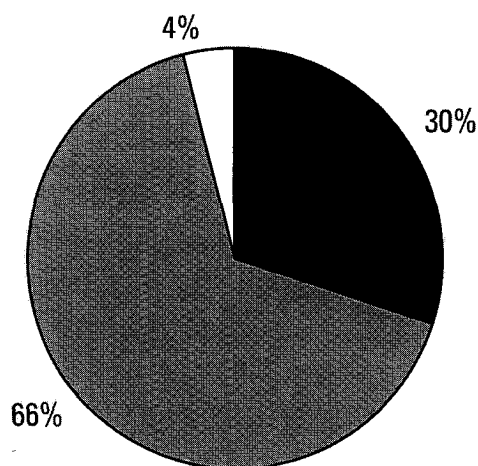


FIGURE 3

INFLUENCE OF FAITH IN LIFE

	Most or very important influence in my life	Important or some influence in my life	Not an important influence in my life
All	30%	66%	4%
GENDER			
Male	25%	72%	4%
Female	35%	61%	4%
GRADE			
7-8	26%	72%	2%
9-10	28%	68%	4%
11-12	37%	59%	4%
CHURCH ACTIVITY			
Inactive	22%	64%	14%
Highly active	45%	54%	1%
CHURCH SIZE			
1-200 members	36%	62%	2%
201-500 members	27%	69%	4%
501-999 members	28%	68%	4%
1000+	32%	64%	4%
DENOMINATION			
CC(DOC)	30%	67%	3%
ELCA	25%	70%	5%
PCUSA	35%	62%	3%
UCC	17%	79%	4%
UMC	32%	65%	4%

Percentages represent the number of youth who marked each option.

Question: How important is religious faith in your life?

Statements: It is the most important influence in my life.
 It is a very important influence in my life.
 It is an important influence, but other things are also important in my life.
 It has some influence in my life.
 It is not an important influence in my life.

COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST

How do young people come to make a commitment to Jesus Christ? What do we mean by religious conversion? These questions can bring theologians from different perspectives close to fist-fights. Some argue that a faith commitment is a discernible, one-time event during which one makes a first-time commitment to Christ. The conversion of Saul (Paul) on the road to

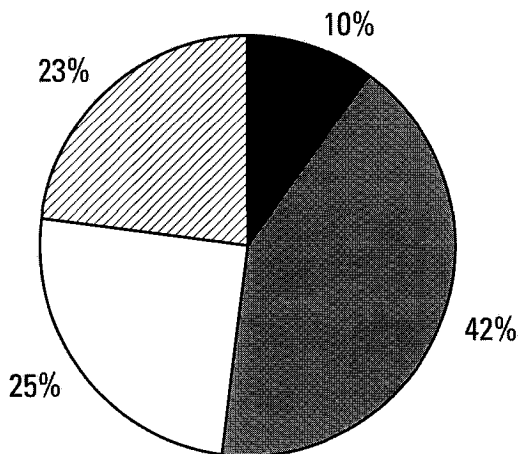
Damascus (Acts 9:3-19) is the archetype of this perspective, which is predominant in the evangelical tradition. Others focus on the gradual unfolding of faith and the ongoing transformation, a more common perspective among main-line Protestants.

The experiences of a majority of youth in this study parallel the latter view, with two-thirds indicating that their commitment has developed gradually over time or that they have been committed since childhood. Only 10 percent can point to a specific conversion experience. In addition, about a fourth of all young people indicate either that they are not committed or not sure of their commitment.

Gender and grade have relatively little impact on young people's experience. However, highly active youth are much more likely than inactive youth to point to a specific conversion experience. This may be attributable to the dramatic, memorable impact of that experience that keeps young people committed and involved. Furthermore, approximately four out of 10 inactive youth are not sure of their commitment to Christ.

AT A GLANCE

Here's how young people say they made their commitment to Jesus Christ:



-  Committed at a specific moment in time
-  Commitment developed gradually
-  Have been committed since I was a child
-  Not committed or not sure

COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST

	Committed at a specific moment in time	Commitment developed gradually	Have been committed since I was a child	Not committed or not sure
All	10%	42%	25%	23%
GENDER				
Male	9%	44%	21%	26%
Female	12%	40%	27%	21%
GRADE				
7-8	11%	48%	20%	21%
9-10	8%	42%	23%	27%
11-12	13%	36%	30%	21%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	1%	26%	25%	38%
Highly active	18%	43%	26%	14%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	14%	37%	31%	18%
201-500 members	10%	43%	27%	20%
501-999 members	10%	37%	29%	24%
1,000+ members	11%	43%	22%	25%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	10%	38%	35%	17%
ELCA	6%	45%	33%	16%
PCUSA	7%	50%	23%	20%
UCC	8%	41%	23%	28%
UMC	12%	40%	22%	26%

Percentages represent the number of youth who marked each option.

Question: Which of the following best describes your commitment to Jesus Christ?

Response options: I am not committed to Christ.
 I am not sure if I am committed to Christ.
 I committed my life to Christ at a specific moment in my life.
 My commitment to Christ developed gradually over a period of time.
 I've been committed to Christ since I was a young child.

TEENAGERS' FAITH MATURITY

Most of the literature on young people's faith focuses on their religious involvement (church attendance, Bible reading, prayer) or their assent to various beliefs about God, the Bible, or Jesus. However, both theologians and social scientists recognize that these measures are inadequate for examining the nature of faith.

Our study of mainline Protestant youth takes a different approach. Believing that mature faith influences and shapes all aspects of life, we sought to examine what people of faith do because of their faith. In other words, how do people act because they have faith? We addressed that question to theologians, pastors, and denominational leaders, surveyed hundreds of adults, and reviewed the literature on the subject to identify eight characteristics or "marks" of mature faith. (See Appendix A for a listing of the 38 individual items used to measure each mark of faith.)⁴

In this framework, a person of mature faith . . .

1. trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus.
2. experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace.
3. integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one's religious life.
4. seeks spiritual growth through study, prayer, reflection, and discussion with others.
5. seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another.
6. holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.
7. advocates social and global change to bring

about greater social justice.

8. serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice.⁵

In addition, the mature faith framework can be collapsed into two dimensions or themes, using a subset of the same items. A person of mature faith experiences . . .

1. a life-transforming relationship with a loving God—the vertical dimension; and
2. a consistent devotion to serving others—the horizontal dimension.

These two dimensions allow us to create four "faith types" as shown below:

	Vertical	Horizontal
Integrated faith	High	High
Vertical faith	High	Low
Horizontal faith	Low	High
Undeveloped faith	Low	Low

What does this framework tell us about young people's faith? Two-thirds of the young people in mainline congregations have an undeveloped faith—a faith that is low on both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Eleven percent have an integrated faith that is high in both dimensions.⁶ (For comparison, 38 percent of adults in the same denominations have an undeveloped faith, and 31 percent have an integrated faith.)

While we wouldn't expect youth to have the same levels of faith maturity as adults, it is sobering to realize that two-thirds of young people in congregations have an undeveloped faith. For many of them, faith is dormant or declining, not life-changing and challenging.

Several important patterns are evident in the specific comparisons. Girls are twice as likely as boys to have an integrated faith; 70 percent of boys have an undeveloped faith. This pattern continues into adulthood, with women consistently showing higher levels of faith maturity than men. (Among adults in their 40s the split

is most dramatic, with 43 percent of women and 8 percent of men with a mature faith.)

Furthermore, there is an overall decline in levels of integrated faith as teens move into high school. The patterns vary between boys and girls:

	Boys*	Girls*
Grades 7-8	12%	18%
Grades 9-10	1%	15%
Grades 11-12	8%	8%

*Percent with Integrated Faith

Thus, boys appear to experience the most dramatic decline earlier than girls. These data fit common patterns of faith development in which boys are more likely to experience crises in faith in 9th and 10th grades, whereas girls are more likely to experience such a crisis in grades 11 and 12. Adults in their 20s were asked when they experienced a crisis in faith. Men were more likely to report such a crisis at age 13-15, while women were more likely to report a crisis at age 16-18.

The gender differences reflect common patterns seen in other areas of inquiry. During the ninth and tenth grades, boys are more likely than girls to come into conflict with systems of authority and to choose personal freedom over connection and belonging. During this age period, boys are also less interested in school than are girls, and are more apt to disengage from structured activities than are girls.

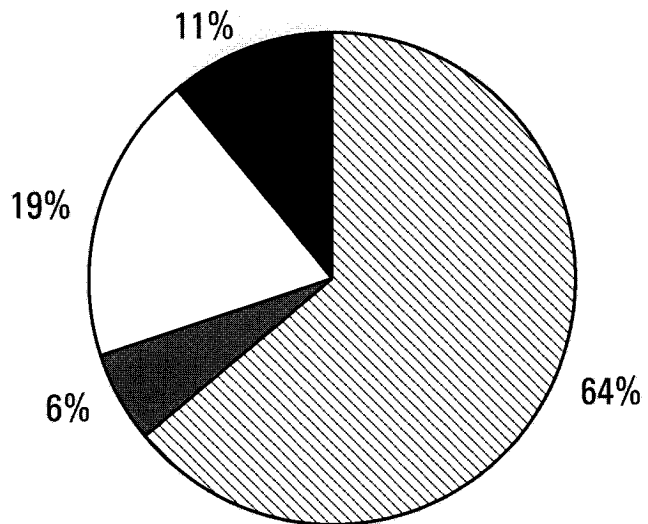
Ups and downs in faith are to be expected during adolescence as young people test limits, search for their identities, doubt, and question. However, there is also important evidence that this "backsliding" is not inevitable. Among Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) youth and Southern Baptist youth (who are not included in this report due to sampling problems), there were significant increases in levels of integrated faith through high school. These two denominations are unique in their tendency to keep young people involved in religious education throughout high school.

This difference suggests that keeping young people actively involved in church throughout high school can have a significant impact on faith development. This is not to say that "faith crises" are problematic from a developmental point of view. Indeed, such crises can be quite constructive if congregations provide structured opportunities where they help young people work through their questioning.

The comparison between active and inactive youth raises important questions as well about how religious programs reach out to inactive youth. The dramatic differences in levels of faith maturity suggest that one cannot assume any significant faith commitment among inactive youth; rather, religious programs may need to tap other needs or interests of inactive youth in order to integrate them into the congregation.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth with each type of faith:



Undeveloped	Horizontal
Vertical	Integrated

F I G U R E 5

TEENAGERS' FAITH MATURITY

	Undeveloped	Vertical	Horizontal	Integrated
All	64%	6%	19%	11%
GENDER				
Male	70%	5%	19%	6%
Female	57%	9%	20%	14%
GRADE				
7-8	62%	5%	18%	15%
9-10	68%	6%	17%	9%
11-12	59%	10%	23%	8%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	85%	3%	11%	1%
Highly active	47%	11%	23%	19%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	57%	7%	22%	14%
201-500 members	70%	3%	20%	8%
501-999 members	73%	5%	16%	6%
1,000+ members	58%	9%	20%	13%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	68%	4%	19%	9%
ELCA	65%	3%	23%	9%
PCUSA	55%	5%	27%	13%
UCC	67%	2%	25%	6%
UMC	63%	9%	17%	11%

Percentages represent the number of youth whose responses place them in each faith type based on median splits of 5.26 on the vertical dimension and 4.05 on the horizontal dimension. See Appendix A to identify items used to measure each dimension.

MARKS OF FAITH MATURITY

As explained in the previous section, young people's faith was assessed in this study using an eight-part Faith Maturity Scale. In this framework, those eight dimensions highlight the key characteristics of a person who exhibits mature faith. Instead of focusing on what youth believe or how involved they are in religious activities, this scale delves into how they live their lives because of their faith.

Young people were asked to respond on a seven-point scale (1=never true; 7=always true) to a series of 38 statements about how they think and act, and selected items were pulled together into subscales for each of the eight marks of faith.

(Appendix A shows all the items that were included in each dimension.) Figure 6 presents young people's mean scores on each of these subscales.

Looking across all eight dimensions, young people are strongest in the "trusting and believing" category, which focuses on basic theological statements and a trust in God. The lowest area among youth is "acting and serving," which focuses on spending time serving others.

This basic ranking (trusting and believing highest; acting and serving lowest) is true for all the denomina-

tions except the United Church of Christ. In the UCC, the highest score is in the area of holding life-affirming values; the lowest score is for nurturing faith in community.

The relative strength of the belief areas as opposed to the behavior areas parallels the strengths of congregations we studied. Most religious education and youth programs place heavy emphasis on biblical and theological understanding, while few adequately address issues of justice and service (see Chapter 4).

Comparisons between boys and girls show that girls are more likely to be stronger in every mark of faith except one: experiencing the fruits

AT A GLANCE

Here are the mean scores for youth on each mark of faith (1=never true; 7=always true):



of faith. This dimension includes having a sense of meaning and purpose, a lack of stress, and a sense of peace, security, and self-acceptance. This pattern is not surprising, given that most research surfaces serious concerns about girls' self-image and stress levels. It affirms the need to address these issues in a faith context.

Several of the differences between active and inactive youth are not as dramatic as we might expect. However, three stand out: integrating faith and life; seeking spiritual growth; and nurturing faith in community. These characteristics,

in particular, indicate that faith is not a transforming influence for inactive youth, and that they have little interest in nurturing a vital faith. Thus, the challenge of reaching them is even greater.

The pattern by church size is particularly interesting, and it recurs throughout the report: highest levels of faith among teenagers are in the smallest and largest congregations. Some of the differences may not be meaningful, but they raise questions about the dynamics of youth ministry in medium-sized congregations.

MARKS OF FAITH MATURITY

	1. Trusting and believing	2. Experiencing the fruits of faith	3. Integrating faith and life	4. Seeking spiritual growth	5. Nurturing faith in community	6. Holding life-affirming values	7. Seeking social change	8. Acting and serving
All	4.59	4.42	4.03	3.75	3.72	4.51	4.16	3.44
GENDER								
Male	4.50	4.46	3.89	3.66	3.52	4.43	4.08	3.33
Female	4.68	4.39	4.15	3.83	3.91	4.59	4.22	3.54
GRADE								
7-8	4.56	4.43	3.98	3.81	3.64	4.66	4.35	3.51
9-10	4.53	4.37	3.96	3.64	3.59	4.41	4.05	3.33
11-12	4.69	4.45	4.13	3.78	3.92	4.50	4.09	3.47
CHURCH ACTIVITY								
Inactive	4.50	4.36	3.43	3.15	3.04	4.33	3.61	3.10
Highly active	4.78	4.51	4.41	4.18	4.29	4.69	4.36	3.72
CHURCH SIZE								
1-200 members	4.66	4.37	4.14	3.83	3.80	4.48	4.24	3.53
201-500 members	4.57	4.36	3.91	3.51	3.36	4.46	4.19	3.36
501-999 members	4.53	4.36	3.90	3.64	3.59	4.40	4.00	3.36
1,000+ members	4.61	4.47	4.11	3.86	3.88	4.57	4.19	3.49
DENOMINATION								
DOC(CC)	4.51	4.37	4.05	3.61	3.58	4.44	4.20	3.44
ELCA	4.57	4.20	3.97	3.69	3.65	4.51	4.18	3.48
PCUSA	4.62	4.44	4.13	3.92	3.78	4.62	4.40	3.60
UCC	4.37	4.19	3.67	3.38	3.14	4.41	4.11	3.43
UMC	4.61	4.49	4.05	3.76	3.77	4.51	4.11	3.41

Numbers represent mean score on a scale of 1 (never true) to 7 (always true) of the items in the Faith Maturity Scale (see Appendix A).

GROWTH IN FAITH

The patterns of faith maturity would give us little to worry about if most young people were growing in their faith. The assumption would be that, over time, the issues would take care of themselves. Unfortunately, though, that hope does not match the experiences of young people. In fact, two-thirds of the youth studied indicate that their faith is stagnant or has declined in the past two or three years.

To determine this, we asked a series of 18 questions in a Growth in Faith scale. These items, which parallel items in the Faith Maturity Scale,

focus on the extent to which the teen has experienced changes in the area in the past two or three years (see Appendix B).

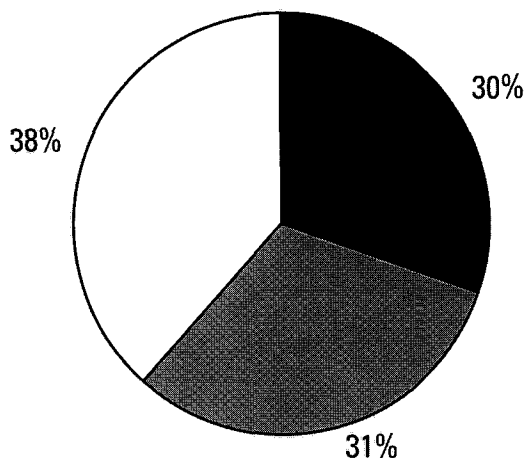
To measure changes in faith, all the items were combined to show the mean number (on a scale of 1 to 5 for each young person. These numbers allowed us to group youth into categories based on whether their faith has declined ("much less now" and "somewhat less now"), remained constant ("about the same as 2 or three years ago"), or grown ("somewhat greater now" and "much greater now").⁷

Perhaps the most critical issue here is to underscore that there is no single faith development pattern for teenagers. Teens are almost evenly split between decline, stagnation, and growth. Thus, it is inaccurate to assume that all young people will decline in faith through the watershed years of adolescence. Many factors influence faith patterns, and those who seek to influence the journey must avoid the temptation to stereotype the patterns to fit a particular viewpoint or theory.

A particularly disturbing finding is the high percentage of 11th and 12th graders whose faith has declined through high school. While some of this decline may be attributable to a developmentally appropriate faith crisis, there's also reason to believe that the problem ties to a lack of effective programming for older youth in many congregations. Many youth experience significant growth during the time when many congregations offer confirmation (usually around eighth and ninth grades); then they have little to challenge them to continue that growth into adulthood. Indeed, many congregations offer little programming for older youth. (See page 74.)

AT A GLANCE

Here is how young people say their faith has changed in the past two or three years:



- ☒ Much or somewhat less now
- ☒ About the same
- ☐ Somewhat or much greater now

F I G U R E 7

GROWTH IN FAITH (IN PAST 2-3 YEARS)

	Much or somewhat less now	About the same	Somewhat or much greater now
All	30%	31%	38%
GENDER			
Male	34%	37%	29%
Female	27%	27%	46%
GRADE			
7-8	26%	32%	42%
9-10	26%	31%	43%
11-12	39%	31%	30%
CHURCH ACTIVITY			
Inactive	55%	28%	16%
Highly active	14%	28%	59%
CHURCH SIZE			
1-200 members	32%	32%	35%
201-500 members	35%	36%	30%
501-999 members	35%	25%	40%
1000+	27%	32%	41%
DENOMINATION			
CC(DOC)	33%	35%	33%
ELCA	34%	31%	35%
PCUSA	23%	33%	44%
UCC	31%	36%	33%
UMC	30%	31%	39%

Percentages represent a three-way split for youth on the 18 items in the Growth in Faith Scale (Appendix B).

Question: *How has your faith changed in the last 2-3 years? For each of the following, tell whether it is true to a greater or lesser degree for you than it was two or three years ago.*

Statements: *See Appendix B*

HOW WELL CONGREGATIONS NURTURE FAITH

What can congregations do to nurture the kind of life-transforming faith suggested in the Faith Maturity Scale? Earlier books and reports based on the Effective Christian Education study have thoroughly examined the factors that make a difference, so those factors will not be examined here.⁸

However, earlier reports focused on the relationship between levels of growth in faith and congregational characteristics. In addition, we

asked young people to evaluate their congregations in several areas that reflect the two dimensions of faith maturity. Figure 8 presents how well young people perceive the congregation to be doing in specific areas of nurturing faith.

In most cases, young people give higher marks to congregations in less concrete areas. For example, whereas 75 percent of youth say their church does a good or excellent job helping them know and love Jesus, only 33 percent say their church does as well helping them learn to pray or meditate.

Other differences are less pronounced. For example, girls and boys have similar perceptions, and church size makes little difference. And, as we would expect, highly active youth are more affirming in their evaluation.

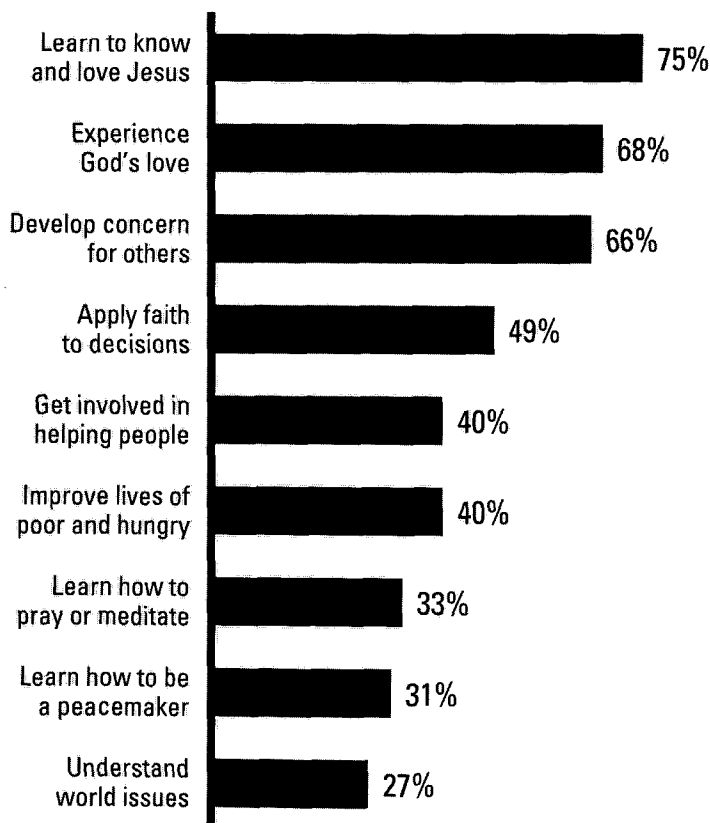
While some items remain relatively constant for all ages, there is an overall pattern of decline in positive perceptions in the upper grades. In most cases, 11th and 12th graders give lower marks to congregations than 7th and 8th graders. This trend may reflect both the declining involvement of older youth as well as the widespread lack of emphasis on programming for high school students.

Similar patterns are evident in the horizontal dimension. However, across the items, youth tend to give lower ratings in relation to the horizontal items than they do to the vertical items. The only exception is "developing concern for others," which is relatively abstract.

It's interesting that "understanding what is going on in the world" ranks at the bottom of the list, even though it involves attitudes and intellect, not actions. However, throughout this report we see that a vast majority of congregations simply do not make world awareness and social issues a part of their youth ministry agenda.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who say their church does a good or excellent job helping them in each area.



HOW WELL CONGREGATIONS NURTURE FAITH

	Learn to know and love Jesus	Experience God's love	Learn how to pray or meditate	Apply faith to decisions	Get involved in helping people	Develop concern for others	Understand world issues	Improve lives of poor and hungry	Learn how to be a peacemaker
All	75%	68%	33%	49%	40%	66%	27%	40%	31%
GENDER									
Male	74%	67%	37%	46%	35%	59%	27%	33%	33%
Female	75%	69%	29%	50%	45%	72%	28%	45%	30%
GRADE									
7-8	80%	71%	42%	50%	43%	58%	31%	45%	35%
9-10	76%	69%	28%	48%	35%	67%	27%	43%	32%
11-12	69%	64%	30%	48%	44%	70%	24%	31%	27%
CHURCH ACTIVITY									
Inactive	60%	67%	14%	27%	32%	54%	15%	47%	25%
Highly active	78%	75%	42%	58%	48%	76%	28%	45%	38%
CHURCH SIZE									
1-200 members	72%	63%	37%	46%	35%	54%	29%	36%	31%
201-500 members	73%	65%	28%	47%	35%	55%	28%	38%	26%
501-999 members	73%	63%	31%	47%	40%	69%	28%	37%	29%
1,000+ members	76%	71%	35%	50%	43%	69%	27%	41%	34%
DENOMINATION									
CC(DOC)	80%	73%	32%	52%	32%	64%	35%	34%	35%
ELCA	74%	74%	34%	48%	35%	60%	34%	41%	29%
PCUSA	77%	68%	30%	53%	39%	66%	33%	43%	38%
UCC	63%	56%	26%	42%	41%	63%	34%	51%	30%
UMC	75%	67%	33%	48%	42%	67%	24%	38%	31%

Percentages represent the number of youth who say their church does a "good" or "excellent" job.

Question: In your opinion, how well does the church you attend do each of the following? How well does your church . . .

Statements: Help you learn how to pray or meditate.
 Help you learn how to apply your faith to everyday decisions.
 Get you involved in helping people in your town or city.
 Help you understand what is going on around the world.
 Get you involved in helping the lives of people who are poor or hungry.

Help you know and love Jesus Christ.
 Help you experience God's love and forgiveness.
 Help you develop concern for other people.
 Help you learn how to be a peacemaker.

POSITIVE FAITH INFLUENCES

For all the emphasis on building effective youth programs, it is important always to remember that faith is nurtured primarily through relationships. When asked what has had the most positive influence on their faith, most of young people's top choices were people, not programs. We know the programs are important and provide a context for growth, but the real impact comes from a person of faith modeling, influencing, guiding, and sharing.

In this survey, as in the preponderance of other research, parents are clearly the most vital influence on faith (even if teenagers appear to spend a lot of energy rebelling against that influence!). The ideal situation, of course, is for young people to experience the positive influence of parents as well as church leaders, while also participating in effective programs. Each experience and relationship reinforces the others.

The tables on pages 26-29 look in more detail at each of these influences. Some highlights:

FAMILY—Both boys and girls see their mother as the most positive influence on their faith. This finding suggests that the mother is the primary socializer into the faith, not the father. (In fact, boys are more likely to choose their mother as an influence than are girls.) One reason for this is that, as noted earlier, men tend to be less spiritually active than women—particularly when they are in their 40s. The best combination would be for young people to experience spiritually active mothers and fathers, but that's not a common reality.

While there is a significant drop in parents' influence through high school, this drop likely reflects the growing independence that young people have and the fact that they are drawing from multiple sources to help shape their own faith. At the same time, mothers and fathers

remain the most important of all the faith influences, even among 11th and 12th graders.

It is also interesting to note that inactive youth are more likely than highly active youth to choose their mother as a key influence. This does not make sense on the surface. However, it is explainable in that highly active youth have many more influences on their faith from which to choose; inactive youth are not likely to have participated in many of the activities that the highly active youth find to be powerful influences on their faith.

The powerful influence of families underscores the importance of congregations intentionally nurturing the faith and building the skills of parents so they can be positive faith models to their children. As we'll see in Chapter 7, few parents make intentional efforts in the family to nurture their children's faith. Compounding the problem, few congregations make parent education a central focus of their youth programs.

CHURCH PEOPLE—Given the stereotype that many pastors don't know how to relate to teens, it may come as something of a surprise that the pastor is the third most important influence for teenagers—right after mother and father. Part of this can be attributed to the high percentage of 7th and 8th graders who select the pastor (61 percent). Since many pastors lead confirmation during this time, the influence makes sense. One wonders what might happen if young people felt connected with the pastor after confirmation; as it is, the pastor's influence drops by 20 percent in 9th and 10th grades.

Youth group leaders are surprisingly low in terms of influence, except in the largest churches (where the youth leader generally operates as the pastor for youth). Why do youth leaders not have more influence? Is it because they focus their attention on activities, not relationships?

Are young people not interested in influence from another adult? Do youth leaders change congregations too frequently to build the trust and relationships needed to be an effective faith mentor? Though the answers are not self-evident, the questions need to be explored.

OTHER PEOPLE—Outside the family and the church, there are few people who have a positive influence on teens' faith. The one significant exception is friends. Despite incessant worrying about negative peer pressure in some circles, many young people—particularly those active in the church and those in large congregations—point to their friends as a significant, positive influence on faith.

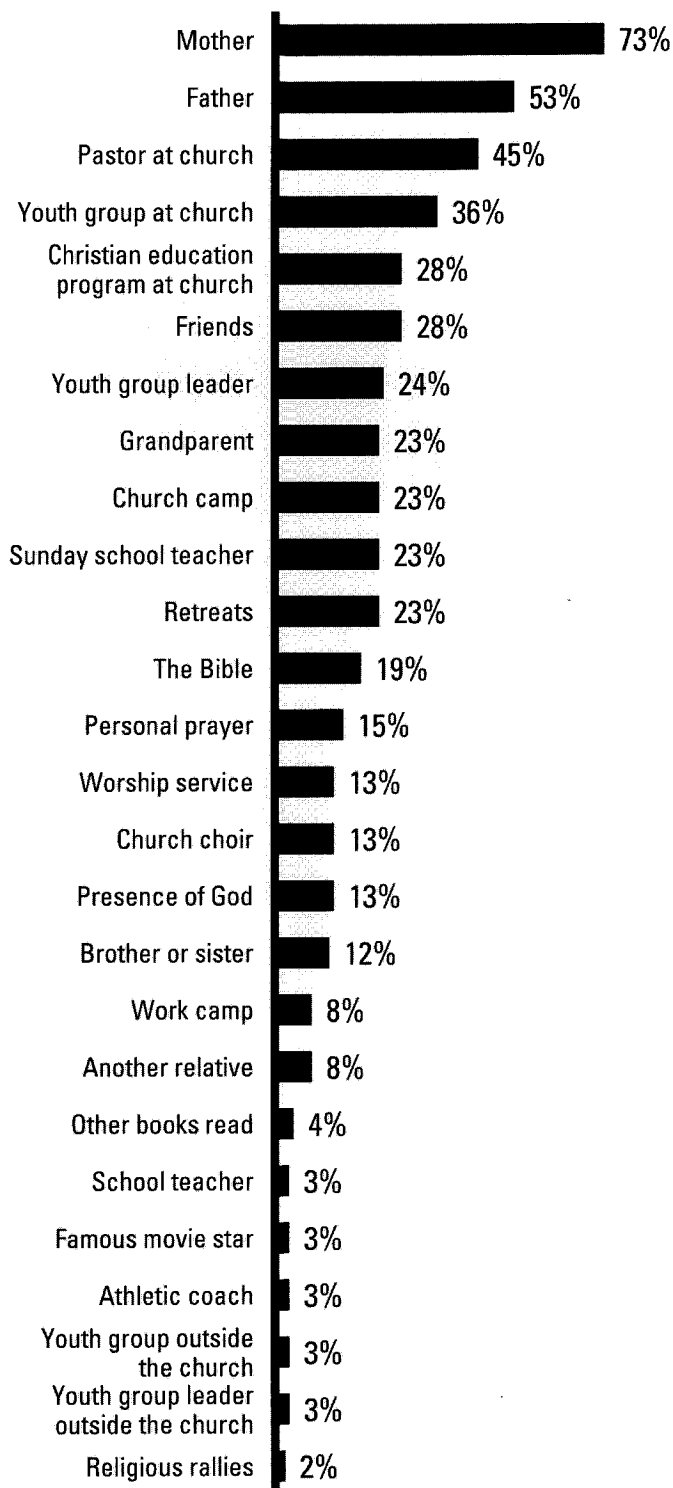
CHURCH PROGRAMS—Though their influence is not as high as the influence of people, Christian education and youth group are seen by young people as significant positive influences.

Furthermore, the impact of camps and retreats is particularly noteworthy, given that these experiences occur only occasionally. Young people remember these "mountain top experiences" as significant times of growth in faith. Similarly, though work camps are relatively low in overall percentages, they are clearly influential for the relatively few youth who are involved in them. (Note the 18 percent of active youth who cite them as major influences.) A third of youth indicate that the church youth group is a positive influence (ranging from a high of 44 percent among Presbyterian youth to a low of 19 percent among Evangelical Lutheran Church in American youth.)

PERSONAL SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES—Many teenagers find Bible reading and personal prayer to be important sources of growth in faith—even though these activities are relatively rare among teenagers. Inactive teens are more likely to rely on these than highly active teens. (One suspects this is true because they have fewer other experiences in the congregation that nurture faith.)

AT A GLANCE

Here is the percentage of youth who say each of the following has been one of the five greatest influences on their faith:



F I G U R E 9

POSITIVE FAITH INFLUENCES: FAMILY

	Mother	Father	Brother or sister	Grandparent	Another relative
All	73%	53%	12%	23%	8%
GENDER					
Male	78%	62%	13%	26%	8%
Female	68%	46%	11%	20%	8%
GRADE					
7-8	82%	64%	15%	24%	10%
9-10	68%	51%	12%	23%	9%
11-12	69%	47%	10%	21%	5%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	79%	56%	18%	27%	9%
Highly active	69%	52%	11%	15%	5%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	76%	51%	20%	31%	19%
201-500 members	76%	57%	13%	32%	13%
501-999 members	79%	56%	16%	22%	9%
1,000+ members	69%	51%	10%	19%	5%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	75%	41%	13%	30%	10%
ELCA	75%	45%	16%	28%	13%
PCUSA	76%	59%	18%	20%	12%
UCC	74%	49%	10%	31%	11%
UMC	71%	55%	10%	21%	6%

Percentages represent the number of youth who selected each item as one of five of the most positive influences on their religious faith (out of 26 possibilities (Figures 9-12).

Instructions: Which of the following have had the most positive influence on your religious faith? From the list below [which included 26 items], choose the five most positive influences.

Statements: My mother
My father
Brothers or sisters
A grandparent
Another relative

F I G U R E 1 0

POSITIVE FAITH INFLUENCES: OTHER PEOPLE

	Pastor	Youth group leader	Sunday school teacher	Friends	School teacher	Athletic coach	Famous movie star	TV or radio evangelist
All	45%	24%	23%	28%	3%	3%	3%	<1%
GENDER								
Male	54%	23%	28%	24%	4%	5%	3%	<1%
Female	37%	25%	18%	30%	2%	2%	3%	<1%
GRADE								
7-8	61%	23%	25%	21%	7%	1%	3%	1%
9-10	39%	29%	20%	34%	1%	4%	5%	<1%
11-12	38%	20%	24%	27%	3%	5%	1%	<1%
CHURCH ACTIVITY								
Inactive	51%	5%	18%	22%	4%	11%	3%	1%
Highly active	35%	26%	16%	34%	3%	1%	5%	<1%
CHURCH SIZE								
1-200 members	51%	11%	21%	30%	4%	4%	3%	1%
201-500 members	59%	13%	30%	22%	3%	2%	3%	<1%
501-999 members	41%	19%	18%	21%	4%	<1%	5%	<1%
1,000+ members	40%	30%	22%	31%	3%	3%	3%	0%
DENOMINATION								
CC(DOC)	52%	21%	23%	33%	7%	7%	1%	1%
ELCA	54%	11%	23%	28%	4%	3%	5%	1%
PCUSA	36%	25%	19%	34%	1%	2%	2%	<1%
UCC	55%	17%	23%	33%	4%	2%	2%	2%
UMC	43%	28%	23%	26%	3%	4%	3%	<1%

Percentages represent the number of youth who selected each item as one of five of the most positive influences on their religious faith (out of 26 possibilities (Figures 9-12).

Instructions: Which of the following have had the most positive influence on your religious faith? From the list below [which included 26 items], choose the five most positive influences.

