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# Young Adults Leaving the Church: The Tie to Intentional Spiritual Mentoring Among Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Teens Through Youth and Confirmation Ministry

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YOUNG ADULTS LEAVING THE CHURCH:  
THE TIE TO INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL MENTORING AMONG LUTHERAN  
CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD TEENS THROUGH YOUTH AND CONFIRMATION  
MINISTRY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on March 13, 2013  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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To my young adult friends, Ally S. and Liz M., thank you for teaching me about ministry to youth and young adults and for sharing your hearts with me. Here’s to the journey ahead! To Pastor Mark Schaefer at Water’s Edge Lutheran Church in Frisco, Texas, thank you for letting me pick your brain. What a sweet community of missionaries you are!

I pray this topic will inspire others to serve as mentors to young people, seeing their spiritual formation as crucial to the life of the church. I am forever grateful for those who walked with me through the dissertation process. To God be the glory!



## ABSTRACT

Title: YOUNG ADULTS LEAVING THE CHURCH:THE TIE TO INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL MENTORING AMONG LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD TEENS THROUGH YOUTH AND CONFIRMATION MINISTRY

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Previously churched Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS)<sup>1</sup> young adults are leaving the worship community post confirmation and post high school. Is this truly what is taking place? If so, what structures within churches and youth ministries might contribute to this problem? In order to address this problem, it is proposed that the lack of youth mentorship ministry, especially of teen-agers in the church, contributes to the problem. Worship communities can help ensure that young adults stay connected by establishing mentor relationships during the confirmation and teen years.

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<sup>1</sup>Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is a conservative church body, established in 1847.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Narrative: I Hoped to Meet Someone Like You**

It was often the case that I found myself in the airport for business travel for the university where I worked. This morning was a travel morning. I knew the trip ahead would belong. I like getting to the airport early so that I do not feel rushed. It is good to get a jump on the crowd and find a nice place to settle in, close to the doors of the gate, of course. There, I do my best work. The truth of the matter is it is also the place where much ministry has happened for me. This day, the prayer was this:

“Lord, I really have a lot on my plate that I need to tackle between now and the time I arrive at my destination. I do not really want to be bothered, unless you just want me to. In that case, I hope you will make me open to it.”

This day, I thought for certain my time would be uninterrupted and productive. I thought to myself, “Great! Does she have to sit there? There are so many other seats to sit in and she picks one right next to me. Maybe she wants to be close to the doors of the gate, too.” I quickly went back to reading.

“Excuse me. I couldn’t help noticing what you are reading.”

I remember thinking, “Oh really?” I asked, “Why is that?” I was reading a book on decision making in the church. I wondered how this resonated with her.

“I guess it has been on my mind lately, I mean the church part. Hi, I’m Erica,” she says.

She was bubbly and inquisitive. At age twenty-three, she was engaged to be married. After finding out we were from the same city, I asked which church she was to be married in.

“Well, I do not think it would be proper for me to be married in a church.”

Curiously, I asked why she thought that way and found out she grew up in the Presbyterian Church, but left it soon after she publicly confirmed her faith. I decided to go ahead and ask her to explain why she left the church and soon realized my reading was to be postponed.

Her first reply was, “I have been waiting to speak with someone about this.”

Here is where a man named Tony entered the picture.

“Hi there. I hope you don’t mind that I have been listening to the conversation. It’s just that I’m kind of in the same boat as you are, Erica. Did I get your name right? My name is Tony. I grew up in the Lutheran church.” My interest was fully piqued, as this was the denomination I had grown up in and served. He continued, “I don’t know what I am today, other than Christian. Everyone was sure I would become a pastor. I was pretty active in our youth group. I really want to go to church, but it’s so hard now. It’s as if my hands are on the door to the church, but I just can’t get past something, maybe the hypocritical people. I don’t know.”

He must have been somewhere in his early to mid-thirties. He had never been married.

Erica piped up. “Did you have to do the confirmation thing, Tony?”

“Yeah, and it really meant something to me. I think everyone just assumed I had arrived and didn’t need any more spiritual nurturing after that.”

“Oh, I totally know what you mean! There was so much build up to that point. Well, I did not feel the least bit ready to go before the people at my church and say this was what I believed,” Erica said.

I decided that I was just going to listen. That did not last long. Tony was looking straight at me. “So, you are in ministry, huh? That’s really great. I am glad there are people like you who do good for others. I am really glad to have bumped into you both. It’s not often I get to have conversations about faith without people looking at me strangely, but it really is something that has been on my mind lately, too.”

I asked them to share more about their hurts and perceptions of the churches they grew up in so that I could dig a little deeper in order to understand their worlds. Both of these people grew up in similar church settings. Erica’s church worshiped approximately 400 members, while Tony’s worshiped around 800. It seems like the neighborhoods were similar, suburban. There were fewer older adults in Erica’s congregation, but both had a good number of young families.

“My church really did not do anything for families,” Erica commented. “I mean, it seems like you had to be at least eighteen to express any of your ideas or be involved. They kind of put the high school youth off in their own room. Maybe that was because we accidentally spilled paint on some special memorial carpet in the fellowship hall. Do you know that we even had a blessing for the carpet? They blessed me at my Confirmation and blessed the carpet on the same day! I guess they were waiting for us to grow up.”

Tony replied, “I don’t know how to put it into words. Your experience differs from mine because my church did place us in front of the congregation at an early age, but I almost felt used. It was as if they used the youth to get things for the church. No one really talked to us unless they wanted something from us. It didn’t sit well with me. I really did not return after I graduated from high school. I attended only a few times. That

was something like fifteen years ago! I guess, in the same sense, I did not understand my role within my church after I was confirmed. Of course, going off to college and not having a well-known community of believers to participate with on a regular basis contributed, I am sure, to how I fell away from the church. When I would go back home on weekends, people would say hello, but the relationships simply were not the same. What happened to the people who made sure I was confirmed? Where were they? I mean, besides my mom. She was great, but no one ever taught her how to speak with me about faith, I mean about tackling the big questions. Does support simply end after confirmation? Anyway, I found support in my buddies on my college campus. So I guess those relationship needs were found elsewhere.”

“Well, I really left church in my freshman year of high school, so it was something like nine years for me,” said Erica. I had to interject. “That’s our boarding call for our flight out. It has been great speaking with you both. I hope you continue to wrestle with these things and find peace. Is it okay if I offer a quick prayer for you both?” We briefly prayed, said goodbye, and Tony boarded first for business class. I found my seat next to a young college student and resumed reading. “Hey, my name is Lindy. What’s that book you’re reading? Yeah, I used to go to church.” “Okay, God! I get the point!” The conversation began all over. It was at that moment that I realized I needed to gain more insight into the problem of young adults leaving the church and possible solutions to the problem. One of the biggest themes that I heard from these young adults centered on a lack of people to walk with them in their faith.

## Introductory Statement

When young people do not feel connected, it is much easier for them to walk away from something or someone. This is the case for many congregations who are searching for ways to keep youth involved in their churches through the transition from youth to adulthood.

The Pew Research Center indicates that:

...more than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion – or no religion at all. If change in affiliation from one type of Protestantism to another is included, roughly 44% of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.<sup>1</sup>

It is the author's belief that mentoring is one solution in closing the door that young people seem to exit the church through. Where is mentoring happening? So that young adults do not walk away, the need to connect young people to others, whether professional workers or lay workers must be recognized and addressed, further granting an advocate during the transitional years of young people.

In Chapter Two, the reality of young adults leaving the Church will be explored. Culture-wide trends of teens leaving the Church, including young adult characteristics and their perceptions will be viewed. A specific look into LCMS youth ministry, Bible instruction and general trends of young adults leaving the Church will be studied further. Materials will be presented from interviews with two young adults, in order to gain understanding of their perceptions and learn why they left their worship communities, seeking to know if their spiritual needs were fulfilled elsewhere. This

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<sup>1</sup>Pew Research Center Publications, "The US Religious Landscape Survey Reveals a Fluid and Diverse Pattern of Faith," entry posted February 25, 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/743/united-states-religion> (accessed October 27, 2012).

anecdotal insight may help in revealing areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction and could propose reasons for leaving that have not yet been considered. The question of connectedness to one's congregation will be reviewed in this chapter, as well. This author contends that church workers and family members can have a far greater impact on young adults than they realize. When intentional role modeling is present and intentional opportunities are in place, a young adult is more likely to feel valued. Feeling valued and connected provides a reason for a young person, then, to stay plugged in and involved. From a study by the author, of seven college-age students, only one agreed that she had felt like an important member of her home church.<sup>2</sup> The seven students cited as contributing factors to their leaving their church community: the lack of pastoral care, relationships, and opportunities to discuss faith openly and safely, as well as their parents' indecision, lack of commitment, and even fighting over denominational attendance. Research will be presented that support similar factors of young adults' lack of church attendance, offering statistics, trends and demographics from Search Institute, Gallup, and the LCMS that further support and show the need for youth mentorship in maintaining a low attrition rate in the adult membership of congregations. Such statistics demonstrate agreement with this author's premise that the LCMS is lacking in the area of maintaining young adults in the church.

In Chapter Three, an investigation on mentoring will be made. Mentoring is defined, as well as Christian mentoring basics. The benefits of mentorship will be discussed along with possible models. The differences between mentorship and discipleship will be further defined, offering models that mentors may use. The hoped for

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<sup>2</sup> Serena Pace, DMIN 524, September 5, 2005. Students at Concordia University of Texas in Austin, Texas, were given a short survey and asked to discuss the results.

outcome is to strengthen the idea that mentor relationships can impact the lives of the young people of the LCMS and their uninterrupted journey into active church-going adults within LCMS congregations.

From Eugene C. Roehlkepartain's book, *Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy*, a variety of facts, training tips and insights are presented. One study included in the handbook asked LCMS youth if they often experienced the care and support of an adult. Seven percent of inactive attendees, 10 percent of regular attendees, and 20 percent of active leaders/volunteers agreed that this statement was true.<sup>3</sup> This is a small reminder of the lack of relationships present in our congregations. The harm caused is still to be determined and investigated, as well as the blessings of experiencing care and support.

In Chapter Four, Jesus as a mentor of his disciples will be studied. Jesus cared for those he interacted with in a way that went beyond following simple steps to mentorship. He was available to those he mentored, was credible, ethical, instructive, and committed.<sup>4</sup> First, it will be important to know the historical Jesus by exploring the role of Jesus as rabbi or teacher and consider the sociological and cultural events of the first century. Second, the rabbinical styles of mentorship in the first century will be explored, focusing on Jesus' use of metaphors and parables. Third, understanding how Jesus effectively served as a mentor to his disciples will be attended to. His relationships and

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998), 87.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 265-270.



training methods will be viewed. Jesus was a storyteller who had a tremendous love for others and equipped others for real life situations.

In Chapter Five, the impact of mentoring on teens will be investigated, especially through the lens of confirmation and youth ministries. First, the focus will be upon the history of mentoring, considering various stages and the role of adults in mentoring. Such biblical materials show the need for continuous spiritual nurture upon children, the role of the parents and community upon such nurture, and the need for all to be spiritually disciplined. It is important for parents to play an active role in the faith life of their children. Faith nurturing can be more meaningful coming from parents. Parents know their children better than anyone else and are given the responsibility to train their children in the faith. In the Lutheran church, this occurs during an infant's baptism, where the parents publicly confess their intention to raise their children in the faith. Furthermore, the community of believers promises to support that family in their walk. In a 2007 Barna Group study, of parents who raised exemplary young people, the behavior that was considered a success in shaping the young person centered on the parent acknowledging the importance of his or her role in raising the child over any other task. "They relied upon schools, their church and other entities to support them in that endeavor, but they accepted the primary responsibility for the task and the outcomes."<sup>5</sup>

The impact of both short and long-term mentoring will also be given consideration, along with the thoughts of Martin Luther on passing the faith on to young people, finding support in pertinent Bible passages on mentoring and passing on the faith.

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<sup>5</sup> Barna Group, Virginia Tech Tragedy is a Wake-Up Call to Parents, entry posted April 23, 2007, <http://www.barna.org/media-articles/105-virginia-tech-tragedy-is-a-wake-up-call-to-parents?q=parents+primary+role+models>, (accessed January 12, 2013).

Are youth experiencing a world where people take the time to learn their culture and build relationships, or are older adults passing them off as children experiencing a phase that they will emerge from soon enough? It is not easy to relate to a new culture of young people, but certainly worthwhile to explore their world. How can anyone relate to youth if they are not taking the time to learn of how the world impacts them or what their views are of the world? The present emerging group of teens is certainly a group in need of relationships. How can church leaders hold the kind of meaningful faith discussions we hope to have with youth if we are not in relationship with them? Without relationships, DCEs<sup>6</sup> will have a hard time serving. With relationships, trust is built. When trust is present, the opportunities to move deeper and more genuinely arise. Sally Morgenthaler, a well-known worship leader and speaker on Postmodernism, says, “We have to remember that most kids need an authentic relationship with us before they walk through the youth room doors. When they get up the courage to come, it’s because they literally want to meet the God they’ve been sensing in our lives.”<sup>7</sup>

Second, the importance of mentoring teens through spiritual growth, specifically studying confirmation ministry will be given attention. Martin Luther originally intended confirmation instruction to be carried out in the home with the parents as primary spiritual leaders. While the Director of Christian Education profession in the LCMS has reach its fifty-year mark and has experienced much success in passing on the faith, it is possible that more responsibility has been placed upon the church worker than upon the parents. It

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<sup>6</sup> Director of Christian Education is a trained and rostered life-span Christian educator within the LCMS. Six universities from the Concordia University System house this program.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 85.

is necessary for churches to evaluate their role in partnering with families in the faith. When churches work alongside families, serving as advocates to the faith and helping to build relationships, families feel supported and are able to experience greater health and connectedness. A partnership is then experienced, making it harder for people to fall away. When there is accountability, there is connection and reason to invest.

Third, developmental and spiritual insights given by famed social scientists such as Fowler, Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg will be considered. Science supports the idea that the faith life of a young person requires the guidance and attention of mentors to transition well from child to adult. When one has strong examples to learn from, one is better able to adjust. Spending time discussing one's thoughts and exploring questions in a safe relationship can build confidence and connectedness. As we explore faith stages, for example, we learn from James Fowler's Stage Three of Faith Development, Synthetic/Conventional Faith, that young people approximately twelve to thirteen years old are greatly concerned about the feedback and evaluations from significant other people in their lives.<sup>8</sup> How often are youth given the opportunity to fulfill this need in churches? Fourth, specific confirmation models and mentoring from two different LCMS churches will be examined.

In conclusion, a solution is presented: Worship communities can help previously church-ed young adults stay connected into adulthood by establishing mentor relationships through Confirmation and youth ministry. Congregations are taking notice of what is required to nurture young people into vital, engaged and maturing adults present in the pews. Group Publishing has partnered with Gallup to produce a church training called,

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<sup>8</sup>Exploring Spiritual Development, "James Fowler's Stages of Faith Development," (2009) <http://www.exploring-spiritual-development.com/JamesFowlersStages.html> (accessed January 16, 2013).

“Friendship: Creating a Culture of Connectivity in Your Church.”<sup>9</sup> It is important for churches to give serious consideration to steps they can immediately facilitate. By doing so, young people may transition into healthy adult churchgoers. With healthy adult churchgoers, the church is further impacted with positive relationships and the greater possibility of the continuation of the church for generations to come.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Several assumptions and limitations are helpful to address while founding the premise of this study. First, the assumption is that with the use of the word, mentoring, we are looking for evidence of the benefit of spiritual mentoring on young people, not simply general mentoring. Second, research available within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is limited. Of the studies completed within the LCMS, the longitudinal studies were not spaced very far apart. Trends do not change as drastically a time period of five-years or fewer, so when comparing earlier research to later research within such a short time span, new information gathered is minimal. Third, a variety of churches and students within the LCMS were not studied, as most of the research was dependent on the willingness of people to participate. Therefore, a greater representation of rural churches was presented.

With an overview of the dissertation established, it is time to engage in the heart of the study. Chapter Two brings clarity in understanding why young adults are leaving the church. Current trends and characteristics of young adults will be viewed in tandem with the evidence of their departure.

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<sup>9</sup>Group and Gallup, PowerPoint Presentation on DVD, *Friendship: Creating a Culture of Connectivity in Your Church* (Loveland: Group Publishing, Inc., 2005).

## CHAPTER 2

### YOUNG ADULTS LEAVING THE CHURCH

Current culture-wide trends demonstrate that young adults are leaving the church. This chapter will explore such trends, including characteristics of young adults being impacted and overall perceptions they have of the church. The departure of young adults in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, through emerging evidence within youth ministry, Bible instruction and general trends will be investigated. As we seek to understand young adults leaving the church, we do so with the following in mind. For the sake of keeping youth connected to the LCMS Christian community, serving God's people and sharing the Gospel vibrantly into and throughout adulthood, mentorship should be considered as a primary aspect of youth and confirmation ministry. This proposal will unfold as the impact of mentorship throughout the dissertation is explored.

#### **Current Trends of Teens Leaving the Church**

Young people are leaving the church at an even younger age than we would like to believe. Ham and Beemer suggest if we look around at the children and teens in church on any given Sunday, we can conclude that two thirds of them are already gone and will not be coming back to church in the near future.<sup>1</sup> In order to reverse this trend, the church will have to take action and develop a strategy that goes beyond the best curriculum and entertainment. One key strategy churches can implement is that of mentorship.

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Hamm and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2009), 21-22.

When young adults stop attending church, it might be easy for church leaders to remark with hope and confidence that they will return to church some day when they have children of their own. “Some faith leaders simply say they will wait until young people get old enough to get married and have their own kids. Then they will be ready to return to church.”<sup>2</sup>It will be important to view the evidence of students leaving the church after confirmation/high school to gain understanding, hope, and insight into how to prevent such an exodus in the first place.

First, we meet Ally, a single 25-year-old woman. She attended a church that identified with the LCMS through high school. In high school, she attended church most of the time and was involved in her weekly Wednesday night youth group Bible study. She views her former youth director as one of the advocates for the youth in her church and views her former senior pastor as a mentor, even to this day. Ally enjoyed going to church but did not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. She did not feel engaged in the life of the church. Speaking of her nondenominational church, Ally stated, “The older adults that I worship with now value youth. When I was in the LCMS, I felt ostracized and cast to the side. The way we worshipped made me feel as if people saw us as irrelevant.”<sup>3</sup>Ally admits she misses Lutheran doctrine every now and then. She attended church “here and there” after high school. Her first year of college took her to another city. She returned one year later to finish her degree closer to home. This was the time she plugged into a nondenominational church, where she regularly worshiped and was quite thankful for the many offerings available to her age group. Ally recently moved to

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<sup>2</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ally S., phone interview by author, October 2, 2012. See Appendix A.

another state for work, but is motivated to find a faith community much like the nondenominational one she had been a part of for several years.<sup>4</sup>

Next, we meet Liz. Liz is a married 26-year-old woman. She attended an LCMS church from childhood through high school. In high school, she attended church and Sunday night youth group regularly, as well as youth events. She had a mentor throughout high school who served as both her piano instructor and her prayer mentor through a church prayer ministry that connected youth with caring and committed adults. She speaks favorably of her youth minister as an advocate for the youth. Liz experienced a time of crisis late in high school and stated that the church and LCMS counseling ministries did not seem to offer comfort. She departed from attendance in the Lutheran church and considers herself to be spiritual in her faith more than anything. Liz had this to say about why she left the church:

When I entered college, not going to church was an issue of not having enough time. I began exploring other faiths and I no longer had a connection to my old church. I met my now husband who was raised differently. His dad was an Atheist and his mom was Muslim. He never persuaded me one way or another. If anything, I am constantly trying to explain the Christian faith to him; but I do see how a person can lose all faith due to war, death, and loss. In the bigger scheme of things, trying to get him to attend a church, even LCMS, is not the end goal. I don't want to go by myself (social anxiety). The different religions of my friends got me questioning so many religions. It didn't seem to connect with what I was raised with.<sup>5</sup>

According to David Kinnaman, Liz fits well into the “Nomad” category of young adults leaving the church:

Frequently, nomads among the mosaic generation say that leaving the church was less an intentional choice and more of a slow fade, a period of increasing detachment that took many months or years. For some, faith was never very deep;

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Liz M. phone interview by author, October 2, 2012. See Appendix B.

they were “in the building” but never really committed to following Christ. Yet for others [perhaps Liz], the opposite is true. Many nomads describe a personal history of intense commitment.<sup>6</sup>

Many nomads tend to be disenchanted with religion on some level, though they still maintain some ties that bind them to Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Kinnaman notes characteristics of the Nomad group as the following: they describe themselves as Christian but believe personal involvement in a Christian community is optional; they hold a faded view of the importance of faith, maintain a peaceful outlook toward Christianity and view themselves as spiritual experimentalists.<sup>8</sup>

Both Ally and Liz were raised in similar medium-sized, conservative church settings, though one in a metropolitan area of the Southwest and the other in a rural area of the Midwest. Both expressed that their needs were not met by the church. After college, one committed herself to a dynamic ministry for her age group, partly due to a friend who enjoyed the ministry at the nondenominational church and led her there, while the other drifted from the church. There are many factors that play into the present journey of each of these young women. Clearly, in both cases, a perceived lack of attention by the church towards their age group had a significant impact on each of them. Interestingly, both women mentioned the significance of someone who walked with them in their faith during high school.

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<sup>6</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 63.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 64-65.



“The ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance; this segment is missing in action from most congregations.”<sup>9</sup> According to Kinnaman, overall there is a 43 percent drop off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement.”<sup>10</sup> Powell and Kubiak note, “Various denominations have estimated that between 65% and 94% of their high school students stop attending church after they graduate,” while estimates indicate “that only about 25% of youth group graduates end up plugged into a church or a parachurch college or young adult ministry the year after they graduate.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, one out of four students in most youth groups will remain involved in their church after graduation day.<sup>12</sup> One reason 18-22 year olds drop out of church, according to Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer in their book, *Essential Church*, was the young people simply wanted a break. “Church was just another waster [of time] for them.”<sup>13</sup> Research surveyed 617 young adults who had dropped out of church but eventually decided to return. The number one reason that was given for why they returned was simply encouragement from others. This includes 39 percent who said family members and parents were instrumental in their return and 21 percent who said friends and acquaintances were instrumental.<sup>14</sup> Others simply felt the desire to return (34%: 22% male and 41% female) or felt God was calling them to return to the church

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kara Powell and Krista Kubiak, “When the Pomp & Circumstance Fades: A Profile of Youth Group Kids Post-Youth-Group,” *Youth Worker Journal* (September/October 2005), [http://dg-web.dcgary.org/youth/pdf/YWJ\\_College\\_Transition\\_Article\\_9\\_05.pdf](http://dg-web.dcgary.org/youth/pdf/YWJ_College_Transition_Article_9_05.pdf) (accessed January 12, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer III, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 75.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 193.

(28%: 18% male and 34% female).<sup>15</sup> A Barna study, based on research conducted for the *Faith That Lasts Project* [2007 – 2011] and including a series of national public opinion surveys, offered six significant themes that explain why nearly three out of every five young Christians (59 percent) over the age of 15 disconnect either permanently or for an extended period of time from church life. Reasons included: Churches seem overprotective; teens' and twentysomethings' experience of Christianity is shallow; churches come across as antagonistic to science; young Christians' church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, and judgmental; they wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity, and the church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.<sup>16</sup> This paper will touch on the theme of churches being overprotective as safety in youth ministry is discussed later in the paper. Furthermore, the idea that a young person does not feel he or she is allowed to wrestle with faith and express doubts speaks to the need for a trusting mentor who will walk alongside a young person, granting acceptance of where the young person is in life and allowing him or her to share what is truly on his or her heart.

To gain a small understanding of what has historically taken place regarding young people leaving and then returning, we look to the following. In a 2002 Gallup study, the findings support that “teens are more religious during their early teen years, and that religiosity begins to decline as teens near adulthood,” further indicating that

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>16</sup> Barna Group, “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church,” entry posted September 2011, <http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church> (accessed January 12, 2013).

church attendance begins climbing as adults age.<sup>17</sup> Statistics given indicate the following decreases and increases in church attendance over time:

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Attended Church in Past Seven Days</u>
13-15	54%
16-17	51%
18-29	32%
30-49	39%
50-64	44%
65-74	50%
75+	60% <sup>18</sup>

One might find justification from this study that young people will indeed return to church as earlier (and now older) generations have done. This study, however, seems to indicate only a small snapshot of the various generations at this particular point in history at best. Information does not consider the current culture. The markers for Millennials differ from those of the Boomers. Projecting into the future, a 60-year-old Millennial will likely respond differently to the culture than a 60-year-old Boomer does today. Future studies are warranted.

