

Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

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Winter 2008

Innovations in Faith Formation

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Cover Art: "Celebrating the Treasure" by Mary Southard, CSJ

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About the Artist: Mary Southard, CSJ is visual artist who works in a variety of media—paint, plaster, fiberglass, clay, cast paper, pastel—and is best known as creator of the Earth calendar which has been a favorite in homes around the world since 1980. Mary is also an experienced educator, retreat director, and a voice for Earth healing.



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From the Editor

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Welcome to the Winter 2008 issue of *Lifelong Faith*. Our focus in this issue is on "Innovations in Faith Formation."

I invited eighteen leaders in faith formation from a number of denominations to write about an innovative project, program, or initiative in faith formation with age groups (children, youth, young adults, adults), families, or multiple generations (intergenerational) that could be adopted by a church or group of churches. Many of the innovations were created by the authors, while others report on innovations with which they were involved.

You will find eighteen innovations that serve as examples of what is possible in faith formation today. Each author describes the innovation, the impact of the innovation on the target group, and its applicability to congregational faith formation.

Throughout the issue are resource reviews that compliment the articles.

I hope you will find this issue both inspiring and helpful as you find new ways to provide faith formation for all ages and generations in your church.

If you want additional copies for your staff or for a course or workshop, just contact me by phone at 203-729-2953 or by e-mail at jroberto@lifelongfaith.com

John Roberto, Editor

Contribute to our 2009 Innovation Issue!

Each year we will devote one issue of *Lifelong Faith* to reporting on innovations in faith formation. If you have created an innovative project, program, or initiative, please contact me at jroberto@lifelongfaith.com. Your innovation can inspire others to enhance and expand their faith formation efforts.

Be sure to visit LifelongFaith.com to view the new Christian Practices resources.
Go to www.lifelongfaith.com.

Lifelong Faith

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Next Issue

Spring 2008
Family and
Intergenerational Faith
Formation



Innovations with Children

Let Those Who Have Ears to Hear, Listen Practicing Silence with Young Children

Karen Marie Yust

Union Theological Seminary

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When I volunteered to be half of an alternating set of teachers working with a five and six year old church school class, I also saw an opportunity to test for myself a practice I had only witnessed before as a spectator: developing a regular practice of silence with young children. Quaker schools engage in this practice with persons of all ages, and my oldest child was lamenting the loss of weekly silent meetings for worship after moving away from such a school in the seventh grade. But like many non-Quaker parents, I wondered how such a practice might transfer to a different setting, especially given the fine line between teaching children silence and telling children to “be quiet” as a means of controlling their behavior.

Conventional wisdom claims that noisiness and activeness are basic traits of early childhood and signs of healthy development. Parents notice when children at play become quiet, as it often means they are up to mischief that they don’t want mom or dad to discover. Teachers work to “draw out” quiet children, although they also often label such children “easy” or “obedient” or “good students” because of their non-disruptive behavior. Silence among children is suspect, except when it is deemed necessary for crowd control or attention to particular tasks (e.g. schoolwork or congregational worship). We have low expectations for childhood silence, especially among boys, who have an even greater reputation for boisterousness than girls. What does it mean, then, to invite young children to cultivate silence as a spiritually useful practice for their lives?

In talking with my church school teaching partner about this question, I discovered that she felt quite anxious about implementing a practice with which she had no personal experience, so we agreed that on the weeks she taught the class, she would simply use the printed curriculum provided without any special attention to silence. On the weeks I taught, I would teach the story for the day outlined in the curriculum, but also gather the children in a

practice of silence for the last 10-15 minutes of the class session. We would evaluate the effects of this semi-regular engagement in silent prayer and contemplation midway through the year and decide whether to proceed in the same fashion or revise our approach.

The first Sunday of the church school year began with an intergenerational kick-off event, so my partner and I only had 30 minutes with the children once the festivities ended. We used the first 20 minutes to get acquainted with one another and the room. The last 10 minutes we shifted from tables to a quilt I had spread on the floor. I had drawn a circle with tape on the quilt and invited each child to sit along the outline. Children’s Bibles were also scattered around the circle—enough for all—and in the center was a large pillar candle. I encouraged the children to take a Bible and look for a picture they liked or that told a Bible story that they already knew. When each child had found a picture, I asked them to sit quietly and look at the picture. After a minute of silence, I said, “Sometimes God says something to us when we sit quietly, and sometimes God just sits with us without saying anything. As you look at your picture, listen for anything that God might want to say to you.” We continued our time of contemplation for about four more minutes. Some children gazed intently at their chosen pictures, others watched the flickering candle flame, and a few stared into space. I then said, “Would anyone like to share what God said or did while you were sitting quietly?” In soft voices, the children responded, a few with words that they felt God had said and others with their experiences of God just being quiet, too. Not one of them seemed to find our actions or my questions odd or incomprehensible. They seemed to take for granted that God was present and a potential voice in their lives.

Every time we practiced silence, we sat in a circle on the same quilt, but our ways into silence varied. I purchased modeling clay—harder than play dough but softer than potter’s clay—and invited the children to

roll and squeeze the clay while they sat quietly and listened for God's words or felt God's presence. In conversations with Quaker teachers and a child psychologist, I had learned that relaxing one's hands relaxes the entire body, which makes holding one's body and mind still easier. Working clay tenses and releases hand muscles, moving one more quickly toward full body relaxation. Most children liked the feel of the clay, but for those who did not, I placed the clay in a small baggie so they could squeeze without getting residue on their hands. We would sit quietly for up to ten minutes working our balls of clay, and then I would invite the children to share their experiences with God in the silence.

Occasionally a child would show something she or he had fashioned from the clay that God had helped make or for which God had given them the idea. More often, children would simply say that God had felt near to them or share a few words they had heard whispered in their minds. The messages they heard were sometimes words of comfort ("Mommy will feel better soon"), sometimes words of advice ("If you are nice to your brother, he will share his new toy with you") and sometimes divine exclamations ("Aren't butterflies beautiful?!" and "I love baseball, too!"). It was clear the children were experiencing God as an active participant in their world, and interpreting that participation through the lenses of their everyday anxieties and activities.

One Sunday, I set a large group of votive candles in the center of the quilt. I told the children that sometimes Christians light candles to remember people they love who have died or to share special thoughts with God. I then helped each child light a candle, saying, "This is Jackson's candle for remembering people he loves and sharing with God." I invited the children to watch their candle flame flicker and let God be with them, reminding them of loved ones or listening to their hopes and dreams. We sat quietly for another five minutes before I asked if anyone wished to share. Anna looked from her candle to me and said, "God said he is taking care of my grandma, so I shouldn't be sad. He says he loves her." The children around her nodded, as if they understood exactly what she meant. I later learned (from Anna's mother) that Anna's grandmother had died several months earlier and no one realized that Anna was still thinking about her grandma until Anna asked if the family could light a candle at home—as she'd done in church school—to remember.

Saint Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you" (I.1). What Anna, Jackson and the other young children in this group discovered through their practice of silence was space and means to rest in God. In the

midst of noisy lives filled with cartoons, electronic toys, parental admonishments to hurry, and information-packed lessons at school and afterschool, these kindergarteners and first graders settled easily and happily into a time of structured contemplation. Parents dropped by the classroom to ask us about this practice because their children were asking for silent times at home. We received one report of a child sharing silence as his "show and tell" at school. My co-teacher began ending her sessions with silence at the children's request. The children showed us that the ability to sit quietly with God and listen for God's guidance is not only within their grasp but something they desire.

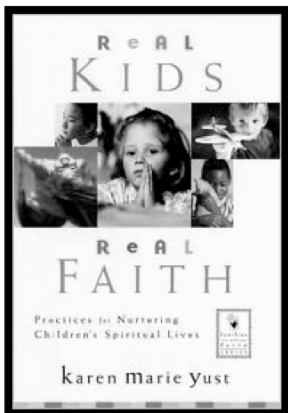
The challenge, then, is for adults unfamiliar with the practice of silence to humble themselves and learn alongside children the means and benefits of listening for God. One resource for the journey is *The Way of the Child*, a curriculum for children ages 6-11 that focuses on cultivating spiritual practices. Another is *Real Kids, Real Faith*, my book for parents trying to cultivate spiritual practices in the home. A third can be found in the session plans of the two-volume set, *Parent-Child Retreats*, which incorporate Mary Terese Donze's concept of the "heart room" within persons where children can "visualize their friend Jesus, listen to him, speak to him, and sit with him in silence" (Pike et al., 15). Local Quaker schools and communities can also provide assistance and inspiration.

Beginning a practice of silence with young children is an opportunity to begin a practice of silence for ourselves. It need not be complicated and success can be measured in increments of a minute or two. Shutting out the noisiness of life to listen for God is the Sabbath rest all people need to remain fit for work in God's realm. Children are drawn to quiet as a blessing. As Christ's disciples, may we welcome all God's children to sit at Jesus' feet and listen.

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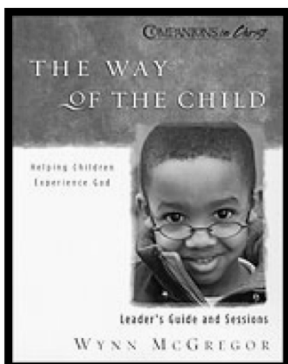
Children's Spiritual Life Resources



Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives

Karen Marie Yust (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004) [\$19.95]

Drawn from a three-year study of children's spirituality and the best in theological tradition, Karen Marie Yust provides insights and a variety of helpful tips for nurturing children's spiritual and religious formation. She challenges the prevailing notion that children are unable to grasp religious concepts and encourages parents and educators to recognize children as capable of genuine faith. Chapters include: Creating a Spiritual World for Children to Inhabit, Telling Stories that Draw Children into a Life of Faith, Helping Children Name God's Presence in their Lives, Praying with Children, Supporting Children as They Grow in Spiritual Awareness, and Acting Out Our Spirituality with Children.



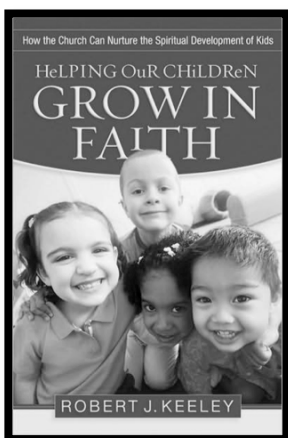
Way of the Child: Helping Children Experience God

Wynn McGregor (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2006)

The *Way of the Child* recognizes that children have an innate spirituality with a natural acceptance of mystery, an amazing capacity for awe, a vital imagination, a longing to be their unique selves, and an ability to be open to and receive God's love. The program components include:

1. **Leader's Guide** includes five brief chapters on the spiritual nature of children, theory of faith formation, and how to plan and lead the sessions; 39 experiential sessions in modules on the themes of the incarnational nature of God, parables, prayer, sacraments, meaningful passages of Scripture, Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter. Daily Exercises for the leaders prepare them to lead sessions.
2. **Family Booklet** helps churches support families, parents talk to children about spiritual matters, and families integrate spiritual awareness into their daily lives.
3. **Resource Booklet:** handouts, patterns, journal pages for reflection stations.
4. **Introduction DVD**
5. **Training DVD**
6. **Music CD**

Web Site: www.companionsinchrist.org/WOC/index.html



Helping Our Children Grow in Faith

Robert J. Keeley (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008) [\$14.99]

The Christian community has a responsibility to help its children develop a three-dimensional faith—a faith that affects their heads, their hearts, and their spirits. *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* presents six practical principles for fostering a three-dimensional faith. It shows how to integrate children into congregational worship, how to teach them the Bible but leave room for the mystery of God, how to distinguish the difference between faith development and moral development, how to tailor teaching to children's developmental levels, and how to balance age-specific programs with the full life of the church.



Innovations with Children

Doing a New Thing

Advocacy Ministries

J. Bradley Wigger
Louisville Presbyterian Theological
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And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ... On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child." (Luke 9:29; 37-38)

The Transfiguration represents a pinnacle in the ministry of Jesus. Peter, John, and James go with Jesus up a high mountain to pray and there witness several amazing events: the face of their teacher changes and his clothes become dazzling white; Elijah and Moses appear and talk with Jesus, and then the very voice of God speaks from a cloud, telling them "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

As those familiar with the text already know, the event is so powerful, so intense and glorious, that Peter wants to make three dwellings—who would not want to stay there, and forever? But biblically, mountaintop experiences are never an end in themselves. They are always preparation for something greater; in this case a difficult road ahead for the Messiah, one that requires the full support and wisdom of the prophets to walk. And though the telling of the Transfiguration ordinarily ends upon this mountain, what happens next is even more telling.

The first thing that happens when Jesus and his friends come down from the mountain, come down from this high point of prayer and glory, is that Jesus listens to the pleas of a desperate father. His boy has a demon, the father explains, one that convulses him, mauls him, makes him foam at the mouth, and continuously throws him to the ground. Jesus cast out the demon, healing the boy.

In spatial terms, the story moves from the dazzling heights of a peak in the clouds, down the mountain, to the ground itself where demonic forces throw a child. The movement is instructive for the church. For in all the ways the body of Christ can confront demons of injustice that convulse a community or nation, it may be most critical to look

low. Because those who are the least of these are so close to the ground, it is all the easier to overlook them, those who are most mauled by heartless systems that leave fathers desperate and mothers pleading for help.

This is all the more true in a nation that craves power and glory. Seeing the vulnerable is not easy. In a culture dazzled by glamour and celebrity, looking low is nearly impossible. As the great preacher and non-violent civil rights activist, Otis Moss Jr. puts it, "We live in a society that worships youthfulness, but despises children." So, churches that seek to direct caring attention to the shadows and valleys that hide hurting children will find the road difficult, and that they cannot travel alone.

Child Advocacy

In 1967 a young lawyer testified before a Senate subcommittee on behalf of Mississippi families. "They're starving," Marian Wright simply but firmly spoke. "What do you mean?" she was asked. "They are hungry, they need to eat." Three days later she took subcommittee members Joseph Clark and Robert Kennedy to the homes of some of the nation's poorest families, living in the Mississippi delta. In her words,

There was a baby sitting on the mud floor. The baby was filthy, and it had a swollen, bloated belly, and Bobby sat there trying to get that baby to respond, and he couldn't. It was one of the most moving things I've ever seen. You could see him get a sense of rage. He couldn't stand it. (Tomkins, 64)

This was only the beginning of Marian Wright Edelman's national advocacy on behalf of families and children and it paved the way for the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), a legacy of the Poor People's Campaign of the civil rights movement. CDF is nonpartisan and has now been going strong for over 35 years, advocating for children—particularly poor and minority children, as well as those with

disabilities—in the United States. The print and web-based materials of CDF provide a wealth of statistics, policy initiatives, newsletters, legislative scorecards, videos, and publications to help educate and motivate this movement. But the basic facts are still staggering: over 13 million young people in this country live in poverty, nearly half of these in extreme poverty—living on less than \$10,500 annual income for a family of four (www.childrensdefense.org).

In addition to efforts aimed at ensuring that all children have enough to eat and a safe place to live, CDF supports initiatives to promote quality early childhood education, (e.g., through Head Start), health care (nearly 9 million children do not have health care coverage), improved child welfare strategies (e.g., parent training and abuse prevention programs), and quality summer programs (through a new generation of Freedom Schools). These programs and policy initiatives are part of the general work of CDF, concentrated in Washington, D.C., and welcome the support of all concerned citizens and communities.

Child Advocacy Ministry

Just as the civil rights movement found its legs through religious communities, especially through historically Black churches and denominations, CDF has also found that religious communities of all colors and backgrounds are crucial to building what Edelman calls a *children's movement*. While the political work is concentrated in the nation's capitol; the educational and spiritual work of CDF is being cultivated on a farm just outside of Knoxville, Tennessee at the former home and farm of *Roots* author, Alex Haley, in Clinton Tennessee. Here the children's movement has been seeded and is growing, rooted in the soil of faith and the kind of vision that aims high but looks low, down to the ground. In Edelman's words, "Every movement needs a school for training and skills and Haley Farm is our movement-building home." (Edelman, "About CDF")

The *Religious Action Program* of CDF has three main components and through them provides opportunities for individual people of faith as well as congregations and religious leaders to get involved. They are: The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry, The Joshua and Deborah Generation Program, and The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths.

- 1) *The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute* is held every year at the Haley Farm during the third week of July. It is a remarkable gathering of some of the greatest preachers, teachers, and child advocates you will find

anywhere. I have been taking groups of theological seminary students to the Farm for over a decade now where we have heard from the likes of civil rights warriors such as William Sloane Coffin, Fred Shuttlesworth, Dorothy Cotton, Walter Burghardt, Otis Moss Jr., and Eileen Lindner, as well as from another wave of faithful leaders such as Otis Moss III, Cornel West, Prathia Hall, and Geoffrey Canada. Workshops focused upon breaking up the "cradle to prison pipeline" and "reaching the hip-hop generation" and "how to start a Freedom School" or "advocating for children through your congregation" combine the convictions of prophetic vision with the nitty-gritty details of programs and policies that help children thrive. Most of all, the Institute is an opportunity to link the work of your own hands, congregation, parish, neighborhood, or community with the larger national efforts of public-policy making and movements.

- 2) *The Joshua and Deborah Generation Program* is a special track within the *Proctor Institute* designed particularly for young adults (18-25). These young adults participate in most of the plenary events and workshops of *Proctor*, but in addition, participate in forums and discussions particularly aimed at the next generation of community and church leaders and advocates. They all return to their own communities, then, with the commitment of participating in at least one child advocacy activity, and they are provided the support and resources to do so. Importantly, scholarship aid is available so that committed young adults can participate in the program regardless of limited financial resources.
- 3) The third area of work particularly relevant to faith communities is the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths*. It is an annual multi-faith event—typically held on the third weekend of October—that, through worship, educational programming and other congregational activities, "provides the opportunity for communities of faith to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect, and advocate for all children" (www.childrensdefense.org). Religious communities are encouraged to involve more intentionally their own children in its worship and educational life, but also to educate themselves about the needs and circumstances of not only their own children,

but all children. The hope is that these weekends are only a beginning, “a vital step towards saving our children and launching a new campaign to end child poverty in America now” (Edelman, 2008B). To this end, every year CDF provides a manual full of resources such as prayers and discussion materials, liturgies and religious education lessons, and leadership helps. The manual can be ordered from the CDF website (www.childrensdefense.org), but even better, it can be downloaded for free and freely copied and distributed. It is a resource to share.

A New Thing

In her brand new book, *The Sea is so Wide and my Boat is so Small*, Marian Wright Edelman writes an open letter to faith leaders. In it, she describes the Proctor Institute and a song sung there, *A New Thing*. Inspired by the song, Edelman reminds us all:

Each day, each moment we have the opportunity to do the new thing to which God calls us as

(until) we transform our places of worship, communities, nation, world—and especially ourselves—to extend the love, respect, compassion, and justice that all our children need and deserve everywhere. (Edelman 2008A, 48)

May this vision of glory help us to see low.

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Did You Know?

More than thirteen million children in America live in poverty. Poverty casts long shadows throughout their lives in many different areas—among them health, nutrition, early development and education. Multiple barriers associated with poverty build upon one another and unjustly deprive children of the opportunity to reach their full potential. Poverty affects the entire nation through its drag on the economy, loss of productivity and earnings, greater crime and public health demands. However, child poverty is not inevitable. Many factors and programs can reduce a child’s chances of growing up poor or reduce poverty’s impact on them.

- A total of 13.3 million children, or 1 in 6 of all children in America, live in poverty. Of these children, almost half—5.8 million—live in extreme poverty.
- Child poverty has increased since 2000. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of poor children increased by 1.7 million.
- Most poor children have working parents. Seven out of 10 poor children are in working families where someone works full- or part-time for at least part of the year.
- Children of color suffer disproportionately from poverty. Black and Latino children are more likely to be poor than White children. In fact, approximately 1 in 3 Black children and more than 1 in 4 Latino children are poor, compared to 1 in 10 White children.
- Children with a parent holding a high-school diploma are nearly half as likely to be poor (25%) as children whose parents have not completed high school (48%), while slightly over 3 percent of children with either parent holding a bachelor, professional, or graduate degree are poor.
- Children who live in single-parent families are at higher risk of poverty. A child living with only his or her mother is five times as likely to be poor as one living with both parents, and a child living with his or her father is two and a half times as likely to be poor as one living with both parents.
- Poverty has become more suburban. A study of the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas shows that in 1999 the number of poor living in cities nearly equaled those living in their suburbs, but by 2005 the number of poor living in suburbs became larger than those living in cities by at least 1 million.

“Child Poverty in America.” August 26, 2008. Children’s Defense Fund Report. (www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/Child_Poverty_in_America__August_2008_.pdf?docID=8341)



Innovations with Youth

Learning to Question

Critical Questioning as Faith Formation

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Every summer I look forward to spending three weeks in community with a group of high school youth. In the midst of tying up odds and ends, confirming travel arrangements, reassuring parents and packing everything but my office desk; I smile when I see youth embraced in hugs and kisses by family and friends sending them off for a summer of theological exploration. As I get on the bus with my group of curious and lively youth one thing remains constant. They always have questions. “Where are we going?” “What kind of food will we eat?” “What are we really going to be doing for three weeks?” “Will my cell phone work out here?” Funny thing about questions, not all of them require an immediate answer.

