

Middletown Christian Church

Louisville, KY

Youth Ministry Assessment Report

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BACKGROUND

Middletown Christian Church (MCC) is a congregation committed to growing faithful children, youth, adults and families. Located in Louisville, KY, Middletown Christian Church is a place where members have a passion to “call disciples to be the Kingdom now” and where people love seeing lives transformed by the good news of the gospel. Church members describe their church as “family-oriented” “welcoming,” “friendly,” and “humble.” One member said, “We were in Louisville for twenty years before we found this church. People actually spoke to us, which is why we are here.” Though people know Middletown to be “exciting,” “interesting,” and “exceptional” overall, one member described the church to be “in transition” and another said it is “adolescent,” meaning “at a stage where we have hit a huge growth spurt and we need to figure out a way to flex new muscles and fit into our new size.”

Middletown Christian Church was established in 1836 on a site about one half-mile from its current location. During the Civil War, the modest, brick church, built by members’ own hands, was used as a hospital and camp, and then later its second building became Summit Academy, a school founded by church members for children with learning differences. In the late 1990s, the congregation purchased land and built a new sanctuary and facility at its present location, 500 N. Watterson Trail. In the spring of 2009, the congregation also expanded to the Valley Station campus, multiplying efforts to transform lives. Despite many changes over the years, Middletown Christian Church has a long and stable history in the community and, even still, consistently lives into a passion for making disciples of Jesus Christ.

The membership of Middletown Christian Church is 2,069 and on an average week, 915 people attend one of the church’s four worship services. There are 128 members at The Valley, 83 of whom are in worship on an average week. Given those numbers, the total church membership is 2197 people and an average of 998 people worship weekly.

The youth program at Middletown Christian Church has had the very unique gift of having the same staff person, Dave Seely, at its helm for the last seventeen years. Several longstanding traditions were established among the youth in these years, some of which include a youth week, hayride, mission trip, muck night, service opportunities, “Y’all come!” events, and a senior banquet. Also of significance is the tradition of having many Middletown Christian youth participating in youth choir and leading worship in praise bands. These youth have opportunities to lead worship for the congregation and for the children’s ministry during the year, and they anxiously anticipate both a middle school and a high school choir tour every summer. Because Dave Seely, an associate minister with both music ministry responsibilities and youth responsibilities, was so overextended, with the blessing of the church, he decided to focus his energies on music ministry beginning in January 2010, creating a need for a new youth minister.

Currently, there are approximately 160 6th through 12th graders on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, about 70 of them participate in either Sunday school, worship, hand bells, choir, praise band, or youth group. There are approximately 12 to 15 adult volunteers involved each week in one of these youth programs. Other volunteers help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

The youth ministry is described by some students and parents as “fun,” “explosive”, “welcoming,” and “exciting.” One student describes the youth ministry as “meaningful but unstructured,” and many students agree that they feel socially engaged in the youth group but would like more opportunities for spiritual growth.



Parents and volunteers involved in the youth ministry feel the same way. There is also a general feeling that so much emphasis has been placed on the choir program, and though youth choir is a unique asset of this ministry, it also creates an exclusive atmosphere that leaves those who are not a part of choir searching for a context to plug into the ministry in a meaningful way.

Middletown Christian Church has a 2011 budget of \$1.95 million and The Valley, a Kingdom Now ministry of Middletown, has a 2011 budget of \$242,000. For the year 2011, the youth ministry has a budget in the neighborhood of \$102,500, including the program budget. This includes the salaries and benefits for the unfilled youth minister position as well as some funds allocated for the Praise and Worship Minister and the Director of Choral Ministries, both of whom have significant responsibilities with the youth. Currently the youth ministry is being partly staffed by the Praise and Worship Minister, the Director of Choral Ministries, a 20/ hour week interim youth minister, a 12-15/ hour week youth program coordinator and a volunteer youth intervention team.

After Dave Seely's decision to focus on music ministry, Middletown Christian was excited about the possibility of placing their seminary intern, Adam Kilchenman, in the youth pastor's position. Though Adam has great connections with the youth and served them through summer's end, he chose not to continue in a staff capacity at Middletown Christian. While the church searches for the next youth minister, Tomara Brown and Matt Ackerman are serving as interim staff for the youth ministry and they, along with a team of committed volunteers, are continuing to love youth and run weekly programs during this transition.

