

ADOLESCENT FAITH THAT LASTS

Barry Gane*

A growing number of articles and books have dealt with the problem of building a faith experience in adolescents that lasts (Powell & Clark, 2011; McGrath, 2000; Black, 2000; Kinnaman, 2011). Sociologist Marie Cornwall (1998) looks at the influence of three agents -- family, church, and peers -- in the process of transmission of values, and she concludes that parents play a key role in the process. She states that the "religious training in the home had a greater influence on the religious development of children than did a parochial school education" (p. 208). She puts forward the theory that "parents are influential because they channel their children into experiences and environments which support the socialization received at home" (p. 209). Cornwall's research revealed the importance of friends in the process of adopting religious beliefs and values and stressed the need for young people to meet together if they are to adopt the religious values of the institution that their parents support. This has important implications for this study regarding the impact of youth ministry and the transmission of values.

Arweck and Nesbitt (2004) introduce us to the LVEP (Living Values: An Educational Program). Their research revealed the value of using this education program at school, in the church and also in the family. They recognize that the individual pupil's temperament and the climate of the home contribute to the child's receptivity of values. The interesting thing about this approach to values transmission is that the tools used in the process overlap with what youth ministry has used for much of its existence. It would almost appear that the LVEP has borrowed from the processes used within youth ministry.

In this paper we will examine the results of the church, the family and the school working together. We will look at the impact of specific parenting styles, some of the specific things that contribute to

*Barry Gane, serves as head of the School of Ministry and Theology, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia

the development of intrinsic faith and highlight in particular the role of youth ministry, mentoring and also the school chaplaincy.

The Research Instrument

This study reports on responses to part of a larger survey, (Valuegenesis II), of 331 items investigating adolescent attitudes to beliefs, values and behaviour (Gane, 2012). All items used Likert-type scales, with from four to seven categories. Higher scale values indicated stronger agreement, or more positive and desirable behaviour.

Student Demographics

The sample for this study was taken from the Seventh-day Adventist school system across the South Pacific including Australia and New Zealand¹. A number of students did not take part in the study and a small number of surveys were removed from the final report after the data cleaning process. The report includes 80% of the possible SDA students in Adventist school system and over 95% of students in major SDA schools in the South Pacific Island nations of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati.

There were 3,168 respondents from Australia and New Zealand, 1,359 were identified as coming from a home with at least one Adventist parent. The Valuegenesis report (Gane, 2012b) focused on the responses of students having at least one Adventist parent, however in this paper there will be occasional reference to the responses of all students even though the non-SDA sector includes students from all religious backgrounds including Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. The South Pacific Island Nations Valuegenesis report (Gane, 2012a) had 1,607 students who were all from SDA families.

Christian parents invest assiduously of their physical and emotional resources in an effort to help their children make a personal commitment to a life of devotion to God, to serving their fellow men and remaining loyal to their church. How successful are the various initiatives of the home, the Church and the Christian school? Figure 1 examines environments and initiatives within each of these areas and shows the extent to which young people judge them to be effective in helping to develop their faith. The percentages listed incorporate those categories which helped 'a fair amount' and 'very much'. Figure 1 shows that the home, the Church and Christian school are all judged as important contributors to faith development.

¹ The sample in the first study of 1992 (Hughes, 1993) used randomly selected churches across Australia and New Zealand. The names of adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 were collected and they were personally sent an invitation to participate in the study. In the intervening years this approach has been deemed inappropriate and hence the school system was used and parents were alerted to the study and asked to grant permission for their children to be involved.

Eighty-two percent of young people viewed the influence of their family (Item I 19) as being helpful in faith development and 77% listed their mother's faith as being important. Seventy eight percent saw the Sabbath School (equivalent to Sunday school) as contributing to their faith development.

There have been some considerable shifts since the first Valuegenesis study twenty years ago. Church services (Item I 14) are now viewed as contributing greatly to faith development. Figure 1 reveals that 81% see them as contributing to their faith development. The influence of father's faith (Item I 17) is perceived to be of greater influence now, 72%, up from 60%. However mother's faith (Item I 16) is still the stronger. It would appear that the presence of the campus/school chaplains (Item I 34) has brought about major shifts in perception of the role of the school in faith development. Figure 1 shows that all aspects of school life are more influential. Seventy nine percent saw attendance at a Seventh-day Adventist school (Item I 23) as helpful in the development of their faith. The influence of weekly chapel (Item I 21) has risen from 52% to 71% and the overall influence of the total school program (Item I 23) has risen to 80%! Sixty-nine percent of all students report that both the church pastor (Item I 31) and the youth pastor (Item I 32) have had influence on their faith development.

