Creating Faith Based Venturing Programs

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Heart of Virginia Council (602)
The Boy Scouts of America has succeeded now for one hundred years due to many causes. The first, and foremost, is the quality of the program itself and its value to the youth of our country. We in Scouting intrinsically know the value of our programs. However, if the BSA had not cultivated a strong program development plan coupled with strong leader development it would have likely not succeeded to today. Still, with those strengths in place this youth focused program would not have survived without a constant, ever diligent, membership growth plan. A great program with great leaders and great value will not remain and grow without a steady influx of participants.

The Heart of Virginia has challenged itself, here in Scouting in America’s 100th year, to charter one hundred new units. Units must be chartered with a minimum of five youth to register. It must maintain that number each year at recharter time. This development plan, then, calls for a minimum of five hundred new Scouts to be registered in our programs in 2010.

The Heart of Virginia has seventy-three (73) chartered Venture crews with eight hundred and sixty nine (869) participants and two hundred and twenty eight registered leaders (228).
### 2008 Youth Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2008 Members</th>
<th>% Chg '08 v. '07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Cub Scout-Age</td>
<td>1,655,635</td>
<td>-1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Boy Scout-Age</td>
<td>905,879</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Ventures</strong></td>
<td><strong>261,122</strong></td>
<td><strong>-2.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>2,832,636</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### 2008 Adult Volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2008 Volunteers</th>
<th>% Chg '08 v. '07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pack Scouters</td>
<td>470,400</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop Scouters</td>
<td>551,926</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crew Scouters</strong></td>
<td><strong>65,621</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Scouters</td>
<td>44,406</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Scout Leaders</td>
<td>1,132,353</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Adults</td>
<td>1,165,828</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A faith-based application of the Venturing method encourages and empowers youth to dig deeper into their faith. This is true whether they are currently members of the youth group or new to the group. When this happens, the youth in a church youth group become more effective leaders and a healthier church evolves. The church then experiences a direct benefit to their youth ministry and their overall mission. That benefit begins when a new or existing church youth group is chartered as a Venturing crew.

This application of the Venturing method is quite different from the conventional application. In the conventional situation, a crew is often closely associated with a Boy Scout troop. This may not be the situation here. In fact, this proposal does not infer that a troop exists at all. Other components of a full family of Scouting may or may not be present in the
faith institution for this Venturing plan to be effective. The creation of a
successful Venture crew within the youth of the church may, in fact, be the
catalyst to opening opportunities for a pack or troop at the church. This
paper will not address that possibility but it is essential that this possibility
be mentioned. The focus of this paper is to cultivate and develop Venturing
crews within established faith youth groups. The strong possibility exists for
packs and troops to be developed after the church sees the success of this
Venture program but that possibility (probability?) will not be addressed in
this presentation.

There are three distinct applications of Venturing. The first is the
conventional method where a crew is established as a natural outgrowth of
an existing Boy Scout program. The second is a natural partnership-
oriented Venture organization where a crew is created where there are girls
and boys together. The last one, the one we are focusing upon here, is a
variation of the partnership-oriented Venture crew. This application is where
the crew is created as an overlay of an existing youth group program at the
local church.

The partnership-oriented application uses a conventional crew as its base
definition. This crew could have either started from a Boy Scout troop or
with no direct association with a troop at all. At times, the partnership-
oriented crew will invite a local church youth group to join their activities.
Each separate group will benefit from this partnership by having the
opportunity to experience new and exciting activities. By combining their
groups for certain activities, they increase their overall size so that they can
conduct larger service projects and more cost-effective activities. This faith-
based application linking a crew with an existing church youth group (of any
faith) will have the following characteristics:

- The Venturing method is used as an additional, complimentary
  resource for a church’s youth ministry.
- The youth group retains its primary identity as a ‘youth ministry’.
- The new or existing youth group is registered as a Venturing crew.
- A faith-based Venturing crew can either standalone in a church or
  coexist with a conventional Venturing crew.

Faith-based Venturing does improve the health of a church; no matter the
denomination or faith. It will encourage and empower youth to really study
their relationship with their God and delve deeper into their specific faith and
be more effective leaders within the youth program and be tuned to develop
into stronger adult leaders. Perhaps the most noticeable improvement will
be with the quality level of the leaders; both youth and adult. This will be
directly attributable to Venturing’s leadership training.