Statements:	The pastor at my church	A teacher I've had in school
	A youth group leader at my church	A coach on an athletic team
	A Sunday school teacher or church school teacher I once had	A famous movie or musical star
	My friends	A television or radio evangelist

F I G U R E 1 1

POSITIVE FAITH INFLUENCES: CHURCH PROGRAMS

	Church youth group	Christian education program	Worship	Church music programs	Church camp	Retreats	Work camp
All	36%	28%	13%	13%	23%	23%	8%
GENDER							
Male	36%	33%	14%	10%	13%	14%	6%
Female	37%	24%	13%	15%	30%	31%	9%
GRADE							
7-8	27%	24%	10%	18%	22%	14%	<1%
9-10	42%	27%	9%	10%	24%	28%	8%
11-12	39%	32%	19%	12%	23%	27%	14%
CHURCH ACTIVITY							
Inactive	16%	26%	16%	6%	23%	8%	3%
Highly active	43%	22%	16%	14%	30%	33%	18%
CHURCH SIZE							
1-200 members	23%	21%	12%	8%	27%	9%	1%
201-500 members	31%	28%	10%	8%	24%	11%	1%
501-999 members	36%	29%	12%	12%	25%	18%	7%
1,000+ members	9%	28%	15%	15%	22%	30%	11%
DENOMINATION							
CC(DOC)	35%	21%	13%	7%	36%	17%	<1%
ELCA	19%	31%	19%	13%	26%	18%	1%
PCUSA	44%	22%	13%	11%	24%	21%	3%
UCC	36%	28%	14%	9%	17%	20%	4%
UMC	40%	28%	12%	13%	22%	25%	11%

Percentages represent the number of youth who selected each item as one of five of the most positive influences on their religious faith (out of 26 possibilities (Figures 9-12).

Instructions: Which of the following have had the most positive influence on your religious faith? From the list below [which included 26 items], choose the five most positive influences.

Statements: A youth group at my church
Christian education programs at my church
Worship services at a church I attend
Choir or other musical activities at church

Church camp
Retreats
Work camp

F I G U R E 1 2

POSITIVE FAITH INFLUENCES: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES

	The Bible	Other books read	Personal prayer	God's presence
All	19%	4%	15%	13%
GENDER				
Male	19%	1%	10%	9%
Female	20%	6%	19%	15%
GRADE				
7-8	21%	4%	9%	8%
9-10	18%	3%	18%	13%
11-12	18%	5%	16%	15%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	26%	13%	37%	12%
Highly active	18%	1%	11%	17%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	31%	2%	14%	11%
201-500 members	25%	4%	16%	9%
501-999 members	23%	6%	17%	7%
1,000+ members	15%	3%	14%	16%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	19%	3%	17%	8%
ELCA	23%	5%	19%	13%
PCUSA	17%	3%	12%	16%
UCC	20%	9%	15%	9%
UMC	18%	3%	14%	12%

Percentages represent the number of youth who selected each item as one of five of the most positive influences on their religious faith (out of 26 possibilities (Figures 9-12).

Instructions: Which of the following have had the most positive influence on your religious faith? From the list below (which included 26 items), choose the five most positive influences.

Statements: The Bible
Other books I've read
Personal prayer or meditation
The active presence of God in my life

PERSONAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

In addition to church and service involvement (Chapter 5), young people can seek spiritual growth through a variety of personal religious activities. While most church youth say they pray alone at least once a week, there are few other explicitly religious private activities in which they become involved. Only a small number of these teenagers use the religious media (books, radio, television) as a source for spiritual growth.

As we have seen before regarding higher religious involvement for girls, girls are more likely than boys to read the Bible. Grade patterns are more difficult to find. Furthermore, church size

appears to have little influence.

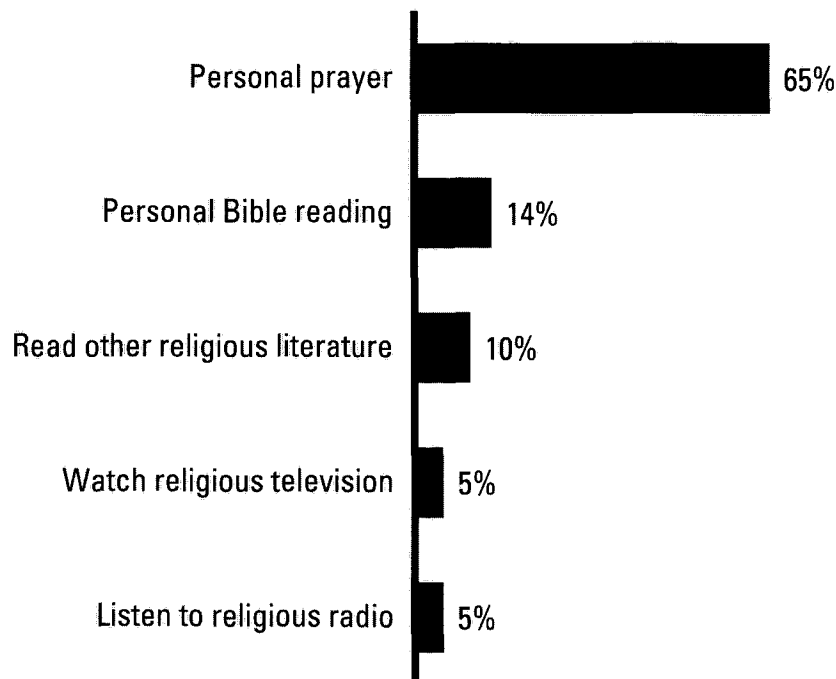
An interesting finding is that highly active teenagers appear to be more likely to listen to religious radio and read religious literature than inactive youth. It doesn't appear that young people use these media as substitutes for church, but as a supplement to it. Furthermore, youth ministers appear to be successful in guiding teens to religious literature. In fact, highly active teens are more likely to spend time reading other religious literature than reading the Bible.

The differences between denominations in prayer and personal Bible reading are dramatic.

Youth in Presbyterian and United Methodist churches report higher levels of personal prayer and Bible reading as well as more use of much of the religious media than youth in the other denominations.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say they do each activity at least once a week:



PERSONAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

	Personal prayer	Personal Bible reading	Read other religious literature	Watch religious television	Listen to religious radio
All	65%	14%	10%	5%	5%
GENDER					
Male	58%	8%	7%	6%	2%
Female	72%	18%	13%	4%	8%
GRADE					
7-8	70%	13%	12%	7%	5%
9-10	63%	10%	7%	3%	6%
11-12	62%	17%	12%	5%	5%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	50%	7%	2%	2%	1%
Highly active	80%	19%	23%	4%	7%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	62%	17%	11%	5%	9%
201-500 members	60%	9%	7%	5%	5%
501-999 members	61%	12%	10%	5%	4%
1,000+ members	69%	15%	11%	5%	6%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	54%	9%	7%	4%	4%
ELCA	57%	9%	7%	2%	3%
PCUSA	70%	18%	13%	5%	9%
UCC	51%	8%	7%	2%	3%
UMC	68%	14%	11%	6%	6%

Percentages represent the number of youth who indicate that they do each activity about once a week or more.

Question: How often, if ever, do you do each of the following?

Statements: Pray or meditate, other than at church or before meals.
 Read the Bible when you are alone.
 Watch religious programs on television.
 Listen to religious programs on the radio.
 Read religious newspapers, magazines, or books other than the Bible.

SUMMARY ON THE SHAPE OF FAITH

Our study finds reason for serious concern and reflection about the shape of faith among church-going youth. Only a few youth experience the kind of life-transforming faith depicted in the Faith Maturity Scale, and only a minority are experiencing growth in faith. For most, faith is undeveloped, stagnant, or declining.

A common reaction to data such as these on young people's faith is to dismiss concern, saying that young people will "grow out of it." Certainly, the developmental needs for autonomy, independence, and self-definition are real. The concern, though, is that young people are not finding in congregations places where they can ask their tough questions without being dismissed. So young people are not making their tough life choices with the support and care of a faith community. And they are not being led to think about the important questions about life that are most commonly asked from a faith perspective.

In the late 1980s, the Lilly Endowment supported a project titled "Youth Ministry and Theological Education" designed specifically to examine the realities in youth ministry in mainline churches. After three years of study, the group came to this conclusion:

It is time to take a hard look at the mainline churches' ministry with youth. . . . How are mainline churches faring? Statistics tell the tale: Not only are they failing to hold on to their own youth and young adults, but they are increasingly losing them, not to other churches, but to no religion at all! . . . Many congregations are perfectly willing to keep youth in a marginalized position; they want the church to meet teens' social needs and keep them out of trouble, but they are

not really interested in involving them in the larger congregations' struggle to discern what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the contemporary world.⁹

How can congregations respond to these faith realities? Several themes in the data suggest possible opportunities.

1. RESPECT AND SUPPORT THE UNIQUE FAITH JOURNEYS OF EACH YOUNG PERSON. Different teenagers have very different faith journeys. Assuming that all are at the same levels of commitment or sense of purpose only isolates those who may not be mature—or who have matured beyond the leader's preconceived ideas. Getting to know each young person's faith story is a beginning point to assuring that differences are affirmed and that young people receive support wherever they are on their faith pilgrimage.

2. ENCOURAGE SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS. Help parents talk with their teenager about faith. Encourage the pastor to interact regularly with teens. Seek congregation members to serve as faith mentors. Help teens support and nurture each other through programs such as peer ministry. In short, work to weave a supportive web of relationships in which teens feel safe and challenged to work out their own faith.

3. FOCUS ATTENTION ON BOYS' FAITH. The gender differences in faith maturity and commitment to faith continue to raise questions about the religious socialization of boys. What can be done to connect boys more effectively with the faith? What messages do we send boys in our culture and congregations that may inhibit growth in an integrated, multi-dimensional faith? These questions must be addressed in youth ministry lest congregations lose another generation of males without a solid foundation in faith to carry them through adulthood.



C H A P T E R T H R E E

RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL BELIEFS

When young children ask out-of-the-blue questions about God, we all get a good chuckle at the latest gem “out of the mouths of babes.” But as those children move into the middle grades and high school, we become less amused by the questions and sometimes more worried. What if they run off in a cult? What if they reject our beliefs? What if . . . ?

Almost by definition, adolescence is a time when young people’s beliefs are challenged and their minds are stretched. As their intellectual capabilities shift toward more critical thinking, they no longer automatically accept the beliefs that they have inherited. Instead they ask questions, say things that seem outrageous, and experiment with intellectual options in ways that help them make sense of the world and their place in it.

In spite of some people’s fear that teenagers indiscriminately reject the beliefs of their parents, our study shows that most hold relatively conventional theological perspectives and religious world views. Indeed, the spectrum of their beliefs would likely be similar to the patterns among adults in these same denominations. However, among both adults and youth is ample evidence that beliefs are not well-formed, consistent, or systematic. This chapter examines a range of beliefs of church-related teens.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

Protestant young people are surprisingly monolithic in their view of God. Virtually all see God as loving, forgiving, and accepting. And almost all (85 percent) believe God sees everything they do. On the other end of the spectrum, few teens describe God as strict or as one who decides everything we do.

Only a third of teens see God as judging. However, this perspective is more prevalent among boys (39 percent) than girls (25 percent). Could it be that boys are more strongly conditioned to expect judgment from authority

figures based on their performance? And does this perspective drive some boys away from the church?

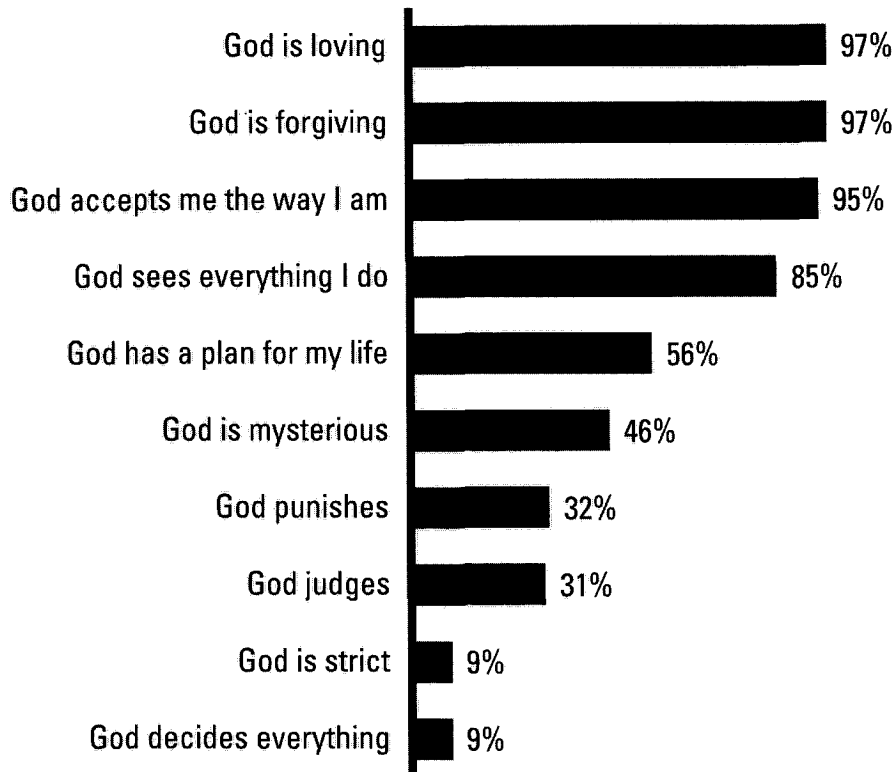
Another noticeable difference is the jump between grades 7-8 and 9-10 in the percentage of teens who say God is mysterious. Such a jump may reflect the natural intellectual development of young adolescents as they move from concrete to abstract thinking.

Finally, we see important differences between active and inactive youth based on items that address God's involvement in life and the world. About nine out of ten highly active teens believe

God sees everything they do, compared to 77 percent of inactive youth. Similarly, while 65 percent of highly active youth believe God has a plan for their life, only 43 percent of inactive youth feel the same way.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who say God has each of these characteristics:



CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

	God is loving	God is forgiving	God accepts me the way I am	God is mysterious	God sees everything I do	God decides everything	God has a plan for my life	God punishes	God judges	God is strict
All	97%	97%	95%	85%	56%	46%	32%	31%	9%	9%
GENDER										
Male	97%	97%	94%	84%	49%	43%	30%	39%	9%	8%
Female	97%	97%	96%	86%	63%	47%	34%	25%	10%	10%
GRADE										
7-8	96%	98%	97%	84%	53%	35%	31%	35%	7%	8%
9-10	98%	96%	97%	87%	59%	49%	34%	29%	10%	9%
11-12	98%	96%	92%	83%	55%	51%	31%	30%	9%	10%
CHURCH ACTIVITY										
Inactive	98%	88%	90%	77%	43%	43%	34%	23%	12%	10%
Highly active	96%	98%	95%	91%	65%	43%	30%	23%	8%	10%
CHURCH SIZE										
1-200 members	96%	94%	94%	86%	69%	44%	47%	37%	19%	17%
201-500 members	97%	97%	94%	88%	60%	44%	42%	32%	14%	9%
501-999 members	97%	99%	94%	87%	50%	50%	34%	30%	8%	11%
1,000+ members	97%	96%	96%	83%	56%	45%	27%	31%	7%	8%
DENOMINATION										
CC(DOC)	95%	97%	94%	88%	62%	45%	42%	33%	13%	10%
ELCA	97%	97%	94%	84%	51%	52%	34%	34%	11%	13%
PCUSA	98%	97%	95%	83%	60%	47%	33%	29%	14%	13%
UCC	97%	96%	94%	80%	47%	54%	28%	24%	9%	9%
UMC	97%	97%	95%	86%	58%	43%	32%	31%	8%	8%

Percentages indicate the proportion of youth who marked each response.

Instructions: Listed here are 10 things some people believe about God. Mark each one of those that you yourself believe.

Statements: God is loving. God is strict. God is judging. God is forgiving. God is mysterious.

God is aware of everything I think and do. God decides everything I do. God accepts me as I am. God has a plan for my life. God punishes those who do wrong.

UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

Some of the most raucous debates in organized religion have been around views of scripture. In the Effective Christian Education study, we sought to sort out the range of perspectives that young people hold. Five basic positions about the nature of scripture were identified and named, and teens were asked to choose the one that best fit their own perspective. The positions were described as follows:

• **INTERPRETED**—The Bible was written by persons who were motivated by deep faith in God and

who tried their best to describe and interpret their understanding of God and God's activity in the world.

• **GOD INSPIRED**—The Bible is the Word of God. It was inspired by God and recorded by writers who interpreted God's message in the context of their times. It speaks truth on matters of faith and practice, but it may contain some historical and scientific errors.

• **INERRANT**—The Bible is the Word of God. It was dictated by God word for word and recorded by writers who were not influenced by their times. Everything in the Bible

is true—historically, scientifically, and in matters of faith and practice.

• **LEGENDS AND MYTHS**—The Bible records the stories, legends, and myths that people developed to understand the mysteries of life. It contains a great deal of wisdom and insight into the human experience.

• **RELIGIOUS BOOK**—The Bible contains no more truth or wisdom than do the religious books of the other world religions.

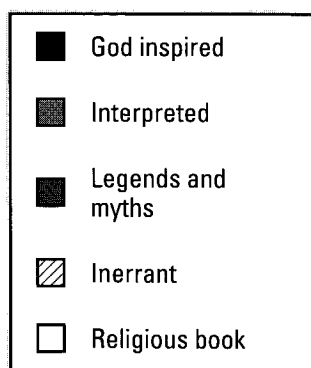
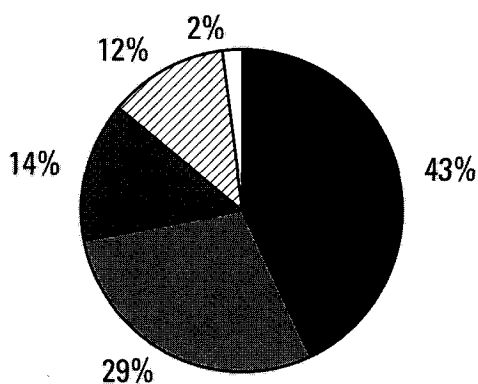
Most teenagers accept the “God inspired” position that is traditional in most mainline denominations, and few choose the extremes on either end (inerrant or religious book). However, young people—particularly those in the younger grades—are less likely than adults (54 percent) or pastors (71 percent) to hold the “God inspired” position. They are more likely than pastors and other adults to hold the inerrancy and “legends and myths” perspectives.

Church activity level does not have much impact on the middle positions, but it does influence both ends of the spectrum. Twenty-two percent of inactive youth believe the Bible is a collection of legends and myths, compared to 9 percent of highly active teens. And, on the other end, highly active teens are twice as likely as inactive teens to believe the Bible is verbally inspired.

Denominational differences are slightly more pronounced here than in many other places in the report. For example, youth in the United Church of Christ tend to hold more liberal views of scripture than youth in the other denominations.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who hold each view of scripture:



UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

	God inspired	Interpreted	Legends and myths	Inerrant	Religious book
All	43%	29%	14%	12%	2%
GENDER					
Male	44%	27%	17%	12%	1%
Female	43%	31%	12%	12%	2%
GRADE					
7-8	41%	30%	16%	12%	2%
9-10	43%	31%	15%	11%	1%
11-12	47%	27%	12%	13%	2%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	37%	28%	22%	8%	4%
Highly active	43%	31%	9%	16%	1%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	38%	29%	11%	21%	1%
201-500 members	39%	28%	14%	17%	2%
501-999 members	47%	30%	8%	13%	2%
1,000+ members	44%	29%	17%	9%	1%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	38%	37%	8%	16%	1%
ELCA	51%	24%	9%	15%	1%
PCUSA	48%	28%	13%	10%	1%
UCC	36%	25%	25%	13%	2%
UMC	41%	31%	15%	11%	2%

Percentages represent the proportion of youth who selected each option.

Question: Which of the following best describes your belief about the Bible? (Mark one.)

Statements: (See description on left-hand page.)

BELIEFS REGARDING INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNAL DIMENSIONS OF FAITH

The faith maturity framework described in Chapter 2 has two dimensions: a vertical dimension (a relationship with God) and a horizontal dimension (a relationship with others and the world). These two dimensions are also connected to two world views or sets of beliefs,

which we label individual and communal dimensions. These dimensions involve how people view their responsibilities in the world and how they believe God works in the world. The basic question is whether faith primarily concerns individual issues (a personal relationship with and responsibility to God) or communal issues (a sense of responsibility and concern for others and the world).

In reality, the question is not either/or; rather it represents a continuum, with people blending the two dimensions in different mixes. Some may heavily emphasize one dimension over the other, but few discount one or the other dimension as totally irrelevant.

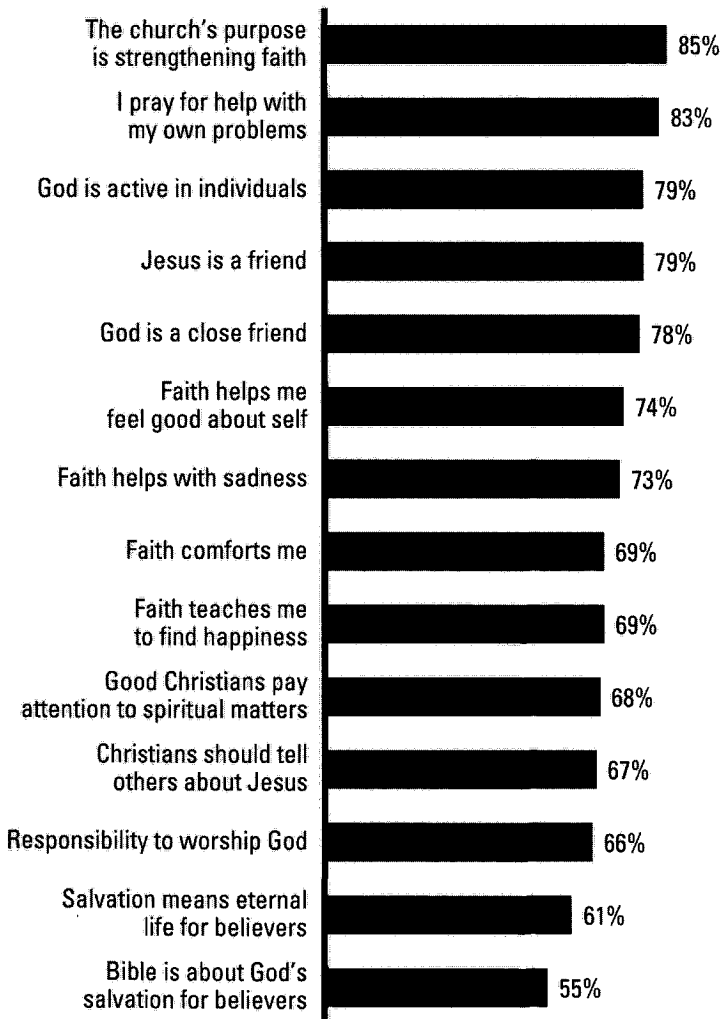
In the Effective Christian Education study, young people were asked a series of 28 questions that speak to the belief systems and priorities related to the individual and communal dimensions. Figures 16-19 present young people's responses to these items. The first two tables focus on the individual faith issues, and the second two focus on the communal faith issues. Each column in one dimension has a parallel column in the other dimension (for example, "God is active in the lives of individual persons" pairs with "God works through social and economic systems to bring about social change.") This pairing shows the creative tensions between the two dimensions.

Several overarching patterns surface when we examine these tables:

- Young people tend to have much stronger beliefs related to the individual issues in faith than the communal issues. While 85 percent agree that "the purpose of the church should be to strengthen faith in God," only 58 percent agree that "the purpose of the church should be to help reduce pain and suffering in the world."

AT A GLANCE: INDIVIDUAL

Here are the percentages of youth who believe each statement:



The same basic contrast can be seen in most of the pairs.

- Within the communal issues, another difference appears. Young people are more likely to endorse statements about compassion and service than they are statements about issues of social change and politics.
- Girls consistently emphasize the individual faith issues more than boys, with meaningful and sometimes dramatic differences between the genders on some items (most show at least a 10 percent difference). However, boys and girls place somewhat similar emphasis on the communal statements that deal with social change; girls place more emphasis on the communal items related to showing compassion, concern, and personal care for others.
- Differences between inactive and highly active youth are dramatic. Highly active youth are quite a bit more likely than inactive youth to endorse the items in both the individual and communal dimensions (with only two exceptions out of the 28 items). Thus, the world views of highly active youth tend to be marked by both a sense that God cares for them personally but also cares for the world and seeks to make positive change in it.
- Differences based on church size are not dramatic. If any pattern can be found, it is that youth in the largest congregations are slightly more apt to agree with statements in both dimensions than are youth in smaller churches.

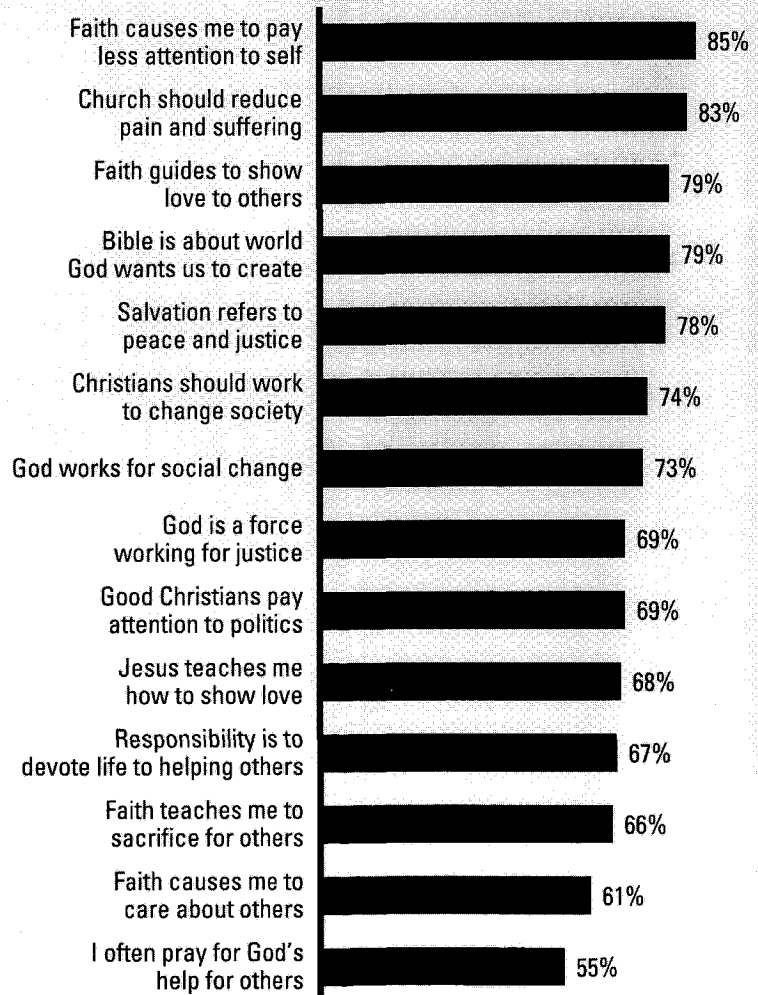
Many of the items and pairs in these data would be ample fodder for ongoing debates among theologians and pastors. Do they adequately capture the continuum? Do they accurately capture an element of the faith? Are they unnecessarily juxtaposed against each other? How does one element influence the other?

Those are all valid questions worthy of serious

discussion. However, regardless of how the debates might come out in the end, the responses from young people point to issues that need to be addressed to be effective in challenging and shaping their faith perspectives. If, for example, a congregation is committed to the horizontal or communal dimension of faith, the findings on beliefs may raise questions about how such an emphasis might be enhanced so that youth will come to see the dimension as integral to their lives.

AT A GLANCE: COMMUNAL

Here are the percentages of youth who believe each statement:



F I G U R E 1 6

BELIEFS REGARDING THE INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION OF FAITH, PART 1

	God is active in individuals	Salvation means eternal life for believers	Christians should tell others about Jesus	The church's pur- pose is strength- ening faith	Bible is about God's salvation for believers	Good Christians pay attention to spiritual matters	Responsibility to worship God
All	79%	61%	67%	85%	55%	68%	66%
GENDER							
Male	72%	62%	65%	78%	49%	67%	60%
Female	85%	61%	70%	91%	59%	69%	72%
GRADE							
7-8	76%	53%	62%	76%	46%	62%	64%
9-10	80%	64%	73%	89%	60%	69%	68%
11-12	81%	65%	65%	87%	55%	70%	66%
CHURCH ACTIVITY							
Inactive	66%	48%	57%	83%	45%	56%	52%
Highly active	90%	76%	74%	95%	58%	78%	80%
CHURCH SIZE							
1-200 members	74%	64%	69%	81%	62%	62%	67%
201-500 members	71%	56%	66%	76%	58%	60%	60%
501-999 members	76%	59%	66%	84%	58%	58%	61%
1,000+ members	84%	64%	68%	88%	52%	74%	70%
DENOMINATION							
CC(DOC)	77%	63%	75%	85%	60%	69%	71%
ELCA	81%	64%	67%	85%	59%	55%	74%
PCUSA	79%	67%	78%	85%	60%	70%	68%
UCC	72%	47%	50%	78%	47%	52%	55%
UMC	79%	61%	67%	85%	53%	71%	64%

Percentages represent youth who responded somewhat true, mostly true, and absolutely true.

Question: How true are each of the following statements for you? Please mark one answer. The questions in this section cover only part of what you may or may not believe.

Statements: God is active in the lives of individual persons.
 Salvation refers to eternal life for those who believe.
 Christians should be about the work of telling others about Jesus.
 The purpose of the church should be to strengthen faith in God.
 The Bible is about how God saves those who believe.
 The good Christian should pay attention to spiritual matters.
 My ultimate responsibility as a person of faith is to love and worship God.

F I G U R E 1 7

BELIEFS REGARDING THE INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION OF FAITH, PART 2

	Faith helps with sadness	God is a close friend	Faith comforts me	Faith helps me feel good about myself	I pray for help with my own problems	Jesus is a friend	Faith teaches me to find happiness
All	73%	78%	69%	74%	83%	79%	69%
GENDER							
Male	68%	70%	64%	70%	74%	73%	64%
Female	77%	84%	74%	78%	90%	84%	74%
GRADE							
7-8	69%	80%	63%	69%	85%	77%	62%
9-10	74%	75%	70%	73%	80%	80%	72%
11-12	74%	78%	74%	80%	84%	78%	72%
CHURCH ACTIVITY							
Inactive	56%	67%	59%	64%	77%	67%	59%
Highly active	81%	84%	81%	81%	92%	87%	82%
CHURCH SIZE							
1-200 members	70%	75%	65%	68%	80%	80%	65%
201-500 members	67%	75%	65%	70%	80%	75%	63%
501-999 members	69%	75%	71%	72%	83%	77%	65%
1,000+ members	76%	80%	71%	77%	84%	81%	72%
DENOMINATION							
CC(DOC)	70%	73%	67%	72%	78%	77%	62%
ELCA	72%	78%	62%	72%	86%	82%	63%
PCUSA	76%	79%	74%	79%	83%	81%	68%
UCC	62%	64%	57%	70%	81%	67%	56%
UMC	73%	78%	71%	74%	82%	78%	71%

Percentages represent youth who responded somewhat true, mostly true, and absolutely true.

Question: How true are each of the following statements for you? Please mark one answer. The questions in this section cover only part of what you may or may not believe.

Statements: My faith helps me when I feel sad and lonely.
 God is a close personal friend who guides and protects me.
 My religious faith gives me comfort.
 My faith helps me feel good about myself.
 I often pray for God's help when I have problems.
 Jesus to me is a friend who cares for me each day.
 My faith teaches me how to find true happiness.

FIGURE 18

BELIEFS REGARDING THE COMMUNAL DIMENSION OF FAITH, PART 1

	God works for social change	Salvation refers to peace and justice	God is a force working for justice	Christians should work to change society	Church should reduce pain and suffering	Bible is about world God wants us to create	Good Christians pay attention to politics
All	39%	36%	54%	51%	58%	59%	29%
GENDER							
Male	38%	40%	54%	53%	63%	55%	31%
Female	40%	33%	54%	49%	55%	63%	28%
GRADE							
7-8	45%	37%	58%	48%	49%	53%	19%
9-10	35%	37%	56%	51%	60%	64%	30%
11-12	37%	34%	49%	53%	66%	59%	37%
CHURCH ACTIVITY							
Inactive	23%	20%	46%	40%	52%	45%	28%
Highly active	43%	33%	66%	53%	55%	66%	28%
CHURCH SIZE							
1-200 members	44%	32%	49%	46%	52%	56%	31%
201-500 members	38%	33%	56%	46%	55%	55%	29%
501-999 members	31%	34%	48%	50%	56%	57%	24%
1,000+ members	41%	38%	55%	53%	61%	62%	31%
DENOMINATION							
CC(DOC)	40%	39%	50%	51%	65%	62%	33%
ELCA	37%	38%	53%	48%	61%	56%	27%
PCUSA	41%	32%	58%	63%	64%	65%	39%
UCC	30%	30%	52%	49%	58%	50%	30%
UMC	39%	36%	54%	50%	57%	59%	28%

Percentages represent youth who responded somewhat true, mostly true, and absolutely true.

Question: How true are each of the following statements for you? Please mark one answer. The questions in this section cover only part of what you may or may not believe.

Statements: God works through social and economic systems to bring about social change.
 Salvation refers to the attainment of justice and peace throughout the world.
 God is a force in the world working to make societies more just and fair for all people.
 Christians should be about the work of changing society.
 The purpose of the church should be to help reduce pain and suffering in the world.
 The Bible is about the kind of world God wants us to create.
 The good Christian should pay attention to politics.

BELIEFS REGARDING THE COMMUNAL DIMENSION OF FAITH, PART 2

	Faith guides to show love to others	Faith causes me to care about others	Responsibility is to devote life to helping others	Faith causes me to pay less attention to self	I often pray for God's help for others	Jesus teaches me how to show love	Faith teaches me to sacrifice for others
All	72%	78%	60%	24%	83%	78%	63%
GENDER							
Male	65%	70%	52%	23%	75%	71%	57%
Female	78%	84%	68%	24%	90%	85%	69%
GRADE							
7-8	73%	73%	53%	23%	86%	73%	52%
9-10	72%	81%	68%	23%	80%	80%	67%
11-12	72%	77%	58%	24%	84%	81%	68%
CHURCH ACTIVITY							
Inactive	53%	58%	51%	20%	75%	68%	52%
Highly active	83%	89%	77%	27%	89%	90%	76%
CHURCH SIZE							
1-200 members	67%	72%	60%	20%	82%	79%	63%
201-500 members	62%	72%	53%	21%	79%	70%	59%
501-999 members	70%	76%	56%	14%	79%	70%	57%
1,000+ members	77%	81%	65%	28%	85%	84%	67%
DENOMINATION							
CC(DOC)	64%	77%	61%	17%	74%	74%	65%
ELCA	77%	77%	62%	18%	85%	77%	68%
PCUSA	73%	80%	66%	24%	85%	87%	66%
UCC	65%	72%	57%	14%	78%	76%	56%
UMC	72%	78%	60%	26%	83%	78%	62%

Percentages represent youth who responded somewhat true, mostly true, and absolutely true.

