

## Lewinsville Youth Ministry Task Force

### **Final Report to the Session December 2009**

Youth Ministry Task Force Membership: Hannah Bartram; Linda Bender; Brian Cassidy; Barbara Gibby; Libby McConnell; Alex Hinton; Allison Lineberger; Debbie McKinley; Ed Moore; and David Morrison.

We, the members of the Youth Ministry Task Force, submit to the Session of Lewinsville Presbyterian Church the following report and recommendations:

#### **Introduction:**

Earlier this year, the Session chartered the Youth Ministry Task Force to re-examine the spiritual and conceptual underpinnings of Lewinsville's youth ministry. In addition, the task force was asked to provide recommendations on personnel and organizational structure. Our group met three times in plenary session – in July, September, and November. The task force also supported a weekend-long assessment by the Youth Ministry Architects, a consulting firm headed by Mark DeVries, the author of the book entitled *Sustainable Youth Ministry*.

We gathered mindful of the importance of our charter, coming in the shadow of uncertainty created by staff turnover of the past several years. This shadow, darkened by other worrisome trends occurring throughout our denomination, created the imperative for our task force to go beyond simply reviewing the programmatic content of our youth ministry and develop a more complete understanding of the ministry's foundations, callings, and mission. Our task was not without joy; there are many vibrant, positive elements to Lewinsville's youth ministry that were confirmed by our review. We now must build on these positive elements to grow a sustainable youth ministry program over the coming years.

#### **Youth Ministry - Spiritual Underpinnings:**

Our church's vision statement prescribes that we "...develop a strong spiritual grounding in the midst of modern life..." This applies no less to our children than to any other group within the church. Arming our children

with the knowledge of God's abiding love so that they may grow and prosper amidst the turbulence and complexities of the modern world is indeed one of most important callings. Kendra Dean, in her book entitled *The Godbearing Life*, puts it this way: "In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Christian faith offers a center that holds and not just one more alternative from which to choose."

Unfortunately circumstances within and outside of Lewinsville have constrained our efforts to meet this important calling. Many of the main-line Protestant denominations – including the Presbyterian Church – have witnessed declining participation by children in worship and other church activities as membership numbers have decreased. In our own church we have experienced worrisome attendance trends in youth activities, particularly in the junior high grade levels. These trends may have been exacerbated to some degree by the frequent staff turnover in Lewinsville's youth ministry program over the past several years. And, even though Lewinsville staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly, dedicating their time and talents to create a solid youth ministry program, our efforts have been hampered by the lack of a shared vision.

Defining a shared vision and mission for our youth ministry was the principal objective of the task force. We grappled to discern the spiritual underpinnings of a youth ministry – the elements of a mission and vision statement for Lewinsville's program. Our review concluded that:

- Our mission is to name each and every person in our youth ministry program as a child of God, so that they come to know God even as they live in and cope with a sometimes hostile and always complex environment.
- Knowing God is a function of formation, education, training, spiritual journeys and, ultimately, serving as disciples and apostles.
- The objective of our ministry is forming our youth in the belief that God matters, that God is relevant to life, and that they (the youth) matter to God, to the Church and to Lewinsville Church.

These spiritual underpinnings serve as the basis for the "why" and "what" of Lewinsville's youth ministry program. From these, the task force further

concluded that our youth ministry should grow and evolve with the following core values in mind:

- Our youth ministry at its core should be designed and built around the person – to encourage kids to say “yes” to the Christian faith.
- Further, our youth ministry should be just that – a ministry that builds relationships and arms kids for coping with daily life, as opposed to focusing solely on programmatic content.
- The ministry should strive to create an everlasting support system for our children, by continually training our advisors and volunteers, and enlisting the help of kids that have gone on to college and beyond (everyone gets a mentor).
- Family participation is critical – a successful youth ministry engages the whole family.

The Youth Ministry Task Force’s review also revealed that “numbers matter”. That is, without sufficient resources to staff, train, and physically support a youth ministry program, Lewinsville could not expect to sustain and grow the ministry. As it turns out, the Youth Ministry Architects’ assessment of Lewinsville’s program confirmed that our church was meeting the basic numerical norms for supporting a youth ministry program (dollars to participant ratios, youth to active membership percentages, and the like). But, to grow and sustain a vibrant youth ministry in the future would require more.

### **The YMA Assessment:**

On October 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup>, Lewinsville hosted the Youth Ministry Architects (YMA) – a consulting group that specializes in assessing youth ministry programs. YMA met with numerous Lewinsville focus groups, staff, and Session members to discuss the assets, joys, and challenges of our youth program. YMA’s conclusions and recommendations were provided in a report to the Pastor, the Session and the congregation on October 18<sup>th</sup>, a copy of which is attached to this report. Following a thorough review of the YMA report, our task force agreed that some of the most important findings and conclusions from the YMA assessment were:

- There were no real surprises in the YMA findings. The YMA report validated the positive aspects of our youth ministry, yet confirmed the worrisome trends that prompted the creation of our Youth Ministry task force.
- The positive aspects and activities include:
  - A pool of talented youth willing to share their time and talents
  - Worship services in which our youth find meaning and joy
  - The continuing robust size of our confirmation classes
  - The summer mission project
  - A respected (“rockin”) church staff and dedicated volunteers.
- Some of the worrisome aspects of our ministry include:
  - The “busyness” of our lives – in fact and as an excuse for things not getting done
  - Struggling to go beyond meeting the basic metrics and numerical averages for supporting a youth ministry
  - No shared vision of what the mission and objectives of our youth ministry should be
  - Overtaxed staff and volunteers
  - Instability
  - A lack of integration between various youth activities – fellowship, confirmation, etc.

