

A Comparison of Youth Ministry in the Three Divisions of Christianity: Orthodoxy,
Catholicism, and Protestantism

By

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Abstract

This study seeks to expand the definition of success in Christian youth ministry by comparing youth ministry programs in Murfreesboro, Tennessee with one church representative of each of the three divisions of Christianity: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. By analyzing the goals of each youth ministry program and the methods utilized in an attempt to reach these goals through surveys, informal interviews with youth ministry leaders, and field observations, this study is able to compare Christian youth ministry across denominational lines. By including the Orthodox Christian branch of Christianity this study reveals that the definition of success in Christian youth ministry is much more broad and differentiated across denominational lines than would be argued by previous studies. I argue that the expanded definition of success in youth ministry must include both the possible successful result of the youth forming personal relationships with Jesus Christ and the possible successful result of the youth developing a personal connection to their denomination's unique traditions, practices, and community.

Introduction

Picture the scene: a room of teenagers filled with an electrifying level of energy. Teens are talking to their friends, throwing Frisbees, and taking selfies together. Then an adult calls everyone's attention to the front of the room. He prays briefly and then gives the stage to a group of the teens who proceed to lead the rest of the room in song. After a short period of music, the adult returns to the stage and begins to speak of an event in the near future, building hype and emotion with each word. Eventually he pulls out a book for a quote, which shakes him to his core and even brings tears to his eyes as he relates to what he read. His emotion is an apparent and powerful witness to his passion for what he does and why he is here. So what is this? Is this a special concert or a speaker at a conference? No. This is just another night at a youth group for Belle Aire Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Belle Aire Baptist Church is one of the three youth groups that agreed to be a part of my thesis research. The events I just described were only a brief example of the passion he had for the success of his youth ministry program. In order to examine the goals of Christian youth ministry, I conducted fieldwork at three churches in Mufreesboro. Each church represents one of the main branches of Christianity: Orthodox (St. Elizabeth), Catholic (St. Rose of Lima), and Protestant (Belle Aire Baptist). The leaders of the youth ministry programs at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church and St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church were equally passionate and zealous for the souls of their teens as this leader at Belle Aire Baptist just showed. However, the leaders of each church's youth ministry program reveal this in different manifestations that are dependent

on the goals and methods of their specific youth ministry programs as they relate to their respective denominations.

By analyzing these goals and methods in three churches representative of the three major divisions of Christianity in Murfreesboro, Tennessee this study is able to expand the definition of success in Christian youth ministry accounting for the differences in methods and goals seen as central elements in three very different denominations of Christianity. The inclusion of Orthodox Christian youth ministry is especially important to this study in order completely and accurately to determine what success looks like in Christian youth ministry since they have been left out of previous comparisons of Christian youth ministry. This means that the nuanced differences between their idea and the ideas of other Christian denominations on the subject of success in youth ministry have not been included in the formulation of the definition of success in Christian youth ministry until this point.

By including the Orthodox Christian branch of Christianity this study reveals that the definition of success in Christian youth ministry is much more broad and differentiated across denominational lines than would be argued by previous studies. This is due to the different theologies operative in them and the context in which each of the denominations in my study exists. This means that the inherent differences between these denominations and their contexts in society directly affect their individual goals for youth ministry and therefore the overall definition of success in Christian youth ministry.

Since the context of each denomination is a key element for understanding how it affects their goals, methods, and overall definition of success in youth ministry, this study begins by explaining the context of each church involved. Both the Orthodox Christian

and Catholic Church identify themselves as being founded by Jesus Christ and passed down through apostolic succession. This is because they were once united before the Great Schism of 1054. As such, they share a great deal of similarities. Both celebrate seven sacraments or holy mysteries and identify as Catholic or universal. However, their separation from each other was a result of two major disagreements between Eastern and Western Churches. The Western churches, which became the Roman Catholic Church, argued for the authority of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome and successor of Saint Peter, over the other Bishops and the addition of the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed, which states a belief that the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity proceeds from both the Father and the Son as opposed to just from the Father as stated in the original version of the creed used by the Orthodox Christian Church. These distinctions between the two are what have kept them separated since 1054; however there are more obvious differences between them, especially in the United States.¹

Since the Catholic Church developed and became highly influential in Western Europe and eventually in the Americas, it is the largest Christian denomination in the United States with an estimated number of over 69 million members.² This in comparison with the number of Orthodox Christians in America being only somewhere between three and six million depending on the definition of adherent Orthodoxy, shows that these denominations are vastly different in terms of public knowledge about their beliefs and the influence they have on American Christian culture.³

¹ "Great Schism", Oxford Reference, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press. 2009.

² *Diocese of Reno Directory*. Reno, Nevada: Diocese of Reno. 2014, pg 72.

³ Alexei Krindatch. *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches*. Brookline, Massachusetts, Holy Cross Orthodox Press. 2011, pg. 143.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church and St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church are also both uniquely similar in Murfreesboro as the only congregations for their respective denominations. However, the similarities between the two denominations end there. St. Rose has a population of approximately 2,400 families, which is significantly larger than St. Elizabeth's population of approximately 40 families. This seems to almost replicate the much larger population of the Catholic Church compared to the population of the Orthodox Church in the United States to scale in Murfreesboro. However, the fact that each of these congregations are the only options for practitioners of their denominations in Murfreesboro means that their goals and methods as related to youth ministry are representative of their denomination in Murfreesboro as a whole.

The same cannot be said for Belle Aire Baptist Church, which is only one of twenty Southern Baptist congregations in Murfreesboro. The Southern Baptist Convention is the second largest Christian denominational body in the United States with a population of over 15 million members.⁴ Rather than answering to any particular authority, each church congregation has autonomy to decide its own beliefs about biblical interpretation within a reasonable degree of variation. Protestantism is much more complicated than Catholic and Orthodox Christianity in that it consists of a large number of different denominations and theologies that began to develop and break off from the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's.⁵ Therefore, Protestantism is commonly split into the subdivisions of mainline and evangelical. Mainline Protestantism is difficult to define other than distinguishing it from evangelical Protestantism. However, it is characterized by liberal approaches to social issues and

⁴ Eileen Lindner. *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. 2010, pg. 11.

⁵ Leroy Froom. *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. 1948, pg. 243-244.

religious doctrine stressing social justice and personal salvation.⁶ Evangelical Protestantism on the other hand stresses the importance of conversions and the idea of being “born again.” They also often hold that the Bible is without error. Along with these beliefs, they feel they must proselytize.⁷ The three churches in my study fit into these categories as St. Elizabeth is an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, St. Rose is a Roman Catholic Church, and Belle Aire Baptist Church is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, which is considered to be an evangelical Protestant denomination based on their theological teachings and practices. Overall though, congregations that are members of the Southern Baptist Convention are focused on individual conversion and evangelization.⁸ Another church that is a part of the Southern Baptist Convention, Saddleback Church, is home to the largest and often considered most successful youth ministry in the United States. This makes the inclusion of Belle Aire Baptist Church as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention in this study extremely relevant given the acknowledged success of youth ministry of another congregation in their organization and the effect this must have on their own ministry as a representative of successful youth ministry.

It is also important to note for this study that the Southern Baptist Convention is based in Nashville, Tennessee and serves as a good representation of the Protestant population not only in the United States but especially in the Murfreesboro area. As a denomination, they are one of the most populous not only among the Protestant division of Christianity, but among Christian denominations as a whole with a population of

⁶ C. Lippy. *Faith in America*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger. 2006, pg. 3.

⁷ J. Gerstner. *The Evangelicals*. Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press. 1975, pg. 21-36.

⁸ "Fact box: The Southern Baptist Convention". Reuters. June 10, 2008

almost 1.5 million adherents in Tennessee.⁹ This makes their goals and methods of youth ministry almost the standard for what most might think of when defining success in Christian youth ministry in Murfreesboro.

