

**Top Factors Contributing to Turnover Rates in the Pacific Northwest Youth Pastorates**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis deduces the top three factors affecting turnover rates in the Pacific Northwest. The role of the youth pastor has only come about within the last century. With this information, it is understandable why job descriptions and the consensus on what a youth pastorate does can be vague and easily dismissed. However, this thesis contends that increased material and emotional support must be given to youth pastorates from one's supervisor and coworkers. In this study, I mimic the survey done by Roger McKenzie in 1997 and use the theories of adult development and the theory of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction to survey youth pastors within the greater Seattle area. Through the data collected in this survey, I extrapolate the top three factors explaining why a youth minister leaves a church position before guiding church leadership to prevent this problem—age thirty transition, their “call” changes, and their interpersonal workplace relationship.

## Introduction

Youth ministry is a relatively new concept. Up until contemporary times, students were expected to be involved in daily activities that included working for the family, joining adults during Sunday services, and marrying during their teen years. As society develops its understanding of adolescence as a growth stage of its own, the Church has continued to develop age-based programs for students. External parachurch organizations such as YMCA and Young Life were the pioneers of the youth ministry space. After developing such programs in the early 1900s, the Church decided officially to create youth-based ministries in the 1950s and 1960s. Since the development of youth groups was less than 100 years ago, understandably the vocational youth pastor's job is only loosely defined and often becomes a point of weakness for a local church when a dissatisfied leader quits abruptly.

This problem lies mainly in the way we have approached youth ministry and the respective leaders in it. As mentioned above, youth ministry is often equated to a youth *program*. In the chase to throw the biggest party, largest worship night, or host the most students at summer camp we have diluted and undervalued the role of the youth pastor. The commonly quoted statistic indicates that a youth pastor stays at the same church for an average of 18 months. However, this 18-month myth masks the reality that “the average youth minister serves at a single church for 3.9 years.”<sup>1</sup> Although the former statistic is quite lower than that of the latter, the actuality of one minister only serving approximately four years is still disheartening. At best, this means a youth pastorate is almost seeing one group of students through high school. Reaching upcoming generations is understandably difficult, but partner this with a leadership

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<sup>1</sup> Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 92.

transition somewhere in their time in student ministry and it is an equation for a mess. This preexisting difficulty then compounds due to the nature of the pacific northwest.

The PNW is categorically one of the largest pop culture centers where emerging ideas tend to be born and accepted. Seattle and the surrounding areas are identifiably the most politically liberal and lifestyle-affirming cities in the nation. Additionally, this area is rich with adolescents and young adults due to the concentration of schools and universities. For this reason, churches in the area are naturally inclined to be aware of cultural trends and, therefore, may strive to reach the younger demographic intentionally. This attempt is commendable however, the transient nature of a youth pastor position still affects this region negatively.

In churches across the greater Seattle area, one finds value statements that include "invest in the next generation," "multigenerational church," "for the next generation," and the like. However, a study conducted by Barna in 2019 shows that 64% of students walk away from their faith sometime after graduating high school.<sup>2</sup> That same age group of 18- to 29-year-olds make up 16% of the entire US population.<sup>3</sup> With these numbers, roughly 34,112,000 students have abandoned their faith in the past two years. In a post-Christian and post-postmodern area, the way we approach youth ministry and youth ministers must change, not just for the hope of youth ministry but for the sake of the Church.

This thesis endeavors to identify how to break the trend of high turnover rates among youth pastors by uncovering the top factors contributing to the issue within the greater Seattle area. Due to the need for stability and longevity as significant factors for successful ministries, I will address that a youth pastor's tenure has exponential value when sustained for more than an

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<sup>2</sup> "Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%-but What about Those Who Stay?," Barna Group, accessed January 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

average of 3.9 years to track with students through their middle and high school tenure. The Church is called to be a place of stability and belonging for the lost and broken; therefore, I believe we must determine how to stabilize ministry leaders, especially youth pastors.