Thanks to the committed leadership of Dave Seely and the investment of his heart, talent, and energy the last 17 years, Middletown has a history of strong youth ministry. Dave was able to combine his passion for Christ, youth, and music in unique ways while at the helm of the ministry and, with the help of a vibrant congregation, he created a space for youth to grow in their understanding of the love of Jesus through study, worship, service, and fellowship. Since Dave currently serves as the Praise and Worship Minister, Middletown Christian youth and families will still benefit from exposure to Dave's heart and gifts. As the youth ministry transitions, MCC invited Youth Ministry Architects to do an initial assessment and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward as it looks to build upon the foundation which has already been laid and create a new chapter of youth ministry. We met with 75 individuals in 12 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens we like to use for understanding youth ministry is the idea of the "three rents." It has been our experience that though these three rents, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff, and the congregation at large.

Youth ministries that "pay these rents" tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. And those youth ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing, and discouragement.

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



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

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

It is clear that the youth ministry at MCC over the past few years has struggled to pay these rents. As the leadership of the congregation goes about the process of re-visioning its youth ministry, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these “three rents.”

With this in mind, the current youth ministry faces parallel tasks:



1. Laying the Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the youth ministry’s *future* effectiveness, and at the same time (laying the foundation).
2. Continuing to Worship on Stilts: Maintaining its *current* youth ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, their families, the staff and the church at large.

This year, Middletown Christian has the opportunity to do both: successfully revamp its youth ministry and create an appropriate infrastructure for sustaining an effective youth ministry that allows both staff and volunteers to thrive.

As the youth ministry considers how it might develop a sustainable youth ministry in the future, five “rules of thumb” or what we call “youth ministry norms” will be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1) **10% of the Worshipping Congregation:** In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshipping congregation. Being a church with an average worship attendance of 915 and an average youth participation of around 70 throughout the year in worship, Sunday school or other weekly youth activities, MCC is operating below the norm from an attendance standpoint.
- 2) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Active Youth:** When combining the 2 interim youth ministry staff positions as well as the Director of Choral Ministries and the Director of Praise and Worship, the youth ministry is staffed currently with approximately 1 full-time staff person. With 70 youth active weekly, MCC is clearly understaffed even to simply maintain its current structure. It is also significant to note that the youth ministry will not likely be successful in engaging a significant number of non-participating youth without additions being made to the youth staff. Ordinarily, a congregation that expects its staff to build a ministry without enough personnel sets itself up to be unable to fulfill all the expectations placed on them. And often the natural result of this situation is a climate of criticism, negative parking lot evaluations, and burnout for the staff. Given the 160 youth



on the rolls and the 70 who currently participate in some aspect of the church, MCC would do well to add an additional fulltime staff person, as well a part-time administrative logistical staff person. This would bring the total staff budgeted to 2 full-time staff people and a part-time staff person if MCC would like to staff the youth ministry for the growth that focus group members spoke about wanting during the time of this assessment.

3) **1 Adult for Every 5 Youth:** We like to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than five students on an on-going basis. The fact that 12 to 15 adults are involved as youth leaders on a weekly basis, would indicate that this congregation is poised to effectively engage 60 to 75 youth per week. With an average weekly youth attendance of 70, Middletown Christian is on target.

However, with additional volunteers and with encouragement and equipping given to the volunteers, MCC has the capacity to increase the number of active youth in its midst. It is also important to note that having at least 2 adults present at all youth events (Sunday school, youth group etc.) is important to have in place for appropriate child protection policy standards in order to protect both the youth and the adult present.

4) **\$1200 for Each Youth:** With a budget of approximately \$102,500 dedicated to the youth ministry, MCC is budgeted for 85 active youth. With a weekly participation level of around 70 youth, the ministry is equipped to maintain the current youth and perhaps 15 more. However, if MCC wants to create a sustainable and growing youth ministry to engage more of the inactive youth on the role (currently there are 160 youth on the roll), it will need to consider this formula and increase the budget to accommodate for appropriate staff time as well as programmatic needs. Considering the various staff members and programs who make-up the youth budget, it might also be helpful to review allocations and ensure maximum staff time and programmatic returns are being given for the amount of money allocated within each specific program.

