

Youth for Christ as a Chain-Scale Operator: Risks for Leland

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Executive Summary

Leland, known worldwide as historic “Fishtown,” is a Lake Michigan village whose charm, economy, and well-being depend on locally rooted businesses and community institutions. This memo grew out of a simple question: what is the end game when a large, well-resourced organization moves into a small town at a rapid pace with significant resources? In that context, the report offers a concise overview of Youth for Christ (YFC)—its scale in North America, selected community and legal controversies, and documented abuse cases—to help residents understand what it means when a large, franchise-style organization like YFC enters a town like Leland and to inform local decisions about its proposed activities.



YFC is a multinational youth-ministry network with an estimated global system revenue of roughly \$151 million annually. Similar to franchise based multinational companies like Dollar General or the YMCA, YFC operates via a combination of global, national, and semi-independent local entities, including more than 110 locations in the U.S. and 35 locations in Canada, serving millions of young people worldwide annually. This structure means that any local YFC presence is backed by a sizable, centrally branded organization with shared programs, training, risk management, and fundraising practices.

Public-record review highlights three primary categories of risk:

1. **YFC's global corporate structure operates on the order of \$151 million in annual revenue; publicly available summaries estimate that approximately \$100 million of this is associated with U.S. operations.** Two central headquarters entities in Colorado (Youth for Christ/USA, Inc. and Youth for Christ International) together account for nearly \$30 million of that revenue and sit on top of a network of more than 100 U.S. chapters and additional national ministries worldwide. Functionally, the structure operates like a franchise or "formula business": common brand, charters, centralized policies, and standardized programs. And when a corporate actor of this scale enters a small town, it can quickly tip the balance of local civic and youth life.
2. **Community, business, and rights-related controversies.** In Winnipeg (Manitoba), Montgomery County (Ohio), Medford (Oregon), and other communities, YFC-related ministries have been at the center of high-profile disputes and lawsuits over public subsidies, land use, nondiscrimination requirements, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. These cases show how YFC's faith commitments and operating model can generate significant conflict with local expectations around inclusion, public funding, and the use of prominent community sites.
3. **Documented abuse cases involving YFC staff and volunteers.** A small but serious set of cases across the United States involve criminal charges or civil allegations of sexual abuse of minors, often in contexts where YFC staff had privileged access to youth through school-based programs, juvenile-justice ministries, or youth centers. While these incidents are not representative of all YFC chapters, large multinational organizations are often polarizing, and YFC's focus on children can make it especially vulnerable to bad actors—an added concern given the notable number of leadership-level criminal convictions that underscores the need for strong safeguards and oversight.

Taken together, the information means that:

- YFC operates at **national and international chain scale**, not as a one-off local club.
- In several jurisdictions, YFC facilities and ministries have become **flashpoints for community division**, particularly around LGBTQ+ inclusion and the use of public resources.
- **Experience from other small communities as detailed below shows that when a national YFC operation goes wrong, the town (not the national office) absorbs the damage:** divisions between neighbors, public complaints, and long-lasting reputational harm. In Leland's case, preliminary estimates suggest that the total annual revenue of all local businesses combined is on the order of \$50–\$60 million per year—meaning the entire village economy is only a fraction of the roughly \$151 million Youth for Christ system. That asymmetry in scale puts Leland at acute risk that the Township and Planning Commission could lose practical leverage over how a multinational-branded entity uses prominent properties over time. For a tourism-dependent village like Leland,

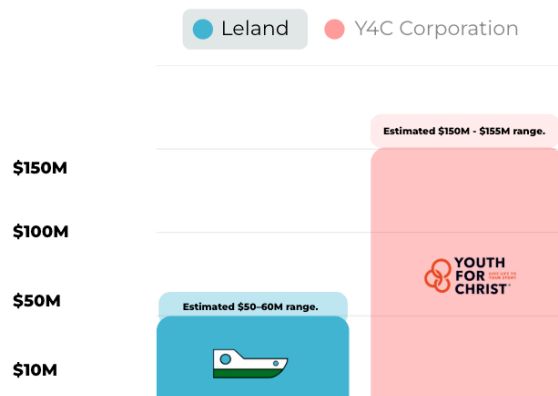
child protection, strict zoning alignment (including limits on chain-style enterprises), and guarding the town's reputation are of paramount importance.

