

Building Intentional Community in Youth Ministry

An Interview with Paul Bowen

Overview

Paul Bowen is a strong advocate for creating intentional communities in youth ministry and education. He senses that youth share the same spiritual cravings that adults do. He believes that many of the experiences that support adult faith—community, worship, and formation programs—can help young people find God's love, grace, and hope.

The CRG spoke with Paul in May, 2006. The conversation covered five primary topics:

- Part I: Dimensions of Youth Ministry
- Part II: Considerations of Youth and Technology
- Part III: Observations about Youth Spirituality
- Part IV: The Church Camp as a Vehicle for Youth Ministry
- Part V: The Trinity Education for Excellence Program
- Resources and Continued Reading

About Paul Bowen

Paul Bowen's enthusiasm for youth ministry and working with underserved young teens is infectious. Paul began serving as a Youth Ministry Director at [Trinity Church Boston](#) (Episcopal) in 1999 when he was just 23 years old. In that role, he developed a vibrant youth ministry program and helped found the [Trinity Excellence in Education Program](#) (TEEP). He now serves as TEEP's Executive Director. He volunteers as a [youth worker](#) with the [Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts](#). His experience includes many years as a camp director and camp counselor.

Paul asserts that vibrant youth ministry programs focus on forming Christian community and spiritual formation. That ministry has included education (often leading to Confirmation), retreats, "lock-in" overnights, camp experiences, and some form of community service—from addressing the immediate needs of the community such as helping with an annual homeless census to taking mission (or as Paul prefers to call them, "mutual ministry,") trips to the devastated communities in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch or Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina.

Paul ties much of the success of youth ministry programs to leadership's commitment to provide the resources to do it right. Those resources include hiring exceptional staff and supporting a top-notch diocesan camp—which offers teens week-long spiritual formation experiences.

Interview

Part I: Dimensions of Youth Ministry

Paul observes that many factors influence youth ministry, including the priority of youth ministry in the overall church or regional program, resources allocated to youth programs, cultural differences, and the buy-in of decision-making leaders.

CRG: What factors have you observed that affect Youth Ministry?

Paul: The biggest factor is where youth ministry falls as a **priority**. In different parts of the country, **cultural differences** influence where on the priority list it falls.

In the **North**, it seems harder to get youth programs started. The first priority—especially in white, upper middle class suburbs—is almost always education and school-related activities. The second is almost always sports. Church youth group activities are lower down. Just getting kids to come to Confirmation class for eight Sunday afternoons is really difficult.

In the **South**, youth group, church, religious education, and Confirmation tend to be higher priorities. If a kid has to skip a football game to go to Confirmation class, he'll do it.

Resources available to support youth ministry is another factor. When churches facing tight budgets have to make spending decisions—especially smaller churches with 100 people or less—they often have difficult choices to make. When choosing between hiring a youth ministry worker or a music director, what is the church going to do? Hire the music director. In those churches, youth ministry is a lower priority—and for good reasons.

Another factor is where youth ministry falls on the **leadership's agenda**. Our bishop [head of the regional area] rightly realizes that if there's going to be a church in another generation, we've got to invest in youth. He's made a huge investment in youth programs. He goes on a youth mission trip every summer. He's been with our youth to Honduras and El Salvador. He spends time with youth at the annual convention. He has put more personal time into youth ministry than any other bishop I know.

As a result, our growth in youth ministry is extraordinary. When you look at priorities—and at the budget—you can see that youth ministry has been given significant attention.

CRG: The diocese has started hosting a lot of youth ministry events. How does that relate to congregational youth ministry programs?

Paul: The [regional youth ministry office](#) empowers congregations and youth leaders in their work. It provides resources for congregations trying to start a youth ministry office or to host Confirmation and/or education programs.

Confirmation is done by region. Instead of preparing five to ten youth in a small program offered in an individual congregation, the diocese sponsors [regional classes](#) for a given area, which can have eighty to one-hundred participants. This enriches the experience and helps confirmands get connected to one another. The diocese can provide a rich program that individual churches may not have the resources to offer.