Building a Sustainable Youth Staff

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

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and insures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.
- **The Construction Foreman:** A person who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific responsibilities for particular pieces of the building project.

Though these three roles are very different, they are equally important, each one essential to the building of a sustainable youth ministry.



THE ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry

Shared Value in the Priority of the Youth Ministry: There seems to be a common goal and an intentional desire to revitalize the youth ministry. The staff, youth leaders, parents and youth share this common value. The fact that 75 youth and adults participated in focus groups or one on one meetings, taking time to share their input about the youth ministry, gives undeniable evidence of a broad based eagerness about building a thriving youth ministry at Middletown. All these factors contribute to a climate that says to youth and their families that they are highly valued and that their growth in faith is a high priority for this church family. As one focus group member stated, “Part of what we have to figure out is how to empower our youth. We are worried about what we are going to do but if we can’t give them something to put in their backpack we are selling them short.”

Dedicated/Invested Volunteers: We heard from numerous people that this is a church willing to volunteer with enthusiasm if given training, resourcing, and a clear purpose. This is clearly true in the children’s ministry and the devotion of teachers to Sunday school and to the ROCK, as well as children’s choir and Bible MAX . There are numerous parents and others who have been committed and are willing to volunteer in youth ministry. As one member said, “I am here because I love this church and what God is doing here, and I want to give back.” Another said, “I want to help in any way I can,” and we also heard “I’ll volunteer wherever they need me.” As the youth ministry moves forward at Middletown Christian Church, it will be necessary to motivate and rally those who have a natural willingness to volunteer in youth ministry. One volunteer expressed, “I feel like we have been one big experiment and are under-utilized.”

Thirsty for More: This church is filled with students who enjoy growing in their faith. They hunger for depth and they are searching for truth. Youth want to know how the Bible applies to their lives. They want to ask deep questions and they are looking for a youth minister who will walk with them through the mystery of faith. They are also looking to serve and lead. Comments from the focus groups included: “I like it when we reach out and touch people” and “Our youth group time is not based enough on the Bible.”

Supportive Staff: It is apparent and discussed amongst focus group participants that the youth ministry is finally receiving the attention it desires and deserves. By choosing not to rush into a decision about the next youth minister and by hiring Youth Ministry Architects to assist in building the infrastructure to sustain a long and thriving ministry, the message is apparent that the clergy is supportive of the youth ministry program taking the steps it needs to take in order to build a sustainable foundation as it moves forward.

Opportunity Cometh: It was unanimous that the children’s ministry is a “well-structured and flagship ministry” for the Church. There have been numerous families that have found a home here through the children’s ministry. One staff member said, “We have such a great children’s ministry and there are huge numbers of kids getting ready to hit the youth program.” This critical mass of children and their parents present an open window of ministry opportunity and momentum for those rising up into the student ministry program.

Highly Invested Youth: The fact that 22 youth would turn out to talk in focus groups about the youth ministry is a sign that students care deeply about the future effectiveness of this program. Many youth spoke about their faith and their healthy appetite to grow even more. These are not youth who are just looking for “more fun”; they are longing for genuine encounters with the living God in the context of trusting relationships with peers and adults. Comments from youth included:

- *I came tonight because want to see this youth group give to others what its given to me.*
- *I am graduating but I want to see the program be even better for those coming behind me.*
- *I love our youth group and love to see it get better.*
- *I like to see this youth group really reach out to people and really bond and to be one, big, happy family.*



- *We know each others stories and are just like a family.*
- *It's awesome that y'all (YMA) are here to help us solidify the program*
- *If you only go to youth group you don't get a lot out of it. I wish we did more retreats outside of choir tour so we can get to know each other better and have experiences outside of normal youth group.*

Youth Choir and Choir Tour: Focus group members agreed that the youth choir and summer tours are one of the pillars of the youth ministry program. Weekly choir and the summer tours have provided an amazing opportunity for those youth who have participated over the years. As one youth stated, "I love choir tour because it's the only thing that has been consistent over the years and everything else changes." While this ministry is one that is an asset to the ministry, the church will also need to consider making room on its calendar for other ministry opportunities in order to engage youth who are unable to participate in the choir ministry. As one youth stated, "I can't commit to choir or going on the choir tour. I wish there was another trip to go on in the summer."