However when it comes to what we think we know or believe about God, how often do we raise those critical questions of faith that don’t have easy answers? How often do we invite young people to struggle and be present with their critical questions of faith? Have you ever observed a youth group and watched teenagers squirm and listen to the biblical narratives only to blurt out in the middle of a well-prepared lesson, “But why did God do that?” Immediately all eyes become fixated on the teacher, who has now turned into a waterfall of knowledge preparing to saturate the sponges that sit in front of her, eagerly waiting to soak it all up. Taken a bit off guard, the teacher could offer an answer she thinks will satisfy and quickly move on with her lesson. Yet more questions will arise. How do we as people of faith nurture and support the theological inquires of young people in a way that challenges them to not only raise these questions but to live them as well?

Youth are constantly questioning everything. They question authority from adults, the status quo of societal norms and the traditions of the church. They are seeking deeper meaning through relationships that are authentic and consistent. They are seeking community through sacred spaces where they can feel safe and loved. In these communities and relationships they are looking for God in their

ordinary everyday living and in the extraordinary “aha” moments.

They want to know how God is present and near to them yet also active in the world. The rich ruminations of youth about their faith, beliefs and theological discontent challenge us to create hospitable spaces for this type of faith formation.

In the Perkins Youth School of Theology our ministry with young people works from the premise that every young person is a theologian. Young people have an astute sensitivity to the Divine, even if they are unaware of their own capacity for engaging in theological inquiry. We invite youth to come with their questions of faith as they nurture a spiritual discipline of faithful witness in word, reflection and action. Youth may not always have the ecclesial language for talking about God, but they do have their own theological narratives. They encounter God in their daily struggles and through their acts of service. They encounter God as they journal, dance, write poetry, listen to music, and develop an action plan to work on behalf of just causes. This is their language of witness, their embedded theology which comes from their daily encounters with God in formal and informal encounters (Stone and Duke). When youth are called to reflect on how, where and when they experience God, it opens them up to discover and interpret the meaning of faith in their lives.

Critical questioning breaks up this fallow ground so that the seeds of these encounters can germinate and help them dig deeper into their own theology. It is not only a process of learning how to pose the questions but learning to seek the God of their questions. Paulo Freire offers, “The point of the questions is not to turn the question into an intellectual game, but to experience the force of the question, experience the challenge it offers, experience curiosity and demonstrate it to the students” (Freire and Faundez 37). If young people are to be transformed by their faith, they need to be in congregations that challenge them to not only raise questions but to probe beneath them, sit with them, note what feelings and thoughts arise from them and

offer them up to God. Youth need to renegotiate the questions, rephrase the questions, and reflect on how the questions encounter the Christian story. Critical theological questioning involves what Freire would call discovering the living, powerful, dynamic relation between word and action and reflection.

Youth bearing questions is not always a comforting image for adults. It is not the fact that youth have theological questions, but oftentimes adults don't feel equipped to give them appropriate answers. Most times the questions help young people reinforce their deepest faith convictions and develop a richer appreciation for their faith traditions. At other times, the questions may challenge their images of or language about God or the church which causes them to seek more affirming ways of relating to their faith. The objective is to bring the young person to a responsiveness of an active faith; one that is not stagnant but liberating, where youth can flourish and grow. It is in these teachable moments that we should serve as loving theological dialogue partners on this journey with youth.

Learning to question is not a practice that should be done in a vacuum. Christian practices are a way of exploring the meaning of the Christian faith. They are practices of communal and personal action that draw us closer to God and one another. As youth explore and examine the tensions and ambiguities of their faith, they need mentors and spiritual companions who are ready to listen, love, and learn with them on their journey. Cultivating relationships with loving, caring adults is one way to help young people nurture their own capacity for raising critical theological questions. Mentors render guidance at a time of critical thought development and formation (Parks). When young people engage in Christian practices of Bible study or service and reflect critically with a mentor or spiritual companion about the questions that surfaced while experiencing these practices; it helps to develop their identity and discover their deep passions. This search for deeper meaning shapes both the seeker and companion and nurtures the whole the congregation.

I think back to Darnell, a young man I watched struggle with his own theological questions. He was deeply religious and had a very keen sense of how the Bible applied to his life. The summer we spent in community, I watched him study in class, participate in worship, serve in community projects and talk with his peers. At the end of the day he would come away from each experience with some interesting questions. He would share with me what was in his heart, and I would listen with mine and offer words of affirmation for his process, but also challenge him to reflect critically on his questions and develop spiritual practices that would help him to process

what he was experiencing. On one occasion I asked him what would it look like for him to "live out" what he thought the questions were calling him to do and be at that moment. When Darnell completed the program that summer, he returned home a different person, one who had explored a new path with God.

Here are several practical ways that churches can walk alongside youth engaged in critical questioning.

- Serve as mentors and spiritual companions for youth.
- Encourage youth to engage in or create Christian practices that will deepen their understanding of God's presence in their lives.
- Encourage youth to journal their questions or write a letter to God in the form of questions. Create a ritual and a sacred space or box where the letters can be placed and then leave them there for a couple of days. Later, have the youth come back to reflect and re-engage on what was learned when they stepped back from their questions.
- Design contemplative retreats for youth where they can experience the Christian practices in community and engage in exercises of critical thinking and theological reflection with adults.
- Get youth involved in service work and afterwards convene small groups with lay leaders to reflect on pressing questions or thoughts that surfaced in the midst of or as a result of the service.

There will always be "big questions" of meaning, purpose and faith that young people will raise on their faith journeys (Parks). Learning to question is a lifelong process. It will require courage to trust the process that may not lead you to an immediate answer but rather into "living the questions." Although he's in college now, Darnell continues to seek me out as a mentor. When I asked how that summer experience shaped him he said, "I learned there's nothing wrong with asking why. As a believer wrestling with Scripture only strengthened me in my faith. This further sparked my interest in theological studies. In the program I was stretched in my thinking, and I am grateful for that. I learned to put my faith into action; through service to others I entered a new dimension in my faith. When I learned to question, it stimulated me to live out my faith." How will your congregation help youth live out their questions of faith? I'm glad we offered a space where Darnell could trust the process of raising the questions. And with grace and patience, I hope he continues to do it one day at a time.

(For Works Cited see page 14)



Innovations with Youth

Worship and the Formation of Christian Identity in Youth

Fred P. Edie

Duke University Divinity School

The Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation (DYA), a deliberately “alternative” model for youth ministry, invites approximately 50 high school students and thirty adults into a two week residential community on Duke’s campus each summer. DYA features several innovations in youth ministry practice including: serious theological study and reflection with the Divinity School faculty; sustained conversation between youth and mature Christian adults; regular engagement with the poor, sick, and imprisoned in the community; and even practices of “embodied” theology by way of participation with theologically trained artists in our Arts Village. Yet the most distinctive innovation of the Youth Academy is its attention to immersing youth in the depth and breadth of the Christian worship tradition as a primary means to forming them in Christian Identity.

The rationale for immersing youth in Christian worship is as follows: If the fundamental gift and call to Christ’s Body in the world is the love of God and the love of neighbor, then worship will ever be the primary and principal practice of Christian life. Theologically speaking, the church’s faith that the triune God creates, redeems, and sustains all that exists always prompts its grace-engendered responses of praise and gratitude—of worship. In and through this worshipful communion with God Christians learn to draw upon the Spirit’s gifts and power for loving ourselves and our neighbors. Thus, worship is always at the heart of the church’s mission and ministry—including its youth ministry.

In theory, such a claim may seem underwhelming. Nobody—save the Grinch—thinks kids shouldn’t worship. But in practice, youth are often marginalized from a community’s liturgical life. They are confined to the back row of the balcony; passive spectators to the liturgy. Or worse, they are relegated to the trailer at the edge of the church parking lot and forced to dream up their own worship, the content of which almost inevitably

neglects the grace-filled ritual symbols of the church—her baptismal waters, Eucharistic feast, biblical Story of God’s Salvation, and the embracing rhythms of her patterning of time. Worst of all may be the annual Youth Service, where teens parade around in the sanctuary long enough to reassure the congregation that “our young people are terrific” before they are quickly herded back to obscurity.

This critique is about more than the injustice of youth’s marginalization from congregational worship, however. Such marginalization also deprives the young of essential practical and theological resources for discerning their unfolding vocations for God and world. In other words, to miss out on the best practices of Christian worship is also to lose the possibility of deep formation into Christian identity. Put positively, the regular and purposeful practice of Christian ritual symbols in worship may form youth capable of interpreting and living their lives consistent with the Gospel.

A Worship-Centered Formational Ecology

Given this diagnosis and prescription, the Youth Academy employs a formational ecology grounded in worship that is designed to remediate youth’s liturgical ignorance, empower their liturgical participation and leadership, and foster their vocational imaginations such that the liturgy of their worshipping illumines the liturgy of their living beyond the sanctuary walls. I employ the language of “formational ecology” purposefully. DYA employs multiple interrelated and interdependent practices that together constitute what we hope is a vibrant formational ecosystem. In the paragraphs below I briefly describe the members of this ecology; (1) robust daily corporate worship; (2) deliberate teaching on the theology of worship and the theological significance of its ritual symbols (book, bath, table, time); (3) opportunities for youth and

adults together to practice planning and leading corporate worship; (4) deliberate juxtaposition of corporate worship with other Christian practices (serving with the poor, just food distribution, hospitality to strangers, and more); (5) sustained and repeated occasions for reflection between students and adult mentors on the emerging significance of Christian worship to their theological self-understandings and to living out faithful Christian life.

1) Robust Corporate Worship

At DYA, the community gathers daily for worship, fourteen times over two weeks. The gifts of book, bath, table, and time are ritualized artfully and expectantly. A “lectionary” is employed that seeks over time to tell the full biblical Story of God’s Salvation from creation to Christ to God’s Coming Reign. This lectionary is also keyed to daily theological themes (creation, covenant, Christ, church, and so on). Diverse preachers and presiders bring their various cultural and stylistic interpretations to the basic pattern of Word and Table. Sometimes worship “feels” contemporary, sometimes high church Anglican, sometimes African American call and response, but all styles partake of the basic pattern. Worship music also covers a wide spectrum from old to new, North American to World, and it evokes a similarly broad affective range from ecstasies of praise to the pathos of lamentation.

2) Teaching on the Theology of Worship

DYA devotes considerable time and energy to sharing the theology of Christian worship with youth. One session considers the basic biblical pattern for Christian worship: Gathering; Proclaiming and Responding to God’s Word; Thanksgiving and Holy Communion; and Sending Forth. Additional sessions consider baptism, Eucharist, and the church’s worshipful patterning of time. Each session seeks to deepen students’ capacities to imaginatively “play” with ritual symbols, i.e., to explore the multivalent meanings already resident within such naturally occurring symbols as water, bread, cup, and temporal rhythms; to discover how the fashioners of the biblical story and church tradition were inspired to make theological meaning out of these symbols; and to notice how ritual symbolic practices in worship intersect with daily life.

3) Planning and Leading Worship

As they are being schooled in the theology of worship, so are youth at DYA invited into the practices of worship leadership. Small teams of youth and adults take responsibility for worship on a given night. The process begins with exegesis of the biblical texts assigned by the lectionary and in light of the day’s theological theme (Christ’s passion, for example). From this point the group must make multiple decisions—how to proclaim the texts, what ideas seem central to preaching on these texts at this time and place, what responses are possible, what music best suits the service, what prayers are germane, what if any adornment of the worship space may contribute to worship, how the Eucharist both shapes and is shaped by the texts and theme, and so on. Admittedly this is a complex assignment. It is asking youth to subordinate worship preferences based in habit and personal taste to worship generated out of theological reflection and communal negotiation.

Worship planned must then be enacted. Worship teams practice speaking, singing, acting out biblical texts, processions, and more, then lead community worship.¹ In eight years, I have found these services unfailingly doxological and theologically responsible. Though small performance glitches are part of the package, these services always engage the entire community precisely because they are born out of the faithfulness and gifts of that community. Worship becomes, as it should be, the peoples’ work.

4) Juxtaposing Christian Worship with other Ministry Practices

Through careful planning DYA strives to place its worshipping life in relationship to its life beyond the sanctuary. In this way, swimming with disabled children at a community pool may become an expression of baptismal servanthood; agricultural gleaning on behalf of the food insecure a Eucharistic ministry; or conversation with the elderly a testimony to God’s gift of time. The intent of these juxtapositions is to demythologize worship. Instead of an arcane and esoteric practice disconnected from faithful life, students are invited to see how worship is, at its best, organic to and generative of that life.

5) Student Reflection

Though a formationally rich environment is crucial, it is also essential to invite students to reflect upon their experiences in it. At DYA adult mentors are trained to help students connect the dots between the interdependent pieces of this ecology. They also ask

what impact the liturgical and extra-liturgical pieces of the ecology have upon students' growing sense of who and what Christians are called to be and do.

DYA's Impact

Students profess deepened appreciation for and understanding of corporate worship. They often comment on the transformational impact of assuming agency for worship or related ministry. Their pastors report that many return home with a desire to get where the action is, liturgically speaking. They volunteer as acolytes, as lay readers, and as lay Eucharistic ministers. They form liturgical dance troupes for the children of the congregation. They push the congregation to share its Water of Life and Bread of Heaven with the world. Longer term trends suggest that approximately 15%-20% of DYA graduates enroll in seminary after college with many others taking up lay ministries.

DYA and Congregational Youth Ministries

DYA was birthed in support of local congregations. Its "curriculum" is worship, the central event of congregational life. It seeks to provide youth greater knowledge and practical agency for faithful worship in their communities, and, in the process, to afford them a better hope for and practice of faithful Christian life.

Since worship belongs to local faith communities, creating a formational ecology rooted in worship is readily within their grasp. The pieces of the ecology outlined above are easily adaptable to local communities. With commitment and patience congregations may yet invite youth to their worshipful center and, in the process, empower them for service to God's reign.

End Notes

¹ Readers should note that in our case preaching and presiding at table are practices reserved for ordained clergy. However, students contribute sermon ideas and sometimes take speaking roles in support of the preaching. In addition, they may assist at the table.

Resources

Edie, F. *Book, Bath, Table and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007.

Includes full descriptions of the five members of the formational ecology outlined above.

Duke Youth Academy Web Site

www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/youth

Includes daily blogs from summer academies, a link to a video documentary report produced by *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, and downloadable applications for students and adult staff members.

Continued from "Learning to Question" by Tonya Y. Burton

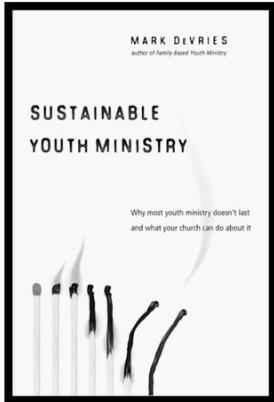
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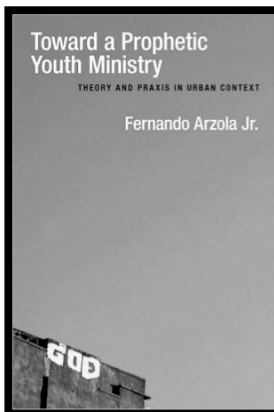
Youth Ministry Resources



Sustainable Youth Ministry

Mark DeVries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008) [\$16]

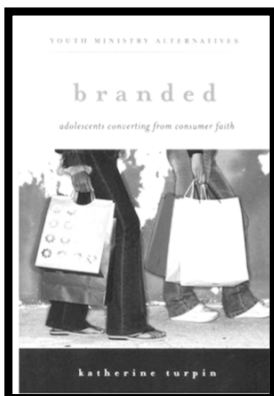
Based on his own experience as a youth pastor and his hands-on consulting work with scores of churches, Mark DeVries pinpoints the problems that cause division and burnout in youth pastors and youth ministers. He provides the practical tools and strategies needed to lay a strong foundation for a church's youth ministry, one that isn't built solely on a person or a program. The book explores: 1) understanding why most churches stay chronically stuck in very predictable (and solvable) problems in their youth ministries, 2) moving toward a systemic approach to youth ministry by tending first to the climate and structures undergirding the ministry, 3) helping senior pastors and search committees avoid the common pitfalls made in hiring youth staff, 4) equipping youth pastors to build strong volunteer teams and navigate the turbulent waters of church politics, and 5) giving youth pastors creative tools for lasting in youth ministry for the long haul.



Toward Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in Urban Context

Fernando Arzola Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) [\$18]

Most of the resources and program models in youth ministry are conceived, tested and produced exclusively in the suburbs, and bring little to bear on the realities of urban youth culture. Fernando Arzola notes that as a consequence, youth ministries in large cities have tended to settle onto one of three paths: 1) a traditional paradigm that jealously guards the spiritual formation of its young people, 2) a liberal paradigm that concentrates exclusively on personal growth, and 3) an activist paradigm that galvanizes youth around the social concerns surrounding them. Fernando proposes a fourth way, a *prophetic paradigm* that integrates the three and cultivates young people who are spiritually rooted, emotionally mature and responsive to the needs of their community. In this pace-setting book he draws on various disciplines—from biology to sociology, from psychology to theology—to guide urban youth workers into an effective and transformational ministry to youth.

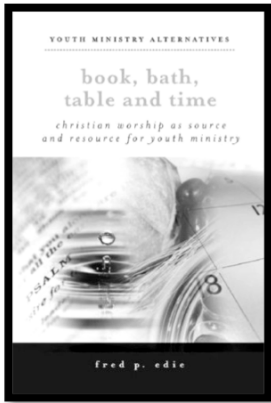


Branded: Adolescents Converting from Consumer Faith

(Youth Ministry Alternatives)

Katherine Turpin (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006) [\$24]

Branded addresses and examines three key elements in youth ministry: 1) the distortion of adolescent vocation in a consumer-focused culture; 2) the dream that adolescents would discover the freedom to live into a vocational path not dominated by consumer culture; and 3) an educational process of enlivening agency and imagination that would allow for such freedom of vocational development. The book is organized into three parts: 1) adolescents and consumer culture, 2) exploring the process and practices of ongoing conversion, and 3) nurturing contexts for adolescent ongoing conversion.

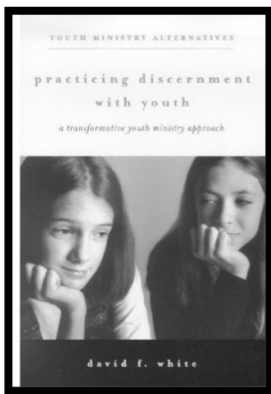


Book, Bath, Table and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry

(Youth Ministry Alternatives)

Fred P. Edie (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007) [\$24]

Book, Bath, Table, and Time focuses on how to practice the liturgical holy things of the ordo—the ancient church’s life ‘ordered’ around its liturgical holy things—Bath (Baptism), Book (Scripture), Table (Eucharist), and Calendar (Prayerful Patterning of Time)—in order to provide the church with a faithful ecology of life that is capable of forming Christian youth who experience God’s presence, identify God rightly, and take up their baptismal vocations before God and for the world. Edie offers practical ideas that ground youth ministry in a playfully orthodox ecclesiology which holds liturgy and worship at its center, yet takes into account and is sensitive to the characteristics of the younger generation so as to successfully engage them.

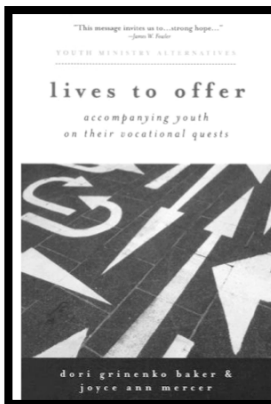


Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach

(Youth Ministry Alternatives)

David F. White (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005) [\$24]

David White calls congregations to engage their own young people in practices of discernment that involve the gifts and problems of their own context, bringing their lives more fully into partnership with God’s work in their particular place. In Part One, he presents discernment as an approach to youth ministry. In Part Two, he describes how to practice discernment in a local setting. White models how to do this through historic discernment practices of Christian communities such as Ignatian contemplative practices, Quaker clearness counsels, consensus decision making, and silence. He concludes with a chapter of how to appropriate discernment for ministry with youth.



Lives to Offer: Accompanying Youth on their Vocational Quests

(Youth Ministry Alternatives)

Dori Grinenko Baker and Joyce Ann Mercer (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007) [\$24]

Most youth ministry programs seem to arise from consumerist, program-driven views of ministry. *Lives to Offer* presents a different vision: youth ministry as a companioned walk with young people in search of vocation in its public and private dimensions. The book offers adolescent stories of vocation, gleaned from research encounters with youthful collaborators. Chapters include: Finding Lives of Meaning; Walking Alongside; Nature as Teacher; Holy Listening; Stories Worth Living; Like Job’s Daughters: Parents, Vocation, and Adolescent Girls; Isaac’s Long Walk: Keeping Faith with Guys on the Path to Wholeness; Whose Calling?: The Spirit of God and the Calling of Youth. The book concludes with a conversation on youth and vocation with Dr. James Fowler of Emory University.



Innovations with Youth

Service that Transforms Youth, Congregation, and Community

Sean Lansing
Center for Ministry Development

St. Stephen the Martyr Catholic Parish in Renton, Washington is an active parish located 20 miles outside of Seattle. The parish has a long tradition of dynamic youth ministry. One of the pillars of this tradition is the summer mission trip the youth make to Yakima through the Young Neighbors in Action program. For over ten years, St. Stephen's has sent young people to Yakima to spend a week of their summer serving people struggling in poverty. Listening to the stories of the adults and youth who experience this summer mission trip, one cannot help but be inspired by the way this experience draws their young people to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. What is even more inspiring is how this yearly mission trip has transformed the whole parish.