Question: How true are each of the following statements for you? Please mark one answer. The questions in this section cover only part of what you may or may not believe.

Statements: My faith guides me on how to show love to other people.
 My religious faith causes me to care about other people.
 My ultimate responsibility as a person of faith is to devote my life to helping other people.
 My faith causes me to pay less attention to myself.
 I often pray that God will help other people.
 Jesus to me is a teacher who shows me how to love and serve.
 My faith teaches me how to sacrifice for the good of others.

NON-TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

There has been much concern in congregations about the influence of non-traditional religious beliefs on teenagers. Whether the concern is “cults” or the “New Age Movement” or “Satanism” or other religions, some in the church worry that these beliefs may become widespread in the thinking of church members.

Depending on the specific item, the Effective Christian Education study found that a sizable minority of church-related youth agree with one or more statements that reflect New Age beliefs or influence. One-fourth indicate that they believe in astrology. One in five believes it is possible to communicate with people who are dead.¹

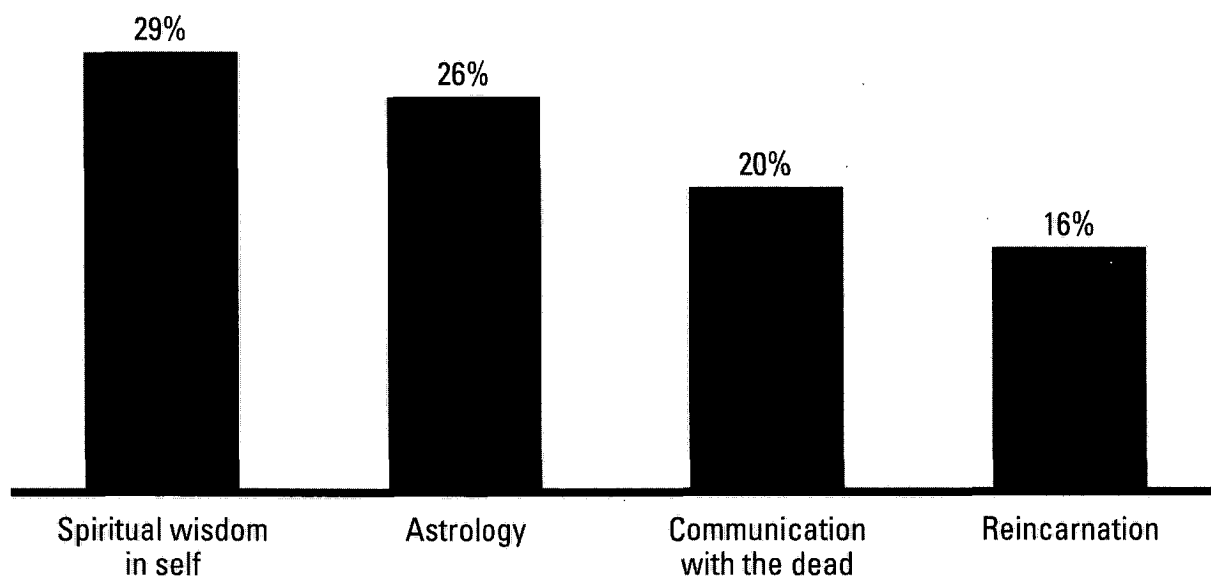
Gender and church size appear to have little impact on levels of beliefs. It's interesting to note that highly active youth are more likely than inactive youth to see all spiritual wisdom

within themselves and to believe in astrology. This pattern may reflect that inactive youth simply have less interest in and awareness of spiritual matters—no matter what form they take.

While all these figures may alarm some observers, it's difficult to find consistent patterns that suggest that young people are abandoning traditional beliefs in favor of these non-traditional ones. Rather, it may be that many young people simply have not been challenged to sort through their beliefs (particularly since the beliefs tend to be most common among younger youth). And the questions may have subtleties that young people miss because they are not familiar with traditional theological categories and distinctions. Thus, what may be at issue is not rebellion but fuzzy, incomplete thinking brought on by not being challenged to think about the many dimensions of faith and the world.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say they agree with each statement:



NON-TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

	Spiritual wisdom in self	Astrology	Communication with the dead	Reincarnation
All	29%	26%	20%	16%
GENDER				
Male	28%	21%	19%	15%
Female	30%	31%	21%	17%
GRADE				
7-8	36%	30%	18%	24%
9-10	26%	29%	22%	14%
11-12	26%	21%	19%	10%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	16%	18%	23%	14%
Highly active	40%	27%	13%	15%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	33%	28%	19%	19%
201-500 members	31%	24%	22%	20%
501-999 members	26%	27%	25%	16%
1,000+ members	28%	27%	18%	14%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	24%	23%	13%	17%
ELCA	33%	32%	22%	19%
PCUSA	27%	26%	16%	18%
UCC	22%	26%	23%	17%
UMC	29%	25%	20%	14%

Percentages represent the youth who said they "tend to agree" or "definitely agree" with each statement.

Instructions: For each of the following statements, tell how much you agree or disagree. Choose one answer for each.

Statements: Through meditation and self-discipline I come to know that all spiritual truth and wisdom is within me.
 I believe in astrology.
 It is possible to communicate with people who have died.
 I believe in reincarnation—that I have lived before and will experience other lives in the future.

VIEWS ON HUNGER AND POVERTY

One set of world issues that has consistently been addressed by Christians from across the theological and political spectrum is hunger. Some people have focused on responding with compassion and care to those who are hungry. Others have emphasized working for social changes that would make poverty and hunger less likely.

Most young people in congregations share the concern about world hunger, and most say they would make personal sacrifices if those sacrifices would reduce poverty. Furthermore, most youth have rejected misperceptions about some of the causes of poverty (only 9 percent place the blame on the poor themselves). (At the same time, 28 percent of youth suggest that poverty is part of God's plan.)

There are few differences in perceptions of causes of poverty when we compare different subsets of youth. Inactive youth are more likely to have misperceptions about the causes of poverty than active youth.

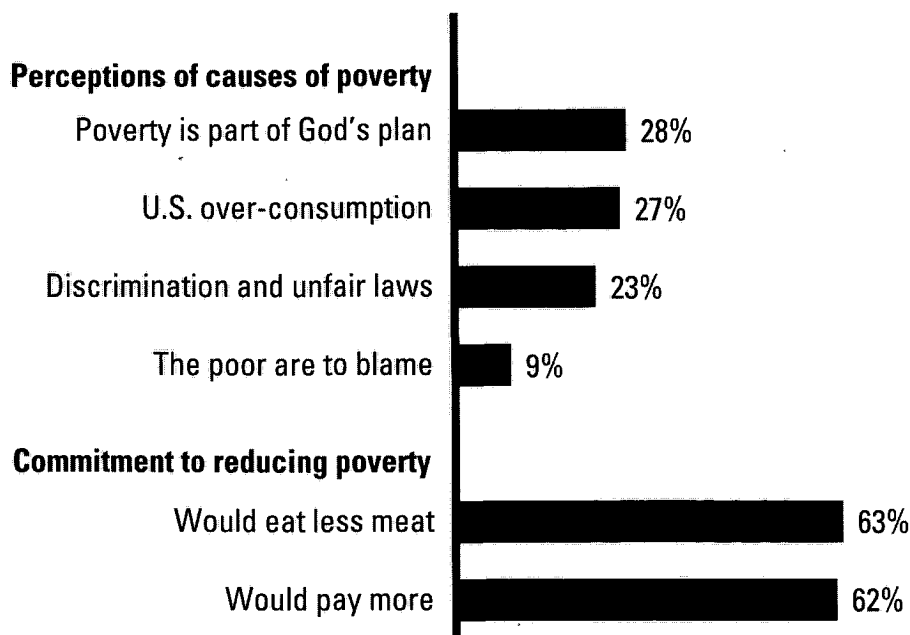
What are more significant are the comparisons related to commitments to reducing poverty. Girls are much more likely than boys to express a willingness to eat less meat if it would help feed the hungry. Highly active church youth are also more willing than inactive youth to commit to making sacrifices to reduce hunger.

We see here a fairly widespread verbal commitment among youth to make personal sacrifices on behalf of others. But, as we saw in Chapter 2, few congregations place a strong emphasis on getting young people involved in helping the

poor. If churches would capitalize on young people's concerns about the poor through service projects and study, those commitments could be realized in concrete action and change to address issues of hunger and poverty.²

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who "tend to" or "definitely" agree with each statement:



F I G U R E 2 1

VIEWS ON HUNGER AND POVERTY

	PERCEPTIONS OF CAUSES OF POVERTY				COMMITMENT TO REDUCING	
	Poverty is part of God's plan	U.S. over-consumption	Discrimination and unfair laws	The poor are to blame	Would eat less meat	Would pay more
All	28%	27%	23%	9%	63%	62%
GENDER						
Male	27%	28%	23%	10%	52%	59%
Female	29%	26%	22%	9%	73%	64%
GRADE						
7-8	33%	27%	23%	12%	59%	61%
9-10	29%	28%	23%	7%	60%	60%
11-12	23%	26%	21%	10%	68%	64%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	37%	25%	22%	17%	51%	53%
Highly active	23%	29%	24%	10%	68%	78%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	30%	32%	27%	14%	61%	56%
201-500 members	34%	28%	22%	10%	57%	58%
501-999 members	29%	24%	20%	10%	61%	63%
1,000+ members	26%	27%	23%	9%	66%	63%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	31%	34%	24%	14%	67%	57%
ELCA	29%	26%	22%	11%	59%	57%
PCUSA	29%	32%	25%	10%	69%	76%
UCC	31%	29%	28%	12%	66%	59%
UMC	28%	26%	22%	9%	63%	61%

Percentages represent the youth who said they "tend to agree" or "definitely agree" with each statement.

Instructions: For each of the following statements, tell how much you agree or disagree. Choose one answer for each.

Items: The poor have only themselves to blame for their poverty.
The way many people in the U.S. buy and use things (food, clothes, cars, appliances) is one reason poverty exists in other parts of the world.
I would favor a good plan to help the poor, even if it costs me money.
Poverty in the U.S. is mainly due to discrimination and unfair laws and policies.
Part of God's plan is that some will be rich and some will be poor.
I would be willing to eat less meat and more grains and vegetables if it would provide food for starving people.

VIEWS ON OTHER ISSUES

The Effective Christian Education study asked young people for their beliefs on a range of theological and social issues. Rapid changes in world events make some issues irrelevant while others gain new prominence. Through it all, some issues remain current and relevant. Young people's perceptions on these issues give a glimpse into their thinking.

• **WOMEN'S ISSUES**—Almost half of the teens surveyed indicate that they would like to see more women pastors, but only 15 percent favor using feminine language for God. Seventh and eighth graders are more likely to favor these possibilities than older youth, and girls are more likely than boys to want women pastors. Youth in the United Church of Christ are slightly more likely to favor using feminine language for God.

• **MANDATED RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS**—Few of the youth surveyed favor government-mandated religious activities in the schools. Youth in the smallest churches are more likely to favor

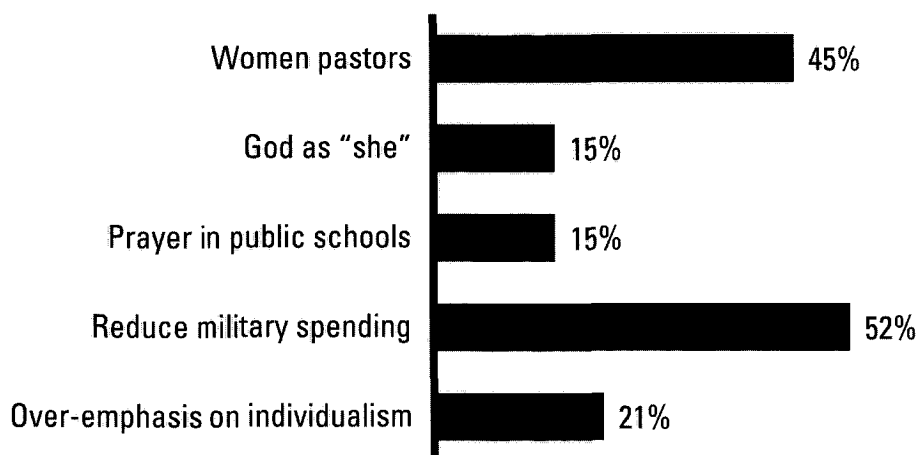
such a mandate. Youth in the United Church of Christ are most likely to oppose it.

• **MILITARY SPENDING**—At the time of the survey (1988-1989), half of the youth in the survey favored decreases in military spending. We can only speculate that this percentage might be even higher now after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Girls favor reducing military spending more than boys, and youth who are highly active in church are almost twice as likely as inactive youth to favor such reductions.

• **INDIVIDUALISM**—Though many observers worry about an overemphasis on individualism in our culture, young people don't appear to be too concerned. Only one in five says the country overemphasizes individualism, and there are few variations between teens in different groups. This finding must be balanced, however, with the data that show that youth tend to emphasize the individual dimension of faith more than the communal dimension (see pages 38-43).

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who "tend to" or "definitely" agree with each issue:



F I G U R E 2 2

VIEWS ON OTHER ISSUES

	Women pastors	God as "she"	Prayer in public schools	Reduce military spending	Over-emphasis on individualism
All	45%	15%	15%	52%	21%
GENDER					
Male	38%	12%	16%	45%	20%
Female	51%	17%	15%	58%	22%
GRADE					
7-8	51%	22%	18%	48%	21%
9-10	42%	13%	15%	55%	21%
11-12	43%	11%	12%	53%	21%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	44%	10%	11%	36%	20%
Highly active	44%	15%	17%	66%	17%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	41%	15%	27%	42%	24%
201-500 members	38%	18%	18%	46%	21%
501-999 members	44%	12%	16%	46%	19%
1,000+ members	48%	14%	13%	57%	22%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	38%	13%	19%	48%	25%
ELCA	42%	15%	13%	48%	19%
PCUSA	44%	19%	18%	62%	29%
UCC	44%	22%	8%	48%	19%
UMC	46%	14%	16%	52%	21%

Percentages represent the youth who said they "tend to agree or "definitely agree" with each statement.

Instructions: For each of the following statements, tell how much you agree or disagree. Choose one answer for each.

Statements: I would like to see more women pastors.
I think that sometimes God should be referred to as "she."
Public schools should require religious expression, such as saying the Lord's prayer, reading Bible verses, or saying prayers.
I think our government should spend less money on the military.
In our country too much emphasis is placed on individualism.

HOW WELL CHURCHES NURTURE BELIEFS

According to young people, one of the strengths of their congregation is how well it does at conveying basic Christian beliefs. Three-fourths say their church is good at teaching the church's beliefs and who God is. Two-thirds say their congregation does well at conveying an understanding of the Bible and its meaning for life. Youth are less sure of the congregation's effectiveness in exploring the uniquenesses of their tradition.

Both sexes have similar perceptions, and, other than a gradual decline, there are few differences in the grade comparisons—with one important exception. The perceived effectiveness of congregations regarding the Bible and its meaning drops significantly for the oldest group of teens. One suspects that this drop may be due to the increased critical thinking of older teenagers

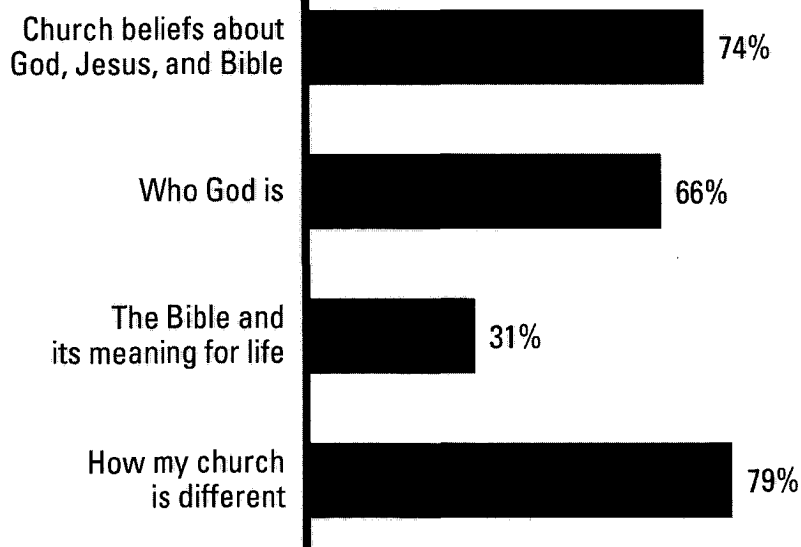
and the congregation's inability or unwillingness to confront tough questions about scripture.

Not surprisingly, inactive youth tend to have lower evaluations of congregational effectiveness than active youth. This may be because they are not involved, so they can't give high marks. It may be that the church programs that address these issues do not appeal to the interests or learning styles of the inactive youth. Finally, active youth are already more committed and interested—important prerequisites for learning.

Denominational comparisons reveal differences on the item regarding church beliefs about God, the Bible, and Jesus. United Church of Christ youth generally rate their congregations lowest in conveying beliefs, while the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American youth rate their congregations higher.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say their church does a good or excellent job at each:



HOW WELL CHURCHES NURTURE BELIEFS

	Church beliefs about God, Jesus, and Bible	Who God is	The Bible and its meaning for life	How my church is different
All	74%	79%	66%	31%
GENDER				
Male	75%	77%	66%	32%
Female	74%	80%	66%	31%
GRADE				
7-8	76%	80%	69%	36%
9-10	75%	80%	71%	31%
11-12	73%	76%	57%	28%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	68%	77%	64%	21%
Highly active	81%	85%	64%	37%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	66%	72%	64%	25%
201-500 members	67%	78%	68%	27%
501-999 members	70%	74%	59%	32%
1,000+ members	79%	81%	68%	33%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	72%	74%	61%	28%
ELCA	79%	82%	65%	35%
PCUSA	70%	77%	64%	28%
UCC	60%	73%	60%	29%
UMC	75%	79%	67%	31%

Percentages represent the youth who said their congregation does a "good" or "excellent" job.

Question: In your opinion, how well does the church you attend do each of the following? How well does your church . . .

Statements: Help you learn what your church believes about God, Jesus, and the Bible.
 Help you learn who God is.
 Help you learn about the Bible and its meaning for your life.
 Help you understand how your church is different from other kinds of churches.

SUMMARY ON TEENS' BELIEFS

No obvious patterns emerge from the data on teens' beliefs on religious and social issues. On the one hand, they indicate traditional Christian perspectives on many issues. But in other cases, their beliefs seem almost random. We might wish that some kind of pattern would emerge so that we would have evidence that young people believed something!

Three different things could be happening.

First, the lack of pattern might mean that there is great diversity among teenagers in the area of belief. They hold many different views and connect with different traditions. If this were true, we would comment that youth in Protestant churches reflect the wide diversity of a pluralistic world and nation.

But the evidence does not suggest that young people in churches are accepting different beliefs because they have "bought into" different traditions. If that were the case, we would likely see strong denominational differences or clear patterns within sets of items on a particular subject.

A second interpretation is that young people in Protestant churches have not yet developed well-formed belief systems and structures. They are borrowing and experimenting from many different places to test out what is true for them. To be sure, some of this is probably occurring. But there's no strong reason to believe this is at the core of the issue.

A third possibility—which seems most likely—is that exploring theological and social issues is not part of many teenagers' religious lives. And since they have rarely been challenged to think systematically about the topics, they pick up bits and pieces from the media, popular culture, friends, fads, and other places. Their opinions are not well-formed or strong. One more conversation might easily sway them to another perspective.

In the next two chapters, we will see that many congregations do not adequately address theological and world issues. As a result, young people have little guidance, support, or challenge to shape their beliefs and perspectives into a world view that reflects the values, priorities, and concerns of their faith tradition.



C H A P T E R F O U R

VIEWS OF THE CHURCH

Not many decades ago, the congregation was the center of life for many families and communities. The church was not only where young people learned together, but where they socialized, built their best friendships, and spent their time. The leaders in the First Church youth group were the leaders in the school's student council and the stars on the football team.

Some teenagers and communities may still have such experiences, but they are the exception. For most religious young people, church life is only one of many influences and activities. In large communities, a teenager may be the only one in the church from his or her school. Instead of having a single set of friends, teenagers have multiple networks of relationships that revolve around school activities, part-time jobs, and other social activities.

Most Protestant teens continue to hold positive perceptions of the church. Most say they look forward to going to church. However, their reviews are less than stellar. In many areas that are vital for nurturing faith and building commitment to the congregation, teenagers generally find the church lacking. This chapter examines these issues.

ATTITUDES TOWARD CHURCH

Most Protestant teenagers go to church because they want to and look forward to being in church. Few fit the caricature of feeling imprisoned at church. About half wish that their church offered more programming for their age. Yet the positive attitudes are not universal. In fact, young people's general attitude is lukewarm at best. It is troubling that only 57 percent of teens connected to churches say the church does a very good job of making a difference in the lives of teens.

The more detailed percentages hold both obvious differences and some surprises. For example, it is no surprise that inactive youth have more negative views of the church than do highly active youth. Similarly, given the gender patterns we see elsewhere, it makes sense that girls tend to be more positive than boys.

More surprising are the patterns that surface by church size. To this point, we have often seen a U-shaped pattern in which the smallest and largest congregations have relative strength

compared to the two middle sizes. That pattern is broken here, with small congregations receiving lower ratings than the largest churches.

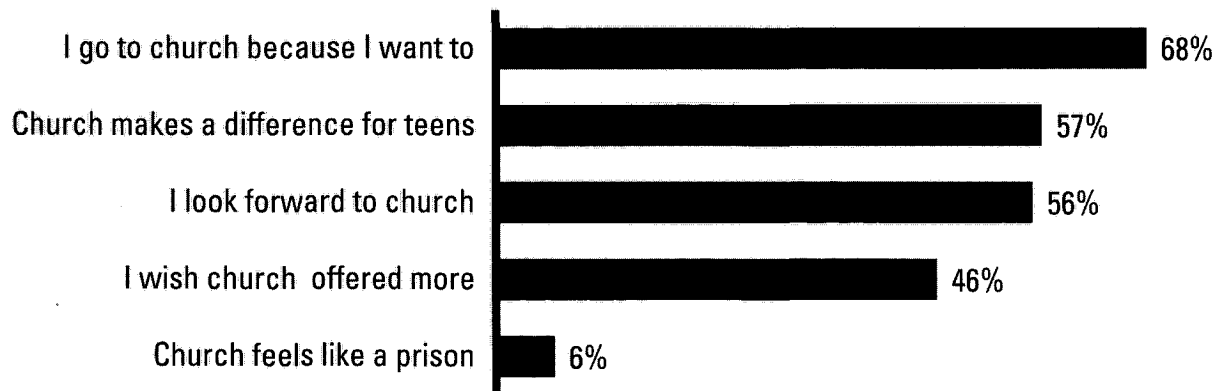
One reason for the difference is that these items focus on positive feelings about church, not evaluations of what the church does. In other words, teens may agree that their congregation does a good job at teaching belief, but that doesn't mean the young person wants to be involved—and enjoys being involved.

The item on going to church "because I want to" may have as much to do with a teen's own independence as his or her perceptions of the church. This might explain why older teens are more likely to indicate that they have a choice.

While teens' attitudes on several items show little difference among the denominations, there are a few exceptions. Lutheran youth are less likely than others to say they look forward to church, and they—along with United Church of Christ youth—are least likely to say they go to church because they want to.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who believe each statement is true about their church:



ATTITUDES TOWARD CHURCH

	I go to church because I want to*	I look forward to church*	I wish church offered more*	Church feels like a prison*	Church makes a difference for teens**
All	68%	56%	46%	6%	57%
GENDER					
Male	64%	52%	49%	9%	54%
Female	72%	59%	44%	4%	59%
GRADE					
7-8	61%	56%	52%	12%	58%
9-10	66%	52%	44%	5%	54%
11-12	77%	60%	43%	2%	59%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	49%	23%	39%	5%	41%
Highly active	85%	82%	50%	3%	75%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	56%	49%	62%	12%	35%
201-500 members	51%	41%	55%	6%	44%
501-999 members	65%	57%	44%	9%	55%
1,000+ members	76%	61%	43%	5%	64%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	65%	56%	51%	9%	48%
ELCA	57%	43%	49%	4%	48%
PCUSA	74%	60%	48%	6%	58%
UCC	56%	52%	45%	6%	51%
UMC	71%	58%	45%	7%	59%

*Percentages represent youth who said each statement was "true" or "very true."

** Percentages represent youth who said "very good," "excellent," or "outstanding."

Instructions: For each of these statements, tell how true it is for you.

Statements: I look forward to going to things at my church.
I wish my church offered more things for kids my age.
My church feels like a prison.
I go to things at church because I want to.

Question: Overall, how well do you think your church does at making a difference in the lives of its teenagers?

Choices: Poor Fair OK Good Very good Excellent Outstanding

WARM CLIMATE IN CONGREGATION

The Effective Christian Education study identified five congregational factors that are key for nurturing faith. They are a warm climate; a thinking climate; a caring church; uplifting worship; and service to others (see Appendix C). The following pages give young people's perceptions on each of these key influences. After examining these five congregational factors, we'll focus on the most influential factor in nurturing faith: effective Christian education.

A warm congregational climate is a vital factor in bonding young people to the church. In fact, of the five congregational factors explored, a warm climate is the most significant in nurturing loyalty to the congregation.

Most youth indicate that their congregation has a warm climate (63 percent). A strong majority (85 percent) agree that it is friendly, and three-fourths believe their congregation accepts peo-

ple who are different. In fact, youth are more likely to experience a warm climate than any of the other congregational factors.

Given that most youth have positive views of congregational warmth, differences are not pronounced. Girls tend to have slightly more positive images of congregational warmth than boys. The youngest youth are more positive than the oldest youth. Denominational differences are minimal. Each of these distinctions continues the themes that we have noticed before.

The breakdown by church size is less clear. No consistent pattern emerges—which may be somewhat surprising, in itself, given that we typically expect smaller churches to be warmer. These data suggest that congregations of all sizes have the potential to create a warm, accepting place for young people.

It is also interesting to note that inactive youth do not have radically different perceptions of

congregational warmth than highly active members. While they are less likely to say their congregation feels warm and strangers feel welcome, they are almost as likely as highly active youth to say the congregation accepts people who are different and is friendly. This lack of difference may suggest that creating a warmer climate is not necessarily the key to drawing youth to more active participation.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say each factor in a warm climate is true in their church:



WARM CLIMATE IN CONGREGATION

	My church feels warm	My church accepts people who are different	My church is friendly	Strangers feel welcome
All	63%	75%	85%	69%
GENDER				
Male	58%	74%	85%	65%
Female	67%	77%	85%	73%
GRADE				
7-8	61%	79%	88%	74%
9-10	60%	78%	86%	70%
11-12	67%	69%	81%	64%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	59%	75%	81%	74%
Highly active	72%	71%	85%	62%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	55%	73%	78%	69%
201-500 members	56%	77%	82%	73%
501-999 members	67%	76%	85%	76%
1,000+ members	64%	74%	86%	66%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	68%	72%	86%	73%
ELCA	58%	76%	82%	69%
PCUSA	69%	78%	85%	68%
UCC	63%	78%	87%	67%
UMC	63%	75%	85%	70%

Percentages represent youth who responded "quite true" or "very true."

Instructions: Think about the church you attend. How true of your church are each of these statements?

Statements: It feels warm
It accepts people who are different.
It is friendly.
Strangers feel welcome.

THINKING CLIMATE IN CONGREGATION

Conventional wisdom in youth ministry doesn't put much emphasis on creating a thinking climate. Many leaders either worry that challenging kids too much will scare them away or they fear that youth will learn the wrong things, so they concentrate on making sure that teenagers know all the right answers that are fed to them.

The Effective Christian Education study found,

however, that a thinking climate is an important ingredient in nurturing faith in youth. Youth—whose intellectual capacities are growing exponentially—need a place where they are challenged to think and ask tough questions about their faith.¹

Whereas most youth indicate that their congregation has a warm climate, fewer than half experience a thinking climate. This should raise important concerns, particularly given that a thinking climate is vital for nurturing faith, and it rivals warmth in terms of potential for nurturing loyalty to the congregation.

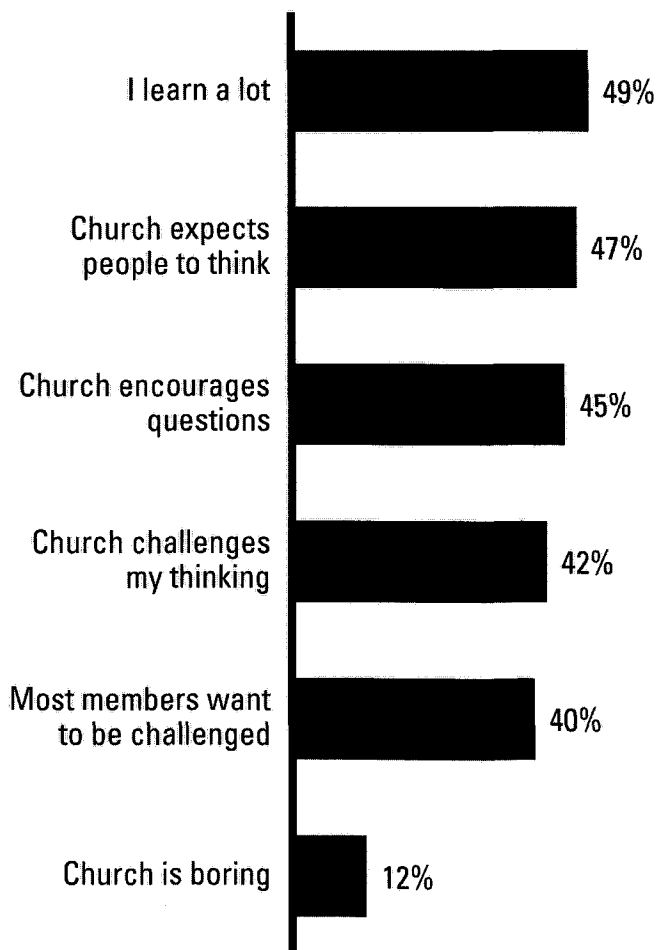
Inactive youth are particularly unimpressed with the thinking climate in their congregation. This perceived apathy and lack of questioning may be a central reason that many youth are inactive. Indeed, they are three times as likely as other teens to say that church is boring.

The dip in ratings among 9th-10th graders suggests that this transitional age is one where congregations have difficulty addressing the intellectual needs of youth. It may be that young people feel they were challenged to think and grow during confirmation. When that experience ends, they may have fewer opportunities that challenge them to think. If so, it represents a significant missed opportunity in that youth at this age often develop new thinking abilities and experience doubts and questions about faith as they move toward adulthood.

A final difference merits mention: Youth in the largest churches are most likely to say their church encourages questions. This may be a result of large congregations developing a cafeteria of programs that address a multitude of interests and learning styles.

AT A GLANCE

Here is how youth evaluate their congregation's thinking climate:



THINKING CLIMATE IN CONGREGATION

	I learn a lot	Church expects people to think	Church encourages questions	Church challenges my thinking	Most members want to be challenged	Church is boring
All	49%	47%	45%	42%	40%	12%
GENDER						
Male	47%	41%	39%	39%	38%	12%
Female	51%	52%	50%	44%	41%	12%
GRADE						
7-8	54%	51%	46%	48%	42%	10%
9-10	44%	42%	43%	36%	42%	12%
11-12	51%	50%	46%	44%	35%	14%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	30%	36%	28%	32%	20%	24%
Highly active	64%	59%	57%	51%	46%	7%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	48%	46%	41%	38%	34%	15%
201-500 members	49%	46%	39%	39%	33%	16%
501-999 members	53%	43%	35%	42%	37%	12%
1,000+ members	48%	49%	50%	43%	43%	11%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	47%	49%	44%	38%	31%	11%
ELCA	54%	47%	39%	40%	31%	16%
PCUSA	55%	49%	43%	45%	41%	10%
UCC	48%	38%	34%	34%	31%	12%
UMC	47%	48%	47%	42%	42%	12%

Percentages represent youth who responded "quite true" or "very true."

Instructions: How true of your church are each of these statements?

Statements: I learn a lot.
 Most members want to be challenged to think about religious issues and ideas.
 It challenges my thinking.
 It encourages me to ask questions.
 It is boring.
 It expects people to learn and think.

CARING CHURCH

Caring church involves the sense that others in the congregation care about you. It's sometimes called a "sense of family." As the original Effective Christian Education study reported, this dimension is important for nurturing faith and for building loyalty to the congregation.²

Two-thirds of mainline Protestant teens say that their congregation emphasizes supporting members in times of personal crisis, and even more say it emphasizes giving members love, support, and friendship. Yet fewer than half of teens report regularly feeling care and support from an adult in the church. The perceptions are quite different between the inactive and highly active youth. One wonders whether some inactive youth have experienced crises during which they did not experience the church's care.³

Given that some people argue that larger congregations are more impersonal, it may be sur-

prising to note that youth in larger churches actually report more contact with caring adults than in smaller churches. In this area of adult contact, however, no set of congregations does well. This lack of intergenerational relationships is a reminder of the missed opportunity within congregations for enhancing religious and social/personal development because most congregations segment all their programs by age.

UPLIFTING WORSHIP

Spiritually uplifting, meaningful worship is a fourth important influence on nurturing faith in teenagers.

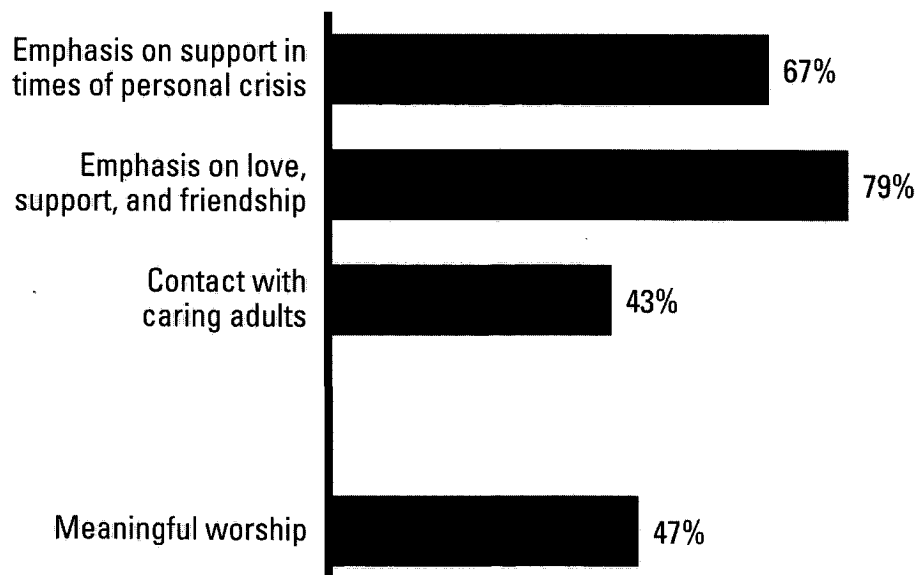
While three-fourths of adults give congregations high ratings here, only half of all young people do. Younger youth and inactive youth are particularly unenthusiastic about

their congregation's worship. The younger youth's lower ratings may result from liturgies and sermons that emphasize thinking processes and language beyond their grasp.