- A non-trivial number of historical abuse cases underscore the need to scrutinize local safeguarding systems rather than relying solely on national policy statements.

Key Findings

David Meets Goliath

Leland Small-Business Revenue vs. Y4C Corporation



Estimated annual revenue for all small retail, restaurant, and tourism-facing businesses in Leland Township is \approx \$50–60 million, based on data compiled and analyzed from Leelanau County retail/foodservice statistics, local business directories, and third-party revenue estimates (2019–2024).

My estimates suggest that the Leland's total annual revenue of all local businesses combined is on the order of \$50–\$60 million annually, meaning the entire village economy is only a fraction of the roughly \$151 million Youth for Christ system, and a single YFC outlet would immediately become one of the most powerful institutions in Leland and even Leelanau County. This multinational network of 110+ U.S. chapters and 35+ affiliates in Canada has already been tied to serious community controversies (including taxpayer-funded proselytization, LGBTQ2S+ discrimination disputes, and lawsuits over nondiscrimination rules) as well as multiple criminal cases of sexual abuse of minors involving YFC staff and volunteers. Given this

combination of outsized corporate scale and documented governance failures, any prominent YFC footprint in Leland poses elevated legal, reputational, and child-safety risks that warrant extraordinary due diligence and strict conditions, if not outright denial.

1. YFC Scale and Footprint

- Approximately 110+ U.S. chapters and more than 35 chapters and affiliates in Canada, serving hundreds of communities.
- Multiple U.S. chapters report mid–six- to low–seven-figure annual budgets; some executive director salaries are in the \sim \$80,000–\$120,000+ range depending on location and size.

2. Community & Business Controversies

- Winnipeg's YFC complex at Main & Higgins and its Edge Skatepark have been publicly criticized as taxpayer-funded proselytization and accused of discriminatory policies toward LGBTQ2S+ skaters and staff, triggering resignations and a movement to create an inclusive alternative facility.
- Gracehaven's lawsuit against Montgomery County, Ohio, highlights friction between YFC affiliates' religious staffing requirements and government nondiscrimination rules.

3. Documented Abuse Cases

- Several YFC staff (including leadership) and volunteers across different states have been charged with or convicted of sexual offenses involving minors connected with YFC programs, including online exploitation and long-term grooming.

4. Implications for Leland

- Given the scale of the network and the history of controversy in other communities, any proposal for a prominent YFC presence in Leland warrants robust due diligence on child-safeguarding controls, use of central properties, and alignment with local tourism- and neighborhood-oriented planning goals.

1. Youth for Christ – Scale and Corporate Structure

1.1 Overall Scale

Youth for Christ is not a stand-alone local ministry. Public summaries of YFC's finances indicate that the global Youth for Christ system has roughly \$151 million in aggregate annual revenue, of which about \$100 million is associated with the U.S. organization (national office plus U.S. chapters).

1.2 Headquarters Entities

Two central nonprofits sit at the top of this system.

1. **Youth for Christ USA (YFCUSA)** – U.S. national office, Englewood, Colorado
 - Approximately \$14.4 million in annual revenue and \$14.1 million in expenses.
 - Roughly 146 employees and about \$20 million in assets.
 - Identified as the parent of roughly 136 subordinate organizations (its chapters and related entities) under the IRS group exemption.
2. **Youth for Christ International Ministries (YFCI)** – global coordinating body, based in Colorado
 - Approximately \$14.1 million in annual revenue and \$13.5 million in expenses.
 - Around \$9–10 million in assets.

Taken together, these central headquarters entities alone represent roughly \$28–29 million per year in activity, before counting any local U.S. or overseas chapters.

1.3 Chapter-Level Entities (U.S.)

Third-party databases such as MinistryWatch, CauseIQ, and ProPublica list dozens of separate U.S. corporations using the Youth for Christ name, each with its own board and Form 990 filing but operating under Youth for Christ USA's group exemption. Examples include:

- **Central Ohio Youth for Christ (Columbus, OH)** – roughly \$3.8–4.2 million in annual revenue and around 80 employees.
- **Youth for Christ of Northern Indiana (Fort Wayne, IN)** – approximately \$2.4 million in annual revenue, with around 40 employees.
- **West Michigan Youth for Christ (Grand Rapids, MI)** – about \$2.1 million in annual revenue.
- **Seattle Area Youth for Christ (Seattle, WA)** – roughly \$660,000 in annual revenue.

