

## **Research Conducted for the National Student Leadership Project**

The findings of this significant research project are discussed in detail--with particular attention to ministry implications--in a book published in June 2000, with the following bibliographic data:

**Rahn, Dave & Linhart, Terry. (2000). Contagious faith: Empowering student leadership in youth evangelism. Group Publishing.**

This web-site is intended to complement the book by supplying--first of all--a copy of a paper presented to Youth Ministry Educators in October 1998. This paper contains some of the more technical data not available in the book, and has been slightly edited for this site. We then supply a copy of the both the procedural instructions and instruments developed for this project

### **PROCEDURE**

We began in the fall of 1996 to solicit nominations of those church youth groups and para-church youth ministries who may have evidenced teen-to-teen evangelism as a normal occurrence for at least three previous years. Our inquiries led us to denominational youth directors, youth ministry educators, writers, and para-church youth ministry leaders. The requests for nominations came via e-mail and phone conversations, seminars and conferences, in group settings as well as individual conversations. After four months of such efforts a total of 109 different youth ministries across the United States had been suggested for our research. This relatively small population represents a limitation of this study which was recognized from these earliest stages.

In the meantime, a plan was agreed upon which would allow us to use the research task as an excuse to become meaningfully involved with a team of undergraduate ministry majors/minors in a shared growth experience. And so, parallel to this activity of seeking youth ministry exemplars, a team of ten students was selected for participation in the project. Grants for undergraduate travel expenses related to this research were supplied by the MacLeod Foundation.

In order to find out whether those youth ministries nominated for further investigation met our criteria for effective student leadership (a stable and immediate history of 3 or more years where peer-to-peer evangelism was a normal occurrence) we distributed these 109 groups among the team for the purpose of conducting a phone interview. Our process was relatively simple after we designed a master interview template. Initial contact was made with youth pastors seeking a phone appointment of no more than 20 minutes where we could ask them questions about their use of student leaders in youth ministry. Nearly one out of every six calls found the youth sponsors to be unresponsive. We reviewed each case separately and, in most cases, dismissed these locations from consideration for our project. In a few instances the contact was passed to another team member for another attempt at contact before such a decision was made.

Upon completing the interview and filling out the three page questionnaire, the team member conducting the interview assigned a "grade" to the ministry. Sites receiving "A's" deserved further serious consideration while those receiving "B's" might be worthy of a closer look. Those ministries which didn't receive either an "A" or "B", had experienced a recent youth minister change, or were unwilling to help were removed from the dwindling list of locations to be visited for our project. One of the important practical considerations of this project involved the limitation of time and money. After careful planning we decided that various team members could visit as many as 20 sites between March and May in 1997. With major consideration balanced

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between the strength of the location and the effective use of funds, we deliberated which of the 20 sites offered us the highest probability of effective return and attempted to set up team visits with each. Logistical limitations reduced our site visits to a total of 17 in this first year.

When visiting a location, nearly always in teams of two or more, team members employed a combination of three data-gathering devices. It was agreed that these distinct approaches would supply us with data for both quantitative and qualitative analyses, as well as affording the youth ministries multiple avenues to communicate to us in a relatively short period of time.

Forced-choice surveys were designed and administered on location. These instruments asked students to answer eight questions about themselves before asking them to indicate what the relative frequency of their practice was for 24 different evangelism-related behaviors. For example, in response to the stem "I pray for one friend to accept Christ" students could choose responses from one of seven frequency options, ranging from "never happens" to "a few times daily."

We also designed and implemented a small group data gathering tool that we called "timed team responses." The larger group of student leaders gathered for our visit was divided into small groups of equal size and composition with regard to gender and age. Adult volunteers were invited to form their own group and professional youth ministers were excluded from the process. Each team was given the same question and asked to come to consensus and record their top three answers within a strict five minute time period. Our intent was to surface commonly agreed upon important elements in the life of each particular youth ministry in a way which would allow us some control with regard to peer influence during discussion.

Finally, we also employed large group discussions that helped us to discover the expectations and spirit of the groups. Extensive notes were taken at each location. Adults were allowed to participate in this discussion but asked to defer to students with regard to how often they contributed comments. Youth ministers were, again, asked to listen only. Before leaving each site we also collected some descriptive data about each youth ministry from the youth minister.