Denominational differences are interesting as well, with highest percentages found in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the lowest found in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say their church emphasizes each characteristic:



CARING CHURCH AND UPLIFTING WORSHIP

	Emphasis on support in times of per- sonal crisis*	Emphasis on love, sup- port, and friendship*	Contact with caring adults**	Meaningful worship*
All	67%	79%	43%	47%
GENDER				
Male	65%	76%	40%	44%
Female	69%	82%	46%	49%
GRADE				
7-8	71%	78%	36%	40%
9-10	66%	80%	45%	47%
11-12	64%	78%	48%	52%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	56%	71%	21%	40%
Highly active	72%	84%	57%	55%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	71%	73%	33%	42%
201-500 members	71%	75%	30%	39%
501-999 members	69%	74%	45%	35%
1,000+ members	64%	83%	48%	54%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	77%	83%	40%	54%
ELCA	72%	73%	37%	43%
PCUSA	73%	76%	48%	50%
UCC	69%	83%	37%	39%
UMC	65%	81%	44%	47%

*Percentages represent youth who said each is a "strong" or a "very strong" emphasis.

**Percentages represent youth who indicated feeling care and support six or more times in the past year.

Question: How much emphasis do you think the church you attend puts on each of the following? Remember that a church cannot emphasize everything on this list, so mark strong emphasis or very strong emphasis only when you think the emphasis is particularly evident or visible.

Statements: Supporting members in times of personal crisis.
Providing members with love, support, and friendship.
Providing meaningful and uplifting worship experiences.

Question: How many times, if ever, during the last 12 months have you done each of the following?

Statements: Felt the care and support of an adult in your church (don't count relatives).

SERVICE TO OTHERS

Serving others has been a hallmark of the Christian faith. Few congregations do not contribute to benevolences, and many make service an explicit part of mission. Yet, despite the prominence of service in the Christian tradition, few young people say their congregations place a strong emphasis on service or do a good job involving them in service. As a result, congregations miss important opportunities to nurture faith in youth and to help young people build a bond to the congregation.⁴

As we would expect, youth report a stronger emphasis on the general "reaching out to the poor and hungry." However, their ratings fall considerably for all the items that actually point to personal involvement in the service.

Gender differences parallel actual reports of service: Girls are a bit more likely to say their

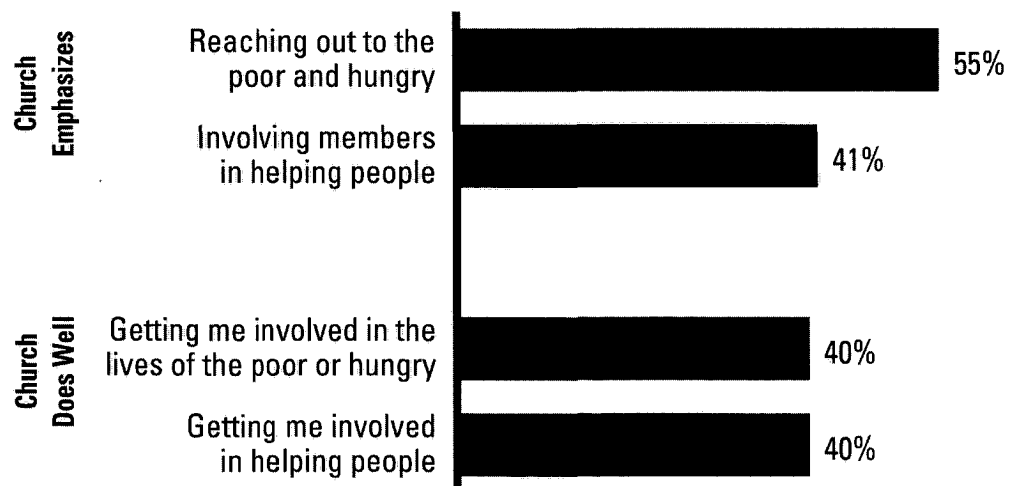
church does a good or excellent job of getting them involved, and they are also more likely to be involved in service (see pages 76-79).

It's surprising to see the little difference between highly active and inactive youth on two items, but major differences on the other two. It may be that the inactive youth have similar images of the congregation's emphasis on the more abstract notion of serving "the poor and hungry," but the concrete experience of serving others is clearly missing.

Few other strong patterns surface through the data. While the largest churches appear to do a slightly better job here, differences are minor. And United Church of Christ youth are most likely to report that their church gets them involved in helping to improve the lives of the poor or hungry.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who report that each area is a "strong" or "very strong" emphasis in the congregation, and that the congregation does a "good" or "excellent" job in each area:



SERVICE TO OTHERS

	STRONG OR VERY STRONG EMPHASIS		GOOD OR EXCELLENT JOB	
	Reaching out to the poor and hungry*	Involving members in helping people*	Getting me involved in the lives of the poor or hungry**	Getting me involved in helping people**
All	55%	41%	40%	40%
GENDER				
Male	51%	39%	33%	35%
Female	59%	43%	45%	45%
GRADE				
7-8	58%	41%	45%	43%
9-10	50%	37%	43%	35%
11-12	58%	45%	31%	44%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	53%	34%	47%	32%
Highly active	55%	52%	45%	48%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	53%	37%	36%	35%
201-500 members	54%	36%	38%	35%
501-999 members	55%	38%	37%	40%
1,000+ members	56%	44%	41%	43%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	57%	37%	34%	32%
ELCA	58%	37%	41%	35%
PCUSA	54%	39%	43%	39%
UCC	60%	41%	51%	41%
UMC	54%	42%	38%	42%

*Percentages represent youth who say this is a "strong" or "very strong" emphasis.

**Percentages represent youth who say church does a "good" or "excellent" job.

Question: How much emphasis do you think the church you attend puts on each of the following?

Statements: Involving members in helping people in your town or city.
Reaching out to the poor and hungry.

Question: In your opinion, how well does the church you attend do each of the following? How well does your church . . .

Statements: Get you involved in helping people in your town or city.
Get you involved in helping to improve the lives of people who are poor or hungry.

EVALUATION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

As mentioned earlier, involvement in an effective Christian education program is the most powerful influence on a young person's faith of any congregational factor. Examination of the characteristics of effective Christian education has been explored in detail elsewhere.⁵ The table on the right presents young people's own views on aspects of their congregation's

Christian education.

About two-thirds of youth indicate that their Christian education programs are interesting and make them think. Girls are slightly more enthusiastic than boys, and youth in the largest churches generally give higher marks than those in small churches. And two-thirds of Presbyterian and United Methodist youth—in contrast with others—say their congregations make them think.

The real difference comes, however, in the comparison of inactive and highly active youth (not surprising, given that inactive youth are, by definition, uninvolved in these activities). Highly active youth are almost

twice as likely as inactive youth to say programs are interesting and make them think. For whatever reason, inactive youth don't seem to be attracted to what is happening in the Christian education program.

Most young people give high marks to their leaders, particularly in areas of warmth and friendliness, and care. Youth in larger churches are more likely to feel that their leaders care and are warm. Inactive youth are less likely to give high marks, but their ratings are relatively high. They apparently perceive the care and warmth, but it's not enough to keep them coming back. Note here that ELCA and UCC youth give particularly low marks on whether adult leaders care about them.

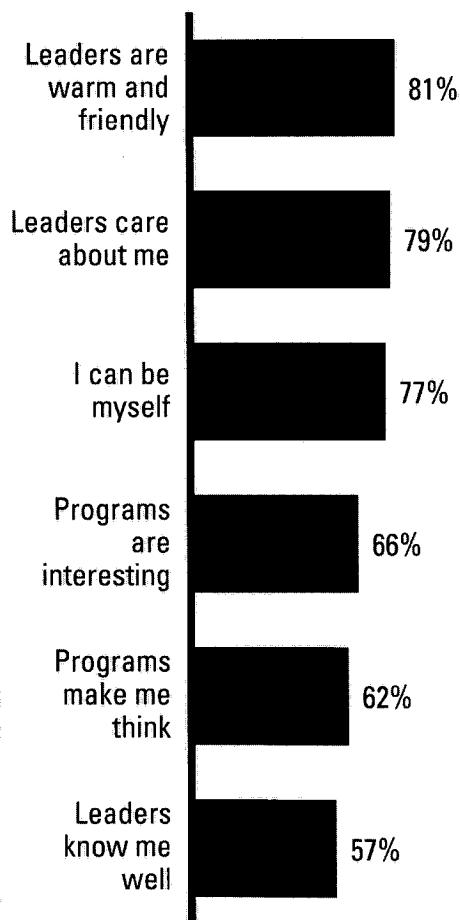
Leaders receive somewhat lower marks in the area of knowing students well, and, as we might expect, the gap is particularly wide between active and inactive youth. These differences raise the interesting question of how inactive youth would respond if their leaders—who they already think care about them—made more efforts to get to know them individually.

Finally, three-fourths of youth say they feel comfortable being themselves in Christian education programs. This comfort level increases with age—perhaps a natural progression of building relationships and confidence over time. Furthermore, youth in larger churches are slightly more apt to feel comfortable.

The differences between active and inactive youth is not startling, but it does suggest that inactive youth may feel out of place and awkward at church. Getting to the core of those reasons (maybe by getting to know them well) may be an important first step toward reassimilating them into the congregation.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say each characteristic is true in their congregation's Christian education program:



EVALUATION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

	Programs are interesting	Programs make me think	Leaders are warm and friendly	Leaders care about me	Leaders know me well	I can be myself
All	66%	62%	81%	79%	57%	77%
GENDER						
Male	62%	58%	74%	76%	54%	78%
Female	69%	66%	86%	82%	59%	77%
GRADE						
7-8	69%	62%	76%	77%	56%	70%
9-10	66%	65%	79%	79%	53%	79%
11-12	64%	58%	86%	82%	63%	81%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	39%	46%	69%	69%	35%	65%
Highly active	79%	77%	86%	88%	69%	86%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	55%	48%	75%	70%	50%	71%
201-500 members	53%	52%	77%	71%	53%	73%
501-999 members	57%	53%	83%	75%	60%	78%
1,000+ members	75%	70%	82%	84%	58%	79%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	63%	56%	83%	80%	57%	77%
ELCA	57%	52%	76%	67%	48%	72%
PCUSA	64%	65%	88%	84%	59%	83%
UCC	64%	52%	78%	67%	53%	72%
UMC	69%	65%	81%	82%	59%	78%

Percentages represent youth who responded "true" or "very true."

Instructions: Think about Christian education at your church. . . . For each of these statements, tell how true it is for you. If your church has no Christian education programs, or if you are never involved, mark "does not apply."

Statements: Programs at my church are interesting.
 Programs at my church make me think.
 My teachers or adult leaders care about me.
 My teachers or adult leaders know me well.
 My teachers or adult leaders are warm and friendly.
 I can be myself.

CONGREGATIONAL LOYALTY

Church is a comfortable place for most Protestant teenagers. Eighty-three percent say they feel at home at church, and 71 percent say church matters a great deal to them. While the percentage who say they would feel a great loss if they had to leave is lower (58 percent), only 10 percent say they would leave their church if it had leadership or financial problems.

Gender patterns are as we would expect, with girls having a higher sense of loyalty than boys, based on these measures. In something of a break from other areas, older youth are somewhat more positive on these measures than younger youth. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that their friendships have a longer time to grow.

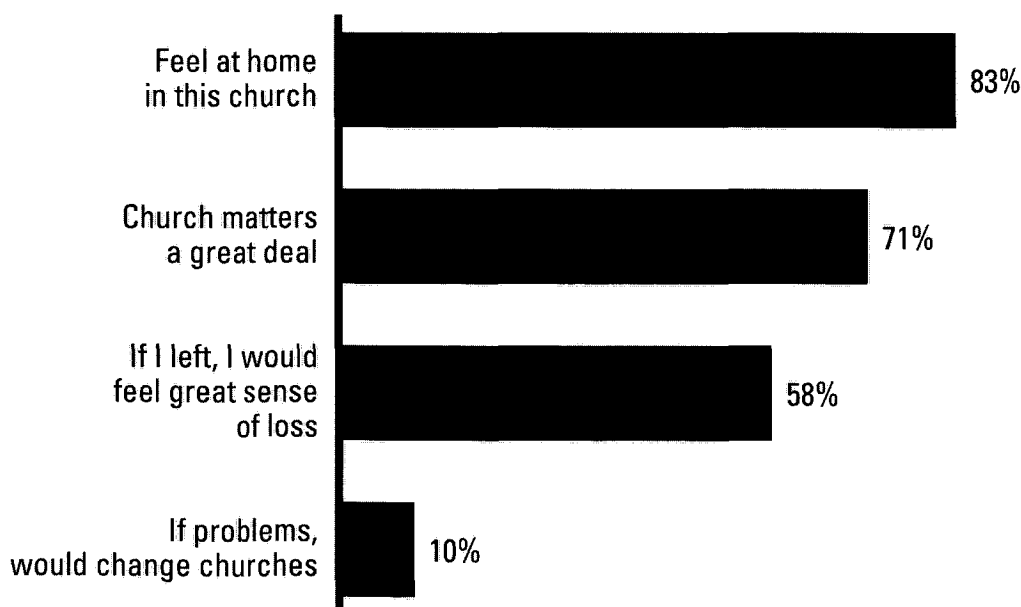
The differences between inactive and highly

active youth suggest another reason why it may be difficult to reach less active youth. Only four in ten youth indicate that their church matters to them or that they would experience great loss if they left. Furthermore, they are much more likely to leave a church if leadership problems were to develop. Clearly, their sense of connectedness to the church is weak, at best.

No clear patterns are evident in comparisons by denomination, which affirms the Effective Christian Education finding that denomination is not a powerful influence on congregational loyalty. Church size, however, makes a considerable difference on this measure. Youth in larger congregations generally exhibit greater loyalty than those in smaller congregations. It may be that youth in larger churches have found niches within their congregations where they build deep relationships and strong connections.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who agree or strongly agree with each statement:



CONGREGATIONAL LOYALTY

	Feel at home in this church	Church mat- ters a great deal	If I left, I would feel great sense of loss	If problems, would change churches
All	83%	71%	58%	10%
GENDER				
Male	80%	63%	52%	10%
Female	87%	78%	63%	10%
GRADE				
7-8	79%	68%	48%	11%
9-10	84%	72%	60%	8%
11-12	86%	72%	64%	11%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	71%	41%	42%	17%
Highly active	91%	88%	67%	7%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	73%	66%	43%	13%
201-500 members	71%	61%	40%	12%
501-999 members	84%	73%	58%	12%
1,000+ members	89%	74%	65%	8%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	84%	77%	57%	11%
ELCA	79%	62%	54%	12%
PCUSA	82%	77%	52%	11%
UCC	79%	68%	48%	12%
UMC	85%	72%	60%	9%

Percentages represent youth who "agree" or "strongly agree."

Instructions: For each of the following, indicate how much you agree or disagree.

Statements: If I had to change churches, I would feel a great sense of loss.
I feel at home in this church.
I would change churches if my church developed major leadership or financial problems.
The church I attend matters a great deal to me.

DENOMINATIONAL LOYALTY

Levels of denominational loyalty are quite similar to congregational loyalty. About eight in ten youth say they are satisfied with their denomination, and the same percentage say they would probably or definitely go to a church of the same denomination if they moved. Yet, despite the apparently high marks, only 54 percent say it is "important" or "extremely important" to attend a church of their denomination.

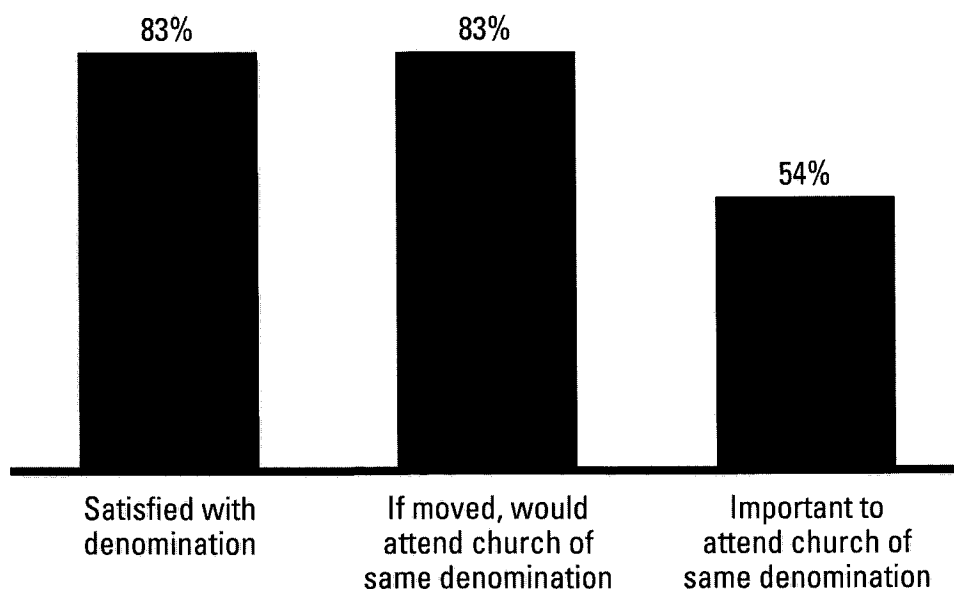
For the most part, there are few major differences in denominational loyalty levels among the subsets of youth examined. Age points to only minimal variations, and there are few differences among denominations. (One exception is that the United Church of Christ youth are quite a bit less likely than youth in other denominations to say it is important to attend a church of their denomination.) However, differences are quite pronounced in comparing active

and inactive youth. Just as these inactive young people display lower levels of congregational loyalty, they also show much less loyalty to their denomination than do highly active youth.

From some perspectives, the apparent levels of denominational satisfaction and importance can be seen as surprisingly high. After all, there is ample evidence in the literature that, in general, people are expressing less and less commitment to their denominational structures.⁶ It's likely that young people's views of their denominations are filtered through or transferred from their experiences in their own congregations. Questions could still be raised, then, about whether teenagers have developed a significant loyalty to the denomination in and of itself—particularly given the lower rating when asked about the importance of attending a church of that denomination.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who express satisfaction with their denomination and that their denomination is important to them:



F I G U R E 3 1

DENOMINATIONAL LOYALTY

	Satisfied with denomination*	If moved, would attend church of same denomination**	Important to attend church of same denomination**
All	83%	83%	54%
GENDER			
Male	80%	82%	47%
Female	85%	85%	61%
GRADE			
7-8	80%	80%	53%
9-10	83%	82%	58%
11-12	84%	87%	50%
CHURCH ACTIVITY			
Inactive	70%	79%	31%
Highly active	87%	85%	63%
CHURCH SIZE			
1-200 members	77%	75%	52%
201-500 members	76%	78%	48%
501-999 members	86%	83%	54%
1,000+ members	84%	86%	57%
DENOMINATION			
CC(DOC)	85%	80%	57%
ELCA	76%	85%	55%
PCUSA	86%	79%	55%
UCC	81%	74%	43%
UMC	84%	84%	55%

*Percentages represent youth who said they were "very satisfied" and "satisfied."

**Percentages represent youth who responded "it is extremely important to me" or "it is important to me."

Questions: How satisfied are you with your denomination?

If you moved to another city that had many churches from which to choose, would you attend a church of the same denomination you now attend?

How important is it to you to attend a church of your denomination?

SUMMARY ON VIEWS OF THE CHURCH

It seems to have worked. For the past 20 years or so, youth ministry has emphasized building community for youth—creating a safe, warm, accepting place where they can feel at home. Congregations have used youth lounges, recreation centers, and group-building activities designed to build relationships and a sense of acceptance.

The efforts paid off. When young people talk about the church, their most positive feelings revolve around feeling at home, having people who care about them, and church being a friendly place. They say they go to church because they want to. To be sure, not all have those positive feelings, but the majority see these things as strengths of their congregation.

But young people keep leaving. Warmth and acceptance may be important in building loyalty to the congregation, but they are not enough, in and of themselves, to keep teenagers active and committed to the church. Many of the other important factors are missing or weak for a majority of Protestant youth:

- Fewer than half of teens indicate that their congregation has a thinking climate.
- Most youth do not have meaningful relationships with caring adults in the church.
- Only four out of 10 teens say their congregation does a good job getting them involved in service to others.

- Many youth give less-than-stellar ratings to the quality of their congregation's Christian education programs. When these programs are examined in depth through surveys of Christian education coordinators, it becomes clear that only a minority of youth are part of truly effective programs.

Furthermore, those young people who are on the fringes—the inactive youth—have even less positive perceptions and experiences. They may feel at home at church, but they aren't challenged to think or serve, and they are much less likely to feel connected to caring adults.

Perhaps it is time to balance the emphasis on community building with an emphasis on challenging young people to think about their faith and their lives. Instead of only building community within the youth group, perhaps it is time to broaden the focus to find ways that whole congregations can become intergenerational families. Instead of only asking what needs of young people can be met through youth programming, youth programs should also ask where young people can use their creativity, energy, and idealism to address some of the pressing needs in their congregation, community, and world.

Perhaps if congregations would do these kinds of things, young people would not see the church as another option for fun activities, but as a critical shaper of their lives and faith.



C H A P T E R F I V E

CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Attitudes do not always match behaviors. Young people can profess commitment to church, yet never participate. Or they can indicate aloofness toward religion while actually being deeply committed and involved. So this chapter moves beyond perceptions and attitudes about the church to examine teens' actual involvement in their congregation.

Most youth in this study are involved in their congregation in some way. Most attend worship fairly regularly, and most attend some kind of other church programming. However, many fewer are involved as volunteers at church. Even fewer express their faith by reaching out to others in service or evangelism or financial giving through their congregation. Part of the issue may be that teens aren't interested. Another part could be that many congregations do not provide the opportunities that young people want or need to boost participation. (Larger churches, which typically have more programming to offer, tend to have higher percentages of youth participating in various activities.)

In addition to examining overall participation rates in various types of church activities, this chapter also explores what young people say they are interested in learning through the church. These topics suggest program priorities that could, if addressed, improve overall commitment and involvement.

LEVELS OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

Seven out of 10 young people in this study participate in church through weekly worship attendance and/or through other church programs for three or more hours per month. These might be considered minimum expectations for regular church involvement. Half as many young people volunteer time to teach, serve on a committee, or help with a program or event. And about a third indicate that they participate in non-church religious activities.

Attendance patterns are not very different between boys and girls. But girls are much more likely to volunteer in the church than boys. Many factors may lie behind this difference. It may be that girls are more inclined or socially conditioned to give their time. Developmental differences may make boys less ready than girls

to give their time. Another possibility, though, is that volunteer opportunities in the church have primarily involved the types of service that most interest and appeal to girls, and boys do not have meaningful outlets for service.

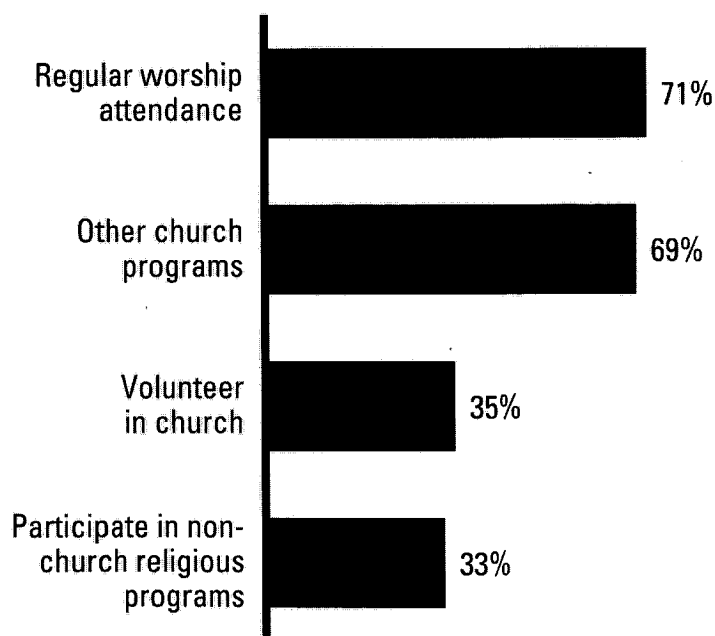
Several interesting patterns are present in the grade differences. After the 7th-8th grades, there is an 11 percent drop in worship attendance and attendance at other church programs. Worship then stabilizes, but attendance in other church programs drops another 8 percent. At the same time, volunteer levels gradually increase through high school. These patterns suggest that youth who remain active may be more likely to take on leadership roles as they grow older—a type of involvement that fits their developmental needs at that age.

Church size has a relationship to involvement as well. Young people are less likely to be involved in various activities and leadership in smaller churches than larger churches. Part of this difference may result from the larger congregations' abilities to address multiple needs and interests of youth to keep them involved. But it also questions conventional wisdom that youth have more leadership opportunities in smaller congregations; if that is true, teens are not taking advantage of those opportunities.

The issue of involvement in non-church religious programs gives insight into the debate over the value of parachurch and independent religious youth programs. On the one hand, many argue that these programs meet vital, unmet needs. Others argue, though, that these programs siphon youth away from the church. Given that youth who are active are more than twice as likely to be involved in non-church religious activities, it suggests that, for many church youth, these activities supplement their church involvement but do not replace it.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of teens who regularly do each activity:



LEVELS OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

	Regular worship attendance*	Other church programs**	Volunteer in church**	Participate in non-church religious programs**
All	71%	69%	35%	33%
GENDER				
Male	67%	66%	25%	29%
Female	74%	71%	43%	35%
GRADE				
7-8	79%	78%	30%	33%
9-10	68%	69%	35%	34%
11-12	68%	61%	39%	32%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	20%	11%	2%	18%
Highly active	***	***	***	45%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	64%	51%	28%	32%
201-500 members	61%	57%	24%	27%
501-999 members	69%	70%	40%	32%
1,000+ members	76%	74%	37%	35%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	69%	62%	34%	23%
ELCA	60%	55%	31%	29%
PCUSA	66%	69%	31%	27%
UCC	60%	63%	35%	27%
UMC	75%	72%	36%	35%

* Percentages represent youth who responded "about once a week" and "more than once a week."

** Percentages represent youth who indicated three or more hours of involvement in the past month.

***The comparisons between "inactive" and "highly active" are not meaningful because the items themselves were used in the definitions of active and inactive youth.

Question: How many hours, if any, during the last month have you . . . ?

Statements: Attended programs or events at your church (other than worship services)
Given volunteer time at your church to teach, lead, serve on a committee, or help with some program or event
Participated in religious events, programs, or groups outside of your church

Question: How often do you attend worship services at your church?

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION INVOLVEMENT

Most congregations offer a myriad of Christian education programs for youth. According to the Effective Christian Education study, 92 percent of congregations offer Sunday or church school for younger youth, 85 percent offer confirmation programs for young adolescents, 84 percent offer camping for youth, 78 percent offer Sunday or church school for older youth, 77 percent have high school youth groups, 70 percent have middle grade youth groups, 57 percent offer community service projects, and 47 percent offer youth choirs.¹ A vast majority of youth surveyed participate at least minimally in these kinds of programs, and 72 percent report regular involvement.

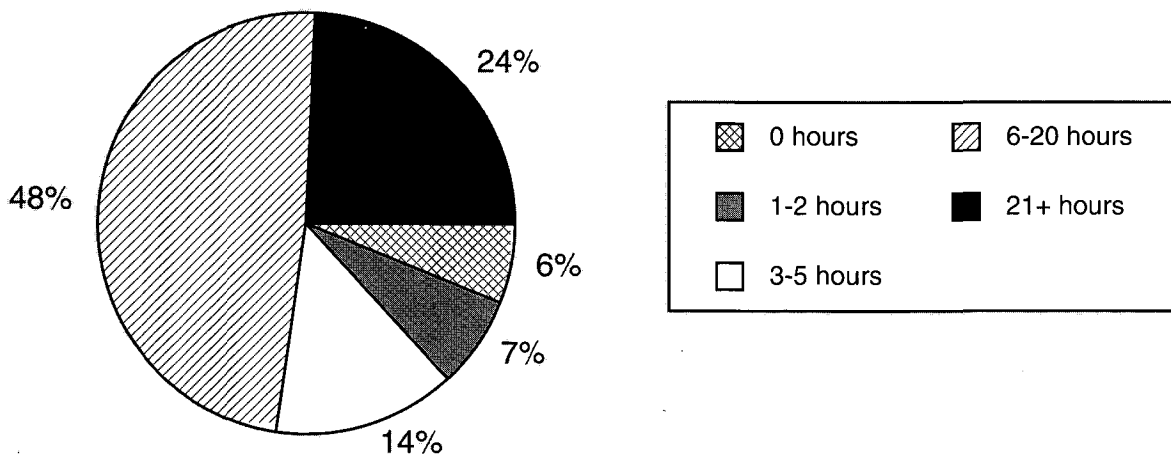
It comes as no surprise that older youth are less involved in Christian education than younger youth. The dilemma is that they aren't involved, so congregations are less likely to offer programs for them. While 84 percent of 7th-8th grade youth are involved six or more hours, only 63 percent of the oldest youth are.

Differences in church size are not as great, but they are large enough to suggest patterns, particularly at the highest levels of involvement. Sixty percent of youth in the smallest churches are involved six hours or more, compared to 77 percent of youth in the largest churches (1000+ members). Youth in the largest congregations are twice as likely as those in the smallest churches to be involved more than 20 hours. In these cases, the amount of programming that is feasible in a very large congregation is clearly a determining factor in this high involvement.

It's interesting to note that the shifts between groups tend to occur between the 3-5 and 6-20 hour ranges. We can speculate that this shift suggests the value of involving youth at least five or six hours beyond their worship attendance, since this amount of time may mark an important hurdle in commitment level. Young people who spend this much time have likely committed more than two hours a week, which may make it easier to nurture community, commitment, and growth in faith.

AT A GLANCE

Here is the amount of time that young people say they spent in Christian education in the past 30 days:



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION INVOLVEMENT (IN THE LAST 30 DAYS)

	0 hours	1-2 hours	3-5 hours	6-20 hours	21+ hours
All	6%	7%	14%	48%	24%
GENDER					
Male	5%	9%	18%	46%	21%
Female	7%	6%	11%	50%	26%
GRADE					
7-8	1%	5%	10%	58%	26%
9-10	7%	8%	14%	49%	22%
11-12	10%	9%	18%	39%	24%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	33%	23%	21%	22%	2%
Highly active	*	*	*	*	*
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	11%	10%	18%	46%	14%
201-500 members	8%	11%	18%	45%	17%
501-999 members	7%	9%	16%	51%	17%
1,000+ members	5%	5%	12%	48%	29%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	8%	7%	19%	45%	22%
ELCA	8%	10%	19%	49%	14%
PCUSA	6%	9%	14%	52%	18%
UCC	9%	11%	15%	48%	17%
UMC	6%	6%	13%	47%	28%

Percentages represent youth who indicate each level of activity in the past 30 days.

*These percentages for "inactive" and "highly active" are not meaningful for comparison because the items themselves were used in the definitions of active and inactive youth.

Question: During the last 30 days, how many hours have you spent at your church in church school or Sunday school classes, Bible studies, youth programs or events, or other activities for youth your age?

Statements: 0 hours
1-2 hours
3-5 hours
6-20 hours
21 or more hours

LIFETIME INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE AND JUSTICE

The denominations that participated in the Effective Christian Education study all espouse a religious faith that challenges people to serve others and to work for justice. Furthermore, the study found that involvement in service is a powerful influence on shaping a mature faith in both youth and adults. There is strong evidence that involving young people in service also increases their commitment to the church and helps to reduce their involvement in at-risk behaviors.²

Yet this study indicates that most young people in churches have spent little time in service and justice activities through their church. Only three out of five say they have spent at least six hours in their lifetime helping others in the church, and fewer than half say they have spent

that much time helping people in the community. Keep in mind, here, that a single work day could come close to meeting this minimum service level. Further analysis shows that only 29 percent of youth have spent 11 or more hours in their lifetime in church service projects.

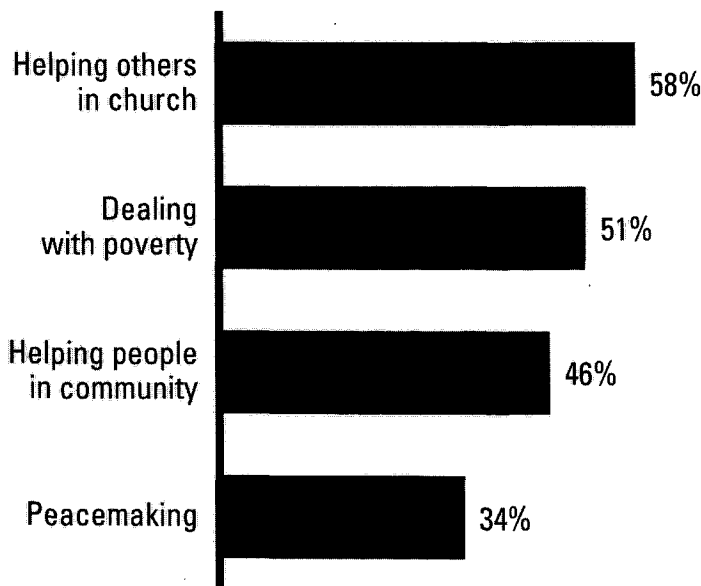
Many of the comparisons in the table suggest important patterns. As we would expect, girls tend to serve more than boys; however, boys tend to have spent slightly more time in peacemaking activities than girls. Percentages for older youth are naturally higher, since they are accumulating over a lifetime. They don't necessarily mean that older youth are more involved (as we'll see in the next chart).

In most of the areas, highly active youth are twice as likely to have been involved six or more hours in some type of service. It may be that connection to the congregation not only provides the opportunity for service but also—through education and awareness—nurtures a sense of responsibility and commitment to serve.

Youth from larger churches are also more likely to serve, though the differences are not as dramatic. The same can be said of denominational differences. It is interesting to note that in only one denomination (PCUSA) are youth as likely to be involved in peacemaking as they are in helping people in the community.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who say they have spent at least six hours in their lifetime in each activity:



LIFETIME INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE AND JUSTICE (6 OR MORE HOURS)

	Helping others in church	Dealing with poverty	Helping people in community	Peacemaking
All	58%	51%	46%	34%
GENDER				
Male	52%	44%	43%	37%
Female	63%	57%	48%	32%
GRADE				
7-8	46%	39%	38%	32%
9-10	59%	50%	46%	32%
11-12	68%	62%	52%	40%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	41%	46%	27%	21%
Highly active	75%	62%	66%	42%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	48%	39%	36%	29%
201-500 members	49%	43%	38%	29%
501-999 members	56%	42%	49%	36%
1,000+ members	62%	54%	48%	36%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	49%	37%	42%	31%
ELCA	50%	41%	38%	27%
PCUSA	57%	62%	45%	44%
UCC	55%	50%	48%	34%
UMC	61%	52%	48%	35%

Percentages represent the young people who indicate six or more hours of involvement in their lifetime through their congregation.

