

# YOUTH PASTOR, YOUTH MINISTRY, AND YOUTH ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CHURCH\*

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*A large number of churches hire youth pastors or workers to support their ministry for adolescents and young adults. An empirical exploration of whether and how youth pastors influence youth attitudes toward the church and denomination remains to be done, however. This study, using a nationwide youth survey data set, attempts to fill this research gap. The results affirm hiring a youth pastor or worker is an effective way to develop and maintain quality programs in the church, which in turn induce youth to remain faithful to the denomination. This study also confirms a positive link between caring pastorship and youths' attitudes toward the church, although it is far from obvious that most youth pastors successfully adopt relational ministry.*

Personal religion plays a major role in peoples' lives, including those of adolescents. A national survey showed that 60% of American high school students consider religion important in their lives, 50% attend religious services regularly, and over 80% have some kind of religious affiliation (Wallace, Forman, Caldwell, and Willis 2003). In spite of these statistics, however, there is also a growing concern among churches about losing their youth to other religious and non-religious forces. According to Smith, Denton, Faris, and Regnerus (2002), there was a 10% drop in Protestant religious affiliation from 1976 to 1996 among twelfth graders.<sup>1</sup> Their study also showed an 8% drop in weekly church attendance among twelfth graders during the same period and a 4% increase in those who stated "rarely" and "none" for church attendance. Similarly, Hastings and Hoge (1976) found that only 36% of youth had a positive attitude toward organized religion, and only 22% and 30% of those who grew up in Protestant and Catholic homes, respectively, recognized their parents' religion as their own religious preference.

In an attempt to curb the decline of youth church affiliation, churches have looked for ways to keep their youth in the churches. One popular strategy has been hiring youth pastors or workers, even though using a paid youth pastor or worker means a considerable financial and resource commitment by a congregation to its youth ministry (Goreham 2004; Kageler 2004). One widespread premise behind this commitment is that youth pastors or workers would increase the frequency of youth activities, develop quality programs, enhance youth perception of the church, and eventually keep them loyal to the denomination (Strommen 1963). Nevertheless, little empirical evidence as yet exists pertaining to the impact of youth pastors or workers on youth ministry programs and youths' decision to remain faithful to the denomination; with only a handful of research cases, that can be considered far from conclusive (e.g., Hoge and Petrillo 1978).

The objective here is to examine the link between the presence of paid youth pastor(s) or worker(s) (hereafter youth pastors) in a church to youths' attitudes toward the denomi-

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nation that the church belongs to. To this end, the article proceeds as follows. First, we review previous studies on youth pastors and youth ministry in order to set up research hypotheses for empirical testing. Second, we employ data from one nationwide youth survey to estimate the association between youth pastorship and their general attitude toward the church programs. Third, using the same data set, we analyze the connection between this attitude and youth contentment with the church attended and their desire to continue to affiliate with the denomination after graduating from a high school or moving to another place.

## **YOUTH DISAFFILIATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY MODELS**

The source of youth participation in religious activities is one of the frequently discussed issues in the American youth ministry literature. Dudley (1999) and Hoge and Petrillo (1978), for instance, conducted studies of Catholic and Protestant teenagers to identify determinants of their church attendance and attitude toward the church. In their studies, the main predictor for youth church attendance was parental religion, while past religious education, pastoral leadership style, and personal religious beliefs related closely to an overall attitude towards the church. A shift from organized religion to liberalism and humanism was also an influential cause of the decision to leave the church (Hastings and Hoge 1976). On the other hand, O'Connor, Hoge, and Alexander (2002) examined the salience of youth program participation for church involvement at the age of 38. One youth variable that was a significant predictor of adult church involvement was youth group participation, along with the influence of spouse and personal religious commitment.

This previous research has correctly focused on the importance of personal and parental attributes in determining youth involvement in religious activities. It does not, however, explain adequately the import of a youth pastor for youth attitude toward the denomination, particularly the mechanism of how that relates to the youth attitudes through youth ministry programs and their perception of youth pastors. For example, does the presence of youth pastors relate to the frequency and quality of youth programs? Do caring youth pastors engender better youth perception of the worship services and church programs? Do these changes lead to an increase in denominational loyalty? Personal religiosity and parental factors are important to youth support for the church, but youth pastors are also likely to have a pronounced connection with youth attitudes toward the church. It seems worth examining how youth pastors associate with youth adherence to the church. Also, an empirical exploration of this issue is long overdue given that churches have routinely employed youth pastors in an effort to keep youth in the church and to bring back those who left the church (Kageler 2004).

As could be expected, in response to the increase of professional youth pastorship, a variety of youth ministry models have been suggested (Cole 2001). Particularly timely and useful in this regard is Canales' comprehensive exposition (2006) of eight youth ministry paradigms: the models of friendship, spiritual awareness, servant leadership, liberation, biblical hermeneutic, liturgical-initiation, social justice, and Christian discipleship. The central concern of the friendship model is to create and sustain quality relationships in a church, while the spiritual awareness model focuses on nurturing a deeper spirituality and arousing a sense of holiness in the life of teenagers through self-awareness and personal discovery. Respecting and serving youth members with honesty and humility are paramount to the servant leadership model, and the liberation model gives heavy attention to Jesus'

call for compassion, justice, and peace. Biblical instruction of adolescents is pivotal to the biblical-hermeneutic model; the liturgical-initiation model allows youth to experience the supreme being through a church's liturgy and ritual activities. Additionally, the social justice model calls for justice, peace, and service for those in need, while the goal of the Christian discipleship model is to empower youth to experience God personally and internalize moral values, which involves a call to holiness.