Building a Tradition

Every year, St. Stephen's parish brings over fifty youth and adult participants on summer mission trips. Over the years it has become a part of what the parish youth do in the summer. Little brothers and sisters look forward to their opportunity to serve during the summer just like their older siblings did. The parish community looks forward to their annual spaghetti dinners and pancake breakfasts which not only serve as fundraisers, but as parish community events.

This tradition started over ten years ago with the idea of giving youth in the parish an opportunity to serve the poor and learn about their Catholic faith. Youth ministry leaders chose the program Young Neighbors in Action, a Catholic week-long service learning experience, and decided to participate in the Yakima, Washington, location. It was only three hours away and provided an experience that focused on learning Catholic social teaching while serving the poor. Bill Swedberg, the youth minister, says they chose the Young Neighbors in Action (YNIA) program because it pushes participants to think

beyond the six-day experience and actually write an action plan to implement their insights and experience back home. He also noted that the evening program helps process the experience they are having and really helps make the connection to their faith.

Choosing the right experience is just one of the factors for their success. Good preparation helps to make the experience of the week more profound and more transformational. Their preparation consists of teaching the values of faith that motivate the service that they do, creating a sense of community among those who are going on the mission experience, and creating a sense of identity that informs how they approach service. This identity is shaped by the values of faith and a commitment to acting as ambassadors of their parish community.

Bill sums up the goals of the preparation experience this way: "We prepare the kids to encounter Christ, but not necessarily in the way that they expect to encounter Christ." The leaders challenge the young people to be prepared to share themselves with the people they will be called to serve. In other words, participants are called to see and affirm the dignity of each and every person whom they encounter on their mission trip experience.

Expanding the Tradition

About five years ago something happened that changed this mission experience from a youth program to a whole parish event. It started when Debbie, the social outreach coordinator of the parish, volunteered to be an adult participant on one of the annual YNIA trips. Their service site led them to a family home on the Yakama Reservation. Debbie noticed that while their task that week was to repaint a house, the family had many more needs. Debbie helped to create an action plan that included engaging the whole parish in a strategy to meet some of these additional needs. When they returned home

from that trip, the youth and adults held a furniture drive for the family. The parish responded generously and they went back months later with furniture and volunteers to help response to the other needs the family had.

That was the beginning of what would become an intergenerational parish service event that is anchored in the youth mission experience in the summer. Here is how it works. Youth and adult volunteers experience Young Neighbors in Action and spend a week in Yakima serving a family in need. The youth come back to the parish with an action plan that describes the ongoing need that the family is experiencing. The whole parish gets involved by raising money and supplies to fulfill those needs. The parish plans a service day-trip back to Yakima with parish members to help finish up projects and deliver supplies to help the family. This follow-up trip involves seniors, empty nesters, families with children, and even some of the teens who served in the summer. What started as a youth mission trip has become a whole parish project.

A Parish Transformed

Bill Swedberg notes that this tradition of mission has changed the parish in many ways, some of the most significant include the following:

- The parish is inspired by the youth and has come to really value, respect, and celebrate the gifts of the young people of the parish.
- Intergenerational service is the regular way that the parish serves.
- Adults have become eager to do mission trips themselves so the parish has started to offer adult mission trips as well.
- When the parish does service, whether it is youth, adult, or intergenerational, the focus is not only on meeting the immediate needs of the people they are serving, but also on getting to know them, sharing stories, praying together and connecting with each other as brothers and sisters.
- Individuals who are engaged in mission experience solidarity with those whom they serve.

Bill says very succinctly that this experience helps the parish look beyond the parish walls and into the community.

Service That Is Transformational

St. Stephen the Martyr Parish experienced doing service with youth as a transformational experience for the whole parish and it did not happen by accident.

First, they did **intentional justice education**. They chose Young Neighbors in Action, a program that not only engages youth in service, but uses a pedagogy for justice education called the pastoral circle.¹ This is a process that not only engages participants in the gospel values that compel one towards service, but helps participants to see the broader social issues, probe for causes and consequences, and work for the transformation of society. Good justice education seeks to transform doers of service into people of justice.

Second, they **prepared well for the experience**. Their preparation for the summer event started the previous fall and the preparation was holistic. Participants prepared spiritually by praying together and examining the attitudes and behaviors that shape the way that they serve. Their financial preparation (fundraising) reflects the values that they are living out in the service project. A sense of community and the responsibility that being a member brings is of high value to St. Stephen's and so their community-oriented fundraising exemplifies that.

Third, they **engaged the whole parish**. What started out as a youth event became a whole parish event because they asked the question, "What resources does our parish community have that can help us do more?" Asking the question led to what has become a whole parish tradition of service and learning that is anchored by the mission activity of their youth.

Involving the whole parish, however, is more than a question about resources. The follow-up day of service is an intergenerational service event that brings community members from all stages of life together to serve.

Finally, **the parish communicated and celebrated the vision**. This vision of mission and service is not a secret in the parish. From liturgical celebrations to parish community events to bulletins and newsletters, community members not only know the "what" and "how" of service, but why the service is done. They even have blogs where parishioners engaged in service trips share their thoughts and experiences for the whole parish.

Service that transforms helps those who do service not only see need and respond to it; it invites them to be in real relationship with those who are experiencing need. It is entering into these relationships, letting them affect the people who are serving, and then working to end the need of our brother and sister. This is where service transforms into justice. It is the challenge of the Gospel.

End Notes

¹ For more information on the pastoral circle process see recommended resource list.

Recommended Resources

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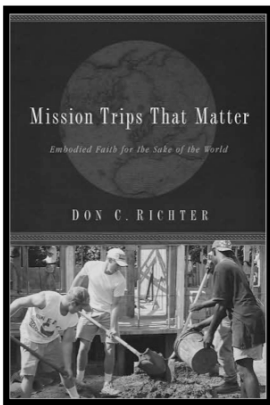
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Young Neighbors in Action Web Site
www.youngneighbors.org

Resources for Service and Mission Trips

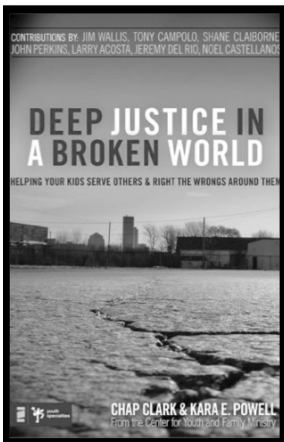


Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World

Don Richter

(Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2008. \$15)

Explore Christian practices for pondering the body as your group prepares for, engages in, and interprets mission trips and outreach projects. Life in the body is at the heart of Christian faith. What wisdom might the Spirit whisper as mission team members get immunization shots, pack bags, fill water bottles, lace up walking shoes, strap on cameras, and pull out maps for the journey? Focusing on faith practices can shift mission trips from being episodic and event-focused to be woven into the larger fabric of a way of life, weaving human activities into God's redemptive activity for the sake of the world.



Deep Justice in a Broken World: Helping Your Kids Serve Others and Right the Wrongs around Them

Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007. \$18.99)

It probably doesn't take a long list of statistics to convince you that our world is broken. Mission trips, service projects, and supporting children through relief organizations are just a few of the ways that many youth workers engage their students in serving the least, the last, and the lost. As good and helpful as these things may be on the surface, that's where they remain—at the surface. The problems run far deeper than an occasional paint job or fundraising project can solve. Kara Powell and Chap Clark provide you with research and insights that will help you go beyond simply trying to motivate youth to serve those in need, and invite them to wrestle with why those people are in need in the first place. You'll hear from well-known social justice leaders and youth workers who are making a difference in urban, suburban, and small town settings. There are also online resources to take you even deeper into the journey.

Fuller Youth Institute Web Site for Justice Resources:
<http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/deep-justice>



Innovations with Youth

Feet to Faith

Responding to Poverty

Marti Burger
Youth and Young Adult Ministries
Evangelical Covenant Church

One hundred and forty young people attended the first-ever Feet to Faith gathering in the North Pacific Conference and gained a better understanding of how they can respond to poverty and other hardships faced by their neighbors and those around the world.

The Story

The 140 youth participated in activities across Seattle that pushed them out of their comfort zones, as well as listened to speakers. Planners hoped the teens “would begin to ponder what God is calling them to do as they gain a holistic view of Matthew 25:14-46,” says Carolyn Potorek, one of the chief organizers and pastor to high school and college students at Trinity Covenant Church in Salem, Oregon.

The event was held August 6-11, 2008 at Seattle University. Each day was devoted to a different facet of compassion and justice:

1. *International Day:* Youth walked one kilometer carrying five-gallon water jugs on their backs. The distance is only one-fifth of what many in the world must walk each morning to retrieve water. Participants also wrote letters to their state senators encouraging them to increase spending for humanitarian aid.
2. *Refugee/Immigration Day:* Youth dressed as refugees and learned how difficult it is to get through various state department, health care, and food check points.
3. *Race Day:* Youth interviewed several people around Seattle to discover where and how people perceive racism and how the church contributes to those perceptions.
4. *Homeless Day:* Youth carried their possessions for twelve hours, purchased dinner with a budget of just three dollars, and slept outside in boxes in the parking lot of Newport Covenant Church.

5. *Creation Care Day:* Youth celebrated the beauty of creation while walking through Discovery Park.

The event also featured speakers that included Jim Sundholm from Covenant World Relief; Ernie Cathcart, director of Casey Family programs and member of Emerald City Bible Fellowship in Seattle; and Edward Sumner, who spoke on homelessness.

Planning for the event began 18 months in advance. “It began when a few of us youth pastors were talking and realizing that oftentimes we take students to help others around the world. But we felt we needed to be more intentional to disciple our students to see that God is calling them to show compassion and justice right in their own neighborhoods,” Potorek says.

Compassion, mercy, and justice are words that seem to be heard over and over again in youth ministry. For years we have done a good job of making youth aware of ministries where we could share compassion and mercy. Youth have been invited to participate in missions in their community, their region, throughout the country, and on an even larger international scale.

We have learned, grown, and benefited from these experiences. We have grown in our understanding of how we can reach out and share the wealth and blessings we have received. We have come away feeling blessed and wondering how we can help more in our own communities. Compassion and mercy have been a stretching and growing edge for us. We come home feeling like we have somehow made a difference and in some small way feel that we have contributed to the world by sharing our time, talent and treasure.

But what about taking time to ask these questions:

- Why do the people in this area suffer from poverty?
- Why don't they have enough food or good housing?
- Why are the roads not well cared for?

- Why is there a difference in the education system?
- Why does where you live impact so much of your life experiences?
- Why are there people who are homeless?
- Why is immigration not working?

Asking these questions has challenged us to think about how we help youth wrestle with issues of injustice. By doing this, our lives become *undone* in many ways, meaning that it is an interesting thing to come in contact with the divine, for God seems to undo the things that we have spent so much of our lives doing. The brilliant thing about that encounter is that after God has undone our work, we are empowered to do all the undone work of the Kingdom.

As we gathered a team together we felt that our challenge was to help students put motion to their faith—to go to the next step in not just wanting to go and help but to ask the questions why—and out of this dream came Feet to Faith. In the summer of 2008 we piloted Feet to Faith in one of our conferences. Our goal was to challenge youth to ask the tough questions. The main focus of this program was exposure to an opportunity; to cause a stirring within each person that necessitates a reaction.

The Project

Mission

To disciple youth by exposing and exploring with them issues of injustice in our world.

Vision

That youth would walk where and with all whom Christ walked—with the hungry, sick, prisoners, homeless, and aliens—showing compassion, mercy, and justice.

Goals

- Youth would begin to ponder what God is calling them to do as they gain a holistic view of Mathew 25:14-46.
- Youth would see new ways that God can use them today and in their future wherever they live.
- Youth would be encouraged to move beyond compassion and helping to seek justice by asking the “why” questions.

Web Resources

- Compassion, mercy, justice: www.covchurch.org/cmj
- Covenant World Relief: www.covchurch.org/cwr
- Creation Care: www.floresta.org/index.html

- International Justice: www.ijm.org
- Racial Righteousness: www.covchurch.org/cmj/ministry/rr
- Water First: www.water1st.org
- World Relief: www.worldrelief.org
- World Vision: www.wvi.org/wvi/wviweb.nsf

The Program

International Day

- Water First Experience: Walk for Water
- Small groups
- Interactive simulations
- Teaching session: World Relief staff
- Bread for the World: Offering of Letters
- Dinner
- Worship

Refugee and Immigration Day

- Cherry Street Market
- Share meal with homeless person
- Refugee Project at World Relief
- Teaching session: World Relief staff
- Small groups
- Dinner
- Worship

Creation Care/Environmental Justice Day

- Worship
- Teaching session: Creation Care
- Small groups
- Hike in the mountains to experience God’s creation
- Dinner
- Small group debriefing
- Worship

Racial Justice Day

- Worship
- Teaching session: Compassion Ministries
- Small Groups
- Afternoon experience
- Dinner
- Small group debriefing
- Concert

Homelessness Day

- Worship
- Teaching session
- Small groups
- Afternoon experience: collect boxes to construct a shelter for the evening
- Dinner: each person receives \$3 for a meal
- Small group debriefing
- Worship

Homelessness and Wrap-Up

- Small group debrief
- Closing worship with slideshow
- Next steps in youth groups



Innovations with Youth

Learning about Innovation through Publishing

Mike Carotta
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Religion

We always have one eye open for something that will help us. We look to religious publishers for decent resources. Some of us send publishers ideas that we are sure will help them “meet needs.” Some of us even send publishers our own stuff, material that we’ve tested and tried and “have a lot of success with.”

None of it gets published.

Why not?

Publishing stuff is expensive. It takes about a million dollars to write, design, print, launch, market and sell just about anything.

I’ve seen innovative resources get published before church leaders were ready for them, resources that were too innovative for the field. I’ve seen some really innovative publications left in warehouses because not enough people were ready to be innovative.

Million dollar mistakes. A million dollars of innovative resources sitting in publishing warehouses rotting like unsold salmon at a fish market.

I once saw 24 people lose their jobs because a publishing innovation didn’t catch on. Twenty-four families having to relocate, look for another job, pull kids out of schools, scratch college plans for their children.

So publishers are careful, conscientious, *and* courageous.

Here’s what I’ve learned about innovation from my experience working with publishers, especially my most recent experiences.

1. The best kind of innovation is the kind that enables adaptive change.

Ronald Heiffetz, author of *Leadership Without Easy Answers* and *Leadership On The Line* makes a distinction between technical problems and adaptive change. Technical problems are usually addressed with technical solutions. For example: Your two year old car is not getting the gas mileage it is supposed to

get. Technical solution: Make sure the tires are inflated to the correct level. Maybe even take it in for a tune-up and have the mechanic fix it.

Heiffetz points out that there is nothing trivial about technical solutions. Doctors and nurses save lives every day by a commitment to the right procedures, the right norms, the right knowledge.

But adaptive change engages people in revisiting behavior patterns and learning another way. Technical fixes tend to count on authorities in the field to apply their current know how. Adaptive change counts on people with the problem to generate the innovation. (See the chart at the end of the article for examples of technical and adaptive change.)

Sharon Parks in *Leadership Can Be Taught* points out that “Technical problems can be solved with knowledge and procedures already in hand. In contrast, adaptive challenges require new learning, innovation, and new patterns of behavior...the transformation of long-standing habits and deeply held assumptions and values.”

An adaptive change to improve your car’s gas mileage? Establishing the practice of *combining errands* so that you drive less. Maybe explore trading your relatively new car for a gently used but more fuel efficient car.

There have been many technical approaches to our faith formation difficulties. All of our solutions have been important. None of them trivial: recruit more teachers, use both inductive and deductive methods, change our language, become more intentional, strive to be age-appropriate, integrate a family perspective, go Christocentric, highlight Scripture, expand service experiences, address multiple intelligences, attend to Catholic social teachings, invest in liturgical seasons.

Adaptive change to our catechetical difficulties is represented in a new explorations of intergenerational faith formation and blended models of lifelong learning.

In the area of adolescent spirituality, we are responding to the difficulties of adolescent faith formation with solid technical responses. All of our solutions have been important. None of them are trivial: call youth to discipleship, incorporate media, employ more concentrated formats, provide religious experiences, cultivate spiritual practices, focus on the parish's role, etc.

All these responses center on improving our faith formation efforts when we gather young people. However, if we took a month of a teen's life and reduced it down to an hour (60 minutes), we would see that we have less than a minute of eye contact them. Our technical responses to adolescent faith formation seek to answer the question: *How do we want to spend our minute?*

Adaptive innovation in adolescent faith formation lies in the echoing question: *How can we help them use some of their 59 minutes?* Adaptive change lies in finding innovative ways to help young people do faith formation *on their own time*.

Over the last two years, I have been blessed to work with publishers on two adolescent resources *Have Faith* and *Lincoln Park*. Both are designed for youth to use on their own, but not alone. Adaptive innovations investing in *their minutes*.

Have Faith, published by Twenty-Third Publications, guides confirmation candidates in developing their own "Spiritual Growth Plan" for confirmation and beyond, enabling them to identify the strongest and weakest dimensions of their spirituality, revisit their Catholic identity, and assess the expectations of discipleship.

Young people work through *Have Faith* on their own and *so do their sponsors*. Candidates and sponsors then discuss their discoveries three different times via phone, email, or face to face. This structured faith sharing between the adolescent candidate and adult sponsor takes on the form of three conversations by fellow travelers on the spiritual path.

Lincoln Park, published by ACTA publications, is a trilogy of junior high paperback mysteries that cultivate spiritual sensitivity and moral imagination by having young adolescents *read on their own, but not alone*. It is a publishing innovation that pitches a tent in what Princeton's Robert Dykstra calls the *adolescent isolate*. So while seventh and eighth graders read the books on their own, there is a free facilitator's guide available on line for the adult leader to help young adolescents further explore the key themes together.

Book 1 focuses on honoring the body, Book 2 focuses on honoring others, and Book 3 focuses on honoring God. In addition to these main themes, the series offers gentle pastoral messages that provide guidance on secondary themes such as handling loss,

grieving, divorce, racism, nurturing the soul, and the need to "see, judge, act."

2. The best kind of innovation often requires a partner.

Without exception, publishing innovation always involves wall to wall partnering. An author partners with the editor, who partners with production manager, who partners with the designer, printer, marketing director, and sales team. Sprinkle in occasional partnering with consultants and outside readers.

I have come to believe that in most all forms of innovation, both in church life and publishing, God gives us passing partners whose path joins ours to work on an innovative project for a minute, a month, or longer. Upon completion of the project, each partner's orbit then moves them down a different path.

The gifted Catholic story teller and theologian, John Shea, and I co-authored the *Lincoln Park* series. Each of us took on specific roles, sometimes working weeks on our own, and sometimes working days together going over every word in every line. Neither of us have a history of collaborating with others on projects. Both of us tend to do our own thing. But given the increased complexity of our time, the best innovation in business, science, health care, government, and faith communities seems to reach it's fullest potential when innovators form partnerships.

Innovation partners recognize and trust each other's competence, learn to momentarily live with a bit more restrictions than they are used to, and by God's grace learn so much from the other.

3. The best kind of innovation often requires an advocate.

Innovation usually needs explanation regarding its merits, a rationale for putting it in play, and a clear articulation of it's costs. Like all innovation that involves adaptive change, there are questions innovators face, both in publishing and parish life:

"This isn't what we usually do, so why start now?"

"Who will benefit from this exactly?"

"What's the worse case scenario?"

The innovation of adaptive work usually needs someone with authority or credibility to vouch for it. Whether it's the church council president, the pastor, or the publishing executive, adaptive innovation usually needs an advocate who is not part of the actual design team. In the case of *Lincoln Park*, Diane

Lampitt, president of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Religion, had to lobby her supervisors long and hard regarding its merits and its place.

4. The best kind of innovation has heart.

Some innovation makes work easier. Some innovation improves efficiency. And some innovation even improves productivity. We have witnessed these kinds of innovation, and while we take note, nod approval, and express our admiration, we are not taken by it.

Our imagination is not engaged by this kind of innovation. This is not the kind of innovation that gives us courage, keeps our hopes alive, or helps us sustain our callings.

The best kind of innovation serves a deeper purpose: addressing deeper human needs. Parker Palmer, in *Courage To Teach*, writes about education in this way: "We become teachers for reasons of the heart. But most of us lose heart as time goes by. How do we keep heart, alone and together, so that we can give heart to our students and the world. Which is what good teachers do."

The same can be said for the best kind of innovation in publishing and church life: We become ministers for reasons of the heart. But most of us lose heart as time goes by. How do we keep heart, alone and together, so that we can give heart to our faith community and the world. Which is what good ministers do.

5. The best kind of innovation is often a "small good thing."

We seem enamored with innovation that hits it out of the park. We want a grand slam innovation. We want the game winner. But innovations that have unrealistically high expectations, silver bullet solutions, or require extensive adaptive change are increasingly impossible for people to implement or afford. Many churches are finding time, talent, and money are shrinking.

Million dollar mistakes in publishing innovation can damage people's livelihood. Likewise, overly ambitious parish innovations in faith formation, youth ministry, or adult participation can damage people's morale.

Perhaps all of us, church leaders and publishers, would find fruit in innovations that represent the adaptive change found in a small good thing done well.

"We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do

something and to do it very well. It may be incomplete...but it is a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest." (Oscar Romero)

So after 20 years of working on publishing innovations this is what I've learned:

1. The best kind of innovation is the kind that enables adaptive change.
2. The best kind of innovation often requires a partner.
3. The best kind of innovation often requires an advocate.
4. The best kind of innovation has heart.
5. The best kind of innovation is often a "small good thing."

