
Bringing Home our Adventist Prodigals

Paul Tompkins
Youth Director
Trans-European Division

Abstract

Studies agree that the church is losing a significant proportion of its young people. This trend is hurting families, congregations and the church as a whole but very little seems to be done about it. Now is the time to do so.

Back in the 1990's the church last looked at restructuring youth ministry — following a commission on youth, the autumn council of 1992 voted a six point plan including revival, recovery, evangelism and nurture. A strategic plan was also authorized but the aspect of recovery has only recently begun to gain significant attention. Now is the time to make this a priority.

In this paper, I will outline a model of family-based youth ministry that is part of a long term strategy for retention and recovery. This is placed in a setting of Churches of Refuge, where the model and strategy can be utilized to maximum effect.

Historically the church has always been a place of refuge and it needs to be so again today. The Church of Refuge initiative is born with this in mind and is based on a model of cities of refuge as recorded in Deut. 19 where people could flee for safety. In this context a Church of Refuge is one that is intentional about ensuring that young people are protected, valued and involved. In the Trans-European Division a strategic plan incorporating both criteria and action steps for such churches has been developed and is included in the Appendix of this paper.

The Problem Outlined

There is something interesting happening in the Christian community across the western world, and this includes our own church. “Very quietly and unobtrusively, one group of believers is growing on a daily basis. Soon the numbers will be such that they cannot be ignored. Who are they? They are Christians that don't go to church anymore” (Riddell, Pierson, and Kirkpatrick, 2000).

In a Church of England study entitled “The Tide Is Running Out,” it is stated that we (the church) are just one generation away from extinction. Of course in one sense this is always true as the task of any church is to pass on the faith to the next generation. Over the last two decades, however, there has been a growing realization in many churches that something is seriously wrong. We are, quite simply, losing far too many of the young people who have grown up in our church families.

The Valuegenesis surveys in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in America, Australia, and Europe have been well

documented and have echoed this fact. One question, that has now been universally asked, was first stated in the 1990 North American study. The question asked, “Do you think you will still be in the church at age 40?” In their article “Youth Apostasy and Recovery,” Barry Gane and Steve Case note, “The results indicate that 28 percent of today's 12 — 18 year-olds *are not planning* to be in the Church when they are 40 years old” (Gane and Case, 2002).

The European Valuegenesis survey (2006/7) raised the same question but gave a slightly different slant. Here the sample group was 14-25 year olds, and the survey was web based. Over 6000 replies came from seventeen different unions. In response to the question: “In twenty years time do you think you will be active in the Adventist church?” 52% answered definitely, 41% probably, and only 7% no/unlikely. The challenge lies, however, to turn the 41% into those who definitely will remain.

Numbers always provide the hard facts, and Gane and Case further comment: “Figures for those who leave the

Church in many Congregations and Conferences range between 35-63 per cent” (Gane and Case, 2002). If we take the mean average to be approximately 50% (note; some quote as high as 75%), a very disturbing trend is highlighted that we simply cannot ignore! Gane and Case ask a natural question in response: “What can we do to stop this hemorrhaging of one of our most valuable assets?” (ibid).

I believe Roger Dudley puts the case clearly when he says: “The church can have no higher priority than stemming the loss of young adults and winning back those who have left its ranks” (Dudley, 2000). These people are not just statistics; they are our sons and daughters!

However, I seek to emphasize that all is not lost, and that we have a window of opportunity that must now be taken. We are still in the early days of the new Millennium, and at this time I feel we need to recognize why youth have been leaving and then create a new model, with clear strategies to meet the need. I then wish to put the model and strategies into a context of creating a safe haven for our young people that will be effective for both today and tomorrow.

Merton Strommen (1993) highlights both the seriousness of the situation and the opportunity that exists: “We face a decade or two of opportunity that ought not to be ignored. Why? Because every major denomination is losing a major segment of its youth. Now is the time to bend the course of history with respect to youth and reverse the trend of non-involvement. Now is the time to minister to their growing interest in spiritual experience.” Although some years have passed since this statement was made, the principle still rings true. For while there is life, while there are youth, there is still hope for the future!

It is also my strongly held conviction that this is not a youth problem alone, for as Strommen (1993) indicates: “Loss of faith is an issue that is no respecter of age.” Before doing anything else, however, we need to look at why they are leaving.

Why They Are Leaving

They are leaving for many reasons, some of which they find hard to articulate. Many feel that the church is not their home anymore, especially during the teens and early twenties.

