

Venturing in Faith-based Organizations

by Stan Belyeu

How is this application different?

A faith-based application of the Venturing method encourages and empowers youth to dig deeper into their faith. When that 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. The initial crew members might come from an existing troop. Its existence helps to encourage older scouts to continue their scouting experience. These crews usually have many male members and concentrate their activities on high adventure.

Figure 1 shows two additional applications of the Venturing method. Both are characterized by their ability to bring added value to the chartered organization. They are especially helpful when the chartered organization is a faith-based organization.

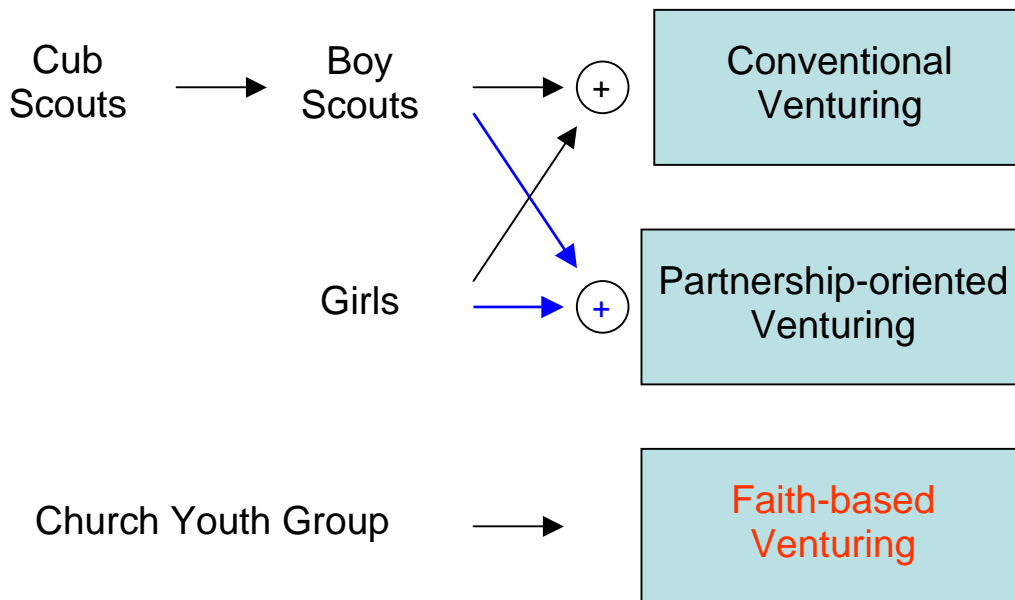


Figure 1. Venturing Method Applications

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 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, 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.

The third application of the Venturing method is shown at the bottom of Figure 1 as “Faith-based Venturing.” This approach is a direct application of Venturing to new and existing church youth groups (of any faith). It has the following characteristics:

- The Venturing method is used as an additional, complementary 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 stand alone in a church or coexist with a conventional Venturing crew.

Faith-based Venturing improves the health of a church. It will encourage and empower youth to dig deeper into their faith and to be more effective leaders. It brings an added level of excitement and interest to a church youth group.

Applying the method

Since one of the most critical requirements for success with the faith-based application is for the youth group to retain its primary identify 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 mostly closely aligned with the activities of that particular youth ministry. This “background method” will direct the way the group deals with all the Venturing phases, including registration, group activities, and programs.

Partnership

Figure 2 demonstrates the “partnership relationship” that guides the implementation of each Venturing phase. The Venturing methods that define each phase are shown on the left side of the figure. Each one is quite familiar to those working in youth ministry in every faith. However, each faith has its own objective that is very much directed toward building healthy churches. Some typical faith-based objectives are shown on the right side of Figure 2. Notice how they are very closely related to the Venturing methods. A youth’s “exploration of God’s creation” can be enhanced by the Venturing methods that

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. As the faith-based youth group implements the Venturing method, the group extends the “Duty to God” ideal so that the individual “spiritual growth” objective is met in a way that matches that faith’s beliefs.