A young adult college senior, Tom, at Bethel College submitted a paper that was accepted by Group magazine, where he offered insight into why young people were leaving the church. Though he could not prove anything, he offered,

I think one reason four out of 10 young people (based on a 2002 Barna study) stop going to church during their college years has a lot to do with their positive experiences in youth ministry. In their youth groups, many of my friends experienced authentic community, but when they left high school, they found nothing close to that community available for post grads [post high school]. They went from playing an important role in something greater than themselves – a close Christian community – to either a weak or non-existent community. The

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<sup>17</sup> George H. Gallup Jr., “The Religiosity Cycle,” entry posted June 4, 2002, [www.gallup.com/poll/6124/Religiosity](http://www.gallup.com/poll/6124/Religiosity) (accessed September 19, 2012): 2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 3.

failure here may have little to do with youth ministry and much more to do with a church that's been slow in bridging the young adult gap.<sup>19</sup>

This theory is shared by the National Study of Youth and Religion in a 2008 study stating, "In addition to this general pattern [of decline in attendance in church, religious education and youth groups], the decrease in religious education and youth group participation might also be understood in terms of age-related offerings of religious congregations. In many congregations, formal opportunities for involvement outside of regular service attendance are limited after adolescents graduate from high school."<sup>20</sup> Churches might believe young people should naturally transition right into adult ministry after they graduate from high school, leaving very little intention into developing this age group in an age-appropriate way. It may further be assumed that high school graduates go off to college and will find a church home in a new city, thus not providing further assistance or care beyond a college care package. What happens to the young person who does not attend college or goes to a school nearby? Providing attention and intentional ministry towards transitioning youth from more dynamic and active youth ministries into a shockingly different adult ministry may prove helpful in keeping young people in the church. This will be further discussed in the following section.

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<sup>19</sup> Tom Carpenter, "Busting the Dropout Myth," *Group Magazine* 33, no 3 (March/April 2007): 78-79.

<sup>20</sup> Melinda Denton, Lisa Pearce and Christian Smith, "Religion and Spirituality on the Path Through Adolescence: A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion Number 8," [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org) (accessed September 20, 2012): 16.

## **Young Adult Characteristics and Impact on Leaving the Church**

Who are these young people and what are their worlds like? What pulls them away from the church? For starters, they are engrossed with technology and tend to move further away from regular face-to-face interaction. Eighth graders are teaching their parents how to design web pages. Family time is spent in the car, also known as a second home, traveling from one event to another.<sup>21</sup> Hahn and Verhaagen state:

Consequently, the expectations of business and family life have changed accordingly. We are people on the move, always driving and flying and dialing and faxing. You have a new family reality: more kinetic, less connected. Even when families stay together, the members rarely join in the same routine anymore. Now we have an intermingling of multiple realities under one roof.<sup>22</sup>

One can see how important our vehicles are to us (and how boundaries might not be as important) by viewing the personalized decals on the rear of newly defined ‘mobile’ homes. We note how many members are in the family, including the dog or cat, what the children’s names are, where they go to school, what their hobbies are, and with which church they are affiliated. We can guess that every nook and cranny of the inside of the car is also stuffed with crumbs and spills from the families’ fine dining done on the road. The demands are great. With both parents working, and some commuting to other cities, states or countries during the week, time for family is difficult and the potential for experiencing feelings of abandonment is a possibility. Stated in the National Survey on Youth and Religion, “Adolescents have become less religious as a result of being too busy. Adolescents cited school, work, extracurricular activities, and friends as examples

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<sup>21</sup> These are observations from working with middle school students at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Carrollton, Texas.

<sup>22</sup> Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen, *GenXers After God: Helping a Generation Pursue Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 93.

of things that fill their time and leave less and less time for religious participation and devotion.”<sup>23</sup> Church workers grow impatient with parents and teens who choose other options over church attendance. They wonder just why people will not take the church seriously. List serves bounce back and forth about what should be done about Sunday school attendance. Assumptions are easily made about how people are simply not committed to their faith. In their passion for doing ministry “the way it has always been done,” could those in the church be contributing to the exit of young adults?

For those going off to college, a time of self-discovery and newfound freedom, depression can easily set in. College years include, according to Kim Krull, decision making on such topics as “sex, alcohol and drugs as well as choices regarding careers and possible mates. Unfortunately, this life-shaping period also is a time when an overwhelming number of young adults disconnect from the church.”<sup>24</sup> Relationships are necessary for this age group and may be difficult to find in larger university settings. One young woman, age 22, believes most college students “feel like they are too busy with school or just too overwhelmed to take the time to find a campus church and go to a service.”<sup>25</sup> A 2003 George Barna study estimated that eight million people in their twenties, who were regular churchgoers as teens, will no longer be active in church by

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<sup>23</sup>Melinda Denton, Lisa Pearce and Christian Smith, “Religion and Spirituality on the Path Through Adolescence: A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion Number 8,” [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org) (accessed September 20, 2012): 27.

<sup>24</sup> Kim Krull, “Anguish and Assurance on Campus,” *The Lutheran Witness* 124, no. 7(August 2005): 11.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

their thirtieth birthday.<sup>26</sup> Students in this study should currently have reached their thirtieth birthday, though specific research is unavailable to see how they fared.

A more recent study offered by the Barna Group revealed that one out of three adults (33%) have not attended a religious service of any kind during the past six months, classifying them as unchurched.<sup>27</sup> This study included adults ages 18 and older and went on to explain the various groupings and percentages of those considered unchurched. The conclusion of the study estimated 73 million adults are unchurched at the time of the study in 2007. When teens and children are added, the total swells to roughly 100 million Americans.<sup>28</sup> Church leadership can view such statistics and decide reaching out to students on college campuses is urgent. A question that churches might find beneficial to address includes how they should go about reaching out to students from their own denominations and congregations. How might they become aware of them? The people at Grace Lutheran Church in Arlington, Texas, hope not only to expand their outreach to college students at the local university, University of Texas at Arlington, but they are seeking intentional ways to find the young adults from their own church who have left and seem to be floating out in spiritual limbo. Perhaps we see a need to continue walking with young people beyond high school in a proactive way. Some churches send names of students going off to various colleges to churches in their new locations for follow up and care. How many churches pursue young adults to walk with who are new or unchurched

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<sup>26</sup> The Barna Group, *Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches*, (2003), <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/127-twentysomethings-struggle-to-find-their-place-in-christian-churches> (accessed January 12, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Barna Group, *Unchurched Population Nears 100 Million in the U.S.* (March 2007), <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/107-unchurched-population-nears-100-million-in-the-us> (accessed January 14, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

in their own community? If we see the church as the body of believers, perhaps we ought to seek out young adults to care for and engage beyond our church rosters.

As we consider the need for spiritual nurture and mentorship upon young people by parents and the community, there are more factors to consider. Hahn and Verhaagen write, “In a culture that often provokes feelings of alienation and to members of a generation often forced to raise itself, the image and truth of a God who is radically and faithfully present with his people are deeply resonant.”<sup>29</sup> Generation X both hungers for and struggles to be in relationship, so the idea of focusing on God and who he is in the context of community appeals to this generation.<sup>30</sup> How much more does this same idea apply to Generation Y? In the words of Brett Hoover: “Faith requires commitment if it is to develop and grow. Yet young adulthood is the time when, stereotypically at least, people have the most trouble with commitment.”<sup>31</sup> There are many new choices, which may present fear and frustration, further demonstrating the need for support and practice.<sup>32</sup> Perfectionism may also plague young adults, since they often choose not to commit to something as they remain on a search for the perfect job, major, significant other, or possibly even church. One young adult explained his feelings in this way, writes Hoover, “Our incomplete sense of self-worth passionately fears failure, so we develop

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<sup>29</sup> Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen, *GenXers After God: Helping a Generation Pursue Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 93.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Brett C. Hoover, *Losing Your Religion Finding Your Faith: Spirituality for Young Adults* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 33-34.



perfect standards and avoid commitment to anything that might end in failure. This defense does protect us from failure, but also protects us from engaging life.”<sup>33</sup>

Culture whispers several myths into the minds of young adults, according to Hoover. These myths may affect this age group by keeping them from being open to being disciplined and seeking a committed walk with Christ. A mentor who walks alongside a young person through the critical transition from adolescent to young adulthood may help the young person grasp his or her faith as a life-long journey. The myths described by Hoover center around a young person maintaining a basic child-like faith instead of one that takes ownership for faith.<sup>34</sup> Maintaining a child’s spirituality to handle adult issues can be problematic. If a young person believes one is bestowed with spiritual maturity at a certain age or during a certain life experience, one is misled and is left not only with the potential for poor choices to have a long-lasting impact on his or her life, but is also missing out on his or her calling and the blessings of serving the Church and living in community. Such a belief plays into idealistic thinking and could benefit from the experience of a mentor who can share realistic scenarios and encourage a young adult to wrestle with his or her faith, especially through a biblical lens. Young adults can be led to move beyond the faith of their childhood, which believes a certain way simply because it is what they heard from parents or church leaders. They can be mentored towards a deeper faith that understands how God calls and leads them to live and make choices. Mentors can help young adults envision what it means to live as children of God, so that they begin to value the impact their faith has on every aspect of life. Mentors can be instrumental in helping young people find true fulfillment in their

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 45-46.

relationship with Jesus instead of through secular options. While there are new and old myths that plague young adults regarding owning their faith, solid mentorship will help young adults to discern the blessings of engaging in a faith community for themselves. It becomes a value of theirs to connect with other believers.

Chap Clark, national speaker, professor, author, and youth ministry expert, reminds adults that relationships are of key importance when nurturing youth and young adults, since relationships drive the church, and programs are merely tools.<sup>35</sup> What are our agendas when ministering to our young people? Do we call students to see how they are or are we more focused on reminding them of upcoming activities? Young adults may sense that older adults have an agenda for them. Their identity may also be confused as they are praised for their talents, skills, and performances instead of who they are as children of God. Pressure to continue to be the best is overwhelming in our culture, and young people learn to light multiple identity candles to represent who they feel others want them to be in a variety of different settings.<sup>36</sup> While adults see these candles and believe all is fine, the truth of the matter is that there is another world, where comfort is found, and it is among their peers, where older adults are not allowed to enter until invited. This “underworld” or “world beneath,” as Chap Clark explains, is a place of acceptance and protection, but not necessarily a healthy place.<sup>37</sup> Young adults need a place where they can bring the things they wrestle with to adults who will not judge them, but instead will listen and guide them. Mark 10:13-16 demonstrates a safe place for

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<sup>35</sup>Chap Clark, “LCMS Youth Ministry Symposium,” (lecture, Marriott Galleria, Houston, TX, January 5, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

children to wrestle with faith, as opposed to being seen as a hindrance to adults around them. In the Mark 10 passage below, Jesus demonstrates the value children (teens included) have in the Kingdom.

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Young people may stand a better chance as adult churchgoers if given a place that feels safe, a place where they are invited in to listen, learn and be blessed by the Lord.

### **Young Adult Perceptions of the Church**

What are the perceptions of today’s 20- and 30-somethings about the church? In Dan Kimball’s book, *I Like Jesus... Not the Church*, he discusses six perceptions of the church by most young-adult college students. Of the six, three prevail in the current United States culture: “The Church is an organized religion with a political agenda. The Church is judgmental and negative. The Church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong.”<sup>38</sup> The *Faith That Lasts* project, mentioned earlier, supports the perception of church being judgmental. Kimball believes most people do like Jesus but not what the organized church has been turned into by people. “We need to explain that if they truly like Jesus, then they cannot help but also like the Church because it’s His Church and His bride. They need the Church because it’s the expression of Jesus as His body.”<sup>39</sup> How can churches best communicate this truth?

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<sup>38</sup> Dan Kimball, “I Like Jesus... Not the Church,” *Outreach Magazine*, March/April, 2007, 64-72, 92-96.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Are church workers assuming that because they have dedicated four years to high school students' lives in small group ministries that they are ready to fully embrace life and leadership in the church and take on the world upon graduation? Do those in the church believe they have taught young adults all they need to know to operate as faithful and mature people of God? It is not being said that young adults are ignoring their faith. Specifically being addressed is the decline in desire by young people to be actively involved in the church and in taking on church membership. A newly baptized sixteen year-old male, when asked if he wanted to be confirmed in the LCMS, said he was recently baptized a Christian and then asked why he needed to be confirmed in order to be a member of the church. He wanted to know if it was enough to make him a part of the body of believers since he was a Christian. He worshipped regularly in his church and participated in the youth ministry and in music leadership. The church did not make him a member on paper, but he very much felt a part of his church community and it was good enough for him.<sup>40</sup>

If the number of Christian churchgoers in the United States on any given weekend is considered, only 17.7% of the population is found attending.<sup>41</sup> This percentage is not easy to measure and is debated, as people may claim to be identified with a church, even if they attend only twice each year. What people claim they do, and what they actually do, may not match.

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<sup>40</sup>Teen attending Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Carrollton, Texas, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Barnes and Linda Lowry, "Special Report: The American Church in Crisis," *Outreach Magazine* (April/May 2006) <http://www.moneyradio.org/www/pdf/CHURCHCRISIS.pdf> (accessed January 12, 2013).

In Carol Lytch's book, *Choosing Church*, the religious life of high school seniors is investigated. In this research, Lytch discovered much of what attracts teens to churches. Many teens simply desired a place to belong where they were valued. Interestingly, in this study, the gender or age of the youth minister has no correlation with effectiveness in attracting youth.<sup>42</sup> The teens studied seemed to resonate strongly with being held to a higher standard where intentional goals were set and excellence was expected. With many opportunities and demands on today's teens, the church must offer experiences worthy of a young person's time that consider both the individual needs and those characteristic of this age group. A church that focuses on equipping through the continuation of faith milestones after confirmation may stand a strong chance of impacting teens and families for the long term. Three churches were included in Lytch's research with three distinct leadership styles. Each church included adult mentorship, accountability and youth assimilating into service, including serving as mentors to younger students. In Lytch's work on variables relating to student loyalty to the church (their denomination or Christianity in general), "church attendance, praying and/or Bible reading, knowledge of the religious tradition, religious experience, and religious rituals" were key factors.<sup>43</sup> Socialization was a primary focus of Lytch's study. In each church, socialization happened within the community through the various opportunities the youth had for ministry, usually through worship arts and mentoring others. One may think a confirmation or baptism experience would hold special significance as young people transitioned into adulthood, but Lytch's research does not show this to be true among the

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<sup>42</sup>Carol E. Lytch, *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004)32.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

Catholic, Evangelical Protestant or United Methodist denominations. These rites were actually viewed negatively compared to other opportunities that allowed for socialization in the church.<sup>44</sup>

Through the Lytch study, parents were another significant focus. The parents in the study were given great opportunity to consider the long-term impact they had upon their children. It is a common misperception for parents to believe they only impact their children at a young age. One parent is quoted as saying, “I think the influence is when they’re very young. I think at a certain age a parent is not going to influence their child... You know, like I said, I think even though my kids stopped going to church, which I think is a stage, I think they will go back.”<sup>45</sup> The author of *Choosing Church* maintains that relationships between parents and teens may be conflicted in the senior year – so much so that there is “little energy left for insisting that teens attend church.”<sup>46</sup> Lytch goes on to report, “Some parents feel the church and parochial school have succeeded with their teen. On the other hand, some parents blame the church and/or parochial school for failing with their children.”<sup>47</sup> Though it is improper to view the church worker or teacher in the primary role of imparting faith knowledge and a heart for Jesus and the church to children, it is a common practice by parents and families. “Pawning off the teaching and discipling of a child to the church, without providing parental insight, results

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 147.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

in a greater chance of that child's dropping out of church."<sup>48</sup> A question arises regarding how church workers or teachers might encourage this view. The importance of equipping parents to play the crucial role of primary faith facilitator becomes evident in such research. The role does not decrease even when a young person is of collegeage. Older teens continue to look to parents to see how they are living out their faith and to hear what is being said about the importance of being involved in the church. The action of parents has a strong influence on their children.<sup>49</sup>

According to Lytch, stronger family units happen as a result of religious socialization. It could also be said that religious socialization will happen as a result of stronger families. Teens tend to be more loyal to the church when their parents hold the same religious background. When parents share a similar faith, children are more likely to follow suit. This is likely because there is unity in the belief system that has impacted the values of the family system. The young person then is able to see what is role modeled and act accordingly within the system. There is no need to take the side of one parent over another, since both parents are in agreement, creating an environment for a child to choose to be like his mother and father in order to please the parents or simply fit into the family by holding the same values.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps such an environment would allow a young person to wrestle with faith ownership a bit more, being that the parents have a solid foundation, minimizing temptation to fight for the child to pull more towards one parent over another.

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<sup>48</sup>Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer III, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 98.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.,93.

<sup>50</sup>Carol E. Lytch, *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004), 163-174.

Previously, we met Ally and Liz. Ally grew up in a two-parent home. As Ally left the LCMS church she grew up in and found her place in a nondenominational church, her parents followed into the same church. Liz, raised in her teen years by her mother only, drifted from her LCMS church as her mother also drifted away. This is helpful to consider as church leadership addresses what parents communicate to their children, even young adult children, and how the children can also impact the parents. A message is communicated to the children when one parent does not share a same view of church and chooses, with hopes of not creating tension, to remain silent regarding faith. Lytch's study confirms that teens mirror the pattern of the less active parent where faith patterns differ between parents.<sup>51</sup> When all family members attend church, the outcome is better. "In families where church attendance is left to each individual as a matter of choice, either because parents prefer this or because they feel unable to enforce more regular attendance, teens tend to drift away in later years."<sup>52</sup> Parents' faith-formation choices are essential in the lives of our teens.

Perhaps some assume upon baptism or confirmation of a young person that they can truly take leadership of their own faith without continued guidance. Legally, teens cannot drive until 16 years of age, and they are not considered adults or able to vote until they are 18. It has been deemed that they should not drink until they are 21, so that they might do so more responsibly. If the average teen is confirmed at age 14, and yet may not be ready to make other adult decisions, why would we set them free to lead themselves without guidance? Lytch reminds parents to choose regular religious participation for the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 175-177.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 178.



family in order to help their children make the same choice for themselves: “When parents hold youth in their church a little longer, through all the years of high school, teens tend to predict they will be active in the church even after they leave home.”<sup>53</sup> Lytch notes that, compared to Baby Boomers, the Millennials experience a greater decrease in consistency and intensity in their religious socialization.<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to think that our current teenagers have more exposure to other cultures and major world religions than previous generations. There is more to consider and experiment with, along with the potential to be confused when mom believes one way and dad believes another way or even when parents simply choose not to speak about their faith in the home.

From Lytch’s study, two emerging themes arise with great significance. The first theme centers around what children learn early on about faith stories, symbols and practices. These teachings have a strong potential to serve as an enduring foundation impacting their faith identity, religious experience, decisions and actions. The second theme speaks to the importance of parents leading their children in the faith and especially in the church even into and throughout the teen years.<sup>55</sup>

Culture-wide evidence of the reality of young adults leaving the church has now been viewed. Insights into the characteristics of today’s young adults, an understanding of the struggles they face, as well as overall perceptions of the church have been gained. This is important in further understanding the church’s role in supporting and facilitating growth among young adults in their faith and in our churches.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.,180-183.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 200.

## **Departure of Young Adults in the LCMS**

The focus of this chapter now shifts towards evidence within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod of young adults leaving the church. Studying youth ministry, Bible instruction and viewing general trends within the LCMS will prove helpful.

### *Youth Ministry*

“The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has a long history of working with young people. Our first youth group was organized at Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO in 1848. The Walther League (named after C.F.W. Walther, the first President of the LCMS), (formerly organized in 1893) defined the LCMS youth ministry into the mid-1960’s. In 1968, the LCMS formed a Board for Youth Ministry and in 1979 formally organized Lutheran Youth Fellowship. The first National youth gathering was held in 1980 in Ft. Collins, CO.”<sup>56</sup> Statistics from an article written in one LCMS national publication, *The Reporter*, are as follows:

1975 - LCMS Membership: 2,859,153  
 1977-1980 LCMS Youth Population (based on jr. high confirmation): 182,621  
 1975 LCMS Youth Confirmed: 56,878  
 2005-2006 LCMS Membership: 2,440,864 (a 15% decrease in membership from 1975)  
 2005/2006 LCMS Youth Population: 102,838  
 2005 LCMS Youth Confirmed: 24,572 (a 57% decrease/decline of 32,306 from 1975)<sup>57</sup>

Today, youth ministry in the LCMS happens in a variety of ways, offering different goals and outcomes for young people. Some ministries equip and others focus more heavily on events and fellowship. Some ministries consider the youth apart from the

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<sup>56</sup> Terry K. Dittmer, “Looking Back and Moving Forward: What About the Future of Youth Ministry?” *The Reporter*, June 2007.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

family, others seek to help parents nurture the faith of their children, and still others find a middle ground to provide autonomy and a place for the family to grow together. Mark Senter, in *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, offers this statement about effective youth ministry, “The most effective youth ministers today seek to partner with parents and teachers in all ministries of the church to guide youths to know God and his love, to have a personal relationship with Christ through salvation and to grow through a lifetime of discipleship.”<sup>58</sup> In the book, four approaches are presented by various authors that are helpful in assessing how churches carry out ministry to young people. The first is the Inclusive Congregational Approach, which “integrates youths into congregational life. Characterized by friendly relations between youths, children, and adults, this approach sees youths as full partners in every aspect of God’s coming to the faith community.”<sup>59</sup> In the second approach to youth ministry, the Missional Approach, the view of youth ministry is “as a mission, using responsible evangelism to disciple young people into established churches. Youths and youth ministers are considered to be missionaries. By functioning semi-autonomously as church-, school-, or community based, their responsibility is to communicate the kerugma, or the gospel, with their generation.”<sup>60</sup> At Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Carrollton, Texas, a group called Student Venture is supported by men willing to cook a hot dog dinner for after-school youth events that occur on a public high school campus. The event is led by someone who once worshipped at the church and exists to serve students in the public school

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Senter, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 56.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.,xv.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

setting. This parachurch ministry has the goal of teaching students to evangelize to other students with the hope of the students one day plugging in to a local church body. The third approach, called the Preparatory Approach, coaches students in a type of ministry lab and “is a specialized ministry to adolescents that prepares them to participate in the life of existing churches as leaders, disciples or evangelists. Students are viewed as disciples in training with opportunities for service both in the present and the future.”<sup>61</sup> The fourth approach is the Strategic Approach, which prepares the youth group to serve as a church plant.<sup>62</sup> Two LCMS churches in the Dallas area have launched a church movement for college students called, The Station, serving students at the University of North Texas in Denton. A young adult is leading the college students, and they are being trained to take on leadership roles on campus. As we consider these four approaches we see that two are more fellowship oriented: the Inclusive and Preparatory Approaches, and two are more missional: the Missional and Strategic Approaches. Two are centered more around being the church of today: the Inclusive and Missional Approaches, and two are centered more on serving as the church of tomorrow: the Preparatory and Strategic Approaches.<sup>63</sup> Each will have their fair share of benefits and challenges.