The task force believes that Lewinsville has the gifts and talents to address these worrisome aspects, and build on the positive aspects to create a sustainable, growing ministry. To do so requires a shared vision, implemented through an architecture of foundational documents and staffing structures that clearly define the roles of our youth ministry leaders and volunteers.

### **Mission and Vision Statements:**

Our youth ministry mission:

*To name each and every youth as a child of God, knowing that God matters to them and the world; to ensure that each young person knows that they matter to God, to the Church and to Lewinsville Church; to nurture faith in*

*our young people such that it will guide and comfort them throughout their lives; to set before our youth the vision that as today's disciples they will be called to become tomorrow's apostles.*

Our shared vision:

*To grow and sustain a vibrant youth ministry that:*

- *Provides opportunities to serve Jesus Christ through mission and outreach;*
- *Offers a safe, welcoming place of refuge, fun, and activities to deepen the connections of youth to God, our community, and the world;*
- *Welcomes all who come and actively reaches out to others;*
- *Encourages active participation of parents and families and develops creative ways for balancing youth activities with life's other demands;*
- *Takes the "long view", crafting programs and activities that will continue to draw youth back to the church and create a life-long faith; and*
- *Recognizes that the youth have important roles to play in our church as worship participants, as disciples and apostles, and as leaders.*

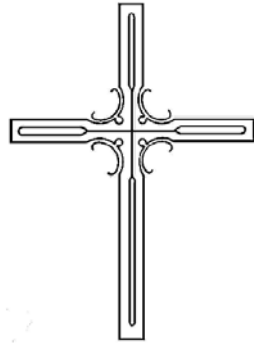
### **Recommendations:**

Implementing this shared vision cannot be done in a day, or a month, or even a year. It will take time and resources. Lewinsville Presbyterian Church has the gifts – indeed, the imperative – to invest in building a strong youth ministry. We need to leverage those gifts – the talents of our church leadership, the dedication of our volunteers, and the financial blessings we've received – to address the instability and worrisome trends that have beset our youth ministry program. As such, the task force recommends that the Session approve the following:

1. Hire a full time youth director and retain a part-time program assistant.
2. Charter a Youth Ministry Design team, charged with implementing the mission and vision statements by creating/enhancing supporting documents (directories, manuals, communication plans).

3. Establish performance metrics that include 3-year goals for number of youth participants, composition of staff and volunteer cadres, outreach mechanisms, and financial support.
4. Pray

The task force appreciates the opportunity the Session gave us to review our youth ministry and asks for your favorable consideration of these recommendations.



# YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT

## *Lewinsville Presbyterian Church*

*McLean, Virginia*

*October 18, 2009*

Prepared by Lynn Barger Elliott (Grand Rapids, MI) and Mitch Gore (Washington, DC)

### **Background**

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church (LPC) is located on a well-traveled corner in the tree-lined suburb of McLean in Northern Virginia. Its history dates back to 1812 when occasional services were held on its property, though it was officially organized on October 17, 1846. The founding congregation built a small, wood frame building, seen in photos and paintings around the church, at the crossroads of the village that became known as Lewinsville. The original building remained in use until 1955, when the present sanctuary building was erected. Today this building sits on a much busier intersection, but hints of its rich past are still present in the surrounding cemetery. Reflecting the landscape and values of the community, LPC strives to balance its historical roots with the desire to remain relevant to contemporary society.

Lewisville Presbyterian Church is a congregation of about 700 members, who travel distances up to 50 miles and “pass many other churches” on their drive to church. Members worship at two traditional services at 8:30 and 11:00, averaging about 275 in worship attendance. There is a strong tradition and emphasis on education for members of all ages. Between the worship services, much of the worshipping congregation also participates in an education hour. When asked to describe themselves, focus group members included adjectives like “intellectual,” “regional,” “refreshed” and “liberal.”

The church currently has two full-time ordained staff. Debbie McKinley is about to complete her first year of ministry as the Head of Staff. Emily Berman D’Andrea serves as the Associate Pastor responsible for pastoral care and parish life, and has just completed her ninth year at LPC. Ed Moore (“Dr. Ed”) is the Director of Music Ministries and leads the Youth choir, which includes youth in grades 7-12. Laura Hinton leads the handbell choirs for the youth. Allison

Lineberger, Director of Christian Education, is currently dedicating 10 hours/week to resource teachers for the junior and senior high Sunday School and Confirmation and to support youth group leaders. Carole Huston, who serves as the assistant organist, provides 10 hours/week administrative support for the youth program. Both Allison and Carole have stepped into their roles temporarily, to fill the leadership gap which occurred when Amanda Tompkins left her role as Director of Youth Ministry in July 2009.

In addition to the 20 hours/week dedicated to youth ministry in temporary support, it should be noted that a significant investment from the music ministries also upholds the youth ministry. It is estimated that the Director of Music Ministries contributes 5 hours/week and the Director of Handbells contributes 2 hours/week. In total, there is approximately 27 hours/week of staff time dedicated to youth ministry.

The staff has experienced much turnover in the past 5 years. The Reverend Gary Pindar, who served LPC for 37 years as youth pastor, assistant pastor, co-pastor and head of staff, retired in 2006. His tenure was followed by two years of interim ministry.