Part II: Considerations of Youth and Technology

Technology can help with the logistics of running a youth ministry program and can provide a forum for conversation and virtual community. It can also highlight the

cultural differences between haves and have-nots, exacerbating issues related to socio-economic class, diversity, and self-esteem. Security and implications for younger youth leaders present new challenges.

CRG: Technology is an integral part of youth culture—teens today are wired. How does that effect youth ministry?

Paul: I was in high school in the late 80s and early 90s and graduated just before the whole internet and email thing started. Today, most youth have moved beyond the internet and email into [Instant Messaging \(IMing\)](#), and [online social networks](#) such as [FaceBook](#), and [My Space](#). It's incredible how little they use email.

What they have now; especially with My Space, are their own [virtual communities](#). They can create their own profiles and their own spaces. They can say whatever they want and change it as they evolve. They can post their music. They can talk very openly about their faith. They can create affinity groups, so if a teen is an Anglican really into Taizé, he or she can find students all over the world who are into that, too.

The definition of community in the online age is much more global. When I was in youth group, our youth group was local. We went away and did retreats. We did overnights at the church. Occasionally, we'd do regional things, but our community was the local people with whom we worshipped, prayed, and traveled. We saw them face-to-face every week.

Often, the online community serves as one of the student's primary communities. A kid may be on a sports team and see people face to face, or serve as an acolyte in the local church, but with this new virtual community, he or she can have friends around the world. Even though they may not have met face to face, they may have more conversation with their online friends than with their sports teammates who they see three or four days a week.

The implications of this new online, virtual community are stunning. The research is only now beginning to try to understand what's going on. In the two years since it started, My Space became one of the top ten web Sites—up there with Google and Yahoo and Microsoft! And, even more important, it's now being replaced with newer sites, such as FaceBook.

A lot of parents are getting blind-sided. The security implications are incredible. Imagine a teenager saying online, "Hey, we're going over here on Friday night; we're gonna be there at such and such a time." Now anyone in the world can know where kids are and what's going on.

When those involved in leading youth programs are teenagers or college students themselves, they are likely to be online. They can get caught in the middle. Online, they want to be cool, edgy, and attractive to others. And yet, now they have to think about what their youth—and youth parents—are going to see online. (What's cool for the 17-year-olds might be inappropriate for younger teens.) Supervisors are setting policies about **how staff members represent themselves** in this new virtual, public space.

A big debate is if camp staff and youth mentors—adults in their 20s—should be involved in these virtual communities. What should the leader do if he or she

happens to be online at midnight and a student pings him or her? Is it appropriate to respond?

There are also issues around **confidentiality**. If an adult mentor sees something online; what should be done with that information? Youth will password protect their sites so their parents can't access them, but will give the passwords to their youth mentors.

This is a relatively new debate that has not been settled. Youth ministers come down in different places. The issue is still emerging. It is causing us to rethink and reshape how we define community. How do we build and support healthy communities in an online world?

CRG: How does this virtual community technology change how a congregational leader might do youth ministry?

Paul: Logistically, the internet can really help. If you are in the suburbs—like most of the kids in our diocese—then you can assume that all of your kids are online. Kids today don't give out phone numbers any more, they give out screen names.

You can develop a Web site with a lot of great functionality. It can be a great tool. On the [diocesan site](#), virtually every schedule, every registration form, and every news bulletin is online. We don't bother giving out a lot of handouts anymore. We don't even bother to email; we just send everyone straight to the Web site. That can be a very effective gathering place.

Many churches have embraced technology. They plan to have message boards or they decide to let students blog. But when they do that, they aren't sure what they are going to get. Some have moderated message boards that can be edited, but these backfire as some teenagers will react negatively to being edited.

CRG: Are there other aspects of technology that influence youth ministry?

Paul: In our summer program, we have banned cell phones—many of them now have cameras. Pictures could end up on the internet or My Space, which could be dangerous. Some parents push back; they want to stay connected to their kids by phone. We've had to do some teaching with parents around this.

CRG: Have you heard about the [national studies](#) on those 18-years old and younger? Some say there aren't enough teens without internet access to be statistically significant.

