

Passing On Our Faith: False Starts, Faith Formation, and Fruitful Foundations for Youth Ministries in the 21st Century

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Opening Prayer: Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for all the blessings in our lives. We especially thank you for the young people we know - for their enthusiasm, their energy, and their honest questions. Enliven your Holy Spirit into our hearts and minds as we consider together ways to build effective ministries with these young saints. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Elizabeth's Story

I want to begin by telling you a story. For several years now I have been the director of a program of theological education for high school youth at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Each summer we provide an opportunity for high school youth to come to our campus to engage in theological study and service learning with members of the PLTS faculty. That's where I met Elizabeth, who was a high school junior at the time. In one of our study times, I was leading a discussion about Lutheran worship. I began by asking the participants to make a list of things they enjoyed about worship in their congregations, and things they wished they could change. When we were sharing our lists, we began with things they wished they could change. Of course, I **expected** to hear the "usual" things: better music, perhaps; or more interesting sermons; or a less formal structure. And indeed, I did hear some of those things and some others as well. Then I asked participants to say what they enjoyed most about worship, and Elizabeth was the first to raise her hand. I **expected** that it would be a pretty "short list," but Elizabeth raised her hand right away. "I like the Eucharistic prayer most of all," she said. "**Really??**," I replied. [I hadn't **expected** that answer at all!] After reminding everyone about what a Eucharistic prayer was, Elizabeth then went on to tell us all **why** it was her favorite part of Sunday worship. "It's the part of the worship service," she explained, "when I can remember and feel connected with everyone I love - my family, my friends, Christians all over the world, my dad who

died last year, and all those generations of Christians who came before me. It's the greatest feeling! It's when I know how much God really loves me."

Wow! Elizabeth got that exactly right, didn't she? I tell this story for two reasons. First of all, I tell it because I want to celebrate this strong young woman's faith and witness for the Gospel. Elizabeth is in college now and is preparing for a career in social work with an eye toward being a pastor some day. But secondly, I tell it as an illustration of the way I, as an adult working with youth, had made some **assumptions** about young people that got blown out of the water that day. I assumed some things that turned out not to be true - which brings us to taking a look at some persistent myths about youth and youth ministry that I want to challenge. Before we continue, I want to make **clear** that these are **myths, false starts, untrue assumptions** that are often made about young people and about ministries with young people.

So, let's take a look at a few of my favorite "myths" about young people. The first one is -

A. Young people are problems to be fixed - you know this one, right? It goes something like the question - "What's the matter with youth today?" or the statement, "I just don't understand young people today." We've all said it. I know I certainly have. And it's true. I don't understand some of the things they do, or that they wear, or that they listen to. Maybe you don't either. But what is **not true** is that our not understanding their culture makes youth a problem that we adults must somehow "fix." Young people are not problems - they are people - people with joys, fears, dreams, sorrows, and yes, even faith in God. They are people, making passages toward adulthood and making plans for the future. Youth are not problems to be fixed. A second "myth" about youth is that -

B. Young people are the future of the church - I hear this statement frequently from adults who are worried about the fact that our churches are often empty of young people in the pew on Sunday. They wonder about their absence and say, "After all, young people are the future of the church. Why aren't they here this morning?" This myth presupposes that youth are not the church quite yet - that somehow youth ministry is **only preparation for adult church leadership**. And of course, this myth misses the unique perspectives and gifts that youth can contribute to Christ's church right now! Young people are not only the church of the future: youth are a significant part of today's church. They have perspectives, enthusiasm, energy and gifts which are needed if Christ's ministry in our world is to be inclusive, faithful and effective. Our church needs the wisdom and gifts of its young members as well as of its older members.

Myth number three laments that -

C. Young people don't care about the church - I learned that this was a myth first from my encounter with Elizabeth in our opening story, and most vividly in my recent visit to the youth of the Devula-Lebowa circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa [your very own partnership synod in South Africa]. Youth from Devula-Lebowa were hosts to me and to six young people from the United States. In the two weeks we were there, they were wonderful hosts to us. But more than that, they were powerful witnesses to the Gospel and active, full participants in the life of their congregations. They preached, they planned and conducted retreats, and they shared with us what the mission of the Lutheran Church was in their part of the world. Not only did they talk about mission - they were active participants in that mission, which of course, included their sharing of their time and their perspectives with us. From these young Lutherans I learned first hand that young people do indeed care about the church. Passionately so.