With some youth it seems to be a case of fractured or compartmentalized identities. On Sabbath they are expected to lead one life, yet during the week it is a very different story. It may not be that they are doing anything too radical, at least by worldly standards, but there is certainly a lack of personal association with the church and what it stands for at this time. That is not to say that these youth would not see themselves as Christian, as they often quite clearly

do; it is more the case that they do not see themselves as practicing Seventh-day Adventists.

The Valuegenesis study from the South Pacific Division gives the following reasons that appear in descending order from the reason most given:

- Adult members living phoney lives
- The church places too much emphasis on non-essentials
- Attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring
- Church leaders are preoccupied with organization, not concerned with people
- Worship services are dull and meaningless
- Do not want to be a hypocrite
- Attracted to a different lifestyle
- Do not have any real friends at church
- Church does not allow me to think for myself

Gane and Case comment that “Many use any or a number of these reasons as an excuse to experiment with the world” (Gane and Case, 2000). They are, however, symptoms of the fractured identity mentioned above. Neither is this an entirely new phenomenon.

It is true that many of these reasons may be given as an excuse by youth who actually wish to live a different lifestyle, at least for a time. There is, however, a recurring theme as we can see from a much smaller study I did in my local church during 2007.

Although the study size was too limited (22 non-attending young adults) to be statistically significant the top three reasons expressed were: Attitude of older members being critical and uncaring; worship services are dull and meaningless; and the recipients of the survey felt they did not want to be hypocrites by still attending. The attraction to a different lifestyle also scored equal third place.

It should be noted that the different order may be as a result of a number of variables, including the sample size, age group, and the fact that the answers came from two different continents with a ten-year gap between the studies. From my study it is clear that the younger recipients surveyed (those in their teens or twenties) definitely saw the church members as critical and uncaring. This would seem to indicate that this perception is more keenly felt at a lower age.

As time moves on other reasons are also significant. Andy Hickford, a long-time English youth worker asserts: “Human nature has not suddenly changed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The joys and tensions of adolescence are still basically the same. What has clearly changed, however, is the environment in which teenage years are lived out” (Hickford, 2003). Society today lives

for now, and as he states, “The future whispers whilst the present shouts” (ibid).

Therefore, talk of a future eternity with Jesus does not speak as loudly to our current generation of youth as does the prospect of a weekend with their friends! The church needs to be in tune with the movements in society as it tries to meet the needs of its current youth and those who have become disaffected.

Hickford also notes: “Choice is a core value for young people now. Young people are prepared to live with the anxiety of having choice in order to keep their options open and avoid commitment” (ibid). Yet the church exists to lead young people to a point of commitment and has traditionally seen that the teenage years are the ones best suited to such decisions. This may still be the case but evidently we need to re-think our strategy for reaching and keeping our youth.

We can readily agree, therefore, with Hickford’s final assertions that young people today are 1) an immediate priority 2) a strategic priority, and they need and deserve 3) a long-term strategy (ibid.).

Re-Casting Adventist Youth Ministry

A New Model for a New Millennium

I believe Youth Ministry now needs to be recast for the new millennium. In Europe, for instance, this means re-setting youth ministry into a very secular society where youth societies no longer exist, and where in many countries, at least in their traditional format, regular Adventist Youth meetings do not take place.

I believe that such conditions call for a new model of youth ministry that fits into a long-term strategy. In this section I will look at such a model, and it is my belief that this new model must have as a prime element an emphasis on working in partnership with our families and congregations at the local church level. This new model must also include an approach to re-connect with many former Adventists.

Seventh-day Adventist Youth Ministry has a long and distinguished history centred around :

The era of Societies and Leagues (1888 — 1930’s);

The era of Campaigns and Fellowships (1930’s-1950’s);

The era of Youth Ministry (1960’s — 1990’s).

Now is the time for a new model that can also be part of a revised strategy.

The Seventh-day Adventist church last looked at restructuring youth ministry in the 1990’s. After a Commission on Youth met at Newbold College, the Annual Council of 1992 voted the following six points: (Allen, 1995).