Mission Mindedness: When asked for adjectives to describe Middletown Christian Church, youth lifted up commitment to mission and service as a huge asset. One said that the church has "strong outreach" which includes "mission opportunities for all locally as well as outside of Louisville." Students described experiences that had been meaningful to them, and many included those that they had while serving. It's clear that there is a desire for more of this. As one ninth grader stated, "I like opportunities where we can reach out and touch people. I don't want to just rake leaves. I could rake leaves at home." One middle school student said simply that she would like to have "more mission opportunities."

THE CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the youth ministry strategically forward

One-Eared Mickey Mouse: Although Middletown is a "welcoming" and "loving" congregation, the youth ministry seems to function separately from the rest of the church. There seems to be a strong desire to see the youth ministry "highlighted" or "recognized" in the main worship services beyond just praise band opportunities. Studies show that youth group participation rarely indicates the likelihood of a youth returning to the church as an adult. Rather, the studies indicate that if a youth has a relationship with at least three adults outside of the staff and their parents, they have the opportunity to see what it looks like to live the Christian faith as an adult and are likely to be active in the church as adults. Comments from focus group members included:

- *These kids want to be involved in the grown up stuff and outside of the youth ministry and they have a lot to offer.*
- *Let them read the scripture!*
- *Incorporate Junior Deacons, send them through the training, and that is something that is long lasting.*
- *Think we have isolated them in saying this is your block of time on Sunday nights; it's not intentional but it is what it is.*
- *Youth are so incredibly smart, they just are.*

Untapped Volunteers: The amazing paradox of the youth ministry at Middletown Christian Church is the inability of the church to effectively access the number of adults who desire to be involved in the program. Like a ship's crew dying of thirst while floating in unrecognized fresh water, the youth program seems to have all the volunteer resources it needs at its fingertips. As one focus group member stated, "We have got to do a better job of asking people to volunteer and getting more people involved like we do in the children's ministry program."



Training Deficit: It can be assumed that the church is already asking a lot of the volunteers and to expect them to participate in a training program would be asking too much. However, it is our belief that well-meaning, untrained volunteers will never be able to establish a stable youth ministry education program. A lack of training and direction also leads to the inability of the youth ministry to recruit and keep good volunteers because of the amount of frustration that results from a lack training and communicating with those who can become some of the best tools in the tool belt of the youth ministry program. Comments from focus group members included:

- *I Feel like I am doing a lot but don't know if doing what they want me to do.*
- *I will never forget the first time I was asked to work with youth ministry. I was probably in my 20's, and I was terrified. I remember thinking I didn't know what to say to these kids, and I was also terrified because I was not trained or given any sort of direction. Now it's comfortable to me. Then we did it anyway and now wonder if we scarred some of them off.*
- *We need to recruit them but we also have to equip and train them and know how to use them.*
- *We want to not just recruit people. We want to make sure they are connected where they feel called and being fulfilled while they are serving. I don't think we're delivering that experience to our volunteers.*
- *I felt thrown to the wolves when I was asked to teach Sunday school and wasn't given a curriculum.*

Crisis of Capacity: One of the most glaring realities that Middletown Christian Church must face in its youth ministry is its lack of capacity to do anything beyond what it is doing. Like a person trying to stay warm with a 4 foot by 4 foot blanket, the program simply doesn't have enough infrastructure to provide all the coverage that is needed for the kind of program the church would like to see. There is little question that the youth ministry has become stuck and that doing more of what has been done is not likely to change that situation. Realistically, the youth ministry has simply not had a staff person with enough time to devote to youth ministry to create the kind of effective program the church is looking for.

Facilities: While the MC Café is a great space for the youth, it isn't conducive for appropriate break out space for times such as Sunday school and small groups. The youth spoke of how cool the space is, yet they also spoke of their desire to have more dedicated space outside of the Café like the children's ministry does. It also should be noted that the Café space does not provide ample room to grow the ministry as focus group members spoke of seeing. Comments from the parents and youth included:

- *I think youth space needs to be renovated.*
- *I think carpet would make a whole world of difference and cramming people in smaller space means more. We're all together and touching each other and into it.*
- *My Sunday school class meets in a space for preschoolers.*
- *We need to make the youth feel special. We've got 5th graders coming out of a beautiful building and then they don't feel special in the youth facilities.*

Terminal Uniqueness: We observed that many we met with suffered from a perception disorder we call "terminal uniqueness," focusing intensely on the "unique" challenging factors facing this youth ministry:

- *Youth with packed schedules, who are therefore unable to participate regularly.*
- *Youth attending so many different schools keeps them from connecting.*

Though these factors present undeniable challenges, the truth is that none of them are completely unique to MCC. Since we know that a majority of these factors are present in almost every successful youth ministry in our country, the church would be wise to make the decision to keep their thinking about youth ministry off the dead-end streets of explaining away a less than effective youth ministry by pointing to these factors.