Question: Think about the time you have spent in your life going to things at church. As you look back over your time at church, how many hours would you say you have spent doing the following?

Statements: Helping other people in my church.
 Learning about or doing something about people who are poor and hungry.
 Doing projects to help people in my town or city.
 Learning about or discussing peacemaking.

RECENT INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE AND JUSTICE

In addition to the question of lifetime involvement in service and justice, youth were asked about time they had spent on service activities in the past month. While most youth indicate that they have spent at least an hour helping friends or neighbors with problems, only half indicate spending at least an hour in any of the other kinds of service. Less than a third say they have spent time promoting social justice and peace.

While older youth are as likely as others to spend time helping friends and neighbors, younger youth are most likely to have spent

time in service in their community. And inactive youth are much less likely to have served others than highly active youth.

Church size appears to have less impact on involvement; youth in smaller churches are as likely (and in one case, most likely) to spend time in service to others. This is an important reminder that you don't need a large group to involve youth in service. It can occur with any group, no matter the size, since projects can be designed to fit the young people's particular skills, needs, and interests.

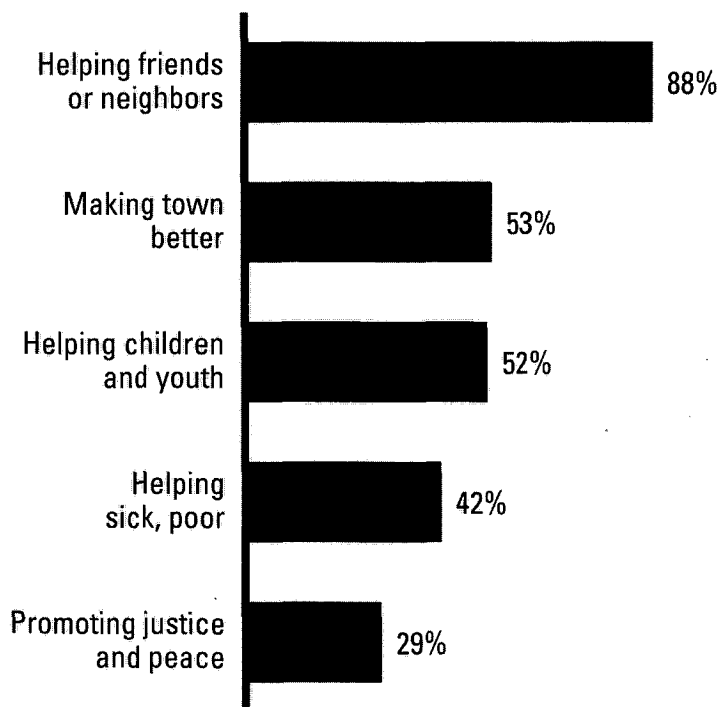
Comparisons among columns highlight a common reality. Young people are most likely to serve those whom they already know (friends and neighbors). They are least likely to be involved in social-change activities such as peacemaking. In between, they are more likely to serve in ways that benefit them (making the town better) or that are relatively "safe" (children, youth, and families) than the riskier issues of helping the sick and poor.

This pattern suggests both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to move young people beyond service that is comfortable. Veterans of service-learning indicate that service has its greatest impact when it takes people out of their comfort zone so that they think and see the world from a different perspective.

The opportunity lies in recognizing that most youth—even inactive ones—serve at some level, even if it just means helping a friend. By starting at that level through friendship-building and peer counseling, congregations can, over time, stretch young people to move out of their comfort zone into areas of poverty, peace, and justice.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who say they have spent at least an hour in the past month doing each activity:



RECENT INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE AND JUSTICE

	Helping friends or neighbors	Making town better	Helping children and youth	Helping sick, poor	Promoting justice and peace
All	88%	53%	52%	42%	29%
GENDER					
Male	81%	53%	46%	37%	27%
Female	93%	53%	57%	47%	30%
GRADE					
7-8	82%	59%	54%	48%	31%
9-10	89%	52%	53%	44%	28%
11-12	92%	50%	49%	35%	28%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	82%	40%	28%	12%	29%
Highly active	95%	69%	74%	61%	38%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	85%	48%	57%	46%	30%
201-500 members	86%	47%	50%	40%	27%
501-999 members	86%	54%	60%	38%	24%
1,000+ members	89%	55%	49%	44%	31%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	89%	40%	55%	45%	25%
ELCA	90%	49%	50%	40%	33%
PCUSA	90%	50%	53%	41%	34%
UCC	88%	54%	61%	43%	23%
UMC	87%	55%	52%	43%	28%

Percentages represent youth who report at least one hour of involvement in the past 30 days.

Question: How many hours (through church, other organizations, or on your own) have you done each of the following during the last 30 days? Give your best estimate for each. Don't count time you spend while in a paid job.

Statements: Helped friends or neighbors with problems they have.
Spent time making your own town or city a better place to live (for example, by promoting the arts, doing volunteer work in a school, being on a city committee or task force).
Donated time in your town or city to help children, youth, or families.
Donated time helping people who are poor, hungry, sick, or unable to care for themselves (don't count family members).
Spent time promoting social justice (for example, racial equality, women's rights, economic reform) or world peace.

RECENT INVOLVEMENT IN EVANGELISM

Depending on its particular tradition and language, the church has expressed its outreach to others both in terms of service and evangelism. And—like service—only about half of young people indicate that, at least once in the past year, they have expressed their faith by sharing it with others or encouraging others to believe.

Given that the measurement here is just one time in the past year, the low percentages suggest that sharing one's faith is simply not part of

everyday life for most Protestant youth. This becomes clearer with additional analysis: Only 11 percent of youth say they have told others about God's work six or more times in the past year, and only 5 percent have encouraged others to believe in Jesus Christ six or more times in the past year.

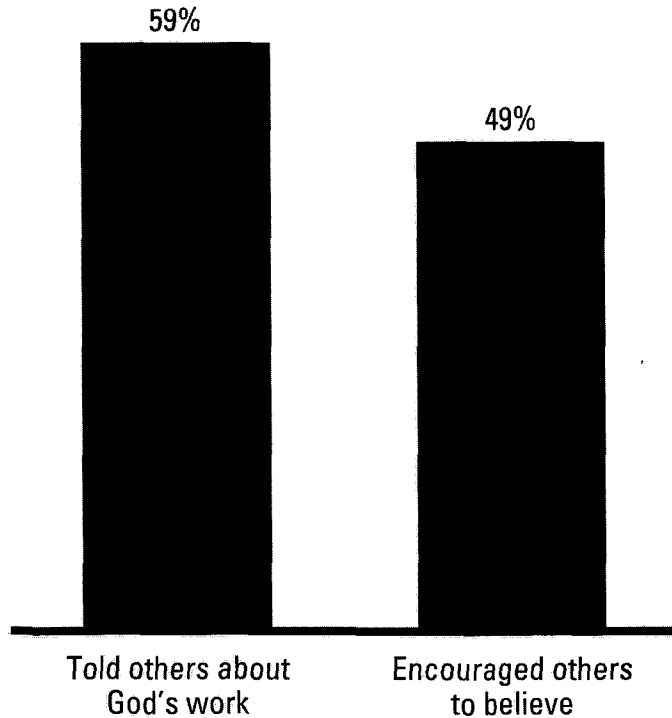
It should be no surprise that few inactive youth talk about their faith or encourage others to believe in Jesus Christ. Once again, the gap here underscores the importance and impact of involvement in the church. Youth who do not remain active and involved are much less likely to make their faith part of their daily lives.

Gender clearly plays a role in young people's sharing of their faith. Girls are particularly more likely than boys to have told others about how God has worked in their lives. This may be due, in part, to the socialization of boys that makes them less likely than girls to talk about these personal issues. As we would expect, highly active youth are much more likely than inactive youth to share their faith with others.

Church size does not appear to have a major impact here. However, a slight trend suggests that youth in the smallest and largest congregations are the ones most likely to express their faith to others. Among denominations, Presbyterian youth are most likely to have expressed their faith to others, while United Church of Christ youth are least likely to have done so.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say they have done each activity at least once in the past year.



RECENT INVOLVEMENT IN EVANGELISM

	Told others about God's work	Encouraged others to believe
All	59%	49%
GENDER		
Male	50%	45%
Female	66%	53%
GRADE		
7-8	58%	52%
9-10	54%	47%
11-12	63%	48%
CHURCH ACTIVITY		
Inactive	38%	25%
Highly active	79%	68%
CHURCH SIZE		
1-200 members	60%	57%
201-500 members	51%	47%
501-999 members	58%	42%
1,000+ members	61%	51%
DENOMINATION		
CC(DOC)	55%	51%
ELCA	54%	53%
PCUSA	64%	54%
UCC	44%	41%
UMC	60%	48%

Percentages represent youth who report doing the activity at least once in the past year.

Question: How often have you done each of the following during the last year?

Statements: Told others about the work of God in your life.
Tried directly to encourage someone to believe in Jesus Christ.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

According to Teenage Research Unlimited, the typical teenage boy spends \$69 a week and the typical teenage girl spends \$62 per week.³ During the year, then, the average teenager spends between \$3,200 and \$3,500. Yet fewer than one in five gave at least \$50 to their congregation in the year preceding the study. Since \$50 is less than 2 percent of \$3,000, it is clear that most church-going teenagers are only giving tiny fractions of their income to the congregation.

It's not that young people are giving their money elsewhere. They are three times as likely

to give to the church as they are to charities or social service agencies—the next-highest category. Only 5 percent give \$50 or more to these organizations. Just 2 percent give to other religious groups, and only 1 percent give to peace or justice groups. Almost no teens give significant amounts to TV evangelists.

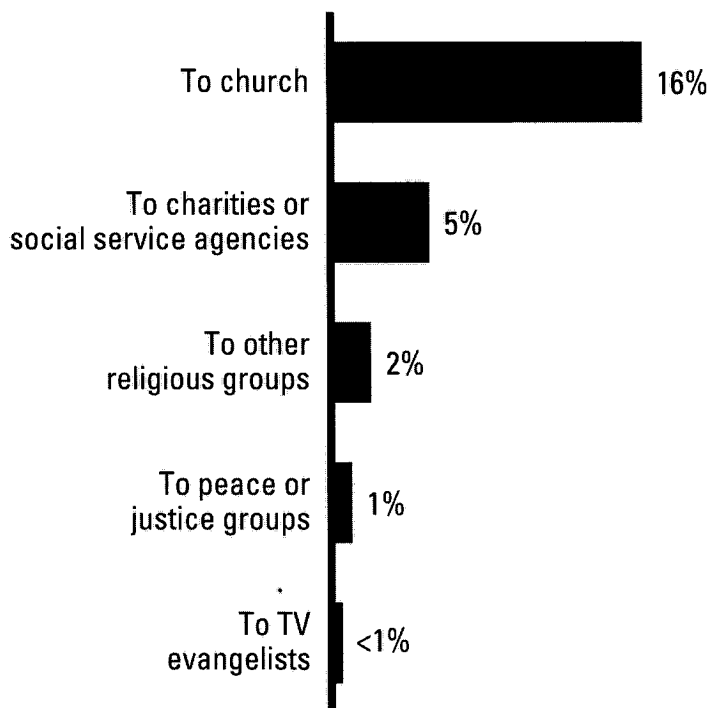
Because the overall percentages are low, it is difficult to know which differences are meaningful. Other than differences between active and inactive teens, there are few major differences among giving levels in all the columns in the table. However, smaller differences may suggest some subtle patterns.

Younger youth may contribute more than older youth to every type of organization—even though older youth likely have much more disposable income due to part-time jobs. This difference may reflect the higher level of involvement and commitment among younger youth, and the encouragement given in Sunday school for younger ages.

The overall pattern of youth not contributing to the congregation or to other organizations has important implications. We might have expected such low giving if we knew that teenagers did not have money to spend. But since many teenagers do have significant income (much of it disposable), the issue becomes how to build commitment to giving and an understanding of stewardship. For it is unlikely that the giving patterns will change automatically when the teenager becomes an adult.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who gave at least \$50 to each type of organization in the past year.



FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS (\$50 OR MORE IN THE PAST YEAR)

	To church	To charities or social service agencies	To other religious groups	To peace or justice groups	To TV evangelists
All	16%	5%	2%	1%	<1%
GENDER					
Male	14%	5%	2%	1%	<1%
Female	17%	5%	3%	1%	<1%
GRADE					
7-8	18%	8%	5%	2%	2%
9-10	17%	3%	1%	1%	<1%
11-12	12%	3%	1%	<1%	<1%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	5%	3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Highly active	18%	7%	3%	1%	<1%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	19%	6%	4%	2%	2%
201-500 members	16%	6%	2%	2%	<1%
501-999 members	17%	5%	6%	1%	1%
1,000+ members	15%	4%	1%	<1%	<1%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	16%	5%	2%	1%	1%
ELCA	12%	6%	2%	1%	1%
PCUSA	18%	7%	4%	3%	1%
UCC	18%	5%	2%	2%	1%
UMC	16%	4%	2%	1%	<1%

Percentages represent youth who have given \$50 or more in the past year.

Question: During 1987, about how much money did you contribute to each of the following?

Statements: To my church.
To other religious groups or organizations.
To a TV evangelist.
To charities or social service agencies.
To peace or social justice groups.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERESTS

In working with youth and developing programs for them, one important factor in the equation is their interests. Knowing these interests gives clues to what needs can be addressed and what types of issues are most salient or appealing for teens. Furthermore, knowing that teens do not express interest in certain important issues may suggest a need for deliberate strategies for building interest in those issues if they are an important part of the faith tradition.

The Effective Christian Education study asked teenagers about their interest in learning in church about 34 different topics, which are ranked in order in the chart on the facing page. As occurs in most similar studies, friendship tops the list of interests. Also clustered near the top of the list are several topics related directly to understanding the faith: learning to know and love Jesus Christ; learning more about who God is; and learning about the Bible and its meaning for life.

On the tables that follow, we have divided the interests into topical categories, thereby giving more detail about differences in young people's interests in learning through their congregations. Here are some highlights:

- **FAITH AND BELIEF ISSUES**—As noted above, youth tend to be highly interested in learning about basic belief issues through their church. This is true among youth in all grades and across all church sizes. Girls are slightly more interested than boys, and highly active youth are more interested than inactive youth. In general, youth are more interested in “learning about” than “doing” the faith. (Interest in the latter is higher among older youth.) Most teens appear not to have internalized their beliefs to the point where they are as interested in applying their faith, talking about their faith, and praying or meditating. The differences between active and inactive youth are even more pronounced on the application issues.
- **SOCIAL SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS**—As noted earlier, friendship skills are the top interest of teenagers (particularly among girls). Other support issues do not gain as much interest, though having sources of support and learning how to communicate with parents are interests of a majority of youth. As we might expect, interest in parent communication declines with age, whereas getting to know other adults in the church becomes more interesting. Church size is not a major consideration in interests, though youth in the largest congregations seem to be more interested in having a place to relax at church—perhaps a reflection of the available facilities and activities in larger congregations.
- **SELF IMPROVEMENT**—These interests include a diversity of issues involving self-esteem, self-competence, and related concerns. Young people are less interested in learning specific skills (leadership, school, career guidance) through church than in receiving help with attitudes. Girls are particularly interested in these topics, compared to boys. Most of the issues have appeal across the ages; leadership skills become quite high interests of older youth.
- **VALUES AND DECISION-MAKING**—Given the issues that teens face, it is not surprising (and even encouraging) that they are quite interested in learning about how to make moral decisions. They are less interested in learning about peer pressure, alcohol and other drugs, or sexuality. This lack of inter-

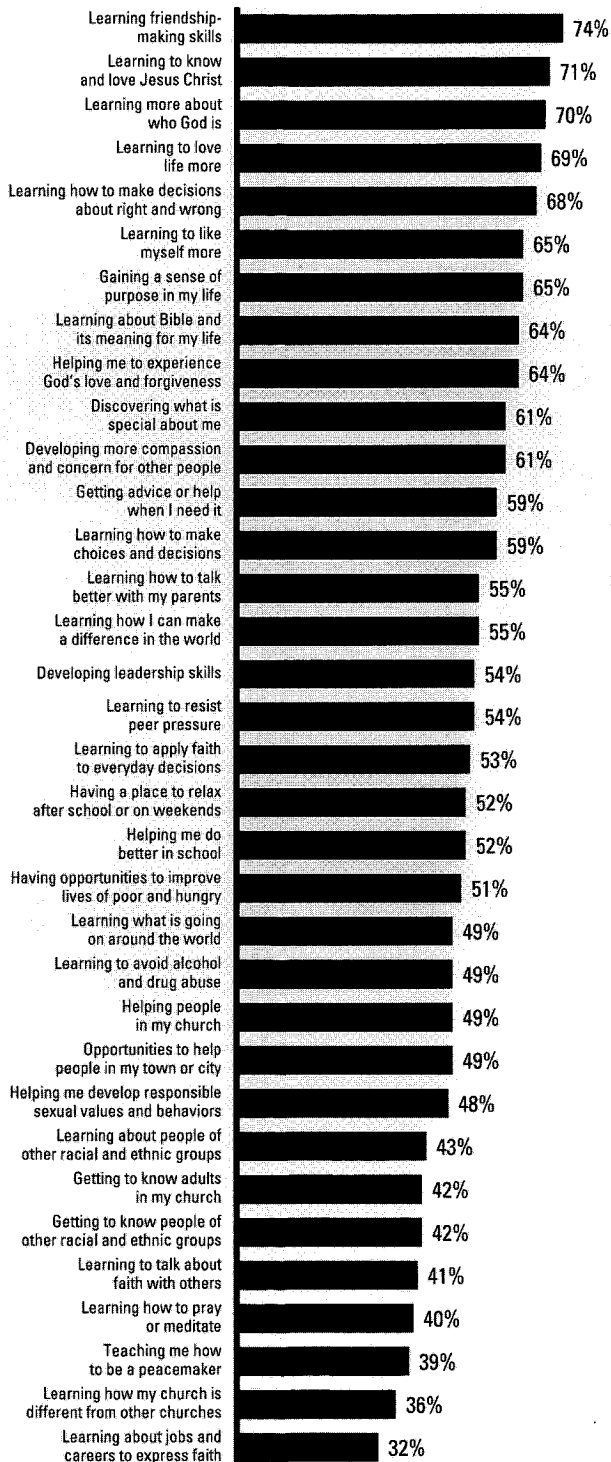
est is particularly strong among older youth; younger youth are more interested in all three issues.

- **SOCIAL ISSUES**—With few exceptions, teens express less interest in social issues than most other topics. However, they are interested in developing compassion and learning how to make a difference—both of which could be gateways to deeper interest in and commitment to social issues. Once again, girls tend to express more interest than boys in these issues, and church size and grade have little impact.

Throughout, inactive youth have lower interest levels than highly active youth. Further analysis shows that inactive teens have roughly the same top interests. The difference is that inactive youth are less interested in everything than are highly active youth. This finding suggests that the problem with reaching inactive youth may not be the tension between programming for youth with very different sets of interests. Rather, it suggests that it will take more energy (and creativity) to get the inactive youth's interest piqued enough for them to participate.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who say they are interested or very interested in learning about each topic through their church:



F I G U R E 3 8

INTEREST IN FAITH AND BELIEF ISSUES

	Know and love Jesus	More about who God is	The Bible	How church differs	Experience God's love	Apply faith	Talk about faith	Pray and meditate
All	71%	70%	64%	36%	64%	53%	41%	40%
GENDER								
Male	66%	64%	62%	26%	59%	45%	38%	36%
Female	76%	75%	65%	43%	68%	61%	43%	44%
GRADE								
7-8	71%	70%	68%	28%	65%	51%	41%	39%
9-10	72%	68%	58%	36%	63%	49%	40%	35%
11-12	71%	73%	67%	44%	63%	60%	41%	47%
CHURCH ACTIVITY								
Inactive	63%	61%	52%	32%	52%	36%	20%	22%
Highly active	82%	83%	73%	46%	78%	67%	58%	53%
CHURCH SIZE								
1-200 members	68%	71%	61%	32%	63%	53%	40%	43%
201-500 members	69%	64%	61%	27%	61%	49%	36%	38%
501-999 members	65%	63%	53%	34%	55%	45%	39%	36%
1,000+ members	74%	74%	68%	39%	68%	58%	43%	43%
DENOMINATION								
CC(DOC)	73%	79%	66%	33%	67%	56%	35%	40%
ELCA	65%	68%	59%	29%	61%	54%	39%	38%
PCUSA	78%	78%	67%	34%	76%	63%	46%	46%
UCC	55%	55%	46%	26%	47%	44%	22%	28%
UMC	72%	70%	65%	38%	63%	52%	42%	41%

Percentages represent youth who say they are "interested" or "very interested" in learning about the topic through the church.

Question: What kinds of church programs and church events interest you? Listed below are some things a church could help you with. For each one mark an answer to show how much it interests you.

Statements:

- Learning how to know and love Jesus.
- Learning more about who God is.
- Learning about the Bible and its meaning for my life.
- Learning how my church is different from other churches.
- Helping me to experience God's love and forgiveness.
- Learning how to apply my faith to everyday decisions.
- Learning how to talk about my faith with other people.
- Learning how to pray and meditate.

INTEREST IN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

	Friendship	Advice or help	Talk with parents	A place to relax	Get to know adults
All	74%	59%	55%	52%	42%
GENDER					
Male	66%	52%	49%	49%	36%
Female	82%	65%	60%	54%	46%
GRADE					
7-8	72%	57%	55%	66%	34%
9-10	74%	59%	61%	44%	44%
11-12	77%	61%	49%	49%	46%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	64%	54%	49%	21%	28%
Highly active	86%	71%	57%	64%	52%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	70%	51%	51%	43%	42%
201-500 members	72%	51%	61%	44%	39%
501-999 members	72%	56%	54%	46%	47%
1,000+ members	77%	63%	54%	57%	41%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	74%	55%	51%	50%	47%
ELCA	67%	55%	50%	47%	35%
PCUSA	76%	65%	63%	52%	49%
UCC	71%	55%	51%	49%	45%
UMC	76%	60%	56%	53%	42%

Percentages represent youth who say they are "interested" or "very interested" in learning about the topic through the church.

Question: What kinds of church programs and church events interest you? Listed below are some things a church could help you with. For each one mark an answer to show how much it interests you.

Statements: Learning how to make friends and be a good friend.
 Getting advice or help when I need it.
 Learning how to talk better with my parents.
 Having a place to go to relax and have fun after school or on weekends.
 Getting to know adults in my church.

INTEREST IN SELF IMPROVEMENT

	Love life	Like self	Sense of purpose	What is special	Leadership skills	Do better in school	Jobs and careers
All	69%	65%	65%	61%	54%	52%	32%
GENDER							
Male	61%	55%	59%	52%	52%	51%	28%
Female	75%	73%	69%	68%	56%	53%	35%
GRADE							
7-8	67%	64%	62%	57%	45%	59%	34%
9-10	67%	66%	67%	65%	51%	52%	28%
11-12	73%	65%	65%	59%	66%	46%	33%
CHURCH ACTIVITY							
Inactive	60%	56%	60%	48%	42%	36%	13%
Highly active	77%	73%	65%	69%	63%	58%	35%
CHURCH SIZE							
1-200 members	63%	58%	60%	52%	46%	56%	39%
201-500 members	67%	63%	64%	52%	52%	55%	29%
501-999 members	66%	65%	61%	63%	54%	48%	31%
1,000+ members	71%	66%	67%	64%	56%	52%	33%
DENOMINATION							
CC(DOC)	71%	69%	67%	59%	59%	60%	28%
ELCA	66%	62%	61%	59%	50%	57%	30%
PCUSA	77%	70%	66%	69%	63%	48%	42%
UCC	56%	54%	55%	48%	52%	50%	25%
UMC	69%	65%	66%	61%	54%	51%	31%

Percentages represent youth who say they are "interested" or "very interested" in learning about the topic through the church.

Question: What kinds of church programs and church events interest you? Listed below are some things a church could help you with. For each one mark an answer to show how much it interests you.

Statements:

- Learning to love life more.
- Learning to like myself more.
- Gaining a sense of purpose in my life.
- Discovering what is special about me.
- Developing leadership skills.
- Helping me do better in school.
- Learning about jobs and careers through which I can express my Christian faith.

F I G U R E 4 1

INTEREST IN VALUES AND DECISION-MAKING

	Decisions about right and wrong	Choices and decisions	Resist peer pressure	Avoid alcohol and other drugs	Responsible sexual values
All	68%	59%	54%	49%	48%
GENDER					
Male	60%	54%	49%	49%	40%
Female	74%	63%	58%	50%	55%
GRADE					
7-8	72%	59%	68%	66%	54%
9-10	64%	56%	54%	51%	43%
11-12	68%	61%	41%	32%	48%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	55%	53%	23%	31%	38%
Highly active	73%	62%	59%	48%	54%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	65%	53%	57%	53%	45%
201-500 members	64%	60%	59%	52%	49%
501-999 members	59%	51%	47%	45%	37%
1,000+ members	72%	61%	54%	50%	51%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	72%	56%	52%	46%	40%
ELCA	65%	59%	55%	46%	51%
PCUSA	70%	64%	60%	51%	52%
UCC	62%	56%	48%	42%	37%
UMC	68%	58%	53%	51%	48%

Percentages represent youth who say they are "interested" or "very interested" in learning about the topic through the church.

Question: What kinds of church programs and church events interest you? Listed below are some things a church could help you with. For each one mark an answer to show how much it interests you.

Statements: Learning how to make decisions about what is right and wrong.
 Learning how to make choices and decisions.
 Learning how to resist pressure from kids my age when they want me to do things I know are wrong.
 Learning how to avoid alcohol and drug use.
 Helping me develop responsible values and behaviors in the area of sexuality.

F I G U R E 4 2

INTEREST IN SOCIAL ISSUES

	Developing compassion	How to make a difference	What's going on in the world	Other racial/ethnic groups	Improve lives of poor/hungry	Help people in the city	Help people in the church	Get to know other racial/ethnic groups	Be a peacemaker
All	61%	55%	49%	43%	51%	49%	49%	42%	39%
GENDER									
Male	48%	50%	47%	38%	40%	40%	35%	34%	29%
Female	73%	60%	52%	47%	60%	57%	60%	50%	47%
GRADE									
7-8	60%	55%	44%	42%	50%	45%	52%	41%	38%
9-10	55%	55%	50%	45%	49%	53%	49%	42%	39%
11-12	69%	57%	53%	41%	55%	46%	45%	44%	38%
CHURCH ACTIVITY									
Inactive	48%	41%	37%	44%	47%	37%	34%	35%	22%
Highly active	74%	68%	60%	42%	60%	55%	62%	44%	51%
CHURCH SIZE									
1-200 members	57%	49%	44%	39%	48%	47%	48%	41%	37%
201-500 members	55%	51%	48%	42%	50%	44%	45%	43%	35%
501-999 members	60%	53%	44%	36%	48%	43%	45%	36%	32%
1,000+ members	64%	58%	52%	46%	53%	53%	51%	45%	43%
DENOMINATION									
CC(DOC)	63%	54%	59%	48%	50%	48%	48%	51%	37%
ELCA	61%	56%	49%	40%	50%	48%	46%	43%	41%
PCUSA	74%	64%	62%	48%	64%	55%	61%	50%	51%
UCC	57%	45%	49%	39%	50%	45%	45%	44%	34%
UMC	60%	55%	48%	43%	50%	49%	48%	41%	37%

Percentages represent youth who say they are "interested" or "very interested" in learning about the topic through the church.

Question: What kinds of church programs and church events interest you? Listed below are some things a church could help you with. For each one mark an answer to show how much it interests you.

Statements:

- Developing more compassion and concern for other people.
- Learning how I can make a difference in the world.
- Learning what is going on around the world.
- Learning about people of racial and ethnic groups other than my own.
- Having opportunities to improve the lives of people who are poor and hungry.
- Having opportunities to help people in my town or city.
- Helping people in my church, such as those who are sick, handicapped, or in nursing homes.
- Getting to know people of other racial and ethnic groups.
- Teaching me how to be a peacemaker.

SUMMARY ON TEENS' CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Depending how you read it, this chapter is filled with either good news or bad news. On the one hand, many youth are involved in their congregations. They are committed to many positive concepts and values, and they have strong interests in a range of topics that the congregation can address. On the other hand, commitments to service, giving, volunteering, and spiritual disciplines (prayer, etc.) are relatively low, with only a minority of youth making these issues priorities in their lives. The data suggest several challenges:

INVOLVING OLDER YOUTH—This report finds the same patterns that youth workers experience week after week: Older youth become less and less active in most congregations. In comparing interests, however, we find that the overall level of interest remains fairly stable. Interests shift, but youth do not necessarily lose interest. This would suggest that older youth are not dropping out of church because they are no longer interested in learning from church. Rather, it suggests that either they have let other priorities interfere with their attendance or their shifting interests are not being addressed in the church.

There is evidence, however, that the issue of priorities and schedule may be overstated. Further analysis of these data finds that the most active youth in church are the same youth who are highly active in school, extracurricular activities, and other activities. (The exception is work; youth who work more are less likely to be highly active in church.)

The underlying issue is likely quite complex, but it may include at least these three elements, which merit further discussion and exploration in congregations.

1. Many youth ministries operate on the assumption and expectation that youth will

not stay involved. So programs for senior high youth are dismantled, and no one worries that older youth are not around.

2. Many congregations operate confirmation programs as though they were a "graduation" or a final rite of passage. The message to youth is that once they have completed confirmation in eighth or ninth grade, they are finished with Christian education and no longer have reason to participate in church youth activities.
3. A third issue involves programming focus. Do older youth get bored with the content focus of youth programs? Chapter 4 noted that many youth do not experience a thinking climate—precisely at a time when teenagers' are developing new ways of thinking. The interests of older youth shift toward issues of leadership, building adult relationships, uniquenesses of the congregation, learning spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation, and addressing social issues (in contrast to service to individuals). Do congregations adequately address these emerging issues for older youth? If not, older youth may be looking elsewhere for these challenges.

CONNECTING WITH INACTIVE YOUTH—A chapter on church participation underscores the gap between highly active and inactive youth. Even though they are church youth, inactive youth are not involved or connected. The challenge comes in the question of how to reach these teenagers. Conventional wisdom has suggested that these youth need different types of programming with different topics. However, the lists of top interests between active and inactive youth are remarkably similar. Inactive youth are not interested in different things; they just are not as interested in any of the topics. Their

interest seems only half-hearted, and thus it would be difficult to motivate them to get involved based on those interests alone.

The answer to the question probably lies in identifying each young person's core interests or values or source of meaning re relational needs, and seeking to connect the young person through that interest or relationship to the congregation. This likely involves building relationships with inactive youth, then building a youth program that has room for a diversity of youth and perspectives.

GETTING BOYS INVOLVED—The differences between boys and girls continue to be an underlying theme in this report. Boys simply do not become as actively involved in the congregation or as committed to their faith. This same pattern continues in adulthood (with men consistently lagging behind women in faith maturity and religious involvement), suggesting that the difference is not a quirk of adolescent develop-

ment, but a deeper issue that demands careful thinking about spirituality among men in this culture.

Several hypotheses could help to explain the differences between boys and girls. One could argue that many congregations do not appeal to masculine interests and needs. It may be that boys are not nurtured or socialized in ways that open them to the spiritual life, so they are less able to connect with the message of the faith tradition.

Western culture may not expect boys to be actively religious; in fact, religious involvement may be looked down upon by some, making self-conscious teenage boys reluctant to express strong commitment. Whatever the reason—or combination of reasons—the gap between boys and girls deserves serious attention, not just for the youth group, but for the entire church that is nurturing its emerging generation of members and leaders today.



C H A P T E R S I X

LIFE ISSUES AND AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

Today's young people face challenges and opportunities that previous generations never faced. On the one hand, they are growing up in a world of computers, media, and information that give them unprecedented opportunities to learn and grow. On the other hand, they face an array of negative influences and attitudes that threaten their lives and their futures.

Youth in the church are no different, facing the same opportunities as other youth as well as the same risks. They are busy in multiple issues, and they have many of the same stresses, worries, and concerns that occupy the minds of unchurched youth. In short, being active in church does not insulate youth from all the issues and concerns that are present for other youth in towns and cities.

Though young people in the church face the same challenges as other youth, church involvement does make a difference. A Search Institute analysis of responses from a study of almost 47,000 6th-12th grade students in public schools found that youth who are active in church or synagogue are half as likely to be involved in a variety of at-risk behaviors than unchurched youth.¹ Thus congregations appear to offer a particular strength to young people.

Many congregations seem not to be addressing these issues for youth and guiding youth in the difficult decisions they face. This chapter examines these issues, showing how churched teenagers spend their time, their levels of at-risk involvement, their sources of guidance, and how well they believe their congregations support them.

MEDIA, HOMEWORK, AND WORK

Using the media is one of the most common activities among teenagers. When they aren't watching television, they may be listening to music in the car or their bedroom or—if parents are tolerant—on the family stereo.

Almost three-fourths of teens in the church say they listen to at least six hours of music in a given week. Two-thirds indicate that they watch six or more hours of television in a given week. (Nationally, the average teenager watches 2 hours, 45 minutes of television per week. On average, adults watch more than teens: 3 hours, 44 minutes for men and 4 hours, 25 minutes for women.¹)

Two interesting details emerge in the table. First is the difference between boys and girls. While girls may listen to radio slightly more than boys, boys are almost 20 percent more likely to watch

lots of television. As young people grow older, music listening remains constant, but TV viewing drops in high school. Finally, inactive youth listen to less music than highly active youth, but both groups watch similar amounts of television.

The level of media use presents a challenge and opportunity to congregations. The challenge is recognizing that most teens spend more time with the media than they do at church, which gives the media an edge in terms of potential influence. Media use also suggests that these are pleasurable activities for teens. Capitalizing on these interests by using media in youth programming may be an effective way to attract youth.

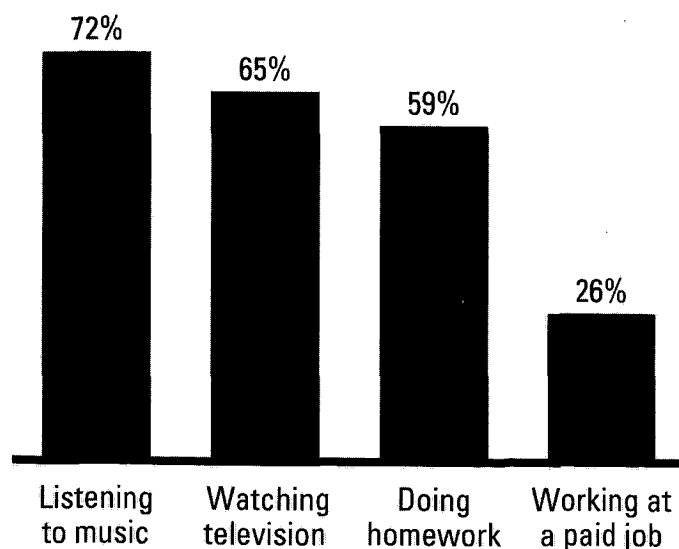
Homework—a focal point of educational reform—is a regular part of the day for 59 percent of church-going youth (keeping in mind, of course, that this amount represents about an hour a day). Girls tend to spend more time doing homework. And while schoolwork may be getting harder through high school, homework levels remain flat across the years. Once again, highly active youth are more likely to spend time doing homework than inactive youth. Finally, it is interesting to note that levels of homework increase in the larger churches.

