



**McEachern Memorial**  
**A United Methodist Church**  
**YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**March 23-25, 2009**

Prepared by Lesleigh Carmichael (Nashville, TN) and Mark Danzey (Atlanta, GA)

## **BACKGROUND**

McEachern United Methodist Church is known in Powder Springs, GA as the “big Methodist church on the corner”. Church members describe their church family as “traditional, fabulous, loving and mission oriented.” McEachern UMC also has the reputation of having one of the best preschools in the area. The preschool has served as a tool for evangelizing to families as many of the folks we met with in focus groups became members of McEachern because of their involvement with their children in the preschool.

John Newton McEachern United Methodist Church had its beginnings in the hearts of the pioneers who came to Cobb County on December 3, 1832. These early settlers brought with them their religious faith and their desire for education. In 1893, John Newton McEachern, Sr. bought and donated to the church and the community the land now known as Macland Cemetery. Descendants of these pioneer families are still active in McEachern Memorial UMC.

After John N. McEachern’s death in 1928, the idea was conceived to build a new church as a memorial to him and as a result, the present Chapel building was erected and named the John Newton McEachern Memorial Methodist Church, South. The new church was dedicated on June 5, 1932. In 1968 an annex to the chapel was built and then in 1990 the current Sanctuary was built and dedicated. McEachern Memorial UMC and the community where it resides, was established by people who truly believed that they should first "Seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you".

McEachern’s membership is 3,137 and worship averages range from 900 to 1,100 in one of its five (5) Sunday morning worship experiences. 575 people attend Sunday school in various classes. The recreation ministry, children’s ministry and mission’s ministry are some of the many bright spots in the congregation and community. There are 15 different schools represented in the youth ministry of McEachern and families drive from near and far to participate.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

In years gone by, McEachern has seen an active and thriving student ministry. It was recalled by one focus group participant that between 1980-1989 the student ministry produced five (5) students that went on to seminary and into the ministry. Many students had a great experience here and still serve in the Church as adults today. In the early 90's, the program continued strong under the direction of Greg Brugner. Greg was not an organizer but was able to develop a strong team of adult volunteers that gave McEachern the status of "The Place to be" in the community.

Since Greg's departure in 1995, the student ministry program has seen a persistent pattern of high staff turnover, with the ministry experiencing 7 staff changes since 1995: From Greg to Susan, Susan to Allen W, Allen W. to Scott, Scott to Allen R, Allen R to Drew, Drew to the recent hiring of Jason. This change in leadership has left the student ministry with a legacy of inconsistent leadership over the past 14 years averaging a new youth director every 24 months. As one parent volunteer stated, "My daughter is in college and I think she has had 4 youth directors; there have been so many I can't count them!" With the recent hire of a new Minister to Students, families are looking forward to a period of stability, consistency and strong leadership. As one parent stated, "We hired you (YMA) in an effort to take the steps needed to build a foundation for our new Director."

Student Ministry activities include worship, Sunday school, Confirmation, small groups, "fun" outings, Big Stuff, Youth Choir, Wired (6<sup>th</sup> Grade), Vertical (Middle School UMYF) and Elevation (High School UMYF), and mission trips. Currently, there are approximately 160 sixth through twelfth graders actively participating in these areas of the church. During a typical week around 135 of them participate in Sunday school, Sunday worship or Wednesday night programming. Students and parents describe the student ministry as a close-knit, yet unorganized community that is ready for a new direction.

The church has a 2009 budget of \$ 2,054,383. For the year 2009, the student ministry has a budget of \$128,475. This includes the salaries/benefits for the staff. Currently there is one full time Director of Middle School Ministries, a part-time intern on Sunday evenings, and 10 hours a week of administrative support given by the Discipleship/Evangelism Administrative Assistant. However, on April 1 the church will celebrate the addition of a full-time Minister to Students onto its staff who will oversee the student ministry program. There are approximately 28 adult volunteers involved each week in one of the major student ministry programs. Others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

The recent hire of a new Minister to Students, who will begin on April 1, has created some momentum to build something new and sustainable in the student ministry. The members of McEachern Memorial UMC are ready to rebuild from the "roller-coaster" and frequent transition in leadership. Youth Ministry Architects was invited to do an assessment of the student ministry and to make recommendations about how it might move strategically forward. We met with 83 individuals in 13 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

## YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

This year, McEachern Memorial UMC has the opportunity to do both: successfully revamp its student ministry and create an appropriate infrastructure for sustaining an effective youth ministry that allows both staff and volunteers to thrive. One parent said: “There are certainly a lot of opportunities here.”