For the present study, Canales' thesis seems to be significant in two regards. First, there has been little scientific research up to now on the efficacy of youth ministry models in conjunction with youth attitudes toward the church, to which Canales' exposition assumes that quality youth programs are closely linked. But, in an empirical sense, we know almost nothing about the linkage between youth pastor and program development and their importance to youth contentment with and support for the church and denomination.

Second, exploration of Canales' ministry models allows us to develop a hypothetical theory for empirical testing on two fronts. A first presumption that emerges from the review of the models is that effective youth ministry is attainable particularly when youth find their pastors are caring, warm, and friendly. To begin with the friendship model, Canales proposes that a close pastor-youth relationship is the key to move youth ministry in a positive direction; assuring the youth that their pastors are trustworthy friends and counselors is a cardinal task for youth pastors. Similarly, Shelton (1983) and Warren (1989) assert that a good relationship between youth and the pastors serving them is essential for the success of youth ministry; youth pastors must be perceived by the youth members first as caring and dependable leaders and secondly, as providers, counselors, and caregivers in the life of the youth (see also Strommen and Hardel 2008). Aligned with this point of view is Canales' servant leadership model that portrays Jesus as the ultimate servant-leader. This view sees coercive and constraining pastorship as a formidable barrier to bringing out personal commitment and denominational support among youth members. In this model, youth ministry can have desired results only if a pastor becomes a living witness of servant leadership by caring, loving, and serving youth as did Jesus.

Presumably, quality programs that can create vibrant personal religion and the sense of sacredness in the youth's spiritual life are equally indispensable for effective youth ministry. This idea pertains first of all to the models of spiritual awareness and biblical hermeneutics. To Canales (2006), interesting and inspirational church activities are the backbone of successful youth ministry. Youth leave a church or denomination for lack of meaningful worship services or church programs (see Strommen and Hardel 2008). Also salient in Canales' thesis is the bearing of thought-provoking programs for youth ministry. Effective pastors investigate and interpret the scriptures and other literature and teachings so that they have meaning and purpose for youths' religious experience and expression. Messages delivered in worship services and church programs must be relevant and applicable to youth culture and lifestyle. That is, adolescents who attend a church may broaden and deepen their support for the church when its programs and worship services are accepted as interesting, inspiring, and cognitively stimulating because they enlarge and stabilize the vision and faith of the ones who attend the services. This supposition is also embedded in the liturgical-initiation model that underlines the import of youth encounter with the divine. In this model, youth support the church when they are connected with God through meaningful sacred rites, liturgical events, and the celebration of religious services.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Applying the ideas of Canales and others to the issue of youth attitudes toward the denomination provides testable hypotheses of the structure of youth pastor influence, models that consider church programs and caring youth pastorship as mediators in shaping youth attitude toward the denomination.

Specifically, this study first postulates that youth affiliated with a church with youth pastors more often take leading roles in the worship services and other activities and perceive their programs as interesting and cognitively stimulating than do those in the churches without youth pastors. This notion is in line with the report that churches with youth pastors generate increased leadership opportunities in church activities for the youth (Goreham 2004). It also coincides with Severe's contention (2006) that most youth pastors consider program development and maintenance as pivotal for effective ministries and thus expend considerable effort to create and sustain interesting and stimulating programs on behalf of their youth members. Concomitantly, for the same reason hiring youth pastors is likely to augment the frequency of youth programs, as previously found by Rubin and Billingsley (1994) in their study of African-American ethnic churches. In our view, these combined changes in turn lead youth to assess their church programs and worship services as valuable and meaningful with respect to their personal and religious lives. The increased meaningfulness then boosts youth loyalty toward the denomination.

We are also interested in how youth's perception of their pastors relates to their attitude toward the denomination. Research has repeatedly affirmed that one dominant attribute of effective parenting and schooling is the creation of positive and safe environments for adolescents, allowing them to become confident and autonomous individuals and learners (Santrock 2007; Snowman and Biehler 2000). We anticipate a probable parallel between youth pastorship and parenting and schooling. The majority of youth pastors reportedly not only believe that creating and maintaining a caring relationship with the youth are fundamental to the success and growth of their ministry but also actually exert much effort to bring about a church environment that is safe and responsive to the youth members (Severe 2006). Our expectation is that the majority of youth pastors, due to this perception and endeavor, actually succeed in acquiring high levels of warmth and understanding with their youth members and that the youth should value the warmth, affection, and responsiveness that their pastors show toward them. Once youth pastors are recognized as warm and accepting, the youth subsequently respond to the caring pastorship in meaningful ways that possibly engender high levels of denominational satisfaction and support. In short, the more youth pastors are perceived as caring and friendly, the more likely it is that the youth delight in and support the denomination.

