



RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Keep these commandments that I am giving you today in your hearts. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

In a world rich in resources for children, youth, and family ministry, what a daunting privilege and challenge to select twelve. Beginning with two works foundational to this ministry, we progress from ministry to our youngest children, through youth, into young adulthood, linking the generations in faith milestones, ending with Sabbath time, a context vital to passing on faith.

Marty, M. (2007). *The mystery of the child*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmans.

In a radical shift in how we understand the child, Marty moves from the contemporary view of the child as a problem (or series of problems) to be solved, to viewing the child as God's gift of mystery to be experienced, wondered at, and emulated by adults.

Marty explores providing care for children; creating a world in which they are cherished, protected, and valued; wondering about what God might be teaching us by experiencing the mystery of the child. The child becomes the teacher, as well as the learner.

This countercultural view of the child acknowledges something inherently precious and valuable and holy in every child. But this is nothing new – it is Biblical. It started with God, who created the child; Jesus, who enjoins us to welcome the child in his name; and the Holy Spirit, God's gift in baptism, calling the child to faith every day of life.

It is also a countercultural view of the adult. Marty helps us rediscover the child within each of us, the holy wonder and mystery of the "childness" within each of us. The mystery of the child within each person unfolds throughout all of life.

Anderson, D. & Hill, P. (2003). *Frogs without legs can't hear: Nurturing disciples in home and congregation*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

In the church, we have assumed that if the church "frog" has a head (church leadership) and a church torso (publicly gathered and visible community in the congregation), then it should be able to jump. The legs of the frog, which carry the church into the world to make the difference Christ intended, are its members, as they go about their everyday lives in congregation, home, workplace, school, and community. Linking the head and body to its legs propels it to "go make disciples." How do we do that?

Undergirded by five theological principles, lived out in four faith practices, this model for youth and family ministry produces adults, who are authentic, available and affirming. It includes major themes in Scripture, research, and history; stories and experiences that illustrate central ideas, and specific strategies and practices that make the principles come alive in congregations.

David Anderson has written a preaching and teaching series on *Frogs*, available from TYFI.

Yust, K. (2004). *Real kids, real faith: Practices for nurturing children's spiritual lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Karen Marie Yust begins her book with the question, "What's faith got to do with childhood?" Her answer is "everything." Written to parents, this book develops Yust's three core themes in faith formation: faith, as a gift of God; faith practices, which link us to God; and faithfulness, our best human response to faith, affecting all aspects of our lives. (13)

Topics include creating a spiritual world for children to inhabit, telling stories so that God's stories and our stories interweave, helping children name God's presence in their lives, praying, living a response to God's love in acts of service, and finding a faith community.

This book is a rich resource for congregations in educating parents to be faith formers for their children and in planning education, family, and cross-generational experiences.

Lynn, D. & K. (2006). *HomeGrown faith*. Nashville, TN: World Publishing.

As parents of two teenage daughters, David and Kathy Lynn have lived this book and know it works. Thirty-year veterans in children, youth, and family ministry and prolific writers in the field, they bring solid theology, current research, creativity, and passionate commitment to passing on faith to all God's children. Understanding that parents are the most influential people in faith formation for their children, this book is inspiring, motivating, and doable.

So, why would this be a resource for pastors? The Lynns provide guidance in

- Building congregations that welcome children and youth,
- Examining congregational programs that pull families apart,
- Offering alternative ways to do congregational ministry that strengthens families,
- Helping congregations equip parents to braid faith into daily life,
- Providing a resource for all faith parents, with "Fifty Nifty HomeGrown Faith Activities You Can Do With Your Kids and Grandkids,"
- Creating congregational opportunities to experience the HomeGrown Faith activities,
- Using this resource (and book study available from TYFI) for a faith parenting class.

Walsh, D. (2004). *Why do they act that way? A survival guide to the adolescent brain*. New York: Free Press.

Why would I suggest this book for clergy? Adolescents are God's children, too. In baptism, we welcomed them as fellow members of the body of Christ, but sometimes their behavior, attitude, and language are

confounding, if not repellent. Secretly, we wish they'd either become well-behaved, respectful young adults ... or go away until they grow up. Unfortunately, many have gone away, and they haven't come back!

To welcome and understand them, to recognize how vitally important it is that we keep them during this formative, fragile time, we need to learn about the teen brain and its implications for ministry. Topics include cultural biases against teens; brain development; character development and decision making; risk taking; communication that works; gender differences; love and sex; media; impact of chemical abuse; and adolescent mental illness.

Three important insights for ministry include the importance of laying down durable neuropathways of faith formation during this time of brain cell proliferation and pruning, helping parents understand what is going on with their adolescents and develop parenting practices that help youth thrive, and understanding core adolescent needs for connection, guidance, and love ... and building ministry that provides all three.

Smith, C. (2005). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This is the largest study ever done on the religious and spiritual lives of American teens. Assuming that American teens had left the Christian church, found it irrelevant, and were looking elsewhere to make meaning, the researchers at the University of North Carolina were surprised.

Very few American adolescents are "spiritual seekers." For many adolescents, religion and spirituality is important. "For the committed adolescent, religion is not simply a matter of general identity or affiliation or cognitive belief. Faith for these teenagers is also *activated, practiced, and formed* through specific religious and spiritual practices." (27) But teens are busy, and religion is losing to other competing commitments.

Further, most adolescents are not able to clearly articulate their faith. They exhibit a faith virtually identical to their parents. "The best general rule of thumb that parents might use to reckon their children's most likely religious outcomes is this: 'We'll get what we are.'" (57) Historic Christianity has been colonized by something new, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (be good, be happy, there is a god out there somewhere). (171)

So, where is the hope? *Soul Searching* identifies both a hunger and a need. Smith identifies what parents and congregations are doing that make a difference. Kenda Creasy Dean, researcher and faculty member at Princeton Theological Seminary, has identified what our youth need from us: a creed to believe in, a community to belong to, a call of their own, and hope for the future. We can give them this!