Out of the Loop: Across the board, in all focus groups, there was consensus that better communication is needed in communicating the youth programs to youth and parents and the larger church. These communication and organizational challenges seem to have left some parents and youth with the perception that details are not under control. A staff member said, “We cannot look irresponsible when it comes to taking care of another person’s kid.” When asked about how they know what’s going on at youth group, one middle school student said, “Last year it was very organized and they gave you a printed sheet. This year I don’t really know what’s going on. Sometimes what’s in the bulletin changes and doesn’t even happen,” and another youth said, “Sometimes I get a text at the last minute telling me what’s happening.” A comment from another focus group member was “Some parents do not know what youth do for missions. I am really surprised at the level of unawareness.” A staff member said, “We can do a better job of communication.” Another went on to say “Fifth grade parents need to know what’s coming so that they can be excited about what we have to offer from the spring before their youth experience begins.”

Where There is No Vision.... The youth program at Middletown is undoubtedly in need of a clear vision and structure. The focus groups revealed that the youth program is in need of a renovation and that the youth ministry should be a priority for the congregation. However, it is important that the vision and goals of the youth ministry be shared and arrived at collectively, and that they are embraced and understood by all who are responsible for leading the youth ministry of Middletown. As one youth said, the program is “meaningful but unstructured”. Other comments from focus group members included:

- *I don’t know when we have done vision casting for youth ministry.*
- *As a church organization we have a hard time sticking with our vision and so we keep morphing. We have become flexible and fluid and respond to needs but we have got to get traction. We have got to have system of accountability.*
- *As a result of the fact that things keep changing, people are hesitant to commit and volunteer. It is frustrating.*
- *We have to have a strategy and vision and then a structure and we haven’t had it.*
- *What are the key things we want to focus on? Let’s decide and just do it.*
- *We need clarity on what success looks like and we need to be able to measure that.*

Depth Deficit: Parents, youth, and staff expressed a strong desire to see a more central spiritual focus in all youth ministry activities. Many indicated awareness that youth would need more than entertainment to keep them connected to the church. There was a strong sense that Sunday school wasn’t everything it could be. From curriculum to teaching style, youth and parents indicated concern over the depth of the overall program. Comments from youth included:

- *I don’t feel we are focused enough on the Bible.*
- *At my old church we would bring the Bible into what we were doing. For example we went bowling because that reminded us to stay on the straight and narrow so we did fun things but we also brought the Bible into what we were doing.*
- *I think small groups are important.*
- *I’ve grown a lot spiritually over the last couple of years but am sad to say that that didn’t really happen here; I got it from Young Life and like to see that change.*

Curriculum 911: Focus group members and staff expressed a unanimous concern over the lack of intentional and structured curriculum in the youth program. All agreed that without a clear vision and intentionality of what is taught to the youth, the program will continue to flounder without a clear purpose and plan, leaving the youth without tools needed to take their faith to the next level.



Sunday Makeover: From Sunday's marathon schedule to packed summer scheduling, to youth roaming halls and haphazardly volunteering in the Rock, Sundays need a makeover in order to give youth, their families, and volunteers the best possible experience. Though we definitely heard from several students that they loved being at church all day, we also heard these concerns:

- *I feel like 8 hours is too long because something has to get cut due to homework on Sundays.*
- *How do I protect family time on Sundays and also encourage my daughter to be involved in youth activities?*
- *As a parent, it's too much driving on a Sunday. The time gaps are really hard to figure out for a family with multiple aged kids.*