## METHODOLOGY

### **SAMPLE**

A large questionnaire survey that provided the database for this article involved sixth-twelfth grade students who were enrolled in the schools affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States and Canada.<sup>2</sup> The Adventist church is distinguished from other Protestant churches by its observance of Saturday as the Sabbath, espousal of the separation of church and state, and the rigidity with which it upholds the particulars of

their eschatological worldview (Lawson 1996; 1998; Morgan 1994). In other respects the Adventists are similar to many mainstream Evangelical churches, supporting such Christian tenets as the Trinity, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, salvation through Christ's atoning death on the cross, repentance of sins, the second coming of Jesus, and resurrection and eternal joy in heaven. Generally, the church is conservative on matters of morality and ethics, including endorsement of modest dress and healthy life style, avoidance of premarital sexual intimacy, disengagement from many forms of contemporary entertainment, and restriction on drug use and homosexuality. Given these facts, much of the findings from the Adventist church are probably generalizable to other conservative Evangelical churches (Dudley 1999).

The headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist church supported the survey and named it the Valuegenesis research (cf. Gillespie, Donahue, Boyatt, and Gane 2004; Ji, Pendergraft, and Perry 2006). During the 2000 school year, a sample of about 30% of the 1,050 schools affiliated with the denomination was chosen by a stratified-random method that ensured proportional representation of school type, size, and geographical location.<sup>3</sup> Each selected school appointed a survey administrator who oversaw the entire process of surveying all pupils in grades six through twelve. Some 21,000 questionnaires were sent, 16,000 of which were completed and returned to the surveyors. At each school, the survey took place in a classroom setting according to the guidelines offered by the surveyors so that the students received as identical and consistent a survey setting as possible. The survey was made up of 396 items related to various aspects of family, school, church, friends, life-style, and religion. Of the 396 survey items, the present study utilized 59 items related to doctrinal orthodoxy, faith maturity, and religious orientations along with the items on youth pastor, youth program, and denominational loyalty.<sup>4</sup>

The final database available for the present study had 11,481 respondents. Female students comprised 53% of the sample. There was a balance across the age groups represented: 44% of the respondents came from grades ten to twelve while the rest were identified as seventh-ninth graders. In regards to ethnicity, 68% of the respondents represented non-white ethnic communities, which included 15% who identified themselves as multiracial. The final male-female percentages in the sample were representative of the overall population in the whole school system under consideration, yet ethnic minority pupils were found to be over-represented in the sample by about 10% as compared to their proportion in the entire student representation (Ji, Pendergraft, and Perry 2006).

## **VARIABLES**

In this study, youth attitude toward the denomination is operationalized as a combined measure of the current level of youth satisfaction with the church attended and the extent of anticipated loyalty toward the denomination. In detail, it is equal to the mean score of three 5-point-scale items in the survey: "How satisfied are you with the denomination of the church you now attend?", "If you move to another city that has many churches from which to choose, would you attend a church of the same denomination as the church you now attend?", and "When you are 40 years old, do you think you will be active in the denomination of the church you now attend?" The responses to the first question varied from "very dissatisfied" (1) to "very satisfied" (5), while the responses to the other two questions ranged from "no chance" (1) to "yes, absolutely" (5). For validation, responses to the three items were subject to a factor analysis using a principal axis method, followed

by a varimax rotation. Only one component was retained with eigenvalue = 1.81, accounting for 60.21% of the total variance, and factor loading was greater than .74 for each item. Scale reliability was assessed by computing an  $\alpha$  coefficient, which produced .67 for the three items.

The Valuegenesis survey questionnaire contains nine youth pastor and program-related items. To begin with pastoral variables, the presence of youth pastor was grounded in a single dichotomous item (0 = no, 1 = yes) in the survey, which asked the youth whether or not the church that they attended had a full-time or at least half-time youth pastor or worker. The measurement of caring youth pastorship was taken from the mean score of three 6-point-scale items asking the youth how true it was that their youth pastors were warm and friendly, cared about the youth, and knew the youth members well. Responses ranged from "not at all true" (1) to "very true" (6). A factor analysis, once again, pointed to a one-factor solution using the same extraction and rotation methods as those for denominational loyalty above. This single component explained 77.86% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 2.34, and the factor loading was greater than .84 for each item. The reliability estimate was .85 for the three items.

Turning to the program-related variables, program meaningfulness was tapped from one dichotomous question (0 = no, 1 = yes) in the questionnaire that asked if the samples found the programs and activities meaningful at their church. Related to this item were two 6-point survey questions that asked the youth whether the programs at their church were interesting and made them think. Responses could vary from "not at all true" (1) to "very true" (6). On the other hand, one item that addressed whether or not youth and young adults regularly took leading roles in the worship services at their church served as the measure of youth leadership role in the church. This item had a "no" (0) or "yes" (1) response. Additionally, frequency of youth program was assessed based on one questionnaire item that asked if there was a regular youth ministry program in the church, an item ranging from "never" (1) to "more than once a week" (5).