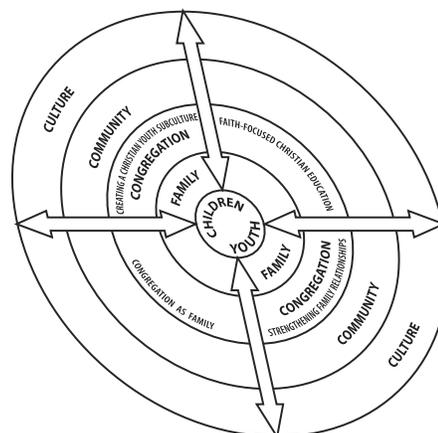
- 1) Youth acceptance as full participants in church membership
- 2) The appointment of youth specialists at every level of the church organization
- 3) The establishment of an organized youth ministry in every local church
- 4) A four-module approach to youth ministry that includes; Revival, Recovery, Evangelism, and Nurture.
- 5) Authorization for the formation of a strategic plan to restructure and rebuild Youth Ministry
- 6) The establishment of a president’s youth cabinet at every level of the church organization

My analysis, a decade later, is that the first five of these six points are still valid today. Number six, although well meaning, seems strangely at odds with reality and never really got off the ground. Also number five seems to hold the key to building on the first four, but strangely until recently I have never seen such a strategic plan emerge for the world field.

The fourth point shown above could not be formulated better today and includes the component of recovery. It should be noted here that at the 2006 World Youth Advisory seven Strategic Themes were voted with the third theme dealing with Reclamation. Also in 2009 the Year of Evangelism (Shining) and the Week of Prayer will focus further on reclamation. So now is the time to build on this, creating a new strategy that can help to usher in a new era of Youth Ministry.

Family-Based Youth Ministry Model

As mentioned, I believe strongly in adults working together in partnership with families in a family-based youth ministry. Merton Strommen outlines a model that I find very persuasive (Strommen and Hardel, 2000). Pictorially, this model is shown below and uses concentric circles to show that the family is the most influential point in ministering to youth as they must always be the nearest point of contact and influence.



With this model in mind youth ministry should be seen as a support to the family ministry that takes place in the home and not the other way around. Strommen summarizes his position by saying: “We conclude by re-iterating that

“The message is quite clear; we need to focus heavily on children, teens, and those in their twenties.”

the family is the most powerful institution in promoting faith in youth” (Strommen and Hardel, 2000). Youth ministry is, therefore, best seen as a support ministry that is most effective when

put in place as an integral part of a family and congregation network. Strommen finally calls for “a radical new model in which families and congregations enter into a conscious partnership of faith development” (ibid).

The congregation is then a key point in helping parents to carry out their God-given role of passing on the faith. In turn, parents should turn to the congregation for assistance in giving doctrinal and intellectual structure to the faith that they are trying to nurture in their children. The key word here is partnership.

Partnership Challenges

There are many challenges which the partnership between youth and family are ideally placed to meet. Churches and youth directors need to work together with families to provide information, training, and resources. The focus of this approach will remain as a relational youth ministry, and the impact will be enhanced by forming a united support network for the care of our youth.

The challenge of moulding and shaping adolescents will certainly remain, as teenagers are probably the largest single group of non-Christians who regularly attend our church activities! Although growing up in the church they are still non-Christians until the point of commitment. As such, our ministry to them needs to be taken very seriously, and every opportunity must be used to help lead them toward the kingdom.

Another facet to this new model must be to re-connect with many former “stalled” Adventists. It has been estimated that there may be between one to two million former Seventh-day Adventists in North America alone. There are no corresponding figures for Europe or other parts of the world, as far as I am aware, but the trend is undoubtedly the same in many areas. This means, that in all probability, there are as many former Adventists in a given country as there are currently attending church. Many of these are our young people. We need them back!

We can’t make people belong, but we can certainly create an environment where it is favorable for many to return. We need to take the ministry of reclamation seriously and create a measured strategy for “Bringing Back Our Adventist Prodigals.”

I believe a model for family-based youth ministry will help re-cast our approach to working with children and youth in the current age. We must, however, go further than this and create a system that allows for youth workers in conjunction with families to focus on important age groups within the church.

Strategies for a Way Forward

In this section I wish to begin to build a strategy by examining more closely the suggestions from the “English Church Attendance Survey” noting particularly the following main points that relate to youth (Brierley, 2000).

- Focus urgently on children
- Continue to focus on teens and 20’s where the church is weakest and bring young people into leadership.
- Encourage personal spirituality especially among the 30’s and 40’s.
- Teach both church and non-church people the foundations of Christian faith.

The message is quite clear; we need to focus heavily on children, teens, and those in their twenties. Unpacking this summary allows for some further reflection on the first three points shown above.

1. Focus Urgently on Children.

Advertisers and the media are focusing on younger and younger children, and so must we. If we wish children to make decisions for Christ in their teenage years, we need to lay the ground much earlier. Statistics from the Barna research foundation show that “nine out of ten young people (93%) consider themselves to be Christian by the age of 13” (Barna, 2003).