Data from the forced-choice surveys were entered into a computer and analyzed through separate one-way ANOVAs and subsequent Scheffé post-hoc tests. Data from the timed team responses were immediately analyzed for internal (within group) consistency. They were also used with large group discussion data as comparative analyses were made between groups. Frequent and extensive team interaction helped us to verify perceptions and judgments made throughout the research procedure.

Because it became apparent that there were some worthy sites which, for various reasons, could not be personally visited, we developed self-administered packets to pass along to those who might be willing to help us. This was necessarily more limited than our on-site data collection, but it was felt that descriptive data and forced-choice survey responses would, at least, contribute to the quantitative analysis done in this project. Unfortunately, while a number of youth ministers agreed to help us in this regard, they did not follow up and we received no data through this means.

After our visits were concluded, we engaged in analytical work and hypotheses development during the summer of 1997. Eight preliminary conclusions were developed and discussed among the research team for their validity. After concluding that further study was warranted, including some revisits to test our hypotheses and new visits to diversify our samples, a second grant was solicited and approved for another year of research.

In this second year of study our undergraduate research team was pared from ten to four. This decision reflected more limited funds while rewarding those students who had distinguished themselves by "over and above"

dedication to the project. This smaller team worked together to develop on-site strategies that would help us to check our hypotheses. In addition to employing the earlier three data gathering strategies, an individual interview template was developed and employed with student leaders at each location. Large group discussion questions were also modified a bit in this second year to assist us in uncovering the truth with regard to our hypotheses. A total of seven site visits were done from October to March in this second year, with two of them being revisits of locations from our first year. In total, 22 different youth ministries participated in our study.

## **Student Leadership Research Project**

### *Data Collection Design*

#### **The Set-Up**

We ask each site we visit to arrange for as many key, informed leaders of their youth ministry as can be drafted--both young people and adults--to be available to meet with us. However, we want to make sure that there are at least 2 student leader-types for every adult present. For at least one phase of the data-gathering, we'll reassemble the groups into sub-groups of 5-7 persons. Let's ask for a time commitment of two hours.

#### **Group Demographic Profile**

One person (typically the youth pastor) will help us to fill in the following questions offering a description of the group.

##### **As it relates to your group's size (senior high only)...**

*...how many students are on your "official roll"?*

*...what's the average attendance at your biggest weekly event?*

*...how many students do you have involved in weekly small groups?*

*...how many students are involved in student leadership/ministry teams?*

*...how many full time (paid) staff work with this group?*

*...how many part time/volunteer staff work with this group?*

##### **As it relates to your group's weekly programming (senior high only)...**

*...what various meetings/activities do you have going on each week and what purpose have you identified for each?*

##### **As it relates to evangelistic results of your group's ministry (senior high only)...**

*...how many persons have come to Christ through your ministry this school year?*

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### Student Leader Research Project

#### *Timed Team Responses*

After organizing the group into teams of 3-5, inform them that you are about to hand them some group assignments. Once they look at them, they will have exactly 5 minutes to complete each of the tasks. The following assignments will each be completed within this 5 minute time period:

*“Assume that there is a clear consensus among people who know: this youth ministry is extremely effective on behalf of the kingdom of God. In the next 5 minutes this group is to agree upon and write down **NO MORE THAN** the 3 most important factors contributing to that ministry effectiveness. You may write less than 3, but please do not write more than 3 factors.”*

*“In the next 5 minutes this group is to identify and agree upon the 3 most important historical events that have taken place in the life of this ministry during the past 2 years. Write down **NO MORE THAN 3**; you may write less than 3, but please do not write down more than 3 events.”*

*“Imagine that this group has a chance to offer practical advice to other youth ministries all around the country about **HOW** to help young people reach their classmates for Jesus Christ. In the next 5 minutes this group needs to agree upon and write down **NO MORE THAN 3** sentences representing that advice. You may write less than 3, but please do not write down more than 3 statements of advice.”*

*“In the next 5 minutes this group is to identify and agree upon the 3 most important truths that have been taught to your group during the past year. Write down **NO MORE THAN 3**; you may write less than 3, but please do not write down more than 3 of these teaching truths.”*

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#### *Questions used in FCR Interview*

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions by checking the box that most accurately represents what you believe.