Apart from the youth ministry variables, the present analysis considered five personal religiosity variables in order to control their potential effects on denominational loyalty and perceived meaningfulness of church program: vertical and horizontal faith maturity, doctrinal orthodoxy, and intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity.<sup>5</sup> For faith maturity, the twelve 5-point items in the Valuegenesis survey were taken from the Faith Maturity Scale (cf. Benson, Donahue, and Erickson 1993; Ji 2004). Ji, Pendergraft, and Perry (2006) conducted a validity study on the twelve Valuegenesis items, which yielded a two-factor solution of vertical and horizontal faith maturity. The seven items loaded on the first factor plus the five items loaded on the second factor were named Vertical and Horizontal Faith Subscales, respectively. For the analysis, in keeping with Ji and his colleagues' proposal, the mean scores of the five and seven items were then calculated for use as the scores of horizontal and vertical faith, in the order specified. The doctrinal orthodoxy score came from the mean of eight 6-point Likert scale items in the survey pertaining to general Protestant orthodox beliefs. Their factor structure was also examined by Ji and others, and the results showed a clear single-factor solution. On the other hand, in the Valuegenesis survey, the measures of intrinsic and extrinsic orientations were derived from Allport and Ross's Religious Orientation Scale (1967). The intrinsic religiosity estimates were grounded in nine 5-point Likert scale items in the survey for which the factor analysis by Ji, Pendergraft, and Perry (2006) clearly pointed to a one-factor solution. Thus, the mean of each of the nine items was comput-

ed to obtain the intrinsic religiosity score. Similarly, the mean score of eleven items related to extrinsic religious orientation served as an index of extrinsic religiosity, a measure designed to emulate the degree to which a respondent embraces utilitarian Christianity.

Finally, the Valuegenesis data contain four measures of student demographic attributes: grade (0 6-9 grades, 1 10-12 grades), gender (0 male, 1 female), ethnicity (1 white, 2 black, 3 Asian, 4 Hispanic, 5 others), and region (1 northeast, 2 midwest, 3 west, 4 south, 5 Canada). The analysis took these demographic variables into account. This decision was justifiable based on previous studies of adolescents in that age, gender, ethnicity, and the location of residence were found to have associations with youth religiosity and denominational loyalty (Gunnoe and Moore 2002; Sloane and Potvin 1983; Wallace, Forman, Caldwell, and Willis 2003).

## ANALYSIS

### *PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS*

The results of frequency and descriptive analyses for youth ministry and religiosity variables are shown in Table 1. Approximately 60% of the sample indicated their church had at least one youth pastor, while 66% said that their church programs were meaningful. When the respondents were asked how true it was that the programs were interesting and made them think, they reported a mean of 3.99 and 3.80, respectively, indicating that these statements were "somewhat true." When asked if the youth oftentimes took leadership roles in worship services at their church, 67% said, "Yes." In regards to the frequency of youth programs in their church, 17% of the respondents answered that they never had youth programs, 29% indicated once a month, 10% every two weeks, and 41% every week or more than once a week. In addition, the samples recorded a mean of 4.29 for caring youth pastorship, which posits that the youth pastors as a whole practice caring pastorship but only to "some" extent. On the other hand, the mean score for youth denominational attitude was 4.07. This meant that on average, the samples were "satisfied" with the denomination of the church they were attending and they would "probably" attend a church of the same denomination when they are 40 years old and if they move to another city.

For personal religiosity, some indications of the average-level religious orientation of the sample were demonstrated by the means that ranged from 2.98 to 3.69 on the 5-point scales for faith maturity and intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. In contrast, the respondents were highly orthodox in terms of their doctrinal faith; they scored a mean of 5.77 on the 6-point response-format scale.

### *PREDICTING YOUTH MINISTRY AND CHURCH PROGRAMS*

In what follows, our analysis proceeds in two stages. An initial stage pertains to whether youth pastors succeed in increasing the frequency of youth programs in a church, after which we undertake to assess the importance of youth pastors to the quality of youth programs, tapping youth evaluation of their church programs. Upon completing these analyses, we continue to the second stage in which youth pastors and youth programs are scrutinized in terms of whether and how they determine the extent of youth contentment with and support for the denomination.

Table 2 summarizes the results of estimating differences in church programs between the youth with and without youth pastors in their church. The subjects attending a church



with youth pastors, as anticipated, tended to portray their church programs as more interesting and more thought-provoking than did those attending a church without youth pastors. Churches with youth pastors also offered youth programs more regularly than did those without youth pastors. In a similar fashion, the former allowed youth members to take leading roles in worship services more frequently when compared to the latter.

Next, we expected several factors to have positive effects on the meaningfulness of church programs: the presence of youth pastor, frequency of youth programs, interesting and thought-provoking programs, taking leading roles in worship services, and caring youth pastors. To test this expectation, two sets of hierarchical regression were used, in which we also examined if addition of the youth ministry-related variables substantially improve the prediction of perceived program meaningfulness beyond that afforded by demographic and personal religiosity variables.

