

1-1-2006

Training Volunteers to Effectively Make Disciples of Troubled Youth in the Emerging Postmodern Culture

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Recommended Citation

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

TRAINING VOLUNTEERS TO EFFECTIVELY MAKE DISCIPLES
OF TROUBLED YOUTH
IN THE EMERGING POSTMODERN CULTURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DWIGHT H. SPOTTS

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

JANUARY, 2006

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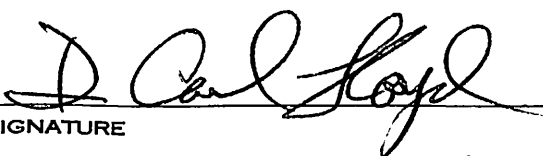
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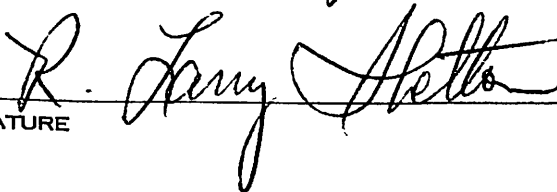
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over thirty-four years ago it became evident to me that I needed help learning and becoming. So I married Lila who has continually stuck by me, encouraged me and put me through school more than once. Lila, I would not and could not be where I am today without your understanding and love.

To my sons, Christopher, Graeme and Jon; my daughters, Jamie, Carmen and Heidi; and my grandchildren, Mikaela, Jeffrey, Noah and Benjamin. Alone, and as a family, they have helped me smile and have taught me in a very practical way that I'm special, God has blessed me, and it has nothing to do with education.

To a group of fellow "renaissance men" who have taught me that slaying modern sacred cows is only the beginning and the emerging conversation needs to continue. Rick Bartlett, Tony Blair, Jason Clark, Rick Hans, George Hemingway, Nick Howard, Todd Hunter, Randy Jumper, Eric Keck, Mike McNichols, Ken Niles, Craig Oldenburg, Rob Seewald, Rick Shrout, and Dave Wollenburg, you are friends for life.

To Len Sweet, who has taught me that without the ability to temporarily forget what we know, our minds would be cluttered with ready made answers, and we would never have the opportunity to ask questions and hear what others are saying. To Carl Lloyd, my advisor, who has patiently encouraged me to keep remembering that ministry to troubled youth isn't something that comes easily for the evangelical church. To Loren Kerns, whose friendship and counsel has continually encouraged me to persevere.

Finally, in the wisdom of Scripture I'm reminded that "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work" (Eccl 4:9). Once again "many" have proved better than one, so with each of them I share the "good return for their work." And a deep sense of gratitude.

Dwight H. Spotts
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January 9, 2006

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ABSTRACT

One of the great opportunities for the Christian community in an emerging postmodern culture will be the renewed potential for incarnational ministry to troubled youth. For over a half century the evangelical church in America has failed to significantly impact the problem of delinquency. This has not always been the reality. Yet current research pertaining to the relationship between religion and delinquency shows that when contextual variables are considered the church can have an inverse effect upon delinquency. In other words, the practice of religion does have something positive to offer troubled youth.

While it has traditionally been assumed that religion is an important factor in inhibiting various types of social deviance, the practical application relating to making disciples within the emerging evangelical church has often been ignored. Furthermore, almost no attention has been given to how these socializing factors relate to emerging postmodern trends and how they, in turn, could be used to facilitate volunteers teaching troubled youth how to become followers of Jesus Christ.

The real-world problem addressed in this dissertation is: How can the evangelical church effectively train and enable volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth within an emerging postmodern culture? The author shows that one of the best solutions to the problem, given the current reality of non-involvement in most evangelical churches, is to train and enable volunteers online how to understand and utilize emerging postmodern trends to make disciples of troubled youth.

The dissertation begins with a narrative. It establishes the problem typically faced by many volunteers attempting to make disciples of troubled young inside the evangelical church. This section then delineates the primary reasons that lie at the heart of why so many evangelical churches struggle to enable and train volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth. Section 2 outlines what the church has attempted to do to train volunteers in this regard. It shows that the current proposed solutions and resources within the evangelical community are minimal and rarely consider the socialization needs of troubled youth.

Chapter 3 articulates the missional significance of enabling volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth and the merit of utilizing emerging EPIC trends in this regard. Chapters 4 through 7 then describe a practical solution to the problem of enabling and training volunteers how to minister to troubled youth by making use of these emerging EPIC trends in the form of an online interactive website. Chapter 8 outlines the project specifications, noting budget, format, design, scope and audience. Chapter 9 is a postscript that considers changes and future developments that will need to be made to improve how volunteers are found, trained, and enabled to make use of the emerging EPIC trends in their efforts to disciple troubled youth.

CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The problem addressed in this work is: How can the evangelical church effectively train and enable volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth within an emerging postmodern culture? This section uses a case study to show how the problem manifests itself within the typical evangelical church setting and then details specific challenges that compound the problem for most church-based volunteers.

For well over a half century the evangelical church has appeared to be uninterested, unintentional, and ineffective in making disciples of troubled youth. During this time the North American evangelical movement has increasingly stepped away from its biblical mission to live incarnationally in the context of troubled youth and often replaced that mission with the modern mandate of “church growth.” “Mission,” as Leonard Sweet recognized, is “what every church of every age tends to take for granted, and what we have conveniently forgotten in many creative ways. ... We have made a fetish of mortar and brick and forgotten our mission.”¹ Yet the problem addressed in this work, in large part, is contingent upon how the evangelical community understands and fulfills its biblical mission.

The end result, of course, is an evangelical church that has often failed to effectively enable and empower volunteers involved in this type of incarnational

¹ Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), 197.

ministry. Consequently, most troubled youth today are socialized in a postmodern culture with its subsequent emerging trends apart from any intentional connection with a Christ-centered ecclesial community and its spiritual foundations. On the one hand that might appear to be overly harsh. Not every church has disregarded this missional purpose intentionally. Furthermore, there are many practical reasons why churches have found it difficult to minister to troubled youth. But on the other hand, it is the practical outcome for the majority of evangelical churches, as indicated below.

Therefore, the practical ministry problem before us pertains to helping the church train and enable volunteers to most effectively disciple troubled youth. However, the challenge of helping volunteers to effectively teach troubled youth to become Christ followers is not easy ministry problem to solve. In fact, the problem as seen from within the context of the church is somewhat daunting. Consider Carl's challenge in making a disciple of Loren.

Case Study: Carl and Loren

Carl knew the time was right. He had first heard about his own need to have his sins forgiven when he himself was about Loren's age. Now, as an adult, he could recite all the key verses. "Yes, we have all sinned..."; "For the wages of sin is death; "God so loved the world..."; "I am the way the truth and the life. No one can get to the Father except by means of me." They were all going through his mind.

Having spent the last few years as a volunteer working with the youth at the church, Carl could honestly say he enjoyed the experience. He knew that unlike some of the adults in the church, he was gifted to work with teenagers. He could see that many of

the youth he related to were caught up in the discrepancy between their hopes and aspirations and the realities and prospects they face. They were living in an extended youth subculture bolstered by mass media images of themselves, facing the most pluralistic world ever with respect to religion, culture, and lifestyle, yet feeling an aloneness he had never experienced growing up.

As with numerous others, he had built a good relationship with the young man sitting across the table. Several months ago they'd met outside the church, almost by accident. They talked for a while and over the intervening months had spent a great deal of time together. Carl could tell Loren hungered for "meaningful relationship," for a home and the father he had never had. He could see Loren wanted to be a part of this new group even though his tattoos and body piercings made him stand out. It had been difficult at first but Carl could smile now realizing how far they had come.

Early on Loren knew Carl was "religious." The images on his shirts, the cross on his rearview mirror, and the way he prayed gave it away. When they went places he would often play some of the Christian "rap" CDs in Carl's SUV. Loren would ask about TV shows and the latest movies. Lately, he had begun to ask questions about Carl's God and wanted to know why others in the youth group chose this religion as their own. Carl would respond with the answers he knew to be so clearly written in the Bible. He'd even attended church with Carl over the last two Sundays.

"So this is it," Carl thought as he picked Loren up for lunch, "four steps, a bridge illustration, and Loren will know how to become a Christian." Once inside the restaurant Carl explained and Loren listened. Carl opened his Bible and showed him the verses. He tried his best to help Loren understand the concept of sin and the fact that Jesus had come

to pay the penalty in his place. Loren kept asking questions: “Where’s hell?” “Is that the only way to know God?” “What happens if I don’t trust your Jesus?” But he struggled to understand the concept of salvation. Because of their friendship Loren listened...but in the end he declined to verbally respond to Carl’s invitation.

Carl was frustrated. He really thought Loren had trusted him and that by now he would accept Christ as his savior and be well on his way. As the weeks passed, Carl found himself more confused about how to help Loren. The more Carl tried to teach Loren about the truth found in God’s Word and his need for making a decision, the less interested Loren became in learning. It became evident that the curriculum he was given to use, the teaching methods he had learned, and the way he was explaining the gospel wasn’t working. Soon it seemed all Loren wanted to do was hang around, connect with other kids, and play video games. Carl recognized that Loren was more interested in what he would personally experience and the possibility of winning *Tomb Raider: Legend* on his new XBOX 360 than his real need for personal salvation. Finally, Carl decided that perhaps he had “cast pearls before the swine,” and that he might better spend his time with other teens more convicted of their need to know Jesus as savior.

Soon other adults voiced concerns about Loren’s behavior. It became evident that Loren wasn’t going to become the disciple Carl had once thought possible. Carl felt alone. Over the last several years he had been a success witnessing to most of the other kids. He wanted to talk with someone, anyone who could help, but no one at the church seemed to have the answers. He wasn’t a professional youth worker. No one had taught him how to make a disciple out of a kid like Loren. The lack of interest in school, the

drinking, the language, the hostility toward other adults, plus a non-involved single parent—were all more than Carl had anticipated.

Over the next several months Carl continued to invite Loren to youth meetings, but Loren had drawn a few of his own conclusions. He had met enough of these “do-gooders.” His life had been full of social workers, counselors, foster parents, and now a “Christian.” They were all the same. They all had the right answers but Loren had had his fill of advice about staying in school, living at home, and staying out of trouble. He knew the system. He learned long ago that if you don’t buy what adults say, you get punished for your “sins” and they move on. Well, he’d been there. He’d done that. But with all the time they’d spent together he was hoping Carl would be different. Obviously, he was wrong. And Carl’s “religion” wasn’t the only one out there to connect with.

This scenario is not an isolated incident. The vignette is typical of the experiences many church-based volunteers have attempting to minister to troubled youth. It is an apt example of how well-intended adults, sincere and passionate in their faith, often struggle in their desire to make disciples of troubled youth. There are valid reasons why volunteers like Carl tend to avoid troubled youth:

- 1) They are afraid of them and what they might do;
- 2) They do not understand them;
- 3) They do not think they have the time, skills, or abilities to help them;
- 4) They do not see it as their God-given responsibility.

But the problem of training and enabling Carl to effectively disciple Loren is not easily solved because every volunteer and the church they attend will relate to these challenges and its biblical mandate differently.

Granted, on one hand, it seems relatively simple. God has always chosen to use, more often than not, volunteers to effectively and responsibly incarnate the good news of Jesus Christ to troubled youth. The problem for most has little to do with motivation, spiritual gifting, vocation or desire. Volunteers are willing to spend the time and “pay the price” to show they really care. Most understand the importance of “winning the right to be heard” and have learned through experience that any viable communication begins with the young person. They have come to recognize the significance of context in order to communicate God’s story of love. And, for the most part, they recognize that even though these kids do not determine what God’s story is, they always determine the language, metaphors, and means by which the story is to be told.

Furthermore, every troubled young person who responds to the Gospel does so primarily because of the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life, not the clever technique of the volunteer. It is the Spirit’s job to convince, convict, and change. It is the volunteer’s job to faithfully serve and live as Jesus Christ in the life of a troubled youth. The implication is that adults called to this type of ministry become the human agents through whom God expresses his love and story of care, redemption, and restoration to their world. Consequently, the essential character of a Christian volunteer is evidenced in his lifestyle, his love, his compassion, and his caring presence with those in need—those who are often neglected, marginalized, and left out of the church. So, failure is rarely the fault of the volunteer *per se*. Ultimate failure is when the emerging evangelical church falls short of fulfilling its biblical mandate to follow our Lord’s “priestly” lead and give troubled youth a relationship to reject or accept in a postmodern culture.

On the other hand, helping a volunteer effectively disciple any troubled young person is often very involved and complex. There is no doubt that this type of ministry is often costly. The incarnational efforts of the best caring adults will often seem to fail. Many troubled youth have rejected the call to follow Jesus Christ in the past, and many unfortunately, will in the emerging postmodern future. The nature and socialization of the young person; the background, skill, and expertise of the volunteer; the resources allocated; the contextual understanding of the church's mission, cultural values, and program methods; and the ethos of an individual church all influence how intentionally and effectively adult volunteers are enabled to disciple troubled youth. Simply put, the challenges of enabling volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth are many and have not changed very much over the last twenty five to thirty years.

Troubled Youth Today

Looking back over the last quarter of a century one could appropriately ask what has changed regarding troubled youth in America. On the one hand, the answer is "not much." Although recent statistics suggest that arrest rates for violent offenses has dropped significantly in the last eight to ten years,² delinquents today, for all practical purposes, still get in trouble in ways and numbers similar to the adolescents of the 1980s. Donald Shoemaker, in his recent *Theories of Delinquency*, makes this point well:

² According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, arrests rates for juveniles under 18 years of age committing violent offenses increased from 1989 to 1994 by 62%. However, after reaching a high point in 1993-1994, this rate began to decline and by 2000 the arrest rate for violent offenses dropped by 41% to its lowest rate since the mid-1980s. By 2002, the rate was nearly one-half its 1994 high. See Howard N. Snyder, *Juvenile Arrests 2000* (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2002) and Howard N. Snyder, *Juvenile Arrests 2002* (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, September 2004).

Practically no day passes without the appearance of some news item carrying a story of a crime committed by youth. Figures vary from year to year, but generally, rates of delinquency in the United States were higher in the late 1980's and early 1990's than they were a generation ago....Although rates of delinquency in the United States, in terms of arrests and referrals to juvenile court, have been declining since the mid-1990s, the rates of delinquency are still higher than they were in the 1980s....Delinquency is still a societal concern, and rates could go up again, with economic downturns and social problems affecting youth."³

While there have been increases in the violent way young people offend, in how the juvenile justice system has responded, in the scientific understanding of the causes and solutions, as well as the number and type of treatment programs available, the situation regarding troubled youth in America has not improved all that much.⁴ "Despite recent encouraging trends, the juvenile crime rate, particularly for violent crime, remains higher than it was at mid-century and higher than those of other industrialized nations..."⁵ Trends over the last ten to twelve years show that females arrests have increased; that a disproportionate number of all juveniles arrested involved minorities.⁶

Maybe the most key concern for our purposes during this same time period has been a 33% increase in child delinquents, those seven to twelve years of age.⁷ These troubled children have their own offense profile and will typically become the troubled youth of tomorrow. "Compared with adolescents who become involved in delinquency in their teens, child delinquents between 7 and 12 have a two - threefold greater risk of

³ Donald J. Shoemaker, *Theories of Delinquency: An Examination of Explanations of Delinquent Behavior*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

⁴ Kirk Heilbrum, Naomi E. Sevin Goldstein and Richard E. Redding, eds., *Juvenile Delinquency: Prevention, Assessment, and Intervention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ See Snyder, 2004, 8-9.

⁷ Rolf Loeber, David P. Farrington, and David Petechuk, *Child Delinquency: Early Intervention and Prevention* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 2003).

becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders.”⁸ They account for one-third of all juvenile arrests for arson, one-fifth of the sex offenses and vandalism, one-eighth of the number arrested for burglary and forcible rape, and one-twelfth of juvenile arrests for violent crime.⁹

Furthermore, most causal factors associated with delinquent behavior remain unchanged. Practitioners both inside and outside the church have long understood that there are many reasons young people get into trouble. Yet families, peer groups, schools, and neighborhoods are still the primary socialization factors for most young people. These four factors still provide the best clue for determining which young person is at risk for getting into serious trouble.¹⁰ Even though these risk factors have been actively considered in the causation of delinquency since the early development of control theories,¹¹ today effective intervention and treatment programs are understood for their importance in addressing the problems of troubled youth.¹²

⁸ Howard N. Snyder and others, *Prevalence and Development of Child Delinquency* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, March 2003), 1.

⁹ Howard N. Snyder, “Epidemiology of Official Offending,” in *Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs*, ed. Robert Loeber and D.P. Farrington (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001), 25-46.

¹⁰ *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1998).

¹¹ Control theories pertaining to delinquency causation are often recognized to cover a large range of topics. Travis Hirschi, in his *Causes of Delinquency* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), traces the original idea all the way back to Emile Durkheim in the late nineteenth century. Others see most of the individualistic theories of delinquency of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as “control” theories. See for instance, Lamar T. Empey’s *American Delinquency*, rev. ed. (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1982). However, for our purposes control theories grow out of the 1950s and 1960s and Walter Reckless’ self-concept or containment theory and the subsequent work of Travis Hirschi. Hirschi assumed that the family, school, and other social institutions can greatly control for or contribute to social order by controlling a young person’s deviant tendencies. If such controls are lacking young people will get into trouble and commit deviant acts.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11

Key among these factors is the family. Risk factors associated with peers, school, and the nature of the child are strongly associated with problems in the family and parenting practices.¹³ In several recent studies, violence within the family, antisocial parents, and lack of parental supervision have consistently correlated with the antisocial behavior of troubled youth.¹⁴ Certainly, when it comes to the spiritual lives of youth, families are the key influencing factor. Ironically, many evangelical churches think of themselves as “family-oriented” communities and focus their programs and market accordingly.

Over the last 30-40 years, research has identified other associated risk factors that, correlated with demographic and offense categories, stand out as amenable to treatment.¹⁵ Heilbrun, Goldstein, and Redding helpfully categorize the most significant risk-factors:

These significant risk factors at the child level include substance abuse, mental health problems, impulsivity, and poor social problem-solving skills. Low parental warmth, poor parental supervision, and ineffective or harsh discipline practices are significant factors at the family level. At the school level, risk factors include untreated learning disabilities, low academic achievement, alienation from school, and truancy. At the peer-group level, they include association from school, and truancy. Exposure to violence and drug dealing and access to firearms are among the significant risk factors at the community level.¹⁶

¹³ G.A. Wasserman and others, *Risk and Protective Factors of Child Delinquency*. Child Delinquency Bulletin (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2003).

¹⁴ J.D. Hawkins and others, *Predictors of Youth Violence*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000).

¹⁵ I use this term “risk factors” broadly to refer to influences or conditions that are typically associated with young people getting into trouble. It is not my purpose to prove direct or casual correlation with negative behavior but merely to recognize that risk-factors do exist and the more risk-factors a young person has, the greater likelihood s/he will have serious problems. The most recent research shows this to be the case. See J.D. Hawkins and others, *Predictors of Youth Violence*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000).

¹⁶ Heilbrun, 11.

Yet the simple fact remains that across numerous studies risk factors associated with the individual young person, delinquent peers, family, and neighborhood/community continue to lead the way identifying which young person will have problems.

The point is that not a great deal has changed. Over the last quarter of a century approximately ten percent of America's youth population is arrested every year as juvenile offenders.¹⁷ Those arrested and then incarcerated remain substantially more likely to be incarcerated as adults. For all practical purposes, juveniles are arrested in numbers and ways associated with risk-factors similar to their delinquent counterparts of a half-century ago. Yet a particularly salient concern for our purposes is the fact that these numbers only account for young people arrested and processed through the justice system. They do not include troubled youth inside the church or those on the margins.

Unfortunately, the rates of young people getting in trouble and not being formally arrested and adjudicated are open for debate.¹⁸ It is fair to say that official measures of delinquent and criminal behavior suffer from a number of limitations. Self-report studies often reveal that arrest rates correlate with the type of crime or deviance more than race or social class, that criminal deviance is mostly a male activity and that many crimes simply go undetected.

¹⁷ For example, according to Snyder, 2002, in 2000 approximately 2.4 million troubled youth were arrested.

¹⁸ It is not our purpose to discuss the nature of reporting criminal or status offenses. The best research available recognizes the limitations of relying solely upon arrest statistics to determine the number of young getting into trouble. At best arrests rates merely report young people who have been caught and formally processed in the justice system. For the purposes of this study, the problem of solely defining the rate of "troubled youth" using arrest statistics is compounded by the fact that recent studies have found a significant co-occurrence of delinquency, drug, school, and mental health problems. Furthermore, most youth who exhibit delinquent behaviors do so for relatively short amounts of time. It is safe to say that young people who are truly "troubled" regardless of how they are classified are influenced by a range of similar risk-factors. See David Huizinga and others, *Co-occurrence of Delinquency and Other Problem Behaviors* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, November 2000).

Rates of troubled young people involved in church activities are also somewhat ambiguous. There are multiple dimensions of “getting into trouble” and religious “involvement.” One study found, for instance, that “seventy-four percent of all church youth engage in one or more of the 10 at-risk behaviors, and nearly one-third...in three or more of the 10.”¹⁹ Another more recent and comprehensive four-year study concluded that teens who were actively involved in church related programs were doing noticeably better than kids disengaged:

The more religiously involved teens are much less likely to smoke cigarettes regularly, drink alcohol weekly or more often, and get drunk every few weeks or more often. More religiously involved teens are also more likely to not drink alcohol and not smoke marijuana. By comparison, it is the least religiously active teens who smoke marijuana the most. Among those attending school, the more religiously active teens are much less likely to cut classes in school, to cut a lot of classes when they do cut, and to be expelled from school. They also tend not to earn poor grades in school. Finally, the more religiously involved teens are much less likely to be said by their parents to be rebellious or to have a bad temper.²⁰

The point is that while involvement in church is a healthy influence, it is in no way a vaccination against troubles. There are plenty of youth with “problems” and no denomination or size of church is immune.

The problem is compounded when considering “troubled youth” on the margins. Many youth have no association with church youth groups. But not all youth involved in illegal behavior are arrested. Plus, many youth who are arrested are only intermittently

¹⁹ Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and Peter L. Benson, *Youth in Protestant Churches: A Special Search Institute Report* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1993), 98. In this study risk factors were defined as behaviors that included depression, suicide, alcohol use, binge drinking, marijuana use, cocaine use, aggression, theft, school, and sexual intercourse. The study also found that there is predictable variation with age, older youth being more involved with these behaviors.

²⁰ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221.

involved in serious problems and many often for a very short period of time.²¹ In other words, defining and categorizing how many youth are “troubled” and why is often difficult at best. When one recounts the history and hopes of America’s Child Saving Movement at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as the establishment of the juvenile court and its *parens patriae*²² doctrine, it is easy to recognize that little has improved regarding the state of troubled youth in America. If God placed the church here to make a difference in their lives, something has not worked well.

Vocabulary and Acronyms

Readers unaware of the challenges in ministering to troubled youth, both inside and outside the context of an evangelical church environment and postmodern culture, may not be familiar with the essential vocabulary of the enterprise. Consequently, for the reader it is helpful to review some key words, the rationale for using these, and an explanation of the acronym EPIC.

To begin, this project uses the phrase “troubled youth” to broadly categorize young people who have actively chosen to violate accepted cultural values and norms both inside and outside the evangelical community. This is a purposefully all-encompassing term. The reason is quite simple. We are interested in helping volunteers

²¹ Delbert S. Elliot, David Huizinga and Barbra Morse, “Self-Reported Violent Offending: A Descriptive Analysis of Juvenile Violent Offenders and Their Offending Careers,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 1, no. 4: 472-514.

²²The juvenile court in America has extraordinary legal power. Their authority has its origins in the ancient common law doctrine of *parens patriae*, under which the Crown was the ultimate parent of every child, with both the right and obligation to protect the property rights of orphans and other children. When the English legal system was transplanted to the United States, state courts took over the *parens patriae* role. As the number of “predelinquent” children increased cases involving minors were moved to separate hearings and then a separate system of juvenile courts. Today youth may come under the jurisdiction of juvenile court as a result of either their own, or their parents’ misbehavior. See David S. Tanenhaus, *Juvenile Justice in the Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for a scholarly development of this doctrine and its historical framework.

make disciples of young people who have trouble but it is not our purpose to label who “they” are or to define youthful “deviance”.

The answer to who “they” are is relatively simple. They are all around us: the 14-year old girl whose mom threw her out of the house, the 15-year-old boy who is flunking out of school, the 16-year-old who is hostile and withdrawn. But the answer is often made more difficult because it is assumed that a troubled young person is a “juvenile delinquent” in trouble with the law.

People everywhere distinguish between “good” and “bad” behavior. Every society establishes rules and regulations and punishes young offenders in one way or another. Some young offenders are caught and get processed and labeled “delinquent” accordingly. Others do not. Many times the situation never comes to court (i.e. is not adjudicated) and is instead handled by a social service agency, school, or caring volunteer...or is forgotten altogether. Consequently, the use of this phrase herein is intentionally inclusive of, but not limited to, young people adjudicated through, or diverted from, the juvenile justice system.

Furthermore, students of sociology understand that a strict interpretation of causality argues that the “cause” always precedes the “result” and that this effect never occurs without the cause. For many in the evangelical community the only real “cause” stems from an individual young person’s sinful nature. The “devil made them do it;” it was sin that caused the problem. Humanity is unable, in and of oneself, to believe the gospel and follow Christ because everyone’s heart is desperately corrupt, or so the argument goes. For others, one’s freedom consists of one’s ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters. The young person has the power and potential to either

cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish.²³ Yet, because we live in a "fallen" world even young people from "good, Christian homes" and involved in effective youth ministries have a tendency to get in trouble. In actuality, then, such a causal definition of "troubled" is particularly simplistic and inappropriate for our purposes because of the existence of a multitude of factors that are associated with any young person's socialization and subsequent wrongful behavior.²⁴

Therefore, irrespective of behavioral and demographic characteristics, socio-economic factors, legal descriptions and socialization factors, the term "troubled youth" is utilized here to define young people caught in this web. For the purposes of this project, a "troubled youth" is any young person, male or female, who mistrusts others, lacks necessary socialization skills and moral values, turns to illegitimate means to find acceptance or approval, lacks significant adult role models to provide emotional support and appropriately model social behavior, and/or has virtually no life-changing relationship with God. The problem of "troubled youth" is endemic in our current

²³ The purpose of this work is not to examine or discuss the historical or twentieth century controversies over interpreting the nature of sin and salvation. However, I have deep concerns that the modern evangelical need to know what is right often refocuses the attention from where it needs to be. We do disregard neither the individual nor the universal effect of sin. We believe that Jesus Christ saves us, not only from the power of sin but its consequences. Furthermore, we believe that every individual needs to make an existential decision to follow Jesus Christ if the relationship is intended to have meaning for the young person. Debates regarding election, free will, universal or particular redemption, and irresistible grace within evangelical circles have very little practical relevance to teaching troubled youth how God can transform their life today. Consequently, we would go so far as to argue that the legalistic view of sin and the "penal substitution" view of atonement along with other theological concepts will need to be redeveloped and connected to a more holistic meta-narrative of God if the church intends to effectively teach troubled youth the merits of following Jesus Christ and living a life of faith in community.

²⁴ The behavior of many troubled youth often has little to do with how they view their spiritual condition. Some young people simply react in an extreme, hostile and negative ways to the institutions of socialization and the environment in which they live. Others make choices because of the limited options available and their need, real or imagined, for physical and emotional survival. For instance, for a physically, emotionally or sexually abused adolescent the "bad" behavior of running away and living on the street may be the "best" choice available at the time. The point is: the social and religious definition of deviance--what people often view as right or wrong, praiseworthy or blameworthy, good or bad--is highly variable.

culture and will continue to emerge as a major challenge facing youth ministry within the church.

“Evangelical church” is intentionally used to describe a very broad segment of Christianity. The word “church” is used in both a sociological and scriptural sense. In a sociological sense it refers to a well-established religious institution that is integrated into society. It has a formalized structure of belief, ritual, location, and authority but has learned to reconcile itself to the other institutions of society. It is also typically thought of as a relatively inclusive organization welcoming members from a wide spectrum of socio-economic and political backgrounds. In a biblical sense it connotes a people who are “called out” by their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ to enter into a new relationship with God and one another (1 Cor. 1:9-10). Understood biblically, the church is also to welcome new members from the outside regardless of socioeconomic or political roots. This church is given the task of both proclaiming the present and future reign of God as well as being the incarnational example of God’s love to the culture and people in which it is placed.

More specifically, the word “evangelical” is used to refer to the trans-denominational sociological movement associated with evangelicalism. It is common knowledge that the term generally identifies those who hold several key theological principles in common: the need for a personal conversion experience and relationship with our Lord; salvation by faith alone, not works; the importance of proclaiming the gospel story to non-believers; and the supremacy of Scripture over any other revelation and rule of faith. It is recognized that the term is often open to definition.²⁵

²⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: BridgePoint Books, 2000), 14-15. Interestingly, Grenz points out the problem of trying to adequately define the evangelical movement and

Yet, as many have also come to recognize, the term “evangelical” has become much more than a descriptor of religious belief. Today the term is used to define for many a religious movement within America that identifies a distinct set of cultural beliefs. As this paper shows, these cultural beliefs most often reflect the dominant white, middle-class values of our American way of life and have a distinct impact on how “troubled youth” are ministered to within the church. At the very least evangelicalism has become a movement that is well integrated in American culture and political life.

I have chosen to narrow the focus of this work to the “evangelical community” in particular for two simple reasons. First, my roots in parachurch ministry have been primarily evangelical in nature. For over twenty years I was directly involved in an organization recognized to be evangelical: Youth For Christ, International. This evangelistic organization was founded in the mid-1940s; is located in Wheaton, Illinois; and was deeply influenced by the founders and leaders of what would become America’s evangelical movement.²⁶ Second, my connection with church-based ministry has been as a congregational pastor in the Free Methodist denomination, which is also considered to be evangelical. Free Methodism grew out of the conversion piety of the

concludes that “...the simplest method is to define the movement sociologically. Viewed from this perspective, evangelicalism constitutes a loosely structured coalition of persons who share certain religious and cultural symbols, participate in a somewhat readily identifiable number of institutions, look to a changing yet discernable group of leaders, and through these associations gain cooperative self-consciousness as well as a sense of identity and belonging to a particular group” (15) In many respects the challenge before the evangelical community of ministering to troubled youth is more a sociological problem than a theological one.

²⁶ It is fair to say that I was deeply influenced by the theology, terminology, and ministry philosophy of Youth for Christ. Yet over the years I was able to see and experience first-hand the challenges of trying to help those inside the evangelical movement accept the biblical mandate to make disciples of troubled youth. This project is intended to help bridge the ministry gap between evangelical churches and organizations that are ambivalent to the ministry needs of troubled youth and volunteers who want to make difference in their lives.

eighteenth century that “provided the clearest defining moment marking the genesis of the evangelical movement as a whole.”²⁷ Interestingly, the denomination was described as “free” in large part because of its social concern roots and desire to help the poor.²⁸

Over the last seven years I have had the opportunity to see firsthand how the fundamentalist movement has influenced one congregation’s understanding of its biblical mission and disconnected it from its social ministry roots.²⁹

However, because of these ministry experiences and others I have also intentionally used the word “evangelical” because of my personal conviction that many in the movement today have come to focus almost exclusively on a gospel of individual salvation and experience but in so doing practically disregard the need for a gospel of social justice and reconciliation. Needless to say, this concern for individual salvation while minimizing the transforming potential of our faith to bring about social restoration and hope has significant implications when it comes to encouraging and

²⁷ Grenz, 17.

²⁸ The literature regarding the historical development of Free Methodism in the 1860s emphasizes its founding on certain basic theological beliefs and social freedoms. Among those social freedoms typically listed are the right of every person to be free; denying the right of anyone to hold slaves; free seats in church, so the poor would not be kept out or discriminated against; freedom and openness in relationships and against secret societies; freedom from materialism thought to help the poor; freedom of lay people to be fully involved in decision making and equal rights of women. Between 1866 and end of 1890s five colleges were founded to educate the poor (e.g. Roberts Wesleyan, Azusa Pacific, Seattle Pacific). Interestingly, B.T. Roberts, first bishop and founder of the church, organized farmers and wrote against the emerging capitalistic empires of the late 1880s. See Leslie Ray Marston, *A Living Witness* (Indianapolis: Light and Life Press, 1960), 121-173, or David L. McKenna, *A Future with a History* (Indianapolis: Light and Life Press, 1997), 21-59.

²⁹ The particular church I pastor is located in the second largest city in the State of Washington. Demographically, the congregation is white, middle-class, family-oriented, and middle-age. The vast majority of those over 35 have grown up in the Free Methodist denomination and in this particular fellowship (society). It was originally established as a Free Methodist society within the Columbia River Conference of the Free Methodist Church of North America in 1898. Most live outside the community where the church is located. The church now occupies a building, which it built and moved into in 1965, ten blocks from one of the poorest neighborhoods in the state of Washington.

training volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth. The significance of this problem is addressed in Chapter 2.

Finally, the acronym “EPIC” has been chosen as an outline to describe and discuss the merits of utilizing the emerging trends of a postmodern culture. This term has become popular in church circles over the last four or five years and has been attached to church names, training materials, seminars, conferences, etc. This author was first made aware of the acronym through the writings of Leonard Sweet and this project relies upon his articulation of it.³⁰ EPIC is his acronym for “experiential, participatory, image-driven, and connected.” These words describe trends that have become identified with an emerging postmodern culture but have “more in common with the first century than with the modern world that is collapsing all around us.”³¹ This dissertation demonstrates how each of these trends relates to socialization factors found to be primary casual characteristics of troubled youth and how volunteers can effectively utilize them to make disciples.

³⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

³¹ Ibid, xvii.

CHAPTER 2. CURRENT SOLUTIONS FOR TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

Introduction

The problem before us is that the evangelical church in the last half century has failed to significantly impact the delinquency problem in America. As this study will show, volunteers can make a significant difference. Yet, volunteers like Carl who are who are motivated and “called” to become involved in this type of incarnational ministry with troubled youth often lack the screening, training, and ongoing encouragement available in so many other types of church based ministries. Arguably, volunteers involved in this type of ministry with at-risk young people need more training, supervision, and support, not less. As mentoring relationships develop, individual problems need to be continually dealt with, discipline issues addressed, and discipleship applications made on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, the emotional costs and spiritual challenges associated with this type of ministry require a constant need for prayer, communication and inter-volunteer support. However, as this study demonstrates, there are significant problems that any evangelical community must overcome to provide this kind of training and support.

The question, then, is how best to train and enable volunteers like Carl to make disciples of troubled youth in an emerging postmodern context. The answer to that question given by this study is that by connecting with, training and encouraging adult volunteers online to understand and make use of emerging trends, the evangelical

church can most effectively enable volunteers to make disciple of troubled youth. But it is helpful to begin with a review of the current solutions used to address this problem.¹

Solutions for Recruiting, Screening and Matching Volunteers

The primary advantage churches have over not-for-profit organizations and social agencies is a ready available pool of potential recruits. Studies have consistently demonstrated that the most effective means of recruiting volunteers is through friend associations. Frankly, the major reason people volunteer is because they are asked.² Consequently, for most churches the best method of recruiting is an ongoing process of praying, listening, discerning, and individually recruiting those who have been “called” to this type of ministry. As volunteers are constantly being generated, they can at the same time be matched with individual young people. Needless to say, there are many types of people who can do the job, from college students to working men and women to retirees. A secondary approach is the presentation of the need before Sunday school classes, small groups, ministry fairs etc. Volunteer recruitment dinners with friends, direct mail letters, posters and flyers, and church announcements, as well

¹ The purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive list or a long explanation in any of these areas. These are well understood and utilized methods that could be effective. The intention here is to demonstrate that the solutions that are now available have not been used in many churches and why an alternative method of enabling volunteers is needed to fulfill this mission of the church.

² Recruitment through people associations is not unique to church settings. Most nonprofit organizations and government agencies find that word-of-mouth is the most effective means of recruiting volunteers. See, for instance, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, “Research Findings for Volunteer Match: Results of On-line Surveys among Potential Volunteers and Nonprofit Partners” (Washington, DC: Volunteer Match, 2004, accessed 27 October 2005), 6. Available: http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/resources/hart_survey_full.pdf. They find that 71% of volunteers are recruited by word of mouth. See also “Community Ventures: Partnerships in Education and Research,” Community Series, ed. L.M. Butler, C. Dephelps, and K. Gray (N.P.: Western Washington University and U.S. Department of Agriculture, March 1995), 14.

as an open class dealing with relevant emerging youth and family issues could give people an opportunity to volunteer.

When it comes to screening most churches are again at an advantage. Certainly any church that attempts to minister to at-risk kids has a moral, legal, and spiritual obligation to appropriately screen those who do the ministry. Research consistently confirms that for the vast majority of victims of sexual offences the accused was a friend, acquaintance, or family member.³ Applications, interviews, following up on references, police checks, and ongoing supervision are a must. Likewise, when it comes to “matching” a volunteer with a troubled young person the most essential ingredient is a good understanding and knowledge of both the young person and the volunteer. Typically government and private-sector agencies use five determinant characteristics for matching volunteers and clients. Apart from the severity of behavioral problems, factors such as age, sex, race/sub-culture, location and interests/activities/skills are considered. The same characteristics can work for church-based matches.

However, recruiting volunteers and matching them with youth may not require all such efforts. Many of the relationships between the volunteer adult and needy young person have already been initiated, actively or passively, through family, peers,

³ A recent Justice Bulletin from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention notes that “incidents of child abuse committed by parents and other caretakers make up about one-fifth of violent crimes against juveniles (ages 0-17)...” but “noncaretaker acquaintances (63 percent)...” In other words, there is a significantly higher rate of child abuse among secondary care providers like teachers, babysitters, and other adults. David Finkelhor and Richard Ormrod, *Child Abuse Reported to the Police* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 2001), 2-3. Many studies reveal similar patterns of abuse. See, for instance, A. J. Sedlak and D.D. Broadhurst, *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse Neglect* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). The point is that many churches fail to adequately screen volunteers for a number of reasons: lack of perceived need, friend/family associations, and administrative challenges. Yet typically, child maltreatment and abuse is committed by both persons responsible for the care and supervision of the victim as well as volunteers who are non-caretaker providers.

school, and friend associations. In other words, the match has already been made. The challenge, then, for many churches is not primarily the recruitment and screening of volunteers but the training and enabling of these same volunteers over the long term.

Solutions for Training Volunteers

Classroom lectures are the traditional means most churches use to transmit information from one person to another. Frankly, in many instances lecture can be both inappropriate and boring unless good visual aids are used to support content. Unfortunately, whether the effects of teaching are facilitative or retarding often depends upon the teachers' skills.

Books, articles, case studies, and handouts are also common resources for training volunteers. Yet, clearly, knowledge about something does not necessarily enable the volunteer to do something. Just because one understands what a thing is and does (and even the advantages of using it) does not mean that one will do the things involved at the appropriate teachable moment. Simply put, readings are often limited to transferring knowledge; they cannot teach helping skills.

Discussion is an excellent way for volunteers to learn together, although it is often relatively slow in facilitating the learning of information. Volunteers personally identify with the content as a result of verbalization and interactive thought processes. Typically, discussion is best when based upon open-ended questions that are designed to elicit not only information but also "ownership" and ideas from the volunteers.