Spiderman not Superman: As the church goes about the process of searching for new youth staff, it will need to ensure that the foundation being laid is one that invites, empowers and includes adults from the congregation outside the youth staff so that a web of support is created around each youth. A youth ministry which is built upon the youth ministry staff is a ministry which sets itself up for instability; the youth ministry must create a web of support for the youth so that the youth are surrounded by adults who mentor and support them so when transition occurs the ministry continues and does not suffer as a result of a program dependent upon a single youth worker or youth staff. As focus group members stated:

- *How does one person come in and get everything implemented?*
- *Our new leader will have to have the help of volunteers, and we'll need more training and structure to do that.*

The Bridge Is Out: Many acknowledged that the bridge between the Children's Ministry and the youth ministry seems to be out. Recently, large numbers in the children's ministry have not translated into large numbers transitioning into the youth ministry. Focus group members stated:

- *There is no building from one program to the next.*
- *We have such a great children's ministry and there are huge numbers of kids getting ready to hit the youth program. The JYF program is a great way to make the transition if we could figure out how.*
- *The middle schoolers have tons of people but the high schoolers drop off.*
- *Parents are involved with children and not with youth so maybe that's a factor in the fact that the youth drop off when leave children's ministry.*

Where's the Welcome Mat? Parents and youth alike voiced the concern that there is a lack of hospitality in inviting new and current youth into the program, especially those not participating in choir. Comments from adult focus group members included:

- *We (adult volunteers) reach for the same ones, not intentionally.*
- *We don't have a process for when a visitor comes. A lot of that Dave did and we didn't know about.*
- *Our adult sponsors have not intervened and said something to a youth who might not be welcoming others; I haven't had training.*
- *If a new person comes in, there is not a connection point for where the new person with a youth is to go.*
- *This is certainly not a radically welcoming youth program.*
- *We need to empower the youth to do it.*

Comments from youth included:



- *One of the things we have a problem with (and I am a culprit of this) is that we are one group that's a huge group of friends and we don't aim to exclude others. I have been in this church since I was born so I have always felt linked in and it's always hard for me to reach out to others not because I want to exclude but because i just know folks so well and naturally gravitate to those I know.*
- *I think a lot of people are intimidated because we know each other well because we go on choir tour and live on a bus for 10 days together and so we naturally have that connection and have shared stories and we don't have other opportunities for that during the year.*
- *Sometimes we are reliving a happy moment from the trip and not meaning to be exclusive.*
- *We are talking about how all this and I am realizing how bad that sounds and we don't mean for it to be that way.*
- *We picked our small groups so I think that added to the whole clique thing.*
- *You have to build yourself into the youth group, it's hard.*

Other Menu Options: While choir tour and the music ministry at Middletown is something to treasure, across the board focus group members spoke of the need to have other big events and ministry opportunities outside of choir tour to continue to build into the sustainability of the youth ministry program. Comments from youth who attended focus groups include:

- *I don't really do choir so I wish there was something else besides choir tour to do in the summers.*
- *Wish we had small groups as they are less intimidating.*
- *I just don't think we have seen them (small groups) done well and they have been inconsistent.*
- *I think we should go on retreats. Retreats would be good.*
- *If you are not in choir, you aren't looked at really being part of the youth group even though I come on Sunday night.*



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 18 months (through August 2012) as a time of retooling and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target August 2012 as the start date for a new, fully funded, sustainable structure for the Middletown Christian Church youth ministry.
- 2) Invite the staff and the appropriate youth ministry team to consider which recommendations from this report to embrace and then present this report to the Church Board asking them to endorse an intentional 18-month strategic design process for the youth ministry.
- 3) Establish a 18-month Youth Ministry Renovation Team of 4 to 6 volunteer/parent stakeholders in the church, that is charged with responsibility for two primary functions:
 - a) *Addressing immediate pressure points facing the youth ministry*
 - b) *Implementing the strategic, long-term changes recommended in this report:*

Youth Ministry Renovation Team (YMRT)

TASK #1: IMMEDIATE PRESSURE POINTS

To be accomplished before any major changes in other areas of the youth ministry.