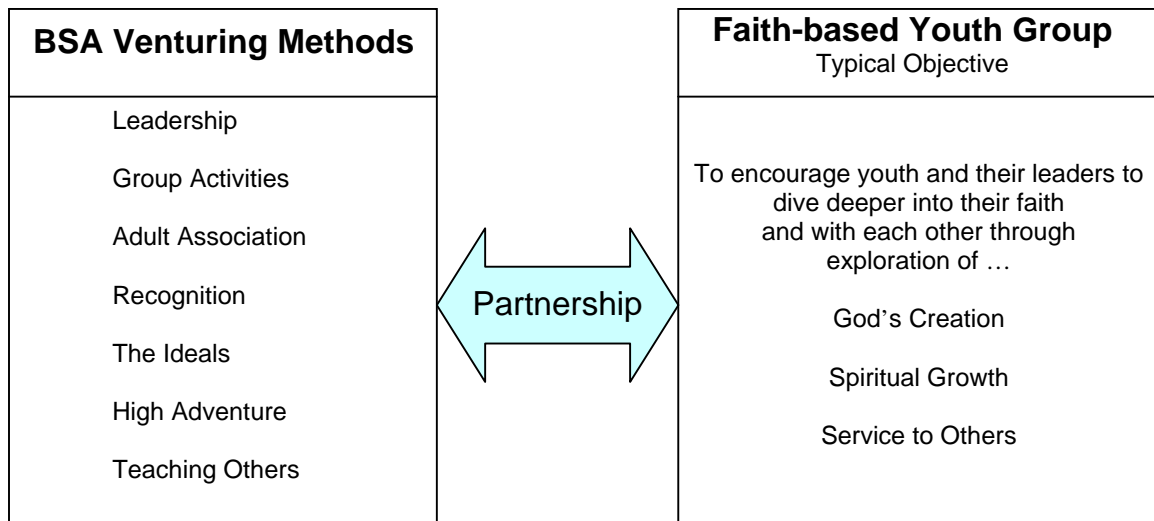


Figure 2. An implementation based on partnership

How does a youth group implement the Venturing method?

A youth group implements Venturing by taking the following actions:

- Register the group as a Venturing crew and complete the youth registration form for each member of the group.
- Take advantage of the liability insurance that is provided through the Boy Scouts of America with youth registration.
- Use Boy Scout camps and facilities.
- Use the Venturing program material as an additional resource for meetings and activities.

The registration phase should be executed with care and sensitivity. The youth group might view this step as one that detracts from their primary identity as a “youth ministry.” The next section of this chapter will discuss some ways to address this sensitivity.

The liability insurance will be attractive in the small church environment. Large church youth groups 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 tour permit guidelines.

One of the primary reasons for a youth group deciding to register as a Venturing crew is often “camp access.” When the group visits a Boy Scout camp, they will experience activities that offer increased excitement and interest for their 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, they are able to introduce 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. They do 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 Venturing crew.

Leadership skills development

The Venturing method will empower and enhance the leadership skills for the core members of the church youth group. These core members (the youth leadership team and the most frequent group participants) 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. For the large church, improved youth leadership can give the adult leaders an opportunity to let the youth run their program. For the small and medium church, this can make the difference between having a church youth ministry or not.

Large and small church implementations

Youth leaders in large churches often have strong and vibrant youth programs. At first, they do not see the need for a partnership based on Venturing. They often have paid staff members who have experienced extensive training in youth ministry.

The Venturing method can add value to the large-church youth group. That value can be realized if the group visits a Boy Scout camp once or twice a year. Extended value comes from the core youth leadership team learning about the Venturing method and how it can be applied to programs in large churches. This could be done by conducting a Venturing leadership retreat. That core team could then use Venturing program material and leadership skills to enhance their current meetings and activities.

The method is applied in a much different way within small churches. These churches often do not have a current youth ministry and have a difficult time finding adult volunteers. 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. Some faiths are implementing this step with guidelines that are like “cookbooks for volunteer youth leaders.” These guidelines should represent a mixture of the Venturing program material and the faith-based principals of the faith organization.

Advancement and Awards

Rank advancement and religious awards are optional attributes of Venturing. They should not be stressed too much in a faith-based application of the Venturing method. Since these applications need to be characterized by a “background presence” and “complementary programs,” a focus on advancement and awards might not allow the primary identity to be a “church youth group.” There are some faiths where advancement and awards will be welcome. Those faiths will find awards, such as the Trust Award, to be good complements to their faith objectives. However, it is a good idea to keep these “Venturing attributes” low-key and optional.