It is also important to understand what Christian youth ministry is and the context of its existence. Since youth ministry, as it is known, is an American concept of the last sixty years or so, this analysis will focus on the context of these denominations in the United States and especially Middle Tennessee and Murfreesboro. Christian youth ministry as it is understood today can be attributed to two different sources.

The first signs of Christian youth ministry began to appear in the form of Catholic youth organizations and parochial schools that began to form in the mid nineteenth century in the United States. These schools and organizations organized on a local parish or congregational level in an effort to prevent Catholic children in a mostly Protestant Christian environment that was quite hostile towards Catholics from losing their Catholic faith due to the influence of their Protestant teachers and peers. These organizations and schools focused their efforts on teaching orthodoxy and piety in the tradition of the Catholic Church focused directly at the youth for the first time.¹⁰

In the 1940's, the next significant attempt to direct church teachings and ministry specifically towards the American youth occurred in the form of a new youth movement. Rather than a reaction against the attacks of other denominations, this was more of a movement towards forming relationships and creating a more relevant way to evangelize the youth of America by Protestant congregational leaders. The rise of teen bible studies and soon the formation of specific church leadership positions for ministering to a more

⁹ "State Membership Report: Tennessee." The Association of Religion Data Archives. 2010.

¹⁰ James J. Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*. 1983, pg. 172.

uninterested youth of the Post World War II era than had previously been seen in American Christianity indicated the beginning of Christian youth ministry as it is known today. Around this time, research on human development also began to reveal that the years of adolescence are perhaps the most formative years in the human life and largely determine much of the future of a person's life.¹¹ This continued to encourage youth specific ministries in a variety of Christian denominations in the United States going forward. As American culture became more and more entertainment focused, so did Christian youth ministry as many churches and denominations began to add more attractions to their ministry events such as food and games. These became the standard for what defined an attractive youth ministry program and indeed even a church congregation by the end of the 1980's.¹²

Understanding the context of both the denominations in this study and Christian youth ministry as a whole allows us to begin dissecting how youth ministry has been defined in studies similar to this one. Orthodox Christianity has been consistently left out of the sphere of Christian youth ministry, which is why this study of Christian youth ministry which includes Orthodox Christianity is important in expanding the definition of success in Christian youth ministry and highlighting the shortcomings of the existing definition.

Literature Review

In the field of religious studies, a number of studies have investigated Christian youth ministry. Most of the research that is relevant to my study compares and contrasts

¹¹ Benjamin Alvarez. "Assessing Youth Programs: An International Perspective." *Comparative Education Review*. 253. 1994, pg. 253-266. Eric P. Szymanski. *Engaging Adolescence Within Youth Ministry*. 2010, pg. 2-5.

¹² Wright, Dave. "A Brief History of Youth Ministry." The Gospel Coalition. April 2, 2012.

Christian youth ministry in Catholicism, mainline Protestantism, and evangelical Protestantism.¹³ However, none of them address Orthodox Christianity and its goals and methods in youth ministry. This is a significant gap in the field that this study will address by adding Orthodox Christianity to the comparison of Christian youth ministry.

"Success" in Christian youth ministry is assessed differently by researchers.

Scholars like Gary Goreham, concluded that the size of the youth ministry program was a sign of success.¹⁴ R. Hoge argues that success in Christian youth ministry is defined differently among denominations. For example, he states that in his study of youth ministry, which included Southern Baptist congregations as well as Church of God congregations and are each categorized as evangelical Protestant denominations, that these denominations have similar goals to each other that differ greatly from any of the other Christian denominations in his study.¹⁵ Specifically, these evangelical Protestant congregations were more concerned with conversion as an overall goal of youth ministry than other goals, such as those related to social justice as in Robert Crosby's study, in

¹³ K. Christofferson, Smith, C., Snell, P., & Tavares, C. "Denominational Differences in Congregation Youth Ministry Programs and Evidence of Systematic Non-Response Biases". *Review of Religious Research*. 51(1). 2009, pg. 21-38. G. Goreham. "Denominational Comparison of Rural Youth Ministry Programs". *Review of Religious Research*. 45(4). 2004, pg. 336-348. D. K. Glassford. "Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture". *Christian Education Journal*. (1). 2015, pg. 202. H. Heflin. "Supervision and Success in Youth Ministry Internships". *Journal Of Youth Ministry*. 9(2). 2011, pg. 35-48. R. Hoge, Heffernan, E., Hemrick, E., Nelsen, H., O'Connor, J., Philibert, P., & Thompson, A. "Desired Outcomes of Religious Education and Youth Ministry in Six Denominations". *Review of Religious Research*. 23(3). 1982, pg. 230-254. R. Hoge, and Andrew D. Thompson. "Different Conceptualizations of Goals of Religious Education and Youth Ministry in Six Denominations." *Review of Religious Research*. 23(3). 1982, pg. 297-304. J. Sanderson, Ambrose, D., & Perreault, J. "The Hartford Project: Program Evaluation and Implications for Youth Ministry". *Journal of Youth Ministry*. 12(1). 2013, pg. 87-108. These are all existing studies comparing Christian youth ministry across denominations.

¹⁴ Ibid. G. Goreham 2004.

¹⁵ R. Hoge, Heffernan, E., Hemrick, E., Nelsen, H., O'Connor, J., Philibert, P., & Thompson, A. "Desired Outcomes of Religious Education and Youth Ministry in Six Denominations". *Review of Religious Research*. 23(3). 1982, pg. 230-254. R. Hoge, and Andrew D. Thompson. "Different Conceptualizations of Goals of Religious Education and Youth Ministry in Six Denominations." *Review of Religious Research*. 23(3). 1982, pg. 297-304.

comparison with the other denominations in his study.¹⁶ This is attributed to the nature of theological differences between these evangelical Protestant denominations and other Christian denominations, including mainline Protestant denominations.

Upon diving deeper into the literature on youth ministry, it becomes apparent that many strong opinions exist about the best practices for youth ministry and the goals of these practices. Many expert youth ministers from a variety of denominations propose different methods for achieving what they see to be the goals of their ministry to others in the field of Christian youth ministry in other denominations. Some of the protestant ministers encourage a strong relational and narrative based ministry that helps youth to make sense of their struggles through the experiences of others.¹⁷ At the same time, other Protestant ministers encourage integrating youth ministry with the rest of the church.¹⁸ Others in the Catholic Church, encourage focusing much more on helping youth understand their place in the world by explaining Christ's sacrifice on the cross as an important part of their own salvation.¹⁹ This is similar to Leonard Kageler and other's statements about the importance of properly explaining the personhood of Christ in order to properly relate it to youth, especially in a multi-faith society.²⁰ Still other ministers say

¹⁶ Robert G. Crosby III and Erin I. Smith. "Church Support as a Predictor of Children's Spirituality and Prosocial Behavior." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. 43(4). 2015,pg. 243 .

¹⁷ Brandon McKoy. *Youth Ministry From The Outside In: How Relationships And Stories Shape Identity*. Downers Grove, Illinois, IVP Books. 2013.pg. 13-19. Mark Oestriecher. *Volunteer Youth Worker's Guide To Leading A Small Group*. Kansas City, Missouri, Barefoot Ministries. 2013, pg. 7-18.

¹⁸ James C. Bohher. *Imagining the Future of Youth Ministry*. Johnson City, Tennessee, Emmanuel School of Religion. 2010, pg. 1. Edward W. Shyu. *An Evaluation of the Children's Ministries of Chinese Churches in the Greater Los Angeles Area Focused on Increased Retention of Adult Church Members*. 2010, pg. 8.

¹⁹ Kendra Creasy Dean. "Proclaiming salvation: youth ministry for the twenty-first century church." *Theology Today*. 56(4). 2000, pg. 524.