No one is surprised by the fact that we live in a visual culture. The emerging generation will learn much via television, videos, films, and internet. Many modern

adult volunteers are running to catch up. However, incorporating visual elements and online technology into the way churches train volunteers will become increasingly important in the days ahead.⁴

Role playing is yet another method that can be employed. It is most effective when the person observing the interaction can give constructive feedback. Again, visual and experience based technology can make role-playing a much more effective tool in the emerging culture.

Finally, other training options include supervised practical experience, study of a specific field/problem, writing an essay, preparing a presentation, and having more experienced volunteers prepare to train other volunteers. This also can be done more effectively now than in the past with online searches and extended learning opportunities.

All of these methods can be used effectively. They have a long track record in church, parachurch, and secular communities. Furthermore, the benefits of relatively inexpensive technology will help volunteers understand and learn the necessary skills more easily. Yet the quality of any training program will still determine volunteer satisfaction, effectiveness, and longevity. Volunteers who believe that they have a low sense of knowledge and skill for their role tend not to stay with it, compared to volunteers who have a high degree of competence. Research continues to verify this observation.⁵ Unfortunately, the process of training and developing volunteers is also a discipleship process. Training is the educational process of facilitating not only the

⁴ One such evangelical organization is The Youth Workers Institute (www.uywi.org/index.php).

⁵ See Paul J. Ilsey, *Enhancing the Volunteer Experience: New Insights on Strengthening Volunteer Participation, Learning, and Commitment* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), or Helen Little, *Volunteers: How to Get them and How to Keep Them* (Naperville, Ill.: Panacea Press Inc., 1999), 53-57.

volunteer's growth in knowledge but also in the skills and awareness needed to become the mentor God called them to be. In other words, training should be geared to the personal growth and development of the volunteer as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, it is necessary to provide two levels of training—content and experience. The challenges, of course, are that both the knowledge and the experience must be relevant to the needs of both the volunteer and the client; the learner should be actively involved; and a physical setting conducive to learning must be employed. The best solutions to training volunteers effectively will also address a volunteer's attitudes and spiritual formation. Toward this end methods like role reversal, self-evaluation, counseling, and ongoing observations can help. This naturally leads to a discussion of solutions for supervising and enabling volunteers called to this type of ministry.

Solutions for Supervising and Enabling Volunteers

It would be easy to list methods and means in supervising volunteers but overlook the most important principle of all. The purpose of supervising volunteers is not primarily for the purpose of “policing” volunteers. Rather, supervision is a relationship and commitment that enables a person to be what God created him or her to be. “Jesus never told us to go and recruit volunteers – he told us to go and make disciples.”⁶ The practical application of Paul's words to those in Ephesus need to be taken seriously: “It was he who gave some to be...pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

⁶ Wes Roberts and Glenn Marshall, *Reclaiming God's Original Intent for the Church* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004) , 49.

Supervision is a ministry to the volunteer and intentional relationships and communications are the key. It is in the context of the relationship and spending time together that the supervisor mentors, models, and teaches skills. As in any other setting, effective leaders are authentic, open honest, and willing to listen, confront in love, and encourage. Research consistently demonstrates that the effectiveness of the volunteer is in large measure contingent upon good supervision and ongoing relationships.⁷

Nevertheless, in a review of the solutions, methods and resources used to address the problem of recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers inside the church over the last two to three decades certain trends have become evident. First, the majority of resources available for training volunteers to work with troubled youth have been developed by agencies and organizations that may or may not reflect Christian values and purposes *per se*. The majority of these resources are geared to paid professionals who are faced with the challenges of limited resources and increased service demands. Training individual volunteers how to understand and work with troubled youth does play a part in the overall training curricula of these agencies and organizations but considering the sheer volume of material that has been developed in the last forty years it appears to be a secondary priority.

Looking back, it is evident that these resources grew out of a period of increased volunteerism during the 1960s through the 1980s.⁸ During this time the

⁷ See Ilsey.

⁸ The history of volunteer involvement in both the juvenile and criminal justice systems suggests that the concept was practically dead in the early 1960s but by 1979 it had grown to over half million volunteers. See, for instance, Vernon Fox and others, *Issues, Trends and Directions for Juvenile and Criminal Justice Volunteerism in the 1980's* (Royal Oak, MI: Volunteers in Prevention, Prosecution, Probation, Prison, Parole, 1981), 1.

federal government took up the cause of welfare reform, passed the multifaceted Civil Rights Act of 1964 and began its “War on Poverty.” But the period also gave rise to a new sense of volunteerism in both the juvenile and criminal justice system and social welfare involvement.⁹ Interestingly, a review of the volunteerism resources developed during this period suggests that a great deal of attention was originally given to changing the philosophy of the state and county justice systems.¹⁰ It is evident that the perceived need for resources pertained to the development and administration of programs much more than the enabling and care of volunteers.

Understandably, as administrators began to recognize the merit of using volunteers to provide direct services they also understood that the philosophy and culture of a “professional-based” system of services would need to change. The problem was to change the system from “professional-based” client services to allowing volunteers to become involved in all sectors of the organization, from answering phones to counseling clients. Most of the published work consequently was

⁹ The “War on Poverty” was conceived by President Kennedy as part of his New Frontier before his death. Along with President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society initiatives, The Civil Rights Act was enacted in 1964. Later that year the Economic Opportunity Act and with it came a domestic peace corps, Volunteers in Service to America (V.I.S.T.A.), a Job Corps for school dropouts, Upward Bound for disadvantaged inner city youth, a Neighborhood Youth Corp, and Operation Head Start for training preschool children, among others. See Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 321-324.

¹⁰ During this time there was a proliferation of information about volunteering made available to agencies and institutions. Men like Vernon Fox, G. LaMarr Howard, Ernest L.V. Shelley, Keith J. Leenhouts, and Robert Moffitt led the way. In May, 1978, the National Information Center on Volunteerism (NICOV) began to establish and operate an information clearinghouse for volunteer programs in corrections. Many of these early resources were geared to encouraging agencies and professionals to rethink their philosophy re: volunteerism and lay out the method to begin volunteer administration.

written primarily for agency and organization administrators who had authority to allow for and determine volunteer policy.¹¹

During the seventies, as this philosophical change from “professional-based” services to “volunteer-based” programs began to come of age, the need for volunteer friendly resources and training also grew.¹² However, for many government and private agencies the primary concern remained the effective administration of programs much more than the training and enabling of volunteers.¹³ Today, conferences, seminars, and volunteer initiatives abound. However, many of these training resources connected to government agencies¹⁴ still have to do with the research, management, and administration of volunteer programs and not the enabling of individual volunteers *per se*. In other words they are predominantly “agency friendly” resources.

That is not to say that volunteer-related resources are in short supply. A simple Google search for “volunteer training resources” resulted in 2,500,000 results,

¹¹ As one example, an annotated bibliography of 193 different books and articles pertaining to volunteers in both the government and private sector all dealt with the “administration” of volunteer programs. This bibliography compiled by the Department of Education at Temple University covered material “within the past ten years” (1958-1968) for “the ever growing number of professional workers primarily concerned with volunteers...” See Ethel M. Adams and Suzanne D. Cope, *Volunteers: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: United Community Funds and Councils of America, February 1968), iii.

¹² Ivan H. Scheier stands out among others as a leader in America’s volunteerism movement during this period between the late 1960s and late 1980s. He helped launch the National Center for Citizen Involvement during this time and wrote some 25-30 different books and articles on the subject. In one book he identified some 20,000 distinct variations in volunteer involvement encouraging organizations and agencies to recruit more people in terms of their helping styles. See Ivan H. Scheier, *Exploring Volunteer Space: The Recruiting of a Nation* (Boulder: The National Center for Citizen Involvement, 1980).

¹³ One primary example of this fact is Eileen M. Garry, *Volunteers in the Criminal Justice System: A Literature Review and Selected Bibliography* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, June 1980). However, “user-friendly” volunteer resources were not a priority for many agencies and organizations prior to the late 1970s and early 1980s.

¹⁴ For instance, The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), American Correctional Association (ACA), and the National Association of Volunteers in Criminal Justice or the National Institute for Justice, to name a few.

“volunteer training delinquent youth resources” produced 35,000 possibilities, and “volunteer resources – delinquent youth” resulted in 42,900 sites.¹⁵ Today, nearly every not-for-profit organization utilizing volunteers, such as Big Brothers and Sisters, Junior Achievement, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 4-H, and a large number of newer mentoring programs, all have available resources for volunteers. Furthermore, over the last decade a number of web-based resources have come online to provide help for volunteers. These sites match volunteers to service opportunities as well as offering resources and training.¹⁶

However, even though these agencies, organizations, and online sites recognize many of the general needs associated with volunteers an honest evaluation of these resources also shows that 1) most of the resources are geared to the administration, management, and research of operating volunteer programs; 2) resources developed and available to train and enable volunteers to work directly with troubled youth are minimal; and 3) even “faith-based” resources are not geared to enabling volunteers directly or, more importantly, teaching them how to effectively make disciples of troubled youth.

The second major trend in the literature of the past generation is that those programs, resources and solutions typically marketed to and utilized by those inside the evangelical community have several characteristics in common. First, like many entities in the secular community, these resources have been developed for and marketed primarily to paid youth workers or professionals. Ministries whose purpose it is to train

¹⁵ Search conducted 28 November 2005.

¹⁶ Two of the best examples are <http://www.pointsoflight.org/resources/volunteerresource/> and <http://www.independentsector.org>.

churches regarding volunteerism and to develop resources to this end have begun to address this need using web-based online marketing to promote national and regional training events, conferences, and seminars.¹⁷ This emphasis on professional-focused training is true not only for training seminars and marketing but also for the printed materials available.

Furthermore, as one would expect, the content of books and Christian publishing materials are primarily general in nature and rarely deal with the specific challenges of making disciples of troubled youth. Print, CD, and video resources to train volunteers how to work effectively with troubled youth are the very limited exception.¹⁸ Very few (if any) ongoing interactive resources have been developed for connecting, training and enabling church-based volunteers online. Most resources that are volunteer friendly are limited to what individual churches may or may not choose to utilize or do.¹⁹ Admittedly, this review of methods and resources is in no way

¹⁷ Arguably one the leading resources marketed and available to equip the evangelical church using volunteers is Group Publishing's Church Volunteer Central. Its stated purpose is as follows: "We equip churches to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus, by providing innovative and effective resources for identifying, equipping, and releasing people into their gift-based ministries." On its website (<http://shop.grouppublishing.com/cvc/>) and in its materials it claims that "our success is measured by how well we *help churches* fulfill Christ's command to make disciples," with which no one in the evangelical community could find fault. However, the practical application is the seminars are marketed across the country as "a Workshop for Church Leaders."

¹⁸ As of November, 2005, a cursory review of the major evangelical publishing houses (e.g. Zondervan, Eerdmans, Thomas Nelson, Group, Multnomah, Baker, Broadman & Holman, Standard, NavPress, Gospel Light, Good News Publishing, etc.) turned up only fourteen books and resources that dealt in even a general sense with ministering to troubled youth in a general sense. This is not to suggest that no one cares about training adults to work with troubled youth. There are some valuable resources available, including Scott Larson, *At Risk: Bringing Hope to Hurting Teenagers* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 1999).

¹⁹ There very well could be publishers, seminars, and ministries that have committed themselves to developing materials and resources to enable caring volunteers to work with troubled youth. However, it is obvious that the majority of publishing and training entities typically used by the evangelical community have limited resources available. One exciting exception is the Urban Youth Workers Institute (<http://www.uywi.org/index.php>). Began in 1997 and targeted to addressing the needs of inner city Hispanic youth, it has always valued the effectiveness of lay adults. Furthermore, since its inception it realized that American youth culture was defined by the urban youth culture. This organization recognizes

exhaustive, over the years other methods have no doubt been tried, but it does help to focus attention on the problem addressed in this dissertation. Currently, there is a scarcity of resources and methods to effectively train and enable caring adults to make disciples of troubled youth.

The church has an obligation in this regard. God, in his wisdom, has given everyone in the Body of Christ gifts in order to build His Kingdom. Every volunteer has a unique contribution to make. Every caring adult is called to be “a minister of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:17-20). So, in a very practical way encouraging and enabling volunteers like Carl to do the job they were created by God to do is the reason the church is obligated to help volunteers. However, in the last half-century the way the church has gone about this and the current methodologies used are inadequate to the task. In fact, instead of enabling volunteers like Carl they have tended to disregard the challenge all together. A new solution is needed, a practical model for training and enabling volunteers can be effective and the reason is based upon the claims presented in the following five chapters.

that many inner-city churches cannot pay professional youth workers. Consequently, its practical purpose is to train and enable inner-city adults (primarily volunteers) to minister to troubled youth.

CHAPTER 3. THE CHALLENGES FOR CHURCH-BASED VOLUNTEERS

The Problem of Church Youth Ministries

In addition to the challenges noted above, despite being given the responsibility to live as the Body of Christ and incarnate the gospel to troubled youth, many churches still cater to mainline youth populations and not those on the margins. Youth programs do not typically involve troubled youth outside their particular faith communities.¹ Furthermore, churches across the spectrum often limit their outreach young people within their own socioeconomic and value boundaries. Most adults who have worked with young people know the practical truth of this fact.

Simply put, there is significant difference between youth populations inside the church and those outside. In a typical week, about nine million teenagers attend religious services in churches and synagogues.² Typically, surveys indicate that a greater percentage of youth attend religious services than adults. Yet, in contrast to the seemingly encouraging involvement, is the perception that more and more young people are leaving

¹ For our purposes it is important to define what we mean by religious youth programs. We are referring to programs/ministries typically a part of individual congregations. The primary target of these youth programs are youth grades nine to twelve, though in the last fifteen to twenty years there has been an increased interest and participation with youth in grades six to eight. Dean, in her study of religious youth groups, identified them as “a club-like gathering of young people who typically meet for socializing, study, community service, and worship experiences together.” Kenda Creasy Dean, *A Synthesis of the Research on, and a Descriptive Overview of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious Youth Programs in the United States* (New York: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1991), 10.

² These estimates are based upon Gallup Youth Surveys indicating that about 48% of America’s youth attend church or synagogue services in the last seven days. See George H. Gallup Jr. and Robert Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans* (Princeton, NJ: The George H. Gallup International Institute, 1992).

the organized church. Church-based youth leaders express concern over their inability to keep young people and their families actively involved through high school.

The formal research verification of this fact is substantial. The most recent comprehensive four-year study of the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers points out that only forty percent of America's youth population stays involved over a number of years:

Religious youth groups seem to be an important part of the religious and spiritual experiences of a substantial minority of U.S. adolescents. Nearly four in ten U.S. teens are involved in a religious youth group and have been for multiple years. About seven in ten have been involved in a religious youth group at some time in their lives. Most of those currently involved belong to youth groups sponsored by their own religious congregation. As to frequency of involvement, one-quarter of all U.S. teens report attending religious youth groups weekly or more often Viewed from the other direction, however, all of this also means that the majority of U.S. teenagers are not involved in a religious youth group, and nearly half of U.S. teens who at one time did participate in a religious youth group no longer do so.³

Other research draws similar conclusions suggesting that 57% of youth overall are involved in church activities for at least one hour every week.⁴

Practical experience and research both recognize the simple fact that religion does make a difference. "Contrary to many youths' own inability to see or articulate the influence or importance of religion in their lives, religion does in fact appear to be a significant factor that does make a considerable difference in a host of life outcomes. And these observable differences are not scattered and uneven but emerge regularly...."⁵ Plus, as one would expect, the more devoted to church and involved the young person is the more consistent the benefit. "A modest amount of religion...does not appear to make a

³ Smith, 69.

⁴ Peter L. Benson, *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1993), 13.

⁵ Smith, 232.

consistent difference in the lives of U.S. teenagers. It is only the more serious religious teens... whose outcomes are more consistently and significantly positive than those of their entirely religiously disengaged peers.”⁶

Certainly there are many reasons why young people do not become involved in church-related activities: inconsistency, irrelevance, independence, lack of peer associations, and social pressure. “However, averages for all teenagers hide the higher levels of involvement of young adolescents.”⁷ But even those who do get involved early in life, whose parents encourage them to go to church and have prepared them to learn about God often fail to stay involved as they get older.⁸ This means that there is a difficulty in making disciples of older youth if they have not been involved in early adolescent years. This is not necessarily good news for those youth ministries that focus primarily upon high-school teenagers.

What is less clear is whether or not youth ministries actually do the job most churches want them to do. Are youth programs teaching the “faith” and making disciples the way adults (and denominations) intend? Do most church-based youth programs effectively make disciples who “go” and make disciples? It is doubtful at best. However, that is not to say that young people are totally disinterested in religion. Every indication is that American teenagers are paying attention to religious things. Or, as Tony Jones recognizes in his *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, “One of the noteworthy characteristics of the postmodern/post-Christian world is the dramatic rise in spirituality. Propositional

⁶ Ibid, 233.

⁷ Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and Peter C. Scales, *Youth Development in Congregations: An Exploration of the Potential and Barriers* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1995, accessed September 2005), 49. Available: <http://www.search-institute.org/archives>.

⁸ Ibid. The Search Institute, for instance, found that 62% of sixth graders were involved but only 48% continued to go to church at least one hour per week by grade 12.

truth is out and mysticism is in. People are not necessarily put off by a religion that does not ‘make sense’—they are more concerned with whether a religion can bring them into contact with God.”⁹

But the interest in spiritual things is not what most in the evangelical community would hope for. And an interest in spiritual things does not automatically translate into effectively training youth to become “doers of the word” (James 1:25) and not hearers only. Granted, many evangelical congregations have alternative, more formal ways to accomplish explicit spiritual training and preparation for membership. Public worship is seen to be the primary way to integrate youth into the intergenerational life of the faith community. However, most young people today are not learning how to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Research shows that they have a very benign attitude toward modern religious belief even though they remain interested in spiritual things:

In our in-depth interviews with U.S. teenagers, we also found the vast majority of them to be *incredibly inarticulate* about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives. We found very few teens from any religious background who are able to articulate well their religious beliefs and explain how those beliefs connect to the rest of their lives...

A substantial minority of religiously affiliated U.S. teenagers, when asked if they held any specific religious beliefs, simply answered, “No” or “Not really” or “Not that I can think of.” We expect such answers from nonreligious teens, but we also heard many religious teens say flatly that they hold no particular religious beliefs. Another large minority did claim to hold religious beliefs but were unable to describe them.¹⁰

Simply put, when it comes to individual belief American youth, even those inside the church are unsure of what they believe and what it all means. Churches that effectively train their youth to become real Christ-followers are the exception, not the rule.

⁹ Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 63.

¹⁰ Smith, 131.

Creating the right church environment is always a very delicate balance when it comes to spiritual formation. Some churches fail because the atmosphere becomes vindictive rather than exciting, creative, and connected. Yet every church needs to have definite aims for its youth ministry and a passion for the emerging generation. Despite the presence of youth programs in most churches and the perceived potential for reaching many youth, very little is known from research about the nature of discipleship training programs in evangelical congregations. The extent of participation of vulnerable, at-risk youth and the effectiveness of involvement has only begun to be assessed. What we do know is who typically participates in youth programs.

Unfortunately, in light of the problem of how best to help volunteers make disciples of troubled youth, one has to acknowledge the limited participation. Sadly, a forty percent or even a fifty-seven percent involvement rate in church-based youth groups (at best) is a sad indictment regardless of demographic and causal factors. Yet all of this does strongly suggest that the evangelical church over the last thirty to forty years has struggled to involve and make disciples of troubled youth typically found outside the evangelical church.

The Problem of Socialization and Values

The challenge is compounded when one considers that teaching troubled youth how to become disciples goes far beyond merely involving them in weekly youth programs or keeping them out of the juvenile justice system. Effectively teaching troubled young people how to become followers of Jesus Christ will require more than just attractive programs and prevention. Higher patterns of reasoning and behavior will

need to be taught within an experiential environment if true spiritual formation is expected to actually happen.

Troubled youth are integrated mentally, physically, socially and spiritually whole human beings.¹¹ Patterns of development are in the nature of each of these areas. But these patterns of development cannot be easily or significantly altered. What and how a volunteer teaches will have an effect but it is not the only element in learning. Consequently, this whole troubled young person must be considered in the teaching-learning process. And addressing the needs of the whole young person often requires volunteers to understand practically the process of socialization and the enculturation of different values.

Fortunately, most adults recognize the fact that adolescence is a time of transition between childhood and adulthood, between dependence—when the parents do most of the structuring and choosing of what the child experiences—and interdependence. Adults in almost any church realize that the adolescent is beginning to move away from the parent/adult and is beginning to make his/her own decisions. Knowingly or unknowingly accepting the tenets of Psychosocial Development Theory, they have come to believe that what all young people face is a brand new task—the quest for identity.¹² The process of

¹¹ We recognize that this work is not overly concerned with theories of cognitive, social, physical, or moral development. However, we believe one of the mistakes that many adults make in thinking about troubled youth stems from a simplistic view of man's organic-social-spiritual development. Many adults have been taught that a young person's "spiritual" life is distinct and separate. We would argue for a holistic view of man as an integrated functional whole—that God created man to be a mental, physical, social, spiritual, structured whole being. Areas are not dichotomous, independent, separate entities. Young people have a continuous need to change, adjust and adapt to new conditions, changed relationships, unfamiliar perceptions, and a host of other imbalances in their dynamic temporal existence. Development, then, is a complex integrated process involving each of these areas. Young people in a healthy state are living "balanced", organized, unified lives. But they are much more than mere "spiritual" beings.

¹² See, for instance, Erik Erickson's work on psychosocial development theory. According to Erikson, an individual experiences eight stages of personality development. In each stage, people are faced with a crisis that must be resolved. In stage five (Adolescence) youth are caught between identity and

knowing “who you are,” “where you’re going,” “feeling at home in your own body,” and “knowing how to get approval from those who really count.”

Yet few in the church give much thought to the developmental tension between nature (heredity or “what we inherit”) and nurture (environment and “what we learn”), let alone the challenge of re-socialization. Although nature sets the limits on what young people can achieve, socialization plays a very active role in determining what they do achieve. Patterns of development are in the nature of a young person but externals can help or hinder how that young person learns. In other words, whatever physical, social, and mental potential they are given by God may be improved or stunted through the process of socialization. Whether one believes that the process of socialization is primarily a benefit, by instilling society’s values and norms on the young person, or a process that is primarily harmful, exploiting and abusing children, or potentially both. Depending on what self-image young people develop, the fact remains that socialization plays a significant role in the development of any young person.

The factors of socialization are considered more carefully in Section Three of this study. For now, what is significant in laying out the reasons behind the problem is the fact that the outcome of socialization is often different for young people inside the evangelical community than for those outside. Not every young person will keep on growing to become what s/he was created by God to be. But not to develop to one’s highest potential is possibly to deny one’s humanness. Obviously, young people both inside and outside the church inherit some of what makes them who they are. But what? Physical traits like skin color and sex are inherited, but how they affect the way a young

confusion; in other words, between knowing and not knowing who they are and what their goals in life are. Either they will have a clear sense of self-identity or they will suffer from a lack of self-identity that will result in a lot of problems. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd.ed. (New York: Norton, 1963).

person behaves and his/her personality depends to a great extent on the factors of socialization.

The importance of the “nature versus nurture” debate increases when one recognizes that most troubled youth are not easily assimilated into the subculture of most evangelical churches. They have not been socialized in the same way. They do not share the same cultural and moral values that most evangelicals believe correctly reflect the biblical principles by which they have chosen to live. Instead, these young people will do whatever is most expedient for their circumstance.

As a result in a specific situation, there may be a vast difference between the moral principle and the action the young person takes. Why? Because instead of applying abstract, biblical ideals and principles, troubled young people judge the seriousness of an act by its practical consequences and the potential punishment. As Lawrence Kohlberg recognized, concepts of “right” and “wrong” are interpreted literally and are often difficult to understand and accept because the moral agents have not been taught to think conceptually.¹³

¹³ See the work of Lawrence Kohlberg concerning his levels or stages of moral development. Interestingly, his view of individual moral development, which progresses from a stage of “preconventional morality,” in which a child learns to define right from wrong according to consequences, to “postconventional morality,” in which a child judges actions by taking into account conflicting norms, has been criticized for being more applicable to males than females. Yet I applaud Kohlberg for his psychological and philosophical conclusions regarding the fact that there are universal moral structures. However, looking at Kohlberg’s work from a Christian perspective, I believe one of his failures is that he does not deal adequately with the biblical concept of justice. From a Christian perspective justice has to be seen from a covenantal viewpoint. Kohlberg omits a very crucial part of moral judgment and moral action by divorcing morality from Christian theism. He says as much in *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Our new approach to the study of morality started with the assumption of the autonomy of morality and moral principles, rather than deriving moral development from or reducing it to something else, such as religious attitudes or principles.*” Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (New York, Harper & Row, 1981), 318.

For our purposes possibly the most valid criticism is that in working with troubled youth moral choices are concrete, not abstract. He uses moral dilemmas and principles that are all very abstract, rational, and individual. But volunteers are faced with helping delinquents act right not merely think right usually in the context of others.

What is “normal,” then, for any young person, troubled or not, depends upon what is taught and practiced by adults and peers inside and outside the church. As Smith points out, this influence of adults on the lives of young people is often misunderstood and underestimated:

Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misconceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents....Teenagers do not seem very reflective about or appreciative of this fact. But that does not change the reality that the best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents *do* look like.¹⁴

What adults in the church, especially parents, value does matter. Cognitive, social, and moral development can be helped or hindered by adults. Consequently, it is helpful to examine how adults in the church view what is normal and important.

Every adult and every church, as part of the culture in which it is placed, has its own ideas, not only of what is important in the world but also about how people should act. This, of course, is the normative component of a culture, its norms and values. Every church community has certain values—shared ideas about what is good or important. These shared values determine the norms of how people are to behave. People are not always conscious of the values instilled in them but they are likely to abide by the norms if they believe in their underlying values. Consequently, underlying economic and social class values have a bearing on how any troubled young person is assimilated into the church.

Over the last half century social science has continued to validate that the way the middle class socializes a child varies significantly from those in the lower class. Most of

¹⁴ Smith, 261.

the research stresses the child-rearing values and lifestyle differences between the two classes. Shoemaker, for instance, in reviewing Albert Cohen's research, reminds of nine middle-class values all pertinent to the value differences often associated with troubled youth and those in many churches:

- 1) drive and ambition;
- 2) individual responsibility;
- 3) achievement and success;
- 4) willingness to postpone immediate satisfaction of wants and desires;
- 5) rationality in the form of long-range planning and budgeting;
- 6) exercise of courtesy and self-control in association with others, particularly strangers;
- 7) control of violence and aggression, verbal or physical, in all social settings;
- 8) "wholesome" recreation, that is, constructive use of leisure time...; and
- 9) respect for the property of others, perhaps the most basic of all.¹⁵

These values listed do not seem to be overly significant until one realizes that these are the values generally aspired to in our culture and, more importantly for our purposes, they are values characteristic of most in the evangelical community. As noted above, what is traditionally referred to as evangelicalism is a combination of cultural values and a theological belief system often understood to be almost inseparable. For many they are so interwoven that to deny any part of the values listed above is to emotionally deny the whole package.

Ironically, evangelicalism has veered in this regard from its roots. The movement that was originally intended to be a broad representation of God's purposes, a "challenge to fundamentalist anti-intellectualism, antiecumenism, and anti-social action"¹⁶ has been narrowed to represent "pragmatic," "white," "middle-class," "all-American" socio-economic values. The point is that for many in the modern evangelical movement the

¹⁵ Shoemaker, 115.

¹⁶ Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 30.

challenge of separating their faith and mission from these values is difficult if not impossible.

Furthermore, because the evangelical church in America today is a way of life almost identical to that of most white, middle-class Americans, it stands for restrained criticism of authority, nurtures a deep belief in competitive enterprises, places a premium on government non-involvement, and encourages punishment as a way of child and social control. The evangelical subculture also has a variety of taboos that are remnants from cultural/religious fundamentalism of the 1920s and 30s. These taboos vary from church to church, but they are expressed in such forms as opposition to drinking alcohol, smoking, card-playing, music, dancing, body piercing, and tattoos, to name a few.

This, of course, is a thumbnail sketch and arguably a misrepresentation (though unintentional) of some evangelical churches. However, the practical outcome has been that many well-meaning evangelical churches have tended over time to concentrate their efforts primarily on making good “middle-class” youth and not necessarily Christ-followers. Consequently, Christian communities, given the responsibility to incarnate the gospel of Christ to those in need, cater primarily to mainline youth populations with similar values and ideals and not those on the margins.

Furthermore, a basic objective for any church intentional about ministering to troubled youth should be to provide opportunities for developing significant relationships with mature, caring, adult models. As we have seen, there is a strong correlation between troubled youth and family associated risk factors. Many churches recognize that troubled youth are often more at risk because the adults in their life model negative attitudes, values, and behavior. Consequently, there is no substitute for solid helping relationships

with a Christian adult role model. Yet in order for volunteer adult to be this kind of effective mentor and role-model one must be able to “hear” and understand what the young person is saying. This, too, becomes a problem.

Most adults in evangelical church settings take their ability to “hear” what a young person is saying for granted. After all, they were once teenagers themselves. But few, as adults, have allowed for the challenge of finding and speaking a common language with the youth they encounter. Herein lies the challenge for many adults in evangelical churches. Adult volunteers inside the evangelical community often speak a different language and attach different meanings to the symbols and metaphors common to troubled youth outside. Troubled youth do not usually speak “white,” “middle-class,” “adult,” and “evangelical.” Words like “atonement,” “grace,” “sin,” and “justification” have no meaning. Troubled youth often speak a language of the street, formed in the inner cities, expressed in rap and hip hop and metaphors unfamiliar and uncomfortable to those in the church. Simply put, the language used to explain and connect the gospel story inside the church will not be understood by most young people outside evangelicalism.

The Problem of Associated Risk

A difference in cultural values leads to another problem that lies at the very heart of why many Evangelical churches struggle to help volunteers effectively minister to troubled youth. The problem pertains to how those in the church community understand the risks associated with ministering to “troubled youth.” It is helpful to ask, “Why do

many churches fear troubled youth?” The answer is relatively simple yet it has a significant negative impact.

In essence adults, both inside and outside the church, have always been concerned about the miscreant behavior of their youth. When young people are known to be “troubled,” adults are concerned for a number of reasons. Why did they do that? Why do they act that way? How will they affect the “good/better/best” kids in the church? What should we do with them? These are questions adults in the church ask and for which they, more often than not, demand answers. This worry and attention derive, in part, from the perception that the future of the church (and the nation) rests in the hands of today’s young people. But typically the overriding concern is one of fear.

It would be easy to overlook the “fear factor.” But one cannot minimize the fear many adults in the church have regarding troubled youth. Why are they afraid? Perhaps it is due to the fact that Americans have increasingly become crime conscious. They see troubled youth as “criminals” who place families and other young people at risk. Therefore, people in the church try to avoid them as much as possible.

This is a valid concern. Recent research indicates that nearly two-thirds of the victims of violent juvenile crime were young people under eighteen years of age, “as were 43% of the victims of robberies...53% of aggravated assaults, and 61% of simple assaults.”¹⁷ One should not minimize the need to exercise caution. Yet, statistically, violent offenders make up a very small percent of those found to be delinquent.¹⁸ Most

¹⁷ Carl McMurley and Howard N. Snyder, *Victims of Violent Juvenile Crime* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, July 2004), 1.

¹⁸ According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (UCR), arrests for juveniles accounted for only 15% of all violent crimes in 2002. This means that approximately 85% are committed by adults, not juveniles. Over the last eight years arrests for violent crimes—murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault—have declined. See Howard Snyder, *Juvenile Crimes 2002*.

juvenile crime is not violent person-to-person crime and only 7% of adults who were victims themselves of a nonfatal violent crime faced a juvenile offender.¹⁹

The bigger challenge for the church is that many adults fear troubled youth because they equate “strange” with “dangerous.” This is not a recent phenomenon. For well over half a century criminologists have been studying the reasons people fear crime. A 1967 Presidential Commission on crime, as an example, concluded that “... fear of crimes of violence is not a simple fear of injury or death or even of all crimes of violence, but, at bottom, a fear of strangers.”²⁰ The point is that a troubled youth appears out of place: someone unknown who does not fit in, does not wear the same clothing, look the same way, speak the same language or value the same things. This lack of understanding translates into fear and always has. But this fear, in turn, compounds the challenge for caring volunteers ministering to troubled youth within the context of the church. .

The Problem of an Emerging Culture

Few are surprised by the fact that over the last ten to fifteen years the original institutions of North American evangelicalism have struggled. The ministry methods that worked in the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s like weeklong revival meetings, bus ministries, and confrontational evangelism had all but disappeared by the 1990s. The “old” ideas were no longer working; in fact, they were alienating the emerging generation. Those who began looking forward held two basic notions: Western culture had changed

¹⁹ McCurley and Snyder, 1.

²⁰ *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. Report by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and The Administration of Justice.(Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 52.

significantly since the start of the evangelical movement in the 1940s and 50s, and the church needed a different way to live out its purpose and respond to that culture.²¹

Today, whether the evangelical church wants to accept it, ignore it, or use it to more effectively train troubled youth, the reality is that Western culture has experienced a paradigm shift.²² As Stanley Grenz recognized over a decade ago, the Western world is changing for everyone:

We are apparently experiencing a cultural shift that rivals the innovations that marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages: we are in the midst of a transition from the modern to the postmodern era. Of course, transitional periods are difficult to describe and assess. Nor is it fully evident what will characterize the emerging epoch. Nevertheless, we see signs that monumental changes are engulfing all aspects of contemporary culture.²³

This same paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity means that a division between what is spiritual and what isn't is no longer thought to be reasonable. Around the world, there seems to be a growing interest in spirituality among the general public as well as among scholars. One sees religion and spirituality playing defining roles in most major geopolitical tensions. Radical doubt is no longer seen to be rational. Scholars have not been able to agree on what constitutes absolute truth. And postmodernism has emerged to show that no single meta-narrative is superior. Instead, specific languages and personal stories have come to serve as the lens through which reality is understood. Simply put, postmoderns reject even the possibility of a single, unified, absolute

²¹ I have in mind people like Stanley Grenz, Tony Jones, Erwin McManus, Brian McLaren, Sally Morgenthaler, Leonard Sweet, Robert Webber, Dallas Willard, and N. T. Wright, among others. See, for instance, Leonard Sweet, ed. *The Church in the Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

²² Ironically the very concept of a "paradigm shift" is inherently Western. The concept was invented in the 1950s by Thomas Kuhn in relationship to his study of Scientific Revolutions. Kuhn wanted to show that new scientific theories were not just simple add-ons to old ideas but were, in fact, radically new ways for scientists to see their scientific world differently than before. See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer On Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 54-56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

worldview and are content to see many possibilities, many worlds. And along with this shift from modernity to postmodernity has come a renewed interest in spirituality. As Robert Webber notes, “Those of us who grew up in the sixties and seventies remember the day when a secular humanist was behind every bush, the day when serious theologians declared that God had actually suffered a metaphysical death, and the time when any mention of the word spirituality was regarded as quaint and irrelevant. But all that has changed.”²⁴

On the one hand, to a great extent, the evangelical church in America is a product of the Enlightenment and a child of modernity. Without thinking, many evangelicals have come to accept that the world creates culture and Christians are to react in response. Grenz notes, “As modern thinkers, evangelicals have always used the tools of modernity, such as the scientific method, the empirical approach to reality, and the commonsense realism. But these tools became especially important in the twentieth century, as evangelical intellectuals attempted to understand and articulate the gospel with eyes turned toward the challenge posted by the worldview of late modernity—secularism.”²⁵

The problem of understanding troubled youth is often compounded by the fact that many evangelical churches intentionally disregard the changes of an emerging culture. In many respects the struggle is understandable. Evangelical denominations have favored conversion piety and separating themselves from any association with the emerging trends of “sinful” culture. The fear of pluralism and deconstruction of “absolute” language have caused many in the Christian community to react strongly against these postmodern changes. Some within the evangelical community fear that

²⁴ Webber, 173.

²⁵ Grenz, 161.

“truth” will die. Others believe that the substance of their faith’s foundation will collapse. On the other hand, still others embrace the opportunities and argue that “Christians should celebrate ‘the turn to language’ as an important contribution in the pursuit of knowledge.”²⁶

Troubled youth are often the product of an emerging postmodern culture. Understanding the culture and socialization of many troubled youth is made more difficult by the fact that many modern evangelical churches have come to believe they have the only answer. Change is always a threat because truth is not supposed to change. Arguably this is more a characteristic of modernity than evangelicalism *per se* or even the church as a whole, but it does not mitigate the fact that one of the main components of evangelicalism is its definitiveness. It has answers to just about everything, from how to invest to why war is Biblical to what should be done with those on public assistance. If one has been brought up in a world where answers are black and white, and where there is a well-defined blueprint for living, and a belief that all they need is to extrapolate the right answer from a Biblical text, one is likely to struggle with answers and applications that are not always clear or when questions arise. Such is the situation in ministering to youth at-risk outside the church where most of the issues are complex and the answers are hard to come by.

Furthermore, the trends of an emerging culture have changed the way the story of God’s acts will need to be told.²⁷ This will not only force the church to rethink its

²⁶ Robert C. Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 227.

²⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*. Sweet uses the acronym “EPIC” (Experimental, Participatory, Image-driven, and Connected) to describe this emerging postmodern culture. This acronym is utilized later in this study.

connection to modernity but also the way it makes disciples of troubled youth. As Leonard Sweet observes, “For the church to incarnate the gospel in this postmodern world, it must become more medieval than modern, more apostolic than patristic. I call postmodernity an EPIC culture ... In the midst of one of the greatest transitions in history—from modern to postmodern—Christian churches are owned lock, stock, and barrel by modernity.”²⁸

It is fair to say that the evangelical church in America is trying to sort all this out but is struggling to do so. Frankly, it is struggling to emerge and engage the present but it is ill prepared for change either culturally or theologically. Yet, as Gibbs notes in his compelling work, *ChurchNext*, the American church during this paradigm shift into postmodernity must resist mistaking past social position for future spiritual vitality:

Within contemporary American evangelicalism there is a loud and influential voice calling for a return to a past era of privilege and prestige when there was a more broadly accepted Protestant Christian ethic and culture. However, there is no going back along the tracks that have been obliterated by the windstorms and rock falls created by the contemporary social and cultural context, with its religious pluralism, philosophical skepticism and ethical relativism. Not only are we prevented from retracing our steps, we also discover that there is scant possibility of further advance along this road.²⁹

For our purposes this means that the evangelical church must move beyond living in the past as a well-established religious movement integrated into society. Evangelical churches must reengage the present and figure out how to best take advantage of emerging trends to best reach troubled youth.

The jury is still out about where the majority of churches will align themselves. However, the more one studies and participates in the evangelical church in America, the

²⁸ Ibid, 28.

²⁹ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 21.

more it becomes evident that it lacks the broader ecumenical language and hermeneutic to enfold troubled youth outside the evangelical community and train them in the faith. It will need help in training volunteers how to make use of emerging opportunities as they teach troubled youth to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Problem of Recruiting, Training, and Enabling Volunteers

The final reason many evangelical churches struggle to enable volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth stems from the way they have come to understand volunteerism. It would be misleading to assume that the challenge of recruiting, training, and enabling volunteers is unique to any particular church or denomination. It is not. Nor is it correct to think that the antipathy to volunteerism in this regard is a recent development in the church. So it is helpful to take a step back and recognize how volunteerism is understood in many churches. In other words, to what extent do churches value recruiting, screening, training, and enabling volunteers to work with young people typically understood to have problems and found outside the church?