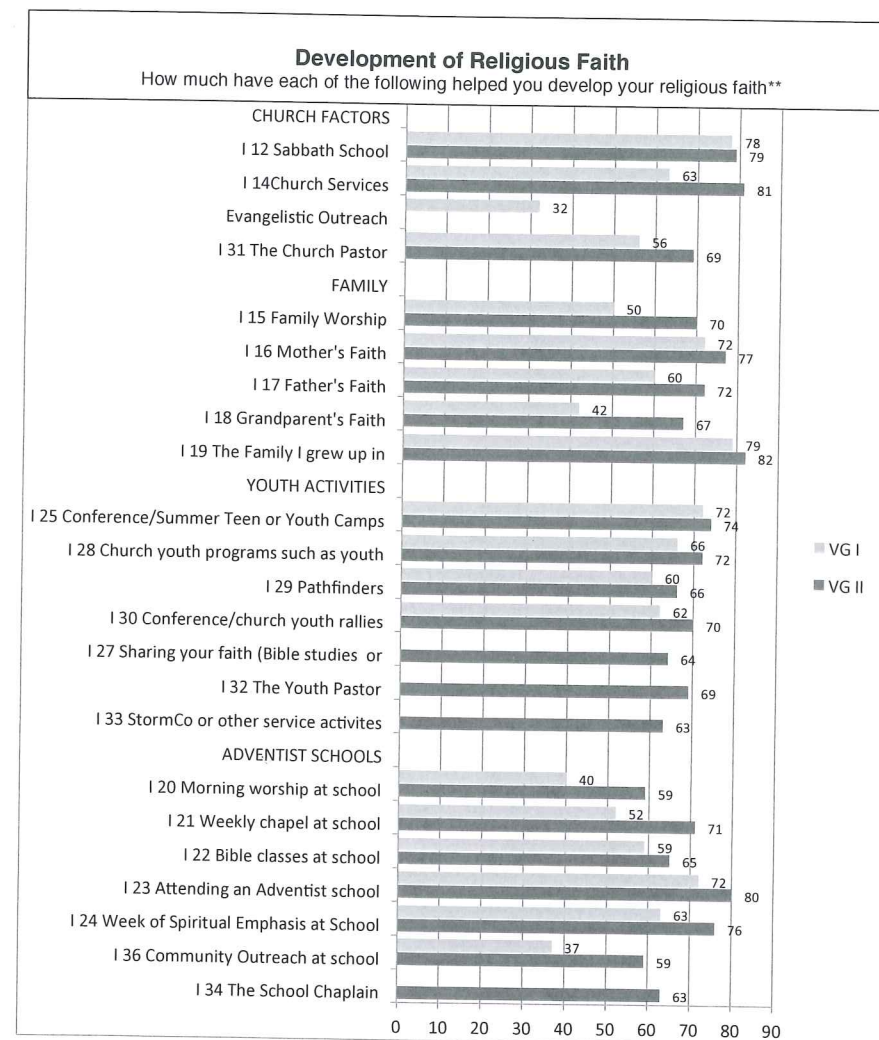
These results show clearly that young people are helped in their faith journey by influences from the home, the Church and the SDA school. The responses from the South Pacific Islands up 10% or more for all the measures with the exception of I 19 'the family I grew up in' which is only 4% greater.

Working Together – Home, Church and School

The Christian home has long been known as the most effective environment for building faith in children. There are a number of studies on the impact of the parents on the faith development of their children (Anderson, 1994; Clark, 1998; Dudley & Dudley, 1986; Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Flor, 2002; Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982; Homer, 1993; Myers, 1996; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999; Parker & Gaier, 1980; Sawyers, 1998; Taris & Semin, 1997; Powell, 2011). The major conclusion of these studies is that children for the most part adopt the beliefs and values of their parents. A number of these studies have looked at the individual impact of fathers on sons and daughters, and mothers on sons and daughters (Anderson, 1994; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999; Sawyers, 1998; Strahan, 1996; Taris & Semin, 1997; D'Angelo, Weinberger & Feldman, 2000)

The process of becoming adult involves individuation and differentiation (Erikson, 1968). The adolescent begins to separate from the parent as they establish their own identity and set of beliefs. However Santrock (2011) notes:

Figure 1



** Refers to data from SDA Schools only.

* Percentage agreement includes 'a fair amount' and 'very much' categories.

The old model of parent-adolescent relationships suggested that as adolescents mature they detach themselves from parents and move into a world of autonomy apart from parents. . . . The new model emphasizes that parents serve as important attachment figures and support systems while the adolescents explore a wider, more complex social world (p. 390).

This new model is encouraging for parents who wish to see their children establish personal identity and still enter adulthood with their beliefs and values intact. Arnett (2006) reminds us that the conflict between parents and teens often turns to companionship in young adult years and they become closer to their parents.