²⁰ L. Kageler and Chap Clark. *Youth Ministry In A Multifaith Society : Forming Christian Identity Among Skeptics, Syncretists, And Sincere Believers Of Other Faiths*. Downers Grove, Illinois, IVP Books. 2014, pg. 15-16. Tiffany D. Smith. *Equipping Selected Southern Baptist Leaders in Texas to Train Youth for Cross-Cultural Ministry*. New Orleans, Louisiana, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. 2009, pg. 1-2.

that a family oriented ministry is necessary to connect the youth with the adult world.²¹

Overall, the existing research shows three results: first, that theological differences exist between each of the major divisions of Christianity as well as within the divisions themselves, especially in Protestantism; second, that these differences are made apparent in the differences and similarities of goals of youth ministry in each division of Christianity; and third, that the existence of youth ministry in Orthodox Christian churches has been omitted from the formulation for defining success in Christian youth ministry. This study contributes to the existing body of research literature by adding Orthodox Christianity and its goals and methods of youth ministry to the formula for defining successful Christian youth ministry, thus expanding the definition of success is in Christian youth ministry to a more complete definition which is inclusive of each of the three divisions of Christianity.

Methodology

Since the nature of this study is much more of a qualitative analysis than something that can be quantified, the analysis of each of the three youth ministry programs in this study must be based on the information both given to me by participants directly and that which I am able to gather through my own observations of their behaviors and actions. In order to do this, I have opted to use surveys and field observations at public events for each of the youth ministry programs in this study.

Thomas Tweed puts particular emphasis on the importance of field work of this type when studying U.S. religions. He argues that while fieldwork can make

²¹ Anthony L. Dockery. *Establishing a Family Based Youth Ministry at Saint Stephen Baptist Church*. 2010, pg. 11-14. Philippa Strong. "Effective Youth Ministry: Embracing a Family-Orientated Approach/Effektiewe Jeugbediening: Omhelsing van 'n Familie-Georienteerde Benadering." *In die Skriflig*. 48(1). 2014, pg. 2-4.

understanding religious organizations more complex, this complexity is exactly the detail that is necessary to understanding the constant fluidity of meanings and contestation present in religion. Following Tweeds example, I used surveys and informal interviews to gather information from leaders of youth ministry in each of the churches involved in my study (See Appendices). In addition to the information gathered from leaders of youth ministry, I also observed four public events at each of their youth ministry programs. This allowed me to see first-hand both the consistencies and discrepancies in what they said their goals and methods were and what they actually did in their ministries. These observations, informal interviews, and surveys are ethnographic methods of research encouraged within the field of religious studies to most thoroughly examine a religious organization.²²

My study began by contacting the leaders of St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, the largest Catholic Church in Murfreesboro, St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church, the largest Orthodox Christian church in Murfreesboro, and Belle Aire Baptist Church, the third largest Protestant Church in Murfreesboro and the one hundred and fourteenth largest congregation nationally in the Southern Baptist Convention, which is based in Nashville. I informed him or her of my study, distributed surveys to all leaders of Christian youth ministry programs, and observed any ministries that they direct at persons ages 14 to 18 years old. Each of these churches was selected as the best representative for their division of Christianity in Murfreesboro that would allow me to conduct research with their youth groups: St. Rose and St. Elizabeth, being the only options for their respective denominations in Murfreesboro, and Belle Aire as a part of the Southern Baptist

²² Thomas A. Tweed. "Between the Living and the Dead: Fieldwork, History, and the Interpreters Position." *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*. New York, New York UP. 2002, pg. 63-74.

Convention which is representative of more Christians than any other unified Protestant denomination in the United States and especially in Murfreesboro and the greater Middle Tennessee region in which it is based. The surveys consisted of questions about methods used in their Christian youth ministry programs (See Appendices). I then observed these programs through attending public events for a duration of two months from January through February 2016, informally interviewing youth ministers or leaders during this time. After collecting all data from these organizations, I compiled the data and describe the differences and similarities in how different religious organizations attempt to achieve their goals in youth ministry and how they judge the success of specifically directed ministries. In using surveys, informal interviews, and observations, I was able to see the contrasts between what leaders said their methods are and the way that they applied them to their ministry²³. This allowed me to draw conclusions on how Orthodox Christianity compares and contrasts with other Christian denominations in youth ministry from an unbiased but unique outside perspective, thus redefining the success in Christian youth ministry to account for this new analysis.

These methods allow me to draw accurate conclusions about the nature of youth ministry at each of the churches in my study and the larger divisions of Christianity which they represent in Murfreesboro. However, due to the sample size being restricted to only one youth ministry program per each division of Christianity and only examined in Murfreesboro, Tennessee I cannot determine the consistency of the results of this study in the youth ministry programs of many other congregations of these denominations

²³ I interviewed five different leaders at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church and received two completed surveys. I interviewed four different leaders at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church and received seven completed surveys. I interviewed five different leaders at Belle Aire Baptist Church and received four completed surveys. I performed a total of twelve field observations, four at each youth group.

across the United States. Thus while the results of this study do reveal significant findings on a local level, they may not indicate the same goals and methods of youth ministry of every Christian youth ministry program in the United States. That being said, they do contribute valuable information and analysis on the field of Christian youth ministry by adding Orthodox Christianity to the comparison and formula used to define success in Christian youth ministry which has not previously been included.

Chapter 1: Success as Related to the Goals of Youth Ministry

As I studied each of these ministries, I sought to find what they determined to be “success.” It is easy enough to ask youth leaders what they hoped to achieve in their youth groups and how they hoped to do that, but determining whether or not their ministries actually reached these goals effectively was a challenge. The most common result I found was that all of the youth ministers in this study considered their ministry to be successful if they were able to save at least a few of their youth’s souls from the fires of hell for the kingdom of heaven. This is of course a difficult measure of success to gauge based on the non-falsifiability of these claims. After all, none of these ministers claimed to have any special knowledge of the resulting salvation of anyone. Rather, they determined the likelihood of the salvation of their youth and therefore the success of their ministries by outward signs in the lives of their youth. As this study demonstrates, there were some minor similarities, but overall each church operated their youth ministry with different goals in mind.

St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church

As with the other denominations in my study, Orthodox Christian youth ministry achieves success by leading the souls of the youth being ministered to salvation. Based on survey data the outward signs of this coming salvation emphasized by St. Elizabeth can be divided into three distinct goals: intimate experiences with God, service to others, and personal connection to the church.

Intimate Experiences with God

Intimate experiences with God, as defined by the leaders of St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, are a direct result of the fullness of faith that they believe

have been passed down through their traditions over the ages. This goal is in my opinion the least emphasized and obvious of those presented by St. Elizabeth's youth ministry as well as being the most difficult to assess in determining its success. Though many leaders and parish community members mentioned the concept of personal relationships with Christ as an important element of their faith and something they hoped to cultivate in their youth, this was not readily apparent in the language and interactions directed at the teens of their parish. That being said, each survey listed either mentioned "the formation of a Christian worldview...based on actual experience with God" or "inspiring the youth toward intimacy with Christ" as important goals that they sought to achieve. The successful or unsuccessful achievement of this goal is also very difficult to determine due to the non-falsifiability of the goal itself.

However, this reveals a great similarity between the goals of Orthodox Christianity and the goals in Catholic and Southern Baptist youth ministry which will be made apparent throughout this thesis. Though much more subtly in Orthodoxy than in the other two denominations, each of the churches in this study seem to have a goal of some kind of personal relationship or experience with God. The difference between them seems to be in the methods that they each hold as being most effective to achieve this in their respective denominations.

Service to Others

The next goal that is revealed in the survey results and conversations from St. Elizabeth is the importance of service, especially to the poor. The surveys from St. Elizabeth youth ministry leaders state "engagement with others," "cultivating a love for the poor," and "encouraging opportunities for outreach" as important goals for their

youth ministry. This is much more apparent in the way the leaders at St. Elizabeth encourage the achievement of this goal in their youth ministry. They readily encouraged service to others even in their parish community and presented the youth with ample opportunities to participate actively in their church community in roles of service.