Despite the various types of youth ministries, practically every youth ministry has what Lutheran pastor, professor and author, John Oberdeck, calls a “Eutychus” youth. In Scripture, the bored, at risk and unnoticed Eutychus is in need of an adult friend who has the ability to nudge and mentor the young person back to a more productive path. Such a friend promotes what Oberdeck says the primary goal of youth ministry is about, to

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., xv-xvi.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

promote an understanding and lifestyle of forgiveness, redemption and grace in Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup> Essentially, the importance of the cross should be the focus. This thought is exemplified in the following statement from Oberdeck's book, *Eutychus Youth*:

If I am led to understand that my relationship with God is established on the basis of the purity of my behavior, if I come to believe that I am doing God a favor by coming to His events and His church, then I'm missing out on the Gospel. I've learned moralism, but I haven't learned the cross.<sup>65</sup>

Oberdeck asks youth leaders to consider crucial questions regarding ministry to teens in his book. Do we ask youth what they think about God? How do they perceive their relationship with Christ or relate their faith to the life they live daily?<sup>66</sup> As we wrestle with why young adults leave the church, we consider the purpose of youth ministry in the LCMS. Oberdeck says youth ministry ought to be based on Ephesians 4.<sup>67</sup> Truly it should be that we help teens focus on Jesus. "So also at the center of youth ministry is the proclamation of forgiveness in Jesus' name."<sup>68</sup> Some congregations may focus strongly on maintaining a status quo within the institution. This includes maintaining a steady membership and focusing more on raising young people who will one day serve the church, as opposed to being considered an important part of the present church. There is safety in operating as such. Oberdeck raises the idea that parents may feel comfort in knowing there is a place where other adults will speak to youth, enforcing morals and

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<sup>64</sup>John Oberdeck, *Eutychus Youth: Applied Theology for Youth Ministry – Reaching Youth on the Ledge* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 15.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, 27.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid, 81.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 100.

providing a place for the young people to be held on to until such a time exists that they are ready to lead and follow the same patterns that will maintain the same church setting that has always been.<sup>69</sup> The idea of teaching a young person to focus on the meaning of the cross, so that a legacy of faith may be passed on to the next generation, or simply so the young person understands the promises of God in Jesus Christ may not be the first priority. What is safety? Safety equates to church workers doing their jobs so that youth will be safe from the harmful ways of the world [drinking and driving, illegal substance use, etc.]. “Youth ministry is in danger when themes, curriculum and activities become prevention-oriented.”<sup>70</sup> Many parents seek safety for their children and are relieved to know churches can provide that kind of teaching. There is more that must happen, however, if a teen is to stay connected to Jesus and the church post high school.

There are three outcomes Oberdeck speaks of regarding young adult ties to the church. They “will claim the name Christian and give thanks to God that they are part of a Lutheran church body that unashamedly confesses Jesus Christ; much of the next generation will believe, but not within the confines of the organized congregations; much of the next generation will, based on their negative perceptions, reject the faith and seek their spirituality elsewhere.”<sup>71</sup> The first outcome is the most desired, though a reality exists in the next two outcomes, requiring attention from the church leadership.

Another point for churches to consider is how an understanding of Law and Gospel ties into young adults leaving the church. A proper understanding might mean

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 141.

that a young adult sees the church through a lens of truth, where people live in two worlds as both sinner and saint. Without such a view, the church is easily viewed as hypocritical and “not for me.”<sup>72</sup> If young adults see a disconnect between their churches they grew up in and their message, “if there is an aversion to ‘organized religion’ as researchers indicate, then certainly a key instrument at our disposal to restore a biblical understanding of church is to teach what it means to be both saints and sinners, not just as individuals, but as a body of believers.”<sup>73</sup> The author of this paper contends it is far easier to feel the judgment of the law. For young people to understand that God has also made them a Saint by the blood of Jesus provides hope and a new outlook that lives out of joy.

When working with teens and young adults, Oberdeck suggests that churches also focus on the theology of the cross that “assumes that in a fallen world, fallen creatures suffer, but that God has chosen to suffer with us and for us” vs. the theology of glory, where “loss and tragedy is inexplicable. If there is a God, these things shouldn’t happen.”<sup>74</sup> The theology of glory view says we are blessed with all things we consider to be good. “A glory theology places each of us in the center; God’s purpose is to serve us and fulfill our needs, and a consumer culture not only promotes such a view, but requires such a view.”<sup>75</sup> How will young adults know and trust God when their needs are not being met? For teens, they must understand their identity rests in the act of Jesus Christ – his death on the cross and resurrection on Easter morning. “The evidence of God’s love for us is the cross of Christ, and the proof that God has not abandoned us in our suffering

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 164.

is the cross of Christ.”<sup>76</sup> Focusing on such theology allows the young person to answer why bad things happen to good people and points them to a God who does not abandon and a God who can be trusted. It places person and Creator in the right order for a right perspective.

Exploring youth ministry within the LCMS is helpful in understanding what has taken place and what needs to take place. Understanding how the church goes about imparting Bible knowledge upon young people in a way that impacts for life long faith further equips the LCMS to serve young people well.

### *Bible Instruction*

The impact mentors have on our teens through Bible instruction has many different facets to it. Within the LCMS, confirmation ministry is a standard teaching tool for teaching the faith that may also impact one’s dedication towards the church. Author David L. Reuters suggests churches use confirmation ministry to build on what the students have already learned, suggesting this happen in short courses (four to eight weeks) for seventh through tenth graders.<sup>77</sup> “An added feature of these courses as well as the support offered between sessions and courses can include the use of mentors.”<sup>78</sup> Mentors could be someone known by the young person already, and must be someone continually growing in faith. Mentors help break down the large group teaching in a meaningful way. “It’s our hope to build a lasting faith – growing and vibrant so that they

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> David L. Rueter, “Confirmation – A Developmental Understanding,” *Lutheran Education Journal* 142, no.1 (2008): 20-21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 21.



do not make a quick exit from church life after confirmation.”<sup>79</sup> Mentorship in confirmation allows an adult to debrief material and simply serve as an advocate for the teen.

In the 1990s, the suggestion was to use various art forms as means of expression in confirmation such as journaling, poetry, and artwork. Finding mentors for students was also promoted so that young people would be paired with an adult for regular discussion of what it means to be an active adult in the congregation.<sup>80</sup> Denise McKinney, in *Mile Markers*, writes, “They [students] need guides to walk all the way across [the bridge to adulthood] with them and if we don’t guide and encourage the real mile marker moments for students, they’ll create or seek out their own.”<sup>81</sup> We can appreciate the use of mentors in the early 90’s and adults showing young people what it meant to be active in the church. How mentors are trained and interact with students (and for how long) today is of the utmost importance to intentionally explore. Are mentors a confirmation-only phenomena? While confirmation ministry is important, teaching for faith is a continual process. Teens with ongoing faith-mentor relationships will likely stand a better long-term outcome in the church than those without such relationships. From their research in the book *Sticky Faith*, Powell and Clark offered this insight about college freshmen:

Hearing from an adult from their home church – whether via text, email, phone, or something you’ve perhaps heard of called the US Postal Service – seems to help students take their faith to college with them. In fact, that ongoing contact still makes a difference three years later.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>80</sup> Ken Smith, *6 Models of Confirmation Ministry* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993), 10.

<sup>81</sup> Denise McKinney, *Mile Markers: A Path for Nurturing Adolescent Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 63.

<sup>82</sup> Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 100.

Mentors in confirmation ministry may prove to be a positive reinforcement in the life of a teen. Mentors walking with young people through high school and even into young adulthood may prove to hold a more significant long-term impact.

*Trends in the LCMS*

Current trends will now be viewed through a variety of church practices in the hopes of shedding light on the need for adults to walk with teens. “No one should be surprised at the drop off rate when students begin to grow out of youth church. Adult church is a foreign environment.”<sup>83</sup> DeVries speaks of the importance of integrating youth in with adult members as they can assist in the “spiritual growth and maturation of youth.”<sup>84</sup> Larger churches can easily separate youth out of the main church activities, believing it is for the better and to the advantage of the young person. “Unfortunately, without connecting those advantages to the previous generation and to the worship life of the entire community, the advantages rapidly deteriorate into disadvantages.”<sup>85</sup> On top of this division between age groups, young adults may encounter teachers and professors who are on a mission, according to Roehlkepartain and Roehlkepartain, “to debunk the myths of the spiritual and extol the merits of the material, the reproach they will feel and the disdain they will encounter for their religious convictions may be overwhelming. A faith that might have survived getting shot at could be the faith that is lost when it is

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<sup>83</sup> Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 208.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 209.

laughed at.”<sup>86</sup>This is a good point. Teens can be easily confused or swayed when they do not understand how their faith relates to the real world, to real academics, and to their own real lives.<sup>87</sup> “Teens who have a grasp of who they are, how God has redeemed them, and the meaningfulness of their lives, have an immediate advantage when they find themselves challenged. Teens in the middle of a challenge who have leaders, guides or mentors ready to affirm these truths also have an immediate advantage.”<sup>88</sup>The availability to an older person who has experience is helpful in such times. When it is the case that a young person has an older adult whom they can confide in, he or she can go to that person for support and to seek guidance in what Scripture has to say and how to draw closer to God during a time of confusion or doubt.

Studying students who are involved in churches, synagogues, temples or mosques, a national research study reported how often adolescents participated in religious services, education and youth groups. This was done in two waves [Wave 1 – 2002/2003, 13-17 years old; Wave 2 – 2005, the same students at age 16-21 years old]as a longitudinal study.<sup>89</sup> Overall, only a slight difference was noticeable. However, “more change was evident in their reports of public religious involvement,” indicating a 13 percent decline in public religious practice.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Jolene L. Roehlkepartain and Eugene Roehlkepartain, *Prescription for a Healthy Church: Ministry Ideas to Nurture Whole People* (Loveland: Group, 2000), 223.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 223-224.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>89</sup>Melinda Denton, Lisa Pearce and Christian Smith, “Religion and Spirituality on the Path Through Adolescence: A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion Number 8,” (2008) [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org)(accessed September 20, 2012): 1.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.,14.

In Schwadel and Smith's National Study of Youth and Religion, 40 LCMS students were surveyed. Such conservative protestant teens were deemed overrepresented in rural areas.<sup>91</sup> In this research, it was found that "conservative teens are more likely to attend church regularly than are other Protestant teens;" at least 65 percent of the category that LCMS teens fall into reports worshipping at least one time a month.<sup>92</sup> This statistic is similarly reported in a Barna study sponsored by the LCMS that indicated "Nearly one out of every fourteen LCMS teens, however, attends a regular weekend church service no more than once or twice a month. All in all, 5 percent attend once or twice a month."<sup>93</sup> In the study by Schwadel and Smith, LCMS teens in the United States, ages 13-17, were asked to respond to questions in several categories regarding their activity in their churches. The following are their replies.

Current involvement in any religious youth group? Yes 48%  
 Attended Sunday school in the last year a few times a month or more? Yes 52%  
 Attended a religious camp? Yes 48%  
 Attended religious youth retreat, conference, Rally or Congress? Yes 49%  
 Faith is very or extremely important in shaping daily life. Agree 54%  
 Made a personal commitment to live life for God – 52%  
 Church is usually boring. Agree 9%  
 Adults at church are somewhat/very easy to talk with/get to know. Agree 67%  
 There are regular opportunities for teens to be involved in religious services.  
 Agree 79%  
 Church has been very/extremely helpful for parent trying to raise teen. Agree 52%  
 Percentage of parents who view ministry to teens as a very important priority in their church – 42%; Conservative Protestants – 76%; Mainline Protestants – 73%<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Phil Schwadel and Christian Smith, *Portraits of Protestant Teens: A Report on Teenagers in Major U.S. Denominations* (Chapel Hill: National Study of Youth and Religion, 2005), 13.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>93</sup> Barna Research Group, Ltd., *LCMS Texas Teens and Their Faith: A Study of LCMS Youth Group Attenders*, Ventura (Summer 2001), 15.

<sup>94</sup> Phil Schwadel and Christian Smith, *Portraits of Protestant Teens: A Report on Teenagers in Major U.S. Denominations* (Chapel Hill: National Study of Youth and Religion, 2005), 16-51.

In all cases, LCMS percentages were lower than those for Conservative Protestants. “For many but certainly not all measures, teens whose parents are affiliated with conservative denominations are more likely to believe and participate religiously than are teens whose parents are affiliated with mainline denominations.”<sup>95</sup> One can see from the last statistic in this 2005 study above, regarding parents who view ministry to teens as a very important priority in the church, that there is quite a gap between the LCMS denomination and other conservative and mainline protestant denominations. What does this mean? It could mean LCMS parents value their children being in worship with them and so a youth ministry is not as important. Earlier in the study, we learn that the teens surveyed strongly represented rural areas. Perhaps opportunities for larger and more active youth ministries were not an option and therefore not missed or thought about. To drive to church once a week, may have been the norm. Rural churches may not have the money to afford youth or family ministers who could specifically minister to teens. On the other hand, it might mean that there is some type of disconnect taking place whereby LCMS parents are not considering the long-term faith of their children. This cannot be assumed, however.

Rev. Terry Dittmer, the Director of LCMS Youth Ministry, shared more current statistics in an article reviewing the previously mentioned *Eutychus Youth*. Dittmer reports the overall LCMS youth population as diminishing:

In 1980 for the first National LCMS Youth Gathering in Ft. Collins, Colorado, based on confirmation statistics, our youth population for 15-19 year-olds was about 220,000. Thirty years later, for our 2013 Gathering, again based on confirmation statistics but for 14-19 year-olds, the LCMS youth population is

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 64.

around 100,000 -- fewer than half what we had 30 years ago. We are an aging church like most denominations.<sup>96</sup>

Using the same study in this chapter by The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), Dittmer offers good news and bad news. “The LCMS is among ‘conservative Protestant denominations’ that retain 86 percent of their youth through high school. The bad news? Our young adults drop out of church at the same alarming rate as most post-high-school young adults.”<sup>97</sup> In an article written in the LCMS official newspaper, the following is reported. “Among other official acts reported for 2010: 23,464 children were baptized (down 1,281) and 17,700 teenagers were confirmed (down 1,334).”<sup>98</sup> There are not large amounts of evidence within the LCMS to indicate how many of our young adults will leave the church after high school. What research is showing is lesser commitment towards involvement in teen years based on a small sample and a larger picture, as well as trends that do not look favorable. Perhaps one of Oberdeck’s outcomes – that students will not be ashamed to confess Jesus Christ as Lord within the Lutheran church body – brings this church body something to address. What must adults and ministries model, teach and do so that teens are confident enough to actively belong to the LCMS and not seek spirituality elsewhere?

This chapter has offered insight on young adults leaving the church, focusing on both the general Christian church and the LCMS. Specifically, we have considered current culture-wide trends of teens leaving the church, gaining understanding in the

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<sup>96</sup> Terry Dittmer, “Review: Eutyclus Youth,” *Youth Source*, <http://www.youthsource.com/index.asp?Function=View&ArticleID=1803&PageID=7082> (accessed May 17, 2012).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Linda Hoops, “Synod Membership Continues to Decline,” *The Reporter* (October 2011): 2.

characteristics of today's young adults and in their overall perceptions of the church.

Within the LCMS, we specifically explored youth ministry, Bible instruction through the lens of confirmation ministry, and general trends. While there are still many young men and women who find significance in being affiliated with a church, evidence exists that demonstrates strong trends emerging that will not bode well for our young people in the future. The author maintains the impact of mentoring on teens will provide a solid future for our young people and for future generations. In the next chapter, understanding what mentoring entails and its significance will be focused upon.

## CHAPTER 3

### MENTORSHIP

In our previous chapter, we gained insight into the current trends centering on young adults leaving the church. In order to contribute to further understanding the potential problem, and in order to address how mentorship might be of help in retaining our young people, it is important to investigate the role that mentorship plays in the lives of young people and especially in confirmation and youth ministry. For the purpose of this chapter, we will consider what mentorship entails, as well as the difference between mentorship and discipleship.

#### **What Mentorship Entails**

Mentoring is not a new phenomenon. Mentors come in all shapes and sizes. Such relationships are formed for a variety of reasons in a variety of settings. It is first helpful to understand where we get the word “mentor” in order to form a basic definition. From *The Odyssey*, we learn that Mentor was Odysseus’ friend who took on the education of Odysseus’ son, Telemachus. Mentor was possessed by Athene, a Greek goddess of war, who safely led Telemachus back to his father after a time of separation.

#### *Definition of Mentorship*

According to Thomas Keller, in Chapter Six of DuBois and Karcher’s *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*, “The defining feature of youth mentoring is the personal relationship established between a young person and a caring, competent individual who offers companionship, support and guidance.”<sup>1</sup> Author Kenneth Gangel views a mentor as being

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<sup>1</sup> David Dubois and Michael J. Karcher, *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 82.



a wise friend who is willing to teach using personal experiences to lead others to accomplish goals and face challenges.<sup>2</sup> A mentor's value in Christian leadership today goes without saying. Seeking to move someone from past to present to future can only bless another. "Mentoring is more than telling; it depends on thorough and adequate feedback and mutual cooperation."<sup>3</sup> Mentoring engages critical thinking skills. There is both a difference and a tie between mentoring and discipleship. Mentorship points people to make choices so that they are capable of owning their faith. This leads to pointing people to spiritual growth in God, which is discipleship at its best, which then supports mentorship. Jesus did both. He mentored and disciplined people. More people can be disciplined than can be mentored. "Availability also implies an allowance of sufficient time for each learner so that her problem can be satisfactorily handled."<sup>4</sup> One cannot have time for many people, and being accessible is of key importance to a mentor relationship.

Mentoring is not about a person sharing all the things that have worked for him or her. Anderson and Reese insist, in the book *Spiritual Mentoring*, that mentoring is about listening to the other person.<sup>5</sup> They point out the importance of a mentor considering the whole person, including mind, soul and spirit, as well as not simply focusing on information, stating that this is an influential means of helping others grow in intimacy with God that teaches people of their true identity as God's beloved children who have a

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>5</sup> Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 28.

unique role to play in the Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Anderson and Reese use St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila to demonstrate the beautiful interaction between a mentor and a mentoree. Here were two people who mentored one another with a discerning and listening spirit, as well as by providing motivation and inspiration to one another<sup>7</sup> “Mentoring provides an opportunity for Christians to go back to a relationship where one person [the mentor] cares enough about another person [the mentee] to invest valued time, precious energy, and emotional and mental effort in him or her.”<sup>8</sup> Through several definitions, we learn that the word mentor embraces the idea of the need for one to guide another along the life journey.

### *Christian Mentoring Basics*

Now that the definition has been established for the word mentor, several basics for Christian mentoring will be offered. Teens questioned about their biggest challenge in growing deeper in their relationship with God in a survey by Group Publishing had this to say: “I feel alone – I wish someone could walk alongside me to help me know how to grow; I do not have someone to go and talk to one-on-one; I wish I had a mentor.”<sup>9</sup> If mentoring is so beneficial and important, why are people not doing more of it? Mentoring is not necessarily easy to do. There are several difficulties that need to be addressed in order to understand mentorship. A person should not fear lifting another person up, but sometimes this is the case. John Maxwell, in *Mentoring 101*, has much to say on the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 35-37.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>8</sup> Henry A. Simon, *Mentoring: A Tool for Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Rick Lawrence, “The Secret Dreams of Teenagers, Part 2,” entry posted December 6, 2011, [http://www.youthministry.com/Dreams\\_of\\_Teens2](http://www.youthministry.com/Dreams_of_Teens2)(accessed January 16, 2013).

topic. He begins with noting the insecurities of potential mentors. Such insecurities may keep people from desiring to lift others up for fear that they will be viewed in a lesser light. Such a view centers largely on self and further promotes choosing not to spend time with another person out of the selfish desire to put oneself in a position of higher importance.<sup>10</sup> Possibly the most crucial difficulty in mentoring is determining what will form a person being mentored into a success. To be able to see the potential within a person requires much time, care, investment, and a true desire to know and focus on their heart, needs, joys, etc. What kind of encouragement is needed in order for them to grow? These questions must all be considered if one is to be mentored well. A leader must ask what defines success, seeking a healthy understanding of this concept and providing proper training.<sup>11</sup> Regarding a wrong concept of success, the average person does not know his or her purpose and may focus instead on building bigger, better, and building more than others as a life foundation. The way success is measured can be warped and culture based. So that a mentor is not ignorant of a process that brings success to another, training is essential. Strong mentors believe in the person being mentored, offering encouragement, removing barriers and allowing for natural motivation.<sup>12</sup>

It is further helpful to get into the mindset of the mentor. John Maxwell writes about the phenomena where church workers chose to believe church is about them and can be formed alone by their own skills and talents. When this is the mindset, a lack of equipping takes place, strengths are played out, and areas of weakness are never

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<sup>10</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Mentoring 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

developed.<sup>13</sup> This may further enhance a Pied Piper mentality, where a leader's ministry is about him or her and how good he or she looks to others. This mindset does not work long-term. Leaders need to be about equipping people to equip others for ministry. If this is not the case, the person being mentored is still only as good as the mentor is and only for the time that the mentor is present in the lives of others. Church leaders may want to take on a large following, but it is not wise. Leaders need to remember to choose whom they will mentor, since it is impossible to develop everyone. This cannot be stressed enough and is carried out by considering and acting upon the following: build relationships with people before beginning mentoring relationships; give without expecting back; experience on the job training; share resources; stick with the person being mentored; and help the person being mentored to do the same for someone else.<sup>14</sup> Everyone can find people to mentor in order to look good, but the point behind mentorship is to develop future mentors to impact the world.

John Maxwell speaks of treating those who are mentored with genuine respect, and seeing their full potential, even if they do not. When this happens, people give their best.<sup>15</sup> Maxwell reminds the reader of the importance of remaining dedicated to the task of developing people for the long haul. From this comes positive change in the relationship with those the mentor interacts with. He further explains that a strong loyalty by a leader develops when people [those being mentored] understand that the leader has the best interest of others at heart. The longer people are developed, the longer they are

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 13-21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 55.

likely to remain loyal themselves.<sup>16</sup> It is understood that the body of believers may also stand a chance of a stronger relationship with God and the church when not abandoned in the faith, and when developed over time by people who are well trusted. This is the most basic understanding necessary for mentorship.

### *Why and Whom to Mentor*

Now that the basics of mentoring have been reviewed, the focus will move to why and whom leaders should mentor. It has already been discussed that a mentor cannot mentor everyone. Johnson and Ridley note, “No matter how energized, idealistic and gifted you are, taking on too many protégés is a sure way to compromise your health and the quality of your mentoring.”<sup>17</sup> This is true across the board. Yet church workers may fall into the trap of believing they are going to create huge and life-long change in the masses by operating as a charismatic leader instead of equipping others to walk with a few people and over a period of time. In this case, the most appealing people to take on as protégés are those who exhibit talent, competence and skill. When it comes to mentoring for faith, choosing the best of the crop must not be a factor. Instead, a mentor should ask God to lead in such a relationship, choosing not to rely on self-strength and motivation. According to Anderson and Reese in *Spiritual Mentoring*, mentors must believe “we are formed spiritually through the ongoing mystery of the Holy Spirit as God brings to completion the good work begun in a believer’s life.”<sup>18</sup> Johnson and Ridley add, “To obtain an insightful understanding of protégés, mentors need to have a personal

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>17</sup> Brad W. Johnson and Charles R. Ridley, *The Elements of Mentoring* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Keith R. Anderson, and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 132.

relationship with them. . . . It is a knowledge garnered through substantial observation, frequent interaction, and intense involvement – a real relationship.”<sup>19</sup> Excellent mentors want to “provide knowledge, make recommendations, offer consultation and stimulate motivation with encouragement.”<sup>20</sup> Mentors have the ability, through their personal experience, to provide a big picture view that incorporates an appreciation for the past and an awakening of what lies ahead. Giving vision for how one contributes (and can do so in the future) is essential and enhances confidence and commitment. “Mentors also help place minor setbacks and failures in perspective, detailing the larger picture of development and success.”<sup>21</sup> If more mentors were available to speak the truth into a young person, perhaps more confident and vision-oriented adults taking on church leadership would be the result.

The Church can learn from a business model, regarding mentoring. Grow those who are mentored and walk with them to the point that they move into leadership roles, instead of fading away. All Christians should seek to reproduce other followers through mentorship. Church leaders desire parents to take on this role, but also know the importance of exposing young people to other godly adults who can serve as role models. “The experience of giving and receiving in a safe mentorship prepares protégés to become colleagues to their mentors and to others.”<sup>22</sup> Being an intentional model is crucial. Johnson and Ridley offer the importance of inviting “protégés to participate with you in various dimensions of your professional life. The best mentors understand that protégés

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<sup>19</sup> Brad W. Johnson, and Charles R. Ridley, *The Elements of Mentoring* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 8.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 41.

need to watch them perform the activities necessary in a particular field.”<sup>23</sup> This speaks to how important it is for one to live out his or her faith outside of the church. It is important for younger eyes to see. Of course this brings about a sense of vulnerability and requires consistency and dedication to walking with the Lord in all circumstances and stations of life. While the mentor, protégé relationship is a significant one, it should not be overlooked that the parent-child relationship is the most significant form of mentorship. The relationship parents have with their children, especially in the early years, shapes the way a young person views the world and how he or she will react to being mentored by another.