Dudley and Dudley (1986) spelled out both social learning theory and the emancipation theory in the process of values transmission. Their study showed the clear connection between the values and beliefs held by adolescents and those of their parents. Transmission was most effective where both parents held shared, strong religious beliefs, and were willing to consciously carry out religious socialization in the home. They found that the emancipation theory held true, that adolescents are likely to assert their independence by becoming different and somewhat less traditional in their religious values than their parents, but that more traditional parents did produce children with more traditional views. Bao, Whiteback, Hoyt, and Conger's (1999) study revealed evidence that parents played a key role in the transmission of religious beliefs and values to their children. Kara Powell (2011) in a more recent study came to the same conclusion. Social learning theory is based on the belief that children learn by observing attitudes and behaviours modelled by significant others in the child's life, and Bao and colleagues came to the conclusion that parental models are central to the development of children's personalities and that "regular association and interaction with parents repeatedly give children opportunities to observe and imitate their parents" (p. 362). Grusec and Kuczynski (1997) make the case that parents are the most crucial influence on children's acquisition of values as child rearing places parents in the closest of positions to their children.

Bao et al. (1999) cite the importance of parental warmth and acceptance in facilitating or modeling values and beliefs. Smetana's (1997) research supports the importance of the warm, accepting bond between parent and child and demonstrates that this can motivate the child to both listen and respond. Other social learning theorists also cite the need for warmth and acceptance in facilitating imitative and modelling learning (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1964). For more detail on the impact of the Christian (SDA) home see Gane (2012b, pp. 45-47). D'Angelo, Weinberger and Feldman (in Adams, 2000) inform us that virtually all theories on children's developmental processes include the premise that parents have a major impact on adolescent development. The Valuegenesis data showed that the more a parent talked about their personal faith the more likely the child was to develop both faith and Christian commitment. This was also true for the frequency of family worship, Gane (2012).

Parenting Style

Fifty items (C20 – 69) evaluated the individual parenting styles

of the mother and father. Two parenting scales are derived. The atmosphere of warmth, care and protection that is provided by the family were determined by the first scale, (the 'care' scale) and were measured by, questions such as, 'spoke to me with a warm, friendly voice', 'was affectionate to me' and by negatively stated items such as, 'didn't help me as much as I needed', 'seemed emotionally cold to me'. The second scale, the 'protection' scale relates to the degree to which parents protect or in many cases over-protect their children from outside influences and from making decisions for themselves. Items such as, 'did not want me to grow up', 'tried to control everything I did', 'invaded my privacy', 'let me decide things for myself', 'gave me as much freedom as I wanted', allow measurement of the degree of protection that families offer.

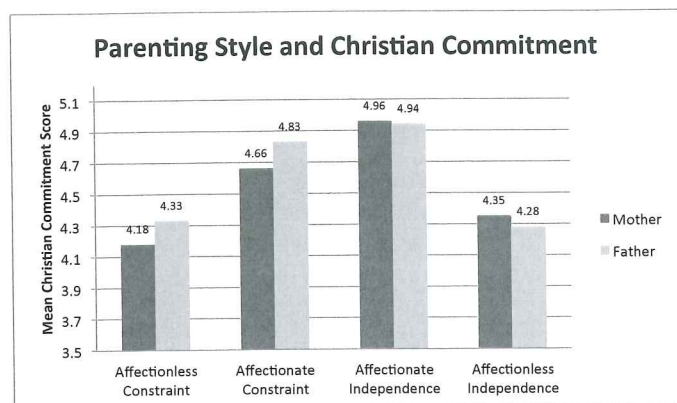
A matrix was developed by combining these two scales. The resulting four different parenting styles were identified depending on whether the parents were rated high or low on the care dimension and whether they were related high or low on the protection dimension. The four parenting styles were as follows (see Parker, 1979). Parenting Style 1 Affectionless Constraint was high protection and low care. Parenting Style 2 Affectionate Constraint was high protection and high care. Parenting Style 3 Affectionate Independence was low protection and low care. Parenting Style 4 Affectionless Independence was low protection and low care. Not all scales proved reliable cross-culturally, (South Pacific Islands), with Chronbach's alpha being between 0.6 and 0.7 compared to 0.8 and 0.9 for the Australian and New Zealand sample.

Parenting Style, Commitment, Belief and Lifestyle

Because of the limitation of space only a few of the results of parenting style will be given to support the importance of this measure. A highly significant relationship was found between parenting style and a number of significant dimensions that relate to Christian faith, belief and loyalty to the Church. The third parenting style "affectionate independence" is the optimal parenting style as it relates to Christian commitment ($p \leq .001$), and denominational loyalty ($p \leq .001$). These are considered to be highly statistically significant results. These relationships are presented in figures 2, and 3. This was true for the Island sample as well although the differences in the mean scores was not as marked.