There are many similar regional entities across the country (Southern California, New England, the Southeast, etc.). Aggregated estimates place total U.S. YFC revenue at roughly \$100 million per year.

1.4 Franchise-Style Features

Although YFC is legally structured as a network of tax-exempt religious organizations rather than a for-profit franchise, several features parallel a franchise or “formula business” model:

- **Common brand and trade dress.** Local chapters are required to operate under the Youth for Christ name, logo, and national visual identity, similar to how franchise outlets share a common brand.
- **Charter-based affiliation.** Local ministries operate under charters granted by YFC International and Youth for Christ USA, which can be granted or withdrawn—functionally comparable to franchise agreements that license the brand and operating model.
- **Centralized policies and risk management.** YFC/USA develops national policies, training, and safeguarding standards that apply across chapters, and participates in a captive insurance company that provides coverage for general liability, auto, workers’ compensation, and sexual-misconduct liability across the network.
- **Scale of operations.** With approximately 110 U.S. chapters and activity in more than 100 countries, serving more than a million young people annually, **Youth for Christ operates at a scale consistent with large multinational enterprises.**

From a land-use and community-character perspective, this means the proposed Leland operation would not be an independent church youth room. It would be one branded outlet in a large, multi-entity, multinational system with roughly nine-figure annual revenue, centralized headquarters, standardized branding, and 100+ affiliated corporations in the U.S. alone.

2. Community, Business, and Rights-Related Controversies

2.1 Winnipeg, Manitoba – Downtown YFC Complex & Edge Skatepark Crisis

Executive Summary

- **Controversy Summary:** Concentrating a large, faith-branded youth facility in a central or tourism-sensitive area has, in Winnipeg’s case, generated long-running public debate and negative coverage that directly connects YFC to questions of downtown identity, inclusiveness, and the use of public resources. In addition to long-running public debate, concerns about its policies later reached the federal level, with a Winnipeg Minister of Parliament asking the Government of Canada to review federal funding and potential human-rights implications.
- **Project design and location.** YFC Winnipeg’s downtown facility at Main & Higgins was positioned as a major revitalization project, including a skate/BMX park, gym, theater, and job-training facilities. It received city-backed loans and other public funding.
- **Political and reputational issues.** Member of Parliament Pat Martin publicly objected to the project, calling it “taxpayer-funded proselytization” and characterizing YFC as evangelical fundamentalists preying on vulnerable youth. This framed the development as a test case for whether public funds should support a strongly proselytizing ministry in a highly visible downtown location.
- **Allegations regarding LGBTQ2S+ inclusion.** Subsequent reporting and first-person accounts describe tension between local skateboarders/volunteers and YFC leadership over attempts to create explicitly queer and trans skate sessions and related materials. YFC policies and required faith statements were perceived by some as non-affirming of LGBTQ2S+ identities.
- **Operational impact.** As a result of staff and volunteer departures, The Edge has reportedly operated only a few hours per week, serving a narrow age range, with large parts of the facility underutilized. The Manitoba Skateboarding Coalition and other groups are actively campaigning for an alternative, explicitly inclusive indoor skatepark, positioning YFC’s restricted facility as a driver of unmet demand and community fragmentation rather than a broad-based downtown amenity.