The results, which are given in the upper tier of Model 3A in Table 3, suggest that entering five youth pastor and program-related variables to the equation with demographic and religiosity variables resulted in a substantial increment in  $R^2$  of .18, while adding five religiosity variables to the demographic-variable-only equation raised it by .15. This result suggests that youth pastor and frequent quality programs not only contribute in a marked manner to the prediction of youth attitude toward church programs but also the degree of their contribution is as great as the one for personal religiosity.

The results of the final Model 3A expansion are summarized in the lower tier of Table 3. The summary shows that youth pastor, youth leadership in church services, and frequent, interesting, and thought-provoking programs were all positively linked with perceived meaningfulness of church programs, as expected. For control variables, the levels of intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and vertical faith positively related to the extent to which youth felt positively about the church programs. Gender and ethnicity were also significant: females and whites tended to define their church programs as less meaningful than did males and multi-ethnic samples, while Asians and African-American groups were likely to remark more positively about their youth programs as compared to the referent group. Besides, junior high school students assessed the programs to be more meaningful than did senior high school students. Horizontal faith and doctrinal orthodoxy were found to be non-significant, however; this was also the case for the impact of geographical region.

In addition, we anticipated a positive impact of caring pastorship on youth perception of church program meaningfulness. Hence, summary statistics solely for the youth who attend a church with youth pastors are given in Model 3B of Table 3 after adding perceived caring youth pastorship to the predictor variables in lieu of the presence of youth pastors. As for Model 3A, entering caring youth pastorship and four program-related variables to the model of personal religiosity and demographic control variables increased  $R^2$  .15, despite the loss of five degrees of freedom, roughly equivalent to the .17 for the addition of personal religiosity variables to the initial demographic-variable-only prediction model.

From the parametrics, caring youth pastorship was significant and positive, supporting our anticipation that the youth are more likely to define their church programs as meaningful when their youth pastors are thought of as caring and accepting. In addition, as in Model 3A, perceived meaningfulness of youth programs had positive associations with youth leading roles in worship services, frequency of youth programs, and interesting and thought-provoking programs, along with intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and vertical faith maturity. Interestingly, doctrinal faith turned out to be significant after the replace-

Table 1

## Frequency and Descriptive Statistics for Youth Ministry and Personal Religiosity

Variables	f	%		
Presence of Youth Pastor in Church (Yes)	6,832	59.49		
Meaningfulness of Youth Program (Yes)	7,583	66.05		
Youth Taking Leading Roles in Worship (Yes)	7,642	66.56		
Frequency of Youth Programs in Church				
Never	1,972	16.91		
One a Month	3,313	28.86		
Every Two Weeks	1,199	10.44		
Every Week	3,689	32.13		
More than Once a Week	1,027	8.95		
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	Min.	Max.
My church has interesting youth programs.	3.99	1.24	1	6
My church programs make me think.	3.80	1.27	1	6
Youth Attitude toward the Denomination	4.07	.75	1	5
Caring Youth Pastorship	4.29	1.16	1	6
Intrinsic Religiosity	3.62	.66	1	5
Extrinsic Religiosity	3.22	.46	1	5
Horizontal Faith Maturity	2.98	.79	1	5
Vertical Faith Maturity	3.69	.76	1	5
Doctrinal Orthodoxy	5.77	.50	1	6

Note. N = 11,481.

ment of the presence of youth pastors with caring youth pastorship.

### PREDICTING DENOMINATIONAL LOYALTY

We next proceed to youth attitude toward the denomination they attend. As in Table 3, Table 4 first presents the results of two expansions of the initial full-sample equation (Model 4A). As shown in the upper tier of Model 4A, adding five personal religiosity variables increased  $R^2$  from .01 to .35, a ratio much greater than the .02 increase for the addition of youth pastor and program meaningfulness. This gap postulates that, as a whole, unlike the case for program meaningfulness, personal religiosity is much more powerful than youth pastor- and program-related variables in explaining youth attitude toward the denomination.

Turning to individual parameters, in the lower tier of Model 4A, meaningful programs served to boost the levels of denominational satisfaction and support among the youth. The data, however, failed to support the idea that youth pastors have a direct link with youth attitude toward the denomination. Besides the pastor and program variables, youth attitude toward the denomination was noted to become more positive as the levels of intrinsic religiosity, vertical faith, and doctrinal orthodoxy increased, while extrinsic religiosity was

**Table 2**

**Group Differences in Church Programs between Youths with and without Youth Pastors and the Association between Youth Pastors and Youth Leadership in Worship Services**

	Presence of Youth Pastor				t	df
	Yes		No			
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Frequency of Youth Programs	3.14	1.23	2.45	1.28	28.83*	11, 119
Programs are Interesting.	4.09	1.24	3.86	1.23	9.54*	11, 296
Programs make me thinking.	3.88	1.27	3.68	1.25	8.25*	11, 280

  

	Regular Leading Roles in Church Services		
	Yes	No	Total
Presence of Youth Pastor			
Yes	5,016 (73.87%)	1,774 (23.16%)	6,790
No	2,579 (57.45%)	1,910 (42.55%)	4,489

Note. \* $p < .001$ .

inversely associated with denominational loyalty and satisfaction. Horizontal faith was found to have little to do with youth attitude toward the denomination, however. Whites and senior high school students were more loyal to their denomination than their respective counterpart groups. Students in the southern and midwestern states showed more fidelity to the denomination than those in Canada.