Now we turn our attention briefly to three myths about the nature of youth ministry. They are -

D. Youth ministries are "Lone Ranger" ministries

E. Youth ministries are "Pied Piper" ministries

F. Size matters

Let's treat these last three myths together. What I have in mind with the first, "youth ministries are "Lone Ranger" ministries" is the mistaken notion that youth ministries are the responsibility of the pastor or youth director or church member who is "good with kids." It presupposes that the church can pay or appoint one or two people to do the work of youth ministry for everybody else in the congregation. The congregation abdicates its corporate responsibility for youth ministry and waits to see how well the pastor, the youth director, or the youth sponsor is doing at it. At worst, this myth leads to a "personality cult," and even at its best, it makes youth ministry dependent upon only one or two people. When the "Lone Ranger" leaves, however, the ministry is in serious jeopardy.

The "Pied Piper" myth is a lot like the "Lone Ranger" myth, with an added twist. The "Pied Piper" myth assumes that those doing youth ministry must possess a kind of special, "magnetic" personality that will attract youth to the group. Thus, those who work with youth must be young, energetic, and filled with enthusiasm, and so the "Pied Piper" myth often excludes outright those older persons in a congregation who have wisdom and many important gifts to share with young people.

Lastly, the "size matters" myth. Sometimes we have the mistaken notion that a youth ministry's success should be measured by how large the youth group

is. "How many kids were there?" we ask, and feel disappointed to learn that there were less than 10 or less than 20 or less than 50. But, as Jesus himself knew, the size of the group is not really the important thing. After all, as the saying goes, "there were only 12 in the first Sunday School." Often we can talk ourselves out of embracing ministry with and for our youth by thinking that we don't have a youth ministry because we have only one or two or five youth in our congregation. [I'll have something to say about the challenges of numbers later on]. Instead of lamenting about size, it is better to rejoice in each young person God has given our congregation to love and to nurture in the faith.

So much for the myths about young people and about the nature of youth ministries. Now I want to move to the second part of this address by telling you another story.

Megan's Story

"Megan doesn't spend much time with adults. Today the alarm goes off at 6:15 in the morning, setting in motion a series of events that explode upon her day at a furious pace. During her morning ritual, she sees her mother [a single parent] for about 15 minutes while hurriedly wolfing down a bowl of cereal. Megan makes it to the bus stop by 7:30 a.m.

At school she listens to the teachers lecture, but has little one-on-one interaction with them. After school she stays for pom-poms, which is lead entirely by youth. Her boyfriend picks her up and takes her home. Mom will get home from work around 6:00 p.m. By then, Megan is out with friends.

When she gets home at 8:45 p.m., Mom is winding down and getting ready for bed. After a brief conversation with her mom [frequently interrupted by her younger sister], Megan sits down in front of the television and pulls out the books and begins work on some homework that is due tomorrow. By 11:30 p.m. she is in bed. She has spent 45 minutes with her mother [this is about the national average]. What's interesting is that two generations ago, her grandfather would have spent most of the day with his father [working on the farm]. Clearly, those days are gone."¹

In this next section, I want to turn our attention toward increasing our understanding about the internal and external realities faced by young people like Megan. Of course all of us were adolescents at one time, but I know that the farther away I get from those years the fuzzier my memory becomes about just what being in my teens was like. And, what it was like to be a teenager when I was one is not exactly the same as what it is like to be a young person today. So...let's

¹ Mike Reinhart, "I Really Love You Friend!, The Relationship Proverb," in *Up the Creek With a Paddle: Building Effective Youth and Family Ministry*, ed. by Paul Hill (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), 12.

take a look at some of the important developmental things that influence the life of young people in the early 21st century.

A. Individuation and Belonging - Social and Theological - According to many of the things I have read on the culture of adolescence, there is no more influential reality than this first one - the struggle for individuation on the one hand, and the need for belonging on the other. Let's look at the struggle for individuation first. Adolescent identity is shaped first of all by a history of dependency. As a child, an adolescent has been dependent upon adults from a variety of institutions - parents, teachers, coaches, doctors, and pastors have largely determined the child's world. Adolescence marks the beginning of the transition toward making decisions for one's self. Adolescents want freedom. They want to go their own way, choose their own friends, and have their own thoughts. They hold things inside and keep secrets. The way they dress, the way they speak, and the music they enjoy become expressions of individuality and freedom of choice. They put the beliefs and values of significant adults in their lives to the test. They also put the religious world in which they were raised under the microscope.