***For how many of your friends who have come to Christ would you say you played a key role?***

RESPONSE OPTIONS: 1) none 2) 1 - 3 3) 4 -8 4) more than 8

***How did you come to put your faith in Christ?***

RESPONSE OPTIONS: 1) one on one with youth pastor/staff 2) one on one with an adult 3) one on one with other teen 4) parents/family 5) I was by myself 6) through a youth group program/event 7) other

***What is the most important thing you do as a leader in your youth group?***

RESPONSE OPTIONS: 1) invite friends 2) encourage others 3) provide up-front leadership 4) lead a small group 4) meet with other leaders 5) plan meetings/activities 6) share my faith

***What has been the biggest personal obstacle you've faced to your leading others to Christ?***

RESPONSE OPTIONS: 1) my own fears 2) my lack of training 3) my busy schedule 4) I need someone to get me started

***What has helped you the most to become a person that works at leading others to Christ?***

RESPONSE OPTIONS: 1) youth pastor/key adult 2) my parent(s) 3) Christian friends 4) youth group meetings 5) special huge conference 6) missions trip 7) my own experiences 8) small group meetings

***What is most helpful to you as you try to convince your friends to put their faith in Christ?***

RESPONSE OPTIONS: 1) adults who care 2) leadership team 3) other friends 4) youth group meetings 5) special conferences 6) special trips/retreats 7) special activities 8) small group meetings

**For each of the following statements, please place a check in the *ONE* box that most accurately reflects what your personal experiences have been in *the last six months*.**

RESPONSE OPTIONS FOR EACH STATEMENT BELOW:

- 1) never happens 2) seldom happens 3) about monthly 4) about weekly 5) few times weekly 6) about daily  
7) few times daily**

I pray for opportunities to tell someone about Jesus

I pray specifically for one particular friend to become a Christian

I pray with others so that our specific friends will become Christians

I organize others to pray for specific friends who need to become Christians

I do some things just so I can build friendships with classmates who aren't Christians

I invite non-Christian friends to large group activities where I know they will learn about Jesus

I invite non-Christian friends to join me in a small group where they will learn about Jesus

I invite non-Christian friends to talk with me about Jesus

I invite non-Christian friends to talk about Jesus with an adult friend I know

I help plan events where non-Christians can hear about Jesus

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I tell my non-Christian friends what my personal relationship with Jesus Christ means to me

I pray with non-Christian friends for special problems

I explain to non-Christians how they can begin a relationship with Jesus Christ

I pray with non-Christians when they ask Jesus to come into their life

I hang out with my church friends

I am involved in church-related activities

I read the Bible on my own

I memorize Scripture

I've seen a teenage friend lead an individual into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

I've seen an adult lead an individual into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

I've seen one of my parents lead an individual into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

I've been coached or trained by an adult about how to share my faith with others

I've been coached or trained by another teen about how to share my faith with others

I've met with an adult individually to talk about my own walk with the Lord

I've gone out with a team of friends for the single purpose of sharing our faith

**Thanks for your help!**

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## **Student Leadership Research Project**

### ***Data Collection Design for Round Two Interview Template***

#### **Demographics**

Gender? Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Grade? \_\_\_\_\_

*For how many of your friends who have come to Christ would you say you played a key role?*

none \_\_\_\_\_ 1-3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4-8 \_\_\_\_\_ more than 8 \_\_\_\_\_

*What groups are you involved in at your school?*

student council \_\_\_\_\_ class officers \_\_\_\_\_ sports \_\_\_\_\_ band \_\_\_\_\_

drama \_\_\_\_\_ academic \_\_\_\_\_ not much \_\_\_\_\_ other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have a part-time job, about how many hours per week do you work?*

don't have job \_\_\_\_\_ 1-9 \_\_\_\_\_ 10-15 \_\_\_\_\_ 16-20 \_\_\_\_\_ more than 20 \_\_\_\_\_

*What positions or offices have you held at your school?*

President \_\_\_\_\_ Captain of sports team \_\_\_\_\_ Vice President \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_ Club Officer \_\_\_\_\_ Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_ None \_\_\_\_\_

*How would you describe your role on the youth group's ministry team?*

Vocal leader \_\_\_\_\_ Helper/behind the scenes \_\_\_\_\_ Worker \_\_\_\_\_

Creative person \_\_\_\_\_ Loner \_\_\_\_\_ Prayer Warrior \_\_\_\_\_

Youth Pastor's helper \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interview Questions**

1) Looking back over your last 6 months of involvement with ( \_\_\_\_\_ ), how many friends have you invited to a ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) meeting that were not already involved?