Next, we look at the estimation of the significance of caring youth pastorship. First, the results in Model 4B of Table 4 show that entering personal religiosity variables to the initial demographic-variable-only model increased  $R^2$  from .02 to .35, while this value increased to .39 when program meaningfulness and caring youth pastorship were added to the second equation. This once again affirms the previous observation that personal religiosity is more powerful in accounting for youth attitude toward the denomination than youth pastor- and program-related variables. We next notice that caring youth pastorship was significant, and its relationship with youth denominational attitude was in the expected positive direction. That is, youth tend to show high levels of content with and support for the denomination when they perceive their youth pastors being amiable and responsive. Apart from caring pastorship, the coefficient estimates of the other predictors tell a story virtually identical to the one illustrated above in Model 4A.

Table 4 also includes partial correlation coefficients to help estimate the relative importance of the key predictors. In general, intrinsic religiosity and doctrinal faith displayed the largest coefficient, each uniquely explaining roughly 6% of the total variance of youth atti-

Table 3

## Logistic Regression Summary Predicting Youth Attitudes toward Church Programs

Hierarchical Regression Step/Predictors	Model 3A			Model 3B		
	<u>R</u>	<u>ΔR</u>	Chi-Sq	<u>R</u>	<u>ΔR</u>	Chi-Sq
1. Demographic	.04	.04	325.51*	.04	.04	175.26*
2. Personal Religiosity	.19	.15	1564.85*	.21	.17	1018.28*
3. Youth Pastor & Program	.37	.18	10086.05*			
3. Program & Caring Pastor				.36	.15	1813.39*
Summary of the Final Model	<u>B</u>	<u>SE</u>		<u>B</u>	<u>SE</u>	
Constant	-3.79*	.37		-4.46*	.47	
Female	-.11**	.05		-.10	.07	
Senior	-.61*	.05		-.53*	.07	
White	-.16**	.07		-.18	.09	
African-American	.21**	.11		.17	.15	
Asian	.23**	.11		.22	.14	
Hispanic	.04	.10		-.04	.14	
Northeast	-.02	.12		.19	.18	
Midwest	-.17	.11		-.11	.16	
West	-.11	.09		-.02	.13	
South	-.17	.10		-.10	.14	
Intrinsic Religiosity	.24*	.07		.21*	.09	
Extrinsic Religiosity	.31*	.09		.59*	.12	
Horizontal Faith	-.04	.04		-.02	.05	
Vertical Faith	.27*	.05		.38*	.06	
Doctrinal Orthodoxy	.04	.05		.19*	.07	
Presence of Youth Pastors	.29*	.05				
Leading Roles in Worship	.46*	.05		.46*	.07	
Frequency of Youth Programs	.30*	.02		.20*	.03	
Program: Interesting	.46*	.03		.43*	.04	
Program: Thinking	.30*	.03		.27*	.04	
Caring Youth Pastorship				.17*	.04	
Chi-Square (df = 20)			3291.02*			1813.39*
-2LL			10086.05			5664.86
Pseudo R Square			.37			.36
Correct Prediction (%)			77			79

Note. \* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; dependent variable: church program meaningfulness (0 no, 1 yes); Model 3A: all samples; Model 3B: samples attending a church with youth pastors.

Table 4

**Summary of Hierarchical Ordinary-Least-Squares Regression Analysis Predicting Youth Attitude toward the Denomination+**

Hierarchical Regression Step/Predictors	Model 4A			Model 4B		
	<u>R</u>	<u>ΔR</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>ΔR</u>	<u>F</u>
1. Demographic	.01	.01	16.57*	.02	.02	11.18*
2. Personal Religiosity	.35	.34	401.70*	.35	.33	235.76*
3. Pastor & Meaningfulness	.37	.02	371.35*			
3. Meaningfulness & Caring Pastor				.39	.04	241.61*
Summary of the Final Model	<u>B</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>r</u>
Constant	.88*	.09		.78*	.11	
Female	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	.02	.02
Senior	-.08*	.01	-.07	-.07*	.02	-.07
White	.08*	.02	.05	.06*	.02	.03
African-American	-.03	.02	-.01	-.05	.03	-.02
Asian	-.03	.02	-.01	-.06	.03	-.03
Hispanic	.03	.01	.01	.04	.03	.02
Northeast	.01	.01	.00	-.01	.04	.00
Midwest	.08*	.03	.03	.11*	.04	.04
West	.06**	.02	.02	.05	.03	.02
South	.11*	.02	.04	.13*	.03	.05
Intrinsic Religiosity	.44*	.02	.27	.41*	.02	.26
Extrinsic Religiosity	-.21*	.02	-.11	-.21*	.02	-.12
Horizontal Faith	.01	.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01
Vertical Faith	.12*	.01	.10	.09*	.01	.08
Doctrinal Orthodoxy	.35*	.01	.26	.32*	.02	.24
Presence of Youth Pastor	.01	.01	.01			
Program Meaningfulness	.22*	.01	.16	.17*	.02	.12
Caring Youth Pastorship				.12*	.01	.20
R Square/Adj. R Square	.37 / .37			.39 / .39		
F	371.35*			241.61*		
df	17, 10820			17, 6485		