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

- 1) **10% of the 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. Being a church with an average worship attendance of 1,050 and an average youth participation of around 125-150 throughout the school year, McEachern is actually performing well from an attendance standpoint. Whether or not that attendance is actually transforming into committed Christian discipleship is another question, and as the church poises itself for growth in overall attendance, attention to growing the youth staff would be wise. Additionally, one way to help alleviate some of the exodus of families to other congregations in the area would be to focus extra energy on pro-actively staffing the youth ministry for higher numbers. But the industry standards suggest that the average attendance among adult worshippers should increase at a parallel rate.
- 2) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth:** 2 full-time (once Jason begins next week) and one part-time staff member currently spread out their workload over all of the programmatic, organizational/administrative, and relational components of the youth ministry. McEachern is therefore slightly understaffed even to simply maintain its current structure—so it’s actually receiving a pretty good return on investment. However, the youth ministry will not likely be successful in engaging a significant number of non-participating students without additions being made to the youth staff. Ordinarily, a congregation that expects its staff to build a ministry without enough personnel sets itself up to be unable to fulfill all the expectations placed on them. And often the natural result of this situation is a climate of criticism, negative parking lot evaluations, and burnout for the staff.
- 3) **1 Adult for Every 5 Students:** We like to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than five students on an on-going basis. The fact that 27 adults are involved as youth leaders on a weekly basis, with (many of those overlap) parents indicating interest in the Student Servant Team, would indicate that this congregation is poised to effectively engage 135 students per week. With an average weekly youth attendance of 135, McEachern is right on target; however the lack of training and equipping of volunteers had led to the inability for these volunteers to serve at full capacity. Subsequently there is a desire for greater communication, recruitment, training, and equipping for the volunteers currently engaged.
- 4) **\$1,500 for Each Student:** With a budget of approximately \$128,475 dedicated to the youth ministry staffing and programs (about 5% of the overall budget) and a weekly participation level of around 135 students, the ministry is performing above the level expected. This is not a sustainable model even to simply maintain the current involvement level, much less to create a vibrant, growing ministry.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

## Building a Sustainable Youth Staff

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

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

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

## THE ASSETS

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

**Shared Value in the Priority of the Student Ministry:** There seems to be a common goal and an intentional desire to revitalize the student ministry. The staff, youth leaders, parents and students share this common value. McEachern has the unified support to undergird this renovation project. The fact that close to 83 youth and adults participated in focus groups or one on one meetings, taking time to share their input about the student ministry, gives undeniable evidence of a broad based eagerness about building a thriving youth ministry at McEachern. All these factors contribute to a climate that says to youth and their families that they are highly valued and that their growth in faith is a high priority for this church family. As one focus group member stated, “If we want kids to invest in the church then we (the church) need to invest in them.”

**Volunteers:** There are a sufficient number of parents and adults that are serving in some capacity in the student ministry. While many expressed the desire to take a sabbatical, others are excited about the potential of new leadership and clear direction. Many adults that are not currently involved expressed an interest in helping in the future if they only knew how they could be of service. The 80/20 rule is no exception at MMUMC and the small group of leaders that have faithfully weathered the rollercoaster ride of leadership. Frank Neal and the Sunday night volunteers are to be commended.

**Thirsty for More:** This church is filled with students who enjoy growing in their faith. They hunger for depth and they are searching for truth. Students want to “know how the Bible speaks to my life.” They want to ask deep questions and they are looking for a youth director who will walk with them through the mystery of faith. They are also looking to serve and lead. Comments from the focus groups included:

- *We have fun but there’s not a lot of God in it.*



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- *I came last night to see what Sunday night service was about but feel like God should be more a part of it.*
- *I think the volunteering we do is my favorite thing to do. Trinity House was my favorite and I tried to get more involved in the community.*
- *I don't come to Sunday mornings anymore but wish we could've uncovered the Bible more like the grownups are doing.*
- *I am never hit hard anymore and made to feel convicted.*
- *I wish we could get more connected with each other and a little more serious and wish I could be affected more by the lessons.*

**Supportive Clergy:** It is apparent and discussed amongst focus group participants that the student ministry is finally receiving the attention it desires and deserves. By taking 9 months to locate and secure the new minister to students and by hiring Youth Ministry architects to assist in building the infrastructure to sustain a long and thriving ministry, the message is apparent that the clergy is supportive of the student ministry program taking the steps it needs to take in order to build a sustainable foundation as it moves forward.

**Andy Smith:** While the student ministry struggled with another transition in their student ministries director position, the student ministry has been blessed to have the continued support of Andy Smith who has continued to keep the student ministry afloat. Focus group members stated:

- *We love Andy. He is awesome.*
- *Great personality and kids love him but he has had no one helping to direct him.*
- *My child loves Andy and wants to do anything Andy wants to do. I think Andy is still learning and when Drew left his mentor left.*

**Confirmation:** A number of focus group members spoke enthusiastically about the power and effectiveness of the church's Confirmation program. Comments from the focus group members included:

- *The Confirmation retreat is what has meant the most to me because it was the first time I actually asked God into my life and that was good for me*
- *I felt like confirmation was strong but can't figure out what is after that, there is no structure after confirmation*

**Facilities:** Many churches would love to have the facilities dedicated to the student ministry that McEachern Memorial has in place. With the Higher Ground building, the small group meeting space and the athletic facilities, there is certainly a lot of dedicated space for student ministry programming. Comments from youth included:

- *Higher Ground is where we meet, it's a great youth building, we have some pretty nice facilities. It's a steel building and if it were any nicer we would break it.*
- *We have some nice fields to play on and I wish we would use them more.*

**Upward:** It was agreed by many that the upward programs of McEachern are alive and well. Many of the students participate in the program and it is a real draw to the community. One parent said, "Did you see the fields this past week, they were packed."