Paul: Some urban students come from homes where there isn't money for computers or the internet. They're getting pretty resilient about finding access—at friends' or grandparents' houses—but many still don't have internet access at home. When they come to a program like ours—which could have an online component—class and self-esteem issues often surface.

For a kid who's not a part of the online age, there's a whole range of things they miss out on—everything from dating to sports to music. It's awkward when their supervisors or leaders want to post or email an upcoming schedule or details of an upcoming event. We've always dealt with issues of class, but these technology disparities add just one more thing.

In many of our programs, we're using a pre-internet model that remains based on physical community; on close proximity. We create an unplugged, real community—where we live together, cook together, eat together.

Part III: Observations about Youth Spirituality

CRG: You talk about the Internet as a place where people are developing a different kind of community, where teens can talk about their issues. Do you have a sense of how they perceive God? What spiritual issues are they concerned about?

Paul: In the late '80s and early '90s, in public schools, there was a general resistance to God, church, youth group, even faith. If you went to school wearing a faith-based T shirt—say something about prayer—you could expect a less than positive day, just because the culture was less than welcoming to those who took faith seriously.

There are still those, who—particularly in New England public schools—are uncomfortable with hardcore Evangelical ideas. One thing we've tried to do is to reclaim some of the center space to say, "Just because you pray, just because you believe in God, doesn't mean that you're a hardcore, right-wing, Red State kind of Christian." There are those, like the [Jim Wallis](#) sorts, who are trying to recapture a moderate centrist place to say, "It's okay to have faith, and it doesn't mean that you accept all that stuff."

CRG: That doesn't sound very different from adults dealing with the same issues.

Paul: You're right. However, I see a greater openness in this generation—the [millennial generation](#)—toward faith, toward spirituality, and toward God. A lot of my students talk very openly about God, issues of faith, and struggles that they have with faith. It's in their online journals that are read by a lot of their public school friends. Most of the time, the public school friends are not judgmental. They don't push back in a negative way. A lot of them ask some really profound questions, just by reading what these Christian kids are struggling with in their own faith.

CRG: Can you give me an example of some of those struggles?

Paul: Struggles of loss. Someone dies. Someone wrecks their car. Teenagers have to deal with their own mortality, usually when they see someone else either die or get very sick. Or when they lose a parent or a grandparent. This opens up classic issues of theology for the very first time. I think it's a little bit more acceptable for this generation to bring their faith into those kinds of conversations. Sometimes they find answers from their faith.

Today's culture is more tolerant, too. Those who are more open to this have experienced Christianity that is more tolerant, where everyone's opinions and views and faith are welcomed. We'll have done well if we can create a centrist space where it's okay to have faith, whatever your faith is.

In TEEP, we have a lot of Roman Catholic Latin American kids. And a lot of black Pentecostal Evangelical kids. We have a few Muslim kids, and a few Seventh-day

Adventist kids. We work really hard to create a community where it's okay to talk about faith. It's okay to ask questions, to struggle.

Most of the kids who we work with have some kind of faith background. Redemption is one our five core values at TEEP, but we often address it only when kids are being redirected after inappropriate behavior. At some point, I may need to sit down with their parents to talk about their understanding of redemption.

We've worked to create a place where every student, if he or she has a faith tradition—whatever that may be—can bring faith that to the table. They can also choose to leave it behind.

CRG: You've taken kids on mission trips. Aside from the community that comes from just being together, what else have you observed?

Paul: When you read the same Scripture text together, and you hear the same preaching, and are fed at Christ's One table, it becomes a truly transformative thing. Youth have led the adults in understanding that transformative relationship. On mission trips, kids say, "Y'know what? We can set aside the politics. We can interpret Scripture however we want to when we get to that point. That's not our priority right now. These are our friends; our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we've got a job to do. We're gonna go to Biloxi, Mississippi." Mission work gives a whole new paradigm for both the Liberal Church and the Conservative Church to think about what it means to be the Body of Christ.

CRG: Do you sense that kids today are spiritually hungry?

