

2013

# Connecting the Dots: A Case Study Examining the Impact of Service Learning on a Youth and Young Adult Student Ministry

Thomas Spencer LeGrand Jr.  
*Gardner-Webb University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education\\_etd](https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd)



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

LeGrand, Thomas Spencer Jr., "Connecting the Dots: A Case Study Examining the Impact of Service Learning on a Youth and Young Adult Student Ministry" (2013). *Education Dissertations and Projects*. 38.  
[https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education\\_etd/38](https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd/38)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Dissertations and Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

Connecting the Dots: A Case Study Examining the Impact of Service Learning on a  
Youth and Young Adult Student Ministry

By  
Thomas Spencer LeGrand, Jr.

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2013

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Thomas Spencer LeGrand, Jr. under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

---

Sydney Brown, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

---

Date

---

Tracy Jessup, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Date

---

Ronald W. Garner, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

---

Date

---

Jeffrey Rogers, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Gayle Bolt Price School  
of Graduate Studies

---

Date

## Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by offering thanks to several people, some posthumously, whom I have never met. Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, Diana Krall, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Billie Holliday were of great help in this process. Their music was a calming influence throughout the storm, like the musicians playing on the deck of the Titanic.

Beyond the collection on my iPod, I am greatly appreciative to Dr. Doug Eury for allowing a pastor to infiltrate the School of Education and learn some much-needed information about how to be an educator rather than just a preacher. I must offer that same appreciation to Dr. Jane King for helping me to find my way through the early stages of this process and offering tremendous encouragement to continue in it. I am also grateful to Dr. Tracy Jessup and Dr. Ron Garner for their willingness to serve on my dissertation committee. Finally, words cannot express my gratitude to Dr. Sydney Brown, chair of my committee, for taking on such an annoying project as a pastor working well outside of his field. Her ability to persevere and overcome served as an inspiration to me to keep going, in addition to her tremendous efforts to regularly talk me *off the ledge* of the dissertation free-fall.

Several former teachers/mentors led me to be able to complete this task. Nothing in education is more critical than the ability to write, and no one taught writing better than Martha Duggan, whom we affectionately called “Murph” in high school. My hope is that all high school students find such a writing teacher and confidence-builder.

Five professors inspired me to earn my doctorate. Furman University always has—and always will—influence my life in powerful ways. None was more powerful in

that influence than Dr. Jeff Rogers, who now serves at Gardner-Webb University, and Dr. Albert Blackwell. They made me believe that I had the ability to learn, write, and communicate on this level and fought to offer my first teaching experience in higher education. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary had a similar influence through Dr. Andrew Purves, Dr. Robert Gagnon, and Dr. Scott Sunquist. Their challenges in the classroom and the realm of theology taught me to think and write on levels that I never imagined.

It is difficult to imagine a church family that could be more supportive than the people of Augusta Heights Baptist Church. Their offer of time and assistance to help me complete this journey was overwhelming. Every pastor should be so fortunate to lead such a congregation!

Finally, my entire family has provided unbelievable support through this ordeal. I apologize to them and thank them at the same time, for they had to endure my endless groans and complaints as I tried to proceed. Fortunately for my son, Spencer, he was away at college and missed much of this. For my wife, Tracy, and daughter, Abbie, they have sacrificed far too much for me to have some letters in front of my name. They have given up time and treasure and endured the constant level of stress that a dissertation puts on a person. I have nothing to offer but my love and gratitude for what Tracy and Abbie have endured to help me finish the race.

## **Abstract**

Connecting the Dots: A Case Study Examining the Impact of Service Learning on a Youth and Young Adult Student Ministry. LeGrand, Thomas Spencer, Jr., 2013: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Service Learning/Curriculum Design/Christian Education/Inductive Learning/Collaboration/Youth Ministry/Young Adult Ministry

The purpose of this study was to provide a case study on the application of service-learning curriculum in a youth ministry at a traditional mid-size church. The intent of the curriculum was to provide a new and creative way for the church to impact youth by getting them involved in actions that correspond with Biblical principles. Church leaders hope that this curriculum change will not only impact youth in their teens but also influence them to remain involved in a traditional church as they reach college and become young adults.

The researcher used the process model of curriculum study from Lawrence Stenhouse (Smith, 2000) to investigate the selection, implementation, and desired outcomes of service learning. The researcher, who also served as the Student Minister at the church, used qualitative data collection methods to discover the thoughts of students who left the ministry prior to service-learning implementation. He then compared that to focus-group research, survey responses, and interviews of youth and young adults as well as adult leaders of the youth ministry.

The research sought to demonstrate the impact of service learning on the youth ministry, as well as the potential impact on youth as they grow into young adulthood. The youth and adults involved had very positive reactions to the curriculum; however, the church did not share that reaction. In fact, certain elements of the church tried to block certain aspects of the curriculum. How the youth and the church respond organizationally and educationally in the future will determine the overall impact of the curriculum. If changes and improvements can be implemented, the present case study may provide a model for youth ministry that can have a positive impact on young adults as well as the larger Christian community.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Definition of Terms .....	8
Researcher's Role .....	11
Research Questions .....	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	13
Introduction .....	13
Justification of Literature .....	14
Christianity and Ministry .....	16
Family and Social Dynamics .....	26
Organizational Studies .....	29
Christian Education: Back to Basics Approach .....	36
Christian Education: Exploratory Approach .....	41
Summary of Christian Education Literature .....	51
Educational Literature .....	54
Service-Learning Education .....	60
Limits of the Literature .....	64
Summary .....	65
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	67
Introduction .....	67
Educational Foundation .....	68
Rationale for Research Approach .....	71
Participants .....	77
Procedures and Instruments .....	80
Significance of the Case Study .....	88
Limitations .....	89
Delimitations .....	91
Summary .....	91
Chapter 4: Results .....	93
Introduction .....	93
Coding of Results .....	94
Beginners .....	95
Summary of Beginners .....	106
Initiators .....	107
Explanation of Initiators .....	114
Summary of Initiators .....	116
Sustainers .....	118
Summary of Sustainers .....	125
Educators .....	126
Summary of Educators .....	137
Conclusion of Results .....	139
Chapter 5: Analysis .....	141
Introduction .....	141

Context.....	142
Summary: Where Does Service Learning Stand at Smithsville?.....	157
Interpretation and Significance of Results.....	158
Critique of the Curriculum.....	164
Implications for Christian Education.....	169
Recommendations for Continuing Research.....	178
Recommendations for Further Research.....	180
Conclusion.....	181
References.....	184
Appendices	
A Questions for Beginners.....	190
B Questions for Initiators.....	192
C Questions for Sustainers.....	194
D Questions for Educators.....	196
E Organizational Approval Document.....	198
F Research Participant Authorization.....	200
G Debriefing Document.....	202
H What do Students Need to Learn at Smithsville Church?.....	204
I Biblical Knowledge and Study Design.....	206
J Bible Assessment.....	209
Tables	
1 Changes in Youth Attendance at Smithsville Church, 2002-2007.....	14
2 Primary Means of Spiritual Expression.....	17
3 Descriptions of Christianity by Americans Age 16-29.....	19
4 Explanation of Research Groups.....	80
5 Process Model of Examination of Service-Learning Curriculum at Smithsville Church.....	81
6 Demographic Information for Beginners.....	97
7 Demographic Information for Initiators.....	109
8 Demographic Information for Sustainers.....	119
9 Demographic Information for Educators.....	128
Figures	
1 Cycle of Adaptation.....	32
2 Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.....	55
3 Process Model of Implementation of Service-Learning Curriculum.....	70
4 Line of Clients for Smithsville Youth Food Pantry in June 2012.....	122
5 Processes for Christian Education and Formation.....	174



## Chapter 1: Introduction

A Google search of the question “Why do young adults leave church” yields approximately 96,500,000 results in .27 seconds addressing the question. This example demonstrates the immense interest in opinions and research in the Christian community regarding the issue of young adults and church. The consensus is that young adults are abandoning the traditional church right after their high school years and not returning until their late 30s, if at all (McMillan, 2009).

Several issues have contributed to the departure of young adults from the church. The first is the issue of authentic community. Audrey Barrick (2006) tackled this issue in an article found online in *The Christian Post*. “Survey: Young Adults Want Genuine Church” analyzed data from a study conducted by LifeWay Christian Resources concerning the views on church held by 18- to 34-year-olds (Barrick). This study employed surveys and interviews of people within the designated age range to discover their views about church. Findings among those within the range were also divided between those who currently attend church and those who do not. The article interpreting the study pointed to data that highlight several critical issues for 18- to 34-year-olds, including relationships, *genuine* church, and the process of searching for truth. It illustrates the importance of community for young adults, pointing out that “73% of church members and 47% of non-affiliated young adults indicated that community with other young adults is extremely important in their lives” (Barrick, p. 2). A majority of the 18- to 34-year-olds who participated in the survey felt that traditional church structures were ineffective at providing community among young adults.

A second issue that accompanies the problem of community is the lack of adequate education among youth and young adults. Dave Kinnaman, a Christian

researcher with The Barna Group, initiated eight national research studies to narrow down the reasons that 59% of young Christians leave the church after the age of 15. In his study of Christians ages 16 to 29, he connected the issue of community with a lack of adequate Christian education. Nearly one-third of young Christians stated that “the Bible is not taught often or clearly enough” for youth and young adults (Kinnaman, 2011, p. 2). They also characterized church as boring and irrelevant to the lives of youth and young adults. The study also showed that young Christians viewed the church as unfriendly to those who have questions. Thirty-six percent felt that church was not a safe place to ask life questions or explore spiritual issues. One-fifth of those involved in the survey felt that “God was absent” from their church experiences as teenagers (Kinnaman, p. 2). Kinnaman’s work demonstrates how churches are failing to create a community where youth and young adults are encouraged to openly develop their faith and knowledge of Christianity. Until churches reform youth ministry from entertainment-focused systems to create communities that are “passionate about learning and teaching,” churches will fail to “close the back door” of students and young adults departing (Douglass, 2009, p. 9).

A third factor that is contributing to declining church involvement among youth and young adults is service to others. A survey of Christ followers between the ages of 16-29 demonstrated a strong desire to learn by taking action that followed Christ-centered principles rather than listening to sermons or memorizing scripture (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2008). Serving the needs of the community or those who are less fortunate is a strong desire among youth and young adults. Young Christians desire to learn how to put their beliefs into action through the community of believers (Ketcham, 2008). They see acting on faith as a way of learning to discern how to put Christian teaching into direct action

through real-life situations (Ketcham, 2008). One way to foster community and education is through integrated service learning, which also gives students and young adults involvement in active learning processes (Dekker, 2007).

The collective impact of these factors indicates that youth and young adults are seeking genuine Christian community and active service towards others as a part of the formation of community. At the same time, research indicates that students need a stronger emphasis on education in Biblical and theological Christian principles before and during the move to young adulthood. The effort of one church to find ways to create community and service opportunities among students, while educating them in preparation to be Christ-centered young adults, is the subject of the present study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Around the year 2000, a church in upstate South Carolina began to experience a decline in the attendance and involvement of youth and young adults described by Barrick (2006). In 2007, the senior pastor and leadership at this particular church began to discuss plans for encouraging ongoing participation of youth and young adults in the life of the church. They took this action in hopes of reversing this trend of younger people leaving the church. Part of their response involved hiring the researcher as a full-time Student Minister and charging him with the responsibility of reaching youth and young adults. The Student Minister is serving as the researcher for this study.

The Student Minister/researcher began to study the curriculum, activities, and overall education program for youth involved in the church. He began to question whether or not the departure of students after high school was connected to poor education for youth and activities that did not connect youth to the mission of the church and Christianity as a whole. The Student Minister/researcher reasoned that students were

more likely to fall away from church or other Christian activities if they departed the youth ministry without an adequate understanding of Christian faith and principles. This reasoning is supported by the conclusions of Douglass (2009) as well as other researchers in the field of youth and young adult ministry. Dave Kinnaman, a research specialist from The Barna Group, stated, “The levels of disengagement among ‘twentysomethings’ suggest that youth ministry fails too often at discipleship and faith formation” (Black, 2008, p. 54). Researcher Wesley Black (2008) concluded that lack of spiritual depth and knowledge is a major factor in young adults leaving the church after their time in youth ministry.

The Student Minister/researcher began to enlist parents and other volunteers to reform the curriculum and instruction offered to students in Grades 7-12, with special emphasis in working on improving the education offered to students in Grades 9-12. Youth ministry leaders hoped that this would lead to more students staying connected to their particular church or some other Christian church as they entered young adulthood. The Student Minister/researcher hoped to increase the working knowledge of and commitment to Jesus Christ by students as they moved into their later high school years. The Student Minister/researcher and leaders hoped to create a more Christ-centered ministry for youth in the church that would continue into their young adult years through church involvement. The ultimate goal was to improve the educational experience for students to include activities that contributed to Biblical knowledge, the building of community, and Christian service. Church leaders and other stakeholders ultimately hoped to see students stay involved in the church as they moved into young adulthood. If students chose not to be involved in this particular church, leaders hoped that they would get involved in another Christian church or similar Christian organization.

The Student Minister/researcher also sought a transformation of the church and youth ministry that would improve student perceptions about church. He envisioned the creation of an authentic, learning-based community where students would desire to stay involved. His belief was that students who were well-educated and immersed in Christ-centered teaching and activity would stay involved if they saw Christ being embodied in the actions of the church. In addition to reforming the educational process for students, the Student Minister/researcher hoped to reform the church to make it a better model of Christ. The vision for these reforms was to encourage students to stay involved in Christian faith through the church as they enter their young adult years. While the church leadership envisioned these youth staying at Smithsville Church (a pseudonym), the Student Minister/researcher and adult leaders of the youth adjusted their hopes and vision. Their desire was to motivate students to stay involved in some church or other Christian community, even if that was not Smithsville. All stakeholders hoped to see education for youth continue to impact students as they moved into the realm of young adulthood.

The Student Minister/researcher held numerous meetings and made several attempts to work with the church staff and stakeholders to reform the curriculum and educational process for youth. This led to the decision in 2011 to implement a service-learning model for youth education and participation in the life of the church. A study of the literature related to both youth and young adults, described in the following chapter, led the Student Minister/researcher to believe that service learning could have a significant impact on youth both now and as they grow into young adulthood. By integrating Christ-centered service based on Biblical principles, the adult leaders and volunteers in the youth ministry believed that students would grow a strong sense of

community, Biblical knowledge, and active Christian faith. The majority of stakeholders in the youth ministry agreed with the direction, leading the Student Minister/researcher and a part-time paid Youth Ministry Intern to begin a curriculum design centered on service projects and Bible studies that related to those projects.

In the course of research and study of the departure of young adults from traditional Christian communities such as Smithsville Church, the Student Minister/researcher discovered that this departure actually begins when youth turn 16 (Douglass, 2009). He also discovered three common themes between these older youth and young adults. The first theme is a desire to experience a deeper study of the Bible and spirituality (McQuillan, 2009). Youth grow tired of repetitive lessons, themes, and Bible stories as they develop higher-level learning skills (Ketchum, 2008). While youth desire to learn the practice of discernment of Biblical information and how it impacts their life (Ketcham, 2008), young adults also seek a more impactful study of scripture and its relationship to life (Lottes, 2005). This common thread indicated to the Student Minister/researcher that the desire in young adults is something that begins in the late stages of high school as students are challenged to higher levels of integration in their overall development.

Youth and young adults both seek this deeper knowledge and spirituality within the context of strong Christian community. As Barrick (2006) pointed out, a real or perceived lack of genuine Christian community causes young adults to depart from traditional churches. In the same way, youth often feel that the church has failed to create a community where they can ask questions and honestly inquire about the Bible, Christianity, and the nature of the church (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2008). This second common thread indicates that the needs and desires of youth and young adults merge well

before Graduation Sunday celebrations at the local church.

This merger leads to the final common thread between older youth and young adults. Both want to see their spirituality and their faith community doing the work of Christ rather than just talking about the work of Christ. Youth often experience community service as a part of the curriculum for high school juniors and seniors that often continue through their college education (Berman, 2006). Mission trips and service projects are at least a sporadic part of most youth ministries (Dekker, 2007). One of the major complaints of young adults is that they see the church gathering and talking about the work of Jesus Christ but rarely doing that work (Lottes, 2005). The desire to put the knowledge of Christ and the community of Christ into action connects older youth to the research regarding young adults.

Considering these three connections, the Student Minister/researcher envisioned a curriculum that would integrate all three aspects. After presenting his findings to the adult volunteers and leaders, he stated his belief that a service-learning curriculum might present a worthy approach to youth ministry. This process could foster stronger Christian community while also providing an answer to the strong call to serve that youth feel. By developing a component for Biblical learning and theological reflection based on service learning, students could also strengthen their spiritual development. After a long process of *trial and error* that sought to improve Christian education at Smithsville, a service-learning curriculum model was selected. Leaders believed that service learning would strengthen the common threads that connect youth to young adulthood in the hope of developing a lasting commitment to Christianity among the youth at Smithsville Church.

The purpose of this case study was to describe the impact of service-learning curriculum on the students at Smithsville. In Chapter 3, the case study documents the

process that led the Student Minister/researcher and youth leaders to select service learning and indicates the methods the Student Minister/researcher followed to examine the impact of this curriculum. This chapter includes major organizational and educational obstacles that had to be overcome in order to make changes in the educational model for youth. The study follows with a description of the design and initiation of service-learning curriculum. The final element of the case study includes qualitative research into the impact of the new curriculum on the youth ministry. This includes interviews, focus groups, and qualitative surveys of past and present students and stakeholders to assess the impact of service learning on Smithsville students.

The desired outcome of the study was to help Smithsville Church understand the impact that service learning can have on the education of youth and their continued involvement in the church as young adults. The results of the case study offer clues to changes that can be made to increase that impact in the hope that students will remain connected to the church as they grow up. This could also help create a model for education ministry at Smithsville Church that would provide an example to similar churches struggling to connect common threads with youth who are drifting away from the church in high school and departing altogether when they become young adults.

### **Definition of Terms**

For readability, the pseudonym *Smithsville Church* refers to a mid-size congregation in upstate South Carolina that is the subject of the study. Mid-size is defined by Christian researcher George Barna (2003) as a church with between 301-999 active members. With an average Sunday attendance estimated at 320, Smithsville Church falls into the mid-size category. The researcher conducting the study also served as the Student Minister at Smithsville. The term *Student Minister* or *Student*



*Minister/researcher* refers to both capacities for the remainder of the study.

In their book, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why it Matters*, Kinnaman and Lyons (2008) identified young adults born between 1984 and 2002 as Mosaics. The authors characterized young adults born between 1965 and 1983 as Busters, in reference to the Baby Boom generation that preceded 1965 (Kinnaman & Lyons). The present study refers to young adults who are ages 18-29 as Mosaics and Busters or young adults. The term *youth* refers to teenagers in Grades 9-12, or roughly ages 14-17; however, the study placed heavy emphasis on Grades 11-12.

The study uses the term *postmodern* to refer to the contemporary context of culture and time that encompasses youth and young adults (White, 2008). While the term is difficult to specifically define, it generally means “That which comes after, and in reaction to, the modern . . . it often entails . . . an abandonment of sharp differences between fields of study, and a flattening of former hierarchies” (Jones, 2008, p. 35). The term is appropriate for this case study because the curriculum under evaluation is an effort to blend various fields within Christian education and practice.

Postmodern is also used in the study to offer a frame of reference for the time period in which youth, Mosaics, and Busters live, are educated, and are forming their values and ideas of what church is supposed to be. While Smithsville is a traditional church, certain aspects of postmodernism impact the youth and young adults who Smithsville is attempting to educate (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2008). The influence of commentary and writings by postmodern scholars influenced the Student Minister/researcher to believe that service learning could help students understand how their Christian faith should function in a postmodern context. As a result, references to

postmodernism help to explain the direction of the curriculum at Smithsville.

At the outset of implementation of the service-learning curriculum, the youth leadership at Smithsville Church formed into two teams. The Youth Ministry Team focuses on planning and activities for youth, while the Youth Education Team focuses on the curriculum and instruction that are related to those activities. The education team includes youth teachers. When the study refers to *ministry teams* or *youth leaders*, it is in reference to the combination of these two groups. The term *volunteers* refers to adults who simply help with the youth ministry as needed but do not hold a specific leadership role. It is important to note that all of these terms refer to adults who are assisting with the youth ministry at Smithsville.

The Student Leadership Team is composed of youth selected by the Student Minister to provide input from a youth perspective as the adult ministry teams go about their work. The former Student Minister, who is continuing to act as researcher, was a full-time paid staff person and possesses a terminal degree. He was responsible for the ministry to youth, Mosaics, and Busters. In addition, a Youth Ministry Intern is a paid, part-time assistant in the ministry to youth. He is currently serving as Interim Student Minister, since the departure of the researcher in March 2012. Either the Student Minister/researcher or Youth Intern was present for all meetings and decisions of the ministry teams or Student Leadership Team. The Student Leadership Team is not currently meeting while the church seeks a permanent replacement for the Student Minister.

The term *Stakeholders* refers to the collective whole of those who have a vested interest in the youth and young adult ministry at Smithsville Church. This includes youth leadership teams, parents, volunteers, and the youth and young adults involved.

## **Researcher's Role**

The researcher served in the role of Student Minister until March 2012. He was present for the process that led to the decision and implementation of a service-learning approach to youth ministry education. This close connection between researcher and subject is not without precedent. Action-research models where the teacher also works as a researcher in his/her classroom are common in the qualitative study of curriculum and educational practice (Merriam, 1998). While not identical, action research is closely connected to case study methodology (Merriam, 1998). Case studies often involve researchers who are closely connected to the situation that is being studied, enabling the teacher to act as an inquirer who wants to improve his or her own practices, the curriculum, or other aspects of the educational process (McKernan, 2008). The present study is an effort to assess and improve the curriculum and practice of both the church and the researcher, an appropriate approach according to education experts such as Lawrence Stenhouse (1983).

The researcher has extensive experience in church and ministry in general and, in particular, ministry to youth and young adults. At the request of the pastor, youth parents, and young adult lay leaders at Smithsville Church, the researcher studied and documented the specific situation of the church in their relationship to youth and young adults. As stated by the church in 2007, the long-term goal of the church was to create a youth ministry that will inspire students to develop their Christian faith in the present and continue that development as they grow into young adulthood. The relationship of the researcher to the church and church leadership enables him to study the efforts thus far to create such a ministry through a service-learning curriculum.

## **Research Questions**

After extensive research, discussion, observation, and meetings with stakeholders, four key questions emerged as primary concerns for the research in the study of the ministry at Smithville Church. The questions target a greater understanding of youth and young adults and how the church can connect to them through service learning.

1. How do select members of Smithville Church characterize the conditions leading to the need for a service-learning curriculum?
2. How do student leaders of Smithville Church react to implementation of service-learning curriculum?
3. How does service learning impact youth of Smithville Church who are currently participating in the service-learning curriculum?
4. How do the adult leaders of youth of Smithville Church believe that service learning is impacting youth who are participating?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, the literature relating to needs in youth ministry education and the exodus of Mosaics and Busters from the church is extensive. In this study, the literature analysis included scholarly articles, books, and Internet resources such as blogs that relate to the problem. Non-scholarly Internet sources did not provide information for factual or statistical analysis; instead, such works assisted in providing a framework for popular opinion and thought on issues relating to youth and young adults. They may also point to some general misconceptions about the problem. This particular study of Smithville Church examined the related literature that contributes to understanding the importance of Christian community in education, teaching youth in a church setting, and utilizing service learning in youth ministry education. The review begins with a brief background to explain why the Student Minister/researcher and youth leaders felt the need to learn more about education and curriculum options. To continue a comprehensive review following this background information, the literature was analyzed in seven categories: Christianity and Ministry; Family and Social Dynamics; Organizational Studies; Christian Education: *Back to Basics*; Christian Education: *Exploratory*; General Education; and Service-Learning Education. A summary of the Christian Education category illustrated points of connection and distinction between the Back to Basics approach and the Exploratory approach to Christian education.

Some literature crossed into more than one category. All categories involved articles, books, and Internet sources. The Literature Review concluded with an explanation of the limitations of current literature regarding the problem of youth, Mosaics, and Busters departing from the church.

### Justification of Literature

The particular problem in this case study began with the detachment of young people from Smithsville Church as they entered their later teen years and moved into the college-age category towards young adulthood. From 2001-2007, average attendance in Sunday morning youth ministry activities steadily declined. This decline is reflected in statistics showing the change in attendance between 2002 and 2007:

Table 1

*Changes in Youth Attendance at Smithsville Church, 2002-2007*

	2002	2007
Average Weekly Attendance		
Grades 9-10	12.1	5.2
Grades 11-12	7.4	7.7
Average Weekly Membership		
Grades 9-10	24.3	18.8
Grades 11-12	16.7	38.6
% Members Attending		
Grades 9-10	50%	28%
Grades 11-12	44%	20%

The most noteworthy change from 2002 to 2007 involved the percentage of enrolled students who actually attended church on at least a weekly basis. The 24% drop among juniors and seniors indicates an issue with retention of students who were once active enough to be enrolled in youth ministry activities. The clear decline in the percentage of students attending on a weekly basis alarmed church leaders.

The Student Minister/researcher discovered that this trend mainly alarmed church leaders because of their emphasis on “the way it used to be.” In a conversation with a young adult who had grown up in the youth ministry in the mid-1990s, the minister heard stories of activities that drew more than 100 students. Wednesday night Bible studies drew huge crowds. Youth sports leagues were in such demand that the youth minister also took on the role of recreation minister. The church had to charter five buses to take everyone on ski weekends (A. Culbreath, personal communication, 2009). Statistical data on this *golden era* of youth ministry could not be obtained; however, at least the *perception* permeated the church membership that such an era existed in the not-so-distant past. Church leaders, including the governing board of deacons, were intent on returning to the numerical glory. Most conversations with members of the church centered on improving the number of students who attended and bringing back many of the Mosaics and Busters who had attended during their high school years.

While church leaders were concerned with quantitative data, the Student Minister/researcher who was hired in 2007 believed that the attendance drop pointed to a qualitative issue. He concluded that a smaller percentage of students attended as juniors and seniors because youth ministry was not relevant to them as they matured and advanced in other areas of life. He theorized that the level of teaching and activity did not challenge students who were beginning to develop higher-level critical thinking. This theory was supported by findings in the fall of 2007 concerning Mosaics and Busters. At that time, he received a roster with 102 Mosaics and Busters listed as members; however, only nine attended church more than twice a month, if at all. No classes or ministries existed specifically for them and had not existed since before the year 2000. The Student Minister/researcher believed that this was yet another indication that the quality of

education and activity tapered off dramatically for youth who were maturing into young adults.

After reviewing the data and working with the church for 2 years, the Student Minister/researcher sought to research the quality of youth ministry at Smithsville and how Christian education for youth might influence the perspective of older youth, Mosaics, and Busters regarding Christian faith. The literature review reflects his desire to know more about the impact of Christian education on these age groups. It also demonstrates how he discovered the importance of building community and serving others to youth and young adults.

### **Christianity and Ministry**

A number of texts and articles written from a Christian perspective address the issue of the detachment of young people from the church as they enter their later teen years and move into the college-age category towards young adulthood. While these texts are related to the overall context of Christianity and the church, they are applicable because these same issues are a pressing concern for Smithsville Church. This study used some of these works in order to gain a better understanding of Smithsville's issue in relation to the overall Christian context. While the current study is a case study that focuses on youth ministry and education, the relationship of youth ministry to Mosaics and Busters is a critical feature. If students fail to see the importance of church as they move beyond adolescence, then it is logical to infer that they may not have had adequate preparation from the church during their adolescent years. By understanding the struggles of the church with older generations, new insight is gained into the developmental needs of youth. This insight assisted in understanding the situation at Smithsville Church.



One of these texts is the book *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of Christianity* by George Barna (2005). The author heads a leading research and resource firm called The Barna Group, an organization that studies trends among Christians and churches ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)). *Revolution* is based on Barna's statistical studies and observations of Christians over the years, particularly those who are retracting from traditional Christian community (Barna). Barna's projection is that there will be a dramatic shift in spiritual direction by the year 2025. His data point to a movement away from the local church as a primary means of spirituality.

Table 2

*Primary Means of Spiritual Expression* (Barna, 2005, p. 49)

	2000	2025
Local Church	70%	30-35%
Alternative Faith Community	5%	30-35%
Family	5%	5%
Media/Arts/Culture	20%	30-35%

According to Barna (2005), young adults have rapidly moved away from the traditional structures and institutions of Baby Boomers. As this continues to happen, younger people will seek alternatives to express their spirituality as long as the church remains focused on more traditional methods of spiritual expression (Barna). These methods would include modes of Christian education such as Sunday school with a set curriculum that focuses more on remembering what is taught rather than critical thinking. The goal of Barna's research is to encourage churches to rethink their methods of

spiritual expression and education in order to adjust to these trends.

Another research-based work that focuses on the young adult generation is the work by Kinnaman and Lyons (2008) as referenced in Chapter 1. These two ministers took time away from their respective ministries to study what people under the age of 40 think about the Christian faith. Their study of Mosaics and Busters revealed a gap in perceptions of churchgoers and outsiders, as well as Busters/Mosaics and Boomers (Kinnaman & Lyons). The two authors engaged in a 3-year study that included more than a dozen surveys as well as interviews of 16- to 29-years-olds and “hundreds of pastors and church leaders” (Kinnaman & Lyons, p. 15). One example of their research involved the views that young outsiders and churchgoers have about Christianity. The authors used their collected data to show the issues that trouble young adults within the church as compared to the struggles that non-churched young adults have with those same issues. This data showed the similarities and gaps between Mosaics and Busters both inside and outside of the church. Kinnaman and Lyons analyzed issues from both a Christian and a non-Christian perspective to provide insight into the issues that might separate Mosaics/Busters from the church.

Table 3

*Descriptions of Christianity by Americans Age 16-29 (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2008, p. 34)*

Description	Outsiders	Churchgoers
Anti-homosexual	91%	80%
Judgmental	87%	52%
Hypocritical	85%	47%
Out of Touch	72%	32%
Insensitive to Others	70%	29%
Boring	68%	27%
Not Accepting of Other Faiths	64%	39%
Outsiders: 440; Churchgoers: 305		

The Student Minister/researcher found that some people, including the Youth Leadership Team, Youth Education Team, and volunteers, expressed these views at various times. Youth in particular expressed their disdain for aspects of church that are “boring” and people that are “hypocritical” in their actions. Questions at youth meetings often revolved around the struggles of youth with a church body that talked about love but seemed so unloving towards people who were different (homosexuals, non-Christians, etc.). The research of Kinnaman and Lyons (2008) confirmed the observations of the Student Minister/researcher that youth progressively began to struggle with a church that preaches love but does not demonstrate it through actions.

While Kinnaman and Lyons (2008) explained some reasons why youth leave the church, other research seeks to find things that might encourage youth to stay. Wesley

Black (2008) proposed a method of studying youth in the church to predict the likelihood that they will continue church involvement beyond high school in “The Search for Lasting Faith: Development of a Scale to Predict Continued Faithfulness in Church Attendance Following High School Graduation.” In this article for *Journal of Youth Ministry*, Black pointed out that the “beer and circus of college life” cannot bear the blame for Mosaics and Busters leaving the church (p. 53). Black acknowledged that the departure of some 18- to 30-year-olds from the church is due to the fact that they are normally going to “drop out of church and explore a different lifestyle than they were allowed to during the teenage years” (p. 54). In spite of this reality, Black has placed a significant blame for the exodus on a lack of Biblical education and faith development in youth ministries. He argued that youth ministers/ministries have come under legitimate criticism for failing at faith development among teenagers (Black). Youth leaders at Smithville shared similar concerns to the ones expressed by Black, fearing that a failure to educate Christian youth could contribute to their separation from the church later in life. Those concerns drove their efforts to reform the youth education towards a service-learning model.

A study from 1982 revealed some of the educational history that the leaders at Smithville tried to reform. Seven authors worked together to study “desired outcomes of religious education and youth ministry in six denominations” (Hoge et al., 1982, p. 230). Their research categorized and rated the highest priorities of youth ministry across Mainline Protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian), Evangelical denominations (Baptist, Church of God), and the Catholic Church (Hoge et al., 1982). The goal of helping students develop appropriate moral behaviors was the highest priority, while helping them understand other faith traditions or act on concerns of social

justice was the lowest priority (Hoge et al., 1982). This favored approach reveals that youth ministry was more interested in moral lessons of right and wrong than in-depth faith development and comprehension of Biblical themes (Hoge et al., 1982). In particular, the evangelical denominations stressed conversion and baptism into Christianity, with little emphasis on educational goals (Hoge et al., 1982, p. 243). According to the research, moral legalism and proper religious practice were emphasized over understanding and acting on faith (Hoge et al., 1982). This study demonstrated the priorities that influenced the youth ministries that educated current Mosaics and Busters as they formed their opinions regarding Christian faith and the church. It also pointed out the historical lack of emphasis on serving that is strongly desired among modern youth and young adults (Hunter, 2008).

One text that challenged the traditional priorities of youth ministry described in the previous study is *Adventures in Missing the Point* by Brian D. McClaren and Tony Campolo (2003). This book clearly was not intended as a statement on youth or young adults. It was a theological discussion concerning the misconceptions and misunderstandings that the church has spread concerning traditional Christian beliefs. McClaren, in particular, emphasized the need for a theological basis for all church ministry rather than a focus on increasing numbers. McClaren and Campolo analyzed the church's teaching on doctrines and practices such as salvation, evangelism, and social justice. Their responses to these *real-world* issues from a Christian perspective have provided excellent insight into questions that youth and young adults might have on these issues. The authors focused heavily on the application of Christian principles in life situations. In connection to Black's (2008) article, McClaren and Campolo stressed that youth who are involved in applying their Christian faith by actively doing and serving in

life situations were much more likely to remain connected to the church. McClaren and Campolo emphasized honestly addressing Christian principles and finding how to apply them in life as opposed to increasing attendance as a measure of success. This emphasis stressed the epistemological component of community and service in the name of Christ.

The ongoing struggle of Mosaics and Busters with the moralistic approach to youth ministry is the subject of Tony Jones's (2008) *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. Jones and McClaren are both leaders in the Emergent Movement, a grassroots Christian movement that is generally comprised of people under the age of 40. Jones offered case studies of individuals and Emergent groups that lived out Christian faith separately from the traditional church. These case studies also involved insight into the lives of people who are frustrated with the traditional church often tracing back to their time in youth ministry and/or youth *parachurch* organizations such as Youth for Christ or Young Life. Jones also offered an honest assessment of the problems with the Emergent movement itself and the difficulties of acting separately from traditional church structures.