A committed youth pastor, who serves within a single student ministry, for an extended period is one of the best and most attainable solutions for this ever-present issue. In my attempt to establish the common factors that decide a youth pastor's longevity within the pop-culture capital—Seattle – I mimicked the survey conducted by Roger McKenzie more than a generation ago (1997). I hypothesized three factors that would be the cause of why one did or did not stay in their vocational youth pastor position. I assume the first factor holding the greatest influence would be the sense of call one felt over their life. Within the scope of this paper “call” is defined as the specific instruction or command of the Lord regarding a specific life. This call can be experienced personally or be communicated and/or confirmed through outside mentors, leaders, family, friends, etc. The second greatest influencing factor I would presuppose is the level of satisfaction with interpersonal workplace relationships. I identified these two top factors, along with a third - the age thirty transition, and propose that a shift in perception, and an increase in support, as supervisors of youth pastors would significantly impact the likelihood of a youth pastor staying within their position.

## **Review of Literature**

### *Introduction*

Youth ministry is a field often known for the free pizza on group nights and wild stories gathered at summer camps. Previous to the last couple of decades, literature on ministry was simply based on fun skits for your youth group and pamphlets on how to do missions the right

way. There have been significant advances in youth ministry literature within the past twenty years as the importance and validity of this field have become more widely recognized. Some of the leading voices in the academic realm include Kara Powell at Fuller Youth Institute and Dr. Tim McKnight at Claret Divinity School. In the more commonplace, lay ministry route, names such as Doug Fields, a youth pastor of over thirty years who has become well known for books such as *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry*, and Todd Jones, a youth pastor of 13 years and founder of Stoked on Youth Ministry. The voices such as Fields, Powell, and Knight are needed to understand the state of our youth pastorates and greater youth ministry. Youth ministry, like any other, does not happen in a vacuum, rather it is a living collection of people who are interacting and responding to the situations around them. Often successful youth ministries find themselves, “reaping the fruit of long, durable relationships built over a span of years, not weeks”<sup>4</sup> not just putting on the best program. The research done in this paper was guided by two psychological frameworks to address the very human side of ministry. Rather than propose a new exegetical framework to lead from, I want to address the intersection between the holiness of ministry work and humanity of it. That is only possible when we address that youth pastorate is a role like any other job.

### *Theoretical Framework Underlying the Research Purpose*

#### Theory of Adult Development

The first of two theoretical frameworks used was Daniel Levinson’s theory of adult development. In this theory, Levinson proposes that the age thirty transition in adult development is one that “an opportunity to reappraise and modify the entry structure and to

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<sup>4</sup>Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 155.

create the basis for the next life structure.”<sup>5</sup> Like Erik Erikson’s explanation of development from birth to adulthood, Levinson furthers this train of thought by breaking down lifetime developments through the lens of adulthood. For the purposes of this paper, we will expand upon the age thirty transition mainly.

In Levinson’s theory he proposes that there are four main stages, or “eras” when considering one’s life span: pre-adulthood (conception to twenty-two), early adulthood (seventeen to forty-five), middle adulthood (forty to sixty-five), and late adulthood (sixty to death). Between each of these eras is a range of years that are considered the transition years. For example, although pre adulthood seems to end at age twenty-two one reads that early adulthood can begin at age seventeen. This is because of what Levinson states is the early adulthood transition. There are three major life transitions between the four eras of life. Then between each major life era transition, there are smaller, but just as important, age-based transitions – one of which is the age thirty transition which is one focus of this study.

The age thirty transition can range from age twenty-eight to thirty-three and is a time for someone to reconsider where they are, dream about where they want to be, and adjust what is necessary for the disparity between the two. Levinson breaks the time of early adulthood and the transitions contained in such into two groups—structure building and structure changing. Essentially a structure is the physical, material life and systems a person has around them. In a structure building time one should focus on making “certain key choices [that] form a structure around [a person] and pursue values and goals within that structure.”<sup>6</sup> In a season of transition,

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<sup>5</sup> Levinson, D. J. (1986), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Levinson, D. J. (1986), 7.

such as the age thirty transition, one has the ability to reevaluate what has built up the structure around them and then change what they do not need, desire, or align with moving forward.