New unit development goes the way of the police detective’s statement
when a crime has been committed in his precinct. “Round up the usual
suspects.” This is what Scouting will generally do when trying to cultivate
new units. We will go to our existing Chartered Partners and study the possibility that could be turned to a probability of forming a new unit. We will often try to expand Scouting within that organization to what is called a “full Scouting family”. This would have our chartered partners supporting a Cub Scout Pack, a Boy Scout Troop, or a Venture Crew. In many cases we have scoured those paths so much that we may have found ourselves breaking out a Pack or Troop to charter a second unit with that Charter Partner. We have identified an opportunity that has often been overlooked. Project planning has used the term ‘low hanging fruit’ identifying something that is ready to bear, ready to fall. Such is the case with Venturing in our supporting faith communities. We are proposing a plan to significantly enhance unit chartering with “Faith Based Venturing Programs”. No ‘usual suspects’ are necessary in this plan. The only criteria would be to identify a church, synagogue, temple, etc. that has teenagers under their roof and be open to exploring a new, exciting opportunity that will offer experiences beyond their spiritual program that will not only expand their program offerings but will create a vehicle that may entice additional youth, both within the organization and outside. This is simply called a growth opportunity. For each of use, this thesis will use the terms church or faith community interchangeably.

A faith-based application of the Venturing method can capture a youth market that has already been created and formed as another entity. Many
faith communities already have youth groups within their church, their
temple, their cathedral. The faith community long ago identified the internal
need to create and foster a program to keep the teenagers in the building, in
the faith. Thus, Youth Groups were founded across the faith spectrum.
Youth Directors or Youth Ministers were hired to lead these groups of “I-
can’t-slow-down / what-is-next” kids in their houses of faith. The prime
directive of these directors/ministers is to create and deliver a quality
program compliant with the doctrine of the home church and its ministries.
While that covers issuance of a faith program it does not offer nor administer
any activity program and certainly does not offer any structure or leadership
development component to the program. When Venturing is brought into
the faith community these are present.

While Venturing and the faith youth programs may initially appear to be a
good match on paper it is essential that a determination be made of the
purpose and mission of the youth group. Venturing is designed to enrich and
support this effort; it should be an integral part of the youth program, not a
separate or competing organization.

If the group meets every Sunday night, consider devoting one or more
meetings a month to career or hobby exploration.
Conduct a Program Capability Inventory, (PCI) among adult members of the congregation and a career and hobby interest survey among youth group members.

Match interests of youth with resource persons identified from the PCI. Line up program consultants who will present programs on their career and/or hobby, either at the youth group meeting place or at their place of business. Emphasize a hands-on experience, not just lecture.

Consider these additional benefits from affiliation with Venturing:

- Venturing journal and Program Helps
- Local Boy Scouts of America council staff and volunteer help
- National high-adventure bases
- Liability insurance
- Council camp and other facilities
- Council activities
- Fellowship with other Explorers/networking with other Explorer Crews
- National activities
- Awards and scholarships

Venturing offers resources, i.e., optional programs and activities that may be chosen, mixed, and matched according to the needs and desires of youth group members.

All youth group members may register as Venturing and adult leaders may register as Advisors and committee members. This ensures the members
have liability insurance and guarantees all rights and privileges of membership in Venturing.

The youth group may register as a Venture Crew and use the word "Venture" as part of the youth group name (Example: United Methodist Youth Fellowship Venturing Crew). The word ‘venture’ can be used to help cultivate venturing forth in faith and beyond.

Youth who develop a strong interest in a community service, mission work, church ministry, sport or hobby can be referred to those.

Small youth groups especially can benefit greatly from Venturing because it provides an opportunity for program enrichment as well as an outreach to youth in the community Crews.

A faith-based application of the Venturing program method encourages and empowers youth to dig deeper into their faith. When this happens, the youth in a church youth group become more active in this ministry and more effective leaders. The result is a healthier church. This improvement will be led by the strength of the program that Venturing brings to the existing youth program. There will be annual planning sessions, focused meetings, exciting outdoor events and the previously mentioned strong leadership training. These benefits should be marketed to the church. The church will then experience a direct to their youth ministry and to their overall program.
This will occur when a new, or existing, youth group is chartered as a Venturing crew.

This application of the Venturing method is quite different from the conventional application. The conventional situation is one where a crew may most often be closely associated with an existing Boy Scout troop. The initial crew members might come from the existing troop. Its existence helps to encourage older Scouts to continue their Scouting experience. These crews usually have many male members who want to concentrate their activities on high adventure. An obvious addition could be adding females to the membership mix. This application purpose is primarily to retain boys in Scouting.

This application is not dependent on the existence of a Boy Scout troop at all in the church. Where the conventional method is to create the crew from the troop, this application fosters the creation of a crew through an existing church youth group or a situation where there is a sufficient number of youth within the age range qualification of Venturing Scouts.

The partnership-oriented application uses a conventional crew as its base definition. This crew could have either started from a Boy Scout troop or with no direct association with the Boy Scouts of America at all. At times, the partnership-oriented crew will invite a local church youth group to join their activities. Each separate group benefits from the partnership by having
the opportunity to experience new and exciting activities not heretofore available just through the church group structure. By combining their groups for certain activities, they increase their overall size so that they can conduct larger service projects and more cost-effective activities.