This is not only something that they emphasized for the youth at St. Elizabeth, but for everyone that is a part of their parish community. Every time I attended Divine Liturgy, at the conclusion some announcements would be made which often called for volunteers for different projects related to the improvement of their immediate community as well as for basic instances of service such as serving cleaning up during lunch afterwards. This indicates that this goal is something that they encourage throughout their lives as an important part of their faith.

Personal Connection to the Church

At St. Elizabeth, the greatest emphasis is placed on the goal of developing a personal connection to their church and its history as the form of Christianity that has been practiced since the inception of the Christian faith. This is best exemplified in the information gathered and results of the two surveys I was able to collect from leaders at St. Elizabeth. All of the information I gathered pointed to centrality of their church community in the spiritual development and formation of their youth. For example, in response to questions regarding their youth ministry goals, one leader responded that “participation in the community of believers” was a top priority that they hoped to achieve through “encouragement to regularly participate in the rhythm of the church liturgical year.” Even more so, he also stated that they self-determine success based on the assimilation of teens into church life on a case by case basis. This directly indicates

that St. Elizabeth, as an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, defines success in Christian youth ministry as personal connection with and affinity for the Orthodox Christian Church and tradition.

This concept is best exemplified in my observations during a visit to St. Elizabeth for Divine Liturgy. On this occasion, it was a special form of their Divine Liturgy called a Hierarchical Liturgy due to the presence of a Bishop for the ordination of a deacon and the elevation of the priest of St. Elizabeth to an Archpriest. On this occasion, the Bishop used his homily to encourage the members of the parish, but especially the youth, to examine their obedience to God. He asked them to think about their daily lives and if their actions and choices were made with God's will for them in the forefront of their mind. He encouraged them to choose their obedient practices of Orthodox Christian teachings and traditions over their own earthly desires. This exemplifies that the desire for the youth to become personally connected to the Orthodox Christian Church community and traditions was not only held by the leaders of St. Elizabeth but by leaders of the larger Orthodox Christian Church in the United States.

By defining success as a developed personal connection with the Orthodox Christian Church community and its tradition as the original form of Christianity, they are also able to visibly witness the outward signs of obedience to the teachings of the church and the involvement of youth in church practices and the life of their parish community. This reveals to them the effectiveness of their ministry methods and how successful they are at reaching their goals.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church

St. Rose also seeks the overarching goal of the salvation of its youth through the unique goals of its ministry. However, the two goals that are most important for St. Rose's youth ministry program are very different from the goals of St. Elizabeth's youth ministry.

A Personal Relationship with Christ

The most important goal of St. Rose's youth ministry program is that their teens develop personal relationships with Christ. This involves both living in what they describe as a Christ-like way and by seeing them active in the Catholic Church and their youth ministry program. This was indicated as the main goal of St. Rose's youth ministry in the results of five of the seven youth leader's surveys as "leading the youth to Christ," "knowing how to have a relationship with Him (Christ)," and "encouraging the teens to encounter Christ and to walk with Him for the rest of their lives."

So how does one determine if the youth are developing this personal relationship with Christ? As described by one of the Catholic youth leaders, they identify people who seem to not only pray often but encourage others to as well and allow the rest of their lives to stem from this relationship with Christ. As they grow in what they call discipleship, they will form other disciples for Christ and so on and so forth. This seems to be the model of success sought after by the leaders of St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church youth ministry.

Good Works

Another goal of their ministry seems to be more closely directed at understanding the meaning of good works. At least one of my conversations with youth leaders at St.

Rose at each visit or even the overall topic of discussion for their event would focus on the importance of doing service work or volunteering to serve others. In these discussions, I discovered that they see these good works not only as an outward sign of success in their youth ministry program, but also as a sign of a person's relationship with Christ and as only useful and truly good if the person doing them has developed a relationship with Christ.

The idea of the importance of doing good works or service as an outward sign of a personal relationship with Christ was best exemplified by the discussion that took place on one site visit at St. Rose. That evening the topic of discussion was mercy. As their youth leaders spoke, they discussed the importance of having a strong personal relationship with Christ before going to serve others and perform good works. This was especially evident in their discussion about mission trips. Though I was not able to attend the event night when they watched this movie, they spoke about planning to watch a movie with the teens that discusses the problems of mission and service work that does not take their actions into prayerful consideration and therefore fail to think about how to best help the people they want to serve.

This points to their goal of not only doing good works but that they see it as necessary to have a strong relationship in Christ in order to understand the meaning of these works. This goal builds on their other goal of developing a personal relationship with Christ. This was obvious in their desire to encourage the youth in participating in opportunities for service only when they felt they would also be able to grow in their own spiritual relationship with God. This type of teaching seems to be a core element of the youth ministry events I attended and was prominently discussed by leaders at St. Rose. In

fact, almost all of the surveys received from St. Rose youth leaders indicate an emphasis of developing a strong prayer life centered on relationships with Christ with only one mentioning the importance of missions and works of service.

With the definition of successful youth ministry being developed personal relationships with Christ which then manifest themselves in the form of discipleship and good works, this will allow us to understand how St. Rose effectively monitors the success of their youth ministry program by looking for these elements in the individual lives of their youth.

Belle Aire Baptist Church

Belle Aire Baptist Church is also somewhat different in the goals they set in order to achieve success in their youth ministry program. While Belle Aire also seeks the salvation of the souls of their youth as the overall goal just as St. Elizabeth and St. Rose do, their two goals to achieve this also differ from the previous two.

A Personal Relationship with Christ

Just as with St. Rose, Belle Aire's most emphasized goal is that their teens form personal relationships with Christ. Each survey form Belle Aire's youth ministry leaders indicated either a "personal conversion to Christ" or "personal relationships with Christ" as a top priority for their ministry. In order to determine these relationships, Belle Aire hopes to not only see them active in their church, but also bringing others into their personal relationships as well. One youth leader in particular emphasized the importance of seeing their "teens bringing friends" as a sign of their own personal relationships with Christ.

The concept of having their teens display their personal relationships with Christ by evangelizing to their friends and inviting them to attend youth ministry events was also indicated in the actions of the leaders at Belle Aire Baptist. During one of my observations, I listened as the leaders made some announcements at the end of their event, which included a reminder about an upcoming event that they were hosting at a local restaurant. The leaders encouraged them to invite their friends saying that it was “a great opportunity to introduce them to their church community outside of a church environment.” This further emphasizes that their goal of forming personal relationships with Christ is made apparent in the evangelizing actions they can then observe in their teens.

Biblical Knowledge

The other most important goal that is presented by Belle Aire Baptist Church’s youth ministry leaders is that their teens study and learn the Bible. This focus specifically on knowledge of the Bible seems to be the most important element present in the Baptist youth ministry. In fact, this further builds upon the goal of developing personal relationships with Christ by their understanding that knowledge of the Bible will likely lead to conversions to and relationships with Christ.

The achievement of these goals in the individual lives of the youth at Belle Aire Baptist Church is the measure of success for their youth ministry program. By observing the outwards signs of a fruitful personal relationship with Christ in the lives of their youth through their knowledge of the Bible, the leaders of Belle Aire Baptist Church can effectively determine their successfulness in ministry.

Chapter 1: Conclusions

The goals of each of the three youth ministry programs in this study indicate how they both define and determine success. By observing the differences present in the goals associated with the youth ministry programs at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, and Belle Aire Baptist Church, it is apparent that though they all seek salvation of the souls of their teens, their ideas about how to successfully obtain this vary greatly. St. Elizabeth encourages personal connections to the tradition and community of the Orthodox Christian Church as well as the importance of service. St. Rose encourages good works, which are similar to service as it is understood in the Orthodox Christian Church; however St. Rose only encourages taking on these good works as a means to build an existing personal relationship with Christ through serving others. Belle Aire also seeks for their teens to develop personal relationships with Christ, however they encourage their teens to have a strong knowledge of the Bible as an important goal that builds on their relationships with Christ. By differentiating the goals sought by each of these Christian youth ministry programs, it becomes evident that the definition of success is much broader than has been indicated by previous studies, which focus primarily on the goals of Protestant and Catholic youth ministry. However, in order to better understand these, it is imperative to understand the methods each of these youth ministry programs uses to achieve these goals in the lives of their teens.