*...1 or more ...zero*

1a) Why? Why did you invite Why? What has kept you from

others to ( \_\_\_\_\_ )? bringing friends to ( \_\_\_\_\_ )?

1b) What about your group gave you confidence that it would be OK socially to

invite your friends? (be sure to probe beyond "unity")

1c) What about your group gave you confidence that it would help your friends find

Christ if you invited them?

1d) How would kids at school describe your youth group?

2) Do you consider it important that student leaders are good examples in their

Christian life? (probe)

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3) Do you have any regular one-on-one meeting time with an adult where you are helped to grow in your faith and responsibility as a student leader?

3a) Who? (no name necessary) What role does this person play in your life? Ex:

father, pastor, etc.

3b) How did this meeting first come about? When? What goes on? Describe details.

3c) Are you held accountable in any way? Describe.

4) Have you ever seen someone lead a person to Christ?

**...yes ...no**

4a) Any chance it was the person How do you think that could

you meet with one-on-one? help you as a student leader?

4b) Any chance it was a teenage peer?

4c) Describe what you remember.

5) Have you ever individually led another student to faith in Jesus Christ?

**...yes ...no**

5a) How? What one thing do you think Why not? What one thing would you

was most instrumental in the process say was missing that you think would of leading them to Christ? have “opened the door” to lead a peer to

Christ?

6) What is the one personal experience or training event that most effectively developed you to be a student leader who reaches your friends for Christ? Describe.

6a) What one experience or training strategy from this point forward do you believe

would most contribute to your growth as a student leader who reaches others for Christ?

7) Describe what role (if any) missions or service trips have played in your development as a student leader.

8) What is the philosophy of (  youth ministry  )? How would you describe its purposes?

9) As a student leader, are you clear about what is expected of you? Please explain.

9a) Are the expectations just described the same for everyone who is a student

9b) How are these expectations communicated to you?

9c) Do you have contracts or covenants?

**END OF INTERVIEW**

## **RESULTS**

A total of 424 high school students from across America constituted the sample for this study. They came from student leadership teams ranging in size from six to 51 and represented youth ministries with official rolls from 80 to 850. Attendance at the largest weekly events for these groups ranged from 35 to 350.

The study included 6 Baptist churches, 3 Evangelical Free churches, 1 United Brethren, 1 Free Methodist church, 3 YFC chapters, 1 Young Life program, and 7 independent and/or community churches. They were variously located in Texas, Indiana, California, Ohio, Massachusetts, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, Illinois, Washington, and Pennsylvania.

### *Student Characteristics*

Most of these students (57.8%) came from Christian families where the parent or a key family member led them to Christ. Another 17% gave their lives to the Lord Jesus through some kind of outreach event or program. Only 4.3% of the respondents came to put their faith in Christ as the result of the efforts of another teen.

When asked to choose from among options the most important thing they did as student leaders, 42.9% picked "encouraging others", 15.9% said "upfront leadership", 15.4% marked "sharing your faith", 13.2% indicated "inviting friends", and 6.5% chose "leading a small group." Only 3.2% of the responses were "plan meetings/activities."

It was clear that the biggest obstacle students had to sharing their faith was their own fears (49%), although another 33.8% indicated that their busy schedules were hindrances. An additional 10.6% noted that their lack of training was their biggest barrier to peer evangelism.

Students also had a chance to choose which person was most helpful to them as they had grown in their evangelism responsibility. Youth pastors (22.5%), Christian friends (17.1%), and their own experiences (14.6%) were cited as most helpful. It is worth noting to observe that only 3.5% indicated that their parents were most helpful in this area of development.

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A bit of a different twist on helpfulness was offered when students were asked to indicate what resources were most helpful as they attempted to reach their friends for Christ. Other friends (25%) and trips/retreats (21.3%) were the top responses to this question. Only 2.7% reported that big conferences were the most helpful.