Paul: In our Diocese, the thing that's really causing us to grow is worship. Worship is the fuel. When kids get connected with worship, they experience the transformative power of grace. Worship is our response to God's grace—and when kids connect with that, they become part of a worshipping community that's like nothing I've ever experienced. I grew up in the South. We went to worship because the adults made us. Worship wasn't the fuel that empowered everything else we did.

For our kids—for those who really buy into it and are on fire with us—the fuel for the fire is worship. They experience grace in a sacramental way; and their response is worship. And that's infectious. Kids who have no idea what worship is all about and may not know anything about God can learn through worship.

The three cardinal virtues are faith, hope, and love. Kids pretty much get love; love is the easiest one to understand. The cool thing is to talk with them about hope and about grace; and about love and faith. Yes, even here in New England, kids today are every bit as hungry for grace and for hope and for faith. I would say more so. Particularly when they see other kids whose lives resonate with that hope, that faith, and that grace.

Part IV: The Church Camp as a Vehicle for Youth Ministry

CRG: Are there other resources that have contributed to the success of youth ministry in your diocese? Is it primarily due to the personality of the bishop and those he hires or recruits?

Paul: One really big thing was starting the [camp](#). It's amazing. 2006 was the fourth summer for the camp, and it was filled to capacity with between 700 and 800 kids. There was a waiting list.

As a former camp director, I can tell you, it's unheard of for a start up camp to go from zero kids to over capacity in four years. Especially in New England! The new camp is competing with 200 other camps that have been established for 50, 100, even 200 years. Other directors are scratching their heads asking how the diocesan camp did it.

CRG: How did the camp do it?

Paul: The bishop made a commitment to do it right. That starts with a very generous budget to do everything. It's unlike any other church camp. It has state of the art facilities and a beautiful conference center. It also has a top of the line staff. The camp has the budget to bring in incredibly gifted, talented people from all over the country, and—with [Camp America](#) staff—from around the world.

They hired the right guy to direct the camp. The director has more than 20 years experience. He's spent his whole career in camping. He knows how to bring the right staff in. That staff has created an exciting, energetic, vibrant camp—a good staff is a magnet.

CRG: Was it the camp alone that led to the success?

Paul: What really happened over these first four years was that a few kids went from their churches to the camp. They fell in love with it and went back and said, "Wow, this camp is incredible. You've never had a week like this in your life." That made other kids want to go.

CRG: What about the camp makes kids think it's incredible?

Paul: **Worship** is incredible; it's the fuel that sustains everything else. They have a great band; a really high-energy rock band. There is also a commitment of resources to have clergy there. They have a lead chaplain, and each week bring in volunteer chaplains. All of the newly-ordained clergy, candidates, postulants, and deacons have to serve as chaplains. There's almost always a bishop there.

The camp experience has become an integral piece of the youth ministry faith formation journey. The staff is well prepared. The camp and program directors have studied different programs all around the country. They've gone to the conferences—not just Episcopal conferences, but other conferences that bring together people from across the country (e.g. [Youth Workers Conferences](#)) from [Youth Specialties](#).

Kids go to camp for a week, and they're very serious about faith formation. They're doing it in a very intentional, thoughtful way.

At a pre-confirmation retreat, we invite parents to consider that their kids will have more hours of faith formation in one week at camp than in 40 weeks of church school (assuming a 45-minute class each week.) Churches have that message. When kids come back from camp and tell their friends how transformative it was, churches hear about it, too.

Part V: Observations from the Trinity Education for Excellence Program

The [Trinity Excellence for Excellence Program](#), (TEEP), is a cultural/educational enrichment program for underserved middle school students in the Boston Public Schools. It provides the academic vigor of summer school with the recreational aspects of summer camp.

TEEP is the fusion of a summer school program for Boston public middle school students and a year round leadership development and college prep program for high school students. TEEP's mission is to create a safe community where every member is inspired to discover, empowered to engage, and individually affirmed.