The youth ministry has seen frequent transitions. After a tumultuous time in the program in the mid 1990s and the resulting departure of Jeffry Neal, the youth program was staffed by several seminary students. In 2004, LPC made the commitment to staff the ministry with a full time Director and hired Allison Nahr who stayed until 2007, when her husband was transferred to another state. Linda Bender, a much beloved church member and longtime coordinator of the mission trip, has stepped into interim leadership twice (2003-2004, 2007-2008). Unanimously, youth and adults speak positively of ministry under her leadership. In 2008, Amanda Tompkins was hired to be the full-time Director of Youth Ministry and left the position within a year. For a variety of reasons, her ministry gifts were not a match for this congregation and youth program.

There are currently 85 youth on the church roll with an average of 27 individual youth involved weekly in Junior and Senior High Sunday School, confirmation (9<sup>th</sup> grade), Youth and Handbell Choirs, Youth Group (includes junior and senior high youth) and occasional youth group events.

**The average attendance for each of the groups is:**

Junior High Sunday School	7
Senior High Sunday School	7
Confirmation	12
Worship	25? (this isn't tracked, but most kids said they stay for worship)
Choir and Bells	17
Youth Group (Jr/Sr High)	8

The flagship event for the LPC is the summer mission trip. This weeklong trip has occurred every summer for 20 years and draws over 20 youth, about 20 college students and young adults who are "alums" of the youth program and about 10 adult members of the congregation. The trip is mostly self-sustainable, with a few minor fundraisers throughout the year. The mission committee designates \$2,000 from its budget to support this trip.

The church has a budget of \$1,155,000. Approximately \$69,530 of this budget is dedicated to youth ministry, which includes \$63,400 for salary and \$6,130 for program expenses.

Though LPC can point to a rich history of youth ministry, all focus group members were clear that the program can be more than what it is currently. To help address staffing and opportunities for growth, Youth Ministry Architects (YMA) was asked to do an initial assessment of LPC and

to assist the church in developing a path for the planning, development and implementation of a new future in youth ministry that will meet the needs of the current youth of the church as well as set the infrastructure for growth in the near and far future.

YMA met with 50 individuals in 8 focus groups. We also received 7 absentee interview forms. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

## MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

The current youth ministry struggles to pay the basic rent in all three of these areas. There are strong numbers and great enthusiasm surrounding the mission trip, yet this event does not translate into weekly involvement or a climate of stability. One focus group member told us, “Youth Ministry is a struggle right now. It’s inching along.” Though there is a solid group of youth who are involved in multiple activities, several youth are not connected in any significant way. There is clear consensus that though there are some successes to applaud in the youth ministry, it currently lacks the traction and momentum required to thrive.

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

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



As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, five rules of thumb – or what we call “youth ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1) **\$2,200 per Youth<sup>1</sup>**—With a budget of \$69,530 dedicated to the youth ministry and a weekly participation level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 27 students in some aspect of the church’s life, this ministry still has a little room to grow. The budget should allow the church to reach about 32 youth on a weekly basis.
- 2) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth**— Currently, about 27 hours/week is dedicated to the youth ministry. At this rate, the program is operating right on target. As we think strategically about future staffing for sustainable growth, LPC is not be poised to grow in the current staffing structure. However, if full-time staff is hired, it must be understood by the congregation that significant time in the first few years will be spent building a foundation for the ministry to thrive. This will include ministering to the families of the congregation, as well as involvement with community and denominational organizations serving youth.
- 3) **1 Adult for Every 5 Youth**— We like to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five students on an ongoing basis. Currently LPC has 10 regular volunteers working on a weekly basis with the youth. If the goal is a ratio of 1 leader for every 5 youth, the volunteer base is meeting the current needs and will be able to sustain growth.
- 4) **10% of the Worshiping Congregation**—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshiping congregation. With an average worship attendance of 275, the fact that there are approximately 27 youth who participate in church activities

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<sup>1</sup> Typically we recommend churches that churches need to invest \$1000 per youth. According to Sperling’s **Best Places**, McLean’s cost of living is 122.87% higher than the U.S. average.

on a weekly basis, points to a youth attendance that meets the national average.

5) **The 20% Challenge** —We have also observed that when the youth ministry begins to exceed 20% the size of the worshiping congregation, growth of the youth ministry typically stalls. It might, therefore, make sense at this point for the leadership of LPC to consider that if they double their effort to youth ministry, they are building a ministry with a maximum capacity of about 54 youth, regardless of any larger aspirations. Should the church desire to grow its ministry beyond that size at some point in the future, a qualitatively different kind of strategic plan would need to be implemented at that time – or the attendance of the church as a whole would have to grow.

## **ASSETS:**

### ***Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry***

#### **The Mission Trip that Keeps on Happening...**

Without a doubt, the mission trip is the pride of the youth program, if not the church. This tradition, which is over 20 years old, has touched the lives of generations of youth, many of whom continue to return as college students and young adults. Current and past parents attend as leaders. Youth, young adults and adults work side-by-side to serve others. They all come back renewed, excited, and as one focus group member said, “different people.” With great energy and enthusiasm, the participants lead worship the Sunday following their return and interpret the week to the congregation. Focus group members put this in their own words:

- I love that people of different ages come together for faith and mission
- When we are on the mission project, we act out our faith. I am friends with all these people.
- The summer mission project is fun! I like talking to people who went to church here when they were kids.

#### **Happy Youth**

The good news is that the youth who are active love this church. They value the emphasis on faith, learning, service and music. While it is true that they wish more people would come and that they had a permanent leader, they appreciate what they are receiving and have a sense of belonging to a group. When we asked the youth to rank their experiences of worship, confirmation and Sunday School, most scores were between 7-9 on a scale of 1-10. We heard comments like:

- I really like the kids in my youth group; we are like family.
- We feel safe with each other and can tell each other anything.
- I like that I can worship with my friends. We have a common faith background, which I don't have with my friends at school.
- I like having friends outside of school.
- I wish the church would consider ways that we could be more involved...like we would like to talk to the new members class and tell them about what we do and who we are.
- We are rebuilding right now. We need to connect with our own people and we need to build an identity as a group.