- **Propose a clear, appropriate youth team/staffing plan** for the youth ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth keeping in mind the ratio of 1 fulltime staff member to every 50 active youth. YMA also recommends the need to have staff members dedicated to the programmatic and relational components as well as one team member dedicated to overseeing the logistical and administrative needs of the youth ministry. Consideration in staffing time needs to also be given to providing volunteer coaching and training for the youth ministry leadership at The Valley.
- **Based on the staffing plan selected**, determine the search process options which MCC would like to embrace, meaning are we searching for all new possible staff positions at once (those suggested by YMA) or would MCC prefer to hire a lead position prior to hiring any additional youth ministry staff.
- **Invite YMA to serve as MCC's Youth Ministry Renovation Coach and Architect**, overseeing the building of the infrastructure of the youth ministry and the implementation of the recommendations of this report. YMA's responsibilities would include coaching staff, assisting in the recruiting of volunteers, developing strategies for galvanizing parental support, assisting in the searching and hiring process for youth staff, and generally "keeping both hands on 10 and 2" as the church walks through the growing pains of building a sustainable, magnetic youth ministry.
- **Create a results-based, written job description** for each proposed youth ministry staff team position.
- **Send a letter** from the Senior Minister and the Youth Ministry Renovation Team to all families in the youth directory, informing them of the renovation process and the upcoming youth events and programs. Publish a similar article in the church newsletter or bulletin, sharing the news with the entire church and asking them to be in prayer for the renovation process.
- **Determine a system and schedule** for youth to volunteer in the ROCK program on Sunday mornings.



- **Identify all volunteer roles** within the youth ministry program and create written results-based job descriptions for each of the current roles.
- **Complete the recruiting** of any volunteers needed for current youth ministry programs, including Sunday school and youth praise band adult support on Sunday mornings using the guideline of one adult for every 5 participating youth.
- **Calendar youth ministry leadership training and orientation meetings**, one in April/May and one in August/September.
- **Publicize in the bulletin** weekly meeting plans for all youth ministry programs and events, including choir, praise band activities and youth group topics and events.
- **Create a calendar of youth ministry** events for the coming year (through August 2011), including local service projects, summer event/ mission trip, a fall kick-off, a youth parents' orientation, and choir tour(s). Confirm and publish (on-line, in print, and on bulletin board) this youth ministry calendar.
- **Recruit event coordinators** for each major youth event through August, 2011.
- **Consider separating middle school and high school ministries** with the exception of possible big events or fall kick-off during the year. This separation would address some of the developmental concerns in having a 6th grader in conversation with a 12th grader as well as the need for each group to have freedom in the autonomy that needs to come with appropriate programming for where each of these age groups are along the journey of life and faith development.
- **Calendar the Youth Ministry Renovation Team** to meet at least twice a month until all the pressure point recommendations have been completed.

YMRT TASK #2: LONG-TERM INFRASTRUCTURE

Creating a Sustainable Foundation for the Youth Ministry

A) SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY

- **Visioning:** Complete a three-day visioning retreat with YMA, resulting in four key documents: (1) a youth ministry mission statement, (2) a statement of values, (3) three-year revolving goals with practical steps of implementation, and (4) a clear organizational structure for the youth ministry.
- **Youth Directory:** Update and distribute a youth directory to all youth families. This directory should also contain the names and contact information for all volunteers in the youth ministry.
- **Major Event Notebooks:** Create a planning notebook for every recurring event of the youth ministry that can be passed from one event chairperson to another in subsequent years.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Develop a Middletown Christian Church Youth Ministry Manual, including the most recent directory, an 18-Month Calendar, volunteer and staff job descriptions, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar and notes for every major ministry event in order to ensure the effective functioning of the youth ministry.
- **Facilities:** Complete a facilities review of areas designated for youth to ensure enough space is given and there is youth ownership and proper utilization of space.



- **7-Year Intentional Discipleship Plan:** Create an integrated template for youth ministry curriculum that deliberately maps the key topics to be covered in the various programs of the youth ministry (Sunday school, Sunday night) over the next seven years. Locate appropriate curriculum resources to be used through the 2011-2012 school year.
- **Discipleship Track:** Create a deliberate discipleship track that allows youth and parents to understand where youth are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are. This track will also help identify what program/discipleship pieces are missing within youth ministry programs
- **Compliance Documents:** Ensure that copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained, that screening processes and background check processes are in place for every weekly volunteer and every trip volunteer. Ensure, as well, that a written sexual abuse/child protection policy is adopted and affirmed in writing by all adults working in a hands-on way with the youth of the church.
- **Creative Kick Off/Parent Orientation:** Develop an intentional, outreach-focused, family-based, surprisingly fun event to kick off and parent orientation for the youth ministry in the fall of 2011.
- **Outreach:** Establish processes for reaching out to non-participating youth (both those whose families are members or visitors and those youth who are friends of Middletown Christian youth).
- **Communications & Marketing:**
 - Develop a sustainable game plan for communications between staff, volunteers, youth and parents surrounding the youth ministry and establish systems for implementing and enhancing that game plan.
 - Establish clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.
 - Develop processes for communicating upcoming events and weekly programs that allows participation targets to be regularly reached in the youth ministry.
 - Select normative processes for effective and timely communication with parents, youth and volunteers, considering as many forms of communication as possible including updating church's website, church newsletter, bulletin, Facebook, Twitter, mass texting, phone tree, etc.