It is a free, accelerated five-week program designed to enrich the minds and lives of students through a summer of cultural and academic exploration. Each morning, certified public school teachers offer stimulating explorations of music, art, math, and language arts in small groups of 10-12 students. In the afternoon, students enjoy field trips to various museums around the city, sports, art projects, and a weekly hiking, swimming, or other sporting event, and a cookout lunch.

TEEP also offers a year-round leadership development program for TEEP graduates in ninth-twelfth grades that features monthly events, leadership retreats, and college admission support. TEEP graduates in the leadership development program return as TEEP summer counselors when they are entering tenth-twelfth grades.

TEEP aims to teach its core values—the Five Rs (respect, responsibility, reciprocity, restraint, and redemption)—experientially in all of its activities and classes. TEEP believes that these Five Rs provide students with a model for academic success and for leading fulfilling and meaningful lives.

—From TEEP brochure, 2006.

CRG: How does TEEP work with young people?

Paul: We create a safe community for these kids. The heart of creating a safe community is taking them to safe places, emotionally as well as physically, where we can come away from the technology-saturated culture.

The high school component of TEEP is the Leadership Development Program, LDP. It meets monthly—one month here on Saturdays; the next month for a weekend retreat or college admissions trip.

To return to TEEP for a second year as an eighth-grader or a third year as a ninth-grader, students must participate in a retreat. These retreats are completely produced and led by LDP participants. They choose the theme of the weekend and write the session plans and schedule. They do everything. It's all designed around our mission: safety, community, inspiration, empowerment, affirmation.

I'll give you a really powerful example. As renovation construction was being done at TEEP's permanent home, Trinity Church, we held TEEP in a neighborhood closer to where many students and TEEP staff live. As the renovation was nearing completion, we had a big debate about whether we should return to Trinity. While construction continued, it was loud, we met in trailers, and there were related security issues.

Some donors to the construction project wanted TEEP back at Trinity.

I heard arguments on both sides. I sat down with my TEEP kids, many of whom walked or rode their bicycles to TEEP in its temporary home. I asked them what they thought. They were adamant, and said, "Take us home. Trinity is our home." I said, "I'm stunned, 'cause you walk. You ride your bike. To get to Trinity, you gotta take the Red Line T [subway] to the Green Line T." They responded, "No, no, no. You're not hearing us. ...Trinity's our home. It's a safe community. We've created that safe community. Take us home." That was the end of discussion. We came back. We dealt with the construction. We got through it, and here we are.

CRG: TEEP is a program that is a partnership with the Boston Public Schools. Is there a religious component to TEEP?

Paul: We invite TEEP graduates to come to the diocesan camp and to participate in our youth programs, but that's extra, that's not TEEP. If we were preaching the Gospel, some principals wouldn't have their students participate. But that's shifting. In just the last year or two, after I've met with principals and teachers and explained TEEP, they'll ask about the faith piece, thinking they'd missed it.

I explained that TEEP is a program focused on education, not faith. I had a principal say to me, "Boy, that's a shame, aren't you an Episcopal church? Why can't you be who you are?" I asked if she'd send us students if TEEP was religious—with worship every morning, Bible study, etc. She said, "Of course we would, we trust you."

Most of our staff are not Episcopalian, and several come from other faith traditions. In the religious context, our staff are very careful to make sure that TEEP does not become a recruiting, proselytizing ministry. I've been very clear about this.

If there are kids who don't have a faith community, if they don't have a safe youth group where they can struggle and question and grow and be affirmed and be loved, we talk through what Trinity offers for youth. Parents can be enthusiastic, but we're clear with them that TEEP is an education program. We're not trying to get a kid who already has a faith community to switch or to convert.

How do we do ministry with these kids who don't have churches, or youth groups, or a community that nurtures them? A question for me is how the Trinity community—a wealthy, primarily white congregation—effectively invites and welcomes these largely immigrant working class, minority kids. How do we include them in what's going during the school year that isn't TEEP related? It's a huge jump to get the kids to take the next step from coming here for a TEEP event on a Saturday to coming here to a church event on Sunday. A few have made it; some will come on Friday nights, but not many come on Sundays.

CRG: Tell me about the TEEP experience at camp.