### Theory of Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

In the 1950s, Fredrick Herzberg proposed the theory of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. After interviewing and collecting data from 203 participants within a thirty-mile radius of Pittsburg, Herzberg theorized that two dimensions played a key role in one's satisfaction with their job and deduced how that impacted their likelihood to stay at said job.<sup>7</sup> The two dimensions of this theory are motivational and hygiene oriented. Hygiene factors are often external and include "supervision, interpersonal relations, physical working conditions, salary, company policy and administration, benefits, and job security."<sup>8</sup> While motivational factors are mostly intrinsic and include recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, achievement, and growth. It is important to note that Herzberg implies in his study that the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction but rather neutrality.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the presence of multiple satisfiers, or motivational factors, does not always equate to an employee doing their best, yet it does ensure a higher retention rate in the job. Conversely, the presence of multiple job dissatisfiers, or negative hygiene factors, would lend itself to one abandoning their position. Again, these factors act independently and therefore cannot be used as an exact formula to predict one's job stability.

Aside from the two theoretical frameworks in use, it is important to discuss the researcher and lived experience of tenured youth pastors. Doug Fields and Mark DeVries have invited churches into correcting the conversations regarding youth ministry specifically, within the past

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<sup>7</sup> Stello, C. M., 2011, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Stello, C. M., 2011, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence J. Gitman et al., "Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory," Introduction to Business (OpenStax, September 18, 2018), <https://opentextbc.ca/businessopenstax/chapter/herzbergs-motivator-hygiene-theory/>.



10-20 years; rather than continuing the debate on the best approach or program, these leaders have identified that churches must refocus the program around the people, not the people around the program.

In *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, Mark DeVries contends that churches have failed to create lasting, impactful youth ministries because leadership has undervalued and over-expected a youth worker to be an “all-star” or “save the program.” This perspective that senior leadership and other church members take toward the youth pastor expedites burnout and bitterness within the youth worker. DeVries explains that due to the seemingly impossible expectations placed upon the youth minister, the average youth worker serves at a single church for 3.9 years.<sup>10</sup> Although higher than the 18 months other youth workers have cited, this statistic is still shockingly low in light of the nature of church work. As previously stated, if the average youth worker is with a church for 3.9 years, they will not see a single group of students through their entire high school career, let alone junior high. This instability can only further the new generation’s mistrust and distaste for the Church.

The go-to guide for a youth ministry, *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry* by Doug Fields, addresses the same inclination for a youth worker to leave around the 18-month mark. Whether 3.9 years or 18 months, the consensus is that a youth worker is most likely to become overworked and discouraged within their career. While this is not unlike other positions within a church or even in the secular workforce, Fields addresses that a youth pastorate must have a high commitment level to last before the hardships. Within the first few chapters of the book, Fields directly addresses how the discouragement from parents, students, leaders, and fellow staff members will try to discredit the youth worker’s call to ministry. He explains the boundaries and

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<sup>10</sup> Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 92.

actions the youth worker must take to protect the longevity of his (or her) career at a local church.

Along with DeVries, Fields enforces that longevity is the key factor to a life-changing impact within a program; however, this longevity is not accomplished apart from having trusted relationships with other staff members. These relationships are lacking in most churches. In summary, both unspoken expectations and presumptions surrounding the roles and relationships of a youth worker are detrimental to their career.

Lastly, the inspiration for this thesis, the dissertation by Roger McKenzie, must be acknowledged. McKenzie was one of the first graduate students to study the reasons behind the short tenure of youth pastors for his dissertation “The Longevity in Youth Ministry.” Within his study, McKenzie shares the conclusion of his survey within the Church of God. Using the two theories stated above, McKenzie surveyed youth workers to understand why they were still or formerly engaged with youth ministry. Through his research, he found that most youth workers transitioned out of youth ministry before “completing the developmental task at age 30.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the relationship between the youth worker and senior pastors or parents was the largest source of dissatisfaction.

### *Summary*

In the context of this study and how these theories apply to the field of ministry, specifically youth, it is critical to look at the holistic scenario of a youth minister. Levinson’s theory of adult development was chosen because of the natural tendency to hire younger when staffing a youth department. Historically youth ministry has been seen as training ground for

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<sup>11</sup> McKenzie, Roger. “The Longevity in Youth Ministry.” 1997.

those that a lead minister, or someone, may sense the call over a young man or woman's life for "greater" ministry as Dr. McKnight shared in *The Longer Haul in Youth Ministry Podcast*.<sup>12</sup>

There is a nonnegotiable truth to this otherwise debatable myth, however. To be in youth ministry means to be willing, at least for a season, to fulfill weird hours (i.e., all-nighters and summer camps), consume a less than decent diet (i.e., pizza nights, food challenges, donuts), and relate to an everchanging young and upcoming generation. Reliability and relatability with students are high priorities in youth ministry. Understandably, those in their early twenties can be a perfect fit for this role. However, the tension comes when that young twenty-something becomes a married thirty-year-old with a child or two on the way. The structure of their early life era may no longer benefit the needs and goals of their future for various reasons: physically or financially. Unless the youth pastorate has a long-standing relationship with their supervisor and/or feels comfortable enough to ask for shifts in salary and job requirements, this leaves them with the only option – to leave their student ministry.

