

Keeler, Charles V. faced by Teenagers

ESSAYS PRESENTED AT THE 70TH CONVENTION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

THE CHURCH CAN MEET THE PRESENT CRISIS FACED BY TEENAGERS

by
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The church is getting older, not so much in years, but in the average age of her members. Some have expressed the fear that she will cease to exist by the year of our Lord 2000 because the present membership is being called home at a rate faster than new and younger souls are being assimilated into the church. A recent Gallup poll reported,

One striking feature about Lutherans today is that they are considerably older than the general population. While 35 percent of the total population is over 50, 46 percent of all Lutherans and 49 percent of those in the A.L.C. are over 50.

At the same time, while 27 percent of the general population is 19-29, only 17 percent of Lutherans—and only 11 percent of those in the American Lutheran Church—fall within this group. This pattern could reflect differences in birth rates, but it also suggests that Lutherans are having a problem keeping young people involved in their church.

Estimates of young souls lost to the church after confirmation day range between 50 and 75 percent. Most any congregation in our fellowship expects to lose half of the young folks who are even somewhat faithful until their day of confirmation.

At the same time, Americans claim to be very religious. Most polls indicate that the majority of Americans believe in God and consider themselves to be religious. Many young families see themselves as becoming church members some-

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day, but they are looking for congregations which have strong and active programs for teens. Call committees list as a high priority, a pastor who is young enough to be "good with kids."

These facts might be our motivation for developing good, successful programs for youth. Resolution No. 3: CRISIS IN YOUTH WORK from last year's convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod began, "Whereas, the future of the church is its youth." All too frequently children are described as being the church of the future. *Confirmed teenagers are much more than the church of tomorrow. They are an important part of the church of today.* The teenagers of our land need us and we need to serve them. They are a part of "all nations" mentioned in the Great Commission of our Lord. And we need them too.

No one in the world can offer them the solutions to their unique problems better than we who are equipped with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The solutions offered by the world for teen problems always fall flat and are inadequate. The world views people as being little more than animals whose behavior can be modified if one uses the proper stimulus.

The church should know the truth. All people are sinners in need of salvation and peace with God through the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The church alone knows how to change people. The church values its young because they are precious creations of God, redeemed by the holy, precious blood of Christ.

There can be no question that modern teenagers experience many crises, some of which are life-threatening. All of these crises have the potential to destroy souls. All one need do is read a daily newspaper or watch a television news broadcast to be reminded of the troubles suffered by the teens of this land. Television documentaries present specific problems endured by teens.

Today we shall consider how the churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod can help. We shall consider how this Synod can assist young people in meeting and overcoming their crises. We shall direct our attention to the efforts of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod with this thought,
THE CHURCH CAN MEET THE PRESENT CRISIS FACED BY TEENAGERS!

Before we presume to solve teenage problems, we must consider who the teenagers are. Understanding adolescence is a major step in solving the problems of the adolescent. Then we shall consider what we, as a Synod, have done and are doing. We shall consider what more we could do and we shall conclude by listing major crises endured by teens with some suggestions as to how to turn these problems into opportunities for growth.

I. Understanding Adolescence.

Kids are, basically, immature human beings. Many psychologists believe kids are different today from what they were three, two, or even one decade ago. However, a number of teenagers were asked about their hopes for the future. A strange trend was revealed. Their answers were predictable, at least from the church's perspective. Most of them were very pessimistic about the future of the world while being very optimistic about their own future. Most of them believed they would have a great opportunity to succeed financially and to have the things of which every American dreams. Kids live under the perceived threat of nuclear devastation. They live in the age of instantaneous gratification. A push of a button gives them instant music and entertainment while at the same time they fear a push of a button could wipe out their existence. Living in dread of such a future, they still are concerned, as good children of Adam, with their own pleasures.

Before we can effectively minister to anyone, we need to understand them. This is more necessary in ministry to teens because we are not teens ourselves. Our thoughts, our problems, our pressures are not the same as those of teenagers. To be successful with modern kids we must give them what they need. If we do not, they will have their needs met some other place. We need to get into the minds and hearts of God's kids and supply them with the food which will satisfy their hunger.

This will be most difficult if there is such a thing as a generation gap. If modern kids are living in times which are unique, facing problems we did not experience, given choices which were once unknown, their needs will be different as well. Therefore, it is necessary to get inside the head and heart of the modern adolescent and let him supply us with insight as to where he is today and what needs he has which the church should meet. This is the beginning of helping the youth with their problems.