In comparing TV use and homework, note that boys typically spend more time watching television than doing homework; girls spend more time doing homework than watching television.

The last issue, part-time work, takes up six hours or more per week for only one in four church youth. However, the percentage rises to 45 percent for juniors and seniors. Highly active youth are more likely to spend time working than inactive youth. The higher levels of work involvement among older youth may account for some of the dropout from church activities. However, highly active youth are more likely to work than inactive youth.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of church youth who spend six or more hours each week in each activity.



MEDIA, HOMEWORK, AND WORK (6 OR MORE HOURS WEEKLY)

	Listening to music	Watching television	Doing homework	Working at a paid job
All	72%	65%	59%	26%
GENDER				
Male	69%	74%	54%	27%
Female	74%	56%	64%	25%
GRADE				
7-8	75%	72%	59%	13%
9-10	72%	61%	60%	18%
11-12	70%	63%	60%	45%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	59%	61%	47%	25%
Highly active	80%	61%	69%	34%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	76%	71%	50%	20%
201-500 members	72%	70%	49%	26%
501-999 members	77%	64%	55%	31%
1,000+ members	70%	62%	65%	25%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	74%	69%	54%	25%
ELCA	83%	71%	55%	27%
PCUSA	73%	54%	60%	30%
UCC	73%	65%	56%	29%
UMC	68%	64%	61%	25%

Percentages refer to teenagers who indicate participating in each activity six or more hours in an average week.

Question: During an average week, how many hours do you . . . ?

Statements: Listen to music
Watch TV
Do homework
Work in a paid job

ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES

Constructive, structured activities are an important part of adolescent development. Youth who are involved in these kinds of activities are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors and more likely to make positive choices. Our study shows that most youth in congregations take advantage of a range of these activities. To get a sense of the range of involvement, we have listed the percentage of youth who are at least

minimally involved in each activity; some youth are much more involved in specific activities.

Given that this survey is a sample of church youth, it should not surprise us that the vast majority say they participate in church at least an hour a week. (It does suggest, however, that the study undersamples youth who may be on church rolls but never attend.) Youth are almost equally involved in school clubs, sports, and music. Fewer are involved in clubs outside church or school.

The similar levels of involvement suggest

that congregations may be making a mistake by focusing youth programming around only one type of activity (sports, music, etc.). Young people have diverse interests, all of which can be built upon in youth programming to reach different groups of young people.

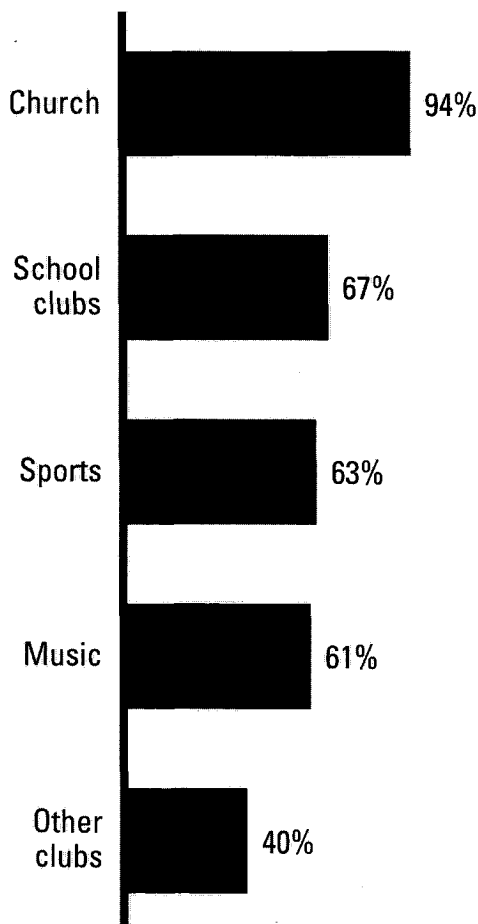
Gender patterns should be no surprise to people who work with teens. Girls are more likely to be involved in school clubs and music, while boys are more likely to be involved in sports. In all cases, however, a majority of both genders are involved in all three activities.

Grade differences suggest some additional issues. Across all the activities, we see a drop in participation for older youth. In some cases, the drop is rather dramatic: almost 20 percent. In short, all types of youth programming—not just the congregation's—experience a decline in participation. Are young people dropping out of organized activities altogether and spending their time alone or with peers, away from the influence of community institutions? Or are they simply focusing all their energy on fewer programs (for example, varsity athletes spending all their time in sports) so they no longer have time for other activities? In either case, what does this trend mean for programming for older youth?

If nothing else, this finding means that all types of youth programs face similar issues and concerns in this area. Perhaps youth workers from different sectors (congregations, schools, athletics, youth organizations) would do well, instead of competing, to come together to compare notes and develop mutually beneficial strategies to assure that the greatest percentage of older youth are being included in constructive programs throughout the community.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who spend at least one hour each week in each activity:



ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES (ONE OR MORE HOURS WEEKLY)

	Church	School clubs	Sports	Music	Other clubs
All	94%	67%	63%	61%	40%
GENDER					
Male	93%	62%	72%	55%	38%
Female	94%	72%	55%	66%	42%
GRADE					
7-8	98%	71%	71%	71%	52%
9-10	92%	67%	65%	59%	33%
11-12	92%	65%	54%	54%	38%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	63%	44%	63%	34%	30%
Highly active	100%	83%	67%	75%	49%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	92%	61%	53%	57%	39%
201-500 members	89%	61%	64%	51%	40%
501-999 members	93%	62%	60%	59%	37%
1,000+ members	95%	72%	64%	65%	41%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	96%	68%	59%	55%	41%
ELCA	95%	63%	63%	62%	37%
PCUSA	94%	71%	68%	52%	40%
UCC	92%	66%	64%	59%	43%
UMC	93%	68%	62%	62%	40%

Percentages indicate youth who spend one or more hours in an activity in an average week.

Question: During an average week, how many hours do you . . . ?

Items: Go to your church
 Participate in clubs and organizations at school (other than sports)
 Play sports on school or community teams
 Participate in a band, choir, orchestra, music lessons, or practicing voice or an instrument
 Participate in clubs or organizations (not at church and not at school)

OVERVIEW OF AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

The concept of at-risk behavior is used to define a range of health-compromising choices. Each makes a young person vulnerable to short-term and/or long-term difficulties. We focused on ten such behaviors, defined as follows:

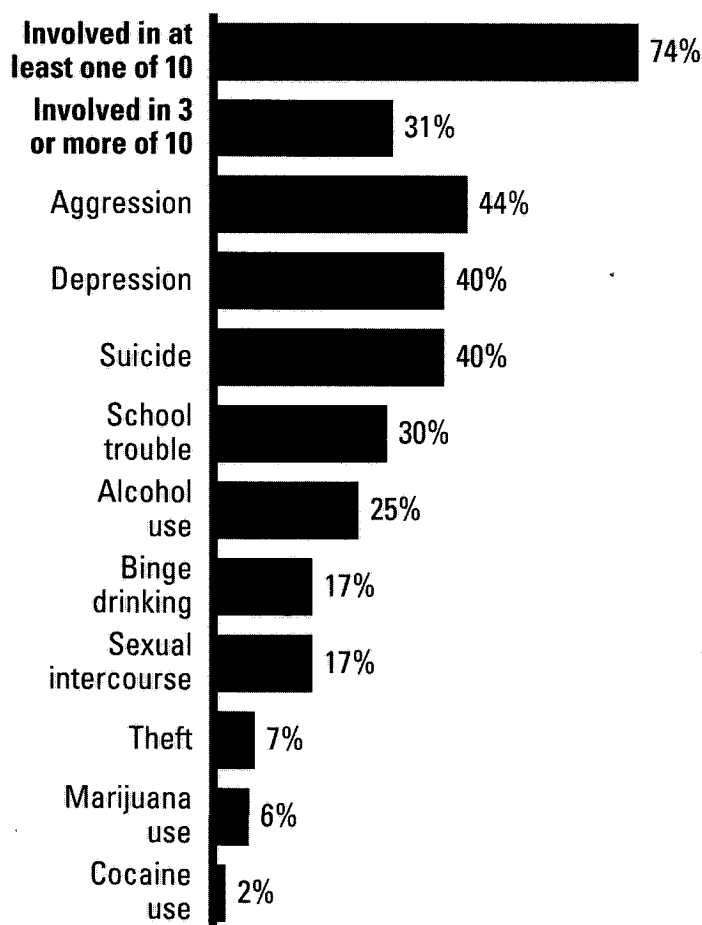
- **DEPRESSION:** Felt sad or depressed 20 or more time in last 12 months.
- **SUICIDE:** Thought about suicide once or

more in last 12 months.

- **ALCOHOL USE:** Drank alcohol six or more times in the last 12 months.
- **BINGE DRINKING:** Got drunk (five or more drinks in a row) three or more times in the last 12 months.
- **MARIJUANA USE:** Used marijuana three or more times in the last 12 months.
- **COCAINE USE:** Used cocaine once or more in the last 12 months.
- **AGGRESSION:** Hit or beat up someone six or more times in the last 12 months.
- **THEFT:** Shoplifted three or more times in the last 12 months
- **SCHOOL:** Got into trouble at school three or more times in last 12 months.
- **SEXUAL INTERCOURSE:** Have had sexual intercourse once or more in lifetime.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of church youth who are involved in each at-risk behavior.



Research shows that church youth are less prone to these behaviors than non-churched youth.³ This may be due, in part, to the positive effects of religious community and program—in addition to spiritual development—in helping young people make responsible choices.

Seventy-four percent of all church youth engage in one or more of the 10 at-risk behaviors, and nearly a third (31 percent) in three or more of the 10. There is predictable variation by age, with at-risk involvement higher for older youth.

Somewhat surprisingly, there are no gender differences in the percentages with one or more at-risk behaviors, though the following tables do show differences in specific at-risk indicators.

It is also important to note that no denomination or size of congregation is immune from at-risk involvement. All congregations face an important challenge to address these issues to help ensure a positive future for young people.⁴

OVERVIEW OF AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

	Involved in 1 or more at-risk behaviors*	Involved in 3 or more at-risk behaviors**
All	74%	31%
GENDER		
Male	73%	31%
Female	74%	31%
GRADE		
7-8	66%	15%
9-10	76%	36%
11-12	80%	40%
CHURCH ACTIVITY		
Inactive	78%	53%
Highly active	71%	23%
CHURCH SIZE		
1-200 members	74%	33%
201-500 members	73%	32%
501-999 members	75%	34%
1,000+ members	73%	29%
DENOMINATION		
CC(DOC)	71%	27%
ELCA	76%	32%
PCUSA	74%	30%
UCC	71%	26%
UMC	73%	31%

*These percentages represent the number of youth who are involved in at least one of the ten at-risk behaviors defined on page 98 in the past year.

**These percentages represent the number of youth who are involved in at least three of the ten at-risk behaviors defined on page 98 in the past year.

ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol is the drug of choice for American teenagers. Despite laws banning drinking under age 21, its use is more common and more widespread among youth than any other drug.

The same is true for youth in the church. Half of those in the survey have used alcohol at least

once in the past year. One-fourth have used alcohol six or more times, and 28 percent have been on a drinking binge at least once in the past year.

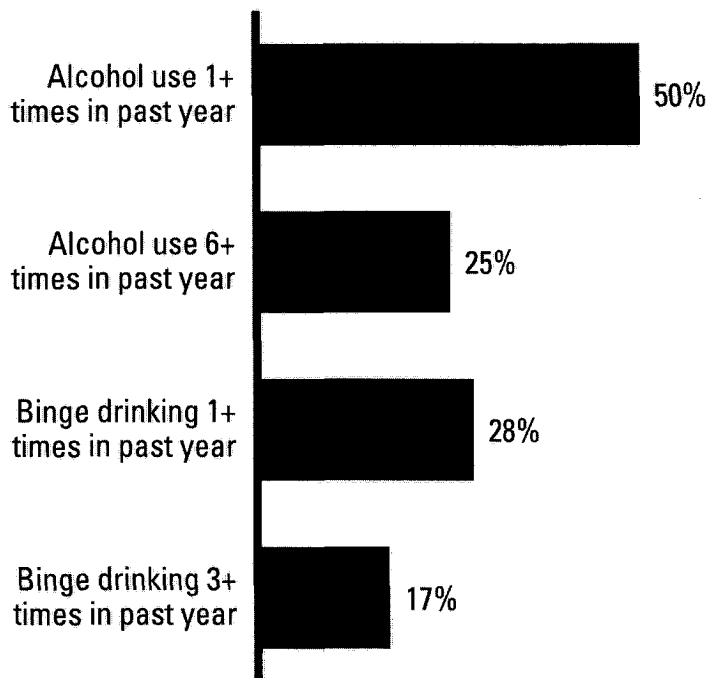
The real concern comes in noting the high percentages of older youth who use alcohol. Forty-two percent have used alcohol six or more times in the past year. A third have been on drinking binges three or more times in the past year. A third have done so at least once.

Differences between boys and girls are not significant—despite popular images that boys are more likely to use alcohol. Highly active youth are about half as likely as inactive youth to use—particularly at the higher levels.

Like society in general, congregations must examine the messages it sends young people about alcohol. Too many teenagers are learning that alcohol is an acceptable drug and are falling into patterns of regular alcohol use and abuse. Furthermore, congregations can become active in addressing community norms, practices, and attitudes that make alcohol accessible and acceptable among too many teens.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who have been involved in each type of alcohol use:



F I G U R E 4 6

ALCOHOL USE

	Alcohol use 1+ times in past year	Alcohol use 6+ times in past year	Binge drinking 1+ times in past year	Binge drinking 3+ times in past year
All	50%	25%	28%	17%
GENDER				
Male	51%	25%	30%	18%
Female	48%	24%	26%	16%
GRADE				
7-8	23%	8%	7%	5%
9-10	52%	23%	29%	12%
11-12	69%	42%	45%	34%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	70%	50%	48%	33%
Highly active	44%	20%	23%	15%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	51%	22%	28%	19%
201-500 members	49%	23%	27%	18%
501-999 members	52%	24%	27%	19%
1,000+ members	49%	26%	29%	16%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	49%	21%	28%	16%
ELCA	57%	29%	31%	18%
PCUSA	51%	26%	27%	19%
UCC	51%	20%	22%	13%
UMC	48%	24%	28%	17%

Percentages represent the number of youth who report each level of involvement in the past year.

Question: How many times, if ever, during the last 12 months have you done each of the following?

Statements: Drank alcohol (beer, wine, or liquor) while alone or with friends.
 Had five drinks or more in a row (a drink is a glass of wine, a can of beer, a shot of liquor, or a mixed drink).

SCHOOL TROUBLE, SEXUAL ACTIVITY, AND DRUG USE

Many different at-risk behaviors are often in the national spotlight. Figure 47 presents data on three different at-risk issues among church-going youth:

SCHOOL TROUBLE—Three in 10 youth in churches indicate that they have gotten in trouble at school three or more times in the past year. Some of those occurrences were likely minor infractions; others, though, were probably more serious. Girls are less likely to get in trouble at school, as are older youth. Interestingly, highly active youth are no less likely to experience

school trouble than inactive youth.

The fact that one-third of church youth indicate trouble at school raises questions about how little congregations address school issues. Only 19 percent of youth say the church does a good or excellent job at helping them do better in school (see pages 112-113). Perhaps congregations have missed an important need when they do not address school issues formally or informally through their programming.

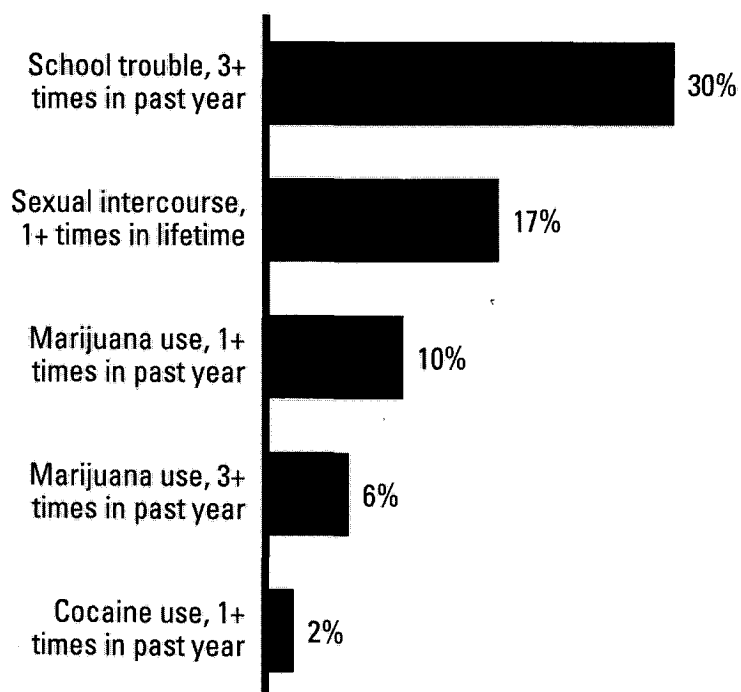
SEXUAL ACTIVITY—While just 17 percent of church youth have had sexual intercourse in their lifetime, a third of them have had intercourse by 11th and 12th grades. (Nationally, approximately 60 percent of teens indicate that they have had intercourse two or more times by 12th grade.⁵) Inactive youth are more than twice as likely as highly active youth to have had intercourse.

ILLCIT DRUG USE—This study asked about two types of illicit drug use: marijuana and cocaine. Ten percent of youth indicate that they have used marijuana at least once in the past year, and 6 percent have used it three or more times. Among juniors and seniors, one out of five has used marijuana in the past year. Boys and girls are equally likely to use marijuana, and inactive youth are four times as likely to use it as highly active youth. Cocaine use is low enough that it is difficult to make comparisons among different subsets of teenagers.

In all three of these behaviors, the greatest differences surface when we compare grade and church activity. Church size and denomination have little if any impact. In short, no congregation—regardless of size or denominational tradition—is immune from these concerns.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of church youth who are involved in each activity:



SCHOOL TROUBLE, SEXUAL ACTIVITY, AND ILLICIT DRUG USE

	School trouble, 3+ times in past year	Sexual inter- course, 1+ times in lifetime	Marijuana use, 1+ times in past year	Marijuana use, 3+ times in past year	Cocaine use, 1+ times in past year
All	30%	17%	10%	6%	2%
GENDER					
Male	36%	15%	10%	6%	2%
Female	25%	19%	10%	6%	1%
GRADE					
7-8	38%	5%	5%	4%	2%
9-10	32%	15%	5%	2%	1%
11-12	21%	31%	20%	11%	3%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	25%	32%	22%	12%	4%
Highly active	25%	12%	5%	3%	1%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	36%	18%	9%	6%	4%
201-500 members	33%	19%	14%	8%	2%
501-999 members	32%	16%	10%	6%	4%
1,000+ members	28%	17%	9%	5%	1%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	29%	20%	11%	6%	2%
ELCA	34%	20%	11%	5%	3%
PCUSA	32%	17%	9%	5%	2%
UCC	30%	13%	8%	5%	3%
UMC	29%	17%	10%	6%	1%

Percentages represent the number of youth who report each level of involvement in the past year.

Question: How many times, if ever, during the last 12 months have you done each of the following?

Statements: Gotten into trouble at school (three or more times)
 Cheated on a test at school (three or more times)
 Used marijuana (grass, pot) (one or more times; three or more times)
 Used cocaine (coke, snow, crack) (one or more times)

Question: Have you ever had sexual intercourse ("gone all the way")?

Response: Yes (one time or more)

DEPRESSION AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Depression and suicide are among the most common at-risk behaviors among church youth. They also break the patterns we've seen in other at-risk behaviors.

Whereas the religious values and norms of the faith community appear to have a restraining effect on at-risk behaviors involving alcohol and

other drugs, sexual activity, etc., there does not appear to be as strong an impact in relation to depression and suicide. Highly active youth are only slightly less likely to experience

depression and think about suicide than inactive youth.

Furthermore, girls are more likely than boys to experience depression and think about suicide. While most at-risk behaviors increase throughout high school, these seem to peak in the 9th and 10th grades. Further analysis shows that the primary issue here is with girls. Among 9th and 10th grade girls, 54 percent have thought of committing suicide, compared to 38 percent of boys. It may be that these grades are turbulent times developmentally—particularly for girls—and many teens do not have adequate support through the transition. Among girls this age, 26 percent (compared to 8 percent of boys this age) say they needed help but had no one to turn to, ten times or more in the past year.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who indicate involvement in each at-risk behavior:

DEPRESSION/ SUICIDE

Depression,
20+ times 40%

Thought about
suicide 40%

Felt no one
loved me 67%

No one to
turn to 55%

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Shoplifting,
3+ times 7%

Aggression,
1+ times 44%

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS

The survey looked at two antisocial behaviors: shoplifting and aggression. While 7 percent of youth report shoplifting three or more times, 44 percent indicate that they have hit or beat up someone in the past year. More than half of all boys report aggression. At the same time, aggression is not simply a male phenomenon; one-third of girls indicate they have hit or beat up someone in the past year.

In contrast to other at-risk behaviors, these antisocial behaviors tend to decline with age among church youth. Younger youth may not have developed appropriate personal skills for resolving conflict and dealing with differences, and thus they may resort more readily to aggression.

DEPRESSION, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS

	DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE				ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS	
	Depression, 20+ times	Thought about suicide, 1+ times	Felt no one loved me., 1+ times	No one to turn to, 1+ times	Shoplifting, 3+ times	Aggression, 1+ times
All	40%	40%	67%	55%	7%	44%
GENDER						
Male	33%	35%	64%	57%	10%	55%
Female	47%	45%	70%	61%	4%	35%
GRADE						
7-8	34%	28%	72%	54%	9%	55%
9-10	48%	47%	66%	61%	6%	49%
11-12	38%	44%	63%	48%	6%	29%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	46%	41%	54%	44%	8%	38%
Highly active	40%	36%	69%	60%	4%	41%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	44%	44%	74%	60%	10%	52%
201-500 members	39%	38%	69%	57%	10%	45%
501-999 members	44%	45%	72%	53%	4%	45%
1,000+ members	39%	39%	64%	54%	6%	43%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	38%	38%	71%	55%	8%	33%
ELCA	43%	49%	82%	62%	8%	43%
PCUSA	39%	37%	75%	54%	7%	48%
UCC	41%	37%	67%	57%	6%	41%
UMC	40%	39%	62%	53%	6%	44%

Percentages represent the number of youth who report each level of involvement in the past year.

Question: How many times, if ever, during the last 12 months have you done each of the following?

Statements: Felt very sad or depressed (20 or more times)
Thought about killing yourself (one or more times)
Felt like no one loved you (one or more times)
Needed help but had no one to turn to (one or more times)
Taken something from a store without paying for it (three or more times)
Hit or beat up someone (one or more times)

SEXUALITY-RELATED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Earlier in this chapter (page 103) we noted that a third of church-going juniors and seniors have had sexual intercourse. One of the factors that may keep this percentage lower than in the general youth population is that almost half of Protestant youth say that premarital sex is "often" or "always" wrong. (One-fourth say they are "not sure.") However, while 56 percent of girls believe it is wrong, only 34 percent of boys do. This difference may grow out of a double-standard that "boys will be boys," while girls receive more deliberate sanctions against sexual activity.

However, the taboo against sex outside marriage is not as strong when youth think about adults. Only 30 percent of the teenagers believe sexual activity between two consenting, unmarried adults is wrong. (Twenty-seven percent say "not sure.") This percentage is fairly consistent across gender, grade, church activity, and church size. The difference is most pronounced in the com-

parisons by denomination. Only 20 percent of United Church of Christ youth believe sexual activity between unmarried adults is wrong; close to a third of youth in other denominations believe it is wrong.

Two other questions about sexuality were asked. Just under half (45 percent) of youth say adult homosexual relationships are wrong. (Another third say they are "not sure.") Boys are more likely to hold such a view than girls. Inactive youth hold this view more often than highly active youth. Furthermore, older youth are more likely to believe homosexual activity is wrong than younger youth. Denominational differences are particularly interesting here. Presbyterian youth are most likely to believe it is wrong; United Church of Christ youth are least likely to believe this.

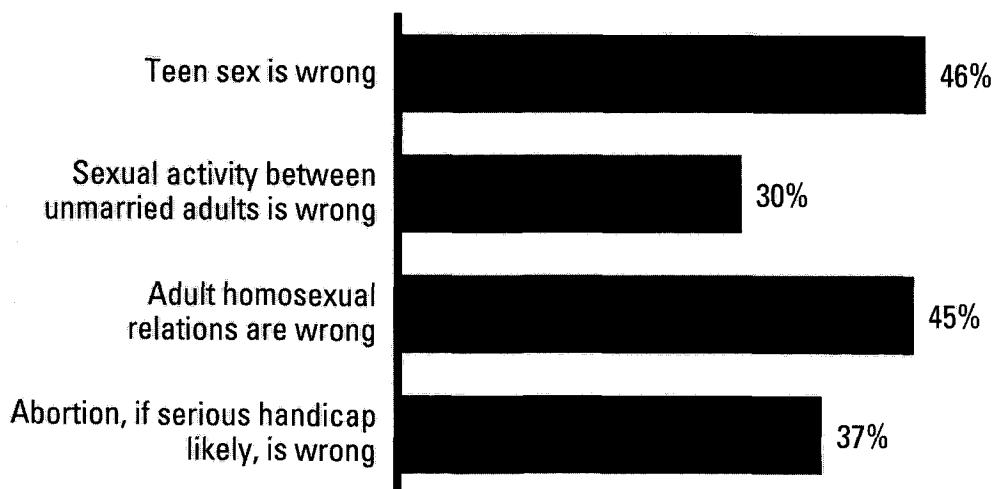
Only 37 percent of youth believe abortion is "often" or "always" wrong if the baby is likely to be born with a serious handicap. (Thirty-six percent say they are "not sure.") Girls are more

likely to believe it is wrong than boys. Church activity has little impact on this issue. Here, denominational differences are not pronounced.

In all cases, a considerable proportion of youth are not sure what to think. This "undecided vote" suggests a need and opportunity for congregations to address the issues within their programming to help young people sort out their values and perspectives.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who believe each is wrong:



SEXUALITY-RELATED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

	Teen sex is wrong	Sexual activity between unmarried adults is wrong	Adult homo- sexual relations are wrong	Abortion, if serious handi- cap likely, is wrong
All	46%	30%	45%	37%
GENDER				
Male	34%	27%	50%	33%
Female	56%	32%	41%	41%
GRADE				
7-8	46%	31%	36%	40%
9-10	45%	26%	45%	39%
11-12	45%	32%	53%	33%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	39%	26%	54%	34%
Highly active	57%	31%	38%	37%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	49%	34%	64%	36%
201-500 members	41%	28%	48%	39%
501-999 members	41%	26%	44%	42%
1,000+ members	48%	31%	43%	35%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	50%	33%	49%	32%
ELCA	40%	27%	44%	38%
PCUSA	48%	32%	54%	38%
UCC	38%	20%	36%	35%
UMC	47%	31%	45%	37%

Percentages indicate youth who say the statement is often wrong or always wrong.

Question: In your opinion, how right or wrong are each of these? Mark one answer for each.

Statements: Abortion when a doctor says the baby is likely to be born with a serious handicap.
 Sexual intercourse by two unmarried adults who love each other.
 Sexual intercourse by two unmarried 17-year-olds who love each other.
 Homosexual relations between two adults of the same sex who choose to be in that relationship.

DEALING WITH LIFE ISSUES IN CHURCH

Given the reality of these issues in young people's lives, how much have they explored these issues in the church? The survey asked about how much time teens have spent in their lifetime dealing with two prominent issues: alcohol and other drugs, and sexuality. Fewer than half of the youth surveyed have spent more than six hours in their lifetime dealing with either issue at church. And both issues receive a similar amount of neglect. (Keep in mind, one overnight retreat or six weeks of youth group would take six hours.)

Because the hours accumulate, it's not surprising that more older youth have spent six hours at church addressing these issues. Even so, only

half have done so. Even among those young people who are highly active in the church, only two-thirds have spent this much time addressing these issues.

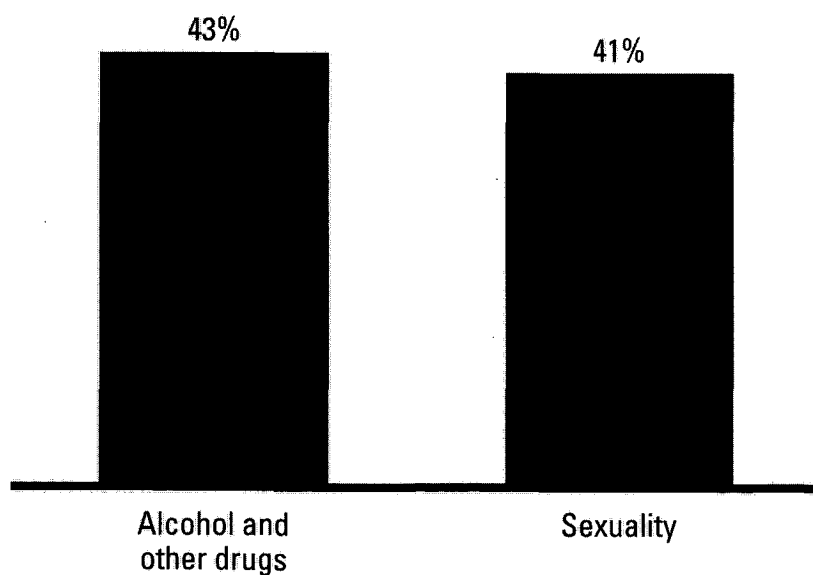
There are some differences based on congregation size and denomination. Larger congregations tend to do a quite a bit better job of addressing these issues than smaller congregations. And United Methodist and Presbyterian youth are more likely to indicate such discussions in their church. Evangelical Lutheran and United Church of Christ youth are least likely to have spent as much time in discussion.

Across the spectrum, however, no group of congregations adequately addresses these critical

issues. While churches express their concerns about the issues, young people are not having opportunities to explore the issues within the context of their faith. Thus congregations are missing a real opportunity to address pressing concerns among today's youth.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth who say they have spent at least six hours in their lifetime discussing each issue at church:



F I G U R E 5 0

DEALING WITH LIFE ISSUES IN CHURCH

	Alcohol and other drugs	Sexuality
All	43%	41%
GENDER		
Male	46%	43%
Female	41%	39%
GRADE		
7-8	34%	33%
9-10	46%	39%
11-12	50%	51%
CHURCH ACTIVITY		
Inactive	27%	23%
Highly active	63%	57%
CHURCH SIZE		
1-200 members	27%	24%
201-500 members	34%	26%
501-999 members	35%	35%
1,000+ members	51%	50%
DENOMINATION		
CC(DOC)	36%	37%
ELCA	26%	22%
PCUSA	41%	42%
UCC	29%	29%
UMC	49%	46%

Percentages represent youth who indicate six or more hours of involvement in their lifetime.

Question: Think about the time you have spent in your life going to things at church. As you look back over your time at church, how many hours would you say you have spent doing the following?

Statements: Learning about or discussing drugs and alcohol.
Learning about or discussing sex.

EVALUATION OF CHURCH'S HELP WITH LIFE ISSUES

As noted throughout this chapter, involvement in a congregation has a positive impact on young people's development. Do young people perceive that value? Where do they find the most help from the church? The survey asked a questions in which young people evaluated how well their congregation does different things. Tables on the following pages give details.

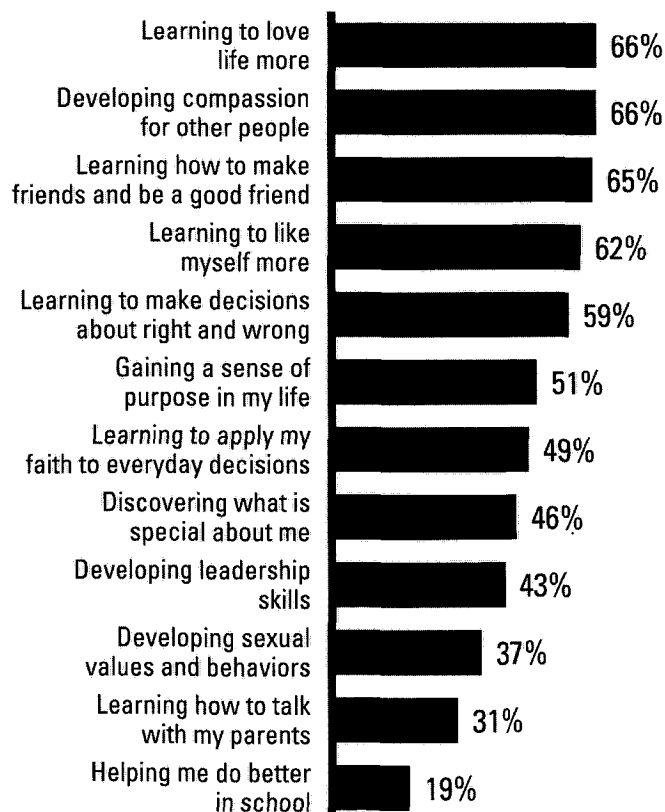
HELP WITH MORAL QUESTIONS—Most youth believe their congregation does a good or excellent job

teaching them to develop concern for others, and most believe that the church does well helping them know right from wrong. But only half say their church does well helping them apply their faith to decisions. And only four out of ten say it helps them develop responsible sexual values—one of the lowest areas in the whole list.

Percentages are fairly consistent across sub-groups, with a few exceptions. Inactive youth consistently rate the congregation lower than highly active youth. Differences between boys and girls only surface in the area of developing concern for others. Denominational differences are not dramatic, except in the area of sexual values, where the range is from a high of 40 percent (United Methodist) to 22 percent (United Church of Christ).

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say church does a good or excellent job in each area:



HELP WITH SELF-IMAGE—Several items have been grouped into this category, which involves self-esteem, a passion for life, and having a sense of purpose in life. Several of these items are given a relatively strong rating; weaker are “gaining a sense of purpose” and “discovering what is special about me”—both of which should, in theory, be strengths of the church. As teens get older, their evaluations become lower, particularly in the area of finding purpose in life. This is particularly disturbing, since youth make more life decisions in the upper grades.

HELP WITH LIFE SKILLS—The chart on life skills shows a range of evaluations. One of the strengths that youth perceive involves friendship skills. But other areas are rated highly by fewer than half of the youth surveyed. Only a minority of youth give high marks to help with communication with parents or doing better in school. In these two areas, the scores by inactive youth are particularly low.

F I G U R E 5 1

CHURCH'S HELP WITH MORAL QUESTIONS

	Concern for others	Decisions about right and wrong	Apply faith to decisions	Responsible sexual values
All	66%	59%	49%	37%
GENDER				
Male	59%	57%	46%	36%
Female	72%	60%	50%	38%
GRADE				
7-8	58%	59%	50%	38%
9-10	67%	61%	48%	36%
11-12	70%	56%	48%	39%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	54%	37%	27%	16%
Highly active	76%	64%	58%	41%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	54%	52%	46%	29%
201-500 members	55%	56%	47%	25%
501-999 members	69%	57%	47%	30%
1,000+ members	69%	61%	50%	45%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	64%	56%	52%	34%
ELCA	60%	57%	48%	32%
PCUSA	66%	62%	53%	34%
UCC	63%	55%	42%	22%
UMC	67%	59%	48%	40%

Percentages represent youth who say church does a "good" or "excellent" job.