The physical, mental, and spiritual needs of a youth pastorate speak to the importance of using Herzberg's theory of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. A decision to leave a job does not often occur without reason. The field of ministry is such a high-paced, ever-changing, multiple-input space that it is hard to pinpoint why career changes are made. It would be naive to think that every youth pastor leaves because the Lord is calling them somewhere else. We must face the reality that the role of the youth pastor is justifiably as hard as any other ministry position, if not more so, in the current cultural moment. Youth pastors not only interpret large theological ideas into understandable and applicable points for the developing mind of a student, but they also must equip parents and volunteers, to come head-to-head with prevalent, emotionally taxing

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<sup>12</sup> The Longer Haul in Youth Ministry, *The Longer Haul in Youth Ministry*, 2022.

issues such as eating disorders, suicide, fatal illnesses, teen pregnancy, abuse, and fulfill their expected daily work activities. These activities can range anywhere from balancing their budget, crafting a sermon, attending a staff meeting, or even serving/ leading a whole other ministry. The varying and vast amount of work required by a youth minister can potentially lend itself to a job dissatisfier if interpersonal relationships and working conditions are not healthy. Furthermore, when a youth pastor's salary does not consider the various jobs and nuances of the position, that too can breed more dissatisfaction and ultimately apathy towards the role. I believe it is for these reasons, that many youth pastors have left their position and are hard to find in our current time.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study mimicked the qualitative study done by McKenzie in 1997. Through a series of interviews with a handful of people, the researcher attempted to capture the most universal and core answers to the following question: What factors most contribute to the longevity of a youth pastorate? In order to collect the most honest and accurate answers, the researcher interviewed both current and former youth pastors from various denominations within the greater Seattle area. Participants ranged in ages from the early twenties to later forties and were represented by both male and female pastoratees. The questions chosen to use were based on the survey Roger McKenzie used for his dissertation at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Both his original survey and the questions I decided to add are founded on the two major theories previously discussed: Fredrick Herzberg's theory of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction and Daniel Levinson's theory of adult development.

*Participants* \*names changed for anonymity purposes\*

Fred – 42 – Free Methodist Pastor; former youth pastor

Sarah – 26 – nondenominational former youth copastor/wife; current  
administrative assistant

Dylan – 25 – Assemblies of God current youth pastor

Lisa – 22 – nondenominational youth director

Jared – 45 – former nondenominational youth pastor; current videographer

*Role of Researcher*

The role of the researcher was to facilitate a conversation surrounding the previous and/or current experience of the five aforementioned youth pastorates in the Pacific Northwest. The researcher intentionally designed questions for the in-person interviews that would evoke honest answers about the experiences of the youth pastor with their family, church community, students, and fellow staff members.

*Information collection*

To collect information regarding the experiences and factors contributing to a youth pastorate's vocation the researcher personally invited 15 current and former youth pastorates out to an informal discussion over coffee. Out of the invited fifteen, five responded with a willing desire and ability to share about their time in youth ministry. It should be noted that each of the youth workers was either a personal friend and colleague of the researcher and/or was connected through mutual friends.

After exchanging multiple emails, a date and time were set to meet in person and converse about their experience in youth ministry. All meetings were held at various public, local coffee shops and were recorded on an iPhone voice recording app. These interviews ranged from an hour to an hour and a half.