**Opportunity Cometh:** It was unanimous that the children's ministry is a "well-structured and flagship ministry" for the Church. There have been numerous families that have found a home here through the children's ministry. This critical mass of children and their parents present an open window of ministry opportunity and momentum for those rising up into the student ministry program.

**Highly Invested Students:** The fact that 25 youth would turn out to talk in focus groups about the student ministry is a sign that students care deeply about the future effectiveness of this program. Many students spoke about their own faith in Christ and their healthy appetite to grow even more. These are not students who are just looking for "more fun"; they are longing for genuine encounters with the living God in the context of trusting relationships with peers and adults. Comments from youth included:

- *The youth group needs to be better so more people will come. We need to improve the things we do well and stop doing things that are hurting our youth group.*
- *Church is my comfort zone.*
- *If I get in trouble sometimes my parents take Elevation away from me.*
- *Don't know where I would be without youth group.*
- *We are ready for things to change and turn around and so if he (Jason) wants to take it to the next level we will be ready to accept that.*
- *I don't grow spiritually but come because I feel obligated to. Since only me and my best friend really who are the only seniors that go I feel obligated to the adult leaders.*

**The Search is Over:** After a 9 month search for a Minister to Students, both youth and parents expressed hope and excitement about the recent hire of Jason Jordan. There is, however, a guarded optimism due to the high staff turnover but most agree that it is unrealistic to expect Jason to come in and immediately cure all the ills of the program upon arrival. Several parents realize that it will take working together to support and partner with the student ministry staff to bring health and vibrancy back on campus. Jason said: "One of the challenges of working with a larger church staff is that they are looking for a super star but here at McEachern, there is a desire to build a structure that is healthy and that excites me."

**Youth Choir:** In most of the focus groups, there seemed to be consensus that the youth choir provided a good alternative of connection and a mission opportunity to serve. While the ones involved in the youth choir were supportive, many of the participants were not aware of how to get involved and what the full scope and purpose of the youth music ministry was. There were some frustrations over a lack of cohesion and support between the student ministry and the youth music program. Some quotes we received were...

- *Youth choir has been a good entry point for my daughter.*
- *The Tours are a lot of fun.*
- *My child is in youth choir and she loves it and she also goes to dance.*



## THE CHALLENGES

### ***Obstacles to Moving the Student Ministry Strategically Forward***

**Everybody Has a Great Idea:** In the groups we met with, there was no shortage of ideas related to the student ministry, and many of those ideas came with the force of those who believe that their idea holds the key to the future success of the student ministry. Just for the sake of illustration (and entertainment), we have included some of the various agendas that we noted in focus groups:

- *We should make t-shirts and people would know about us.*
- *We need to go to Lake Winnie over the summer.*
- *Dodge ball tournament has to keep going.*
- *I like how it's small and close knit.*
- *Wish we had more people here like other churches do.*
- *We need to be more active and play more games.*
- *I wish it weren't all about games.*
- *We need to be more serious.*
- *We need a separate worship service for High Schoolers on Sunday morning.*
- *I want my son worshipping with me on Sunday mornings.*
- *We should have youth Sunday once a month.*
- *We should line them up and throw pies in their faces to get them excited.*
- *We need to have a spiritual poem contest.*

While there are challenges facing McEachern's student ministry, a lack of ideas is not one of them.

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

- *I think we don't give them ways to support us.*
- *We need to let people know we are having fun. When I went to my aunt's church they showed this slide show about the youth and I think we need to let people know about youth that way in our big church.*
- *We need to get the word out; the youth are not mentioned in big church or bulletins. If the mission team goes somewhere we hear about it but if the youth go you don't hear about anything.*
- *We need to figure out who the youth are in our church and extend an invitation to them so when we see them walk through the halls we can take interest in them and know who they are and say, "How are you?"*
- *We need to tie the culture from the seasons of other generations, be inviting and encouraging and they have tremendous stories to share and kids need to be involved in that.*



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

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

- *From my experience there has been no one to help with small groups. If you wanted your child to do it you had to do it yourself with no support from the church leadership. I wish we had leaders who were called and were then urged to come; the invitation process is lacking.*
- *This will be my last year teaching because teaching has become a frustration because of the lack of support from staff.*
- *I can't take the chaos of Sunday night. There is a lack of leadership from staff as well as kids. There has got to be structure and I think it's missing. If I am going to be volunteering then I have got to know the structure.*
- *Having been a volunteer and when I came on staff one of the things I recognized was that our church is not good at supporting volunteers with materials and providing whatever resources they need whether it's curriculum or tape.*
- *It's not fair to volunteers who work 40 hour a week job and volunteer 3-4 hours and then on top of that they have to go find their own material.*