Faith-based Venturing is a direct application of Venturing to new and existing church youth groups of any faith. It will be offered as an additional, complementary resource for the church’s youth ministry. The youth group will retain its primary identity as a ‘youth ministry’ if it so chooses. The new or existing youth group is registered as a Venturing crew. There are examples of both currently successful in the Heart of Virginia Council. Mt. Pisgah Crew 1876 is a direct outgrowth of a youth group in the church. The highly successfully Venture Crew at Woodlake United Methodist is first and foremost a Venture Crew but does have strong interactions as a faith-based unit within the church.

Since one of the most critical requirements for success with the faith-based application is for the youth group to retain its primary identity as a ‘youth group,’ it is important for the Venturing method to be applied as a ‘background method’ with a program implementation that is carefully orchestrated so that it serves to complement the objectives of the faith group. The youth should be aware that their group is using the Venturing method, but they should view their participation to be most closely aligned with the activities of that particular youth ministry program. This use of a
‘background method’ will direct the way the group deals with all the Venturing phases, including registration, group activities, and programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BSA Venturing Methods</th>
<th>Typical Faith-Based Youth Group</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Activities</td>
<td>Encourage youth &amp; leaders to deepen faith together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Association</td>
<td>through explorations of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>- God’s Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals</td>
<td>- Spiritual Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Adventure</td>
<td>- Service to Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

The partnership relationship guides the implementation of each Venturing phase. Each faith has its own objective that is very much directed toward building healthy churches. Some typical faith-based objectives are to encourage members of the program to explore more deeply their relationship with their view of God, their own personal growth and their service to others. These objectives match with the Scouting Venture
methods of leadership, group activities, ideals, high adventure and teaching others. Each faith has its own objective that is very much directed toward building both healthy churches and strong, healthy relationships with God. Notice in the figure above how closely related the faith-based objectives are to Venturing methods. A youth’s “exploration of God’s creation” can be enhanced by the Venturing methods that may focus on high adventure and group activities. The “service to others” objective matches the Venturing methods that focus on leadership and teaching others. The faith organization’s “spiritual growth” objective is the point at which a true partnership is evident between the Boy Scouts of America and each faith. It is important to mention, once again, here the P.R.A.Y. programs that are designed for each faith. As the faith-based youth group implements the Venturing method, the group will extend the “Duty to God” ideal so that the individual “spiritual growth” objective is met in a way that matches the faith’s beliefs.

The youth group implements Venturing by taking the following actions:

- Identify the existing youth program structure’s existence and purpose within the local church
- Cultivate partnership demonstrating objectives outlined herein
- Meet with the Youth Minister/Director to build partnership. Enlist same for Advisor role
- Register the group as a Venturing crew and register each youth member
- Assign Unit Commissioner (you?)
- Develop program implementation method serving to compliment faith objectives
- Take advantage of BSA liability insurance through youth registration
- Leader training
- Use of Venturing program materials as supportive, additional resources for meetings and activities

Applying the Method

The registration phase should be executed with care and sensitivity. The youth group might view this step as one that detracts from its primary identity as a ‘youth ministry’.

The liability insurance will be attractive in the small church environment. Large church youth groups will often have their own group insurance. If the group decides to take advantage of the Boy Scout insurance, they will need to comply with all the standard BSA Tour Permit guidelines. For this, and other BSA-specific policy usages it is highly recommended that the unit commissioner work closely with the new unit advisor(s) to ensure that all the correct “I’s are dotted and t’s crossed”.

One of the primary reasons a youth group may decide to register as a Venturing crew is the availability of “camp access”. When the group visits a Boy Scout camp, they will experience activities that offer increased excitement and interest for the youth. This will improve their ability to “explore God’s creation” and to retain and attract youth.
The last action revolves around “program material.” When the youth group uses the Venturing program suggestions for meetings and activities, it offers enhancements to their “service to others” and “spiritual growth” objectives. They will find material that complements almost every activity that is typically planned and executed in a youth ministry. They will even experience a growth in youth leadership skills as they use the Venturing program material. Generally leadership training and development tools are not present in today’s youth ministry bag of tools. The group will not have to conduct new activities from the Venturing material in order to realize the leadership benefit. They can use Venturing leadership material to introduce planning and execution enhancements to the activities that they were doing before becoming a Venture crew. This evidence will show program strength well beyond using BSA facilities.

The Venturing method will empower and enhance the leadership skills for the core members of the church youth group. These core members will gain these skills by taking advantage of the Venturing Leadership Skills Course for youth and by using the activity and planning guidelines in the Venturing Leaders’ Manual. This leadership development opportunity will yield more effective future church leaders and will help to encourage youth to take a more active role in guiding their current youth group activities.