But on a much different level, those engaged in innovation can choose to be *careful, conscientious, and courageous.*

Examples of Technical and Adaptive Innovation

Situation: Relatively new car not getting the expected gas mileage.

Important Innovation:

- *Technical* responses: Make sure the tires are inflated to the correct level. Have the mechanic check filters and maybe do a tune up.
- *Adaptive* work: Develop the practice of combining errands so that you drive less. Explore feasibility of trading for a used but more fuel efficient car.

Situation: Weather threatening deciding game of World Series

Important Innovation:

- *Technical* responses: Provide ground crew with enough high quality tarp to cover field if needed. Advise coaches of possible rain delay. Consult with umpires during game should weather turn bad. Establish live communication with meteorologist. Suspend the game before the fifth inning if rain increases.
- *Adaptive* work: Explore employing latest radar technology to forecast weather during upcoming game. If warranted, cancel game sometime that morning based on the day's forecast. Save thousands of dollars related to setting up TV and radio broadcast equipment trucks and crews, wasted concessions, hourly

wages, and 20,000 fans commuting to ballpark for nothing.

Situation: Difficulties in faith formation programming

Important Innovation:

- *Technical* responses: recruit more teachers, use both inductive and deductive methods, change our language, become more intentional, strive to be age-appropriate, integrate a family perspective, increase Christocentricity, highlight Scripture, expand service experiences, attend to multiple intelligences, invest in liturgical seasons
- *Adaptive* work: Explore new forms of lifelong learning, models of whole community and intergenerational faith formation.

Situation: Limited number of youth gatherings for faith formation programming

Important innovations:

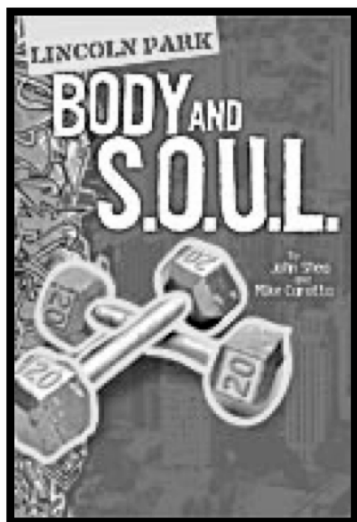
- *Technical* responses: call youth to discipleship, incorporate media, employ more concentrated formats, provide religious experiences, cultivate spiritual practices, focus on the parish's role, etc.

- *Adaptive* work: Design ways to help adolescents do intentional faith formation *on their own time*. "On their own, but not alone." Explore the merits of doing youth ministry through online parish youth group and electronic faith formation "to, with, for, and by" the majority of those who show up infrequently.

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The Lincoln Park Series



Body and S.O.U.L.

Lincoln Park Book 1

John Shea and Mike Carotta

(Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2007. 96 pages)

(\$4.95)

All Souls

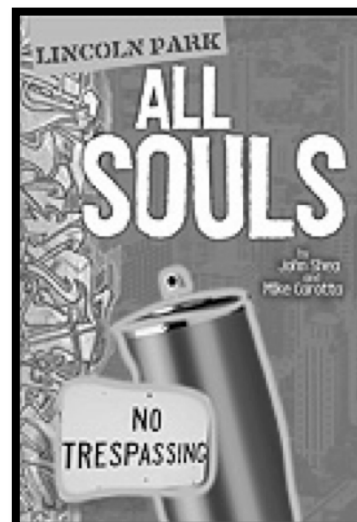
Lincoln Park Book 2

John Shea and Mike Carotta

(Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2007. 96 pages)

(\$4.95)

Lincoln Park is a new, three-volume mystery series for young adolescents. The books center around the experiences of ninth-graders who undergo spiritual awakenings through participation in a very special extracurricular club—Save Our Urban Life—at their high school. As they read, pre-teens and teens will discover their own strengths of character and spiritual interests. Book 1 focuses on honoring the body, Book 2 focuses on honoring others, and Book 3 will focus on honoring God.





Innovations with Youth

What Happens When the Church Prays?

Susan Hay
General Board of Discipleship
United Methodist Church

“When they had prayed, the place in which they had gathered was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31)

Some time back I was invited to join the staff of a large membership church as their youth director. It wasn't long after I began working that it became clear youth were to be seen and not heard, and if I really wanted to make the adults happy, seen as little as possible. The only people in the church who seemed to have any relationships with the youth were their parents, all others kept a safe distance away.

To say that my ministry was challenging was an understatement. The youth were aware they were tolerated and not welcomed. In worship they sat as far away from the congregation as they could as a group and did the normal things youth are capable of during worship unsupervised: passing notes, whispering, and squirming.

Nine months into my ministry I found myself lamenting to a ministry friend of mine over lunch one day of the difficulty working in a church that flat out did not like nor want the youth as part of the life of the congregation. As we talked he shared a ministry he had created over two years before and the impact it was having in the life of his church and especially with how the youth were being impacted. He had designed and implemented a prayer partner ministry linking the adults and the youth of his congregation. The longer he talked the more intrigued I became with the possibilities of implementing this ministry in my setting. I began to see real value in partnering one adult with one youth. I began to vision the benefit of a church praying for its youth, one adult matched with one youth.

My first stop upon returning back to the church was the senior pastor's office who responded with “this needs to go before our staff, but I want you to know I want to be the first to sign up.” At staff meeting the idea was received with the same

enthusiasm and willingness to sign up to be a prayer partner by every staff person in the room. Then ideas began to flow on naming the prayer ministry. So began The Elijah Project, based on the power of prayer in the life and ministry of the prophet Elijah.

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth yielded its harvest. (James 5:18)

We launched the opportunity to sign up for this ministry the first Sunday in Advent. Within three Sundays 90 adults had agreed to be secret prayer partners, enough adults for every youth on the youth ministry rolls. The prayer ministry started January 1 and concluded six months later with the “Power of Prayer Celebration Dinner” where the prayer partners would be introduced to the youth for whom they had been praying.

A brochure was created to describe the prayer ministry to those adults who had signed up and included essential information about the youth for whom they were to pray for daily. A brief overview of the prophet Elijah taken from 1Kings 17-19 helped set the stage for the prayer ministry followed by questions and answers like:

- **Question:** Okay...I've read the story of Elijah, and I want to know; what in the world does the Old Testament prophet Elijah and his fight with those ancient false gods have to do with praying for youth today?
- **Answer:** Whatever we organize our lives around can become a “god,” and false gods still attract! Our youth are tempted daily by many false gods. These things (or the desire for them) can leave a young person feeling as though they live in a world struck by famine.
- **Question:** Can my prayers make a difference if the youth don't know me?
- **Answer:** Your prayers can be like rain falling in the famine-struck land of Elijah's time.

Just knowing that someone is praying for them is an important gift to young people in our church. They will know that you are lifting their name to God, regardless of what they may be involved in, regardless of how “good” they are.

- **Question:** How can I remind the youth assigned to me that I’m praying and thinking of him or her?
- **Answer:** Send seasonal greeting cards. Send cards for no reason at all. Send a poem that’s meaningful to you. If you hear good news or bad news involving the youth, their family, their school, write an appropriate note. Use your imagination.

Space was given in the brochure to list out the essentials of prayer: praise, confession, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession. Along with the suggestion to choose a specific time each day to offer prayers of intercession noting that without a prayer “habit,” it is often difficult for us to maintain our commitment to this important discipline.

Because I was often aware of specific needs of the individual youth, if the information was not confidential, I would contact their prayer partner and ask them to pray for the specific need. Youth were sent a letter informing them that an adult in the church had agreed to pray for them daily. Without knowing them, this adult believed in them.

Youth became curious about these “secret” adults who had agreed to be in prayer for them and began to bring in cards or letters to be given to their prayer partners. Sometimes saying thanks, other times with specific needs they wanted to share, or just saying I am also praying for you even though I don’t know your name. The prayer partners came asking for photos of their youth, they wanted to create a devotional space in their home with their Bible and photo of the youth.

By the time for the Celebration Dinner, excitement had built among the youth, their parents and the prayer partners wanting to “officially” meet one another. The family life center was filled with energy as youth, parents and prayer partners entered for the meal. Placards were out on the table as prayer partners and youth sought out their seats to be seated across from one another. Parents sat at separate tables and received the honor of watching the interaction between their child and prayer partner. It was an evening in which people wanted to hang around afterwards and continue to share the meaning of the last six months. Prayer partners continued sharing how rewarding it had been to have a reason each day to pray for their youth. Youth were sharing what an important gift they had received knowing that someone was praying for them each day no

matter how good or bad they had been. Parents were thanking their youth’s prayer partner for sharing in the life of their youth and being blessed knowing someone was holding their youth in prayer each day.

In August youth and adults were starting to ask if we would be doing The Elijah Project again in January. While I remained at this church, this became a central ministry between the adults and youth. In the fifth year, for the first time, I began to have adults say they could not participate anymore. Concerned I went to each of these adults to understand why they were leaving the prayer ministry since they had been some of most faithful prayer partners and was thrilled to learn that not only had they agreed each year to be a prayer partner, they also were continuing to prayer for each of their prayer partners the following years. They were concerned that adding another youth to their prayer list, they would be slighting the other youth they were continuing to hold in prayer. But they also wanted to assure me that they were recruiting other adults to enter into this rewarding ministry of being in prayer for a youth in the church.

As I look back on The Elijah Project wonderful transformation began in this church. Adults who didn’t care about youth, found that one on one youth mattered. Youth who felt dishonored found that adults do care about them and value them when given an opportunity to touch them in meaningful ways.

Were there bumps in the road? You bet. The first year was a year of significant learning for me. Time was spent in helping adults understand intercessory prayer. That it was not the purpose of the prayer ministry to change the youth to fit their mold of what a good Christian youth looks like or act. The purpose of the prayer ministry was to hold a youth up to God each day, to pray God’s blessings on that youth, to lift up that youth’s need for love and then to trust that God will act, even if it’s not in the manner or the timing that the prayer partner might be seeking.

Time was spent with youth in helping them understand the prayer ministry was not about who got the most cards this past week, or who got balloons for their birthday at school. The purpose of the prayer ministry was that someone had promised to pray for them daily and that was the most important gift to receive.

Were their rewards? Far too many to count. The first year I experienced subtle changes in many of the youth’s behavior; they began to talk more positive about themselves. Adults were saying for the first time in their life they had a reason to get out of bed each morning and go directly to their devotions. By year three youth were asking if they could be prayer partners to elementary classes, to the church

members in nursing homes. Youth and adults would recognize each other out shopping and speak. Adults were showing up at school plays, sports and other opportunities to see their former prayer partners. And the youth section in the balcony – it seemed to disappear as youth came down to sit with their families or during year two-five of the prayer ministry with their previous prayer partners on occasion.

And the greatest reward was experiencing adults and youth growing in their dependence on God's love and direction.


For More Information on the Elijah Project

Contact Susan H. Hay, Director Effective Practices in Youth Ministry at shay@gbod.org.

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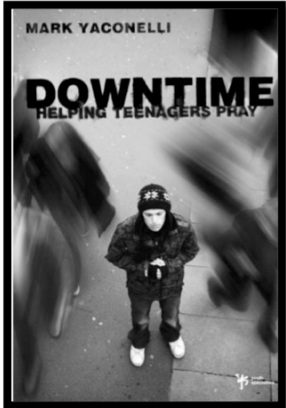
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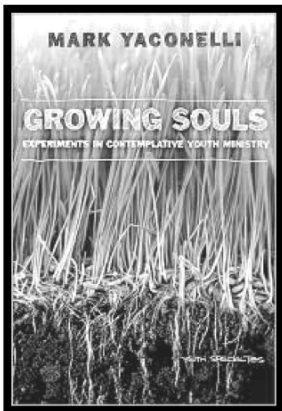
Youth Spiritual Life Resources



Downtime: Helping Teenagers Pray

Mark Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) [\$19.99]

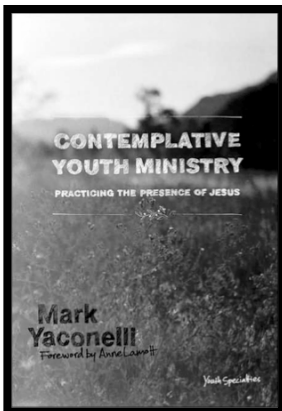
Downtime is a book about tending the life of prayer within young people. It is a response to the yearning for prayer that lives within adolescents, and all of us who seek to follow Jesus. Young people crave the peace of Christ that waits beneath the frantic hamster wheel of modern society. They are longing to set aside the many agendas, expectations, and amusements in which they find themselves entangled in order to stop and open themselves to God. Yaconelli writes, “With *Downtime*, I’m seeking to offer a different kind of prayer book—a book with the same rhythms and spirit I’ve experienced within my own life and glimpsed in the experiences of other seekers who have shared their inner lives with me. You’ll see that this book—like prayer itself—is an intentionally unpredictable mixture of stories, ideas, methods, theological ruminations, meditations, Scripture passages, quotes, and testimonies. My hope is that this book will stir up the Holy Spirit so youth workers, parents, and pastors might be inspired to discover creative, countercultural strategies for giving young people the spiritual leisure necessary for knowing Jesus.”



Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry

Mark Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) [\$21.99]

In 1997 Mark Yaconelli cofounded the Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project at San Francisco Theological Seminary, leading retreats and events to help youth workers cultivate a practice of unceasing awareness of God in their lives and ministries, which led to the development of a contemplative approach to youth ministry. *Growing Souls* is a collection of stories, conversations, and insights from many of the people involved in the project; it reveals the struggles and successes encountered while exploring contemplative prayer and presence in youth ministry. Included are profiles of four churches involved in contemplative youth ministry.



Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus

Mark Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) [\$19.99]

Mark Yaconelli spent hundreds of hours in small circles of people praying, listening, and discerning God’s presence within churches and youth ministry programs. This book puts into words the experiences and wisdom he gained from these little communities of faith. *Contemplative Youth Ministry* is an organic approach to youth ministry allowing ministers to create meaningful silence, foster covenant communities, engage kids in contemplative activities, and maximize spontaneity, helping young people recognize the presence of Jesus in their everyday lives. Through the application of contemplative traditions and authentic relationship building, a new style of youth ministry can emerge.

Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project Web Site: www.ymsp.org



Innovations with Youth

A Faith Journey on a Ropes Course

Paul Hill

The Youth and Family Institute

“I’ve never heard these kids talk so much in my life, and I’ve spent over two years with them as they went through confirmation,” said Jim, an adult sponsor from Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Apple Valley, MN. He continued, “When everyone got in the van they were buzzing about the experience they had just had on the low and high ropes course. The question raised by the facilitators at the end of the day really got them thinking: ‘So what’s God been up to today?’ This led to a wild conversation about *The Lord of the Rings* and other spiritual matters.” Jim’s experience with a vanload of 9th graders was exciting for him and the youth. It was also the happy outcome of a very intentional ministry strategy designed to explore vibrant faith with this cohort, especially the males. (To view a video of the day go to the website of The Youth & Family Institute at www.TYFI.org. Click on *Vibrant Faith Ministries*, and then click on *Adventure Ministries*. On the left side of the page click on *9th Grade Retreat Ropes Course Video*.)

Shepherd of the Valley is a very large congregation in the southern suburbs of Minneapolis. The 9th grade class alone has more than 140 youth. They attend a wide variety of schools. It is difficult to establish a real sense of community with such a large and dispersed group. Pastor Randy and Youth Director Katie wanted to build significant, cross-generational connections and community with these kids. They knew that if this did not happen there would be a loss of between 30-36% of their kids immediately after confirmation. This attrition would continue throughout their senior high years. Young people who were just beginning to explore their faith and sense of vocation would have the journey interrupted, often permanently. This led Pastor Randy and Katie to consider an early fall high adventure experience on a nearby low and high ropes course. Why did they pick this strategy?

In the spring of 2008 Katie had heard me speak on the spiritual nature of adolescent males. That

presentation led to an extended conversation and ministry design for their 9th graders. Since 2000 I have been studying and researching the question, “What are the methods and contexts boys and young men use to grow spiritually?” In the process I have done extensive study in the brain sciences, especially relating to gender differences in how the brain works and the implications for ministry. I’ve also done research with junior high boys and co-published a book with David Anderson and Rollie Martinson on young adult men entitled, *Coming of Age: Exploring the Identity and Spirituality of Younger Men*.

One of the findings of this work is that boys and young men will use nature, sports, and kinesthetic methods to vitalize, or revitalize, themselves personally and spiritually. They literally wiggle themselves into faith. They do not separate themselves into two realms, the spiritual and the physical. Rather, they seem to naturally and unselfconsciously integrate these two spheres. Their bodies are both the temple and the receptacle for spiritual growth and development.

From a bio-neurological point of view this makes sense. They have ten times the testosterone flowing through their bodies than females. Testosterone is energizing, and is understood to be the hormone of rough and tumble behavior, and/or aggression. Secondly, brain studies show that males generally use the right hemisphere of the brain, whereas females tend to use both hemispheres. (No jokes about males only using half a brain!) The right hemisphere of the brain provides spatial images and pictures. It is oriented towards risk taking and novelty. There is very little impulse control. This may explain why boys are much more likely, for example, to try and ride their skateboards down a stair rail and do other seemingly hazardous activities, without much awareness for the consequences. God has made their brains and bodies in such a way that their experience of God will often have a significant physical dimension to it.

Boys and young men use nature, sports and kinesthetic outlets to achieve five things. Not surprisingly, it provides them an outlet for recreation. Secondly, they gain a sense of peace in doing activities such as walking in a park, hiking in nature, skateboarding, running, weightlifting, playing team sports etc. Third, these activities give them a sense of their own identity. Fourth, in doing these activities with others it provides them a real sense of community and bonding. Finally, they are inspired in doing these activities. One may argue that this is also true for females, and it often is. My research has been descriptive in nature, not comparative. My hunch is that much of what is being said would hold true for many females, although how their brains would process the experience would be somewhat different.

With this research in mind Pastor Randy, Katie, my colleague Sara Larson Woodruff, Director of Adventure Education and Women's Ministry at TYFI, and I created a design together built around four guidelines. We would divide the group in half and take each half on a sequenced, day-long low and high ropes course experience at nearby Ox Lake Lutheran Bible Camp. We would shape the day using four guidelines that came out of the research. First, we would encourage the kids to **Be Real**. They could come as they are, do what they wanted to try, and did not need to do any "posing." Secondly, we would ask them to **Show Respect**. There would be no "dissing" of those who might get scared, or not do as well as others. We would encourage, cheer for, and celebrate whatever accomplishments took place. Third, we guided them to **Work Together**. Community building was the order for the day. Therefore, we led the activities in such a way (and had enough trained support staff) that everyone could be involved, nearly all the time. Finally, we told them we would be asking them to look for **God Sightings**. Where was God active in what we were doing together?

It was also critical that there be a large number of adults, and senior high youth doing the activities with the 9th graders. We know that cross-generational community is a critical means by which God plants, nurtures and brings to light vibrant faith. I trained this group at the church regarding what to expect, and what was expected of them, prior to our trip to the ropes course.

Both Pastor Randy and Katie report that this experience was transformational for many and has created a more cohesive, energized, engaged, cross-generational Christian community. The positive feedback they have received has created a buzz to do it again in the spring. The group wants to explore further dynamics of the course and they want to do it together. Both report that they have a much different group and are having a much more meaningful

conversation with the kids, the senior high leaders and the adult mentors as a result of this immersion.

As a former parish pastor and camp director in the Lutheran church, and as a certified adventure facilitator for nearly 30 years, I have seen this happen many times. It's only more recently that I had a better idea as to how God was working spiritually in these young people through these physical, kinesthetic and outdoor activities. It is a grave mistake to assume that congregational life devoid of these outlets and opportunities is particularly faith formative, especially for males. The proof is demonstrated across North American congregations each week where between 60-75% of the participants are female. The guys did not find their spirituality in the "God box" experience. Their spiritual journey calls for congregations to expand their understandings of where and when the Spirit is nurturing faith. Congregations and parents need to encourage their young people, especially males, to participate in Christian retreats and Bible camps; and then accompany them on these programs. The faith formative classroom needs to move out of the basement or education wing of the church into parks, nature preserves, the back yards of members homes, and athletic fields. Adult members can serve as coaches and fans of sports teams.

Most significantly, the spiritual journey is fully engaged when these activities are framed with the four guidelines:

1. **Be real.**
2. **Show respect.**
3. **Work together.**
4. **Ask "What's God up to here?"**

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www.TYFI.org



Innovations with Technology

Podcasting Faith: Media for Ministry

Mike Hayes
BustedHalo.com

Twenty years ago, who would've thought that dedicating an entire cable TV channel solely to food, or gardening, or even religion would've been a good idea.

Simply put, traditional broadcasting is dead. Or perhaps better stated it may be in hospice, kept alive by what I have come to call the "customized media culture." People no longer rush home to catch the new episode of their favorite sitcom or drama instead they watch it at their leisure by recording the episode in advance on a computerized Digital Video Recorder (DVR, Tivo being the most popular brand name). Movies and other TV shows are available on demand from local cable companies and online. YouTube allows you to upload and view your own programming and view more material produced by individuals rather than a group of broadcast executives. Everyone is now able to view what they want, when they want it; *and* they can also cheaply produce and syndicate it to a wide audience over the World Wide Web.