#### More than Administrative support providing stability

Allison Lineberger has served the youth ministry as the staff resource by providing seamless youth program direction in the transition period following the resignation of Amanda Tompkins. Beginning in the summer Alison organized the schedule for the youth group with volunteer advisors, has supported the volunteer Confirmation teaching team, helped select curriculum and work with teachers for Junior high and Senior high Sunday school. She also makes unbelievably detailed cool bulletin boards. Carole Huston provides admin support for Allison.

#### Committed and willing adults for volunteer service

The youth ministry at LPC could not happen without major outpouring of time, energy, love and compassion of a dedicated team of adults. Each week at least 10 adults are pouring themselves into the youth as Sunday School teachers and Confirmation and youth group leaders. In addition to the weekly leaders, twelve adults have committed to walking alongside of each confirmant. Adults also participate in the life of youth as mission trip leaders and members of the mission trip planning team. These adults are not only present, but deeply care for the youth, desiring that they experience the abundance of Christ in fun activities balanced with spiritual truths and service. The youth are acutely aware that the adults of the congregation care for them.

- I like seeing other adults at church that I would not see in my daily life.
- I like that I learn about faith from people who have more experiences than I do.
- I like the feeling of community we have here. I like seeing people of all ages.

#### Pastor Debbie Rocks!!!

“Pastor Debbie is fantastic!” In less than a year, Pastor Debbie has engaged many of the youth and their families. In the youth focus group, all 15 said that she would know them by name and be able to ask something about their life. The fact that she went on the mission trip and participated in the 30-hour famine communicated to the youth and their families that she cares about them and wants to get to know them. We heard comments like:

- She’s available.
- On the mission trip, she’s hands on. She doesn’t watch us; she hammers with us.
- She doesn’t seem religious.
- She has worked hard to establish a connection with our youth
- The reason we know her is that she has made the initiative.

## Dr Ed is a Cool Guy!

Another person who has a strong impact on the life of youth is “Dr. Ed” Moore. The youth enjoy learning music with him and appreciate the way in which he trusts and empowers them to lead worship. In their work together learning music and practicing for the cantata, Dr. Ed communicates that he cares for the youth and enjoys being with them. The fact that he attends some of the youth events also sends this message (even though he beat everyone at Putt Putt!). We heard rave reviews from the youth:

- We are in choir because of Dr Ed.
- He’s a cool guy.
- He makes it fun for us to lead worship. We like it and it’s not hard for us.
- We love the cantata and can’t wait to hear what it will be every year.
- Our music is good. Dr. Ed is the best organist I’ve ever heard.

## We like our Worship Service

In a time when many youth around the country opt to attend youth group and to skip worship, we were very impressed with the number of youth who worship on a regular basis. Beside those who lead by singing and playing handbells, many youth said they enjoyed leading worship after the mission trip and would be willing to be more involved with worship. Though they attend regularly throughout the year, several said Christmas and Easter were their favorite services. We also heard:

- I like that I am together with my family at worship.
- Church is relaxing to me, I’ve been here all my life.
- I like hearing the organ. It’s not something I hear every day
- Songs are fun to sing with other people.
- I like the humor Debbie puts in the sermons.
- I take life a week at a time. Starting the week with church is a good way to pace my life...one week at a time.
- I like to be able to reflect.
- I like that we can share our prayers and concerns. It’s a good community.
- I like the sermons, they are funny and interesting.
- I like that it’s traditional.

## Confirmation Affirmation

Though some parents have concern as to whether the confirmation class and process is too long and taxing on the youth, the youth who are presently in the class and those who have gone through it, had only positive things to say about the class.

Sunday School gets progressively better. Now I am in confirmation, and we are learning as we are discussing.

- We all get really close in this class.
- I like that we are able to talk and discuss so we can learn about the Bible.
- Having mentors is a cool thing. A lot of our mentors already know us, so it's not hard for them to track us. Staying in contact with these folks isn't a problem.
- I like that we can discuss things and be open with each other because we aren't competing with other grades.
- Confirmation is really cool. We got to learn awesome things....like world religions retreat.
- We have some really cool teachers.

There is Value in Pausing....

Amanda's departure this past summer has provided LPC the opportunity to step back and to ask, "Why do we do what we do?" Many focus group members acknowledged that some of the challenges in the youth ministry's past could have been avoided if they had taken time as a church to clarify the unique needs of their youth and the skills required to minister to them. Voices included comments like these:

- We need to evaluate what we do. It's possible that the ministry could come out looking the same....but it will be intentional.
- We are in a rut. We do what we do because we have always done it. We always say that we'll reconsider when the next person comes...then we don't.
- We haven't defined what we want them to get out of youth group. If we can't figure that out, why would the kids think it's important to come here?

CHALLENGES:

Obstacles to Moving the Youth Ministry Strategically Forward

Terminal Uniqueness

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

- Overcommitted youth with packed schedules, who are therefore unable to participate regularly.

- Multiple feeder schools, making it difficult for kids to feel connected,
- Youth attending multiple schools that demand high levels of performance, including several hours of homework each night.

The fact is that none of these challenges are even remotely unique to this church. The majority of these factors are present in almost every successful suburban youth ministry in our country. The church can make the decision to hold onto their thinking about youth ministry off the dead-end streets of explaining away a less than effective program by pointing to these factors. As one focus member warned, “To say that our youth just have too much competing for their time is disingenuous. People make time for what they are committed to.”