Nowhere are volunteers understood to be more needed than in the programs and services provided by churches. Every church leader knows that without volunteer labor many churches would not reach nearly the number of people or provide the level of service they do. Plus, it is fair to say that evangelical churches think of themselves as primarily “volunteer-led associations” and not “professional organizations.” Comments like “You are the ‘engine’ behind this movement”³⁰ or “Our volunteers need to hear how

³⁰ Tony Morgan and Tim Stevens, *Simply Strategic Volunteers: Empowering People for Ministry* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2005), 8.

meaningful and valuable their role is in the church's ministry"³¹ reflect the heartbeat of most church professionals. The research also validates the significance of volunteer involvement within the church.³² Furthermore, one can even make the case for the fact that the very genesis of Pietism, out of which has grown the Evangelicalism of today, "was a call for a church that involved and ministered to the laity."³³ The simple fact is that most evangelical churches today are not only recognized as volunteer dependent but truly are volunteer dependent.

It is assumed that one, if not *the*, primary avenue of outreach to troubled youth must be through the utilization of volunteers. Unfortunately, not everyone in the church is confident about voluntarism's ability to address such major social problems as juvenile delinquency or the challenges faced by young people in an emerging culture. This could be due to the fact that few churches have paid staff devoted to these types of social service ministries. "Only 6 percent of congregations, for example, have a staff person devoted at least 25 percent of his or her time to social service projects."³⁴ Another factor may be that proportionately very few congregations recruit and enable volunteers to become involved in social service ministries. "Even volunteer involvement in social services is small-scale for most congregations, with the median active congregation involving only ten volunteers in these efforts."³⁵ The bottom line is that there exists a lack

³¹ Barbra Boltin, Mike Bright, and Byron Cressey, *Care and Feeding of Volunteers: Recruiting, Training and Keeping and Excellent Volunteer Ministry Staff* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2001), 90.

³² For instance, according to the US Department of Labor, 28.8% of the US population (or 64.5 million people) volunteers regularly and 34.4% volunteered regularly in a church or religious organization. See "Volunteering In the United States" (2004), p. 3. Available: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun>.

³³ Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 40.

³⁴ Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 50.

³⁵ Ibid.

of motivation and a degree of skepticism regarding the notion that church-based volunteers can solve serious social problems.

This seeming skepticism is even more sobering when one remembers that the church is a community of Christ-followers called to go out into the community and not just spend time volunteering inside the church. Simply put, church-based volunteers are no longer recognized to be the “child-savers” of a century ago. Years ago it was the responsibility of the church as a whole to care for the poor and disenfranchised. Over the years the government has assumed this role and the church has slowly phased out of the caregiving role they had once led. Although the government has attempted to make financial provision, the deeply rooted emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs are no longer addressed by the church. As Mark Chaves points out in his study of congregations, “We fundamentally misunderstand congregations if we imagine that this sort of activity is now, was ever, or will ever be central to their activities. The Social Gospel image of congregations deeply engaged in serving the needy of their communities has been for many a compelling normative vision for more than a century, but we should not let notions of what congregations ought to look like influence our assessment of what they do look like.”³⁶

Unfortunately this problem is not just representative of one particular arm of Christianity. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to believe that evangelicals are somehow intolerant of the social needs of people.³⁷ The fact is that there is a general malaise to

³⁶ Ibid, 93.

³⁷ See Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Smith shows how ordinary evangelicals are generally far from intolerant, far different from popular perception, and in many ways are more caring about the social needs of Americans than the general population. That does not seem to improve, however, the evangelical church’s enabling of volunteers to become involved with troubled youth.

social service involvement that is just as true for “mainline” as “evangelical,” for “liberal” as “conservative” churches. “There is, in fact, *no* specific type of social service activity, including the more intensive types that conservative congregations are more likely than other congregations to perform.”³⁸ Churches, as a whole, are not committed providers of social welfare services or volunteer manpower. “For the vast majority of congregations social services constitute a minor and peripheral aspect of their organizational activities, taking up only small amounts of their resources and involving only small numbers of people.”³⁹

The church, as a whole, struggles to be intentionally involved in addressing social service needs let alone the specific needs of troubled youth. Volunteers are not being intentionally recruited, trained, or enabled. American church current volunteer estimates suggest that only seven to fifteen percent of the volunteering done through churches goes outside the walls of the church into the community. Churches across the theological spectrum have failed to intentionally encourage volunteers to become involved with young people outside their own boundaries. The evangelical church, like other arms of American Christianity, has failed to provide significant holistic help to at-risk young people by recruiting, training, and enabling adult volunteers.

The problem of recruiting, training, and motivation is not simply defined. Certainly part of the difficulty no doubt lies in the fact that many churches fail to see this type of ministry as a primary mission. Yet for those in the evangelical church concerned with meeting the needs of troubled youth it is helpful to consider why the church has difficulty motivating and enabling volunteers to minister to troubled youth, especially

³⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁹ Ibid., 93.

when the involvement of volunteers can significantly multiply a church's ministry in terms of both quality and quantity. However, in many situations volunteers meet resistance.

The problem is not that church-based volunteers are not willing to serve. Ironically, studies typically find the reasons people volunteer are altruistic and religious in nature to a great extent.⁴⁰ Research of various Protestant denominations indicated faith or theology was the strongest motivation for volunteers serving in the church. Members of mainline Protestant denominations tend to volunteer less than more conservative groups (e.g., Southern Baptists) to help their churches but more to help non-church organizations and medium-sized churches often have the highest percentage of volunteers.⁴¹ Research further indicates that the "frequency of church attendance was strongly associated with volunteering, consistent with all other research."⁴²

One can easily understand how churches that possess little intrinsic value for the praxis of a holistic, transformational "social gospel" will choose to motivate volunteers toward a different end. Typically churches take the attitude that social service ministry can, is, or should be done by the parachurch organization. The local church conflict with parachurch groups is often the most intense, because both have programs to promote that require volunteers. It would make sense that if "helping others" is the primary reason

⁴⁰ Interestingly, according to a 1990 study, a high percentage (56%) of people volunteer because they want to help other people. Religious reasons were stated by 22%, enjoyment of the work by 35%. Almost 30% volunteered because of an interest in the activity and 9% volunteered because they want to learn more. When one considers the mission of the church (religious reasons) and the desire to help troubled youth, one would expect that church-based volunteers would be highly motivated to become involved. See James L. Brudney, *Fostering Volunteer Programs in the Public Sector: Planning, Initiating, and Managing Voluntary Activities* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 93-94.

⁴¹ D. R. Hoge and others, "The Value of Volunteers as Resources for Congregations," *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 470-480.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 474.

people choose to volunteer and a particular church does not encourage “helping” troubled youth volunteers will not be motivated to do so in the church. Consequently, as long as a church has a restricted view of its mission, its ministry will never significantly impact the life of at-risk kids in the community through volunteers. And, as noted below, this non-commitment to the praxis of a “social gospel” has no biblical support.

The lack of encouragement to participate in a larger mission and help troubled youth is not the only reason volunteers are rarely enabled to help young people in need. The problem goes beyond how a church understands the need to apply the gospel to issues of social reconciliation, concern, service and justice. Frankly, there are many in the church who doubt the effectiveness of laypeople working with youthful deviants. They believe the primary responsibility rests with the state paid professionals and see punishment as more appropriate than rehabilitation. When asked, “Why don’t volunteers think they have the skills or abilities to help troubled young people?” the main reason given is that their problems seem so difficult and complex, causing volunteers to wonder how they could make a difference. “After all,” they surmise, “you would have to be psychologist or social worker to help those youth.”

It is true, of course, that certain problems need professional attention, but most troubled youth need personal attention—loving relationships with adults who take the time to care about them. Practical experience teaches us that most troubled youth can be helped significantly by caring adult mentors with minimal skills. Everyone who has ever worked with young people regardless of the problems they face understands that *who* adult volunteers are is much more significant to the young person than *what they know* or *think they know*.

The bigger problem stems from the fact that adults inside and outside the church have been led to believe that all of society's problems should be solved by "professionals," people paid to do the job. Society now hires police officers, teachers, social workers, counselors, and others to do what individuals used to do for themselves. Of course, professionals are needed in our large and complex society, but with their proliferation has grown the subtle expectation that someone else always can be hired to do the work. Unfortunately, this trend toward solving social problems with "professionals" is an idea that has been brought into the modern church.⁴³

As our culture has grown and become more complex, and as the base of what is believed to be known has increased, each generation has raised up "experts" to explain the cause and solve the problem. Church and religion came to be seen as the primary shaper of the "mysterious" spiritual life but not the practical physical, mental, or social areas. However, the socialization factors associated with troubled youth were seen to be beyond an individual's spiritual life. Modern professionals were encouraged to set aside religious belief. Professional psychology, sociology, and social work norms valued an objective, nonjudgmental approach stripped of mystery and religious belief.⁴⁴ And the

⁴³ In ways that go beyond the scope of this work, the concept of "professionals" to which we have become acculturated is an "enlightenment" view that favors what professionals "know" over what volunteers can "do." Looking back, one is able to see how over the last several centuries the church in America has perceived itself to be living in "enlightened" times. What our ancestors saw as mysterious, moderns knew they could explain and make practical. Cultural trends they saw as dangerous to the "rule of faith" and contrary to tradition moderns were eager to experiment with changing. Influenced by the Enlightenment, the church ignored its place in making sense of life's mysteries. What moderns learned in school and from those in the "know" was that knowledge is not revealed, or handed down, but discovered cognitively through careful scientific reasoning. Specific problems could be separated and solved. "Give us a problem and we can find the 'right' answer and apply the solution." But it required the discipline of learned professionals. And those methods of "professional" learning would need to be applied to something as difficult as socializing young people correctly.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Richard John Neuhaus *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), where he argues that religion had been marginalized from public life. Or Charles L. Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

“specialized” but limited role of the church volunteer was born to care for the spiritual needs of the client.

Unfortunately, today the ministries of many evangelical churches have followed suit. Youth ministry has become “specialized.” The job of understanding and mentoring the younger generation has fallen almost exclusively to youth pastor “professionals” who are thought to have “specialized” knowledge and methods for connecting with youth. Volunteers were not thought capable of doing the same job. They were thought to lack the skills or the sensitivity to work with troubled youth. Many of the social, psychological, and physical needs were even thought to be outside the expertise of paid church professionals. Yet experts in the field of “helping” point out that research does not support the theory that professional helpers are more effective than non-professionals. A non-professional may not have the sophisticated social work techniques to offer, but he has time to hear and a sincere desire to help.

Another problem with how the church enables volunteers is that from a human standpoint, it is often seen to be a volunteer organization but is rarely examined with God’s view of volunteerism in mind. The rules and dynamics that apply to Girl Scouts and Little League apply in the church. The church has recruiters and recruits—those who sell the purposes and needs of the organization, and those who listen to the sales pitch. Churches outline specific tasks and give strokes to those who volunteer their time to work. Words and letters of appreciation are essential, or volunteers begin to feel used and unappreciated. After all, they chose to give of their time to help out the programs of the church.

But what about God's standpoint? One of the challenges in finding volunteers to do ministry within the context of the church is that while the modern church functions like a democracy it is really a theocracy. The church is comprised of individuals in God's kingdom. Volunteer organizations are democracies in which the governed give consent to the governors and the consent can be withdrawn whenever the masses wish. Not so in a kingdom. From a kingdom perspective volunteers have one responsibility to serve the king. Consequently, the concept of democratic voluntarism as it is often sold and practiced in the church is not consistent with the Christian's calling to glorify God and serve his purposes.

This pernicious mixture of democracy/voluntarism with the kingdom of God has diluted our Lord's call to commitment. On the one hand, people in the church like to think of themselves as "slaves" of Jesus Christ but, on the other, they regard themselves as volunteers who serve the church if they so choose. "Too often the church is aiming its people toward self-fulfillment through God's blessings and away from the failure and pain that could bring its people together as the community of the broken but loved and hopeful because of Jesus."⁴⁵

Furthermore, the effective utilization, training, and support of volunteers ministering to troubled youth in the context of a church can only take place when the focus of the church is on the development of the volunteers. Put another way, in a church the paid professionals are to serve the volunteers. Yet, typically, churches have voiced many objections and problems when it comes to using volunteers:

- Volunteers require too much supervision.

⁴⁵ Wes Roberts and Glenn Marshall, *Reclaiming God's Original Intent for the Church* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 9.

- Volunteers disrupt staff schedules and plans.
- Volunteers are not reliable.
- Volunteers are often critical and want to do things differently.
- Volunteers do not really understand and relate to the kids in the program.
- Volunteers have too many personal needs, and many are immature.
- Volunteers do not do what is expected of them.
- Working with volunteers takes too much time.

Some of these objections do have a basis. However, most these objections are a result of a lack of a comprehensive strategic approach to volunteerism.

Volunteers are motivated to become involved with troubled youth for many reasons but their primary desire is helping kids in need connect to their faith. They will only remain involved if certain conditions prevail inside the church community. Over the years a number of principles have been isolated that have implications for keeping volunteers like Carl (from the case study above) enabled to serve:

- Volunteers must feel needed and important.
- Volunteers need recognition for their contributions.
- Volunteers expect to be trained.
- The volunteer often derives a great deal of self-worth from relations with those in charge.
- Ownership is a significant factor in volunteer involvement, fulfillment, productivity, and longevity.
- Volunteers need tangible and meaningful roles.

Unfortunately, as indicated, the tendency is to see volunteers as an appendage to the work that fulltime “professional” staff do with youth. If volunteer involvement and enablement is seen as an addendum or a sideline to the real ministry of the church it will never lead to the enabling of volunteers reaching out to troubled youth. Stated another way, ministry *through* volunteers to troubled youth only occurs when there is an emphasis on ministry *to* volunteers. In terms of discipleship, ministry input results in discipleship output, and consequently for the effective utilization of volunteers the intention for a church must be one which is focused upon on the enabling, training, and support of those adult volunteers. To varying degrees this requires a shift in emphasis from the role of professional staff as “direct service providers” to professional staff as trainers and enablers of volunteers doing direct ministry.

This is a strategy that for many modern churches is fundamentally different from the dependence and emphasis on the role of professional paid staff as “direct ministers” with youth. It is not that the paid staff approach, in and of itself, cannot be fruitful in ministering to troubled youth. The problem stems from the fact many churches develop the expectation that their pastor is their “hired gun” paid to work for them. Sometimes they are allowed to do ministry to those outside the church. But the expectation more often than not is that a youth pastor’s primary responsibility is to those inside the church community whose parents pay the bill. The result is that few church communities support ministry by paid staff to troubled youth outside their fellowship.

Ironically, existing paid staff members are often seen to be overburdened with ongoing program and ministry responsibilities and thus cannot be stretched any farther without seriously affecting their ministry involvement with kids. As an organization, the

church is understood to be committed to making a maximum impact on a maximum number of young people. Overall financial resources, even if they can be increased, will not allow for proportionately greater ministry expansion based upon paid professionals alone. The only cost-effective, efficient means whereby ministry to young people outside the norm can be increased is through the mobilization, enablement, and management of volunteers. To varying degrees this requires every church to shift its emphasis from the role of professional staff as “direct service providers” to professional staff as leaders enabling and serving volunteers. Without the effective enablement of volunteers the evangelical church in North America will not be able to significantly minister to troubled youth.

In order to effectively motivate and enable volunteers, lay leaders and paid church professionals must change their philosophy of staffing and again believe that the call of Jesus Christ to make disciples is the responsibility of everyone, not just a few paid professionals. Wes Roberts and Glenn Marshall make this point:

The role of pastor will be remolded according to a more biblical perspective. We'll become post-pragmatists, no longer driven by the so called “proven methods” that promise success in the consumer-driven church business. After we realize that there's more to ministry than finding and employing the proper techniques, we'll repent of our reliance on them and learn to rest again in our dependence on God. We'll learn to become equippers rather than program managers.⁴⁶

The simple truth is that few churches value the effectiveness of volunteers working with troubled youth. Few believe that lay adults can do the job. Few are willing to sacrifice to the extent necessary for holistic ministry with at-risk kids. Most churches believe that even if they had the professional expertise, the resources required for motivating, training, and enabling volunteers is just too costly. Consequently, few

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.

churches value, recruiting, training, and enabling volunteers to work with troubled youth. Therefore, it should not surprise anyone that few evangelical churches have intentionally considered designing a program to enable volunteers to make disciples of troubled youth using the principles above.

CHAPTER 4. GOD'S MISSIONAL INTENT AND VOLUNTEERS

Just about everyone in America is familiar with the institution of the church. The reason is very simple. Few institutions have played as significant a role in defining our society. Every religious person and every church is integrally involved in society and its problems in one way or another, either by default or design. There are no exceptions. Even though “postmoderns think the corrupt world of church politics and ‘organized religion’ is something new or something uniquely Christian,”¹ there is a renewed interest in religion and faith. Twenty years ago, as the evangelical movement in America was basking in apparent unbridled success, Richard John Neuhaus was noting that issues of religion and faith were being relegated to a shrinking arena of private affairs.² Yet, it is safe to say that the last fifteen years have seen a significant change in public attitudes about religion and faith in society. Both have returned to the public arena and scholarship has begun to study their social implications once again.³

However, even for many potential volunteers inside the church, God’s intent for his church and its subsequent mission has often been misunderstood and poorly applied. This mission provides a structure for its identity and helps to establish the institutional boundaries for why a church exists and how it does things. Mission models “are an ‘is’

¹ Sweet, McLaren and Haselmayer, 260.

² Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*.

³ See, for instance, Christian Smith, “Correcting a Curious Neglect, or Bringing Religion Back In,” in *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, ed. Christian Smith (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1-25.

that implies an ‘ought.’”⁴ Or, as Len Sweet succinctly notes, “Church without a mission is not a church. Of course, what matters most is not whether your church has a mission. Here’s the question: Will God’s mission have your church?”⁵ How an individual church understands and fulfills its God-intended mission relates directly to making disciples of troubled youth.

The challenge to identify and fulfill the mission of the church has been a struggle for many in the evangelical community. The movement has a long tradition of trying to balance the issues of theology, anthropology, and the history of the church. As evangelicals have wrestled with the underlying issues of missiology and the challenges of contextualization, for most “the church” has been understood to be all Christians everywhere and not is not perfect this side of heaven. But many have also come to think of themselves as “low church” and separate from a larger, more hierarchical Catholicism. As such, they have come to believe they are able to get by without a strong emphasis on the sacraments, creeds, and tradition that has enriched the church over the centuries. The tendency to favor this view of church stems in large part from the axiom that the church needed correction in the centuries following its formative years. Williams, for instance, makes the point well in his work, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism*: “Long inherent within fundamentalism and evangelical Christianity is an antitraditionalism and anticredalism which has played a key role in its theological outlook and interpretation of the Bible. Protestant consciousness was shaped by an awareness that the true faith had been seduced and distorted by a contrived religious system which left a

⁴ Penny Edgell Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16.

⁵ Sweet, 198.

lasting suspicion of religious hierarchy, elitism, and ritual.”⁶ The simple fact is that many North American denominations grew to have less respect for tradition and traditional institutional structures.

Unfortunately, following in the footsteps of the Reformation, the modern evangelical church has had a hard time distinguishing between purposeful church tradition and the mission of the church. It continues to evidence a certain suspicion and disenchantment with examining the doctrinal and institutional foundations laid by post-apostolic Christianity. It has continually reinterpreted its accepted understanding of scripture and ecclesiological reform and become more pietistic in its doctrine. There has been an emphasis upon individual salvation and an experience of faith along with a distinction between primary and secondary doctrines.⁷ Twentieth-century evangelicals following in this pietistic tradition have come to emphasize an individual heart experience with Christ first and a solution to thorny church questions of doctrine and subsequent mission later on, if ever. “Along the way, evangelicals led America in adopting these basic beliefs: freedom of religion; salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone; the centrality and authority of Scripture; the privatization and individualistic practice of faith; tradition has little value; the gospel message is simple enough to be understood by all who read it.”⁸ Consequently, the accepted solution for many within the evangelical camp to questions of church identity, doctrine, and mission has been to focus primarily upon individual convertive piety and practice and the authority of scripture, but not necessarily upon the larger social mission of the church. Unfortunately, this neo-

⁶ D.H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 19.

⁷ For a considerable development of this point see Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 33-64.

⁸ Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 37.

evangelical theology has resulted in a trend that moves away from God's intended mission for the church.

The emphasis on individual piety has interfered and often replaced a concern for addressing the needs of those outside the church. Many churches have failed to demonstrate their authenticity as Christ followers as "salt and light" before the world. The connection between an inward faith and an outward obedience to the cultural mandate broadly detailed in scripture is left unbalanced. At the very least, the practice of religion in many churches has failed to significantly influence the individuals of our culture. George Barna notes,

Religion, although an enduring interest of Americans, remains oddly incapable of influencing the lives of a larger number of people. Growing evidence shows, too, that the traditional foundations of our spiritual character—such as church attendance, involvement in small groups, and Bible reading—are on the decline. Our study also showed that it is increasingly less common for people to describe themselves by traditional religious labels such as Protestant, Catholic or Jewish. In short, the foundations of America's faith are crumbling.⁹

It is not the purpose of this study to review the development of neo-evangelical theology nor to critique the way many evangelical churches have come to understand ecclesiological doctrine and the subsequent practice of their organizational methods and ministry. Nor is the intent here to find fault with a movement that has often been used by God to very effectively reform the American church and evangelize.¹⁰ However,

⁹ George Barna, *Absolute Confusion* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 58-59.

¹⁰ At no period in the history of the church has the church failed to engage the world and wrestle with its God-given mission. In one way or another, the church has always debated and acted upon issues of apostolic practice, church structure, salvation, culture, and mission in light of these. I also recognize that many evangelicals are increasingly responsive to the needs of the oppressed and want to be "salt and light". However, the issues of social justice, racism, poverty, economic imbalance, etc. must become the participatory concern of all those who profess to be Christ Followers. Many evangelical churches have intentionally separated themselves from these "social gospel" concerns and need to balance the evangelistic task of proclaiming Christ and making "salt and light" disciples. Toward this end, the Christian movement must not only be redemptive but also prophetic.

questions regarding the nature of the church, its doctrine, and mission in the world, far from being unimportant and secondary to the praxis of our faith are quite central. As Becker notes, how a church understands its mission represents “ideas about core tasks of the congregation and legitimate means of achieving them...[are] manifest in policies and programs, in taken-for-granted ways of doing things.”¹¹ This is certainly true of the church’s intention to become involved in what is typically thought to be a “social service” ministry to troubled youth, including reaching a kid like Loren in the narrative above.

One could almost excuse this seemingly poor commitment to expending significant time, energy, and resources to meeting the social, emotional, and sometimes physical needs of these youth, if it were not for the fact that this is not a temporary lack. This “salt and light” mission is something many evangelical churches have disregarded for quite some time. Interestingly, it is widely held that if churches were doing their job parachurch groups and social service ministries would not be necessary. Others have come to think that “parachurch” is just as much “church” as any local body of believers, and they have a point. This may explain why specific ministries have grown up in the last century, but it cannot explain the reason so few churches chose to minister to troubled youth through enabling volunteers. Mark Chaves, in his recent work *Congregations in America*, looked at what more than 300,000 churches, synagogues, mosques and temples do and concluded: “At present, most congregations engage only minimally in social services, and typically the few that do engage more deeply rely heavily on paid staff,

¹¹ Becker, 16-17.

involve relatively few congregational volunteers, conduct their efforts in collaboration—including financial collaboration—with secular and government agencies.”¹²

A cursory glance of other studies seem to suggest consistent patterns of congregations actively involved in social service ministries. Heidi Unruh and Ronald Sider, in their 2005 work, *Saving Souls, Serving Society*, comment upon the work of Chaves and others and conclude, “Indisputably, the great majority of congregations engage in efforts to improve the well-being of those outside their membership. Findings from national studies on the percentage of congregations that sponsor social services range from 57% (Chaves) to 80% (Rozen and Dudley 2001) to 87% (Hodkinson and Weitzman 1993).”¹³ They go on to use the 1993 work of Virginia Hodkinson and Murray Weitzman to conclude that “about half of church members volunteer through their congregations, and about half of this time is channeled into activities that reach beyond the church membership.”¹⁴

However, the sheer numbers do not reflect the kind of social service involvement or the long-term commitment required to meet the needs of troubled youth. “The impressive breadth of congregation-based social services, however, does not appear to be matched in depth. Most congregation-sponsored programs provide a limited commodity to meet urgent one-time needs, such as food, clothing or emergency financial service....Moreover, churches tend to balk at serving particularly disenfranchised populations...”¹⁵ The point is that few congregations, evangelical or otherwise, have

¹² Chaves, 78.

¹³ Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

shown much interest in intentionally committing themselves long term to social service type ministries. “The historical reality, however, is that at no time in the twentieth century were more than a tiny minority of congregations deeply involved in social services.”¹⁶

Furthermore, the inherited character of many evangelical churches today has hindered the social service aspect of their mission. Like the typical American frontier characteristics they value, many churches often have an attitude favoring the autonomy of one’s own community, denomination, or group. They are answerable “only to God.” They are self-reliant and independent. They often choose to start their own new work rather than to join what God is doing through someone else. Seeing little success in their own ministry they keep a low profile or choose to use new ministry methods proven to work efficiently somewhere else. But if the individual church has little respect for church tradition, they can also come to hold a more independent view of the larger mission of the community of God.

Moreover, they are pragmatic. Most evangelical churches have assimilated this acculturated American pragmatism into their mission intentions. If the church cannot do the job, it will turn to someone who can. Consequently, whole denominations as well as local congregations often subordinate their mission to procedure and program methods that seem to make sense in the “real” world. Unfortunately, this tendency for pragmatism jeopardizes ministries that are understood to be more resource costly, less efficient, and not highly productive. Needless to say, ministries to young people like Loren are put at risk. They are not seen to be market-effective or cost-efficient.

¹⁶ Chaves, 79.

This pragmatic view of the church's purpose has led many congregations to change how they do ministry and fulfill their God-given mission. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ingrained "marketing" of the church. Simply put, many modern evangelical churches have chosen to become more practical and market driven than mission-oriented. This market driven interest in many churches is detrimental to building incarnational relationships with troubled youth and training volunteers how to disciple these youth into a local church community.

Retuning to the narrative above, one would have to acknowledge that Carl's desire to "evangelize" Loren is not working well. But from Carl's standpoint his efforts are entirely understandable. He believes that getting Loren to verbalize his spiritual need for salvation is the most important reason for building a relationship. Today, success is judged by "getting a decision" and improving the number. Consequently, Loren's verbal commitment is seen as the ultimate response to the Great Commission. Yet one has to ask if this is really God's intent for building a relationship with at-risk young people like Loren? Eddie Gibbs emphasizes this point:

Commercial interests divide the world into a plethora of narrowly segmented and precisely defined markets. If the message and services one wishes to extend only relate to certain segments, then the marketing task is to discover the location, size and accessibility of that market. However, the gospel is not a "product" developed for a restricted market. The church is mandated to pass on the message that has brought it into being to all peoples everywhere. This cannot be undertaken by a simple "blanket-cover" approach but has to be contextualized for each people group. In order to "broadcast" the message effectively a much more sophisticated approach must be adopted.¹⁷

Arguably, another ramification of ignoring the larger mission and purpose of the church and choosing what is most cost-efficient, pragmatic, and effective is that it has

¹⁷ Gibbs, 39.

caused many churches to primarily focus internally. All too often “churches can become so traumatized by their internal problems that they fail to notice that society at large is in the midst of a cultural shift of seismic proportions, which affects every area of society.”¹⁸ Unfortunately for those on the outside the outcome has been quite negative: “The world has seen too many petty disputes over nonessential doctrines. They’ve watched venom spew from our lips against each other. They’ve seen churches split over the most insignificant matters....They’ve seen the way we work against each other while claiming to believe a creed that speaks of ‘the communion of the saints.’ The world sees all this as hypocrisy, and they’re not wrong.”¹⁹ Richard Harries makes an even stronger indictment when he writes that

...we come to a juddering halt before the reality of the Church as it has appeared in history and as we might have experienced it ourselves. Too often in history the Church has seemed simply to reflect the prevailing outlook of society, very often its worst aspects. Too often the life of individual congregations now can seem mean and petty-minded. If the Early Church saw itself as the new human/divine society in embryo, the Church in history has hardly looked like that. Too often the Church has seemed not a sign of the kingdom of God but as just one more expression of human divisiveness, our congenital incapacity to relate to one another. This is a point we need to look straight in the face without any attempts to evade or sidestep the terrible indictment that can be made.²⁰

Yet, as disturbing as all this may be, the major result has been that many churches have failed in large part to become what God intended them to be within the culture in which they are placed. “The people around us that we’re commissioned to reach with the gospel need to hear more than the truth of Christianity. They’ve often heard truth from us. However, they remained unconvinced because they haven’t seen the evidence of that

¹⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹ Roberts and Marshall, 152.

²⁰ Richard Harries, *God Outside the Box: Why Spiritual People Object to Christianity* (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 141.

truth lived out in their lives.”²¹ In other words, the church’s practice of its mission makes little sense if its faith and practice do not have real implications within the context of the real world in which it is placed. This is true for any type of ministry but nowhere is it more significant than in applying the gospel to the social needs of troubled youth.

What, then, is the mission of the church and how does it relate to enabling volunteers to minister to troubled youth? Few could disagree with the fact that the ultimate purpose of the church is to glorify God. Few would disagree with the fact that God has revealed his intended mission for the church in his Word. Furthermore, most can accept the fact that God created the church to be a caring community of individuals whom God enables to “love one another.” However, if the very nature of our God is relational, if He enters into covenant with his creatures and seeks their partnership, what then is the essence of the church?

The New Testament, using many different images and analogies, describes the church, or *ecclesia*, as a new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in response to the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This *ecclesia* refers to a unique and transformed way of being human in relationship with God and with others. It designates a distinctive form of community characterized by inclusiveness, mutuality, interdependence, forgiveness, and love. In the *ecclesia*, power and responsibility are shared, and there is always a special concern for the weak, the poor, the despised, and oppressed.

Simply put, the church that God intends is a collection of those “called out” to live as God always intended human society to live. God’s purpose for the church

²¹ Ibid., 153.

community is more about creating a new society than reacting to the existing one. Some believe that the church should keep away from any emerging culture and become a culture of its own.²² Yet, as Richard Harries points out, one of the reasons people outside the church object to Christianity is because Christians often fail to accept this social aspect in the origin of their faith: “While Christianity has points of contact with both Buddhism and Marxism, its starting point is different. It conceives the basic problem of human existence to be not suffering as such or exploitation as such but a radical inability to relate to one another in mutual care.” Harries recognizes that

the purpose of God in creation is to bring about a universal, inclusive society, characterized by a profound mutual care that draws on the depth of love within God himself. Because this purpose is being continually frustrated, something had to be done about it. Both Judaism and Christianity teach that God himself has set out to tackle this problem. In short, God has acted to re-constitute or re-create human society on a new basis, not just leaving us to slug it out until we are exhausted.²³

That is what God did by raising up a chosen particular people to whom he disclosed the laws and principles by which a society should live and eventually flourish. As most evangelicals understand, the outcome of that story was that Israel failed, even though God remained faithful to his promise and continued to remind them of the hope of true community. Because God remains faithful to caring for his creation his work of re-creating a new society comes together in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Consequently, it is in Jesus that those “called out” learn what God desires his people to be.

So, this ecclesial life is a new covenant community of free persons centered on God’s love, incarnated in Jesus Christ, and empowered to service by the Holy Spirit.

²² Dennis McCallum, *The Death of Truth: What’s Wrong with Multiculturalism, the Rejection of Reason and the New Postmodern Diversity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996).

²³ *Ibid.*, 134.

While flawed, always in process, and continually in need of reform and renewal, the church is nonetheless the real beginning of God's new and inclusive community of liberated people reconciled to God and each other and being made new as they are called into service in the culture in which they are placed. The end, then, for which all of us were created and redeemed is deep and lasting. Communication and fellowship between an all-loving God and his creation intends for a world of justice, mercy, reconciliation, and freedom based upon the grace of God. And no matter how individualistic and exclusive a church may want to be, its origins are social and its larger purpose is derived from God.

Furthermore, God has always been in the business of social justice. It becomes very evident as one considers the written Word of God. The prophet Micah makes this plain: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Unfortunately, many who have grown up in the evangelical community have failed to recognize the transformation of justice that the Bible has occasioned.

One cannot fully appreciate the opportunity that has been missed or the one emerging in a postmodern culture until they understand the context from which Micah 6:8 is taken. Within the context lies the application and connection that can be made to an emerging culture regarding juvenile justice and the needs of troubled youth. The context of Micah 6 is God's covenant structure, God's covenant lawsuit form. Israel has violated covenant justice; therefore, God, in the words of the prophet, initiates a lawsuit against his people because there are consequences.

Without going into great detail, the Micah text is one of the many legal forms of the Bible and contains two Hebrew words often translated into English as “justice.” One, *sedāqā*, refers to God’s acts, as in Micah 6:5: “My people...Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.” The second, *mispat*, refers to man’s acts as in Micah 6:8: “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly...”²⁴

Micah sets forth an I-thou relationship between God and his people. In this relationship God redeemed his people from slavery and Israel is to respond to his redemption by doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with their creator. But it is the righteous acts of God (according to Micah 6:4-5, these include liberation from Egypt, protection in the wilderness, and the occupation of Canaan) that provide the foundation for an understanding and practice of justice.

This context of I-thou relationship is the context of all Biblical law. It is this I-thou covenant context of Biblical law that stands in contrast to all the law collections of the ancient Near East. For example, the Ten Commandments begin with “I am the Lord your God.” The text continues with “Thou shalt.” The Ten Commandments are spoken by God to his people whom he redeemed. This covenant relationship is also the context of the three great Biblical law collections: the Covenant Collection, Exodus 20-23; the Holiness Collection, Leviticus 17-26; and the Deuteronomic Collection, Deuteronomy 12-28.

This transformation of justice continues, of course, into the New Testament. In the New Testament these acts of God climax in the good news of Jesus Christ coming

²⁴ See Leslie C. Allen, *Micah* in *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1976), 364-377; and Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Interactive, 1998), compact disc.

and living among his people. Part of what it is for God to be righteous and just is his willingness to act redemptively and save creation from its enemy—death. This culminates, of course, not in the Old Testament *cultus* but in the atoning work of Christ revealed in the New Testament. Whereas in the Old Testament, justice and steadfast love were part of the covenant relationship that the elect have with God, the New Testament reveals that God so loved the world, not merely Israel. In the New Testament love (*agape*), expressed in the atonement, continues the Old Testament judicial justice and steadfast love of God. God's justice is clearly demonstrated in the crucifixion of Christ by means of his love. Judicially, God finds his people wanting, but redemptively and caringly he provides what is missing. It is on his initiative that the relationship continues. "The cross of Jesus Christ is God's claim to this world—the claim, however, not of a despot, yearning for greater power and glory, but of a lover yearning to love and be loved, and thus to liberate the beloved from false masters."²⁵

The point is that these salvation acts of God form the foundation for law and justice in both the Old and New Testaments. So in the Old Testament God's people are told to stop doing wrong, learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, take care of the widows (Isaiah 1:1ff). And in the New Testament they are reminded that

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

²⁵ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 37.

he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.²⁶

Christ reveals God's perfect justice. He shows us what the norm is and he empowers us to live it out.

What, then, is the appropriate response for any Christian person or evangelical community to God's righteous acts? The answer is that the appropriate response is not burnt offerings or sacrifice, i.e. the practice of religion and church. God's acts demand comparable acts of justice and steadfast love on the part of his people, a humble walk along with their God. There is both a relational action directed toward man and a spiritual

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²⁶ Romans 3:21-26.

believe that the primary mission of the church is evangelism and proclamation, resulting in personal reconciliation and salvation. Any intentions leading toward interpersonal reconciliation and social justice are at best secondary. Consequently, anything overtly social is not as spiritual and is less important.

Of course, evangelicals accept the fact that God sent Christ into the world to bridge the gap between his love and man's sinfulness. This was an incarnational act in which Christ, essentially as God among men, became the fleshing out of God's love in the context of the real world. They recognize that Christ himself spoke of his ministry when he quoted Isaiah at the outset of his ministry in Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Yet many evangelicals tend to spiritualize this and similar passages. For them passages like "recovery of sight for the blind" means a bringing of "spiritual" sight only to those who were formerly blinded by the fact of their sinfulness and bondage to sin. It is true that man is inherently sinful and sin does have lasting physical consequences. Nevertheless, the very example of Christ's ministry while on earth and his relation to people in need seems to refute a simple spiritualization of this passage. True, Christ's ultimate mission, motivated by God's infinite love is deeply significant because of what he has done to restore humanity and a way for individual reconciliation through his death and resurrection. Yet being saved *from* sin is not the only reason Jesus Christ came to a suffering world.

Evangelism is a significant part of the mission of any Christ-centered community but, as Michael Green correctly recognizes,

The mission of the church is, of course, much broader than evangelism. It embodies the total impact of the church on the world: its influence; its involvement with the social, political, and moral life of the community and nation where it is placed; its succor of bleeding humanity in every way possible. This mission includes evangelism. The greatest thing we can do for people is to bring them face-to-face with Christ who died for them. But it is clear that evangelism is one aspect, and one only, of the total mission of the church.²⁷

What is it that those in the kingdom were saved *for*? God also demonstrated his love for us through Christ's healing of the sick, raising the dead, restoring sight to the blind, and releasing the oppressed. The Gospel is intimately personal but also radically social for every person is deeply enmeshed and socialized in and through social relationships. Simply put, there is no single "individual gospel" apart from God's "social gospel."

Leslie Newbigin addresses this misunderstanding of the church's mission as one of two misguided concepts regarding the purpose of the gospel. On the one hand there are those who believe that "The gospel...is about God's kingdom, God's reign over all nations and all things. At the heart of the Jesus' teaching is the prayer: 'Your kingdom come; your will be done, as in heaven so on earth.' The central responsibility of the Church is indicated by that prayer. It is to seek the doing of God's will of righteousness and peace in this world."²⁸ Such a view is understood to confront Satan at his societal roots and result in the sharing of goods and services to alleviate the suffering and injustice of individuals.

But for many evangelical churches such a view seems to suggest left-wing politics and dissent, or at least something that seems contrary to biblical example and good

²⁷ Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1992), 9.