The following six suggestions are starting points:

- a) Each church should have a complete and up to-date list of all youth who are associated with the church family. This includes baptized and non-baptized youth.
- b) The ministry team/youth leader of each church should visit every home at the start of a year and specifically ask parents what the church can do to help their children this year.
- c) We should plan for and help parents at the key life stages such as going to school for the first time, entry into secondary/high school, becoming a teenager, legal voting age, etc. We need to develop distinct rites of

passage that allow for more responsibility and involvement at each age. The Kids in Discipleship program is one example of a specialized program for children.

- d) We should put a plan into operation that allows every child growing up in an Adventist home to receive access to a basic and youth-based Bible study course by the time they are fourteen years of age. This should again be done in cooperation with parents.
- e) This should be backed up by an absolute youth program for ninth grade (age 14) organized by the conference or union and in cooperation with our schools. In Norway the church has taken advantage of the country's legislation that allows for a specific time away for confirmation classes, and the eleven Adventist schools in the country have such a period written into their curriculum where our youth have a special Bible week organized at a local Adventist campsite or church-retreat facility.
- f) At a local level, wherever possible, each church should dedicate a room in its building as the "youth room" where training courses, mentoring, and fellowship can take place on a regular basis.

2. Continue to Focus on Teens and Twenties, where the Church is Weakest

It is at this age where the drop out usually begins to happen. Special attention should be given at age 14 (see above) and then again at age 17. These are key transition points where changes are often taking place. Age 17/18 is a time when many leave home for a university experience and leave behind family, friends, and the local church for the first time.

During the university years a drop in spirituality is often observed. The church AMICUS program is very important to help reach and contact Adventist youth studying at non-denominational colleges. Friday nights remain a constant problem in the winter for Adventist youth, and local churches can help by providing a system of Friday evening small-group meetings in local homes, etc.

At this point I would like to mention two new programs that are being adopted at this time. The first is in my local church which has just started a parallel service aimed at reaching youth in this age group who may no longer attend the main church regularly. It also has a strong discipleship path to help nurture faith and has the potential to be one of the churches of refuge outlined later in this paper.

The second program is from the Trans-European Division Institute of Youth Evangelism, named Relay, which is aimed specifically at the 18-25 age group. This course can be taken to any country and is comprised of three core courses: Foundations of Adventist Beliefs, Foundations of

Discipleship, and Foundations of Youth Outreach. This is part of a strategy aimed at teaching the core young people in the church.

3. Encourage Personal Spirituality especially among the 30s and 40s.

This is the age group of the first-time parents. Life is often busy with new and developing careers and also with starting a family. Thought needs to be given to effective discipleship and ongoing spiritual growth for this age group. *If we lose them we lose their children!*

A cursory look at most churches during Sabbath School time shows that in many countries a high percentage of members are simply not attending. Parents will bring their little children, but somehow the once excellent Sabbath School program is now not scratching where many people in their 30s and 40s are itching.

We need to find new ways that may involve Crowd, Cell, and Core small groups, worship renewal, and alternative worship programs, designed specifically for this age group. Creating community and meeting their spiritual growth needs are very important so they, in turn, can share their faith experience with their children.

Finally we must not assume that because young people attend the church, they have been taught the principles of the faith. Strong youth and collegiate classes are needed that can also assimilate new believers.

"A cursory look at most churches during Sabbath School time shows that in many countries a high percentage of members are simply not attending."

Having identified and set some strategies for these age groups, we also need to focus on those who have become inactive and who will at some point wish to return. We must be intentional in helping them to find a way to come home.

Coming Home

I believe that the family-based youth ministry model outlined above together with the strategies suggested also create a synergy for an intentional ministry that could welcome back many of the millions of non-attending youth who have grown up in our families.

Let me share Becky's story. I invested Becky as a Pathfinder when she was young, and she had also attended youth retreats I conducted when she was in her early teens. I had not seen Becky for many years when I met her again recently at a Youth Leadership convention. She told me a remarkable story of how she had left home and entered into a destructive relationship. Through those years she had

come to the point where she rarely smiled on the outside and inside at the same time.

I asked her what the turning point in her life was. She said that one day she was alone in her flat and very unhappy. She began to cry, and as she did so she looked out of the window of her flat and saw the cross on a church opposite. This reminded her of her upbringing, and she knew she wanted to read the Bible to see if God had heard her cries and seen her tears. She knew somewhere in the flat there was a Bible that her partner's grandmother had given him. So she found it and turned at random to where the Bible fell open. It opened in the Psalms, and although she could not remember the exact text, she clearly read the words, "The Lord hears my cry." She knew then that God had heard her.