Venturing brings extras to the table such as camp facilities and access and a strong leadership development regime. Outdoor facility access, such as
BSA camps, coupled with the leadership opportunities will lead to a stronger youth program. Leadership development alone will yield more effective future church leaders and help encourage youth to take a more active role in guiding their current youth group activities. Larger churches will benefit by providing the current adult leaders to give opportunity for improved youth leaders to run their program. For the small and medium church this can make the difference between having a church youth group or not.

Often the pull back from larger churches comes when those churches have strong, vibrant programs. Many will have paid staff members who have extensive training in youth ministry. They will ask what Venturing will give them that they do not already have.

The Venturing method can add value to the large church youth group. This value can quickly be realized if the group visits a Boy Scout camp once or twice a year. Extended value comes from the core youth leadership team implementing the Venturing method in the church. These skills, along with Venturing program materials, can enhance their current meetings and activities.

There is great growth potential for Venturing in churches. The major points are:

- New units would bring opportunity for Christian ministry to new group of youth
Many youth will have had no church exposure. Now they would see the church in action.

Immediately offers the youth and church opportunity to grow in faith participating in the religious rewards programs offered by P.R.A.Y. from St. Louis.

Venturing features offer an unobtrusive outdoor program using the BSA camps and outdoor programs. One of the major benefits of instituting a Venture program is that it is a program that is tailored for both young men and young women. This will allow the youth ministry program to be fully incorporated in Venturing. As will be stated later, our Scouting program is fully interactive within faith programs. Chartering new units would open Christian ministry to a new audience of youth that may be more Scouting oriented than faith. This would show the church to a group who may have no church exposure. With all of this, it immediately offers the church the opportunity to display their particular faith structure and values in a number of unique manners.

Startup

The method will be applied in a much different way with smaller churches. These churches, often without a current youth ministry, may have a difficult time finding adult volunteers. This is not unheard of in Scouting circles. In this situation, the best approach is to use a set of implementation guidelines that has been prepared by youth leaders at some higher level within the
faith organization structure. This could come in the form of “Cookbooks for Volunteer Youth Leaders” or “Developing a Youth Program”. These guidelines should represent a mixture of the Venturing program materials and the faith-based principles of the organization.

The commissioner service for the Heart of Virginia Council should perform monthly checkups with the crew and the charter organization as with any unit. This would be particularly important with a new unit. The commissioner is critical to each and every unit but particularly to those who are new. This will be an essential relationship to foster and cultivate with this new partnership plan being proposed. The commissioner should have a good understanding of the differences between the conventional and the faith-based Venturing organizations.

**Program Delivery**

Program delivery in the faith-based Venturing application will most often use a three part delivery forum:

- Activities
- Meetings
- Service
Venturing methods reach deep into the roots of the partnership and support each of the delivery forums listed above within the faith-based crew. The Venturing partnership components are:

- BSA Venturing
- Leadership
- Faith Organization
- Deeper Faith Experience

The partnership between the Boy Scouts of America and the faith organization fits neatly together. Venturing provides leadership skills guidance for youth and adult leaders within the youth ministries. This is true, of course, for both large and small churches. It presents an opportunity for leaders to enhance planning and program execution phases of the ministry. This enhanced program attribute is then complemented by faith-specific program steps to enable both youth and their adult advisors to have a deeper faith experience every time they participate in the new program.

Enhanced leadership and deeper faith experience are hallmark attributes of all three faith-based delivery forums (Activities, Meetings, Service). Each forum should be quite familiar to the members of the typical youth ministry. Almost every youth group will leave their usual meeting place to participate in interesting and fun activities. They conduct service projects to help
others and they often hold regular meetings at a certain time at a certain
place. Venturing programs are easily applied to each of these.

Promotion and Growth
While performing the regular, standard unit visit the unit commissioner will
glean operational and functional steps that the unit uses to cultivate and
stimulate promotion and growth of the specific Scouting program. Although
faith-based applications of the Venturing method can certainly be started
one at a time they lend themselves for larger campaigns conducted by the
Council in partnership with specific faiths. The United Methodist Church has
such a structure called “The Bishop’s Dinner”.

Use of such a mechanism, on a small one-by-one basis or at a larger group
setting will show how Venturing fits, without intrusion, with most standard
youth ministry programs. It should be clear that Venturing helps the youth
in any faith to “dive deeper into their faith and with others though
exploration of God, spiritual growth, and service to others.” With these
linking features clearly demonstrated from Venturing to youth ministry
programs it should provide, to paraphrase Neil Armstrong from June of 1969
“a small step for youth ministry, and a very large step for Venturing and the
faith-community.”
Appendices
The next five PowerPoint slides have been intentionally removed from the presentation. However, these represent specific views and points held by individual faith communities that are currently strong supporters of the Boy Scouts of America regarding their stand on the BSA and its value to their faith.