²⁸ Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 135.

citizenship. They fear the possibility of losing a soul for the sake of changing a system and, as a result, limiting the growth of the church. However, by elevating the importance of proclamation and individual salvation over interpersonal and societal reconciliation churches also risk misunderstanding God's incarnational mission for the church:

On the one hand, there are those who place exclusive emphasis on the winning of individuals to conversion, baptism, and church membership. The numerical growth of the church becomes the central goal of mission. Action for justice and peace in the world is a secondary matter. It is not the heart of mission. The gospel, it is said, is about changing people, not about changing structures....The emphasis here is exclusively on the salvation of the individual soul and the growth of the Church. The primary task is evangelism, the direct preaching of the gospel in words—spoken or written. Action for social justice and peace may be a way of drawing people to hear the gospel, but it is not an intrinsic part of the gospel itself. The preaching of the gospel of salvation from sin and of the offer of eternal life is the primary business of the church.”²⁹

Troubled youth are inextricably connected to the culture and social institutions around them. Any ministry attempting to make disciples of young people has to face this fact.³⁰ Consequently, any church attempting to fulfill its mission by ignoring the social institutions, systems and cultural trends of a young person's world is doomed to failure. A theology that separates a person's physical, mental and social aspects from one's spiritual being is inadequate theology at best. The same can be said about God's purposes for the church, as Grenz points out in his *Theology for the Community of God*:

Classical theology rightly affirms that God's program in the world is directed to individuals in the midst of human sin and need. Unfortunately, this emphasis—correct as it is—all too often settles for a truncated soteriology resulting in an inadequate ecclesiology. The program of God includes the salvation of the individual, of course, but it overflows the human person in solitary aloneness. Our salvation occurs in relationships, not in isolation. Hence, God's purpose includes human social interaction.”³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000).

³¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 626.

In other words, God's incarnational purpose goes beyond just the "spiritual" needs of the individual young person to include socializing factors—mentally, physically, and socially.

Regrettably, because many evangelicals have been more focused on evangelism and reforming methods and programs, their churches have failed to seriously care for the holistic needs of those in trouble outside their particular community of faith.

Almost universally, what evangelicalism has been great at doing is bringing life back to cold religious form. But, evangelicalism is a parasitic movement. The great evangelical leaders are not theoreticians of institutions. Some of them are very good theologians on questions of personal salvation. They're not theologians of culture, they're not theologians of society. There are problems with the Christian outreach that is just the theology of society, but there are also problems when individual attention is so strong that culture and society is lost sight of.³²

A misunderstanding of God's mission for his church is not only an evangelical church problem. This is simply not true. Very few American congregations, regardless of denomination, have intentionally fulfilled the social gospel mission for which they were "called out." The majority of American churches are not the providers of holistic social services that many faith-based advocates have come to claim. The services that are often provided by church and religious organizations are short term and targeted to address the immediate needs of America's poor and needy, including troubled youth. Programs and services that are intentionally long term and transformational in nature are not engaged in by most churches. "Programs that appear to involve only short-term or fleeting kinds of

³² Mark Noll, "The Rise of the Evangelicals," interview by Rob Moll. *Christian History Newsletter* (23 June 2005). Available: www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2005/jun23..

contact with the needy are far more common among congregations than programs that involve more intensive or long-term, face-to-face interaction.”³³

But that does not necessarily mean that people inside the church do not understand the need to be salt and light to the people they meet in the real world. Ammerman, for instance, maintains that that the majority of people inside the church are not significantly impacted in this regard by classic church-based expectations. The average people, she writes, “feel much freer than do professional idealogues to put together ideas and practices from very large cultural tool kit. These ideas may not appear to form a coherent intellectual system, but they contribute to workable strategies of action.”³⁴

With so much attention being given to marketing, growing, and maintaining the church inside rarely are volunteers taught how to share the good news of food, legal assistance, medical care, tutoring, job training, or a myriad of other social services. Often when these social welfare efforts are emphasized and relationships developed with those in need they are hinged to proclamation as another tool of evangelism. Consequently, the message of personal reconciliation to a “captive” young person like Loren fails to connect and the intentional, long-term, transformational mission is rarely valued.

Yet for believers called out to incarnationally live as Jesus Christ to those outside the church community, what is even more sobering is how rarely the disenfranchised are intentionally assimilated into the Christian faith. Chaves, drawing his conclusions from the 1998 National Congregations Study, makes this plain:

³³ Ibid, 59.

³⁴ Nancy Ammerman, *Congregations and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 358.

Case studies of congregations that are more actively involved in social services sharpen the picture that emerges from survey results. This body of research shows that even when congregations are more actively involved in social services, that activity rarely brings the needy into the life of the congregation. The more typical situation is one in which the people served by a congregation's human needs programs remain at quite a social distance from the congregation's members. *If the holistic and personalistic character of congregation-based social services is meant to emerge from the integration of the needy into a faith community, it is important to recognize how rarely this happen [emphasis added].*³⁵

Wellman draws a similar conclusion following the review of one congregation's outreach efforts when he writes that the intent of such efforts "is designed to help others, not integrate them into the community....[It is] an ideal form of lay liberal ethos that gives individuals the opportunity to help others without making the content too intimate."³⁶ Recognizing how ineffective many evangelical congregations have been in enabling volunteers to integrate troubled youth into a community of faith, one has to question just how effective many evangelical churches have been in truly incarnating the gospel to those outside. The findings of Wellman and others regarding the assimilation of needy people into a church community speaks to another shortcoming in many evangelical churches that directly impacts its mission regarding troubled youth.

God's purpose for his church goes beyond merely proclaiming his good news to being salt and light. But God's intention for any Christian community is disciple-making. So whether a local church or denomination focuses primarily upon personal proclamation, interpersonal reconciliation, or social justice issues, its purpose is to make disciples. The words of Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 vividly communicate his understanding of this: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in

³⁵ Chaves, 60.

³⁶ James K. Wellman, Jr., *The Gold Coast Church and the Ghetto: Christ and Culture in Mainline Protestantism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 172 -173.

the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus Christ was never content with mere proclamation but always called people to become followers who would respond to his kingdom message. Our Lord saw a disciple as one who becomes a follower, who is taught, who is nurtured in the faith, who in turn goes out to make disciples who are then taught and nurtured in the faith, who then continue the goal of making disciples. New disciples have always been God's human instruments used and empowered by the Holy Spirit to make disciples. Dallas Willard provides great insight when he writes: "The word 'disciple' occurs 269 times in the New Testament. 'Christian' is found three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to the disciples—in a situation where it was no longer possible to regard them as a sect of the Jews (Acts 11:26). The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples."³⁷ This intentional multiplying of disciples reflects God's strategy for growing the kingdom and, in turn, his church.

However, the process of discipleship is much more than a passive inclusion within a community of believers. It is an intentional process of spiritual faith development. The church is a community of those called out to live as God intends in the culture in which it is placed: "In short, God's program is directed toward, and is experienced in community. For this reason, the church is far more than a collection of saved individuals who band together for the task of winning the lost. The church is the

³⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1990), 258.

community of salvation.”³⁸ All who choose to follow Jesus Christ and declare their commitment to him are welcomed into the church. But the church throughout its history has always been instructed that the intentional and primary purpose of every church community is to make disciples, regardless of age, sex, cultural identity, cognitive abilities, or socialization factors. Despite this, as Willard and others recognize, “It is almost universally conceded today that you can be a Christian without being a disciple.”³⁹

This theme of intentional spiritual formation is not new but often overlooked. It has been primary in the past: “The process of formation was not left to mere hope that the new converts would mature.”⁴⁰ It will be equally important in the days to come. “In the emerging post-seeker-sensitive church, making disciples needs to be the lifeblood of the church from the beginning.”⁴¹ Consequently, disciple-making is much more than just introducing someone to Christ or encouraging them to attend church. The modern church’s concept of proclamational evangelism and the best seeker-friendly methods of outreach programming will not form disciples out of troubled youth (or any other person for that matter). But simply meeting the physical needs of the poor and hungry or changing social institutions and systems will not get the job done either.

Many evangelical churches struggle to make that happen with troubled young people. Churches misunderstand the concept of experiential spiritual formation and what it takes to intentionally make disciples into “doers of the word and not hearers only.”

³⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 627.

³⁹ Dallas Willard *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 26.

⁴⁰ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 24.

⁴¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 215.

Discipleship, the way God intends, is a whole-life commitment to intentionally learning how to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There are no boundaries of age, sex, ethnicity, or socialization factors. It is a God-given way of life in which young people process their experiences with reality and make sense for themselves out of those experiences in light of what God wants them to become. It is a commitment to holistic spiritual formation--mentally, physically, socially and spiritually—though often difficult. Again, as Dallas Willard notes, “From literal beginnings discipleship acquires metaphorical authority for all believers in Christ. The connotations of relatedness, trust and obligation endure through successive generations. The image is radical, for a changed life is fundamentally assumed; and it is dynamic, for progress and development are of the essence.”⁴² And the challenge of teaching any troubled young person how to be a disciple is essential to the process of practicing his/her faith the way God intends. As Paul tells the believers in Colossae,

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done. Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ. For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe.⁴³

Discipleship, therefore, defines what new believers are called to become. But again this is a difficult challenge for any church. The process of discipleship is much more than mere “religious influence,” “religiosity,” and “delinquency prevention.”

Environmental factors contribute to growth but do not cause growth to occur. In some

⁴² Ibid, 209.

⁴³ Colossians 2:6-10, New Living Translation.

respects all any church or volunteer can do is help or hinder holistic growth and development. Teachers, parents, and caring volunteers all have an influence in the discipleship process by providing input, stimuli, and experiences but what it means to be a disciple only occurs within the learner.

Clearly the content of choice for any evangelical community intentional about doing discipleship is the Bible. Scripture is God's Word as well as His works. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). A new disciple cannot understand what God has done apart from God speaking and connecting His words to His works. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16).

Through the centuries, people in the Christian faith have realized that fact and have made the Bible the best selling book in history. Unfortunately, the overwhelming number of people who own Bibles do not read them much. And the number one reason given for not reading the Bible is the perception of irrelevance.⁴⁴ "After all, the Bible was written thousands of years ago in a time and culture a lot different from mine." In other words, most people, even those who own Bibles, do not believe that the Bible has anything to say to them in their time. And so they relegate God's "inspired" Word to the spiritual areas of their lives and leave it at that.

This perception of irrelevance, of course, does not mesh with the practical advice of James: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

⁴⁴ George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1990).

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25). In other words, according to James, troubled youth are to *do* what the Bible says, not just read and know about it. In commenting upon the purpose of the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul wrote: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Again, “learning” God’s story must be experiential.

It is clear that those invited into the Christian faith are learning to become disciples of Jesus Christ by becoming *doers* of God’s Word and not just *hearers* or *students* of it. As Willard notes, “Discipleship to Jesus is, within clearly defined limits, not a matter of what I do, but of how I do it. And it covers everything, ‘religious’ or not.”⁴⁵ So, the connection between one’s understanding of what Scripture is and what it is intended to accomplish—the outcome—cannot be separated, anymore more than the mission of the church can be limited to proclamation or social concern. Putting the content into practice and becoming a “doer” is God’s intended outcome for every disciple and should be integrally connected to the primary mission of the church.

When the church recovers the importance of making disciples it is able to recover what it means to be a Christian community and fulfill its purpose. No one can make a disciple apart from the ministry of the community. The very process of making a disciple

⁴⁵ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 284.

is not something that can be done alone or between just two people. True, authentic discipling can only happen inside a community of faith where becoming disciples is the expected life outcome and the process is something more than culturally relevant.

Grenz addresses this fact when he writes,

The fellowship of Jesus' followers is not merely a loose coalition of individuals who acknowledge Jesus....It is a community of disciples who seek to walk together in accordance with principles of the kingdom....This forms the ultimate reason why the goal of evangelism is disciple making. The Spirit directs his great creative work toward establishing the eschatological community, a people that are bonded together by their mutual obedience to God revealed in Jesus. It is their commitment to living as Jesus' disciples which facilitates the mutuality that characterizes the community they form.⁴⁶

In other words, the process of helping an at-risk young person become a “doer” of the Word has to be intentionally done within a community of believers. Leslie Newbigin hits the nail on the head when he says that only a community like this can serve as the real hermeneutic of the gospel.⁴⁷ This has always been the case but even more so as the culture moves into postmodernity.⁴⁸ Tony Jones recognizes that “postmodern students want *real* more than *relevant*. The church needs to be what it is: a sacred community of persons who follow a mysterious and demanding Lord....The church is different. And to be taken seriously, we must be on guard, always measuring our youth ministries in terms of their authenticity and integrity.”⁴⁹

All of this of course means very little if volunteers remain Christians in a spiritual sense only, without their faith having real implications within the context of a world that needs to experience an ongoing relationship with Jesus. God's dealings with his people in

⁴⁶ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 656-657.

⁴⁷ Newbigin, 222-223.

⁴⁸ See Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

⁴⁹ Tony Jones, *PostModern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 90.

the Old Testament were driven by his concern for them expressed in the most practical ways through deliverance from oppression and his provision of food and water. God's sending of Christ into the world was an incarnational act in which Christ, as God living among men, became the fleshing out of his love in the context of the real world. God's incarnate compassion in Jesus Christ is extended to the whole person, culminating in personal wholeness and spiritual regeneration through faith through the commitment of volunteers. By the indwelling grace and love of God volunteers extend God's love and hope to troubled youth. Essentially that is what the mission of volunteers has always involved and the reason it has been effective.

CHAPTER 5. VOLUNTEER EFFECTIVENESS

Introduction

Those within the evangelical community interested in addressing the challenge of making disciples out of troubled youth in the emerging culture should not underestimate the impact volunteers can have. As pointed out above, many Christian parents, teachers, and adults often live in a world with which the troubled adolescent has little in common. Furthermore, because of time, fear, and the belief that working with delinquents requires “professionals,” adults tend to back off and are often reluctant to volunteer. Yet these same adults have the responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission by caring for those young people at risk. Jesus himself gave the most dramatic motive for volunteering to help troubled youth in his admonition about those who are hungry, thirsty, alone, naked, and in prison: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). For this reason alone, non-paid caring adults can have a significant impact on the problem. But the sheer number of volunteers available, the practical, proven benefit of an adult mentor involved in the life of an at-risk young person, and the track record of volunteer effectiveness all combine to support the assertion of this study that church-based efforts can have a tremendous impact, effectively making disciples of troubled youth.

The Historic Role of Volunteers

The actual practice of volunteering to help troubled youth is nothing new; in fact, it is very old. Many trace the concept of volunteers back to the time of the Greeks when a man by the name of Damon volunteered his time to help his friend Pythias. The story is that Pythias had been thrown in jail and was about to be executed. Damon, knowing Pythias wanted to say goodbye to his family, volunteered to take his place so Pythias could go home and visit. The King was so deeply touched by the friendship he arranged for Pythias' release and pardon with one condition: that they tell the king the secret of their deep and abiding friendship.¹ Thus, the idea of volunteering to help a young man in trouble goes back at least to antiquity and often in conjunction with institutions of the state.

In early America, colonial justice was simple and direct for both young and old alike, consisting mainly of immediate punishment and warehousing of offenders. By the late 1700s, however, it became evident to many who cared that conditions for prisoners were intolerable. As early as 1787, a group formed in Philadelphia to focus on the main stream of prisoners. The Philadelphia Society for the Alleviation of Public Prisons led the way for "humane societies" in caring for the physical needs of prisoners. Though the state provided some care for other offenders, many imprisoned debtors of all ages were completely dependent upon volunteer help.² With deplorable conditions in the physical and social realm spiritual programming was virtually non-existent: "Now and then some

¹ See Vernon Fox and others, *History of Volunteers in Juvenile and Criminal Justice*, National Education-Training Program Booklet (Royal Oak, MI: National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Volunteers In Probation Division, 1981), 7-8.

² Susan J. Ellis and Katherine H. Noyes, *A History of Americans as Volunteers* (Philadelphia: Energize Books, 1978), 11-13.

society, or some individual, shocked at this state of affairs, would see to it that the Bible was read a few times and a few sermons preached.”³

Approximately thirty years later in 1821, a group of Philadelphia citizens determined to “save young children from falling into vicious ways”⁴ organized to address this problem. The group of volunteers studied the problem and concluded that the cause of youthful crime was lack of education. They proposed the establishment of training schools as a long-range solution but, realizing they had to solve the immediate problem, they mobilized a group of volunteers. “The young men had a public meeting and chose seven of their number for each city ward and assigned them the duty of rousing the people to take vigorous measures to suppress the alarming nightly depredations on persons and property of our citizens.”⁵ Interestingly, especially for our purposes, is the fact that assisting in the effort to control crime by juveniles at this time were black citizens, such as members of the Philadelphia African Methodist Church, who pledged themselves to assist the Mayor’s anti-delinquency campaign.⁶

The approach of using citizen volunteers to maintain law and order continued to grow. The upheaval of the Civil War did little to dissuade volunteer based nineteenth-century justice. Yet the role of volunteers began to change as they played a large role in apprehending, trying, and punishing youthful offenders. Vigilantism began to grow, especially as a reaction to the political and racial conflicts of Reconstruction. At a time when substantial change in America was being fostered by war and altered in social

³ John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1884), 544.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 540.

⁶ *Ibid.*

institutions, a special field of child welfare was being carved out as an undifferentiated response to the poor and helpless. By the late 1800s the Age of Rescue was being driven, in large part, by a faith community of caring volunteers. Anthony Platt points out that these “child savers” were a generation, mainly women, who sought to “domesticate” both humanitarian Christian zeal and the learning of behavioral sciences in the interest of practical reform.⁷

Perhaps the most far-reaching development attributed to volunteer involvement at the end of this period was the separation of juvenile justice from the adult court process. Concern for the harsh treatment of “paupers” and juvenile offenders led volunteers to crusade for the formation of the “juvenile courts.” In the forefront were the church and women’s clubs of their day. The reward for this determined volunteer involvement came in 1899, when both Chicago and Denver established juvenile courts, staffed almost totally by volunteers until the late 1920s.

The objective of the new juvenile court was to avoid the stigma of crime by creating a new mechanism for dealing with child offenders. Criminal procedure was abolished and replaced by non-adversary or chancery court proceedings, a legal device based upon a medieval philosophy that a young person who commits an illegal act should be considered someone whose socialization is so needy that the state is warranted to step in and act as the child’s parent (the *parens patriae* philosophy). Re-education rather than punishment was the goal. The desire was to enlighten and save these youth and caring adult volunteers were seen to be the primary providers.⁸ In a nutshell, the volunteer-led

⁷ See Anthony Platt, *The Child Savers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

⁸ Interestingly, ever since the Supreme Court settled the question regarding the procedural safeguards in cases that might result in the incarceration of juvenile offenders (*In re Gault*, 387 U.S. 503, 1967), there has been a debate over the motivation behind the “child savers” of the late nineteenth and early

juvenile reformation movement in the nineteenth-century can be summarized as follows:

“Youthful offenders were removed from harsh surroundings and from association with adult criminals and placed in special institutions or private homes where they were treated from an educational and constructive rather than a punitive point of view—as changing concepts of childhood... dictated.”⁹

The movements pertaining to the interests of child welfare and juvenile justice often coincided in the early 1900s, as exemplified by the push for child labor and compulsory education laws. By the mid-1890s the Salvation Army, which had originated in England, was a familiar sight on the streets of America up and down the East Coast. The open air evangelism ministry remained the heart of the movement but volunteer efforts grew to include child welfare and justice concerns. Volunteerism was so much a part of the movement that “in 1892 Marshall Ballington Booth, the national commander, enrolled the fifteen hundredth officer in the United States: three years later there were two thousand officers serving in six hundred corps and twenty-four slum and rescue stations.”¹⁰ Interestingly, over the next few years discord over leadership and American versus English control would spin off a new volunteer movement in March, 1896—Volunteers In America.¹¹ Similarly, the Big Brothers Association, founded in 1903 in Cincinnati, paired volunteers with needy boys and the Big Sisters Association, founded in

twentieth century. Platt, for instance, has argued that these volunteers who worked to create the juvenile court were influenced less by a concern for the children’s welfare and more to carve out a meaningful role for themselves. Others, like Ellen Ryerson, *The Best-Laid Plans: America’s Juvenile Court Experiment* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) argue that these volunteers were motivated out of a sincere, dedicated desire to establish an agency that would result in constructive laws and reforms. What seems evident is that for whatever reason they became involved they were connected to the religious communities of their day.

⁹ Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 122.

¹⁰ Edward H. McKinley *Marching To Glory: The History of the Salvation Army in the United States, 1880-1992*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

1908 in New York City, was specifically committed to working with court-referred youth.

Juvenile courts continued to be developed across the country, initially staffed by volunteers who provided the parental care at the direction of judges but, as the era progressed, paid court staff gained increasing importance while volunteers were pushed into more supplemental roles. The rationale for this change was that the state had the primary responsibility to provide the social services needed for their rehabilitation. As a result, churches began to turn inward. By the 1940s the trend toward “professionalism” virtually shut out volunteer involvement. The priority of the system remained “rehabilitation” rather than punishment or justice, despite the growing paucity of resources and caring adult volunteers, the lack of which ironically undermined the quality of the facilities and the services that were suppose to rehabilitate these troubled youth.

In retrospect there are many examples of this fact. Youngsters sent to juvenile detention centers and training schools, originally set up to care for, protect, and rehabilitate, became places where kids were likely to be brutalized. Supreme Court Justice Abraham Fortas, in his majority opinion about the landmark case *In re Gault* that assured the legal right of due process for juveniles, referred to the “kangaroo court” atmosphere in which juveniles were tried: “The child receives the worst of both worlds: that he gets neither the protections accorded to adults nor the solicitous care and regenerative treatment postulated for children.”¹² Unfortunately, between the early 1900s and the mid-1930s the church in America removed itself from any active involvement in the lives of troubled youth.

¹² See *In re Gault*, 387 U.S.1 (1967); or *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. 541 (1966) for examples of the ways in which judges, courts and other mandated facilities up until this time violated the spirit of the *Gault* decision.

One might wonder what this short review of American volunteerism and juvenile justice has to do with the evangelical church today. Certainly, one can understand that any historical review of America's social welfare movement has to recognize the significant role church-based volunteers have played in helping troubled youth. Historically, it has been the responsibility of the church to care for the needs of poor and disenfranchised youth in communities and our society as a whole. Over the years, as the government assumed the role of *parens patriae* and increased its public assistance and social welfare programming, the church slowly phased out of the care-giving role it once had volunteered to lead. Although state institutions were making the financial and legal provision for many youth, the deeply-rooted emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs soon overwhelmed these institutions and these needs were no longer met, to say nothing of the responsibility those in the church had to make disciples of these same youth. Even though church-based volunteers abdicated their responsibility in the first quarter of the twentieth century, many professionals within the Juvenile Justice System would come to understand this as a mistake.¹³

The Current Situation

The fact that many church-based volunteers today often refrain from providing the primary social service care for troubled youth is difficult to understand if not

¹³ One indication of this fact is the proliferation of court-supported volunteer movements across the United States beginning in the 1960s. The amount of literature that supports this fact abounds. One quotation will make the point: "In 1960, the juvenile and adult misdemeanor courts, which deal with 80-90 percent of all future felons in our land, were called 'lower' courts, 'inferior' courts and 'minor' courts. ... In another decade it will not be true at all.... What then has made them so strong? The answer is simple: volunteers. Starting with virtually no courts in 1960, the volunteer movement spread to about twenty-five courts in 1967. By 1969, perhaps 200 courts... In 1971, between 1,500 and 2,000 courts... Within a decade, approximately one million volunteers will be involved...." Keith J. Leenhouts, "Volunteers in the Lower Courts The Weak Become Strong," *Judicature* 55, no. 6 (Jan-Feb 1972): 239.

worrisome. Understandably, there are those who doubt the effectiveness of laypeople working with troubled youth and believe the primary responsibility rests with the state. Yet for those concerned with addressing the problem of at-risk youth in our emerging culture there are valid reasons to not underestimate the positive impact church-based volunteers can have.

Organized religion continues to play a significant role in American life. The religious fervor of the 1950s and the threat of “cold war” seemed to spawn a time of religious revival but, in retrospect, observers recognize it was more a time of shallow participation than grounded theological belief. The turmoil of the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement led many baby-boomers away from their parents’ denominations. Liberal, mainline, and Roman Catholic churches declined and over the last decade many voiced a rather pessimistic view of Christianity in America. But reports of the death of organized religion in America and religious sentiment have been greatly exaggerated. Over the last two decades civic involvement has been deeply influenced by the commitment to religious organizations and churches. The proliferation of news articles related to religion and society continues.¹⁴

Since the end of the Second World War—the time when church-based volunteers took a back seat to the “professionalism” of the state—we have witnessed what Roger Finke and Rodney Starke have aptly described as the “churching of America,” resulting in a nation with an estimated half million churches, temples, and mosques, 2,000 or more religious denominations, and an unknown number of independent churches by the mid-

¹⁴ See www.religionandsocialpolicy.org.

1990s.¹⁵ In 1995, Gallup's Religion Index, an on-going measurement of eight key religious beliefs and practices, hit a ten-year high.¹⁶ From the famous nineteenth-century observations of Alexis de Tocqueville¹⁷ to the latest findings of research and social science, it is abundantly clear that Americans have been, and continue to be, a religious people. "The United States," observes George Gallup, Jr., "is one of the most devout nations of the entire industrialized world, in terms of religious belief and practice."¹⁸

Certainly the re-emerging interest in religion and spirituality (not church attendance, much less involvement) has been driven in part by an emerging postmodernism. But belief in "God" remains the norm in America, with levels of belief ranging between 94 percent and 99 percent over the past five decades. Claims of membership in church, synagogue, or similar place of worship have ranged from a high of 75 percent in 1947 to a low of 65 percent in 1988 and 1990 and remain open to interpretation. Indeed, the words of Mark Chaves seem to be a purposeful caution:

Today, about two thirds of Americans say they are members of a church or synagogue. These rising membership numbers, however, are potentially misleading about underlying religious participation because congregations have become much less exclusive clubs than they were at earlier points in our history. Thus, a historic increase in formal church membership may not be a valid indicator of a historic increase in religious participation.¹⁹

However, the fact remains that religion plays a significant role in the American experience and has impacted voluntarism.

¹⁵ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

¹⁶ George Gallup, Jr., "Emerging Trends," *Princeton Religious Center* 18, no. 3 (March, 1996): 5.

¹⁷ Observing America in the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville, the noted Frenchman, made much of the "principal of association" as he called it. He felt this caused Americans to establish voluntary organizations of all kinds. Such organizations, he believed, were America's substitutes for the more stable institutions and class relationships of Europe.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ Chaves, 30.

Religious volunteers are the primary resource of compassion, empathy, and altruism available in America today, not only because of religious affiliation but also because of motivation. Frankly, “religious people are far more likely than secularists to have these feelings (of compassion).”²⁰ Research continues to find that the religious volunteer’s connection with one’s church proves to have a positive impact on one’s motivation to become involved: “Frequency of church attendance and membership in church organizations correlates strongly with voluntary service. People who attend services once or more are approximately twice as likely to volunteer as those who attend rarely if ever.”²¹ Surveys consistently show that active church attendees are more likely to give both time and money to voluntary organizations, including efforts that have no direct connection to church.²² Furthermore, Robert Wuthnow and others suggest that the higher level of volunteering in the United States compared to contemporary societies may be the result of America’s religious participation. Whatever the reason, it is hardly surprising that, as Greeley notes, the best available data suggest religious organizations and “relationships related to their religion” are clearly the major forces in mobilizing volunteers in America. Amazingly, even a third of purely secular volunteers who did not volunteer for specifically religious purposes and activities also relate their service “to the influence of relationships based upon their religion.”²³

²⁰ Arthur C. Brooks, “Compassion, Religion and Politics,” *Public Interest* 157 (Fall, 2004): 57.

²¹ Andrew Greeley, “The Other Civic America: Religion and Social Capital,” *The American Prospect* 32 (May-June, 1997): 70.

²² Virginia Hodgkinson and Murray Weitzman, *From Belief to Commitment: The Community Service Activities and Finances of Religious Congregations in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, n.d.).

²³ *Ibid.*, 72.

Over the last twenty years politicians from both major parties have recognized the connection between religion, volunteers, and social service. They have advocated voluntarism, citing the many beneficial outcomes that can result. Former President Bush set up a White House office to promote voluntarism and supported the creation of The Points of Light Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to connecting volunteers with social problems. During his administration, Congress passed legislation that created the Commission for National Service. During President Clinton's administration, Congress reauthorized the National Service Legislation and set up the Corporation for National Service that would oversee his newly-created AmeriCorps program as well as other volunteer agencies. Most recently, President George W. Bush established the U.S. Freedom Corps to foster a culture of service, has encouraged faith-based partnerships by establishing the White House Office on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and has repeatedly called upon every American to volunteer. Even with differences over how "faith-based" efforts can be implemented, the role of government programs, and the utilization of religious volunteers, it is hard to imagine how anyone can disagree with President Bush's comment that "government does not have a monopoly on compassion."²⁴

Needless to say, such government-encouraged initiatives with religious organizations that are often highly dependent upon volunteers have triggered a lot of debate.²⁵ Some argue against such initiatives on constitutional grounds; others are concerned that pragmatically such ventures would undermine the efficacy and scope of

²⁴ George W. Bush, "Faith in the Future of Texas," as cited in *Policy Review* (Nov-Dec, 1998): 92.

²⁵ See E.J. Dionne Jr. and Hsu Chen Ming, eds. *Sacred Spaces, Civic Purposes: Should Government Help Faith-Based Charity?* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 331-364.

services. Interestingly, from the beginning arguments have even arisen from more conservative elements that charge that such initiatives do not go far enough.²⁶ Others support faith-based initiatives, arguing that they provide a necessary corrective to a long-term government bias against religious programs.²⁷ Regardless of where one stands, one thing seems to be sure: the sheer scope of the welfare problem is beyond the resource capabilities of churches, religious programs, and not-for-profit ministries: “Even if all 353,000 religious congregations in America doubled their annual budgets and devoted them entirely to the cause of social services, and even if the cost of government social welfare programs was magically cut by one-fifth, the congregations would barely cover a year’s worth spending on (social) programs and never even come close to covering program costs.”²⁸ Again, the fact remains that America’s social welfare needs cannot be addressed by churches and non-profit ministries without the assistance of church-based volunteers.

Granted, the value of a volunteer’s time, the quality of volunteer work, and the individual’s skill, motivation, and interest in ministry with troubled youth all need to be considered. Studies have often found that the reasons people volunteer are many and varied. For example, Brudney cites a 1988 Gallup poll pointing out that helping others is the most frequently cited reason (56%), followed by 35% who claimed they enjoyed the work, 30 % who had an interest in the activity, 22% who volunteered for religious

²⁶ Dana Millbank and Thomas B. Edsall, “Faith Initiative May Be Revised; Criticism Surprises Administration.” *Washington Post* (March 2001), 12.

²⁷ See Unruh and Sider, 15-22.

²⁸ John DiLulio, speech delivered at the National Association of Evangelicals, Dallas, Texas, 07 March 2001, as cited in Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice. From the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 203.

reasons, and 9% who volunteered because they wanted to gain experience.²⁹ But across the board the substantial number and dollar value of volunteers, both religious and secular, is without question. According to a comprehensive study done for Independent Sector:

- Forty-four percent of adults over 21 in America volunteer. This represents a total of 83.9 million volunteers, 63% of whom serve on a regular basis, averaging 3.6 hours per week.
- This service is equivalent to over 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion.
- Seventy-one percent of adults volunteered when asked.
- Forty-two percent both give and volunteer.³⁰

Typically, people often have more than one reason for volunteering. Very often, by giving their time and assistance volunteers benefit themselves, not only the recipients of their efforts. For some, it rekindles a sense of community and bridges the gulfs that exist within our society. Individuals both within and outside the church tend to move within relatively small spheres, stratified by age, race, class, and environment.

Volunteering, especially in an organization to which one does not belong, is a powerful way to reconnect with the social reality outside one's own worlds. Volunteer programs, for example, bring the primarily middle-class Christian public into the classrooms of low-income children in poor schools. The children benefit and the mentors learn about the difficulties of growing up poor. Volunteering can also provide physical benefits to

²⁹ James L. Brudney, *Fostering Volunteer Programs in the Public Sector: Planning, Initiating and Managing Voluntary Activities* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 93.

³⁰ "Giving & Volunteering in The United States 2001" (Independent Sector, n.d., accessed November 2005). Available at www.independentsector.org/programs/research/gv01main.html.

seniors who make excellent tutors.³¹ The point is that both the reasons and benefits of volunteerism are many and varied both for the adult volunteer and the young person being helped.

Finally, for those concerned about addressing the challenge of troubled youth in an emerging culture, the value of the volunteer mentoring process itself cannot be underestimated. The underlying religious presupposition with mentoring is that Christian adults who feel loved by God through an experience of personal redemption and forgiveness will be motivated to love unconditionally troubled youth. Typically, this unconditional willingness to mentor has proven to be far more effective for troubled youth than the efforts of secular professionals.

Mentoring, as we know it today, also has historic volunteer roots. It goes back to the early twentieth century (1904) when Ernest Coulter founded a new movement to connect “big brothers” to children in need. Like thousands of troubled youth today, those boys were in need of socialization, firm guidance, love, and connection with positive role models. Today, “mentoring programs for disadvantaged children and adolescents have received serious attention as a promising approach to enriching children’s lives, addressing their need for positive adult contact, and providing one-one support and advocacy for those who need it.”³²

Of course, strong mentoring relationships do not happen automatically nor are they a panacea for addressing the socializing problems of all troubled youth. However, an

³¹ See Marc Freedman, “Seniors in National and Community Service,” *Public and Private Ventures* (1994): 7.

³² Jean Baldwin Grossman and Eileen M. Garry, “Mentoring—A Proven Delinquency Prevention Strategy,” *Juvenile Justice Bulletins* (United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, April 1997), 1.

18-month study by the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention concluded that "mentored youth were 46% less likely to use drugs...27% less likely to initiate alcohol use...31% less likely to hit someone"...36% less likely to skip a class...52% less likely to skip school." Plus, they got along better with their parents and improved their relationships with their peers.³³ Research further shows that the longer a mentoring relationship lasts, the more positive the outcome. From the standpoint of the child's behavior the most negative factor is when a relationship is severed too quickly.

Today, once again, prevention is thought to be one of the emerging directions in the research, policy, and practice of working with at-risk young people. Research continually finds that problems early in life are significant indicators of later offending.³⁴ Early intervention is still an urgent need. The associated risk factors are both individual and social/environmental (e.g., family, school, and peers) and can be effectively addressed in a mentoring relationship. Many studies could be cited in support of these assertions. The following makes the point well:

One of the strongest protective factors against juvenile violence is the establishment of a close relationship with at least one supportive adult....Research suggests that the unconditional acceptance of a child by an adult caregiver may be the most important factor contributing to the resiliency of a child despite the presence of multiple risk factors....This protective factor is generally effective regardless of whether the adult caregiver is a parent, teacher, or even a volunteer, which may account for the popularity and effectiveness of some juvenile mentoring programs (e.g., Big Brothers//Big Sisters of America).³⁵

³³ Ibid., 4.

³⁴ See Heilbrun et al, *Juvenile Delinquency: Prevention, Assessment and Intervention*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 111-133.

³⁵ Ibid., 28.

The importance of volunteers has not changed since the beginnings of the juvenile court. The fact is that ongoing volunteer relationships can still make a significant difference in the lives of troubled youth.

Finally, the potential impact that volunteers from the evangelical community can have should not be underestimated because of the beneficial effect religiosity has in a troubled youth's life. As shown below, any well-documented study of current research suggests a positive correlation still exists between religious involvement and the prevention of delinquency. Ironically, while the expert consensus has been that religion has either no effect or a net negative effect on delinquent behavior and socializing outcomes, the opposite has proven to be the case. American youth have been and will increasingly be exposed to religion and spirituality early in their lives and that fact can have a beneficial impact on their socialization. Consequently, volunteers committed to religious values and religious associations in their own lives are able to provide proven, effective mentoring and faith development connections. Religious mentors do have a positive role to play. Simply put, evangelical volunteers can make a difference.

CHAPTER 6. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Historical Perspectives

To this point this study has demonstrated that those interested in positively addressing the problem of troubled youth in the emerging culture should not underestimate the impact Christian volunteers can have. Volunteers have a missional mandate to confront the problem, a track record of history, a population large enough to make a significant contribution, the support of the research literature, and knowledge of the practical benefits of an adult mentor involved in the life of a troubled young person. For these reasons and others, evangelical volunteers can have a very significant impact. Yet if volunteers are going to become effective mentors, intentionally helping troubled adolescents become “doers of the word,” they are going to have to incarnate the gospel outside their church and into a subculture that is often different from that of the volunteer. Consequently, these volunteers will have to be supported, trained and taught how to contextualize the gospel most effectively in an emerging EPIC culture. If done appropriately, these caring adult volunteers can have a proven inverse effect upon the problems associated with individual troubled youth, but only if social/environmental factors are considered. In other words, volunteers can effectively make disciples of troubled youth but only if those volunteers address socialization factors that put the young person at risk in the first place. This is true not only from a missiological standpoint but from a sociological one as well.

Even though the relationship between delinquency and religion¹ has generally been thought to be historical and speculative, a review of the research supports the argument that it is valid. This research can be divided into two basic time periods, the first up to 1969 and the second from 1969 to the present. These divisions are not completely arbitrary because they will help to focus attention on the major shifts in research that have taken place since the 1920s. Such a review will also demonstrate why the evangelical church today needs to rethink the assumptions once made about religion's effectiveness, its concern about maintaining boundaries, and the context of its message.

Research findings regarding the relationship between religion and delinquency have come full circle. Over the years assumptions have been made by both secular professionals and the religious community that religion somehow prevents law-violating behavior among adolescents. Bonds to religion and religious beliefs were thought to have significant impact on the control and prevention of delinquent behavior. It is not surprising, then, as over fifty percent of the studies have shown, that religious participation inhibits crime, delinquency, and deviant behavior in general.² However, a review of the literature suggests that this relationship is not quite as simple as it once was. Recent research, for instance, suggests that religion is effective in preventing only minor

¹ Sociologists typically draw a distinction between "religion" and "church." Religion is understood to be an institutionalized set of beliefs and practices that deal with the ultimate meaning of life. Church, on the other hand, is often used to describe a distinct type of religious organization. For our purposes I have chosen to use the two terms interchangeably. The reason is quite simple: most often the differences between them lie in their relationship to the culture in which they are used. This relationship depends upon whether a religion accepts or rejects the dominant social order, and, to what extent it considers itself to be uniquely legitimate. However, even though there are differences in definition between the words "religion" and "church," most sociological research pertaining to the issue of delinquency, crime, and religion fail to distinguish between the terms, use the terms interchangeably, and use "religion" primarily. I follow that tradition here as we consider its relationship to troubled youth.

² Kirk W. Ellis and David M. Petersen, "Religiosity and Criminality: Evidence and Explanations of Complex Relationships," *Sociological Perspectives* 28 (1985): 501-520.

forms of deviance at best.³ So the question often asked is: “What difference does religion make in the lives of troubled youth?” Or, “Can a troubled young person’s religious affiliation and belief really make that much difference?” And, “What can the research tell an evangelical congregation about the emerging ecological context of troubled youth?”

Taking a step back, one can see the question of why people, including young people, hold religious beliefs has long intrigued social scientists. The power of humans to control events is limited. Accidents happen, people get sick and die, and the best-made plans are interrupted; technology cannot always predict the weather, let alone prevent earthquakes. Religion helps explain suffering and evil and the uncertainties of life. Humans need to feel that the world is comprehensible, that there is a reason for the events of their lives. Religion accounts for, and indeed celebrates, the puzzles, the ambiguities, and the paradoxes of life. Postmoderns are once again embracing this fact.