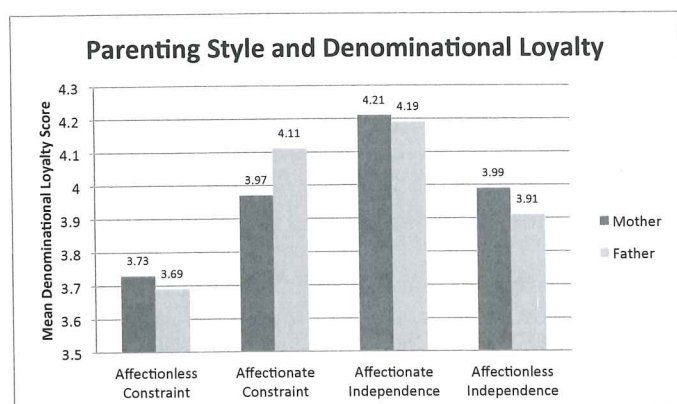
When the home, the Church and youth ministry, and the SDA school work together in concert the positive effect is compounded. There are so many influences working against faith development that creating an environment in which young people can grow spiritually should be the concern all Christian parents, and churches. Figure 4 shows that if a

Figure 2



$p \leq .001$ for both Mother's and Father's Parenting Style

Figure 3

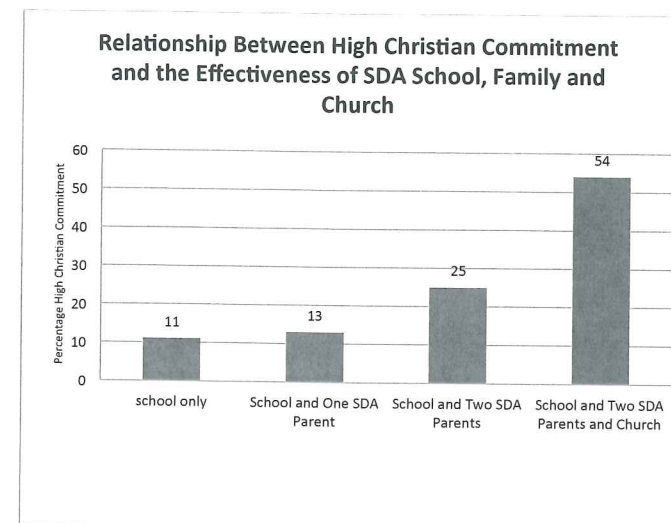


$p \leq .001$ for both Mother's and Father's Parenting Style

young person does not experience any effective environments apart from the SDA School the probability of demonstrating high Christian commitment is 11 out of 100. The graph also shows that 54% of students whose home, church and school are effective rated high in the area of Christian commitment. Students with one or two effective environments were placed in lower rank-ordered intermediate positions.

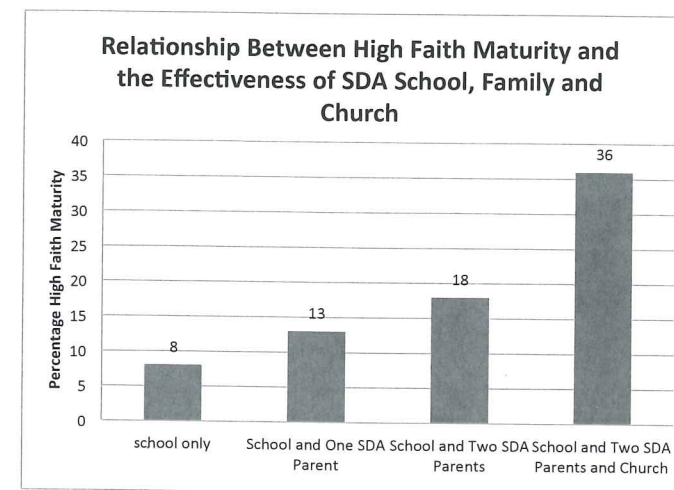
Figure 5 shows the dramatic rise in High Faith Maturity as the number of effective environments increase. In addition it is interesting to note that 28% of students from non-SDA homes who go to an SDA school and also attend an SDA church have High Faith Maturity. It should be noted that there were only 33% with high faith maturity across the total sample so this is a significant increase.

Figure 4



Note: Since all the students were SDAs in the Island sample this analytical treatment was not possible for that group.

Figure 5



$p \leq .001$

The Role of Mentors

Since Valuegenesis I (1992) there have been a number of studies that support the role of mentoring in the spiritual and personal development of youth (Dubois et al., 2002; Herrera, 2011; Goldner et al., 2009; Langhout et al., 2004). Scales were included in Valuegenesis II to inves-

tigate the role mentoring actually plays. The survey revealed that 70% of students in the SDA school system can identify someone who has positively influenced their spiritual growth at school. There are considerably more, about 80% of young people, who can identify adults other than their parents who have positively influenced their spiritual growth at church. The study findings do not tell us how much time the adult has invested in the student. The scale only indicates that the young person knows of interested, concerned adults in their lives apart from their parents. It could be that mentors with an ongoing or even formal time commitment to these young people might have an even greater spiritual impact on their lives.