Although Jones's (2008) work has little statistical data, the case studies and insights provided information about the needs and desires of Mosaics and Busters regarding the church. His work confirmed that some young adults are looking for close-knit community more than an oversized or overpowering organizational structure. In the case study of his church, Solomon's Porch in Wisconsin, he shared stories of working through conflict as a community rather than referring to the pastor, church board, or denominational hierarchy to solve problems (Jones). The information can be applied by providing insight into how churches like Smithville can build community that will help youth deal with faith issues as they grow beyond the youth ministry.

Jones (2008) pointed out that a key characteristic for young adults within the Emergent movement is “to welcome others into friendship” and “bring whatever resources we can to enrich this shared faith and resolve” (p. 78). Sharon A. Kujawa-Holbrook (2010) echoed this emphasis on relationship in her article about youth and young adult evangelism in the 21st century—“Resurrected Lives: Relational Evangelism with Young Adults.” Kujawa-Holbrook stated that many churches have emphasized conversion and baptism just as they were in 1982, and this has continued to be true in the field of evangelism. Youth and young adults have viewed this as a self-serving tactic, with the goal of preserving the institution rather than building relationships or caring for people (Kujawa-Holbrook). In her research, Kujawa-Holbrook cited church planting strategist Tom Brackett who stated that “focus on evangelism primarily as a church growth strategy is counterproductive, especially with young adults” (p. 18). Relational evangelism, on the other hand, has moved the focus to building knowledge and community among youth and young adults through personal contact (Kujawa-Holbrook). This has included building relationships through Internet and social media (Kujawa-Holbrook). Kujawa-Holbrook’s work described some possible avenues for churches to reach out to youth, Mosaics, and Busters with strategies that differ from the focus that churches had in 1982.

The works cited to this point indicate that youth, Mosaics, and Busters are longing for new ways to experience Christ and understand the function of Christ within the current postmodern context. *Postmodern* can be defined as “that which comes after, and in reaction to, the modern” (Jones, 2008, p. 35). Literature on Christianity and ministry in the postmodern age has offered explanations of the desires of youth and young adults, as well as ways to relate to them through the church. *Generation Change* by Zach Hunter

(2008) and *Welcome to the Revolution: A Field Guide for New Believers* by Brian Tome (2008) attempted to address new methods and techniques of learning among teens as well as Mosaics and Busters. Hunter's book has challenged church leaders to get Christians from middle school through young adulthood to learn by *doing* Christianity rather than listening to someone talk about it. He offered practical yet nontraditional suggestions for getting the younger generation involved in sharing Christ through what they do right now (Hunter). Tome offered similar insight from a more theoretical point of view. He has suggested an educational system that challenges young believers to go beyond a *do this, don't do that* view of Christian faith (Tome). By taking traditional ideas of spiritual discipline and applying them to a younger generation, he has sought to help Mosaics and Busters within the church look beyond typical modes of reaching non-Christians (Tome). These sources provide challenging strategies for the traditional church that is seeking to reach and teach youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

Hunter (2008) and Tome (2008) opposed the idea that modern music and technical advancements in worship will automatically draw young adults into the church (McMillan, 2009). Interviews and research in local churches like Smithsville have indicated that Mosaics and Busters want Biblical information and discussion (McMillan, 2009). Young adults often have found appeal with interaction before, during, and after preaching and teaching through blogs, message boards, and text messages that can be sent to a screen during worship (McMillan, 2009). These new and nontraditional methods of interaction have shown the strong connection that can exist between community and learning through the various types of media interaction that are at the fingertips of youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

Although youth and young adults seem to desire nontraditional forms of Christian



education, the face-to-face art of preaching still has a major function in attracting Mosaics and Busters to stay in or return to the church (Adams, 2011). Youth need preaching that relates scripture in a direct and straightforward manner, and that needs to continue into their young adult years (Adams, 2011). Preaching also needs to relate to the postmodern context of Mosaics and Busters without becoming shallow or overly simplistic (Adams, 2011). The most important element of preaching and teaching for youth and young adults is to help them relate the power of the Word of God revealed in the Bible into real actions that demonstrate serious belief in what the Word says (Adams, 2011). The literature has demonstrated that youth and young adult ministry in the postmodern context seek depth of teaching and preaching as well as actions that correspond to the instruction that is being offered.

Michael A. Clarke (2007) captured this perspective of education in action in an article for the *Anglican Theological Review*. He recalled the Biblical story of Elijah to illustrate the call of God on young adults in the Anglican tradition and in Christianity as a whole (Clarke). Young adults have been “strategically placed in this time” to answer a call to action that will transform the church (Clarke, p. 67). In this article, he stated:

The transfer of spiritual authority from one generation to another ensures the continuity of the faith community. At the same time, the nature and quality of what is transferred affect the quality of the faith experience of those who follow. Religious experience must be powerful and life changing; otherwise it is worthless. Young adults need to be exposed to a faith that challenges them and engages them in a way that produces growth and maturity. In a rapidly changing environment, the church must provide young adults with the effective tools needed to develop a wider perspective of faith. (Clarke, p. 59)

Clarke's description summarized the research and investigation in other literature concerning the expressed needs and desires of youth, Mosaics, and Busters who have struggled to connect with Christianity and ministry in the postmodern era. It also illustrated how a service-learning curriculum might help these groups *connect the dots* between Christian education, community, and action.

### **Family and Social Dynamics**

Understanding the current dynamics of Christianity and ministry as they relate to youth, Mosaics, and Busters is critical to studying the present situation at Smithsville Church. At the same time, other dynamics warrant serious consideration in order to form a more holistic approach to Christian education with youth and young adults. More than one quarter of all people under the age of 35 grew up in divorced families (Marquardt, 2006). Such statistics indicated that social and family dynamics demand consideration in the educational process. The literature in this section examines factors and dynamics that might help or hinder a shift towards service learning at Smithsville or similar churches.

Several works described social and family dynamics as major factors in the ongoing relationship between youth, Mosaics, and Busters and the church. Family relationships impacted the Christian education, spirituality, and church involvement of these groups (Dudley & Wisbey, 2000). An early text that described this relationship is *Family-Based Youth Ministry* by Mark DeVries (1994), a former associate/youth pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. DeVries drew on his own experiences in ministry to describe how the church can actually separate youth from their parents and become detrimental to family development. By creating a ministry that is separated from long-term relationships such as parents, youth ministry has set youth up to fail as disciples of Christ in their adult lives (DeVries). As DeVries described it, youth ministry

in the church has done a fine job of growing Christian teenagers. At the same time, churches have “somehow failed to place (youth) on the track to mature Christian adulthood” (DeVries, p. 26). The focus of DeVries’s research and observation demonstrated how youth ministries have failed to connect with families in a way that prepares students to stay committed to the church.

Marcia J. Bunge (2008) echoed DeVries (1994) in her article “Biblical and theological perspectives on children, parents, and best practices for faith formation: resources for child, youth, and family ministry today.” Bunge argued that ministry to youth has largely ignored family dynamics, only including parents in the ministry by informing them of the next event. “One study of 8,000 adolescents whose parents were members of congregations . . . found that only 10% of these families discussed faith with any degree of regularity, and in 43% of the families, faith was never discussed” (Bunge, p. 349). By drawing on Biblical and theological texts, Bunge pointed out that this worked against the grain of church history, going back to early church fathers such as John Chrysostom (Bunge). Chrysostom advocated an approach that saw families as small churches or *sacred communities* within the church (Bunge, p. 351). Faith development within this smaller context greatly increased the potential for ongoing growth of youth into the greater church community (Bunge).

Further compounding the impact of families on youth and young adult involvement in the church was the previously mentioned issue of divorce. Traditional church policies and teachings came across as hostile and insulting to those who have been divorced, creating a sense of resentment and distrust among the young adult children of divorce (Marquardt, 2006). “If the church is to minister to these children and young people, and if it is to grow, an understanding of the impact of divorce must be incorporated

throughout the life of the congregation” (Marquardt, 2006, p. 23). Elizabeth Marquardt (2006) has advocated an approach that includes rituals of healing, counseling, teaching, and preaching on the issue of divorce, even for adults who were past the age of living in a divorced home. In her words, it is “fully possible to be compassionate to children of divorce and emphasize the importance of marriage while, at the same time, affirming and supporting single and divorced parents” (Marquardt, p. 24). By ignoring the issues that these *children of divorce* face, the church has risked alienating a growing number of youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

In a follow-up study, Marquardt worked with Christopher Ellison, Norval Glenn and Elisa Zhai to offer a statistical basis for her theological case. “Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement Among Young Adults” is an article found in *Sociology of Religion* that details a study of 1,506 young adults from both divorced families and traditional nuclear families (Ellison, Glenn, Marquardt, & Zhai, 2007). Of these young adults between the ages of 18-35, 755 came from nuclear families and 751 from divorced families (Ellison et al., 2007). None were adopted and none came from a situation where a parent had died during their youth; also, those from divorced families experience this prior to the age of 15 (Ellison et al., 2007). The findings of the study indicated that young adults from divorce situations were significantly less likely to be involved in organized religion. This collaborative work further indicated the importance of family dynamics on the current involvement of Mosaics and Busters in traditional church organizations. This research provided a resource for youth ministry leaders to conclude that divorce may have a similar impact on student involvement in church in the future.

A final piece of noteworthy literature concerning the influence of family dynamics on Mosaics and Busters was a study of parenting styles. Roger L. Dudley and Randall L.

Wisbey (2000) described the impact of parenting styles in “The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church Among Young Adults.” In their study of 653 young adults, they found that those who viewed their parents as providing a combination of “loving care” and “protection/control” were more likely to remain connected to the church beyond their youth (Dudley & Wisbey, p. 47). Memories of “warm, caring relationships with both mother and father” translated into greater commitment to and involvement in the church (Dudley & Wisbey, p. 49). Mosaics and Busters who viewed their parents as controlling, but without loving relationships, were least likely to be involved in the church (Dudley & Wisbey). This study provided a degree of contrast to other studies, such as the one by Randy Douglass (2009), that call for greater control and discipline as a means to keep youth involved in the church beyond their teen years. While such control might ensure student involvement through high school, when parents have more influence, Dudley and Wisbey’s results indicated that it might not provide positive motivation for retention beyond the grasp of parental controls.

Service-learning curriculum did not provide definitive answers for the social and family dynamics that impact participation and retention of youth, Mosaics, and Busters in Christian community. At the same time, the concept of a curriculum that combines service activities with building knowledge and community could help Smithsville respond to some of the negatives within those dynamics.

### **Organizational Studies**

In order to understand the dynamics of Smithsville Church as it attempted to relate to youth and young adults, it was critical to analyze literature about organizations. Some of these works were specific to churches or nonprofits, while other works described how organizations in general tend to behave. The literature also provided insight into

how churches could, or perhaps should, react as organizations to the perceived crisis among youth, Mosaics, and Busters. Greater understanding of organizational theory has provided greater understanding of the dynamics facing Smithsville's youth leaders in their efforts to change the organization of the youth ministry.

Much of the literature did not directly relate to church and ministry; however, the groups that were the subject of this study were part of organizations. They belonged to schools, sports teams, businesses, fraternal and professional organizations, etc. Even as a religious body, the church has organizational dynamics and principles that apply. Furthermore, several of the works in this section are best-selling books that are highly regarded in the world of business, industry, and academics. If Mosaics and Busters read these texts or work for organizations that follow these texts, then the church can benefit from understanding what the members read or follow in the world of school or work.

Understanding the gap that exists between younger generations and the church requires a deeper understanding of the organization of the traditional church and youth ministry. To gain this understanding, it is important to understand various theories of organization. One text that described a variety of theories on organization is *Writers on Organization* by Derek S. Pugh and David J. Hickson (2007). These authors summarized a variety of works by organizational theorists throughout history. The book included articles that relate organizational theory to education, offering a greater understanding of the dynamics of how schools have functioned and impacted youth as students (Pugh & Hickson). The work of Pugh and Hickson offered a glimpse into many types of theories that may or may not apply to the church; however, that glimpse allowed the researcher to study general educational theories in relation to church educational and organizational dynamics.

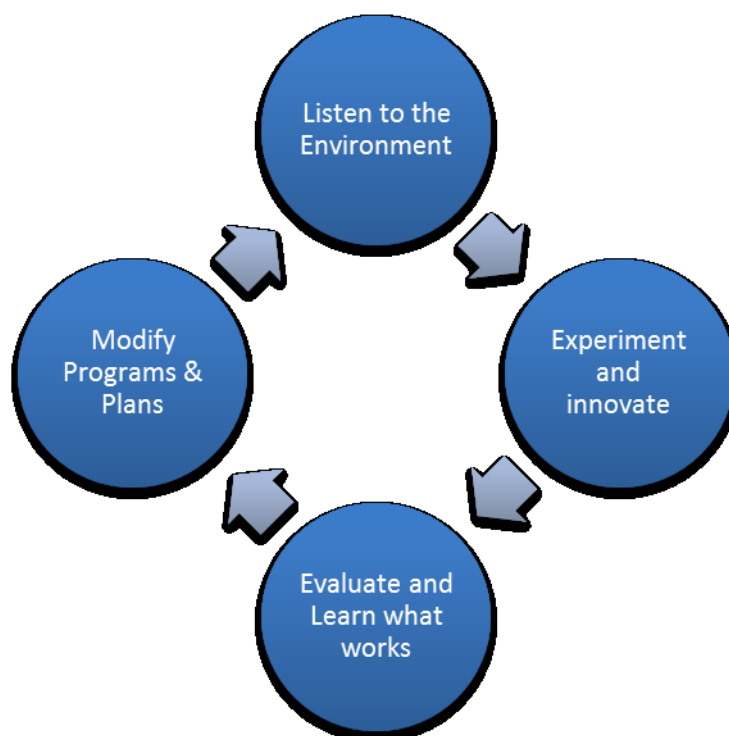
A Christian-based work on organization was *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere, by Anyone*, written by church consultant William Easum (1995). Using case studies from his ministry experience, Easum analyzed the organizational functions of traditional churches. He suggested how the church can improve decision making in order to become more functional and flexible (Easum). While his analysis may not be indicative of all churches, the organizational principles that he described speak to traditional evangelical churches such as Smithsville. The cases that Easum cited point out the fact that change will always meet obstacles in traditional churches (Easum). His chapters on overcoming structural and organizational obstacles in order to enact change were particularly noteworthy for the purposes of the present study of how the Student Minister/researcher and other leaders went about their efforts to change the youth ministry.

In support of the idea that Smithsville lacked the organizational structure to meaningfully engage youth into their young adult years was the work of Audrey Barrick (2006), previously cited in Chapter 1. Barrick analyzed data from a study conducted by LifeWay Christian Resources concerning the views on church held by 18- to 34-year-olds. A majority of the 18- to 34-year-olds who participated in the survey felt traditional church structures were ineffective at providing the desired community, activity, and teaching (Barrick). Barrick's statistical information helps to support the assertions of other authors that Mosaics and Busters are seeking community rather than traditional church hierarchy and structure.

In order to understand how a church can both create community and maintain functional organization, authors on nonprofit structures merited attention. Peter F. Drucker (1990), a leading thinker on organization and management, offered insight in his

book *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices*. Drucker illustrated three primary *musts* of a successful mission: look at strength and performance of what the organization is already doing; find opportunities or needs to be met that the organization is not meeting; and analyze what the nonprofit truly believes it needs to do (pp. 7-8). These musts provided opening questions as a starting point for assessing Smithsville's mission to youth and young adults. They also helped Smithsville as it continued to look for avenues to improve on service learning.

*Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits* (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008) offered further insight into the best organizational practices for nonprofits like Smithsville Church. A model suggested was the "Cycle of Adaptation" (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008, p. 132).



*Figure 1.* Cycle of Adaptation (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008, p. 132).

---

Organizations needed to make a serious investment of people and financial capital into



the best innovations to meet the community needs (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008). As Smithsville struggled to meet the needs of youth and young adults, the process described in this text provided a possible model for evaluating and improving the new curriculum.

One of the organizational texts reviewed later in this chapter is Jim Collins's (2001) book *Good to Great*. Before moving to the primary text, this chapter analyzed the supplemental text entitled *Good to Great in the Social Sectors: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great* (Collins, 2005). In this work, Collins (2005) recognized the distinctions between nonprofits and the business world that he analyzed in the original text. For example, Collins (2005) pointed out that nonprofits cannot hire and fire at will in order to put the best people in place to run the organization. Collins (2005) stated, "Most social sector leaders . . . must rely on people underpaid relative to the private sector; or, in the case of volunteers, paid not at all" (p. 15). This was particularly apt at Smithsville Church where one full-time staff person and a paid intern were the *executives* responsible for motivating volunteer leaders and teachers to make a major change in the youth ministry. In response to this, Collins (2005) argued that great nonprofits must find those who were self-motivated because of their powerful belief in the cause at hand. The Collins supplement was valuable in helping nonprofits see how his principles applied in a setting where purpose rather than profit was the primary motive.

In addition to organizational literature concerning nonprofit/volunteer organizations similar to churches, extensive literature exists concerning the past, present, and future of organizations in the postmodern world. The purpose of studying these works was to gain a greater understanding not only of the church as an organization but also of the organizations in the larger society that surround churches like Smithsville. Understanding the structure of the world in which youth, Mosaics, and Busters have

worked and interacted on a daily basis has provided a foundation for understanding how to prepare them to make Christ-centered decisions in postmodern society.

One of the primary organizational texts was the original *Good to Great* by Collins (2001). The focus of *Good to Great* was corporate in nature, discussing leadership principles and management strategies that have allowed companies to find success even in the midst of a changing world (Collins, 2001). While these strategies do not speak directly to churches, the principles of choosing dynamic leadership and striving for “Level 5 Leadership” (Collins, 2001, p. 20) can be applied to a church when paired with Collins’s (2005) work on social sectors. Of particular note is Chapter 4 of *Good to Great* entitled “Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)” (Collins, 2001, p. 65). As churches face the changes in society that are confronting them, there is a need for churches to be “infused . . . with the brutal facts of reality . . . with an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of the situation” (Collins, 2001, pp. 69-70). The Student Minister/researcher and youth leaders had to do this in order to make a decision that the church needed to make a major shift in the curriculum and approach to youth ministry. This need in churches paralleled the same need for corporations as Collins demonstrated in his story about the success of Kroger supermarkets against the failure of A&P (Collins, 2001, pp. 65-69). If Smithsville Church hopes to honestly meet the changing needs of youth and young adults, Collins has provided a resource for confronting the changes that need to be made from an organizational perspective.

In order to confront brutal facts, as Collins recommended, without completely losing heart, Smithsville has to approach the issue of youth, Mosaics, and Busters with the right attitude. The topic of John Naisbitt’s (2006) book *MindSet!* is all about having the right attitude. Naisbitt’s goal was to help organizations learn to think, adjust, and

correct themselves without any barriers to gathering and understanding the information at their disposal. In order to create a more positive mindset, Naisbitt recommended 11 ways of thinking about changes within organizations that will have helped them discern how to handle the change. One of the primary concepts in the 11 key mindsets that were set forth in the book was the idea of changes as opportunities rather than problems (Naisbitt, p. 92). Naisbitt's insight may have helped Smithsville and similar churches to view the changing situation with youth and young adults as a positive opportunity for growth.

Literature on organizations and the changes they face in the postmodern world has informed churches about changes that have happened around them, if the churches chose to deal with the facts of those changes (Naisbitt, 2006). As churches have attempted to integrate changing technology and moderate their approaches to the unprecedented economic freedom of youth and young adults (White, 2008), they have also gained a better understanding that similar changes are happening throughout society (Friedman, 2007). Inexpensive computers, telecommunications devices, the ability to upload information, and ease of travel have quickly made the world much more "flat" than it ever was in the days of Christopher Columbus (Friedman, 2007, p. 32). This has proven particularly true in the world of youth and young adults who have obtained ready access to devices with fast information and communication (White, 2008).

Two texts, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Friedman, 2007) and *The Extreme Future* (Canton, 2006), addressed the past, present, and future of society. Friedman's (2007) work elaborated on the circumstances that occurred in the 1990s and early 21st century that influenced the advent of postmodern society. His work listed 11 circumstances that *flattened* the world and changed the way organizations and people interact and communicate (Friedman). Friedman argued that

youth, Mosaics, and Busters now multitask and integrate various types of learning activities. This idea was part of what led the Student Minister/researcher to suggest that education, community-building, and service should function as a cohesive philosophy of curriculum. Understanding the changes that brought about postmodernism can assist churches like Smithville as they attempt to minister within postmodern culture.

Canton (2006) was more concerned with how the changes that Friedman described will impact the future of organizations that have attempted to impact postmodern culture (p. 16). Canton argued that globalization was not a trend but a future reality that has and will eternally impact how businesses, governments, individuals, and institutions interact with the rest of the world. Like any other organization, the church has a need to understand the extremes of the future in order to react and respond with effectiveness.

The desire to reach youth and young adults both now and in the future led the youth leaders at Smithville to change their approach to youth ministry. The Student Minister/researcher believed that the ministry organization could change to adapt to the world in which youth, Mosaics, and Busters must live, learn, and work. Changing the organizational perspective and approach was one aspect of making these changes. The next critical step was to improve the understanding and approach to education. The literature contained in the next two sections addressed the educational aspect of the service-learning curriculum.

### **Christian Education: Back to Basics Approach**

In order to respond to the societal and organizational changes described in the literature, further study was warranted about how to teach the Christian faith in the postmodern era. A number of earlier texts combined with current literature to help

Christian educators understand how to prepare students with appropriate knowledge and understanding of faith in Christ. This portion of the literature review is devoted to curriculum, books, and articles related to education from a specifically Christian point of view. The first part of the review involved a Back to Basics philosophy of youth ministry that encouraged a retreat from the world and a set curriculum with predetermined outcomes. As the literature implied, this approach has fostered a curriculum approach to prepare students to do *battle* with a hostile society and system once they leave their high schools and homes.

In the spring of 2010, the Youth Ministry Team and Youth Education Team at Smithsville Church began joint meetings to discuss ways to improve Christian education for youth. These meetings involved discussions on how to write and/or select curriculum to provide engaging education for the students and to teach basic principles about Christ, the Bible, and Christian faith. The goal of these meetings was to discover ways to lead youth to higher-level thinking about their faith. The Student Minister/researcher and youth leaders reasoned that helping students towards higher order evaluation and creativity was necessary in order to match their social and intellectual development.

One of the first suggestions from these meetings was to analyze a curriculum written by the leadership of another local church. *Growing Graduates* is a curriculum designed to teach students Biblical principles from their preschool years until their graduation from high school (Mize & McMahan, 2009). The website for the curriculum provided introductory material and an overview of the program. The goal of the curriculum was to train children and youth in the truth of Christianity through a four-step process: Heart of a Warrior, Mind of a Scholar, Hands of a Hero, and Feet of an Ambassador (Mize & McMahan, 2009). The website provided outlines for age-

appropriate teaching for preschool, elementary, middle school, and high school within the four steps. The focus of the curriculum was on learning predetermined Christian principles through rote, with elevated activity and challenge across the age range. This approach was an attempt to help students learn and grow in order to prevent them from becoming part of the 70% of students who drop out of church following high school (Mize & McMahan, 2009).

Several other curriculum concepts received consideration, including the study and analysis of Dr. Randy Douglass (2009). In his two-part article, Douglass began by providing the statistics on youth and young adults separating from the church as they enter their later high school years. This trend has continued to grow worse as students enter college where “bias against evangelical students” and an “angry tribe of opinionated educators” have created doubt and moral relativism in the minds of Christian students (Douglass, p. 3).

In the second part of this series, Douglass (2009) proposed several solutions to battle the departure of youth, Mosaics, and Busters through improved Christian education. For the church, he advocated a strict policy of teaching and preaching apologetics, which is a verbal defense of Christian faith in an effort to offer answers to the questions of skeptics (Douglass, p. 7). Douglass also argued that memorization and rote were the appropriate method for providing a background for higher-level learning of apologetics. He argued for increased training for Sunday school teachers and a restructuring of youth ministry away from “entertainment factories” into “passionate teachers” of Christian apologetics (Douglass, p. 9). He also argued that public schools have driven students away from the church and he endorsed a departure from public education at a young age in favor of Christian schools that teach apologetics (Douglass).

Douglass offered an interesting perspective and challenge that was considered by Smithsville as the church revamped its educational ministry.

This approach set a traditional, regimented path of teaching Christian doctrine based upon predetermined definitions of truth intended to drive towards predetermined outcomes for students. This approach indicated a view that there is a right Christian theology that has opposed, and even battled, differing perspectives. The Student Minister/researcher rejected the Back to Basics approach of *growinggraduates.com* and Douglass (2009) for several reasons. The first was pragmatic in theory and in practice. Half of the volunteers involved in the youth ministry worked or taught in public school. All but one of the youth attended public school. Douglass argued that very specific doctrine needed to be taught while eliminating outside forces that called into question or contradicted those doctrines. He went so far as to say that Christians should withdraw from the public schools and select a Christian school or home school “with a proper Christian worldview” (Douglass, p. 10). The Student Minister/researcher believed that a more reasonable response existed to answer Smithsville’s Christian education issues. Alienating volunteers, students, families, church, and community was, to say the least, completely unreasonable. The reaction by the youth leaders to Douglass’s ideas confirmed that this was not going to work at Smithsville.

The second reason involved the philosophy of the curriculum in *Growing Graduates*. After reviewing a curriculum outline at the request of a deacon, the Student Minister/researcher found the language within the outline of the curriculum to be antagonistic to most, if not all, cultural constructs. In middle school, students were to be taught to distinguish between theological “lies and truth” and in high school, students learned “the world’s *incorrect* view of God and His church” (Douglass, 2009, p. 2).

Growinggraduates.com even used the terms *warrior* and *hero* in the headings to the various sections of curriculum (Douglass, 2009). This *us vs. them* language made it difficult to honestly assess how students were learning to apply faith in a world that seemed to disagree at times with Christian teachings. The curriculum used the same categories and patterns of teaching from preschool through high school graduation, with no discussion of exploration or creativity in theological ideas (Douglass, 2009). Repeating the same themes and concepts for 18 years did not seem to fit the educational concept of Bloom's Taxonomy, illustrated later in this chapter, of challenging students to evaluate and create at a higher level. The minister also wondered how students would adapt to the curriculum if they started at age 12 instead of 2, or if they did not come from a Christian background. All of these factors led the Student Minister/researcher to reject the idea of adopting growinggraduates.com as the youth curriculum.

The decision to reject this approach was summarized in the work of John M. Hull (1991), a Christian educator and writer. In his book, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning*, Hull argued that the need to be right has often created pain in the process of learning. Learning is in fact a journey of questioning and uncertainty that has caused many students to be critical; and "without self-criticism religion like science is dead" (Hull, p. 96). The Student Minister/researcher did not believe that choosing a curriculum without room for criticism or question would serve to create lasting faith in youth as they became Mosaics and Busters.

With the decision that a Back to Basics approach was not compatible, the youth leadership and Student Minister/researcher still needed to decide on a plan for improving curriculum. The literature that the Student Minister/researcher began to study and relay to youth leaders took the Exploratory approach to youth ministry education. Since there



was little about how churches can stem the tide of departures among youth, Mosaics, and Busters, the Student Minister/researcher searched for new, less traditional alternatives to a set curriculum with a predetermined outcome of what a *good* Christian should be. This research led to ideas on how to create a curriculum that would integrate Biblical education, community, and service.

### **Christian Education: Exploratory Approach**

The Student Minister/researcher and Youth Ministry Team liked the general concept in *Growing Graduates* of helping youth move along a planned curriculum path. Other options considered by the ministry teams at Smithsville were two online curricula, [www.studentlifebiblestudy.com](http://www.studentlifebiblestudy.com) and “SymLive” curriculum. “SymLive” changed to [www.livecurriculum.com](http://www.livecurriculum.com) in 2012. Both of these offered features intended to increase the ease of communication between teachers, online study sources, and options for teaching direction. Each site provided message boards that enabled teachers and parents to discuss what was taught and what was planned. The sites also offered several different types and tracts of study, including Sunday school lessons, small-group studies, and directed short-term (6-12 week) studies. Subscriptions to the sites were also cost-effective and dramatically reduced the amount of paper required as students and teachers accessed all materials online. In a volunteer organization like Smithsville Church, these web-based curricula offer appealing options that cut costs, limit the need for meetings, and increase options for training and communication. As discussed in Chapter 3, these became components of the overall service-learning curriculum.

Beyond the online curriculum, the Student Minister/researcher worked to research helpful literature to discover methods of helping youth learn about faith while also learning to engage society through higher-level integration. An earlier text that offered

insight into best teaching practices that had a lasting impact on teens was *Religious Education in Youth Ministry*. This was a series of studies and essays edited by D. Campbell Wyckoff and Don Richter (1982). Although the essays were collected in the 1980s, the applications of the principles were relevant to the subject matter of this study. The book focused on a variety of topics including desired outcomes of youth ministry from mainline protestant perspectives on Christian education (Richter, 1982). Richter (1982) specifically offered suggestions for simplifying the planning process for youth ministry teaching in order to create a focus on the specific needs of youth within the context of the church (p. 37). Articles also focused on the questions that churches need to ask themselves before starting any new ministry with youth (Wyckoff & Richter, 1982), encouraging churches to follow Jim Collins's (2001) suggestion to confront facts before taking action. The author questioned whether or not churches were truly willing to accept the challenge and make the necessary changes to begin educating youth and integrating them into the life of the church (Gardner, 1982). While the text was from an earlier era of church and ministry, the educational principles still hold value for churches seeking best practices in Christian education for youth.

The Youth Education Ministry Team expressed a desire to know more about the spiritual and emotional needs of youth. In order to help them in this process, the Student Minister/researcher shared information from his research. Another early text that retains its value for Christian education in the postmodern era is *Five Cries of Youth: Issues that Trouble Young People Today* by Merton P. Strommen (1993). Drawing on data and behavioral studies, Strommen identified five universal struggles of mental/emotional/spiritual health that students have faced across generations. These were the Cry of Self-Hatred, the Cry of Psychological Orphans, the Cry of Social Concern, the Cry of the

Prejudiced, and the Cry of the Joyous (Strommen). Strommen documented changes in behavior of “reached” youth, including the likelihood of these youth to get involved and stay involved in church (p. 93). The most noteworthy of these was the cry of social concern, which indicated that service learning might be a viable model for youth ministry. Strommen’s work illustrated lasting principles of working through the emotional and developmental stages that youth endure in order to help youth leaders better understand their role in ministering to them through those struggles.

The youth ministry teams and teachers expressed to the Student Minister/researcher a great concern for creating lasting spiritual connections with youth that would continue to impact their lives as young adults. With this in mind, the Student Minister/researcher began to research how spirituality might impact or be impacted by the move to service-learning curriculum.

In moving further into the spiritual needs of youth and young adults, Susanne Johnson (1989) provided another text from the 1980s that examined lasting spiritual principles. In *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and in the Classroom*, Johnson’s research focused on the idea that “we have not taken seriously the radical, countercultural, protracted process of Christian initiation” (p. 27). This approach to spirituality coincided with findings by postmodern authors such as Tony Jones (2008) who expressed a desire on the part of Mosca and Busters to find a deeper, more rooted spirituality that does not seek to maintain the status quo of church life. Johnson’s work focused on a spiritual foundation that finds value in story and pilgrimage as the primary vehicle of Christian education of believers from a young age all the way through later adulthood (p. 91). She advocated a format of spiritual care and Christian formation that allows disciples of Christ to both learn and experience a deeper, specifically Christian,

spirituality that has not dictated the shape or the nature of development (Johnson, p. 123). Such formation has allowed pilgrims in the journey to live in the light of Biblical, Christ-centered teaching as a model for *experiencing* grace rather than simply learning about it (Johnson). Johnson's book stressed the need for spiritual and educational answers rather than simple programmatic changes for churches seeking to keep people involved and progressing in their journey of discipleship.

Spirituality, particularly among youth and young adults, continued to be an issue of study and discussion. The International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry (IASYM) has conducted ongoing qualitative and quantitative research on the spiritual habits and formation of youth with a special emphasis on pre-college or those just beginning their college career (McQuillan, 2009, p. 73). Some of the research compiled from this study indicated that the church was responsible for the lack of significant spiritual experience among youth in western, industrialized nations (McQuillan, 2009, p. 75). Operating from the premise that spirituality is "hard-wired" into human consciousness (McQuillan, 2009, p. 78), McQuillan addressed the issue of the church potentially turning youth, Mosaics, and Busters away from the church with their presentation of that spirituality. As stated by one of the researchers cited by McQuillan (2009), the importance of recognizing that reality and tapping into it "challenges the Christian churches about the images of God they present . . . these are simply not relating to young people and have the potential to turn them towards unbelief" (p. 75). McQuillan pointed out that spiritual development among youth and young adults was critical, but churches might have to change their approach if they hope to address such a critical reality.

The attitude of some members of Smithsville's youth leaders reflected the need of

the leadership to understand these studies on youth spirituality and Christian development. One leader stated that youth only need about 10 or 15 minutes of Bible study at Sunday school and midweek meetings, while the rest of the time should be reserved for games and fun activities (Anonymous, personal communication, February 2011). A youth parent/volunteer stated that the youth need more fellowship activities that do not involve preaching, prayer, or Bible study (Anonymous, personal communication, August 2010). Sarah Caffrey Bachand (2010) challenged these notions in her article “Living God or Cosmic Therapist? Implications of the National Survey of Youth and Religion for Christian Religious Education” published in *Religious Education*.

Drawing on the results of the National Survey provided by sociologist Christian Smith, Bachand (2010) concluded that youth have inherited a faith and spirituality from their parents that “worships a God who *meets* rather than *makes* demands” (p. 141). Teens believe in God, but it is a God who is devoid of the knowledge of traditional Christian faith and theology (Bachand). Historical teachings that present God as judge and punisher were not adequate for teen spiritual development; however, neither was the view that God is a “moral cosmic therapist” who is simply present to make people feel better (Bachand, p. 145). Bachand placed the responsibility for this view at the feet of Christian educators who need to see their role as intricate to helping youth know and develop Christian faith (p. 142). Youth cannot accept or reject traditional Christian/Biblical teaching if they do not know and cannot articulate what traditional Christian/Biblical teaching is (Bachand). Bachand’s article presented a challenge to religious educators, such as the ones at Smithsville, to take seriously the responsibility to understand and teach traditional Christian doctrine. At the same time, youth teachers must stay current with teaching methods and techniques that relate to youth in a rapidly

changing culture (Bachand). Smithsville's decision to focus on building community, relationships, and serving others challenged the notion that youth ministry is present to provide for the *wants* of youth rather than their spiritual needs.