Startup and health assurance

Every “new unit sales call” (a promotion discussion with prospective chartered organizations) for any Boy Scout program should highlight “value to the chartered organization.” This is especially important when making a sales call that is focused on registering a church youth group as a Venturing crew. That value should be described with a careful description of the following requirements:

- Youth registration
- Program introduction timing

The registration step should be executed with sensitivity. Church youth groups often require parent consent and medical forms for certain activities. So, the registration form will be better received by parents and youth if it is presented in a manner similar to the forms they are used to seeing. It’s best to introduce the registration requirement at the time when the Venturing program is first implemented. Many churches like to make that introduction at the time when school starts and they begin a new church year.

After a youth group has been registered as a Venturing crew, it is important to monitor their progress and to assure that the group remains healthy. Some faiths will create district committees that will periodically visit the youth groups and be available to help facilitate the combination of the Venturing and the faith-specific program material. The commissioner service for the local Boy Scout council should periodically check on the youth group crew, but they should have a good understanding of the differences between the conventional and the faith-based Venturing applications.

Program Delivery

Program delivery in the faith-based Venturing application uses the three delivery forums shown on the right side of Figure 3 and is based on the partnership shown on the left side of the figure. The Venturing methods reach deep into the roots of the partnership and support each of the delivery forums through the delivery of meaningful programs.

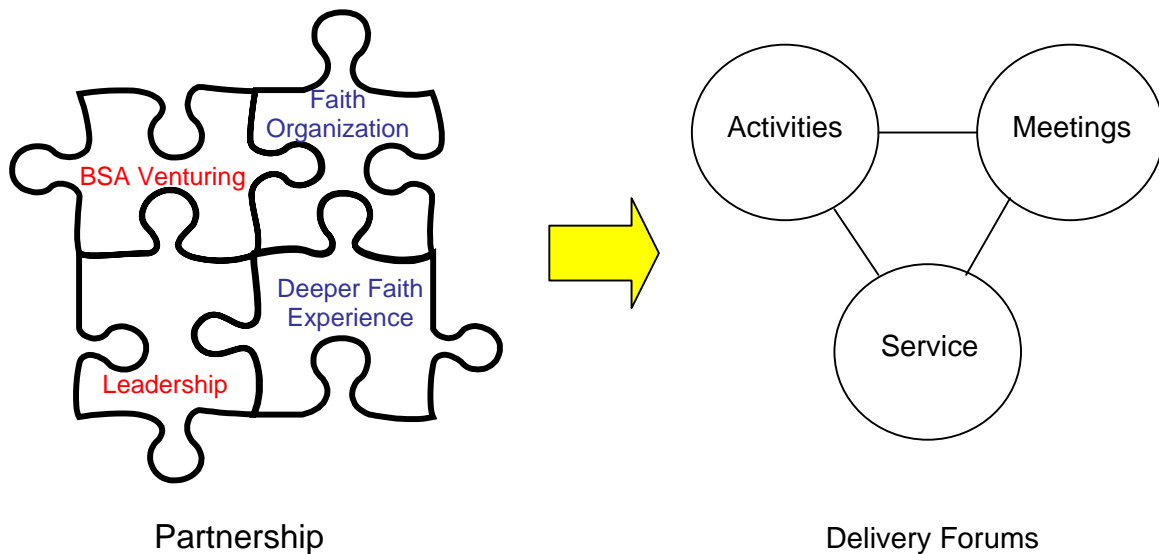


Figure 3. Program Delivery

The partnership between the Boy Scouts of America and the faith organization fits together like a puzzle. Venturing provides leadership skills guidance for youth and adult leaders in the youth ministries found in both large and small churches. It presents an opportunity for the leaders to enhance the planning and program execution phases of the ministry. This enhanced program attribute is then complemented by faith-specific program steps to enable 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 program delivery forums. Each forum is quite familiar to the members of the typical youth ministry. Almost every youth group leaves their usual meeting place to participate in interesting and fun activities. They conduct service projects to help other, and they often hold regular meetings at their usual meeting place. The Venturing program can be applied in each of these three forums.

When a faith-based crew conducts special activities, they are reaching out to create an atmosphere marked by interest, excitement, and fun. That objective is perfectly aligned with Venturing. The crew can select an activity from the Venturing Leaders Manual or the program guide. An alternative approach is to use an activity that comes from other sources. Venturing “program value” is introduced to each activity in a way that is fairly low-key. Remember that the spiritual growth is always the highest priority for any faith-based crew environment.