Henri Nouwen notes characteristics ministers must consider when preparing to minister to or even mentor upcoming generations. Two key characteristics he speaks of are inwardness and fatherlessness.<sup>24</sup> It has been stated that parents play a key role in the lives of their children. How is a young person impacted when a father is not present in the home? Can the role be filled by another? Perhaps this is not ideal, but a mentor may prove helpful. John Cragg of Long Island Youth Guidance offers this, “Fatherless families are an epidemic, and Christian mentoring is a pathway to the cure.”<sup>25</sup> David Kinnaman reminds us in his book, *You Lost Me*, “Fatherlessness is nearly eight times more common today than it was fifty years ago, and young adults are far less likely to attain full ‘adulthood’ by their thirtieth birthday.”<sup>26</sup> Kinnaman raises the question of how

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>24</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books/Double Day, 1972), 27.

<sup>25</sup> John Cragg, Peter Vanacore and Lynn Ziegenfuss, “Building Bridges to Vulnerable Youth,” *Network Magazine* 22, no 3 (Fall 2004): 15.

<sup>26</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2011), 56.

such a change would not hold an impact on the faith journey of young adults. Nouwen further notes a cultural shift wherein youth no longer strive in young adulthood to take the place of their fathers. Instead, they desire to conform to their peer groups. “This aspect of the coming generation raises serious question for Christian leadership of tomorrow.”<sup>27</sup> Consider the impact on the church if people are without healthy role models. When inwardness is chosen over relationships there is a failure to gain knowledge from the experience of others. While either a male or female youth leader may tremendously impact a young person of either gender for the better, positive male role models are still needed in our churches and para church ministries today in order to address the issue of fatherlessness.

One might find the numbers of female to male students entering Director of Christian Education training programs in the LCMS of interest. Dr. Mark Blanke of Concordia University in Nebraska had this to offer about the gender make up of students in the DCE program, many who will end up serving in Lutheran churches with a role in youth ministry as somewhat of a mentor, but more of an advocate for young people. “About 54% of the students in our program are female – and that’s been pretty steady for the past three to five years. The 2011 directory indicates that 47% of Directors of Christian Education in parishes are female, and the same percentages of females have been certified over the years.”<sup>28</sup> At Concordia University of Texas, the 2012 statistics of enrolled students are as follows: Freshmen: 50% male, 50% female; Sophomores: 54% male, 46% female; Juniors: 40% male, 60% female; Seniors: 76% male, 24% female;

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<sup>27</sup> Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Blanke, email by Director of DCE Program, Seward, NE, October 11, 2012.



One-Year Interns: 35% male, 65% female.<sup>29</sup> A noteworthy finding of a DCE Career Path Project that took place in 2009 was that the general demographics of those participating in the survey included a gender split of 61% male, which “serves as a reminder of the early years of DCE ministry (1970s) when 75% of those certified as DCEs were male. In 2008, the percent of certified men is only 54%.”<sup>30</sup> Young people may decide they have no healthy role models available to them, or they may not know they have access to their leaders, whether male or female. It may be easy for them to choose to follow their friends, who seem far more loyal than most of the adults in their lives. In such cases, the lack of life experience may lead to a young person believing the choices they make to leave the church are acceptable and right, especially if little evidence is given that young people are cared about by the church or there are no positive role models serving as mentors to fill the void of missing parents. Interestingly, Powell and Clark note, “More than any single program or event, adults making an effort to get to know the kids [high school seniors] was far more likely to make the kids feel like a significant part of their church.”<sup>31</sup> This is yet another reason why implementing a mentor ministry is important, including and equipping role models and considering the need for more male leaders.

Mentoring others requires much intention and time. When it comes to developing leaders, state Malphurs and Mancini, “we can measure our success not by the numbers of people we attract but by our own relating to and training a competent, godly core of

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<sup>29</sup> Jacob Youmans email by Director of DCE Program, Austin, TX, October 15, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Karpenko (lead researcher), Debbie Arfsten, Steve Christopher, Ben Freudenburg, Jack Giles, and Bob McKinney, “DCE Career Path Project Phase 1” (October 2009): 39, [http://dcecareerpath.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/dce\\_career\\_path-finalreport-09oct31.pdf](http://dcecareerpath.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/dce_career_path-finalreport-09oct31.pdf) (accessed October 24, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids: Chicago, 2011), 99.

leaders who will have significant ministries long after we have been forgotten.”<sup>32</sup> It is vital to consider equipping and offering growth opportunities before and after someone begins participating in or living out faith. Discipleship training is on-going, requiring a dedicated mentor. Why would our focus only be on winning non-believers to Christ? Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Carrollton, Texas, has held to the mission of Invite, Lead, Equip and Send for several years. So often, the focus of the church is to equip people to speak the Gospel message, but church leaders everywhere may fail to impress upon believers the need to equip to equip. Water’s Edge Lutheran Church in Frisco, Texas has this as one of its core attitudes for life and ministry: “Passing on the Christian faith unto the next generation and equipping them for their life as missionaries is a highest and most holy priority.”<sup>33</sup> “It is imperative as well that we pursue and mobilize people to maturity and development in ministry.”<sup>34</sup> Let us make mature believers as Jesus did.

We, as followers, must learn to follow well. In Jesus we have the example of “being a penetrating influence” to those we mentor so that they seek to always be adding to the church instead of maintaining the selfish and club-like mentality.<sup>35</sup> In other words, we are to engage in the world instead of retreating from it. As we consider the equipping that is evident in biblical models of mentorship, we see the importance of intentionality in mentoring, as well as lifting up God given gifts. Let us consider the early church and the

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<sup>32</sup> Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 71.

<sup>33</sup> Document, “Water’s Edge Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Core Attitudes for Life and Ministry” (obtained October 3, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Malphurs and Mancini, *Building Leaders*, 72.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

development of leaders. The first century church leaders found future leaders through recruitment. The equipping process was cyclical. Jesus directly invited and asked disciples to pray to God for more workers – “the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few” (Matthew 9:36-38).<sup>36</sup> Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:2, directed Timothy to develop other leaders for ministry. Here we see “leadership multiplication” taking place.<sup>37</sup> Malphurs and Mancini look to the example of the Apostle Paul to remind leaders what is necessary for mentors to consider when mentoring others. The focus centers on the importance of developing competence, the need to teach for faith and equip, and raising the bar of expectations for mentees so that they are challenged and expected to take an active role in the church.<sup>38</sup> These examples provide solid ideas for leaders serving as mentors. They also grant insight into whom leaders should mentor. Further insight on mentoring will be gained as the chapter shifts to the heart behind spiritual mentorship, observing specific elements and models.

#### *A Heart for Mentoring, Elements and Models*

Exploring the work of David Stoddard in his book, *The Heart of Mentoring*, allows for a greater understanding between the difference of mentoring and coaching. The difference is noted in the following: Coaching is “typically skills-driven, short term and focused on behavior, while mentoring is relationship-oriented, has a long-term scope, and is holistic.”<sup>39</sup> Coaching, though, can be included in mentoring. Stoddard notes that no

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.,96.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.,99.

<sup>39</sup> David A. Stoddard, *The Heart of Mentoring: 10 Proven Principles for Developing People to Their Fullest Potential* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, 2003), 11.

matter how a person approaches mentoring, in order to be effective, their heart must be in it.<sup>40</sup> Though the mentor offers support, they know they do not control the person being mentored or how he or she grows. Mentors cannot change people, no matter how wonderful the mentorship model, because motivation must come from within, especially when speaking about faith. Still, mentors can give people a fighting chance and equip them to make wise choices.<sup>41</sup> Stoddard sees mentorship as a form of equality and not a hierarchy. Mentorship is therefore a peer relationship. “Because mentoring is a two-way learning and growing process; when we show that we are real, it becomes safer for our partners to be real with us.”<sup>42</sup> When we consider spirituality and mentoring, we see the importance of sharing our faith even in the public sector where “sharing each other’s spiritual story paves the way for significant dialogue and forces both of us to search for answers to the questions that arise.”<sup>43</sup> Stoddard encourages people to reflect on their biblical roots, leading others to form their own opinion as to who Jesus is to them. He uses terminology that indicates how important it is, even when people are young, to consider making a lasting legacy by being engaged in mentoring those younger than them.<sup>44</sup> The goal is to get young people to think in terms early on of long-range impact on the world and to do so from a biblical worldview or Christian perspective. Such a view

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 184.

allows a person to see the world and act based on God's perspectives, reflecting God's choices.<sup>45</sup>

The Bible offers many examples of spiritual formation through a person serving in a relationship as mentor and one serving as the person being mentored. Proverbs 27:17 says that iron sharpens iron and one person sharpens another. Jesus is a wonderful example of teaching that is centered on relationship building. "This teaching was not something that was conceptually defined for his disciples as much as it was lived, experienced, tasted and touched by the learners. Jesus not only spent time instructing, training and informing; he spent much time forming a community."<sup>46</sup> In Scripture, "Philip's question is the simplest form known for the mentor: 'Do you understand what you are reading?' The Ethiopian's response is precisely the cry of those wishing to go deeper in faith. 'How can I, unless someone guides me?'"<sup>47</sup> This is a wonderful picture of spiritual formation through the leadership of another. It is about forming a way of life and perhaps has the chance of granting a person a chance at longevity in the faith. "Spiritual mentoring includes a process of listening to the life of another and then teaching people to open their eyes and see what is there – everywhere – teaching them to become detectives for the presence of divinity."<sup>48</sup> Daniel 12:3 states, "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever." "Our conviction is that spiritual formation is nurtured most profoundly

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<sup>45</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura: Issachar Resources, 2000), 83.

<sup>46</sup> Keith R. Anderson, and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

when disciples are ‘apprenticed’ to a spiritual mentor who will partner with God’s Holy Spirit toward spiritual development.”<sup>49</sup>

There are seven elements that Anderson and Reese use in their book, *Spiritual Mentoring*, for explaining the model of spiritual mentorship. First is the Incarnate Word. Second, it is grounded in the ordinary parts of everyday life. Third, it includes a coming alongside of the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> The primary task of a mentor is “to awaken the mentoree to his or her uniqueness as a loved child of God, created in the image of God for intimacy of relationship that empowers the individual for authentic acts of ministry.”<sup>51</sup> The spiritual mentoring relationship is therefore three dimensional, considering the mentor and the Holy Spirit, the mentor and the person being mentored, and finally the person being mentored and the Holy Spirit.<sup>52</sup> Fourth is understanding that spiritual mentoring is purposive. The fifth element of spiritual mentoring includes the art of listening. “The heart of mentoring is the attentive, discerning mentor who, sometimes, intuitively, knows how to listen to the spirit of God. When I am listened to, probed, encouraged, challenged and helped to hear God’s voice, then the mentor has come alongside.”<sup>53</sup> It is not so much about technique and system. The sixth element includes the idea that spiritual mentoring requires adaptable discernment because one size does not

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 37-44.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 51.

fit all, while the seventh element leads all to be involved. Spiritual mentoring is not only for specialists but for the priesthood of all believers.<sup>54</sup>

Spiritual mentoring is worthy of emulation, imparts biblical knowledge, practices spiritual disciplines, listens, recognizes the potential in people, offers spiritual discernment, fosters trust, uses life experiences and seeks accountability.<sup>55</sup> In such a model, it is important to consider a covenant that includes such questions as why be interested in a mentor, how often and where should one meet, what kind of format should be followed, along with other items such as accountability, confidentiality, evaluation and closure.<sup>56</sup> “What the mentor shares most personally is not technique of instruction but a space for relationship to happen so that attentive learning might be possible.”<sup>57</sup> According to Anderson and Reese, there is a three-way dynamic to spiritual mentoring. Listen with concentration to what is or is not said and how it is communicated. Listen to the Holy Spirit. It is possible to hear how to guide when listening to the mentee because the Holy Spirit may whisper some type of insight through the speech of the mentee. Third, the mentor also ought to listen to his or her own heart, and do so wholly, as the Holy Spirit may stir a word to be shared.<sup>58</sup> As Jesus mentored disciples, he considered the inward and outward journeys of each of them.

The Ignation Way is a worthwhile model for mentors to consider, as well. In this model, mentors prepare the heart and become more Christ-like (to the best of their

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 48-55.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 96-97.

ability) by putting on the virtues of Christ. They pay attention to the passion of Christ, as well as God's salvation story, celebrating redemption.<sup>59</sup> Necessary considerations in such a model include considering the life and age of a person being mentored, adapting as needed, providing intentionality and discipline, and using one's imagination, as well as discernment.<sup>60</sup> For some, considering the use of *Lectio Divina* or 'sacred reading' in mentoring and moving beyond stories and reflecting on who God and self are and how that moves a person to live his or her life can also be helpful.<sup>61</sup>

Peter Vanacore, director of the Christian Mentoring Institute, offered the importance of training that provides knowledge skills and materials in an interview in *Network Magazine*. He said that this training is important in order "to help even those who have no mentoring experience to screen, train and supervise mentors."<sup>62</sup> After training, mentors are given advice and direction to begin. After six months, the mentors return for a review of progress, a follow-up forum and next steps.<sup>63</sup> Jon Cragg, who has led Long Island Youth Guidance for 18 years, said in the same article that, "Even though mentoring is a very simple ministry, it can be very difficult emotionally. Often mentors are doing a great job but don't realize it. Troubled kids do not easily express positive

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 135-137.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 138-139.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>62</sup> John Cragg, Peter Vanacore and Lynn Ziegenfuss, "Building Bridges to Vulnerable Youth," *Network Magazine* 22, no 3 (Fall 2004): 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



feedback since they rarely see it modeled. Good supervision helps a mentor appropriately process their experience.”<sup>64</sup>

Overall, there are many models and ways to mentor another person. Clinton’s Mentoring Types point out that some mentor styles, such as serving as a disciple, spiritual guide or coach are more active mentor relationships. Some mentor relationships happen occasionally, such as counselors, teachers and sponsors. They may also happen to be more passive: a contemporary people look up to, a historical figure or a divine contact.<sup>65</sup> Indeed it is interesting to see all the different types of mentoring relationships.

### **How Mentorship Differs from Discipleship**

Learning what mentorship entails is beneficial if one is to serve in this capacity. It is further important, in order to gain a deeper understanding of mentorship and its tie to keeping young people in the church, to weigh mentorship against discipleship, noting the differences. Where, according to Barna, mentoring “implies personal openness to evaluation, willingness to consistently work on areas of weakness, and submission to the guidance of someone else,” discipleship has its differences.<sup>66</sup> Senter says, “We are all on the road of discipleship leading to perfection, and adults do their best when they walk alongside youths in the discipling process. This provides a loving, nurturing environment in which youths see the model of adult Christian learning and growing along with

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, “Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction,” (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 171-173.

<sup>66</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura: Issachar Resources, 2000), 44.

them.”<sup>67</sup> Discipleship can be viewed as a lifelong journey, not just something that takes place in childhood or in one’s young adult years. In George Barna’s book, *Growing True Disciples*, he defines discipleship as “someone who is a learner or follower, serving as an apprentice under the tutelage of a master,” which is really more about a lifestyle than it is about being prepared for a specific occupation.<sup>68</sup> In the Christian church, discipleship is “about the intentional training of people who voluntarily submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and who want to become imitators of Christ in every thought, word and deed.”<sup>69</sup> Being discipled is not just about being a follower in name, but in doing something.

What if church leaders asked, “How are the disciples?” instead of, “What are our numbers?” Well-discipled people tend to live out their faith each day of the week; they have new faith insights and make life application to what they experience. They submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in word and deed as mentioned above and are sensitive and have hurting hearts for sin, whether their own or of others. They are joyful and share resources, holding a commitment to building a life-changing community. They have a selfless compassion that assists others in need through acts of service and live a life that goes against the flow. They are loving people and are focused in pursuit of God, always linked to Him in prayer. They give of their resources to the church and are enabled and equipped for ministry.<sup>70</sup> Disciples in the church are assured of salvation by grace alone, learn and understand the principles of Christian life, obey God’s laws and commands,

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<sup>67</sup> Mark Senter (General Editor) with Wesley Black, Chap Clark and Malan Nel, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001), 72.

<sup>68</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura: Issachar Resources, 2000), 19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

represent God in the world, as well as serve and reproduce.<sup>71</sup> “Another key to the process [of discipleship] is beginning it before a person reaches adulthood.”<sup>72</sup> Many churches begin discipleship early on. The goal is to maintain it throughout all age groups, considering the developmental and various needs of each life stage.

There are several models of discipleship by which we gain further understanding of the process. Jesus disciplined in the following way: he taught, modeled, exhorted and encouraged.<sup>73</sup> In the Acts 2 model, the church in Jerusalem worshiped, learned, had intentional relationships, shared, served, evangelized, and prayed individually and as a group with the goal of spreading the Gospel. Churches with effective discipleship demonstrate passion to become like Christ and depth to go beyond the basics so that people own their faith and pass it on. Such churches have a maturity that screams total commitment, and they practice being all they have the potential to be. They understand discipleship is a process and interact with the community on the journey. They are multi-faceted with many growth areas being attended to and are committed for life, understanding they will never arrive. Churches engaging in discipleship strive to be Christ-like in all situations.

Another discipleship model focuses on competencies, being missional, the impact on the neighborhood, educating for a worldview and using a lecture-lab for people to cultivate faith and knowledge.<sup>74</sup> This model facilitates the ability for people to act and

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 107.

think like Christians, develop in character, and build affirming relationships.<sup>75</sup> Still another model focuses on commitment to Christ, evaluation of life by a biblical worldview, commitment to a healthy family, being morally pure and evangelistically bold, as well as being socially impactful and responsible.<sup>76</sup> Yet another model might focus on Bible knowledge, practical ministry skills, outreach, prayer and accountability.<sup>77</sup> One can see the similarities in each of these models. A ministry such as confirmation in the Lutheran church, which often impacts middle school students, or youth ministries in general may also set forth a very strong discipleship model for young people, incorporating many of these elements. Students are being taught to follow the ways of Jesus, are challenged to grow in their prayer life, participate in relationships, serve others, learn to speak their faith and to see the world through a biblical worldview lens.

Author and speaker, Richard Foster, offers a model that focuses on 12 spiritual disciplines for followers of Jesus to engage and grow in. He warns:

We must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who care for children, who must wash dishes and mow lawns.<sup>78</sup>

The importance for a mentor to be well disciplined in the faith has already been stressed. How the disciplines may be an important tool to use when mentoring young people has also been addressed. Foster is an advocate for spiritual disciplines being

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>78</sup>Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 1.

carried out in the normal parts of a person's daily life. There are many Scripture verses and passages Foster suggests support the spiritual disciplines he mainly focuses on.

Meditation – “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.” (Psalm 1:2)

Prayer – “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

Fasting – “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day...” (Esther 4:16)

Study – “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

Simplicity- “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Luke 16:13)

Solitude – “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

Submission – Abraham's test of faith regarding sacrificing his son Isaac in (Genesis 22:1-19)

Worship – “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...” (Ephesians 5:19).

Service – “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another before yourselves” (Romans 12:10).

Confession – The Parable of the Lost Son, (Luke 15: 11-24)

Guidance – “For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them” (Matthew 18:20).

Celebration – “Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name” (Psalm 103:1).

There is indeed a need for young adults to be spiritually disciplined. Colossians 1:21-22 says, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body

through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” Kenneth Gangel and James Wilhoit in their book, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, point out that young adults may grow in their relationship with God when the truth of who they are in God is established, when they understand God has done all for us out of love so that they do not react out of fear or duty, and when a realization occurs that one cannot earn love or improve one’s standing with God.<sup>79</sup> Part of discipling young adults, so that they might be solid in their identity, includes the task of showing God’s grace that they may relax in God, trusting that he is at work in them. This is a wonderful gift to give a young person through mentorship. There are two ways adolescents develop a sense of who they are: imitation or integration, in which imitation shows a lack of depth or truth to self, while integration consists of intentionality, interaction, personal reflection, opportunities to explore, struggle, and faith ownership.<sup>80</sup>

The family is a context for spiritual formation, as well. An integrated faith, with strong vertical [personal relationship with God] and horizontal [personal ministry with others] elements, is essential. Yet, faith nurturing is not one-size fits all. Gangel and Wilhoit comment, “In short, spiritual formation is pictured here in terms of art; it is analogous to the direct, customized sculpting of all human beings by their Creator, along with other influences. No single design is ever repeated since each person is unique.”<sup>81</sup> Family nurture begins with the parents. This is a recurring theme. What do they know and show about God? It is difficult to speak of God if one does not engage in a

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<sup>79</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, and James C. Wilhoit, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 250.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 282.

relationship or utilize opportunities to grow through spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, or worship. We see how the Bible promotes the idea of family nurture and right relationships in the following passages.<sup>82</sup> “Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). “Her children arise and call her blessed” (Proverbs 31:28). “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). “But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God” (1 Timothy 5:4).

The spiritual nurture of young adults must be intentional. The Bible gives evidence of the role of all family members and the community of believers to care for and interact with one another. Scripture clearly demonstrates a progression of spiritual nurture, beginning in childhood and moving through adulthood. There is no mention in Scripture of the process being complete while on earth. Faith development is ongoing and is passed from one generation to the next. The need for discipling is real and present in our development as people of God who are active in living out our faith and contributing to God’s Kingdom. It therefore would seem likely that without such a connection or opportunity for one to be nurtured in the faith, one might live oblivious to what one is missing out on. The concern for young adults attending church comes from the hope that they would know the fulfillment that comes from a relationship with our Triune God and that they would be able to nurture and pass on the faith to others.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 285.

There is not one model that is better than another, yet all models demonstrate what each congregation of people value the most. It helps to guide the ministry taking place and is at the heart of discipleship.

In this chapter, the unique elements of spiritual mentoring and discipleship have been considered, as well as several elements and models of each. There is a joy that comes from living in community as believers. A community is strengthened when discipleship happens through mentorship. If those who are mentored would someday become mentors to their younger counterparts, quite an impact would be made on the church and even our culture. The hope is that people would form an interest in impacting others and the church in the future and that life would be viewed and lived through a biblical worldview. In the next chapter, we will move towards a deeper understanding of Jesus as mentor of his disciples, viewing him as an example and considering various training models he used.



## CHAPTER 4

### JESUS AS MENTOR OF HIS DISCIPLES

In the previous chapter, we took an in-depth look at mentorship and discipleship and reviewed models of each. In this chapter we will first engage in a study of the historical Jesus. Second, we will gain insight into rabbinical styles of mentorship in the first century. Third, we will look at Jesus as a mentor of his disciples. As we understand the context in which Jesus lived and the role Jesus played in the life of his disciples, we hope to learn the best ways to lead our young people into a life-long faith journey using mentoring relationships to combat the problem of young adults leaving the church.

#### **Historical Jesus**

To consider the historical Jesus we will review scenarios of Jesus' life and leadership in order to understand the relationship between teachers and students in the New Testament. We will look at the sociopolitical climate of Jesus' time and consider the opposing viewpoints of Borg and Wright in order to obtain a broader view of who Jesus was.

William Herzog II, author of *Prophet and Teacher*, writes much on Jesus' leadership. "Jesus lived in a Palestine controlled by a colonial power, the Roman Empire, and its client rulers, like Herod Antipas and the high priestly houses in Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup> Jesus faced the challenge of articulating the meaning of the Sinai Covenant to the peasant villagers in Galilee in the context of life controlled by the Roman Empire. He was an advocate for the poor and the marginalized. It is important to understand that the values

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<sup>1</sup> William R. Herzog II, *Prophet and Teacher* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 14.

of the people were similar to his, and his position was not one of power.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is only called ‘Rabbi’ in John’s Gospel. He was called ‘Teacher’ elsewhere. Jesus rejected the ‘Rabbi’ title in Matthew 23:7-8 because it was associated with “status-seeking ‘Pharisees’ who ‘sit on Moses’ seat.’”<sup>3</sup> Again, it is important to keep in mind Jesus’ goal was not to seek status.