Chapter 2: How the Methods Reveal the Definition of Success in Youth Ministry

In observing and surveying the leaders of these three churches representative of the three divisions of Christianity, patterns began to emerge in relation to how they sought to achieve their success and indeed even in what they defined to be success in their youth ministry programs. Though they may approach youth ministry from different perspectives on Christian theology and use somewhat different methods to reach their goals, they all seem to be striving to achieve the same overarching goal. Through different means and measurements of success, they are all seeking to save the souls of from the clutches of Satan and for the Kingdom of God in Heaven. In order to reasonably determine if this is likely, they use different indicators that they believe should be present in the lives of people who will likely take their place in Heaven after their life here on earth. That being said, some of them do share a great deal of similarities in the way they organize their ministry, the general methods for reaching their ministry goals, and the goals themselves. By comparing and contrasting these methods as they relate to their goals for success in each youth ministry program in my study, it is apparent that the methods used to meet these goals for successful Christian youth ministry speak to the nature of the goals themselves. This reveals whether these methods attempt actually to meet ministry goals that have been unrealized in the lives of their teens or if they are used more to maintain the results of meeting these goals in the lives of teens who they may see as already achieving these goals. The methods and their results then can have a far more powerful impact on the teens that they are aimed at than the goals they are meant to achieve and therefore shape the definition of success in Christian youth ministry.

St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church

St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church sets itself apart from the other Christian youth ministry programs in this study. This is most obvious in their lack of a weekly meeting group for teens as is seen at both St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church and Belle Aire Baptist Church. However, this points to their most important overall goal which is also an outlier compared to the goals of the other two churches. St. Elizabeth desires for their teens to form a personal connection to their Orthodox Christian Church community and tradition above any other goal as a means of achieving salvation. Coupled with the desire to see their teens doing acts of service to others and for them to have intimate experiences with God, they see that a personal connection to their Orthodox Christian traditions and practices will likely lead to the salvation of their teens. So how do they attempt to make these goals a reality in the lives of their teens through their youth ministry practices? As I have observed, there seems to be three distinct methods used to achieving these goals by the leaders of St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church.

The Role of the Family and Parish Community

The structure of the youth ministry program at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church serves as an important means of achieving their ministry goals. Their focus on a more family-oriented ministry that relies on families and parish members to play a strong role in leading all the youth of the parish is encouraged by the lack of weekly meetings and the use of fewer special events spaced throughout the year. The lack of a lay minister whose only job is to serve the youth of their church requires a much more involved role by the parents and family members of youth in their church and reinforces their emphasis on having a united community that seeks to live by the teachings of Christ in the tradition

of the Orthodox Christian Church. Each of these structures for youth ministry serves to reveal the elements that each denomination sees as most essential to their goals and their own definitions of success in Christian youth ministry.

This was the subject of a conversation I had with the priest at St. Elizabeth during a visit to their church. During this conversation, he mentioned that though he wished he had a larger group of youth and a larger program run by a lay youth minister, he stated that he was glad to encourage the parents and members of their parish community to help him in ministering to their youth.

This was also obvious in the way in which the adults and parents of their parish community cared for and instructed the teens and indeed all the children of the parish. Every time I visited their church for an event, I observed parents and other adults directing the youth in how they should act and practice their faith in the tradition of the Orthodox Christian Church. For example, on one occasion I witnessed a teen attempting to enter the sanctuary of the Church during what was considered a very important and solemn time of their Divine Liturgy. An adult nearby stopped him and asked him to wait until it was an appropriate time to enter that would not be distracting from the liturgy for others. However, the instruction did not stop there. After Divine Liturgy had ended, the adult explained why he had stopped him to the teen in order to instruct him in the proper practices and traditions of the Orthodox Church.

This instance of instruction and guidance perfectly exemplifies the predominant style of youth ministry used at St. Elizabeth. The whole community is involved in the formation of their youth in some form or fashion. Not only this, but they point them towards the overarching goal that St. Elizabeth has of developing personal connections

between their teens and the unique traditions, practices, and community of the Orthodox Christian Church.

Opportunities for Service

The method of having the families and parish members play a strong role in the youth ministry of St. Elizabeth shows a clear connection to their goal of creating a personal connection to the traditions and community of the Orthodox Christian Church. The same can be said about the connection between their goal of seeing their youth performing acts of service and their method of providing ample opportunities to do so in their community. They also encourage their service to be built upon prayer and intimate communication with God in order to best serve His will, allowing this method of providing opportunities to serve others to lead their teens towards meeting their goal of developing intimate experiences with God as well.

The community at St. Elizabeth relies heavily on the service of almost every member of the community, especially the youth. During Divine Liturgy, boys often serve at the altar in assistance to the priest and deacons while many of the girls lead the congregation in chanting from the choir. Younger children collect the offering before Holy Communion from the rest of the community. Indeed, the Divine Liturgy would be much different without the service of the youth.

However, the best example of the encouraged service of the youth at St. Elizabeth took place during the Bishop's visit which I was able to attend and observe. After the liturgy, they held a grand banquet at which all of the youth of the parish acted as waiters and waitresses, taking orders, serving food and drink, and cleaning up afterwards. This demonstration of their service at the request of their leaders was a strong visible sign of

the effect the teachings encouraging obedience and service have had on the youth at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church.

By encouraging the youth to participate in service opportunities often in their own parish community, the leaders at St. Elizabeth enforce their teaching and reach the goal of serving the will of God and serving others, especially the poor and needy.

An Enculturation of Orthodoxy in the Context of Middle Tennessee

In order fully to encourage their teens to develop a personal connection with their Orthodox Christian Church traditions, practices, and community, the leaders at St. Elizabeth must not only encourage them to be serving members led by their parents and community, but they must also show them why the Orthodox Christian Church has unique qualities, which they see as essential to salvation. They do this in two ways. First, they use unique indicators of their Orthodox Christian faith in place of more secular action for everyday life. Second, they encourage their teens to form personal connections with their Orthodox Christian faith on their own.

An excellent example of their substituting distinctly Orthodox Christian practices and indicators of faith in place of more common secular actions in the daily lives of the youth is their practice for celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions. On two different visits, I observed the congregation of St. Elizabeth celebrate such special occasions in the lives of their members: two birthdays and a wedding anniversary. Rather than singing happy birthday as most other Americans would, they sang the words “May God grant you many years” in the same style as many of their Antiochian chants used during the Divine Liturgy. This directly encourages that their Orthodox Christian tradition and practices are unique from most other people and that it

is something to be celebrated and sought by the members of their parish community, especially the youth.

In order to encourage the teens to come to this conclusion on their own they must be able to compare their beliefs to those of others in the context in which they exist: Middle Tennessee. Though the main structure for youth ministry at St. Elizabeth is not separate from the rest of the church community, a technique that encourages their goal of personal connections with their church community and traditions, they do occasionally have events specifically for the youth.

The only teen specific events held by St. Elizabeth are used to compare their own beliefs and practices with those of other churches in the Middle Tennessee area. Though I was unable to attend one of these events due to the sparsity of their scheduling, I was able to inquire as to their typical schedule of activities and purpose. According to my conversations with leaders at St. Elizabeth, every few months they will take a group of teens to another church in their area to observe their services and beliefs. Afterwards, they gather at a restaurant and discuss what they observed, how it compares with their own beliefs, and the opinions and beliefs of the teens. Their use of events which compare their beliefs with those of others emphasizes their unique history and tradition as Orthodox Christians and encourages a personal connection with their unique qualities among other Christian denominations in a way that allows the youth to come to this realization somewhat on their own. The priest at St. Elizabeth said that he found it important to allow the teens to compare their own faith to those of others churches in the surrounding area. He said that this was something he started doing recently in an attempt

to emphasize the uniqueness of the Orthodox Christian faith while at the same time exposing the youth of his parish to the faith of others in their area.