### *Procedures*

As mentioned these were informal conversations, however, they did all go through the questions as outlined in Appendix A. The conversation surrounded two main categories, the first being the memories of the youth pastor and the second was the satisfaction of the youth pastor. Specifically, the pastorates were questioned on their thoughts about entering youth ministry, their experiences within it, the reason for changing positions or careers, and their level of satisfaction with their time in youth ministry. After collecting preliminary information about the volunteer interviewee (i.e., name, age, marital status, date range of youth work, etc.) the researcher asked the subject to think of both a positive and negative experience the pastor had in their time of youth. This approach of questioning follows Fredrick Herzberg's explanation of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction theory. Ideally, the answers given for both the positive and negative experiences would speak to the elements both externally in the workplace and intrinsically that the youth pastor felt satisfied and/or dissatisfied with.

Following the initial interviews, the researcher then transcribed the audio clips through Tanscribeme.com and proceeded to search for various themes surrounding the youth pastorate's position. To find these common factors the researcher did a simple reading and rereading to identify if there were repeated words, ideas, or even experiences of the interviewed pastorates.

Information analysis

Analysis of the transcribed interviews illuminated both common experiences of joy due to students’ individual and communal growth and frustrating experiences due to mishandled situations and/or feeling unsupported. It should be mentioned that every interviewee looked upon their time in youth ministry, be it current or past, with sincere affection and gratitude. This was evident due to the love they expressed for the students, families, and communities they served. Furthermore, most participants said that they would return to youth ministry in some way when the time was right.

**Table 1. RELATIONSHIP STATUS**

Fred	Married a year after time served as the paid youth pastor
Sarah	Married 3 years into time served as the paid youth pastor
Dylan	Married after beginning and during time as the paid youth pastor
Lisa	Single
Jared	Married a year into time served as the paid youth pastor

Every participant stated that youth ministry was their first ministry position. However, reasons ranged as to why that was so. Two of the five shared it seemed like “the next right step,” because they wanted to stay where the fun was in the church. Another two shared that with the encouragement of their youth or lead pastor sensing God’s call in that future youth pastor’s life they began to intern/volunteer with students. The final participant shared that youth ministry was what seemed “available and comfortable,” so confident in their desire to pursue full-time ministry they stated with what they are existing. Each of the participants entered youth ministry shortly after graduating high school and before they were engaged or married.

**Table 2. UNDERSTANDING OF MINISTRY AND WORK**

Fred	Small details and power of discipleship
Sarah	Serving and leading youth is does not only take place in an official role; power of playing a supportive role
Dylan	Value the little things a lot more – small changes overtime creates a large impact
Lisa	Value the power of a team
Jared	Cut down the programming

When asked about their perception of work in youth ministry now compared to before, or when they first started, their time as a paid staff member the answers ranged widely. The specifics of their lessons are quite different, yet there is a common theme that is important to recognize. Almost every answer contends against the common ideology that bigger, better, and faster is the best route for a youth pastorate. Each participant shared that they wish they would have taken more time to slowly grow relationships and programming rather than chase after the next big number or event. This aligns with research done in multiple studies and books, which share that effectiveness and impact in youth ministry come when people are disciplined to disciplined not when programs become perfected.

**Table 3. POSITIVE EXPERIENCE**

Fred	Missions trip
Sarah	Personal development of a student's faith
Dylan	Growth of community and leadership
Lisa	Growth of volunteer/ student interactions and community
Jared	Personal development of a student's faith



Each participant relayed a story of how one or more students and/or volunteers' faith development was a highlight of their time in youth ministry. The similar nature of these answers, although nuanced for the specific community, background, and setting of their ministry, speaks to the intrinsic motivator that inspired the work of the participants. Youth ministry, like other forms of ministry, is a type of career that is almost impossible to do if the work itself – loving God and loving people—does not intensely inspire oneself. Growth was also another motivational factor that positively influenced the time each youth pastorate served within their ministry.

**Table 4. NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE**

Fred	Broken friendships
Sarah	Mishandled interaction with student (dress code)
Dylan	Mishandled interaction with student (de-escalation)
Lisa	Unsupported with policies and training
Jared	Lack of volunteer support

A reoccurring story of disappointment was shared when a youth pastorate felt that they mishandled various situations with a student and/or volunteers. Interestingly enough, each scenario in the graph above could be avoided if more (or any) training was provided for the interviewed youth pastorate. Each circumstance involved three main factors—a high-stress situation, lack of communication from one or both parties (supervisor, volunteer, friend), and a well-intentioned but ill-advised, new youth pastor.