Immediately she put on her coat and left the house without packing. She went to the station and caught the first train which was a non-stop train to her home town. She went through the streets to where her parents lived and knocked on the door. When her mother opened the door, Becky simply said, "Your prodigal daughter has returned." She then told her parents everything, and she said they were very understanding.

Now 27 she looked at me with a big smile on her face and said that she had been baptized earlier that year and now led a youth group of teenagers and was the youth leader for the local district. She then said, "Never give up praying because if God can reach me, He can reach anyone."

In the book, "Ten Who Came Back," interviews were carried out with former Seventh-day Adventists who had found their way back to the church. In the conclusion the authors noted; "No matter how long one has been away, returning remains an option" (Lale and Habada, 1998). That is a key point that can be built upon in any ministry for prodigals.

In the same book it was noted that "Eight out of ten persons interviewed expressed memories of early childhood Adventism that reminded them of happy times in the church" (ibid). The key seems to be how to build on these positive memories and use them as a catalyst for change.

It is clear that while some do find their way back to church, not enough do. We must be intentional in reaching out to them (Luke 15). I believe this will include the need for transition groups, or youth friendly churches, geared to meeting the needs of returning youth.

In the next section I wish to put the model of family-based youth ministry and the strategies outlined into a context where I believe they can be best applied.

Churches of Refuge

In the Trans-European Division (TED) we have looked at the concept of providing a place of refuge or safe haven

for our youth. The church always was a place of refuge and needs to be so again.

This is a model taken from the Old Testament Cities of Refuge. Numbers 35:9-15; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1-3; and Joshua 20:8-9 describe cities that were strategically located as places of sanctuary or refuge where people could flee in times of dire need. This concept included the idea of protection, mediation, and long-term care. These attributes can be re-created today but this time in a church setting.

We have followed a process which commenced at the TED Youth Advisory held in Norway during the latter part of 2007. Ron Whitehead from Andrews University was a guest speaker, and a conversation we had at this time led to a significant break-out group discussion on the topic. This culminated in a small group later arriving at the following criteria for such Churches of Refuge today. The criteria and action plans are dynamic and open to change, but they lay the basis for a program that has since been accepted by the TED Executive Committee (See the Whitehead paper in this collection).

The vision for TED Churches of Refuge is: A church of refuge is a church that is intentional about young people, ensuring that young people feel protected, are valued, and can get involved.

Criteria and Action Steps

Ten Criteria with accompanying Action Steps have been established to date and are outlined in Appendix 1 at the end of this paper. The first three of the ten criteria focus on the need to unconditionally accept young people and to be intentional in assisting their faith development. This includes young people being involved in the development of the church's vision--communicating to young people both what they can expect from the church as well as sharing the opportunities to be involved in the mission of the church.

Criteria four and five deal expressly with the churches intention to actively seek to contact young people moving into the vicinity, as well as being committed to staying in contact with anyone who, for whatever reason, has taken a break from church fellowship. The action points accompanying criteria five were very specifically aimed at creating an extensive list of all inactive youth, contacting them with the aim of sensitively starting visiting, and holding a homecoming Sabbath as part of a three month re-encounter program. This stressed the importance of Strategic Theme 3 (Reclamation) from the General Conference plan.

Criterion six dealt with systematically praying for all of the young people. This criterion in particular met some of the main points highlighted by the focus groups. The last criterion dealt with the practical issues of providing a youth elder, integrating young people into the leadership of the

church, providing physical space for them, and having a substantial budget for their care and support

The Strategic Plan was presented to the TED Executive Committee's Spring Meeting in May 2008. At this time three actions were voted. 1. Record receipt of the Churches of Refuge document with the TED Youth Dept. to further prepare a Plan of Action for developing the concept. 2. Aim to plant 25 Church of Refuge type churches--one refuge church per country-- where young people with challenges can be embraced and their immediate needs are met. 3. Incorporate the Churches of Refuge criteria and action steps in the TED Relay training program.

Since that time the planning group has met again to prepare an eight-point plan of action. This includes a process of identifying and launching pilot projects with a view to both evaluating them and also launching a full program in 2009. The story is not yet complete, but it does offer hope that those who seek to return will find a church community that is waiting to welcome them home. A church of refuge will be one where the welcome is that of the Father in the parable of Luke 15 and not that of the older brother!