This concept of allowing teens to form their own opinions with an informed knowledge of their own denominations teachings in comparison with the teachings of other churches in the Middle Tennessee area is one that I observed in some form at each of the churches in this study and I believe to be an underlying goal of each youth ministry.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church

At St. Rose I observed that almost all of the methods used in their youth ministry program were directed at achieving the goal of having their teens develop personal relationships with Christ. As such, each of the three distinct methods seems to build upon each other in a way that reveals the purposeful structuring of the youth ministry program.

The Role of the Sacraments

In my observations at St. Rose, I noticed a strong focus on the sacraments of the Catholic Church. However, the teachings about these sacraments and their institution was not so much focused on the importance of ritual, but more so directed in how they were tools in building a personal relationship with Christ. This was the most important outward sign that was identified as a sign of a successful ministry in this youth group. Coming to Holy Mass on Sundays and praying the rosary are important outward signs of the Catholic faith, but my research has shown a strong emphasis on the importance of developing a personal relationship with God in their youth ministry program.

This was exemplified in one of my site visits as I observed a small group discussion on how effectively to use the sacraments of the Catholic Church to unite with

the person of Christ. Specifically, they emphasized the importance of the Eucharist, which Catholics believe to be the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ that has been transformed into simple bread and wine. Not only did they emphasize the importance of receiving the Eucharist during Mass but also for their youth to take advantage of a type of prayer known as Eucharistic Adoration. During this type of prayer, Catholics come to pray in front of a consecrated Eucharist displayed in what is called a monstrance, usually a gold and jeweled cross with a place for the host to be placed in the middle. After discussing the importance of the sacraments and ways to increase their participation in them, the youth were led into a small chapel at their church to have a time of Eucharistic Adoration with some praise and worship music being played in the background. This encouragement of the sacraments of the Catholic Church simultaneously helps them to reach the goals of encouraging personal relationships with Christ as well as developing an affinity with the Catholic Church over other denominations in Christianity by the portrayed uniqueness of their sacraments. This particular method of obtaining and at the same time displaying their relationship with Jesus through the sacraments is a unique distinguisher that separates the Catholic youth ministry from the others in my study.

A Structured Ministry

The youth group at St. Rose meets on Sunday evenings immediately following one of the Holy Masses offered that day. They often focus their events on group discussions led by one of the leaders on a different topic each week. Since the importance of the sacraments are emphasized so much within St. Rose's youth ministry program, it

comes as no surprise that they would schedule their meeting to encourage their youth to attend Holy Mass before coming to join them for their event afterwards.

I was able to attend Holy Mass before their youth group on one visit and witnessed many of the youth who were involved in their youth ministry program in attendance and participating in the activities of the service. For example, not only were many of the youth participating in the call and response parts of the mass and the pattern of kneeling, sitting, or standing for different parts, they also served to collect the offering from the congregation by passing baskets just before the preparation of Holy Communion. This seemed to be something they did without any encouragement or schedule for who was to do what. Rather, certain teens would come forward to pass the collection baskets because they recognized the need for someone to do it and they would fulfill that need without question of hesitation. This alone shows their respect for and understanding of the necessity of the process of Holy Mass and the reception of the sacrament of Holy Communion that takes place during the Mass as is emphasized in their youth program. It also reveals the successful achievement of their goal to see the youth doing good works in their lives encouraged by their personal relationships with Christ.

As the main event of St. Rose's youth ministry program, group discussions are used often to discuss certain topics that the leaders see as relevant in the lives of their teens. On one visit in particular, I observed the leaders discussion on the topic of mercy. This was especially relevant to them as Catholics at this time since the Catholic Church had declared this liturgical year to be the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Though there were very few teens in attendance that night, those who did attend were very interactive in the discussion. Both leaders and teens alike shared what they believed the definition of mercy

to be, how they both gave and received mercy when interacting with others, and how this concept of mercy was or could be applied in their lives. Though one leader did start the discussion with an instructional teaching on mercy, the rest of the discussion seemed to explore the reality of mercy in the lives of the teens, allowing them to state and form their own beliefs as they related to the topic. This was yet another example of how each church in this study encouraged their teens to develop their own beliefs.

The intentional structure of scheduling their youth ministry to follow directly after one of the sacraments which they teach to be so important in an attempt to encourage participation in it reveals just how important the leaders of St. Rose's youth ministry program believe they are in meeting their goals. Their use of discussions helps the leaders to share their own personal relationships with Christ with the teens they are ministering to in a way that allows the teens to think for themselves and compare Catholic beliefs with the beliefs of others in developing their beliefs while being led in the teachings of the Catholic Church. This is another example of what seems to be an underlying goal of each youth ministry program in this study.

Personal Relationships with Teens

In order further to encourage the development of personal relationships with Christ, the leaders of St. Rose youth utilize their weekly meeting schedule to develop personal relationships between themselves and the teens. In essence, the leaders try to develop relationships with their youth based on trust, shared experiences, and open sharing of how discussion topics have and are actively shaping their lives. This could be seen by the interactions they had with each other throughout their events, but especially at the beginning. At each event I attended at St. Rose, the youth and leaders were always

mingling before the activities and discussions for the night began. Sometimes the teens would be playing basketball with some of the leaders while others held personal conversations with topics ranging from school to family to emotions and breakups. This was not the only way that they built these relationships though. The leaders at St. Rose were especially personal in sharing their own feelings and experiences during small group discussions. By sharing their personal experiences, feelings, and beliefs with the youth, they encourage the youth to do the same and build their relationships with each other. In doing this, they also share their own relationships with Christ, encouraging the youth to grow their own relationships with Him by learning from their experiences.

This example of their own personal relationships with Christ, shared in relationships and environments that encourage the same, help to gently advocate for similar lifestyles in the youth. This seems to be rooted in the belief that a personal relationship with Christ will be made visible to others through the actions of the individual that exemplify a practice of teachings of their Catholic faith and a desire to share that relationship and its fruits with others.

Belle Aire Baptist Church

My observations at Belle Aire Baptist revealed that their methods are very clearly designed to reach the goals which they see as pertinent to being a successful youth ministry program. Each of the three distinct methods used at Belle Aire Baptist Church builds upon each other and towards two main goals of their ministry which are to have their teens develop personal relationships with Christ and to gain a working knowledge of the Bible.

A Structured Bible Study

One of the most direct methods used by the leaders of Belle Aire Baptist Church's youth ministry program was an organized and structured bible study. This particular style of bible study focused on a single section of the Bible, going through it word by word in order for the teens to develop a solid and detailed understanding of how the leaders interpreted it with their Southern Baptist understanding of scripture.

The first time I visited Belle Aire, I observed the adult volunteers leading a teaching on the book of Ephesians. This particular evening focused on the first ten verses of the second chapter. As they read these verses, the leaders would stop to explain each one in detail and to allow the youth to fill out some handout sheets with blanks that allowed them to follow along by filling them in. As the leaders read through and explained each verse, the youth would occasionally ask question and make comparisons to their own lives. Throughout the study, leaders asked the youth to have certain verses "committed to memory." This style of detailed an organized bible study focused on a single section at a time makes it abundantly clear that studying the Bible and understanding scripture is an important element in their youth ministry program, so much so that their ministry events seem to be almost entirely structured around it.