## Data Analysis and Results

While each current or former youth pastorate had unique settings and approaches to ministry the struggles and celebrations shared were common. Each participant shared the effects of being unsupported as a frustration and each rejoiced over the growth and development of the people within their ministry, be it students or volunteers. Three factors stood out from the rest as to why the youth pastorate finds themselves staying within youth ministry or not. These factors include their experience with the reality of the age thirty transition, their view and experience of God's call on their life, and their experience with interpersonal relationships at the church they worked for.

The first of the top three factors are the inevitable age thirty transition as proposed by Levinson. In the preliminary data collection, 60% of the participants showed that during their time in youth ministry they got married. Out of the remaining two participants, one was dating the woman he would marry less than a year later. The five participants who either transitioned to marriage or were soon to be engaged shared that the reality of leading and living alongside students is difficult to do. Four of the five participants spoke specifically about the fact that the hours they kept affected their family life negatively at one point or another. Every participant spoke about the long nights spent awake at camp, responding to a student emergency, or cleaning up an event. The two current youth pastors spoke about the necessary intentionality needed to maintain healthy habits. Furthermore, they address that sometimes the best relatability a youth pastor can offer is a free pizza night or run to the fast-food chain with a small group thus inducing negatively impact diet behaviors.

Along with these lifestyle impacts, every participant shared a frustration with the salary they were receiving. Exactly 60% of interviewees shared that they were underpaid and

overworked during their time in youth ministry. Interestingly out of the five participants only one confronted their supervisor about the pay gap. This disparity in pay the youth pastors felt they received was challenging when planning for the future. The three youth pastors who have since transitioned out of the field of youth ministry all stated that the pay they received just did not provide enough for the future of a family. While this was not the sole factor for why these three participants left, it should not go without mentioning due to the nature of the age thirty transition. If the role as a youth minister affects one's sleep, diet, time, and levels of activity then it is valid to reevaluate if one's pay compensates them adequately to maintain such a lifestyle.

The second main factor was the role of the "call" as the person felt in their life. The call, as defined in this study, is the specific instruction or command of the Lord regarding a specific life. This highly personal feeling and/or experience can, and often is, confirmed through outside parties. Due to the nature of ministry, it is understandable that someone's call plays a significant role in the decisions they make, especially as they pertain to the life structure they are building. Pastors of any status and level often, if not always, testify to feeling a personal call to the ministry they work in. Regarding the response in the informal interviews held an interesting phenomenon took place. The two youth pastors who still find themselves in active youth ministry testified to feeling a specific call to youth ministry. However, the other three shared that their time in youth ministry was due more so to an overall call into ministry and the belief that the youth program would be an easy and safe place to begin. Understating this perception of the participants makes it clear that the influence of one's call will have a long-lasting effect on one's time in any ministry or vocation.

The third factor this study addressed is the role of interpersonal workplace relationships. Often the narrative around youth pastors is similar to that of the lowest man on the totem pole.

100% of the interviewees shared memories of being the go-to staff member that picked up the jobs others toss aside, did not want, or simply were assigned a plate full of additional responsibilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic alone, many senior pastors turned to their youth staff as the church moved online and into various social media and streaming platforms. Partner this reality with the contention with salary and that is breeding ground for dissatisfaction, and therefore abandonment of position. The same participant that shared their confrontation for more compensation did so only after speaking for ten minutes on the depth of this preparation and the long-standing relationship they had with their supervisor. Every other participant felt that their supervisor, or lead pastor, was “too distant” to have such a conversation with.

Overall, the consensus was that during the time one spent in youth ministry they felt unsupported by their fellow staff members, and instead worked hard to build a supportive volunteer base in their ministry. While this is a positive outcome of such a workplace disparity one must understand as a supervisor and fellow staff member to youth ministers that the volunteers they find support in are the same people they have to pour into and lead as well. The workspace and relationships fostered there should be the first place any form of minister should feel confident finding support in. The unique nature of the job ensures that this truth is a necessity.