Varenhorst, B. & Griner, L. (2005). *Peer ministry training manual*. Bloomington, MN: The Youth & Family Institute.

Lyle Griner describes transformative ministry with youth. "You are not doing youth ministry until your youth are doing ministry!" Youth ministry is not to amuse, amaze, or simply grow knowledge in our youth; it is to equip them for ministry themselves and send them out.

This effective, experiential training equips adults to equip youth in the congregation with the attitudes, skills, support, and confidence to live out the parable of the Good Samaritan, training for a lifetime of service in Jesus' name.

It builds on what we already know about youth – they turn to other youth with crises, questions, loneliness, and fear. This training equips youth to reach out, welcome the stranger, listen deeply, make healthy decisions, deal with sensitive issues, name gifts of others, and share faith. This training builds relational ministry.

Yaconelli, M. (2006). *Contemplative youth ministry: Practicing the presence of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Remember a time when the way you spelled “youth group” was F-U-N? Today’s youth and their parents are busy, busy, busy. Other opportunities for “fun,” with larger budgets and more glitz, compete for time and attention. The bigger and better hayride simply doesn’t work, and fun is not what youth are really looking for in life. They want meaning, in the context of real relationships.

Mark Yaconelli, son of youth ministry guru Mike Yaconelli, tried the frenetic, fabulous, fun approach to youth ministry. “Despite doubling the number of youth events, increasing the youth budget, and working 70 hours a week, the youth program appeared stagnant.” (49) A friend invited him to something different, rediscovering the way faith has been passed on for two millennia – slowing down, spending quiet, focused time to be present with God, with authentic, available, and affirming adults, with peers, and with themselves. It marks a return to ancient contemplative faith practices.

But it doesn’t end here. This ministry sends youth out into the world, to live out their faith in discipling and serving others. The real stuff of faith in Jesus invites youth to “pick up your cross and follow me.”

Hendricks, P. (2006). *Hungry souls, holy companions: Mentoring a new generation of Christians*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing.

Patricia Hendricks, executive director of Christos Center for Spiritual Formation in St. Paul, MN, spent years talking to youth and young adults, ages 16-30. She discovered the central issues for youth and young adults are relationships, vocation, identity, and faith.

Hendricks uncovered their hunger for spiritual connections and their disconnect with the church. Providing a smorgasbord of ideas, stories, and practical suggestions, she identifies how we can prepare holy companions to walk with youth and young adults on the faith journey. Mentors listen, are respectful, ask reflective questions, affirm, and accompany young people. Equipped with basic skills in spiritual direction, they help the “hungry souls” formulate and live their questions, without providing simplistic, one-size-fits-all answers.

Adults blessed to be “holy companions” will also be immeasurably enriched on the journey.

Claiborne, S. (2006). *The irresistible revolution: Living as an ordinary radical*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Shane Claiborne is a young adult, following Jesus' call to live justly. He writes with passionate engagement, from personal experience. Shane lives in an intentional community in inner-city Philadelphia that exists to know, love, learn from, and serve the poor. His book weaves contemporary stories with God's stories, moving seamlessly from the streets of Philadelphia to the streets of Jerusalem, finding God loose in all the stories. But it doesn't stop with knowing; it always moves into living the Gospel.

Claiborne's call to the church and to Christians is to really live this faith. In North Carolina, a good friend has been reading this book with his youth and they have all been transformed. Youth and young adults are looking for this challenging call to live a life that matters.

It seems only fitting that he closes with an "altar call"

... to the world, an invitation to see a new kind of Christianity and to hear the confession of a church on its knees asking your forgiveness for the mess we've helped create. And it is an "alter" call to the church, to alter our vision from the patterns of this world and create new ways of living. (357)

The Youth & Family Institute staff, ed. (2007). *Milestones ministry manual for home and congregation*. Bloomington, MN: The Youth & Family Institute.

What ministry opportunity brings together all of the generations, time after time, sharing their unique and varied gifts, to mark and celebrate God's presence and pass on faith? It's spelled Milestones Ministry.

In congregations, we recognize some universal faith milestones – baptism, entering Sunday school, receiving a Bible, first communion, confirmation, weddings, and funerals. Countless other possibilities exist within congregational life. Here are some proven new ideas, including FaithChests®, baptism anniversaries, prayer, worship, kids and money, blessing backpacks, first time campers, sexuality, middle school, driver's license, and high school graduation.

Detailed plans are included for three ways to celebrate these milestones: worship, cross-generational events, and home celebration.

Muller, W. (1999). *Sabbath: Finding rest, renewal, and delight in our busy lives*. New York: Bantam Books.

We live in a world addicted to speed, achievement, acquisition, and busyness. People are frazzled, stressed, burned out and exhausted. Even the church is not exempt. Individuals and families are too busy. We have forgotten God's example, commandment and invitation to re-creation in observing the Sabbath. What would Sabbath look like in 2008? How can we recapture the natural, healing, restoring rhythms of a life well lived? Can we reclaim Sabbath for ourselves, our families, and our congregations? Muller's book helps us to experience Sabbath in many forms, plan to make it a sustainable spiritual practice, and enjoy its restorative benefits as spirituality and wellness. Sabbath creates the holy space we need to pass on faith.

This book, a collection of short chapters with simple Sabbath practices, is readable, delightful, and a Sabbath of its own. A preaching and teaching series is available.