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

- *Youth with packed schedules, who are therefore unable to participate regularly.*
- *Youth attending so many different schools keeps them from connecting.*
- *North Metro and Burnt Hickory are taking all of kids away from us.*
- *There are very few young adult leaders in our congregation to pull from.*

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

**Clarity of Programs:** One of the results of a lack of structure in the current student ministry program is the uncertainty about what programs are going on and when and what they are called. In the groups we met, youth, parents and volunteers were at times stuck in terms of being able to articulate what programs are currently available for youth and what time they occur. An environment of uncertainty is a Petri dish for frustration, disarray and disconnect for all involved, not to mention any visitors who walk through the doors trying to find their place around the table. There are two Sunday school classes for High Schoolers at 9:30 but no one could tell us the distinct names of the classes. They finally determined one was deep and one was topical.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- *One of the concerns I have for 11:00 hour is they each go separate ways when we get here and they have their own programming. At 11:00 there doesn't seem to be any place for youth and as a result, I see a lot of youth roaming around during 11:00.*
- *They roam around the halls on Sunday morning and they try and volunteer in nursery but if not able to do that they don't go to worship they roam around.*
- *I see kids coming out of classrooms during the 11:00 hour and that concerns me*
- *I am concerned about the 11:00 hour. We know where they are with other kids but it's unstructured.*
- *There is nothing for us at 11:00, so now the three of us just walk around and play basketball.*
- *What's the name of your class? I don't know, I guess it's the more serious kids. If you don't have a Bible in your hand when you come in the door we'll get you one.*
- *Kids show up to classes and there are sometimes no teachers there or they have moved and there is no sign where to go. It's very frustrating for the parents.*
- *The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.*

**Out of the Loop:** Across the board, in all focus groups, there was confusion and lack of understanding about the youth programs and activities occurring at McEachern. Some didn't know when events were occurring or what the programs/classes were called. These communication and organizational challenges seem to have left some parents and youth with the perception that details are not under control. We heard comments from parents and youth such as:

- *I have been in the dark; my 6<sup>th</sup> grader is not going to come home and tell me what is going on.*
- *If you want information you are supposed to go to the website. Does anyone go on the website?*
- *The ADT groups just accidentally form and there were no announcements about the groups and I can see how people would feel left out if they didn't know.*
- *If you want a small group experience you just have to start your own.*
- *There needs to be more communication as to what is going on and more notice as to what is down the pike. I heard about a retreat last minute last year and advance notice would have been good. Email us or whatever means for kids and parents instead of just having us show up and see what is there.*
- *The website has not been updated in 8 months.*
- *Children's ministry spoils you as you know what is going on and then you hit the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and you are clueless.*
- *I can't tell you who teaches my son.*
- *We need communication in their language....texting and face book etc. They are not going to read the monthly newsletter and in addition we need good communication to the parents.*
- *We need to stay consistent with the plan and meeting with a group months in advance to plan instead of planning week to week. It's extremely frustrating for both parents and kids.*
- *Not a date for the mission trip this summer in the bulletin and I want my child to go but don't know the date and it's aggravating and people get tired of waiting for information and so they do other things.*
- *I should not have to have a child in the youth program to know what is going on in the youth ministry at our church.*
- *We have an email blast about everything else, why not the youth ministry?*
- *Everything we publish says pick up at 8:00 but leaders leave at 7:30.*
- *We have a significant communication issue and it takes a while to reacquaint parents and we need to reenergize our parent base but they aren't engaging either and so need to figure out a way to make them feel part of the loop.*



- *I have never been asked to do anything.*

**Where There is No Vision....** The youth program at McEachern Memorial UMC is undoubtedly in need of a clear vision and structure. The focus groups revealed that the youth program is in disarray and that the youth ministry should be a priority for the congregation. However, it is important that the vision and goals of the youth ministry be shared and arrived at collectively, and that they are embraced and understood by all who are responsible for leading the youth ministry of McEachern. As one focus group member stated, "I would like to see greater leadership where the youth staff interacts with parents and becomes a team with parents and all working toward a purpose and that purpose is clearly defined."

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

- *It seems like there is a lot of missed opportunity...what is the follow up when we do things, like mission trips, that move the kids?*
- *I think they can hear the message and the Word and can handle more than we think sometimes.*
- *I recognize the need for pizzazz but kids are looking for answers about who they are and who this God is and we ought to be able to provide that.*
- *It is all about having a good time and that's where we are messing up a little bit. I don't think they know what they are here for and see it as just another group to play in.*
- *If we draw 1000 youth here but don't have the substance to give them what's the point?*
- *I am fired up about my church but I am not at all fired up about the youth ministry.*
- *I was here when they left for laser tag and maybe they stopped and prayed but doubt it. Where are the discipleship and the opportunity for kids who don't meet that niche?*
- *Kids want to go deeper and I want to see an opportunity for him before he goes off to college to get deeper in his faith and know that's just as cool.*
- *There is a lot of apathy in our youth group and there needs to be more intense devotion.*

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

- *I bet some families don't know what their youth are being taught.*
- *There doesn't seem to be a clear SS lesson.*
- *The program seems more social and less about the word or anything structured.*
- *Curriculum has not been good, and it's for much bigger group and I usually have 5 people.*
- *Got to have some sort of curriculum that gets our kids fired up.*
- *We don't have a curriculum and that's one of the big problems.*



**Conveyor Belt of Youth Directors:** Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the student ministry is its habitual pattern of short-term staff people leading the ministry. Seeing program after program characterized by fits, starts and fizzles, it has been difficult for the ministry to lay a foundation that provides long term sustainability. Since 2000, the church has experienced 5 youth pastors. It is obvious that the youth, parents, and leaders of the student ministry are feeling the dust left behind by each director and are ready to establish a more solid foundation in hopes of attracting someone who will stay.