Whatever the level of investment by these concerned adults might be, the study shows significant correlations between having an interested adult/mentor in one's life at church and high Faith Maturity ($r = -.40, p \leq .01$), Christian Commitment ($r = -.43, p \leq .01$) and Denominational Loyalty ($r = -.39, p \leq .01$).²

Over 70% of all students can identify a person who takes an active interest in their welfare at both church and school. Distributions are similar for all year groupings for both church and school. About 50% identify more than five church related adult persons showing interest in them and about 40% identify five adult mentors at school. About 70% maintain a current significant relationship with a mature Christian at church and 60% have a similar relationship at school. The data show that over 56% of respondents can identify four or more people who have shown a significant interest in them at their church, while 47% can identify people doing the same thing at school. Sadly 12% cannot identify anyone at church that they feel is interested in them. This figure rises to 13% for the schools.

The survey instrument further asked the students about relationships between themselves and mature Christians. It is encouraging that over 70% can identify these relationships at church and 63% say that they have these relationships at school.

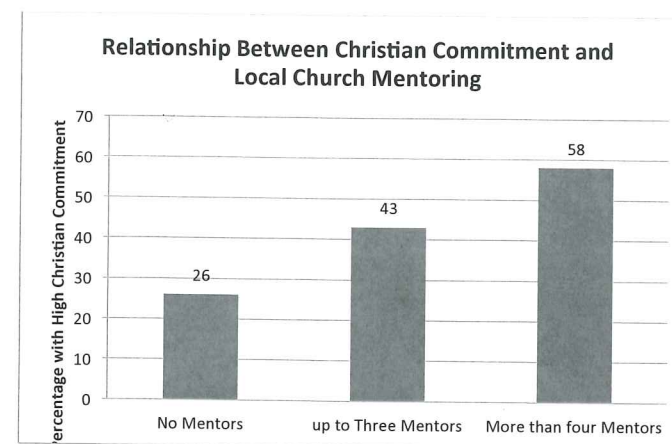
It is interesting to note that there are strong correlations between having an interested adult/mentor in one's life and the absence of alcohol use, sexual intercourse and self-harm. There are also strong correlations with having high self-worth, and higher levels of Christian commitment, faith maturity, denominational loyalty and understanding of grace.

² Although there are also correlations between these items in the Pacific Islands they are much weaker. The figures for the number of adults involved in the lives of respondents as almost the same but the influence is not as strong.

Figures 6 - 7 show the correlations between local church mentoring and High Christian Commitment ($r = .53, p \leq .01$), High Faith Maturity ($r = .51, p \leq .01$), High Denominational Loyalty ($r = .26, p \leq .01$), and Understanding of Grace ($r = .37, p \leq .01$). The respondents who report that they have more than four interested adults in their life show a 100% increase over those who report that they have no interested adults in their life (see figure 7). Although respondents from other faith groups did not identify their church/religion the correlations for high Christian commitment and faith maturity and number of mentors mirrored the results outlined above. Figure 7 shows that the increase is even greater when we examine the differences for the various groups and their relationship to high faith maturity moving from 17% to 41%. Although the correlations are not as strong for school mentors they are still significant ($p \leq .01$).

When the child perceives the school to have a high Christian impact there is a highly significant relationship between the school and its mentors and levels of Christian commitment, denominational loyalty and intrinsic orientation to their religion. We will deal with intrinsic orientation this later in the article.

Figure 6

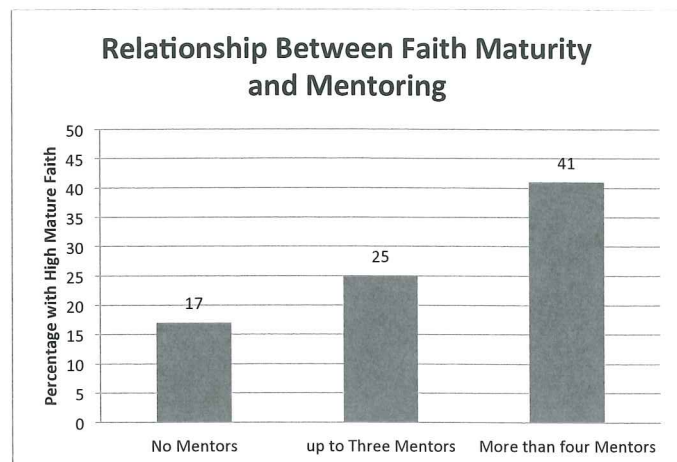


* $p \leq .001$

Youth Ministry and Mentoring

There is a significant relationship between Youth Ministry and Mentoring ($r = .31, p \leq .01$). Those who report involvement in youth ministry are also likely to have multiple interested adults/mentors in their lives.