Paul: After kids attend the summer five-week program, we provide time at the camp for those graduates who are comfortable going away to an overnight Christian Episcopal summer camp—some of our kids have never been outside the state; some never even outside the city limits. We make it very clear that this is different from TEEP, which is an educational not religious program.

The camp experience includes worship every morning, Bible study every night, and prayers before meals. Last year, a little more than half of our graduates went to camp with us. We spent a week integrated with about 200 other kids from around the diocese. We invite TEEP campers to return for a big junior high retreat in the fall or a senior high retreat in the winter. It's a total opt in. It's Christian, although we did have a Muslim kid go.

CRG: What strikes you most about your work in TEEP?

Paul: Our first students recently graduated from high school. All are continuing on to college; I've not seen that in other programs. These graduates have really internalized TEEP's mission. They know what it means to create a safe community where every student, including themselves and their siblings, are empowered, inspired, and affirmed. They believe in second chances (redemption.)

They've figured out the empowerment piece better than a lot of college-age staff. They figure out inspiration in culturally-relevant ways. In their culture, in the street culture, the hip-hop culture is a big thing.

Some of our students, 'from when they wake up 'till they go to sleep, have headphones on—some even wear them to bed—listening to the local hip-hop station. It's hip-hop 24/7. They come into this TEEP community which is hip-hop free, radio free, and electronics free. The only music we have is live music. If you make it, that's fine. If you want to write and perform your own rap, it has to be live. (I listen to the station just so that I can be in that dialogue with them.)

I once challenged my ninth graders. I'll let the driver play the radio on the bus, but not the hip/hop station. The kids were pushing back pretty hard, accusing me of being insensitive to their culture. I offered them a deal. We'd listen to the hip/hop station for 45 minutes. If there were two songs, 20 percent, two out of ten, that were not blatantly violent, not blatantly sexual, not homophobic, and not misogynistic—songs that would fit within our five R's (respect, restraint, responsibility, reciprocity, and redemption)—then I'd play the station on the bus.

They didn't take me up on the offer, because they knew there wouldn't be two songs out of ten that would reflect our values. What do you do when hip-hop is what's in the car, or at home? Hip-hop can potentially have an impact on their identity. Particularly for the guys, rappers define masculinity. And what does hip/hop say about forming an identity? Identity comes from a gun and sexual promiscuity.

As we teach about empowerment, we stress that we're digging deeper than what a gun provides. I've asked our high school Leadership Development Program counselors to think with seventh, eighth, and ninth graders about new ways to be empowered. Some of the younger students are not sure if they want to go to college. I encourage them to really think about where they would be as they graduate from high school if they weren't going to college; and about how life would be different if they did continue their education in some way.

The key thing is inspiration and affirmation. We spend a lot of time training staff to help build self-esteem in kids. Some of our students believe, when they first come to TEEP, that they are bad kids. When I do behavior modification, they'll tell me, "Look, man, you don't know me. I'm just being who I am. I'm a bad kid, and you watch,

and pretty soon I'm gonna convince you, too. And this is who I am. This is how I do it. Deal with it."

We invite them to rethink that. We say, "Here at TEEP, we will never accept that you're a bad kid. We actually believe that you have all the potential, all the gifts, all the abilities. You actually are loved and valuable and worthwhile, and you will never, ever change our minds. "I can say that as a 31-year-old white male. For some of these boys, it goes right off 'em like water off a duck's back. But when their 17- or 18-year old counselors who went to the same schools that these students went to, who speak exactly the same language that they speak—affirm these students and challenge them to think differently about who they are, it's a powerful thing.

When a student really is changed by that mission, they are inspired, empowered, and individually affirmed. This change happens through art, music, and by experiencing community. Those are students that will be here five years from now. They'll be with us right into college.

Our goal here at TEEP is to be what we call an intentional community, where every single staff member—be that as cook, counselor, director or anything in between—is driven by our mission. It's got to get back to safety, community, empowerment, inspiration, and affirmation. If it doesn't, we stop doing it.