Key Links

- YFC Winnipeg: <https://yfc.ca/winnipeg>
- The Edge Skatepark (YFC program): <https://theedgeskatepark.wixsite.com/theedgeskatepark>
- Winnipeg Free Press, “MP takes aim at youth centre”: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2010/02/18/mp-takes-aim-at-youth-centre>

- Winnipeg Free Press, “Bravely out, disappointingly out in the cold”:
<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/featured/2022/11/21/bravely-out-disappointingly-out-in-the-cold>
- Winnipeg Free Press, “Wheels come off for downtown skatepark”:
<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/featured/2024/03/11/wheels-come-off-for-downtown-skatepark>
- Xtra Magazine, “LGBTQ2S+ skateboarders in Winnipeg are looking to make their own skate space”:
<https://xtramagazine.com/culture/lgbtq2s-skateboarders-winnipeg-241569>
- CityNews Winnipeg, coverage of inclusive indoor skatepark campaign:
<https://winnipeg.citynews.ca/2023/01/29/manitoba-2slgbtq-skateboard-inclusive/>
- Manitoba Skateboarding Coalition, background on The Edge and need for an inclusive park:
<https://manitobaskateboarding.com/winnipeg-indoor-skatepark>
- Change.org petition, “Build an Inclusive Indoor Skateboarding Space in Winnipeg”:
Relevance for Leland

2.2 Gracehaven (Central Ohio Youth for Christ) vs. Montgomery County, Ohio

Executive Summary

- **Context.** Gracehaven is a residential and community-based program for trafficked youth, operated as a ministry of Central Ohio Youth for Christ. It previously held a contract with Montgomery County to provide services for youth.
- **Dispute.** The county incorporated standard nondiscrimination language into its contracts, including provisions related to religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Gracehaven sought to maintain employment policies requiring key staff to share its religious beliefs. When negotiations failed, the county declined to renew the contract, and Gracehaven Y4C filed suit, alleging that the county’s conditions violated its First Amendment rights.
- **Implications.** This case illustrates how YFC affiliates may prioritize religious staffing requirements even when this creates conflict with government funders and nondiscrimination expectations. For a town that values broad community access and neutrality in publicly partnered services, this is a governance-risk signal.

Key Links

- Gracehaven (ministry site): <https://gracehavenohio.org>
- Complaint in Gracehaven v. Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services (PDF):
<https://adfflegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/gracehaven-v-montgomery-county-2024-12-11-complaint.pdf>

2.3 Youth 71Five Ministries (formerly Rogue Valley Youth for Christ) vs. Oregon Youth Development Division

Executive Summary

Context. Youth 71Five Ministries in Medford, Oregon—formerly Rogue Valley Youth for Christ—is a regional Christian youth organization that received substantial state funding for its programs through the Oregon Youth Development Division (YDD).

Dispute. The crisis began after an anonymous complaint raised concerns about Youth 71Five’s practice of hiring only Christians for certain positions. Following review, the YDD cut more than \$400,000 in previously awarded grant funding, citing conflict with state nondiscrimination and grant requirements. Youth 71Five, supported by a national religious-liberty advocacy group, responded by filing a federal lawsuit arguing that the state’s conditions violated its religious-freedom and expressive-association rights.

Implications. This episode shows how YFC-lineage organizations, even when operating under new names, can become flashpoints in broader church–state and nondiscrimination debates, with immediate financial consequences for local programs. For small communities considering deep partnerships, it highlights both how confusing these rebranded substructures can be and how quickly disputes over hiring and inclusivity can escalate, polarize stakeholders, and jeopardize public funding streams.

Small-Town Exposure: Litigation, Funding Disputes, and Downtown Identity

Beyond these specific cases, commentary from local media and advocacy groups frequently frames YFC as:

- A significant recipient of public or quasi-public support (loans, grants, favorable leases) for youth facilities, especially in downtown or “gateway” locations.
- An organization whose strongly evangelical and conservative sexual-ethics stance can sit uneasily with inclusive branding and tourism-oriented positioning for central districts.

For Leland, which actively restricts large chain-style operations to preserve a specific visitor experience, the cases in Winnipeg, Montgomery County, and Medford illustrate how large, branded ministries can become focal points for litigation, funding disputes, and community polarization. In each instance, it is the small community—its public services, downtown identity, and civic cohesion—that ultimately bears the greatest risk.

3. Documented Abuse Cases Involving Youth for Christ Staff & Volunteers

Note: These examples are based on publicly reported cases where both (a) a Youth for Christ role and (b) criminal charges, convictions, or civil abuse allegations are clearly documented. They are serious but not exhaustive.