Figure 7



* $p \leq .001$

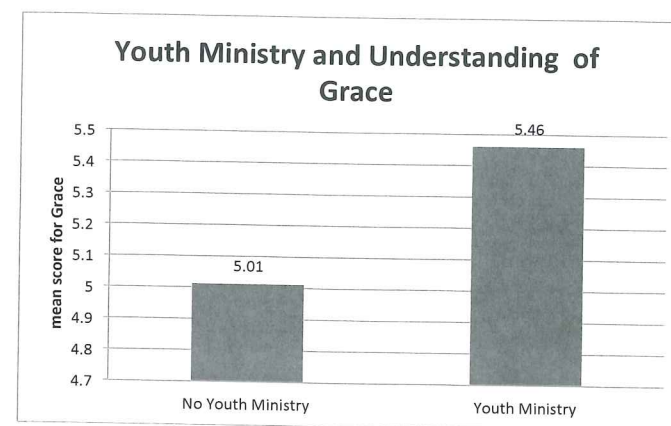
In the Valuegenesis I study there was some concern about the lack of understanding of grace. This has improved in the current high school students. Figure 8 shows the relationship between youth ministry and understanding of grace. A series of one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine the relationships between youth ministry and the respondent's understanding of Grace. At $\alpha = .05$, there are significant differences ($F = 485.729$, $p \leq .001$) among the various groups for the Grace scale tested (see figure 8). The $\eta^2 = .15$ score revealed a large magnitude of difference.

Kara Powell (2011) informs us that parents, the church and its leaders have failed too many youth. Powell challenges parents to build an intergenerational web where they connect their children to caring adults but when they fail youth leaders should "step in to create additional strands" (p. 73).

Youth Ministry and Attitudes to the Local Church

In the first Valuegenesis study Gane (1997) found that there was a major change in attitude to the local church when one was exposed to youth ministry (pp. 80-82). This time the difference between the two groups, those with youth ministry and those without it is even more pronounced. A series of one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine the relationships between youth ministry and the respondent's attitudes to their local church. At $\alpha = .05$, there are significant differences ($p \leq .001$) among the various groups for the 18 items tested (see figure 9).

Figure 8



* $p \leq .001$

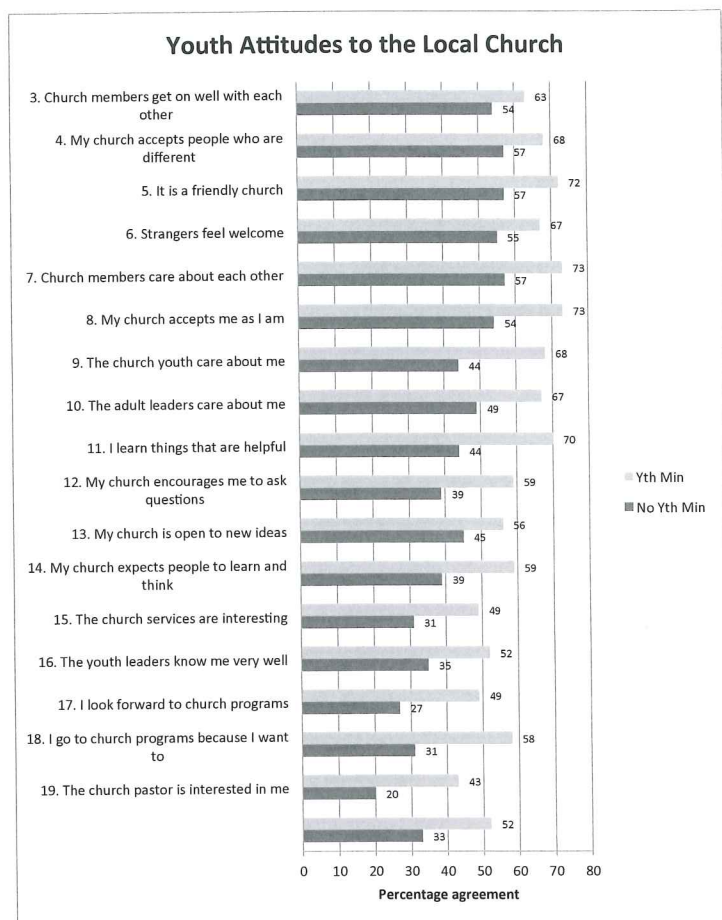
A quick scan of figure 9 shows that every item has a major positive shift when the young person has involvement in youth ministry. The four items of the church climate scale had sizeable positive shifts. In item F8 "My church accepts me as I am" the shift is 19% ($p \leq .001$), this was the largest shift with item F6 "Strangers feel welcome", being the smallest with a 12% shift ($p \leq .001$).

Those who indicated that they were involved in youth ministry are more likely to see the Pastor as being interested in them (item F19) and the difference between the two groups is shown in Figure 10. Those students with exposure to youth ministry are more likely to go to church because they want to (item F18), here the percentage moves from 31% to 58% ($p \leq .001$), and there is also a much larger percentage ($p \leq .001$) who look forward to going to church (item F17). Forty-nine percent look forward to going to church when they have youth ministry whereas of those without it only 27% look forward to going to church.