For over one hundred years, social scientists have recognized this interplay between religion and social problems. Yet the sociological assurances of modernity have again brought questions regarding religious belief to the forefront. People came to question the legitimacy of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between religious belief and social problems. The old anchor of finding a proven sociological reason and subsequent “cure” has not worked. Many today want to deconstruct religion as an institution and find out what difference, if any, it makes. For all practical purposes, as Sweet notes, postmoderns are “temperamentally allergic to [religion]....Postmoderns are not made for institutional life. The word *religion* comes from the Latin *religare*, which means to be bound to safety, to be tied to an anchor so that one is not carried away into

³ B.B. Benda and R.F. Corwyn. “Religion and Delinquency: The Relationship After Considering Family and Peer Influences,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 82-92.

the deep. Postmoderns are natural ‘lift anchor’ types.”⁴ The point is that an emerging postmodern generation is no longer willing to assume religion’s traditional role.

Yet, since the nineteenth century, views about just how religion and society relate to one another have always differed significantly. Three nineteenth and twentieth-century thinkers epitomize these contrasting views. Emile Durkheim emphasized the function of religion as basically a celebration of social order. Karl Marx, on the other hand, saw religion as an instrument of oppression used by the ruling class to wield power and cover up economic exploitation of the masses. Finally, for Max Weber, religion, in addition to being a motivator, was an agent of social change. In Weber’s view, religion deals with the problems of meaning and serves as a motivator, with different religions functioning much like railroad switchmen switching trains, directing human behavior onto various tracks.⁵

Traditionally, the literature pertaining to any possible correlation between religion and the prevention of deviance is traced to the late 1800s and the work of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim, a pioneer in the sociology of religion and particularly the concept of deviance, first began to suggest that deviance had a significant role to play in establishing social solidarity. In his work *The Division of Labor in Society* Durkheim points out that the excitement and response generated by crime bonds people together by providing a focus for their attention.

Crime brings together upright consciences and concentrates them. We have only to notice what happens, particularly in a small town, when some moral scandal has just been committed. They stop each other on the street, they visit each other, they seek to come together to talk of the event and to wax indignant in common. From all the similar impressions which are exchanged, from all the temper that gets itself

⁴ Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer, 260.

⁵ Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

expressed, there emerges a unique temper...which is everybody's without being anybody's in particular. This is the public temper.⁶

Several years later he outlined how someone interested in studying societies could distinguish between what was “normal” and “pathological.”⁷ In a work originally intended for people who wanted to systematically study societies he suggested that behavior that might look abnormal to one person might not be abnormal to somebody else. He concluded that people should be careful because even the worst kind of behavior could appear normal. But he went on to suggest that crime (deviance) was really a natural kind of social activity, “an integral part of all healthy societies.”⁸

Later, in 1912, he became interested in the social sources of religion and what the study of religion could reveal about the nature of society itself. It was during this time that he presented his functionalist view of religion in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*,⁹ where he argued that there is real merit to the role religion plays in any society. Durkheim rejected the scientific significance of psychological motives proposed by contemporaries like William James and Sigmund Freud as an explanation and argued instead for another explanation of the observation that religion is found in every society. He suggested that all societies distinguish between the “sacred”—that which is holy, inspires a certain awe, and must be treated with respect—and the “profane”—or the ordinary, everyday things that are treated casually. In short, the “sacred” for Durkheim

⁶ See Emile Durkheim, *On the Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1966).

⁷ Emile Durkheim *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. Sarah A. Solvay and John H. Mueller (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1958).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. John W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1966).

was the symbolic representation of society. Now “religion” and “society” were connected.

But Durkheim did not stop there. He went on to emphasize that religion functions to preserve and strengthen the social order. For our purposes, religion could help keep “bad” kids in check. Why? Because every religion (and, by extension, every church) not only connects people together but also strengthens that commitment through its rituals, norms, and beliefs. Thus, religion according to Durkheim has a significant role to play in any society. Religion is, in fact, man’s response to unseen and supernatural forces. These responses in turn help to define society and the context where the “supernatural” and “sacred” are allowed. But religion also serves to strengthen social norms and help define those who are “deviant.”¹⁰

Today many in the church tend to view the idea of deviance as categorically harmful: “good” young people in the church need to be separated from the “bad” outside. In other words, if one has gone against the established norm it is usually considered bad behavior and the tendency among believers is to stay away from such behavior and to protect those in the church from it. However, for Durkheim deviance can serve a number of very positive functions. It can help define and enhance conformity to rules and norms that are often ambiguous and abstract. It can provide solidarity among society’s members and protect them from those outside. It could provide a certain safety value and be an impetus for much needed change. The very idea that a little deviance can be beneficial is hard for many to fathom, especially in a religious community that values conformity. Imagine a church volunteer embracing “delinquent” behavior as a teachable moment for

¹⁰ One is reminded of the fact that much of the contemporary language of “civic association” and spiritual belief relating to delinquency prevention would have fit right in. with Durkheim’s functionalist views. See his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

making disciples. One has to wonder at times how “deviant” our Lord appeared in his society. As we will see, the role religion plays in defining what is normal and what is deviant is very important to how the church practices its ministry to troubled youth.

It is not the purpose of this study to critique Durkheim’s theory. However, it is helpful to understand that he reasoned this way and because of it, came to the conclusion that many of the experiences that people have in a society can be categorized as “religious.” He questioned the assumptions about certainty, identity, truth and the typical understanding of religious language. He laid the groundwork for those who would follow and asked questions about the inconsistency between cultural goals and institutionalized means to achieving those goals. He recognized that religions are belief systems that affirm the existence of the supernatural and are formally enacted through ritual. He understood that these same beliefs are subjective and contextualized and have direct significance for any culture and faith community. Apart from the ideas that Weber voiced about religion being an agent for social change, no one has had more influence on the theoretical correlation between religion and society than Durkheim. The questions that Durkheim raised a century ago are keys to understanding the complex relationship between religion, deviance, and the cultural value of church. This is true as much in the present for the evangelical community as it has been in the past and will be in the future.

It is not difficult to come up with practical examples of how religion and the church carries out this function of strengthening conformity to society’s norms and defining what is deviant. Religion helps to enforce or make sacred certain norms and values like the Biblical commandments “Thou shalt not kill” or “Thou shalt not steal,” which are codified norms. Religion can also encourage good, friendly, and cooperative

behavior (i.e. the story of the Good Samaritan), thus helping to maintain social stability. However, it is purposeful to point out that religions are not static; neither are churches and neither are the societies in which they are founded.

The relationship between religion and society can and often does change. This has certainly been true as American religion has evolved and given root to the evangelical movement.¹¹ Erikson, in his classic work on the study of deviance, points out that in sixteenth-century England, the Puritans were viewed as a sect. They saw “the Bible as a complete guide to Christian living, a digest of all the statutes and regulations necessary for human government.”¹² But they regarded the Church of England, with its hierarchy of bishops and elaborate rituals, as an obstacle that society had erected between people and God, as a corruption of “the Word.” They then set out to establish a holy commonwealth in which political, economic, legal, and, in fact, all institutions, were to be based upon the Scripture. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Puritans were no longer a sect on the outside, but an established church where church elders were given authority over social life and dissenters were banished. The point is that religion in America has determined how deviance was to be understood and practiced. This has always been the case. The impact of these changes becomes evident when we realize that “while American evangelicalism gained new power and visibility with the rise of megachurches during the 1980’s, its roots are actually much older. In fact, the seeds of American evangelicalism already had been planted by the time of the Revolutionary War.”¹³

¹¹ See Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 25-53.

¹² Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1996), 47.

¹³ Tomlinson, 35.

Today the evangelical church, as an integral part of our American religious culture, struggles to deal with non-conforming youthful offenders. As a religious movement it has definite ideas about deviance and which youth are “troubled,” largely by loosely combining legal, social, and spiritual definitions under the language of “normality,” “holiness,” and “righteous conduct.” Yet, regardless of how one defines “deviance,” both Christians and secular sociologists share the view that the deviant person is somehow “different” from those who manage to conform. In other words, the “deviant” is the young person on the outside of what is accepted and for many evangelicals “outside” their church.

Interestingly, over the years, researchers have found that definitions of deviance, as noted above, vary widely. This will become increasingly true in a postmodern culture with an increased pluralism of belief, values, and “God.” This is true not only from state to state but church to church. This being the case, sociologists have come to employ a much simpler tactic to solving the definition problem—namely, to let each group individually define what is delinquent/deviant behavior. Erikson is typical of this school of thought when he writes:

From a sociological standpoint, deviance can be defined as conduct which is generally thought to require the attention of social control agencies—that is, conduct about which “something should be done.” Deviance is not a property inherent in certain forms of behavior; it is a property conferred upon these forms by the audiences which directly or indirectly witness them. The crucial variable in the study of deviance, then, is the social audience rather than the individual actor, since it is the audience which eventually determines whether or not any episode of behavior or any class of episodes is labeled deviant.¹⁴

Herein lies part of the problem for many within the evangelical movement attempting to make disciples of troubled youth. Simply put, “deviance” is often

¹⁴ Erikson, 10.

determined by *the audiences that directly or indirectly witness* the behavior of troubled youth. In other words, much of what defines a young person as “troubled” lies outside the individual child. One’s “bad” behavior can only be understood when a volunteer takes into consideration both individual and environmental factors.

There are significant ramifications with defining deviant or troubled in this way. Key among them is the fact that churches and adults take a number of factors into account when they pass judgment on those they allow in or those they exclude. But the standards they use for including or excluding others may or may not be connected to the deviant act itself. Compassion comes easy when those in the church think of innocent young children who are victims of poverty or war or troubled parents. But what if the troubled youth is a homeboy, covered in tattoos, or a fifteen-year-old prostitute, or a sixteen-year-old with a drug problem? Would the ritual of a holy kiss, for instance, be in order and well received?¹⁵

Churches, by and large, define their own boundaries. Individual church communities decide which troubled young person can be included and how. Characteristics of ethnicity, economic status, peer associations, and religious affiliation are often considered. The people of many religious communities spend most of their lives in close contact with one another, sharing common experiences which make them feel like they belong to a “special kind” and live in a “special place.” Some see this as “community” building, but in the formal language of sociology this also means that they

¹⁵ Leonard Sweet, commenting upon the work of New Testament scholar William Klassen, writes, “The ritual of the ‘holy kiss’ was a way of symbolizing to rich and poor, men and women, clean and unclean, old and young, morally pure and morally not so pure, that they were loved by God beyond anything they could imagine and that God’s Spirit played no favorites.” Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 13. I use the concept of a “holy kiss” in stark contrast to the way many evangelical communities intentionally embrace some outsiders their boundaries.

are “boundary-maintaining.” The challenge is that the troubled young person is often understood to be a “deviant” (delinquent) whose activity has moved outside the margins of the group. When the church community calls him to account for the behavior, it is not only making a statement about the nature and placement of its boundaries but also risking the very relationship so vital to connecting with the individual youth.

Furthermore, each church community has a specific territory in the world, not only in the sense that it occupies a defined physical space but also in the understanding that it takes over a particular niche in culture and develops its own “ethos” or religiosity. Many evangelical churches have established their own ethos, which are often intended to set their church communities apart as special in order to maintain their boundaries. The boundaries of this ethos can differ. Sometimes they are socio-economic, ethnic, denominational, or doctrinal. Yet God intended the church to be something different: a community that intentionally opens boundaries and links the “insider” and “outsider” together through incarnational relationships. The point is that in an emerging culture the willingness of a church community to expand its boundaries and rethink the context of its message will have direct bearing on its mission to include and make disciples of deviant youth. This becomes evident as one reviews the research literature. It also becomes evident as one comes to understand the critical role volunteers have in connecting their faith to the real world of troubled youth.

Religion and Troubled Youth: A Review of the Research

As stated above, volunteers in the evangelical church can have an inverse effect upon the problems associated with individual troubled youth if the church will consider

contextual/environmental variables associated with at-risk behaviors. Research directly supports this assertion and indirectly supports the importance of contextualizing the message of the church. Traditionally, religion has been held to be influential in preventing both deviant and criminal behavior, but empirical proof has been lacking. Religiously-based programs involving many ethnic and socio-economically underprivileged groups have historically been thought to be particularly effective in handling serious situations but how much religion can directly do is highly debatable and with good reason. In a 1967 paper for the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and The Administration of Justice, Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, a Jesuit, concluded that the relationship of religion to deviant behavior is obscure.¹⁶ In other words, when religious functions are an element of social control, their role may be very ambiguous.

Interestingly, some of the early studies pertaining to the relationship between religion and criminality maintained that more criminals tend to exist in populations where either Catholics or Protestants dominate and "there are fewer criminals where atheists abound."¹⁷ However, these studies proved to be methodologically and statistically flawed, largely due to the fact that the researchers failed to relate the total number of offenders to religious populations in the areas of the country they were studying. In short, most early research failed to consider the simple fact that where religious commitment is expected of all members of a community crime can nevertheless exist among its members due to the wide diversities in their experience and attitude.¹⁸

¹⁶ Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, "The Role of Religion in Programs for the Prevention and Correction of Crime and Delinquency," *Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 315-330.

¹⁷ Cesare Lombroso, *Crime*, trans. Henry P. Horton (Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1968), 139.

¹⁸ Charles Glock, "The Sociology of Religion," *Sociology Today*, ed. Robert K. Merton and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

Over the next half century research into the relationship between religion and delinquency continued with mixed results. Between the mid-1930s and mid-to-late-1950s most studies found a positive correlation between religion and the problem of delinquency.¹⁹ However, much of this early research possessed analytical deficiencies. One of the foremost problems was that it measured religion and criminal deviance only in terms of preference, affiliation, observable church attendance, or similar variables. Other critiques during this period struggled to adequately define the variables. Robert Caldwell, for instance, in his work on criminology, argued that the moral precepts and ethical consideration of a non-religious type are so interwoven with religious principles that they cannot be separated for evaluation.²⁰

Critics of these empirical studies continue in this vein. Yet much of the early argument over the attitudes and commitment of delinquents to religion is merely a restatement of the basic question of whether religion transcends society, defining what society's ultimate values are, or whether religion, as Durkheim emphasized, is already inherent within society itself. Yet no one seemed to question the fact that in America, religion was essential to identity. The institution of the church and the experience of religion still had a role to play. Consequently, during the years between the 1920s and late 1950s there were few studies on religion in general, let alone on its relationship to the problems of juvenile crime and troubled youth. Demearth and Roof make this point when writing to other social scientists 25 years later:

As recently as two decades ago the challenge of writing an annual review of research on religion would have been to find enough to fill it—that is, enough work

¹⁹ Richard D. and Mary S. Knudten, "Juvenile Delinquency, Crime and Religion," *Journal of Religious Research* 12, no. 3 (September 1971):133-135.

²⁰ Robert G. Caldwell, *Criminology* (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), 246-247.

that was more than substantive sounding and represented a true theoretical or methodological advance. Despite the classic statements by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and others, there emerged very few works on religion in the years between 1920 and 1955 that are now deservedly recalled; however, beginning in the middle 1950's, the field has undergone what can only be described as an accelerating revival.²¹

The simple fact is that between the late 1920s and early 1960s, minimal empirical work was done pertaining to religion and the prevention of delinquency. While one researcher believed that religion could help prevent crime and delinquency if it offered the right combination of values, goals, and understanding, another saw the task of religion in preventing delinquency to be the teaching of ethical principles. Still others began to ask much larger questions: Had the advent of modern science and the beginning of technology stripped the supernatural realm of much of its power? Had the idea of religion inversely affecting delinquent behavior become outdated and "old-school"?

Despite the lack of significant research and the arguments over methodology going into the 1960s, it is fair to note that the problem was seen by some in less empirical terms.²² Others argued a similar refrain for the practical connection between the troubled youth and religious belief. It is safe to say that up until the late 1960s, the preponderance of the literature supported the idea that there was a positive, albeit practical, relationship between religion and reported delinquency. The central thrust of this idea that religion could positively benefit the problem of delinquency stemmed from a certain comfort

²¹ N.J. Demarth and W.C. Roof, "Religion: Recent Strands in Research," *Annual Review of Sociology* 2, no. 1 (1976): 19.

²² Marshall Miller, "The Place of Religion in the Lives of Juvenile Offenders," *Federal Probation* 29 (1965): 50-54. Miller, writing to probation officers in 1965, stated that troubled youth need a rational religious faith that can weather the sophisticated skepticism of their peer groups and provide a positive religious experience that can teach the dependability of God. The spiritual dimension of man, he maintained is not absent from the lives of troubled youth but functions at various levels of effectiveness.

level with both religious institutions and sociological and individual control theories.²³ Delinquents needed to be controlled and one of the most practical purposes of religion was conformity. The church, in other words, was seen to be a valuable tool or, better yet, “control agent” for taking care of a growing social problem.

Paradoxically there is a certain caution here that many in the church often failed to notice. Control theories, fathered in large part by the work of Travis Hirschi, generally assume that the tendency toward deviance is to be expected if certain controls or bonds are taken away.²⁴ In other words, they all assume one basic point: human beings, young or old, rich or poor, black or white, religious or not, must somehow be held in check if deviance is to be repressed. If controls and bonds are weak young people will commit deviant acts. Consequently, control theorists believe that delinquency is the result of a social deficiency much more than an inner “sin” problem of the heart. The answer to why a young person commits an offense rests primarily with social factors outside the actor, the troubled young person himself. So even though a young person comes into a “saving relationship” with Jesus Christ, that experience does not necessarily address one’s delinquency problem.

²³ For the purpose of this paper I have chosen to focus primarily upon sociological research that deals specifically with religiosity and delinquency. However, the cause of delinquency is multifaceted and complex. There are many theories and studies that have been done that have little to do with religion per-se. Some like Walter Reckless’s work regarding “containment” theory deals with the subject of personal controls and has attracted a great deal of attention since the late 1960s. Yet because it deals with a troubled young person’s poor self-concept this and other work is not directly related to this paper.

²⁴ See Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*. Control theories have a long and diverse history. Travis Hirschi is generally given credit for the development of Control Theory even though the broader idea of social controls could be traced back to the ideas of Thomas Hobbes. But, according to Hirschi, the best controls against a young person (or adult) getting into trouble is the bond they have with society. He went on to outline four specific bonds: attachment to conventional institutions, commitment to conformity, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in the moral validity of society’s rules. His idea was that if society and its institutions failed to strengthen these bonds a person would commit deviant acts. Psychological explanations, on the other hand, find their answer to the causes of delinquency, in most part, with the actor and his characteristics. One has to ask how much the lack of a bond between the church and troubled youth has had on the overall delinquency problem in America.

Hirschi, expanding upon Durkheim's theory of anomie,²⁵ reasoned that all youth are tempted to get into a little trouble. The question he wrestled with was not "Why do they get into trouble sometimes?" but "Why do they conform the rest of the time?" Hirschi's conclusion was that the more attached young people are to family, friends, and institutions like the church, the more they are involved in the right activities, the more they will believe and do the right thing. Consequently, control theorists attribute deviance to the inability of society, particularly of institutions like religion (and by extension the church), to regulate individuals. What this came to mean for many was that "bad" human nature must be controlled by societal institutions, like the church, which demand conformity. The practical application is that if young people are getting into trouble, conforming institutions like the church are not doing their job. It would be easy to overlook such a simplistic explanation if there were not both justice system professionals and churchgoers alike that believed the primary role of religion is to help the state control young people who are bent on misbehaving.

Fortunately, social scientists such as Albert Reiss, Ivan Nye, David Matza, and Walter Reckless began to examine a variety of sources that "controlled" delinquency.²⁶ This meant that traditional factors of control, like church attendance and family religiosity, were questioned.²⁷ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the preponderance of

²⁵ *Anomie* literally means "normlessness," a social condition in which norms are absent, weak, or seen to be in conflict.

²⁶ Many works refer to these sociologists and control theory. However, the work of Donald Shoemaker is especially helpful. See his *Theories of Delinquency*. Chapter Eight deals specifically with the history, variety, and significance of control theories.

²⁷ These sources of control were found to be important but social scientists agreed that the most important "controls" are those which resulted in the internalization of conventional norms. Furthermore, they found that when personal and social controls are weakened or absent young people are likely to get into trouble. Interestingly, each theorist was careful to stress that the lack of controls, personal or social, did

opinion about the relationship between religion and delinquency changed as baby boomers came into their own and the evangelical social conscious began to take shape. The thinking that religion's primary value was in its ability to control the delinquent began to soften. Crime was on the increase. Civil unrest, civil rights, and the war in Vietnam were forefront in the minds of many. Conflict theories were beginning to surface as the American cultural landscape began to reconsider forms of inequality and injustice.²⁸

Not only were Control Theories being questioned, but they were also being frequently dismissed. This became evident in 1969 when a widely-cited article entitled "Hellfire and Delinquency" was being circulated. Written by Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark, this study found that adolescents who frequently attend church (along with their parents) and "students who believe in the Devil and in life after death are as likely to commit delinquency as are students who do not believe in a supernatural world."²⁹ Furthermore, while Hirschi and Stark found that the attitudes of church attendees differed significantly from those of non-attendees, they also found that church attendance was "unrelated to the commission of delinquent acts, while those variables strongly related to delinquency are unaffected by church attendance."³⁰ Their conclusion that these attitudes had absolutely no correlation to delinquency changed the way many social scientists understood the relationship. The finding was significant—the inverse effect of religiosity

not necessarily result in deviant behavior. Weak parents and dysfunctional families were not the direct cause; rather, they "permit" the occurrence of such behavior.

²⁸ Richard Quinney, for instance, placed the blame of increased crime on the unjust laws that were being used by a upper class to dominate the lower classes economically. See Richard Quinney *The Social Reality of Crime* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970).

²⁹ Travis Hirschi and Richard Stark, "Hellfire and Delinquency," *Social Problems* 17 (1969): 202-213.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

on delinquency was now publicly questioned. The church and its faith were no longer thought to effectively control troubled youth. The argument spread like wildfire and its impact cannot be over-stated.³¹

What did this all mean? What the Hirschi and Stark work did was to focus attention upon what truly differentiated a truly troubled young person from any other young person with merely adolescent problems. In other words, their work caused researchers to re-ask: “What causes a young person to become delinquent, whether or not they are involved in church?” As Shoemaker notes, the work of Hirschi and Stark left several key questions unresolved.³² Researchers were now faced with the problem of determining what delinquents, which type of offenses, what church communities, and what location made the difference. Furthermore, what difference did parents, peers, religious affiliation, and belief really make to youth getting into trouble? Together, Hirschi and Stark examined beliefs about conventional authority and moral values as well as supernatural controls.

Questions about the effectiveness of religion and the church were now open for debate. Long-held beliefs about conventional authority and moral values were related to law-violating behavior but had only weak relationship to things religious. Beliefs about supernatural sanctions did help differentiate religious and non-religious ideas but this measure, in turn, was almost unrelated to a young person violating the law. The bottom line was that the beliefs affected by religious activity are “essentially unrelated to

³¹ It is important to recognize that much of the debate over the last 35 years concerning the role of religion in preventing juvenile delinquency was generated by this study. Regarding the impact on sociological circles Brent Benda and Robert Corwyn wrote, “For many this became the accepted conclusion to a long debate in the literature concerning the influence of religion on adolescent delinquent behavior.” Benda and Corwyn, 1.

³² Shoemaker, 178.

delinquencies; the beliefs and attitudes the church has been traditionally assumed to affect are in fact strongly related to delinquency, but alas for the church, it does not influence these beliefs and attitudes.”³³ This meant that church attendance and association had little if any effect on delinquency.³⁴

The findings of the “Hellfire” research did not go unnoticed. The questions that were raised then should be kept in mind for churches wanting to make disciples of troubled youth today. One explanation for the findings was that the evidence presented by Hirschi and Stark was not an adequate test of how effective religion is in preventing delinquency because church attendance was their sole measure. For all practical purposes Hirschi and Stark believed that the more often a young person went to church, the more likely he/she was committed to religion. This was a simple assumption, one that has significance to how volunteers connect troubled youth into the church, because it represents a mistake many evangelical churches continue to make as they measure discipleship interest and commitment today. Another failure of the Hirschi and Stark “Hellfire” research that is worth remembering and applying to ministry today was their failure to differentiate standards of behavior often used to set troubled youth apart.³⁵ What was “bad” behavior in one church was not necessarily seen as bad or discouraged in another. On the other hand, as Rorbaugh and Jessor noted six years later, there are several factors that merge in religion to act as personal controls against a young person

³³ Hirschi, 210.

³⁴ Interestingly, this conclusion from the “Hellfire” research is inconsistent with Hirschi’s prediction in his *Causes of Delinquency*, which was published that same year. See Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

³⁵ Certain social standards, for instance, like stealing or assault are usually prohibited by both religious and nonreligious people. But other standards are not easily agreed upon and often tolerated even within church circles, like drinking, smoking, premarital sex, or marijuana use. The point is that behaviors that are contrary to many evangelical churches are sometimes tolerated, expected, or even encouraged outside the individual church.

violating the law.³⁶ For example, emotional fulfillment or participation in religious activities with a group provide young people with a network that reinforces personal control.³⁷

During the 1970s and 1980s, several more studies, using more sophisticated research methods and better statistical analysis, produced mixed results as they wrestled with the questions raised by “Hellfire and Delinquency.”³⁸ For example, another review of the Hirschi and Stark work, this time by Paul Higgins and Gary Albrecht, found an inverse relationship between church attendance and delinquent behavior but determined that respect for the juvenile court was the causal link between the two variables.³⁹ In other words, they found that when young people attend church more often they do respect the law more and are less likely to get into trouble. But they also held that the difference between their study and the studies of Hirschi and Stark or Burkett and White was a reflection of regional influences on the importance of church attendance. They argued that “church attendance in Atlanta might indicate a stronger commitment to general

³⁶ John Rohrbaugh and Richard Jessor, “Religiosity in Youth: A Personal Control against Deviant Behavior,” *Journal of Personality* 43 (1975): 136-153.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁸ Kirk W. Ellis and David M. Petersen, “Religiosity and Criminality: Evidence and Explanations of Complex Relationships,” *Sociological Perspectives* 28 (1985) 501-520. As an example, Rohrbaugh and Jessor found religious involvement to have a negative influence on pre-marital sex and marijuana use. John Rohrbaugh and Richard Jessor, 136-153. But Burkett and White, in their review of Hirschi and Stark, following a self-reported study in the early 1970s, found that marijuana use was no longer condemned by all segments outside the church. Steven Burkett and Mervin White, “Hellfire and Delinquency: Another Look,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (1974): 455-462. Hirschi and Stark, of course, measured delinquency by asking their participants to respond to questions about the number of times they had engaged in offenses that ranged from petty larceny to grand larceny, auto theft, vandalism, and assault. But Burkett and White argued that the relationship between religion and delinquency increases when victimless crimes are taken into account. So they included drinking and marijuana use and found stronger attachment to religion than Hirschi and Stark.

³⁹ See Paul Higgins and Gary Albrecht, “Hellfire and Delinquency Revisited,” *Social Forces* 55:4 (1977), 952-958.

ethical and moral values than does attendance in California.”⁴⁰ Simply put, the regional location of the church made a difference. In 1983, Tittle and Welch found no substantial religious effect in environments where religious values and interpretation were open and difficult to comprehend (in other words, in contexts where religious mores were not distinctive and easy to comprehend from their social surroundings). Secularized social settings, they went on to say, seem to lack the things that are necessary to make a distinct difference in the life of a potential young offender.⁴¹ Benda and Corwyn have further shown that the effect of religiosity is not moderated by “region of residence” (the area of the country).⁴² It is safe to say that all these studies found some association but varied greatly depending upon what was controlled for.

Furthermore, it was during this same time that researchers began to consider associations between peers as necessary for the maintenance of religious beliefs and practices. It had long been recognized that peers mattered but even though the concept of peer associations had long been studied in relationship to delinquency before 1980, there was little significant literature directly related to the influence of peers on the acceptance of religious beliefs. Who influenced whom? Ironically, Hirschi again presents evidence, this time for the position that “attachment to peers does not foster alienation from conventional persons and institutions; it if anything fosters commitment to them.”⁴³ In contrast, Hindelang found attachment to peers to be positively related to delinquency in

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁴¹ Charles R. Tittle and Michael R. Welch, “Religiosity and Deviance: Toward a Contingency Theory of Constraining Effects,” *Social Forces* 61 (1983): 672.

⁴² Benda and Corwyn.

⁴³ Hirschi, 154.

his replication of Hirschi's work.⁴⁴ Hindelang accounts for this discrepancy by suggesting the findings may depend upon the characteristics of the peers. But despite what seemed to be some apparent inconsistencies between Hirschi and Hindelang, it was generally accepted that bonds to conventional peers served as a deterrent to law-violating behavior. Therefore, having "religious" friends should reinforce one's own religious beliefs, thus rendering delinquent behavior even more unlikely.

Again, for the purposes of this study, the idea of involving and developing significant associations between "good" kids in the church and those that were found to be "troubled" outside was being researched and questioned. Yet questions regarding the beliefs and values behind these relationships began to surface as well. What is it that these religious friends valued and believed? Did any one denomination have the right answer? And, equally important, did the ability of any one denomination to "get it right" really matter? Neither the work of Hirschi nor Hindelang answered these questions sufficiently. Denominational differences and their impact on the prevention of delinquency had been supported up to this point by some researchers⁴⁵ but not by others.⁴⁶ Interestingly, researchers often failed to find denominational differences because they treated the Protestant category as one. In other words, research failed to note the "liberal/conservative" divide or the denominational distinctions so important to many evangelical churches today.⁴⁷ In the end, Shoemaker notes that "it would appear more

⁴⁴ Michael Hindelang, "Causes of Delinquency: A Partial Replication and Extension," *Social Problems* 20 (1973): 471-487.

⁴⁵ Albert L. Rhodes and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "The 'Religious Factor' and Delinquent Behavior," *Journal of Research in Crime* 7 (1970): 83-98.

⁴⁶ Burkett, 1974.

⁴⁷ The discrepancies here may be partially explained by the fact that Protestant groups are rarely thought to be different by those outside, as Glock and Stark noted 40 years ago: "While Protestant-Catholic

accurate at this point that the religious convictions of members are more central to an explanation of their behavior than the fact that they belong to or attend one denomination or another.”⁴⁸

Frankly, if the original work of Hirschi and Stark had not garnered so much attention and become the benchmark for analysis since 1969 for many, one might be able to overlook the impact it has had and the research that followed. However, the finding that there was more to it than the mere conclusion that religion does not influence these beliefs and attitudes had to be considered. There are other studies from this period available for review but as a result of the research generated by Hirschi and Stark, several conclusions began to surface that have a bearing on how effective any church community can be in keeping young people out of trouble. First, the frequency of church attendance is not sufficient in and of itself to indicate how effective religion is in preventing young people from violating the law. Put another way, Sunday attendance alone was not effective in keeping kids out of trouble. Therefore, examination of the variables that bond a young person to religious beliefs should include elements of attachment and involvement beyond just coming to church. Second, religion has more influence on troubled youth when religious values occupy a more central role in the surrounding culture. Put another way, the research was beginning to show that without considering an

contrasts are often large enough to be notable, although often, too, remarkably small, they seem inconsequential compared to differences found among the Protestant groups. Indeed, the data indicate that the overall impression of American Protestantism produced when members of all denominations are treated as a single group...at best bear resemblance to only a few actual denominations making up the Protestant collectivity. Indeed, in some instances these ‘average’ Protestants do not closely correspond to any actual denomination.” Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), 121.

⁴⁸ Shoemaker, 181-182.

association with the surrounding culture the church would not be effective in addressing the problem of troubled youth.

This ecological association with religiosity continued to raise questions. In the early 1980s, Rodney Stark and several of his graduate students began to look at the reason for the contradictory findings in his earlier studies of religion and delinquency.⁴⁹ They found that there was almost no religious effect on delinquency in Seattle but a substantial effect in Provo, Utah, and they wanted to know why. Like some of the earlier research, the “Hellfire” findings did not provide answers for the variation in two distinct religious settings. Yet the conclusions Stark and others have reached in the last decade have significant meaning for any evangelical church intent upon making disciples out of at-risk youth in an emerging culture. Interestingly, a 1996 article by Stark speaks to what he was wrestling with at the time:

More than 20 years ago, Travis Hirschi and I dealt a disturbing blow to social theory as well as to common sense when we reported that religious practice and belief had not the slightest impact on delinquent behavior (Hirschi and Stark 1969). Analyzing data based on students in Richmond, California, we tried our best to find any link between church and Sunday school attendance and belief in Hell, on the one hand, and delinquent behavior, on the other. No matter how we teased the data attempting to discover suppressor variables, our initial findings stood up. Religion just didn’t matter.

Had we found the positive effect we had expected, I am not sure we could have found a journal willing to print such a self-evident finding, despite the fact that at the time we knew of no other empirical results on the subject (perhaps prior positive findings had in fact been rejected). But, given that social scientists love nothing so much as irony, “Social Problems” accepted our paper virtually by return mail. Hence, the word quickly spread that kids on their way home from Sunday school were as likely to strip your car as were kids on their way home from the pool hall.

Five years later Burkett and White (1974) reconfirmed the original findings using a sample from the Pacific Northwest. While they did find that religion

⁴⁹ Rodney Stark, “Religion and Conformity: Reaffirming a Sociology of Religion,” *Sociological Analysis* 45 (1984): 273-281.

affected drug and alcohol use, they could find no religious effects on other forms of delinquency.

But then, conflicting findings began to trickle in. A study based on Atlanta found strong negative effects of religion on delinquency (Higgins and Albrecht 1977). So did one based on Mormon wards in Utah and Idaho (Albrecht et al 1977). Shortly thereafter, Gary F. Jensen and Maynard L. Erickson (1979) also found strong support for the conventional hypothesis using Arizona data. And although its authors denied finding any relationship between religiousness and delinquency, a study based on Nashville had in fact discovered a strongly negative linkage (Rhodes and Reiss 1970).

This was a sorry state of affairs. Does religion deter delinquency or doesn't it? To say that sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't is not satisfactory. As I concerned myself with the matter over a decade ago, I was struck by the geography of the contrary findings. West Coast data had yielded no religious effects. But anywhere else in the country the data behaved as one would expect. *This led me to formulate a truly "sociological" explanation of how religion contributes to conformity, to replace the purely psychological formulation on which all of the prior studies rested*" [emphasis added].⁵⁰

Applied to this study, then, these findings indicate that volunteers can have an inverse effect on the problem of delinquency and make disciples of troubled youth only if contextual variables are considered. It is helpful to note what Stark goes on to say:

How is it possible that an individual's religiousness can limit delinquent behavior in some places and not in others? What if we discard the assumption that religion is primarily an individual trait, a set of beliefs and practices of individuals, and substitute the assumption that religion is, first and foremost, a social structure? By social structure I mean...the proportion of persons in a given ecological setting who are actively religious. *I suggest that what counts is not only whether a particular person is religious, but whether this religiousness is, or is not, ratified by the social environment*" [emphasis added].⁵¹

In other words, his conclusion was that the variable that he and Hirschi missed in their earlier research was the social context in which the religion was practiced. It was not just important to study what was being valued and taught inside the boundaries of a church; what had to be considered was whether or not the message and values taught inside were

⁵⁰ Rodney Stark, "Religion as Context: Hellfire and Delinquency One More Time," *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 163-164.

⁵¹ Ibid., 164.

endorsed and practiced by those outside. Put another way, when considering the effect religion has on the problem of delinquency the cultural context had to be considered. Contextual variables have to be understood and accounted for if the church is going to effectively teach troubled youth how to do what the Bible says.

Of course, this opened the door to observation and the possibilities of distinct differences between contexts. Why was religion found to be significant in some locations and not others? It was argued that in some settings (ecologies) religious beliefs and practices made a difference but in others no difference at all, as Stark and Bainbridge concluded in 1996.⁵² Others, like Chadwick and Top in their study of Latter Day Saints (LDS) youth, found that “the religious ecology hypothesis was not supported: religiosity had a strong negative relationship to delinquency in both the high and low religious ecologies.”⁵³ They went on to say, “It appears that LDS youth have internalized religious values and beliefs, and engage in religious practices, that are indeed associated with their nonparticipation in delinquent activities. These findings indicate that if we are to understand fully the relationship of religion to delinquency, contrary to Stark’s observation, both psychological and sociological perspectives are essential.”⁵⁴

The practical relevance of all this will not seem to matter to those not working with troubled youth. Unfortunately, because so many adults in the evangelical church think of “social environment” in the context of their own church community, socio-economic class, and denomination, they struggle to think in terms that are not just

⁵² Rodney Stark and W.S. Bainbridge, *Religion, Deviance and Social Control* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁵³ Bruce A. Chadwick and Brent L. Top, “Religiosity and Delinquency among LDS Adolescents,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32, no. 1 (March 1993): 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

“boundary-maintaining” (intent upon protecting young people inside). Stark’s research took the question of religion’s effect on delinquency in a distinctly sociological direction, a direction away from troubled youth as simply “sinners,” a direction beyond the walls of an individual church, a direction that connected those inside to their peers outside, a direction many youth ministries have come to experience the hard way. Interestingly, Stark concludes his 1996 study by saying:

Looking back, it appears to me that it was good for the field that Hirschi and I misled everyone about there being no relationship between religion and delinquency....When contrary findings did begin to come in, our results could not simply be ignored because they had, by then, gained such a firm place in the literature that it easily could be seen that the question wasn’t which results were right, but why did the results vary....The apparent ecological solution to this question gives me great satisfaction because it testifies to the need for a sociology as distinct from a social-psychology.⁵⁵

Over the last two decades especially, questions directed toward what religion prevented and how the beliefs and practices of religion could control and ideally affect positive change in a troubled young person’s life have changed from the nature and characteristics of religiosity inside the church to the difference religion made in the context outside its boundaries. Where a church is located, its environment, what Stark refers to as the “social context,” had a great deal to do with preventing young people in an emerging culture from getting into serious trouble, to say nothing about effectively teaching them how to do what the Bible says. In many ways the challenge speaks for itself. Does the message of evangelical Christianity today resonate with young people outside its walls? And, if so, does it make any difference to how they live their lives? It should also encourage the evangelical church to recognize that the challenges of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 172.

ministering to troubled youth are much more complex than just teaching a kid what to believe.

Of course, one has to wonder, for an emerging generation enveloped by wired technology, connected by the internet and personal instant messaging devices, “What difference will context or social environment make in how a young person responds to religious related values and the practice of faith?” The findings for now suggest that peer groups will continue to influence and demand conformity like they have always done. Even though there is no one single peer culture among today’s adolescents, and in actuality there are many cultures supporting a wide variety of values, young people choose friends who are similar to themselves. When it comes to religious values, like everything else, much depends upon whom the young person chooses as reference group:

Teenagers form and sustain their interpretations of norms in day-to-day interaction with friends. If most of a young person’s friends are not actively religious, the religious considerations will rarely enter into the process by which norms are accepted or justified....In such a situation, the effect of the religiousness of some individuals will be smothered by group indifference to religion, and religion will tend to become a very compartmentalized component of the individual’s life—something that surfaces only when the majority of a teenager’s friends are religious, then religion enters freely into everyday interactions and becomes a valid part of the normative system....In any event, these reflections led me to restrict the conventional proposition as follows: Religious individuals will be less likely than those who are non-religious to commit delinquent acts, but only in communities where the majority of people are actively religious.⁵⁶

The bottom line is that young people who lack appropriate strong social ties with their peers are likely to get into trouble.⁵⁷ Volunteers cannot make disciples of troubled youth apart from strong associations and applications to friends. In other words, youth cannot learn to be disciples in isolation.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 164-165.

⁵⁷ Heilbrun, 76.