Interaction between two youth ministry professionals, Sharon Ketcham (2008) and David White (2008), offers a glimpse into the current debate over methods and techniques of educating youth. Ketcham investigated the findings of White, a youth ministry expert from Austin Seminary. White theorized that youth, in order to fully participate in the larger Christian community, must use their potential for discernment to develop a lasting relationship with Christ and the church. Ketcham examined White's work in light of Robert Keagan and his work on theories of youth stages of development. Ketcham's ultimate conclusion was that ministry to youth can be transformed with a focus on discernment, which would better equip students to maintain their faith connections as they become adults. Youth leaders should use caution, however, in expecting youth to have the ability of discernment beyond the developmental capacities outlined by Keagan (Ketcham).

White's (2008) response to Ketcham's (2008) questions of capacity offered greater insight into his case for creating *transforming* youth ministry that prepares youth to enter the Mosaic/Buster generation. White pointed out that his research was designed to account for the development of youth within the community over a period of years. It would be unrealistic to expect youth to instantly move through the stages of development to a practice of discernment (White). With a proper theological and developmental approach, youth ministry can become a transformative experience for both the youth and the larger community to which they are attached (White). By staying attentive to the stages of development, youth ministries can help students develop both skills and

sensibilities to create an environment that fosters the practice of discernment among youth. These debates demonstrated the variety of options that faced the youth leaders at Smithsville Church as they made decisions about curriculum. If experts still have not reached full consensus on best practices for youth curriculum, then Smithsville has the task of weighing the options and making a decision on what works best in their cultural context.

Making those decisions even more difficult was the task of connecting best practices for youth ministry with the needs of young adults. An article from *Journal of Youth Ministry* began to bridge the gap between Christian research on Mosaics and Busters and research on youth ministry to teens (Black, 2006). In “Youth Ministry that Lasts: The Faith Journey of Young Adults,” Wesley Black (2006) highlighted a number of issues in traditional church youth ministry that assisted students in their faith transition to young adulthood. Young adults of all faith levels struggled with similar issues in Christianity, including maintaining their faith through the general changes such as leaving home for college and beginning to understand how Christianity applies to life after the removal of parental controls (Black). Black pointed out that these life changes often begin for students around the age of 16, meaning that students start to fall away from church around the age that they begin to drive. In addition to church involvement, Black analyzed how various types of involvement impacted student involvement throughout the years. Students who were involved in church leadership and had mentors to guide them through their high school years and had multiple adult leaders involved in the youth ministry were much more likely to remain involved in the church as young adults (Black). Black’s research offered insight into the kind of education that youth need if traditional churches hope to keep them involved beyond their youth ministry

years.

A number of members of both the Youth Ministry Team and the Youth Education Team were professional educators acting as teachers and administrators in the local school systems. These professionals expressed a desire to adapt and apply educational principles to Christian education for youth. The Student Minister/researcher advocated teaching foundations of evangelical Christianity from a Biblical perspective but doing this in a way that utilized culturally relevant curriculum and teaching practices.

In recent years, Christianity has experienced a renewed interest in designing curriculum according to solid educational, as well as theological, principles (Pazmino, 2008, p. 9). One text that attempted to combine education and theology was *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Pazmino, 2008). The third edition of this educational text organized the Biblical, theological, and educational foundations for churches to better understand the educational process (Pazmino, 2008). This resource provided guidelines for churches to follow not only in what to teach to students but also in how to teach it (Pazmino, 2008).

A similar but more exhaustive text was *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Parrett & Kang, 2009). The extensive nature of this work was an indication of the renewed interest in Christian education pointed out by Pazmino (2008). In their discussions of curriculum education, both ministry teams at Smithsville expressed a desire to teach youth in a way that would continue through young adulthood, helping them integrate into the full life of the church. Parrett and Kang's (2009) work was exceptionally valuable to that end. They concluded their writing with two chapters on the need for a "Commitment to a Congregational Curriculum" (Parrett & Kang, pp. 361-430). They advocated "Consistent, ongoing



teaching of the scriptures and the faith to all members, regardless of age” that could help the community worship and act as a whole (Parrett & Kang, p. 403). This text responded to questions posed by the ministry teams about how youth education can better connect students to the church, both during and beyond their teen years.

Questions still remained among the ministry team and church staff about how youth education could help students remain connected to the church as they move into college and grow into young adulthood. The pastor at Smithsville continually asked the Student Minister/researcher to present a clear *picture* of how the church could effectively minister to all age groups in a cooperative manner. In addition to the chapters from Parrett and Kang (2009), additional literature suggested other methods of integrating youth, Mosaics, and Busters into the community of the church. One suggested approach was to create an atmosphere of individual and community mentoring for young believers that will educate and hold them accountable in the development of their Christian faith (Lottes, 2005, pp. 128-129). According to John D. Lottes (2005), the atmosphere of mentoring can help to create an educational environment where it is safe for Mosaics and Busters to ask the questions that spark their spiritual curiosity. Failure to address these questions can lead Mosaics and Busters to spiritual apathy, particularly in reference to traditional church (Lottes). Lottes contended that confronting these questions rather than avoiding them is a key to Christian education with young adults.

In our ministries with young adults, questions are the order of the day, including big questions having to do with vocation, sexuality, relationships, faith, and more. As we engage students and others in these and other pressing questions of life, we will be stretching them—and sometimes ourselves as well—in ways that help them see God more clearly as their partner in a life adventure that is indeed “born

from above.” In the process of addressing these questions, lives are changed, faith is deepened, and light shines where there was darkness. (Lottes, 2005, pp. 129-130)

Lottes’s work mirrored some of the concepts expressed by Jones (2008), Kinnaman and Lyons (2008), and Barna (2005). These concepts indicated a desire by Mosaics and Busters to explore and dialogue about the religious and philosophical questions of the day as a part of their Christian education.

Hunter (2008) and Tome (2008) illustrated a strong desire among Mosaics and Busters to see faith in action rather than simply sitting in a classroom or listening to a sermon. The Student Leadership Team expressed a desire among youth at Smithsville to take a more *hands-on* approach to ministry (Youth Leadership Retreat, September 2010). The Student Minister/researcher and Youth Ministry Intern began to explore the idea of service learning as a basis for curriculum and instruction with youth. The concept drew significant interest from both ministry teams who began to *brainstorm* ideas for how students could learn in the process of serving.

While research indicated that service learning is a prominent feature in many youth ministries, proper connection to a theological foundation is essential to make it a true learning experience (Dekker, 2007). Without question, the power of working with Habitat for Humanity or teaching Bible stories to children with AIDS is a moving experience (Dekker, 2007, p. 59). If such experiences were not related back to action and reflection in the normal context of the lives of youth, then they became “mountain top” experiences that have limited lasting educational value (Dekker, 2007, p. 61). In order to make lasting educational connections, youth and young adult ministries must engage in ongoing theological and sociological reflection on the work, while also understanding the

various perspectives of the stakeholders involved (Dekker, 2007). Such discussion and reflection allowed participants to gain an eternal perspective on the nature of mission and ministry, rather than just enjoying a one-time experience of otherness (Dekker, 2007). By understanding the connection between education and service, the teams at Smithsville hoped to give appropriate consideration to service learning as a basis for youth ministry curriculum.

### **Summary of Christian Education Literature**

The literature concerning Christian education as it relates to youth and young adults was extensive and, to some degree, confusing. It resembled a map dotted with possible destinations that have little connection through proximity, climate, or common characteristics. While authors, professors, pastors/youth ministers, and curriculum designers had clearly provided extensive research and writing, there appeared to be little consensus on the research or how to respond to it. This case study was an effort to connect the dots on the map to find some common ground and possible directions in response to the current thinking within Christianity concerning youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

In order to begin connecting the dots, it became necessary to provide a summary of the common threads within the presented literature. The first two threads were points of agreement. The research demonstrated that there was a problem in the way that the church ministered to youth, Mosaics, and Busters. It is also demonstrated that the church needed to change if it hoped to stem the tide of older youth and young adults leaving the church.

The point of disagreement came in the approach that various authors advocated towards addressing the problem. The Student Minister/researcher, with the blessing of

youth leadership, rejected a Back to Basics approach in favor of an Exploratory approach to curriculum change. He sought creative methods that would pique the interest of youth while also forging opportunities for teaching scripture and theological reflection. This suggested less traditional methods of curriculum and instruction based on allowing students to develop creativity through questioning and experience rather than memorizing doctrine. Authors who exemplified this approach demonstrated a willingness to integrate and engage culture in a positive manner rather than waging war against it. The Barna Research Group argued that Mosaics and Busters are not leaving the church because they are ignorant on matters of the Bible or because college life destroyed their faith, as Douglass (2009) argued (Thompson, 2012). Many have walked away because the church has not related to real life, has failed to provide deep engagement with scripture, and came across as hostile to science or anyone who questions traditional practices and doctrines (Kinnaman, 2011). Lottes (2005) argued that youth, Mosaics, and Busters are willing to question and seek answers so the curriculum should reflect that willingness in an effort to help them think creatively about Christian responses to society's problems. Dekker's (2007) work endorsed a nontraditional approach to education of youth and young adults that drew on their desire to serve others while helping them reflect spiritually and theologically on those experiences.

Since the literature has not yet revealed a proven, *one size fits all* solution to the common problems of Christian education and the departure of youth/young adults, the Student Minister/researcher recommended an Exploratory approach to the youth leaders, volunteers, and other stakeholders. He proposed a service-learning curriculum as a methodology for this revitalization, similar to the approach suggested by Dekker (2007). Three common themes within the literature brought this idea together.

The first was the need to create better educational opportunities for youth, especially for those on the verge of graduating from high school and entering the college-phase of young adulthood. This need was a point of universal agreement even between the Back to Basics and Exploratory camps. Once again, both camps agreed on this principle, in spite of their different views on how to create it. Smithsville's leaders chose to create it based on discussion, theological reflection, and inductive learning that will be described more in depth in the following chapter. A second theme in the literature was the importance of meaningful community. Barrick (2006), Bachand (2010), Johnson (1989), and Lottes (2005) all concluded that developing meaningful relationships was key to the needs and spiritual development of youth as they grow into young adults.

The final point of agreement among much of the literature was the importance of learning to serve others in the name of Christ. Strommen (1993), Dekker (2007), and Kinnaman and Lyons (2008) argued that youth, Mosaics, and Busters have exhibited a strong desire to help others and serve the community/world around them. Once again, the difference in the literature came down to the approach. Growinggraduates.com and livecurriculum.com, for example, made serving a component of the curriculum or the subject of a series within the curriculum. At Smithsville, the Student Minister/researcher and Youth Intern recommended that serving others needed to be the *centerpiece* around which Biblical exploration, spiritual expression, and community building revolved. Based on the literature, their belief was that education and community building could revolve around service, creating an integrated approach to learning, relationships, and faith in action.

Questions still remained about the viability of service-learning curriculum,

particularly in regard to educational practice. Since it was experimental for Smithsville, it remained to be seen if such a curriculum could offer a valid, engaging Biblical/spiritual education for youth as they grow into young adults. The following two sections of literature explored the educational viability of this curriculum choice and outlined approaches that helped Smithsville make this educational approach effective.

### **Educational Literature**

While the literature on Christian education was extensive, literature from the discipline of education itself provided insight from a different set of *lenses* into educating people within the church setting. By drawing on the discipline, the Student Minister/researcher discovered methods and techniques that enlightened the church's quest to be more effective in educating youth and young adults.

One educational principle that the Student Minister/researcher learned in 2009 was Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Learning ([http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms\\_taxonomy.htm](http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm)). In 4 years of college and 3 years of seminary training, including classes in Christian education, the Student Minister/researcher had never seen an example of Bloom's taxonomy. His discovery of this educational principle provided a chart that helped the youth leadership to understand more about curriculum and instruction:

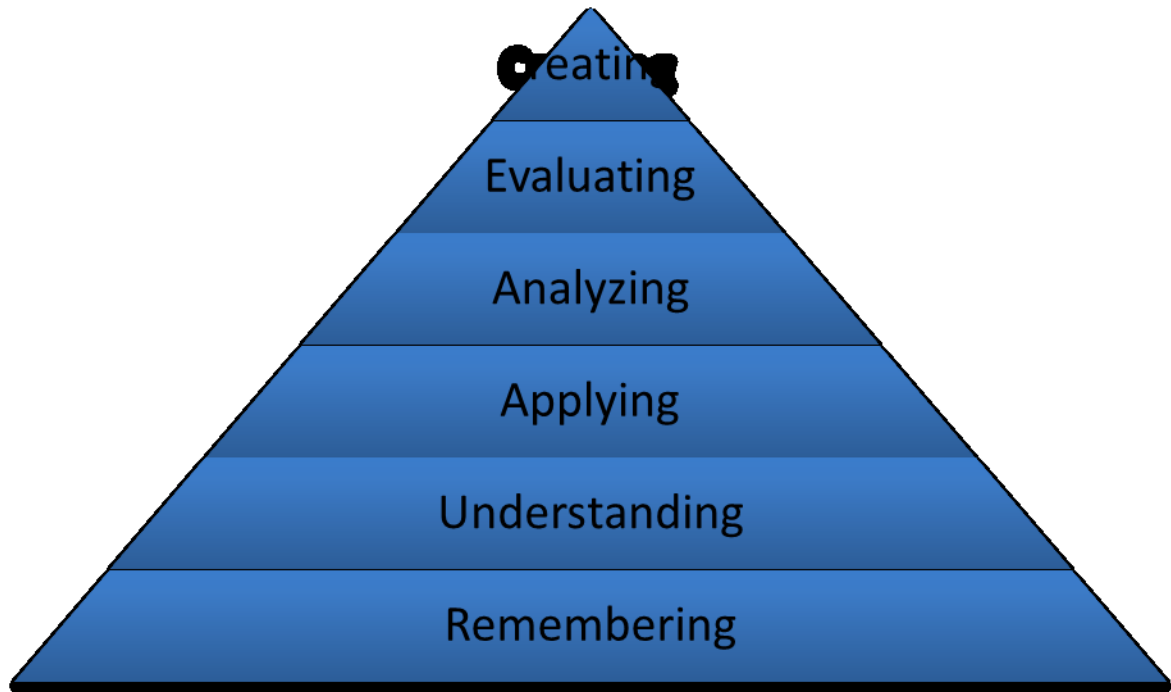


Figure 2. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.  
([http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms\\_taxonomy.htm](http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm))

The Student Minister/researcher discovered that, in Bloom's hierarchy, *Evaluating* and *Creating* constituted higher-level thinking and integration in education. The Student Minister/researcher hoped to move youth beyond memorizing verses and concepts of Christian doctrine. His desire was to begin moving students towards higher-level thinking in their Christian development, just as teachers in school would hope to move them up in their intellectual development. Bloom's revised taxonomy seemed to offer a simple model to help Christian education become more effective in a postmodern world.

The postmodern context is not only an issue for Christianity but is also an issue for education. If postmodernism is significant to present reality, then pedagogy should reflect this significance (Scott, 2008). Christian education must learn to deal with the

“radical relativism” of postmodern thought which limits or discounts universal applications of knowledge and truth (Scott, 2008, pp. 136-137). Douglass (2009) and the designed curriculum of [www.growinggraduates.com](http://www.growinggraduates.com) advocate standardized, uniform pedagogy that openly opposed the decentralized nature of postmodern thought (Scott, 2008). Those examples of curriculum philosophy opposed postmodernism; while McClaren and Campolo (2003), Barna (2005), and Jones (2008) have embraced postmodern approaches to Christian thought. Smithville was faced with the difficulty of deciding to either choose hostility towards postmodernism or embrace it in Christian education. Embracing postmodernism meant selecting a curriculum of exploration and discovery that did not follow the standardized forms of other Christian curricula (Scott, 2008, pp. 138-139).

One of the primary educational theorists that informed Smithville’s youth leaders in their approach to postmodernism was Lawrence Stenhouse, the British curriculum theorist who died in 1982 at the age of 56 (Scott, 2008). The Stenhouse philosophy on curriculum theory was especially adaptable for work in the church, as it focused more on process than specific educational procedures (Smith, 2000, p. 7). The process model of curriculum theory and practice was more comparable to creating a “recipe in a cookery” rather than focusing on specific plans with predetermined outcomes (Smith, 2000, p. 10). While Stenhouse believed in planning and organization, he strongly emphasized that learning comes with experimentation and questions rather than a set of designated answers to be memorized by students (Smith, 2000). “[A curriculum] is a way of translating any educational idea into a hypothesis testable in practice. It invites critical testing rather than acceptance” (Smith, 2000, p. 10). This philosophy of curriculum reflects a position more favorable to postmodern ideology than that of Douglass (2009)



or [www.growinggraduates.com](http://www.growinggraduates.com) (Mize & McMahan, 2009).

Stenhouse's (1983) work and theories related to the exploration of the Youth Ministry Team and Youth Education Ministry Team at Smithsville Church, as well as to the other documented literature relating to youth, Mosaics, and Busters. If youth and young adults sought to ask questions, explore answers, and experience faith in action, then the Stenhouse emphasis on learning as a process appealed to those needs. One popular method of education in the postmodern church is the small-group Bible study, a method that was also being explored by the leadership at Smithsville. Stenhouse outlined a format for teaching through small-group study, including the importance of cooperative interaction on the part of learners (Stenhouse). The teacher/facilitator serves not only as an expert on the subject matter but also as a learner who benefits from the knowledge that students bring to the group (Stenhouse). The work of Stenhouse worked well into the recent findings of Christian authors about the way youth and young adults desire to interact and learn in the postmodern church.

With his emphasis on process, interaction, dialogue, and experience as valid methods within the curriculum, Stenhouse put the focus on an exploratory education (Scott, 2008). According to the reviewed literature, this was more in tune with the education and faith development that Mosaics and Busters are seeking. It is a deeper level of knowledge and interaction than simple memorization and repetition:

The superficialities of the disciplines may be taught by pure instruction, but the capacity to think within the disciplines can only be taught by inquiry. What is characteristic of the advocacy of inquiry-based teaching in this sense is the assertion that one can *think* in a discipline at elementary as well as advanced levels of study. (Scott, 2008, p. 33)

Within this theory, the educators “value for their students the *process* of learning more than the *product*” (Scott, 2008, p. 35). Students of Christian education would be allowed to openly discuss questions, mistakes, and misunderstandings as a method of learning, with less focus on the consequences of those misunderstandings and mistakes (Scott, 2008). In order to help experiential and experimental learning hold a lasting value for educational research, Stenhouse emphasized the need to document and record the work through case study research (Walker, 2002). This would allow stakeholders to establish a record of the creation of new models and methods of the inquiry-based teaching advocated by Stenhouse (Walker, 2002).

In addition to Stenhouse (1983), recent educational research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was also of interest in the education setting at Smithsville. PLCs thrive on the concept that educators act in collaborative teams rather than separate, individual fragments (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 11). The focus on data and results (Eaker et al., 2002) is somewhat in opposition to Stenhouse; however, collaboration before, during, and after implementing curriculum still places significant emphasis on the educational process (Eaker et al., 2002, pp. 11-13). If the question facing Smithsville Church revolved around integrating youth and young adults into lasting relationship with the church, then collaboration between various educational leaders and groups was a logical step.

The typical practice for a multi-staff church such as Smithsville was to allow various ministers or ministry teams to focus their attention on one aspect of Christian education for their particular age group or interest group (Wyckoff & Richter, 1982, p. 151). This fragmentation of church ministries was in contrast to the desired goals of the PLC. Such an approach did not value the collaboration between preschool, children,

youth, and young adult Christian education that would be a necessity in a true PLC environment (Eaker et al., 2002). Since the PLC went against the norm for Smithsville, addressing the obstacles that blocked change were essential to creating a PLC environment within the church (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In order to create a spirit of collaboration among various church ministries, Smithsville needed to undergo a complete cultural change that required the leadership (pastor, staff ministers, and key lay stakeholders) to *buy in* to the PLC concept (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Without leadership initiative, Smithsville and churches similar to it will struggle to build the collaboration advocated by the PLC concept.

Even as Smithsville and the Student Minister/researcher struggled to create collaboration, another text described the change in mentality that Smithsville needed to experience in order to change its approach to collaboration. Carol S. Dweck's (2006) book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* addressed the attitude that educators needed to adopt in order to enact reform. As the ministry teams for youth pondered the direction of education and curriculum, there was a need to decide what constituted a *successful* youth and young adult ministry. Dweck's work emphasized the differences between fixed mindsets and growth mindsets. According to Dweck's description, people with a fixed mindset believed that the church and its ministries are etched in stone, with the education of individuals based on their response to those ministries. The growth mindset believes that the church can change and grow, adapting to what is happening in the world rather than waiting on the world to adapt to fixed-religious practices (Dweck). The growth mindset does not require the abandonment of Christian truth; instead, it would simply learn to adapt to share that truth within the present reality. Dweck's description of these mindsets provided a dynamic picture of Smithsville's options for

adapting and growing into new methods in a postmodern context where youth and young adults are no longer responding to the church.

The final text that requires a brief note was *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States* by Joel Spring (2004). One of the issues facing the minister and ministry teams for youth at Smithsville was the multicultural nature of the program. For Wednesday night Bible studies, a significant number of African-American children attended the church. Since the students were from very different cultural and religious backgrounds, the education ministry faced the challenge of integrating and educating in the midst of diversity. While this was not the primary issue for the present study, it was a factor that cannot be dismissed. Spring's work documented the history of desegregation in the realm of public education and drew conclusions about the successes and failures of that process (pp. 57-58). A review of this history was valuable to the Student Minister/researcher and the church as it tried to deal with similar issues in a much smaller and more specific context.

The educational literature presented to this point offers suggestions to Smithsville as they embark on an exploratory journey of integrating education, community, and Christian action through service learning. One additional section is warranted from the discipline of education, namely an analysis of educational literature on service learning. Combined with Dekker's (2007) work on this topic, service-learning literature could offer valuable information for evaluating the service-learning curriculum at Smithsville.

### **Service-Learning Education**

As noted earlier in the chapter, research on service learning showed that it has been a regular and noteworthy aspect of youth ministry in many churches (Dekker, 2007). Short-term mission trips and local mission projects have been the norm for youth;

however, these projects did not always continue into young adulthood and beyond (Tome, 2008). If Mosaics and Busters have a strong desire to serve just as youth do (Kinnaman, 2011), then it seems logical to emphasize service in both age groups.

While Dekker (2007) advocated an emphasis on theological reflection in conjunction with service learning, she did not present a service-learning curriculum that combined the two aspects. Several education professionals helped to *pick up the slack* for this concept in a way that applied to Smithsville's educational efforts. Analyzing the work of educators who have already researched the impact of the method on students assisted in the assessment of Smithsville's work in youth ministry. The literature also helped to confirm the presupposition that service-learning curriculum can integrate education, community building, and service to others.

Sally Berman (2006) presented a comprehensive guide to service learning that included plans for implementation and assessment of service-learning projects. Berman's workbook-style approach to the subject provided significant information that is applicable to a church educational setting, including two topics near the beginning of the book. Service learning always involves reciprocity where both the learners and those they are attempting to help receive tangible benefits from service-learning projects (Berman). Berman also outlined methodology for aligning service with educational goals. In a point of intersection with Dekker's (2007) work, Berman said, "Students transfer what they have learned . . . by reflecting on the service learning experience" (p. 7). Her work went on to suggest methods of tapping into multiple intelligences, managing projects, and creating opportunities for reflection. Berman set up solid background information about service learning that helped the leadership at Smithsville understand how to apply her educational principles to a Christian education setting.

While Berman (2006) attempted to provide an instructional framework on service learning, other works took a more theoretical tone. Service learning has a growing educational feature, but still has to battle for acceptance as an overall educational philosophy (Flanagan & Christens, 2011). While aspects of it have been used significantly in educational settings in recent years (Weigert, 1998), Smithsville's attempt to make it the centerpiece of the Christian education process for youth was uncommon for any educational setting. In any attempt to begin a new approach to education, theoretical analysis is critical to establishing a workable philosophy and educational plan. Studying various service-learning theories assisted Smithsville with questions about who should participate, how to get started, and how to deal with negative experiences or outright failure in projects (Weigert, 1998).

One positive aspect that educational literature provided for Smithsville was the confirmation of timing. Youth are particularly open to concepts of social responsibility, and developing a strong sense of that can assist their development in emotional, cognitive, and self/identity areas (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). This confirmed the value of Smithsville's approach in both the religious and the life development of students. By helping student development in all aspects, service learning helped them to make a strong connection to a Christ-centered worldview as some researches advocated (Douglass, 2009). These theories on youth development were particularly relevant to Smithsville, as several authors discussed the value of service learning across social, cultural, and racial boundaries (Flanagan, Martinez, Cumsille, & Ngomane, 2011). The youth ministry at Smithsville included a significant number of both African-American and Caucasian students of varying economic and church backgrounds. Understanding how to reach across these lines in order to educate a multi-cultural youth ministry was

critical to the curriculum choices that Smithsville made.

At its core, service-learning curriculum was a product of a progressive educational philosophy (Rocheleau, 2004). If history was to be any guide, Smithsville should have expected significant resistance to this more progressive philosophy just as other educational leaders and institutions have (Rocheleau). Some Christian educators such as Douglass (2009) argued that progressive methods could not provide the proper education in basic Christian principles and doctrine. Others could object that such a curriculum is *slanted* to be anti-traditional Christian education and anti-church (Rocheleau, 2004). A more balanced perspective was that a service-learning curriculum is a vehicle for accomplishing the objectives of Christian education desired by both the church, Mosaics, and Busters (Abel, 2004). It created opportunities to teach the value of community and hands-on service while integrating the teachings of Christ and scripture.

The Student Minister/researcher found that Christian teachings from scripture matched the principles of service learning. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus outlined the importance of helping others by saying, “Whatever you do for the least of these . . . you have done unto me” (NIV). One of the foundational principles of philanthropic service learning is that others need the help of those who are fortunate or can offer it (Sementelli, 2004). The need of human beings to help others when possible existed within scripture and the educational theories around service learning. The importance of community also provided a connection between educational theory and scripture. Acts 2:42-47 points out the importance of communal activity, connection with others, and helping those who are in need (NIV). Communitarian theories of educational service learning emphasized the importance of working together to help others while recognizing the connectedness of all human beings (Codispoti, 2004). “Communitarian theories . . . assume that humans are

social creatures, not self-interested individual egoists” (Codispoti, 2004, p. 102).

Scripture likewise has held up community interests and the putting aside of self-interest as ideals for the Christian life: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phillipians 2:3-4, NIV). While opposition to a progressive curriculum was inevitable, the connections between service-learning educational theory and scripture provided a basis for overcoming such opposition.

Although service learning as an overall curriculum theory is a new phenomenon, it has significant precedence in educational settings. It also has several points of intersection with scriptural teaching. Although the connections seem rather obvious, Smithsville and other Christian institutions should have expected resistance to such a curriculum because it does not fit with traditional pedagogies (Howard, 1998). In spite of the resistance to the nontraditional pedagogy of service learning, the instruction and theoretical basis for service-learning curriculum applied to the Christian education that Smithsville was seeking to provide to youth who are on the verge of becoming young adults. The connections between educational theory and scriptural teachings offered the youth leaders at Smithsville a solid foundation for service-learning curriculum that proved valuable in standing up to criticism and scrutiny of those who opposed change.

### **Limits of the Literature**

While there was extensive literature to assist Smithsville Church in its quest to improve its Christian education ministry, there were also notable limits to the literature. The most noteworthy limitation was the lack of systematic research on the problem. Other than the works by Barna (2005) and Kinnaman and Lyons (2008), statistics were



scattered throughout journals and other writings. Extensive research that tracked the education of students from youth through young adulthood was sparse and left Smithsville with piecemeal information in order to make informed decisions.

There were few readily available examples of churches that have bridged the educational gap between youth, Mosaics, and Busters. A few examples existed in the work of Jones (2008), but such examples were case studies that have yet to fully develop. There was no evidence that these examples can have long-term success.

The Google search mentioned in Chapter 1 contained extensive lists of books, articles, message boards, and Internet sources on the issue of Mosaics and Busters leaving the church. While these works contained statistics about the departure of youth and young adults from traditional congregations, few of them discussed solutions to the problem based on study and evidence. If Smithsville Church hoped to reenergize its youth ministry to have an impact on students as they grow into Mosaics and Busters, it needed to put together a variety of literature in order to decide on reasonable, well-researched courses of action.

## **Summary**

The Student Minister/researcher and the ministry staff at Smithsville Church, along with the Youth Ministry Team and Youth Education Ministry Team, faced a daunting task. These leaders attempted to create a ministry of education for youth that prepared and inspired them to remain connected to church, as they became the next generation of Mosaics and Busters. Creating such a ministry also involved analysis of literature that described the current context of Christianity and ministry. Understanding the social and family currents within the world of youth and young adults was critical to discovering the best practices for educating youth into mature Christian discipleship. By

understanding the way that this particular ministry functioned within the larger organization of the church, youth leaders worked to apply educational theories and practices in their teaching with youth.

The remainder of this study employed case study methodology to take a deep examination of the efforts at Smithville Church to create new and innovative models for educating students. The successes, failures, and obstacles were documented along with related literature to indicate where the right, or wrong, steps were taken in the process of educational reform.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Smithsville Church's purpose for hiring a full-time Student Minister/researcher to work with youth, Mosaics, and Busters was to create long-term, committed disciples of Christ who remained connected to Smithsville. As the Student Minister/researcher analyzed the situation, he came to the conclusion that a change in the approach to youth curriculum and instruction was required to have any hope of achieving that goal. This original intent evolved into an effort to create meaningful community and learning opportunities while serving the needs of the greater community of Smithsville. This effort also shifted the focus towards ongoing discipleship in some type of Christian community rather than specifically targeting the retention of Mosaics and Busters at Smithsville.

The Student Minister/researcher and volunteer leaders had two educational goals. They sought to immerse youth in Christian community as described by Barrick (2006), while providing opportunities for learning and growth through practicing Biblical principles as described by Kinnaman and Lyons (2008). The leadership decided that a service-learning model would provide the best opportunities to build community while helping youth learn about Jesus Christ by serving the needs of the community.

The chapter will begin with details of the educational theory of Lawrence Stenhouse that emerged as a critical foundation for the implementation of service learning. This foundational theory will lay the groundwork for the following sections on participants and rationale for the use of case study methodology. In order to tie these elements together, a section is included to explain the relevance of case study to Christian education and ministry.

The researcher then outlines the procedures and instruments used, including a table describing how the data was organized and collected. This section concludes with details of the methods of data analysis that the Student Minister/researcher employed. The next two sections detail the limits of the study, as well as the possibilities for the study to have broader implications. A summary of the methodology closes out the chapter.

### **Educational Foundation**

One of the strongest educational advocates for both the case study and the emphasis on the educational process was Lawrence Stenhouse. He believed that guiding students through an educational process based on inquiry, collegial activity, and working through difficult issues was more critical than teaching them to memorize the correct answers for the test (Scott, 2008). An experimental effort such as Smithsville's new curriculum fit his view that the educational process is similar to creating a recipe:

It can be criticized on nutritional or gastronomic grounds—does it nourish the students and does it taste good?—and it can be criticized on the grounds of practicality—we can't get hold of six dozen larks' tongues and the grocer can't find any ground unicorn horn! A curriculum, like the recipe for a dish, is first imagined as a possibility, then the subject of experiment. The recipe offered publicly is in a sense a report on the experiment. Similarly, a curriculum should be grounded in practice. It is an attempt to describe the work observed in classrooms that it is adequately communicated to teachers and others. Finally, within limits, a recipe can vary according to taste. So can a curriculum.

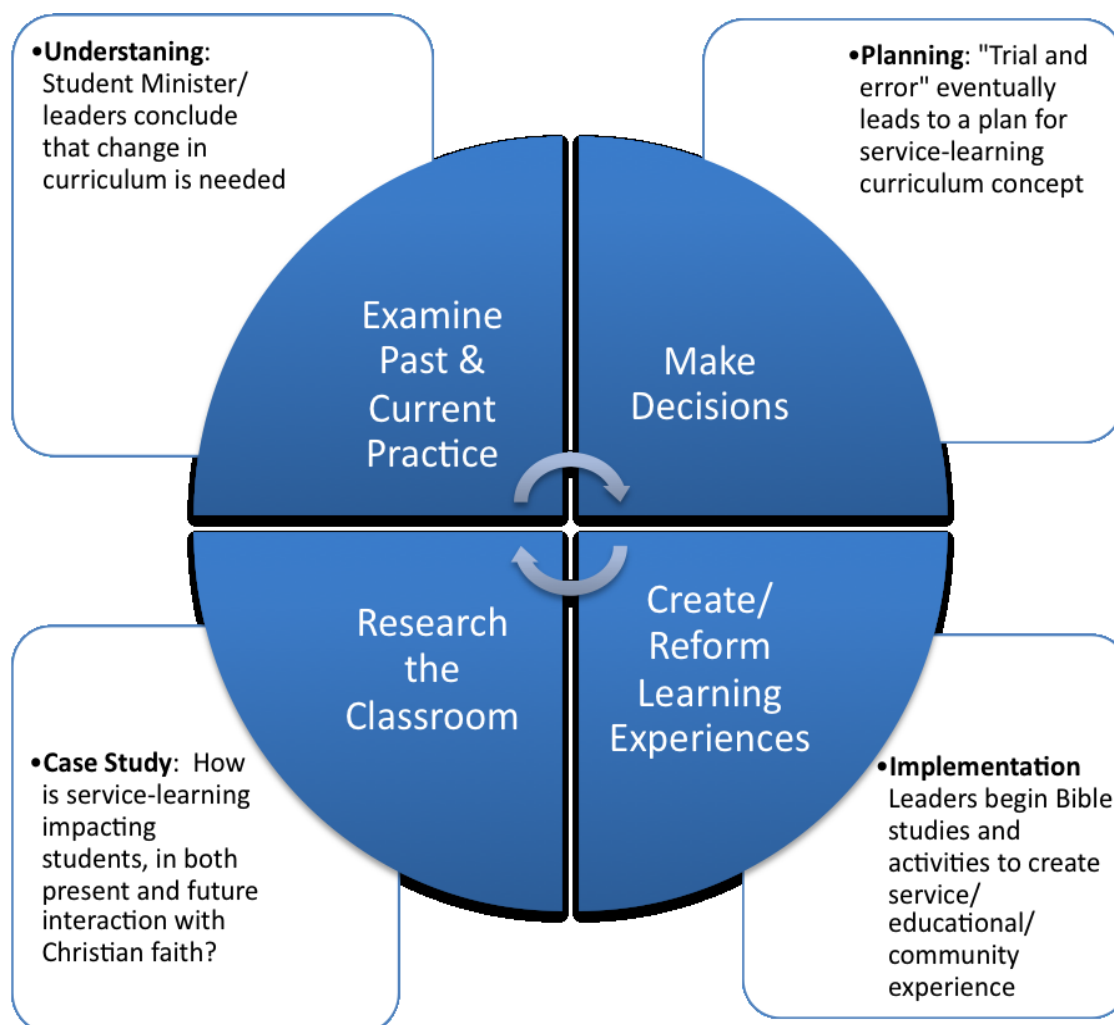
(Smith, 2000, p. 10)

This approach to curriculum aligns with the efforts undertaken at Smithsville. The

Student Minister/researcher and youth leaders came to a *recipe* for curriculum that would put together various elements in the hope that youth would *cook* in those elements to create an ongoing faith relationship with Christ and the church which would continue to be palatable as they grew into the Mosaic and Buster generation.