Every week we look at those five basic components and how they are working. TEEP is designed in teams of 12, each with a male counselor and a female counselor who graduated from TEEP five, six, seven years ago. In the past few years, we've gotten to a place where my staff can actually discuss this intentional community in the context of our Five Rs and our mission.

The most powerful reflection for me, after doing this for seven years, is realizing that our TEEP family (and our Leadership Development Program staff do refer to each other as their TEEP family) has grown to be resilient and empowered. I could get hit by a bus tonight, and this summer, these LDP staff would be there in the trenches making TEEP happen. To me, that is the most beautiful part of TEEP.

CRG: If there was a congregation that was interested in doing something like TEEP, what advice would you give?

Paul: This gets right back to the socio-economic class issue. Are we talking about urban churches or more affluent suburban churches? Many suburbs already have good, healthy summer alternatives. I'm going to ask if the community really needs this program. If it's a community where there is a real need, especially smaller towns that don't have the nonprofits doing the work that they do in bigger cities, then we might explore partnering urban churches with nearby suburban churches. TEEP in the long run is cost effective, but the start-up cost can be a significant challenge. A single year of TEEP (as it has grown to become here in Boston) could cost far more than some churches interested in starting a similar program could raise on their own. Therefore, they might consider regional partnerships.

A suburban church could help by funding or by providing teachers. They could help set up cultural trips. The more urban and suburban churches can work together in ministry, the more transformative that partnership becomes. It can change the way they look at socio-economic class, at race, and ultimately, theology.

Many TEEP students are first, second, or third generation immigrants. Coming from the Southern world, they sometimes bring Southern interpretations of Scripture and values. Our TEEP staff tends to be progressive and represent a variety of religious traditions. It's made us think carefully about how to be a welcoming community that really listens to students and honors where they are, even if it's not a traditional, New England, progressive perspective.

So I'd encourage congregations to think about starting small, finding opportunities for partnership. (We started with 36 students, now there are more than 90.) It can start as after-school tutoring one day a week, or a monthly cultural exchange where kids go to a museum or to a baseball game.

I prefer to call this "mutual ministry" rather than "mission work", because "mission" has a one-sided legacy. It's the have and the have nots. Mutual ministry helps us envision a future that might be possible. There may be a day when mutuality actually can be achieved.

The diocese is working on engaging the mutual ministries concept. They are trying to partner New England parishes with parishes in other countries, such as Honduras and Brazil. That's harder to do. The long-term goal is that each parish will have a partner in the developing world. The short-term goal is partnering suburban, more affluent congregations with other struggling congregations who can benefit from this partnership and who also have a great deal to offer in mutual ministry.

Resources and Continued Reading

Books

[Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation](#)

Jonathan Kozol, Author. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1995.

Children's stories—often told in their own words—are at the center of this exploration of children and teens in the South Bronx, New York City. The juxtaposition of Manhattan (one of the wealthiest places in the U.S.) and the South Bronx (one of the poorest) creates a poignant and sensitive look at poverty, the welfare system, and the devastated and forgotten neighborhoods where these young people live. Kozol interviewed teachers, ministers, drug dealers, and children and found many who, in spite of the harsh realities of their lives, hold onto hope.

Available from the [publisher](#) or from [Amazon](#).

[The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life](#)

Parker Palmer, Author. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Teaching is a calling that draws on one's innermost resources: emotionally, physically, and spiritually. This inspirational exploration of the teaching profession recognizes the potential for burnout and offers suggestions for keeping it at bay: self-care, finding wholeness, and knowledge of one's self. The self in relationship to the learning community is also discussed, with emphasis on the connections between people and ideas, love of the subject taught, and the importance of collegial conversation. Parker asserts that the successful and best teachers create complex networks of connections which, in turn, enable students to create their own.

Available from the [publisher](#) or from [Amazon](#).

[Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul](#)

Tony Hendra, Author. New York, NY: Random House, 2005.