Herzog writes about Jesus from several different viewpoints, one being that of a healer [of disease and illness] and another being an exorcist. Being known as a healer was not done in order to gain public support but in order to restore people back to those whom their disease had isolated them.<sup>4</sup> During the time of Jesus’ ministry, the dynamics taking place included priestly houses focusing more on the health of the Temple economy. This was because the power base of the high priestly families was located in the Temple and it was to the detriment of the larger Judean economy, despite how both were so closely tied. The problem was that money was utilized in a corrupt way in order to greedily obtain more land. “Every foreclosure served to heighten the tensions between ruling elites and peasant villagers, the rulers and the ruled.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the priestly rulers of Jerusalem were overly sensitive to criticism of the Temple or priesthood to the point that they were willing to execute those bold enough to question their legitimate rule, doing so in collaboration with the Romans. This is the political scene Jesus entered upon arriving in Jerusalem. Herod Antipas collected tribute to support his rule in Galilee and the high priests collected tribute [called tithes and offerings] to support the Temple in Judea as

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 49.

well as Roman rule, leaving the peasants so taxed that they needed to borrow money just to plant the following year's crops. Their land was taken away when they were unable to pay taxes and they were considered immoral and were unable to receive any benefits provided by the temple and its sacrifices unless they were caught up with payments.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus was known as someone who offered God's forgiveness of debt and sin without permission of the Temple or of the priests. He gathered in the lost and reconstituted Israel as the people of God so that they need not live as forgotten people but instead as the "focal point of God's patronal love and care."<sup>7</sup> He gathered a core of followers who would continue his work addressing oppression and exploitation that occurred in Galilee and Judea.<sup>8</sup> According to Herzog, some said Jesus was a popular prophet. Such leaders were known as people who had a large gathering of followers and made promises to perform grandiose happenings. Most of these so-called prophets were usually killed by political leaders and were usually of the peasant class. They were not involved in politics, such as the clerical and sapiential prophets, whose authority derived from the interpretation of sacred texts. Furthermore, the popular prophets sought signs of redemption that were almost immediately at hand, not dealing with the future.<sup>9</sup> While Jesus did attract crowds, his goal was not to lead with large crowds by his side. Like the sign prophets, who mostly came after his time, "Jesus did announce God's impending

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 52-54.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 102-104.

action in the present, the coming of the reign of God, but he does not seem to have associated this coming kingdom with spectacular signs he promised to perform.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Herzog’s view of Jesus as prophet is due to the distinctive voice of Jesus, as well as his reputation as traditional teacher and healer.<sup>11</sup> Herzog goes on to question Jesus as simply a social prophet like many others who died in the name of God.<sup>12</sup> From a view outside of Christianity one may fail to see the greatness of who Jesus was. Through Herzog’s study, however, it is clear to see that Jesus was a man of compassion who demonstrated leadership and the desire to bring wholeness to all, especially those who were treated unjustly.

Understanding the New Testament background and relationship of rabbis or teachers and their students in Jesus’ day further allows us to learn who Jesus was and how his leadership touched the lives of people around him. While elementary schools were established to teach alongside the synagogues, noted scribes gathered disciples in order to advance the instruction in the Mosaic Law. According to Metzger, “When the scribe walked down the road, his disciples would follow a few feet behind him, for it was thought unseemly that learners should walk side by side with their master.”<sup>13</sup> Disciples were taught to memorize and learn with accuracy. Teachers repeated material to their pupils constantly and with consistence. This was passed on to future generations of students who were obligated to reproduce what they had learned exactly as it was taught,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 60.

including the manner of expression and word choice. Jesus was similar in that he gathered a group of disciples wishing to follow him and who addressed him as rabbi (John 1:38, 4:31, 9:2, Mark 9:5, 11:2, 14:45), often teaching through a rhythmical structure.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the teachers of his day, Jesus' hearers learned that he taught "as one having authority" (Matthew 7:28), unlike the scribes who quoted from those who had come before them.<sup>15</sup>

In considering the sociopolitical climate of Jesus' day, Darrell Bock, author of *Studying the Historical Jesus*, states, "Jesus was born into such a chaotic sociopolitical climate. Understanding that history helps us see how what he said offered hope on the one hand and challenged cherished views on the other."<sup>16</sup> It is also helpful to look at the sociological and cultural events of first century Jewish life. "It is here, especially, among the various hopes for how God would rescue the nation from the chaos of recent history, that Jesus' message fits."<sup>17</sup> Bock speaks of the importance of ascribed and acquired honor in the ancient world and the importance of religious identity or subgroup identity since one's worth was dependent on the allegiance to the group one was connected with. "This is why certain actions, such as the threat of separation from the synagogue for aligning with Jesus, had so much social force. It is why the debates about theology and practice were significant."<sup>18</sup> One important ancient reality was that a person only owed it to those

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 115.

of their same status or higher to show care and respect, making it acceptable to ignore people on the fringe of society.<sup>19</sup> To change one's status was not usually an option. One can see that Jesus would be received as a contradiction. He took a stand for those no one else would, but his status confused people. He was not considered to be of high status from an earthly standpoint and yet was given the ability to identify with people and bring worth to those thought to be worthless. This was not understandable by those in political authority. In a world where honor was ascribed to those attached to a certain group of people, Jesus stood out.

The opposing viewpoints of Borg and Wright in their book, *The Meaning of Jesus*, also give insight into the historical Jesus. Wright views Jesus as a first century Jewish prophet who announced God's Kingdom and died the death of a failed revolutionary leader.<sup>20</sup> Marrying religion to politics, Wright noted that Jesus was not in favor of a revolution because, paradoxically, he saw it as being disloyal to Israel's calling to be the light of the world. This explains why Jesus encouraged people to move away from attitudes of nationalism, like oppression of the poor, and to take a stand even if it meant losing one's life in order to gain life. He also welcomed sinners into fellowship as members of the kingdom, which some could be offended by. After all, who has the power to offer forgiveness to all people, ignoring the proper channels in place?<sup>21</sup>

Borg, on the other hand, questions the person of Jesus pre- and post-Easter. Before Easter, he is unaware of his role as Messiah and was viewed as a Jewish Mystic –

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus J. Borg, and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: Harper One, 1999), 33-34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

Jesus as Spirit person, healer, wisdom teacher, social prophet, and movement initiator. After Easter, Borg claims Jesus was known as a Christian Messiah, who had an “exalted status as Messiah, Son of God, Word of God, wisdom/Sophia of God, Lamb of God, Light of the World, Bread of Life, Alpha and Omega, Firstborn of all creation,” whereas Wright believed Jesus saw himself as Messiah and his death as what he had to complete as Messiah from the beginning.<sup>22</sup> His religious experience as Jewish Mystic [how he experienced the sacred] was the source of his abilities to heal, exorcise demons and enlighten, as well as the source of his authority, ability to serve as a social prophet and his charismatic presence. Furthermore, the traditions, stories, celebrations of festivals and Scriptures [Torah and prophets] read in the synagogue shaped him. His experience of injustice was first hand as a part of a marginalized social class.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of one’s agreement or disagreement with Borg and Wright, it is once again evident that Jesus was a man of passion and compassion. He was a significant role model, a teacher and a transformational leader who had a lasting impact.

The historical Jesus has been reviewed in this chapter through reading various scenarios of Jesus’ life and leadership, considering the relationship between teachers and students in the New Testament, the sociopolitical climate of Jesus’ time, and the two opposing viewpoints of who Jesus was. The rabbinical styles of mentorship in the first century will now be considered, including language, system and structure of the rabbinic theology in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role Jewish rabbis took on as mentors. This will allow for comparison with Jesus’ style of leading.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

### Rabbinical Styles of Mentorship in the First Century

Parables were more than stories that were passed on by a variety of rabbis over the centuries. The rabbis who wrote from the beginning of the Christian era [200 and 220 C.E.] were known as the Tannaim rabbis, who made up a population of 325 men.<sup>24</sup>

McArthur and Johnston, authors of *They Also Taught in Parables*, shed light on the meaning of a parable.

Most readers of the New Testament thought they knew what a parable was until the German scholar Adolf Julicher published his epoch-making two-volume study *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* [1886, 1899]. Drawing his definitions from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Julicher contended that there is a sharp contrast between parable and allegory. For him, an allegory is an extended metaphor that must be decoded in order to be understood, whereas a parable is an extended simile that makes a transparently simple comparison.<sup>25</sup>

How did Jesus' language, as compared to that of the rabbis' language, ultimately demonstrate a unique leadership? Jesus used many metaphors to communicate his point. Because of the era of Jesus' ministry [about 30 C.E.], we learn Jesus could not have been dependent on the rabbinic parables, though we cannot argue the rabbis developed their use of the parable based on Jesus' practices, either. Most likely, Jesus' style of storytelling was not copied. According to McArthur and Johnston, "The widespread use of parables as a teaching device was a new development in the rabbinic period."<sup>26</sup> "At the same time, the rabbinic literature displays the phenomenon of recycling or reapplication of parables, confirming the early church or the gospel writers could have been inspired to do the same with the stories they had received from Jesus, in order to adapt them to the

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<sup>24</sup> Harvey K. McArthur and Robert M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 9.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 165-166.



spiritual needs of their people.<sup>27</sup> This gives Christian teachers and pastors a model to follow. As for Jesus, his parables stirred people up, especially the pious. “The simplest, most elemental and most effective kind of explanation begins with the words, “It is like...”<sup>28</sup> So one would think of Jesus’ teachings as showing or teaching others through a visual teaching that sheds light onto everyday lessons through narrative. We also see simple morality offered through Jesus’ teachings.

It is important to focus on the language, system and structure of rabbinic theology. To the Jewish people, learning the Torah means stepping out of ignorance; learning is considered worship. According to Neusner, “God meets holy Israel in the school house more than in the synagogue, in the study of the Torah more than in prayer – much more. That is the position of innumerable sayings of the sages themselves and that points to the center of the religious experience they mean to make accessible and available.”<sup>29</sup> Philosophers and rabbinic sages were comparable in their desire for order and all things serving a purpose that was assigned and being subject to a single logic.<sup>30</sup> Jesus differed in that he was not about the business of classifying groups of people or finding concern with the hierarchy of things. His role was to fulfill the stress of the law and to bring equality to God’s people, including those who did not understand ‘higher things.’ Rabbis in Jesus’ day stressed salvation by following the rule of the Torah. The difference in leadership was rule vs. grace. Gentiles could not inherit heaven apart from

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Handbook of Rabbinic Theology: Language, System, Structure* (Boston: Brill academic Publishers, Inc., 2002), 27.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 113.

converting. “This the gentiles will do in exactly the way that Israel attained that status to begin with, by knowing God through his self-manifestation in the Torah, therefore by accepting God’s rule as set forth herein.”<sup>31</sup>

We have now had a glimpse into the rabbinical styles of mentorship in the first century, considering the rabbinical language, system and structure of the rabbinic theology. Let us now move towards the consideration of Jesus as mentor of his disciples.

### **Jesus as a Builder of Leaders**

Many books have been written on the leadership of Jesus, focusing on his ability to model the faith to those he taught and trained. Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, reminds us that Jesus was first dedicated to being with His Father in Heaven and that he modeled the need to be in fellowship with God and others. “The Scripture speaks of three kinds of fellowship that Jesus keeps with his own: daily fellowship at the table, the table fellowship of the Lord’s Supper and the final table fellowship in the Kingdom of God.”<sup>32</sup> These three kinds of fellowship that were demonstrated by Jesus regularly reminded the disciples and others around them of what was important in life. Through the mentorship of Jesus, the disciples learned about the importance of being in relationship with God and others. They learned to see the future potential of each person. They grew closer to Jesus, learning to value knowing one another deeply. Jesus guided the disciples to know their audience and he taught them the art of storytelling as a tool for discipleship. Jesus offered a call to leave their old life and follow him in a way that would allow them to try out what they learned and grow in trust and ability to serve others.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>32</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1954), 66.

Mark 10:43 says that whoever will be great among you shall be your minister. Bonhoeffer comments, “Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service. Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out.”<sup>33</sup> This is exactly how we understand, through Scripture, that Jesus lived his life. Christians today teach these same practices to others and strive to live them out, as well. Exploring how Jesus built leaders next will be helpful in understanding how a mentor should replicate such brotherly service.

It is important to consider in depth what is learned from Jesus about developing leaders through mentorship and to look to the relationship between Jesus and the Twelve for further insight. In the second and third years with his disciples, Jesus built upon the knowledge they gained from the previous year. Within Jesus’ first year with the disciples, relationship building and opportunities to experience ministry regularly occurred.<sup>34</sup> Jesus invited others to learn what he was about.

It is additionally helpful to consider, more deeply than previously discussed, the first century rabbinical schools and compare them to Jesus’ way of teaching. There were five characteristics in the schools. The rabbi’s followers chose to submit to their teacher. They would then memorize the teacher’s words, learn their teacher’s way of ministry, imitate his life and then were expected to find their own disciples.<sup>35</sup> Metzger writes, “The object was that the pupil should learn with accuracy the entire matter, with its thousands

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>34</sup> Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 65.

<sup>35</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 14.

upon thousands of minutiae.”<sup>36</sup> The teachers repeated material over and over, called “Shanah” in rabbinic terms [to repeat or to teach]. Furthermore, scribes taught works of previous scribes and intentionally summed up what they were teaching. This clarity was necessary so that accurate information would be passed on to the next generations. Students were not to veer from this.<sup>37</sup> Jesus’ teaching, on the other hand, was not simply about instructing his followers in doctrine and ethics.<sup>38</sup> His conviction about what he taught was incomparable and he fully put into practice what he preached.

According to Hull, a disciple should submit to a leader who teaches the person to follow Jesus.<sup>39</sup> A need for accountability and structure exists for all who are mentored. Thus, one can conclude that people must learn to submit or risk tuning out the good that others will offer and perhaps miss hearing and knowing the truth. Disciples need to learn Jesus’ teachings. Hull contends that followers of Jesus learn much about the heart of Jesus simply through his example of doing ministry. Hull said, “We have found too many ways to be Christian without being Christ-like,” and that people should train to be godly instead of *trying* to be godly.<sup>40</sup>

Through his example, Jesus as mentor encourages us to look beyond a first impression to see the potential of each person into the future. A person is not to rely on his or her own gut feeling about another when seeking to choose someone to mentor.

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<sup>36</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 50.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit is essential in such matters.<sup>41</sup> This may involve risk taking and turning our worlds upside down as we share with young people the joys of following Christ and living daily for Him. Emotional ploys may be used on young people to get them to follow Jesus. These tactics can serve largely as manipulation, which will not last. “People need to be convinced of the presence of the power of God if they are to catch the vision of his kingdom on this earth.”<sup>42</sup> Such mentorship calls for genuine care and concern toward the person being mentored. This adds value to the relationship.

After the disciples learned about Jesus’ ministry heart and style, they committed to the next step, following him. According to Malphurs and Mancini, true discipleship is noted by: abiding in God’s word(John 8:31-32), loving others (John 13:34-35) and bearing fruit (John 15:8, 16).<sup>43</sup>This can be considered a solid vision for the Church. Hull notes that Jesus’ disciples began to understand they were called to a vision not to another job.<sup>44</sup> When one loses vision for ministry, it is likely one will depart from what a church hopes to accomplish. Hypocrisy, rationalization, impurity and legalism all contribute to a dying vision.<sup>45</sup> Jesus met people’s physical, mental and spiritual needs and therefore never lacked a following of people.<sup>46</sup> Jesus kept His focus on the salvation of those around Him, demonstrating a right vision and a right heart.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>43</sup>Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 65.

<sup>44</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 84.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 92.

As a young person being mentored learns to follow Jesus, he or she comes to understand what it is to have fellowship with God's people. Hull offers four characteristics of effective fellowship: completely accepting others, being in fellowship with God [prayer and Scripture], inclusion of the basic dynamics of spiritual life [Acts 2 model of eating, praying, singing and playing together], and meeting specific as well as general needs [motivation, encouragement, sharpening] of the other person. The disciples watched Jesus model these characteristics time and time again. In addition to this, they learned the importance of not pushing ministry on the people they discipled and learned the importance of retreating in order to recharge and gain focus.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus' disciples knew him, became committed to him and finally received him as he poured his life into them (Luke 6:13).<sup>48</sup> He taught the Twelve much (Matthew 10:5-11:1), including who and how to minister. He trained them in various topics, gave them hands-on opportunities and did not send them out alone, but in twos. By not going out alone or with a larger crowd, they learned to rely on one another for accountability and were not tempted to create allegiances with any other people.<sup>49</sup> Jesus gave them power to perform miracles, intentionally mentoring this core group into developed leaders.<sup>50</sup>

From Hull, it is clear that Jesus guided the disciples to know their audience. He specifically wanted them to serve the Jewish people first. Jesus provided boundaries for the disciples in order to keep them to the task at hand, making it harder for Satan to

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.,133-137.

<sup>48</sup>Malphurs and Mancini, *Building Leaders*, 66.

<sup>49</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 170.

<sup>50</sup>Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 67-68.

disrupt God's plan and ministry.<sup>51</sup> The disciples spent much time with Jesus and learned his ways thoroughly as a result. One of the most important goals for the mentor is to encourage the learner to spend intimate time with Jesus, just as the disciples did.

After the disciples returned from their ministry assignments, Jesus' focus was to deepen the intensity of their hearts' conviction; in order to move from equipped laborer to established disciple, Jesus taught that conviction, ministry skills and supervisory attention were essential.<sup>52</sup> One thing that most likely contributed to the deepening of their hearts' conviction was adversity or conflict with the religious establishment. It is interesting to think of this as normal phenomena. We breathe a sigh of relief in knowing even Jesus' disciples had difficult experiences. Even through conflicts with the Church, they remained faithful to serving God. Jesus allowed the disciples to experience these things and did not shelter them from the reality of life in this world. Those we mentor must know the truth of our fallen worldly state, but how tragic it becomes when they are expected to experience it alone. It is important to consider equipping and offering growth opportunities before and after someone begins participating in or living out faith so that they can discern the convictions of their heart and how to carry out such beliefs. Discipleship training is ongoing, requiring a dedicated mentor. "It is imperative as well that we pursue and mobilize people to maturity and development in ministry."<sup>53</sup> Making mature believers as Jesus did, is crucial to the future of the Church.

Jesus further developed his students into leaders in a variety of ways. One way included the use of storytelling. Jesus told common stories about seeds, vines and soil as

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<sup>51</sup> Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker*, 171.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

he described God's kingdom, referring to people such as farmers, merchants, and bandits. He also spoke in concrete and abstract terms, which helped people visualize what he taught. Since it was easy for people to relate to, Jesus chose to use metaphors, which stressed community and cause.<sup>54</sup> To demonstrate his authority, Jesus used multiple images, including shepherd, harvester and apostle. Such images were to help followers understand that though a person exercises authority, he or she also is under authority (Luke 22:24-30). Jesus demonstrated to his followers and those he mentored the importance of being under his authority.<sup>55</sup> Arthur Just notes, "Those to whom this kingdom is appointed are those who persevere with Jesus through his trials."<sup>56</sup> In Jesus, the church has the example of "being a penetrating influence" to those being mentored, so that they seek to always be adding to the church instead of maintaining the selfish and club-like mentality; in other words, we are to engage in the world instead of retreating from it.<sup>57</sup> Jesus taught those who followed him to live what they preach. This is also called "doing the law." Christ's teachings were the new law for believers. It was not and is not enough to simply listen. Listening must be followed by action.<sup>58</sup> The examples Jesus provided in his teaching allowed the people to understand what it would take to be and serve like Jesus.

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 75-78.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>56</sup>Arthur A. Just Jr., *Concordia Commentary Luke 9:51- 24:53* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 848.

<sup>57</sup>Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 88.

<sup>58</sup>Peter H. Davids, *New International Biblical Commentary: James* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 54.



We learn more from Jesus on the topic of loving others through his example. Jesus told his disciples that people would know them by the way they treated others (John 14:15). This included love for enemies, as all of us have the potential to act out of our dark side. “If we truly love one another with the knowledge of both the ebb and the flow of human nature, its potential for both good and evil, only then will the world’s eyes be riveted to the church.”<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the world is turned off to the church because Christians are to love all as Jesus did; yet this is not always the case. It is easy to run away, reject and refuse to help or even invite certain people groups into our churches. It is easy to reject people willing to serve because we deem them inappropriately dressed. The church needs people willing to tell the truth and keep people safe, offering a reminder where one should place trust and confidence – in God alone.<sup>60</sup> God’s people are called to follow commandments in order to demonstrate love for Christ. This attitude of love should be continued.<sup>61</sup>

The Lord said, “Follow me,” in the calling of Matthew (Chapter 9). Here, Jesus extended an invitation or a call to Matthew to come along with Jesus. Matthew was not an upstanding citizen. He was a tax collector, yet that did not matter in the eyes of Jesus. Immediately, hearts were transformed, wrote Jeffrey Gibbs, “from the moment of Jesus’ authoritative call to faith and discipleship.” Here is where Jesus models complete acceptance.<sup>62</sup> Jesus saw all people as equal; he came to all humbly and with a servant’s

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<sup>59</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 208.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-211.

<sup>61</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: WMB Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1975), 575.

<sup>62</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary – A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 470.

heart, calling people to leave the old life and follow Jesus, inviting them in for meals, expressing both evangelistic and missional intentionality.<sup>63</sup> In Matthew 9:36-38 [The Workers Are Few], the reader sees how Jesus modeled compassion. This would be the source from which the apostles' work would flow. The word compassion seems to summarize why Jesus would act as he did.

Part of mentoring the disciples included letting them try out all that Jesus had taught them. In Matthew 10:16 [Look, I am Sending You], Jesus told the disciples what was ahead and equipped them for what they should do by imparting perspective, courage and comfort upon them. "Now you are the sheep and you will receive attacks," so, "be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves."<sup>64</sup> Jesus built their trust and God-esteem as their mentor. He gave them the bottom line – their souls were safe. Jesus further helped them keep their focus, reminding them there was a hard job ahead and not much time. He demanded excellence and raised the bar, stressing the urgency of their task. People's souls were at stake. There were limitations and Jesus wanted these men to know it. He did not make light of any situation and he provided reality for them, discussing strategy and planning with them. "Whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next" (Matthew 10:23). In Matthew 10:26-31, Jesus taught the Twelve not to be afraid. Life is indeed easier knowing someone, such as a mentor, is on your side walking with you, exactly what Jesus demonstrated with these men. "Such disciples of Jesus believe that their lives possess eternal significance."<sup>65</sup> Confidence and purpose were the outcomes of

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 471-472.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 518-520.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 540.

Jesus walking with the disciples. What followed was the development of passion. If we look at the life of Jesus and the account of feeding the 5,000, Jesus told the disciples to feed the people. Jesus did the miracle in the hands of his disciples. They did it together. He did it with them. Jesus used many teachable moments and taught the disciples as they went. He invested time and did ministry with them. He gave them space to learn, even if they had their doubts. Jesus was a master mentor, from whom we can strive to learn even today.

Many blessings flow from relationship building and intentional equipping when a mentor seeks to help guide and develop a person. Scripture further gives us examples of God's people who experienced a mentor-type relationship with one another. These relationships are helpful for one to learn the importance of such roles in equipping younger generations to continue on in faith and leadership. Two of the largest themes that emerge when considering biblical mentorship are relationships and equipping.

### **Jesus as Builder of Mentors**

We further see the importance of a mentor teaching the student to be both a teacher and a learner. This must happen throughout one's life. This shows the importance of the relationship as being a two-way blessing and ties well into another point. Leaders need to be teachable.<sup>66</sup> There exists a sense of humility in knowing we might all learn something even from someone the world might perceive as below us. All may learn from one another, regardless of the level of experience. For a person who is new in any field, to feel listened to is a gift. So it is within the relationship of a mentor to a mentee. The sense of value that is present is priceless.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

As we consider the equipping that is evident through Jesus' example and in biblical models of mentorship, we see the importance of intentionality in mentoring, as well as lifting up God-given gifts when building a person up to serve as a mentor. We think we have a new problem – young adults declining in attendance in our North American churches. There have always been people in need for hearing the Gospel message. Mentors are needed to pass on the faith. Are people ignoring the call to recruit others in the faith? Matthew Henry writes, “Those that are to teach others must first be themselves taught the word of the Lord, not only to talk of it, but to walk in it. It is not enough to have our tongues tuned to the word of the Lord, but we must have our feet directed into the way of the Lord.”<sup>67</sup> Wiersbe notes our strength to teach others and pass on the faith correctly comes only from God. “The ability to study, understand, and teach the Word of God is a gift of God’s grace. ‘Apt to teach’ implies apt to learn; so a steward must also be a diligent student of the Word of God.”<sup>68</sup> It is easy for one to see that a call to serve others comes from God.