Note. +ordinary-least-squares method; \* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; Model 4A is based on all samples, while Model 4B is based on only those who reported to attend a church with a youth pastor or worker.

tude toward the church. This was followed by caring youth pastorship (4%), meaningful program (1%), and extrinsic religiosity (1%). It is noteworthy that the presence of youth pastors accounted for nearly zero percentage of the variance. Put another way, conventional personal religiosity and caring pastorship have more direct bearings on youth attitude toward

the denomination when compared to other variables. Also, caring pastorship is more dominant than meaningful programs and the mere presence of youth pastors in a church in shaping youth attitude toward the denomination.

## DISCUSSION

### ***YOUTH MINISTRY***

In view of the data, as expected, youth pastors serve to increase the frequency of youth programs as well as to advance church program quality by making them more interesting and thought-provoking, which subsequently helps youth regard overall church services and programs with favor. The finding that adolescents tend to feel church programs more meaningful when they are frequently allowed to take leading roles in the programs also supports our expectation.

This is important for two reasons. First, improved youth attitudes toward church services and programs, as our analysis demonstrate, is likely to translate into youth support for the denomination that they currently attend and thus reduce the likelihood of their leaving the denomination. Second, findings that youth pastors increase the frequency of youth programs may resonate with the findings of earlier qualitative research contending that a majority of modern youth ministers devote a large amount of their time and effort in finding and developing new methods, programs, and activities (Severe 2006). One key concern in the literature is the so-called “ministry methods monster” phenomenon in that pastors are pressured to be always “cutting edge” to have programs and services relevant to the new generations of youth and thus habitually explore new methods without careful consideration of their relevance to ministry vision and philosophy. Consequently, youth pastors can feel helpless and even at the mercy of endless stress produced by having to keep developing and adding new programs to their ministry. Notably, our data show that frequent programs and program maintenance endeavor nevertheless benefit the youth pastor as well as his or her church in general as they tend to generate interesting, stimulating, and valued church programs that subsequently arouse youth support for the church programs and denomination.

As for caring pastorship, the data offer qualified evidence of caring pastorship normality: the sample reported a mean of 4.30 on the six-point caring-pastorship scale. Most youth pastors, according to Severe (2006), greatly value relationships with their youth members and believe that they should devote time and energy to relational ministry with youth members. Unfortunately, however, reaching this goal is regularly compounded by busyness, administration, and various routine tasks, subverting pastoral priority on relational ministry and even demoting relationships to little more than a means to the end of keeping youth in the church. This note has implications because it may provide an understanding of reasons why the youth pastors under consideration obtained a mean score equivalent to only 71% of the possible maximum score. Our data provide further information once the pastors are categorized into three groups based on their caring pastorship scores with the first scoring less than 2.5 (“not at all or probably not true”), the second ranging from 2.5 to 4.5 (“slightly or somewhat true”), and the last more than 4.5 (“true or very true”). The categorization shows that only 41% of the youth pastors were given a mean score greater than 4.5 while 6% and 53% received scores of less than 2.5 and 2.5-4.5, respectively. Put otherwise, from a youth perspective, many youth pastors fail to demonstrate caring pastorship. Possibly, our youth pastors, as those interviewed by Severe (2006), are unable to focus on relation-

al ministry due to their allocation of time and energy for administrative and other routine tasks. This failure is troublesome granted a close link between perceived caring pastorship and youth denominational attitude to the extent that youth perceive their pastors are concerned with them, youth tend to be satisfied with and adhere to their denomination.

### **PERSONAL RELIGIOSITY**

Aside from youth ministry variables, this study also shed light on personal religiosity in relation to youth denominational attitude. Our results on personal religiosity show that conventional religiosity such as intrinsic religiosity, doctrinal orthodoxy, and vertical faith assist youth to be content with and remain loyal to the denomination. In contrast, extrinsic religiosity is inversely tied with youth satisfaction and support for the church. This last finding may not come as a surprise considering extrinsic religiosity's opportunistic and utilitarian attitudes toward religion. In addition, the data show that horizontal faith has little to do with whether or not one holds fast to his or her denomination. In our view, this may reflect the potential off-balance emphasis of traditional Protestant churches on the relationship between God and people over social teachings such as justice, equality, and poverty. According to previous studies, on average, Protestant youth education rarely engages in social teaching such as justice and peace education; the weight of their ministry predominantly lies on Bible study and personal relationship with God. This is especially distinctive in those affiliated with Evangelical churches (Goreham 2004; Rubin and Billingsley 1994). The finding that Evangelical youth ministry is heavily geared toward a vertical dimension of individual faith has implications for the present paper given that the church under consideration represents a major Evangelical denomination in the United States. Possibly, the respondents with high levels of horizontal faith find their accent on social service and justice actually has no distinctive place in the church's youth ministry and religious education, notwithstanding its verbal and doctrinal stress on love for the poor and oppressed. This disappointment may be so large that horizontal faith, as our data posit, fails to statistically relate to youth support for the denomination.