Comments from youth members included:

- *Our youth group falls apart every time a youth minister leaves and a youth minister never seems to stay longer than a couple of years. Youth group fell apart a while ago and it has not built itself back up completely.*
- *I feel like the church itself is strong but the youth program has not been able to consistently keep leadership and the youth group suffers from that*
- *It's hard to get close to them when there is a new one every two years and it's also hard to have a consistent program too.*
- *Since we have so many different leaders it feels like a new one each year and we can't get close to them. Is Andy still going to be with us? Who is the new guy? Wish we could be closer to our leaders.*

Comments from parents included:

- *Our program is waning. It has been a rollercoaster ride for us with each changing youth minister.*
- *Have one (a youth minister) and then focus on youth and great plan and then lose that person then and then everything falls apart and so just frustrating. I understand that the stint is 18 months but need to have a system in place where stable enough where youth pastors leave but the ministry stays.*

**Spiderman not Superman:** As the church celebrates the new chapter of student ministry with the arrival of the new Minister to Students, it will need to ensure that the foundation being laid is one that invites, empowers and includes adults from the congregation outside the youth staff so that a web of support is created around each youth. A student ministry which is built upon the student ministry staff is a ministry which sets itself up for instability; the student ministry must create a web of support for the youth so that the youth are surrounded by adults who mentor and support them so when transition occurs the ministry continues and does not suffer as a result of a program dependent upon a single youth worker. As one focus group member stated, "We have got to make sure the staff continues to be supported by other volunteers".

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

- *There is no building from one program to the next.*
- *The Middle schoolers have tons of people but the High schoolers drop off; maybe not cool or something so maybe I am an un-cool person.*



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848  
lesleigh@ymarchitects.com [www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com) mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- *A lot of people don't come after Confirmation; the week after they are confirmed you never see them again.*
- *Parents are involved with children and not with youth so maybe that's a factor in the fact that the youth drop off when leave children's ministry.*

**Where's the Welcome Mat?** Parents and youth alike voiced the concern that there is a lack of hospitality in inviting new and current youth into the program. Comments from focus group members included:

- *My sister is a junior and she says she doesn't like the people because she doesn't know them. My brother he is a senior doesn't come because he said it doesn't draw him anymore.*
- *I think small group is a big deal as well and older ages it's harder to come into a group and think small groups would help youth be able to connect and come back.*
- *My middle daughter never really got plugged in as there is not a strong group in her age group and so she never got plugged in.*
- *There were friends who were friends already, were really good friends, and he had a hard time breaking in and so he didn't do anything past God Squad.*
- *It felt like a bubble to them and it was hard to break in and some of the social time is free form and there is no structure so free form time the kids who know each other are together talking and they are kind of sitting there and so they tell me that they don't know anybody and I try and get them to talk but their confidence level is hard and I want them to be connected and involved.*

**Episodic vs. Sustainable Ministry:** While Big Stuff and other “fun events” may bring in higher numbers, attendance during weekly programming is missing the number of youth who are actually engaged and active in some of the larger activities. A structure needs to be put into place that is able to sustain the energy and involvement of the students in these activities so that these same numbers are also reflective in the weekly programming at McEachern. Comments from focus group members included:

- *We have to have an intentional youth ministry that is solid and long lasting so that when transition happens and the youth director leaves the ministry does not leave and it doesn't fall apart.*
- *We need an intentional plan that we are following and not making up programming as we go. We have to have a goal and taking steps whatever it may be.*
- *I would like to see that it is intentional so kids aren't falling through the cracks.*
- *We need systems and organizations in place to be sustainable and trying to work on that.*
- *I think we should bulldoze what we have now and then rebuild a good foundation for the youth ministry.*

**Lack of Measurable Markers of Effectiveness:** Many of the adults and youth spoke of “what a successful youth ministry would look like” in terms of having tons of youth coming to Sunday night programming. The fact is that if the church has youth attending at least one student ministry event a week, including worship, the church and the student ministry can celebrate success. As the student ministry continues to build a new foundation of sustainability, it will need to have clear standards of effectiveness in place, or the student ministry staff will continue to be evaluated based on nothing more substantive than each individual's opinion of what the student ministry ought to be doing. As it has been said, “Only that which is measured can be managed.”