In retrospect, the youth leaders at Smithsville travelled through a difficult process that took almost 3 years to create an experimental recipe to improve the educational process in the Youth Ministry. By selecting a curriculum that sought to integrate community, Biblical learning, and Christian service activity, the Student Minister/researcher and leadership chose a process for discipleship of youth. The focus of a Process Model of curriculum went beyond memorization of facts about a subject in order to teach students how to become immersed in living out the principles of that subject (McKernan, 2008). “The superficialities of the discipline may be taught by pure instruction, but the capacity to think within the discipline can only be taught by inquiry” (Scott, 2008, p. 38). Service learning takes discipleship in Jesus Christ as a process of discovery through action rather than a set of facts or theological statements to be drilled and mastered.

In leading up to the implementation of the curriculum, the Student Minister/researcher discovered the Process Model for curriculum research and implementation advocated by Stenhouse (Smith, 2000). Quite accidentally, he and the leadership at Smithsville began such a process at the beginning of 2009. After the Student Minister/researcher learned and studied more about the model, he began following the precepts of Stenhouse and other process advocates as he worked with leaders to establish a new curriculum. Below is a visual model for the implementation process.



*Figure 3.* Process Model of Implementation of Service-Learning Curriculum (Terrell, 2011).

After the Student Minister/researcher and leaders decided to use this service-learning process model, they began to choose the core activities and study approaches to be used.

Smithsville implemented the first two steps in the Process Model. The Youth Ministry Team, Education Team, Youth Ministry Intern, and Student Minister/researcher went through a process of trial and error and implementation as illustrated by Terrell (2011). Further investigation of these steps is detailed in Chapter 5. The third component of the process for this curriculum is the evaluation of the educational setting.

The *classroom* in service learning moves well beyond the walls where the subject matter is taught (Berman, 2006). This case study is the third movement in the process and it investigated how the curriculum impacted youth as they moved beyond those walls.

The present case study was an effort to investigate the impact of service-learning curriculum in the education, activities, and relationships of youth, Mosaics, and Busters who were connected to Smithsville Church. The intent was not to draw complete conclusions, but to draw some clues as to how this type of curriculum might impact youth who are moving into young adulthood. The Student Minister/researcher has moved to another position at a different church, which means that he lacks the ability to make adjustments based on the research. The Youth Ministry Intern is still working at Smithsville, so it will be up to him and the remaining adult leaders whether or not to move forward with the fourth aspect of the process. The researcher's intent was to make the findings available at the completion of the study so leaders could make an informed decision to either continue with the curriculum or move in another direction.

### **Rationale for Research Approach**

A church setting by definition is a volunteer organization. The only paid educators involved with youth, Mosaics, and Busters at Smithsville were the Student Minister/researcher and a Youth Ministry Intern. Participation by both teachers and students is voluntary; therefore, it is difficult to use extensive quantitative measures to gauge the success of various aspects of the student ministry (Collins, 2005). Attendance, participation, and efforts to teach and learn cannot be compelled in any way by consequences. High-quality, engaging activity is necessary to attract and motivate teachers/leaders and students (Collins, 2005). Definitive, measurable goals are difficult to define and even more difficult to uniformly enforce across a church landscape where

youth view faith as subjective rather than objective (Bachand, 2010). In other words, there is no definitive test, checklist, catechism, or confirmation materials to determine if the student has mastered the objectives of service-learning curriculum.

While quantitative data might help to define what facts students can recall about the Bible as learned from a catechism or similar curriculum, faith development is a process that is determined by the transformation of attitudes and actions of students involved in a youth ministry (Bachand, 2010). A process-based curriculum approach allowed Smithsville to choose a variety of activities in order to meet the faith development needs of students, as demonstrated in Figure 3. Because this was a nonlinear process that allowed the flexibility to go in a variety of directions, quantitative data would prove very difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, since churches are individual organizations that are not held to universal standards, a quantitative study of Smithsville Church does not necessarily assist in gauging how service-learning designs might work in other settings. Since accurate and applicable quantitative analysis with broader implications is difficult, qualitative case study methodology is an appropriate research method.

By using case study methodology, the researcher creates an opportunity to gauge the overall impact of service-learning education at Smithsville while making assumptions about how the curriculum might work in other churches. Case studies can serve in new or experimental settings “to generate hypotheses regarding the problems and effects to be expected in implementing the curriculum” (Stenhouse, 1983, p. 75). This widens the possible applications of the research. Because the research took place where teaching and learning were voluntary, it was critical to use qualitative methods to understand the attitude of the participants towards the curriculum. Case study methodology allows the researcher to utilize tools such as focus groups and interviews to gauge the qualitative



impact of the curriculum.

In addition to the volunteer nature of church ministry, the curriculum at Smithsville was still in the early stages of implementation and development. Stenhouse (1983) described the role of case study methodology in developing curriculum innovations:

The field is so underdeveloped that it is difficult to hold to social science canon: because there is no integrated and developed theory of curriculum innovation, hypotheses have to be derived from case study in an effort to build theory rather than being deduced from theory and used to test it. (p. 75)

Service learning is not established well enough to make accurate quantitative assessments. Since the work on the curriculum is still in progress, a case study presents the opportunity to assess the progress and indicate how students are responding through the process of change. While a case study is appropriate for a limited circumstance and environment, the results of the study are valuable when considering curriculum change in other settings (Stenhouse, 1983). Youth ministries often provide service experiences to youth, but service learning as a complete curriculum concept is not a widely-used method in churches (Dekker, 2007). The case study approach at Smithsville provides a solid method of initial research to prompt further experimentation and comparative study in other settings (Stenhouse, 1983).

Case study methodology places a premium on the observation of the history and process by which curriculum choices and changes are made (Stenhouse, 1983). The Student Ministry at Smithsville hopes to create an educated commitment to Jesus Christ through a faith community that actively serves the needs of others. Faith development of this type is an ongoing rather than a terminal process, requiring much more than just

checking off a list of memorized facts as educational objectives (Hoge et al., 1982).

Performing a case study enabled the researcher to show the process of faith development of a service-learning curriculum. By studying the process and aim of the curriculum rather than “predetermined terminal behaviors,” case study methodology is in line with the objectives of the Student Minister/researcher and leadership at Smithsville (Scott, 2008, p. 37). Christ-centered action, Biblical learning, and ongoing community are all part of the process of Christian education at Smithsville. Case study methodology allowed the researcher to focus on how the content and process of the curriculum might impact students, both now and in the future (Stenhouse, 1983).

The nature of the case study for Smithsville was primarily interpretive in nature (Merriam, 1998). The study had some tendencies towards an evaluative case study because its partial purpose was to determine how service learning impacted the youth at Smithsville to this point and whether or not service learning was a valid program to continue (Merriam, 1998). However, a full evaluative case study would require a much broader scope and time period in order to present a complete qualitative evaluation (Merriam, 1998). This particular study investigated the initial steps of service learning and attempted to remain within the parameters of that particular context in order to create a *snapshot* of the curriculum (Creswell, 1998). While the study is at the stage of deciding how effective service learning has been, it is still working more in the realm of interpretation than evaluation. Further study at a later time would offer the opportunity for a more comprehensive evaluative case study.

The study also reflects some elements of the action-research model endorsed by Stenhouse (1983), because the researcher acted as the Student Minister during the formation and initial implementation of the curriculum (Merriam, 1998). In spite of this,

the researcher left his role as action-researcher and is now investigating the work from an outside perspective. The Youth Ministry Intern is continuing to serve and fulfill the youth ministry duties at Smithsville; however, he was included as a part of the research participants as detailed in the following section of this chapter. He was not working in conjunction with the researcher throughout the work. While the implementation and the study draw on the Stenhouse tradition of the action-research model (Scott, 2008), the departure of the Student Minister/researcher from the context at Smithsville eliminated that as the primary form of case study.

An extensive chapter on analysis again resembles both the evaluative and action-research style of case study (Merriam, 1998). This is also a defining characteristic of an interpretive case study, and this study on Smithsville's youth and young adult ministries falls into that category for several reasons. The first is that an interpretive case study is appropriate when there is "a lack of theory, or if the existing theory does not adequately explain the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). As stated in Chapter 2, much literature exists that proves youth, Mosaics, and Busters are leaving the church. Very few works present a full explanation of the causes of this and even fewer present possible solutions to the problem. An interpretive case study creates the opportunity to get to the heart of the *why* and *how* of the issue surrounding youth and young adults.

An interpretive case study reaches into the *why* and *how* by offering the researcher the freedom to study an individual case and present theories based on that case (Creswell, 1998). Because of the need to create the opportunity for new theory, there is a major emphasis on analysis (Merriam, 1998). Interpretive case studies, therefore, are also known as *analytical* case studies (Merriam, 1998). Like the learning method in the process model for service-learning curriculum, the model for analysis in this type of case

study is inductive (Creswell, 1998). The final analysis for Smithsville suggests relationships, possible patterns, and frameworks for further inductive analysis of the curriculum. The interpretation of the research builds the framework for improving service learning if the leadership at Smithsville chooses to accept the researcher's analysis.

To justify this interpretive case study, it is critical to understand the role of a case study in light of the Stenhouse (1983) process model. At this point, Smithsville has analyzed its situation and implemented service-learning curriculum for almost a year and a half. The time period is too short for a full evaluation, and some disruption in the curriculum process occurred with the departure of the Student Minister/researcher. The church is essentially in the third segment of the process, where research of the classroom is needed to make a decision about the future of service-learning curriculum. The present case study can serve as the research of the classroom to this point. Extensive data collection and analysis of the case can help Smithsville and its adult leaders of the youth ministry decide how to proceed. It can also assist the Youth Ministry Intern if he decides to continue in his leadership role or it could serve as a decision-making tool if the church decides to hire another full-time Student Minister. If the church believes in the validity of the curriculum, it could consider hiring a staff person who is *on board* with such a concept. The minister can also use the case study as a guideline for the future of activity and curriculum within the youth and young adult ministries if he or she so chooses.

In summary, the breadth, depth, and flexibility of case study methodology is an appropriate choice for this investigation of the service-learning curriculum at Smithsville. Because case studies are prompts towards ongoing research and development of theory (Stenhouse, 1983), this case study should serve as a solid guide to the church in

continuing service learning or to other churches that might consider such a model. The interpretive or analytical case study approach provides the most valid format for the study as it creates the most extensive space for analysis of the curriculum at this early stage (Merriam, 1998). As the third phase of the process model illustrated in Figure 3, this interpretive case study provides qualitative research on the curriculum to this point. Since the researcher is no longer a part of the youth ministry, the application of the research is left to the discretion of the current Youth Ministry Intern and/or future leaders of the ministry.

### **Participants**

The first group of participants in the present study derived from current Mosaics who participated in the Student Ministry before graduating from high school. This Beginners group assisted in advising, suggesting, or even prompting change in the approaches to curriculum but they were not a part of the ministry when major changes occurred. They were in the youth ministry as juniors and seniors in high school during the first 2 years of the Student Minister/researcher's tenure. While they remained in conversation and close contact with younger youth, the Student Minister/researcher, and volunteer leaders, they did not directly influence service-learning implementation. These students were a part of the youth ministry before the leadership changes in 2007 and remained active after the hiring of the full-time Student Minister/researcher. Fifteen Mosaics who met these criteria were invited to a focus group to discuss their experiences and six chose to participate. Their inclusion paints a picture of what the ministry was and how it changed with the new leadership. These Mosaics offer a framework for the context into which service learning was implemented. They also reflect on how the ministry impacted their church involvement and Christian commitment as they moved

into college, prior to the implementation of a service-learning model.

The second group of participants included students who were in the student ministry both prior to and during the implementation of a service-learning curriculum. These Initiators took an active role in the beginning of the new model for the ministry. Four Initiators had at least 3 years of involvement as youth and were instrumental in the process of deciding on a service-learning model while also participating in the initial stages. They took extensive roles in building specific, ongoing community service activities that youth would continue to sustain even after the Initiators graduated. As catalysts for making the necessary changes to implement the new model, these current college-age students offered insight into why they sought a change in the curriculum and how they hoped that change would impact the ministry.

Only four students were solicited to participate in the study as Initiators. The sample size is limited to four because this group fulfilled a unique and special role in the implementation process. They took on extra responsibility and *owned* service-learning projects such as The Grace Project and the youth food pantry in an extraordinary way. Their distinct involvement and experiences provide a glimpse into Smithsville Church as a whole and the youth ministry's role in particular. Because this group was small and the students are now scattered in various locations, a focus group was not possible. They offered their perspective through written short-answer surveys and interviews.

Following the lead of the Initiators is a significant group of *Sustainers* who worked to continue the service-learning model. These current high school juniors and seniors are still active participants in Smithsville's Youth Ministry and some are heavily invested in service-learning activities. These participants help to assess the quality of the model in its infancy and how the model is growing and developing for students who are

immersed in the experience for longer periods of time. All youth who were affiliated with the Student Ministry at Smithsville were invited to participate in one of two focus group gatherings. This included students who were church members and involved in a wide variety of activities in the ministry. It also included students who attended only on Wednesday nights but have no other connections to the church. Of this group, 11 chose to participate in one of the two focus group meetings. All are current juniors or seniors in high school.

The final group of participants is the *Educators*, consisting of adults who participated in the process of studying the curriculum in search of more effective methods. These leaders helped to choose the service-learning concept and remain active with the students in the ministry. These include activity leaders, Bible study teachers, parents, and those who are willing to help in any way possible because they are passionate about youth. All of these participants expressed a desire to help youth grow into Mosaics and Busters who remain connected to a faith community of some type, either a church or some other Christian organization. The researcher conducted a focus group for those who could participate, one interview with two Educators, and short-answer surveys for Educators who could not attend an in-person gathering. A total of 16 educators were invited to participate, with nine choosing to respond.

The table below offers a concise explanation of the research groups, including their age or participation range, numbers of participants, and justification for asking them to participate in the research.

Table 4

*Explanation of Research Groups*

Group	Range	Number	Justification for Inclusion
Beginners (Appendix A)	Graduate by 2009	15 invited, 6 participants	Preservice-learning context; attitude of Mosaics who departed from Smithsville
Initiators (Appendix B)	Graduate between 2011 and 2013	4 invited, 4 participants	Preservice-learning context; positives and negatives of implementation
Sustainers (Appendix C)	Will graduate by 2015	Open invitation, 11 participants	Positives/negatives of implementation; impact on students after implementation
Educators (Appendix D)	Adults from Youth Ministry Team and/or Youth Education Team	16 invited, 9 participants	Adult leadership perspective on ministry and impact of service learning

**Procedures and Instruments**

The initial procedures and instruments involve the documentation for the organization and the research participants. Smithsville Church received an Organizational Authorization document granting the Student Minister/researcher permission to perform a case study at Smithsville (Appendix E). All participants signed Participant Authorization documents prior to their participation in the research (Appendix F). All participants received a debriefing (Appendix G) following their research participation.

The investigative procedures followed a process model described in this table:



Table 5

*Process Model of Examining Service-Learning Curriculum at Smithsville*

Research Question	Participants	Methodology	Explored Themes
1. How do select members of Smithsville Church characterize the conditions leading to the need for a service-learning curriculum?	Beginners and Educators	Focus Group	Educational focus prior to service learning; impact of ministry on student attitudes towards church
2. How did student leaders of Smithsville Church react to implementation of service-learning curriculum?	Initiators and Sustainers	Interviews and Short-Answer Surveys	Factors that influenced students to get involved; Student view of the difficulties and/or possibilities created by the curriculum
3. How has service learning impacted youth of Smithsville Church who are currently participating in the service-learning curriculum?	Sustainers	Focus Groups	Impact of service learning on sense of community, Biblical education and desire of youth to serve; Glimpse of long-term effects on youth
4. How do the adult leaders of youth of Smithsville Church believe that service learning is impacting the youth ministry?	Sustainers and Educators	Focus Group, Surveys, and Interviews	How service learning has improved the curriculum; how to make service learning better; possibility that it might have a long-term impact on youth, Mosaics, and Busters

To conduct the case study, the researcher employed this Process Model for understanding service learning within the youth ministry at Smithsville Church. This allowed for an examination of the process that led up to the implementation of a service-learning curriculum as well as comprehension of the impact of the curriculum to this

point. Studying the process can potentially indicate how such implementation might work in other religious settings, while providing ideas for how leaders or stakeholders could be more effective through the implementation process.

Smithsville's effort to integrate community, Biblical education, and service was an inductive approach to Christian education (McKernan, 2008). Students are drawn into the process of building community through missional-service activities coupled with Biblical studies that coincide with those activities. It is an ongoing rather than linear process. This educational process encourages students to *swim* in a pool of various activities and draw conclusions based on a combination of hands-on experiences in the real world outside of church. These activities are coordinated with teaching about why the Bible advocates that disciples of Christ should immerse themselves in such actions. A case study based on a process model of evaluation provides the flexibility to observe and interpret the reactions of students in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational process.

In order to begin the case study process, the researcher used a combination of focus groups, interviews, and short-answer surveys to determine the effectiveness of the service-learning model among the youth at Smithsville. These steps involved two focus groups, one with the Beginners and the other with Educators. These two groups discussed the educational process at Smithsville prior to 2009 when educational reforms began in earnest. Since a significant number of these young adults and adult leaders still lived in the area, focus group research was feasible. Although Educators met last in the sequence, their experience in the youth ministry prior to 2007 allowed them to offer insight on the preservice-learning period. This information is closely tied to the thoughts of the Beginners. The purpose of these focus groups was to understand whether or not

educational reform was truly warranted.

In addition to these focus groups, the researcher engaged in direct interviews and short-answer surveys with the Initiators. Because some of these students moved out of the area for college or work, phone interviews and surveys worked more effectively than trying to gather an entire focus group. These interviews and surveys examined both the obstacles and catapults that youth and leaders encountered with the initial service-learning effort. These methods were also intended to encourage dialogue about whether or not service learning improved education in the youth ministry. For the Initiators, they were asked if the projects encouraged or discouraged them from being involved in Christian faith during their early years in college.

A third step involved the Sustainers. This involved two focus groups, both of which asked youth how they felt about the service-learning model and its impact on their lives as well as the youth ministry. It should be noted that one Initiator was still involved in the student ministry and participated in the Sustainers group as well. Similar to the Initiators, the Sustainers were asked if they felt more or less likely to be involved in church through their college years due to the service-learning curriculum. Their responses assisted in determining the short-term impact and long-term possibilities created by Smithsville's new approach to youth curriculum.

These youth who were still a part of the ministry at Smithsville were also asked to discuss whether or not the new curriculum improved their sense of community and their understanding of how to live out Biblical knowledge in life. In addition, they were requested to share ideas about improving the curriculum to have a greater impact on youth, both now and in the future. They also characterized their sense of ongoing commitment to Christian faith into their years as Mosaics and Busters. This helped the

researcher to understand how the service-learning model might encourage continued involvement in Christianity as youth grow into Mosaics and Busters.

The final step connected back to the first three research groups. Educators offered the unique perspective of adult leaders who witnessed the student ministry at Smithsville before, during, and after implementation of service learning. They met in a focus group to share this information. Since several willing participants could not attend the focus group, an interview and short-answer survey were offered. The questions followed the same protocol found in Appendix D.

As a part of their discussion, this group described their feelings as leaders about the current curriculum and how it could be expanded and improved. They also shared their experiences of witnessing changes in student actions or attitudes. An important component of the case study involved the use of volunteer teachers and leaders for such an extensive curriculum project. With this in mind, the researcher asked the Educators how training, education, and planning for teachers/leaders could improve, while understanding the time limits of volunteers. This group offered their thoughts on the relationship of service learning to the rest of the ministries and activities at Smithsville Church. This allowed the researcher to understand how the youth ministry does or does not relate to the overall ministry at Smithsville. This research produced conclusions about how Mosaics and Busters view the connection between their faith activity as children or younger youth and their lives as older youth and young adults. If the youth ministry provides solid learning experiences that do not carry over to adult activities in the church, it is reasonable to assume that Mosaics and Busters will seek other avenues for their faith development or depart altogether from the church.

The combination of focus groups, surveys, and interviews provided the

instruments for a qualitative case study of the service-learning curriculum at Smithsville Church. Since the curriculum evolved into a process model, a process model for evaluation provided the basis for the alignment of the instruments and the procedures for using them. This process helped the researcher better understand what has been effective in service learning, and how it is impacting the quality of Christian education among the current youth at Smithsville. Since the researcher also acted as the Student Minister during the implementation, critical data was provided related to improving and refining the curriculum for future use, should the researcher choose to use it in another ministry setting. This data should also prove helpful if new leadership at Smithsville decides to continue service learning.

One of the goals of service learning is to discover if the curriculum can help to create points of intersection between theology, community, and Christian practice (Erwin, 2006). In order to assess whether or not this is the case at Smithsville, the researcher employed two primary investigation/analysis techniques.

The first of these is the Constant Comparative method, where various aspects of the data are compared to one another (Merriam, 1998). “The basic strategy of the method is to do just what its name implies—constantly compare” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). The researcher analyzed the points of connection, change, and development within the youth ministry across the four categories of participants. For example, the attitude of the focus group of Beginners towards church showed noteworthy contrast to the attitude of the Sustainers. Beginners did not experience service learning in their youth years, while the Sustainers are continuing to experience it. Such comparisons clarified the impact that service learning may have or is having on youth.

The second method is Narrative Analysis. In this technique, the stories that are

shared by the participants are analyzed to find dominant themes or particular points of connection between stories (Merriam, 1998). Since the data collection involved interviews, conversations, and written surveys, stories of the participants naturally developed as part of the collection process. Analyzing these narratives provided clues about the nature of how the development of the service-learning curriculum has impacted students through all stages. It also provided the ability to hypothesize about the possibility that such themes reach beyond Smithsville to other churches and ministries. By studying the shared narratives of the participants, the researcher theorized about how other demographics might respond in similar circumstances.

Prior to conducting the research, the Student Minister/researcher reviewed the research questions and revised them to fit the investigation/analysis methods. The intent was to create questions that would facilitate points of comparison between the various research groups. For example, points of agreement between Beginners, Initiators, and Sustainers illustrated common opinions and suggested trends in the student ministry. These points of comparison were analyzed based on similarities and differences, while taking into account the age group, role, and purpose of participants in each category. Although the questions varied to some degree for each group, the researcher attempted to word them in a way that would draw out comparisons between the responses.

The research questions were also intended to facilitate the narrative of each group. The intent behind this was to give participants the chance to share their story of involvement in the student ministry from their unique perspective. Since the questions helped to draw out these narratives, they permitted the Student Minister/researcher to find similarities and trends within the content. While not all questions were exactly the same for each group, they were put in a similar sequence and aligned with the themes of

building community, Biblical/theological knowledge, and opportunities to serve. By organizing the questions in this way, the Student Minister/researcher was able to find some of the ways the curriculum strengthened or weakened those three themes within the ministry.

After revising the research questions and presenting them to the research groups, the Student Minister/researcher summarized notes and recordings. This helped to accomplish three things. The first involved the Constant Comparison method. The summaries allowed for a comparison to the literature. Chapters 4 and 5 both contain parallels between the literature and the responses of the participants. The second accomplishment was that it demonstrated points of comparison between the responses of various research groups. By studying notes, written responses, and recordings of interview/focus groups, the researcher was able to find common ground and points of differentiation. Chapter 4 will demonstrate a number of these points, while Chapter 5 will elaborate on what the similarities and differences in comparison might mean.

The final accomplishment became clear through the use of the Narrative Analysis method. By noting similarities in experiences and responses of participants, the Student Minister/researcher was able to highlight common themes between two or more groups on certain research questions. In the same way, differences or dissent among the research groups were highlighted, particularly points of differentiation between participants within the same group. By finding similar themes among the responses of the research narratives, the Student Minister/researcher was able to identify the positive areas of the curriculum upon which the youth leaders could capitalize and also those that needed improvement. Chapter 5 also contains an extensive narrative on the context of service learning at Smithsville. Narrative investigation and research helped to explain how the

context might have influenced the narratives of the participants. This analysis also allowed the researcher to identify the research questions and responses that were most relevant based on the strength of the responses from the participants as well as points of similarity.

The reporting of the research results follows the chronological order of the collection process: Beginners, Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators. As described above, the points of comparison, similarities/differences, and common themes from the narratives are highlighted throughout the report. At the end of each research group section, a summary of the research is provided. Each summary demonstrates how the researcher employed the two techniques in collecting, coding, and reporting the data. In addition to Chapter 4, Constant Comparative analysis and Narrative analysis formed threads that run through the analysis of the research that is contained in Chapter 5. When appropriate and necessary, the researcher pointed out these threads in the chapter.

### **Significance of the Case Study**

At the beginning of his educational studies, the Student Minister/researcher intended to find bridges between educational theory and Christian education. The justification of the methodology for Christian education is critical for understanding the bridges that link educational theory and practice to the Christian context. This warrants a brief explanation of how the present case study moves forward towards such a goal.

Christian education practice has long been rooted in traditions that started with the advent of Sunday school in the late 18th century (Pazmino, 2008). The intention of Sunday school was to provide education for children who worked in industry 6 days a week and could not attend school (Pazmino, 2008). Sunday school is still a major educational staple for the majority of Christian churches (Easum, 1995). This long-



standing method of Christian education is based in that tradition. Sunday school and other Christian practices have little basis in research and serve to perpetuate tradition rather than meet educational goals (Foreman, Prosser, & Woody, 2004).

While some organizations such as the Barna Group continue to research trends in Christianity and Christian education, there are very limited examples of change in Christian education. Many myths exist about the vitality of traditional methods and churches tend to hold on to them with little investigation into their effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Foreman et al., 2004). While broad research on the problems of ministering to youth and young adults, there seem to be few specific examples of effective methods of educating and retaining them in the church. The present case study investigated the work of a specific church that attempted to make changes in order to have a long-term impact on youth, in and beyond their teen years. This study has the potential to create a model for ministry that can help Smithsville and similar churches become more effective in educating youth and having a long-term impact on their commitment to Christ and the church.

### **Limitations**

Case study methodology is not intended to produce graphs and charts that quantify data (McKernan, 2008). Because the present Christian environment places increasing emphasis on numbers and quantity rather than quality (Barna, 2005), a case study might not produce a wide audience within Christian circles. While church youth ministries often are involved in service activities, the concept of an overall service-learning curriculum is not widespread. Likewise, the concept is not widespread in secular educational climates (Flanagan & Christens, 2011). Since the use of service-learning curriculum is not broad, the case study may have limited impact for current

curriculum practices of churches and organizations. At the same time, service learning is becoming a more common practice in upper high school and college settings (Harkavy & Benson, 1998). While the study might provide a link between the church and the successes of service learning in these areas, it will be difficult to gauge the possible impact on older youth, Mosaics, and Busters in a church setting. Until service-learning curriculum gains a wider audience, the impact of this particular study will provide more possibilities than hard answers.

With the increased emphasis of churches on numerical growth and impact (DeVries, 1994), qualitative study does not constitute a popular method of research. The scope of the study was limited to only a small number of students and revolved around the impact of the curriculum on those students. It did not address how the curriculum might draw larger numbers of students into a youth ministry or a church. Because churches often desire numerical growth among youth, the study might only appeal to churches that emphasize the quality of a ministry over the quantity of the students involved (Jones, 2008).

One of the major critiques of action research and the *teacher as researcher* philosophy is that it places the researcher too close to the study to maintain an objective approach (Scott, 2008). Because the researcher also served as the Student Minister before and during the implementation of the curriculum, there is a question about the objectivity of the research. While Stenhouse (1983) would refute this idea on several levels, he acknowledged that it is critical for the teacher to “own the knowledge which they developed as a result of the process of action research” (Scott, 2008, p. 40). It is critical for the researcher to move from advocacy of the service-learning curriculum to honest assessment of the impact on students if the case study is to have any lasting value.

Action-research requires honest, qualitative assessment, not confirmation, of the work of the educator (Stenhouse, 1983). One positive aspect is that the researcher is no longer serving as the Student Minister/researcher, which may create enough separation to facilitate greater objectivity in the study.

### **Delimitations**

While there are numerous aspects and a wide range of ages involved in the Student Ministry at Smithsville, the researcher focused the study on upper high school and college-age young adults. Because the research focused on the impact of service learning, the researcher worked with students who were close to the ministry or directly connected to it during implementation. The study of the service-learning curriculum was conducted as a potential predictor of a possible solution to the departure of youth, Mosaics, and Busters from the church. *Hard* quantitative evidence to prove or disprove the effectiveness of the curriculum was not a part of the study.

### **Summary**

By understanding the story of the process of curriculum development at Smithsville, the researcher began to put together a method of inquiry to understand the quality of the curriculum reforms in the youth ministry. The implementation of a service-learning curriculum constituted a major change in the educational approach of the ministry. By investigating the quality of education before, during, and after this implementation, the researcher demonstrated how the process of the new curriculum might possibly impact youth. The study also gives possible indicators about how the curriculum impacts student behavior and involvement in Christian communities when they become Mosaics and Busters.

The focus of the study was on the quality of the education rather than the quantity

of students involved. While this may seem misguided to some, service learning was chosen to create a stronger sense of discipleship and community among the youth in their spiritual development. The hope is that this case will provide a model for quality Christian education among youth that will have a positive impact on their involvement in the Christian life as they become young adults.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

In order to obtain results from Beginners, Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators, the researcher used a combination of interviews, short-answer surveys, and focus groups. The information obtained was subjective in nature in an effort to gauge the real and perceived impacts that service learning both could and did have on students at Smithsville Church. All names in this chapter are pseudonyms. For Beginners, the intent was to discover more about their experiences in the Student Ministry prior to service-learning implementation and how effective (or ineffective) those experiences were as they became young adults. Research questions also led to a discussion of how those experiences might have changed in a service-learning environment.

For Initiators, the research focused on their reasons for wanting to start the process of service learning at Smithsville and their thoughts on how that implementation impacted their view of church and Christian faith. For Sustainers, the questions centered on the positives and negatives of service learning, and how they felt the curriculum would impact their relationship to Christ and the church in the future. For the final group, the Educators, research generates from an adult perspective. Their responses tell how they view the curriculum's impact on the Student Ministry, and why service learning should continue within the ministry.

To make the explanation of the results more legible, the research follows the order of the data collection with the four groups of participants outlined in Chapter 3. This includes one section each for qualitative results from Beginners, Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators. These sections focus on the responses of each group to the research while highlighting points of connection that each group made to the themes of community,

Biblical knowledge, and service. As pointed out in the Introduction and Literature Review, these three themes are vitally important to the spiritual experience of youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

In addition to three themes, the chapter indicates the results that fall into the various aspects of case study investigation/analysis described in Chapter 3. Some of the questions and results fit into the Constant Comparative method of investigation, while others fit into the category of Narrative investigation. A summary follows the description of results for each group of participants. These summaries indicate the results that correspond to either Constant Comparative or Narrative analysis techniques. The research combined to present a predominantly evaluative case study. In closing out the description of research results, the researcher summarizes common threads that run between the four groups as well as points of differentiation. This description will point out how these commonalities or differences relate to the advent of the service-learning curriculum at Smithsville.

The Student Minister in this study also served as the researcher. To simplify the issue for the reader and keep this dual role in mind, the study will move to *first person* when referring to the researcher. I will do this to maintain the clarity of my involvement in the curriculum implementation, research, and the case study as a whole.

### **Coding of Results**

The coding of the results was a challenging process. Because I had a close relationship with most of the people involved in the research, the focus groups and interviews took on a conversational tone, meaning that participants were very comfortable in taking the discussions in a variety of directions. In spite of this variety in direction, the participants generally followed the path and order of the research questions.

However, this also created difficulty in organizing and coding the results.

The research results are organized according to each group, in the order of the data collection procedures. In other words, Beginners were the first collection, followed by Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators. This follows the chronology of the curriculum implementation and the priority for each group in relation to the curriculum. For example, the Beginners help to set the context for the implementation, but Initiators actually participated; Sustainers and Educators are currently in the midst of working in the curriculum at Smithsville. For this reason, the order of the data presented will follow the four groups and the research questions. This should make the results more readable, while making it easier to understand the progression into a service-learning curriculum.

At the same time, those research questions were formed out of the two primary types of data collection/coding that were discussed in Chapter 3. Constant Comparative and Narrative methods of investigation both factor into the collection and understanding of the results. With this in mind, these methods will be mentioned in the descriptions of the results as needed to remind the reader of their use. I will also organize the summary sections for each research group according to the two methods. This will allow me to demonstrate points of connection, similarities in stories, and recurring themes of the research.

### **Beginners**

As described in Chapter 3, the Beginners at Smithsville Church were current college-age Mosaics who were involved in the Student Ministry before the advent of the service-learning curriculum. All of these students graduated by the spring of 2009. Fourteen former students were invited to participate in a focus group on Sunday, August 12, 2012, with six choosing to participate. This included four males: William, Jerry,

Kenny, and Bob; and two females, Naomi and Sidra. Their ages ranged from 20-23. The eight that did not participate received a short-answer survey with the same questions that were presented to the focus group. None were returned. I will, therefore, focus on the responses of those who attended the focus group. All research questions are contained in Appendix A of this study.

I found this to be an extremely candid and loquacious group. While all of the research questions were posed to the group, I felt it best to allow the discussion to move in a variety of directions. Because the Beginners were comfortable sharing their thoughts on a variety of topics, the presentation of the research will begin with their points of discussion. It will then move to address the most critical questions from Appendix A.