One could draw attention to each individual item in Figure 10 but the final few deal with learning and this is a strong indicator of those who will remain in the church into young adult years, (Gillespie, 2004, pp. 201-206). Those involved in youth ministry are more likely to say "my church encourages me to ask questions" (item F12), 59% as opposed to 39% ($p \leq .001$) for those without youth ministry. This is also the case for item F11 "I learn things that are helpful", where 70% of those with youth ministry affirm this while only 44% ($p \leq .001$) of those who do not participate in youth ministry do so. Again for item F13 and F14 those with youth ministry are more likely to affirm the statements "my church is open to new ideas", and "my church expects people to learn and think". The difference between the two groups is 11% and 20% respectively ($p \leq .001$). There is also a more positive view of the church by those

who have youth ministry in the island nations. On the whole they are more positive to begin with so increase ranges from 3-20% with $p \leq .001$.

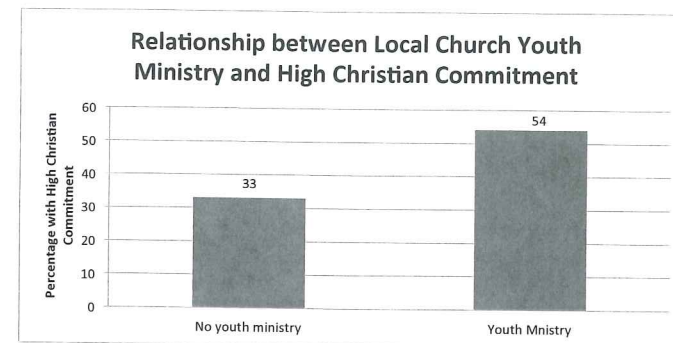
Figure 10



$p \leq .001$

We developed a Youth Ministry scale which consisted of a number of related items however it is of interest to note that there are some strong correlations between the individual items and other measures. Figure 11 shows the relationship between local church youth ministry and high Christian commitment. There is positive shift of over 20% ($p \leq .001$). A one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the relationship between involvement in youth ministry programs at the local church and high Christian commitment. At $\alpha = .05$, there are significant differences among the groups for the item tested.

Figure 11



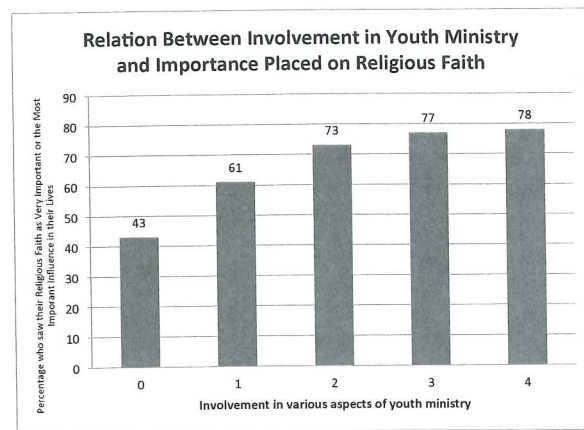
($p \leq .001$)

Where there is no Youth Ministry involvement 43% see their religious faith as being important while 61% of those with youth ministry see their faith as a very important influence or the most important influence in their lives. An Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the relationships between involvement in youth ministry programs and importance of religious faith. At $\alpha = .05$, there are significant differences among the groups for this item.

There is a cumulative effect when youth are involved in a number of aspects of youth ministry as shown in figure 12. There is a much greater chance that religious faith will be important among those who are exposed to multiple aspects of youth ministry. While only 43% of students who are not involved in youth ministry state that their religious faith is important to them, just adding pathfinders (a church based club similar to Scouts) sees a positive shift of 18%. If we add involvement in the other elements of the youth ministry scale we see the dramatic change in the results shown in Figure 12.

Table 1 shows the relationships between various aspects of youth ministry and current attitudes to church involvement and future intention of involvement. A series of independent samples t tests were conducted to examine the relationships between involvement in Youth Ministry in the local church, Conference youth camps, pathfinders and conference youth rallies and item H1 "attend an SDA church if you moved to another city", item H4 "plan to be involved in the church at age 40", item F17 "I look forward to church program", and item F18 "I go church because I want to". At $\alpha = .05$, there are significant differences between those students who have exposure to these aspects of youth ministry and the measures of current attitudes to church involvement and future intention of involvement. The results for both item I 25 Conference Youth Camps and item I 28 Local Church Youth Ministry are all highly statistically significant ($p \leq .001$) while the results for item

Figure 12



$p \leq .001$)

I 29 and item I 30 are very significant ($p \leq .01$). Where the local church has youth ministry there is a 32% positive shift in intention to be actively involved in the church when the student is forty years old.³

The magnitude of the difference for all scores related to local church youth ministry range from medium to large. The effect size for F17 "Look forward to going to church" is medium ($d = .5$). The effect size is the same for F18 "I go to church because I want to" ($d = .5$). There is a greater magnitude of difference for H1 "I would attend an SDA church if I moved to another city" ($d = .6$) and the effect size is approaching large for H4 "I plan to be involved in the SDA church at the age of 40" ($d = .7$). The magnitude of difference measured by Cohen's d is between .3 and .4 for all the other relationships.