At the same time, however, belonging is every bit as fundamental to an adolescent as is individuation. "Do I belong?" is just as important a question to adolescents as is "Who am I as an individual?" During adolescence, peer relationships take on vital importance. Peers become an adolescent's key support network. Having friends to do things with becomes a life and death matter. And, being accepted by one's peers becomes crucial to the development of a young person's self-acceptance.

Individuation and belonging are both crucial, not only socially, but theologically as well. Youth want to and need to have their own thoughts and questions about who God is for them. At the same time however, they want to experience a sense of belonging in church as Carol Lytch has pointed out. Listen to her words about the relationship between individuation and belonging in the following:

Generally when teens described their reasons for participating in church, they mentioned either the sense of belonging they enjoyed there or the church's worship and teaching, which offered meaning to their lives. ... Teens were attracted to high goals, standards of excellence, demands worthy of their attention and energy, and rites of passage marking steps toward their adulthood.²

² Carol Lytch, *Choosing Church: What Makes A Difference to Teens* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 39-40.

Here we glimpse the powerful need for young people to feel like they belong, while at the same time needing to be challenged and celebrated as individuals.

B. Changing Brains and Media Influence - A second important factor influencing faith development in adolescents has gained prominence as we continue to learn more about the human brain and about the important roles that visual and auditory stimuli play in the brain's development. It is now possible to map the neural pathways used by adolescents in thinking and decision making. What we have learned is that the adolescent brain is still developing its skills for abstract thinking and reasoned decision making. Adolescents often impress us as "rash" or "inconsistent" or "foolish." What we are learning from neuroscience, however, is that this is a stage in brain development, and not **just young people trying to be difficult**. Adolescents use a different part of their brain for decision making and reasoning than adults do. Indeed, research tells us that the human brain is not fully developed until sometime around the age of 26!

Moreover, we are also learning that visual and auditory stimuli, especially that of television, computers, PlayStation and other interactive media are influencing the development of brain pathways. This means that adolescents today are developing different pathways in their brains than we did. Young people today are much more visual in their orientation to reality, and less oriented to texts in the learning process. Youth learn better when they can interact with a screen and less well when they must only listen to a lecture. What we are learning about the development of the adolescent brain has important implications for how we structure youth ministry in the 21st century.

C. Sexuality and Family Relationships - A third fundamental influence upon adolescent emotional and physical development is the emergence of a young person's sexual identity. Adolescents must make their way through a maze of anatomical, hormonal, emotional, and relational changes - to say nothing of the accompanying cultural, moral and spiritual issues surrounding sexuality. What is a man? What is a woman? Am I gay or straight? Am I attractive? Such questions both fascinate and frighten adolescents. Youth look to their peers of course, and to the media in many cases to help them navigate the flood of emotions and questions that their emerging sexual identities open up. And, although they may be reluctant to admit it, young people are indeed interested in learning from respected adults in their lives about all the changes and questions that go with the sexual unfolding of adolescence. Here, too, is an important opportunity for a congregation to accompany and support young people. We in the church must not

shy away from providing opportunities for youth to talk together, with others who share Christian faith, about their questions and quandaries concerning growth into manhood and womanhood.

D. Longing For A God Worth Their Time -- We have already touched briefly upon the longing that many young people have for "a God worth their time." Many churches underestimate this longing and believe that youth "just want to have fun" at youth group or at church. Now of course, fellowship and fun are an important part of youth ministry. However, effective youth ministry is much more than fun and fellowship alone. Young people are capable of and hungry for learning about God, about how God is active in their lives, about how God has gifted them for service to the world, and about the content and character of other world religions. Moreover, youth are capable of and eager to study the Bible on more than a surface, "do and don't" level. Often we make a mistake in thinking that youth won't want "anything heavy" at church or at youth group, but we couldn't be more wrong. As we have seen, the emotional life of an adolescent is complex and often overwhelming. Life in the teenage years can be "heavy" indeed. Youth long for a God who they can "go deep" with and who will "go deep" with them. Young people need youth ministries that "go deep" as well.