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 18 months (through September 2010) as a time of retooling and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target September 2010 as the start date for a new, fully funded, sustainable structure for the McEachern UMC youth ministry.
- 2) Invite the Student Ministry Servant Team to consider which recommendations from this report to embrace and then present this report to the Church Council asking them to endorse an intentional 18-month strategic design process for the youth ministry.
- 3) Have the Student Ministry Servant Team assign themselves the role of the Renovation Team which over the next 18 months will take responsibility for two primary functions.
  - a) *Addressing immediate pressure points facing the youth ministry*
  - b) *Implementing the strategic, long-term changes recommended in this report:*

### ***Immediate Pressure Points***

#### ***(The First Mission of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team)***

- Hire or restructure the following combination of interim staff to oversee the youth ministry during the transition process:
  - By May 1, review current youth staff structure and create results based job descriptions for each staff member which would include specific attention given to either Middle School or High School ministry.
  - Increase the current student ministry administrative support role to a 25-hour a week Student Ministries Program Coordinator (i.e., “the Chief Operations Officer,” “the Air Traffic Controller,” “the Organized Mom,” “the Triage Nurse”) who will oversee the day-to-day operation of the youth ministry and provide administrative support for the student ministry staff.
  - Invite Youth Ministry Architects to serve as McEachern UMC’s Student Ministry Transition Coach, overseeing the building of the infrastructure of the youth ministry and the implementation of the recommendations of this report. YMA’s responsibilities would include coaching staff, assisting in the recruiting of volunteers, developing strategies for galvanizing parental support and student leadership, and generally “keeping both hands on 10 and 2” as the church walks through the growing pains of building a sustainable, magnetic student ministry.
- Identify all volunteer roles within the student ministry program and create written job descriptions for each of the current roles.
- Complete the recruiting of any volunteers needed for Vertical and Elevation, Wednesday night small groups, Sunday school, and monthly youth events for the current program using the guideline of one adult for every 5 participating youth.
- Calendar quarterly training events to support and encourage student leaders and Sunday school teachers.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com [www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com) mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- Create a youth directory of McEachern students and leaders that includes contact information, grades, schools, parents' names, phone numbers (and email addresses, if possible).
- Utilize Shelby in developing a process for tracking attendance of students in all programs in which they participate, including Sunday school, Vertical and Elevation/Wednesday night programs and youth choir.
- Calendar monthly meetings between the student ministry staff and the Minister of Discipleship overseeing the youth ministry.
- Investigate a new model of weekly youth programming, which includes reaching out to both middle school and high school groups to launch fall 2010.
- Create a calendar of major youth ministry events for the coming year (through August 2010), including local service projects, a retreat, and a fall youth parents' orientation.
- Position the youth choir within the overall Student Ministry to provide a seamless working relationship and thereby strengthen the whole.

## ***Creating a Long-term, Sustainable Infrastructure for the Youth Ministry***

### ***(The Second Responsibility of the Youth Renovation Team)***

- Visioning—Create four key visioning documents:
  - 1) A Youth Ministry Mission Statement,
  - 2) A Statement of Values,
  - 3) A Set of Three-Year Revolving Goals, and
  - 4) A Clear Structure for the Youth Ministry.
- Outreach: Establish processes for reaching out to non-participating youth (both those whose families are members or visitors and those youth who are friends of McEachern youth).
- Setting Targets: Determine reasonable participation goals for all youth ministry events and weekly programs through September 2010 and take responsibility for filling those events
- Event Planning Empowerment: Create structures and processes for giving responsibility for the planning of each major event of the student ministry to a different volunteer, and recruit all “major event coordinators” needed to cover all events through September 2010.
- Staff Development: Provide on-going “executive coaching” for the youth ministry staff.
- Communications: Develop a game plan for improving the communications between staff, volunteers, youth and parents surrounding the student ministry and establish systems for implementing and enhancing that game plan.
- Intentional Curriculum Plan: Create an integrated template for curriculum, including a design for Sunday school, Vertical and Elevation, and Wednesday night small groups.
- Community Building: Strategically calendar youth events for the coming year which will build the momentum of growth and excitement surrounding the youth ministry.



