by Ken Knipp

Church consultant and author, Lyle Schaller, tells a story of a congregation which always recited the Apostles’ Creed in their worship service facing the back of the sanctuary. This practice had been continued for many years and was continued without question. No one in the congregation knew why this custom was followed; yet the majority of the congregation was unwilling to change this practice.

Finally, it was discovered that many years earlier, when the practice of reciting the Creed was begun, a banner on which the Apostles’ Creed was printed had hung across the back of the sanctuary. Since the congregation did not know the Creed from memory at that time, they always stood, looked at the banner and then were able to repeat the Creed together. This practice continued many years after the banner itself had been removed.

This brief story illustrates how easily we can adopt practices without having any real understanding of the reason why we are doing them. When this occurs, we are exposed to two dangers. The first is that we will follow a very legitimate practice yet fail to draw out its proper results because we don't understand the reason behind the practice. The second danger is that we will continue a practice which no longer meets its original purpose, again because we do not grasp the reason why that practice was initiated in the first place.

There are a number of areas where this applies to the practice of ministry in Young Life. Many staff and volunteer leaders have seen others in leadership roles doing contact work, leading clubs or directing camps and modeled what they did after the form of ministry they saw, without always under-

standing the function which the form intended to fulfill. Here are some examples:

I have encountered plenty of leaders who thought that if they simply attended a game or other school events, or walked onto the school campus, they had done contact work. While going to school events or the places where kids congregate is a necessary part of contact work, that doesn’t get beyond the form.

The function is for leaders to be actively present with kids, initiating friendships with them. Risking our security is involved, dependence on the Holy Spirit is involved, initiating conversations is involved, seeking to personally demonstrate the love and presence of Christ is involved. These things do not automatically happen if we simply show up at a place where kids are.

The principle holds true for club as well; in fact it may be here where we have the greatest danger of holding onto the form while forgetting the function. Take music for example. It is easy to assume because music is a traditional part of club or because music has been led a certain way that that form must be maintained.

There are many important functions of music. Music should create involvement on the part of kids. It ought to draw kids together so that a collection of individuals in some way becomes a group. Music ought to break down barriers kids have to the Gospel and the things of Christ. There should be a message in our music, both verbal and nonverbal. The joy and freedom of knowing Christ can be communicated nonverbally, and, of course, the lyrical content of various songs can communicate an important message about the Lord. The leadership
style of the song leader also can be significant in communicating to young people.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of why we sing. I am simply emphasizing that we are trying to do much more than lead songs when we get up in front of a meeting.

Losing sight of these functions can mean that we do music simply as a form rather than as a function which enables ministry. It also might mean that we sing out of a sense of tradition when some other activity would more effectively accomplish the purposes for which club music was originally designed. In some settings, leaders do not believe music is accomplishing these functions. They then need to design other activities which will accomplish what is needed.

The goal of club is to create a situation in which kids feel safe, where they drop some of their barriers to the Gospel and are open to understand both a verbal and nonverbal expression of the Gospel.

Hopefully, this understanding will be evident in skits, message presentation, camping and every other area of our ministry. We need to have a clear idea of why we are saying what we say and why we are doing what we do.

It was important for the members of the church mentioned above to continue to affirm their faith by repeating the historic words of the Apostles’ Creed. In the same way, it is important for us to continue to express both verbally and nonverbally the Good News of Jesus Christ to young people in ways they understand. In the use of both traditional and innovative forms of ministry, we need to be sure that we understand the function we are trying to accomplish, or else we will be facing the back of the church after the banner has been removed.

THAT’S WHAT THEY KNOW...

What are the functions of your club? List them. Now write the purpose after each.

Spend an afternoon in the local mall. Walk and observe. Sit and journal. Everything in the mall is designed with a purpose. Look at the ads and window displays. What do they communicate? Why? Is there seating and how is it designed? What kind of people do you see there? Think. What does the mall communicate?

You may see your club through an understanding of its purpose, but do your leaders and Campainer kids? How can you give them the same angle of sight?

... WHAT DO YOU KNOW?