Question: In your opinion, how well does the church you attend do each of the following?

Statements: Help you develop more compassion and concern for other people.
 Help you make decisions about what is right and wrong.
 Help you learn how to apply your faith to everyday decisions.
 Help you develop responsible values and behaviors in the area of sexuality.

CHURCH'S HELP WITH SELF-IMAGE

	Learning to love life	Feeling good about self	Gaining sense of purpose	Discovering special qualities
All	66%	62%	51%	46%
GENDER				
Male	65%	60%	52%	44%
Female	66%	64%	49%	48%
GRADE				
7-8	69%	62%	58%	49%
9-10	69%	62%	52%	49%
11-12	59%	64%	43%	41%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	55%	59%	26%	37%
Highly active	71%	74%	58%	59%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	56%	47%	42%	36%
201-500 members	59%	46%	43%	39%
501-999 members	60%	64%	47%	44%
1,000+ members	71%	69%	55%	50%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	65%	58%	43%	44%
ELCA	57%	56%	47%	47%
PCUSA	63%	65%	51%	44%
UCC	54%	59%	47%	38%
UMC	69%	64%	52%	47%

Percentages represent youth who say church does a "good" or "excellent" job.

Question: In your opinion, how well does the church you attend do each of the following?

Statements: Help you learn to love life.
 Help you feel good about yourself.
 Help you gain a sense of purpose in your life.
 Help you discover what is special about you.

CHURCH'S HELP WITH LIFE SKILLS

	Friendship skills	Leadership skills	Communication with parents	Doing better in school
All	65%	43%	31%	19%
GENDER				
Male	59%	39%	33%	17%
Female	70%	47%	29%	21%
GRADE				
7-8	68%	45%	39%	21%
9-10	65%	45%	31%	16%
11-12	62%	41%	24%	22%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	37%	24%	16%	7%
Highly active	81%	61%	31%	24%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	55%	35%	28%	20%
201-500 members	59%	29%	27%	18%
501-999 members	63%	39%	31%	21%
1,000+ members	68%	50%	33%	19%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	60%	41%	30%	22%
ELCA	61%	38%	26%	16%
PCUSA	63%	40%	31%	18%
UCC	61%	37%	25%	19%
UMC	67%	46%	33%	20%

Percentages represent youth who say church does a "good" or "excellent" job.

Question: In your opinion, how well does the church you attend do each of the following?

Statements: Help you learn how to make friends and be a good friend.
 Help you develop leadership skills.
 Help you talk better with your parents.
 Help you do better in school.

SUMMARY ON LIFE ISSUES AND AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

Ministry with youth cannot ignore the life issues that influence today's teenagers. While church participation is a valuable contributor to youth growing up healthy, it is not a foolproof vaccination against all danger. Too many church youth are making poor life choices, and too few churches are adequately addressing the realities. Indeed, participants in the 1990 conference where the first Effective Christian Education findings were discussed named at-risk involvement of youth as the most pressing issue that emerged from the data.⁶

The challenge for congregations is to take more seriously their role in positive youth development. Congregations have clear opportunities to address specific at-risk concerns among youth. These might include topical educational classes on sexuality, substance use, violence, and other issues. These educational opportunities should move beyond discussions of factual information (though many young people may not know the facts) to help youth connect the issues to their faith, their values, and their experiences.

In addition to addressing specific at-risk issues, congregations need to focus attention on protective factors that undergird young people as they make choices. In her monograph *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community*, Bonnie Benard suggests three protective factors that need to be in place in young people's lives.⁷ As applied to faith

institutions, they are:

- **CARING AND SUPPORT FROM A PERSON OR PEOPLE IN THE CONGREGATION**, be it a Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, peer, friend, mentor, relative, or other person. Nurturing these supportive relationships must be central to youth programs.
- **HIGH EXPECTATIONS BY THE CONGREGATION FOR YOUTH**. Just as schools that uphold expectations for their students tend to motivate students to learn, congregations that expect their youth to learn will motivate and challenge them to grow. Youth programs challenge young people by giving them responsibility and exploring challenging issues.
- **OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO CONTRIBUTE WITHIN THE CONGREGATION**—Youth need to be able to participate in meaningful, valued activities and roles. These opportunities enhance their sense of responsibility and purpose, which can help reduce negative behaviors.

Congregations must commit or recommit to addressing the life issues as a key component of their youth programming. They must find ways to partner with others in the community who are addressing similar issues and concerns so that efforts reinforce each other instead of competing. In doing so, congregations not only have opportunity to make a significant difference in the lives of individual youth, but to have a positive influence on the well-being of all youth.



CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND OTHER SUPPORT

The importance and influence of families is being reinforced and reclaimed throughout our society. Youth ministry programs are renewing their energies to connect with families. Schools are exploring new avenues for parent involvement. Communities are examining how they can build strengths in families. And society as a whole is struggling to define—or redefine—family's place in the social order.

The importance and potential of families is clear in looking at the religious life of teenagers. The Effective Christian Education study found that family religiousness and Christian education involvement are the two key factors in nurturing faith in teenagers.¹ How parents live their faith and talk about their faith has a profound impact on their offspring. Congregations face an important challenge in discovering ways to build strength in families so that they are equipped for the task.²

In addition to the importance of the family, people are also rediscovering the importance of the extended family—the adults and teens who are mentors and positive peer influences on teens. Unfortunately, many teenagers in congregations do not have adequate adult contact in the congregation, and many are inadequately connected to peers who can be positive influences.

This chapter looks first at the family and its influence on faith, then turns to examine friends and adults who exert influence.

FAMILY COMPOSITION

Nationally, approximately 75 percent of youth live in a two-parent family at any given time. Among youth in this study, 91 percent live in a two-parent family. Thus, the youth in this study do not parallel national norms in terms of family composition. Girls are more likely than boys to report having divorced parents or living in a single-parent family. Inactive youth more than highly active youth tend to report being in an intact family, and they are less likely to report that their parents are divorced or separated.

The fact that single-parent youth are under-rep-

resented in congregations raises questions about the congregation's ministry with single-parent youth. Are there aspects of congregations' programs that make participation awkward or difficult for these youth? Are single-parent youth looking elsewhere for social support? Do young people still feel a stigma in the church because they are from non-traditional families? How can congregations strengthen their connection to single-parent youth?

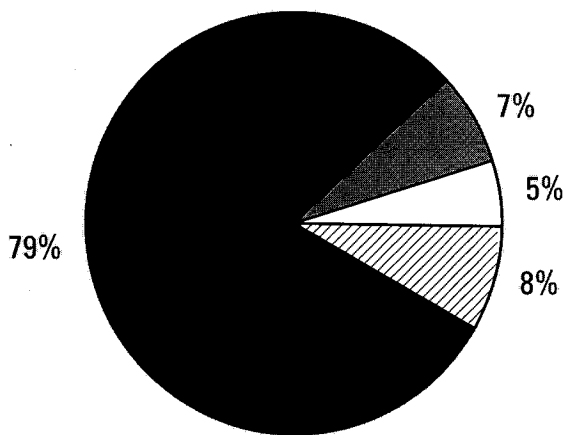
These questions are important for the well-being of single-parent youth. A Search Institute report titled *Youth in Single-Parent Families* found that one of the key factors in helping single-parent youth stay healthy and avoid health-compromising choices is for them to be involved in religious programs.³

Other family composition issues are relevant for programming with youth. One-fourth of youth say their parents have been through divorce or they live in a blended family. Both of these situations demand care, support, and sensitivity to help young people develop healthy relationships. The fact that 5 percent of church youth are adopted (perhaps higher than national norms) suggests that congregations must address issues facing these youth through their programming.

As family composition continues to change and diversify, the need for addressing a range of family dynamics will become more and more necessary. These percentages suggest that many congregations have yet to encounter some of the realities in society at more than a superficial level. These kinds of changes call on congregations to become active contributors to building strengths in these families so they can more effectively provide a healthy context for young people to grow.

AT A GLANCE

Here are the percentages of youth in the church who live in different family configurations:



- Intact biological families
- Blended families
- Adoptive families
- Single-parent families

FAMILY COMPOSITION

	TWO-PARENT FAMILIES				Single-parent families	Parents divorced or separated
	Intact biological families	Blended families	Adoptive families	Total two parent		
All	79%	7%	5%	91%	8%	18%
GENDER						
Male	83%	6%	4%	94%	5%	13%
Female	76%	8%	6%	89%	10%	22%
GRADE						
7-8	81%	9%	4%	92%	7%	18%
9-10	77%	4%	7%	89%	9%	19%
11-12	81%	9%	4%	94%	6%	16%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	86%	4%	3%	93%	5%	12%
Highly active	77%	10%	5%	90%	9%	21%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	72%	12%	4%	87%	11%	23%
201-500 members	74%	9%	5%	88%	9%	18%
501-999 members	81%	6%	5%	92%	8%	16%
1,000+ members	81%	6%	6%	93%	7%	17%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	72%	8%	5%	85%	14%	23%
ELCA	78%	7%	5%	90%	9%	16%
PCUSA	75%	10%	3%	88%	12%	22%
UCC	78%	8%	7%	92%	8%	17%
UMC	81%	6%	5%	92%	6%	17%

Definitions:

INTACT BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES—Youth who marked at least my biological mother (the woman who gave birth to me) and my biological father.

BLENDED FAMILIES—Youth who marked my stepmother and my stepfather; or my biological mother and my stepfather; or my biological father and my stepmother.

ADOPTIVE FAMILIES—Youth who marked the father who adopted me and the mother who adopted me; or the mother who adopted me and my stepfather; or the father who adopted me and my stepmother.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES—Youth who marked one of the following: my biological mother, the mother who adopted me, my stepmother, or my foster mother but did not mark one of these: my biological father, the father who adopted me, my stepfather, or my foster father; and vice versa.

PARENTS DIVORCED OR SEPARATED—Youth who responded "yes" to, "Are the parents who gave birth to you divorced or separated?"

PARENTS' EDUCATION

Most youth in these denominations have fairly well-educated parents, with 80 percent of mothers and fathers at least having gone to college. A quarter have mothers who went to graduate school, compared to 38 percent whose fathers attended.

Interesting patterns occur in examining education levels across subgroups. For example, 24 percent of inactive youth have a mother with a high school education or less compared to 16 percent of highly active youth. For fathers, the numbers are reversed, with 9 percent of inactive youth having a father with a high school education or less, compared to 19 percent of highly active youth. Since a father is typically less influential in shaping a teenagers' faith (see following sections), it is likely that the mother's education is more significant in the child's church activity than is the father's education.

Youth whose mothers have less education are more common in the smallest congregations, whereas those whose mothers have more educa-

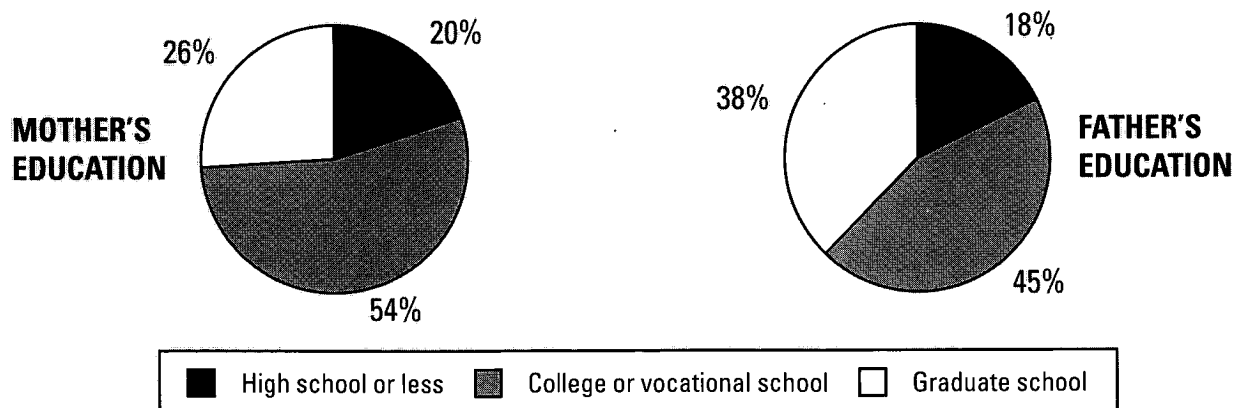
tion (graduate school) are most common in the largest churches. Thus, youth ministry in smaller churches may be more likely to encounter issues related to lower parent education, while ministry in the largest congregations faces issues of having parents with high education levels.

Denominational differences are also noteworthy. Evangelical Lutheran and United Church of Christ congregations are most likely to have youth with mothers with less education; United Methodist congregations tend to have mothers with higher education levels.

How do parents' educational levels affect youth ministry? They could have implications for how programs communicate with parents. What level of detail and complexity do parents need or want? How does the intellectual level of family conversations enhance or detract from growth in faith? What types of emphases will different parents expect? Has the congregation inadvertently excluded youth from families at one end or the other of the spectrum? None of these questions has simple answers.

AT A GLANCE

This chart shows the educational levels of the mothers and fathers of church-related youth:



PARENTS' EDUCATION

	MOTHER'S EDUCATION			FATHER'S EDUCATION		
	High school or less	College or vocational school	Graduate school	High school or less	College or vocational school	Graduate school
All	20%	54%	26%	18%	45%	38%
GENDER						
Male	17%	53%	30%	15%	45%	41%
Female	22%	55%	22%	20%	45%	35%
GRADE						
7-8	20%	58%	23%	17%	51%	32%
9-10	22%	55%	24%	20%	45%	36%
11-12	16%	51%	33%	16%	39%	45%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	24%	59%	18%	9%	33%	49%
Highly active	16%	56%	27%	19%	42%	39%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	37%	46%	16%	40%	43%	17%
201-500 members	27%	54%	20%	26%	47%	27%
501-999 members	24%	56%	19%	21%	42%	37%
1,000+ members	14%	54%	32%	12%	45%	43%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	26%	49%	25%	26%	47%	27%
ELCA	40%	46%	14%	29%	48%	23%
PCUSA	16%	60%	24%	13%	45%	43%
UCC	36%	44%	20%	28%	44%	27%
UMC	14%	56%	30%	15%	44%	41%

Percentages represent the youth who report each education level for their mothers and fathers.

Question: What is the highest level of education your mother (or stepmother or female guardian) has completed?

Merged responses: She completed high school (or less)
 She went to or completed college or vocational school
 She did or completed graduate or professional degree work

Question: What is the highest level of education your father (or stepfather or male guardian) has completed?

Merged responses: He completed high school (or less)
 He went to or completed college or vocational school
 He did or completed graduate or professional degree work

PARENTS' RELIGIOUSNESS

Parents' religious commitment is important in shaping the religious faith of their teenagers—just as parents' beliefs and values influence children and teens in many ways.

Fewer than half of the teenagers in this study believe their mother is "very religious." Only one-third see their fathers as "very religious." As we would expect, highly active youth see their parents as highly religious more often than inactive youth do—though the differences are not as pronounced as some might imagine.

With one exception, the denominations are similar in teens' perceptions of their parents' faith. The exception is the United Church of Christ, where youth are much less likely to indicate that their parents are "very religious." What's interesting is that these UCC youth see their mother go to church as often as anyone else

does, which suggests that these youth may have negative images about what being "very religious" means.

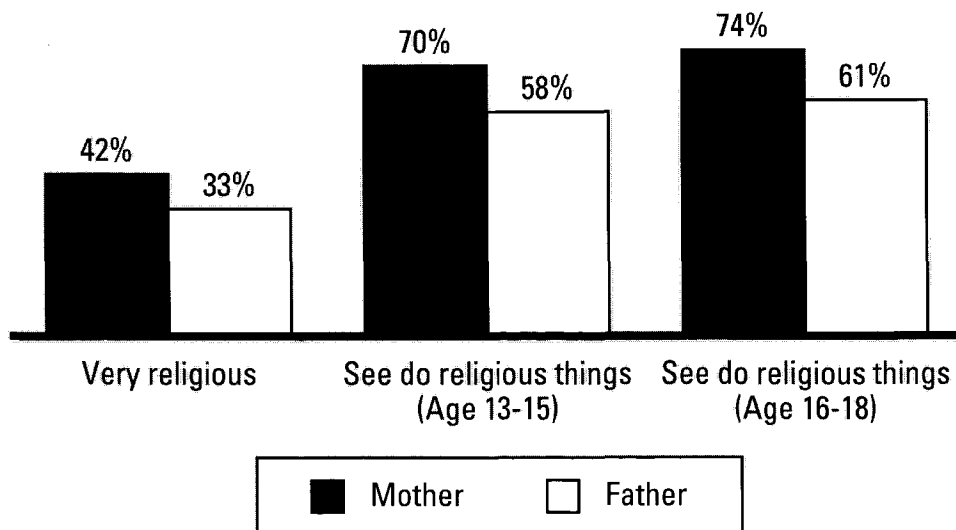
Teens are less likely to say their parents are "very religious" than to say their parents often do religious things such as going to church, praying, or doing other religious things. Almost three-fourths of teens ages 13-15 and 16-18 say they often see their mother do religious things, compared to about 60 percent who often see their fathers do religious things. In short, most teens see their parents do religious things, but they don't interpret those acts as "very religious."

In fact, across the spectrum of faith issues, fathers consistently rank lower than mothers. This finding is consistent with data on adults that find that men consistently have lower levels of faith maturity than women. Among men in their 40s, for example, only 8 percent evidence

a mature faith, compared to 43 percent of women that age. This gap is larger than that for any other age of adults, and it represents an age when many people have teenagers in the house.⁴ It suggests important implications for how congregations minister to and with parents, particularly fathers, who may themselves be going through a crisis in faith at the same time their teenagers are.

AT A GLANCE

Here is what teenagers say about their parents:



PARENTS' RELIGIOUSNESS

	MOTHER'S RELIGIOUSNESS			FATHER'S RELIGIOUSNESS		
	Mother is very religious*	Often see mother do religious things (Age 13-15)**	Often see father do religious things (Age 16-18)**	Father is very religious*	Often see father do religious things (Age 13-15)**	Often see father do religious things (Age 16-18)**
All	42%	70%	74%	33%	58%	61%
GENDER						
Male	46%	64%	67%	36%	57%	63%
Female	38%	76%	80%	31%	59%	60%
GRADE						
7-8	41%	—	—	34%	—	—
9-10	34%	—	—	29%	—	—
11-12	51%	—	—	36%	—	—
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	28%	58%	65%	28%	50%	46%
Highly active	43%	82%	86%	36%	65%	73%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	41%	61%	62%	27%	44%	42%
201-500 members	40%	62%	56%	29%	48%	46%
501-999 members	38%	66%	72%	27%	49%	55%
1,000+ members	44%	75%	80%	37%	65%	69%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	42%	69%	70%	25%	36%	30%
ELCA	45%	67%	65%	28%	46%	46%
PCUSA	44%	65%	63%	35%	53%	48%
UCC	27%	64%	69%	16%	37%	38%
UMC	42%	72%	77%	35%	63%	68%

* Percentages represent youth who responded "very religious."

** Percentages represent youth who responded "often."

Questions: How religious is your mother (or stepmother or female guardian)?
 How religious is your father (or stepfather or male guardian)?
 How often do you see your mother go to church, pray, or do other religious things?
 How often do you see your father go to church, pray, or do other religious things?

FAMILY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAITH

When the Effective Christian Education study examined factors that contribute to growth in faith in teens, family religiousness was at the top of the list, having as much or more influence than Christian education. That family religiousness was measured using three elements:

- Conversations with parents about faith
- Family devotions, prayer, and Bible reading
- Family service projects

Each of these characteristics of families has a positive impact on young people's spiritual

growth. However, few families with teenagers make these experiences an intentional part of their family life.

Talking with parents about faith issues is the most common of the three factors in families. Two-thirds of younger youth and 60 percent of older youth say they sometimes or often talk with their mother about their faith. However, only about 10 percent of youth say such conversations take place "often"; for most, the conversations happen "sometimes." They are less frequent with fathers.

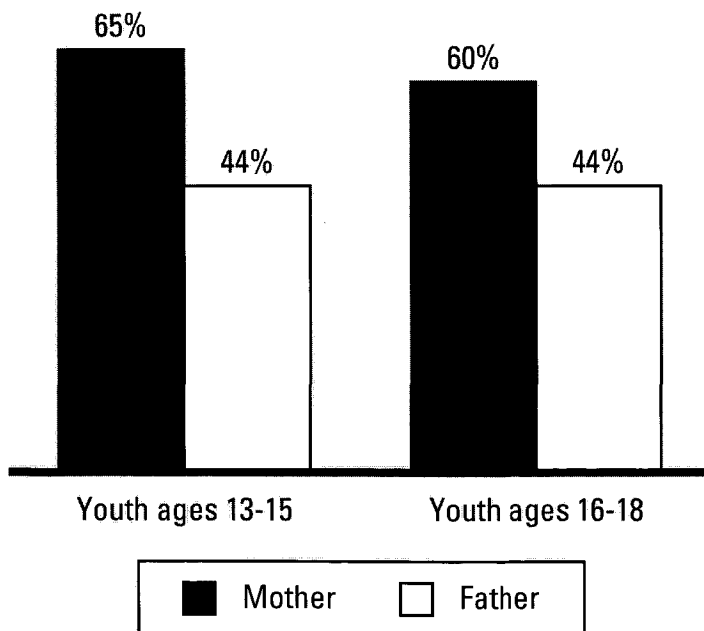
Girls are more likely to have conversations with their mothers than are boys. More younger boys than girls have these conversations with their fathers. In the older age group, however, girls appear more likely than boys to have faith conversations with their fathers.

Church activity has a clear relationship with family faith conversations. In fact, talking with mothers about faith is commonplace among highly active youth in both age groups. And conversations with fathers become the norm in families where youth are highly active in the church.

Different denominations show different strengths in this area. Younger youth in Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ congregations are most likely to talk with both their mothers and fathers. Conversation levels between parents and older teens in Presbyterian and United Methodist congregations are more common than in other denominations.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say they often have conversations with each parent about faith:



FAMILY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAITH

	TALK WITH MOTHER ABOUT FAITH		TALK WITH FATHER ABOUT FAITH	
	Youth ages 13-15	Youth ages 16-18	Youth ages 13-15	Youth ages 16-18
All	65%	60%	44%	44%
GENDER				
Male	59%	46%	48%	40%
Female	70%	71%	40%	46%
GRADE				
7-8	—	—	—	—
9-10	—	—	—	—
11-12	—	—	—	—
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	48%	53%	32%	38%
Highly active	78%	81%	52%	63%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	69%	69%	44%	48%
201-500 members	63%	48%	40%	36%
501-999 members	65%	60%	48%	36%
1,000+ members	65%	62%	44%	48%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	65%	61%	34%	31%
ELCA	72%	61%	43%	32%
PCUSA	71%	71%	44%	48%
UCC	68%	63%	37%	33%
UMC	62%	58%	44%	46%

Percentages represent youth who responded "sometimes" or "often."

Questions: How often do you talk with your mother about religious faith?
 How often do you talk with your father about religious faith?

FAMILY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

About one-third of the youth in the study indicate that they have family devotions, prayer, and/or service projects. The relatively minor differences between age groups (13-15 vs. 16-18) may suggest that, by early adolescence, most families have already worked out their patterns of devotion and service, and they are able to maintain them through high school.

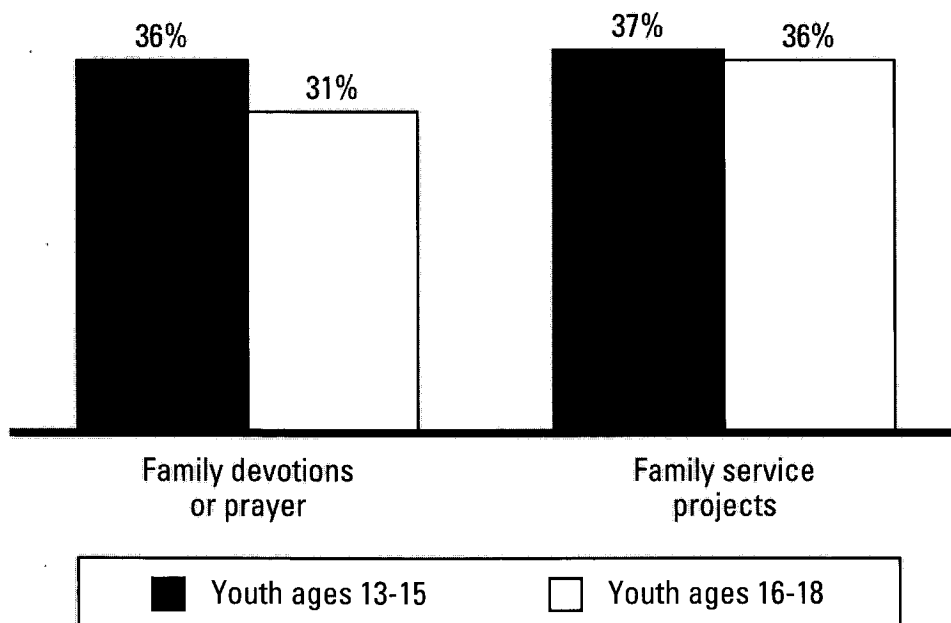
Church activity level has an important relationship to both devotions and Bible reading, and service projects. While about half of all highly active youth report these activities in the home,

fewer than 20 percent of inactive youth report any. Having just 50 percent of highly active youth involved in these family activities is not as high as one might hope; however, the difference between highly active and inactive youth underscores the powerful connection between church involvement and family religious life.

Church size doesn't appear to make a difference in family devotions, prayer, and Bible reading, but it may influence family service involvement. Youth in the smallest congregations are slightly more likely to report involvement in family service projects.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who say they "sometimes" or "often" do each activity with their families.



United Church of Christ youth are less likely than others to report family devotions and Bible reading, while United Methodist youth are most likely to report them. Christian Church (Disciples) and Presbyterian Church youth are the most likely to report service involvement, with the remaining three denominations showing involvement levels similar to each other.

FAMILY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

	DEVOTIONS/BIBLE READING/PRAYER		FAMILY SERVICE PROJECTS	
	Youth ages 13-15	Youth ages 16-18	Youth ages 13-15	Youth ages 16-18
All	36%	31%	37%	36%
GENDER				
Male	36%	27%	35%	33%
Female	37%	33%	38%	40%
GRADE				
7-8	—	—	—	—
9-10	—	—	—	—
11-12	—	—	—	—
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	17%	19%	20%	12%
Highly active	49%	46%	52%	58%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	35%	32%	47%	45%
201-500 members	34%	27%	35%	38%
501-999 members	35%	27%	43%	40%
1,000+ members	38%	33%	35%	35%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	30%	20%	41%	47%
ELCA	30%	24%	32%	27%
PCUSA	31%	26%	47%	44%
UCC	22%	15%	33%	30%
UMC	40%	34%	36%	37%

Percentages represent youth who responded "sometimes" or "often."

Questions: How often do you have family devotions, prayer, or Bible reading at home?
 How often do you have family projects to help other people?

FRIENDS' RELIGIOUSNESS

Friends take on increasing importance through adolescence. And we know that learning about friendship and friendship skills consistently ranks high in the interests and needs of teenagers.

Most Protestant youth (70 percent) characterize their three or four best friends as being at least somewhat religious. Only 13 percent consider

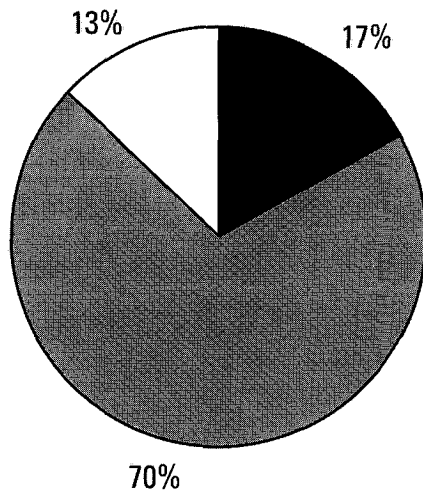
their best friends "very religious." Girls are more likely to have religious friends, as are highly active youth.

We can extrapolate that average church-going teenagers do not build most of their significant friendships with people at church. On average, out of five best friends, fewer than two attend the same church. Girls have a slightly higher proportion of close friends in their own church.

As we would expect, the difference is dramatic between youth who are inactive versus those who are highly active. The average inactive youth would not even name one person from church as one of his or her five closest friends. This reality may point to one of the reasons the young people are inactive in the first place: They are finding significant relationships elsewhere, not with friends in the church. It also points to the potential for these inactive youth to be more heavily influenced by non-religious peers than by religious peers.

AT A GLANCE

Here is how young people described their best friends' religious commitments:



- Not religious
- Somewhat religious
- Very religious

FRIENDS' RELIGIOUSNESS

	Friends not religious*	Friends somewhat religious*	Friends very religious*	How many of five best friends attend their church**
All	17%	70%	13%	1.59
GENDER				
Male	23%	66%	11%	1.43
Female	12%	73%	15%	1.73
GRADE				
7-8	14%	78%	8%	1.66
9-10	19%	69%	13%	1.64
11-12	18%	64%	18%	1.47
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	21%	73%	6%	0.78
Highly active	9%	69%	22%	2.17
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	14%	73%	13%	1.75
201-500 members	18%	77%	5%	1.58
501-999 members	18%	71%	11%	1.50
1,000+ members	17%	67%	16%	1.62
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	17%	71%	12%	1.69
ELCA	12%	74%	14%	1.37
PCUSA	15%	69%	16%	1.75
UCC	21%	71%	8%	1.39
UMC	18%	69%	13%	1.64

*Percentages represent the proportion of youth who marked each option.

** Number represents the average number of friends that youth marked.

Questions: How religious, on the average, are your 3 or 4 best friends now?

Statements: Not at all religious
Somewhat religious
Very religious

Question: If you had a birthday party and invited your five best friends (excluding relatives), how many would be people who go to your church?

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHURCH ADULTS

Overall, most youth in churches feel somewhat connected to adults in the congregation. Eighty-one percent say four or more adults in the church know them well, and 86 percent say there is at least one adult in the church who they could turn to if they had a difficult question to ask. A third have four or more adults

they could go to.

Gender and grade have little relationship to this factor. But church activity makes a tremendous difference. Nearly one-third of inactive youth wouldn't feel comfortable going to any adult in the church about a life question, compared to only 7 percent of highly active youth. Furthermore, 94 percent of highly active youth say four or more adults know them well, compared to 62 percent of inactive youth.

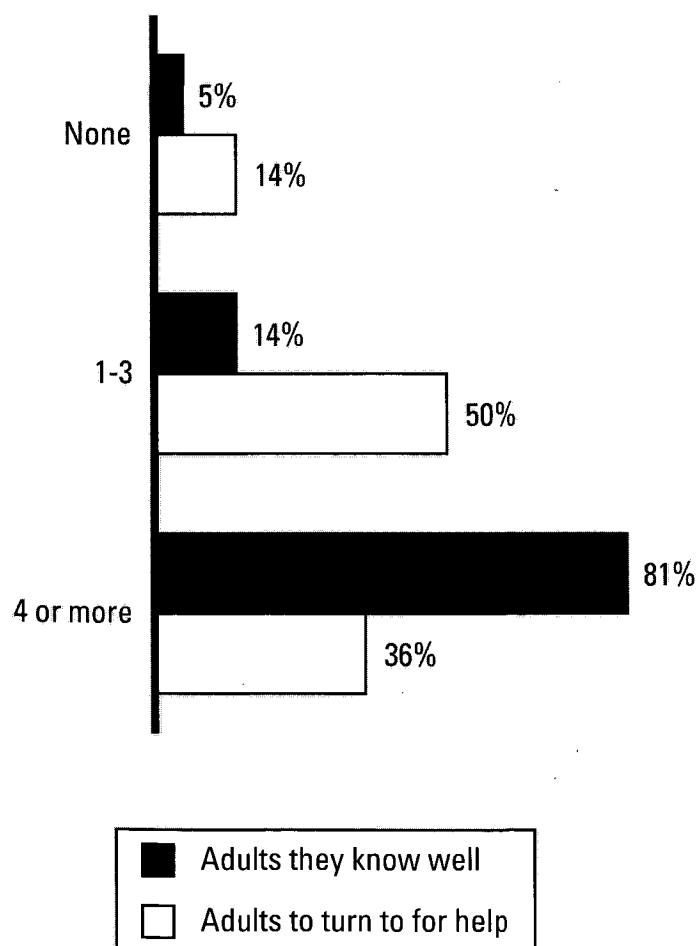
Church size also plays an interesting role here. Youth in the smallest congregations are least likely to say four or more adults know them well. And 22 percent of them say they have no adult in the congregation they could go to with a question (compared to 14 percent in the largest congregations). Youth in larger congregations are also most likely to say they have four or more adults they could turn to.

Youth in Christian Church (Disciples) and the Evangelical Lutheran congregations are least likely to say that four or more adults know them well. Youth in Lutheran and United Church of Christ congregations are the ones least likely to name four or more people they could turn to for advice and support.

The growing body of literature on adult-youth mentoring suggests that congregations explore how to build solid adult-youth relationships in the congregation. Particular attention might be paid to those marginally active youth so that the relationship has the potential of reconnecting young people to the church.

AT A GLANCE

Here the number of adults in the church who teenagers say they know well and could turn to for help.



F I G U R E 6 0

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHURCH ADULTS

	NUMBER OF ADULTS IN CHURCH WHO KNOW YOU WELL			NUMBER OF ADULTS IN CHURCH YOU COULD GO TO FOR HELP		
	None	1-3	4 or more	None	1-3	4 or more
All	5%	14%	81%	14%	50%	36%
GENDER						
Male	5%	15%	80%	14%	47%	39%
Female	4%	14%	82%	14%	53%	33%
GRADE						
7-8	5%	12%	83%	15%	51%	34%
9-10	7%	15%	78%	15%	47%	38%
11-12	2%	16%	82%	12%	52%	36%
CHURCH ACTIVITY						
Inactive	14%	24%	62%	31%	54%	15%
Highly active	2%	4%	94%	7%	45%	48%
CHURCH SIZE						
1-200 members	7%	23%	70%	22%	51%	27%
201-500 members	6%	14%	80%	15%	54%	32%
501-999 members	3%	18%	80%	10%	49%	40%
1,000+ members	5%	13%	82%	14%	49%	37%
DENOMINATION						
CC(DOC)	5%	21%	74%	15%	50%	35%
ELCA	7%	17%	76%	17%	56%	28%
PCUSA	3%	14%	83%	13%	49%	38%
UCC	3%	15%	82%	17%	55%	28%
UMC	5%	14%	82%	13%	49%	38%

Percentages represent the number of youth who indicated each level of contact with adults in the church.

Questions:

How many adults in your church do you think know you well? (Don't count parents or other relatives.)