- **Marketing:** Establish normative processes for ensuring that participation targets are reached for each major event and activity sponsored by the youth ministry (retreats, trips, fellowship events, etc.), consistently accessing the normal communication outlets of the larger church. (newsletter, bulletin, face book, website, bulletin boards, etc.)
- **Parent Engagement:** Sponsor and execute a parent-equipping event, particularly targeting parents of teenagers in the congregation (Understanding Your Teenager as an option), and create mechanisms for engaging the majority of parents in the youth ministry in some way.
- **Leader Recruitment:** Create a potential youth leader list of at least 75 adults (who combine an enthusiasm for life with a genuine love for Christ) who could be approached about working as student leaders (Sunday school teachers, small group leaders and Vertical and Elevation sponsors) starting in the fall of 2010.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement a leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers, geared particularly toward the launch of the ministry in the fall of 2009.
- **Leadership Development:** Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer positions in the youth ministry and create structures for the ongoing training and support of all volunteers.
- **Bridge Building from Confirmation to Youth Group:** Develop a long-term game plan to transition eager, engaged confirmed youth into eager, engaged active 7<sup>th</sup> grade youth.
- **Creative Kick Off/Parent Orientation:** Develop an intentional, outreach-focused, family-based, surprisingly fun event to kick off the youth ministry in the fall of 2009.
- **Compliance Documents:** Ensure that copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained, that an application and screening process for volunteers has been reviewed and is up to date (in compliance with Safe Sanctuaries procedures), and that a current sexual abuse/child protection policy is adopted and affirmed by all adults working with youth.
- **Strategic Staffing:** Propose clear, appropriate long-term staffing plan for the youth ministry that will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Draft a Youth Ministry Manual, containing all visioning documents, directories, calendars, compliance forms, job descriptions, budget, and any other materials necessary for the effective functioning of the youth ministry.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- Major Event Notebooks: Create a planning notebook for every recurring event of the youth ministry that can be passed from one chairperson to another in subsequent years.
- Discipleship Track: Create a deliberate discipleship plan that allows youth and parents to understand where students are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are.
- Welcoming Environment: Develop a three-year game plan for infusing the youth ministry with a contagious friendship culture. Have youth staff and volunteers read Jeanne Mayo's book, *Thriving Youth Groups*.

## Proposed Timeline

April/May — Focus: Preparing for the Process/Leadership Recruitment

Outcomes:

- The Student Ministry Renovation Team is in place.
- Work on Control Documents has begun (18 month major event calendar, youth directory and leader directory, job descriptions).
- Volunteer youth ministry needs for the 2009-2010 year have been identified, and recruiting officially begins for the next year's key leaders.
- A draft of the Youth Ministry Calendar of events through August 2010 is underway.
- Recruiting of volunteers needed for Vertical and Elevation and Sunday school for the current program using the guideline of one adult for every 5 participating youth has begun.
- A student-input event has been completed, resulting in the completion of a special event program calendar through May '10.
- The Student Ministry Renovation Team has completed an orientation to the expectations for their work for the coming 18 months.
- The renovation team and youth staffs have explored new program models to implement and launch in fall 2009.
- New and creative (and multiple) communication outlets (newsletters, bulletins, bulletin boards, web sites, IM, e-mails, phone calls, etc.) are considered
- Weekly staff coaching and troubleshooting support begins.

Estimated YMA Time: 3 Days offsite

June— Focus: Quick Launch

Outcomes:

- A fall kick off team/Rally Day team is in place, and plans have begun for an inspiring event to kick off the program in September.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com [www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com) mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- A parent volunteer survey has been distributed and at least 50 surveys have been returned.
- A parent volunteer database is in place.
- Communication mechanisms are in place to communicate youth events and activities to parents and the church at large.
- A parent equipping event is calendared for Fall 2009.
- The chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team and youth staff receive specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- A major event coordinator is in place for the Fall Youth retreat.

Estimated YMA Time: 3 Days off site

July/August— Focus: Pressure Points, Visioning, and Control Documents

Outcomes:

- All pressure points identified in this assessment have been effectively addressed.
- A volunteer training event has taken place for all youth ministry volunteers.
- A calendar of youth events through December 2009 has been distributed and posted on the website.
- A preventative maintenance calendar (including priorities like when the annual student ministry calendar is created, when work on the youth ministry begins each year, etc.) has been adopted by the Renovation Team and the student ministries staff has begun working to ensure that the targets identified on that calendar are being followed.
- Visioning Documents for the student ministry (Mission Statement, Values, Goals, One year Benchmarks and Structure) have been completed at a visioning retreat.
- Student Ministry events for the coming year which will build the momentum of growth and excitement surrounding the youth ministry have been calendared.
- Student ministry volunteers have received specific encouragement, training and support for their roles.
- A new model for weekly youth group is in place and being promoted to kick off in the fall.
- All key student ministry volunteers for the 2009-2010 school year are in place.
- Control Documents have been completed (18-month major event calendar, youth directory, job descriptions, and leader directory).
- The chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team and student ministries staff have received specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- An updated student ministry directory and a student ministry major event calendar are ready to be distributed to all youth families for the launch of the fall program.

Estimated YMA Time: 5 Days (3 day onsite, 2 day off site)

September— Focus: Leadership Launch, Youth Group Model, and Fall Kick-off



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

Outcomes:

- A master student ministry volunteer prospect list has been created that includes the names of at least 75 adults.
- Student ministry volunteers participate in a training event that leaves them more equipped and inspired to launch the fall youth ministry.
- The chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team and student ministries staff have received specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- A new model for weekly youth programming kicks off.
- A Fall Kick Off event/Parent Orientation leaves youth and parents excited and enthusiastic about the year ahead.
- The student ministries directory has been distributed to all youth families.

Estimated YMA Time: 2 Days off site

October— Focus: Curriculum Planning

Outcomes:

- A curriculum design event has been completed with key youth ministry stakeholders, and a curriculum template has been completed, integrating Sunday school, Vertical and Elevation and Wednesday night small groups.
- A deliberate discipleship plan that allows youth and parents to understand where students are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs and ministries will meet their individual needs where they are has been created.
- Curriculum resources are identified and in place for 2009-2010.
- The chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team has received specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- The student ministries staff completes a half-day coaching, coordinating, troubleshooting meeting with YMA staff.