Furthermore, it should not surprise anyone to believe that one of the contextual variables found to have the most inverse effect on the problem of troubled youth has been the socialization of parents. Certainly single-parent homes and divorced parents are significant risk factors as well as low levels of parental involvement and discipline and high levels of parent-child conflict.⁵⁸ As Shoemaker notes, “Perhaps one of the most persistent explanations of delinquent behavior is the breakdown of the family....The family has been regarded as a major variable in the presence or absence of delinquency.”⁵⁹ Shoemaker reviews a variety of studies over the last fifty years but summarizes by recognizing that there is a casual association between “family conflicts, school problems, peer associations, and delinquency.”⁶⁰

Mark Regnerus reinforces this point well in an article entitled “Linked Lives, Faith, and Behavior: Intergenerational Religious Influence on Adolescent Delinquency,” published in June, 2003. For purposes of this project, what makes this particular study significant is the positive connection he draws between conservative religious affiliations, affiliations one would expect to find within the evangelical community, and delinquency prevention: “Recent research also suggests possible influences of conservative religious affiliations or communities as well.”⁶¹ He uses Curry’s 1996 study as an example:

Curry’s research on conservative Protestant adults suggests that such parents take a more intense interest in the behavioral socialization of their children, regardless of age. Both public and private behavior matters a great deal to such conservatives, Curry argues, and is often imbued with transcendent, eternal significance.

⁵⁸ G.A. Wasserman and others, “Risk and Protective Factors of Child Delinquency,” *Child Delinquency Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2003).

⁵⁹ Shoemaker, 182.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 188.

⁶¹ Mark D. Regnerus, “Linked Lives, Faith and Behavior: Intergenerational Religious Influence on Adolescent Delinquency,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no.2 (June 2003): 190.

Additionally, a study of individual, school, and county attributes revealed that self-identified “born-again Christian” youth who resided in counties whose religious affiliates were disproportionately conservative Protestant displayed lower levels of delinquent behavior than other groups, including “born-again” adolescents living in less densely conservative Protestant counties.⁶²

Regnerus goes on to say that the complexity of relationship that many scientists have found between religion and delinquency is primarily the cause of three things. First, social scientists create “statistical competition between religious and secular social controls when in fact they are typically interrelated.” Second,

accounting for change is critical during adolescence. It is a life change that involves considerable change and a number of “turning points”....Third, the earliest source of moral socialization in youth—their parents—is frequently neglected, often due to data constraints. *This is an important loss, since parent and child religiosity is closely linked not only during adolescence but well into adulthood....Parents then are a logical place to start connecting religion with delinquency prevention*” [emphasis added].⁶³

This causal link between parents, families, and troubled youth is key for any church intentional about making disciples. Volunteers will have to understand and work with families in order to effectively teach troubled youth to be disciples. Through the 1960s and into the 1970s the immediate family exercised a near monopoly on early childhood socialization, especially in white middle-class Protestant families. Needless to say, it was for a practical reason that many churches tended to steer clear of non-nuclear families and that many individualistic theories of delinquency dwelt on family deviations. Today, however, the concept of family and parental socialization is changing. The children of today are not so much dependent upon their parents but on an extended family, single parents, and non-traditional partners for socialization.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 191.

This is not to say that parental influence on childhood socialization no longer matters. Parents continue to socialize young people in ways and with ideas and values they know—including religious ones. This is certainly the conclusion that Christian Smith has reached as a result of his recent longitudinal study of over 3,000 high school seniors:

Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misperceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. Grandparents and other relatives, mentors, and youth workers can be very influential as well, but normally, parents are most important in forming their children's religious and spiritual lives. Teenagers do not seem very reflective about or appreciative of this fact. But that does not change the reality that the best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents do look like.⁶⁴

Other studies pertaining to the moral socialization of troubled youth have shown that as parent's religiosity rose, the child's delinquency fell.⁶⁵

Yet it is helpful to be reminded of the fact that even though there is specific contextual significance to the role parents play in the religious socialization of young people, there is no "one size fits all" formula for addressing the challenge of troubled youth:

Sociologists and criminologists who study religious influence have generally concluded that little relationship exists between adolescent religiosity and more serious forms of delinquency such as theft, fighting, and violence. In doing so, they may be overlooking the important developmental link between parent and child. Indeed, there is a complexity to the relationship of religion with delinquency, but it is not one of finding any relationship at all. It is, rather, about understanding what

⁶⁴Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*, 261.

⁶⁵ See for instance, S.M. Meyers, "An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 858-66; L.D. and Pearce and W.G. Axinn, "The Impact of Family Religious Life on the Quality of Mother-Child Relations," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 810-28.

appears to be a varying relationship—by age, gender, and form of religious influence. This study confirms such a portrayal.”⁶⁶

This review began by referring to a Jesuit, Joseph Fitzpatrick, who had participated on the 1967 President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and The Administration of Justice and concluded that the relationship between religion and deviant behavior is often obscure. Ironically, since that time not much has changed. Benda and Corwyn concluded in 1997 that “any relationship between religion and delinquency is complex.”⁶⁷ It is fair to say evidence surrounding the effect of religion on crime has been contested and remains inconclusive for many.⁶⁸ While some studies have found a strong inverse effect between religion and delinquency,⁶⁹ others have suggested that religion has only a weak or insignificant effect on delinquency.⁷⁰

Frankly, it is easy for any church or denomination to get defensive. Findings that suggest religion has no positive relationship to one of the most pervasive youth problems in America today are not well received. Nor should they be. The research says something different. When more contextual variables are scientifically measured and controlled, most research indicates that religious adolescents will be more likely to abstain from delinquency than non-religious youth. Johnson and Larson, for instance, through an

⁶⁶ Regnerus, 196.

⁶⁷ Benda, 81.

⁶⁸ See C.J. Baier and B.R.E. Wright, “‘If you love me keep my commandments’: A Meta-Analysis of the Effect of Religion on Crime,” *Journal of Research on Crime and Delinquency* 38 (2001): 3-21. Basically they contend that research on religion’s place in explaining delinquency is characterized by inconsistent results and claim the evidence is “...varied, contested, and inconclusive.”

⁶⁹ See for instance, B. Benda, “The Effect of Religion on Adolescent Delinquency Revisited,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 32 (1995): 446-466; or C. Tittle and M. Welch, “Religiosity and Deviance: Toward a Contingency Theory of Constraining Effects,” *Social Forces*, 61 (1983): 653-682.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, J. K. Cochran, P.B. Wood, and B.J. Arneklev, “Is the Religiosity–Delinquency Relationship Spurious? A Test of Arousal and Social Control Theories,” *Journal of Crime and Delinquency* 31 (1994): 92-123.

evaluation of articles on the subject over the last twenty years, found that the more reliable the measures of religiosity, the more likely that the conclusions show religiosity has an impact on reducing juvenile delinquency.⁷¹ Shoemaker concludes his review of the religion/delinquency research thus: “In summation, it may be unrealistic to expect the influence of religion on juvenile delinquency to be greater than that of competing secular forces. At the same time it would be equally unrealistic to suppose that religion has no effect on juvenile behavior. Most recent research...indicates that there *is* an association...especially in areas where religion is still generally influential and with delinquent offense for which secular sanctions have become ambivalent.”⁷²

This is certainly true for young people who are involved in at-risk behaviors but who not formally adjudicated. These are the “delinquent” young people with which most church based volunteers will choose to work. Smith, in his study of the religious lives of American teenagers, notes:

We can draw some larger summarizing conclusions. First, ironically, contrary to many youths inability to see or articulate the influence or importance of religion in their lives, religion does in fact appear to be a significant factor that does make a considerable difference in a host of life outcomes. And these observable differences are not scattered and uneven but emerge regularly across a wide variety of adolescent attitudes, experiences, relationships, behavior and beliefs⁷³

It is fair to say, however, that ever since social scientists began considering the relationship between religion and troubled youth it has always been obscure, complex, and difficult to judge. There have always been many ways of studying the problem and many factors related to the outcome of troubled youth. Yet that conclusion alone has

⁷¹ See Byron R. Johnson and others, “Does Adolescent Religious Commitment Matter? A Reexamination of the Effects of Religiosity on Delinquency,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38, no. 1 (Feb., 2001): 22-44.

⁷² Shoemaker, 182.

⁷³ Smith, 232.

importance for an evangelical community that places high value on method-driven evangelism, pragmatism, and simple spiritual answers for the problem of troubled youth.

Evangelicals correctly believe that the problems of troubled youth, like those of any young person, stem from our human failure to become what God created us to be. Sin affects the very core of our humanity (Mark 7:14-23) and corrupts how we think (I Timothy 6:5). Like all of us, troubled youth cannot understand spiritual truths (I Corinthians 2:14) apart from the Spirit's help. Consequently, the result of any young person's human situation and experience is not only separation from God but alienation from socializing interpersonal relations and a powerlessness to remedy their situation. However, the evangelical community needs to recognize, that religion, by its very nature, as Durkheim recognized a century ago, is in the business of the "sacred" and not the "profane" or ordinary. The realm of the supernatural was never intended to be analyzed and put to the test. Religion's effect on delinquency cannot simply be rationally studied and understood. Neither can the evangelical community afford to provide simple answers and make broad generalizations that overlook the mysteries of God and ignore the personal relational context and experience of troubled youth. As Sweet notes, "What makes us human is the same thing that makes us created in the image of God. We are not isolated entities, self-contained, existing apart from God or from one another or even from God's creation. We are made for 'community' and 'communion' and 'ecology'..."⁷⁴

These cautions are justified. The basic elements of religion are beliefs that affirm the existence of mystery. Everything does not need to be explained, proven, and

⁷⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question, Into the Mystery* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 17.

rationalized. Evangelical theology affirms that God is knowable because he gives himself to be known through his self-revelation in Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. Yet there is a limit to what both science and evangelical theology can tell us about the fact of any supernatural experience. The research will always have escape phrases like “any relationship between religion and delinquency is complex” and use words like “obscure” and “difficult.” There will always be “variables” and “factors” because causal relationships by their very nature are connected and not simple. But that same caution should remind those in the evangelical community and, more importantly, those intending to minister to troubled youth, that they are not in the business of replacing complex relationships with simple religious answers about “right belief” and “deviance.” They are in the business of living as Christ followers in the context of those young people often outside the boundaries of the local church.

Our purpose here is not to critique how the evangelical church came to this place of disregarding contextual factors and being satisfied with providing easy answers. But if the emerging church is going to positively impact the problem of troubled youth in an emerging postmodern culture it will need to feel comfortable about opening its theological boundaries and not always having to be right. In other words, it will have to teach volunteers how to share God’s story in ways that focus upon ecological relationships and go beyond simple answers geared to protecting those inside. Despite differences with those outside, the evangelical church is also going to have to understand and apply what the research is generally saying about religion and context. The problem of context is not a theological issue *per se*. As important as doctrinal questions may be about the authority of scripture, salvation through God alone, or how one views man’s

responsibility in God's salvific purposes, the primary issue for changing the lives of troubled youth is contextualization. From a sociological standpoint religion is only effective when factors of context outside the church are considered. From the standpoint of the church its message is only effective when it makes a difference in the context of troubled youth outside.

It is somewhat ironic that researchers should have waited until the 1980s to wrestle with the connection between delinquency and context. We have seen that was due in large part to an errant assumption that religion did have an inverse effect on the problem of troubled youth regardless. However, the church has always been called to wrestle with the meaning and application of contextualization. It is a simple connection that the church should make, as Frost and Hirsch point out: "It might seem obvious from all we've said so far that if the church is prepared to adopt an incarnational stance, it should take seriously the issue of contextualization....[There are] some fundamental reasons for the necessity of contextualized mission: Christ did it!...The First Christians Practiced It...Because it Works."⁷⁵

Naturally, when society wanted to control the delinquent it turned to one of its primary socializing influences—the church. The church had always been a primary institution of American culture. The church was seen by many to be part and parcel with America's Christian experience. It was the church that provided beliefs, rituals, and ideas of "hellfire" and damnation. Plus, it was the local church that provided community. But even from a sociological standpoint, it is questionable whether America was ever one big "melting-pot" community with shared cultural and religious values. Certainly, when

⁷⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 84-86.

Christian faith was predominant in America, and there was an evident religious conformity to Christian values, it was acceptable for many to think that religion could “control” if not solve the problem of delinquency. After all, its values were an integral part of the ethos of growing up in America and among the most powerful socializing forces in any young person’s life. However, for a variety of reasons a one-size-fits-all religious ethos no longer exists.

Today, America is a plurality of many religious and socio-economic subcultures. A postmodern ethos will continue to emerge with a diversity of religious beliefs making room for individual experience and mystery. It is fair to say that no one knows exactly how this will impact the methods and programs of the evangelical church but one conclusion that is easy to reach is that evangelical volunteers will fail to impact troubled youth if they cannot apply the message of Jesus Christ contextually to the experiences of those outside its boundaries. Frost and Hirsch note that

There seems to be general agreement among evangelical scholars that in an important sense the Gospel is outside the context of all human culture. Yet, as we’ve noted, the gospel is good news for humankind who cannot access truth outside of their cultural context. Kraft and others therefore operate from within the fundamental premise that God is above culture but has chosen to work within it to achieve his purposes. ...The creation of humankind in God’s image means that there is no culture that lacks virtuous elements in terms in which the gospel can be expressed. At the same time the fall of humankind from grace means that no culture is completely virtuous....The gospel message as we find it in Scripture is for all peoples, all nations, and all subcultures. Yet it is expressed in terms of the Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultural contexts of the first century. Therefore, for God’s message to cross from that context into ours, or from our context to others in evangelistic ministry, there has to be the complex work of contextualization.⁷⁶

Ironically, as the evangelical church opens its doors to “outsiders” and re-contextualizes its message, there will be a corresponding increase in the potential conflict

⁷⁶ Ibid., 87-88.

that is likely to erupt if people identify too strongly with maintaining their own boundaries. This is, in practice, what will often happen when churches try to effect missional change in an emerging culture with troubled youth. The words of Leonard Sweet seem appropriate here: “Western Christianity went to sleep in a modern world governed by the gods of reason and observation. It is awakening to a postmodern world open to revelation and hungry for experience. Indeed, one of the last places postmoderns expect to be ‘spiritual’ is the church. In the midst of a spiritual ‘heating up’ in the host postmodern culture, the church is stuck in the modern freezer.”⁷⁷ Yet any church unwilling to “open” its boundaries and contextualize its message will remain ineffective in addressing the problem of delinquency. Frankly, if the emerging church intends to do a better job of making disciples out of troubled youth it would do well to forget many of the ministry assumptions passed down from modernity and re-contextualize its evangelical message. It is this author’s belief that God has uniquely prepared many volunteers within the evangelical church to do just that in the emerging postmodern culture of troubled adolescents.

⁷⁷ Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 29-30.

CHAPTER 7. TRAINING VOLUNTEERS TO BE EPIC

Introduction

As we have demonstrated, the evangelical church has a missional responsibility to address the problem of troubled youth in America by teaching them how to become “doers of the Word and not hearers only.” The record of history, current research and the practical worth of adult mentors have proven that volunteers can effectively disciple at-risk youth. Furthermore, research pertaining to religiosity and delinquency suggests that the church can have an inverse effect on the causal factors of troubled youth if it intentionally opens its boundaries, responds to related ecological factors, and contextualizes the gospel message accordingly. But, even acknowledging all of these claims, questions pertaining to the emerging postmodern culture remain: “How can volunteers be taught to easily understand and effectively contextualize the gospel to troubled youth today?” If volunteers are going to become effective mentors, intentionally helping at-risk youth become “doers of the word,” they will need to incarnate the story of God’s love into a subculture that is often very different from that inside the church. The argument of this project is that one of the best answers to this question is to teach volunteers how understand and make use of emerging cultural trends.

The dilemma of any religious institution like a church, evangelical or not, is not only that it is concerned with the orthodoxy of the sacred, but also that it is called to live incarnationally in this world, an earthly rather than a heavenly society. That causes all

kinds of challenges, for religion has long valued “right thinking” (orthodoxy) and “right practice” (orthopraxy) as key to maintaining a distinction between culture and its particular belief. This certainly has been true for churches and denominations within the evangelical tradition. Tomlinson addresses this tension between the “right thinking” of evangelical churches and the emerging culture in his work *The Post Evangelical*.

Many people will feel uneasy about this close connection between faith and culture; some may even argue that their faith is based on the truth unaffected by culture. But nowadays, such a naïve view is impossible to sustain; nearly all scholars, evangelical or not, argue that our whole perception of the world—including our faith—is deeply influenced by culture and language. The way we perceive the being and person of God is influenced by culture, the way we imagine heaven is influenced by culture, and the way we approach the Bible is influenced by culture.¹

But how can an evangelical church make disciples of at-risk youth who, are rarely socialized inside the boundaries of the church and value neither the “right thinking” nor the “right practice” of the evangelical community? And, subsequently, why would an evangelical community that proclaims the “eternal truth” that is “the same yesterday, today and forever” need to explain it differently for an emerging postmodern generation? Could it be that “postmodernity poses an entirely new interpretive situation for Christianity,” as Tomlinson says?² *And could it be that postmodernity poses an entirely new opportunity for making disciples of troubled youth?*

Even though the religion of modernity was once a significant factor in teaching a child to behave and conform to society, over the last three-quarters of a century most socialization has been done outside the formal institution of the church. That is not to say that religiosity no longer has an effect on the problem of delinquency. As we have seen,

¹ Tomlinson, 29.

² Ibid., 84.

religion can have a very valuable impact on helping young people conform and “obey.” Nevertheless, for all practical purposes the modern church, an institution that once shaped society by profoundly forming young lives into Christian disciples, has been marginalized in an emerging culture. “What once profoundly shaped communities and changed lives has today been sidelined in society. The radical message of Jesus is now seen as nothing more than an ancient myth containing little, if any, historical truth or contemporary relevancy.”³

Because the socializing influence of the church has been marginalized, the practice of making disciples has also been sidelined in many churches. Arguably, no one in the last decade has had more impact upon the churches’ responsibility regarding making true disciples than Dallas Willard. His writings are not only obligatory reading in this regard but also rather sobering: “You will find few scholars or leaders in Christian circles who deny that we are supposed to make disciples or apprentices to Jesus and teach them to do all things that Jesus said. Jesus’ instructions on this matter are, after all, starkly clear. We just don’t do what he said. We don’t seriously attempt it. And apparently we don’t know how to do it.”⁴ This is certainly true in relationship to troubled youth.

Furthermore, apart from God’s intention for the church to make true disciples there is also a concern about the state of the church in the West. On the one hand, there are those who see the decline as primarily a mainline church problem about which

³ Steve Chalk and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 9-10.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xiv.

evangelicals need not overly concern themselves.⁵ Some see a new vibrancy emerging, due in large part to the passionate belief and practice of evangelical pietism. Alister McGrath, for instance, notes that “evangelicalism is one of the powerhouses of the modern Christian church in the Western World. Time and again, people—especially young people—put their discovery of the vitality and excitement of the gospel down to the witness of evangelicalism....Evangelicalism, once regarded as marginal, has now become mainline, and can no longer be dismissed as an insignificant sideshow....”⁶ McGrath asserts that both Christian and secular scholarship have shown similar trends.⁷

On the other hand are those who argue that the modern American church has not only been marginalized but is, in fact, dying. Gibbs speaks for many when he writes:

North Americans had long considered themselves immune from such a fate....Americans, it appeared, were incurably religious, reflected in both the orthodoxy of their religious beliefs and the high percentage of the population that attended church each Sunday....At the present time there is a refreshing new humility spreading among church and mission leaders in the face of the challenges presented by a post-Christian and postmodern Western culture confronting them on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.⁸

And this concern regarding the modern church is not a minority opinion. Across the evangelical spectrum, leaders have voiced similar concerns about this marginalization of the church and its subsequent lack of intentionally making disciples. For instance, “at the brink of the twenty-first century...the combined impact of the Information Age,

⁵ In my own denomination, the Free Methodist Church, many leaders draw a comparison between the decline in mainline church populations over the last few years and the increase in Free Methodist church attendance and evangelism numbers.

⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), 17.

⁷ McGrath refers the reader to similar scholastic studies: Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (Princeton: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

⁸ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next*, 14.

postmodern thought, globalization, and racial-ethnic pluralism that has seen the demise of the grand American story has displaced the historic role the church has played in that story. As a result, we are seeing the marginalization of the institutional church.”⁹ The emerging shift from modernity to postmodernity has caused similar unease among others.¹⁰

Whether one is encouraged or discouraged about the emerging evangelical church one thing does seem to be certain: The evangelical church is facing a time of transition. “Evangelical Christianity is in a state of change. The change taking place is not abrupt, nor simple.”¹¹ Yet, for some very practical reasons this is not an easy transition for many in the evangelical community to make, as Stanley Grenz remarks:

Twentieth-century evangelicals have devoted much energy to the task of demonstrating the credibility of the Christian faith to a culture that glorifies reason and deifies science....Modern evangelicals have done well in developing a vision of the Christian faith for the old *Star Trek* society. But we are now moving into a new context. The Western world—from pop culture to academia—is jettisoning the Enlightenment principles that formed the foundation for modernity. We are entering the postmodern era.¹²

As a result, the old language of modernity and the accepted methods of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples will need to be intentionally improved beyond what many churches have tried to do so far. “It’s not that the evangelical church hasn’t changed over the last fifty years, but the changes have been cosmetic. We’ve unplugged organs, padded pews, removed shag carpet, and added video projectors. Meanwhile, everything else in

⁹ Mike Regele and Mark Schulz, *The Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 11, as cited in Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 14.

¹⁰ Another example of this seeming pessimism about the state of the church is Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in the North* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹¹ Robert E. Weber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing The Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 13.

¹² Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 161-162.

our culture has undergone a complete metamorphosis. The changes are so radical that some parts of our culture are barely recognizable to modern eyes.”¹³ Furthermore, this means that the mission of the church will need to be intentionally refocused outward. “A missional church faces outward toward the world....For too long, churches have faced inward, offering religion as a benefits package—something that ‘meets my needs’ or offers good outcomes.”¹⁴

Granted, while some believe that evangelicalism has capitulated to modernity¹⁵ not everyone embraces the idea that Western society is experiencing a cultural shift to a postmodern, post-Christian world. Many in the evangelical church reject the idea all together. Others have worked to balance the two extremes and redefine evangelical theology and purposes accordingly.¹⁶ There is great debate about what exactly is “emerging” for the American church (“It probably would mean something different to everyone you ask...”¹⁷) and about what defines “modernity” and sets it apart from “postmodernity” (“a controversial term with a maddening number of contrary definitions, generally referring to a philosophy that we believe does not yet exist”¹⁸).

For many evangelicals who approach the philosophy of postmodernism more seriously the concept that evokes fear and raises eyebrows is “deconstruction.” By definition, “deconstruction” questions all previous assumptions about how things work.

¹³ Spencer Burke, *Making Sense Of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations About God, Community, and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 25.

¹⁴ Timara Cissna, “God Sent a Person, Not a Proposition: A Conversation with Len Sweet,” *George Fox Journal* (Fall, 2005): 15.

¹⁵ See, for instance, David Wells’s explanation of the theological crisis facing evangelicalism in David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

¹⁶ See, for example, Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Language of The Emerging Church*, 239.

“The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come.”¹⁹ Many modern evangelicals approach the whole idea of something emerging and coming after the modern church with a certain skepticism, if not cynicism, simply because they are themselves enmeshed in modernity and struggle to see any “emerging” trends that could be helpful to living the Christian faith. Leonard Sweet makes this point when he writes, “Many Christians who approach postmodernism as a philosophy misunderstand, oversimplify, and hastily critique it not realizing how enmeshed with modernity they are and how much they have made modern culture a cult....”²⁰ A certain degree of “deconstructing” might be exactly what the church needs to help it reconnect at-risk youth to doing what the Bible says.

For layman and scholar alike, defining postmodernism is nigh to impossible, whether one is referring to its philosophical, sociological or theological manifestations. The reason is quite simple. Postmodernism is at its heart a rejection of modernism and is easiest to define by noting the areas in which it calls into questions the assumptions of modernity. So, as Sweet notes, “It makes most sense to try to understand the key themes of modernity and then imagine what a culture does and where it goes after having marinated in these themes for several centuries.”²¹ But even that is of little value for this essay, which attempts to establish a context within which ministry to troubled youth in

¹⁹ John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction In A Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham, 1997), 31, as cited in Tony Jones, *PostModern Youth Ministry*, 22.

²⁰ Sweet, *Language of the Emerging Church*, 240.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

the twenty-first century can be better accomplished. Making disciples of troubled youth cannot be done without teaching them how to do what the Bible says in the context of where and how they live. And contextualization cannot be done without understanding and making use of emerging postmodern trends.

Unfortunately, for many volunteers the culture of troubled youth will not so much “emerge” as “collide” with their modernist understanding of evangelicalism. So, in a very practical way, this discussion needs less of a definition and more of a descriptive understanding of this emerging culture best framed in terms applicable to ministry. Because the arguments about what is or what is not emerging in a postmodern culture has little relevance for any volunteer intentional about making active disciples of troubled youth unless 1) these volunteers can be taught how to understand and make use of these emerging trends, and 2) they can easily connect these trends to the experiences of at-risk young people in the context of where and how they live. In other words, once the emerging philosophical, sociological, and theological conversation is over, the only question that is important is: “Will it make any difference in the lives of at-risk young people?”

That brings us to one such descriptive analysis that is contextual, positive, simple, and in general agreement with the broader literature on postmodern culture. It is the “EPIC” acronym (Experiential, Participatory, Image-driven, and Connected) introduced by Leonard Sweet.²² Together, these four descriptors of an emerging postmodern culture can be used by volunteers to effectively reconnect the evangelical faith and make disciples of troubled youth. This acronym, therefore, is employed in this discussion as the

²² See Sweet, *PostModern Pilgrims*.

lens through which postmodern culture is to be understood and practically applied within the context of ministry to at-risk youth.

Experiential

The perpetual openness to experience of postmoderns is such that one can never underestimate the e-factor: experiential. Postmoderns will do most anything not to lose connection with the experiences with life....Moderns want to figure out what life's about. Postmoderns want to experience what life is, especially experience life for themselves....They want life to explode around them. Postmoderns don't want their information straight. They want it laced with experience.²³

Why have not more churches been successful in “making disciples” of troubled youth?²⁴ At first glance the challenge of making disciples out of troubled youth seems to be relatively simple. After all, as any beginning educator understands, the effectiveness of the procedure simply comes down to four factors that have any real bearing on how volunteers teach troubled youth to be Christ Followers. One can think of these as the primary ingredients, parts, or components, if you will, of any discipleship learning process. The active participation of all four factors is necessary in order for any new disciple to grow and become the discipler of someone else.

First, and arguably most important, there is, for any Christian, the supernatural empowering of God himself. It is the Spirit of God that makes His story active and dynamic. Most evangelicals correctly understand that the work of God's Spirit is not limited by human resource. This fact alone cannot be overlooked. Telford Work makes

²³ Ibid., 31, 33.

²⁴ We recognize that the evangelical church in America has not completely failed to make disciples of troubled youth. There are many evangelical churches (and organizations) that have done a very credible job of training disciples. Furthermore, we understand that the challenge has not developed overnight. We do suggest, however, that any honest evaluation of the evangelical church in America will show that troubled youth are not being disciplined into the community faith in a way that enables them to become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” and then turn around and become the spiritual mentors of other peers.

this point well in his discussion of the need for recognizing the Spirit's sovereignty in the process of biblical interpretation:

Proper interpretation is governed not by those who practice it, but by the sovereign Holy Spirit who inspires biblical practice from start to finish. Just as the Bible's voice is distorted or silenced by hermeneutical rules foreign to it, so the Bible's sovereignty, which is the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, is quenched when its work is evaluated according to rules that fall short of fully respecting the work of the Holy Spirit, *even if they emerge from within the community itself* [emphasis added].²⁵

Consequently, the Spirit not only empowers the teacher to teach but enables the new disciple to learn and live a changed life (Galatians 2:20).

Second, there is the teacher. For the purposes of this study, this is the volunteer. The mentor/teacher can influence faith development and learning but is limited by the fact that no one can make a disciple apart from the young person herself. Nevertheless, one can easily understand that the role of the teacher is critical in any discipleship process. No troubled young person can learn effectively without the right mentoring, as educational research has consistently shown. Carkuff and Berenson make the point well:

When the door of the classroom is closed, there are only the teachers, the learners and the content. The teacher is the critical ingredient in accounting for additional amounts of learning achievement. How well the teacher implements teaching skills in developing and delivering the content will determine the potential for student achievement. How well the teachers respond to student needs and prepare the students to receive the teachers' contributions will determine how well the students learn.²⁶

Rarely in a church setting does the formal teacher–student relationship develop with a troubled young person. Typically, the opportunities volunteers have to make disciples are outside the classroom. They are “teachable moments” but rarely planned for. Therefore,

²⁵ Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 254.

²⁶ Robert R. Carkhuff and David H. Berenson, *The Skilled Teacher* (Amherst: Human Resource Development Press, 1983), 23.

volunteer mentors who are responsive and able to understand a troubled youth's situation apart from the context of church can be most effective in helping him learn. Of course, the process of teaching church-based volunteers how to teach is another matter all together.

Third, there is the content—the curriculum to be taught. Content may take on many forms, from a detailed outline to a page of pictures to video to online images. It may entail the use of a textbook series or individualized instruction. Image, metaphors, and personal stories will be the vehicle for delivering content in the emerging culture. But, even given the assumption that caring adults are responsive, flexible, and varied in their approach, what do they teach? Where can any young person find the story of God's grace? Where can he find guidance and direction for how to act at home, school, or with his friends? Where can he find comfort in times of need? Of course, for evangelical Christians, the answer is the obvious: the content is the Bible. The primary story used for making Christian disciples is the Word of God. In many churches it comes in pre-packaged lesson plans from evangelical publishing houses. It has been repeated from pulpits, in Sunday School classes, in weekly Bible study groups, and in literature for centuries. It has been taught as the primary and foundational "rule" of faith detailing how anyone is to talk, make decisions, act, relate, and believe.

But herein lies the problem. Many well intended adult mentors have grown up in evangelical settings and have been led to believe that becoming a disciple is more about what they believe and what they know than about what they do. Unfortunately, the way most adults have been taught to think about Scripture does not mesh with how troubled youth learn. Nor does the modern emphasis on knowledge, facts, and precepts necessarily

translate into a young person becoming a true follower of Jesus Christ. A troubled young person first learns about Jesus Christ not as a theological construct but as an affective experience in relationship. Consequently, the way many evangelical churches have gone about teaching at-risk youth to become disciples often runs contrary to the way most youth learn, the way they need to be taught, and the experiential trend of an emerging culture.

Since the Reformation there has been little disagreement over the importance of Scripture. Fundamentalists, evangelicals, and those of a more Orthodox tradition have viewed Scripture differently, but every evangelical theological system has implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the authority of Scripture. Over the centuries serious discussions have never questioned whether Scripture is a primary influence for the understanding and practice of the Christian faith. Grenz connects the heritage of evangelicalism with a developing doctrine of Scripture: “Christians have always been to some degree a ‘people of the book.’ All Christian traditions value the Bible as Scripture. But the Reformation elevated Scripture as its special concern, and consequently Protestants, especially conservative Protestants, are cognizant of the foundational role of the Bible. As those who see themselves as true heirs of the Reformation, evangelicals quite naturally uphold the Scriptures.”²⁷

But other questions regarding Scripture have long been debated: “What authority is it?” “What does that basis of authority mean?” These arguments over foundationalism and the trustworthiness of Scripture have often hindered the possibility of any practical

²⁷ Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 54.

experienced-based hermeneutic.²⁸ Certain words have been used to champion the cause of some but also separate and find fault with others. But these difficulties in trying to justify correct content and how it should be taught are often found to be inseparable from the simple fact that many caring adults have learned about the Bible through the lens of modernity.

Many in the evangelical church overlook this fact, but most volunteers with an interest in helping troubled youth are a product of the Enlightenment. Long inherent in the fundamentalist and evangelical traditions of Protestantism is an anti-traditionalism and rationalism that stems from an Enlightenment worldview. This Enlightenment worldview has played a key role in Protestantism's theological outlook and its subsequent interpretation of Scripture. After all, Protestantism was born to a great extent in reaction to the seeming tyranny of ecclesiastical authority and practices. The Protestant consciousness was shaped by a belief that the true faith had been seduced and distorted by a religious system that left a lasting impression of hierarchy, ritual, and the supremacy of knowledge. But no less influential were the developments and influences of the Enlightenment on how Scripture would become understood. While the concept of spiritual maturation and development is unquestionably important, the modern church has focused almost exclusively on cognitive spiritual growth for those "inside" the community. Few would disagree that the modern church has based its teaching methods on the Western intellectual and pedagogical tradition of formal education. Cognitive

²⁸ I use this term ("foundationalism") to make a very simple point. The debate over whether Scripture can be used as the epistemological basis for all Christian belief and the desire to overcome any uncertainty has very limited relevance to teaching troubled youth how to put their experiential faith in God into practice. For a more balanced view of the problem pertaining to "foundationalism" see Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post Modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

understanding and knowledge has been emphasized. Spiritual information is stressed; spiritual formation and experience much less so. Many churches have assumed that the process of making disciples can be best accomplished through formal didactic learning with an emphasis placed upon knowledge and content.

The problem, of course, is not limited to individual believers and it certainly is not limited to youth. This is the way most adult volunteers who have grown up in the evangelical church have been taught. Nor does it take a great deal of imagination to understand why many evangelical churches are satisfied with this method of teaching. It is how many evangelical churches treat the Bible. To their credit these evangelicals profess to love God's Word. They may even study it and memorize it. In fact, they could pass a Bible "final exam" with ease. And they have attended countless meetings where others have testified about changed lives.

Consider the weekly adult Bible study group that ends with the leader saying something like: "Now don't forget to put what we've learned into practice." Then, after closing prayer (and, of course, food), the participants file out and back into their daily routines. Or what about Sunday worship's Biblical fare? Does a typical Sunday sermon necessarily lead to a listener becoming a more mature disciple? How does outlining and unwrapping the active story of God's revelation like an unpeeled onion help to make disciples? If the majority of these professed disciples were honest, they would admit that they seldom, if ever, have put what they have learned and memorized into practice. In other words, their Bible knowledge has made little difference in their lives. The reason is simply that the primary fare of most church-based education is knowledge and facts

taught without focusing upon application in the context of individual experience outside the church. In other words, knowledge separate from the experience of faith.

Finally, there is the disciple—a troubled youth. The disciple is given the opportunity to learn certain things and through learning acquires the knowledge and skills to grow into the person God intends for him to become—physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. As one would expect, the young person is critical to any teaching/learning situation. Volumes have been written in this regard, yet apart from all the causal factors that may or may not relate to a young person getting into trouble, it is helpful to begin by asking the question, “How do troubled youth learn?” Seldom do churches do this! Hardly ever do volunteers think about it. The simple answer, however, is that personal experience is the key. Consequently, if Leonard Sweet and Brian McLaren are correct and “experience is the holy grail of postmodernism,”²⁹ no trend could be more helpful to a volunteer trying to connect the Gospel of Jesus Christ to troubled youth and mentor them to become “doers of the word and not hearers only.” This emerging trend toward experiencing one’s faith will facilitate volunteers making disciples of troubled youth.

Fortunately, most volunteers committed to working with troubled youth do a decent job of building relationships and modeling Christian principles and/or values. Most assume that mentoring will take time and not be an easy task. Plus, most volunteers believe there are spiritual forces fighting against the successful outcome of any attempt to make true disciples. But the question is: “Does this go far enough?” The answer is “no!” Even if the new disciple has a good relationship with this mentor and thus hears and sees firsthand the practical principles associated with God’s Word via a real-life model, has

²⁹ Sweet, McLaren and Haselmayer, 119.

the volunteer gone far enough in their responsibility to make disciples? The answer is “no!” Why? Because troubled youth, like most youth, learn experientially. The most potent force of learning is experience by doing. Experience is the key and young people today more than ever want to experience their faith; young people today are “experience gatherers. They don’t know it when they see it they know it when they experience it and enact it.”³⁰

Even given the possibilities of a troubled youth who wants to learn, a caring adult mentor who can effectively teach, and a community of believers that is eager to participate in the process of making disciples, it still cannot happen without transferring Bible knowledge (content) into skills to that can be learned through experience. Very often volunteers have not understood and made use of this trend to achieve its full potential. There is a marked difference between teaching a young person how to experience Bible-based decision-making and instructing him to memorize, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Here the “experiential” trend of the emerging culture becomes an ideal model for making disciples into “doers of the word.” It could be as practical as helping a young person learn how to make good decisions by connecting with the experiencing of walking across the street: “STOP, LOOK, LISTEN and GO.” Thus, youth can be advised to STOP (think about their choices), LOOK (at what’s important), LISTEN (to the good advice of others) and then GO (with the best decision).

Experience is the foundation upon which discipleship needs to be learned by a troubled youth. It will make a practical difference in how he talks, listens, make

³⁰ Ibid., 120.

decisions, relates to the opposite sex, spends his money, and helps his peers, just to identify a few examples. Needless to say, individual application of these Bible-based life skills will be different for each new disciple, but experience is the key. But the content of what is taught is “throwaway information” if it is not connected to the concrete experience of the troubled youth.

This connection between learning and experience is not new. The concept has been around for years. John Dewey made the connection early in the twentieth century as a philosopher of education. He pointed out that experience is not only necessary to learning but also that the quality of the experience has great importance.³¹ Jean Piaget’s work also brought to light the significance of concrete experience with his Stages of Cognitive Development theory.³² One might suppose things have changed considerably over the last eight to nine decades. They have at the level of educational theory and research, but in truth, things vary when it comes to how troubled youth learn. Relationships and educational engagement are only half the battle. Recent developments in research technology have enabled scientists to understand far more about the brain than they did even ten years ago. It might be a drastic overstatement, but basically all young people learn in similar ways.³³

For the most part troubled youth learn like most untroubled youth often found within the church. The brain uses a meaning-driven system to learn and retain

³¹ See Carol Garhart Mooney, *Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget & Vygotsky* (St. Paul: Redleaf Press, 2000), 1-20.

³² Ibid., 59-81.

³³ See Steven I. Greenspan, *The Growth of the Mind: And the Endangered Origins of Intelligence* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997). A review of Greenspan’s work in neurobiology has helped me to understand how the brain of most children develops similarly and the significance of socialization for how all young people learn.

information, regardless of how “at-risk” or “troubled” a young person is. Sensory experience triggers electrical charges, which strengthen connections between neurons; connections or synapses, in turn, form circuits that grow stronger with every repeated experience. When a new fact or concept comes in, this is placed in different categories.³⁴ If in the cognitive domain it does not fit, a new category needs to be formed or the information (knowledge) is lost, and the concrete material is no longer able to be retrieved. In order for a new category to be formed, the material needs to be understood. So there have to be enough pieces of information taught and then experienced over a long enough period of time to reinforce the meaning.

But cognitive ability alone does not keep a young person out of trouble or make her a saint.³⁵ Again, at the risk of over-simplification, experience is the key. Without experience, troubled youth are relegated to a life of sensory stimulus and verbal knowledge, which is, as Jean Piaget noted, not real knowledge. But experience alone is an insufficient criterion without some consideration of which experiences are more meaningful and God-honoring than others. Fortunately, the adult volunteer in effect can help a young person link what is concrete and what is abstract by teaching him to make the connection between a stimulus event and a God-honoring choice or outcome.