Here’s how it works. The youth leaders select an activity. Then, they use the Venturing leadership method to plan the details of the activity. This introduces a strong element of youth-led, youth-oriented ownership. Sounds like the core elements of Venturing, doesn’t it? Even more Venturing-based value add is introduced in the execution phase of the activity. This is where the partnership aspects shown in Figure 3 really become apparent. The crew’s youth leadership team should make sure that each activity is executed by using specific events that use the partnership attributes of “leadership and deeper faith experiences.” For example, a whitewater rafting activity could include the use of several small group team leaders who facilitate faith-oriented experiences. Each raft could select a place to stop along the river bank to identify some small often-ignored insects or plants life. It would be an interesting break from the wild ride on the river. Then, before embarking again on the action-packed river trip, each group could pause to share their “wonders of God’s creation” with each other. That type of hands-on experience can then serve as a basis for a short group discussion (at riverside) about the Creator’s attention to detail in our lives. Before re-entering the fun-oriented whitewater experience, the group will have experienced the Venturing leadership method in partnership with the Crew’s deep dive into their faith. That combination is the hallmark quality that sets the faith-based Venturing application apart from the conventional applications.

As you think more about this brief activity-based example, it should be easier to see how the partnership attributes of leadership and faith can be applied to the service and meeting program delivery forums. Each forum follows the following steps:

1. Select program ideas from either the Venturing literature or other faith-oriented material.
2. Use the Venturing leadership method to plan and execute the event.
3. Combine the Venturing methods with appropriate deep dive faith experiences during execution of the event program.

A crew that follows these program delivery steps will experience exciting and interesting events that always include deeper faith experiences for their group activities, meetings, and service opportunities. That type of program is what builds a healthier youth ministry and a stable crew.

Table 1 shows an example of how a full-year program can be developed by using both Venturing and faith-oriented program material in a complementary manner.

<p>August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Retreat for program planning and team building • Select 3 or 4 primary faith themes for the year 	<p>September</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall Kickoff meeting with key scripture foundation • Crew interest survey • Parents' Night • Fall camp retreat at a local BSA camp (use C.O.P.E.S. course) 	<p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-part pure faith-based program • Extend part 3 and 4 of the program by using Venturing Ethics activities such as "Entrapment" or "Paternalism"
<p>November</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group offsite fellowship night • Photography activity from the Venturing Leaders Manual (VLM) focused on serving others • Scripture-based discussion/experience 	<p>December</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith-oriented sessions with complementary VLM Ethics topics (e.g. "Censorship" or Self Defense") • Caroling (if appropriate) or service projects for homeless 	<p>January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter retreat at faith or BSA camp • Small group faith discussions highlighted by indoor games from VLM
<p>February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Super Bowl Party with scripture-oriented pre-program • Winter faith theme kickoff with fun night using initiative games from the VLM 	<p>March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kodiak experience with breakout sessions based on specific faith-oriented topics • Spiritual Gifts Night (applying those gifts in service to others) 	<p>April</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend a "Saturday at a Boy Scout Camp" with outdoor activities highlighted by faith experiences and discussions • Snack supper and Talent Show later in the month
<p>May</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in Venturing Impact Event (sponsored by local council) • Conduct a service project for shut-in member of the church (using Conservation ideas from the VLM) 	<p>June</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to youth moving into the youth group next year. Use games from the VLM ("Trust Circle" or "People Pass") 	<p>July</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for the August Leadership Retreat • Use steps learned in the Venturing Leadership Skills Course

Table 1. Sample Annual Faith-based Program

The “day at camp” shown in the April portion of Table 1 deserves a special comment. This is an event that would be conducted in partnership with the local Boy Scout council. The experience would combine a day of Venturing outdoor activities (such as shooting, C.O.P.E.S., climbing tower, canoe skills, etc.) with faith-oriented small group breakout discussions throughout the day.

Table 2 includes a list of general Venturing-oriented activities that might be used in weekly youth group meetings throughout the year. Each activity is combined with a faith experiences so that it complements the primary objective of the youth group.