Using bible studies to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Christ is their chief method of meeting their goal of having their teens gain a strong knowledge of the Bible, which they also see as the most fruitful method of developing a personal relationship with Him when coupled with prayer. After all, what better way to get to know somebody than by studying what they taught and talking to them regularly? This is the general opinion held by and made apparent through the teachings and

leadership styles used at Belle Aire Baptist Church. For example, even an event that I attended that did not focus on a main scripture teaching or discussion the leaders still used scripture in their brief address to the youth. This evening, they were building hype and explaining some details for a retreat that they had been planning in conjunction with other churches in the Murfreesboro area. As the teens were addressed, the youth leader spoke about why they had put so much effort into preparing for this retreat. He expressed joy and said that everything the youth leaders did was so that they might see the youth “walk in truth.” He quoted the third book of John in the Bible which says, “The elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” The last line in particular is what he used to describe why he and the other leaders continued to serve as youth ministry leaders at Belle Aire Baptist Church, even bringing tears to his eyes. Not only did this moment reveal the passion of the youth leaders at Belle Aire, but it also continued to reveal the centrality and constant presence of scripture as part of their ministry and a way of leading their youth into personal relationships with Christ.

Personal Relationships with Teens

Similar to the leaders at St. Rose Catholic Church, the leaders of Belle Aire’s youth ministry program also believe that it is important for them to build strong personal relationships between themselves and the teens they are leading. They utilize their weekly meeting schedule to dive into the lives of their teens each week.

I observed the leaders at Belle Aire Baptist Church interacting with the teens before and after every event that I attended. Just as at St. Rose, they were conversing and playing games that was an obvious display of their friendship. Many of the teens would willingly share details about their lives, some more emotional than others, with their leaders which reveals the high level of trust that is held between them. The leaders also knew almost every teen by name which was impressive considering there were in excess of forty teens in attendance at each event.

A Bible Study of Enculturation & Comparison

A great example of this can be seen in my observations at two different events I attended. At each of these nights, they discussed questions brought up by youth. The youth room at Belle Aire has a small box in the back that they use to collect different paper work from the youth but also for questions that they might have about their faith. Questions from this box provided the topic of discussion on both of these evenings. In trying to answer these questions, the leaders would come prepared with an assortment of bible verses that could possibly help them to answer the questions as to what they believed about these subjects. On the first evening, the topic of discussion was focused on tattoos and if they were considered to be sinful by desecrating the body, which they teach is a gift from God. Rather than simply reading the bible verses and explaining what they meant or how they applied, the leaders at Belle Aire would ask the teens to read selected bible verses as they applied to a developing discussion. As they read them, the teens would then try to understand and explain how each individual bible verse applied to the topic and what they could learn from it, after which another question was usually raised that would bring another bible verse into play and the process would repeat itself. This

would happen until they had read through and discussed every bible verse that the leaders had found relating to the main topic question. Throughout this discussion, the leaders rarely offered their own opinions or beliefs, only leading the discussion by reminding the teens of the conclusions they had already reached in previously read bible verses and directing them to a new bible verse based on the questions that were arising throughout the discussion. As they read them and began to form opinions about these bible verses, the leaders would also encourage the teens to “commit them to memory” just as they did during their more structured style of bible study mentioned above, further revealing their emphasis on scriptural knowledge as an important part of their youth ministry program.

This style of leading a topic oriented bible study not so much by teaching but by allowing the youth to discuss, question, and especially read the Bible shows the importance of scripture in their ministry. Having the youth read many verses from their Bibles, often encouraging them to memorize them, allows them to build strong personal knowledge of the Bible especially as it relates to these topics that seem to be relevant to them as teens. By encouraging a strong knowledge of the Bible, they are able to reasonably assess the success of their ministry by looking at how well the individual youth members in their ministry know and understand scripture in order to grow in a relationship with Christ.

However, this also does something else that was only mentioned as important in conversations I had with youth leaders at Belle Aire. In these discussions on subjects that lead them through a collection of related bible passages, the leaders encourage the youth to think for themselves and formulate their own opinions, interpretations, and beliefs based on what they have read. In discussing issues that are relevant to many of the teens

who are involved in these events and encouraging them to think for themselves and form opinions informed by their knowledge of scripture, they also make their ministry more personal and applicable. They also compare their teachings as Southern Baptists with other denominations in their area. For example, during one of my visits I observed a discussion on the topic of heaven, hell, and other matters related to the afterlife. During this discussion, the Catholic idea of purgatory was brought up at one point by a teen. This led the group to discuss how this compared with their own beliefs about the afterlife based on their interpretation and understanding of the Bible. Belle Aire's youth ministry program is also open to participating in services and events with other Christian denominations that are willing to join them. During the course of my studies, they planned and hosted a retreat in conjunction with a number of other churches in the Murfreesboro area. Though many of these churches were also Baptist in denomination, some of them were non-denominational Christian churches that they joined in with for events of worship and ministry over the course of a weekend. This reveals yet again an underlying goal of each church in my study: the formation of their teen's individual beliefs informed by the instruction of their denomination in comparison with the teachings of others.

Chapter 2: Conclusions

By observing and analyzing the methods used by the youth ministry programs at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, and Belle Aire Baptist Church, it is apparent that they are both influenced by and have influence on the goals which each church seeks to achieve in the individual lives of their teens. The different methods used further separated each denomination from each other in how they

define success in Christian youth ministry. However, they also reveal the common ground of Christianity on which they all stand. For example, the use of different methods in each church in this study that all allow their teens to develop beliefs for themselves in comparison with the beliefs of others while being informed by the teachings and beliefs of their own denomination reveals that having the teens formulate beliefs for themselves may be an underlying goal of each division of Christianity that is practiced with nuanced differences in each denomination's version of Christian youth ministry. This is something that has not been made evident in the existing literature of Christian youth ministry. Also, by observing these methods and showing their correlation to the goals of each church's youth ministry program, it is now possible to expand the definition of success in Christian youth ministry to include elements present in Orthodox Christianity that seem to have been left out of the existing definition.

Final Conclusions & Analysis

Each of these youth ministry programs has developed strong, concrete ideas for what it means to be a successful ministry and how to go about achieving these ideas of success. Though they may appear to be quite different, they have an overall commonality. Each church in my study has the same goal of saving the souls of their youth from the fires of hell and the temptation of Satan and for the Kingdom of Heaven, which they believe in through the teachings of Jesus Christ. This goal remains a strong uniting factor and part of how they all identify to be a part of Christianity. However, they seek to achieve this goal in a variety of ways based on the beliefs held by their denominations. Since the salvation of souls does not seem to be something that can be visibly witnessed directly, each of these ministries seek to encourage their youth to engage in behaviors and form their own beliefs that will result in outward signs of their salvation.

St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church has shown a strong emphasis on having their teens develop a strong personal connection with the unique traditions, practices, and community of the Orthodox Christian Church and service to God through the service of those around them. Not only did the parish leaders say this, but they also demonstrated it in action as the youth serve often during Divine Liturgy as well as throughout the special banquet during the Bishop's visit to the parish. Though the concept of developing a personal relationship with Christ was mentioned as being important by some of their leaders, St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church did not place as much importance on this as the other churches in my study. However, they indicated a strong emphasis on the personal development of ideas and beliefs in their youth by organizing events that allowed them to glimpse the religious practices and beliefs of other churches in the

Murfreesboro area and then discuss what they saw in comparison with their own beliefs and the teachings of the Orthodox Christian Church.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church encourages personal relationships with Christ amongst their teens, and their main emphasis is on the importance of the sacraments of the Catholic Church in developing these relationships. These sacraments serve as not only one of the main methods they encourage for developing a personal relationship with Christ, but also as a part of the outward signs that reveal this relationship and the success of their ministry. However, they also encourage these relationships with Christ through their own relationships with the teens and the sharing of their experiences and beliefs in discussion. These discussions also allow the teens to formulate their own opinions and beliefs in comparison with the beliefs of others. I believe that these are all a result of the structuring of these ministries as weekly meeting groups as opposed to the more family oriented ministry present at the Orthodox Christian Church which serves as a way to reach their goals and perception of success.