³⁴ In other words, for a layman, the brain is like a house with different rooms and closets that store new information. As much as we think we know about how we learn, the brain organizes new information according to categories of previously used information. At birth the basic circuits of a baby’s brain for seeing, hearing, speaking, muscle coordination, etc. are in place. But the brain is not organized alphabetically; that is, when new information comes in, it is organized according to meaning and experience. Experience washes through the brain in waves, so to speak, carving out mental channels as the baby grows.

³⁵ However, measures of cognitive ability, such as IQ measurements taken during childhood, have been used successfully to indicate the likelihood of delinquency later on. See Heilbrun and others, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 76.

In short, heredity sets the stage for human development, but experience through socialization writes the script. Socialization strongly influences how one feels about things, how one experiences faith, and, consequently, what kind of Christ-follower one will become. Every young person's learning characteristics are strongly influenced by heredity, culture, and environment.³⁶ How an individual troubled youth learns will be directly influenced by socializing factors, like family, neighborhood, school, and peers, and, needless to say, individual application will be different for each new disciple. Their background directly affects how they learn and the backgrounds of most troubled youth are woefully deficient.³⁷ Therefore, due to inadequate socialization there are challenges in the way troubled youth learn.

These differences in the way troubled youth learn have been well documented in recent years in a plethora of research on learning styles and group dynamics.³⁸ The simple fact is troubled youth tend to have learning disabilities. Estimates regarding the percentage of young people processed through the juvenile justice system with learning disabilities range from 36% to 53% (compared to 4% to 9% for the general population).³⁹ Common sense suggests that the percentage indirectly associated through a volunteer to the average church will be significantly lower; nevertheless, for the past twenty to

³⁶ See David Reiss, *The Relationship Code: Deciphering genetic and Social Influences on Adolescent Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³⁷ Recent research shows a strong correlation between poor cognitive development and neurocognitive problems related to serious delinquency. See, for instance, R. Loeber and others, "Juvenile delinquency and serious injury victimization" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001).

³⁸ R.E. Mayer, "Cognitive Theory for Education: What Teachers Need to Know," in *How Students Learn*, ed. by N.M. Lambert and B.L. McCombs (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, n.d.).

³⁹ J.O. Smykla and T.W. Willis, "The Incidence of Learning Disabilities and Mental Health Retardation in Youth under the Jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 9 (1981), 219-225, cited in Heilbrum, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 314.

twenty-five years numerous studies have demonstrated a relationship between learning disabilities and troubled youth.⁴⁰ Hence, even though, in general, young people learn the same way by processing and organizing information according to experience, troubled youth often have differences in the way they learn. Troubled youth tend to be late afternoon and early evening learners as opposed to morning learners. They tend to need a variety of learning modes, such as visual, tactile, kinesthetic, and auditory. They tend to process information more slowly and are often non-readers or poor readers at best, because of a lack of ability to process information through reading. In fact, the national average reading level for adjudicated youth is third grade with a large proportion of adjudicated youth functionally illiterate.⁴¹ And, as one would expect, students who have continued to get in trouble often fall far below their academic grade level and potential. And that means that the church-based mentor/teacher cannot rely on reading and lecture to teach new disciples. Adult mentors can teach troubled youth with learning disabilities if they are willing to use other modes of learning and individualized approaches.

At this time, very few people would question the correlation between learning problems and troubled youth. But no one should be surprised by the fact that young people who are at risk in many other ways are a particular challenge to work with, let alone teach. Twenty years ago conventional wisdom emphasized basic skills, such as phonics, spelling, and math facts. The assumption was that these skills would best serve in the real world. In fact, in 1978 one of the more recognized works pertaining to correctional education questioned for the first time the primary focus of correctional

⁴⁰ W.C. Love and G.H. Bachara, "The Diagnostic Team Approach for Juvenile Delinquents with Learning Disabilities," *Juvenile Justice* 26, no.1 (1975): 27-31.

⁴¹ Steve Curcio, "Finding Ways to Teach Today's Youth," *Corrections Today* 57, no.2 (1995): 28-32.

education upon academic skills.⁴² Today this commonly held belief has continued to prevail resulting in an emphasis on basic skills, while neglecting higher level thinking skills and problem solving activities in both scope and application. For instance, Pfannenstiel refers to one study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education of four correctional educational programs. Researchers concluded that this type of program, which is limited to teaching basic skills, needed to change: "Along with basic skills there is a need for a focus...on comprehension and problem solving relevant to life outside the institution."⁴³ Other more recent studies call for teaching troubled youth more "functional skills related to basic employment and independent living and appropriate social skills for daily living."⁴⁴

Consequently, the teaching that needs to be done by a volunteer is much more than Bible information, rational knowledge, and facts. In the process of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ all cognitive learning is transferred to real life either *by* or *from* experience. Furthermore, volunteers must repeat concrete opportunities for them to reconstruct their experience in their context outside the church. But concrete experience, as critical as it is, is not enough. Reflective thought must accompany the experience and

⁴² See Dennis A. Romig, *Justice For Our Children* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1978). Romig reviewed 16 significant studies. He included all the elements in the studies that achieved favorable results. These program elements were combined into a composite list, which he claimed maximized learning. His general prediction almost 30 years ago was that rehabilitation programs that focus on the teaching of academic skills will fail to reduce recidivism. His specific prediction was that classroom education that included at least four of the composite program ingredients will succeed. The composite program ingredients he included include *basic academic skills*, such as understanding teacher, individualized instruction, specific learning goal, individualized program, multi-sensory teaching, high interest material, sequential material, rewarding attention and persistence initially, differential reinforcement of learning performance. What is interesting to me is how few of those ingredients are used in the typical church education setting.

⁴³ J.C. Pfannenstiel, "Educating Juvenile Offenders: Teaching Techniques Determine Students' Success or Failure," *Corrections Today* 55, no.1 (1993): 73.

⁴⁴ Heilbrun, 285.

go beyond the concrete experience phase into a time of reflection and practice. It is learning with an outcome to put into experience what the Bible says, or to “become a *doer* of the word,” which introduces the second descriptor of the EPIC culture.

Participatory

[Participation is] the anchoring ingredient in all EPIC methodologies. Postmoderns are less “seekers” after meaning in life than participators in experiences that are meaningful....Everyone is both a participant and an observer.⁴⁵

Postmoderns are often misunderstood as “it’s all about me.” Actually, it’s less about “me, me, me” than about participation, participation, participation. People want to live within their own experience, not the experience of what they read or see.⁴⁶

“Participatory,” the second descriptor in Sweet’s acronym “EPIC,” refers to a young person who lives to experience life firsthand, not as just an observer but as a participant. This is also a characteristic many would see as similar to youth with behavior problems, who

- live for immediate gratification;
- believe postponement of reward and reinforcement are unacceptable;
- often accept pleasure as their as their guiding principle (“what I want I want now!”);
- do not respect the law, tradition, or people in authority; and
- tend to find comfort and a measure of fulfillment in “bad” behavior.

It is safe to assume that problem behavior is an effort on the youth’s part to say something to the world. Generally speaking, the more severe the problem, the louder the

⁴⁵ Sweet, *Language of the Emerging Church*, 232.

⁴⁶ Sweet, *PostModern Pilgrims*, 66-67.

cry for help, which could be interpreted as “Love me, listen to me, accept me, help me, and teach me.” As this study has demonstrated, troubled youth have basically the same drives and desires as the average young person. They will grow up in an emerging iPod, digital technology, and “Army of One” postmodern generation like every other young person inside the church. But their actions are less predictable. They love adventure and excitement but, unlike the norm, they are unhindered by conventional or social restraint. Yet these are also young people who

- exhibit learned behaviors and rarely try to develop behavior patterns of their own;
- are self-centered but usually not independent;
- have a peer group that reinforces their behavior;
- are not overly anxious to change; and
- never like to get challenged, “punked” or “dissed” in front of their peers.

The point is that for troubled youth growing up in an emerging culture, who have been socialized to bypass adults and take control of their own experiences, the descriptor “participatory” can be more of a help than a hindrance for a volunteer passionate about making a “doer of the Word” and not just a “hearer only.”

This is certainly true when one recognizes that, apart from concrete experience, the most potent source of learning is repeatedly *doing*. We have already seen what happens in the learning process when the content of the Bible is taught outside the context of the troubled youth’s world. *Tell* and *show* apart from the context and *doing* experience of the young person does not work. Granted, the concrete experience of learning what the Bible says is often indistinguishable from *doing* what God wants. But while volunteer mentors are often comfortable with and even expectant that troubled

youth *do* what they are told, these volunteers are less at ease with encouraging them to participate as an equal participant from the beginning. Consequently, this essay argues that postmoderns who “want to experience it for themselves and help create what they experience”⁴⁷ will, in fact, facilitate discipleship.

True, Piaget and others have tended to think about cognitive development in a social vacuum, but research has proved Piaget right in suggesting that virtually all children go through a sequence of mental development. And children from a very early age think concretely before thinking abstractly, rather than the reverse. By the time they become adolescents (Piaget’s “formal operational stage”), children are supposed to be able to manage their emotions and feelings and to think and reason with abstract concepts.⁴⁸ But, even considering the strong influence social forces play, emotions are not innate; they must be learned. How are they learned? At the risk of over-simplifying, they are learned by *doing*. Kohlberg’s theories of moral development have also been criticized (and with good reason⁴⁹) but it is hard to imagine moral reasoning of any form developing taking place apart from a young person intentionally choosing to be involved.

Furthermore, in a very practical way, an emerging young person who takes the initiative to participate in figuring social and spiritual things out will help the volunteer get to know her better. Apart from Jesus no one can really know someone else if she chooses to hide. But even Jesus chose to make disciples in our world. “The Word became

⁴⁷ Ibid, 67.

⁴⁸ See Mooney, 1-20.

⁴⁹ Craig Dykstra makes a very strong case in criticizing Kohlberg’s work. He outlines four criticisms of Kohlberg, one of which is that he separates religion from moral reasoning. Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator’s Alternative to Kohlberg* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 7-29.

flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

And he connected with one person at a time. Those familiar with Scripture, for instance, are familiar with how Jesus began evangelizing a “troubled” Samaritan woman from the city Sychar, as told in the Gospel of John, chapter four. It is evident he spent time getting to know the woman and contextualizing the gospel story so it made sense to her. Jesus began at her starting point. Likewise, according to I Corinthians 9:20-22, the Apostle Paul changed his approach to the Gospel story with every “troubled” person he met. Thus, troubled youth should never determine what a volunteer’s message should be, but they always determine how to *tell*, *show* and *do* it. Plan-centered strategies will not work but person-centered strategies do. How better to begin understanding at-risk kids than through their own desire to be participatory?

There are other ways this emerging trend will facilitate volunteers working with troubled youth. They go beyond how volunteers think of discipleship but they have very practical significance. Troubled youth are kinesthetic learners, eager to “experience it for themselves and help create what they experience.” Such an attitude beats no other motivation in learning something new if a volunteer mentor can channel it in the right direction. While some have audio or visual preferences (and these are increasing in the emerging culture), all troubled youth learn by doing, and doing, and doing. By encouraging individual participation the volunteer is providing his new disciple with an opportunity to learn confidence in some new experience. For example, a practical benefit could be the young person’s new confidence in learning a social skill. Learning social

skills has long been thought to be beneficial for helping a young person and adults alike stay out of trouble.

Even in correction settings where education and rehabilitation often remain low priorities there has been a gradual shift over the last fifteen years from the “positivist” school of criminology towards the “classical” school.⁵⁰ The positivist remedy is to teach academic and vocational work skills. The classical remedy is cognitive social skill development with a strong value on taking responsibility for one’s behavior. In reviewing the correctional education research, it is interesting to note the cognitive deficits that have been linked to criminal behavior are not problems related to learning disabilities or low intelligence but deficits in social or inter-personal reasoning and practice, such as difficulty with delaying gratification, learned helplessness, lack of consideration and empathy for others, low frustration tolerance, and blaming others.⁵¹ These are characteristics common with at-risk and delinquent youth.

Other studies make a similar point regarding the merits of social skills training. For instance, Sherman and others, in *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t, What’s Promising*, find that social competency skills (life-skills) training taught over a long period of time reduce delinquency and substance abuse and conduct problems.⁵²

⁵⁰ The “positivist” school views crime as the result of a variety of social problems which corrupt and cause delinquent behavior. The “classical” school views crime as the result of a person making destructive choices because they have low self control and find gratification in committing the crime. In other words, the classical school is characterized by a belief in “free will” on the commission of behavior. Certainly Christians could commit to both views but the key concepts of the Classical School—free will and rational choice—represent more, not less, individual responsibility for behavior.

⁵¹ See especially E. Fabiano, “How Education Can Be Correctional and How Corrections Can Be Educational”, *Journal of Correctional Education* 42, no. 2 (1991): 100-107, and S. Samenow, “Correcting Errors of Thinking in the Socialization of Offenders,” *Journal of Correctional Education* 42, no 2 (1991): 56-60.

⁵² Lawrence W. Sherman and others, “Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t, What’s Promising” (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, July 1998), 8.

Participatory involvement in learning pro-social thinking, behavior, and relationship skills is necessary. This is not to say that everyone believes in the effectiveness of teaching social skills because, comparatively speaking, “there have been few studies that have evaluated the long term effectiveness of these approaches in terms of preventing antisocial behavior.”⁵³ The simple point is that even in teaching social skills often found to be helpful a young person who wants to actively participate is very helpful to a volunteer.

The practical importance of an emerging young person who wants to participate in, not just observe, life goes beyond learning a social or vocational skill. Many troubled youth, as we have seen, are missing the basic needs that nuclear families should provide, such as attention, love, discipline, values, and spirituality. These are foreign challenges to many in a white-middle class evangelical community, especially when combined with cultural differences. Consequently, volunteers unconsciously treat troubled youth (especially minority youth) differently. Unintentionally, of course, these youth recognize different treatment and tend to resist learning, resulting in their being shut out of the discipleship process. Risking oversimplification culture influences cognition and learning.

For example, Janice Hale-Benson and other researchers describe four learning styles in African-American children: Person-Centered, Affective, Expressive, and Movement-Oriented.⁵⁴ The practical ministry application is that volunteers who understand these learning styles can take great advantage of them but those who do not

⁵³ Heilbrun, 34.

⁵⁴ Janice Hale-Benson, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

understand the cultural setting of African-American youth often miscommunicate and invariably authority challenges arise. Why? Because African-American males typically do not like to back down from a challenge, good or bad, or be “punked” or “dissed” in front of their peers. And challenges from adult volunteers usually come when troubled youth have not been encouraged to ask questions or participate and back away from addressing those learning challenges. This author believes that an emerging participatory trend will help volunteers find commonalities with troubled youth that can become a self-motivating tool to learn how to do what the Bible says that are contextually relevant.

Another practical connection between discipleship and an emerging participatory trend with individual troubled youth pertains to individualized instruction. Individualized instruction takes advantage of the oldest and most successful type of teacher: the tutor. In a very practical way the volunteer mentor is a spiritual tutor and the educational concept of individualized instruction applies. There is plenty of research to support individualized instruction: “Professional educators and researchers now recognize individualized instruction as the most effective technique for teaching at risk-youth.”⁵⁵ These tutors have to be able to withstand the redundancy of teaching and re-teaching the same concepts. The key is to strike a balance between the volunteer tutor and the participation of the learner. It is a hard lesson for many volunteers to learn but they must never work harder to teach than the troubled youth is willing to experience. The reason is very simple: All variations of individualized instruction require the learner to participate and eventually create the *do* experience for themselves.

⁵⁵ Frederic M. Muse, “A Look at the Benefits of Individualized Instruction in a Juvenile Training School Setting: How Continuous Progress Accelerates Student Performance,” *Journal of Correctional Education* 49, no. 3 (June 1998): 75.

In an emerging postmodern culture many in the church community fear that young people will become “spiritual but not religious.” “Numerous writers identify this as the emblematic identity of seekers.”⁵⁶ To some extent such a concern is justified. A 2004 cross sample of American youth entitled “OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era” points out that “in fact many young people cannot identify what faith tradition or denomination they belong to and fully 23 percent do not identify with a denomination at all.... While many young people continue to attend worship services on a regular basis, just as many—if not more—practice their faith informally. Young people believe it is possible to be ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ without belonging to a church....”⁵⁷ But moderns assume incorrectly if they believe the church has done an effective job of turning out “Timothys” up until now. That is far from what the research shows:

The majority of U.S. teenagers are [sic] not rebellious toward religion but are generally rather positive about and conventional in living out religion. This fact should not, however, be presumed to mean that religion is among the most important concerns in the majority of U.S. teenagers’ lives.... When it comes to getting specific about religion in their lives, most teens seem simply to accept religion as a taken-for-granted aspect or presence that mostly *operates in the background* of their lives [emphasis added].⁵⁸

Another study, “Youth in Protestant Churches,” notes: “While we wouldn’t expect youth to have the same levels of faith maturity as adults, it is sobering to realize that two-thirds of young people in congregations have an undeveloped faith. For many of them, faith is dormant or declining, not life-changing and challenging.”⁵⁹ This means that the church

⁵⁶ Christian Smith, 77.

⁵⁷ Anna Greenberg, “OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in The iPod Era,” unpublished report (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, n.d., accessed 02 October 2005), 6. Available at www.Rebooters.net.

⁵⁸ Smith, 129.

⁵⁹ Roehlkepartain, *Youth in Protestant Churches*, 14.

has been relatively successful in the enculturation of religion in America but less effective in making disciples who want to tutor other disciples.

Nevertheless, the fact that “postmoderns want interactive, immersive, ‘in your face’ participation in the mysteries of God”⁶⁰ should encourage any volunteer who really does want to see troubled youth learn about God things. Again, the reason is very practical. Recent studies vary on the percent of the emerging generation that is actively engaged, passively engaged, and totally disengaged from religious interests, depending upon their definitions of religious attachment. However, in reviewing these studies one finds that for all practical purposes only about 25-35 percent of the emerging generation could be classified as “devoted,” “regulars,” or “the godly;” another 12-27 percent are seen to be more or less “disengaged;” and the remainder are undecided.⁶¹ This means that approximately half of the emerging generation in America is “undecided” or on the edge. “Youth in the undecided middle do not reject religion—over half strongly agree that religion is an important part of their lives and nearly half will call themselves religious (48 percent). . . . A plurality of generation Y falls in the middle, somewhere in between religious attachment and disinterest in the face of more pressing matters.”⁶² Therefore, any youth wanting to participate in spiritual things and motivated to do so should be encouraging to those who want to make disciples of troubled youth.

Paul, sitting in prison, no doubt knew that he was not going to get to do much more mentoring. He wrote his young disciple Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be

⁶⁰ Sweet, *PostModern Pilgrims*, 72.

⁶¹ See Smith, 219-220, and Greenberg, 18-19.

⁶² Greenberg, 23.

qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 2:2-3). Any one who has answered the call to make disciples understands that at the beginning it is very hard work. But eventually the new disciple catches up and takes the lead and, by the grace of God, “fruit remains.” Paul and Timothy said to the Colossians, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). What volunteer does not live to mentor a young man and see him mature in his faith like Timothy? An emerging trend that values “in your face” participation in the mysteries of God cannot do anything but facilitate making better disciples of troubled youth who want the experience.

Image-Driven

Postmodern culture is image-driven. The Modern world was word-based. Images come as close as human beings will get to a universal language....Metaphors are the medium through which biblical spirituality will be fashioned for this new world.⁶³

In an image-is-everything culture where images have supplanted words as the cultural vernacular, the church is heavily “logocentric” (i.e., word-based), nervous around images....What principles and points were to moderns, metaphors and images are to people in the emerging culture.⁶⁴

What comes to mind when a volunteer thinks about teaching the Bible to troubled youth? Jesus taught in parables—“an image-based form of narrative”⁶⁵—to convey truths about his kingdom, using illustrations and words that the ordinary people of his day could understand. For adults who want to teach God’s story to at-risk adolescents it is vital that they know how to communicate and understand in order to connect the experience of

⁶³ Ibid., 86, 92.

⁶⁴ Sweet, *Language of the Emerging Church*, 152-153.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 154.

learning how to do what God asks to the world outside the church. As we have seen, the way many modern adults have learned themselves is not consistent with how emerging troubled youth will need to be taught. The average adult volunteer growing up in modernity has experienced many different teaching methods over his lifetime. Each of those methods was intended to communicate something important.

Chances are that in the early grades he had a more integrated learning experience. Typically, early grade teachers used a variety of methods that told students about content and showed them how to use it; finally, they were given an opportunity to do something with the content. Indeed, many if not most of the skills the average volunteer relies upon were learned in elementary school. The more practice one had in using the skill the more one retained it. Unfortunately, for many adults this same level of integrated teaching generally decreases as the level of education increases. Most significantly, all those opportunities to do things, to build things, or to apply things are gone. What instructors at secondary and post-secondary levels emphasize is largely didactic, largely *telling* about something rather than *doing* something. Consequently, many volunteers learn to talk and use words and ideas, but they struggle to know how to communicate by *showing* and *doing*. Yet the challenge in discipleship is teaching troubled youth “to do what the Bible says.”

This is an oversimplification. Yet, what many volunteers often forget is what it was like to be taught in elementary school. They forget the stories, the pictures, and the “show and tell.” Troubled youth often function intellectually at the level of concrete experience rather than at the level of abstract conceptualization.⁶⁶ What is real and

⁶⁶ The term “abstract conceptualization” stems from David Kolb’s “experiential learning theory.” Following in the footsteps of others in the early 1980s who stressed that the heart of all learning lies in the

understandable to most at-risk young people is what can be encountered through feelings, experience and repeatedly practiced by doing. But how are things communicated? And what happens if the volunteer mentor does not speak the same language as his learner? The challenges of teaching are greatly compounded if the volunteer and the adolescent cannot communicate easily. The implication is that one must use common language, stories, and pictures to move the new disciple from the known to the unknown. But what language and what forms do they use? Certainly not the words, concepts and ideas experienced in secondary education. And certainly not a language that is foreign to students. This challenge requires adults to teach on an elementary level, using pictures, stories, and symbols.

Without a doubt, language has always been a tool that permits the creation and exchange of ideas, not only among adults in church settings but also across cultures and demographics. And herein lies the challenge for many evangelical adults. Making “Timothys” out of troubled youth requires volunteers to communicate in the emerging youth’s world, not theirs. But as adults they take their ability to communicate and hear what a young person is saying for granted. After all, they were once teenagers themselves. But few adults have allowed for the challenge of finding and speaking a common language. And, frankly, the language of evangelicalism is not understood by most at-risk young people outside the evangelical faith. Volunteers inside the evangelical

way people process or reflect upon experience in stages, Kolb added the stage of “abstract conceptualization.” He suggested that when people reflect they ask questions but in the abstract conceptualization stage people form answers and draw conclusions that lead to applications. We are using the term to draw attention to the fact that troubled youth struggle to move beyond concrete experience and feelings to the point where they can reflect upon what they are learning and then draw conclusions and make practical applications. In other words, they find it difficult to learn abstract concepts or an idea (concept) by comparing it to and disassociating it from, other ideas (concepts) based upon qualities within the environment of the learner. Volunteers need to understand that logic, ideas, and spiritual concepts have to be taught by being connected to experience and feelings. For an in-depth understanding of Kolb’s work, see David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984).

community often speak a different language and attach different meanings to the symbols and metaphors common to troubled youth outside. Troubled youth do not usually speak “white,” “middle-class,” “adult,” and “evangelical.” Words like “atonement,” “grace,” “sin,” and “justification” have no meaning. Troubled youth often speak a language of the street, formed in the inner cities, expressed in rap and hip hop and metaphors unfamiliar and uncomfortable to those in the church. Simply put, the language used to explain and connect the gospel story inside the church will not be understood by most young people outside evangelicalism. This certainly is not a new problem but volunteers have to de-church their language and learn to communicate in images and stories that connect to an emerging generation.

Yet the reality is that language is more than a tool. Language does more than enable us to communicate. It can determine, or at the very least influence, how troubled youth think and perceive the world around them. Symbols “connect with a pattern that has personal significance.”⁶⁷ Language, in many respects, defines how people see their world. There is validity to the Sapir and Whorf hypothesis, which holds that language predisposes us to see the world in a different way.⁶⁸ Sapir held that humans live in cultures that are different from one another, not in the same world with different labels attached to it. Social perceptions are documented in the words we employ. Consequently,

⁶⁷ James Lawley and Penny Tompkins, *Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through Symbolic Meaning* (London: Developing Company Press, 2000), 5.

⁶⁸ See Benjamin Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (New York: Wiley, 1956). According to this view, language does more than just allow us to communicate. It also shapes the way we perceive the world around us. Edward Sapir’s idea was that when societies speak different languages the worlds in which people live are in reality different worlds, not just the same world with different labels. Some critics argue that the hypothesis as later developed by Sapir’s student Benjamin Whorf overemphasizes the power inherent in language. They would argue that language only influences rather than determines how people think. However, the point we are trying to make is that the language of faith common to so many inside the evangelical community is not the reality for many young people outside.

language molds our minds and can provide insights into existing and changing social beliefs, values, and attitudes, as well as feelings. Symbols are things that stand for other things; in an emerging culture symbols are changing language exponentially. The youth population has changing needs. Tattoos, gestures, and music enable them to transmit conceptualize spiritual meaning required to become disciples.

The connection between language, symbol (image), and metaphor is significant in a counseling or therapeutic context as well. Recent works have shown that “our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature,”⁶⁹ which means that the way troubled young people (indeed everyone) conceptualize, think, and experience their world is largely metaphorical. Sweet recognizes the significance of metaphor when he says, “We live by metaphors. Metaphor is the ordinary language of the mind.”⁷⁰ Without understanding the language and metaphors at-risk kids use, it is nearly impossible for volunteers to effectively listen and participate in a truly helping relationship. Understanding the meaning behind what is being said in the context of interpersonal relationships is at the heart of any behavior-changing experience. For years, therapists have understood that a big part of developing relationships with at-risk adolescents is learning how to communicate with them.

Over four decades ago, Carkhuff shook up the professional mental health community by finding that the average lay person could be as effective in helping troubled youth as trained and “qualified” professionals.⁷¹ Carkhuff described a good

⁶⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

⁷⁰ Sweet, *Language of the Emerging Church*, 153.

⁷¹ Carkhuff in 1967 strongly stated that persons below graduate level who desire to be helpers prove to be more effective than do highly trained professionals. At a time when many in the justice system were beginning to rethink volunteerism this finding was huge. See Robert R. Carkuff and Bernard G.

facilitator as one who listens for the emotion and true meaning behind what an individual is saying.⁷² From that point on, studies indicated that not only is the counselee-counselor relationship a significant variable, but it also appeared to be the single most important factor in influencing group therapy. In a most practical way empathy and transference through modeling cannot happen without being able to listen and “hear” the meaning behind the language and what is being said.

Recently, in their work on “symbolic modeling” and therapy, Lawley and Tompkins recognize the importance of understanding and clarifying metaphors and the symbolic meaning behind what a young person is saying. “When everyday language is examined in detail, it is apparent that metaphor is far more common than first realized.” Like most professional therapists, they recognize that “studies have shown that how the client and therapist relate is one of the most important aspects of a successful therapeutic encounter, regardless of the type of therapy.”⁷³ For the purpose of this study, which seeks to demonstrate how utilization of the emerging “image-driven” trend will facilitate volunteers, it is helpful to note that Lawley and Tompkins also point out that, “in fact, it is ‘hard’ to ‘put together’ and ‘everyday’ sentence which does not ‘contain’ a ‘hidden’ or ‘embedded’ metaphor....Embedded metaphors are especially important because they

Berenson, *Beyond Counseling and Therapy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967). The reason this is memorable to this author is that four years later he began volunteering working with adjudicated youth from inner-city Detroit. Few professionals in the system thought that a volunteer could make much difference.

⁷² Typical of the support Carkhuff’s new lay-helping model was getting were comments like those of Daniel Logan, a professional psychiatrist working within the system. He recognized that these volunteers are “ordinary people with extreme patience,” who are by every indication are having very good results. See Daniel A. Logan, “Community Based Treatment for Juveniles using Volunteers,” *Corrective Psychiatry and Journal of Social Therapy* 18, no. 1 (1972): 26-30.

⁷³ Lawley and Tompkins, 103.

often indicate how the speaker is ‘mentally doing’ the abstract experience they are describing.”⁷⁴

As one would expect there have been volumes written over the last six to seven decades regarding psychological and mental health factors and the diversity of treatment needs associated with troubled youth. “Juveniles often have a myriad of psychiatric disorders and other problems, necessitating the development of a multimodal treatment plan allowing flexibility and creativity in implementation.”⁷⁵ This is certainly true for delinquents processed through the justice system: “While an estimated 15 to 20% of youth who enter the juvenile justice system have a serious mental health problem, a much larger percentage of these youth experience *some* mental health problem (up to 80% in some studies)....”⁷⁶ But it is safe to say that over last decade there has been a renewed interest in the mental health needs of at-risk kids. Whether youth are caught or merely at risk, studies consistently show a correlation between mental health problems and youth problems. Referring to a 2001 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study, Heilbrun notes: “The rate of mental illness in the general adolescent population is approximately 20%...and although estimates in the juvenile offender population vary greatly, rates are at least twice those associated with non-offending youth.”⁷⁷ When one considers the mental health challenges that many volunteers will face from substance abuse to depression to suicide to ADHD to family dysfunction to many other problems, it is impossible to believe that some form of counseling therapy can happen apart from

⁷⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

⁷⁵ Heilbrun, 296.

⁷⁶ Heilbrun, 134.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 85.

understanding metaphor and symbols. Yet the necessity for understanding the meaning behind metaphors and what is said does not just pertain to mental health professionals. It is equally important for the purposes of helping a volunteer to mentor at-risk adolescents.

For our purposes the real merit of taking advantage of an emerging “image-driven” trend is in its connection to the real visual, media-driven culture of Generation Y. As Tomlinson notes, “In the postmodern world image and reality are so deeply intertwined that drawing a line between the two is difficult.”⁷⁸ Today, television and other media, rather than parents or schools, have become the primary source of information about a young person’s world. Smith observes, “In the ecology of American adolescents, lives, religion clearly operates in a social-structurally weak position, competing for time, energy, and attention and often losing against other more dominant demands and commitments, particularly school, sports, *television, and other electronic media*” [emphasis added].⁷⁹ It is helpful for baby-boomer and Generation X volunteers to remember that the majority of youth they will be mentoring will have been born after 1981. An unprecedented number of these young people (referred to as “Generation Y” or the “MTV generation”) will come from households where both parents work or single parent households where the single parent is employed. Many have grown up with computers and are technology-literate with easy access to modern tools of communication.

But it is also a generation “defined by alienation and high school shootings, increases in sexually transmitted diseases, heightened awareness of terrorist activities, and prominent hate crimes based in prejudices of racial/ethnic identity and sexual

⁷⁸ Tomlinson, 81.

⁷⁹ Smith, 161.

orientation.”⁸⁰ When added to the perennial concerns typical of troubled youth, “the heightened attention to young people and their safety is highly understandable.”⁸¹ As most adults both inside and outside the church are aware, kids are encouraged to associate with a small group of siblings and peers and stay at home. Unfortunately, television in many ways destroys the age-old notion of childhood innocence. “In this context, home-based media, including television, personal computers with Internet access, video games, ‘home theater,’ and stereo systems become an important yet not completely unproblematic alternative for young people’s leisure time.”⁸² It does not take volunteers by surprise to hear that “two-thirds of all U.S. children aged two to eighteen watch at least an hour of television a day, and more than a quarter of U.S. ‘twins’—those eight- to thirteen-year-olds who are just entering adolescence—watch five hours of television or more a day.”⁸³ Clark goes on to show how evangelicals want to remain separated from a “image-rich” culture but make use of it to change how young people view evil.⁸⁴

But, as Smith notes, the emerging “image-rich” culture is also driven by the “other electronic media.” This is supported by the latest Pew Internet research, which indicates that

- Close to nine in ten teens are wired (87% of those 12-17 now use the internet, 51% on a daily basis);

⁸⁰ Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Offerings from the entertainment media, a large concern given the amount of time young people devote to them, are viewed in much the same way: they may be helpful when they produce potential converts to the Gospel, but they can be a dangerous distraction when they do not.” Ibid., 44.

- 84% report owning at least one personal media device (computer, cell phone, PDA, etc.);
- 81% are online gamers (compared to 32% of online adults);
- IM is preferred over email, pictures and music are shared more than words, and IM is the backbone of communication multi-tasking; and
- The population of wired teens surges at seventh grade.

Of course there are many variations pertaining to sex, age, ethnicity, the information sought and used, but the fact is that today's young people are "technology rich" and "enveloped by a wired world." Twenty-six percent say they use the internet for religious or spiritual information.⁸⁵ But it is hard to imagine that any adult volunteer can fail to imagine how profoundly influenced troubled youth are by television, film, and electronic images.

As noted earlier, for the last 25 years numerous studies have demonstrated a relationship between learning disabilities and troubled youth. Whether they are "hard" learning disabilities (physical or neurological problems) that are best referred to a specialist or "soft" learning disabilities (reading or emotional problems), volunteers can do much through using a variety of visual, tactile, auditory, and kinesthetic learning modes. It comes as no surprise, then, that these new disciples are typically very comfortable with technology, have shorter attention spans and a lower threshold for boredom, and resist memorization and busy work.

⁸⁵ See Madden A. Lenhart and others, *Teens and Technology: Youth are leading the Transition To a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, July 2005, accessed 15 September 2005). Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org>.

The learning styles of troubled youth in an emerging “image-driven” culture will be more active and visual than verbal. Given the distinguishing attributes of the emerging generation, including a highly visual imagination, volunteers who want to make disciples are obligated to explore different and innovative ways of telling the story that effectively address the young person’s world. So, because these kids tend to be poor readers and process information more slowly, the effectiveness of teaching concepts and reading the written word pale in comparison with teaching troubled youth how to do what the Bible says by making use of story, visual images, pictures, forms, and symbols. This author believes that volunteers who take advantage of an emerging “image-driven” trend will facilitate a young person learning to do what the Bible says.

Connected

The heart of postmodernity is a theological dyslexia: me/we, or the experience of individual-in-community....The church exists to incarnate connectedness and to inculcate greater consciousness of connectedness.⁸⁶

Connected interpersonal relationships are at the heart of any behavior-changing experience. Any young person has been socialized in large part by those around them and will be motivated to new attitudes, new behaviors, and new life in Jesus Christ because they are *connected* with others in a religious community. In a very practical way, volunteers cannot mentor troubled youth apart from *connecting* them into a faith community. This has certainly been the plan of our God all along. As Stanley Grenz notes, *connected* community is “God’s program for creation.”⁸⁷ The question is “Why?”

⁸⁶Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 115-116.

⁸⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Created For Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 23.

Grenz goes on to write, “Because the focus on community encapsulates the biblical message, it stands at the heart of the theological heritage of the church, and it speaks to the aspirations and the sensed needs of people in our world today. In short, as we realize that we are created for community we are in a position to connect Christian belief with Christian living.”⁸⁸

The idea of being connected in the way that God created individuals to be is equally important for everyone. Yet, arguably at no time has the concept of being connected into community been more important than in working with Gen Y young people in a postmodern culture. “Postmodern generations are characterized by a yearning for personal communities.... This need for belonging in a personal community has a horizontal dimension in deep friendships and a vertical dimension in yearning for the sacred or the spiritual.”⁸⁹ Numerous studies have been generated to investigate and get a handle on the communal aspects of socialization. Sociologists use the language of peer associations and cultures or socializing agents but, for all practical purposes, they are considering the influences and outcomes of adolescent connected communities. Much of the research suggests that children from an early age create their own, private peer culture that incorporates elements of adult culture but has special routines, values, and concerns of its own.

So, early socialization is not merely a period of apprenticeship for assuming adult roles and values but a time when children and young adolescents can collectively build their own world of meanings. What teachers and parents think may not matter half as

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Jimmy Long, *Emerging Hope: A Strategy for Reaching Postmodern Generations* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 141.

much to a young person as what his or her friends think. The importance of peers as agents of socialization increases in middle adolescence but by the time they graduate from high school they tend to begin adopting adult values. Thus, they will be influenced by adult role models, either good or bad. Of course, a lot depends upon whom the adolescent chooses as his/her connected community of peers. Studies have found that there is no one, single peer culture among adolescents; rather, there are many cultures (communities), supporting a wide range of different values and behaviors.⁹⁰ Like any volunteer adult, adolescents usually choose friends who are similar to themselves in social class, in race and ethnicity, and in values and aspirations for the future.⁹¹ Some young people of course identify with and connect to delinquent communities.

And, arguably, in no segment of the youth population has the association between individual youth been researched and looked at more than among troubled youth. Over the last half century control theories; theories of social disorganization and anomie; lower-class based theories; theories related to economic opportunity, interpersonal and situational explanations; labeling theories; even the neo-Marxist or radical approaches to understanding why adolescents deviate all find some sort of peer association. And lately, with an increase in the percent of females getting into trouble, these peer associations that have been applied to male delinquents are being revisited in connection with female adolescents.⁹² The point is that any serious consideration of troubled youth has to

⁹⁰ See, for instance, B. Bradford Brown, "Peer Groups and Peer Cultures" in S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliot, eds., *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 171-196.

⁹¹ See Ritch C. Savin-Williams and Thomas J. Berndt, "Peer Relations During Adolescents" in Feldman and Elliot., 277-307.

⁹² See Shoemaker, 246-269.

recognize the association with peers, including siblings, and its connection to the problems of youth.

Again, for the purpose of helping a volunteer make use of emerging EPIC trends, this “connected” trend becomes significant. This need among youth to be connected with peers will help a volunteer teach social skills and group loyalties. It is often assumed that the most effective method of making disciples out of troubled youth is relating them to an adult mentor through one-to-one relationships, and no one can argue that it is not helpful in winning the right to be heard. But experience and research has also shown that the percentage of cases where all variables in a one-to-one relationship are positive and constructive is very low. This means that combining all of the contextual and problematic factors that must enter into a discipler/disciple relationship can often result in a distorted and frustration relationship when only one adult is involved.

Because so many of these kids come from broken homes or negative sibling and peer relationships, they have never come to a place where peers their own age express a sincere concern about their welfare, much less their spiritual growth and well-being. Troubled youth are often very lonely young people hiding behind faces of indifference who do something deviant or illegal to meet their needs and connect to others. Any troubled adolescent has a critical need for belonging and for positive, connected peer relationships. Plus, the typical truly at-risk adolescent has limited verbal skills and a limited willingness to express himself; therefore, a pure, non-directive connected group can be very helpful over time.

Further, it will make it easier for the volunteer to reinforce the values of friendship and caring among peers—values that are relatively absent in the socialization

most troubled youth receive from authority figures, parents, and teachers. This is a benefit the extended church community can provide. Youth *connected* into community, according to Smith, is one of nine factors that account for “religion’s recurrent positive, constructive influence in the lives of American adolescents.” He summarizes by saying,

Most American religions take concrete form as congregational voluntary associations. As such, they provide...adolescent members, with multiple and continuous opportunities to observe, learn, and practice the skills of community life and leadership....Religious youth are exposed to and have the chance to acquire and practice a series of useful capacities and skills....Learning such skills clearly enhances the religious capital of youth....Thus, religious communities may inculcate in youth abilities that can increase their confidence and functional capacities, which may enhance their well-being and life outcomes.⁹³

However, this emerging trend will also facilitate ministry to troubled youth because it will reinforce the idea that troubled youth are not just individuals doing bad things that can be “treated” through the faith experiences of an isolated religious community. The emerging need for young people to be connected will also bring into focus what many are calling “social capital” and the broader need for connecting at-risk kids with “authoritative communities” outside the church.