This book is a first-hand account of the author's 40-year spiritual journey guided by Father Joe, a Roman Catholic priest. The two first meet as the author is sent to a monastery as punishment for having an affair with a married women. Tony becomes enamored with the Benedictine lifestyle, and asserts that he would like to become a member of the order. The struggle with his "calling" and the temptations of the "real world" lead to some amusing and poignant discoveries about human nature and the spiritual life. A [reader's guide](#) is available from the publisher.

Available from the [publisher](#) or from [Amazon](#).

[Raising Resilient Children: Fostering Strength, Hope, and Optimism in Your Child](#)

Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein, Authors. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2002.

Drawing from fifty-years of clinical practice, the authors offer ten "guideposts" parents can use to instill healthy self-esteem in their children and equip them to be resilient. Parents can be empathetic, teach problem-solving skills, help children experience success by reinforcing things done well, and avoiding negative messages. Examples of good and bad parenting episodes are presented, along with advice on how each could be improved. Also included are discussions of specific case studies, personality types and how they influence parenting, and guidelines for incorporating the guideposts. Also available is a follow-up book of related questions and answers, [Nurturing Resilience in Our Children](#).

Available from the [publisher](#) or from [Amazon](#).

[Revolution and Renewal: How Churches are Saving our Cities](#)

Tony Campolo, Author. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Tony Campolo urges all Christians to take a role in revitalizing the city. He affirms the impetus behind direct service approaches such as working in soup kitchens and prisons, but finds them lacking as long-term solutions, labeling them "Band-Aids on the corpse"; initiatives. Instead, he advocates for economic development that brings jobs and prosperity to urban areas. He encourages Christians to work with secular and governmental agencies, but without losing their Gospel-based distinction.

Available from the [publisher](#) or from [Amazon](#).

[Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World](#)

Tracy Kidder, Author. New York, NY: Random House, 2003.

Paul Farmer takes on enormous challenges to follow his life calling: to bring modern diagnosis and treatment to those that need it most. His travels take him to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia, where his organization, [Partners in Health](#), lives out the premise that that humanity is the "only real nation." This inspirational account follows Farmer through good times and bad as he discovers and follows his life's calling. His work demonstrates how change and hope are possible, even in the most dire situations.

Available from the [publisher](#) or from [Amazon](#).

Conferences

[The American Camp Association](#)

www.acacamps.org

This membership association of professional camp personnel is dedicated to ensuring the quality of camp programs. It evaluates and provides accreditation for camps, and offers professional development resources (conferences, educational programs, books, etc.). ACA works closely with other youth-serving organizations and associations. It hosts a 4-day annual conference and a 2-day annual regional conference.

[Youth Specialties \(YS\)](#)

<http://www.youthspecialties.com>

YS offers resources and training conferences for youth ministry. YS intentionally draws from across the Christian spectrum, offering materials and information for "anyone passionate about youth and youth ministry." Conferences are held regionally and are designed to create a community of youth workers, offering workshops on the latest trends and practices in youth ministry as well as support for youth workers.

[Passion](#)

<http://www.268generation.com/2.0/splash4.htm>

This annual 4-day worship conference features Christian bands in a stadium-concert format and small group gatherings. It is devoted to bringing college-aged students to Christ and "glorifying" college campuses across the United States. There is also an online Passion Community and blog.

Paul says, "The impact of this conference on the lives of the students, and on my own life was extraordinary. It changed the way we think about and experience worship. We had 18,000 college students from across the country...The cool thing about it is that you have evangelical, mainline, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic—the whole spectrum of students—coming together...Nothing but worship for four days. It's decidedly southern, but there are enough northern progressive sorts there to make it really, really fascinating."

This interview is part of the [Congregational Resource Guide Wise Voices](#) effort, which gathers thoughts and essays from people who know congregations. These are leaders with know-how—through first-hand knowledge, academic study, or practical experience. If you are or know of a Wise Voice we should include, please contact us at info@crg.org.

The [Congregational Resource Guide](#), <http://www.congregationalresources.org>, is a free, non-commercial guide to resources for congregations. Provided as a gift to American congregations from the Lilly Endowment Inc. through [The Alban Institute](#) in consultation with the [Indianapolis Center for Congregations](#) and other specialists.