Summary

It is my firm belief that many inactive members will look to return home at some time in their lives. It may be that this will happen in both larger numbers and also sooner than was once thought possible.

At the start of this paper I reflected that there is one group that has grown daily, and that is believers who no longer attend church. In his recent book, *Re-Emerging Church* (Standing, 2008), Roger Standing argues that there is a defined sociological group, Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964, who are now facing retirement. He feels that this is a watershed moment with the inevitable aging process bringing them to face their own mortality and the big questions in life concerning what next and what happens after death.

The first of the baby boomers will hit retirement age in 2011. Standing feels that the issues of "roots and identity" will play a very significant role and that many of this generation will seek out the denominations of their youth. This is the last generation that actually does have roots in church, be it Sunday (Sabbath) school, chapel, or some type of Christian camp or youth experience.

It is expected that this group, almost on a whim, will look to try out the church they knew best from their youth once more. The challenge is that we may get only one roll of the dice, and if they do not find their needs met this time, they may leave never to return. The question is: Are we ready for this to happen?

I believe that these concepts of roots and identity are important to all ages. Whether they are boomers or from another defined sociological group, inactive Seventh-day Adventists do have a church background. Also there may come other times before retirement, when their lives are destabilized, and they too are faced with the same big questions in life. It may be marriage, the birth of a child, or even the loss of a job or the passing of a parent. At such time many will look for re-assurance in a familiar setting. The church must be intentional about both seeking those who have entered a post-church experience and also in wishing to welcome them back. There undoubtedly will be challenges, as not all will return with relationships that fit neatly into a traditional family structure. The church must be willing to face these issues and truly be a place of refuge once more.

The bottom line is that we are the church, so we must all take responsibility for this and accept the collective responsibility of being our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

References

- Allen, M. (1995). *Divine Guidance or Worldly Pressure*. Silver Springs, MI: General Conference Dept. of Church Ministries.
- Barna, G. (2003). *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*. Gospel Light.
- Brierley, P. (2000). *London: Christian Research*.
- Dudley, R. (2000). *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.
- Gane, B and S. Case. (2002). Youth Apostasy and Recovery. *Ministry (June)*.
- Hickford, A. (2003). *Essential Youth*. Sussex, UK: Spring Harvest Publishing.
- Lale, T and P. Habada. (1998). *Ten Who Came Back*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.
- Riddell, M., M. Pierson, and C. Kirkpatrick. (2000). *The Prodigal Project*. Trowbridge, UK: The Cromwell Press.
- Standing, R. (2008). *Re-Emerging Church*. The Bible Reading Fellowship.
- Strommen, M. (1993). *The Five Cries of Youth*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- Strommen, M and R. Hardel. (2000). *Passing On The Faith*. Winona, MI: Saint Mary's Press.

APPENDIX 1- Criteria And Action Steps

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>1. The church's main focus is to unconditionally accept young people and be intentional in assisting their faith development.</p>	<p>A church of refuge accepts the different 'youth' stages of faith. Communicating these stages to the wider church congregation. Learning to accept them for who they are, not for what we want them to be or do.</p> <p>The following stages should inform our activities and plans:</p> <p>From 6-12 At this stage kids reflect the faith of their parents. A church of refuge will therefore encourage and resource parents to have a living faith enabling them to share this with their children in a natural way. (e.g. Kids in Discipleship)</p> <p>From 12-16 Helping them to discover a holistic identity which they want to commit to through baptism. This holistic identity should enable them to engage relevantly with the wider society. Possible resources in helping with this process are: identity-confirming activities (e.g.: Absolute Nine, Underground).</p> <p>From 16-25 committed to helping them move from a corporate to a personal faith identity. Helping them with questions about the corporate identity to which they committed in the previous stage. Creating an thinking climate in which young people can explore how their faith makes a difference in real life issues. (e.g. Relay)</p>
<p>2. Intentionally includes young people in the development and ongoing evaluation of its aims and vision, and where all young people are aware of the vision.</p>	<p>A church of refuge has or develops a mission and a vision for the local community. A church of refuge sees its youth as an integral part of the church and therefore actively seeks to include its youth in its vision and mission. She communicates this vision clearly to its youth by sharing it and asking involvement during its development and evaluating it regularly together with its youth.</p> <p><i>Vision Development</i></p> <p>In the development of the mission and vision for the congregation, the leadership of the church asks actively the input of the young people. This can be done either through the involvement of youth in the vision committee or a special meeting with the young people. Young people are seen as an essential group who needs to own the vision of the church.</p> <p><i>Evaluation of the vision and programme</i></p> <p>The leadership actively assists the youth in evaluating the different programmes the church offers. This can be done either through a survey or a direct discussion with the youth. The leadership commits itself in taking these comments seriously.</p> <p>Throughout the whole process a church of refuge is fully aware that depending on the stage of faith development, youth will be more or less involved in the vision of the church or in the development of this vision. Regardless of the response of the young people, the leadership will nevertheless persist in their commitment to engaging young people in the vision of the church.</p>