3.1 Kevin Blair Guy – Metro Maryland Youth for Christ (Maryland)

- Youth ministry director with Metro Maryland Youth for Christ in Baltimore County.
- Pleaded guilty in 2025 to sexual abuse of a minor and related charges involving multiple teen boys he met through YFC ministry; prosecutors described a pattern of grooming and abuse across multiple settings (church, car, home, and public places).

3.2 Nathan Hasty – Fort Wayne Area Youth for Christ (Indiana)

- Campus Life director with Fort Wayne Area Youth for Christ.
- Used fake female identities on Facebook to solicit nude images and sexual conversations from boys in his youth group.
- Pleaded guilty in federal court to sexual exploitation of children and was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

3.3 Adam Z. Parks – Volunteer Linked to YFC Program (Washington)

- Lunchtime supervisor and youth worker associated with a YFC-connected ministry in Tacoma.
- Charged with multiple counts of third-degree child rape relating to a 14-year-old; probable-cause documents describe sexual contact and exchange of explicit images.
- Public sources document arrest and charges; the final judicial outcome is less clearly reported.

3.4 Michael Justin Rueffert – Southern Colorado Youth for Christ (Colorado)

- Executive Director of Southern Colorado Youth for Christ in Colorado Springs.
- Charged with unlawful sexual contact involving an adult woman in a ministry context; placed on administrative leave.
- Outcome details are limited in public reporting but the case illustrates leadership-level misconduct risk.

3.5 Gordon McLean – Metro Chicago Youth for Christ (Illinois, Civil Suit)

- Long-time Youth for Christ leader in Chicago juvenile-justice ministries.

- Civil lawsuit by former participants alleges spanking and sexual abuse of teen boys under the guise of discipline and mentoring.
- The case is civil and contested but has prompted significant scrutiny of program culture.

3.6 Laurie Asplund Case – Lake Geneva Youth for Christ (Wisconsin, 1970s)

- Survivor Laurie Asplund has publicly described repeated sexual abuse by a Campus Life minister affiliated with Youth for Christ in the 1970s.
- Because of statutes of limitation, there was no criminal prosecution, but her testimony is used in some advocacy contexts as an example of historic abuse in evangelical youth work.

4. Implications for Leland and Other Tourist Communities

For a small, tourism-oriented town like Leland, Michigan, the national pattern raises several practical concerns:

1. Child Safety and Oversight

Given the documented history of abuse cases within the YFC network, any local YFC site must demonstrate robust, independently verifiable safeguards: background checks, supervision policies, clear reporting channels, and external oversight, not just assurances.

2. Fit with Downtown/Tourist Core

Experiences like Winnipeg show how a large YFC presence in a central district can become a magnet for controversy, including discrimination complaints and disputes over mission fit with a diverse urban or tourist environment.

3. Transparency and Trust

Because YFC chapters are semi-autonomous and policies can vary, residents should focus less on generic national claims and more on what the local chapter and its partners are willing to put in writing: child-protection policies, complaint and investigation procedures, and building-use plans and long-term intentions for properties.

5. Summary Findings and Recommendation

From a governance and land-use perspective, the evidence above supports treating Youth for Christ not as a small, stand-alone ministry but as a large, formula-style institution with substantial national and international infrastructure. Any consideration of YFC's proposed activities in Leland should therefore be grounded in the same level of due diligence the township would apply to a chain or franchise entering a tourism-dependent corridor. At a minimum, this would include: clear, written child-safeguarding policies and independent oversight; explicit commitments on building use, hours, and activities that are compatible with Leland's downtown and waterfront character; transparency around ownership and long-term property plans (including entities such as Apollos Properties LLC); and an assessment of whether the organization's operating model aligns with local expectations regarding inclusion, nondiscrimination, and limits on chain-style operations.

In my personal capacity as a resident of Leland Township, my conclusion is that approving this proposal would not be in the community's best interest. Youth for Christ is a large multinational organization expanding into a small-town community with a documented record of divisiveness and controversy in other jurisdictions.

YFC is already polarizing neighbors and local institutions. Allowing it to establish a permanent footprint in Leland risks further fragmenting our social fabric, diverting economic activity away from locally rooted enterprises, and undermining the long-term well-being and unique character of Leland's residents, businesses, and visitors.