Besides the convenience of downloading and viewing or even listening to programming when you feel like it, there's also the added benefit of transferring that material to a personal media player (like an iPod or iPhone). Video iPods and the iPhone actually play more than just mp3 formatted songs now. Movies and TV shows can also be downloaded for replay on the device as well.

The news media has started to accentuate their newscasts by making more easily consumable audio podcasts and video podcasts of originally aired material. Sometimes they even encourage people to share their news clips on You Tube. Many people eschew the evening news for a quick podcast or You Tube video subscription update in the morning.

Media for Ministry

Ministers have caught onto the media trend and in some ways have been ahead of the mainstream media in proclaiming their message, not to as wide of an

audience, but to a specific audience of loyal listeners. Religious podcasters have taken this new media format and tailored it for their own purposes. Some are fairly simple uses of technology such as a local priest or minister podcasting his Sunday homily or sermon to shut-ins and others who didn't make to the Sunday service. Others are more varied and include discussions of moral issues (For Faith and Family Podcast), Ecumenical relations (Catholic/Mormon Podcast), or even Scripture (Audio Bible in a Year).

Perhaps the most successful religious podcast is "Daily Breakfast" which is hosted by Fr. Roderick Vonhogen, a Roman Catholic priest from the Netherlands. Fr. Roderick has won many podcasting awards (yes, there are actual podcast awards) not merely in the realm of podcasting but also in some of the main categories represented like "best mobile podcast" where a podcaster does a show on the road instead of in a studio. He also addresses popular culture instead of merely religious topics, which gives him a more approachable rapport with his audience.

I asked Fr. Roderick in an interview that originally appeared on BustedHalo.com® how he got the original idea for his show.

It happened by accident actually. One of my parishioners emailed me and said "Hey I heard about this thing called podcasting! Do you know anything about it?" I didn't. So I started searching and found one of the very first podcasts out there and thought, "This is amazing! I can make a radio show but instead of having this limited reach of only my own village or town I can reach the other end of the world!"

So I got all fired up, started my own podcast when I was in Rome at the Vatican right at the moment when Pope John Paul II fell ill. I made a documentary about that and just improvised and the next day thousands of people were emailing me and saying "I love this" and "Please continue" so that's how I got started! The thing I wanted to do was to create podcasts that I would listen to if I were 17 years old and not interested in God. So I try to find ways to reach people who might have some lingering

religious questions or interests but might be completely turned off if I would do shows that would be called [in stodgy British accent] Fr Roderick's Sermon of the Day.

I didn't want to preach in those podcasts so one of the things that I discovered while I was doing these podcasts is that you have to listen very carefully to what your audience is telling you that they're interested in. And I discovered with my first podcast which was called "The Catholic Insider," was that more than half of my audience wasn't Catholic. But they had a lot of questions about the faith—they were very interested in getting a peek behind the scenes at what's going on and how is this church even working? But they were just regular people—not religious but very open. But of course interested in a lot of other stuff like movies and music and so I thought, 'what if I did a podcast on—for instance—Star Wars.

Instead of doing the geek stuff that a lot of people and other podcasters are doing—you know they just talk about the next Star Wars animated movie and how to dress up as Chewbacca. But that's not going to be very helpful for people. So instead I decided to do a show about all the religious influences that you can trace in Star Wars. Because the story is of course very successful for a reason. It contains all these hidden religious themes that we recognize when we see that movie. And that's why it works on almost a universal level and there are more movies like that.

Another good example is the Chronicles of Narnia which is just chock full with references to Jesus to the history of salvation. But if you're just watching the movie you might not be aware of that. Even in Harry Potter, there is a very strong Christian influence in the themes and in the things that happen to the characters. So what I do is, I talk about the movie, I talk about the books and I explain what is the origin of these ideas—where does it come from? So you can give an almost hidden catechesis in that way and usually what happens is that the audience that looks for Harry Potter information—well they start listening into my Harry Potter podcast and they say 'Hey this is interesting. It's hosted by a priest but he's not preaching to us! He seems to be just as geeky as we are—maybe more—let's check out his other show.' And then they start listening to the "Daily Breakfast" and they get hooked on that. So that's how you kind of bring in a brand new audience. And that seems to be working very well!

Fr Roderick is indeed the leader in this area—so successful that he has started his own podcasting network now (SQPN.com) which features various shows from other podcasts on similar catholic themes.

Impact of the Podcasting Innovation

Are these merely techno-geeks who are doing this. Not likely. According to a 2005 Pew Research survey, "more than 22 million American adults own iPods or MP3 players and 29% of them have downloaded podcasts from the Web so that they could listen to audio files at a time of their choosing. That amounts to more than 6 million adults who have tried this new feature that allows internet "broadcasts" to be downloaded onto their portable listening device." (www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_podcasting2005.pdf)

Not only are you reaching people now that are in your pew every Sunday, but you are also gaining an audience of possibly several thousand more with your message of faith.

In short, podcasting keeps you in everyone's rapid-pace, "on the go" lifestyle. It is well-noted that most people use podcasts as a way to stay connected to the ministers who produce them. They listen to homilies when they are on the road, they listen to local podcasts as "test cases" to see if they want to attend that particular church community or local retreat and they refresh their minds on that point that they just can't remember from your sermon this past week. The strangest thing of all is that podcasts seem not to alienate people from communities. People don't just sit home and listen to sermons but rather use them to inspire themselves to enter more deeply into communities that with whom they long to connect.

So How Do I Do This?

The steps to podcasting are simple enough. First, you need a way to record audio in digital format. This can be done several ways. You can buy an audio recorder from a high end audio/video store. You can spend a lot of money and build a studio in your church basement and soundproof the room. Or you can simply plug a microphone into your computer or run a cable from your church's sound system into your audio recording device as well. I do all three. I bought a rather inexpensive mp3 recorder from Radio Shack that had good enough quality. I downloaded an audio editor from the internet for free (audacity.com) and my boss and I built a studio in his religious community's basement in a room that ironically was once a radio station. When I'm on the road, I use my audio recorder often—to interview people I meet, to record meditation services or reflections that I preach at services or even to simply describe a scene in a unique venue (like World Youth Day with the Pope or the World Series in

Philadelphia). We sit down weekly in our studio and simply answer a question of faith that is on the minds of young adults and my priest friends record their homilies right off of their audio system.

Further innovations include the BustedHalo® Pod Retreat where we take the reflection witness talks that young people give and expose them to a wider audience. We provide additional technical support by forming a discussion group online and even connecting them with a spiritual director that they can chat with over the internet for some further direction.

People find these podcasts on what is called a Podcast aggregator—a website of sorts that lists podcasts and creates a link not merely for you to download the podcasts but also for you to subscribe to it. iTunes is the most popular aggregator on the internet and that is where people can find your podcasts after you list it in their directory.

Sounds confusing? It's not. What's more is that there are two places that will lead you step by step through the process. One is a book called *Podcast Solutions* by Dan Klass. This book is what I used when we started our podcast at BustedHalo® Ministries. The second source is BustedHalo.com® our website where Fr Dave Dwyer has listed the steps for how to podcast at the bottom of our homepage.

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Podcasting Resources

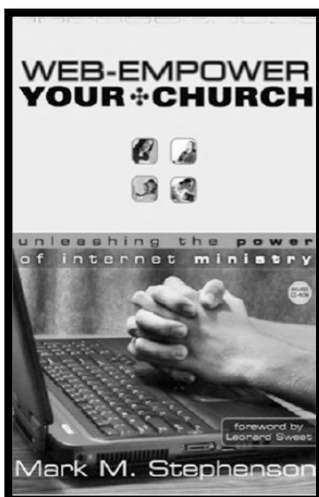


Podcast Solutions: The Complete Guide to Audio and Video Podcasting

Michael Geoghegan and Dan Klas

(Berkeley: friends of Ed, 2007, second edition. \$24.99)

Podcast Solutions is a comprehensive and perceptive guide to all things podcasting. From downloading podcasts to producing your own for fun or profit, *Podcast Solutions* covers the entire world of podcasting whether you want to use podcasting to inform, educate, entertain, or inspire, whether you are a complete novice or an experienced professional. In this book you'll learn 1) how to find and download audio and video podcasts to your computer or portable media player, 2) how to develop, format, produce, edit, encode, and upload your audio or video podcast, 3) how to set up an effective audio studio, and 4) how to create great video.



Web Empower Your Church: Unleashing the Power of Internet Ministry

Mark M. Stephenson

(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. \$23.50)

A great church website is more about ministry than technology. *Web-Empower Your Church* offers step-by-step guidance to web implementers and other church leaders who are on the exciting journey to building an effective web ministry. Mark's engaging, conversational style makes technology accessible. He offers first-hand advice on every aspect of building an internet ministry: from assembling a team to designing and maintaining the website to adding powerful ministry features. The accompanying CD-ROM contains documentation, training, and a demonstration version of website building software from the folks at the Web-Empowered Church ministry.



Innovations with Young Adults

The Latter Factor

Tim Muldoon
University Mission and Ministry
Boston College

They populate student lounges and coffeehouses across the nation. They are smart, technologically savvy, socially engaged, politically active. They move between discussions about TV, global economics, philosophy, and the relative merits of MP3 players. They have been trained in scientific method, know about shaping a portfolio and building good credit, understand the dynamics of population growth and ecology, have dealt with parents' divorce, spend time volunteering, and keep in shape. They are fascinated with spirituality. They ask the big questions. They see wealth, but want to know about happiness. They swim in a world of sex, but want to know about relationships. They have all the world's knowledge literally at their fingertips, but want wisdom. They text, email, video chat, and call each other; they visit each other's Facebook pages; they have vast virtual communities; but they still crave real communities. *Why don't they join our congregations? Why don't they see us as communities that have something for them?*

I want to propose that we consider what I'll call "the latte factor," and point to one example that has taken root on the campus where I'm privileged to interact with young people that often fit the description above. The latte factor, in short, is about marketing. Within the last ten or fifteen years, clever marketers have somehow been able to take the humble coffee bean—a staple of truck stops, diners, and breakfast joints for decades of American history—and transform it into a multi-billion dollar phenomenon that touches every soccer mom, erstwhile poet, and corporate CEO. Starbucks, Caribou, Peet's, Dunkin' Donuts, and thousands of local coffeehouses have built a "latte culture" replete with easy chairs, board games, German philosophy, and term papers on laptops. People shape their quotidian lives around latte culture: for some, it is the stop at a favorite place after a healthy power walk; for others, it is the cup to go on the way to class. The marketers have sold us the lifestyle, based on little more than the taste of a beverage.

What drives this phenomenon, and what clues does it offer us who think about how to invite young people into our congregations? I believe that one significant driver is that latte culture is oriented around conversation—more specifically, around the kind of laid-back, easygoing conversation between friends that allows for both self-discovery and relationship. Consider, for example, the iconic TV show *Friends*, which greatly influenced young adult culture in the 1990's and early 2000's. The title characters came together at a coffeehouse, where they exchanged stories of their work and love lives and built themselves into a kind of family. Theirs were deeply intentional relationships, contrasted (often in very funny ways) with their respective family-of-origin relationships. Their stories resonated (and still resonate) with many young people who have experienced geographic and economic mobility, either through college or work, and who seek places—to use a line from an even earlier iconic TV show, *Cheers*—"where everybody knows your name."

Conversation ("turning together") is about moving beyond image to reality. The latte culture is about creating a space within which people might move out of the flow of busyness that characterizes postmodern life, to relax and enjoy. It is scarcely about the beverage and more about the lifestyle; a similar point might be observed about advertising for alcoholic beverages, cars, soft drinks, underwear, and any number of objects for consumption. Latte culture invites people to conversation, persuades them that lattes enable a kind of focusing of conversation. The average cup of orange juice out of the fridge in the morning says "on my way to work/school!", but the latte says "let's linger and talk about life. There's more than the rat race to think about."

In 2006 Boston College's Church in the 21st Century Center, of which I was then Director, initiated a program we called "Agape Latte." The first word, of course, refers to the New Testament Greek word for "love," predicated of God in the first letter of John. Our hope was to create a forum that capitalized on latte culture, but invited young people

to engage religious, theological, spiritual, and ethical questions. The program was spearheaded by Dawn Overstreet, now of Loyola University in Chicago, who researched the very successful Theology on Tap program that the Archdiocese of Chicago initiated over twenty five years ago, and which has spread around the country. That model was relatively simple: bring talented speakers to talk with young people about interesting Church-related themes, in a relaxed venue where they could eat, drink, and meet one another. Agape Latte began by drawing heavily from this model. We established it at an on-campus coffeehouse, provided free lattes and desserts, and brought many of our most talented professors and administrators to talk in a non-academic, personal, engaging way.

What was important then and is still important now is advertising. The latte factor is all about selling a way of being in the world, and it takes imagination to spread the word. A simple announcement at the Sunday masses on campus would not work, nor would a listing in the student activities calendar. What was critical for the launch—which filled the room of about 150 people—was a multifaceted approach. First, there was the recruitment of talented students to help get the word out. Second, there was the development of the name and slogan (“What Would Jesus Brew?”). Next, there was graphic design, with the helpful work of Louis Eppich (Boston College class of 2008), incorporate the picture of a coffee cup with the slogan was easy to recognize on the many flyers that volunteers posted all over campus. Finally, we printed T-shirts that our volunteers wore the day of the first event, and we gave them away to the first 100 visitors. The “buzz” around campus was very positive, and it was a huge success. Since then, we’ve held Agape Latte monthly, and almost always bring a full house. Students have told me that there are residual benefits, too—conversations that begin in the coffeehouse spill back into the residence halls, sometimes engaging roommates or others who aren’t quite so interested in religious topics.

Agape Latte and other initiatives serve to provide young people with “entry points” into a religious culture which, for the most part, they do not understand. With the fracture of religious communities in the last several decades, young people have not, as a rule, experienced the kind of formation in faith that their parents and grandparents experienced. And so they are religious scavengers, often fascinated by the bits they come upon, but lacking a “big picture” with which to make sense of their own choices in matters of spirituality.

Advertisers know that they sell image; they also know that the images they sell often are disconnected

from reality. There is nothing wrong with selling image in itself; congregations would do well to probe the question of what image they put forth to young people today. Is the image one of old people clinging to a backwards doctrine which modern science flatly contradicts? Or of political conservatives/liberals out of touch with the wider world? Or of judgmental people whose moral stances seem to lack compassion? Young people today have many images of what religion does to people; all too frequently these images are caricatures. What Agape Latte has shown me is that marketing spirituality is not in itself a bad thing; it is bad only if the marketing is a lie. Jesus, Saint Paul, and the prophets understood that proclaiming the word of God meant finding creative ways to get the message out, to pluck people out of their drowsiness to pay attention. “Thus says the Lord!” was the language of the prophets; today’s language must be appropriate for digital media. (In the case of Agape Latte, students can download the talks if they happen to miss one.)

The related challenge is to guide young people through these entry points into fuller participation in the life of the worshipping community. It is too early to know how effective we are at doing this; but there are indicators that as a whole the University is finding ways to encourage spiritual growth and community worship. One ingredient is personal invitation from peers; another is effective liturgy that provides an authentic worship experience, for it too is different from the flow of ordinary life. A third ingredient is a road map; we offer students several, including the “prayer map” of places on campus where people pray, and the so-called “Red Book” that introduces students to prayer in the Ignatian tradition. My sense is that the cluster of these different factors, not unlike different advertising strategies, help students to develop a certain sense of what the Jesuits call “our way of proceeding.” Like advertisers selling latte culture, we too are trying to cultivate an imagination of a way of being in the world. The difference, in my view, is that the way of being in the world to which we are inviting young people is, in the end, much more satisfying.

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Agape Latte:

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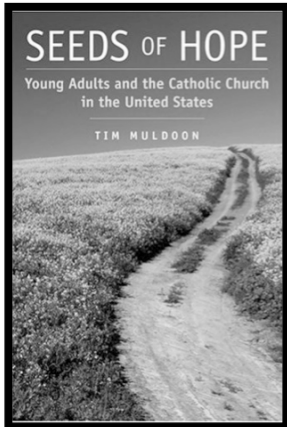
Boston College Prayer Map:

www.bc.edu/sites/prayermap

The Boston College “Red Book”

www.bc.edu/offices/mission/publications.html

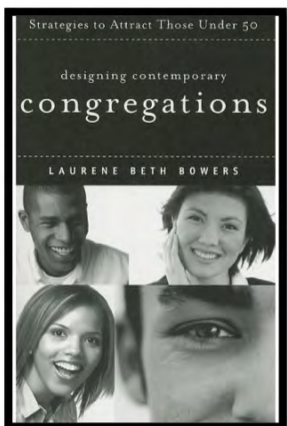
Young Adult Ministry Resources



Seeds of Hope: Young Adults and the Catholic Church in the United States

Tim Muldoon (New York: Paulist Press, 2008) [\$24.95]

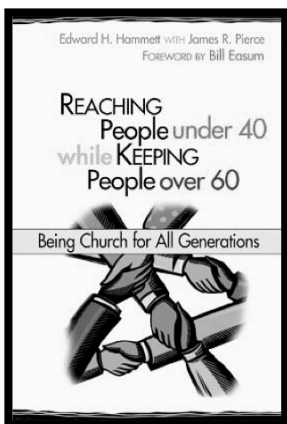
Young adults are immersed in a world governed by market forces, such that the main challenge of the church is to bridge the world of market forces—economics—and the world opened up by faith. *Seeds of Hope* asks what of church we are inviting young people to join and then analyzes the contemporary social and spiritual landscapes in search of signs of hope for the future of the church. The book examines five key areas of concern: theology, ecumenism, liturgy, spirituality, and moral authority. It attempts to both understand the challenges facing young adults in these areas and to offer constructive proposals for building a 21st century church community.



Designing Contemporary Congregations: Strategies to Attract Those Under 50

Laune Beth Bowers (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008) [\$14]

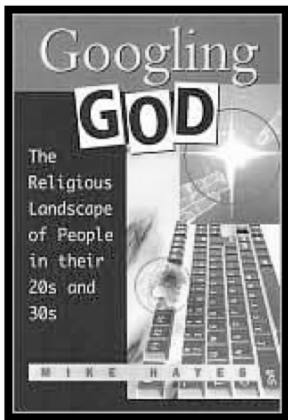
One of the reasons the traditional church is still struggling to attract the postmodern generation (between 20 and 50 years of age) is because it also needs to be a contemporary congregation—in touch with culture and its current trends. Laune Beth Bowers identifies strategies to contemporize worship, fellowship, evangelism, social justice, rituals, and equipping the disciples for ministry. She says that designing healthy contemporary congregations can be achieved in three ways: 1) blending traditional with contemporary trends; 2) producing “karmic balance,” as defined by Jesus (“the measure you give will be the measure you get”); and 3) allowing culture to influence organized religion in order to strengthen the connection between the two and to make them mutually receptive to the influence of the other.



Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations

Edward H. Hammett with James R. Pierce (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007) [\$24.99]

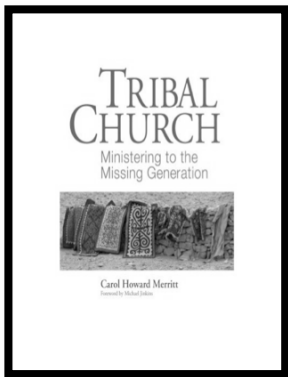
Hammett and Pierce ask: “How do you keep people over sixty years of age—who often hold church culture values, while at the same time reaching people under forty—who often hold postmodern values?” *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People over 60* looks at the church as it seeks to function in a new world. It looks at the differences in the generations and at postmodernism—not just a generational difference but a global change. Most importantly it looks at what a church can do to survive and thrive! The book is organized in three sections: Part 1: Understanding the Challenge of Church Today, Part 2: Discovering the Points of Tension, and Part 3: Finding the Win-Win for the Church.



Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20s and 30s

Mike Hayes (New York: Paulist Press, 2007) [\$17.95]

Mike Hayes, the managing editor of BustedHalo.com and associate director of Paulist Young Adult Ministries, has a new book on ministering to the two generations of young adults today—Generation X and the Millennials. Part 1 of the book examines who are young adults and what is working well in young adult ministry. Part 2 uses twelve interviews to identify the characteristics of Generation X young adults and Millennial young adults. Part 3 provides practical strategies for addressing the needs of young adults and developing a young adult ministry.



Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation

Carol Howard Merritt (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007) [\$17]

Carol Howard Merritt, a pastor in her mid-thirties, has written a wonderful book that approaches young adults from the perspective of their inclusion in an intergenerational congregation. She describes the financial, social, and familial situations that affect many young adults today, and how churches can provide a safe, supportive place for young adults to nurture relationships and foster spiritual growth. There are few places left in society that allow for real intergenerational connections to be made, yet these connections are vital for any church that seeks to reflect the fullness of the body of Christ. Using the metaphor of a tribe to describe the close bonds that form when people of all ages decide to walk together on their spiritual journeys, Merritt casts a vision of the church that embraces the gifts of all members while reaching out to those who might otherwise feel unwelcome or unneeded. By breaking down artificial age barriers and building up intentional relationships, congregations can provide a space for all people to connect with God, each other, and the world.



Innovations with Young Adults

Cooking, Blogging, and Faith Formation

Joan Weber
Center for Ministry Development

Think of a faith-filled person in your parish or congregation who has a particular talent (e.g., cooking, sewing, pottery, car maintenance, investing money, making really good YouTube videos) and is willing to share it. Now imagine listening to what young adults are talking about in your community—and hearing several of them mention that they'd like to acquire that particular skill. The potential for convergence is obvious. What may not be so obvious is that there is also an opportunity for faith formation. In New York, thanks to the creativity and faith of Alice Kearney Alwin, that is exactly what happened.