B) NURTURING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- **Potential leader list:** Create a list of at least 50 adults (who combine an enthusiasm for life with a genuine love for Christ) who could be approached about working as youth leaders (Sunday school teachers, small group leaders and youth group sponsors) starting in the fall of 2011.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement a leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers, including Sunday school teachers, geared particularly toward the launch of the ministry in the fall of 2011.



- **Volunteer Development:** Establish the norm of ongoing, quarterly training of all volunteers, equipping them with necessary tools for success (e.g., copies of *Group* magazine and an up-to-date youth ministry library).
- **Continued Leadership Development:** Review and revise complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry and create structures for the ongoing training and support of all volunteers.
- **Staff Development:** Provide on-going “executive coaching” for key youth ministry volunteers and staff.
- **Event Planning Empowerment:** Create structures and processes for giving responsibility for the planning of each major event of the youth ministry to a different volunteer, and recruit all “major event coordinators” needed to cover all events through August 2012.

C) STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- **Service:** Establish a focused calendar for involvement in local, regional and national service.
- **Parent Engagement:** Sponsor and execute a parent-equipping event, particularly targeting parents of teenagers in the congregation and create mechanisms for engaging the majority of parents in the youth ministry in some way during the 2011-2012 school year.
- **Measurable Markers of Effectiveness:** Determine reasonable participation goals for all major youth ministry events and weekly programs for the 2011-2012 school year and take responsibility for achieving those targets.
- **Sunday Morning Makeover:** Evaluate the current program opportunities available to youth outside of worship on Sunday mornings (volunteering in the ROCK, praise band leadership, Sunday school etc) and determine the purpose and programmatic intent of each program within the context of the youth ministry.
- **Consolidate Sunday Night:** Review the current Sunday evening program times and consider consolidating/ shifting to a 3 hour program block instead of the current 5 hour block. In this model hand bells would move to a midweek possible small group time.
- **Summer Schedule:** Evaluate the current summer programming options and consider a rotational model between choir tours and mission trips to allow youth to be exposed to a variety of ministry opportunities throughout their time as a MCC youth. For example, one summer the MS would go on a mission trip and the HS would go on choir tour and the following summer HS would go on mission trip and MS on choir tour.
- **Retreats:** Consider adding a retreat to the youth ministry calendar in an effort to provide for a more intensive community building experience during the school year as well as an opportunity for youth to dig deeper spiritually outside of weekly youth ministry programming.
- **Community Building:** Strategically calendar youth events for the coming year which will build the momentum of growth and excitement surrounding the youth ministry.
- **Bridge Building:** Develop a long-term game plan to transition eager, engaged 5th graders into eager, engaged active 6th grade youth; new 9th graders into the high school ministry; and launch the church’s high school graduates from the youth ministry, confident that they are surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.



- **Small Group Ministry:** Consider exploring a new small group model to begin fall 2012 which would allow youth an opportunity to engage with one another outside of Sunday morning or Sunday night. Opportunities might include a breakfast club, midweek Bible study one evening, interest group, service group (tutoring at The Valley Learning Center)

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

- *The current MCC staff and volunteers can take responsibility for implementing the strategic initiatives outlined in this assessment.*
- *The church can hire additional staff to take responsibility for the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this report.*
- *The church can select specific outcomes for which they will take responsibility and invite Youth Ministry Architects (or other organization) to take responsibility for a limited number of other outcomes.*
- *Youth Ministry Architects can walk alongside MCC during the entire 18 month renovation process helping take responsibility for the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this assessment.*