Finally, the characteristic most directly relevant to this study was derived from the self-report question asking student leaders to indicate the number of their friends with whom they had played a key role in helping come to Christ. Though coming from groups where teen to teen evangelism was fairly common, 12.9% of these student leaders could not identify any students with whom they felt they had had such an influence. The largest number of student leaders could identify one to three friends for whom they had played a key role in their conversion (65.6%). At the top end of this evangelism effectiveness were those who could identify four to eight friends (17.9%) and even more than eight friends who they had helped draw to Christ (3.6%). To summarize, 87% of the students we had surveyed were influential in helping at least one of their friends come to Christ.

### *Evangelistically Effective Student Leaders*

Given that the various approaches to data collection led to different types of analyses, there were a number of strong findings which are supported by a convergence of these data. Most notable is the consistent vision and activity focus of those student leaders who were most effective at reaching their friends for Christ.

First of all, data support the conclusion that student leaders largely view evangelism as a task to do rather than a natural but intentional outcome of their relationships with non-Christian friends. While this insight emerged first from interview data, it was supported by the near total absence of behaviors that correlated with the statement "I do some things just so I can build friendships with classmates who aren't Christians." In other words, there is virtually no predictive relationship among student leaders who engaged in this behavior with the same amount of frequency. Perhaps the inherent relational nature of a teenager's world combines with the high school social structure to almost assume that--at least in the minds of our student leaders--the only thing necessary for evangelism is to focus on their responsibilities or tasks related to conversion. Enough of a relational base exists through activity co-mingling to support this task orientation.

It was also important to discover that those students who were most effective in reaching their friends for Christ did not primarily invest themselves in program or event planning as a part of their student leader responsibility. The data support the conclusion that if a student was frequently planning events there was no guarantee that she or he would be reaching more peers for Christ, praying more frequently, or being involved in church more often.

One of our most exciting findings was discovering a pattern of behaviors which was common among evangelistically effective student leaders. This pattern clustered around three activities: praying, inviting, and telling. We have begun to label this functional "job description" for effective student leaders as the Student Leader Three-Step.

Statistically significant differences (one-way ANOVAs, Scheffé post-hoc tests,  $p < .05$ ) were reported in the *praying* patterns between student leaders who were the most evangelistically fruitful and those who were less so. For example students who reported that they had not helped anyone come to Christ prayed only about monthly for opportunities to tell someone about Jesus ( $m = 3.33$ ). Those who had helped one to three friends become Christians were more frequent with such prayers (about weekly,  $m = 4.07$ ). But the students who were most effective in peer evangelism, those who had helped more than eight of their friends come to Christ, prayed for such opportunities a few times weekly ( $m = 4.93$ ). Similar trends were found among students with regard to their prayer for a particular friend's salvation. The most robust finding in this area was the predictive nature of praying with others for friends to come to Christ. Those who could not report any evangelistic fruitfulness

typically prayed with others in such causes less than monthly ( $m = 2.80$ ), the majority of student leaders who influenced one to three of their friends for Christ collected with others to pray at least monthly ( $m = 3.393$ ), and those who reported their key role for four to eight of their friends in coming to Christ prayed in this way on a weekly basis ( $m = 3.92$ ). There were also strong correlations between a number of prayer behaviors and activities of inviting and telling. This finding is very clear. Evangelistically effective student leaders engage in frequent multiple strategies of evangelistic prayer. The more frequent their prayer, the more fruitful their evangelism is among their peers.

Students who are most influential in the salvation of their friends were also those who most frequently employed a variety of *inviting* strategies in order to help accomplish the evangelism task. As the table of frequency means below indicates, there were statistically significant differences (one-way ANOVAs, Scheffé post-hoc tests,  $p < .05$ ) among student leaders classified according to their evangelism effectiveness. The direction of this finding followed the same pattern as that established in praying behaviors; that is, the more frequently student leaders engaged in inviting behaviors the more likely they would be to help a greater number of their friends come to Christ.