Estimated YMA Time: 5 Days (3 days on site, 2 days off site)

November/December— Focus: Marketing

Outcomes:

- A process for setting clear participation targets for all youth ministry programs has been established and reasonable mechanisms are in place for the reaching of those targets.
- The curriculum design template and resources have been affirmed and embraced by the Church Council.
- Youth staff and Renovation Team members read Jeanne Mayo's Thriving Youth Groups
- The chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team and student ministries staff have received specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com [www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com) mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

- The student ministries staff and the Student ministry Servant Team have embraced a game plan to encourage the continuing participation of Confirmands in youth ministry activities beyond Confirmation. A point person(s) has been recruited to plan events to navigate this process.
- A game plan game plan for infusing the youth ministry with a contagious friendship culture has been drafted.

Estimated YMA Time: 2 Days off site

January/February— Focus: Welcoming Environment and Parent Engagement

Outcomes:

- The Chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team receives specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- A parenting-seminar for parents of SJD youth (and other parents from the community) attended by 50 parents (Understanding Your Teenager as a possibility).
- The student ministries staff completes a day of coaching, coordinating, troubleshooting meeting with YMA staff.
- An all youth retreat occurs leaving youth (Confirmands and above grades) with a sense of connectedness and community.
- A midyear volunteer training event occurs providing time for feedback from the first semester as well as refueling for the semester ahead.
- A three-year game plan for infusing the youth ministry with a contagious friendship culture is in place.

Estimated YMA Time: 3 Days (2 days on site and 1 day off site)

March/April— Focus: Post Confirmation and Volunteer Recruitment

Outcomes:

- The Chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team and the student ministries staff have received specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- A youth event occurs (with all grades) which celebrates recent Confirmands and sets the stage for creating an immediate attraction for post Confirmation participation.
- Volunteer needs for 2010-2011 have been identified and recruiting season begins.

Estimated YMA Time: 2 Days off-site



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848  
 leslie@ymarchitects.com [www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com) mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

May— Focus: First Year Defrag

Outcomes:

- A game plan is in place for transitioning from the 17-month interim structure for the youth ministry to a structure that can sustain the youth ministry for the long-haul.
- The vast majority of the youth ministry's one-year benchmarks have been achieved.
- The youth staff completes a day coaching, coordinating, troubleshooting meeting with YMA staff.

Estimated YMA Time: 3 Days (2 days on site, 1 day off site)

June — Focus: Curriculum

Outcomes:

- Curriculum resources are selected for the 2010-2011 year, based on the curriculum template developed in the previous year.
- The Chair of the Student Ministry Renovation Team, and the student ministries staff have received specific coaching, support and troubleshooting from YMA.
- Volunteer recruiting continues as needed.

Estimated YMA Time: 2 Day off site

July— Focus: Youth Ministry Manual and Reload

Outcomes:

- The completed draft of the youth ministry manual is completed and ready to present to the Church Council, which includes major event notebooks for each event from the previous year.
- A team is in place to develop a fall parent/youth kick off event designed to 1) instill confidence in parents about the direction of the youth ministry, 2) offer the kids an event that is more fun than they expect, and 3) provides the youth ministry with the chance to promote major events and mission trips and obtain early sign ups for those trips.
- The student ministries staff completes a half-day coaching, coordinating, troubleshooting meeting with YMA staff.
- Volunteers are in place for the 2010-2011 school year.
- All volunteers working with youth have been properly screened for child abuse and appropriate paperwork is on file.
- A new set of three-year revolving goals and one-year benchmarks is drafted for approval by the appropriate bodies of the church.

Estimated YMA Time: 5 Days (3 days on site, 2 day off site)



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com

## August/September— Focus: Preventative Maintenance Plan

### Outcome:

- The Student Ministry Renovation Team is celebrated, having discharged their infrastructure-building duties.
- Structures are in place to provide on-going troubleshooting support for the staff and volunteers of McEachern's student ministry to ensure sustainable, intentional, effective ministry.
- Compliance documents ensuring copyright licensing for music and videos have been obtained.
- 2011-2012 dates are scheduled for re-upping the youth ministry goals and benchmarks and for locating appropriate curriculum resources.
- Leaders and students step into the fall with confidence that there will be a critical mass of students participating in the church's student ministry in the coming year.
- A student ministry volunteer team celebration gives leaders the chance to give input on their upcoming year and gives the outgoing Student Ministry Renovation Team the chance to inspire the leaders about the vision for the fall.

Estimated YMA Time: 1 Day off site

*Total YMA Days 2009: 20 (14 offsite and 6 onsite)*

*Total YMA Days 2010: 16 (9 offsite and 7 onsite)*



5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (864) 616-5848

lesleigh@ymarchitects.com

[www.YMArchitects.com](http://www.YMArchitects.com)

mark.danzey@ymarchitects.com