E. Vocation and Busyness - Remember Megan and the story about her day that I read to you at the beginning of this section? Her's is a story about busyness. Between family, friends, rehearsals and school, Megan is busy enough. But if we add to that the sports in which she may be involved, or the music lessons, or the part-time job, or any of the myriad of other things she has been encouraged to "get involved with" by teachers, parents and friends we can get a sense of how busy and indeed overscheduled many young people are today. Not only does this make it difficult for young women like Megan to fit another "thing," like youth group for example, into an already bursting schedule, but it points to a more pressing concern, I think. Young people in the 21st century are often exhausted by their own schedules! Moreover, when asked about what they "want to be when they grow up," many young people honestly say that they have no idea. Perhaps one reason for this [among some others] is that they are too busy doing things to take time to really consider what their gifts are and where their passions for making a difference in the world lie. I mentioned earlier that I direct a program for high school youth at Pacific Lutheran Seminary in Berkeley. The youth I have met there have taught me the importance of giving them opportunities for silence, for solitude, and for unscheduled time - just to be and to take a break from their busyness. Our youth programming at the seminary now builds in time for youth to

just be quiet. Effective youth ministries will take seriously the need for young people to find respite and renewal from the busy pace of their lives.

F. Hope for the Future and Hope for the World - And lastly, a brief word about the hopefulness of young people today. When I began my work in youth ministry, I believed a lot of what I read about how young people were cynical and "tuned-out" when it came to the future - both their own future and the world's. But my experiences in working with them have taught me otherwise. Youth care deeply about the future, and moreover have a great deal of hope for the future. Young people believe that they can and should make the world a better place, and that the future can be one marked by hopefulness, inclusivity, and compassion. So...don't believe everything you read about the cynicism and self-centeredness of young people. Their hope for the future is palpable and renews my own spirit for the tasks of youth ministry.

Finally, we turn now to consider some models and methods for building effective youth ministries. I want to share with you some of the things that have been effective in my own work. But first, a final story - this time, about Gary.

Gary's Story

"Gary, age 16, stood at the door after the worship service. Without looking up from his shoes he said to his pastor: "You talked today about every Christian having a gift. I know mine. It's to be a driver." As he spoke, the mind of his pastor traveled to the parking lot and visualized Gary's 1967 Oldsmobile with the orange axle, long pipes, and 454 cubic inch engine. Gary continued, "You've been asking for someone to give elderly people rides to church." The pastor was uneasy. Here was someone who wanted to help, but who would ride with him? Suddenly, the pastor remembered Clara. She was 73; her legs were crippled, her mind was sharp; her spirit tenacious and buoyant. She loved to come to church but couldn't drive. Wednesday after school Gary and the pastor went in the Oldsmobile to invite Clara to ride with Gary to church. They came to the door, and Clara said, "Is it him?" The pastor said, "Yes. He's going to be your driver." And the rest of the meeting was awful, terrible. But we set up an appointment anyway. He would pick her up at about ten minutes after eight for the 8:30 service. Gary hadn't been at church at 8:30 for as long as the pastor could remember. ... At twenty-five after eight the next Sunday, the chariot rumbled up to the church. Gary got out and opened the door for Clara. ... He offered her his arm, and she walked alongside of him into church. ... They came together in style. She loved it. She loved him. She came to church, and basking in her love, Gary grew and mellowed. Today Gary is a lawyer in Chicago and has started a group of lawyers who go to some of the most difficult schools in Chicago and ask, "Do you have any young men who would enjoy or might

use a relationship with another man who is older and shares a common passion?" And so these lawyers get hooked up with young guys in the city around a common passion. Some of them are surfers, some of them are into music, and some of them are nerdy. And they are having the same transformational impact on these young men's lives that Clara had on Gary in the car."³

What follows, then, are some suggestions for fruitful foundations as your congregation builds its youth ministry.

A. Youth Ministries are Family Ministries - The first is the seemingly simple reminder that youth ministry is family ministry. Like all of us, youth belong to families. These families may have two parents, one parent, grandparents, siblings, and a variety of other members. Youth do not exist in a vacuum, and ministry with youth means ministry to all those who love and care for that young man or woman who is a member of the youth group. Indeed, the primary arena for faith development and faith formation is the **family** and not the congregation. We are experiencing a shift in thinking about this - away from expecting families to support the church to equipping churches to support the family, especially in its role as formative for the faith of family members. In many ways, the most effective youth ministry takes place in the home, and not in the youth group.