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>3. A church that clearly communicates to their young people what they can expect and provides opportunities for young people to get involved in the mission of the church.</p>	<p>A church of refuge will make a charter so that young people will know what to expect in your church. Such a charter will define for the church its commitment to young people and communicate to young people something of the churches philosophy and value system.</p> <p>A charter could look something like this:</p> <p><i>Because our church's main focus is young people and their faith development, we want to assure you that when you come to our church you can expect the following to be in place:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>You will be greeted in a comfortable and non-threatening way.</i> 2. <i>There will be a well run and resourced Sabbath School class which is relevant to your age group and which will be discussing issues you are interested in.</i> 3. <i>Our worship service will be made with young people in mind. We will do that by involving young people in the planning and running of our worship service.</i> 4. <i>Our church is an inclusive church. We will therefore listen to and respect your theological thoughts and questions. This is a church where we believe we can learn from each other.</i> 5. <i>This is a church which will regularly seek your thoughts and advice in conjunction with the mission and vision of the church. We welcome positive input from young people. Further, we will encourage, though without pressure, ownership of that vision and its implementation.</i> 6. <i>Because our church is a church which cares passionately for young people, you can expect to be prayed for on a regular basis.</i> 7. <i>You can expect regular opportunities for social togetherness. Many of these activities will take place in our dedicated youth room.</i> <p><i>It is our hope that you will make this church your spiritual home and that you find this an inclusive church which welcomes you for who you are and will engage positively with the contributions that you make.</i></p> <p><i>Should you have input on anything in our church you are welcome to contact... So and so on this and that...</i></p> <p>Such a charter should not be so ambitious that a church of refuge does not manage to deliver. Make sure that what you write in your charter is well within what you are able to do. And then plan well, and communicate the charter on a regular basis to all core members and leaders. The charter needs to be central to the church calendar, sermon themes, and board meetings.</p>

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>4. Committed to actively seeking and getting in contact with young people who are moving, or have moved, into your vicinity.</p>	<p>A church of refuge will know that every academic year, students are leaving home and arriving in university/college settings.</p> <p>Knowing this, the church will seek to identify and establish contact with new students moving into their area. The Conference may be able to help with this. Having located a new student the following guidelines should be observed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The church of refuge will seek to make contact immediately with any student moving into their church area.</i> 2. <i>That each student be provided with a student pack. This could include the churches charter, services, youth activities and small group and Bible study possibilities.</i> 3. <i>That each church of refuge sets aside a month at the beginning of the academic year focused on students.</i> <p>A church of refuge will also be aware of students who are leaving and moving to another area. They will have systems in place to make sure that the receiving church is informed of the arrival of this student. The church will continue to be a place of refuge for the outgoing student by staying in contact while they are away and keeping them up to date with church news.</p>
<p>5. Committed to staying in contact with anyone who for whatever reason has taken a break from active church fellowship.</p>	<p>A church of refuge should assess the membership retention capacity with regard to all young people connected to the church. This will require careful review of all records, checking for absent members and mapping your church according to: core, committed, crowd, and fringe or inactive members.</p> <p>In mapping the church go back over the past five years and be aware of important local patterns including age ranges and male/female ratios of absent members. Assessment of the situation should be followed by deliberate steps to address the situation. This would include recruiting and training a team of volunteers to re-connect with those who have discontinued church fellowship.</p> <p>In addressing the situation the following points of emphases could be incorporated:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Create an extensive list of all fringe or inactive youth. b) Call young people who are not attending and invite them to social activities. (take attention of damaged relationships) c) Sensitively start volunteer group visits of inactive youth. d) Have an annual 3 month re-encounter programme specifically arranged with returning youth in mind. These three months would include the education of the church so that they can be friendly and warm toward returning young people, an annual “Homecoming Sabbath” and a system for including returning young people in the life of the church. e) Organize a youth mentoring programme - each returning young person should be linked with an established believer who can help him or her.