After sitting across from five varied pastorates and listening to five distinct stories filled with the highs and lows of youth ministry experience this is clear, it is apparent that we must do better as supervisors and coworkers to youth ministers. If the harvest and benefits that come from the work of a youth pastor do not truly begin until after the first two years then it is critical we change our structures to support the longevity of a youth pastor.<sup>13</sup> Lead pastors and/or

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<sup>13</sup> Fields, Doug. 2002.

supervisors, I ask you, *How are you showing support to your youth pastor—emotionally, physically, spiritually, and financially?* Furthermore, as coworkers, elders, and members of a church with a youth pastorate, how are you doing so? The honest answers to these questions will predict the longevity of the youth pastor at your church.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Demographic Information

1. Name:
2. Address:
3. City: State: Zip:
4. Phone:
5. Year of birth:
6. Present vocation:
7. Age at youth ministry entrance/exit if not continuing:
8. Was youth ministry your first full-time ministry position?
9. Number of churches served as youth volunteer:
10. Marital status at youth ministry entrance/exit. Current marital status if continuing in youth ministry:
11. Number of children at youth ministry entrance/exit. Current number of children if continuing in youth ministry:
12. Educational level at youth ministry entrance/exit. Current educational level if continuing in youth ministry:

### Entering YM

1. Tell me about your first youth ministry position.
  - a. How did you get the job?
  - b. Why did you take the position?
2. Which of the following statements was truer for you? Why?
  - a. "I felt called by God to youth ministry."
  - b. "Youth ministry was familiar and was somewhat a comfortable beginning place for me to respond to God's call to ministry."

### Experiences within YM – great = small group; a girl finally shared

1. Please share about a time when you felt either very good or very bad about your role as a youth pastor. This could be a sequence of related events or a single event.
  - a. When did this event take place?
  - b. How long did the feelings from this experience last? What prompted the feelings to begin and end?
  - c. Was this experience typical of what was going on at the time?
  - d. Can you explain in greater detail why you felt as you did?
  - e. What meaning did you attach to this event?
  - f. What effect did these feelings have on your performance of your ministry? In what ways? For how long of a time? Helped to not be discouraged when students didn't share
  - g. Can you give specific examples of how your ministry performance was affected? For how long?
  - h. How did your feelings about this event influence your personal life?
    - i. Family relationships
    - ii. Diet

- iii. Sleep patterns
- iv. General health
- i. Did this experience cause you to feel good or bad about being the youth pastor at that church?
- j. Did the consequences of this event affect your career? How?
- k. To what extent were your feelings (good or bad) about being a youth pastor affected by what happened? Rate the level of intensity of your feelings from one to ten, with one being low intensity and ten being as high as the most important events in your work life.
- l. Could the situation you described happen to you again with the same affects? Why or why not?
- m. Is there anything else you would like to say regarding the events you described?
- 2. (Introduction to second sequence of questioning) Repeat the experience sequence [questions a-m] but based on a situation when their feelings were the opposite.
- 3. Are there any other outstanding experiences in your memory either positive or negative that you would like to share?

#### YM and Change

1. Do you know or did you ever see yourself as a career youth pastor?
2. In what ways has your understanding and approach to ministry changed since entry into youth ministry?
  - a. Have these changes in understanding and approach to ministry caused you to rethink your call to ministry?
  - b. Have changes in your understanding and approach to ministry caused you to look outside youth ministry to serve God or the church?
3. In what ways has your life changed since entry into youth ministry?
  - a. Family
  - b. Personal goals or dreams
  - c. Time and energy
4. In what ways have your expectation regarding your work environment changed since you entered youth ministry?

#### Career Turnover Intentions Scale

The items utilize a five-point scale with 1 being very unlikely and 5 being very likely.

1. In the past year, I've had thoughts about leaving the youth ministry profession.
2. I'm planning to leave "student ministry" altogether in the coming year.
3. I have no intention of leaving youth work, and plan on staying in the youth ministry field for the future, regardless of which church I'm employed at.

#### Career Commitment Scale

Rate on a scale from 1-5: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

1. I feel God is calling me into a different career than student ministry. (reverse-scored)
2. I am very satisfied with a career in youth ministry.



3. If I could do it all over again, I would not choose to work in the youth ministry profession. (reversed-scored)
4. If I had all the money I needed without working, I would probably still continue to serve in a church where I could pastor young people.
5. I like this vocation—of being a pastor who ministers to youth—too well to give it up.
6. I definitely feel called by God into youth ministry.
7. I am disappointed that I ever entered the field of youth ministry. (reversed-scored)