B. W.O.L.F. [Worship, Outreach, Learning, Fellowship] - Every effective youth ministry, I believe is WOLF ministry [or if you prefer FLOW - wolf spelled backwards]. I borrow this insight from Mike Reinhart, a Lutheran pastor in Texas. Reinhart's important emphasis here is that effective youth ministries will have components of worship, outreach, learning, and fellowship. Some of the best youth ministries have focused on teaching youth to **worship God** through choirs, drama groups, youth services, retreats, and devotional time during youth group. Strong youth groups pray together and encourage **and equip** youth to find avenues for personal devotions. Like Gary, the young driver in our story, strong youth ministries also include real opportunities for youth to **reach out** in service to others. Often, serving a needy member of the congregation or community will do more to change the heart than a hundred sermons, and after some practice in reaching out to others, youth can discover that this outreach means more to them than going to the movies or the amusement park. No youth program is complete unless it also challenges youth to grow in their understanding of the Bible, the Christian faith, the world they live in, and how these interrelate. **Learning**, real learning about Scripture, justice, forgiveness, and love - and not just "extra

³Roland Martinson. This is a combination of two accounts of this story. One is recorded in *Effective Youth Ministry: A Congregational Approach* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 14-15. The other is recorded in "Life and Faith Walking: Joining Youth and God in What Matters," in *The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture 2004*, Institute for Youth Ministry, Princeton Theological Seminary.

school" - is welcomed by young people. And lastly, **fellowship** - the fourth part of a balanced approach to youth ministry is certainly the aspect youth themselves will ask for the most. After all, adolescence is about relationships. Youth ministries can and should foster friendships that have the potential to last beyond high school.

C. Faith Active In Love - A bit more about the nature and importance of service and service project learning as an indispensable part of ministries with young people. As I said a moment ago, putting one's faith into action through loving service is a very effective way of passing on the faith to young people. Working together with adults in service to the neighbor provides for the needs of others, brings depth and concreteness to what being a disciple of Jesus actually means, and gives opportunities to open up discussions about the relationship between believing in God and living in the world. And, service learning is not just for teenagers and adults. I believe that even in the later elementary school years, our young people should be encouraged and enabled to participate in service learning. What better way to pass on our faith than to work side by side for the good of the neighbor?

D. Collaborative Approaches to Youth Ministry - Early on I mentioned that one of the myths of youth ministry is that size matters. Well, I still think that it is a myth - the effectiveness of a youth ministry **must not** be judged by numbers alone. However, many congregations struggle to develop a ministry with and for youth because there are perhaps only a handful of young persons in their congregation. This is true at my own church in Oakland. Right now, we have only three high school youth who are members of our congregation. If this is a situation you face in your congregation, let me suggest a collaborative approach to youth ministry for your young people. By this I mean working together with other congregations in your area to develop a youth ministry to include all the youth from these congregations. Sometimes this looks like a team of folks working together to design and implement youth ministry across congregations. Sometimes this means taking advantage of the camping ministries in your area. Sometimes two or more congregations can find the funds to hire a youth director, who can work in conjunction with the members of the partnered congregations in carrying out the work of youth ministry. In the case of the churches in Oakland, five urban congregations pooled their financial and personnel resources to create a thriving and lively ministry with youth from these congregations.

E. Congregational Approaches to Mentoring - In recent years more and more emphasis has been placed upon "mentoring" as integral to effective youth

ministry. What is mentoring in youth ministry? Mentoring is a ministry of accompaniment and relationship building that takes place between a young person and another congregational member. A mentor is neither a "Lone Ranger" nor a "Pied Piper." Rather, a mentor is someone in the congregation [or a group of persons in a congregation] who serve God by offering themselves and their time to be with young people, to care for them, to get to know them, to share in their activities, and to share with young people their wisdom, their questions, and their support. Sounds great, doesn't it? But often we wonder - how can we get people to volunteer to be mentors for youth? Most adults don't feel qualified or comfortable in doing such work. The key here, I think is to ask young people in your congregation if there is somebody in the congregation that they would like to get to know better - perhaps someone whose job interests them, perhaps someone who serves the community in a particular way. More often than not, a young person will be able to identify someone. And, most adults, upon hearing that a young person in the congregation would like to get to know them, will be more than happy to give it a try, even if only for a few months. The potential for growth in faith for mentor and youth alike is assured, and the relationships that are built are life-changing, as they were for Gary, our 16 year old driver and Clara, his 73 year old mentor.