Setting	Example Activities
<p>Weekly Meetings</p> <p>Focus on faith-specific themes throughout the year and introduce Venturing activities in weekly youth group meetings to complement those themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use several meetings throughout the year to explore ethical issues. Identify a spiritual reference for each discussion. Draw connections to spiritual formation and character development. Assign pairs of small groups to opposing views of some of the ethical controversies listed in the Venturing Leaders Manual. • Combine relevant scripture discussions with Venturing teambuilding activities, such as Blind Triangle. A Christian youth group might select a “Body of Christ” theme. Other faiths could focus this activity on serving others. • Use a goal-setting scriptural theme as the framework for an Olympic Day event with small group teams. • Create and perform a faith-oriented show for residents of a nursing home or a child-care facility. • Collect descriptions of recent church events and have small groups create humorous spoken or musical commercials. Present them to everyone. • Make a photo montage or movie of a special youth group event or a “day in the life of the youth leader or church.” • Conduct regular youth group meetings based on scripture references and lessons from faith-based literature. Use games from the Venturing Leaders Manual to support the meeting’s theme and to introduce additional fun and team spirit. • Start a small group of interested youth to learning more about their faith by working on the Trust Award.

Table 2. Examples of Activities for Weekly Youth Group Meetings

Table 3 is a list of example activities that can be conducted outdoor or with other groups.

Setting	Example Activities
<p>Outdoor</p> <p>Use Venturing leadership methods to plan outdoor experiences that include spiritual formation opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a spiritual retreat at the Florida Sea Base. • Go whitewater rafting with faith-building stops for prayer. • Spend a day at a council Boy Scout camp by combining shooting, boating, and/or climbing with prayer and faith exploration sessions. • Conduct a canoe, boat, or bike trip while taking pictures of God’s creation. • Practice paddling techniques and safety tips at a scout camp before taking a river trip. End the practice session with a cookout and prayer service. • Conduct a bikeathon or walkathon event at a scout camp with shooting sport stations. End with a campfire discussion about faith lessons that challenge us to always do our best. • Sponsor a Road Rally with stops at various churches throughout the area. Those who do not drive cars can be navigators. Each church stop can be highlighted by a faith-learning experience.
<p>With Other Youth Groups or Crews</p> <p>Join large Venturing events and introduce faith building experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in a Kodiak event and include faith-specific breakout sessions • Participate in a council Venturing Impact event • Join other groups for a leadership retreat at a Boy Scout Camp • Partner with a conventional crew to participate in a council Powder Horn event that has a spiritual growth breakout session. • Invite a conventional Venturing crew to join the youth group for an evening of “initiative games” from the Venturing Leaders Manual. Focus on leadership skills and thinking through problems, especially temptations that challenge your faith.

Table 3. Examples of Outdoor and Large Group Faith-based Venturing Activities

Promotion and growth

Although faith-based applications of the Venturing method can certainly be started one at a time and in specific large or small churches, they are perfect candidates for larger campaigns conducted by local Boy Scout councils in partnership with specific faiths at local or regional (state or multi-state) levels. The following list outlines some of the techniques that can be used at these larger levels to promote and grow faith-based applications of Venturing:

- Leader Training Retreat
- Faith-based publicity
- Pilot Program

Since the faith-based application is quite different from conventional Venturing, adult and youth leader training is a most important prerequisite for success. When attempting

to promote and grow faith-based applications across a group of churches, the most effective way to address the training requirement is to conduct a one-day leader training retreat. The retreat syllabus can be a combination of the Venturing leadership skills from the literature prepared by the Boy Scouts of America and the faith-oriented material appropriate for the given faith.

The second promotion and growth technique is “publicity.” As individual churches accept the program and register their youth groups as Venturing crews, articles can often be placed in regional or national literature for the faith. These articles provide information to other interested churches and demonstrate church leadership support for the effort.

The third technique uses a pilot program concept. Figure 4 shows how this concept uses eight steps to achieve regional growth.