The Relationship between Youth Ministry and Intrinsic Orientation to Religion

Gordon Allport's work (Allport, 1950; Gillespie et al., 2004) demonstrated the importance of intrinsic orientation to religion and its relationship to intension of future involvement in the church. Allport developed the intrinsic/extrinsic scales used widely in studies seeking to understand the role of religion in the adolescent as he/she enters young

³ It should be noted that there are those who do not think that predictions by students at this age carry much "research weight". Further longitudinal study would be needed to see if intention does in fact become reality.

Table 1

The Effect of Youth Ministry on Present and Future attendance at a Seventh-day Adventist Church								
	I 25 Conference Youth Camps		I 28 Local Church Youth Min		I 29 Pathfinders		I 30 Conference Youth Rallies	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
H1. I would attend an SDA church if I moved to another city	75*	84*	64*	85*	-	-	-	-
H4. I plan to be involved in the SDA church at the age of 40	61*	80*	49*	81*	71**	82**	66*	77*
F17. I look forward to going to church	40*	53*	34*	53*	45**	53**	-	-
F18. I go to church because I want to	48*	63*	46*	62*	-	-	-	-

* $p \leq .001$ ** $p \leq .05$ Percentages for Good or excellent chance

adult years. Allport's work led to the theory that intrinsic orientation to religion was an excellent predictor of whether or not a teenager would continue to be involved in their religion as a young adult. The mean score for those respondents from homes where the parenting style was "Affectionate Independence" was significantly higher than for any other style. See Gane and Kijai (2006) for more information on the relationship between intrinsic faith and youth ministry from an earlier study.

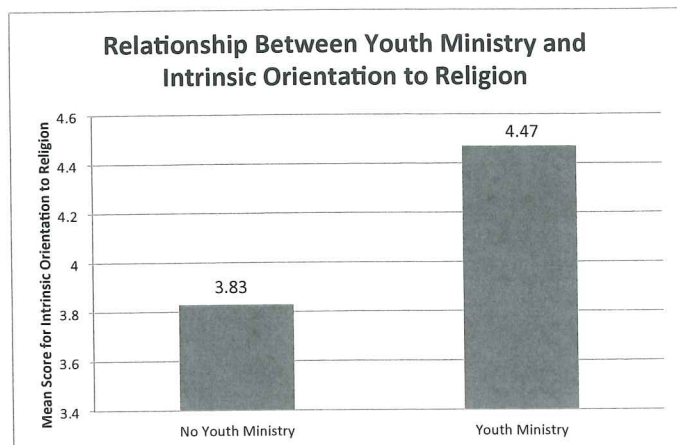
The relationship between youth ministry involvement and intrinsic orientation to religion is seen in figure 13. This is a highly significant result and adds to the data already presented that youth ministry is strongly related to intention to be involved in their church in the future.

An independent samples t test was conducted to examine the relationships between involvement in youth ministry and intrinsic orientation to religion. At $\alpha = .05$, there are significant differences between those students who have exposure to youth ministry and those who have not in their intrinsic orientation to religion ($p \leq .001$). The magnitude of the difference measured using Cohen's d is approaching large ($d = .7$).

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that when the parenting style experienced by the child is affectionate independence there is a more positive attitude toward faith and future intensions to maintain faith. This supports the findings of Kara Powell (2011) that the role of parents and

Figure 13



$p \leq .001$

intergenerational ministry is crucial if we want to see adolescents adopt a faith that lasts. The role of mentors although widely recognised as of significance is seen in this study to play a crucial role in the adoption of faith and values that the student intends to keep. A strong and vital youth ministry program that involves multiple approaches and is intergenerational is strongly related to the adolescent's intention to continue involvement in personal faith and church life into adulthood. Levels of Christian commitment, faith maturity and intrinsic orientation to religion are all higher among those whose parents intentionally involve them in intergenerational youth ministry where there are multiple relationships with caring, mature Christians. Homes, schools and churches that wish to encourage adolescents to continue their faith into their young adult years would do well to seriously consider doing all they can to change the environment and the educational processes of the home, the school and the church. Christian Smith (2011) when thinking about the importance of intergenerational connection and its impact on faith alerts us to the fact that we should proactively maintain connection with those who are leaving adolescence and entering adulthood. What parents churches and schools have done they should continue to nurture if they want to see adolescent faith become a life-long faith.

Because this study involved the youth of only one denomination it would be profitable to see if the findings are similar in other church communities. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that it is but more study is necessary to test these findings.

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