Kearney Alwin is a 28-year-old young adult who heard many of her peers say they wished they knew how to cook. As a great cook herself, she was able to match the *felt need* of young adults in her community with a particular talent she had. So she organized a cooking class. But from the beginning, Alice was thinking beyond recipes and menus. She saw an opportunity for faith formation, using cooking as the catalyst, because she understood how much faith and food are part of our faith Tradition. Her strategy was beautiful in its simplicity: be hospitable, introduce people to each other, engage them in good conversation while stirring up a recipe, ask open-ended questions, imbed nuggets of Church teaching, and always say grace. It is clear that she understands the power of evangelizing outreach in opening the door to deeper faith formation.

How does she bring faith into cooking? One way is through her menu items. When she is cooking lamb stew, she has the opportunity to describe Jesus as the Lamb of God, or how Jewish sacrifice worked in Scripture, or how to live justly by purchasing free-range sheep. When bread-baking is on the agenda through a “bread-baking and wine-tasting” event, she introduces conversation on the Eucharist.

Another way she has integrated faith with food is through donating the meal cooked in her cooking class to the local shelter. What a perfect opportunity to discuss the preferential option for the poor to which the Gospel calls us! She has also had potluck

dinners where all of the budding cooks bring a dish they prepare to share with everyone. The faith theme is, of course, stewardship, and participants walk the talk of sharing their time and treasure and talent with their community.

Kearney Alwin produces a weekly booklet for her students which lists the menu and recipes, a theological essay on the topic, and a bibliography of resources for further reflection. And she has a blog, <http://keepthefeast.blogspot.com/>, which she describes as “A Blog about Food + Theology.” The picture on her blog says it all. There is a bookshelf with a delightful collection of books—from *The Bread Bible* to Raymond Brown's *An Introduction to the New Testament*, from *Joy of Cooking* to *Foundations of Christian Faith*. The books aren't separated into a “theology” section and a “cooking” section, but are delightfully mixed together to make Alice's point.

Does this approach to young adult faith formation work? Perhaps the strongest proof comes from Alice's description of what happened to the students in her cooking class. In her words, they “became communion”. Isn't that one of the goals of adult faith formation?

A Model for Young Adult Faith Formation

Alice's approach to young adult faith formation is replicable in so many ways. A church which wants to reach out to young adults might consider the following steps.

1. To first engage young adults, ask what they want to learn. Then find the resources in the congregation to help them learn. For example, if several young adults want to learn how to service their cars, find someone in the community who is great at changing oil, checking tires, etc., and ask them to volunteer.

2. Emphasize hospitality at the beginning. Get people talking to each other.
3. Ask questions which have the potential for leading to deeper conversation, but only when the participants are ready. Start with questions like, "What's the best car you have ever owned?" or "What other forms of transportation do you use besides the car?"
4. Imbed catechesis naturally; don't stretch it. Follow Jesus' example of teaching in the context of everyday life. If you're doing an oil change, think of bringing in the role of oil in Jesus' time, how he used it to heal, for which sacraments oil is a symbol and why.
5. Include simple ritual in your gatherings. Just as saying grace before eating was the prayer at cooking class, a prayer for drivers or safety on the highway would be appropriate in a class on car maintenance!
6. Give participants something to take home which includes practical information on the topic, but also has a simple theological essay and a suggested (short) bibliography. The theological essay for a class on servicing cars could focus on rights and responsibilities, caring for God's creation, or awareness of the needs of those around us.
7. Don't force communion. (It doesn't work anyway.) Just let the Spirit work.

It's not hard to think of ways ordinary life topics could be expanded to include intentional faith formation. And since most of churches are doing little if any faith formation with young adults, this approach makes sense as a first step. As adults, young couples and singles in their 20's and 30's are motivated to learn by their own felt needs, usually in a just-in-time mode. Tap into this when you design your learning plans.

Increase Your Impact

Did you know that last year over 90 million people in the U.S. were reading blogs and that 22.6 million people were blogging? No one would be surprised to learn that many of these bloggers are young adults. Alice Kearney Alwin developed a blog which connects her passion for cooking with her passion for her faith. Imagine how much further and how many more people she can impact with her blog.

Another example of a young adult who is using a blog to share faith is Laura Fanucci. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame, Fanucci writes on her blog: "I am a young Catholic woman and a Master of Divinity student, passionate about social justice and ministry with young adults. This blog will explore the

interplay between Catholic social teaching, the lives of 20- and 30-somethings, and the future of our faith communities." It is young adults like her who will change the world—and inspire other young adults in the process! What if your congregation or parish connected young adults whom you know are also passionate about justice with Laura?

On her blog, <http://www.sojuya.net/>, Laura writes about a professor who told his students to do theology with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. That's a great image for the faith formation of young adults today. It's also a guideline for creating a blog to engage young adults in a conversation about some aspect of faith. Consider the following steps:

1. Spend time looking at blogs which you hear are popular with young adults. What are the common elements of success? What red flags are raised in your mind which you want to be sure to control?
2. Check out blogs which have a faith connection. Try the www.bustedhalo.com blog, which has emerged out of a popular Catholic young adult website run by the Paulist Fathers in New York City.
3. Research your topic from several perspectives. Be grounded in Scripture and church teachings, but also be knowledgeable about young adults and what they're thinking and saying about your topic. Read the headlines. Keep that newspaper (or podcast, magazine, or other news summary) in one hand!
4. Start a blog on the faith topic and invite the young adults in your community to join the conversation. Always have at least one "soundbyte" of biblical or church teaching to share, along with the questions and your own position on the topic.
5. Encourage people to be honest and respectful.
6. Create links on your blog to your congregation's or parish's website and to other sources online which are

Conclusion

Young adults need "a non-threatening place where they can freely express their questions, doubts, and even disagreement with the Church and where the teachings of the Church can be clearly articulated and related to their experience" (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 196). Could a cooking class or a blog on young adults and social justice be that kind of place?

Church leaders have hundreds of excuses for not utilizing technology in their faith formation efforts. Interactive technology is especially intimidating and creates even more excuses for not trying it: we'd have to monitor the site all the time; what if someone wrote something heretical?; I don't know how to blog, etc. But if there is one thing that's true about today's young adults, it is that we have no credibility if we don't speak their language. And a huge part of their language is technology — instant access, interactivity, and the potential for a global conversation. The Christian church is called to transform the world, and

has called young adults to take a lead in that transformation. Holy conversations online could be a vehicle through which the Holy Spirit inspires young adults to do their part in this transformation. Rather than ask, "Can we afford to do this?" the Church should be asking, "Can we afford *not to*?"

Blogs

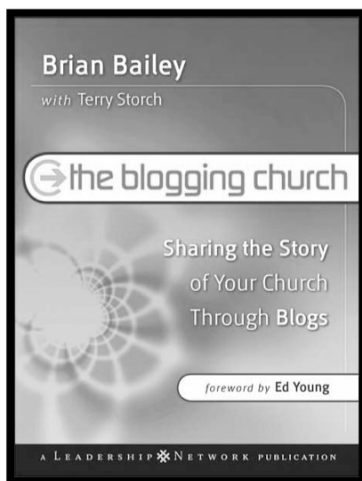
Keep the Feast: <http://keepthefeast.blogspot.com>

(Alice Kearney Alwin)

Laura Fanucci: www.sojuya.net

Busted Halo: www.bustedhalo.com/bustedblog

Bloggging and Internet Resources

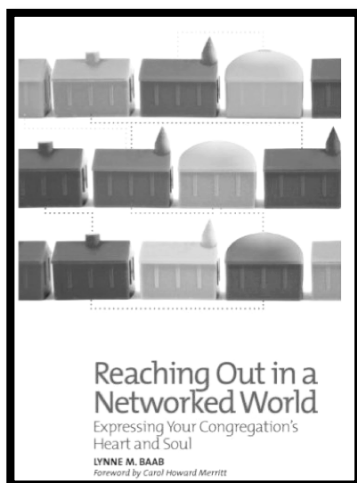


The Blogging Church: Sharing the Story of Your Church through Blogs

Brian Bailey with Terry Storch

(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. \$19.95)

The Blogging Church offers church leaders a field manual for using the social phenomenon of blogs to connect people and build communities in a whole new way. Inside you will find the why, what, and how of blogging in the local church. Filled with illustrative examples and practical advice, the authors answer key questions learned on the frontlines of ministry: Is blogging a tool or a toy? What problems will blogging solve? How does it benefit ministry? How do I build a great blog? and Who am I blogging for? *The Blogging Church* is a handbook that will inspire and equip you to join the conversation. The book includes contributions from five of the most popular bloggers in the world, as well as interviews with blogging pastors.



Reaching Out in A Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul

Lynne Baab

(Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008. \$18)

In *Reaching Out in a Networked World*, communications expert and pastor Lynne Baab examines technologies such as websites, blogs, online communities, and desktop publishing. She demonstrates how a congregation can evaluate these tools and appropriately use them to communicate its heart and soul, to convey its identity and values both within and outside the congregation. Baab urges congregation leaders to reflect on the way they communicate. The recent explosion in communication technologies offers many new ways to present values and identity, but no one has much experience thinking about how best to use these tools. Baab seeks to help leaders use these new technologies with more precision, flair, and consistency. When congregations are intentional about communicating who they are and what they value, people in the wider community can get a clear and coherent picture of the congregation and its mission. Newcomers and visitors are more likely to see why faith commitments matter and why and how they might become involved in this congregation, while current members and leaders will greatly benefit from having a unified vision of the congregation's heart and soul.



Innovations with Parents

Parents Share A 30 Year-Old Innovation

Marilyn Sharpe
The Youth and Family Institute

Is this an oxymoron: 30 years old and still an innovation? Actually, it's a living example of Jesus' proclamation, "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 21:5) Every Wednesday morning for 30 years, I have had the privilege of running a parenting group as a volunteer in my congregation, Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, MN. Each and every week, it is a new creation. New people arrive. New issues surface. New gifts appear. New ministry is done, and faith is formed in every participant and in the children God has entrusted to their care. Whoever comes, they share challenges, triumphs, doubts, personal disasters, daily miracles, and lived wisdom about all it means to raise a child of God faithfully. Over the years, parents claim that this group, Parents Share, saved their lives.

Let me introduce you to a handful of these amazing parents, who bear the light of Christ to their children, to one another, and to children who do not have parents to share the Good News with them.

Renee's family was formed by adoption. Her two wonderful boys, born to crack cocaine mothers, faced seemingly insurmountable odds. Renee has become an advocate, not only for her sons, but impacting policies and their implementation in her school district, in Minnesota, and through the court system. Having dealt with numerous health issues for both her sons, she is our own medical referral system!

David, in his early 40s, had been a stay at home dad since his seven year old daughter was born. He has finished his undergraduate degree and is now in seminary, but is able to join us most Wednesdays for at least part of the time. This fills his cup, as he pours out his wisdom and both gives and receives pastoral care in the circle.

Lisa came to the group, literally led by the hand by the director of our nursery school. With a seven-year-old with autism and three year old twins thrown into chaos by a devastating divorce, Lisa sobs uncontrollably, sure she cannot parent her children, who are so angry, destructive, and out of control.

Overwhelmed, she finds peace as two mothers pick up her children and take them on a picnic, as another mother helps her fill out the papers she needs to complete.

In the midst of foreclosure, Addison shares her confidence that God is walking with her family, as they chart a new course in their lives, grounded in the assurance of God's love and presence. She continues to be a sponsor for and support to those in recovery. She is a non-anxious presence, a living example of what it means to "fear not." When life presses in, she gently tells her children that she is taking some quiet time with God.

Jenn, mother of two preschoolers, heard God's call to care for women in Africa, devastated by drought and disease, whose children do not have reason to hope. She and her husband Ben live in a spectacular home that they have renovated ... and are now selling. They will intentionally down-size, in order to live their faith-driven values of generosity and care for the vulnerable in God's family. This will allow them to do international mission work together as a family.

Barbara, who first came to Parents Share with a triple stroller filled with her two year old and one year old twins, has battled breast cancer. In this group, she is able to be real, to share her fear and hope, her sorrow and confidence that God is with her. Members of the group call, provide childcare and food, listen and sit quietly. One year after her final chemotherapy and with a hopeful prognosis, she shares that cancer was both the hardest thing she has ever experienced and a gift of perspective and priorities.

Elizabeth has an adorable three year old son, a beguiling British accent, sparking eyes, a quick sense of humor, and heart ready to serve anyone who needs her help. Hard to believe that a year ago, she suffered debilitating depression and anxiety, the result of an abusive childhood. She now parents her son, with incredible patience, loving presence, and intuitive insight. She has overcome a fear of answering the

phone and is now one of our church receptionists. She sees the fingerprints of Jesus in all of her healing.

Perhaps the least likely participant of all joined us last month. Ramone is young, handsome, articulate, expecting his first child in March, and incarcerated. The court has mandated that if he is to have access to his child, he needs to complete parenting classes. He arrives with a uniformed and armed guard, Ed, who although not a parent, joins us in conversation, planning a future family that he prays will be his. No one in the group looked askance when they arrived, but welcomed them into the circle. Ramone, who never knew his father, strives to become the father he always wanted ... and the participants in Parents Share cheer him on.

Of course, there are parents dealing with more prosaic, garden-variety issues, whose struggle of the week is toilet training or sleeping through the night or eating green vegetables. But this is not a “Betty-Crocker-Suffer-Off;” all are treated with respect for the issues that are very real in their lives. All see the grace of God and God’s presence in the deep caring of the others in the circle. The parable of the Good Samaritan is lived out every Wednesday in this group.

How did it begin? Thirty years ago on a warm May morning, I was teaching the last session of a parenting class in my congregation. A stay-at-home mom, I was trained as a high school English teacher. As the session began, a participant raised her hand and asked, “When does the next class start?”

“October 8th,” I replied.

“October?” she howled. “I might not still be alive by October!”

As the group split into small discussion groups, I raced up the hallway to talk to our Director of Adult Christian Education. In her office, I recounted what had just transpired.

“We’ve talked about starting a parent support group. Could I tell them we’ll be creating one?” I inquired.

“Of course,” she responded.

“When could we start?” I wondered.

“How about next week?” Joyce replied.

Oh, she had called my bluff. You see, I’d never even attended a parent support group. I didn’t know how they functioned or what to do or, most importantly, what not to do. I wasn’t trained as a counselor or therapist. But I had a cohort in those early years, Colleen Person, my friend, former neighbor, and trained psychiatric nurse, gifted in small group process. (Remember in Luke 10 when Jesus sent out the seventy, he sent them out two by two. Now, I know why! The two of us dared—and did—what neither of us would ever have attempted

alone.) Like the loaves and fishes the little boy brought to Jesus, our meager efforts and gifts were multiplied to feed hundreds of parents with the love of Christ, anchored in His promise to be with us always.

For these parents, it has been enough, and more than enough. Every week, parents reach out to welcome a new attendee, to offer hope and hospitality, to provide childcare or casseroles, referrals or resources, wisdom or witness. The love of Christ is incarnate in this group.

So, why should a congregation offer a parent support network? Parenting is the hardest, most important work humans ever do. Historical supports for parents in our culture no longer exist. And, at its heart, parenting is an inherently spiritual journey. Where better to support and shape and nurture faith in parents, who are the primary faith formers in the lives of children?

How to do it? There is no right way, but I am happy to share a few things I’ve learned along the way:

1. Have a regular schedule, preferably weekly, and at least 1½ hours, with coffee on, nametags, Kleenex, and a place for all to sit. A regular facilitator helps with continuity.
2. Provide a good nursery that is safe, physically and emotionally, for the kids and free or very low cost. Train nursery workers so their childcare mirrors what the parents are learning.
3. Listen, listen, listen. Affirm, affirm, affirm. Be positive and hopeful and love the participants. And that is the easy part.
4. Ask for the wisdom of group to address the issues raised. All will discover they bring experience and wisdom.
5. Let everyone welcome and invite participants. Keep it from being a closed group. People are very nervous the first time they come and need to feel that they are wanted, welcome, and belong.
6. Make sure, most importantly, that you link parenting with faith, with a God who created parents and children alike in great love. Forgiveness and love and hope and the presence of the One who has promised to be with us always are the most crucial ingredients of sustainable parenting. Give parents a safe place to talk about faith and questions and doubt, recognizing that all of them are part of the faith journey. No harsh, judgmental legalism here; just radical love, the gospel come to life with skin on.

Our extraordinarily simple format:

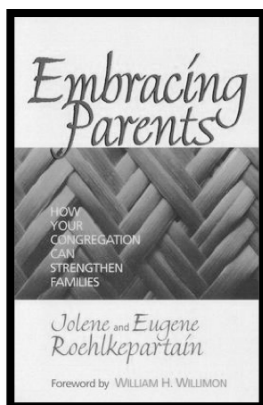
1. Begin with prayer.
2. Share a reflection on a topic, news, concern, or insight.
3. Check in, using parent's name, kids' names and ages, and any issue they choose.
4. Invite the wisdom of the group.

An "alumni" of the group wrote an article about Parents Share in a local community paper. I think she says it best:

Long ago, when I was 25, if someone had predicted my life would be saved by a megachurch group of Lutheran hausfraus, I

would have gagged. As a young journalist, I was far too hip, career-driven, Deeply Ironic, and – this is key – childless to imagine such a mundane source of salvation... I looked for more dramatic, individual forms of salvation. The mountain-top experience. The ultimate workout. The splendid therapist. But at 43, I see salvation as often something far more mundane and powerful: it's community. It's a pot of coffee, an open door and a group ready to extend a few more feet of rope. (Lynnell Mickelsen, *Southwest Journal*, December, 2000)

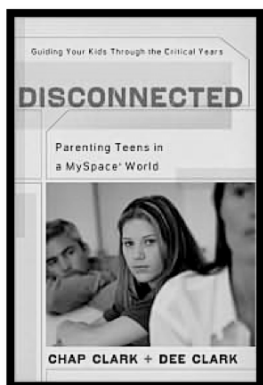
Parent Resources



Embracing Parents

Jolene and Eugene Roehlkepartain (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) [\$15]

Based on the results of 2002 poll of 1,005 parents by the Search Institute and the YMCA, this book presents true stories, quizzes, checklists, and practical tools that congregations can use to become more effective in working with parents and strengthening family life. *Embracing Parents* challenges pastors and other church leaders to expand their vision, to become proactive in meeting the needs of families, and to provide a key place where parents and their children can grow. The first five chapters report on the five major findings from the research. Chapter Six provides tools and ideas for equipping and supporting parents; Chapter Seven describes how to unleash the power of the congregation.



Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a MySpace World

Chap Clark and Dee Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007) [\$12.99]

Dee Clark, a marriage and family therapist, and Chap Clark, a professor of youth and family ministry, have teamed to write *Disconnected—Parenting Teens in a MySpace World* that uses research and their own experience as parents to provide guidance in raising children and adolescents. They have written the book to inform, prepare, encourage, and motivate parents. Chapters include understanding today's adolescent journey, the five tasks of parenting, parenting through the seasons from childhood to late adolescence, and parenting as a partnership. Written for parents, it can be used by congregations as the content for developing parent education programming.



The Parent You Want to Be

Les and Leslie Parrott (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) [\$19.99]

Les and Leslie Parrott have written a guide to parenting that helps parents learn: 1) a three-step approach to avoid become the parent you don't want to be; 2) how to make your child's perception of you as positive as possible; 3) the best way to give children the praise they crave; 4) how to hear what your child isn't saying to you – but wants to; 5) the immeasurable value of commemorating milestones; and 6) the key to building a lifelong bond of deep connection. The book includes exercises and brief self-tests let parents check their progress and provide instant feedback.



Innovations with Parents

Coaching Parents to Form their Own Children

Bill Huebsch
PastoralPlanning.com

There's a powerful and innovative new approach available this year for the faith formation and sacramental preparation of children and their parents. It has the potential to change the way we do business in all dimensions of faith formation.

Coach the Parents

What's new is the method for doing the formation itself. Very simply, it helps parish leaders *coach parents to form their own children*, rather than doing it for them. Early results show, to no one's surprise, and that doing so results in sacramental and faith formation that lasts a lifetime!

We know from our research that most active adult Catholics today are with the church because they were formed in faith *by their parents or guardians*. When you ask adults about this, people never say that they have faith as adults because they had a "great textbook in third grade." Of course, some adults come to faith *as adults*. But for the majority, formation by their parents when they were children is the key element.

And in reality, parents *are* the real forming agents of their children. No matter how well we may do in religious education with that third grade child, if he or she goes home to a house where the faith is not cherished or understood, our best efforts can't produce formation that will last a lifetime. The parents—by their actions, words, and household habits—form their children for life, either with faith or without it.

Therefore, we simply *must include the parents*. But it will never be enough for us parish leaders to simply hand the parents a textbook, send them home, and say, "Good by and good luck. Keep warm and well fed!" Instead, we must gather parents with their children and then *coach them* to provide the formation themselves, using a resource designed for this purpose.

Once we invite parents into the process of faith formation, we must stand by their sides and help them to be successful! They might not have all the terminology just right. They might not be totally enthused in their own faith. They might not even be worshipping with the church on a regular basis. But once they begin to form their own children, and we coach them to do this well, they quickly become more confident, more informed, and more prayerful.