Of the six participants, two of the males and two of the females were *lifers* at Smithsville. They had been in the church from a very young age and their parents were involved in the ministries of the church. All four families continue to be involved in the church. One male participant came into the student ministry in high school, although he had participated in church for his entire life outside of Smithsville. His parents were engaged in the ministries at Smithsville. The final male participant began coming to church during his middle school years, with absolutely no background or family history of being involved in the church.

This group was fairly familiar with one another, although only two of them maintained any close contact after high school. Two went to the same college but were not in the same class or major. In spite of their lack of close contact, they were extremely candid and open about their thoughts on Student Ministry, Christianity, and church in general. I worked with all of these students in the ministry for a limited period of time but maintain a solid rapport with them.



Table 6

*Demographic Information for Beginners*

Pseudonym	Age/Gender	Background	Campus Activity	Church Involvement
William	21, Male	Began in Middle School	Attends conservative Christian university; campus Bible study	Staff member at another local church
Jerry	23, Male	Lifer	None	Occasional attendance at Smithsville Church
Kenny	20, Male	Lifer	Two on-campus Bible studies per week	Does not attend a local church
Bob	21, Male	Began in High School	Occasional Bible study on campus	Does not attend a local church
Naomi	20, Female	Lifer	Two on-campus Bible studies (weekly and bi-weekly)	Does not attend a local church
Sidra	22, Female	Lifer	On-campus Bible study and prayer group	Occasional church attendance

One common thread that emerged from the beginning was that none were presently involved in a traditional church on a voluntary basis. The one young man, William, who has no family support for his church involvement, is working as a staff person in the church. He also attends a Christian college that requires him to be involved in church. In spite of this, he shared that he probably would not go to church regularly if he were not required to go by his circumstances.

While none attended traditional church, five of the six were involved in small-group Bible studies and on-campus ministries. They expressed that they felt a much

greater sense of community in these smaller groups of their peers than they did sitting in a traditional Sunday school class or worship service (Focus group, August 12, 2012). All agreed that choosing to participate in these studies with peers who invited them was a more meaningful experience than attending church activities because “that’s what you’re supposed to do.” They enjoyed the community that they could build without time restrictions and with the openness that existed in these small group studies. Questions, comments, and discussion were the rule rather than the exception in these small groups.

In using the narrative analysis technique, two similar themes emerged very early in the focus group. All six expressed frustration that Smithsville did not foster a similar atmosphere of transparency that more closely resembled their experiences in college. They felt that they learned more about the Bible and Christian faith through peer-led groups because they felt free to be themselves and ask questions that they would “never even bring up at church” (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). One student, Naomi, elaborated on a discussion that I was having with her and another student while she was still a part of Smithsville’s ministry. I was talking with them about their thoughts on the existence of hell, the nature of it, and whether or not it was a real and tangible place. During the discussion, a Sunday school teacher came in the door and she immediately quit talking as soon as she saw him. She shared that she knew the teacher would not hear her questions and concerns; she felt that he would judge her for her ideas. She asked, “How can we learn anything in church if we’re scared to ask?”

In comparing their responses to the literature, the assertions from this particular group of Mosaics confirm Barrick’s (2006) conclusion that young adults are seeking genuine community as their avenue for education and worship. Learning takes place in an environment where students are free to challenge traditional assumptions and be

challenged in their own thinking (Stenhouse, 1983), without fear of judgment from figures of authority (Gardner, 1982). Five of the six students expressed a sense of relaxation and freedom about being in environments where they felt Christianity was their choice rather than a forced activity. The one exception was William, who chose to be a part of the church as a high school student but was forced to engage due to the Christian connection of his university. He shared that he never experienced any inhibitions in church because it was always his choice to attend and he carried no expectations or inhibitions about life in the church.

Another similarity in comparison to the literature emerged regarding their perspective on future involvement in church. One point where the group went against the grain of the literature was their pledge to be involved in the traditional church after marriage and family. On this point, it is important to keep in mind that four of the six participants are lifers with very similar narratives. Five of the six grew up in church for their entire life. Authors such as Barna (2005), Kinnaman and Lyons (2008), and Black (2008) pointed out that youth are not returning to the church later in life as Christian leaders once believed that *stray* young adults would. In spite of this trend, five of the six participants stressed the importance of being involved in the church in the future, after marriage and family. As Sidra stated, “I was going to be in that pew with my family every Sunday, no matter what. And I think it’s important for my kids to be there” (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). This is somewhat in contrast to the argument of Douglass (2009) that students fail to comprehend the importance of an ongoing commitment to church after they leave high school. William added that he could not speak to the issue in the same way because his family did not go to church; however, he is motivated to offer the support that he did not have as a child in order to get his family into church.

While all of the participants believed that they would return to the traditional church later in life, their reasons stemmed from filial obligation rather than a desire to be involved in the church itself. All stated that they would do this because it was simply the right thing to do, particularly for their families, rather than any desire to seek spiritual growth or Christ-centered activity. A common theme in their narrative was that all stated that they are frustrated with Smithsville Church's inability to offer engaging activity beyond sitting in a Sunday school room or in the pews on Sunday mornings. This finding confirms the assertions of Black (2008) and Dudley and Wisbey (2000) that students are frustrated with the lack of Christ-centered action in the church, such as working for social justice through helping the poor.

The Beginners described this lack of engagement in several different ways based on their experiences in Smithsville's student ministry. While they enjoyed the fun and fellowship of ski trips, pool parties, and weekly gatherings, they did not describe the youth ministry as a major factor in their daily lives or decision making (Appendix A, questions 4 and 5). While the activities of the group helped to build a sense of community, their participation in Bible study was more compulsory than voluntary. Although William attended of his own free will, he was more interested in making friends than learning the Bible or helping others.

Another common characteristic to their narratives of their time in youth ministry was a lack of involvement in any activity that required them to put others above themselves or help others in any significant way. While they lauded the fun and fellowship of the ministry, they did not see a lot of long-term value in it. They also stated that the Student Ministry was its own separate *church* that had little or nothing to do with the greater congregation at Smithsville. This separation caused them to view the Student

Ministry as the place where church was *fun*, while the greater church was a place to sit and do nothing (Focus Group, August 12, 2012).

The focus group returned to the core of research with the inquiry, “If you could change something about your youth ministry experience, what would it be?” (Appendix A). Two points about this question immediately came up. Without exception, the first was that the students wished a single Student Minister had been in place for their entire time of middle school and high school. Five different ministers were in charge during their time, with none lasting longer than 2 years. The Beginners expressed that it was frustrating to have to learn a new person, new system, and new approach so many times during their middle and high school years. They felt that the stability of ongoing leadership would have helped them to learn more and have a greater understanding of how to live a Christ-centered life. As one student, Jerry, expressed it, “We couldn’t really figure out who Jesus was because we got a new opinion on it every other year” (Focus Group, August 12, 2012).

The second was that they did not have enough opportunities to get involved in Christ-centered service through the Student Ministry or the church. Several expressed that they did service learning through school programs such as AmeriCorps but did not have regular engagement in service through the church. All felt that they would know more about Jesus if they had more awareness of how to feed the hungry, address the problem of homelessness, work with Habitat for Humanity, or help with the church food pantry. Their time in Smithsville’s Student Ministry involved very little service activity. I began to teach them about those activities in their final 2 years of high school, but it was not an ongoing focus for most of their time. Since most of these Mosaics were juniors in high school when my tenure began, I had very little time with them to implement any

serious emphasis on serving others.

The group then moved on to the issue of how the Student Ministry prepared them for the spiritual challenges of life after high school. Jerry summed up the group's response to this: "It didn't, and that's the problem" (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). They agreed that this was as much their fault as much as it was the church's fault. "People tried to get us to learn stuff, but a lot of the time we just didn't care enough," Bob shared (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). He added that youth would be more interested if the teaching had involved more activity rather than just sitting and reading the Bible. The shared narrative of the group was a lack of preparation for their future as Mosaics and Busters.

This shared narrative continued as all of the students expressed frustration that their time in the student ministry was very sheltered and the world of college and young adulthood was the exact opposite. "You're just kind of in your little cocoon, and you get out of it and find out that not everyone thinks the way you do," Sidra shared (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). They also felt that a small, rural community like Smithsville sheltered them from reality and the church simply followed that dynamic. With one exception, all were shocked at how diverse the world was when they moved outside of the *cocoon* that the church and community had provided. As stated by Adams (2011), they hoped for preaching and teaching that would take on hard questions about diversity, homosexuality, gender, race, and social justice (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). Five of the six found these discussions much more relevant in their social or Bible study groups in college than they ever did during their time in Student Ministry.

The only contrast to this perspective came from William. He attended a high school of 3,000 students, outside of Smithsville. As stated, he then went to a

conservative Christian college. His college actually had *less* diversity than his high school, and Smithsville was much more open-minded in their approach to Christianity than the college (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). His home experience was also much less sheltered and taught him to appreciate the ability to think and make decisions on his own. He added, “It’s kind of like my school is trying to stuff me back into the cocoon when I’ve been out of it for a really long time.” All agreed that the student ministry was a positive influence on their lives as teenagers but was extremely limited in its impact on their ability to handle the uncertainty of the world beyond high school.

To wrap up the discussion, I asked the group how the student ministry could change in order to help youth develop strong spirituality, community, and service. They looked at me with rather puzzled expressions, so I rephrased the question: “If the Student Ministry, as it was, did not work for you, then what would?”

The first point of agreement by all students was a greater sense of ongoing community beyond the Student Ministry. While they were in high school, all of the students received their sense of community from the ministry itself but did not feel a strong connection to the entire church. When they returned to church to visit, they felt isolated and disconnected. Jerry summed up this issue:

We come in and we sit down and we just do whatever we can to get to the end of the sermon. The preaching’s not about us, the music’s not about us. It doesn’t have anything to do with my life or anything I’m doing. I put up with that when I was a kid and I had my friends in youth, but I’m not a kid anymore and I don’t have to sit through that. If I told them (church members) that I was out drinking beer half the night, they’d probably kick me out. It doesn’t matter that I don’t think there’s anything wrong with drinking and having a good time. They just

don't want to hear anything that tells them I'm not that nice little kid who used to go to church here. (Focus Group, August 12, 2012)

The other participants agreed with Jerry that they tolerated church as long as they were involved in Student Ministry. With that aspect removed, they failed to see the relevance of attending a traditional church. Outside of family and a few adults that had assisted in the Student Ministry, they felt no strong sense of ongoing community.

The second point of agreement was the need to make connections between belief in Jesus Christ, scripture, and direct action. As Kenny stated, "I'd rather go out and do something to learn about Jesus instead of just sitting in a pew" (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). All participants agreed that they were not challenged intellectually or spiritually as youth and they saw no evidence that Smithsville would challenge them as adults.

While four of the six participated in some kind of long-distance, short-term mission trip during their time, they saw no correlation between their mission work and the ongoing activity of the Student Ministry/church. Their feeling was that the Student Ministry and the church were very satisfied within a *comfort zone* that had very little to do with the realities of the world. The church was not preparing youth for the world outside of Smithsville because the church had no awareness of the world outside of Smithsville. Since there was very little interest in moving to action in the real world, teaching youth how to relate the Jesus of scripture to the world was not a priority.

This discussion on the lack of relational activity prompted me to ask the group how they might react to a service-learning model if it was in place when they entered the student ministry. After hearing a brief description of the service-learning curriculum that Smithsville had implemented in 2011, five of the six responded that they would have preferred it to the model that they experienced. Kenny stated, "I would have done just



about anything if it didn't involve listening to another speech!" The two girls said that service was a big part of college life, even in the world of fraternities and sororities. They both agreed that a greater emphasis on serving others would have prepared them for college life simply because it would have exposed them to greater diversity in terms of ethnicity and economics. Both expressed the extreme *culture shock* that college brought when they discovered that people were very different, even from various sections of their home state. They believed that learning to serve through the church would help them to understand the Biblical basis for service opportunities they discovered in college, even when those opportunities were not offered from an explicitly Christian perspective.

Jerry offered the lone dissent, saying that he just did not believe that youth would possess the maturity required to commit to such a program. "If I had walked in as a little seventh grader and someone told me to go help someone else, I would've just walked out or asked them when we were going to the gym to play ball," he said (Focus Group, August 12, 2012).

The other participants disagreed, saying that the emphasis on activity would have drawn their interest. I then asked Jerry if he would have had that reaction if the curriculum had been in place for several years and he knew that it was the norm when entering the Student Ministry. He believed that would make a difference but it would largely depend on the way that older students *bought* into the curriculum. He said, "I looked up to all those people, and I would do whatever they did. If they were on board, then I'd get on board." All concurred that it would take several years to get all the students on board with this program and it would largely depend on getting student leaders to buy in and set the example for younger youth.

The group was more skeptical about the curriculum having an impact on their

spirituality and Biblical knowledge. They were adamant that such a curriculum had to connect the activity to scripture and spirituality. “I think you have to make it clear why Jesus wants you (the youth) to do these things,” Sidra commented. “If it’s just doing things to help people, then it’s not different. You have to show why it’s a Christian thing” (Focus Group, August 12, 2012). All agreed that it would be difficult to integrate spiritual/Biblical teaching into service learning activities and they were not sure that it was possible to have a strong spiritual impact on youth. How I worked with youth leaders in an attempt to do this with service learning at Smithsville will become clear in the following research sections.

### **Summary of Beginners**

Out of four males and two females in the Beginners group, only one male is attending a traditional church. In comparing the responses to one another and to the literature, several common points came to light. All agreed that church and Student Ministry were good things for them growing up. In contrast to the indicators from the literature, they largely believed that they would eventually return to the church because it is the right thing to do for their children and family. In conjunction with the indicators from the literature, none felt a compelling desire to come back to the church out of a sense of excitement or enthusiasm about what the church is doing.

The narratives of the participants were frighteningly similar regarding their feelings about the church. They indicated that Smithsville Church is very “out of touch” with the culture of youth and young adults. While the student ministry was enjoyable, it did not prepare youth to move into the world of Mosaics and Busters. They felt a strong sense of community within the ministry, but never made lasting connections to the larger congregation at Smithsville. They now find church to be boring, un-engaging, and

disconnected from the reality of their lives. Church is not for them unless they separate from the culture in which they live and return to the cocoon from whence they were supposed to emerge. This narrative is also comparable to the literature, which points out the feeling of disenfranchisement that many youth experience when they try to engage the church as young adults (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2010).

Regarding their narratives, these Mosaics found common ground in their opinions on what they would have preferred in their experience as youth. If they had it to do over again, Beginners would prefer a student ministry with stability in the leaders that were supposed to mentor and guide them. They would seek more active service rather sitting through sermons and would hope to find ways to do missions and ministry on a regular basis beyond the occasional mission trip. There was also strong agreement between the participants regarding the possibilities for service learning. They believe that a service-learning curriculum would have benefitted them and can benefit students in the future, but they believe that it will take some time to integrate it into the life of the Smithsville Student Ministry. While the Christ-centered, Biblical aspect of service should be emphasized, the group was skeptical about how much youth would learn in the service-based model.

### **Initiators**

The circumstances described by the Beginners are reflections of the environment into which service learning was introduced. In 2010, I began to perceive much of what the Beginners confirmed about their experiences in the youth ministry and the church. Although I could not identify it in such concise terms, the lack of community, learning, and service were obvious. Lack of learning and Biblical knowledge was the first aspect to get my attention. I also believed that youth sensed a separation from the church, the

community, and the spiritual preparation needed to sustain their faith as they entered the world of young adults. I was under a strong conviction that something had to change in order to give youth a sense of community, knowledge, and purpose as they became Mosaics and Busters.

This change led to the implementation of a service-learning curriculum, beginning in 2011, in response to the perceived issues. In order to get this effort off the ground, I sought out committed youth who had shown initiative and a strong desire to serve others. Four students became Initiators who worked to make the curriculum a reality.

Of the four students classified as Initiators, all were willing participants in the research. Two of the girls, Ginny and Anne, graduated soon after the curriculum implementation in 2011. The one male, Wallace, left the ministry in early 2012. The final participant, Kim, is a senior and remains involved as a student leader. Kim also participated in the Sustainers group, as documented in the following research section.

The major quality that separates these four students is the special initiative that they undertook to give service learning a start at Smithsville. Because three of the four are no longer a part of the ministry, I used interviews and short-answer surveys to obtain responses. Research with Initiators addressed this essential question: “How did students and members of Smithsville Church react to the implementation of service-learning curriculum?” All research questions are contained in Appendix B.

Ginny and Kim were lifers at Smithsville, growing up in the church from a very early age and attending with their families. Wallace entered the Student Ministry as an eighth grader, attending with his parents as well. Anne did not grow up in church and began to attend as a sophomore in high school. She became a church member and was baptized as a senior in high school. Because he was away at college early, Wallace

returned a written short-answer survey to me on August 15, 2012. Anne and Ginny responded in a joint interview conducted on August 16, 2012. The final interview was conducted with Kim on August 28, 2012. She remains as the lone Initiator who is still involved in the Student Ministry, and she also participated in the Sustainers group that will follow.

All four were very active participants in all aspects of the Student Ministry: Sunday school, worship, Bible studies, mission trips, etc. They became a core group of participants in the Student Ministry and leaders for younger youth, even as they learned and grew up themselves. Their exceptional work with the service-learning curriculum, particularly with the Youth Food Pantry and The Grace Project, places them in a category all their own.

Table 7

*Demographic Information for Initiators*

Pseudonym	Age/Gender	Background	Christian Involvement
Ginny	20, Female	Lifer	Bible study on campus; limited church attendance
Anne	19, Female	First attended church and became a member in high school	Occasional Bible study on campus; limited church attendance
Wallace	19, Male	Began Smithsville in 8th grade; attended church throughout life	Unknown (forbidden by school to share information)
Kim	17, Female	Lifer	Consistent at Smithsville; High school FCA

Initiators were motivated to change the focus towards service learning because the town obviously needed it. Ginny and Anne pointed to the number of people that came to

the food pantry when it opened as evidence that the need exists. According to the short-answer survey, “a major factor (leading to) the focus on service learning . . . was the lack of such projects in (Smithsville) church as well as surrounding churches” (Survey response, August 15, 2012). The Initiators grew tired of hearing people talk, teach, and preach about missions in the community without taking any time or effort to actually do the work. They felt that the Student Ministry could step up and fill a need both in the community and in the church. They also believed that service learning was a unique approach to Student Ministry that would set Smithsville apart from other churches in the community.

All four participated in The Grace Project Bible study, which focused on teaching youth the concept of grace and how to live that grace in action. During the study, Ginny decided to get involved in service learning by starting a youth food pantry as her senior project. As part of her senior project, Anne decided to assist her. Wallace and Kim took on the task of leading teams of youth to collect the food that was needed for the pantry. All four students were involved in Bible studies about showing God’s grace to others, as designed by me. Wallace shared that those studies led him to believe that “God was calling” him to be involved in service learning. He added, “I knew that even something as simple as . . . asking for canned food donations could be the difference in someone eating or going hungry” (Survey Response, August 15, 2012). Combined with the previous response describing the need in the community, these responses indicate a sense of urgency among the Initiators for helping others. This corresponds with the assertions of Barna (2005), Dekker (2007), Flanagan and Christens (2011), and Tome (2008) that youth are motivated when presented with the opportunity to actively serve others.

In conjunction with the findings among Beginners, the Initiators also found

motivation in action rather than sitting and listening to Bible stories or lessons. Part of the curriculum involved dividing into teams and challenging each team to collect the most food each week or come up with a new, creative idea for helping others. All Initiators responded in their answers that this was a major factor in keeping them involved and motivated, but this was particularly helpful to Wallace and Kim. In their role as team leaders, they took responsibility for these challenges and motivating others to participate. It is logical to assume that this type of leadership role contributed to their ongoing motivation. This also connects to the assertion by Stenhouse (1983) and other authors that students are much more motivated when they have an active role in the learning process, rather than simply memorizing or reciting material. Both students said that working to involve other students gave them a greater desire and sense of responsibility for making the curriculum succeed.

When asked about the reaction of the larger church to service learning, all of the Initiators expressed disappointment and even anger at the response. At one point, the church actually had two separate food pantries. One was maintained by the youth, while the other was under the supervision of adults. The adults made it clear that the youth were *not* to touch any of the food in their pantry or connect to them in any way. A more complete treatment of this issue is included at the beginning of Chapter 5.

From their perspective, Initiators were startled and frustrated with this reaction. It seems to confirm the assertion of Beginners that youth are not integrated into the overall life at Smithville Church. Initiators expressed in their responses that, to this day, they do not understand why some adults of the church reacted in this way. “We wanted this to be something that would bring us together and get everyone working together,” Anne said. “It actually made us more divided” (Interview, August 16, 2012). Anne and Ginny felt

that helping to feed hungry people should be a *natural* spiritual act instead of a point of contention. Kim summed up the thoughts of the four: “It made me not even want to go to church” (Interview, August 28, 2012).

In spite of this frustration, the response of the church did have a positive impact. The reaction motivated the Initiators to keep going and to prove that their ideas about grace and helping others could work. Kim and Ginny both said that they became increasingly determined as they encountered more resistance. Wallace added that this confirmed his conviction that service learning was badly needed at Smithsville, both in the church and in the community, as an example of doing what Jesus asks Christians to do.

The reaction of the church unfortunately changed the Initiators’ perspective about Smithsville and church in general. When asked how service learning impacted their view of Christianity and/or the church, all four had a negative response. Service learning helped them to see that Christianity is not just a Sunday morning event; instead, it is something that should be actively lived in daily life. Ginny responded, “Sitting in church or FCA [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] meetings just didn’t do it for me anymore. I wanted to know what we were going to *do* about what we learned.” At the same time, they were disheartened that they had to fight so hard to follow something they felt called to do. The three girls all expressed doubt about whether or not they would get involved in church in the near future, particularly at Smithsville or a similarly traditional church.

Kinnaman and Lyons (2008) pointed out that youth, Mosaics, and Busters are often frustrated that it takes so long for the church to go to work doing things that should be natural reactions to Christ’s teaching. Initiators at Smithsville very much echoed this concept. All four were compelled to make a difference in the lives of others and all four



were *turned off* by the fact that, other than a few adults and youth parents, the church did not seem to support them. As Kim said, “It wasn’t just that they complained about it. I didn’t feel like anyone stood up to fight for us unless their kids were involved.” She added that it angered her that the church would spend thousands of dollars on other activities and projects but it allotted only a few hundred dollars to support the youth food pantry.

This bewilderment with the church’s attitude contributed to the Initiators’ responses to the final question: “Why or how has service learning influenced you to be involved in the church or other Christian organizations?” The three students who had already left for college responded in the same way. They stated that they would ask *first thing* about the mission projects and community service of a church or organization. Ginny stated that she would not attend a church that did not demonstrate a commitment to serving in Christ’s name in all aspects of the church’s ministry. In agreement with Beginners, Ginny and Anne pointed out that many Christian and non-Christian organizations on their respective campuses engaged heavily in service projects. They stated that they would prefer to join one of those groups rather than “fight” with “church people” about how to serve others (Interview, August 16, 2012).

On an individual basis, the curriculum did have a positive impact on their view of what Christianity is supposed to be. Wallace stated that it helped him to see that Christianity is not simply a religion where believers go to church and learn from the Bible without ever putting [it] . . . into practice. The project showed me the simple truth that being a Christian is about doing two things: Helping your brothers and sisters and praising God while you do it. (Survey Response, August 15, 2012)

This may explain why all four believed that the Student Ministry should continue with the curriculum, in spite of the struggles and frustrations. They believed that any curriculum that gets youth *doing* something is valuable and has the potential to make a lasting impact.

Once again, Wallace summarized the belief of the group about why Smithsville's Student Ministry should continue the curriculum:

The [Student] Ministry should continue service learning because it is a great example of living out the word of God, and many youth like myself won't know what it is to truly do that unless they experience projects like this that teach them the physical part of Christianity and the world around them. (Survey Response, August 15, 2012)

### **Explanation of Initiators**

At this point, it is necessary to offer two points of explanation regarding the Initiators and their role in the service-learning curriculum. The first explanation involves my relationship with these four students as their Student Minister. The second part involves the selection of the youth food pantry as a *cornerstone* project for service learning at Smithsville.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must explain that I had an extremely close relationship with all of these students. Through a variety of circumstances that are not relevant to this study, I was very connected to Ginny and Anne. Both endured some excruciating trials in their young lives and my attempts to be present for them in these trials created this special connection. Kim and Wallace were simply natural leaders who sought my counsel on spiritual and life issues. In turn, I also sought their counsel on most issues regarding youth. All four students were involved in the Youth Leadership

Team. While this creates some degree of risk in objectivity, I do not believe this impacted the honesty of their responses or my interpretation of them. The relationship with these students was special because they were very honest, mature, and *up front* with their thoughts and feelings, hence the reason that I sought their counsel and trusted their leadership. My departure from the ministry in 2012 would also provide them a degree of comfort in honest responses. They did not need to be concerned that honest answers would hurt my feelings or hinder an ongoing relationship.

This relationship did impact the selection of the food pantry as the primary service-learning project. As a graduation requirement, Ginny and Anne had to select a senior project with an outside advisor from the community. Because of their relationship with me, they asked that I serve as their advisor. Following the Bible studies of The Grace Project, they sought out a project that would allow them to demonstrate God's grace by serving the community.

For several years, Ginny had worked on food collection projects for the church food pantry. She became frustrated that she never had an opportunity to actually work with the clients who needed help. The Smithsville pantry was open 4 days a week from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Clients could only receive food once every 3 months. She wanted to supplement that with a Saturday food pantry that was operated by the youth. Her intentions were twofold. One was to give the youth a chance to put a face on the people that they were trying to help and the other was to take some of the *weight* of this work off the people who were distributing the food during the week. The intent was to give smaller amounts of food to people, but allow them to come whenever the pantry was open. This would help people to survive until they could get more help at the church food pantry. Anne decided to join her in this project and I served as advisor to both girls

for this senior project.

After Ginny and Anne explained to the youth what they were doing, Wallace and Kim were extremely motivated to share in the work. Like Ginny, they had worked on several food collection projects and shared her desire to be more directly involved with clients. This desire coincided with discussions that church leaders and I were having about the existing food pantry. The office staff often handled the clients during the day and it was becoming a distraction. The deacons and pastor talked with me about gradually moving the entire food pantry operation to Saturday, in an effort get the church involved rather than having the staff and a limited number of retired volunteers manage it.

This fit perfectly into the plan that Ginny and Anne had for their project. I shared the details of my discussion with the pastor and the deacons. This was viewed as a first step towards changing the direction of the church food pantry. These leaders also believed that it would be a great learning experience for youth to interact with those who are less fortunate. With the blessings of the church leadership, the Initiators went to work setting up a Saturday food pantry. Many of the other service-learning projects, such as helping with Vacation Bible School or doing *cleanup* projects around the church, were temporary. The food pantry created an ongoing project for which youth could take the majority of responsibility. Because these four students worked so fervently for it, other students began to catch their vision and made it the mainstay of the curriculum. It is critical to recognize that these students took on this challenge with the full knowledge and perceived support of the deacons and the pastor.

### **Summary of Initiators**

In the comparative interpretation of the results, the Initiators connect to the

literature in that they are motivated by a strong desire to actively help others. This is congruent with the work of Strommen (1993), who argued that an inner passion to serve is one of the most powerful motivators for youth. It also connects to Dekker's (2007) contention that service motivates youth in the present and impacts their future relationship to Christ and the church. Like the Beginners, the Initiators agree that students learn more by taking action that reflects the teachings of Christ rather than just sitting and listening to lessons about Christ.

The narrative investigation confirms that the Biblical teaching on grace had a significant impact. This fueled their desire to serve, as well as giving them a greater understanding of what it means to serve others. Another shared aspect of their narrative is the ultimate impact that service learning may have on their spiritual choices in the future. All confirmed that they plan to seek a church where service to others outside of the church building reflects the teaching about Christ and scripture that occurs inside the building.

An unfortunate outcome of the narrative was the shared feelings of hurt and resentment that the students developed towards the church. While they have a strong sense of accomplishment about starting the food pantry ministry, they still harbor frustration towards the church for the lack of support. This lack of support hurt their enthusiasm and sense of unity with the larger community of church members. While their future involvement in a traditional church like Smithsville remains uncertain, the Initiators felt good about the service-learning curriculum, as well as what they learned and accomplished by participating in it. They felt more could have been accomplished with the full support of the church. Their inability to connect with the church on these projects has resulted in significant hurt but has also shaped their perspective about what

kind of church they might seek in the future. Indications are that this may be a church other than Smithsville.

### **Sustainers**

One of the *drawbacks* of service learning at Smithsville was that three of the Initiators left the Student Ministry less than a year after implementation of the curriculum. Kim is the only Initiator that is still a part of the ministry. This left the role of continuing the work of service learning to the Sustainers and Educators. The first of these groups, Sustainers, are students who began in the Student Ministry before the implementation and remain in the ministry today.

All students who are involved in the Student Ministry at Smithsville were invited to participate in one of two focus groups. The first met on August 19, 2012 with six girls and one boy attending. The second group met on August 22, 2012 with two boys and two girls attending. Of the 11 total students who responded, there were three boys and eight girls, and all are older than 15. Rather than listing pseudonyms for all participants, they will be included as needed throughout this section. All research questions for the Sustainers are contained in Appendix C at the end of the study.

One deficiency of the group is that no African-American students chose to participate. Although some of those students helped with the projects, they simply did not show an interest in the research. Another aspect that provided both a deficiency and a strength was the lack of students who were marginally involved in the ministry. The research might have benefitted from getting the perspective of students who chose not to be involved in service learning or other aspects of the ministry. This could have provided insight into how the curriculum might improve to appeal to students with marginal interest. At the same time, the strength of the group is that they are all ongoing, active

participants in Student Ministry in general and service learning in particular. All participate at least twice a month in activities for the food pantry and attend Sunday school, worship, Bible study, etc. The research reflects the motivation of students who are clearly entrenched in the curriculum and can offer a true perspective on how the curriculum is impacting them.

Much like the Initiators, all of these students are heavily vested in the Student Ministry at Smithsville throughout their youth years to this point. Eight grew up in the church and would be classified as lifers, while three have joined the church within the last 5 years. The common thread for all of these students is their extensive involvement in the student ministry at Smithsville. All have participated in at least one long-distance, short-term mission trip in addition to fun and fellowship activities. All are regular in attendance at Sunday school, worship, and Wednesday night Bible study. All have taken an active role in the youth food pantry and other activities associated with The Grace Project/service learning. This included activities such as Bible studies about the concept of grace, visits to nursing homes, and writing cards and letters to homebound church members.

Table 8

*Demographic Information for Sustainers*

Focus Group	Female/Male	Age Range	Lifers
Group 1	6/1	15-17	5
Group 2	2/2	17 (High school seniors)	3

For the first investigative question, I asked the students about the differences they have seen in the student ministry since the beginning of service-learning projects. The

youth in Focus Group 1 pointed out that the attendance in the Student Ministry had actually declined but the unity and knowledge of the group had increased. They attributed this to the fact that the ministry focuses more on doing for others than on fun or social activities. One boy, Chuck, responded similarly to the Initiators saying that service learning set the Student Ministry apart from other churches in the community. He felt that some youth did not like the new focus on others rather than on themselves; another young lady, Jen, responded that this had challenged them to be more considerate people. She added that service learning had raised their awareness and concern for the church and the community.

The next two questions rolled together in the course of the discussion. These questions were: “How have these projects personally made a difference in your relationship with Christ and the church”; and “what aspects of service learning have made the greatest impression on you?” Both focus groups offered detailed, reflective, and self-aware answers.

One of the advantages to service learning as described by the literature is the potential to help students become more aware of the world around them (Rocheleau, 2004). In creating opportunities for students to encounter people of varying ages, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, service learning enables students to develop empathy and critical reflection about themselves and society (Rocheleau, 2004). In a religious education setting, one of the struggles for Christian educators is to get students to think less about themselves and consider the fundamental truths of what God is expecting of them (Bachand, 2010). Ministry to youth and young adults tends to focus on serving *their* desires rather than challenging them to see how God is calling them to change how they serve others (Bachand, 2010). The youth responses to these two



questions provide a strong connection to these assertions.

Kim, the Initiator/Sustainer, pointed out the change that service learning made in her view of the world:

We were sitting in this meeting after church . . . but I was paying attention to what they were saying. The deacons, I guess, recommended that we spend \$36,000 to put new doors on the church. It's not that I was mad about it, but I couldn't believe that we would spend that on doors and only give the youth food pantry \$500. I just kept thinking about how much food we could give out to people if we had \$36,000. (Focus Group, August 22, 2012)

One student shared that they give their entire tithe to the food pantry because they feel that it is the most worthwhile ministry of the church. Chuck added that he realized how many people in need lived right beside the church. Another young lady, Elaine, expressed shock that hunger was such a problem in the Smithsville community. She then asked, "Why did it take us so long to do this?" (Focus Group, August 19, 2012).

Several youth talked about going out into the community in groups to collect canned goods from both church members and nearby neighborhoods. Their belief is that these activities, designed as part of The Grace Project to assist the food pantry, really helped to grow the entire ministry. They agree that telling people why they were going door-to-door to request donations was a very strong testimony for Christ. Getting the community involved and raising awareness has assisted the growth of the pantry as well as the profile of the church. The youth talked about a day in June when the line for the food pantry stretched all the way across the church parking lot by 8:00 a.m., a half-hour before the doors were set to open.



*Figure 4. Line of Clients for Smithsville Youth Food Pantry in June 2012.*

“I feel bad saying this, but I was so excited when I saw that,” Elaine said. “When we first started, we only had a few people coming, and look at what we have now. It made me feel like we were really making a difference” (Focus Group, August 19, 2012). Another student reflected that seeing this helped her to see how following Jesus can actually make a difference.

In addition to the growth in the pantry, they indicated that the Bible studies on grace made a big difference in their lives and perspectives. A girl named Olive said, “I never really knew what grace was or understood it at all. But after the Bible studies I felt that I got it. And then doing the food pantry helped me to see it” (Focus Group, August 19, 2012). Another student said that learning about grace helped him to believe that we should help others even if they did not deserve it. After he followed up the Bible study by working in the food pantry, he realized that these were just people who needed help. Chuck summarized this by saying, “I didn’t really believe that we should help people until we did that study. The food pantry just showed us that grace really does work and these people weren’t just lazy” (Focus Group, August 19, 2012).