This study also sought to compare the influence of personal religiosity and youth ministry on youth denominational attitude. The results indicate that youth ministry variables are less important to the account of youth attitude toward the denomination by an average of 15% as compared to personal religiosity. This is to suggest that youth pastor and ministry bear roles in shaping youth denominational attitude, but their significance may be smaller in magnitude than that of personal religiosity on youth attitude. Equally important, however, the data show that youth pastorship and ministry play quite critical roles in determining the extent to which youth find church programs meaningful and valuable. Together, these findings present a picture of youth pastorship and youth ministry influencing adolescent attitude toward the denomination indirectly, rather than directly, by affecting their attitude toward the church they attend and its religious programs.

### **CONCLUSION**

Under conditions of frequent youth disaffiliation, many churches hire youth pastors or workers to help youth develop high levels of youth satisfaction and support for the church. This article demonstrates that indeed, youth pastors or workers may have significant impacts on youth attitude toward the denomination. They appear initially to contribute to the devel-

opment and maintenance of quality programs—increasing the frequency of youth programs, accomplishing interesting and thought-provoking program ministry, and enhancing youth leadership in church services. The increased value of church programs then serves to work out high levels of church satisfaction and anticipated loyalty in youth who may otherwise choose a denomination different from the one they now attend when they move to another city or get older. And in churches in which youth pastors succeed in developing a caring relationship with the youth, adolescents are more likely to remain satisfied with and faithful to the church and denomination that they currently attend.

These results have implications for multiple fields of youth ministry study. First, they add to the list of determinants found to influence youth commitment to church and denomination. As with personal religiosity, family backgrounds, and other demographic attributes, hiring youth pastors or workers makes a difference in youth ministry. Further, hiring youth pastors or workers is a means that is rather readily available to many churches, even though it requires a financial and resource commitment from the church. Second, this study features the importance of caring pastorship. There is reportedly a consensus among youth pastors that a quality relationship between pastors and the youth is a key component in propitious youth ministry. This consensus nevertheless seems to be true to a rather limited extent in building up a good pastor-youth relationship because the data show that almost 40% of the youth failed to rate their youth pastors as caring and accepting. Granted this reality, research needs to give more attention to means of accomplishing the pastoral objective of relational ministry, helping youth pastors build caring and empathetic relationships with the youth members. This call also brings together deliberation of careful recruitment, training and mentoring of youth pastors, and support for youth ministry.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Within the same period of time, there was also a 1% drop in Catholic religious affiliation, a 1% gain in Jewish religious affiliation, and a 5% gain in those who indicated “other” and “none” for their religious affiliation.

<sup>2</sup> As of 2005, the denomination’s membership numbered close to 13 million baptized adult members worldwide, and it is reportedly one of the fastest growing Protestant churches. For statistics on the church and for its official doctrines, see <http://www.adventist.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Since the data were exclusively taken from denominational schools, a question may come to mind whether youth pastors are more important to those who attend denominational schools compared to those in public schools. A Lutheran study proposed that youth attending Lutheran parochial schools tend to be involved more often in church activities than do their counterpart Lutherans attending public schools (Johnstone 1966). The source of this discrepancy may be found in other studies showing that denominational-school students are generally highly satisfied with their school and that this satisfaction has to do with their interactions with teachers and pastors in the school, which in turn engenders frequent church attendance and great contentment with the church as a whole (Ji 2010). This implies that youth pastors may exert more influence on youth attitude toward the church when the youth attend its denominational schools. A caution may thus be necessary in applying the present study to religious youth in public schools.

<sup>4</sup> Apart from demographic information, the items covered in this study include the following Valuegenesis survey items: 1-12 for faith maturity; 61-62 and 69-74 for doctrinal orthodoxy; 110-111 and 145 for denominational loyalty; 213-214, 276-278, 280 for youth pastor and youth program; 213-216 and 218 for caring youth pastorship, and 311-329, 338, and 457 for intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations.

<sup>5</sup> One may correctly suggest that the growth of youth religiosity and spirituality will be greater in churches with youth pastors, asserting the need to additionally consider a hypothesis for youth pastorship and personal religiosity. The data used for the present study, however, do not satisfy the basic condition of time order and length,



a condition required to establish a sequence between youth pastorship and personal religiosity. The changes in personal religiosity begin to take place long before adolescents work with youth pastors and partake of their ministry (Fowler 1981; Markstrom 1999; Oser and Scarlett 1999). Further, it develops slowly over a long period of time. In the data, the respondents were asked if their church had youth pastors at the time of the survey, while personal religiosity had formed sufficiently to be measured prior to the questionnaire survey. Therefore, unlike the other relationships that have theoretical and time-related bases to justify causality, we may not safely assume and estimate that youth pastorship affects personal religiosity based on the present data.

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