If you had an important question about your life, how many adults in your church would you feel comfortable going to for help? (Don't count parents or other relatives.)

SOURCES OF ADVICE

To whom do teenagers turn for advice or support when they have an important question in life? The chart below shows the percentages of youth who chose each person when they were given the option to choose four people.

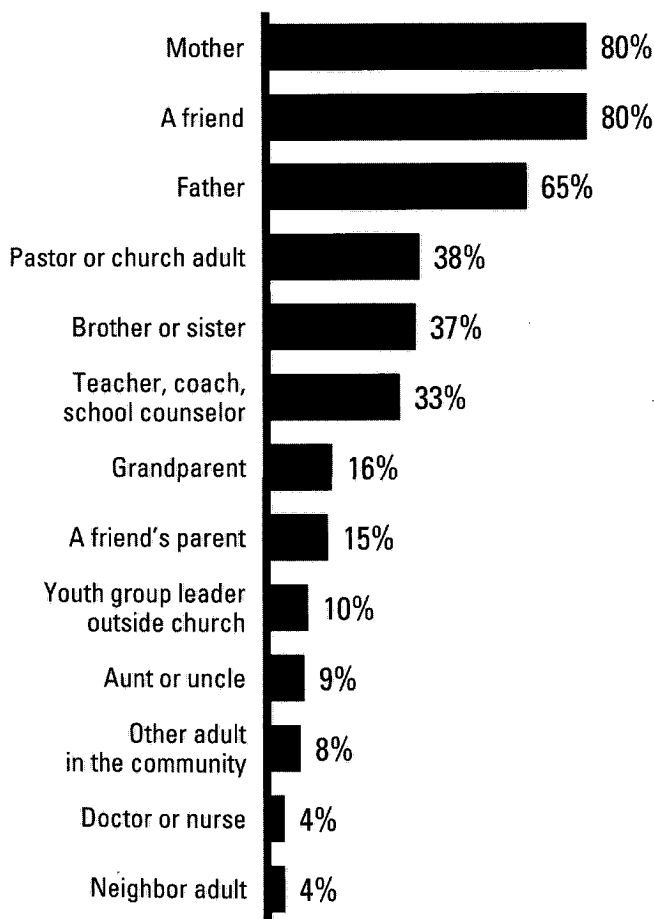
Most teenagers include their mother, a friend, and their father (a distant third) in their top four. A significant proportion also list a pastor or other adult in the church, a brother or sister,

or a teacher, coach, or school counselor. Let's look at some of the differences in these sources of advice among different youth.

- **GENDER**—Both girls and boys put mother at the top of their list. But then the lists diverge. Twenty percent more boys than girls pick their father, and 15 percent more girls than boys pick a sibling. Boys are more likely to turn to grandparents or school personnel, while girls are more likely to turn to a friend or a friend's parent.
- **GRADE**—Sources of support change through adolescence. Yet, despite conventional wisdom, parents stay at the top of the list, even among the 11th and 12th graders (though friends become as common a source of support as parents). At the same time, older youth begin also to look outside the family for more advice.
- **CHURCH ACTIVITY**—The main difference between highly active and inactive youth involves two categories. Active church youth are much more likely than inactive youth to seek advice from a church person. Inactive youth are more likely to include a school staff member on their list.
- **CHURCH SIZE**—Grandparents are slightly more likely to appear on the list of youth in small churches than large churches. Friends are more common sources of support for youth in large congregations compared to small ones. And, finally, church leaders are mentioned more by youth in large congregations than small ones—a finding that challenges conventional wisdom that a small congregation is more likely to provide a more supportive climate for teenagers.

AT A GLANCE

Here are percentages of youth who picked each person as one of four top sources of advice and support:



F I G U R E 6 1

SOURCES OF ADVICE: RELATIVES

	Mother	Father	Brother or sister	Grandparent	Aunt or uncle
All	80%	65%	37%	16%	9%
GENDER					
Male	79%	75%	29%	21%	8%
Female	80%	56%	44%	13%	11%
GRADE					
7-8	88%	69%	39%	28%	11%
9-10	74%	61%	39%	14%	9%
11-12	79%	65%	34%	8%	8%
CHURCH ACTIVITY					
Inactive	77%	60%	46%	23%	14%
Highly active	79%	62%	36%	11%	8%
CHURCH SIZE					
1-200 members	85%	63%	40%	24%	19%
201-500 members	79%	64%	37%	21%	13%
501-999 members	82%	64%	44%	12%	15%
1,000+ members	79%	66%	35%	16%	5%
DENOMINATION					
CC(DOC)	76%	53%	44%	23%	10%
ELCA	78%	56%	44%	24%	11%
PCUSA	86%	67%	43%	16%	11%
UCC	82%	60%	35%	24%	13%
UMC	79%	67%	35%	14%	8%

Percentages represent teenagers who chose this response as one of the four sources of advice out of a list of 13.

Question: To whom would you go for help or advice if you had an important question about your life? From the list below, choose the four persons you would likely turn to for help. Mark four circles.

SOURCES OF ADVICE: OTHERS

	A friend	Pastor or church adult	A friend's parent	Teacher, coach, school counselor
All	80%	38%	15%	33%
GENDER				
Male	73%	39%	10%	40%
Female	86%	37%	20%	28%
GRADE				
7-8	75%	29%	15%	24%
9-10	84%	41%	13%	36%
11-12	80%	42%	18%	39%
CHURCH ACTIVITY				
Inactive	80%	23%	15%	36%
Highly active	81%	52%	15%	27%
CHURCH SIZE				
1-200 members	70%	33%	14%	31%
201-500 members	77%	29%	20%	35%
501-999 members	77%	40%	13%	29%
1,000+ members	83%	41%	15%	34%
DENOMINATION				
CC(DOC)	81%	32%	19%	38%
ELCA	82%	32%	16%	28%
PCUSA	81%	36%	14%	25%
UCC	83%	28%	17%	31%
UMC	79%	40%	15%	36%

Percentages represent teenagers who chose this response as one of the four sources of advice out of a list of 13.

Question: To whom would you go for help or advice if you had an important question about your life? From the list below, choose the four persons you would likely turn to for help. Mark four circles.

SUMMARY ON FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Many of today's church youth have strong families and social support networks. They have people to turn to when they need advice. However, there are gaps that suggest important strategies for youth programs:

- Relatively few families make their faith an integral part of family life. In the past, research has found that parents want to know how to help their children know right from wrong and to be able to help their children grow in religious faith.⁵ But many seem not to have the skills, knowledge, or resources to fulfill their role. Or they may have abdicated to the church, hoping it will do the job for them. Discovering the barriers with parents and addressing them through parent education and support could become a significant part of youth and family ministry.
- There's a growing awareness in the nation of the need for fathers to become more involved and connected with their children. The same need surfaces in these findings. Fathers are not role models of faith for many teens, and they are less likely to

be seen as sources of advice. Congregations must explore effective ways not only to nourish the faith of fathers but also help fathers learn to express that faith and their support to their children.

- A reason many inactive youth may not become more active is that they do not feel connected to the congregation through strong relationships. They do not have significant friendships in the church, and they don't feel that they can turn to church people for advice and support. Connecting these inactive youth to friends who care could be an important strategy for increasing their involvement.
- Friends take on more and more significance as sources of support for teens as they mature. Too often this transition is seen as negative, but it need not be—if teenagers are turning to responsible, caring friends. Through peer ministry and other friendship-building methods, congregations can help to nurture positive friendships that provide needed support in the midst of seeking some independence and autonomy from parents.



C H A P T E R E I G H T

THREE EMERGING THEMES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

What do all these numbers and charts mean for youth programs in congregations? In the end, are they useful for more than statistics in a sermon or a blurb in a newsletter? Can they and do they have any real implications for the way congregations work with youth?

Of course, national data do not necessarily match the specific realities of an individual congregation. But the national data raise issues and possibilities that can be “reality tested” in congregations.

In examining these data on church youth as well as other research about young people, we see three emerging themes for youth ministry that, we believe, have potential to build on strengths and address some of the concerns. These themes parallel and bring together the two areas of research highlighted in Chapter One: research on religious education effectiveness and research on the impact of religiousness on adolescent behavior.

A RENEWED EMPHASIS ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Only a small minority of youth experience an integrated, life-transforming faith. For most, faith is undeveloped and, too often, stagnant. Addressing this reality in a time of changing cultural and social realities becomes a key challenge for the church.

A good place to start may be in examining the characteristics of congregations that the Effective Christian Education study found are most important for promoting growth in faith in youth and adults. Two things rose to the top as vital for nurturing teenagers’ faith. Young people are more likely to grow in faith . . .

- when faith is central in their home; and
- when they participate in an effective Christian education program in their church.

The problem is that only a small percentage of youth experience both those strengths. Furthermore, as we see in this report, many teens are disconnected from their faith tradition and do not find it meaningful.

The Effective Christian Education study suggests some directions that have potential to reinvigorate young people's faith.¹ Some themes that are particularly relevant include:

1. SEEING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS A LIFELONG

PROCESS. One of the most destructive assumptions in congregations is that Christian education is for children. Most older youth and adults apparently have little interest in lifelong religious education. While 60 percent of children on the church rolls are active in Christian education, only a third of 10-12th graders are. By adulthood, only 28 percent of churchgoers are involved.

What is needed is a view of Christian education as a lifelong process. From this perspective, the goal in youth ministry is not to "teach them everything they'll ever need to know," but to convey to young people the richness and depth of the faith. The goal must become to light a spark for learning and growing in faith that will be sustained for a lifetime.

This perspective also suggests that youth workers will advocate for strong adult education programs, just as they have advocated for strong youth and children's programs. Only then will parents and adult volunteers have opportunities to grow themselves. And until that occurs, teenagers will be difficult to convince that learning about the faith is anything but kid's stuff.

2. CONNECTING FAITH WITH TEENS' EVERYDAY CONCERNS.

Unless young people discover that their faith is a resource for their daily decisions and priorities, they are unlikely to take it seriously. Yet most youth report spending little time at all at church talking about the pressing concerns of today: sexuality, alcohol and other drugs, values, and similar topics. It is little wonder, then, that young people make choices in these areas

without ever thinking about their faith.

3. ABANDONING LECTURES AND SERMONETTES. In a time when most educators recognize the limited usefulness of lectures and other one-way communication, many youth programs cling to the old approaches. They can't seem to let go of the notion that the goal of education is to cram in as much head knowledge as possible in as short a time as possible. Youth programs need to try new educational approaches, take risks, and discover what really works.

4. DEVELOPING PROGRAMS WITHOUT WALLS. Though learning can certainly take place in a traditional Christian education, it can happen many other places as well. Around the family dinner table. In a worship service. During an all-church fellowship. Over pizza after a service project. In a time of crisis or grief. Youth ministers need to discover new ways—or rediscover old ways—to integrate education into everything they do in youth ministry and church life.

5. MOVING EDUCATION AND LEARNING TO THE CENTER OF MINISTRY. If, as this research shows, Christian education has more potential than anything else in the church to nurture faith, doesn't it make sense to focus energy on becoming "teaching churches" or "learning churches"? Friendliness, growth, service, missions, evangelism and other functions are also important. But if Christian education is done well and people are truly growing in a rich, life-transforming faith, those things will come more naturally.

INTEGRATING SERVICE AND EDUCATION

Too many teenagers—both in and outside the church—live with a lack of hope or sense of purpose. We noted in the report the troubling levels of depression among church-going teens. One of the problems may be that our society and churches have become so concerned about keeping youth out of trouble that we haven't paid much attention to what we'd like them to get into. Over and over we've said NO, NO,

NO—and we haven't encouraged them to say YES to anything.

More and more research is showing how important it is to give youth something to say “yes” to. Think what would happen to young people's sense of hope if they were asked to work alongside adults in addressing world and youth issues. Think of how it would change youth when they discovered that they can be valued contributors to the world around them.

The service-learning movement in public education has much to offer congregations. Indeed, congregations are a more natural place for it to occur than in schools! After all, most religious traditions have a commitment to service, and most have a heritage and faith that they hope to pass on to the next generation. And yet, few youth experience more than a smattering of service through their congregation in their entire childhood and adolescence.

Service-learning—which uses service projects as vehicles for experiential education—has the potential for addressing several of the patterns that have emerged in this report. So it's no coincidence that this report is being released simultaneously with a book titled *Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn*, in which we present to congregations the service-learning model for youth ministry.² The goal is not only to involve young people in meaningful service to their communities and world, but to use those experiences as entry points for learning and growth through structured reflection.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Imagine a bird that has just been hatched. Its parent has spent hours building a nest where that bird can hatch. The parent fiercely protects the young bird against predators and elements. And the parent exerts unending effort in providing nourishment for that offspring. But that's not the end of the story. As the young bird matures, its wings and independence grow. It is

challenged, coaxed, and prodded to leave the nest so that it can survive and thrive on its own.

Now, what would happen to that bird if its parents didn't bother to make a nest or to offer protection? And what would happen if that young bird was pushed out of the nest with immature or broken wings—and without the skills to survive on its own?

The image is a bit absurd. That would never happen! Yet the image is not unlike what today's society expects of its young people. Far too many of them are growing up without a nest of love, support, control, and structure. And they are being asked to fly on their own without the skills, strength, or values that enable them to survive and thrive on their own.

Instead of helping to build safe nests and strong wings, youth ministries—and many other programs—have spent a lot of time warning young people not to leave the nest under any circumstances. Knowing that some teens will leave anyway, we set up safety nets below in the forms of counseling, intervention, and treatment programs. If young people stray, adults frantically run around below the nest, hoping the net will be strong enough to catch them when they fall. (Few actually trust that youth have adequately strong wings to take positive initiative.) Unfortunately, as we saw in Chapter 6, too many young people continue to fall into patterns of at-risk behaviors and poor choices.

Search Institute's research on youth in public schools suggests that it is time for communities (including congregations) to focus attention on nurturing positive influences in young people's lives. It's time to shift from images of intervening in problems to promoting positive youth development—an approach that seeks to rebuild the support, love, boundaries, values, skills, and commitments that young people need to grow up.

Where can youth ministries begin shifting energy from intervention and prevention to positive youth development or promotion? Service-

learning is one strategy mentioned above. Other strategies should also be considered:

FOCUS ON PROMOTING POSITIVES. Congregations have valuable resources to offer youth. They can provide a loving, supportive community, expect youth to maintain appropriate boundaries, involve youth in constructive activities, nurture positive values and commitments, and help young people develop life skills and positive attitudes. Challenging youth to make healthy choices and to commit to positive endeavors will make much of the current focus on preventing problems unnecessary.

BUILD A SUPPORTIVE, INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR YOUTH IN THE CHURCH. According to our Effective Christian Education study, only a third of youth feel that adults in the church care about them, and only 38 percent say other youth care about them. Families should not be the only place where youth feel cared for and supported. They need that support, love, and affirmation in all aspects of their lives—school, neighborhood, congregation, and all aspects of community life. All members of a congregation can help to create this support when they each recognize (and have opportunities to act upon)

the importance of their involvement with young people.

RENEW THE COMMITMENT TO FAMILY MINISTRY. Though families shouldn't be left with sole responsibility for raising society's next generation, they continue to be the major influence on young people. Yet only about one in ten congregations does an effective job of educating and involving parents. While there are many barriers to effective partnerships with parents in youth ministry, several promising models and resources are emerging.³

BECOME ACTIVE PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY-WIDE EFFORTS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT. Young people need to be supported, nurtured, and given boundaries in all settings—family, school, church, community organizations, work. Furthermore, every institution in our communities has a stake in these issues.

It's time for churches and youth ministers to take the lead in the community to make it a better place for youth. By finding others who care, sharing concerns, and exploring courses of action, congregations become leaders in rebuilding the nests and strengthening the wings that young people need to grow up healthy.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

¹Estimate based on Gallup Youth Surveys indicating that 48 percent of teenagers attended church or synagogue in the last seven days (1991), and the U.S. Census that there were 19,981,000 teens in the United States. See George H. Gallup Jr. and Robert Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans* (Princeton, NJ: The George H. Gallup International Institute, 1992).

²Cited in Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (editor), *The Youth Ministry Resource Book* (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1987).

³Peter L. Benson, *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1993), p. 13.

⁴Previous Search Institute studies have also explored religious issues of youth in more depth. Two of these are Peter L. Benson, Dorothy L. Williams, and Arthur A. Johnson, *The Quicksilver Years: The Hopes and Fears of Early Adolescence* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987) (out of print); and Merton P. Strommen, *The Five Cries of Youth* (New and Revised Edition) (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁵See Gallup and Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans*.

⁶Kenda Creasy Dean and Paul R. Yost, *A Synthesis of the Research on, and a Descriptive Overview of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Religious Youth Programs in the United States* (New York: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1991), p. 10.

⁷Dean and Yost, *A Synthesis of the Research on, and a Descriptive Overview of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Religious Youth Programs in the United States*, p. 11.

⁸See, for example, Benson, *The Troubled Journey*; and Dale A. Blyth with Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1993).

⁹In 1988-89, in-depth surveys were administered in nationally representative samples of congregations. In each denomination, 150 congregations were randomly selected, with sampling stratified by size of congregation (under 200, 200-499, 500-999, and 1,000 and larger) to ensure representative distribution. Within each congregation, samples of adolescents

(grades 7-12), teachers, and other adults were randomly selected for the survey. In addition, in each of the congregations, the pastor (or senior pastor, if more than one) and the coordinator of Christian education were surveyed.

Surveys were administered under the supervision of a project director in each of the 561 participating congregations. Survey sessions were governed by a set of standardized procedures described in a detailed administration manual. Careful procedures were established to guarantee and preserve confidentiality for each respondent. Survey sessions ranged from 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours in length. Of the congregations contacted, 66 percent participated in the study, representing an outstanding participation rate.

Data in each denomination has been weighted to ensure that it maximally represents the national denominational population of youth. In addition, each denomination was weighted in the overall totals to ensure that it was represented proportional to its number of congregations in comparison to the other denominations.

The original study included the Southern Baptist Convention, which has been omitted from this report. The response rate among Southern Baptist churches was significantly lower (45 percent), and, given the large size of the Southern Baptist Convention (about 14 million members), including these youth from a weak sample in weighted averages could skew the overall patterns. Thus the SBC has been omitted from this report.

For more detailed information on this study, see Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life* (Search Institute, MN: Search Institute, 1990); and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993).

¹⁰These figures stand in contrast to U.S. Census Bureau figures that indicate that about 60 percent of 13- to 18-year-olds are male. This difference probably reflects that girls are more likely to be religious than boys; thus a smaller percentage of the total adolescent male population is connected to congregations. For example, *The Troubled Journey* study of 7th-12th

grade youth found that 53 percent of males and 61 percent of females reported being involved in church or synagogue activities at least one hour per week. See Benson, *The Troubled Journey*, p. 85.

¹¹While all of the young people in this study are on the membership rolls of Protestant congregations, not all are active in their congregation. We categorize youth as inactive, moderately active, or highly active as follows:

Inactive youth are those youth who say they attend worship services “never” or “a few times a year” OR indicate spending no time in church programs in the past month and spending no time volunteering in the church.

Highly active youth are those who say they attend church worship services once a week or more AND six or more hours on other programs and events in the past month AND six or more hours doing volunteer work in the church (teaching, leading, serving on a committee, etc.)

Moderately active youth are those who fall between the inactive and highly active youth. The percentages on this middle group are not included in the tables.

¹²Instead of relying on young people’s own guess about the size of their congregation, young people were identified with a particular church size based on their congregation’s official membership statistics.

CHAPTER TWO

¹Gallup and Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans*, p. 23.

²*Today’s Teens*, p. 34.

³Stephen D. Jones, *Faith Shaping: Youth and the Experience of Faith*, revised edition (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), pp. 56-59.

⁴For a detailed exploration of the conceptualization and development of the Faith Maturity Scale, see Peter L. Benson, Michael J. Donahue, and Joseph A. Erickson, “The Conceptualization and Measurement of Faith Maturity,” *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 5, ed. Monty L. Lynn and David O. Moberg (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1993).

⁵Search Institute has developed a study guide with leader’s manual for youth around these eight marks of faith. Designed

for use in religious education settings, the guides include a self-assessment questionnaire and readings and discussions on each mark of faith. See Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and Dorothy L. Williams, *Exploring Faith Maturity: A Self-Study Guide for Teenagers* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1990).

⁶Young people were placed into faith type categories based on median split scores among adults in the study in a seven-point scale. The adult median for vertical was 5.26; for horizontal, it was 4.05.

⁷The categories for growth in faith were calculated by finding the mean on a scale of 1 to 5 and then dividing into thirds as follows:

- Much or somewhat less now: ≥ 1 and < 3.13
- About the same: ≥ 3.13 and < 3.54
- Somewhat or much greater now: ≥ 3.54

⁸See, particularly, Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*; and Benson and Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life*.

⁹Quoted in Dean and Yost, *A Synthesis of the Research on, and a Descriptive Overview of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Religious Youth Programs in the United States*, p. 16.

CHAPTER THREE

¹Analysis of surveys of adults in these congregations indicates that some adults hold similar views. Among adults, endorsement of astrology and reincarnation are relatively infrequent (less than 10 percent), but up to a third of respondents hold attitudes that may reflect New Age thinking. See Michael J. Donahue, “Prevalence and Correlates of New Age Beliefs in Six Protestant Denominations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Vol. 32, No. 2, 1993), pp. 177-184.

²For more on the church’s response to hunger and poverty based on the Effective Christian Education study, see Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, “Taking Stock: Christians and Hunger” (a four-part series), *Seeds Magazine* (February, May, September, November, 1992).

CHAPTER FOUR

¹For more information on creating a thinking climate in youth ministry, see Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, “The Thinking

Climate: A Missing Ingredient in Youth Ministry?" *Christian Education Journal* (in press).

²See Benson and Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life*.

³In *What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), C. Kirk Hadaway notes that one of the major reasons people drop out of church is that they experienced a crisis and did not receive support and care from church.

⁴See Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993).

⁵See Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*; David S. Schuller, editor, *Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993); Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Exploring Christian Education Effectiveness* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1990); and Benson and Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life*.

⁶See, for example, Wade Clarke Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Face and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

⁷See Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*.

CHAPTER 5

¹Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*, p. 76.

²See Benson and Roehlkepartain, *Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn*.

³Janet L. Fix, "Mall Rats' Packing in the Goods," *USA Today* (December 10, 1992).

CHAPTER 6

¹Carolyn H. Eklin and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, "The Faith Factor: What Role Can Churches Play in At-Risk Prevention?" *Source* (February 1992).

²Nielsen Media Research, reported in "Tale of the Tube," *Newsweek* (August 2, 1993), p. 6.

³See Peter L. Benson, Michael J. Donahue, and Joseph A. Erickson, "Adolescence and Religion: A Review of the Literature From 1970-1986," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, Volume 1*, ed. Monty L. Lynn and David O. Moberg (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1989), pp. 153-181.

⁴For more information on at-risk behaviors among youth in the United States, see Benson, *The Troubled Journey*.

⁵Benson, *The Troubled Journey*, p. 43.

⁶See David Ng, "Rethinking Youth Ministry" in Schuller, *Rethinking Christian Education*, pp. 85-97.

⁷Bonnie Benard, *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community* (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1991).

CHAPTER 7

¹Benson and Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*, p. 38.

²For an in-depth treatment of the importance of families in nurturing faith, see Merton P. Strommen, "Rethinking Family Ministry" in Schuller, *Rethinking Christian Education*.

³Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Youth in Single-Parent Families: Risk and Resiliency* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1993).

⁴See Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*, pp. 38-44.

⁵Merton P. Strommen and A. Irene Strommen, *The Five Cries of Parents* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 135.

CHAPTER 8

¹For a detailed exploration of the study's findings and its implications, see Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*.

²Benson and Roehlkepartain, *Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn*.

³One is the Augsburg Youth and Family Institute, Augsburg College, 731 21st Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55454.

INDICATORS OF FAITH MATURITY

The Effective Christian Education study examined the faith of youth and adults in mainline Protestant congregations using the following characteristics of a person with a mature Christian faith. For each item, people responded on a seven-point scale (1=never true; 7=always true). For more information on the development and theory of this scale, see Peter L. Benson, Michael J. Donahue, and Joseph A. Erickson, "The Conceptualization and Measurement of Faith Maturity," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 5, ed. Monty L. Lynn and David O. Moberg (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1993). Youth groups that wish to explore these eight marks of faith in depth can use Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and Dorothy L. Williams, *Exploring Faith Maturity: A Self-Study Guide for Teenagers* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1990).

THE PERSON WITH MATURE CHRISTIAN FAITH:

A. TRUSTS AND BELIEVES

1. Every day I see evidence that God is active in this world.*
2. I have a real sense that God is guiding me.*
3. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross and rose again.
4. (Reverse scoring) I do not understand how a loving God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world.
5. (Reverse scoring) I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved.

B. EXPERIENCES THE FRUITS OF FAITH

6. My life is filled with meaning and purpose.*
7. (Reverse scoring) I have a hard time accepting myself.
8. (Reverse scoring) I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have.
9. I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis no matter how serious.
10. (Reverse scoring) My life is filled with stress and anxiety.

C. INTEGRATES FAITH AND LIFE

11. I give significant portions of time and money to help other people.**
12. My faith helps me know right from wrong.*
13. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.**
14. My faith shapes how I think and act every day.*
15. My life is committed to Jesus Christ.

D. SEEKS SPIRITUAL GROWTH

16. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible.*
17. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.*
18. I take time for periods of prayer or meditation.*
19. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.*

E. EXPERIENCES AND NURTURES FAITH IN COMMUNITY

20. I like to worship and pray with others.*
21. I talk with other people about my faith.*
22. I help others with their religious questions and struggles.
23. I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.

F. HOLD LIFE-AFFIRMING VALUES

24. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.**
25. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation.*
26. I speak out for equality for women and minorities.**
27. (Reverse scoring) I tend to be critical of other people.
28. I take excellent care of my physical health.
29. I accept people whose religious beliefs are different from mine.

G. ADVOCATES SOCIAL CHANGE

30. I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and around the world.**
31. I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor.**
32. I think Christians must be about the business of creating international harmony and understanding.**
33. (Reverse scoring) I do not want the churches of this nation getting involved in political issues.

H. ACTS AND SERVES

34. I do things to help protect the environment.**
35. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.**
36. In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs.**
37. I am active in efforts to promote social justice.**
38. I am active in efforts to promote world peace.**

*Items used to measure the vertical dimension of faith

**Items used to measure the horizontal dimension of faith

GROWTH IN FAITH MATURITY SCALE

Young people's growth in faith was measured by creating a scale of 18 items that somewhat parallel the Faith Maturity Scale. Young people were asked to say whether each item is true to a greater or lesser degree for them than it was two or three years ago. The response options were:

- 1 = Much less now
- 2 = Somewhat less now
- 3 = About the same as 2 or three years ago
- 4 = Somewhat greater now
- 5 = Much greater now

1. The degree to which my faith shapes how I think and act.
2. The effort I make to get involved in activities that help me grow spiritually.
3. The time I spend talking to others about my faith.
4. The amount of time I spend working for peace and social justice.
5. The degree to which I accept people who believe differently than I do.
6. The degree to which my life has meaning and purpose.
7. The degree to which I apply my faith to political or social issues.
8. The amount of time I spend reading and studying the Bible.
9. The time I spend worshiping and praying with others.
10. The degree to which I show love to people I meet.
11. The sense of personal responsibility I feel for reducing pain and suffering in the world.
12. The degree to which I feel that God is guiding me.
13. The degree to which I care about hunger and poverty in the world.
14. The amount of time and money I give to help other people.
15. The degree to which I am convinced that God is active in the world.
16. The degree to which I let God into my life.
17. The importance of my spiritual life.
18. (Reverse scoring) The amount of stress and anxiety in my life.

FACTORS THAT NURTURE FAITH

The Effective Christian Education study found that each of the biographical and congregational factors listed below has a significant relationship to the level of faith maturity and growth in faith among adolescents. That is, the greater the factor, the greater the faith maturity. However, the factors differ in the intensity of the relationship: Some are strong, some modest, some weak.

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS



Family religiousness, lifetime*

Christian education involvement, lifetime*

Quality of formal Christian Education†

MODEST RELATIONSHIPS



Church involvement, lifetime*

Friends' religiousness*

Climate: Thinking†

Climate: Warmth†

Quality of worship†

Caring church*†

Service to others*†

Faith maturity of peers†

Non-church religious activities*

WEAK RELATIONSHIPS



Age*

Gender*

Region (South and North Central higher; Northeast and West lower)*

Denomination†

Congregation size†

* Correlates with faith maturity

† Correlates with growth in faith maturity

Adapted from Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations—Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1990), pp. 39, 45.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM SEARCH INSTITUTE

**TO ORDER, CALL
SEARCH INSTITUTE
1-800-888-7828**

BEYOND LEAF RAKING

By Dr. Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

Subtitled "Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn," this practical, research-based resource challenges congregations to involve youth in community service, and gives practical guidance about how to get started in effective ways. Worksheets, checklists, and extensive additional resources make this a one-of-a-kind guide.

#122 \$11.95

THE TROUBLED JOURNEY

By Dr. Peter L. Benson

This landmark study examines the needs and issues facing young people in the 1990s, based on a survey of 47,000 public school students in the 6th-12th grades. The report examines assets youth need to grow up healthy, deficits that inhibit healthy development, and patterns of at-risk behavior. It suggests strategies for all sectors of a community.

#308 \$10.00

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES, HEALTHY YOUTH

By Dr. Dale A. Blyth and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

This report examines characteristics of a whole community that make a difference in the well-being of all youth within that community. It focuses on community strengths that make the most difference and proposes strategies to allow communities to work together on behalf of youth.

#318 \$10.00

THE TEACHING CHURCH

By Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

This comprehensive book explores the problems and possibilities uncovered by the Effective Christian Education study, moving to the practical application of the research findings in congregational life. Written for pastors, Christian education directors, and other leaders, the book examines the shape of faith among youth and adults, and keys to Christian education that enhance faith maturity.

#119 \$12.95

RETHINKING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Edited by Dr. David S. Schuller

Leading experts in Christian education and theology reflect on the implications of the Effective Christian Education study. Authors each draw on their years of experience to place the research project in the broader context of contemporary Christian education theory and practice. In addition to the editor, contributors are Martin E. Marty, Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, William H. Willimon, Merton P. Strommen, Dorothy Jean Furnish, David Ng, Sara Little, Barbara Brown Zikmund, and Richard Osmer.

#120 \$15.99

SOURCE NEWSLETTER

This FREE six-page, quarterly newsletter explores the latest Search Institute research on children and youth. Each issue explores a different theme, presenting scientific data in non-technical language and suggesting implications for people who work with youth. For a free subscription, send your name, address, and phone number to Source at Search Institute.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR YOUTH

By I. Shelby Andress

Filled with worksheets and tips, this handbook guides individuals and groups in finding ways to turn their concerns about youth into meaningful action and change. It helps readers identify issues

and needs, create a shared vision for the future, and take action together. Ideal for groups responsible for setting the direction for youth ministry in a congregation or community.

#314

\$10.00

DETERMINING NEEDS IN YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

By Dr. Peter L. Benson and Dorothy L. Williams

"Youth workers will gain valuable insight into who their teenagers are, what they believe, and how they act," writes George Gallup Jr. in the foreword to this survey kit for use in youth ministry. It includes 20 surveys and answer sheets, complete administration, tabulation, and interpretation guidelines, and complete workshop outlines for reporting findings.

#306

\$15.95

EXPLORING FAITH MATURITY: A SELF-STUDY GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS

By Dorothy L. Williams and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

Using stories, illustrations, and questions appropriate to junior and senior high students, this booklet helps youth think about their own faith and the dimensions of mature faith. It begins with a self-assessment, then explores eight dimensions of mature faith. The leader manual includes experiential activities and questions for a six-session series. The guide is ideal for use in confirmation, and can be paired with the adult version for intergenerational learning.

#112 — With Leader Manual \$4.50 each

#109 — Without Leader Manual \$3.25 each

UNDERSTANDING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

By Rebecca N. Saito and Dr. Dale A. Blyth

This study explores the variety of types of mentoring programs, suggesting potential impact for youth mentees and adult mentors. The typology presents a typology of mentoring, describing different types of mentoring relationships, different commitment levels, and types of screening that are important for each type of program.

#316

\$8.00

THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: A FOUR-PART VIDEO SERIES

Produced by Dr. James V. Gambone

This four-part video series presents the major findings from the Effective Christian Education study. Featuring Dr. Peter L. Benson, the series is ideal for congregational planning, adult education, workshops, and training.

- Tape 1—Celebrating Possibility—An upbeat look at congregations that make a difference through effective Christian education. (14 minutes) (#113)
- Tape 2—Taking Stock: The Shape of Faith Among American Protestants—This videotape examines faith maturity, its critical role in vibrant congregations, and disturbing problems of faith maturity among youth and adults. (26 minutes) (#114)
- Tape 3—Faith Maturity: Where Does It Come From?—This installment examines life experiences and congregational dynamics that promote faith maturity among adults and youth. (24 minutes) (#115)
- Tape 4—Promoting Faith Maturity: What Congregations Can Do—This final videotape provides helpful ideas for renewing congregational life and strengthening Christian education. (22 minutes) (#116)

By ordering the complete series, you receive a free discussion guide and a copy of Effective Christian Education: A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life.

Individual tapes \$24.95 each

#199—Complete series \$95.00

#117—Video Discussion Guide \$5.00

EXPLORING FAITH MATURITY: A SELF-STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULTS

By Dorothy L. Williams and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

This guide follows the same format as the guide for teenagers, but is addressed to an adult level.

#111 — With Leader Manual \$4.50 each

#108 — Without Leader Manual \$3.25 each

**TO ORDER, CALL
SEARCH INSTITUTE
1-800-888-7828**

**EXPLORING CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION EFFECTIVENESS:
AN INVENTORY FOR
CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS**

By Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

This booklet helps congregational leaders understand factors that contribute to effective Christian education. It guides leaders through self-assessments of congregational life, youth and adult education, and family education. It includes a four-hour workshop design.

#110 \$3.25 each

**EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION: A SUMMARY
REPORT ON FAITH, LOYALTY,
AND CONGREGATIONAL LIFE**

By Dr. Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin

This report outlines the major findings from the Effective Christian Education study, including the shape of faith among Protestant youth and adults in the United States, congregational and biographical factors that contribute to growth in faith, and keys to congregation and Christian education effectiveness

#101 \$6.00

**EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION:
DENOMINATIONAL REPORTS**

By Dr. Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin

Reports for each of the participating denominations highlight differences among denominations in faith maturity, beliefs and behaviors, and other key areas. Data in these reports are not included in the summary report (above). The *Six-Denomination Report* is designed for groups not in the national study.

- #102 — *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*
- #103 — *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
- #104 — *Presbyterian Church (USA)*
- #105 — *Southern Baptist Convention*
- #106 — *United Church of Christ*
- #107 — *United Methodist Church*
- #118 — *Six-Denomination Report*

\$6.00

**TO ORDER, CALL
SEARCH INSTITUTE
1-800-888-7828**



Toll-free: (800) 888-7828
Phone: (612) 376-8955
Fax: (612) 376-8956



**700 S. Third Street, Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55414
Phone: (612) 376-8955**