The model of Christ might not be an easy one to follow, but there are several lessons one can learn when viewing how he lived. Henry Cloud and John Townsend in their book, *How People Grow*, offer four ideas for mentors to follow based on the life of Jesus. They are as follow:

1. Normalize suffering – Jesus did not avoid suffering but saw it as an opportunity for growth (Hebrews 5:8).

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<sup>67</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible: Genesis to Revelation* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1961), 1711.

<sup>68</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the NT Comprising the Entire “BE” Series, Vol. 2 Ephesians – Revelation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 245.

2. Choose godly suffering – unlike being abused, conflict is to be dealt with and experienced so that all parties may grow. Jesus knew the fruit it would bear by choosing the path of the cross.
3. Be humble – Jesus taught the importance of suffering through humility. Jesus could have taken on an attitude of avoidance, claiming greatness in his role as God’s Son, but he did not (Philippians 2:6-7).
4. Depend on God and people – Jesus showed his disciples how to ask God for daily bread (Matthew 6:11). He modeled dependence instead of independence when he asked his closest friends to be with him in his last days. He further taught his disciples to acknowledge instead of deny a wound, to accept things as they unfolded instead of living in denial, and to seek the support of God and friends instead of striving for self-reliance.<sup>69</sup>

Though Jesus knew he must face great suffering, he did not move away from the pain. In the world’s view, the path to glory is about rising to the top, but this is not the case with Jesus. The path to glory is experiencing pain and suffering, “Now, if we are children; then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). Jesus further demonstrated love instead of retaliation and he practiced self-control. When others hurt Jesus, he did not lose sight of his values or direction. He reached out to those who cared about and had walked with him, and called upon his Father. These four examples may prove helpful for mentors to role model to their younger counterparts as they impart humility and offer guidance to coping in the most difficult of situations.

According to Cloud and Townsend, mentors have the example of teaching others to “take the delegated authority Jesus gives over evil and apply it to their own lives and growth paths.”<sup>70</sup> People will always be presented with stumbling blocks. What is known about Jesus is that even he had to deal with temptation. Mentors understand that

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<sup>69</sup> Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *How People Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 82-86.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 88.

followers are tempted much like Jesus was, especially when they are weak. Jesus was in a weakened state of hunger when he was tempted to have his needs met by someone other than God. Mentors should help people find positive ways to meet their needs.<sup>71</sup> It is also well known that Jesus cared for the weak in a way that identified with suffering, teaching others to identify the frailty of others. Therefore, through Jesus, we learn how we should suffer. So we learn that mentors may investigate with those being mentored those parts of their lives where they do not see Jesus as an advocate with authority who both sympathizes with them in their weaknesses and helps them walk through such issues.<sup>72</sup>

From Nouwen's book, *In the Name of Jesus*, more is learned about how Jesus mentored others. Nouwen offered that leaders of the future will have to stand in this world vulnerable. "That is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love."<sup>73</sup> In his ministry, Satan tempted Jesus to put the Lord to the test, as seen in Matthew 4:6. Nouwen has this to say about the temptation:

But Jesus refused to be a stuntman. He did not come to prove himself. He did not come to walk on hot coals, swallow fire, or put his hand in the lion's mouth to demonstrate that he had something worthwhile to say.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout his earthly life and ministry, Jesus demonstrated humility and vulnerability. In Mark 6:7, Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs. Earlier, the importance of going out in twos was mentioned. Nouwen confirms the importance of proclaiming the Gospel in community, the importance of depending on brothers and sisters in Christ for prayer, thoughtful discussion on the spiritual task at hand, and accountability in mind, body and

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 91-93.

<sup>73</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 30.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 36.

soul.<sup>75</sup> This example supports the blessing that comes from a relationship between a mentor and mentee, as well as the positive effects of living in community with believers. Servant leadership can be undesirable and painful at times. We learn much from the role Jesus served in as mentor to his disciples, as well as from what Nouwen offers.

Jesus as an historical figure has been reviewed and his style of teaching has been compared to the rabbinical styles of the first century in this chapter. From Jesus' leadership and how he lived his life, quality mentoring techniques have been learned. Furthermore, Jesus' ministry has revealed the importance of relationships and equipping. All of these insights strengthen and enable God's people to influence young adults through mentorship ministry. In the next chapter, a greater insight into mentoring teens through youth and confirmation ministry will be given attention. Mentoring is just one solution that might impact young people for a lifetime of church leadership and equipping others with the desire to pass on the Christian faith.

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 58.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE IMPACT OF MENTORING ON TEENS

In the last chapter, Jesus as an historical figure was reviewed and his style of teaching compared to the rabbinical styles of the first century. Mentoring techniques from Jesus' leadership style were focused on and helpful tools were given for mentors to impart on mentees. In this chapter, the purpose of influencing young people through a mentorship model of ministry will be studied. It will be helpful to address the history of mentoring in America, review the role of the adult, and gain insight into developmental and spiritual formation and the impact each has on mentoring relationships.

#### **A History of Mentoring in America**

Before the mentoring of teens is discussed, the history of mentoring in America will be considered. Dubois and Karcher review the four stages in the mentoring movement in America:

1. **Emergence:** Industrialization and urbanization found a relationship to the problems of child conduct. Those who were concerned saw the need to intervene for prevention of delinquency.
2. **Establishment:** Formalized youth mentoring began under adult organization and supervision (Big Brothers Big Sisters Program of America).
3. **Divergence:** Mentoring was no longer simply about public charity, but was also about intentional ways to address delinquency and prevention.
4. **Focus:** Largely a 20<sup>th</sup> century development, the study of variables involved in mentoring led to national support for the practice of mentoring through organizations and policy initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

This movement is helpful to see how mentoring in America began in order to seek solutions towards the prevention of delinquency in young people. Mentoring happened

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<sup>1</sup>David L Dubois and Michael J. Karcher, *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 15.



prior to this, but formal programs grew more and more as a result of the movement. The question that arises for church leaders is how mentoring will impact teens positively so that they become adults who are present and active in the church. The role adults can play in mentoring is crucial and will now be given attention.

### **The Role of Adults in Mentoring**

From a 2009 Barna study, we learn that children and teens who attended Sunday school (and other religious education offerings) were much more likely to attend church and have an active faith life as adults than those who did not have such experiences. Of those who attended in childhood, 50 percent said they attended worship in the last week (slightly more than the national average). Of those who attended in their teen years, 58% said they worshiped in the past week.<sup>2</sup> This gives an example of the significant role of faith in the life of a young person. Adults involved in mentoring young people to actively participate in church offerings have the potential to make a lasting impact on a young person today. Thus the youth and adult mentorship relationship is worth investigating.

According to the Handbook of Youth Mentoring, children and adolescents who have healthy relationships with parents may still find it easier to see other adults as role models to confide in.<sup>3</sup> The fact that social circles and support strengthens as adolescents move into middle school and high school makes the need for a significant mentor relationship challenging. There must be some purpose involved that relates to the young person.<sup>4</sup> It is further important for adults to understand that mentoring must happen more

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<sup>2</sup> Barna Group, "New Research Explores the Long-Term Effect of Spiritual Activity Among Children and Teens," (2009), <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/321-new-research-explores-the-long-term-effect-of-spiritual-activity-among-children-and-teens> (accessed January 15, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Dubois and Karcher, *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*, 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

than only a few times and that it requires a relationship with a young person. Dubois and Silverthorn state, “Mentors, in comparison, are not likely to be able to provide a high level of monitoring if they have only one periodic contact with youth.”<sup>5</sup> Interesting to note is, “although included in only a minority of studies, follow-up assessments that have been conducted also offer at least a limited basis for inferring benefits of mentoring that extends beyond the end of program participation [of a formal mentoring situation].”<sup>6</sup> Amongst the strongest predictors of greater reported positive effects for mentoring programs were: “ongoing training for mentors, structured activity for mentors and youth, as well as expectations for frequency of contact, mechanisms for support and involvement of parents, and monitoring overall program implementation.”<sup>7</sup> It is easy to see why intentionality of such a mentor relationship is warranted. The research in the *Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth* study uplifts relationships between young people and adults which foster frequency of contact, emotional closeness and longevity as having positive outcomes. Not only this, but evaluating such relationships is significant in understanding such outcomes between adults and those they mentor.<sup>8</sup> Grossman and Rhodes also support the idea that mentoring relationships that endure tend to provide

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<sup>5</sup> David Dubois & Naida Silverthorn, “Natural Mentoring: Evidence from a National Study on Relationships and Adolescent Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no 3 (March 2005), [http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring\\_238.pdf](http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_238.pdf) (accessed May 15, 2011): 522.

<sup>6</sup> David L. DuBois, Bruce E. Holloway, Jeffrey C. Valentine & Harris Cooper, “Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth: A Meta-Analytic Review,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30, no 2 (April 2002): 30, <http://www.wmich.edu/evalphd/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Effectiveness-of-Mentoring-Programs-for-Youth.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2011): 186.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 188-191.

positive benefits to youth.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, their research demonstrates that students in matches that lasted more than twelve months showed a “significant increase in self-worth, perceived social acceptance, perceived scholastic competence, parental relationship quality, school value, and decreases in both drug and alcohol use.”<sup>10</sup> This supports the hypothesis that poor effects on youth may arise when a short-lived match occurs, as well as the hypothesis that as a relationship matures, so does the impact the mentor has.<sup>11</sup> “If the process through which young people are led to Christ is based solely on that one personal relationship with the youth worker, we’re in trouble – if for no other reason than the frequency with which youth ministers change jobs.”<sup>12</sup> This would contribute to the hypothesis of the negative impact on short-lived mentor matches, especially if the only relationship being offered to a teen is that of a youth worker.

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Kimberling City, Missouri, once utilized an effective ministry called the Prayer Partner Program.<sup>13</sup> In this ministry, young people [as young as elementary-aged children] through college young adults were paired with an older adult. Each adult had no more than two young people, and they were matched by gender. Both sides were given an overview and instructions at the beginning of the school year. A kick-off banquet took place for the families, offering ice breakers, guided discussion, a time of devotion and prayer, as well as expectations and further

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Grossman and Jean E. Rhodes, “The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Relationships,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30, no 2 (April 2002), 200, <http://www.rhodeslab.org/files/testoftime.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Dave Wright and Dixon Kinser, Post-Relational Youth Ministry: Beyond Youth Work As We Know It. *Youth Worker Journal* 21, no 1 (Sept/Oct 2004): 47.

<sup>13</sup> Designed by the author for Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Kimberling City, MO, 2001.

instruction. The adults were to call or email [as texting was not an option yet] their student(s) on a weekly basis, simply to ask for prayer requests and see how the week was going. Some volunteers attended the events of their youth when they could. A mid-year banquet was held as a check-in, since some partners had never connected face to face. An end-of-the-year banquet also took place, where prayer partners could re-commit for the following school year. On occasion, some youth developed relationships with other adults, whom they asked to be their new prayer partners for the new year. Overall, the impact of the ministry was considered significant in bridging the gap between youth and adults. Their church worker regularly encouraged the adults by phone and email. The success came in young people enjoying being mentored and prayed for, and the older people learned about and supported a younger generation in a way that had not previously occurred. In a few cases, where adults and teens decided to extend their partnership into the new school year, a handful of these young people remain in contact with each other after ten years, serving as a visible marker of an impacting mentor relationship.

Research that shows the positive impact of a long-term mentor relationship, at least a year long, as opposed to the weaker impact of a short-term mentor relationship has been reviewed. Martin Luther's words (on the spiritual nurture of children) in the Small Catechism offers insight to this topic, as well. In the section on baptism in the Catechism, the question is asked about why the Church encourages the use of sponsors at Baptism. The explanation includes the following. "They also pray for them and in the case of children, help with their Christian upbringing, especially if they should lose their parents."<sup>14</sup> Two Scripture verses are referenced in the Small Catechism: "Every matter

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<sup>14</sup>*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 208.

may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Matthew 18:16), and “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16). We also consider the following verses. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). These verses demonstrate the need for parents and a community to be a part of the spiritual nurturing of young people.

We are further given biblical examples of the role of parents and community upon the faith of a child in the following verses. “They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). This verse demonstrates community, as well as both individual and communal prayer. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). The Greek word translated ‘give up’ speaks of desertion and abandonment, something our young people may be experiencing by their immediate and church families. We gain a glimpse into the idea of the holy Christian church in Ephesians 2:19-22, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus

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as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” The Ephesians passage and others, serve as reminders that we are united as a family of believers in Jesus and therefore have an active role to play in the lives of other members through relationships and sharing of faith.

Wright and Kinser, in a *Youth Worker Journal* article, write, “Jesus himself built a community of followers. Jesus is present where the church gathers and community exists. The reality is that young people will see Jesus more in a group than in one relationship.”<sup>15</sup> Powell and Clark, in their book *Sticky Faith*, commented that they were not surprised to learn in their research that out of five groups of people who offer support to young people (adults in the church, parents, youth workers, and friends both in and outside of the youth group), adults in the congregation were ranked last [least likely to offer support to the youth in their church] by high school seniors.<sup>16</sup> Powell and Clark stress that the church ought to be a community of belonging, a sort of people movement that overshadows the idea of church being about a place for teens to be entertained.<sup>17</sup> Adults have a greater role to play in the lives of young adults than striving to look like a cool person that every young person will flock to. Adults have depth, wisdom and care to offer young people as they guide them through adolescence and into adulthood.

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<sup>15</sup> Dave Wright and Dixon Kinser, “Post-Relational Youth Ministry: Beyond Youth Work As We Know It.” *Youth Worker Journal* 21, no 8 (Sept/Oct 2004): 48.

<sup>16</sup> Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 98-99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

### **Mentoring Teens for Spiritual Growth**

There is a need to be spiritually disciplined. Teens need someone to walk beside them in order to teach and encourage them on their spiritual journey. The following Bible passages hold outcomes we would desire for our young people.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” John 8:31-32.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” John 15:4.

“Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me’” Matthew 16:24.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened unto you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” Luke 11:9-10.

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

These verses bring guidance to our teens as to how they can tackle life as a believer, something done much better when walking with a community of believers.

Who walks with teens after confirmation or after students age out of youth ministry programming? It is a possibility that middle school students, probably the largest population involved in confirmation ministry in the Lutheran church, do not stand a chance to grow in the Christian faith beyond confirmation instruction. Even with the most caring and tuned-in small group mentor watching over a group of ten or less young people, the lack of family faith involvement seems a greater force in keeping young people from continuing on as active churchgoers. Youth ministers do their best to partner with parents so that they can live out Deuteronomy 6:4-9, but parents have the ability to live up to their God-designed role or not. Hearing the parents’ faith stories is crucial

for a young person.<sup>18</sup> How many of them are actually sharing these? Parent choices impact the choices of students to be sure. For some students, parental involvement in the faith life of their child happens for the first time during confirmation ministry.

Previously, students may have experienced Bible stories in Sunday school or children's church, but the chances that those stories were integrated into the home or personal faith life of the majority of children outside of the study time probably is not likely. To begin nurturing the faith of a child at twelve years old may be considered commendable, but it is also much too late. Learning and knowing Bible lessons or doctrine does not seem to translate alone into an active faith participation post confirmation.

Many Lutheran church bodies instruct youth in grades six to eight in Luther's Small Catechism, with some beginning as early as the fifth grade and even some instructing throughout high school. Most churches have very specific time frames to complete confirmation instruction, while others take on a self-paced approach. There are various approaches used. The need for strong discipleship before confirmation and strong discipleship afterwards remains in need of further attention most likely in most churches.

The problem at hand centers on a young person's exit away from the church and at an early age. Parents can contribute to this problem of flight from the church by not communicating the way of faith to their children. In a 2007 survey, it is noted that the mom, then dad, followed by grandparents had the strongest impact on the faith of a teen. Youth ministers, pastors and small group leaders ranked a distant thirteenth

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<sup>18</sup> Denise McKinney, *Mile Markers: A Path for Nurturing Adolescent Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 112.



place.<sup>19</sup> Young people may find other ways to be reminded of their dying and rising in Christ outside of the church. In an article on the future of youth ministry, Kenda Creasy Dean, a well-known youth advocate and researcher, had this to say, “The days when youth ministry focused only on teenagers are over. Since youth mirror the faith of the adults who love them, parents and congregations need sustained and intentional models for Christian maturity. Parents are key, but research also links adolescent faith maturity to the support of the pastor, followed by other faithful adults who are willing to invest in teenagers.”<sup>20</sup> Mentoring teens for spiritual growth takes much more work than many are willing to give. To simply hire a person who will oversee a particular age group (i.e., teens) is only half of an equation that calls for more people and leadership in the church to be involved, seeing each individual holistically and planning for faith growth in light of that view.

### **Developmental and Spiritual Insights in Mentoring**

Mentorship has now been studied from an historical outlook, and the role of adults and parents in modeling faith has been reviewed. Next, developmental and spiritual considerations will be given in order to gain deeper insight into the positive aspects of mentorship.

It is also important to study youth or confirmation programs as a factor in whether or not this ministry helps or hinders a young adult’s long-term tie to the church. It is further fascinating and wise to study whether or not a person walking in faith with the

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<sup>19</sup> Mark A. Holmen, *Building Faith at Home: Why Faith at Home Must Be Your Church’s #1 Priority* (Ventura: Regal, 2007), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, The Future of Youth Ministry: Expand the Umbrella, *Group Publishing* 35, no 2 (Jan/Feb 2009): 60.

confirmand makes a difference in this journey. If the average middle school or junior high student is considered, certain developmental attributes should be taken note of in order to provide the best environment for spiritual growth. In the area of spiritual development, stages two through four of the faith stages offered by James Fowler seem to impact this age group most. The average middle school student is 11-14 years old. Stage Two, called Mythic Literal faith, impacts 72.4% of seven to twelve year olds. In this stage, it becomes possible to order the world with categories, enter into the perspectives of others and apply meaning of stories to one's life.<sup>21</sup>

Stage Three, called Synthetic-Conventional faith, touches 50% of thirteen to twenty year olds. In this stage, it is possible to take perspective. Beliefs and values are synthesized to support an identity with others in the faith, uniting one emotionally with a group.<sup>22</sup> This faith stage says, "I believe this because this is what my tribe, my parents, my family believes."

Stage Four, Individuative-Reflective, only touches 5.4% of those ages 13-20, but 28.6% of those ages 13-20 are impacted by a combination of Stages Three and Four. Stage Four allows for critical reflection of what one values and believes. Third-person perspective taking is a factor, as well as responsibility of choices one makes, allowing for deeper understanding in the commitments, relationships and even vocation one takes on.<sup>23</sup> A Stage-Four faith is a deeper one that begins to own itself.

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<sup>21</sup> Jeff Astley and Lesley Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 16-17.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 17.

This middle school age group falls in a broad category of faith development. We further see the contribution of others in faith development as we look at the various stages. Interestingly, Fowler offers perspectives about the role of family and Christian education on faith. It is not only the faith understanding of the family, but also of the church body that impacts a person's faith development. Fowler suggests that most families and churches lean towards a Synthetic Conventional faith whereby social conformity to a norm moves people to strive to live up to certain expectations.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps a need exists for churches to understand the reality of how they are impacting young people as a whole, not simply in assessing one area, like the children's or youth ministry. All too often, churches place blame or uplift the worker for a poor job or a job well done. While there are indeed times where this is appropriate, if the church exists in community, all will take responsibility for the growth and care of the young people. How the overall church experience moves the young person from consumer and copier of ministry to embracing unique gifts and a heart for service should be assessed.

Still, it is helpful to understand where middle school students are physically in order to gain the deepest insight of how mentors can be impactful. Through Piaget, we understand students are moving from concrete thinking to the abstract. These stages move from the Concrete Operational Stage to that of Formal Operations.<sup>25</sup> From Erikson, we learn that young people, ages 12 to 18, are trying on identities, including their faith identity, which explains why faith development must continue. This phase is called

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 339.

<sup>25</sup> David L. Rueter, "Confirmation: A Developmental Understanding." *Lutheran Education Journal* 142, no. 1 (2008): 11.

Identity vs. Role Confusion.<sup>26</sup> Students have not arrived at solid faith conclusions by age 14. Their faith is at an awakening point in the growth process. Kohlberg says of this age group that young people are asking moral questions at this stage of life. Therefore it is a good time to meet in small groups under a mentor's guidance, though some are interested in more difficult questions and others are not.<sup>27</sup> These theorists provide us with evidence that students can be challenged to begin thinking more deeply about issues of faith and participating in meaningful ways that will help form their identity in Christ with others on the journey.

### **Confirmation Models and Mentoring**

Now that various developmental and spiritual insights have been considered, the specific confirmation process will be looked at in order to gain understanding of the impact of mentorship on teens for the sake of longevity in the church and living out a vital faith as an adult. Interestingly, in 1968 Klos asked readers of his book about the tie between First Communion and Confirmation not to criticize prior focus of predecessors regarding confirmation practices, noting that today's world differs and calls for new approaches.<sup>28</sup> While today's teens may have some things in common with their parents (and possibly even grandparents) when they were teens, today's culture is entirely different, presenting major differences in the two generations and differences in how to approach faith growth. Confirmation is defined in Luther's *Small Catechism* as "a public rite of the church preceded by a period of instruction designed to help baptized Christians

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Frank W. Klos, *Confirmation and First Communion: Leaders' Guide* (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1968), 16-17.

identify with the life and mission of the Christian community.”<sup>29</sup> As we look to understand why and when young adults exit the church, it is important to gain deeper insight as to how the confirmation process contributes to the longevity of young adult attendance, if at all and especially regarding mentorship. What should be offered in our confirmation ministries within the LCMS in order to foster long-term commitment?

By looking at the statistics of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Carrollton, Texas, over a five-year period one can see that the confirmation ministry is not impacting the young people enough to keep them plugged into church, at least after confirmation. Of students who were confirmed in 2005 twenty-seven percent still remained minimally active in 2010. In this congregation, “active” is defined as regularly attending only one of the following on a weekly basis: church, Bible study or attends weekly youth night. It does not mean they actively serve. Statistics would drop if attendance were defined by two of the above listed offerings [i.e., attends both church and Bible study]. The one-hour church family culture begins with children’s ministry and is quite similar to many churches surrounding Prince of Peace. The church does not have a dedicated Sunday school hour and chooses to run Bible classes during a worship service. For several years, confirmands were in the sixth grade when confirmation was offered and most groupings of students ranged from 40 to 48 young people per class. Of those confirmed in 2006, thirty percent remained active in 2010. Of those confirmed in 2007, forty percent remained active in 2010. Of those confirmed in 2008, fifty-five percent remained active in 2010. Of those confirmed in 2009, sixty-seven percent remained active in 2010. Church attendance and involvement appears higher in the younger age groups. Numbers

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<sup>29</sup>*Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 245.

have been kept as a requirement for national church statistics, although measuring the long-term faith impact, as exhibited in fruitful acts and lifestyles, is not often measured or even considered.

The area in which Prince of Peace is located has an interesting phenomenon that normally occurs, whereby middle school students choose the program in the geographical area that best meets their scheduling needs or personal philosophies.<sup>30</sup> For example, some students belonging to Prince of Peace leave the church during the confirmation years to attend another nearby Lutheran church's confirmation program that is shorter and can be completed through a series of retreats. When Prince of Peace offered a one-year program in the sixth grade, as opposed to two- or three-year programs, other students would come to Prince of Peace from other Lutheran churches. Prince of Peace, at one point, had a two-year program that was changed to a one-year program, in hopes of not overwhelming young people and of moving them right into the pulse of a program-driven student ministry. This one-year program went from being highly driven by requirements, with little parent participation and little interaction with others [except a small group of peers and an adult leader], to a more experiential, large group – small group and family-oriented experience. Requirements were lessened [i.e., the removal of the 85 question test at the end of instruction] and flexibility for families to use the material to disciple youth at home was offered. A special high school home edition was launched for students who were not previously interested in learning about the doctrine. It was designed for parents to interact with their teens and for the teens to come together at the end of each unit for fellowship, accountability, and discussion.

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<sup>30</sup> Middle school, for the cause of this paper, will be considered grades 6-8.