#### OAA – Over Achievers Anonymous

When evaluated against national “norms,” the youth ministry at LPC is about average. It is making the marks, but not excelling. The good news is that LPC is not satisfied with being average. Rather, it prefers to excel. But the general atmosphere of dissatisfaction, particularly heard from the adults, sets the tone for discouragement that could be paralyzing to the ministry. The reality is that the youth ministry could be doing better, but it is not doing badly. There is an art to being content without being complacent. There are churches all over the country who wish they had what you already have. Celebrate and thank God for the blessing.

#### Everybody’s Got a Vision...They Just Aren’t All the Same

In the focus groups, there was no shortage of ideas of what a successful youth ministry looked like. Many of those ideas came with the force of those who believe that their ideas hold the key to the future success of the youth ministry. Just for the sake of illustration (and entertainment), we have included some of the various agendas that we noted in focus groups:

- My daughter likes the discussion on current issues...she doesn’t come to play games.
- My daughter only comes when she knows they will play games.
- My kids will come to anything that has food.
- Our Youth Ministry should have college kids leading it again. That’s why we were successful before.
- When mature adults are with kids, faith is passed on.
- Youth ministry is about being around people with reasonably good values, doing mission work.
- Youth ministry is about communicating that our youth are children of God and that responsibility comes with that.
- We need to give our kids tools so they can live the faith
- Youth need to know why it’s important to be a Presbyterian.
- We need to provide youth with a place where they feel safe- a setting in which they can grow. We need to make them ready for the world.

Agreed upon need for a youth pastor

Though all are grateful for the interim staffing that is currently navigating the youth ministry, focus members are in consensus that the program needs a consistent, skilled and committed leader. This is where the agreement ends. Debate was hot over whether this person is full-time or part-time, “green and young” or “experiences and seasoned,” and what skills this person will bring to the position. However, there is no question that the youth loose out when there is not person in place to lead their program.

The Revolving door let the air out

Recent turnover of pastoral and youth ministry staff has made it difficult for families of LPC to connect and to commit with the church. While there has not been a sharp decrease in attendance or membership over the past 5 years, it is true that there has been a slow leak. Many focus group participants said they are invested in this church and are here to stay, though admitted discouragement. They also voiced hope that this trend will reverse after the rebuilding phase.

Planes, Trains and Automobiles....

Traffic and construction are standard fare for Northern Virginia drivers. Over and over again we heard how difficult and time consuming it is to drive to church on a day other than Sunday. Compounding this is the growing number of members who drive in from neighboring suburbs, making the commute on a good day about 20-30 minutes. These factors combined make it near impossible for anything to happen on a week night.

Mind the Gap

When one steps onto a train in the London Tube system, there is a voice reminding the passengers to “Mind the Gap.” This advice could well be offered to parents and youth at several junctures in the youth program, in particular when enter into the junior high program in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and when they enter into the senior high program in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Informing parents and guiding youth is a great investment into the program, as it equips them to make decisions about involvement and volunteer opportunities.

Lack of connection with college students

LPC provides two weeklong opportunities mission opportunities for college students- one in the summer and one over Christmas break. Admittedly, this is more than most churches offer their college students. However, in most focus groups, there was a nagging sense that LPC was not doing enough for their college students. As one member said, “Other than the mission trip, we have no intentional connections with our college students.”

Disjointed Program

It is obvious to everyone at LPC that the staff works hard to collaborate and to create synergy between the programs. However, the waning role of strong staff leadership in the youth program over the past few years has created the need for volunteer leaders to step up and to take more responsibility in their area of ministry. This is a positive move, but has created a segmented program. We heard comments like:

- The program is fractured. It should be seamless, not a bunch of islands.
- Our K-6 program is strong, but we have a missed opportunity with youth...because we don't have a continuum.
- What? When? No one told me!

In this day, there are many forms of communication and most people gravitate to one or two which they find most convenient and familiar. E-mail is great, for some. Others need phone calls, bulletin announcements, bulletin boards or flyers. And yet others only text or use Face Book. Any program will need to utilize multiple forms of communication with congregation members.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Reframe the next 15 months (through January 2011) as a time of direction setting and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target September 2010 as the start date for a stable and sustainable structure for Lewinsville Presbyterian Church's Youth Ministry.

Review this assessment in the Youth Ministry Task Force process and include appropriate recommendations in the report to the session.

Establish a Youth Ministry Design Team ("Team") who will take responsibility for the implementation of this strategic plan. The "Team" will take responsibility for two primary functions:

- a) Addressing immediate pressure points facing the youth ministry, and
- b) Implementing the strategic, long-term changes recommended in this report.

*But first, address the Immediate Pressure Points*

*(Issues that should be addressed in order to create an atmosphere conducive to change )*

Youth Ministry Staffing: The "team" will determine the direction for staffing the youth ministry. Because of the size of the ministry at LPC, the church straddles the fence on two good options for staffing. Both will work, and both will create a different path for the next 3-5 years.

1. Hire a part-time Program Assistant (administrative support) for 10 hours/week and a part-time Director of Youth Ministry (relational person) for 15-20 hours/week.