In the course of the discussion, Group 1 added some particularly noteworthy comments concerning Biblical knowledge. One young lady asked, “Why did we stop after the Bible study on grace?” The Grace Project began with a series of Biblical studies

and discussions on the concept of grace, followed by work with the food pantry and other service learning activities. This group of students felt that was an extremely effective format, but it had fallen by the wayside following the grace studies. Their view was that the Bible studies “became real” when combined with activities that directly related to the scriptures. All expressed their disappointment that this format did not remain a strong emphasis throughout service learning.

When asked about how service learning has continued since I departed and the Youth Ministry intern was hired as an interim, the youth gave a much more skeptical response. The work continues but they are concerned that it will fade over time. If a new Student Minister does not share the vision and values of service learning, the emphasis could shift to something less focused on showing grace and serving the community. All of the students shared that as a concern for the future, particularly the future of the youth food pantry.

The youth also reflected concern for the future in discussing this question: “Why or how has service learning influenced your involvement in church or other Christian organizations?” Many of the responses mirrored the reflections of the Initiators. The Sustainers also experienced extreme frustration at the disheartening amount of resistance and similarly disheartening lack of support from the overall church. “It broke my heart. I didn’t understand why people didn’t want us to do this,” Elaine said (Focus Group, August 19, 2012). In Focus Group 2, Kim added that it made her furious that people acted as if the food pantry was a bad thing.

As the discussion of this question continued, a distinction began to develop between each group. Groups 1 and 2 were both extremely annoyed at the prospect of having two food pantries, one run by the church and one run by the youth. Group 1

expressed their annoyance and frustration with the church over the reaction to the food pantry. All of them, however, expressed a strong desire to stay involved in the church, even throughout their college years. They did not discount the idea of being at Smithsville or a similar church. Group 2, by contrast, really questioned the validity of staying involved in any kind of traditional church.

Like the Initiators, both groups of Sustainers stated that they would seek out churches or other Christian groups that maintained a strong commitment to helping others. Group 2, however, questioned whether or not they would bother if they encountered similar attitudes of the church towards helping those in need. One boy just said, “If that’s the way it’s going to be, then I don’t want it” (Focus Group, August 22, 2012). All four of the Sustainers in Group 2 felt that they could find places to give their time, energy, and money that would be more valuable than a church that resisted helping people. None indicated that they had any intention of staying involved at Smithsville beyond high school.

Several points might explain this contrast among peers that spoke in separate groups. One is that Kim, who was also an Initiator, was a part of Group 2. As an *insider* to the beginning of service learning, she more directly experienced the resistance of the church and seemed to take it to heart more than other Sustainers. Her own frustration may have influenced the group. Another explanation is that the youth in Group 2 knew each other better and had closer relationships than those in Group 1. This may have allowed them to be more open with their opinions. Finally, the students in Group 2 were all seniors, where some of the youth in the Group 1 were 1 or 2 years younger. Group 2 would obviously have a more pervasive mindset towards moving on from the activities of their high school years. It is possible that Group 2 was more realistic about how they

might react to church as they moved into their college-age years.

### **Summary of Sustainers**

In the Constant Comparative method, the Sustainers revealed several levels of agreement with the Beginners and Initiators. Like those two groups, they shared a hope to be a part of a community that actively served and worked to live out Christian principles. This also confirms the connection to the literature, which asserts that serving others in the name of Christ can have a profound influence on youth (Dekker, 2007). Sustainers also appreciated the teaching on grace and the impact it had on their knowledge of Christ and scripture.

In conjunction with the first two research groups, Sustainers were frustrated by the lack of support and outright resistance of the larger congregation to the youth food pantry. The lack of support from Smithsville Church as a whole was disappointing and at times infuriating. At the same time, it gave the youth a strong sense of unity and determination to carry out their calling to serve the community. They agreed with the Initiators that they plan to get involved in some sort of Christian organization or church in the future that places a premium on serving others.

In the narrative analysis, the story of the Sustainers took on a much different turn. With the exception of Kim, the participants in the first two groups have all departed. These youth are still a part of the church and the student ministry, which gives their story a much different perspective. All agreed that the teaching on grace combined with the service-learning projects taught them a great deal; however, they were disappointed that there was not more effort to continue connecting the projects to scripture and faith. While they developed a clear idea of what kind of church they would seek in the future, their story at Smithsville is still being written. All seem to believe that they can be a part

of a culture change at the church and remain committed to continuing their work and contributing to a new attitude at the church.

The constant in the narratives among all Sustainers was a belief that Christian churches and organizations should emphasize serving others as an essential part of Christ's teachings in the Bible. It remains to be seen if they will be able to share that belief with their church family. It is also less clear if service learning will continue at the church or if it will have the desired long-term impact on Sustainers. The research indicates that the curriculum has at least given them some conviction and direction. The strength of those convictions may determine the future of service learning in the student ministry.

In addition to these three groups composed of youth and Mosaics, the reflections of the adults who helped to initiate service learning offer a unique and sometimes contradictory perspective. This group, known as Educators, shared their views on the impact of service learning on youth from an adult leadership viewpoint.

### **Educators**

To this point, all of the focus groups and interviews offered the perspective of youth and young adults about student ministry and service learning. The final research group offers the perspective of adults who helped to lead youth and get service learning off the ground. Many of the Educators saw the youth before and after the implementation process. This allows them to offer a unique point of view that relates to all three of the previous research groups.

Due to scheduling conflicts, Educators had one focus group, one interview, and one short-answer survey. I attempted to have two focus groups but did not get enough of a response to the second group. Sixteen Educators were invited to participate, with six

responding to the first focus group on August 26, 2012. Two others could not attend but agreed to an interview on August 29, 2012, and one more responded to the questions in written, short-answer form on August 30, 2012. This gives a total sample size of nine Educators. Several of the non-responders have either left the church or stopped helping with the Student Ministry. All research questions are contained in Appendix D.

Just as the youth and young adults had several participants to qualify as lifers at Smithsville Church, three of the Educators fell into that classification. Two women and one man grew up in the church from childhood to the present and even participated in the Student Ministry as teens. Three others have been in the church for more than 20 years and had one or more children that either grew up or is still growing up in the ministry. Three had been involved in the church for more than 10 years. Five of the nine have children who continue to be involved in the ministry, as well as one child who has already graduated from the ministry. The other four do not have children but feel compelled to work with youth in some capacity. The Student Ministry Intern participated as an Educator and was the only male in the group.

All of these adults participated in a variety of ways. Several served as Sunday school teachers, and all helped as part of a volunteer rotation for Jesus 101, the Wednesday night Bible study. All had been on more than one mission trip in addition to other overnight youth excursions. All nine actively participated in implementing the service-learning curriculum and served at least once a month in some capacity with the youth food pantry.

Table 9

*Demographic Information for Educators*

Children in Ministry	Children who Graduated	F/M	10+ yrs/church	20+	Lifers	Sunday School Leaders	Jesus 101	Service- learning Involvement
6	5	7/1	3	3	3	4	9	9

The first question for Educators was, “Why did you believe that the curriculum at the church needed to be changed?” Their responses were basic and unified. It was time for something new, and something that was not purchased from the local Christian bookstore. They universally agree that the *action* aspect of service learning is particularly well suited to youth. The three teachers in the group were extremely adamant that they believed in active learning, and the new curriculum offered a great example of that. They also appreciated the flexibility that the curriculum offered in lesson design options, themes, creativity, and activities. One Educator who serves as a teacher added, “It leaves you so many options for creative teaching that you can use just about any section of the Bible and then you can create your own activities to illustrate your point” (Focus Group, August 26, 2012). While they acknowledged the extra work involved, they believed that it was worth it to get away from standard curriculum options traditionally used at Smithsville.

In conjunction with their thoughts on the need for a change were the Educators’ responses about why it was important to change the focus towards service-learning projects. One mother in the focus group bluntly stated that the change was needed because “our kids are totally focused on themselves, and that’s just not what Christ wants



us to do” (Focus Group, August 26, 2012). In addition to their strong feelings about the Student Ministry curriculum, Educators also shared that they see a need for *all* people at Smithsville to help with this change of focus. One of the adults stated:

I think that as a church, sometimes we focus so much on our own (youth) that we fail to help them recognize the blessings that have been bestowed on them. If we don’t help them to realize how others live, and the struggles others face, then we don’t give them an opportunity to meet the needs of others. (Short-answer survey, August 30, 2012)

The participants indicate a strong belief that a shift towards service learning assists in helping students and the church shift away from self-centered Christianity towards an *other-centered* Christianity (McClaren, 2010).

On the question of how service learning influences the youth of Smithsville, the Educators gave very candid answers, with mostly positive and a few negative comments. One hope of these adults was that the new curriculum would help the students overcome the *Lottie Moon Syndrome*. Lottie Moon was a legendary Baptist missionary to China, and Baptist churches annually collect a mission offering in her name during the Christmas season. One of the participants, who happened to grow up as a Baptist *PK* (Preacher’s Kid), expressed frustration that too many church members think of missions as dropping in their Lottie Moon offering and little else. The educators staunchly believe that service learning will help students learn to *do* missions rather than just dropping some money in the offering plate.

A number of the participants in this group also have children who are in college. One of their hopes is that the new curriculum will provide connections that will help youth maintain their spiritual direction as they become Mosaics and Busters. They have

heard from their children how different organizations in college focus on community service, particularly Christian organizations on campus. It is their belief that starting this type of service earlier in life might give youth a connection to Christian organizations when they go off to college.

From the perspective of the Educators, doing the work of missions is a major positive for the student ministry. The students get at least a glimpse of the *real world* that is not always friendly or kind to people. Such experiences allow them to see “scripture and Bible verses in action” rather than simply hearing or reading them (Short-answer survey, August 30, 2012). It also provides students with a sense that the needs of people are often very close to home. The Sustainers illustrated this as they pointed out that several people they knew actually came to the food pantry on some Saturdays. Similarly, Educators believe that the food pantry and other projects created a great deal of awareness among youth and a greater understanding of the poor in the community. By working in the pantry rather than simply collecting cans for it, youth began to interact with those who came and actually developed some relationship with them. This personal interaction, which was impossible before the youth food pantry opened, allowed students to put a face and a sense of reality with the people they helped.

One of the points made by the group participants involved *connecting the dots* between words and actions (Focus Group, August 26, 2012). This was a common phrase that I used during my tenure, and it was echoed during the focus group. It means that youth were beginning to understand the connection between the scriptures that they studied and how they could begin to act on those scriptures. Youth started to make real connections between the Christianity they proclaimed and the way that they lived and acted on a daily basis.

Several participants, however, pointed out that the principle of connecting the dots needed to be strengthened, because many of the youth were not *getting it* about the service projects. This unique perspective came from an interview with the Student Ministry Intern and another volunteer who attended almost all Student Ministry events (Interview, August 29, 2012). The intern argued that the youth loved the food pantry and wanted it to work but lacked the commitment to consistently attend and make it work. He also pointed out that help from adults could be equally scarce. The other volunteer told of having to come early and stay late to keep things going, pack bags, and organize the food because youth either came late, left early, or only stayed for a short while. Although both were convinced of the positive aspects of the *concept* of the curriculum, they questioned whether or not the youth, the parents, or the church had the commitment to make it fully effective. “The purpose is to get the youth to do it, and it’s not going to work if we keep having to do things for them,” shared the intern (Interview, August 29, 2012).

One place where the curriculum was also inadequate in connecting the dots was the Biblical teaching that needs to coincide with the activities. The Educators, in agreement with the Sustainers, discussed the effectiveness of the teaching about grace that helped to get service learning started. They felt that the focus of those initial studies had faded over time. They believe that action is learning and the youth were gaining much-needed knowledge through their experiences. But they also argued that youth need stronger Bible study lessons that focus on the purpose behind the projects. “I believe that a stronger commitment to an organized curriculum” is needed to help the students fully comprehend the connection between Christian faith and action (Short-answer survey, August 30, 2012). Youth also need time for reflection on their experiences. Allowing

students to think and talk through the events would provide them an opportunity to absorb the full weight and also discover how their work connects to the Bible.

The suggestion of greater time for reflection and thought by service-learning participants is in agreement with the literature. Reflection is one of the most critical and the most difficult aspects of a highly functional service-learning curriculum (Cooper, 1998). Adding this element at Smithsville will require extra time and attention from the leadership. Meaningful reflection requires teachers to challenge students and draw out the elements of service learning that are positive, negative, and in need of improvement (Cooper, 1998). Educators indicated that they would like to see this element added to the current curriculum.

In regards to the question about the lasting impact of a service-learning curriculum, there was almost universal agreement that the *potential* exists for long-term impact. Whether or not that happens will have to wait for further observation. Educators believed that this might happen in several ways. One is the hope that youth will develop lasting empathy with the poor and the needs of others. This could motivate the youth to continue seeking opportunities to serve. Once again, several parents hope that the curriculum will guide students to choose Christian and social organizations in college that focus on serving others. Some of the participants believe that the youth have developed a strong desire to do the work and will hopefully pass that commitment along to younger youth and new Student Ministry leaders as they come into the ministry. If the older youth are *into* it, then the younger youth will sense that and want to get involved as well. This thought process is supported by the Beginners, who argued longevity and buy in from older youth would be keys to the curriculum success. The biggest hope of the Educators is that youth will develop a serving attitude, not only towards the poor but also

towards their peers, teachers, and anyone that they might encounter.

There was absolutely no disagreement on whether or not the youth should continue service learning. All Educators emphatically believe that the curriculum should continue. However, there was much discussion about what needs to change in order for the curriculum to improve and reach its full potential.

Sustainability became the biggest issue when the participants talked about how the curriculum needs to be adjusted. The Educators were frustrated, even to the point of anger, at the reaction of Smithsville Church to the food pantry. They did not understand why two food pantries needed to exist; and if they did, why they could not support one another in their efforts.

In order to help readers fully understand the issue, it is necessary to explain the evolution of the youth food pantry in contrast to the church food pantry. The explanation of the Initiators from earlier in Chapter 4 was the first reason for the separation of the two pantries. The Initiators were very driven to help the community and wanted to have direct contact with the clients. The only way to do this was to create an opportunity for it when students could be available to serve. This led to the initiation of the food pantry on Saturday that was entirely staffed by youth and their adult leaders. Several students took on this task as their required senior project and continued the work after the initial project was completed.

The intent of this project was to provide a supplement to the existing church food pantry and work cooperatively with them to help people in the community. The pastor and deacon board were fully informed of this effort and agreed to let the youth proceed with it. Unfortunately, the Benevolence Committee, who was responsible for the church food pantry, misunderstood the intent and took this as a challenge to their work and their

authority. It should also be noted that two members of the deacon board also served on the Benevolence Committee. This is not uncommon for existing ministries to view the advent of new or supplemental ministries as a challenge to their control and they often resist any effort that they perceive to be in opposition to their control (Easum, 1995).

Although this was an unintended consequence, the youth firmly believed that they were doing the right thing. The project proved successful in getting students engaged and became the most effective ongoing service learning effort that came out of The Grace Project. Since the youth clearly strove to move forward with this program, it continued in spite of the resistance from the committee.

The youth food pantry is the *flagship* program of service learning due to the strong response of the students, and the continuation of the curriculum largely depends on the continuation of the pantry. Educators felt that three things need to change in order for the program to continue. The first is that the youth have to take more complete *ownership* of the ministry. With the guidance of parents and adult leaders, they need to schedule their time to participate in the pantry as well as other aspects of the service-learning curriculum. If they commit to it, others will follow, including new paid staff or volunteers. The second is that the church as a whole needs to support the ministry. If the food pantry becomes an integral part of Smithsville's ministry, then more adult leaders will get involved. This will, in turn, help parents be more committed and show the youth their vitality to the church's ministry. The final change involves the relationship with the other food pantry. Even if two pantries continue to exist, they need to develop a working relationship. The organizers of the other pantry need to at least offer the youth respect for their efforts. If the church gets behind the youth efforts, then it will compel the organizers of the other pantry to do the same. Rather than competing, the two ministries

could work together and greatly expand the benevolence efforts of the entire church. The participants believe that this needs to be supported by the church leadership at Smithsville, especially by the deacons and the pastor.

In order to help this effort, the Educators shared some logistical changes that need to happen. Scheduling and organization are a primary concern, especially from the parents' points of view. They feel that youth and parents need a set schedule for Saturdays that the pantry will open, as well as a schedule of food collection activities. They would also like a schedule for who is supposed to work and what role they are supposed to fulfill. Youth need to know if they are greeting people, bagging food, etc. They also believe that a *clean-up* schedule needs to be established to keep the pantry and youth facilities clean and organized. These adults added that opportunities should be offered for students who cannot come on Saturday. The overall feeling is that some type of activity needs to take place on Wednesday nights when many youth attend Bible studies. Many who attend on Wednesday night cannot participate in other activities. This will be further explained in Chapter 5.

Communication is a key to this improvement. Announcements in the bulletin and during Bible studies and worship services should help. Educators would also like regular updates on pantry needs and events via mail-outs, email, and text message. They also requested training events for adult volunteers as well as youth leaders. If the church begins to get behind the youth effort and more adults want to help, they need to understand the service-learning concept and the philosophy behind it. They also need to be taught how to teach and motivate the youth. Training would help the adults know what to do without taking over the pantry from the students.

In addition to training adults, Educators want to see better training for the youth in

the spiritual/educational aspect of the curriculum. The youth need to have a clear understanding of how scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit factor into their work and how they treat others. Adding the Biblical element will solidify who the youth are as Christians and establish the Christ-centered nature of service learning.

The final improvement that Educators want to see is the expansion of service learning into other projects. They acknowledge that there is plenty of work to be done to solidify the food pantry ministry. However, they also shared that the new awareness that youth have acquired is spawning creative thinking. It is essential to give them outlets to implement these ideas and allow the Holy Spirit to lead them in new directions. This may create problems in working out the logistics of various projects and relating them to the teaching aspect of the curriculum. But it may also foster the commitment and inspiration that is needed to draw youth into a solid commitment to service learning. The best way to get youth to commit is to let them use their ideas and creativity in a Spirit-driven, Biblically-based environment. Giving them the freedom to run with new ideas will spread enthusiasm for the curriculum and also prevent the food pantry from becoming another ministry *rut* that does not inspire students.

The last question for Educators asked: “If adult leaders from another youth ministry said that they were going to start a service-learning curriculum, what would you tell them?” All of the participants said that they would highly recommend it, along with some caveats. They would add a list of things that need to be changed in the curriculum at Smithsville in order to help other churches avoid some of the same mistakes and shortfalls. One leader added that she would encourage other groups to enlist and insure the support of the pastor and church *well before* trying to implement a new curriculum. To sum up the reasons for encouraging other churches to do this, one Educator said, “I



would encourage it [for other churches] and I would express that . . . everyday opportunities for youth to participate in meeting the needs of others will only help them as they grow in their Christian faith and responsibilities” (Short-answer survey, August 30, 2012).

### **Summary of Educators**

The participants among the Educators provided some of the most detailed analysis, praise, and criticism for the curriculum. They echoed many ideas put forward by Beginners, Initiators, and Sustainers, while also adding great detail to those points of view. The summary of their responses will largely focus on the Constant Comparative method. I will highlight similarities but also the areas that they viewed differently from the other three groups. This method assisted in describing the ways that the curriculum needs to be improved in the future.

While the Sustainers seemed to believe that their level of commitment and involvement was fine, some Educators saw the need for a much stronger commitment from the youth. This is particularly true of the Student Ministry Intern, who bore much of the responsibility for getting the youth to help in the food pantry. The youth seem to have a very favorable view of service learning, but that view is not coming across consistently in their actions. The Educators appreciate the enthusiasm from the students but have a much more clear understanding of what is required to continue the curriculum. They shared a hope that the youth will gradually gain that understanding and begin to take full ownership of the pantry and other service-learning projects.

In agreement with Initiators and Sustainers, Educators believe that strong connections to spiritual development will be a major factor in determining the impact of service learning. Educators believe that clarity in the Biblical message will inspire

greater commitment from the youth. This concept is comparable to Bachand (2010) and Erwin (2006), who support less emphasis on meeting the *wants* of youth and more emphasis on challenging spirituality and activity. Educators prefer a model similar to The Grace Project idea, where teaching about the Biblical concept of grace preceded the projects designed to show God's grace. While they appreciate the sense of service and community, they emphatically believe that spiritual development needs equal emphasis.

They also want to see students develop a sense of community where older youth pass along their passion for serving to younger youth. This is in agreement with the Beginners, who stated that this leadership from older youth would be imperative to make service learning a viable option for the future. In addition to continuing the development of community among youth, they hope that the community for youth within the church will improve as well. Educators were equally dismayed by the reactions of the larger church to the youth food pantry; however, they are concerned with overcoming this divide in order to overcome any negative feelings that the youth may develop towards the church.

This desire for community with the church reveals a distinction in the content of the discussion of the majority of Educators. While the other groups seemed skeptical about their future with Smithsville or any other traditional church, this group of adults had great hope as a result of the curriculum. They believe that service learning creates at least the beginning of a connection that might encourage youth to be involved in church *somewhere*, even if not at Smithsville. They are also hopeful that as more parents and other adults start to *catch on* to the service-learning concept, the rift with the church will subside. At the very least, their perspective seems much more positive towards the future than some of the youth.

The constant comparative method reveals numerous suggestions for improvement to the curriculum. The first suggestion is that Educators would like to see the youth develop and implement some ideas beyond the food pantry in order to encourage their creativity and *ownership* of the curriculum. In addition, they would like to see some type of cooperative agreement with the church regarding the two food pantries. It is their belief that these two pantries should not only coexist but also cooperate to help the community. They also believe that greater communication to the students, parents, and the church will help the level of involvement. By making sure there is clarity in all aspects, the youth will feel more confident and more responsible for doing their part. These improvements should help the new curriculum grow into a sustainable model for the Student Ministry at Smithsville for years to come.

### **Conclusion of Results**

The collection of data from the Beginners, Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators was a grueling and fascinating process. The complete candor and straightforward discussion of the Beginners and Educators bracketed the more cautious Initiators and Sustainers. This was expected to some degree because of the different levels of maturity. While their answers were insightful, it is understandable that the youth and younger Mosaics would have less experience and a less-developed thought process than the older groups that participated in the study.

The most positive outcome of the research was the almost universal opinion that the service-learning curriculum is a good concept that could have a real impact on youth in the Student Ministry at Smithsville. While Beginners who had never experienced it had some reservations, they were favorable towards the theory. The other three groups hope to see it continue, but they believe that there is some significant work to be done for

the curriculum to reach its full potential. If improvements can be made and future leaders of the Student Ministry are committed, the service-learning model created at Smithsville Church has the potential to create a model for other churches or faith organizations to build community, Biblical teaching, and a serving environment. The investigation of how this might happen will continue in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Analysis

### Introduction

In his work *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, German theologian Jurgen Moltmann (1993) said, “If the characteristics of the church are statements of faith and hope, they must also lead to statements of action” (p. 339). As the Student Ministry at Smithsville Church progressed, it began an obvious attempt to put faith and hope into visible, tangible actions through a service-learning curriculum. I worked closely with volunteers to help youth build community, Biblical knowledge, and opportunities to serve others in Christ’s name. The curriculum focused on bringing youth together to both study and serve with the intent of demonstrating how those two aspects come together.

In order to fully understand the results of the research and its possible applications, it is necessary for readers to fully understand the context under which service learning began. By giving a detailed treatment of the circumstances surrounding the Student Ministry at Smithsville, readers and researchers will get a clear picture of how the four research groups emerged and why they responded as they did to certain research questions. The context will also provide background into the struggles I faced, along with the leadership team, in establishing the curriculum and corresponding activities.

After the context is explained, there is a brief summary of the ongoing work of the service-learning curriculum, particularly the youth food pantry. The study then discusses the interpretation and significance of the results. This is followed by a critique of the curriculum based on the research, which includes ideas for possible improvement. The critique leads to a section on the implications for Christian education as it relates to the ongoing ministry to youth, Mosaics, and Busters. The final section of Chapter 5 includes

recommendations for future research, both for Smithsville Church and for other churches seeking to improve their curriculum for youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

### **Context**

Studying the Student Ministry at Smithsville is impossible without an understanding of the history and context that led to the selection of a service-learning curriculum. Such a decision on curriculum is not made in a vacuum, and the process of selection is often as critical as the study of the curriculum itself (Scott, 2008). This section will detail the events that led me to initiate the process of curriculum change, how I set out to decide on those changes, how other leaders were engaged in the change process, and challenges to the concept of change. After detailing this process, the final piece to the puzzle will describe the actual decision to implement a service-learning model.

It is critical to note that I acted as the researcher in this case study. I was also the primary agent for selecting material, preparing the leaders, and teaching the youth within the ministry. While some educational theorists might argue that the researcher is too *close* to the situation, others contend that the teacher needs to act as a researcher for his or her own classroom (Stenhouse, 1983). In a church setting, the importance of this is compounded by the fact that other teachers are volunteers with limited time and resources. While their input is critical, the prevailing opinion at Smithsville was that I was the one most responsible for the education of students. That fact will become clear as the story of the history and context begins to emerge.

During the first 2 years of my tenure, I found the educational process at Smithsville to be incomplete and unorganized. Sunday school was the primary teaching time for youth and was divided into three classes of 7th-8th, 9th-10th, and 11th-12th

grades. Attendance was moderately successful, with 30-40 students participating each week. Although the church purchased curriculum books and teaching guides, Sunday school teachers often chose their own curriculum or made up their own lessons. The church allotted 9:30-10:20 for teaching but most lessons lasted less than 25 minutes. Students often arrived late and teachers had to leave early to get to choir or other responsibilities for worship, which began at 10:30 am. The 9th- through 10th-grade class was often subjected to *object lessons* that lasted shorter periods of time and were often drawn from books or websites designed for children's ministry. When asked about this, the teacher of that class shared that these lessons were advanced enough for teaching 9th- through 10th-grade students.

In addition to the primary teaching time on Sunday morning, the ministry offered a Wednesday-night Bible study led by volunteers. Only about 10 students attended this 6:30-7:30 p.m. session. I began to work on developing the Wednesday-night study while slowly making changes in the more established Sunday-morning program. In just over a month, more than 40 students began to attend on Wednesday night; however, this also caused discipline problems and a strain on curriculum planning. No volunteers regularly came on Wednesday night, so I was often left to teach over 40 students ranging from Grades 7-12. Attempts to involve volunteer leaders were difficult and sporadic, as were attempts to divide the study time between middle and high school students. Studies were often haphazard efforts and were frequently not completed in the allotted time due to disruptions from the students.

For 2 years, I struggled to plan curriculum, train teachers, and organize the students into manageable, teachable groups. I led several training sessions for teachers prior to the start of the 2009 school year. As a part of this training, I also recommended a

list of 10 Biblical concepts that students should understand before graduating from high school (Appendix H). Through collaborative discussion, the team formed a list of Biblical facts that students should learn either before or during their time in youth (Appendix I). I shared a plan for trying to obtain qualitative data on the knowledge that students possessed. The plan was to use the data to develop teaching techniques and curriculum to meet the educational and spiritual needs of students.

With the input of schoolteachers and others who volunteered with the youth ministry, a Bible Knowledge Quiz was developed to assess what the students knew about the scriptures. Questions were selected based on basic Bible knowledge and principles that the Youth Ministry Team agreed students should know before graduating from high school. Several of these questions were based on plans for teaching based on the two lists in the upcoming year, serving as a *pretest* to the planning that the Youth Ministry Team started.

The quiz was divided into two separate sections, Old Testament and New Testament (Appendix J). Each section contained 10 questions and was formulated according to the two lists as well as past Bible studies. No one expected the quiz to come back with perfect results, but the poor scores startled me. Of 37 high school students who took the quiz, only five answered 50% of the questions correctly on the Old Testament section. Scores were slightly improved on the New Testament, with five students scoring a *passing* grade of 60%. This still left 32 students who could not answer six of 10 questions correctly about the New Testament. Fifteen students were correct on fewer than three questions. This is in spite of the fact that 78% of the Sunday school lessons and Wednesday Bible studies in the previous year covered information in the New Testament. I concluded that the ministry and the church were failing miserably at



teaching the Bible to students before they graduated from high school.

Following the quiz, the minister urgently called another meeting of teachers and youth leaders to share the results. Although the quiz was not proven to be perfectly scientific and was an initial effort to obtain qualitative data, I was alarmed by the results. At the very least, I viewed this as evidence that the ministry was not effectively preparing students with basic knowledge of the Bible or Christian principles. It also indicated that significant work was required to improve student learning. While the quiz did not definitively prove it, I theorized that a lack of knowledge and adequate Christian education was one reason that students became disinterested in the church after high school. It is logical to assume that students, unhindered by peer or parental pressure, would become disinterested in something they do not truly know or understand.

Even more disheartening was the reaction of youth leaders to the results. Eight teachers/youth leaders attended the meeting. One teacher shared that none of the current college-age members or young adults would be able to pass the quiz, so the lack of youth education was nothing new. A volunteer and youth parent said, “Well, I doubt that many of the adults in the church could pass this quiz.” Still another teacher stated that some of the information should be taught to students before they reached the youth ministry; therefore, it was not the youth ministry’s responsibility since they had no influence over curriculum in the children’s ministry (Grades K-6). Several teachers commented that it was not the fault of the teachers but of the students who showed little interest in learning. While all agreed that the teaching for youth could be better, I sensed that there was very little urgency to change the teaching or the curriculum.

After the meeting, three volunteers approached me and shared their concern over the level of Christian education that youth-age students received. Two were youth

parents who volunteered, while the third was a Sunday school teacher who grew up in the church. They encouraged me to continue research and observation while working towards a more effective plan for curriculum and instruction. With this encouragement, I continued to pursue research and planning to improve the educational process for youth at Smithsville.

In March 2010, I called another meeting of all youth teachers, volunteer leaders, and interested church leaders to discuss my research and plans for the educational future of the youth ministry. This research involved reading, class work, and observations of the students involved in the youth ministry. The presented proposal requested that volunteers work with me to design a new, innovative curriculum that would scaffold learning experiences, beginning with very basic ideas such as memorizing the books of the Bible. After mastering these basic knowledge elements, students would gradually move towards mastery of the Biblical facts listed by youth leaders in previous meetings (Appendix H).

Following that, they would move towards learning, comprehending, and implementing the 10 essential concepts (Appendix I) that students need to know prior to graduating from high school. For planning purposes, the stakeholders at the meeting divided into teams and each team was asked to design one aspect of a 3-point curriculum. Public school teachers and professional educators were asked to design Bible studies that aligned with the Bible facts and 10 essentials presented at previous training (Appendices H and I). Volunteer leaders or teachers without formal educational training were asked to design activities or games that would help to illustrate and reinforce the Bible studies. Volunteers who were not educators or teachers for youth Bible study were asked to plan service projects, retreats, or activities that aligned with the new curriculum design.

During the course of the meeting, most of the people in the room voiced support. One of the professional educators in the group suggested a change in the planning format. She recommended that the group divide up into teams of three and each of the three would plan an educational unit around one or more of the 10 essentials. Teaching of the Biblical facts would be incorporated into the lesson designs where applicable for high school students. Middle school students would focus on a curriculum based around the Biblical facts and I would select and design lessons around these facts. The group agreed to this and tasked me with dividing up the teams and assigning which of the essentials would be the focus of each team.

While the tone of the meeting was generally positive, some participants hinted that they had doubts about the task at hand. One teacher, who possessed a Master's degree in education, commented, "I don't know if you realize what you're asking us to do." Two other Sunday school teachers shared that they believed in choosing curriculum that was already written rather than creating a new curriculum. Both called the next day to say that they were not interested in teaching the more basic concepts, but preferred to find a more advanced curriculum that focused on high-level integration of concepts. When asked about how students could evaluate concepts and use creative thought when they did not know basics, both teachers said that this was not their problem. They simply had no interest in teaching elementary-level memorization and understanding of material.

This negative sentiment was confirmed at three more scheduled meetings over the course of April and May. The original participants agreed to meet bi-weekly throughout the spring and summer, with a launch date of September for the newly designed curriculum. At the first April meeting, only four participants attended, three of whom had encouraged me to continue my work on curriculum following the October 2009

meeting about the results of the quiz. At the second April meeting, only three participants attended; and finally, in May, only two attended. The two remaining participants and I came to the somewhat obvious conclusion that there was not enough buy in to the concept of a collaborative effort of curriculum design and education (Eaker et al., 2002). In addition, there was little interest on the part of the senior pastor or the Minister of Education for a major curriculum reform effort that required significant collaboration. I attempted to articulate clear and collectively supported goals through the lists created in the inaugural meetings but the evidence pointed to a lack of support for applying these. Without buy in from teachers, volunteers, and senior leadership into clear mission, values, and goals, there was little hope of making a significant shift in the educational approach towards youth (Eaker et al., 2002).

As a result of this lack of support, two Sunday school teachers resigned from their positions in May 2010. Both stated that they did not feel led to continue with such a lack of support from parents and other volunteers. Youth classes were reduced to a middle school group (Grades 7-8) and a high school group (Grades 9-12). I worked with two other teachers to handle both Sunday morning and Wednesday night responsibilities. Discouraged by this lack of progress, I then decided to reassess the situation and continue searching for an existing curriculum that might match the goals and objectives chosen by the leadership.

Unseen forces quite often block the process of change, particularly in established organizations and institutions (Naisbitt, 2006). If the organization does not have a growth mindset, then change becomes an arduous process that involves overcoming unseen forces (Dweck, 2006). As I reassessed the needs and possibilities for educational reform during the summer of 2010, I became painfully aware of these unseen forces

blocking changes to the ministry at Smithsville. The most powerful of these forces was racism.

Since 2006, Smithsville Church used two buses to pick up neighborhood children and youth for Wednesday night activities at church. As many as 40 children and youth rode the buses on Wednesdays and the vast majority were African Americans. As a result, it was not unusual for one-third or more of the students in youth on Wednesday nights to be Black. This was a stark contrast for churches close to Smithsville in geography, size, and membership demographics.

Near the end of July 2010, four couples approached me and stated that they wanted to stop running the buses on Wednesday nights and only allow Black students to attend specific events at the church. This prompted me to schedule a meeting with the four couples on the first Sunday evening in August. The pastor attended the meeting as well. The parents accused me of showing preferential treatment to the students who rode the bus and neglecting the needs of their children and other youth who were members of the church/youth ministry. This discussion went on for 4 hours. They also stated their opinion that the reason students were not learning is because the *bus kids*, as they called them, were too unruly and poorly behaved for anyone to learn. In spite of our anger at the accusations and implications, the pastor and I agreed to meet with the group again in 1 week to see if some resolution could be reached.