There is a reason for this. As many inside and outside the evangelical community have noted today, the culture in which Christian volunteers are called to do ministry to troubled youth (and others) is also the culture where the American dream has changed. The American dream that used to be a middle-class living for all Americans has now been transformed into the ability to withdraw from public institutions like public schools, the social security system, and even the need to work, so that individuals can intentionally grow their personal fortunes by themselves. This culture of individualism, greed, competition, and self-sufficiency makes it difficult for caring adult volunteers to

⁹³ Smith, 244. Also see pages 218-251.

cultivate communitarian values and identities that promote empathy and social concern. No one is taken by surprise with that fact that individualism has long been a dominant cultural theme in America. It is an idea that has shaped the American experience and Western modernity. Consequently, over the last century one of the goals in socialization has been to raise children who are independent and self-sufficient. Adults are judged—and judge others—on the basis of individual effort and personal achievement.

Yet those in faith communities have tended to be highly moralistic and react badly when a public official (or parent or young person) does not exhibit the ideal moral values as expected. Judgments have an either/or quality: people tend to classify others and their actions as either good or bad, successful or failed, practical or impractical, right or wrong. This approach leads to thinking about absolute positions. If one accepts a certain principle, one must reject its opposite; the idea that some value may be both good and bad often makes Americans uncomfortable. And it makes many caring volunteers in the evangelical community equally uncomfortable. However, as we have pointed out, at some level in the relationship most religious volunteers have to connect with troubled youth different from themselves. So even though religion does have a significant role to play and the effectiveness of faith-based volunteers should not be underestimated, the question remains: What will facilitate church-based volunteers to incarnate the gospel to troubled youth in the emerging post modern culture?

This study has shown that one of the practical answers to this question lies in a young person's need for relationship, to be connected. The troubled youth, male or female, mistrusts others, lacks significant adult relationships to model appropriate behavior, has "deviant" social values, often turns to peers to find acceptance, and has

virtually no meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. But the fact is that troubled youth are not much different today than they have ever been. God created individuals to be connected. Regardless of the theories and cultural temptations, one understands the problem primarily by looking at the individual young person in relationship to the strengths and weaknesses of his/her connected relationships at home, school, peer group, and the culture as a whole. These are the risk factors that lead to a young person becoming “troubled” but they are interconnected to people and systems often outside the religious community:

According to the Study Group on Very Young Offenders...convened by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), risk factors for child delinquency operate in several domains: the individual child, the child’s family, the child’s peer group, the child’s school, the child’s neighborhood and the media. Most professionals agree that no single risk factor leads a young child to delinquency. Rather, the likelihood of early juvenile offending increases as the number of risk factors and risk factor domains increase....As the child grows older and becomes integrated into society, new risk factors related to peer influences, the school, and the community began to play a larger role.⁹⁴

In other words, many of the problems the typical individual troubled young person is facing stem from the fact that she suffers from “connected” relational dysfunction.

Fortunately, in striking contrast to modernity’s focus upon individuality, postmodernity will center around the connectedness of relationships. Leonard Sweet again observes: “The basic unit of the future is not the isolated individual, not the communal collective, but the interdependent collective. The more interdependent we become, the more important our individual uniqueness becomes....Connectivity is partly a response to the *decline in social capital, civic engagement, and social connections to*

⁹⁴ Gail A. Wasserman and others, *Risk and Protective Factors of Child Delinquency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, April 2003), 1-2.

other people—to partners, family, friends, and strangers” [emphasis added].⁹⁵ In other words, Sweet believes the emerging need to connect is partly due to a relational deficiency in society.

For our purposes of trying to help volunteers understand how best to make disciples it is interesting that Sweet refers to the work of Robert Putman. Since the mid-1990s, Putman’s theory of social capital has rapidly become the dominant framework in which the entire concept of voluntarism has been scrutinized and interpreted. But it also has a practical connection to the challenge of volunteers assuming the responsibility to minister to troubled youth in the days to come. The basic idea behind Putman’s premise of social capital is that social networks have value because people know people and naturally want to help each other. They have value specifically because civic engagement allows for information to be shared, trusting relationships to be developed, and cooperation to take place. Yet civic engagement, Putman argues, has declined because social capital in America is decaying. As the title of Putman’s book (*Bowling Alone*) suggests, even the teams from America’s bowling alleys have disappeared and with them the team spirit.⁹⁶ Needless to say, assuming Putman’s theory is correct, the decay of social capital among baby-boomers does not bode well for the number of volunteers needed to freely give their time and efforts to help troubled youth. But could it be that an emerging Generation X and Generation Y understand the importance being connected better than their parents? Research so far seems to validate this conclusion and only time will tell whether it is right.

⁹⁵ Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer, 72-73.

⁹⁶ Robert D. Putman, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon Schuster, 2000).

For now, the emerging cultural trend to move beyond individualism is both encouraging and needed. In the Fall of 2003, The Commission on Children at Risk, a group of 33 doctors, research scientists, mental health professionals, and youth service professionals, came out with a new study entitled “Hardwired to Connect: The Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities,” in which they painted a bleak picture of not just delinquents (defined as juveniles who have committed an offense) but children in general. According to the Commission’s Executive Summary, “The crisis comes in two parts. The first part is the deteriorating mental and behavioral health of U.S. children. We are witnessing high and rising rates of depression, anxiety, attention deficit, conduct disorders, thoughts of suicide, and other serious mental emotional, and behavioral problems among U.S. children and adolescents.”⁹⁷

That in and of itself should be a wake-up call for Christians to volunteer and incarnate the Gospel to troubled youth, but

the second part is how we as a society are thinking about this deterioration. We are using medications and psychotherapies. We are designing more special programs for “at risk” children. These approaches are necessary. But they are not enough. Why? Because programs of individual risk-assessment and treatment seldom encourage us, and can even prevent us, from recognizing as a society the broad environmental conditions that are contributing to growing numbers of suffering children.⁹⁸

Interestingly, the commission has found that what is causing this problem is a need that children have to connect and not necessarily with their own peer group. “What is causing this problem? In large measure, what’s causing this crisis of American childhood is a lack

⁹⁷ Kathleen Kovner Kline and Arthur C. Maelender, Jr., “Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities,” (New York: Commission on Children at Risk, n.d., accessed 01 December 2004), 1. Available at <http://www.americanvalues.org/ExSumm-print.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

of *connectedness*—close connections to other people, and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning” [emphasis added].⁹⁹

Certainly the church as a community of caring adults who have chosen to be the “hands and feet” of Jesus Christ has a valuable role to play.

Where does this connectedness come from? It comes from groups of people organized around certain purposes—what scholars call social institutions. *In recent decades, the U.S. social institutions that foster these two forms of connectedness for children have gotten significantly weaker.* That weakening, this report argues, is a major cause of the current mental and behavioral health crisis among U.S. children....What can help most are authoritative communities. Authoritative communities are groups that live out the type of connectedness that our children increasingly lack. They are groups of people who are committed to one another over time and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life [emphasis added].¹⁰⁰

In other words, children today are “hardwired” for close connections to others for moral and spiritual meaning. And, as Putman suggests, our society’s social capital needs improvement if we are going to provide the kind of connectedness these at-risk children and troubled youth in an emerging culture will need. Fortunately, the two most generous categories of volunteer donor engagement are young people growing up in a postmodern, connected culture and weekly churchgoers.

Enter the evangelical faith community, a community that is connected and can offer postmoderns “a deeply personal but at the same time communal experience of the divine and the transformation of life that issues from that identification with God.”¹⁰¹ Enter adult volunteers who can mentor, who will model a relational faith of restoration and healing, and who will value others above self, forgiveness, love, and a willingness to serve. Enter volunteers who recognize that “during the modern era, the individual was

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰¹ Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 112.

stressed, lauded, and catered to—sometimes at the cost of community. But Jesus is not just for *me*—he’s also for *us*. In fact, the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—asserts individual spiritual growth in the context of community.”¹⁰² And volunteers have the incarnational connection and effective involvement that cannot be underestimated.

Amy Sherman, author of “Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-based Ministries That Work,” writes: “It appears that only churches are willing to make the long-term volunteer investment required.”¹⁰³ That is the way God has always intended the Christian volunteer to be connected, is it not? And, if Sweet and others are right in concluding that young people growing up in an emerging postmodern culture are going to be more, not less connected, this emerging trend will facilitate how volunteers stay the course to make disciples of troubled youth and connect them to an evangelical community of faith.

¹⁰² Tony Jones, 80.

¹⁰³ Amy Sherman, *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries That Work* (Wheaton, Ill: Good News Publishers, 1997), 39.

CHAPTER 8. THE PROJECT

This study has shown that over the last half century it has been difficult for the evangelical church to enable volunteers to incarnate the gospel of Jesus Christ to troubled youth. Current methods and solutions for recruiting, training, and enabling volunteers have not adequately met this ministry need. Yet the evangelical church has a missional responsibility to address the problem of at-risk youth in America by teaching them how to become “doers of the Word and not hearers only”—in other words, why it is important to teach them how to do what the Bible says in their context and experience. Consequently, this responsibility requires the church to train and enable caring Christian adults to act as salt and light, to understand and respond to the ecological factors associated with the experiences of at-risk youth. The work has gone on to show why volunteers can make disciples of these young people. The effectiveness of Christian adults mentoring at-risk youth has been proven time and again; the record of history, research past and present, and the visible evidence of changed lives all continue to validate this fact.

As demonstrated above, research pertaining to religiosity and delinquency suggests that the church can have an inverse effect on the causal factors of troubled youth if it intentionally opens its boundaries, responds to related ecological factors, and then contextualizes the gospel message accordingly. In other words, if volunteers are going to become effective mentors and intentionally teach troubled youth how to become “doers off the word,” they will need to incarnate the story of God’s love into a subculture that is often very different from those inside the church. Finally, this paper has shown why one

of the most practical and effective answers to this challenge of helping volunteers contextualize the gospel in a postmodern culture lies in teaching them how understand and make use of emerging cultural trends (understood here through the lens of the EPIC acronym). Yet, even after acknowledging all of these claims, the question of “how” remains: “How can these volunteers be effectively trained and enabled given the current reality of non-involvement in many evangelical churches today?”

Simply put, the need for incarnational ministry to troubled youth exists. In turn, these youth can learn how to do what the Bible says and become mentors to their peers. Thus, the call for volunteers is essential. Caring Christian adults can effectively accomplish their missional responsibility and utilizing emerging culture trends will make the task easier. But no church can expect volunteers to just walk “on the job” without any orientation and training. And no church should encourage this type of costly involvement apart from ongoing encouragement and support with others. But many churches do just that. Volunteers are allowed to “sink or swim” on their own.

The need for training is obvious for any volunteer working within the church community but especially for adults working with troubled youth. Frankly, this type of training rarely happens in most church settings, which is discouraging. But a further, often more costly, mistake is to underestimate not only the training needs of their volunteers but also their ongoing enabling and emotional support needs. Again, this problem is not unique to just volunteers working with at-risk adolescents. But typically the expectation is that any caring adult with the right heart does not need a lot of training and support. They are just asked to meet with these “difficult” youth a few hours a week and be a friend. Yet, in reality, as many studies have shown, forming the relationship

between the troubled youth and the volunteer is actually quite difficult and often frustrating for the adult.¹ Without at least some training and support on an ongoing basis, most mentoring matches will not work. Within a year the relationship will likely have ceased and the young person will have experienced one more “caring” adult who did not seem to care.

In addition, volunteers greatly benefit from learning about basic youth development needs, family problems, and other ecological factors pertaining to school, peers, and the “delinquent” subculture. As the mentoring relationship develops, more practical helps regarding communication, building trust, and handling common discipline problems are highly valued. Applying the gospel in an emerging culture and subculture often different from most inside the church requires hearing a “foreign” language and understanding metaphors in rap and hip-hop, compounding the need for ongoing training and support. Furthermore, helping volunteers make use of emerging EPIC trends to teach these kids “how to do” what God wants cannot be taught as “one size fits all.” The point is that volunteers who receive good training, good supervision, and ongoing encouragement are much more likely to form effective mentoring relationships and stay the course in helping troubled youth learn how to do what the Bible says.

This author believes that a very practical and effective way of stepping in and delivering this type of help is through an online interactive website. The primary goal of this project is to develop and maintain a user-friendly website that will facilitate the ministry of Christian volunteers working with and making disciples of troubled youth. This website will allow for ongoing training, asking and answering questions, and

¹ Kristine V. Morrow and Melanie B. Styles, *Building Relationships with Youth in Program Settings: A Study of Big Brother/Big Sisters* (Philadelphia, PA.: Public/Private Ventures, 1995).

discussing with other volunteers the challenges and practical helps pertaining to individual mentoring experiences. It will provide answers to key questions every volunteers asks, like “Should I be working with troubled youth?” or “How do I understand troubled youth?” or “How do I teach troubled youth the Bible? Further, it will provide for an online supportive community of caring, prayerful, and empathetic adult volunteers who going or have gone through similar experiences.

The content of the site will be short and to the point; it will use common “volunteer friendly” language and be scan-able. It will address practical concerns and provide answers for questions like: “Should you be working with troubled youth?” “How to discipline troubled youth?” “How to evangelize troubled youth?” “How to work with the families of troubled youth?” and, of course, “How to make EPIC disciples of troubled youth?” The initial content, consisting of EPIC explanations and applications, will be written by the author. But others will be encouraged to develop and share additional applications that will be useful to readers.² Applications drawn from the EPIC paradigm, particularly those that emphasize the need to teach troubled youth “how to do what the Bibles says” will be especially encouraged. Contributed articles and content will be reviewed by editors before posting for purposes of spelling/grammar, language, usefulness, accuracy of information, and disclaimers. Professional advice will be included and appropriate referrals made when the administrator of the site recognizes that the scope of the problem is beyond the ability of the mentoring volunteer. Hopefully, this site will help volunteers develop a new understanding of an emerging youth’s cry for love

² The site will make use of exciting but rewritten content from Dwight H. Spotts and Ralph Veerman, *Reaching Out to Troubled Youth* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987) as well as other articles and practical applications he has written.

and will fill the need within the evangelical community to effectively enable those called to incarnational ministry in this way in an emerging postmodern culture.

CHAPTER 9. PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

This section outlines the audience, purpose, plan, content, and specifications for an interactive website to encourage, enable, and train volunteers how best to use EPIC trends to make disciples of troubled youth.

Description of the Website

Site ID: Reaching Out To Troubled Youth Network

URL: <http://www.rottynet.org>

Tag Line: A network of caring adults reaching troubled youth

Welcome blurb: How to help make EPIC disciples of troubled youth in an emerging postmodern culture.

Who we are: ROTTY Network exists to encourage, equip and enable a new generation of Christian adults to holistically mentor troubled youth into becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

META Keywords: Current research using *Wordtracker* suggests that the seven best keywords are *teen, teenager, Teen, youth, volunteers, troubled youth, and Youth*, in that order.

Purpose of the Website

It has been the proven experience of many practitioners that volunteer mentors motivated to become involved in this type of ministry need ongoing support, training, and encouragement. Consequently, the primary purpose of the site is simple: to facilitate the

ministry of Christian volunteers working with troubled youth. The site has two objectives:

1. To train adult volunteers how to best relate to, mentor and make disciples of troubled youth in an emerging postmodern (EPIC) culture.
2. To connect volunteers seeking encouragement, answers, and support in an online community.

Website Goals and Strategies

The goals and strategies of the website are as follows:

- To develop a user-friendly website that will accomplish the above two objectives.
- To produce an online website that provides:
 1. Answers to five or six key questions every volunteer working with troubled youth needs to know.
 2. Explanation of emerging EPIC trends and their practical usefulness.
 3. Up-to-date examples of how these EPIC trends can be used to facilitate the experience of learning.
 4. Section for volunteer interactive questions and answers catalogued under 15 to 20 general categories (e.g., sex, drugs, gangs, school, family, etc.)
 5. Sidebars for recent research, findings and ministry applications.
 6. Linked sites containing christian and secular resources.
- To recruit and train a network of volunteers and professionals that can train, enable, and encourage other volunteers online.
- To develop the site over the long term as utilization continues.

Website Intended Audience

The church has often struggled to work with troubled youth. It has subsequently found it difficult to effectively encourage, train, and enable adult volunteers involved in this area of ministry. Consequently, the primary target audience for the *Reaching Out to Troubled Youth* website is church-based volunteers working with troubled youth. A secondary audience will be ministry and secular professionals who desire to explore, learn, and connect with other Christian adults working with this population of youth.

Projected Budget

Table 1. Website Projected Budget

ITEM	COST	TOTAL
Graphic design	Donated	0
Site development/design	Donated	0
Site registration/hosting	\$18.75/month	\$225
Marketing	Brochure/letter = \$200 Marketing mailing = \$150	\$350
Broadband/DSL service	\$50/month	\$600
Miscellaneous	\$300	\$300
Total		\$1475

Contributors

Site test volunteers

1. Robert Miller: Youth Pastor
2. Steve Munter: Parent, IT Professional, Volunteer
3. Josh Roe: Youth For Christ Executive Director, Volunteer Manager

4. Heather Voltz: Residential Care Caseworker, Volunteer
5. Brian Smith: Teacher of LD/Delinquent Youth, Volunteer
6. Alaina Zemke: State Caseworker, Volunteer
7. Kaleb Gentry: College Student, Volunteer
8. Rodney McAuley: School District Administration, Volunteer
9. Ron Nikkel: Former President, Prison Fellowship International

IT site design and content editing

Nathan Zemke has agreed to work on this project with me. He is knowledgeable about both site construction and design. He has also agreed to continue working with me through the initial stages of hosting, testing, publishing and administration of the site.

Content editing

1. Dr. Bruce Barton: Senior Editor, *Life Application Bible*
2. Steve Munter: Website Design/IT Professional, Volunteer Editor

Website Administration

Lisa Nebergall

Website Marketing

Scott Rodin

Technical Specifications

Platform: ASP.net

Primary programming language: VB.net

Database: SQL

Content Management System: A combination of RichTextBox, created by Richer

Components, attached to a SQL 2000 database. All content is stored in the SQL database as a backup.

Host: Discountasp.net

Features and Utilities

Home page features: The home page or site index will contain drop down menus labeled

“Who We Are,” “Questions to Ask,” “Interactive Forums,” “Resources,” and “Ask Question.” It will also include sidebars with an “EPIC Discipleship” explanation, “Things to Think About” and an “Unanswered Questions” section. In this section current unanswered questions will be posted; a user will be able to click on the question and respond with an answer. When a question is answered the system will email the user with the response as well as post it to the site.

User login: User login capabilities will be included that capture email and other pertinent information allowing for the distribution of pertinent information, research, and training resources.


Question data: Users will be asked to provide key details to help clarify online description of the question:

1. Who the young person is (i.e. traits, habits, nature, etc.).
2. What the mentoring relationship is (e.g., friend, Sunday School teacher, youth worker).

3. The length of time the mentoring relationship has existed.
4. What the volunteer's desired outcome is.

Discussion Board: The discussion board will allow users to post and answer questions. It will also be designed to allow for user to ask for “professional” advice from qualified staff.

Additional Resources: Additional resources, both Christian and secular, will be posted to provide insights, training and practical mentoring help be to volunteers. These will include articles from other authors and sources pertaining to the discipleship of troubled youth.


EPIC Icon: An icon  will be used to note possible practical applications for connecting emerging EPIC trends with the teaching troubled youth how to do what the Bible says.

Content

The content will be short and to the point, will use common “volunteer friendly” language and will be easily scanned. The initial content will be written by the author.¹ Other authors will be encouraged to develop and share additional EPIC applications and make suggestions useful to all readers. Content from contributing authors will be reviewed by editors before posting for purposes of spelling and grammar, language, usefulness and accuracy of information and disclaimers.

The content of the site will be primarily in three separate areas:

¹ Some rewritten material will be used from Spotts and Veerman.

1. Discussion Board and Blog: An interactive discussion board and blog where volunteers can ask questions under a broad range of problems on a drop-down menu regarding how to minister to troubled youth; ask and answer questions with others who have similar concerns and connect in online community for encouragement, emotional and prayer support. It will also be set up to allow for administration of privacy issues and advice from professionals in the field.
2. Training: Answers to frequently asked questions from volunteers (e.g., “Should I be working with troubled youth?” “How to handle discipline problems?” “How to understand troubled youth” “How to disciple troubled youth?”).
3. EPIC applications and Icon: The site will make use of the acronym EPIC,² as defined by Leonard Sweet, to explain emerging postmodern trends. Use of a side-bar on the opening page will briefly define each EPIC trend and the merit of utilizing these trends to connect the gospel to troubled youth in an emerging culture. The EPIC explanation and applications will be developed by the author. The EPIC icon  will be used to note a practical EPIC application that can be used to best teach troubled youth how to do what the Bible says.

² See Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*.

Site Architecture

The following components will comprise the architecture of the site: The site is organized as follows:

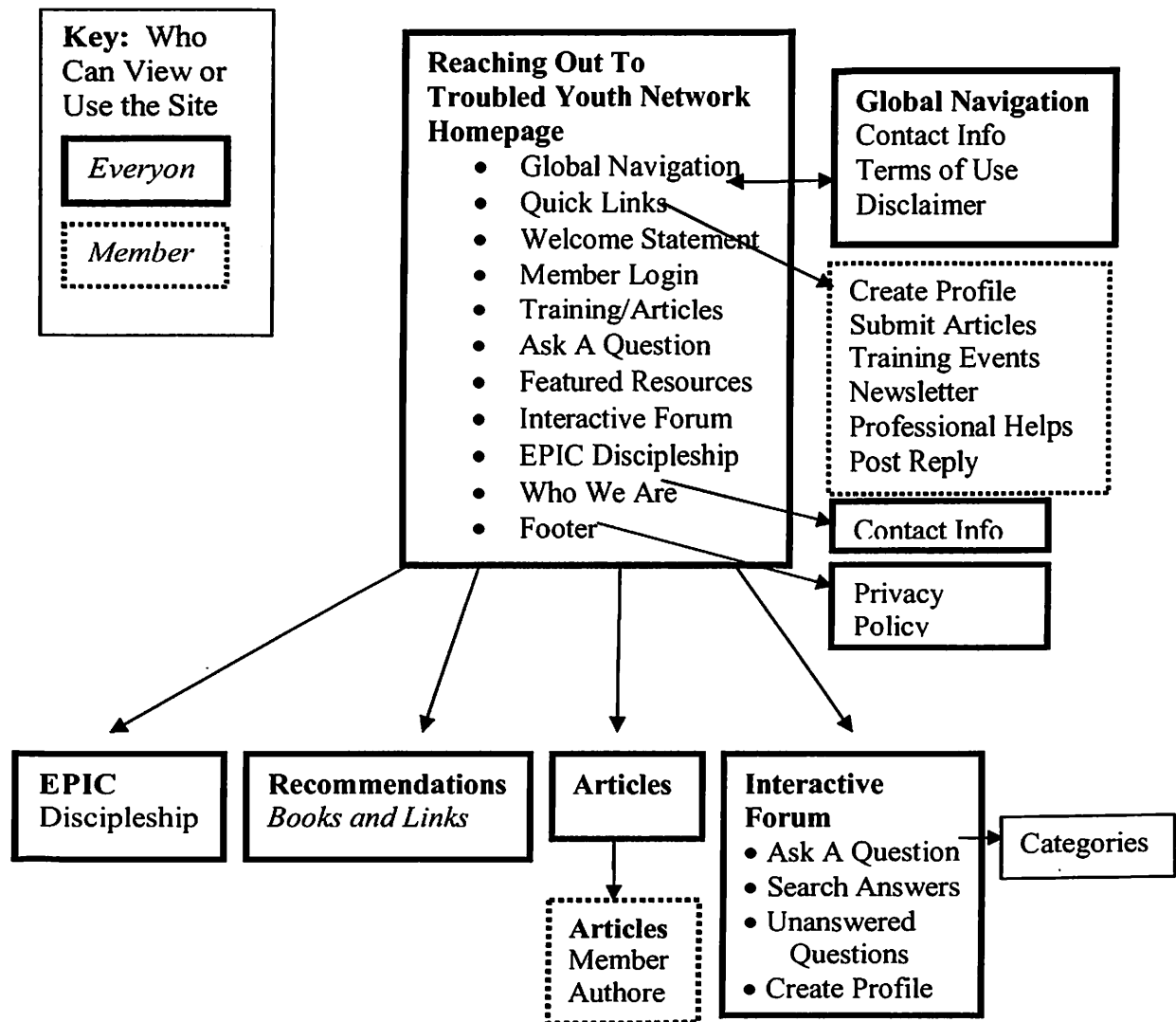


Figure 1. Information Architecture for ROTTY Network Website

Design Specifications

Site Template: All pages will be created using a site template allowing for uniformity across the site.

Stylesheets: The style of the site will be controlled by CSS (stylesheet), which allows for common look and feel of content. Using CSS will also facilitate future change and revision.

Page Size: The page size will be set at 1024 x 768, which is compatible with most monitors today.

Animated Icons: Animated icons, Flash and other items will be used sparingly on all content pages so the reader will not be distracted from content.

Scalability: This site will be created to be scalable. It is built on a MS SQL 2000 database and makes use of a flexible template design to allow for a large increase in content without having to significantly change the site design.

Class Libraries: A series for class libraries for all site procedures will be created to allow for the easy maintenance of the code.

Fonts: Arial, Veranda, Sans Serif

Color: The following color schema has been chosen.



Figure 2. Web site color schema

EPIC Logo

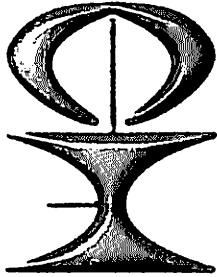


Figure 3. Experience, Participatory, Image-rich, Connected logo

ROTTY Logo



Figure 4. *Reaching Out To Troubled Youth* logo

Header Image

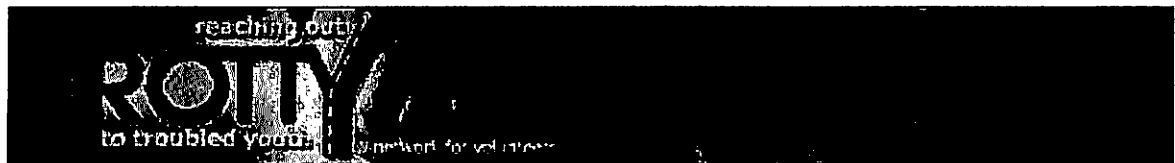


Figure 5. Web site page header

Footer: Information to be displayed in the footer will include contact information, organizational information (i.e. “who we are”), revision date of page, privacy/confidential information, and a legal disclaimer.

Testing

Ideally, there will be two initial stages of testing. The first stage, the “alpha-version,” will consist of a small group of individuals who will use the site repetitively testing key aspects. During this stage debugging will be turned on so all errors can be reported back to the developer.

The second stage, the “beta-version,” will consist of a larger population using the site for its desired purposes. Each user who is using the site during this period will also be required to report errors and error codes back to the developer. After this period a standard error page will be presented to the user with the option of sending a message to technical support.

Evaluation

The success of this site will be evaluated using both a quantitative and qualitative measure. The quantitative measure will be judged in large part by the number of ongoing hits received over a month. This is the most accurate quantitative indicator. The tool used in this regard will be the stats program provided by the site host: <http://www.discount.net>. However, due to the nature and purpose of the site, there is also a qualitative consideration that will need to be evaluated. The qualitative evaluation will purpose to consider the usefulness or effectiveness of the website. This evaluation will be based

upon the discussion board interaction and “support help” offered to other users, the characteristics of the user (e.g., volunteer vs. paid staff, Christian vs. secular), and the level of practical “how to” information generated by users. This type of qualitative information will be a good indicator of site success. The site is being developed to track both the quantitative and qualitative information.

Tracking and Maintenance

The site will contain an ongoing management system consisting of the following:

1. Ability to delete question.
2. Ability to respond with a “qualified” answer to questions marked.
3. Ability to edit all site content in an MS Word-like editor.
4. Ability to add, delete, edit users for the site.
5. Ability to send a message to all site subscribers.

Ongoing evaluation and administration is planned. Updates will be done as needed.

Marketing

Marketing the site will be accomplished through the following means:

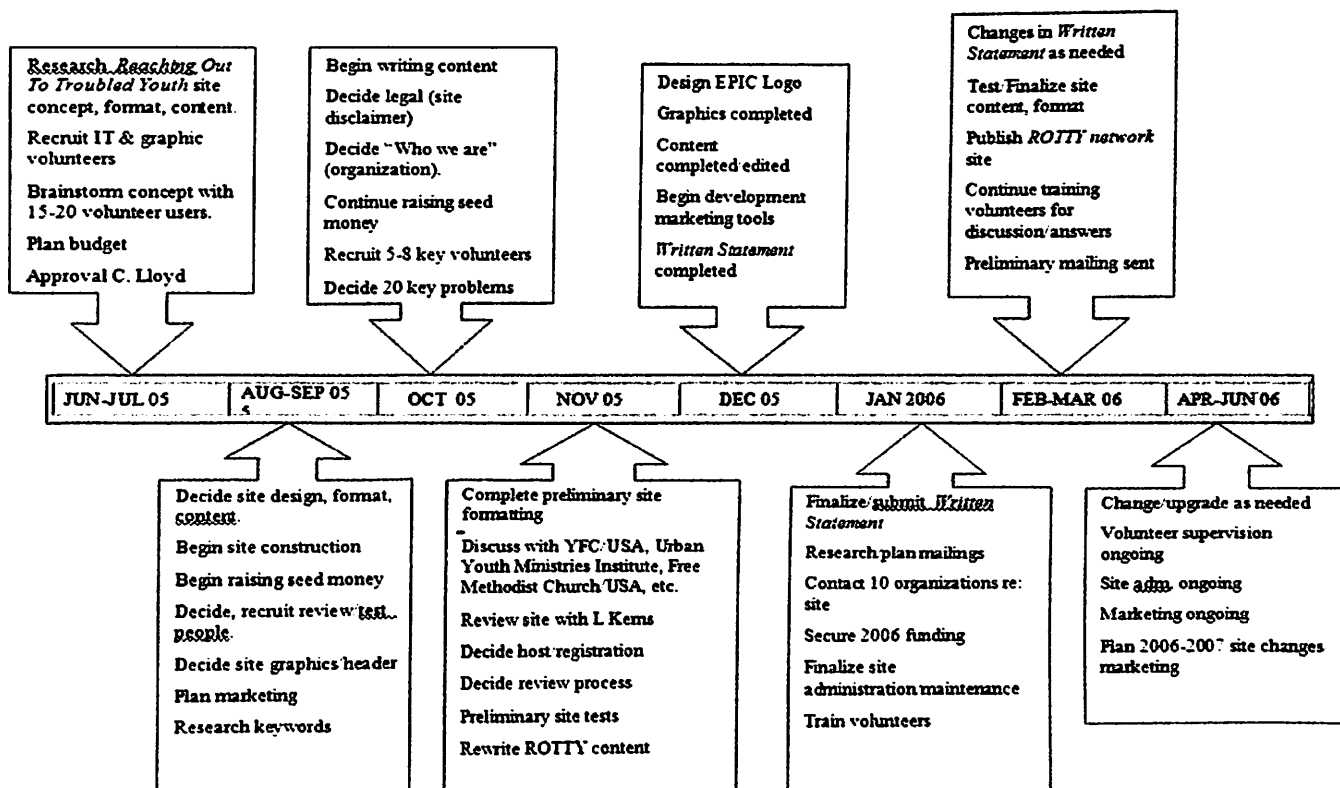
- Identification of Keywords: Research will be done using “Wordtracker” proprietary software to select the best three or four keywords and improve the chances of being found by search engines.
- Individual Marketing: Word-of-mouth to existing organizations and denominations with pre-established relationships interested in this type of ministry.

- Mailings: Selected mailing to parachurch organizations (e.g., Teen Challenge, Youth For Christ/USA, Prison Fellowship International), denominations, and agencies utilizing volunteers in churches.
- Volunteer Associations: Marketing to voluntary organizations and associations (e.g., National Association for Volunteers in Criminal Justice, Points of Light)
- Advertising: Selected denominational and other publications will be researched.
- Online links: The site will use key associated online links (e.g., Urban Youth Workers Institute at <http://www.urbanyouthworkers.com> or Youth Workers Institute at <http://www.youthworkers.com>).

Web Site Development Process

The following one-year process has been implemented to assure appropriate planning, design, development, marketing, publishing, and testing of the *ROTTY* website:

WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



POSTSCRIPT

Introduction

This study has shown that over the last half century it has been difficult for the evangelical church to enable volunteers to incarnate the gospel of Jesus Christ to troubled youth within the context of their lives. The work has also demonstrated why current methods and solutions for recruiting, training, and enabling volunteers have not adequately met this ministry need. Yet the evangelical church has a missional responsibility to be “salt” and “light” and make disciples of at-risk youth by teaching them how to become “doers of the Word.” The author has gone on to show why adult volunteers acting as spiritual mentors can effectively train these young people to experience the gospel, given the proper training and support. Further, this study has shown why one of the most practical and effective answers to this challenge of helping volunteers contextualize the gospel in a postmodern culture lies in teaching them how to understand and make use of emerging cultural trends (understood here through the lens of the EPIC acronym). Finally, this author has established that one of the most practical means of training and enabling volunteers, given the current reality of non-involvement in many evangelical churches today, is through an interactive “Reaching Out To Troubled Youth” website. This work has the theological, methodological and practical ministry implications.

Yet, even after acknowledging all of these claims and delineating the real-world ministry solution it will be helpful to reflect upon and evaluate the execution of the project in the three areas outlined below.

Reflections Regarding the Study

First, no one church community can legitimately argue for non-involvement.

Adult volunteers are mandated and able to help young people learn how to experience the gospel of Jesus Christ. Current findings provide ample evidence that caring Christian adult mentors can be seen as a relevant solution for addressing the problem of troubled youth in America. In the spirit of church-based, multifaceted ministry approaches to various social problems, it would seem that common sense, combined with historical example, empirical evidence, and biblical mandate, warrant the inclusion of the church community in training and enabling volunteers to address at-risk youth. Yet even more research is needed to examine more closely the specific contribution church-based mentors can make to the spiritual development and socialization of troubled youth over the course of life.

Second, much of the prior disinterest in training and enabling volunteers to incarnationally affect the lives of troubled youth within their cultural context will continue to be, at a minimum, unnecessarily short-sighted. This will become increasingly important given an emerging postmodern culture and the prevalence of religious belief among American adolescents. Though more research is needed in this area, the current information provides important relevant evidence that the evangelical church can play a key role as an agent of social control in lives too often typified by disadvantage and at-risk outcomes if it will engage and utilize emerging EPIC trends.

Third, meaningful comparisons between the past and the present church in America and its ministry interest pertaining to at-risk youth are difficult to make. Furthermore, they are not overly useful. Nostalgic reflections on a “child-saving” era and

a church interested in “saving” troubled youth take it back to a time when only a favored few went to school and the church was a primary socializing institution. Today the evangelical church in America is in the midst of yet another great cultural transformation. Consequently, the questions that are pertinent to doing this type of ministry today are “What can the church do to mentor at-risk young people to become Christ-followers in the information and post-Christian era?” and “What transformations will church ministries have to make in order to become part of the solution rather than part of the problem?”

Reflections Regarding Project Development and Implementation

First, the actual formatting and design of a website can best be done by someone who understands and enjoys the process. Designing and developing a user-friendly website site is not something most ministry practitioners (professional or volunteer) will want to do without the help of someone who “knows.” On the other hand, most website designers will not have the practical experience necessary to develop content nor design the site in a way that will be most helpful to volunteer users.

As a ministry practitioner it has been easy to overlook potential design mistakes and focus upon the content and end result of training volunteers. There is value in remembering common web design mistakes, like the following:

1. Content not written for the web, so that it cannot be read, is too long, or has too much technical or “professional” language.
2. Legibility problems, including hard-to-read fonts, small font sizes, and low contrast between the words and the background.

3. Too much flash.
4. Difficult search and key words. Finding the best key words takes time, effort, and some investment in utilizing research software like “Wordtracker.”¹

Selling and marketing the concept of a website to ministry practitioners has not been easy. Even though the actual monetary cost has been minimal from the start it has taken a major investment in time and effort. The author’s conclusions are that:

1. Many churches and youth-serving organizations committed to working with at-risk youth have developed their own methods of recruiting, training, and enabling volunteers and are somewhat satisfied, if not protective, of their volunteers and training methods.
2. Many current evangelical ministry administrators are baby-boomers. As such, many are uncomfortable with accessing the internet and making use of online resources. Frankly, they are committed to an older pedagogical style of teaching and are somewhat skeptical of “their” volunteers learning and encouraging each other online. If one adds that the idea of embracing “postmodern” EPIC trends to help train volunteers, then many evangelical leaders are very cautious.
3. The very idea of a “Reaching Out To Troubled Youth” website is novel. No one can prove how effective it will be long-term.
4. The marketing strategy will need to be multi-faceted (e.g., mailings, person-to-person sales, and advertising).

¹ See <http://webtracker.com>.

5. Even the best multi-faceted strategy will take several years of intentional development before it will pay off in significant user numbers.

The effectiveness of the ROTTY website cannot be judged on user rates alone. Any ministry intent on enabling volunteers to work with at-risk youth must be willing stay the course and consider the quality of help more important than the quantity of volunteers using the site. Indeed, the influence of a website is limited primarily to those who access the internet and make it a habit of getting help online. However, it is obvious from the preliminary test results that this tool has as much, if not more, potential for solving the problem of training and enabling volunteers than current methods and solutions used by the evangelical church in this regard.

Suggestions for Further Study

Preliminary testing has proven that, overall, the “Reaching Out To Troubled Youth” website provides volunteers with a resource they will use to find out how best to mentor troubled youth. To date, the methods used to collect data have been limited to informal online conversations and personal interviews with potential users from a variety of backgrounds and contexts. However, social development theory suggests that the strongest protective factor in the lives of youth is bonding with a parent and/or a positive adult influence. No website evaluation can adequately research the extent to which church-based mentors have been enabled to provide positive role-models and influence the discipleship process without collecting additional data.

The author also wishes to emphasize that evaluations to date have not examined the consistency of the usage across important categories (e.g., religious affiliations, socio-

economic, age, and education demographics) nor have they considered the type of questions being asked and information sought.

Neither has the site been tested for a parallel influence from training efforts and programs within the church. The best training efforts in the future may be a combination of volunteer seminar, online learning, direct mentoring, and supervision within the context of the local church. Toward this end additional training resources (e.g., books, manuals, videos, and CDs) will need to be developed.

In conclusion, our preliminary evaluation suggests that the ROTTY site can function as an effective way to train and enable volunteers. It will reinforce the important message of incarnational involvement and reaching those outside the evangelical community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Consequently, this author would argue that volunteers participating in ROTTY discussions and making use of practical EPIC helps will not only be better able to fulfill the gospel mandate to make disciples of trouble youth, but will also indirectly develop transferable skills that will enable volunteers train others in Kingdom-building possibilities.

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