PROS: Saves money

Staffs to the immediate needs of the ministry

Communicates a commitment to the needs of the youth

CON: Doesn't staff for growth

Gaps in programming will exist, due to the part time nature

2. Hire a full-time Director of Youth (50 hours/week) and retain the part-time Program Assistant (10 hours/week)

PROS: Staffs to the immediate needs of the ministry

Staffs to grow

Overall coverage of programming needs

Communicates a bold commitment to youth ministry

CONS: More expensive

May be overstaffed for the first year

Claim an Identity and a Vision: Invite parents and leaders to go through a process of visioning a new future, resulting in the following documents which will direct the youth ministry:

- Youth Ministry Mission Statement
- Statement of Values
- Three-Year Revolving Goals
- Organizational Chart

Ensure that a letter from Pastor Debbie McKinley is sent to all families in the youth directory, letting them know that the youth ministry is moving forward and that their support and participation is coveted. Use all forms of effective communication, including publishing an article in The Lewinsville Letter and bulletin announcements to share the news with the congregation.

Invite all members of the congregation to participate in a youth ministry prayer team that would pray for the youth ministry through the building process.

Recruit a point person for the nurturing of the current youth ministry leadership team.

Confirm and publish (on-line, in print, on bulletin boards) a youth ministry major event calendar through Summer 2010.

Develop a strategy for the youth ministry teachers and advisors to make personal contact with all families with youth in grades 7-12 by January 31, 2010.. The purpose of these calls would be to make a personal connection with each family, to listen for any of the unique challenges each family might be facing, and to express the youth ministry's desire to support those families and their teenage children and to request their participation for the 2009-2010 year.

### ***Create a Long-term, Sustainable Infrastructure for the Youth Ministry (The 15-month responsibility of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team)***

#### **DEVELOPING AND NURTURING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

- **Staffing:** Based on the findings of the discernment of the Youth Ministry Task Force and the Visioning Retreat, propose a long-term staffing plan for the youth ministry that will

provide the congregation with the capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth. Present this staffing proposal to Session. Upon approval, begin the process of searching for a new Director of Youth Ministry (see Addendum).

- **Toot Your Horn:** Begin a new chapter of positive story-telling by sharing with the congregation stories about the on-going successes that are happening in the youth ministry. This could be done through bulletin boards, announcements, posters with photos, website links, etc
- **Recruit, Train and Equip Volunteers: Create a** structure to recruit, train and equip volunteers to be effective leaders in the ministry.
  - **Volunteer Job Descriptions:** Identify all volunteer roles within the youth ministry and create written results-based job descriptions for each of them.
  - **List of Volunteer Opportunities:** Create a comprehensive list of volunteer needs throughout the program year.
  - **Volunteer Database:** Build a volunteer database of at least 75 adults who could potentially be involved with youth ministry.
  - **Volunteer Training:** Schedule a high-energy, group building leader and teacher training event to launch each semester. Schedule a few fellowship events for leaders and teachers throughout the year that they would actually enjoy! (Examples might be dinner and a movie, including spouses or appetizers at a fun restaurant, located where there's no traffic, of course.)

## DEVELOPING CLEAR STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- **Intentional Curriculum and Discipleship Plan:** Invite YMA to conduct a retreat to create a Curriculum and Discipleship Plan. The following documents will be created:
  - An integrated six-year template for curriculum, including a design for each of the weekly programs.
  - A discipleship plan, using a metaphor and picture-representation. (Models we have seen are rivers, trees, cityscapes, etc). The plan will allow youth and parents to understand where students are in their spiritual lives and to determine what programs and ministries will best meet their spiritual and fellowship needs.
  - A review of current rites of passage or milestones and a proposal for a future pathway.
  - A review of the processes in place and a proposal for future bridging that helps 6<sup>th</sup> graders transition into the youth ministry, 9<sup>th</sup> graders into Senior High and Graduates off to college.

## YOUTH OUTREACH

- **Outreach to Inactive Youth:** Create plan for reaching out to youth on the roles who are not currently participating in the youth ministry.
- **College Outreach:** Create a plan which includes quarterly contact with all LPC college students, including a time of inviting the students back to a worship service and possible leadership or involvement.

- **Welcoming Environment:** Develop a plan for infusing the youth ministry with a contagious friendship culture. (Greeting Team (“We Feel Awkward to You Don’t Have To”), intentional outreach programming like “Bring a Friend Night,” etc).
- **Visitor Follow-Up Processes:** Ensure that a system is in place for the timely and personal follow up for any first-time visitors to the youth group.
- **Creative Kick-Off:** Plan an outreach-focused, sure-to-be-fun event to kick off the youth ministry in the fall of 2010.

## **PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION**

- **Parent Engagement:** Hold surprisingly fun parent orientation events at a cool location (without traffic!) designed to inform parents of the schedule for the semester, introduce them to the leadership team, communicate volunteer opportunities and give progress reports on the strategic design occurring in the program.
- **Parent Education:** Invite a recognized speaker and sponsor an educational parenting event, particularly targeting parents of teenagers in the congregation and community. (**Understanding Your Teenager** is an option) Create mechanisms for engaging the majority of parents in the youth ministry in some way.

## **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN CONGREGATION AND COMMUNITY**

- **Involvement:** Develop and implement a plan to increase involvement and participation of the youth into the overall life of the congregation. Recruit a point person to facilitate this involvement.
- **Missions:** Recruit a service project coordinator to plan and implement the service programs for the 2010 - 2011 year. Careful attention will be given to collaborating with the mission committee and the efforts of the larger church.
- **Facilities:** Create a task force of parents, teachers, advisors and youth to evaluate the ability to the current youth space to meet the future needs of the program and present a proposal for youth space options to the Session committee responsible for property and buildings.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE TASKS THAT BUILD STABILITY**

- **Youth Directory:** Review the current youth database and create a published youth directory, including parents names, emails, preferred phone number, FaceBook, etc. Distribute copies of the youth directory to all leaders, teachers and youth families.
- **Event Planning Empowerment:** Support the youth leaders and teachers by recruiting a coordinator who is responsible for the planning of each major event of the youth ministry. Recruit all “major event coordinators” needed to cover all events through December 2010, with the intention of focusing on inviting “new blood” to serve as coordinators.
- **Major Event Notebooks:** Create a planning notebook for every recurring event of the youth ministry that can be passed from one coordinator to the next in subsequent years.