INVITE TO...	large groups	small groups	talk with me	talk to adults
<i>more than 8</i>	4.73 <sup>0,1</sup>	3.80 <sup>0,1</sup>	3.64 <sup>0</sup>	3.07 <sup>0,1</sup>
<i>4 to 8</i>	3.91 <sup>0</sup>	3.20 <sup>0,1,8</sup>	3.51 <sup>0,1</sup>	2.47 <sup>0,1,8</sup>
<i>1 to 3</i>	3.49 <sup>1,8</sup>	2.70 <sup>0,4,8</sup>	2.89 <sup>0,4</sup>	2.03 <sup>0,4,8</sup>
<i>none</i>	2.88 <sup>1,4,8</sup>	2.07 <sup>1,4,8</sup>	2.28 <sup>1,4,8</sup>	1.63 <sup>1,4,8</sup>

2 = seldom; 3 = about monthly; 4 = about weekly; 5 = few times weekly

### Evangelism effectiveness and frequency of inviting behaviors

The third element in the 3-Step trilogy of student leader effectiveness centers around how often students were involved in *telling* other students about Jesus Christ. This quality clustered around the following two items in the forced choice surveys: “I tell my non-Christian friends what my personal relationship with Jesus Christ means to me.” and “I explain to non-Christians how they can begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.” As with praying and inviting patterns identified earlier, the analysis of these items revealed statistically significant differences (one-way ANOVAs, Scheffé post-hoc tests,  $p < .05$ ) among student leaders classified according to their evangelism effectiveness. These frequency means are reported in the table below, and as can be observed reveal a marked difference in the frequency of these telling patterns among students a varying degrees of evangelistic influence.

	"I explain..."	"I tell..."
<i>more than 8</i>	4.73 <sup>0,1</sup>	4.36 <sup>0,1,4</sup>
<i>4 to 8</i>	3.85 <sup>0,1</sup>	3.27 <sup>0,1,8</sup>
<i>1 to 3</i>	3.19 <sup>0,4,8</sup>	2.71 <sup>0,4,8</sup>

*none*

2.32<sup>1,4,8</sup>

2.07<sup>1,4,8</sup>

2 = seldom; 3 = about monthly; 4 = about weekly; 5 = few times weekly

## Evangelism effectiveness and frequency of telling behaviors

### *Adults' Role in Student Leadership*

A clear picture of the “task focus” for effective student leaders emerged out of the data for this study. Is there a similar clear picture for adults? Yes, though the data constructing such a picture proved to be a combination of information gathered from students through all of the means of collection we employed. Adults who wish to maximize their own role in bringing about effective student leadership must possess a clear vision of their task, be catalyzing models of faithfulness, offer themselves as responsive resources, and facilitate key programs.

**Clear vision.** While student leaders see evangelism as a task, adults dare not see student leaders solely as evangelism jobbers. Rather, adults who were most helpful had a holistic picture of the development of student leaders. They didn't simply use them to accomplish ends, no matter how eternally worthy. They invested in these student leaders so that they might grow in maturity and faithfulness. Wise adults could then expect that the task of peer evangelism would flow (almost) naturally and necessarily from a student leader's healthy relationship with God.

**Models.** Student leaders who reported that they saw adults lead other to faith in Christ were more likely to reproduce that evangelistic behavior themselves. The more often such adult modeling was seen, the greater the evangelism effectiveness experienced by student leaders. As this behavior was modeled, the student leaders in our study reported that an atmosphere conducive to overcoming personal fears (the greatest obstacle to evangelism) was created. In other words, adults could help address student fears by their own fear-conquering willingness to evangelize. There is a transitional agenda here also. Our research indicated that, as effective as adults were as models inspiring teens to evangelize, other teens were dynamically more effective as models among their peers. Thus, while adults may need to initiate evangelism efforts in order to “set the stage”, they must be on the lookout for ways to pass on the primary modeling responsibilities to teens who will—inevitably—be more effective.

**Resources.** Student leaders need the opportunity to develop their skills of praying, inviting and telling. Many of those in our study considered the adult leaders of their ministries as valuable resources, persons they could count on when they wanted to invite their friends to talk with someone about Jesus. Adults should see this as a valuable role to play in the evangelistic development of student leaders. In this way, and in others adults offer themselves as valuable resources in the crucial growth student leaders must experience with regard to the 3-Step. By providing training, encouragement, structures, and opportunities that help student leaders pray-invite-tell more often, adults supply a crucial resource role to their teens.