At the conclusion of the initial gathering, it was decided that the second meeting would focus on establishing guidelines for behavior that would apply to all students and enlisting regular volunteers to assist with behavior. I invited the two youth Sunday school teachers, two volunteer leaders, the adult leader responsible for the bus ministry, and a member of the board of deacons. The group of parents invited two additional

couples to join the discussion. At the outset of the meeting, I presented a proposal for behavior guidelines and consequences.

After going over the proposal, one parent spoke up and said, “These won’t do any good. Those kids are not going to behave because they don’t want to know how to behave.” The discussion then degenerated into two couples listing reasons why the children who rode the bus should not be permitted at regular Bible studies or other youth events. They blamed the African-American students for poor attendance, lack of learning, and lack of community among the entire youth group.

It became obvious that this group of parents were determined to be *Controllers* in the situation and deny permission to participate to students who rode the bus (Easum, 1995, p. 37). In doing so, they intended to deny volunteers and me the right to minister to and educate African-American children in the community. To make this context even more disturbing, three of the Controllers in the room were public school teachers, while another was a staff member at a public school.

I responded with a call for an ultimate decision: “Are you telling me that you want to stop the buses from running altogether? Because I can’t be a party to that decision.” After the entire group responded with blank stares, the minister asserted that he would begin a Tuesday Bible study for the youth who rode the bus if they were forbidden to come on Wednesday. Finally, the deacon in the meeting, who was also a public school teacher, asked the question, “They all go to school together. Why can’t they learn together at church?”

This question suddenly turned the tide of the meeting as parents and leaders who wanted to minister to all students began to speak up. After 5 hours, it was decided and unanimously agreed that the bus ministry had to continue and the group agreed to a set of

guidelines. It was determined that middle school youth would meet on Wednesday nights at 6:30 and high school at 7:30. Adults signed up for times to be at youth meetings and events to help with discipline, but no new volunteers agreed to teach. Several adults volunteered to drive additional bus routes to make sure that all students had transportation.

This grueling process to reach consensus on the issue of the bus ministry is a demonstration of the difficulty of change, particularly in an organization that does not have strong leadership from the top or willing participants among the stakeholders (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). It also demonstrates the struggle faced by those who advocated educational reforms. As difficult as the process was, it was necessary to change some of the “unseen curriculum” that was simmering beneath the surface of the ministry that volunteers, teachers, and leaders were trying to create (Dreeben, 1970, p. 90). These meetings addressed some of the hidden agendas and underlying obstacles that were actually working against the principles and values put forward by the youth leaders, preventing them from making a full impact on youth. At the same time, the actual process of choosing a curriculum and teaching was never addressed. The new youth year at Smithsville coincides with the new school year. Students entering 7th grade moved up to new Bible study classes and began attending youth events; however, no plan was in place for how to teach them or integrate them into the life of the ministry.

For Sunday school lessons, two teachers chose a study guide and set out on their own to teach the middle school group. Left on my own to make curriculum decisions, I began to work to design lessons that focused on the 10 essentials and the Bible facts that youth needed to learn before graduating. I used the 10 essentials for youth Sunday school and Wednesday night Bible study for high school students. The Bible facts helped to

form the framework for the middle school studies on Wednesday nights.

While this pattern continued through the fall and into January of 2011, the results were unsatisfactory. While more volunteers initially came to help as promised during the late summer and early fall meetings, the helpers gradually fell away and left only two or three volunteers attending every youth meeting and event. This left the ministry with both a lack of discipline and a lack of educators. The Controllers from the summer discussion still complained behind the scenes that the youth who rode the bus were disruptive and problematic, continuing to work against the ministry from behind the scenes. From my observations, I did not believe that students fully comprehended the material that was being taught. I also did not believe that lessons were engaging and contributing to the building of a community of faith. Several middle school parents complained that the Bible facts lessons were too elementary for their students, although the students clearly did not know those facts. One parent pushed very hard to rally other parents to allow the middle school students to attend Wednesday Bible study with the high school group.

When I consented to this request in late January 2011, high school students began to stop attending on Wednesday nights. By giving in to the desires of some middle school parents and students, I overlooked the reaction of the high school students. This also drove away the very students who the ministry had intended to retain by reforming the education system. Bewildered by the situation, I felt that I had to honor this decision while trying to find a way to integrate the high school and middle school youth. My conviction was that there had to be a method or approach to curriculum that would allow transformative education to take place and help to keep older high school students engaged in faith.



While pondering this, I reviewed notes on the most effective lessons from September 2010 through January 2011. One lesson that seemed to stand out above the others was a study on the concept of grace. During this lesson from November 2010, a deacon, who randomly volunteered to assist in teaching that night, and I taught a lesson based on Matthew 18:21-35. The lesson taught that God offers unlimited forgiveness through Jesus Christ, while not expecting human beings to earn or deserve it. By the same token, Christians should offer unconditional love and forgiveness to others, even when such love and forgiveness is not earned or deserved.

From that lesson, several students began to discuss ideas for projects or activities that they could perform to demonstrate unconditional love to others. This discussion prompted me to design a curriculum plan entitled *The Grace Project*. In this concept, middle school and high school youth would work together in teams to perform community service projects. In addition, Sunday and Wednesday Bible study time would be devoted to the Biblical concept of grace and how students could demonstrate grace in daily life. The desire of this curriculum was to build community, create service opportunities, and offer a deep and integrated education in the Biblical concept of grace. After almost 2 years of intensive research and debate, the service-learning curriculum at Smithsville was born.

Although youth engaged in several service learning activities in The Grace Project, the one that moved to the forefront of the ministry was the youth food pantry. Several youth, called the Initiators in Chapter 4, took a significant role in leading this project. The church food pantry took requests for assistance during the day, from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., 3 to 4 days a week. The committee in charge of the pantry also received requests for financial assistance (rent, utilities, etc.) on Wednesday nights from 6:00-8:00

p.m. Families were required to live within the city limits of Smithsville, and could only receive food once every 3 months or financial assistance twice a year. The committee also required extensive paperwork, including work history, income requirements, and other personal information. Youth had at least three events per year to bring in food and financial donations to assist in this effort.

As a result of the teaching and design of The Grace Project, the Initiators, adult leaders, and I wanted to give the youth an opportunity to be more involved in the food pantry. Youth had no chance to actually work with the distribution of food or interact with clients. They also wanted to offer food more than once every 3 months and did not want to require paperwork or impose residency restrictions. The Initiators, prompted by Ginny, decided to distribute smaller amounts of food but offer it to anyone who came any time that the pantry was open. She worked with Anne on the food pantry as part of a senior project requirement for high school graduation. These two girls discussed the issue with me and decided that they would require a sign-in sheet for all clients. Name, address, and names/ages of all people in the household were required, along with an official form of identification.

Ginny and I took the idea to the pastor, church staff, and deacons in March of 2011. With the blessing of these groups, they set a start date of Saturday, April 30 from 9:00-11:00 a.m. They signed up adult and youth volunteers and asked youth to collect food and bring it to the youth room on Wednesday, April 27. As the youth were stocking food and organizing their plan for Saturday, the pastor called me and said that there was a problem.

Two members of the church food pantry committee were calling members and the pastor to express their anger that the youth were doing this work. They were asking the

pastor and deacons to stop the youth from doing this and declare that there would be only one food pantry. In front of some of the youth and adult volunteers, three adults from the committee confronted me. They were visibly angry and upset. Their argument was simple: The youth would not have enough accountability of whom they chose to give food, could not maintain the pantry themselves, and should not be doing this with a different approach than the committee. I responded that the youth simply wanted to be directly involved in helping to feed people in the community who needed it. One woman responded by saying, “The only way there are any hungry people in this town is if they’re too lazy to do anything about it.” Two of the Initiators overheard this statement.

On a night that began with a lot of excitement and energy, the youth were now frustrated and confused. Several adult and youth leaders gathered with the intern and me to discuss what to do. It was decided that they would go ahead with the project as planned. Ginny stated that if the committee took that attitude towards the youth food pantry then she would simply go and get all the food that youth had collected in the past for the church pantry and move it to the youth room. The intern and I told her that this was not the right attitude. When she asked why, I responded, “Because we have to act like Jesus wants us to act, no matter how other people treat us.”

The youth food pantry opened on April 30 as planned and served 22 families on that initial day. This work continued once a month through April of 2012. The committee for the church pantry continued to complain and battle against the youth pantry. They publicly complained to several deacons that they were doing the “real” work of helping people, but the youth were just “handing out food” to people who did not need it (Anonymous, personal communication, August, 2011). This unfortunately fed a spirit of tension and competition within the church family. Some people would *designate*

which pantry should receive their canned goods or financial donations. Ginny said, “My grandparents would hand me food and say, ‘This is for YOUR food pantry, not that other pantry’” (Interview, August 16, 2012).

The back-and-forth continued until the fall of 2011, when the committee for the original food pantry requested a discussion with the deacons about which food pantry could exist. The intern, one of the Educators, and I represented the youth, while two members of the church pantry committee came to present their thoughts. After hearing the committee’s case that the church pantry should be the only one, the deacons had two questions: Why did this need to come before the deacons; and why can these two ministries not coexist? (Meeting minutes, September 2011). The youth representatives did not feel the need to make a presentation.

The deacons decided that trying to combine the work of these two ministries was fruitless, because they served very different purposes and seemed to have somewhat differing philosophies of how to do ministry. Their conclusion accurately described the youth pantry as both a help to the community and an educational tool for the youth. With this in mind, they asked the two groups to “cease fire” and agreed that they should continue their work in peace. They also requested an end to any “bad-mouthing” or negative attitudes.

The context clarifies that the move to service learning was an inductive process, with the Youth Ministry Team, Educators, and student leaders evolving through that process. This evolution led them to conclude that the youth food pantry was the cornerstone of service learning. As demonstrated in the research, the students had the great investment in this project and generally strong motivation to see it continue. In spite of ongoing opposition, the youth food pantry has survived and continues to thrive.

Following an explanation of where the ministry/curriculum currently stands, this chapter will continue with suggestions on possible changes, improvements, and advancements that Smithsville can make in their curriculum model.

### **Summary: Where Does Service Learning Stand at Smithsville?**

Following the long process of development and implementation, the service-learning curriculum narrowed from The Grace Project to a centralized service learning activity born from that project. The youth food pantry is the ongoing activity that is sustained as a part of the Student Ministry since my departure from the church. The vision from the beginning was to increase the number of Saturdays that the pantry was open and involve more people in the work. At the present time, the Student Ministry Intern reports that the pantry has increased its days from one Saturday a month to two Saturdays a month. The youth are fighting to keep up with the demand for food.

While there are still two food pantries at Smithsville, more adults within the church are beginning to support the youth food pantry (Anonymous, personal communication, September 9, 2012). The leaders of the new college-age Sunday school class have begun to help and encourage their students to be involved in the ministry. Several other adults from the church are donating their time and their money to the sustaining of the youth pantry. While the adults are offering assistance to the work, the youth still maintain a majority of the responsibility.

The intern added that the present direction of the Bible studies does not necessarily focus on the food pantry or service learning (Anonymous, personal communication, September 9, 2012). There is no concentrated effort to make a connection between the project and scripture. The emphasis on community activity for youth is also changing. Emphasis is shifting more to fun or social activities and sports

rather than the food pantry or similar projects.

The church has hired a new Student Minister, and the Student Ministry Intern has returned to his original role (Anonymous, personal communication, September 9, 2012). The new minister has stated a commitment to continuing the food pantry, but it remains to be seen if that will include other aspects of the curriculum. There is no indication at this point if he will include any of the suggestions made by the Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators about how to sustain and improve the overall service-learning curriculum.

### **Interpretation and Significance of Results**

Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators put forward several points of agreement about service learning. In conjunction with these three groups, the Beginners offered insight into the value of a service-learning curriculum and how they might have benefitted from it. This part of the study will focus on those points of agreement and what they might mean for the future of the curriculum concept at Smithsville.

The first clear point of agreement among the three research groups directly involved with service learning concerns the connection between Bible study and service activities. Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators felt that this had a strong beginning but a weak finish. The Grace Project offered teaching on a subject that was poorly understood by the students and connected it with work that engaged students in offering grace to the community. While the projects were exciting, the Sustainers argued that the teaching offered a valuable connection between scripture and action. They did not understand why those connections were not maintained throughout the implementation.

Learning to apply basic information and grapple with the difficulty of that application in real-world settings is a hallmark of service-learning curriculum (Flanagan et al., 2011). Without the element of prior preparation and post-activity reflection, the

connections between text (the Bible), teaching, and action become lost (Flanagan et al., 2011). The curriculum needed to maintain the link between the Bible studies taking place on Sundays and Wednesdays and the food pantry or other acts of service.

Establishing the spiritual purpose behind those acts of service would help to establish the Biblical knowledge desired by the leadership team and contribute to the sustainability of the curriculum. Based on the Old and New Testament surveys offered to youth (Appendix C), the youth still need to form a solid base of Biblical knowledge. Students are much more likely to continue in a behavior and take advantage of knowledge if they have a clear and convincing understanding of how that behavior and knowledge should impact their lives (Pazmino, 2008).

This point is best illustrated by a situation presented in the Context section. When the committee at Smithsville vehemently opposed the youth food pantry activity, the youth became very aware of their opposition. This is particularly true of Ginny and the other Initiators. Their initial response, as voiced by Ginny on Wednesday, April 27, 2011, was to respond to the church pantry in the same way. In spite of all the teaching on grace, the youth took an *eye for an eye* approach rather than a grace-centered approach to this opposition. In this case, the hidden curriculum of the actions within the church overwhelmed the stated curriculum offered by The Grace Project (Dreeben, 1970). Because the actions of some members at Smithsville were not consistent with the intention of service learning, some youth were exposed to a hidden curriculum that caused them to have bitterness and frustration against the church. This became obvious in the responses that were documented in the results of the data collection.

In spite of the obvious hardship, the episode presented a teaching opportunity for the adult leaders and me. This presented the opportunity to explain to students why they

could not react in the same way the adults from the church pantry had. This allowed them to demonstrate the teachings of Christ and scripture in action, both from an Old and New Testament perspective. The leaders could show them how to live the commands to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) and “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). This type of *teachable moment* fits the original intent of service learning. The educational purpose of this type of curriculum is to illustrate to students how to deal with the successes, struggles, and failures that happen in real-world experiences (Cooper, 1998). The student ministry at Smithsville could have benefitted from such moments by creating more Bible studies and reflective discussions around them. Perhaps the leaders and I could have designed a study focused on how to react to people who opposed their beliefs or act in a way that they believe is unchristian.

Using these teaching opportunities to create a basis for study and discussion would create a greater ability to sustain the curriculum over time and help the students connect the teaching to their actual experiences. The second point of agreement is primarily illustrated in the responses of the Beginners and Educators along these lines. Their belief is that the true measure of the program will be in its viability as a long-term response to the needs of youth and young adults. Both agree that buy in from older youth who are on the verge of becoming Mosaics is essential. If the older youth set the tone and the curriculum becomes established, then younger youth will accept and commit to the curriculum when they enter the Student Ministry. They also shared that the curriculum needs to have an ongoing connection to the experiences created by service learning.

The idea of buy in to the curriculum is not unfounded in educational, organizational, or youth ministry theories. Educators believe that becoming convinced of



the importance and validity of a curriculum concept is critical to its success; and if the key stakeholders do not buy in, then the curriculum is largely doomed (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Without establishing a high sense of the urgency of the curriculum, service learning might become a good idea that falls by the wayside. This is a common problem in changing an approach to education (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Convincing others to buy in is also a common problem when trying to change an organization. No matter how well or how poorly an organization is functioning, there are many steps that take place to turn it towards the positive or towards the negative (Collins, 2001). Most people observe an organization *after* it is a success or struggling and they forget that many steps took place before reaching that point. To get an organization going in the right direction takes extensive work, buy in, and commitment to the ongoing work of moving the organization in a positive, worthwhile direction (Collins, 2001). Smithville's leaders and students have accomplished some good things, but there is much work to be done to establish service learning as a model for ministry in the future. Sustaining the work is essential to determine if it has long-term viability and if it will help to establish Christian principles in youth as they become Mosaics and Busters.

This type of sweeping change in an organization is difficult, particularly in student/youth ministry. The prevailing culture of youth ministry is to focus on numerical success and serving the *wants* of the students, rather than challenging them to sacrifice of themselves in an effort to learn to meet the needs of others (Bachand, 2010). Changing the focus from memorizing a few key verses and learning the appropriate traditional theological positions takes time and perseverance. As noted by Barna (2005), Kinnaman and Lyons (2008), and Barrick (2006), as well as several students in the research groups, youth and young adults are tired of standardized answers and stereotypical prejudices in

their study and exploration of spirituality. They are seeking a community that puts their words into action with genuine love and concern for the other. The self-serving, numbers-oriented material that is being served up as youth ministry education may sustain students for a while. However, the literature and this research show that these are not making a lasting impression on students.

For service learning to empower change and achieve its educational purpose, Smithsville Church must make a long-term commitment to service and to teaching students why they are serving. Beginners and Educators both agree that continuing with and growing the curriculum offers the best chance to discover if service learning can make an initial impression that lasts beyond high school and into the college years of students.

If that lasting impression is going to entice youth, Mosaics, and Busters to be involved in the church, then the *entire congregation* at Smithsville will need to make changes and support the curriculum. Adult leaders at Smithsville reacted to service learning, especially the youth food pantry, with attitudes ranging from indifference to indignation. The hurt and bewilderment at this reaction was obvious in the responses of Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators. Ginny, an Initiator, actually said at one point, “I wish we had just left the church out of it and done everything on our own. Why should we help them if they’re going to treat us that way?” (Interview, August 16, 2012). The lack of community reflected in these projects could potentially drive youth away as they become Mosaics and Busters, rather than bringing them closer to the church. While they love the new curriculum, the general view is that the church’s approach reflects apathy and/or a control mindset rather than a ministry mindset (Easum, 1995).

The lack of a ministry mindset at Smithsville is one of the biggest obstacles to

creating a fully functional curriculum that fosters community. While the food pantry and similar projects created a greater sense of community among the youth, they actually drove the youth further from the larger community of the church. As more adults in the church get involved, it may be possible to mend this fence. However, it is frustrating to the research subjects and the researcher that the fence ever had to break in the first place.

Drucker (1990) argued that all nonprofits and charitable organizations have to build partnerships and relationships with other like-minded organizations, donors, and volunteers in order to be sustainable and viable for long periods of time. This is true of churches just as it is of other charitable/nonprofit organizations. If Smithsville Church truly wants to build a community that will involve youth, Mosaics, and Busters, then it needs to begin working in *partnership* with the ministry rather than viewing these groups as cattle that need to be herded back into the barn of church. To create the atmosphere that youth and young adults are seeking, the church has to get *on board* with partnerships that involve them rather than command them. If youth see the church as a control-driven community that focuses more on minutia than ministry, they are not likely to return to it after they leave the community of the Student Ministry. As the Initiators expressed, they will not seek a church that is not supportive of their calling to active ministry. They have lost interest in what they view to be the standard of simply sitting complacently in church rather than following through by taking action based on what they have learned.

Smithsville and churches like it cannot continue to fragment their efforts at ministry at the expense of community and service. If the attitudes of church leaders drive them away, youth and young adults will view the teaching of scripture as a fraud and establish the dialogue necessary to understand scripture and traditional theology (Winings, 2007).

## **Critique of the Curriculum**

This study was intended to provide a thorough investigation of the impact of a service-learning curriculum on the student ministry of a mid-size church in upstate South Carolina. Such an investigation is designed to find out the positive influence of the curriculum on the ministry and the overall church. It is also designed to critique the curriculum and its implementation, while offering recommendations for improvement for similar endeavors. These recommendations can assist Smithsville in continuing curriculum, while providing wisdom for other churches/ministries that want to use a service-learning model.

Four primary problems emerged from the research on service learning. The first was the lack of planning that went into the curriculum, which coincides with the second problem of a lack of collaboration about the curriculum model. The third problem was poor communication with the overall congregation, which led to some of the negative reactions from church members. The final problem involved an error that I made in gauging the effectiveness of the curriculum. Instead of pulling back from Bible studies and activities of service learning, I should have worked with youth leaders to expand the scope of the curriculum.

In Chapter 2, the literature indicated that collaboration on curriculum design and implementation is essential to making successful changes in the approach to curriculum (Eaker et al., 2002). It is clear that a change in the approach to teaching and preaching is required if churches want to disciple youth and especially if they want that discipleship to continue into young adulthood (Clarke, 2007). It is also clear that there was a divide between youth, Mosaics, and Busters and Smithsville Church. Based on the research, all four groups—Beginners, Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators—believed that this rift

existed, and they were greatly frustrated by it. Service learning could have, and perhaps *should* have, helped to bridge that gap; instead, it may have caused the gap to grow.

Somewhere in the process, there was a breakdown in the planning and collaboration that occurred between the Youth Ministry Team, church leaders, church members and me. It is obvious that key leaders in the church did not understand the curriculum or its purpose, much less the ways the curriculum could improve the church's ability to disciple youth and young adults. In spite of the fact that the pastor, staff, and deacons expressed their approval, they did not have a clear picture of how they needed to support the curriculum change. Some members of the church viewed The Grace Project and the youth food pantry as a threat to the establishment and were not prepared to change. While the research overwhelmingly points to the need for change, perhaps these members are not concerned enough about youth, Mosaics, and Busters to allow such change to happen. Better planning and collaboration on the curriculum plan could have prepared the church to make some of those changes.

To some extent, this lack of planning was my responsibility. This was unavoidable because of the way the curriculum evolved. As described in the Context section, I unintentionally discovered the concept to some degree. After deciding to proceed with it, however, some additional research and explanation needed to happen for the benefit of the church and its leadership. A more extensive and specific curriculum plan, including service projects such as the youth food pantry, might have increased collaboration and avoided some of the conflicts.

Confronting the need to make changes is essential to any established organization that wants to keep up with changing trends and remain viable (Collins, 2001). Service learning is a new, dynamic, and dramatic alteration from the educational and church

culture at Smithsville. If I had been able to work with church leaders to communicate the need for such changes and the plan for implementing them, this might have reduced the resistance to the changes. At the least, other leaders could have helped the student ministry leaders head off the conflicts and their impact. As it was, the youth and some of the members developed very *hard feelings* that must now be overcome. As the research participants shared, this resistance strengthened their resolve; however, it also weakened their opinion of traditional church.

The Student Ministry and church leaders should have presented a more definitive plan prior to implementation, complete with a justification of the reasoning behind the curriculum. I could have offered oral or written presentations to explain the concept to the entire church. At the same time, my efforts to communicate more in-depth were met with lukewarm reactions, at best, from the church staff and deacons. Leaders seemed fine with allowing the youth to do this, but had no passion or desire to connect this to the rest of the church. This reaction points to the second glaring problem with service learning, which was the lack of communication and cooperation from the church.

If any group or subgroup within an organization hopes to enact a major change, it is essential to have the support of the leadership and the majority of the membership in order to help that change happen (Collins, 2001). If the organization, particularly a church, does not have a *permission-giving* culture towards new ideas, extensive cooperation has to occur for lasting change to take place (Easum, 1995). Smithsville did not—and perhaps does not—have such a culture and there was little cooperation from outside the student ministry to enact a change.

Instead of a permission-giving culture, I observed that Smithsville Church had a fragmented culture of ministry. This means that ministers viewed themselves in terms of

their individual work rather than as a whole, cooperative effort that had connected, but different, functions. Separate paid staff members are assigned to preaching, worship, education ministry, music, youth, and children. There was little effort to work together to create a cohesive ministry plan throughout the church. This fragmented approach neglected the *flat* nature of the world and the interconnectedness desired by youth and young adults (Friedman, 2007). Smithsville remains *stuck* in a traditional model of church where the youth are free to do whatever ministry they want as long as it does not interfere with the status quo. The pastor and staff at Smithsville must recognize that younger generations are familiar with a fast-moving, flat society where change is the norm and various aspects of society are intertwined in their impact on people (Friedman, 2007). If Smithsville persists in a fragmented model, the church will continue to struggle in reaching youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

According to the literature and the responses to the research, this mentality is the very mindset that is preventing the church from having a lasting impact on youth, Mosaics, and Busters. If Smithsville persists in this mindset, then it will severely limit the long-term impact that service learning will have on youth. At the very least, it is likely that they will look elsewhere for a community of faith, if they seek one at all. This is supported by the fact that Beginners, Initiators, and Sustainers all stated that they would seek a faith community that puts serving others as a top ministry priority.

In addition to fast-paced change and mobility in ministry, youth also have a need for stability and security (DeVries, 1994). Some of this is provided by immediate family, church family, and trusted leaders/mentors for youth to give them a solid belief system on which to build their lives (DeVries, 1994). This is the final critique of the curriculum, based on the research responses. As the service projects proceeded, I actually curbed the

Bible studies about service learning out of fear that youth would get bored with the subject matter. I was concerned that I had gone too far and was pushing too hard with this line of teaching. In the end, I did not go far enough.

The youth participants and the Educators were obviously beginning to comprehend the service-learning concept with the teaching of The Grace Project. Studies corresponded to the activities of service learning, giving the students a sense of purpose in these activities. All of these participants had one question regarding this: “Why did we stop?” This demonstrates a key principle of a service-learning curriculum: Classroom curriculum must relate to the outside activities and vice-versa (Berman, 2006). Helping students to gain a better understanding of what Christ is calling on disciples to do can help them be more effective when they are given the opportunity to do it. Providing a solid educational background in Christ, the Bible, and Christian theology can anchor students in many areas of life, including the difficulties and rewards of serving others.

In addition to teaching students about Christ, Bible study times could also be used as a time of reflection and discussion about what is happening in the field. Reflection is another critical element, as it offers youth a chance to discuss the correlations that they find between the Jesus Christ of scripture and their work in helping others. Rather than pulling back from this type of teaching and reflection, the curriculum would have benefitted from expanding it. Youth, Mosaics, and Busters are profoundly interested in finding connections between Christian faith and real-world action (Barna, 2005). If the curriculum continues, the leaders at Smithsville would be wise to broaden opportunities for study and reflection that relate to the activities. Research shows that the youth food pantry and other projects have already helped to build a sense of community among the



youth participants. Further reflection and discussion between the students could further the community-building element. Including adult volunteers could also provide some connection between the youth and the larger church.

While this section is devoted to a critique of the curriculum, it is appropriate to complete it with a suggestion for future work. If Smithsville can undo some of the damage between the research participants and the church, it would be fruitful for adults to also participate with youth in some of these times of study and reflection. The hope is that service learning can connect the youth to the church and help them see how they are a significant part of the greater Body of Christ. While service learning offers students a great sense of value and self-esteem (Berman, 2006), it would be that much greater if the adults of the church affirmed those senses by participating with them in all aspects of the curriculum. This would also create a new learning dynamic for adults. Furthermore, this would help to create the security and stability that youth need (DeVries, 1994). If youth see adults setting the example, then they may view them as trustworthy mentors who they can trust with their spiritual/life challenges, even as they become Mosaics and Busters.

### **Implications for Christian Education**

Smithsville has a traditional structure for Christian education for youth. Sunday school meets at 9:30 a.m., with Wednesday night Bible study (Jesus 101) at 6:30 p.m. and Sunday night Bible study (Sunday Night Live) from 6:00-8:00 p.m. on a bi-weekly basis. The analysis involves how service learning might guide, improve, or change the approach to youth education at Smithsville or similar churches. By discussing the implications for Christian education, the study expands its influence and possibility for helping churches reach out to youth. It can also help churches find new, creative methods for retaining youth, as they become Mosaics and Busters.

The primary educational principle that emerged from the service-learning curriculum is the concept of connecting the dots. As stated in the literature, youth and young adults want to see the connections between Biblical teaching, spirituality, and action in the real world (Tome, 2008). The question that the curriculum attempts to answer is how to get youth to build ongoing relationships with one another and the church, while also coming to a greater understanding of the Bible and learning to act on that understanding. The principle of connecting the dots is one that I originally set forth in the discussions concerning the curriculum at Smithville. The Educators group in the study used the same terminology during data collection to describe service learning. This principle signifies the need to provide links for students between their church community, their faith, their Biblical studies, and their daily actions. Youth have a true need to build their sense of self-esteem and compassion for others by serving others (Strommen, 1993). Service learning attempts to educate students by connecting a sense of community, learning, and service among these students.

The research groups all expressed disillusionment at the fact that the church seems so far removed from the new youth approach to curriculum. There is a clear rift, stemming from a lack of communication and understanding, between the goals of the Student Ministry and those of the rest of the church. While the leadership of the youth ministry selected service learning with the permission of the church, the research suggests that they do not have the full support of the church. The youth of the past and the present do not see any connection between their lives, the student ministry, and the rest of the church. Unless that changes, there is little hope that youth are going to be encouraged to grow and develop within Smithville. It is likely that they will look elsewhere for their spiritual challenges and faith actions, as demonstrated by their

responses to the research questions. To illustrate this point, it is noteworthy that only one of the six Beginners is involved in any way in a traditional church.

Service learning is an educational approach that could change that by providing an opportunity for youth and adults to come together to learn through missions and ministry. Strommen (1993) argued that a supportive congregation is essential to the development and education of youth within the church. Support is the *least* a church can offer to Smithsville's Student Ministry. For a truly lasting educational experience that positively impacts youth, Mosaics, Busters, and the church as a whole, Smithsville and other churches need to move from permission to actually helping students make connections between the student ministry and the overall mission of the church. This needs to happen in three phases of the education ministry: collaboration between sub-ministries of the church, comprehensive educational planning for the church, and improvement in the worship/classroom experiences for youth.

The first way that this needs to happen is with collaboration between the student ministry and other ministries of the church. Approaching the church staff and leadership as a PLC is one possibility for creating this collaboration (Eaker et al., 2002). In a traditional church like Smithsville, direction typically comes from a hierarchical approach beginning with the pastor before moving to deacons and/or staff, then on to smaller ministries such as the youth ministry. In this case, the Smithsville Student Ministry initiated the project and might need to set the example that would involve other ministries and leaders of the church. This is still consistent with the dynamics of a PLC, where the people who are working directly with the students in an educational process have input into how the curriculum is implemented, maintained, and changed (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

While this is a drastic change from Smithsville's past, it could be the time for dramatic changes in how the educational priorities are set. If youth and young adults are the *lost generation* (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2008) and the church would like to retain or revive that age group within the church, then dramatic changes in education are necessary. Establishing connections between the various age groups, organizations, and ministries within a mid-size church might revitalize the overall ministry and create enthusiasm for youth to stay involved in the church later in life. If they develop knowledge and understand the link between youth ministry and the overall ministry of the church, they are more likely to stay involved in the future (Black, 2008). If the current culture and educational methods are not working at Smithsville, then the church needs to re-culture itself in a way that will give the congregation a chance to make a sustainable impact on youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

In addition to creating a new culture of collaboration, the second thing that Smithsville needs is to define the educational direction for the church. This should not only impact youth and young adults but also the culture of the overall church. Educational strategies are much more effective if they exist in a unified effort that is supported by the congregation, rather than each subgroup or classroom moving in its own selected direction (Eaker et al., 2002). While the Student Ministry can suggest a direction or advise the church leadership on which direction would be most helpful for youth and young adults, the ultimate decision rests with the pastor, lay leaders, and the Minister of Education. Without an educational direction, the Student Ministry will continue to be disconnected from the rest of the church. If that continues to be the case, then it is logical that they will not have a strong connection to the church as Mosaics and Busters.

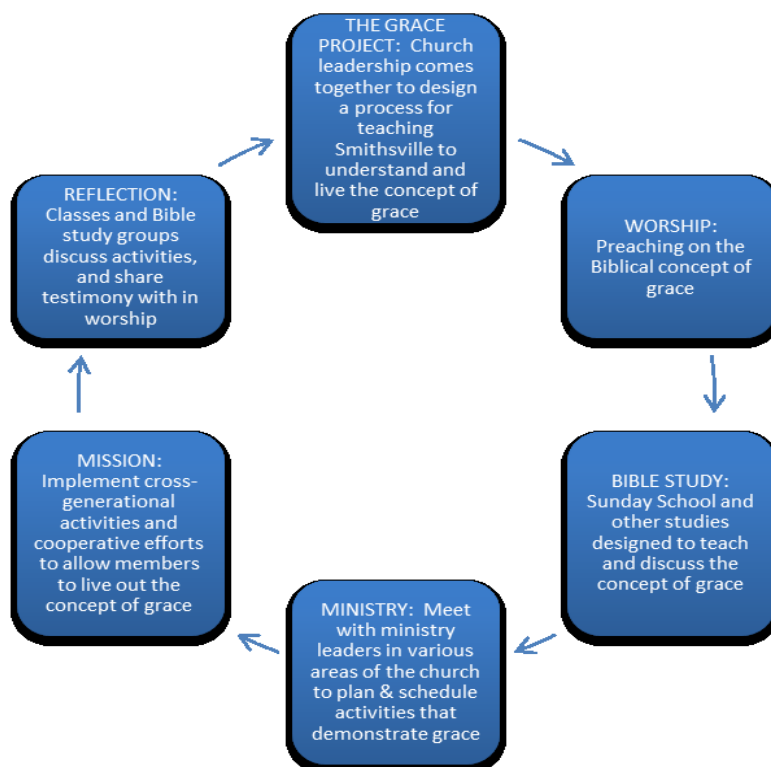
The lack of a curriculum direction allowed me to work with ministry leaders to select service learning with very little resistance. It also contributed to the rift between the student ministry and those who opposed service projects such as the youth food pantry. Because there was no direction for the student ministry, the leaders inadvertently created a conflict that should never have happened. Collaboration and an overall educational plan could have prevented this by giving direction to *all* ministries and classes. If the youth leaders had received some direction prior to the implementation of The Grace Project and the youth food pantry, then they could have worked to make sure that those ideas fit the educational direction of the church. This would have prevented the conflict and minimized the negative impression that the conflict made on youth. The impact of the underlying currents of church attitudes worked against the educational goals that service learning was intended to accomplish.

In addition, it is possible that the service-learning concept could provide an overall educational plan for the church. If the curriculum experiment proves effective with youth, it might also prove effective with adults. This would also provide the link that Smithsville is seeking between youth, young adults, and the larger congregation. This could increase Smithsville's ability to retain Mosaics and Busters. It also creates the opportunity for youth to see their connection to the larger church that seems to be missing in current youth and young adult educational culture (Black, 2008). It would also provide direction for all ministries and ministers.