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>6. Committed to systematically and sensitively pray for all of its young people.</p>	<p>Our young people need the prayers of their church. A church of refuge has a systematic prayer ministry for young people through which they will be blessed and know that they are cared for while the church as a whole will become more conscious of the task and responsibility they have toward their young people. The prayer ministry should be:</p> <p>Systematic: Maybe 1 to 3 specific young people could be prayed for each week, covering all the church's young people in the course of a quarter. This could be done through the church's prayer ministry, Sabbath school, or by involving the older people in the church. How about engaging those who are not able to physically support the youth programme, especially those who are home bound? A church of refuge should be a church where all are involved in the project. Prayer for the young people is a way of engaging the whole church in the values presented in this document.</p> <p>Sensitive: Divine service may not be the ideal time to name names. A prayer ministry needs to be aware that many young people have a need to be low key. There may be specific issues that would be unwise to take up in a public setting. Prayer, especially public prayer, should be positive and avoid embarrassing individuals and families. It is advised that a prayer list be made that includes every young person, not just those we deem to be in special need of prayer. This will avoid anyone feeling that they have been singled out or forgotten.</p> <p>Inclusive: It is suggested that the prayer programme would include present attendees, church young people who have moved temporarily away, young people who no longer attend, and young people who occasionally attend. In other words, all young people that the church has any contact with.</p> <p>An effective prayer ministry for young people will help the church internalize the values outlined in this document as well as helping young people to know that they are cared for and accepted by the church of refuge.</p>

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>7. A designated youth elder, someone with a feeling for young people, aware of their spiritual journey, appointed by and member of the church board.</p>	<p>A church of refuge takes the youth seriously by appointing a youth elder, who is approachable by youth, and respected by both young people and the leadership of the church. The youth elder will be a voice for the young people at the church board (in addition to the youth leader) and is interested in the youth for who they are and guides them in their spiritual journey.</p> <p>The youth elder will also function as a confidential advisor on issues the youth might face. He also advises, coaches and trains young persons for leadership. As a regular elder the youth elder is part of the elder's team and as a youth leader he is part of the regular youth leadership team where he will function as a mentor. The youth elder, together with the local pastor and the youth leader are the first point of call for the youth director in developing and evaluating the church of refuge programme.</p>
<p>8. A church of refuge will seek to integrate young people in the leadership of the church.</p>	<p>The seriousness with which a church takes young people is often indicated by the involvement of young people in leadership at all levels of the church. Youth involvement in leadership will lead to ownership by the youth and positive input by the youth in terms of the churches programmes and mission.</p> <p>Therefore a church of refuge will have the following in place:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A minimum of 2 young people under the age of 26 on the church board. 2. A close working and mentoring relationship between the youth representatives on the board and the youth elder who will often have greater experience and whose mandate as youth elder includes the mentoring and coaching of young people in leadership. 3. There will be training in youth leadership and follow up with the aim of ensuring that leadership for young people is a positive experience with which they are able to succeed and do well.

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>9. Provides a physical meeting space for young people, with the opportunities to socialize.</p>	<p>The evangelistic strategy of the church should provide means for young people to meet together and nurture their faith. This would include both a physical meeting place to socialize (where possible) and also by providing intentional worship services at the church as well as other off-site spiritual retreats.</p> <p>The church provides youth with a safe haven and helps to build community. It can be used in a variety of ways including counselling, networking, training and socializing. It is important that it can be used throughout the week and not just on Sabbath.</p> <p>Youth leaders and other adult mentors can and should join with young people on an informal basis, as well as for designated meetings. The core members of the youth group, and/or youth committee, should be allowed to both create and own the necessary rules for such a room or retreat.</p> <p>The intentional provision of a dedicated and creative prayer room, or chapel tent, where youth can retreat to and spend time in private contemplation should be provided whenever possible.</p>
<p>10. Having a substantial dedicated youth budget with a focus on resources for meaningful youth ministry, with consultation of the young people.</p>	<p>A church of refuge whose vision is to bring the passionate love of God to all will recognize that there is no future for the church without meaningful investment of a wide range of resources in their youth work. This will necessitate the church setting aside and making available adequate financial resources to facilitate such a ministry where the youth can feel valued and a sense of ownership of the ministry of the church. These finances are needed in order to make this ministry a reality.</p> <p>Church financial resources must be prepared in consultation with and not excluding:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. All the youth themselves to ascertain the accuracy of the ministry being proposed and its relevance, both to themselves and to their peers whom they are trying to reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. b. The elected youth leadership and their team. c. The leadership of the church; who will have ministry to youth high on their agenda as part of a strategy of retention, involvement and ownership.