It also turns out that when we coach parents, many find a new priority in living their own faith, as examples for their children. They see themselves as role models and begin taking a more active role in the parish, including more regular attendance at Sunday Mass. By coaching them to help their children, we wind up evangelizing the parishioners who are in their 20s and 30s.

Development of the Idea

Over the past twenty years, there has been a lot of talk in faith formation circles about offering faith formation to a larger group in the parish than merely children. Sometimes it's called "whole community catechesis" and other times "lifelong faith formation" or "intergenerational catechesis."

For many of us, this was a really new idea when we first heard it. For as long as most of us could remember, we had been busy running parish religious education programs. For the most part, parents were not in the picture. We hoped if we educated the kids, they'd bring their parents along. Sometimes that worked. Sometimes it did not.

Some of us even felt a little threatened by "whole community catechesis" as though including the adults would somehow eliminate the children. Others of us simply felt overwhelmed. We were barely treading water in our parish jobs as it was—without adding another entire huge group to our responsibilities. And besides, there are just too many adult Catholics who haven't had much formation since their grade school years.

In the United States the movement for lifelong formation was empowered by the Catholic Bishops, with their now-ten-year-old pastoral plan, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. This pastoral plan was based on the prophetic vision laid out in the *General Directory for Catechesis*. Add to that, we also had the very important work done by the staff at the Center for Ministry Development, which modeled how to gather the whole community.

Parents Sharing Faith

Again, the single most important idea in all of this is that unless the parents of our children are deeply and fully involved in both the formal education and a daily lifestyle of faith, we cannot succeed with their children. This is one of our greatest challenges.

As long as we keep “doing it for them,” parents will never step up and become the persons primarily responsible for the faith of their children. We are in the habit of replacing parents with parish volunteers for this purpose. The volunteers are well meaning and faithful. They want to succeed with the children. But, by continually replacing parents with teachers at the church, we have unfortunately taught the parents that their role is minor. In fact, though, their role is *irreplaceable*. Here’s what the document on Christian education from Vatican II said about that: “The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute’ (*Declaration on Christian Education*, #3).

Turning the Next Corner

This year, we are turning a new corner in regard to the role of parents. In the whole progress toward lifelong faith formation, this is an innovation that will have lasting effects. It is a sure-fire method *for coaching parents to form their own children*. The team that wrote and produced this resource knows that growing up Catholic doesn’t start at first grade, and certainly not at sacrament preparation. It begins at baptism when the child is entrusted to the care of his or her parents. So this new resource, called *Growing Up Catholic*, begins there.

The first element of it, called appropriately *Entrusted To Your Care*, is a method for coaching young parents between baptism and elementary school. Using modern methods for this (such as the Internet and email) added to traditional methods (such as the telephone and parish gatherings), *Entrusted* offers three points of contact each year between parish volunteers or staff and those parents.

Then, when their child is ready to prepare more formally for the sacraments, *Growing Up Catholic* provides a carefully tested and well-crafted formation

process designed for use within the parish or in home schooling. It provides the immediate preparation for First Reconciliation, Confirmation-in-restored-order, and First Communion. But it does far more than merely prepare a child for these sacraments. It also prepares children and their parents for a lifelong journey of faith as Catholics. *Growing Up Catholic* has three key elements:

1. A fully reproducible learning guide designed for the parents and children. Parents are literally coached on how to form children for the sacraments. *Growing Up Catholic* uses a loose leaf style, because when a parent misses a session (and some always will!), or when parents who don’t live together in marriage any longer are both involved, the loose leaf style allows you to send it home, or to multiple homes, or even to post it on the parish web site. And this also allows the children to consume and “make their own” the learning resource which they use.
2. A web site loaded with parent information: www.GrowingUpCatholic.com. *Growing up Catholic* depends on the parents or guardians of the child. Remember, no matter how well we do as a parish, the children still learn at home by watching and listening to their parents. Many parents really aren’t deeply enough connected to their own faith to guide a child. So on this web site, *Growing Up Catholic* reaches past the parish directly to the parents providing them with a roadmap on how to raise a child in the Catholic faith:
 - What prayers should a child know by heart?
 - What is the meaning of the symbols, in plain English?
 - What signs of faith, sacramentals, and other Catholic things do we need in our home?
 - What if one of the parents is not Catholic? How do we bridge multiple faiths and cultures?
 - Using plain English, what is the background from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the various things a child should learn?
 - And much more.
3. A full package of tools designed for the parish leader. This includes a guide for both catechists and leaders, plus one for the pastor and parish musicians. Every other possible leader need is also met, and the team behind

Growing Up Catholic provides unlimited, free support to any parish via the phone. (Y, será disponible en español pronto.)

Conclusion

We said earlier here that the key to this is those parents, those busy, distracted, under-formed, unengaged-with-the-church parents. Because we've used our present model for so long (replacing parents with other teachers) we may have grown to believe that parents don't *want* to take part. But it turns out that they really *do want to have a role in the formation of their children*. They aren't taking part, they often tell us, only because we have not *coached* them to do this, and unless we do that, they just don't know how to become involved.

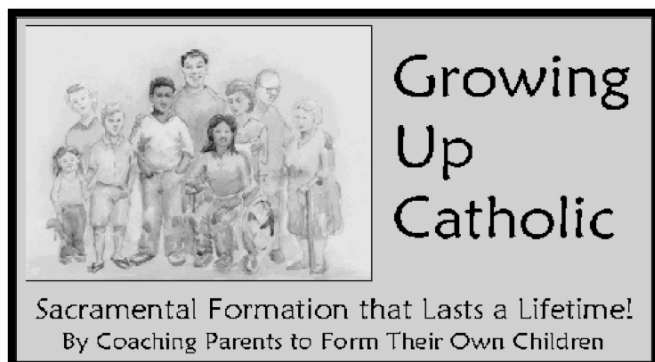
Let the parents speak for themselves about this. Here is what a group of parents wrote in their evaluations after just the first 3 sessions of *Growing Up Catholic* for First Reconciliation:

- Every answer I needed was there. I felt very comfortable.
- I love the website! It's given me access to everything I need for my child. We're going to memorize our prayers this weekend.
- I wish I [had] had this for my older children.
- No one told us forming our own kids was this important. Now I feel I'm learning alongside [Ryan].
- I really prefer this over having someone else teach my child.
- You're kidding! I hope you have more of this for my child as she grows up. This is wonderful!
- Do you have a program like this on the Bible?
- Thank you for helping me with my child.

Web Site

Growing Up Catholic

www.GrowingUpCatholic.com



The Catholic Church on the Importance of Parents

The Declaration on Christian Education from Vatican II:

Parents are, in fact, the first and foremost educators of their children
within a family atmosphere
animated with love
providing a well-rounded formation.

The family can be called the first school of those social virtues which every society needs.

The Christian family is enriched by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony and is the place where children are first taught to know and love God and to know and love their neighbor.

Here they come to understand human companionship, here they're introduced into civic life, and here initiated into the parish community. (From article 3 *Vatican II in Plain English*)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule... (From article 2223, italics theirs)

Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith... (From article 2226)

The General Directory for Catechesis:

The family is defined by Vatican II as a domestic church...

The family passes on human values in the Christian tradition, and it awakens a sense of God in its youngest members.

It teaches the first tentative steps of prayer, it forms the moral conscience, and it teaches human love as a reflection of divine love.

Indeed, the catechetics of the home are more witness than teaching, more occasional than systematic, and more daily than structured into periods. (From article 255, *The GDC in Plain English*)



Innovations with the Whole Church

Expanding Horizons

Intergenerational Learning

Mariette Martineau
Center for Ministry Development

Resurrection Catholic Parish in Rochester, Minnesota, a parish seeking to nurture learning for all ages and learning styles, has created an amazing intergenerational learning opportunity for their parish called “Expanding Horizons.”

Expanding Horizons incorporates interactive stations that focus on a core Catholic teaching. These stations are displayed in the parish’s Great Hall for 10 days, from Friday to the second Sunday. Parishioners can come any time between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. This self-guided tour allows participants to learn at their own pace and engage in learning with a spouse, child, friend, neighbor, or individually. There are three levels of activities: adults (grade 10 and older), youth (grades 5-9), and children (grades 1-4). The stations for children are designed for parent-child learning.

On entering the Great Hall, participants sign in and pick up a guide that explains the layout and gives basic directions. Display boards prompt the reader with intriguing questions, present lists of interesting facts, or provide numbered tasks to complete the designated activity. Collages and posters are often stunningly arranged in a museum style. Short video clips and CD players play music, recite poetry, or present stories. Shadow boxes allow for viewing of precious objects. Framed religious pictures placed on easels tell a story. Journals are available to participants for jotting down questions for the pastor, making comments on what was learned, or sharing additional information with future participants.

Worksheets, word searches, flash cards, and puzzles test parishioners’ knowledge. Instructional booklets are constructed for the intrepid seeker, providing more detailed information. The display often includes computer games, board games, art displays, articles and pictures from parishioners put on display, stories, and videos by well-known Catholic speakers. There are opportunities for those who choose to interact with one another. Whatever will help people enter into the topic is used to set up and create the environment—timelines, maps, and

even converting the entire space into a home. A resource table showcases current magazines and books that address the topic. Additional handouts are available. There are even unique areas for meditation on a theological question with the opportunity for participants to express their own insights.

Expanding Horizons was developed at Resurrection in response to needs expressed in their intergenerational session evaluations. Parishioners were saying, “I don’t like sharing my faith with others because I feel I don’t know enough.” “The intergenerational session (Parish Night) did not fit with our household schedule; we need more flexibility.” “I’m uncomfortable in a large group setting.” “The intergenerational session alone does not provide enough time to adequately teach and experience the topic.”

In the first year, the parish positioned Expanding Horizons a week or two before their intergenerational learning sessions (Parish Night), to prepare the parish for the intergenerational learning session. It gave parishioners an opportunity to think ahead and ruminate on the ideas and information presented. Resurrection hoped this exposure would not only stimulate thought and prayer, but also facilitate the parishioners’ comfort level in sharing their faith experiences and insights at the other intergenerational offerings. This supposition was somewhat borne out on Parish Nights when participants would verbally refer to their Expanding Horizons experience during discussion periods.

The first year the parish’s learning focus was Prayer. The three Expanding Horizons were:

1. **The Lord’s Prayer:** Origins and liturgical development, seven petitions and trinity.
Design: poster displays and instructional materials on tables with CD for listening to the Lord’s Prayer sung by a local singer.
2. **The Rosary:** History, four mysteries, Mary’s role, and Catholic tradition.
Design: A museum environment with artwork and Scripture passages announcing the four sets of Mysteries positioned around the perimeter. Chairs

and kneelers were available for viewing and reflection. Large rosary display with descriptions of rosaries and personalized stories of their significance in the lives of parishioners.

3. **Catholic Devotions:** Saintry influences, prayer styles, and Catholic culture.

Design: Converted the space into a home layout where people explored "The Sacred in our Ordinary Life" by traveling through each room and interacting with questions. Each room and hallway focused on a specific Catholic devotion.

In the second year Resurrection's learning focus was sacraments and Expanding Horizons offered learning about the sacraments of Initiation, Healing, and Vocations. The current year of 2008-2009 focuses on The Creed and Expanding Horizons is offering learning on the need for creeds, the trinity, and four marks of the church.

Resurrection has parishioners who participate in Expanding Horizons but do not come to Parish Night (Intergenerational Learning Session) or Going Deeper (Age Specific Learning Options), but most of those attending take in one of these programs.

Parish staff cite the following advantages of this learning experience:

- Through the Expanding Horizons experience there is so much flexibility in incorporating all the different learning styles and allowing the participant to choose how they learn best as well as a determining which specific aspect of the topic that they want to delve into.
- It offers so many learning directions, with a smorgasbord of information on the chosen topic that gives people multiple topics on a core subject to choose to explore.
- It allows parishioners to learn at their own pace. There is no need to hurry and they might just browse and grab some information made available to take home with them.
- There are layers of learning: an example of a 'sound bite' would be the display boards of major titles and pictures that are on display. There are brief Scripture passages and paragraphs from the *Catechism* that relate to the topic and peak a person's interest at a little deeper level. Then there are pages of information that have been put together by the design team, and a list of books and resources that are recommended for the person attending on a specific topic.
- Time and again, people remark about the beautiful presentation. Resurrection has taken extra effort to box up some of the items that can be reused and have shared them with other groups of people within their diocese.

Participants at one of Resurrection's most recent Expanding Horizons offered these comments about their learning experience:

- Excellent displays in the Great Hall, nice that the Expanding Horizons is available for a long period of time.
- Good content.
- I like the variety of ways to learn.
- Expanding Horizons us helps to understand our faith better and leads us to search more.
- Expanding Horizons is good family time.
- As a generally ill-prepared adult Catholic, Expanding Horizons really reminds me and teaches me about the meaning of our traditions and practices.
- I appreciate the opportunity to learn about my faith in a much deeper way.
- This brings your faith alive.
- It's very rewarding, a way to get closer to God.
- This multiple approach circumvents some of the problems that occur with traditional religious education programs.

Attendance at Expanding Horizons is not as large as it is at the structured intergenerational learning events, however, and space constraints do not permit keeping the displays up for longer than a 10-day period in the Great Hall. To accommodate those who cannot attend during the 10 days, they have consolidated some of the elements of the displays into a single smaller display which is placed in a quiet but noticeable corner of the main gathering space, rotating some of the more transportable display elements to this area during the four-week period following Parish Night or until they move on to the next faith topic of the year.

Due to the time required for team catechesis, planning, design and sometimes construction which are needed to implement the learning environment the team envisions, Resurrection found that the design and implementation team (thus far 7-9 people) is only capable of creating three Expanding Horizons a year without compromising variety and quality. As you can tell from the description, this learning opportunity is a lot of work. But what isn't that is done well and has impact? As a staff member said about her own recent experience: "It was fun to just pop my head in today and see a mother with her two teenage sons playing the "I Believe" game and having a great time. That makes it all worth it!"

For More Information: Resurrection Parish
www.resurrection-catholic.org/gof/description/eh.html



Innovations with the Whole Church

Invite a Friend to Church Sunday

David Anderson
The Youth and Family Institute

Granted, “invite a friend to church Sunday” does not seem to be one of the latest or best innovations to recommend these days. In fact, when it is suggested to a congregation—even with great enthusiasm and delight at its novelty and punch—people laugh and roll their eyes in disbelief that this could be the ticket for innovative change in faith formation. The general response of the impatient and disbelieving crowd: been there; done that.

Underneath this well-worn evangelism tool may, in fact, be something quite novel, especially if the intended definition of “church” is not the Sunday morning worship experience. And therein lies the element of innovation. The “church” intended is not the public gathering of Christians in worship but the more intimate setting of the church in the home, what Catholics have promoted quite clearly since Vatican II as the “domestic church,” and what Protestants have described as the “first church” of a child.

Once the new definition of church has been substituted, a new horizon of meaning emerges. The goal is not to begin with a faith forming invitation to a congregation. The focus is more personal, relational, non-threatening, and, for many, more significant. It focuses on Christian hospitality, one of the ancient Christian practices, and one of the lost arts of the Christian faith in America.

Within the last few generations we have effectively disestablished the role of Christian hospitality in the home. Ironically, this disestablishment seems to have coincided with the emergence of larger homes, bigger incomes, more attention to remodeling and interior decorating, more exotic travels and less time for ourselves and each other, whether that other be family, friend, or stranger.

Fortunately, people are once again lifting up the Christian practice of hospitality. Diana Butler Bass does so, including in her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*. There she references the work of Henri Nouwen on hospitality in his book *Reaching Out*. However, when Bass writes about hospitality, she reflects nearly exclusively on the hospitality of a

congregation. This is legitimate but limiting and definitely not the focus of the work of Nouwen, nor is it the heart of biblical or historic Christianity’s experience of hospitality. When the focus of the art of hospitality is the congregation, its greater gift and practice has been minimized and reduced to an institutional category instead of the intimate, vulnerable, and grace-filled arena of the home. In fact, Nouwen’s own biblical examples of hospitality are all domestic examples, from the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah with the three strangers, the widow of Zarephath with Elijah, and the two disciples on their way to their home in Emmaus with Jesus.¹ When Bass references a biblical example of hospitality, she uses Acts 2 without noting that it was a Christian practice of the home as well as the public temple (see Acts 2:46).²

The home in recent decades has been overlooked and devalued as a treasured expression of the church and place for faith formation. Therefore, it is understandable that when one hears, “invite a friend to church Sunday,” the person automatically thinks congregation instead of domestic church and congregation instead of domestic hospitality. Once that error has been corrected, another location for meaningful hospitality can emerge.

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota made that correction and used the theme “invite a friend to church Sunday” for the season of Epiphany in 2007 to encourage the members and friends of the congregation to open their homes to others with Christian hospitality. Each Sunday the worship service and sermon focused on the Christian practice of home hospitality through one of the Four Keys: caring conversations, devotions, service, and rituals and traditions.³

The Four Keys represent what might be called the embedded faith practices of the church, the essential and irreducible practices that are configured in numerous ways to establish the larger and historic practices of the church, like Christian hospitality. Pastors Paul Nelson and Susan Weaver helped the worshipping congregation imagine the kinds of

caring conversations suitable for a meal with guests in a home. Specific resources like FaithTalk® Cards were suggested.⁴ Table graces were encouraged as a devotional practice that would be appropriate for a meal hosted by a Christian home. It was observed that having people over for a meal and social exchange is itself a valuable form of service. In a culture that has become more sterile in its reliable forms of home hospitality, rich and gracious rituals and traditions associated with inviting people into one's home were recalled.

Following an explanation of the theme and how to fulfill the theme through the Four Keys, the worshippers were given placemats that included conversation starters and table graces. The congregation had even made hundreds of fortune cookies that contained more conversation starters in them as a way to keep the experience both playful and doable. The people were sent out with these tools and the weeks of preparation to join one another in each other's homes for a meal and Christian hospitality. The assignment to actually do Christian hospitality in the home with one another had been communicated weeks before to prepare them to schedule the Sunday meals. The assumption was made that people were far enough removed from the tradition, practice, and the comfort of eating meals in each other's homes. It was determined that before homes could be opened up to the larger community, it would be wise for people to practice with each other the custom of Christian hospitality. It was hoped that later the parishioners would be more comfortable inviting others into their homes to offer meaningful, Christian faith formation.

During the week that followed the assignment of Christian hospitality with one another, Pastors Nelson and Weaver contacted people from the congregation to learn how the experience had gone. What worked? What delightful experiences were there to record? What didn't go so well, and how could the congregation learn to do a better job of teaching Christian hospitality in the future? They learned, to no surprise, the practice of home hospitality is a challenge. Many had not participated. They learned that the experience was also a blessing to many others. People observed that sitting around a table goes much further to connect people to one another than simply sitting in the same pew. There were accounts of shared laughter, stories, struggles, and support—the joy in just being together. Pastor Nelson stated, “This was also a profound growing experience for those who led prayers, devotions and caring conversations in their homes.” One person reported back, “Faith wasn't being done for me by the Pastor. I was doing it, I was leading, I was praying. I could do this.” Pastor Nelson's evaluation

continued, “Perhaps the greatest lesson that came out of this was that it needs to be done again and again. This is not a novel, one-time seasonal event to fill the calendar. It is a vital practice in living out our faith, of helping people turn their homes into church, and stepping up as spiritual leaders.”

Now that the congregation has committed to Christian hospitality in the home, Immanuel Lutheran has been able to enrich their faith group small group ministries. They have been able to help people see that they can lead prayers, lead a devotion, begin a caring conversation and connect their faith more and more to their daily lives, their homes. The congregation continues to develop materials that equip people to do the Four Keys in simple and practical ways. The congregation provides weekly handouts that promote the Four Keys for the following week. The recommendations are used with staff, council, and committees to expand their use. The leadership has made it a priority to connect Sunday worship with daily discipleship, the kind that happens through Christian hospitality. This emphasis has touched lives. One mother who acknowledges that she is not a singer shared with the congregation her nighttime ritual with her children, which includes prayers, blessings and the singing of a lullaby. She sang the lullaby to the congregation, and as off key as it was, it was perceived as beautiful because people could see how much it meant to her and her family.

With this focus on Christian hospitality in the home, Immanuel Lutheran and other congregations are rethinking how to do ministry with small groups, Bible studies, church committees, youth and family groups, and other ministries that can happen in intimate and faith forming settings of the home. For example, one way of incorporating new members into the life of the congregation may be to invite them to the homes of established members instead of putting them on a committee. It is all part of the faith forming practice of Christian hospitality, like inviting a friend to church, the church in your home.

End Notes

¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1975. p. 47.

² Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*. New York: HarperOne, 2006. pp. 83-84

³ The Four Keys are described in detail in the book *Frogs without Legs Can't Hear: Nurturing Disciples in Home and Congregation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. For more information on the use of the Four Keys in congregational renewal and faith formation, contact The Youth & Family Institute at www.tyfi.org.

⁴ A resource available from The Youth & Family Institute (www.tyfi.org) to help stimulate conversation between on issues surrounding their beliefs and values.