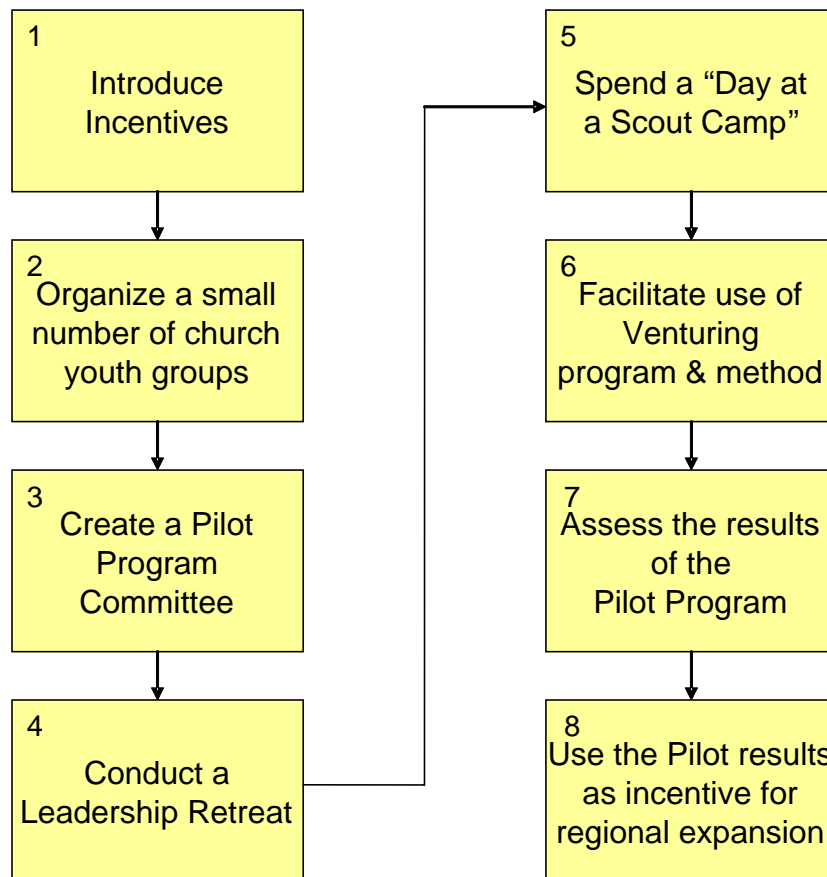


Figure 4. Using a Pilot Program to achieve growth

Using a Pilot Program approach

The first step is based on defining incentives that will attract five or six different church youth groups to join a 1-year pilot program. The incentives might include reduced camp activity fees, registration advantages, and offers of joint high adventure activities.

In steps two and three, five or six youth groups as members of pilot program. A small committee is formed to facilitate interaction between the leaders of each pilot church. Advertise the existence of the pilot program and the committee in faith-specific publications at the local and regional levels. This will help to build momentum.

Step 4 is the point where the member churches in the pilot program learn how to use the Venturing method. Conduct a one-day leadership retreat at a church or a local Boy Scout camp. The camp setting would be best. That would provide the opportunity for use of the camp facilities. Invitees to the retreat should include the adult and youth leaders for each youth group in the pilot. During the session, a training team should take the leaders through a training and team building session. It's best to use a training team that consists of members of the local Boy Scout Venturing training team and some members of the specific faith. It is important to conduct a session that combines a review of the Venturing method with the spiritual growth objectives of the faith.

In step 5, each individual pilot church youth group is invited to spend a "day at a scout camp." This gives all members of the youth group an opportunity to experience the excitement that comes with activities such as boating, swimming, and climbing. During the day, the Venturing method should be used to include strong leadership and character development activities.

Step 6 is focused on the meetings and outdoor activities during the 1-year pilot program. This is where the youth group uses Venturing material to allow youth to plan and execute meetings and activities.

At the end of the pilot program period, step 7 is used to determine how effective the Venturing method was in giving the youth groups added value. Whether the pilot churches are large or small, that value will be visible through the testimonies of the core members of the group. They will be able to describe how the Venturing method enabled them to "dive deeper into their faith and with others."

In step 8, the assessments are used in faith-based publications and through invitation meetings with other youth groups in the faith. This is where regional growth will take place. This is the point at which others will see how the Venturing method can work in partnership with any faith to create effective leaders and to build healthy churches. As growth begins, it will be clear that Venturing helps the youth in any faith to "dive deeper into their faith and with others through exploration of God, spiritual growth, and service to others."

Dr. Stan Belyeu is the son of a United Methodist preacher and is now serving as the Conference Scouting Coordinator for the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. He is an Eagle Scout and a former Vice President of Membership and Relationships for the Occaneechee Council of the BSA. Dr. Belyeu earned a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering at Georgia Tech and has worked with IBM for more than 33 years. He resides in Cary, NC, and can be reached at sbelyeugt@aol.com.