**Programs.** One of the most significant findings of our research which directly speaks to the structures and programs adults provide for student leaders is the relationship between frequency of meetings teens had with adults for life-accountability and these teens' evangelistic effectiveness. Student leaders who met weekly with adults for these purposes were significantly more likely to be fruitful in their peer evangelism than were those who met monthly or less. These mentoring type of structures did not necessarily need to be one-to-one; most

often they were small groups. In addition, adults serve their student leaders by taking on the responsibility of providing appropriately Christian programs of such consistency that the student leaders might have great confidence as they invite their friends. Finally, student leaders in this study routinely cited the important and central role that adult instruction from the Bible played in their own development.

### *Stages of Vitality*

One of the interesting findings of this study, one which was stumbled upon, is probably best treated at this point as a strongly supported hypothesis requiring additional research and exploration. As the research team visited the various youth ministry sites, we began to discern differences in the stories which made up the collective faith histories of each group. We postulated that the youth groups in our study, all very healthy by normal youth ministry standards fell into one of the following four categories, so determined by carefully listening to the content of their answers in large group discussions, timed team responses, and individual interviews.

*Stage 1--Love Flowing Stage* - a loving and caring atmosphere is established such that most youth group members and visitors readily affirm its presence.

*Stage 2--Peer Encouragement Stage* - peer ministry is so common that students easily cite specific “one anothering” examples of teens in the group helping each other grow in their faith.

*THE BIG GULF* - a significant change from these earlier stages takes place and is observable in dramatically different language used to report the activities and evangelistic efforts of the group.

*Stage 3--God at Work Stage* - in the midst of the group an atmosphere of expectancy is present such that students report repeatedly about the common (even normal) intervention of God in their lives as He answers prayer in powerful ways.

*Stage 4--Evangelism Expectancy Stage* - reflecting a subtle change from stage three, students continue to see God at work but the atmosphere of expectancy has been extended and sharpened so that students now look forward to seeing how God will next use them to reach others for Christ.

After these stages of vitality were developed the research team discussed each youth ministry visited and assigned it one of the stage designations above. Subsequent one-way ANOVAs and Scheffé post-hoc analyses were then conducted, controlling for the effect of this stage designation while testing each evangelism behavior.

Moderate support was found for the hypothesis that student leaders whose groups were in the higher stages would display a greater frequency in their peer-evangelism related behaviors than would those students who were members of lower stage groups. The presence of the “big gulf” seemed to be verified by these statistical tests, while the differences between groups in stage 1 and stage 2 were never statistically significant. The same non-significant difference existed between groups in stage 3 and stage 4. Clearly, the concept of stages of vitality which might predict evangelistic effectiveness for youth groups deserves further, more focused, study before it is widely discussed.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This National Student Leadership Research Project proved to be an immensely fulfilling adventure, largely because it allowed us to synergize our roles as minister-mentors and researcher-teachers. Bringing along a research team around such shared experiences has made possible a level of fulfillment that will be difficult to match.

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This study provides some robust findings largely because of the multi-level strength of the research design and analysis. When quantitative and qualitative data combine to support conclusions, our confidence levels increase dramatically. These types of designs seem well-suited to research in the field of youth ministry.

The study also has limitations of generalization derived largely from the convenience nature of the sample which was researched. Purely urban contexts, ethnic and multi-ethnic groups, and some important para-church groups were under-represented in this research.

As a final, global observation, we would note that, while there are some incredibly exciting ministries to youth “out there”, it was not a snap to locate those youth ministries which have a history of developing their student leaders for effective peer evangelism. Our hope is that this research can positively change this state of affairs.

## Footnotes

- [1]Some of the best contributions follow:
- In Penetrating the Campus (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993),
- St. Clair and Naylor include a chapter entitled "Mobilizing Students to Reach Their Campus."
- Cordeiro wrote a chapter called "Developing Student Leadership" in the Dausey edited book,
- The Youth Leader's Sourcebook (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).
- Sonlfe's teaching on this matter is philosophically developed in The Sonlife Strategy by Spader (Wheaton, IL: Sonlife, 1993) and practically coached by Garda (ed.) in How to Begin Your Ministry Team (Wheaton, IL: Sonlife, 1996).
- Johnston's effort, Developing Student Leaders (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 1992) is a significant, though largely practical work.
- Finally, recent efforts by Boshers, Student Ministry for the 21st Century, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997)
- Fields, Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998) both include important discussions about student leadership.