This is particularly applicable to Smithsville as they transition to a new Student Minister. The turnover rate for youth ministers is extremely high, with a tenure lasting somewhere between 18 months and 3.9 years (Atkinson, 2007). Smithsville is now on its fourth Student Minister since 2005. With the possibility of that kind of change in

leadership, direction from the church in the educational curriculum could provide much-needed stability to the ministry. This would be in agreement with the literature that points out the need for stability for youth (DeVries, 1994), as well as the assertion of Beginners that they wanted more stability in their student ministry experience.

A possible model for educational planning is found in the student ministry concept of The Grace Project. Initiators, Sustainers, and the adult Educators all endorsed this method. They appreciated the design of Bible studies about the concept of grace combined with community-building service activities that allowed youth to experience the Biblical concept. Taking advantage of this connection between Bible study and activity is an essential component for the future of service learning. A similar format to The Grace Project concept, based on the Christian education work of Suzanne Johnson (1989), might create a similar effect for Smithville as a church body.



*Figure 5.* Processes for Christian Education and Formation (Johnson, 1989).

The Grace Project is a likely candidate for creating such a cycle for two reasons. One is that the research indicates that the student ministry has already experimented with it and demonstrated the potential for success. Another is that the concept of grace is very misunderstood and needs to be reintroduced as a key concept in Christian education (Johnson, 1989). Creating an “environment of grace” is the most critical element of spiritual formation and education (Johnson, 1989, p. 122). Creating this environment within the church fosters a community where believers can “help each other pay attention to the motions of grace and the promptings of the spirit” (Johnson, 1989, p. 122). This type of environment corresponds to the action-based education advocated by the majority of the research participants in this study.

While the environment of grace creates the possibility of connecting the dots between the various ministries of the church, the task of providing excellent classroom opportunities remains paramount to the success of the curriculum. This is the third educational aspect that needs to be emphasized if Smithsville opts to continue with service-learning curriculum. As the research shows, Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators felt that the service learning activities did a great deal to create a sense of community by offering youth a chance to work together to put their faith into action. These participants also expressed a need to continue strong Bible study and teaching that help youth connect the Bible to the activities of the community.

Kinnaman (2006), in a work that intersected with the research of Wesley Black, argued for a new approach towards youth ministry that changes the focus to educated discipleship. Based on his research work with the Barna Group, Kinnaman said:

Much of the ministry to teenagers in America needs an overhaul—not because churches fail to attract young people, but because so much of those efforts are not

creating sustainable faith beyond high school. . . . A new standard for viable youth ministry should be—not the number of attenders, the sophistication of the events, or the “cool” factor of the youth group—but whether teens have the commitment, passion, and resources to pursue Christ intentionally and wholeheartedly after they leave the youth ministry nest. (p. 54)

Black (2008) supported this sentiment through his research into what youth need in order to develop the level of discipleship that Kinnaman (2006) desires to see. One aspect is a need for students to “have the opportunity to use (their) skills and talents to help” in ministry (Black, p. 56), which Smithsville is clearly doing. The other aspects involve making decisions based on God, developing a desire to study the Bible, meditating on God, and getting involved in church/ministry without undue influence from parents (Black). To develop these qualities, it is essential for Smithsville to allow the “environment of grace” to permeate the classroom and worship settings (Johnson, 1989, p. 122). Developing true Christian formation among youth and sustaining that Christian formation are contingent on developing a culture that creates connections between community, learning, and daily living (Johnson, 1989).

Developing the environment of grace at Smithsville in the church as well as in the youth ministry and youth food pantry is the key to the sustainability of service learning as a viable curriculum. This will require additional preparation and planning by the new Student Minister, youth ministry team, youth education team, and youth leadership team. Their input and collaboration on Bible study curriculum is critical, even if it leads them to design and write the curriculum rather than purchasing it. The teams have not been receptive to this in the past; however, it is possible that service learning has created new energy and a new attitude.



If the decision is to purchase a curriculum, the teams need to carefully study it before the purchase to insure that it coincides with service-learning principles. This will again require extra preparation, as teachers and leaders need to be prepared to illustrate the connections between the study and the activity of service learning. They will also need to work to make sure the studies fall into the parameters set out in the collaboration between the ministries and the leadership of the church.

The research and literature clearly indicate that youth are not going to remain involved in the church simply because they grew up in the church. Youth and young adults need purpose and direction, and they will find other ways to spend their time if the church fails to offer purpose and direction. One of the most important ways that Smithsville—or any similar church—can improve its ministry to youth is to help them connect the dots between the words that they hear in Bible study and worship and the actions that the church undertakes as a community of faith.

In order to help this happen, a change of attitude is required by the *church* at Smithsville. In this instance, the church needs to take a lesson from the students, and buy into the service-learning concept that is clearly having an impact on the youth. In order to do this, strong leadership from the pastor, staff, and lay leaders is required. This must lead to collaboration between the leaders and various ministries in order to set the priorities for ministry and connect those ministries to the Bible study and worship. This will give the youth a sense of purpose and meaning and, hopefully, encourage them to find reasons to stay connected to Smithsville or some other congregation as they become Mosaics and Busters.

The sense of value and community that the youth get from a collaborative service learning effort throughout the church must coincide with strong teaching of the Christian

values behind service learning. If Smithsville hopes to create an environment of grace to foster spiritual formation, the Bible studies, sermons, and discussions must help people connect teaching and spirituality to the actions of the church. By making these connections, youth will have a solid model for discipleship to follow and can find the connection between the ministry of their youth and the church of their adult lives.

### **Recommendations for Continuing Research**

Several fascinating possibilities exist for follow-up study. The first of these involves ongoing investigation at Smithsville, while the second involves research within the larger scope of church settings.

The recommendations begin with the possibility of investigating the continuation of service learning as a relevant curriculum at Smithsville. It will be interesting to see if the curriculum survives a change of leadership as well as the resistance of the church to the concept. If the student ministry continues with the food pantry and similar projects, it will be interesting to see if they can overcome the mistakes of the initial implementation. Furthermore, discovering *how* the leadership overcomes those mistakes could provide a model for repairing the damage rather than abandoning the ministry. Organizations often abandon ideas far too quickly if they do not initially work out as planned (Naisbitt, 2006). If Smithsville can persevere and overcome those obstacles, this could encourage them to apply those methods and help them persevere in other areas of education and ministry. It could also encourage other ministries to do the same when facing challenges and obstacles to educating youth, Mosaics, and Busters in Christian formation.

A final suggestion would involve the church as a whole. Research into the reasons that some people resisted the curriculum could help other ministries understand what obstacles must be overcome in order to effect lasting change. This could also

provide for a study of traditional churches as organizations and what challenges they face to meeting the needs of a postmodern world. It could also further explain why youth are abandoning traditional churches when they become Mosaics and Busters. Although there is already extensive research into this phenomenon, a study of a particular church such as Smithsville could provide specific examples rather than the broad generalizations of current research.

An even more widely applicable study would involve additional research with the Beginners, Initiators, and Sustainers. Finding out where those research participants are in 5 years will further inform the tale of the validity of the service-learning curriculum. It would be noteworthy to discover if they are involved in church or Christian ministry in any way and if those churches or ministries model the service-learning approach. The goal of the curriculum is to disciple youth in a way that helps them to build community, know Christ, and serve others. Whether or not those principles have a lasting impact could influence other ministries to see the validity of a service-based approach to Christian education.

Beyond Smithsville, the study has implications for how other churches might approach education of youth in a way that could connect them to Christianity as young adults. If another church is willing to try service learning, it would provide another possible case study to see how the curriculum impacts that church in comparison to Smithsville. A new experiment would also benefit from understanding the mistakes that happened and could gauge the impact if those mistakes are avoided. It is my desire that others may be prompted to test the curriculum theory in other settings and measure its impact. This is particularly desirable in relation to the impact it might have on youth, Mosaics, and Busters.

This is already happening for me at another church. I am working with volunteers to implement a service-learning model at a new congregation in a much different community setting. Youth are a part of this model, as the new church is just beginning a student ministry from a very small group. This creates the possibility for researching service learning as a foundational curriculum within a new ministry. It can also provide a glimpse into the impact on students if the entire congregation supports the curriculum.

While this singular case study provides a look at service learning within a church setting, the possibilities for further research are fascinating and noteworthy. It will be exciting to discover how this curriculum evolves from Smithsville and from other ministry settings.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

In addition to the possibility for further research at Smithsville and other church settings, additional opportunities exist for investigation that moves beyond the present case study. The first involves research on the issue of change within an organization. One of the major obstacles at Smithsville involved changing the approach to youth ministry education without the complete support of the upper levels of church leadership. How can subgroups within an organization facilitate necessary changes if the subgroup is not a power broker within an organization? A specific example might involve teachers in all levels of education. If a teacher sees the need for changes in the curriculum and instruction with the students who he/she teaches every day, what are the avenues for enacting that change? I would like to see additional study on the organizational aspects of this dynamic and how grassroots movements within organizations can empower change. It seems relevant to understand possible steps and procedures for enacting change, in order to maximize effectiveness and minimize resistance surrounding the

change. Teachers and instructors may have good ideas, but it would be interesting to learn how they go about implementing them or gaining administrative support for making such changes.

I would also hope to see further research on the service-learning concept in other educational organizations. It would be very interesting to see the results of implementing service learning in other schools, classrooms, and particularly churches. I believe that this type of curriculum has the potential to influence students in a variety of ways if instructors can make the proper connections between the classroom and the activities. Further study on how to design and implement such a curriculum on a broader level could prove to be very insightful.

Yet another possibility involves the concept of service learning. While advocates such as the authors cited in this study often praise the concept, further study of the curriculum is needed. In the literature review, I found numerous sources that advocated the use of service learning. It would be valuable to find more qualitative and quantitative research on this type of curriculum. I would like to see some work on possible quantitative measures to support some of this advocacy. This could also lead to further investigation about where and how such a curriculum might succeed. In order to gain wide acceptance, it seems necessary to have further investigation of the feasibility and assessment of the impact of service learning. If research could combine both qualitative and quantitative measures, then service learning advocates would have a significant advantage when arguing for the use of the method.

## **Conclusion**

The long and arduous work of this case study on service learning began with an experiment in helping to disciple a group of youth into a faith community. The goal was

to help them build a community where they both learned a Biblical, Christ-centered foundation. This foundation was not to be memorized or recited but was to be lived by serving others in the name of Christ. In order to do this, the student ministry leaders at Smithsville Church used educational and theological principles to implement a service-learning curriculum for youth.

The research into the curriculum shows mixed results. Beginners flatly stated that something needed to change from their experience with the church, because they felt no drive to stay involved in Smithsville. Initiators and Sustainers, who were directly involved in the curriculum implementation, clearly feel a sense of passion for the curriculum that is carrying over into their attitudes beyond the walls of the church.

Whether or not that passion continues into their years as Mosaics and Busters remains to be seen. There are hopeful signs that they will seek out ministries and churches that give them an opportunity to serve in the name of Christ. However, other factors indicate that Smithsville may not be that church. All research participants are discouraged by the lack of support and involvement from the church. The youth food pantry and corresponding projects are good for the students, but the research indicates that they are not connecting the students to the overall church.

Because of the lack of commitment and direction from the church, the continuation of the curriculum is in jeopardy. If the new Student Minister and other church leaders do not get behind it, then the youth food pantry may be the lone project to survive from the original curriculum. The greatest hope for success of the curriculum lies in the knowledge and inspiration that it has given youth to this point. While the work was flawed and incomplete, research indicates that it moved and motivated all who participated in it. Students achieved new levels of knowledge and understanding about

the concept of grace. They also had the opportunity to live out that grace by coming together to overcome obstacles and help those in need in their community.

If their answers hold to form, then the youth and young adults who participated in the research will seek out Christian ministries that place a supreme value on serving others in the name of Christ. Smithsville Church still has to decide if it is willing to make the necessary changes to be that kind of community. If it does not, then it is likely that the church will continue to struggle in its efforts to make lasting impressions on the Christian formation of youth. It is even less likely that the church will retain youth as they become young adults.

The positive light from this case study resides in the changes of attitude reflected among the Initiators, Sustainers, and Educators. According to their responses, the curriculum has changed their mindset away from self and towards what they can do for others. As Kim said, “I think all the time about how we can get food for hungry people, and how we can help others. I never thought about that until we did The Grace Project and the food pantry” (Interview, August 28, 2012). If the curriculum changes the mindset of any students in this way, then it is an unequivocal success. The goal of the curriculum, however, is not to be successful according to modern youth ministry standards as defined by Bachand (2010). The goal is to change the hearts of those involved. If service learning changed even one heart towards Christ, helped one person eat, or guided one person’s walk of discipleship, then it was well worth the effort.

## References

- Abel, C. F. (2004). A justification of the philanthropic model. In B. W. Speck, & S. L. Hoppe (Eds.), *Service learning: History, theory and issues* (pp. 45-58). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Adams, J. (2011). Preaching to young adults. *Journal for Preachers*, 34(4), 27-32.
- Atkinson, H. (2007). Debunking the 18-month myth. *Strategies for Disciple-Making Ministries*, 4(1), 2-3. Retrieved from <http://alumni.tfc.edu/schoolnews/ce/cefall2007.pdf>
- Bachand, S. (2010). Living God or cosmic therapist? Implications of the National Survey of Youth and Religion for Christian Religious Education. *Religious Education*, 105(2), 140-156.
- Barna, G. (2003, Sept. 2). Small churches struggle to grow because of the people they attract. *The Barna Group*. Retrieved from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/126-small-churches-struggle-to-grow-because-of-the-people-they-attract>
- Barna, G. (2005). *Revolution: Finding vibrant faith beyond the walls of Christianity*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale.
- Barrick, A. (2006, December 7). Survey: Young adults want genuine church. *The Christian Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-young-adults-want-genuine-church-23925/>
- Berman, S. (2006). *Service learning: A guide to planning, implementing, and assessing student projects* (2d ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Black, W. (2006). Youth ministry that lasts: The faith journey of young adults. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 4(2), 19-48.
- Black, W. (2008). The search for lasting faith: Development of a scale to predict continued faithfulness in church attendance following high school graduation. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6(2), 53-68.
- Bunge, M. J. (2008). Biblical and theological perspectives on children, parents, and “best practices” for faith formation: Resources for child, youth, and family ministry today. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 47(4), 348-360.
- Canton, J. (2006). *The extreme future: The top trends that will reshape the world for the next 5, 10, and 20 years*. New York: Penguin.
- Clarke, M. A. (2007). Claiming Elijah's mantle: Young adults and the life of the church. *Anglican Theological Review*, 89(1), 59-68.



- Codispoti, F. (2004). A justification of the communitarian model. In B. W. Speck, & S. L. Hoppe (Eds.), *Service learning: History, theory and issues* (pp. 99-118). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap . . . and others don't*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Collins, J. (2005). *Good to great and the social sectors: Why business thinking is not the answer, a monograph to accompany Good to Great*. Boulder, CO: Jim Collins.
- Cooper, D. D. (1998). Reading, writing and reflection. In R. A. Rhoads, & J. P. F. Howard (Eds.), *Academic service learning: A pedagogy of action and reflection* (pp. 47-56). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, John W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crutchfield, L. R., & Grant, H. M. (2008). *Forces for good: The six practices of high-impact nonprofits*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dekker, J. (2007). What are we doing with the faith development of adolescents in service projects? *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6(1), 55-65.
- DeVries, M. (1994). *Family-based youth ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Douglass, R. (2009). *Why young people are leaving the church: The need for apologetics*. Retrieved from <http://womeninapologetics.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Why-Young-People-are-Leaving-the-Church-1.pdf>
- Dreeben, R. (1970). Schooling and authority: Comments on the unstudied curriculum. In N. V. Overly (Ed.), *The unstudied curriculum: Its impact on children* (pp. 85-103). Washington, DC: ASCD Elementary Education Council/NEA.
- Drucker, P. F. (1990). *Managing the nonprofit organization: Principles and practices*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Dudley, R. L., & Wisbey, R. L. (2000). The relationship of parenting styles to commitment to the church among young adults. *Religious Education*, 95(1), 39-50.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Solution Tree Press.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Ballantine Books.

- Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Easum, W. (1995). *Sacred cows make gourmet burgers: Ministry anytime, anywhere, by anybody*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Ellison, J. E., Glenn, N. D., Marquardt, E., & Zhai, J. E. (2007). Parental divorce and religious involvement among young adults. *Sociology of Religion*, 68(2), 125-144.
- Erwin, P. (2006). Youth ministry education: Where practice, theology, and social science intersect. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 4(2), 9-17.
- Flanagan, C. A., & Christens, B. D. (2011, Winter). Youth civic development: Historical contest and emerging issues. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 134, 1-10.
- Flanagan, C. A., Martinez, M. L., Cumsille, P., & Ngomane, T. (2011, Winter). Youth civic development: Theorizing a domain with evidence from different cultural contexts. *New Directions for child and adolescent development*, 134, 1-10.
- Foreman, B., Prosser, B., & Woody, D. (2004). *Help! I teach youth Sunday school*. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys.
- Friedman, T. L. (2007). *The world is flat: A brief history of the Twenty-First Century*. (3rd ed.) New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Gardner, F. A. (1982). Questions the church needs to answer about youth. In D. C. Wyckoff, & D. Richter (Eds.), *Religious education with youth* (pp. 54-74). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- Harkavy, I., & Benson, L. (1998). De-Platonizing and democratizing education as the bases of service learning. Rhoads, R. A., & Howard, J. P. F. (Eds.), *Academic Service Learning: A Pedagogy of Action and Reflection*, 73, 11-20.
- Hoge, D. R., Heffernan, E., Hemrick, E. F., Nelsen, H. M., O'Connor, J. P., Philibert, P. J., & Thompson, A. D. (1982). Desired outcomes of religious education and youth ministry in six denominations. *Review of Religious Research*, 23(3), 230-254.
- Howard, J. P. F. (1998, Spring). Academic service learning: A counternormative pedagogy. Rhoads, R. A., & Howard, J. P. F. (Eds.), *Academic Service Learning: A Pedagogy of Action and Reflection*, 73, 21-30.
- Hull, J. M. (1991). *What prevents Christian adults from learning?* Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International.

- Hunter, Z. (2008). *Generation change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Johnson, S. (1989). *Christian spiritual formation in the church and classroom*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Jones, T. (2008). *The new Christians: Dispatches from the emergent frontier*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Imprint.
- Ketcham, S. G. (2008). A question of capacity: Can adolescents practice discernment? *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6(2), 11-29.
- Kinnaman, D. (2006, September 11). Most twentysomethings put Christianity on the shelf following spiritually active teen years. *The Barna Group*. Retrieved from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years>
- Kinnaman, D. (2011, September 28). Six reasons young Christians leave the church. *The Barna Group*. Retrieved from <http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>
- Kinnaman, D., & Lyons, G. (2008). *UnChristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity and why it matters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Kujawa-Holbrook, S. A. (2010). Resurrected lives: Relational evangelism with young adults. *Congregations*, 37(2), 17-21.
- Lottes, J. D. (2005). Jesus as mentor: Biblical reflections for ministry with young adults. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 32(2), 128-138.
- Marquardt, E. (2006). If you talk to them they will come: Understanding and ministering to one-quarter of today's young adults: Children of divorce. *Family Ministry*, 20(1), 11-27.
- McClaren, B. D. (2010). *A new kind of Christianity: Ten questions that are transforming the faith*. New York: HarperOne.
- McClaren, B. D., & Campolo, T. (2003). *Adventures in missing the point*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- McKernan, J. (2008). *Curriculum and imagination: Process theory, pedagogy, and action research*. London: Routledge.
- McMillan, E. A. (2009). *Young adults change their thinking on church*. Retrieved from [http://www.yorkdispatch.com/ci\\_12106667](http://www.yorkdispatch.com/ci_12106667)

- McQuillan, P. (2009). Youth ministry in a changing world: The international research project on youth spirituality. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 7(2), 73-89.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. (Revised Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mize, D., & McMahan, R. (2009). *Growing graduates: Mind of a scholar*. Retrieved from [www.growinggraduates.com](http://www.growinggraduates.com)
- Moltmann, J. (1993). *The church in the power of the spirit*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Naisbitt, J. (2006). *MindSet! Eleven ways to change the way you see—and create—the future*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Parrett, G. A., & Kang, S. S. (2009). *Teaching the faith, forming the faithful: A Biblical vision for education in the church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Pazmino, R. W. (2008). *Foundational issues in Christian education: An introduction in evangelical perspective* (3rd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Pugh, D. S., & Hickson, D. J. (2007). *Writers on organizations: Sixth edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Richter, D. (1982). A bibliographical survey of youth and youth ministry. In D. C. Wyckoff, & D. Richter (Eds.), *Religious education with youth* (pp. 1-53). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- Rocheleau, J. (2004). Theoretical roots of service learning: Progressive education and the development of citizenship. In B. W. Speck, & S. L. Hoppe (Eds.), *Service-learning: History, theory and issues* (pp. 3-22). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Scott, D. (2008). *Critical essays on major curriculum theorists*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sementelli, A. (2004). A critique of the philanthropic model. In B. W. Speck, & S. L. Hoppe (Eds.), *Service learning: History, theory and issues* (pp. 59-72). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Smith, M. K. (2000). Curriculum theory and practice. *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-curric.htm>
- Spring, J. (2004). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Stenhouse, L. (1983). *Authority, education and emancipation: A collection of papers by Lawrence Stenhouse*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

- Strommen, M. P. (1993). *Five cries of youth: Issues that trouble young people today* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Harper-Collins Publishers.
- Terrell, I. (2011). *Being a practitioner-enquirer 2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.mdxpartnership.org.uk/hotseats/hotseat-material/2010-2011/being-a-practitioner-enquirer/>
- Thompson, C. (2012, January 26). Five myths about youth/young adult church dropouts. *Anchorage Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://community.adn.com/adn/node/159505>
- Tome, B. (2008). *Welcome to the revolution*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Walker, R. (2002). Case study, case records and multimedia. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32(2), 109-127.
- Weigert, K. M. (1998, Spring). Academic service learning: Its meaning and relevance. *Academic Service Learning: A Pedagogy of Action and Reflection*, 73, 21-30.
- White, D. F. (2008). Dialogue toward a practice of discernment with youth: A response to Ketcham's question of capacity. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6(2), 31-40.
- Winings, K. (2007). Five invaluable resources for young adult religious education. *Religious Education*, 102(2), 224-233.
- Wray-Lake, L., & Syvertsen, A. K. (2011, Winter). The developmental roots of social responsibility in childhood and adolescence. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 134, 11-26.
- Wyckoff, D. C., & Richter, D. (Eds.). (1982). *Religious education with youth*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Appendix A  
Questions for Beginners

**Questions for Beginners** - *How do select members of Smithsville Church characterize the conditions leading to the need for a service-learning curriculum?*

1. When did you start in the Youth Ministry, and when did you graduate? (All participants)
2. What activities did you participate in the most during your time? (Sunday school/worship, Sunday nights, Wed. Nights, Mission trips, fun activities, etc)
3. How did youth ministry increase your knowledge about Christianity?
4. How did it impact the way that you thought or acted in daily life?
5. Who were the people in youth ministry that had the most influence on your life?
6. How did youth ministry impact your feelings about church?
7. If you could change something about your youth ministry experience, what would it be?
8. How did church/youth ministry prepare you for the spiritual challenges of life after high school?
9. In what ways are you likely to be involved in some type of Christian organization in the future?
10. How do you think youth ministry could change in order to help youth develop strong spirituality, community, and service?

## Appendix B

### Questions for Initiators



**Questions for Initiators** - *How did student leaders of Smithsville Church react to the implementation of service-learning curriculum?*

1. When did you start in the Youth Ministry at Inman First, and when did you graduate?
2. What activities did you participate in the most during your time? (Sunday school/worship, Sunday nights, Wed. Nights, Mission trips, fun activities, etc)
3. What led the students and leaders to change the focus towards service-learning projects such as *The Grace Project* and the youth food pantry?
4. Why did you choose to be involved (or NOT be involved) in service learning activities?
5. How did other youth react to these kinds of projects?
6. What were the objections of youth or church members to the idea of service learning?
7. How did service learning impact your view of Christianity and/or the church?
8. Why should the youth ministry continue service learning?
9. Why or how has service learning influenced you to be involved in the church or other Christian organizations in the future?

## Appendix C

### Questions for Sustainers

**Questions for Sustainers** - *How has service learning impacted youth of Smithville Church who are currently participating in the service-learning curriculum?*

1. When did you start in the Youth Ministry, and when will you graduate?
2. What activities did you participate in the most during your time? (Sunday school/worship, Sunday nights, Wed. Nights, Mission trips, fun activities, etc)
3. What are some of the differences that you see in the youth ministry since the beginning of service-learning projects such as the youth food pantry?
4. How have these projects personally made a difference in your relationship with Christ and the church?
5. What aspects of service learning have made the greatest impression on you?
6. How has service learning grown or improved since it first began in the youth ministry?
7. In what ways has service learning continued since the departure of the Student Minister and the hiring of the intern as interim Student Minister?
8. Why or how has service learning influenced your involvement in church or other Christian organizations?
9. How has service learning impacted your thoughts about staying involved in the church or other Christian organizations after high school?

Appendix D  
Questions for Educators

**Questions for Educators** – *How do the adult leaders of youth of Smithsville Church believe that service learning is impacting the youth ministry?*

1. When did you start working with the Youth Ministry?
2. What activities do you lead or participate in as a leader/educator? (Sunday school/worship, Sunday nights, Wed. Nights, Mission trips, food pantry, etc)
3. Why did you believe that the curriculum at the church needed to be changed?
4. As an adult leader/educator, why did you believe that it was important to change the focus of the curriculum towards service-learning projects such as *The Grace Project* and the youth food pantry?
5. How have you seen service learning influence the youth of the church?
6. How has the curriculum impacted their knowledge of scripture and Christian principles?
7. What lasting impact do you believe the curriculum will have on the youth ministry and the youth who participate in it?
8. Why should the youth ministry continue with service learning?
9. Based on the impact that you have seen to this point, how should the curriculum be adjusted?
10. If adult leaders from another youth ministry said that they were going to start a service-learning curriculum, what would you tell them?

Appendix E  
Organizational Approval Document

Dear Pastor and Chair of Deacons/Leadership Board:

I am currently working to complete a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Gardner-Webb University. One of the requirements of the degree is to write a dissertation. The title is *Case Study of the Youth and Young Adult Ministry at a Church in Upstate South Carolina*. I have chosen to research the impact of service-learning curriculum on youth and young adults who participated in such programs as a part of their youth ministry experience.

The youth ministry at your particular church began extensive use of service learning based curriculum within the last 2 years. I would like to focus on students and adults who are connected to the youth and young adult ministry for my field research. I am planning on conducting a case study using short-answer surveys, focus groups and individual interviews, to gather data about the impact of the service-learning programs and their effect on the youth and young adult ministries.

All collected information and all information concerning the church, the students and the adults will remain confidential and anonymous. The participation in this research is completely voluntary.

If you have any questions you may contact the researcher, Thomas S. LeGrand Jr., by phone at \_\_\_\_\_ or by email at \_\_\_\_\_. Any questions regarding the research or requirements for Gardner-Webb University may be directed toward the chair of the dissertation committee, Dr. Sydney Brown at \_\_\_\_\_.

If all parties are in agreement of this proposed study, please sign below. Thank you for your time and your interest in this study.  
Sincerely,

Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate, Gardner-Webb University

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board Representative Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F

### Research Participant Authorization



Dear Research Participant:

My name is Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr. and I am a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University. I am currently finishing the requirements for my degree with a dissertation entitled *Case Study of the Youth and Young Adult Ministry at a Church in Upstate South Carolina*.

I have chosen to focus my research on one particular church. You or your child has been requested to participate in this study because you have participated in the youth ministry either as a youth or as an adult leader of youth at this church.

As a research participant, you will be asked to complete a written survey, interview or focus group. All information and opinions expressed will remain anonymous and confidential. No names or information will be collected or used for any purpose outside of this study without the consent of research subjects. No names or personal information will be reported in results.

All student participants who are under the age of 18 **must obtain a parent/guardian signature expressing their willingness to allow participation of their minor child.**

Please respond to this letter by responding to all relevant options:

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in the research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to participate in the research study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**For Research Subjects Under the Age of 18:** As a parent/guardian, I give permission for my student to participate in research under the direction of Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr. I understand that all information about my child, including his/her responses to inquiry, will remain confidential and secure.

Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name(s) (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, you may contact me by email at \_\_\_\_\_ or by phone at \_\_\_\_\_. You may also contact Dissertation Chair, Dr. Sydney Brown, at \_\_\_\_\_ or by phone at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate, Gardner-Webb University

Appendix G  
Debriefing Document

**Curriculum and Instruction  
Doctor of Education Program  
Debriefing Document**

**Study Title:** Case Study of the Youth and Young Adult Ministry at a Church in Upstate South Carolina

**About this Study:** I am currently working to complete a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Gardner-Webb University. One of the requirements of the degree is to write a dissertation. I have chosen to research the impact of service-learning curriculum on youth and young adults who participated in such programs as a part of their youth ministry experience.

The youth ministry at your particular church began extensive use of service learning based curriculum within the last 2 years. Research is focused on students and adults who are connected to the youth and young adult ministry for my field research. This is part of the case study regarding those ministries of the church. I utilized short-answer surveys, focus groups and individual interviews to gather data about the impact of the service-learning programs and their effect on the youth and young adult ministries.

**If you have questions, contact the experimenter(s).**

Experimenter(s): Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr.

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

For ethical concerns, contact:

Dr. Sydney Brown, Dissertation Chair  
\_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Franki Burch, Dean of the Graduate School  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation!

Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate, Gardner-Webb University

## Appendix H

What Do Students Need to Learn at Smithville Church?

**What Do Students Need to Learn at Smithsville Church?**

1. Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9; John 14:6-7)
2. God exists and operates as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 15:26-27)
3. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8, 6:23; Hebrews 11:1-3)
4. Our faith and practice is our witness to the goodness of God (Hebrews 11:1-3; James 1:27)
5. The Bible, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is our guide for that faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
6. The Bible and the Holy Spirit tell us that Jesus died, was resurrected, and will one day return (Philippians 2:8-11;
7. Jesus is fully God, and fully human (Colossians 1:15; 19; Philippians 2:6-8)
8. Mercy and grace triumph over judgment (James 2:13)
9. We are defined as followers of Christ by how we treat those who are less fortunate (Matthew 25:31-46)
10. The Bible says more about how we treat others than it does about sex, alcohol, drugs, and cursing combined (The Greatest Commandment – Luke 10:25-37)

## Appendix I

### Biblical Knowledge and Study Design

**What Should Students Know about the Bible?**

## 1. Basic Division of Books in the Old and New Testaments

- Number of books in each

- Which books are in which section (Students should be able to make an “educated guess” at where to look in the Bible when a teacher calls out a book)

- Books of the Bible in order

## 2. What are the Gospels? Paul’s letters?

- Where do we find the stories about Jesus?

## 3. Who are the Patriarchs?

## 4. What are some meaningful verses in the Bible other than John 3:16?

## 5. Who are some of the “heroic” characters in the Bible?

- Why are these people or characters so important?

## 6. How do students draw out the life lessons of the Bible and understand what it means for daily life?

## 7. How can students begin to apply the Bible to what they do?

## 8. What are some ways that the Bible speaks to modern issues (abortion, politics, war, women’s issues, etc.)?

**Study Topics (6 months prior to fall 2009)**

1. The story of the prophet Hosea (Youth Revival, March 2009)
2. Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
3. What are Spiritual Gifts? (1 Corinthians 12-13; Galatians 5-6; Romans 12)
4. How do we understand the story of creation? Are dinosaurs real? Is the story in the Bible a myth; or is evolution a myth? (Genesis 1-2; outside videos/materials)
5. Race relations: What does the Bible say about interracial marriage/dating? (Various texts, including those that seem to forbid interracial relationships and those that indicate that it's not forbidden)
6. How does the Holy Spirit guide us and help to keep us "pure"? (John 14-16)
7. Helping the poor & dealing with poverty (James 1-2; Matthew 25:31-46)



Appendix J  
Bible Assessment

**Bible Quiz**  
**Old Testament**

**1. What are the first five books of the Old Testament?**

**2. Who was King David's best friend?**

- a. Saul
- b. Joseph
- c. Solomon
- d. Jonathan

**3. What are the names of the three Patriarchs?**

- a. Jacob, Esau, Daniel
- b. Joseph, Isaac, David
- c. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
- d. Paul, Silas, Abraham

**4. Who brought the Israelites out of Egypt?**

- a. Aaron
- b. Jeremiah
- c. Esau
- d. Moses

**5. According to Genesis, what did God create on the third day?**

- a. Night and day
- b. Birds and fish
- c. Land and sea
- d. Creatures of the land

**6. How many books are in the Old Testament?**

- a. 45
- b. 39
- c. 66
- d. 17

**7. Name four of the books in the Old Testament**

**8. What prophet was God speaking to when He said, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you?"**

**9. What prophet was told by God to marry Gomer?**

- a. Isaiah
- b. Daniel
- c. Ezekiel
- d. Hosea

**10. What Egyptian leader did Moses tell to "Let my people go?" What is one of the things that happened because the leader refused?**

**Bible Quiz**  
**New Testament**

**1. Name the four Gospels**

**2. Who wrote the most books in the New Testament?**

- a. Paul                      b. Matthew
- c. John                     d. Jesus

**3. Which New Testament book uses the most quotes from the Old Testament?**

- a. Hebrews                b. James
- c. Revelation   d. Matthew

**4. What New Testament book only mentions the name of Jesus one time?**

- a. Luke                      b. Galatians                *(Hint: Tom's favorite book!)*
- c. 1 Corinthians        d. James

**5. Which Gospel does NOT contain the story of Jesus' birth?**

- a. John                      c. Hebrews
- b. Mark                     d. Both a and b

**6. In what book does it say, "You are the light of the world; a city on a hill cannot be hidden."**

- a. Matthew                b. 2 Thessalonians
- c. 1 John                   d. Galatians

**7. Name the "Fruits of the Spirit" that are listed in Galatians 5:22-26**

**8. What book of the Bible contains this verse: "All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness?"**

- a. 1 John                    b. 2 Thessalonians
- c. 2 Timothy   c. 3 John

**9. Who said or wrote, "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example...in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity?"**

**10. In John 15, Jesus says, "I am the \_\_\_\_\_; you are the \_\_\_\_\_."**

- a. church, steeple        b. potter, clay
- c. vine, branches        d. light, darkness