- **Participation Goals:** Decide upon participation goals for each class and youth group event and consider ways to best publicize the program in order to reach those goals. Intentionally use the communication outlets of the larger church (newsletter, bulletin, Facebook, website, Twitter, bulletin boards, etc.).
- **Communication:** Create a written game plan for improving communication between staff, volunteer leaders, youth and parents that includes as many vehicles as possible to spread accurate information and “good news” stories. This game plan should include calendared communication dates to ensure that information is coming out in a timely pace.
- **Compliance Documents:** Ensure that copyright licensing for music and videos, the application and screening process for stakeholders and the sexual abuse/child protection policy and that they are affirmed by all adults working with youth.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Draft a Youth Ministry Manual, containing all visioning documents, directories, calendars, compliance forms, staff job descriptions, budget, and any other materials necessary for the effective functioning of the youth ministry.

## **PROPOSED TIMELINE**

(AND OPTIONAL CONSULTING PROPOSAL)

### **November — Focus: Preparing for the Process / Staffing Decisions**

Outcomes:

- The Youth Ministry Task Force reviews this report.
- The “Team” is recruited to commence in January 2010 with the responsibility of maintaining current programming and redesigning for future ministry.
- All information on the church website concerning youth is updated and accurate, including a calendar through August 2010.
- Discussions have begun with the Staff, the Personnel Committee, the Finance Committee, and other groups within the church who can provide input into the structure of youth ministry staffing.
- A gathering is scheduled for all students who are away in school and all “alums” of the program over the holiday break.
- A point person or team is selected for the support and nurture of the volunteer staff.

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite*

### **December — Focus: Celebrating the Good Work of the Youth Volunteers/Session**

**Proposal**

Outcomes:

- In this season of waiting, we also celebrate and give thanks for all God's good gifts.
  - Determine ways to help the congregation celebrate the good work of the volunteers and teachers.
  - Find opportunities to highlight contributions of the youth to the congregation.
- Youth Ministry Taskforce integrates this report into its recommendations to session.
- Invite all students who are away in school and all "alums" of the program to worship and a gathering over the holiday break.

*YMA Time Recommended: .5 Day offsite*

**January 2010--- Focus: Laying the Foundation**

- The Team receives an orientation for its responsibilities and is on track to serve the church in this capacity with non-anxious enthusiasm and competence.
- A Visioning Retreat is scheduled for early next year and "Save the Date" publicity has begun.
- Invitations are sent and preparations are made for the Visioning Retreat.
- A letter is sent from the Pastor to all families, interpreting the design process.
- A Youth Directory is created and distributed to staff, teachers, leaders, youth and parents.
- An attendance database is created and attendance for all youth activities is kept.
- All the volunteer needs for youth ministry programming have been identified for the semester and a list of 30 potential volunteers is created.
- A strategy is in place to facilitate calls by adult leaders and teachers to all youth families. The purpose of the calls would be to invite youth to be more involved, to inform parents of the design progress and to get input.

*YMA Time Recommended : 1 day off site*

**February — Focus: Determining a Course for Ministry**

Outcomes:

- Visioning Documents for the youth ministry (Mission Statement, Values, Goals, and Structure) are completed at a visioning retreat.

- A final report for a staffing model, including a decision about responsibilities, is prepared and presented to session.
- Preparations for search process begin.
- Recruitment for the volunteers for the semester is complete.
- A list of opportunities for youth involvement throughout the church is created and a point person is assigned to help facilitate this involvement.
- An 18-month calendar (through August 2011) is proposed for Middle School and High School youth programming, including all service projects and special events.

*YMA Time Recommended: 3 Days Onsite, 1 day Offsite*

**March — Focus: Volunteer Recruitment and Goal Benchmarks**

Outcomes:

- One-year benchmarks have been established for each of the three-year goals created at the Visioning Retreat.
- A game plan is in place for the accomplishment of each 1-year benchmark..
- A comprehensive list of volunteer needs throughout the program year is created.
- Results -based job descriptions are written for each of volunteer role.
- A volunteer database of at least 75 adults who could potentially be involved with youth ministry is created.
- Applications and screening process for volunteers is in place and a sexual abuse/child protection policy is adopted and affirmed by all adults working with youth.
- Another fellowship event for leaders and teachers to show the church's gratitude and to provide opportunities for communication is scheduled.
- Major event notebooks have been drafted for each major event and each major event coordinator receives coaching and direction about his or her individual project.

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite*

**April — Focus: Curriculum and Discipleship; Planning for the Fall**

Outcomes:

- An integrated six-year template for curriculum, including a design for each of the weekly programs, is created at a Curriculum Retreat.
- A discipleship plan, using a metaphor and picture-representation is created at the retreat.

- A review of current rites of passage or milestones is conducted and a proposal for a future continuum is proposed.
- A review of the processes in place and a proposal for future bridging that helps 6<sup>th</sup> graders transition into the youth ministry, 9<sup>th</sup> graders into Senior High and Graduates off to college.
- Bridging events are calendared and plans are created to implement them.
- A high-energy, group building leader and teacher training event is scheduled for the fall to launch the semester.
- A team is recruited to plan a fall-kick off for the youth which will communicate to all that a new and exciting program year has begun.
- Information sessions are scheduled for the parents. At this time, they will learn about the program, meet the leaders, learn how they can be involved and get to know other parents.
- A task force is recruited to plan a few college outreach opportunities over the summer.