Some families chose not to participate in the confirmation ministry at all and were not ostracized for not participating. The program format made very little difference in the end. Young people continued to leave the visible youth ministry, and church attendance declined upon being confirmed. According to the National Study of Youth and Religion Report, a group of the 30% of adolescents who became less religious due to a life change or a specific life event did so because they gained a greater sense of religious autonomy. Denton, Pearce and Smith write, “Whether completing religious training [e.g., confirmation or bar/bat mitzvah] or just having more freedom from parents or guardians who no longer required religious service attendance, this autonomy led to a decline in religiosity.”<sup>31</sup>

In further considering the dynamics of Prince of Peace, several factors potentially contribute to the exodus of youth that eventually happens. Prince of Peace is located in the Bible belt of America, with denominations surrounding it that do not utilize this type of confirmation ministry. Many people at Prince of Peace are not lifelong Lutherans and do not understand the term “confirmation.” Others have come back to the church for the sake of having their children confirmed as a family tradition or out of obligation. This phenomenon can be called ‘faith guilt,’ where people act out of obligation to family or some outside circumstance; but they do not act out of motivation to grow in a closer relationship to God, seeking opportunities to be in community or exploring life-long spiritual habits. One has not owned his or her faith in this case, and seeing the importance of a young person doing so may be difficult for some. A middle school youth cannot

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<sup>31</sup> Melinda Denton, Lisa Pearce, and Christian Smith, *Religion and Spirituality on the Path Through Adolescence: A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion Chapel Hill, No 8:27* (2008) <http://www.youthandreligion.org>(accessed September 20, 2012).

decide to get up and come to church on his or her own, because that student does not yet drive, unless he or she lives within walking distance. The culture where Prince of Peace is located values sports and education, and Sunday mornings are prime opportunities to practice and compete. The leaders in charge of the confirmation ministry at Prince of Peace also experimented with the hour that Sunday morning instruction was offered. This church has been affiliated with a large Christian school for many years, where students from all faith backgrounds daily participate in Christian religion classes, offering one more reason why students may suggest they need a break from the church/school environment on Sunday mornings. It is perceived that family faith formation and leadership development had not been given large amounts of attention at Prince of Peace until 2008. While wonderful ministry took place, this church was very much in line with the area churches and North Dallas culture.

In the early 1990's people discussed the difficulty of people being committed to confirmation. Smith asked strategic questions of the church regarding confirmation ministry. He cited the decline in denominational loyalty even in the early 1990's, asking how relativity has played into this and asking what kind of persecution students face from being Christian (a student experiences pressure to attend church or play select soccer on Sunday morning, being made fun of or being ignored if the choice is attending church).<sup>32</sup> A more current example of this phenomenon comes from one young teen's experience. Upon making the high school drill team for the following fall, she was told her confirmation ceremony was not a priority and was a silly excuse for missing the annual car wash fundraiser. This teen and one of her friends respectfully stood up to the leader,

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<sup>32</sup> Ken Smith, *Six Models of Confirmation Ministry* (Chicago: Division of Congregational Ministry, ELCA, 1993), 42.



and she was allowed to attend her ceremony.<sup>33</sup> It was easy for the teacher to dismiss something that was foreign to her own lifestyle. The students had two choices: confront or go with the teacher's original decision that made light of something meaningful to them. The pressure was on and almost overwhelming. The parents sought council on what was considered the correct way to approach the situation.

Richard Osmer, in his book about confirmation ministry in the Presbyterian church, was not surprised with the decline in active involvement after confirmation: "Nor should the fact that young people appear to greatly reduce their participation in the Lutheran church immediately after confirmation."<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther's focus was on catechism instruction, not specifically confirmation. It was Melanchthon and Chemnitz who initiated various rites.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that the catechism was used overall in the church's educational ministry and not as a special program; and as early as the late 1500's and early 1600's, "educators began to criticize parrot-like quality of learning catechetical instruction" because they [students in the faith] might not believe what they were being made to recite.<sup>36</sup>

At Water's Edge Lutheran Church, located in the North Dallas area, confirmation ministry is in line with the overall goal of the church – to live missionally. Youth in grades six through eight review the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism and the Old and New Testaments over a period of three years. There are no Sunday morning Bible studies. Instead, youth meet twice a month on Wednesday nights during the school year

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<sup>33</sup> Student at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, May 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Confirmation: Presbyterian Practices in Ecumenical Perspective* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

for an hour and a half of community building and discipleship training. This is considered their confirmation instruction period. There are no small groups, just time for approximately 25 young people to interact with their lead pastor. At Water's Edge, the confirmation process is about an ongoing journey of being disciplined. The church celebrates confirmation as a milestone, just as younger students receive their first Bible and older students are recognized in special milestone Sundays where a celebration of faith is demonstrated through prayers, perhaps the giving of an object and sharing faith testimonies. At the end of confirmation instruction, which is simply referred to as Discipleship Training Extreme [DTX for middle school], teens go before the congregation and share their faith testimonies. Everything studied was done in light of living on mission. Youth seem to stay plugged in post confirmation and post high school, serving missionally in a variety of settings. This church welcomes, includes, and speaks to young people. While the church staff can be viewed as mentors, they are in actuality serving in more of an advocate role for the youth. The pastor sees the need to provide specific mentors for youth and to teach the young people to mentor younger youth. Previously at Water's Edge, high school students were given middle school students to mentor, and adults were given high school students to mentor. While not an intentional or ongoing ministry, the value of the high school students impacting the lives of middle school students during confirmation and in a one-on-one situation has been identified by the pastor. The possibility exists for the church to develop a mentorship ministry in the future.<sup>37</sup> Such ministry could have a large impact on the confirmands and create a cycle where a young person looks forward to moving into high school so that, as he or she

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<sup>37</sup> Pastor Mark Schaeffer, Phone Interview, October 16, 2012. See Appendix D.

grows, he or she can take on the leadership role of passing on the faith to younger peers. Perhaps the web of connections between families and people in the congregation would be strengthened by such a ministry.

Broadly speaking, confirmation's general focus does remain catechetical, "providing nurture and care that allows youth to confess the faith of the church and more fully take up the responsibilities of the Christian life."<sup>38</sup> Regarding such nurture and care, we need to ask how this happens and how it makes a long-term impact. Osmer suggests if spiritual disciplines are not being nurtured at church or in the home, it will be difficult for a young person to continue in these areas.<sup>39</sup> Mentors can enhance these disciplines in the life of the young person. As young people experience and talk about the impact of such experiences with mentors and parents, the individual and corporate disciplines become a more normal part of their lives.

For Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, one of their growing values is to equip and celebrate the family. Spiritual formation is being uplifted within the family unit, and as a body of believers, so that churchgoers will grow their hearts and gain necessary skills to share faith in Jesus in order to expand the Kingdom. In confirmation, not only have young people been placed in small community life groups where they are encouraged to serve and live in fellowship together, but parents are also asked to work through Luther's Small Catechism readings together and participate in the large group with the students from time to time. Such programming is only as good as the desire people have to participate. Some are ready, some are not.

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<sup>38</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Confirmation: Presbyterian Practices in Ecumenical Perspective* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 98.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 205.

Smith offers four suggested goals for youth education ministry (until churches can develop their own): attend to the personal faith of young people, assist young people in ethical decisions, provide youth access to the tradition of the community and engage young people in the fellowship of believers.<sup>40</sup> In its study of the 16% of the adolescents who became more religious from the first time they were surveyed to the second time, the National Study of Youth and Religion observed, “Friends, family and religious leaders were identified as people who had influenced adolescents toward higher levels of religiosity.” Another 14% “explained their reason for becoming more religious in terms of the help that religion provided them in dealing with life’s problems, the guidance that religion provided, or the way that religion helped them to become better, happier people.”<sup>41</sup> Prince of Peace and Water’s Edge churches have both implemented a process that would address the majority of the above mentioned goals in hopes of providing both support and leadership.

At Prince of Peace, youth and families have been invited to attend an event in order to explore the students’ next steps in the faith after confirmation.<sup>42</sup> The prototype is as follows. Parents and students [incoming ninth grade] are asked to come together for one and a half hours. A meal is served and guided table discussion is offered for all at a table to share. This also serves as an icebreaker. After a short devotion and overview of the event, students break off in small groups with one to two adult mentors for the sake of

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<sup>40</sup>Ken Smith, *Six Models of Confirmation Ministry* (Chicago: Division of Congregational Ministry, ELCA), 51.

<sup>41</sup>Melinda Denton, Lisa Pearce, and Christian Smith, *Religion and Spirituality on the Path Through Adolescence: A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion: Chapel Hill, No 8:29*, (2008) [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org) (accessed September 20, 2012).

<sup>42</sup>Confirmand Next Steps Family Event (Prototype). See Appendix C.

guided personal goal setting and the parents stay in the main room to gain understanding of their role as a faith mentor for their teen and to gain tools to support their child in the faith goal she or he sets for the year. After the separated discussion, families are brought back together to discuss as family units the faith goal of the students. The goal is written out on carbonless duplicate paper and one copy is given to the family, one to the mentor and one to the youth minister. Before the event comes to an end, a prayer guide is offered to the families with a prayer role for the students and a role for the parents to be used at the Next Step event. Families are celebrated and given a faith-growth resource. In three months, the goal is to have the assigned mentor gather with the small group of teens after church for a meal in order to offer encouragement in continuing with the faith goal that was set. This process can be repeated all throughout the students' high school life.

One of the hoped for outcomes is that families will support one another in forming new faith goals on a regular basis, offering accountability for one another. This is not to be meant to be legalistic, where one feels guilt if unable to meet personal goals. Therefore, grace must also be discussed. Another hoped for outcome is that teens would have mentors outside of the family to offer encouragement and to simply be known by. Various insights were gained from the prototype event. Moving such an event to a Sunday morning, during the education hour, and moving it to a month before the school year has ended, may prove to be more effective for more families. This would allow for greater attendance and set goals before drifting into a potential 'no-man's land' that seems to be the case between middle and high school. Food is not a necessity and this would allow more discussion time for families if it were removed. It is not yet clear what the impact of such an event will hold on the long term church involvement of the teens

after they have been confirmed and will likely take several rounds of completion before solid results can be identified, should the church choose to pursue this ministry offering in the future. This prototype was also developed into a tool that could be led by parents in the home without the need to attend an event. Creating an environment that allows parents to gain skills in mentoring their children so that they may achieve their spiritual goals and adding another person to help mentor the family beyond the event may hold a favorable impact, especially in a larger Lutheran church, where it is less likely a pastor can find time to spend mentoring youth.

This chapter has considered the impact mentoring can have on our teens. The roles of adults in mentoring has been reviewed, as well as how to mentor teens for spiritual growth, developmental and spiritual insights to consider in mentoring and the overall confirmation process in regards to mentoring, including a mentoring event. This was predominately considered through the lens of confirmation ministry and middle-school-aged youth. The impact of mentoring is a strong one. Ministries can build upon all that is known about mentoring in order to aid in the faith life of teens, so that they do not become a statement of a statistic that is defined as ‘not present,’ but that they may, instead, be the statistic of those young adults who are ‘present’ and involved in the leadership of our LCMS church body.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study discussed the trends of teens leaving the church. We have focused on the characteristics and perceptions of today's young adults and discussed the exit of young adults, specifically in the LCMS. In Chapter 3, we studied mentorship, offering the basics of mentoring and models, as well as the difference between mentoring and discipleship, including basics and models of discipleship. In Chapter 4, historical views of Jesus as a leader were offered, as well as first century rabbinical styles of mentorship and specific examples of Jesus as a mentor to the disciples. After gaining a solid understanding of what mentorship entails and how Jesus serves as the ultimate role model for a mentor, Chapter 5 took on the challenge of what it might look like to mentor teens today, specifically in confirmation and youth ministries. In order to address this challenge, we considered mentoring for spiritual growth, developmental and spiritual considerations when mentoring, and intentional mentoring in confirmation and youth ministry models.

The following findings emerge from our overall study. There truly does not seem to be enough information to be able to say with confidence that mentoring will definitely have a long-term impact on the church attendance of a young person into adulthood. While the current evidence does not show youth leaving the church at an alarming rate, the indications are that there is indeed a problem, a decline in young adult attenders, and a disconnect with the church.

In his book, *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman finds there are many reasons why young adults may leave the church. "No single reason pushes a majority of young adults

to drop out.”<sup>1</sup> Some of the broad reasons include: the church was overprotective towards creativity and cultural engagement, was shallow [not offering a sense of calling for them], was anti-science, was repressive [especially regarding religious rules and sexuality], was exclusive and not a place they could express their doubts.<sup>2</sup> Kinnaman notes, “Teen church engagement remains robust, but many of the enthusiastic teens so common in North America churches are not growing up to be faithful young adult disciples of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Earlier in the dissertation, we met Ally and Liz, two young adult women. While Ally remains plugged into the Christian church, both women exited the Lutheran church. In Ally’s circumstance, she noted that the people she knew who fell away from the Christian church were never engaged in it. While she was engaged in the church, she would have appreciated having a person to help her apply her faith to her life in a practical way.<sup>4</sup> “Too often, we have not provided practical coaching on marriage, parenting, vocation and calling, all the smaller choices emerging adults must make along the road to maturity.”<sup>5</sup> In Ally’s young adult small group at the nondenominational church that she found after leaving the LCMS, an “older person” serves as a mentor to the group to check the pulse of the group and offer insight.<sup>6</sup> From this, we can gather two ideas that may prove beneficial. Peer mentorship is a blessing in its own way. The benefits that exist, however, are great when an older person who has already walked in similar life

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<sup>1</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>4</sup>Ally S., phone interview by author, October 2, 2012. See Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 100.

<sup>6</sup>Ally S., phone interview by author, October 2, 2012.



patterns as the young adults are currently walking through is present. An older person can share life experiences from a credible standpoint and offer wise counsel and guidance. Kinnaman also notes that “many young people feel that older adults don’t understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships; in fact, a majority of the young adults we interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents.”<sup>7</sup> When asked what her hopes were for her faith twenty years from now, Ally replied, “I will be 45 years old and still growing. It’s not about the destination but the journey. I will still be plugged into a church that develops faith like my present one does. I will be pouring into people who are younger. I hope to have credibility as I speak into their lives.”<sup>8</sup>

In Liz’s circumstance, she felt as if she did not have enough support from the church, especially as she dealt with the anxiety of her father leaving the family. She mentioned her piano teacher, who was also her prayer partner in a specific ministry at church, made a significant impact on her life through simply being present and listening. Liz’s college professors from various faith backgrounds also had an impact on her life.<sup>9</sup> It is a basic need to feel wanted and understood. If the community of believers does not take on this role, especially in the lives of young adults who are transitioning at a breakneck speed into the adult world, someone else will. Therefore, the importance of encouraging and walking with our young people is crucial. When asked what she would like to say to the Christian church, Liz said, “The church needs to do a better job and

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<sup>7</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Ally S., phone interview by author, October 2, 2012. See Appendix A.

<sup>9</sup> Liz M., phone interview by author, October 2, 2012. See Appendix B.

spend more resources on their youth. The journey to adulthood isn't an easy one, and I was extremely lucky to have a church with youth programs, but they were not well supported and had only one trained professional [caring for us]. Invest in the future of the church." The impact of the pastor(s), other paid and lay leaders may also prove significant on our young people. At Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, the youth and children directors, small group leaders, adult musicians [paid and unpaid] and others work with youth to teach them church leadership and simply be in conversation with them, offering prayer and friendship so that young people are cared for in more than one relationship.

"What if instead of measuring our success by the numbers, we changed our metrics? What if we said that the hallmark of mature Christianity is a willingness to invest in a young person for a period of two to four years, teaching him or her the fine art of following Christ?"<sup>10</sup> Kinnaman suggests that our churches ought to shift towards the following metrics:

- Knowledge of love for Scripture
- Clarity about gifts and vocation
- Willingness to listen to God's voice and follow His direction
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Depth and quality of a young person's love and service to others<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps these are the wiser and healthier metrics to focus on in youth and young adult ministry.

Another conclusion that is made in Kinnaman's text is offered by Samantha Thomaczek, a pastoral associate for children, youth and young adults at the Cathedral of

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<sup>10</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 128.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 208.

the Assumption in Louisville, Kentucky. When asked to contribute what would be helpful in keeping young adults in the church, she said,

We need mentors, guides, and role models to whom we can bring our successes and failures and be comforted, applauded, and most importantly, led into reflection, all without feeling judged or inferior. In a world more diverse and connected than ever before, we see salvation in the faces of others, and we seek as mentors those who treat others well and who – like us – are working to make an immediate and permanent difference by fostering a mutual respect with all. We recognize the ability to get things done, and seek those who listen to the word of the Lord.”<sup>12</sup>

So we continue to ask the question for further exploration, how are young people being equipped and enabled to serve and lead?

We know how important it is for young people to have a myriad of people walking with them in the faith. In Ally’s life, she states appreciation for her childhood pastor’s role in her teen and young adult years. She uplifts him as a genuine mentor in her life even to this day, despite the change in churches. What role does the senior pastor play in connecting young adults to their church? Must he play a significant role in youth and young adult ministry? If so, what is that role? This would be a worthwhile question to explore.

Because only a short longitudinal study showing only a slight decline of church attendance within LCMS teens and young adults was offered, it is recommended that a longitudinal study be done that follows patterns of the Millennial generation over the next one to two decades. This will be helpful in understanding if Millennials will demonstrate similar patterns to the Boomers and even the Busters in returning to church when they have families of their own. This researcher believes their culture is quite different and

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<sup>12</sup>David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 235-236.

young adults leaving the church after confirmation or high school is not a problem that will soon go away.

Last of all, young people seek to be connected to their churches. We can ask the following questions. What ministries and resources support families worshiping and being disciplined together? Where are we being intentional in training parents to raise their children in the faith? Does the church support this or take the ministry away from the parents and teens? This may help us see where our young people are being connected.

This dissertation sought to address the problem of young adults leaving the LCMS after high school, if not earlier. It was suggested that providing mentors to teens and young adults during the transitional time of young adulthood would result in more young adults staying plugged in to the church in adulthood. The research that was studied supported a decline in youth numbers throughout the LCMS over a three-year period. When families are unified in attendance and make faith a priority, young people stand a better chance of remaining tied to the church in adulthood. When young people have an advocate who they can be honest with, feel cared for by, learn Scriptural truths from, and gain practical ways to incorporate faith into daily life, they also stand a better chance of remaining tied to the church in adulthood. Pastors, DCEs, and churchleaders of all kinds have a role to play in ministering to and including young people in a variety of ways. To leave it up to one church worker, simply will not do. It indeed takes a village to raise healthy young people who are enthusiastic about and see the importance of their church family and continuing on in service to God as a unified church body.

## APPENDIX A

### ALLY S. INTERVIEW

October 2, 2012

Ally is a 25 year-old woman. She attended a church that identified with the LCMS through high school. In high school, she attended church most of the time and was involved in her weekly Wednesday night youth group Bible study. She views her former youth director as one of the advocates for the youth in her church and views her former senior pastor as a mentor, even to this day. Ally enjoyed going to church but did not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the same way she does now. She did not feel engaged. While she misses the Lutheran doctrine every now and then, she feels good about where she is worshipping at the time of this interview. Ally attended church “here and there” post high school. Her first year of college took her to another city, approximately four hours from home. She returned one year later to finish her degree closer to home and plugged into a non-denominational church post college, where she worships regularly. [In November 2012, Ally moved to a new state for work. Leaving her nondenominational church, she was determined to find something similar in her new city.]

1. Why did you switch denominations from the LCMS to a non-denominational church?
  - I fell away and was glad to be engaged in something different.
  - There were not others in my age group at my Lutheran church.
2. How long did it take to plug into a church once you graduated from high school?
  - At 18 years old, I attended here and there. At 21 years old, I plugged into Watermark.
3. How do you receive guidance in the non-denominational church you attend?
  - There are separate college and young adult ministries. Sunday is for all age groups but Tuesday nights are for 20- and 30-somethings [mostly older 20's].
  - There are special courses offered at different times for all age groups, but most of the people who attend are young adults.
  - There are small groups that are both gender and age specific [i.e., 23-28 year old female] until marriage. A leader from the group reports to an ‘elder’ or community group ‘older person’ to check the pulse of the group and offer insight.
  - We grew up in church but lacked faith instruction/mentoring. I wanted more practical application for living my faith out.

4. If you could tell the church anything, what would you say?
  - Play your part! There are dead and dying churches. The Bible is clear on the function the church plays. I think a lot of churches are failing.
  
5. If you could say something to the older generation, what would that be?
  - The older adults that I worship with now value youth. When I was in the LCMS, I felt ostracized and cast to the side. The way we worshipped made me feel as if people saw us as irrelevant.
  - Maybe there's some truth to what Darwin said, "If you don't adapt, you will die."
  - I would question why so many people are stuck in a certain style of worship and even translation of the Bible. I hear people say there is only one way to do church and if you are not doing it their way, then you are missing the way. Just because someone is different [has different ideas on how to do church], it does not mean it is bad or simple.
  
6. If you could say something to the younger generation, what would that be?
  - I think people in high school now have become too tolerant. They value tolerance and have not owned their faith, lacking in the ability to know, communicate and defend it.
  - I would say get plugged in early. Grow in a relationship with Christ and do not worry about the doctrine of it all. I know a handful of people who do this, but the majority of them have gotten caught up in this – they don't believe in anything so they believe in everything. They need to know their own... [faith].
  - When people say they are 'spiritual,' it seems like a cop out. What does that mean to them, anyway?
  - When people say they are 'religious,' it irritates me equally. Religion is important, but what does "I'm religious" mean? Is it checking a box or following rules expecting to reach God? Or, is it practicing faith, knowing God has done it [earned salvation] for you?
  
7. How does your faith impact your views about and interaction with science, media and politics?
  - My faith is the lens or frame in which I view these.
  - As for politics, I look at what is congruent with the Bible. Stated simply, it [the Bible] helps form my opinion of who I'm going to vote for and what issues I will support.
  - As for media, once I began attending Watermark, I realized the danger of what I am putting into me, that it can serve as a hindrance or build me up in the faith. I feel comfortable in my decision to read or watch something if I can say I am doing so, knowing God is here sitting next to me and not objecting to the content.

There are many subliminal messages out there. Sometimes, it can shape you more than faith.

8. What are your hopes for your faith 20 years from now?
  - I will be 45 years old and still growing. It's not about the destination but the journey.
  - I will still be plugged into a church that develops faith like Watermark does.
  - I will be pouring into people who are younger. I hope to have credibility as I speak into their lives.
  
9. Where do you think the church is headed in the next 20 years?
  - I think it's a very slippery slope. Some are too judgmental. Too many people have conformed to what society deems is right and are no longer willing to take a stand on the Bible. Some people are too cowardly to communicate their stance. Churches that do are radical.
  - The impact of the current church won't be great enough to revitalize the church.
  
10. Do you have non-Christian friends?
  - Our job as Christians is to love people. It seems older people see having non-Christian friends as a bad influence on a Christian. That's not biblical!
  - My non-Christian friends know about my faith. I'm verbal about it. "No, I can't stay out that late; I've got church in the morning." I do not tell them, "You're going to hell. You know that, right?"
  - A person asked me about my Bible. We got into a casual conversation about what it means to me. I was told, "My parents made me go (to church)." This one girl asked why I had a different sense of peace. There were two girls I talked with. One of them got plugged in to church where I go and the other wants to know more about the church.
  - I'm not afraid to talk about my failures. Life is not perfect as a believer. Temptation is bigger!
  - The people I know who fell away from the Christian church were never engaged in it. Their faith was inconsistent, along with their morals and values. My thoughts and actions are sometimes inconsistent with how I am called to be.

Used with permission.

## APPENDIX B

### LIZ M. INTERVIEW

October 2, 2012

Liz is a 26 year-old woman. She attended an LCMS church from childhood through high school. In high school, she attended church and Sunday night youth group regularly, as well as youth events. She had a mentor throughout high school who served as both her piano instructor and her prayer mentor through a church prayer ministry that connected youth with caring and committed adults. Liz experienced a time of crisis late in high school and the church did not seem to offer comfort. She departed from regular attendance in the Lutheran church and considers herself to be spiritual in her faith more than anything.

1. Why did you stop attending church?

- When I entered college, it was an issue of having enough time. I began exploring other faiths and I no longer had a connection to my old church.
- I met my now husband who was raised differently. His dad was an Atheist and his mom was Muslim. He never persuaded me one way or another. If anything, I am constantly trying to explain faith to him; but I do see how a person can lose all faith due to war, death and loss. In the bigger scheme of things, trying to get him to attend a church, even LCMS for that matter, is not the end goal.
- I don't want to go by myself [social anxiety].
- The different religions of my friends got me questioning so many religions. It didn't seem to connect with what I was raised with.
- I don't understand the treatment of people who are gay by the church. Why can't they get married?