Belle Aire Baptist Church also encourages their teens to develop their own thoughts and beliefs while guiding them with the teachings of their tradition. However, unlike St. Elizabeth they do not specifically interact with other denomination with the intention of comparing beliefs. Rather, they discuss topics that are of interest to their youth and lead these discussions with studies of the Bible as it applies to each topic. By reading and attempting to decipher what the Bible teaches about these topics with little discussion about the personal beliefs of the leaders, they encourage their youth to develop beliefs that are informed by their understanding and knowledge of scripture. This knowledge formed by studying the Bible is what I see as the most central element of their

ministry at Belle Aire. Unlike the Catholic and Orthodox Christian churches who emphasize ritual and tradition, Belle Aire encourages a deep understanding of the Bible in order to lead their teens to grow in personal relationships with Christ. These personal relationships are what seems to be the utmost goal of Belle Aire's youth ministry program. In order to accomplish this, they lead their youth through bible studies to grow in understanding about the teachings of Christ as well as by having their leaders develop personal relationships with teens themselves.

These observations lead to the conclusion that the existing definition of success in Christian youth ministry is incomplete and must be expanded. As it currently exists, the definition of success in Christian youth ministry only accounts for the goals and methods used in Protestant and Catholic youth ministry programs. Based on the existing body of research and the results of this study, these seem to be that successful Christian youth ministry must result in personal relationships with Christ. These relationships are based either mostly in sacraments and good works as seen at St. Rose, or in scriptural knowledge and personal relationships shared with youth ministry leaders as seen at Belle Aire. The inclusion of practices and goals exemplified in the Orthodox Christian style of youth ministry at St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church adds that success can be determined by an observable set of actions in the lives of teens that reveal a personal connection to the traditions, practices, and community that is unique to the Orthodox Christian Church. These are revealed in the family oriented ministry used at St. Elizabeth and the strong enculturation of Orthodox Christian practices into the daily lives of all of the members.

However, this study has also revealed a further distinguishing element of success in Christian youth ministry that must be included as well. Though not directly implicated as an overall goal of any of the youth ministry programs in this study, each of them displayed a similar method of youth ministry that allowed their teens to develop and compare their own beliefs to the those of other churches in the Middle Tennessee area while being informed by the teachings and traditions of their own denomination. I believe that this reveals itself as another goal that could be universal to Christian youth ministry as a whole, just as the salvation of souls is the overarching goal of all Christians.

By combining these important elements considered to be a part of successful youth ministry from one church youth ministry program representative of each of the divisions of Christianity, this study can reasonably define success in Christian youth ministry as the salvation of the souls of individual youth members by their self-formation of beliefs based on the teachings of their individual denomination in comparison with the teachings of other religious traditions that results in either a personal connection with their denomination's unique traditions, practices, and community or a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, both of which may be revealed through acts of service, the practice of traditional sacraments, the development of personal relationships with youth leaders, or knowledge of the Bible.

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Appendix A: Schedule of Field Research

January 24, 2016 – St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, Divine Liturgy

January 27, 2016 – Belle Aire Baptist Church, Kaleo High School Youth Group

January 31, 2016 – St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, Hierarchical Liturgy and
Bishop's Banquet

January 31, 2016 – St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Forge High School Youth Group

February 3, 2016 – Belle Aire Baptist Church, Kaleo High School Youth Group

February 14, 2016 – St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Forge High School Youth Group

February 17, 2016 – Belle Aire Baptist Church, Kaleo High School Youth Group

February 21, 2016 – St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, Divine Liturgy

February 21, 2016 – St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Holy Mass and Forge High
School Youth Group

February 24, 2016 – Belle Aire Baptist Church, Kaleo High School Youth Group

February 28, 2016 – St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Forge High School Youth Group

March 6, 2016 – St. Elizabeth Orthodox Christian Church, Divine Liturgy

Appendix B: Sample Survey

Youth Ministry Survey

1. Position: _____

2. Time in a youth ministry leadership position (in years):

3. Main Occupation (if not employed as a youth minister):

4. What is the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic make-up of your youth group? (ex. Mostly African American, mostly Caucasian, mostly Hispanic, mostly upper class, mostly middle class, mostly lower class):

6. What are the overall goals of your youth ministry program?

7. How do you attempt to meet these goals?

8. How do you evaluate the success of your youth ministry program in attempting to meet these goals?

9. On a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, rate the following in order of importance to your ministry:

- _____ Personal Conversion
- _____ Number of People Reached by Ministry
- _____ Connection with a Particular Denomination
- _____ Social Skills
- _____ Passing of Traditions

Appendix C: Sample Consent Form

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INVESTIGATOR

The following is a template for a complete informed consent document. As a guide, it can be partially revised to fit your study. However, the first two (2) paragraphs and all questions need to be included, as required the by the Office of Human Research Protections.

If you choose to alter or waive consent for your study, you must provide justification to do so. Fill out the appropriate portion of the Request for Waiver or Alteration of Consent and attach it to your IRB application. The form can be accessed at <http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/irbforms.shtml>

If a question is not applicable to your study, simply insert n/a. You should also eliminate suggested language (in brackets and red type) if not pertinent to your study, to enhance participant comprehension. If used for a parent/legal guardian, alter language to refer to child.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Compliance Officer

compliance@mtsu.edu

Box 134

Sam Ingram Building 011B

(615) 494-8918

Principal Investigator: Trevor Smith
Study Title: A Comparison of Youth Ministry in the Three Divisions of Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism
Institution: Middle Tennessee State University

Name of participant: _____
Age: _____

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

1. Purpose of the study:

Because of your leadership position in your church, you are being asked to participate in a research study to further understand the similarities and differences in Christian youth ministry in the three major divisions of Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.

2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:

During this study, you will be asked to fill out a survey regarding youth ministry in your church as well as being observed during public youth ministry events over the course of three months from December through February. You may also be asked to be informally interviewed about youth ministry at your church. Your position as a youth leader (ex. Youth Director, Assistant, Volunteer, etc.) will be recorded as a part of the survey to compare and contrast results from different positions in each denomination. Your name will not be recorded during this study.

3. Expected costs:

Not Applicable.

4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:

There should be no risks associated with participation in this study due to the fact that you will only be surveyed, observed, and informally interviewed. I will not be asking you to change anything about your methods of ministry or actions in general.

5. Compensation in case of study-related injury:

MTSU will not provide compensation in the case of study-related injury.

6. Anticipated benefits from this study:

There is no direct benefit to you. However, you may gain an increased understanding of Christian youth ministry in each of the three major divisions of Christianity in Murfreesboro. I will be happy to give you a copy of my finished thesis as well as present it to you and your congregation at the conclusion of my research for your own information.

7. Alternative treatments available:

Not Applicable.

8. Compensation for participation:

Not Applicable

9. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:

You will only be withdrawn from study participation by your request.

10. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:

If you choose to withdraw from this study, any information gathered from you will be destroyed and not used in the continuation of the study. You are by no means required to participate if you do not wish to and are able to withdraw from the study at any time.

11. Contact Information.

If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Trevor Smith at (731) 415-1684 or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand at (615) 898-2907.

12. Confidentiality.

All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

13. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Date

Signature of patient/volunteer

Consent obtained by:

Date

Signature

Printed Name and Title

IRB Approval Letter

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Tuesday, January 19, 2016

Investigator(s): Trevor Smith (PI) and Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand (FA)
Investigator(s) Email(s): tds5d@mtmail.mtsu.edu; jenna.gray-hildenbrand@mtsu.edu
Department: Philosophy

Study Title: *A comparison of youth ministry in the three divisions of Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism*
Protocol ID: 16-2130

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the EXPEDITED mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date this notification
Date of expiration	1/6/2017
Participant Size	50 (FIFTY)
Exceptions	NONE
Restrictions	NONE
Comments	NONE

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (1/6/2019) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 1/6/2017. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance in order to close-out the protocol.

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website](#). Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.