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite, 3 days onsite*

### **May — Focus: Planning and recruiting for the next year**

Outcomes:

- All volunteer positions have been recruited for 2010-11 program year.
- A parent education event is planned for late fall.
- All events are reviewed and participation goals are set; Strategies are created to meet these goals.
- A youth missions coordinator is recruited to plan service opportunities throughout the program year.

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite*

### **June / July — Focus: New Staff Preparation**

Outcomes:

- New staff goes through quick start orientation.

- Multiple opportunities for mission trip interpretation to the congregation are planned.
- Control documents for the fall are begun, including directories of students and leaders, a 12-month Calendar, and a volunteer opportunity list.

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 day offsite*

### **August — Focus: Gearing up for the Fall**

#### Outcomes:

- A draft of the youth directory has been prepared and sent to families for approval.
- A potential volunteer survey has been prepared for distribution.
- An integrated service and mission project plan is in place, which clarifies the opportunities for service from 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, how they fit together and how they are funded.
- Compliance documents are complete. (volunteer applications, calendars, volunteer needs, and directories)

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite*

### **September — Focus: Kickoff / Transition**

#### Outcomes:

- A momentum-building youth kick-off has taken place, giving youth a chance to connect and to sign up for the year's major events.
- A orientation event leaves parents informed and excited about the program year, as well as aware of the opportunities to volunteer.
- A potential volunteer survey has been distributed to parents and members of the congregation and over 40 have been returned to the youth staff.
- A game plan is in place for transitioning from the direction-setting and infrastructure building phase to a permanent structure of a youth committee which has the responsibility of supporting the ongoing work of the program.

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite*

### **October— Focus: Climate Control**

## **Outcomes:**

- The majority of the youth ministry's one-year benchmarks have been accomplished.
- A taskforce is recruited to assess the needs of the youth ministry and the ability for the available facilities to meet these needs.
- The youth ministry leadership team meets for bimonthly training and nurture.
- A strategy is created to create a welcoming environment for the youth ministry. Attention will be given to the following areas:
  - Outreach to those not currently attending.
  - Creating a "Friendship Team"
  - Tracking visitors and creating a follow up plan
  - Planning events which are intentionally open to friends

*YMA Time Recommended: 1 Day offsite*

## **November 2010 — Focus: Wrap Up and Reload**

### **Outcomes:**

- All one-year benchmarks for the youth ministry have been achieved.
- A new set of three-year revolving goals has been approved.
- A facilities report is presented to session with a proposal for adaptations for future needs.
- The achievements of the past year are celebrated and the Team is honorably released to serve in other ministries.

*YMA Time Recommended: 2 days onsite, .5 day offsite*

## **Beyond January 2011:**

**On-Going Coaching and Annual Follow-Up:** When the process is complete and the youth ministry has achieved those things it had set out to achieve in the previous year, we strongly recommend that our churches protect their investment in youth ministry with on-going phone/email coaching and an annual follow up visit to:

1. develop new youth ministries goals and benchmarks for the coming year
2. provide leadership training
3. ensure that the youth ministry manual (including the calendar and youth directory) are appropriately revised and up to date
4. assist in managing any staff transitions and with launching strategic new initiatives.

## **OPTIONAL YOUTH MINISTRY SEARCH TIMELINE:**

YMA also offers search support for our congregations who are seeking youth ministry staff. We would recommend that the following timeline be used, after a Visioning Retreat is conducted and the congregation has clarity about the kind of youth ministry it wants to have.

Though we have seen it take less time, our experience is that a six-month time table seems to be most realistic. We have also seen searches take up to a year. However, we are optimistic that, given the unique advantages your position provides, the right candidate should emerge by using the following timeline:

<b><u>Target Date</u></b>	<b><u>Action taken</u></b>
<b>February 2010</b>	Church recruits a job search team of 5-7 discerning go-getters  Team meets and receives brief orientation for their call, their task of writing a job description, strategy for seeking a new youth director, and choosing a chair, candidate tracker, a treasure, a task manager, etc  YMA and Search Committee review their duties together
<b>Within 2 wks of first meeting</b>	Job description is written and approved (YMA/Search Committee/ church staff)  Job posting/marketing piece is written and approved (YMA/Search Committee)
<b>Within 3 wks of first meeting</b>	Search Committee creates a list of 50-100 contacts
<b>3 weeks after first meeting</b>	Marketing piece emailed to minimum of 500+ contacts (YMA) Follow-up calls are made with contacts (duty divided among Search Committee & YMA) Position posted on college, seminary and youth ministry websites
<b>7 weeks</b>	30 names of potential candidates (YMA/Search Committee)
<b>8 weeks</b>	Top 5 candidates selected and reference-checking has begun (Search Committee with consulting from YMA)
<b>10 weeks</b>	Reference calls completed (Search Committee) Phone interviews with preferred candidates scheduled (Search Committee) Interview training from YMA

<b>14 weeks</b>	Phone interviews completed (Search Committee) 2-3 candidates selected for on-site interviews
<b>16-20 weeks</b>	On-site interviews for up to 3 candidates (YMA/Search Committee)
<b>21 weeks</b>	Search Committee recommends top candidate to Session
<b>24 weeks</b>	New Youth Pastor begins

YMA typically proposes 10 days of consulting services for a search process. The total investment for the proposed 10 10-hour days is \$8,000. These trips could be coordinated with other consulting services to eliminate the travel/lodging expenses and decrease consulting expenses.