2. How would you describe your faith now?

- I am spiritual. I believe in God not doctrine.
- I think things are lost in translation or are manipulated.
- I am guided by intuition and doing what's right and good. My mom was spiritual and Lutheran.
- I believe in God as Creator.
- I believe in the historical text of the Bible.
- The only Christian church I do feel comfortable in is the LCMS church, probably because I was raised in it.



3. If you could tell the Christian church anything, what would you say?
  - During my teen years, I experienced great guilt. The church added to that. I was told to find my answer in God and the church. I experienced extreme anxiety and stress trying to deal with coming from a broken family and an absent father. I went to the Lutheran church for counseling [in a professional counseling center]. I saw the woman who also visited with my mom and my sister, as well as one of my best friends, which was not a good experience. The woman used my sessions to gather information on her other clients, and looking back violated some huge ethical boundaries. I wanted to keep religion out of it. I got through it in the end by my own inner strength. I was a good person doing bad things. Faith played a good role in that. The church needs to do a better job and spend more resources on their youth. The journey to adulthood isn't an easy one, and I was extremely lucky to have a church with youth programs, but they were not well supported and had only one trained professional ["You," speaking of the interviewer]. Invest in the future of the church.
  - When I was 16 or 17, I prayed a lot to God and found comfort there. A lady once approached me when I was very down and sitting by the lake. She told me to go to college and get it together. They were the right words at the right time. It's not always about doctrine; focus more on the faith and bringing people together.
  - Piano became therapy for me. I spoke with my mentor a lot. She just listened and didn't give an opinion.
  - I had influential people in my life in college, my professors who impacted my life.
  - People come from different backgrounds. The Lutheran church needs to do a better job cultivating relationships and growing the church as a community. I was a member of the church, but I never felt accepted. Instead, many times, I felt judged by my peers. Practice what you preach.
  
4. If you could say something to the older generation, what would that be?
  - Bring people together instead of tearing them apart.
  - Be more tolerant.
  - The world is globalizing; we aren't going to church with the same people over our entire lifespan. It's time to open the doors to outsiders and start focusing on building a larger/bigger family.
  
5. If you could say something to the younger generation, what would that be?
  - Your teen years are critical. You are making decisions now about your faith that will impact you long term.
  - If you are struggling, religion may comfort you, but still seek out [professional] help. Tell someone you are struggling.

- Faith can't necessarily solve your problems. People say, "Give it over to faith." Sometimes, there's a little more to it than that.
6. How does your faith impact your views about and interaction with science, media and politics?
- As for politics, I try not to judge. I leave that to God. I want to help the poor and needy people at the bottom. I cannot support greed.
  - As for science, my faith doesn't really impact this. I believe in evolution.
  - As for media, I will watch anything. It bothers me to see people in an 'underdog' situation. I don't like a biased media. I will read the Huffington Post, an extremely liberal newspaper, but I can keep it in perspective.
7. What are your hopes for your faith 20 years from now?
- If I have kids, I will probably raise them with the value of community-building. As for their religion, youth are young and impressionable. Religion is a big decision. I would expose them to the Torah, the Bible and the Koran and let them choose what is best for them when they are ready. In 20 years, I also hope that my marriage will have a mutual understanding of what faith means to the both of us. That we can close that discussion/debate, and my husband will find some comfort in faith.

Used with permission.

APPENDIX C  
CONFIRMAND NEXT STEPS FAMILY EVENT (PROTOTYPE)<sup>1</sup>

LEADER'S GUIDE

**Goal:** To provide an event for students to develop a next step faith goal, find support and offer parents insight and tools for supporting their teen on their next step journey.

**Objectives:** We will provide food, space, mentors and interactive conversation for teens and parents. We will guide students towards the completion of one next-step goal to be carried out in the coming school year. We will facilitate parents in drafting a support plan for that goal.

**Target:** 15 families

**Scripture for Devotion:** Ephesians 4:14-16

- Verse 14 is the *why* of what we are doing... being strong enough to counteract false teaching and worldly schemes.
- Verse 15 is the *what* of this event... growing through loving words.
- Verse 16 is the *community support* of the event (i.e. accountability).

**Note:** Older students and their parents may participate, as well.

**Space Needs**

- 1 room for younger children with movie & board games
- 3 rooms for dividing students
- Main room for parents and facilitators

**Food Needs**

- Cater lunch
- Participants make payment during on-line registration (\$5 suggested donation)
- Underwrite remaining costs

**Registration**

- Register each person separately
- Seek to set up on on-line Registration Service: Name, Phone, Email, Food Order
- Web development
- Choose launch and close date/time
- Contact each potential family by phone in order to personally invite (through 8<sup>th</sup> grade small group leaders)

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<sup>1</sup> Serena Pace (Leading Developer), Luke Biggs, Kim Davis, Kim Mueller, and Dave Rahberg aided in the design of this prototype.

### Leader Preparation

- Leader review in person or via e-mail before event
- Leaders present with teens:
  - 1-2 per grouping
- Leaders present with parents:
  - Share overview, guidelines with large group
  - No more than 4 families at a table with one facilitator who shares statistics and offers tools/facilitates discussion at the table.

### 3-Month Follow Up

- Mentors contact assigned teen participants to find date to meet as a group after church over lunch
  - Suggested Questions
    - How are you doing with your goal?
    - Do you have a new goal in mind?
    - How can I pray for you?
    - Is this process helpful?
    - Personal Invitation to upcoming ministry opportunities
    - Prayer

### PR

- Bulletin
- Web site
- Email families
- Facebook
- Slide
- Flyer
- Conversations through previous small group mentors

### Schedule

11:30 Set Up

12:15 Sign In – Students need to fill out a slip of paper with their name and place it in the fishbowl to be drawn for grouping purposes later.

12:30 Welcome, prayer, eat, guided conversation on tables:

Use this discussion as a guide to talk about faith with your family and those at the table. It's simply a guide to aid in discussion—Feel free to speak as the Spirit moves you! Assign the person who sat in an identifiably marked chair to facilitate the conversation.

- **Parents:** As you reflect back on your teen's life, how have you seen his/her faith develop since he/she was a child? Share a story or two that comes to mind.
- **All:** Think to the future, what are one or two goals (any kind) you have for 5 years from now? 10 years? How do you hope to grow in your faith in the next 5 to 10 years?
- **Read this passage:** Ephesians 3:14-19  
<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may

strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,<sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- What does this passage say about faith? How does it relate to what you (parents or teens) just experienced through Confirmation?
- What does a mature faith look like? Do you know anyone who has a fully matured faith?
- How does someone work toward achieving a mature faith?

12:50 **Devotion**

1:00 **Directions/Overview** of expectations and outcomes

Students' names are in the fishbowl and they are randomly chosen by a mentor to be in their discussion group.

- Move to rooms
- (Optional) Ice breaker for teens: Chat balls by Group publishing<sup>2</sup>
- (Optional) Ice breaker for adults: Stand Up if...
  - You were confirmed in (state of the event)
  - You were confirmed as an adult
  - You were baptized as an adult
  - You were confirmed in a denomination other than Lutheran
  - You were never disciple in a confirmation class
  - You went on retreats as part of your confirmation experience
  - You had to miss sporting events or other activities because of class
  - You wore a white robe for confirmation
  - You got a Bible for confirmation
  - You got money for confirmation
  - You got jewelry for confirmation
  - You had a family party after your confirmation
  - You remember your mentor
  - You had to answer spontaneous questions in front of a group before you could be confirmed
  - Your first taste of wine was art your first communion
  - Your wafer got stuck to the roof of your mouth
  - Confirmation was a good experience for you

Question: Did anything surprise you in this exercise? Please share.

1:20 **Processing**

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<sup>2</sup> Chat or Challenge Balls from Group Publishing. Item #: 646847171376.  
[http://store.grouppublishing.com/OA\\_HTML/ibeCCtpItmDspRte.jsp?item=3151391](http://store.grouppublishing.com/OA_HTML/ibeCCtpItmDspRte.jsp?item=3151391).

## ADULT SECTION

- Supply pens/paper
- In table groups, answer the following question: How has your faith changed since your confirmation? If not confirmed, what has had a significant impact on your faith (positive or negative)?
- Insights and statistics of teen faith
  - Family spiritual mentoring requires developing an integrated faith.
  - Authors Malphurs and Mancini suggest that those mentoring others need to be competent in the faith. “Godly competence results in godly confidence based on God’s work in us and through us.”<sup>3</sup> We can transfer this idea to parents who are mentoring their children in the faith. Parents ought to be competent in the faith if their children are going to have a well-integrated faith. This means parents should do biblical research, should ask questions and should lead faith discussion and service opportunities. Parents should teach for faith so that teens can do the same. This means answering tough questions, giving proper tools to answer questions and exploring tough questions together. Parents should also raise the bar and get children involved in ministry. Maybe teens will be fine just mimicking the faith of the parent but will they have the necessary tools to lead the generation after them?
  - Youth develop a sense of who they are by either imitating (lack of depth or truth to self) or integrating (better of the two). Integrating gives opportunities to explore, reflect on and intentionally own faith personally.<sup>4</sup>
  - NOTE: The Bible does not mention anywhere about spiritual maturation becoming complete while on earth. Even the best of faith formation models demonstrates a natural ebb and flow.
  - Fowler’s Faith Formation: Stage 3 = Synthetic Conventional Faith... 50% of 13-20 year olds fall into this category. Stage 4 = Individuative Reflective... 5.4% of 13-20 year olds fall into this category BUT 28.6% of this age group are a blend of 3 and 4. What questions or thoughts emerge from these statistics?<sup>5</sup>

### Stage 3 Synthetic-Conventional Faith

This stage begins with formal operational thought. One can examine what one believes, comparing contradictory stories. This is when one begins to form the basis for spiritual identity and outlook. For instance, which story is true, the big bang theory or the Bible

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<sup>3</sup> Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 99.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, and James C. Wilhoit, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 250.

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Astley and Lesley Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 16-17.

creation story? **Which group do you believe?** Information about existence comes from family, school, work, peers, society, and religion. There must be a synthesis of values and information. The individual in Stage 3 does not take an individual perspective, but seeks to conform to the group that they belong to. This individual is very tuned into the expectations and judgments of the group and seeks to reside in an ideology rather than fully adopting an individual belief. This is "**unexamined**" faith. Things that contribute to going on to the next stage include a contradiction from an authoritative source (i.e. changes in religious practices: Catholic belief that mass should only be in Latin, changes to include English). There must be a deep reflection and examination of what one believes compared to what his/her religion believes in order to move on to the next stage. "The central meaning behind the terms synthetic and conventional ... conventional, in that it is seen as being everybody's faith system or the faith system of the entire community. And it is synthetic in that it is nonanalytical." -James Fowler<sup>6</sup>

"The movement from Stage 3 to **Stage 4 Individuative-Reflective faith** is particularly critical for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. Where genuine movement toward stage 4 is underway the person must face certain unavoidable *tensions*: individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one's strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfillment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being for others; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute."<sup>7</sup>

- It's estimated that among various denominations that between 65 and 94% of high school students stop attending church after they graduate and only 25% of those involved in youth group are plugged into church the year after they graduate.<sup>8</sup> George Barna (2003) estimates that 8 million people in their 20's will not be active in church by age 30.<sup>9</sup>
- Barna (2006) – Adults attending church as children are twice as likely to read the Bible and attend weekly church. 50% are more likely to pray to God.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Blog, "Stages of Spiritualism," (February 7, 2009), <http://www.dontwashanyway.singsnap.com/karaoke/forum/topic/b722388> (accessed July 12, 2012).

<sup>7</sup>Joann Wolski Conn (ed.), "Stages of Faith" *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*. (Paulist, 1986): 226-232, <http://www.faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/fowler.htm> (accessed July 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Kara Powell and Krista Kubiak, "When the Pomp & Circumstance Fades: A Profile of Youth Group Kids PostYouth Group" *Youth Worker Journal*, (September/October 2006), <http://www.youthworker.com.html> (accessed October 25, 2006).

<sup>9</sup>The Barna Group, "Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches," *The Barna Update*, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=149> (accessed March 10, 2008).

## How Parents Can be Supportive of Their Teen's Faith

### Supporting Teenagers A: Boundaries, Discussion, Active (in interests, friends, school, a role in the home)

As the child gets older and more mature, their need for support changes. A teenager's need for emotional support is more complex than before. They have a need to be heard and to be respected by their parents. Too many children do not treat their parents with respect, and when you ask them why they disrespect their parent, they will respond that their parents don't give them respect so why should they give respect to their parent? That's a good point, actually. Most parents do not consider their teenagers as children, and they do not consider them adults either. Somewhere along the way, the teenager is dismissed and the parent forgets that the teenager has needs too. The teen is left to fend for themselves and sometimes make self-destructive decisions such as drugs, alcohol or reckless behavior.

So, how do you support your teenager? First of all, supporting does not mean letting them do whatever they want to do. They need to know that you care, and showing that you care means making some unpopular decisions. If your teen wants to go somewhere, it's important to let them know that you care enough about them to find out where, how long and with whom. Some parents have blind faith and don't even inquire as to where their child is going and this can often be interpreted as uncaring or unsupportive by a teen.

What if they want to do something and you feel it would be dangerous or inappropriate at their age? Well, being supportive means explaining your point of view and hopefully you can compromise a happy medium with your teen. But sometimes that is not an option, and the answer no with an explanation, is all you can do. They may get angry with you for the moment, but that too, will pass. And eventually they will realize that you made the decision out of love.

Supporting your teenager also means being active in their interests. Transporting them to and watching their sporting events, talking with their teachers to find out how they're doing in school, asking to see their homework, and also making them responsible for chores at home. Don't forget to make time to sit down (uninterrupted) to talk with your teenager about how things are going at school, with their friends, or other activities. This shows that you respect them and are supportive of them. Giving them this type of attention is not difficult to do, but often times, parents believe that because their child is no longer "young" that this type of attention is not as important. The truth is that it is actually a **very** important and necessary thing in a young adult's life, because they are

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<sup>10</sup>“Taking Children to Church.” *The Barna Group*, (2001)  
<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=20html> (accessed March 15, 2006).



now making decisions that may affect the rest of their lives. This is when they need the most advice and support from their parents.<sup>11</sup>

## **Supporting Teenagers B: 7 Points**

### **1. Know Who You Are**

Yes, you are an adult, and you may think you know who you are. You may know why you do the things you do, but do your kids? Take a good look at how you parent and why you make the decisions you do. Are your methods effective? What are your reasons behind your parenting actions? Knowing yourself a little better will help you treat your kids in a manner that is more effective for building relationships.

### **2. Talk to Your Kids**

How often do you catch yourself saying, “Because I said so,” or “Because I’m the parent” when your child challenges your demands or restrictions? Teenagers are very capable of understanding why you make certain decisions. Being open with your kids can open up lines of communication and respect. Take time to talk to your teenager about the things on your mind. Let them know a little about what’s going on in your head.

### **3. Listen to Your Kids**

Listening can really open up lines of communication. Sit down and let your teenager talk without getting upset or interrupting him or her. Be an active listener. Use eye contact and nod your head. Ask clarifying questions and repeat back summaries of what it is being said.

Make sure your teen knows you are invested in the things he or she cares about. Teenagers are not always the most communicative individuals, so when they do finally open up you have to take advantage of those moments.

### **4. Offer Choices**

Being a dictator is not always the most effective way to build a relationship with your teen. It can prevent communication and promote rebellion. Sometimes it helps to offer your kids choices. By offering options your child feels like he or she has some control. Allow your teen the chance to help you in the decision making process. Not only will it foster respect, but it will also teach your child how to make better decisions.

### **5. Do as I Say and I Do**

Teens are very sensitive to hypocrisy. Do you expect of yourself what you expect of your teenager? If you want your child to open up, you have to be open. If you want your child to read his or her Bible every night, you have to read your Bible every night. Your teen may never admit it, but he or she will follow the example you set.

### **6. Discuss Your Faith**

Even though you want your child to go to church and grow closer to the Lord, are you discussing it? Some parents don’t, and it can inhibit a child’s spiritual growth. Make faith

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<sup>11</sup>“How to Be Supportive,” (2006) *Supportive Relationship*, <http://supportiverelationship.info/child.htm>, (accessed July 12, 2012).

a part of regular discussions. Ask how God is working in their school and personal lives. Tell them how you see God working around you. The more you discuss faith the more natural it will become.

### 7. Be the Parent

Some parents believe that they should be their teens “best friend.” However, most teens have friends. What they really need is a parent. Teens need someone to turn to for limits and discipline. They need a parent to set an example. They need a parent to offer unconditional love. While you should listen to your kids and talk about faith with them, teens still need you to be the parent in the relationship.<sup>12</sup>

### Supporting Teenagers C: Respect!

Teenagers with high self-esteem and self-respect make more responsible health choices. Help your teen to build these characteristics by:

- allowing him or her to voice opinions
- allowing him or her to be involved in family decisions
- listening to his or her opinions and feelings
- helping him or her set realistic goals
- showing faith in his or her ability to reach those goals
- giving unconditional love<sup>13</sup>
- Explain the process the teens are experiencing. Show the outline.
- Explain how parents can be supportive of the goal their teen sets and the process that will take place once teens re-enter the room.

### STUDENT SECTION

- Supply pens/paper
- Adult Mentors will share with students how their faith has changed since they were confirmed.
- List as many goals that you have for yourself in the following areas (in 5 minutes):
  - **Material:** These are goals that are tangible. You can hold, own or possess them.
    - Examples: To babysit and make enough money to buy a ...; To gain a college education and a good career; To be able to own a house
  - **Physical:** These goals may alter the physical body for the better or involve movement.

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<sup>12</sup>Kelli Mahoney, “Top 7 Ways to Be an Effective Parent,” *About.com*, <http://christianteens.about.com/od/parentresourcecenter/tp/betterparent.htm> (accessed July 12, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> “Helping Your Teen Make responsible Choices,” *Palo Alto Medical Foundation*, <http://www.pamf.org/teen/parents/emotions/choices.html> (accessed July 12 2012).

- Example: To eat better – three salads each week; To do 30 sit ups a day in the morning or run 2 miles; Even to practice playing the piano three times a week
  - **Spiritual:** These goals specifically connect us to our Maker in one way or another, moving us forward in our faith journey.
    - Example: To read through the Bible in one year
- **Discuss:** How do physical/material goals fit into your spiritual goals? (Give examples.)
  - How do you know when a goal is important to someone?
  - How do you know when a goal is important to yourself?
  - How do you celebrate a completed physical/material goal?
  - What happens when you fail to reach a physical/material goal?
- **Discuss:** What is one spiritual goal that you have for yourself? (Give examples. Maybe they have not previously thought about this. Encourage them to brainstorm at least one goal they would like to develop.)
  - What is a spiritual goal that you share with your family/parents?
  - How do you celebrate a completed spiritual goal?
  - What happens when you fail to reach a spiritual goal?
- **Discuss:** What are your next steps you are taking to move towards that spiritual goal? (Give examples.)
  - What do you have to learn to reach the goal?
  - What kind of support will you need to reach the goal?
  - How will you know that you have attained the goal?
  - What changes will you have to make to reach the goal?
  - How can your family help you reach the goal?
- Let students know they are going to share what they wrote and talked about in just a moment with their parents. (Perhaps place duplicate non-carbon sheets behind their guided worksheet.)
- Ask students to ask their parents the following question in the week ahead: How has your faith life changed since your confirmation? (Parents will be talking about this in their session.) Maybe the teen will find out that their parent was not confirmed but that something else may have impacted the faith of the parent.

### 1:50 Families return to large group.

- Talk through the outline, sharing the teens' next step.
- Decide as a family how this plan can be supported. For example... It is Jeremy's goal to read through the Bible in one year. We (parents) will buy Jeremy a resource to keep him on track and will weekly (Sunday dinners) check in with Jeremy to see how he has progressed, asking what he is learning and how we can pray for him in that moment.

- Pray over the goal *and* the support plan. Guided prayer (if wanted):

**Parent(s):** Dear Jesus, We want to keep learning about you individually and as a family. We want to keep growing closer to you. We want to act more and more like you. Please help us to walk in Your ways and send your Holy Spirit to help us support one another. We especially pray for your guidance in supporting (name of teen) in his/her goal of (\_\_\_\_\_). I/we pray that he/she may achieve the desire of his/her heart to grow in faith in this way over the next year.

**Teen:** I thank you, Lord, for my family and their support as I strive to grow in my faith and reach my next step goal.

**Family:** We pray for strength on the journey ahead and offer our praise to You, Jesus, for always standing by us, loving and guiding us. We pray all of this in Your Name. Amen.

2:00 **Celebrate families.** Gift them with resource: Life's Big Questions, God's Big Answers.<sup>14</sup> PR recruitment for next year's event. This group can share stories of their next steps journey with the new group in the following spring. Set them free!

#### **Other Details**

- Order necessary materials
- Design forms with carbonless duplicates 5.5x8.5 100 for \$31.90 plus shipping. See <http://www.anchoraside.com/carbonless.html>
- Inform maintenance/cleaning crew of any needs

#### **Other people needed**

- 3-4 childcare people
- 2 people for the food team
- 2 families for set up
- 2 families for clean up

#### **Guided Family Closing Prayer**[optional]

**Parent(s):** Dear Jesus, We want to keep learning about you individually and as a family. We want to keep growing closer to you. We want to act more and more like you. Please help us to walk in Your ways and send your Holy Spirit to help us support one another. We especially pray for your guidance in supporting (name of teen) in his/her goal of [\_\_\_\_\_]. I/we pray that he/she may achieve the desire of his/her heart to grow in faith in this way over the next year.

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<sup>14</sup> Brad Alles, *Life's Big Questions God's Big Answers* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010).

**Teen:** I thank you, Lord, for my family and their support as I strive to grow in my faith and reach my next step goal.

**Family:** We pray for strength on the journey ahead and offer our praise to You, Jesus, for always standing by us, loving and guiding us. We pray all of this in Your Name. Amen.

## APPENDIX D

### PASTOR MARK SCHAEFFER INTERVIEW WATER'S EDGE LUTHERAN CHURCH

October 3, 2012

Tell me about this church and the philosophy of ministry here.

- We are not an attractional or programmatic model.
- We are about rebirth and revival. We are all about Jesus (relationships, being discipled and one on one).
- Live in your community and with a church family.
- You won't make disciples different from you.
- You can't preach it without doing it.
- It's not my focus that people are involved in church. It's that they fall in love with Jesus and be the church – not about coming to church and being part of a program.
- On our Spoke Folk mission trip where Chase was the spiritual director, he had us meet in 'one on ones.' We had time to check in with one another, read Scripture together and talk about how to apply the Scripture to our lives.
- I want to train people to be missionaries and not church people. We are missing the point if it's about attending church. I want people to come in saying I need training to be a better missionary this week. Depth and community certainly help with that. Of course, not all will buy into this. All the community needs is already placed in the community.
- Our CORE attitudes center on Jesus' core attitudes for life and ministry. We want our people to live these out.
  - Eternity matters most.
  - It's not about me.
  - Live through the lost sheep lens, showing passion for people who are not saved.
  - We have a timeless message for a current culture. The Law (sin = death) and the Gospel (Jesus = salvation) never changes.
  - Matthew 18 – Teach, honor, echo and defend it. Solve disputes and clarify misperceptions.
  - The journey continues, so always keep a teachable spirit.
  - Constant worship = my daily life lived out as servant and witness of the Savior.
  - The Bible is the fuel needed for a missionary lifestyle.

- Tithing and extreme generosity... 10% is a statement that 100% belongs to Jesus.
  - Lives of invitation – Invite into your life, the church, the faith.
  - Next generation priority – Pass on the faith and equip the next generation to equip others as missionaries.
  - Launch new church plants and missional leaders.
- Our official start was 2004. Since then, we've launched four other sites with more to come, we pray. One site is called The Station and serves as a student movement on the University of North Texas campus. This site is mentored by Lamb of God Lutheran Church.
  - I am interested in developing more opportunities for teens to mentor younger youth and for adults to mentor teens.
  - We're riding the wave God brings up.

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