F. Peer Ministry Models - A different kind of mentoring - peer mentoring, or peer ministry is another element you might consider making a part of your youth ministries. Ask any group of youth to raise hands if they know somebody whose family is changing due to a divorce or separation, who is depressed or suicidal, who is struggling with an eating disorder, who has ever been abused, or who worries about relationships. Hands will most certainly go up. Youth know other youth who are hurting. And they want to help. Simply put, youth peer ministry is assisting youth to develop skills that help them take action to help others. Peer ministry is not a "program," but rather a "process." Skills are first learned [often someone in the wider community or in the congregation with counseling skills can teach them], then practiced, then refined, and finally these skills become part of a young person's way of life. Peer ministry skills include listening, encouraging openness through questioning, decision-making, respecting confidentiality, and sharing faith. Over time, peer ministry will strengthen and deepen the practices of youth ministry in your congregation.

G. Investigating the World's Religions [even Christianity!] - In speaking about the influences upon a young person's faith development, I mentioned the interest young people have in learning about the world's religions, even in learning about Christianity as a world religion. I have found youth eager to learn

about the world's religions [Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism] - their histories, their teachings, and their influences on contemporary society. Far from leading youth astray toward embracing "other religions" in favor of Christianity, study of the world's religions provides youth the opportunity to deepen their understanding both of these religions, and especially to deepen their understandings about Christianity. In some areas, visits can be arranged to places of worship, and guests who practice other religions can always be brought in to share with youth their own stories of faith. Most young people already know someone who comes from another faith tradition and will welcome the chance to learn about that person's faith in the context of their own faith environment.

Now What?

And so, we come to the end of these reflections on youth and youth ministries. I wonder - are we any closer to knowing how we might pass on our Christian faith and our Lutheran heritage to younger generations? Can we feel **encouraged** about passing on our faith to young people? Do we still feel like it is mostly an uphill battle to try? Will we continue to **worry** about whether or not our children and grandchildren will "keep the faith?"

Of course, I hope you do feel encouraged by some of what I have written here. And, this hope of mine is not merely a personal, pious wish. I do have hope, but not because I am such a wonderful writer, or even because I have learned some things about youth cultures and subcultures. No - the hope I have, the hope **we** have, rests not in ourselves, but rather in the strong and faithful hands of God - who will abundantly bless our efforts on behalf of young people, who will graciously cover our false starts and mistakes, and who is always at work to grow and to deepen the faith of all our young saints. We can truly rely on God to do these things - **because in baptism God has already passed on the faith to our children**. After all, God made promises to these young people at their baptisms - and God is the One who is faithful and who keeps all His promises. In baptism, God made each of the youth of our congregations His own child, and promises that each and every one of them **will grow** "in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God."⁴ In baptism, God begins a good work and promises to bring it to completion. In baptism, the Holy Spirit is poured out into each young heart, and God's own gift of faith is ignited.

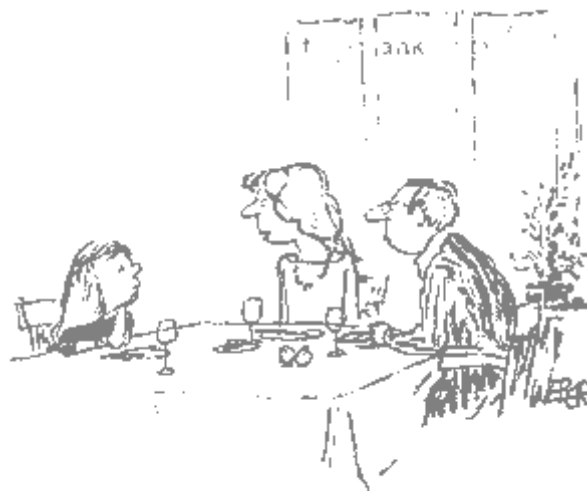
So, we are not alone in our efforts to nurture the faith in young people. God works with us, and graciously passes on the faith to all His children, even those who appear to have wandered so far away from it. And our youth are not alone. God is alive in them. Sometimes we may not be able to see clearly that God's Spirit is still

⁴ *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 121.

alive in our young people, but don't worry. God is there. Because God has promised to be there. So, what's next? As Rollie Martinson says,

To begin, go and be with young people in their world. This sounds like youth ministry 101. It is vital to take up this complex mystery, going into their cultures, their subcultures, their places, their experience of media, their consciousness, their schedules. I am convinced it is absolutely necessary if we are going to be following God into the hearts of our young people - to go on this risky journey.⁵

Following God into the hearts of young people. That's the risk! That's the journey! That's what's next! Thanks be to God who travels this road along with us.



"Felicia, both your father and I feel you're too young to be mysterious."

⁵ Roland Martinson, "Engaging the Quest: Encountering Youth and God in Their Longing," Princeton Lectures on Youth and Culture, 2005, p. 35.