The Four Keys

The Youth and Family Institute
(www.TYFI.org)

The Youth and Family Institute has identified four keys that are essential for nurturing the faith, values, and character formation of children, youth, and adults:

1. **Caring Conversation.** Christian values and faith are passed on to the next generation through supportive conversation. Listening and responding to the daily concerns of our children make it easier to have meaningful conversations regarding the love of God, and are ways to express God's love to others.
2. **Family Devotions.** Adults need to learn the Christian message and the biblical story as their own story if they are to pass on their faith to their children and other adults. Our Christian faith shapes the whole of our lives and involves a lifetime of study, reflection, and prayer.
3. **Family Rituals and Traditions.** Families identify themselves and tell their family stories through daily routines, celebrations, and rituals. Whether it's an annual summer vacation, hanging Christmas ornaments, or an informal liturgy before bedtime, these activities speak volumes about what the family values, believes and promotes, and how much the family values its faith.
4. **Family Service.** Children, youth, and adults are most likely to be influenced by those who "walk the talk." There are many opportunities for service: some in the home, some in the congregation, some in the larger community. Whatever type of service you choose, it is best done with family members or other intergenerational groups.

FaithTalk® Four Keys

Lyle Griner and Andrea Fieldhouse
(The Youth and Family Institute, 2008. \$29.95)
www.TYFI.org



The newest FaithTalk® cards will inspire your family to live out The Institute's Four Key faith practices every day! Designed to keep your faith active and alive, each discussion card poses a question focusing on one of these four areas of spiritual development:

- Caring Conversation: Sharing Our Stories
- Devotions: Identifying God's Presence in All of Life
- Rituals and Traditions: Living Out Our Beliefs
- Service: Actions that Honor Our Values by Caring for Our Neighbor

In addition, the new packaging allows the cards to be "set up" on your table, truly making it a centerpiece for encouraging and growing faith in the home. Pastors, Christian educators, camp counselors, Sunday school teachers, confirmation leaders and youth directors also rely on our **FaithTalk** cards as a powerful resource to engage children, youth and adults in faith-filled conversations.



Innovations with the Whole Church

An Organic Curriculum for the Small Church

Theodore Brelsford
Candler School of Theology
Emory University

In the small ecumenical church which I currently serve as pastor we are experimenting with what I term an *organic minimalist curriculum*. The premises of the curriculum grow out of a commitment to create our own curriculum and to coordinate Sunday school lessons and weekly worship service texts and teachings (sermons), as well as a commitment to the nurturance of Christian community as a primary value. While creating contextually specific curriculum entails significant work, this work (for me as pastor and curriculum writer) serves directly as part of my sermon preparation, and the curriculum aims to put teachers at ease to teach with minimal anxiety from their own knowledge, strengths, and interests.

First, a little background: Orchard Park Community Church is a congregation unaffiliated with any denomination and drawing members from nearly the entire range of Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. The church has barely 100 members (about 55 families), with 10 – 16 children in the Sunday school each week. Sunday school in this church is held during the last 45 minutes of the worship service. About 15 minutes into the service there is a “Children’s Lesson” led by the pastor (a fairly common practice in many Protestant churches), after which children in Kindergarten through 8th grade are invited to go with their teachers to the Sunday school rooms in the back wing of the church for their classes. There are presently just two classes: Kindergarten through 3rd grade, and 4th through 7th grade (there are no 8th graders currently attending). Each class is taught by a team of two volunteers from the membership, and each team teaches for three weeks. On the first Sunday of each month there is no Sunday school, so teachers and students all remain in the sanctuary with everyone else for the entire worship service. Teachers are generally asked to teach two separate three-week sessions during the year, so that this responsibility rotates among a dozen or so volunteers and no one is missing worship for

more than three weeks at a time. Two members serving as co-chairs of the Christian Education Committee recruit teachers, create the schedule, and coordinate the transitions and rotations.

This fall, as the Sunday school year commenced in September I held a workshop for the volunteer teachers. Eleven attended. We met for two hours on a Tuesday evening, over pizza. My primary message in that session was: more than anything you say, the most important things you will be teaching our children are things you will be *demonstrating* by the very fact of your willingness to spend this time with them and share with them. I was building here on Elliot Eisner’s notions of the “explicit, implicit, and null” curricula, particularly as articulated by Maria Harris in *Fashion Me a People* (Westminster John/Knox, 1989). I did not seek to review Eisner’s theory as such with the teachers, but did emphasize the importance of the implicit curriculum as significantly more formative than the explicit. And I sought to illumine three specific implicit lessons the teachers might bear in mind—three primary aspects of our shared curriculum—three things I hoped students might learn, and which they as teachers could embody for students, and effectively teach simply by being a loving presence to the children for 45 minutes:

- We are a Christian community seeking to help each other learn and grow in our faith
- This whole community (as represented by their teachers) cares about them
- Learning about the Bible and what we believe (church doctrine) can be fun (or at least engaging and worthwhile)

In other words, a primary goal of this Sunday school curriculum is to form and nurture persons engaged in and committed to: 1) Christian community, 2) mutual caring, and 3) life-long learning/study (of Bible and Christian doctrine). The specific, *explicit* Bible lessons and doctrines taught during the year, while important, are of secondary importance to these primary, *implicit* goals.

To reinforce this message, the following appears on the cover sheet sent to each teacher via email at the beginning of each month along with the specific Scripture passages and lesson plans for each week of that month:

Thank you for taking on the important responsibility of helping to nurture and educate our children. Please remember that, more than anything you say, the most important things you are teaching are things you are demonstrating by the very fact of your willingness to teach:

- *We are a Christian community seeking to help each other learn and grow in our faith*
- *This whole community (as represented by you as teacher) cares about them*
- *Learning about the Bible and what we believe can be fun (or at least engaging and worthwhile)*

In our September workshop meeting we reviewed a basic structure for each class session, which is also reiterated on the cover sheet each month:

Since the children have different teachers each month, and we don't have a set, printed curriculum, it will be helpful to have a few things that are consistent each week. A consistent structure to the time will help children feel comfortable because they will know more or less what to expect, even with different teachers:

- *Begin with brief prayer (for example: "God be with us this morning as we share and learn together. Amen.")*
- *Then a brief "check in" (for example: "How are doing this morning?" Or, "What's the best/worst thing that happened this week?"). This should probably be kept brief (5 minutes altogether), unless in your judgment something comes up that demands or is worthy of extended attention.*
- *Read the focus text for the day (usually a Scripture passage). This may be read by you, or by a selected student, or by several students taking turns.*
- *Engage in an activity and/or discussion.*
- *Close with brief wrap up (for example: "Thanks for your good participation today, I hope we will all try to remember that God loves everyone, even those people who don't deserve it.")*
- *Blessing ("May God be with you during this week while you are at school, and at home, and wherever you are. I hope I'll see you next week.")*

Finally, in the workshop I sought to emphasize the teachers' own authority as teachers. To teach with integrity and energy and authenticity, each teacher must draw on and teach from his or her own particular interests and experiences and perspectives.

While I would be providing the texts and suggestions for working with the text for each week, I truly hoped teachers would run with those suggestions and/or deviate from them as they felt inspired and led. A final section of the cover sheet accompanying each month's lesson plans reads as follows:

- *If you ever want to have an activity or a discussion before rather than after the Scripture or focal text reading, go for it! Sometimes this can be very effective.*
- *If you don't have time to do all you intended to do or all that was suggested, that's fine. Just wrap up and let them go. And remember that just spending the time together as Christians in community counts as a success (even if there are disagreements, or disruptions, or resistances, or whatever).*
- *If there is something you really want to focus on or do other than what is suggested here that's fine. You are the teacher.*

So, to summarize, as we proceed through the year each month begins with a Sunday on which there is no Sunday school and all children remain in worship for the entire service (These services are modified to hold children's attention: the sermon is very short, there is a puppet skit near the beginning and the puppet(s) reappear occasionally throughout the service, materials for coloring are available, and selected adults are on alert to help guide and direct younger children). A team of two teachers then takes responsibility for each of the two Sunday school classes (four teachers total each month), and I provide texts and lesson suggestions for each week. (A sample week's lesson suggestions may be found at the end of the article.)

The texts are taken primarily (but not exclusively) from the Revised Common Lectionary, and the lesson suggestions are part of my sermon preparation — thoughts about basic comprehension, relevance, and challenges of the text for Sunday school students inform my thoughts about meaning, relevance and challenges for the youth and adults who will hear the sermon.

In one case we deviated from the lectionary when the co-chairs of the Christian Education committee and I decided we wanted to be sure the children learned and/or studied the Lord's Prayer. For this purpose I created a month's worth of Sunday school lessons using Matthew 5:38–6:15. This section of Matthew includes basic teachings of Jesus (love of enemies, giving freely without pride, and prayer) concluding with the Lord's Prayer. Students were to practice the Lord's Prayer each week during the month and then study it directly on the last week. In order to keep Sunday school and worship

coordinated (and my work on them consolidated) I then preached from the same Matthew texts for that month.

Since this innovation is in its first year of implementation the full impact of this curriculum strategy is not yet clear. But it is clear that this has been well received and even garnered significant excitement among Sunday school teachers. A few volunteer teachers have said they were only willing to volunteer because this curriculum innovation is in place and is being enthusiastically touted by the Christian Education committee co-chairs. A number of other members have expressed appreciation for the coordination of Sunday school lessons with each week's sermon, which creates possibilities for intergenerational conversations about a common focal text. Ultimately, our hope is that the model may foster confidence and excitement for faith learning throughout the church community.

Resources

- Eisner, Elliot. "The Three Curricula That All Schools Teach." *The Educational Imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. New York: Macmillan, 1979.
- Harris, Maria. *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989. (especially chapter 3)
- Hawkins, Thomas R. *Cultivating Christian Community*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001.
- Tye, Karen B. *Christian Education in the Small Membership Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. (especially chapter 3)

Sample of One Week's Lessons Suggestions

Overview for November

- Nov. 9: Matthew 5: 38-42. Don't hit back (eye for eye, tooth for tooth).
- Nov. 16: Matthew 5: 43-48. Love your enemies.
- Nov. 23: Matthew 6: 1-4. Don't brag about doing nice things.
- Nov. 30: Matthew 6: 5-15. How to pray and the Lord's Prayer.

In other words, the focus is Matthew 5:38 through Matthew 6:15, which contains four separate lessons and ends with the Lord's Prayer. If you rehearse the Lord's prayer each week with the kids they should know it by heart by the end of the month. But, if the older kids already know it then you probably only

need to go over it on the last Sunday. My children's lessons during worship will focus on the Lord's Prayer all month.

Sunday November 9, 2008

Context

(What's going on this week — stuff you need not necessarily discuss, but may want to be aware of.)

Last week there was a baptism (baby Luke Lanning) and Charles the Church Mouse (puppet) was part of the service.

Focus Text for Sunday School Lesson

Matthew 5:38-42: Jesus refers to the Old Testament teaching that punishment should match the crime (eye for eye, tooth for tooth). This is mentioned in three places: Exodus 21:23-24; Leviticus 24: 19-20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. But Jesus says to "turn the other cheek" instead, and if someone asks for something you should give it to them, and even give them more.

- People in Bible times could sue others for items of clothing since few people had money (barter was more common) and clothing was relatively precious (imagine starting with a sheep to make a coat...) and nearly everyone had at least some clothing.
- Roman soldiers could demand that citizens carry their stuff a mile for them when they passed through an area. If you carried an extra mile, that would save someone else having to carry that next mile.
- This entire section of Matthew, chapters 5-7, is a collection of Jesus' sayings about how to live, and most of them extend or overturn Old Testament teachings. Jesus is not saying the Old Testament is wrong or bad, but he is generally asking for more loving behavior—including love of enemies.

Possible Discussion Questions

(after reading the Scripture passage)

Comprehension:

- What did Jesus mean, "you have been taught 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'?"
- Why does Jesus say, "if someone sues for your shirt, give up your coat also?"
[I don't know exactly why, except to make the point that if someone demands something from you, then you should give them even more than asked for. He is emphatically overturning the "eye for eye" morality.]

Thinking about it:

- What do you do if someone at school or in your neighborhood or at home hits you?
- Isn't it fair to hit back?
[Yes, the Old Testament teaches that it is fair. But Jesus realizes, while it may be fair, it is not effective. As the saying goes: if you follow the "eye for eye" ethic you wind up with a everyone being blind and toothless.]
- Do we really have to give everyone whatever they ask of us?

Activity Ideas for the Younger Children

- Act out or imagine a scenario in which one child hits another on the playground. First play out a scenario where the assaulted child hits back and the fight escalates. Then play out a scenario where the child does not hit back. What happens then? Or what might happen—what do they imagine might happen?
- You might have them cut out a few rough figures of children with construction paper and then have them act it out as a sort of puppet-like skit (but no need to hide the puppeteers). The important thing is to have them imagine all the possibilities of what

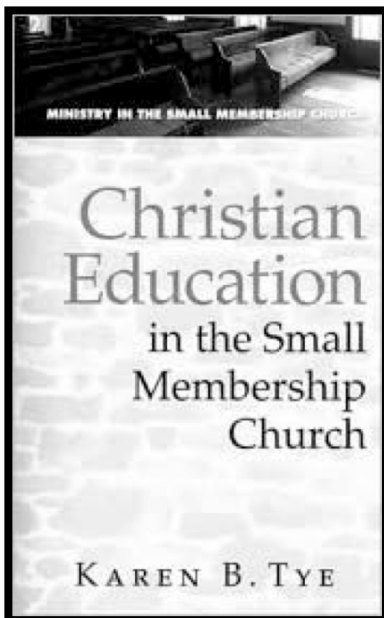
might happen in each scenario. [In my imagination things do not necessarily come out so well for the person who is hit. But let's see what they come up with].

- Or, you could use some of the puppets in the teen room.

For Older Children

- Can you think of any examples of people in history who seemed to try to live by Jesus teaching? [Martin Luther King, Jr.; Gandhi] What kinds of things did they do, or not do?
- Have you seen anyone try to do this in your own experiences?
- Is it good to loan money to anyone who asks for it?
- What if you are a pacifist (as Jesus seems to want) and therefore do not believe in war, are you still supposed to gladly help out soldiers above and beyond what is asked of you?
- I think you could do the same activity as suggested for the younger kids above. It could be interesting to have them imagine various ways the scenarios might play out. They can probably just imagine it in their heads, but interesting things can happen when you push them into some creativity such as acting (via "puppets" or themselves).

Small Membership Church Resource



Christian Education in the Small Membership Church

Karen B. Tye

(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. \$12)

"The small membership church is different!" writes Karen Tye. Christian Education is part of the vital ministry of all churches, but especially of small membership churches. In a culture that places great value on numbers, small membership churches often mistakenly see themselves at a disadvantage. Small membership churches can create wonderful opportunities to form and disciple faithful followers of Jesus Christ. *Christian Education in the Small Membership Church* examines the essential qualities of small churches and the basic aspects of education in a small church setting. Tye explores whom we educate, where and when we educate, and the resources needed. Her final chapter names important principles that will help guide the work of educational ministry in the small membership church. This book invites pastors and educators to lead their small membership churches to develop an imaginative and holistic vision of Christian education.



Innovations with the Whole Church

Small Innovations Helping Huge Problems

Carol Howard Merritt
Western Presbyterian Church
Washington DC

I ask a group of people what political, social, and economic events form them as a generation, and a woman in her twenties raises her hand and replies, “We have more information at our fingertips than any other generation has ever had.”

“Yes!” I smile and nod in excitement.

Then, she continues, “And it makes life really scary. We just don’t know what to do with it all.”

I am taken aback. Typically, I think of technological innovations and the access to all of that information as a good thing. I have the sense that the more you know, the more power you have. Although, I can tell from the direction the conversation is going, that the opposite can be true as well. When young adults, men and women in their twenties and thirties, face such big news as global climate change, the spreading food crisis, and the tumultuous economic upheaval, the information washes over us and feels as if it will engulf us. There does not seem like there is anything that we can do to overcome such massive problems, and it leaves us with a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Yet, we realize that even though these problems are huge, some of the solutions will often be small. As we feel awash in global crises, we will need to look for answers in our local communities; in fact, a bit of salve for our biggest problems can even be found in our own congregations.

It makes sense, then, that the main reason why young adults join our church, Western Presbyterian in Washington, D.C., is because of our innovative engagement with some of the nation’s largest issues. “Food and the environment is the civil rights movement for people under the age of 40,” my colleague, John Wimberly, says.¹ I have indeed seen how our small community of faith works to make a difference.

As we gather to worship on Sunday morning, we have a sense that God empowers us to work for a just and compassionate society. With all of the information at our fingertips, we try to imagine small

ways in which we can help, and much of what we have done has been in the area of food. It makes sense. After all, the good feast is central to our service, and we gather to receive the Eucharist in the sanctuary, we often remind ourselves that the Communion table is connected to the tables in our church basement, where homeless men and women receive a hot, nutritious breakfast. Our worship often leads us to think about big issues in our congregation, such:

- **Soaring oil prices mean escalating food costs.** A strain on our resources has contributed to rising costs of petroleum and petroleum-based fertilizers. The gas hike has exacerbated the escalating cost of food nationally and the food crisis globally.
- **Transporting food contributes to environmental damage.** With the environmental harm that carbon emissions cause and the growing scarcity of resources due to the economic development of China and India, we realize that we will need to think differently about how we grow and transport food. We will need to develop markets for diverse, local food.
- **People in poverty often do not have access to healthier food.** People who are in difficult financial situations (for example, the elderly, the homeless, those on food stamps and WIC) often buy calorie-dense food, because it is cheaper and it satisfies hunger quickly. Food pantries are filled with unhealthy alternatives; in contrast, fruit and organic meat is expensive to purchase.
- **Eating poorly affects our health, as a nation.** The low cost and availability of calorie dense food presents an incentive to eat more junk food, and it causes more health problems in our country in the long run, such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. The risk of diabetes is a particular danger for children.

These are major issues of our time, giant forces that affect our global environment, national landscape, and personal health. With new technologies, we are more and more aware of this information. It can overwhelm us. At least until we realize that these global issues often have local solutions, and innovative communities of faith are in a perfect position to take on some of these sizeable problems, in very small ways.

At Western, where the table is central to our worship and our work, feeding people is at the core of our spiritual practice, and we have been open to innovation as we do it. There are many things that we have done to educate and form our congregation around the importance of food and two initiatives: we organized a farmers market in our neighborhood and started a feeding program for the homeless.

We helped to revive the farmers' market in our neighborhood.

Churches and other faith communities are often in the perfect situation to begin farmers' markets because we often have the available parking lots and space. The Farm Fresh Market in Foggy Bottom relies on our parking garage to store tents and signs.

How could something as simple as a farmer's market affect big issues like the environment, the food shortage, and our health? Farmer's markets will be crucial in the years to come, as they allow for a space where local agriculture can be bought and sold. When we nurture our relationships with local food sources, we help to give farmers a market and an impetus to diversify their crops, and we decrease our dependence on petroleum.

Furthermore, many farmers' markets can become participants with government programs so that recipients of food stamps and WIC can receive checks to use to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition, seniors who need assistance also have incentives to shop at the markets.

In these tough economic times, fruits and vegetables are often the first thing that a financially-strapped family has to cross off of their grocery list, but farmer's markets create a place where they can receive fresh produce, that has been picked that morning, creating a possibility and even incentives for buying healthy food.

All of this brings us to another innovative thing that Western did, twenty-five years ago: we helped to create Miriam's Kitchen.

We started a feeding program for the homeless men and women in our city.

Miriam's Kitchen is housed in the basement of our church, and our services have grown so that we now feed over 200 clients each weekday morning. We not only serve them breakfast, but the staff at Miriam's is committed to assisting their guests with a wide array of social services.

It is not like any other feeding program in which I have been involved, because the chef at Miriam's, Steve Badt, is committed to providing the most nutritious meals that we can. Each morning, the menu includes vegetables that are not often seen on the average American's breakfast table, but they are essential to a healthy diet. Steve knows that a meal at Miriam's may be the only one a client might receive that day, so he makes sure that it has the nutritional value that will get that guest through the next twenty-four hours.

Just as the cost of food increases on our grocery shelves, the food line item in Miriam's budget also rises. In the last couple of years, the food costs at Miriam's have increased by 50 percent. That is where the two initiatives, the farmers' market and the breakfast program, work together.

Not only do farmers' markets help women, infants, children, and the elderly have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, but many farmers are committed to helping the homeless as well. One farmer told me, "It only makes sense to give the leftover produce to people who need it. If I sell at a market that isn't contributing to a soup kitchen or a food bank, then I make sure I *find* an agency that we can contribute to."

At Western, we have seen the generosity of farmers first-hand. Each Wednesday evening, when the farmers are packing up, members of our congregation go gleaning. Participating in a spiritual tradition as old as the days of Ruth and Boaz, they fill their baskets with leftover items that the farmers will not be able to sell at the next market. The members then take those items to Miriam's Kitchen. Through the generosity of the farmers, our members collected about \$15,000 worth of produce last year.

Gleaning after markets is not the only way that this works. Families of all ages also drive out to farms in Virginia and glean the orchards and fields, so they can carry the produce back to Miriam's.

College students and young adults participate in serving at Miriam's. In fact, the young adults in our congregation are an essential force behind the ministry, as they often roll up their sleeves and

contribute to the gleaning, organizing, fundraising, and support of the Kitchen.

It is clear in our spiritual community that adults under the age of forty do not go to Western in order to worship for one hour. They attend because they have all of the information at their fingertips, and they can often feel overwhelmed by it. Yet, they are also reminded through our service, that we are called by God to look at big issues and to find innovative, local ways to address them.

Endnotes

¹ Joan Nathan, "Of Church and Steak: Farming for the Soul." *New York Times*, August 22, 2007.

Resources

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