In this section, two seemingly contradictory points will be made: Modern kids are not really so different and yet the crises they face are unique. Kids are people, and people have common problems. Kids are people who are growing up in the time of heavy metal, crack cocaine, the threat of nuclear annihilation, the new morality, and the deadly wave of adolescent suicide. Thus we see the reason for the contradiction.

Let us hop into a time machine and remember how different we were. The years to which the essayist can best relate are those of the late fifties and early sixties. Many here endured adolescence then also. What was going on in the world? How different was adolescence then from now? A Republican was presi-

dent. He was a nice old guy who had the image of an active grandfather. The Soviet Union was considered a deadly enemy. The nuclear threat was so real that our moms and dads were building and stocking bomb shelters. Elvis Presley was shaking, rattling and rolling while teenage girls screamed and fainted as his feet. We did not look like "punk rockers," but the term "punk" was often applied to those who greased back their hair into a ducktail. We had our uniforms too: black leather jackets and blue jeans.

During the sixties, the Cuban missile crisis was such a real threat, for days we believed it was pointless to study or even attend classes. We felt insecure and uncertain while living with great expectations for our own personal futures. We struggled with our identities and our futures. We wondered if we really believed the faith in which our parents raised us. We were typical teenagers.

The crises in the world today are not too much different from any other period in history. The temptations are not much different. Humanity is not much different. Teenagers are not much different.

The best way to understand adolescence is to remember. Teens tend to behave like teens, no matter what year it is. We can be most effective in helping teens, when our hearts are full of understanding and concern and empathy and not judgment and inflexibility. Maybe if we could treat them as grandparents do, we would be more helpful. Of course, grandparents do not have to live with them.

As people have common needs, kids have common needs. We should not forget the basic need of all humanity, the reason God sent His Son into the world. The Church of Jesus Christ is the most effective solution to all crises because Scripture knows man inside and out.

The present tension between Christians and the secular world gives proof. Secular man is very much aware of the tragedies experienced by young people, but it cannot agree to the solution. The world would like to deal with the symptoms of the problems instead of the causes. Rather than trying to influence behavior, it would try to keep the behavior from causing expensive problems. As an example, the solution to AIDS will be found in a cure rather than an end to homosexuality.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod should be able to go to the root of all problems. There are crises because people sin, because this world is sinful. Children, teenagers, adults, all suffer because we all sin. Any solution which does not go to the root of the problem will fail. We dare not forget this. Everywhere we

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turn, this truth is denied. Even within the Christian Church, it is taught that we fail with kids when we preach to them, especially about sin. Moms and dads throw up their hands in frustration, believing, "You can't tell these kids anything nowadays!" The church's record of success with kids tempts us to seek other means to reach them in place of this truth.

Our lack of success does not change the truth. All people need to be made aware of their common need for salvation through Christ. The church has no other reason for existing than to preach the truth. Only the Holy Spirit, working through the law, brings this knowledge. In the schools the cry is made, "Back to the basics." The law and the Gospel of unmerited love and forgiveness through the Son of God are the real basics for all meaningful life. Perchance we could prevent teenage suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, and any other problems, what have we accomplished? We would have only bandaged the sores. The wounds underneath would continue to fester until the healing balm of the Gospel, the blood of Jesus, closed the wound and healed the sore. Kids are not too different from kids of any age. They certainly have the same basic needs.

Nonetheless, there are clear and unique causes for the present crisis. Humanity has not changed but the modern age is unusual. Dramatic changes have occurred in the post-war era. The world changes before our eyes so quickly we do not have time to adjust. These changes have bewildered and dismayed people of all ages and the young suffer the most. They have not matured enough to adjust. These changes affect the most basic aspects of life.

The first change has been the subtle but perceptible erosion of adolescence.¹ Kids no longer are allowed to be kids. They are expected to be adults before they mature. This causes stress and confusion. They receive conflicting signals, some telling them to act like children, while others demanding that they act like adults.

The most basic causal change has occurred in the structure of the family.² Dr. James Dobson, in a television special, discussed the question "Where have all the fathers gone?" Scripture describes the father as being the head of the family. One could argue that modern fathers are no better or worse than their predecessors were, but the change from a rural America to an urban America has caused a change in the role of the father. The demands of modern society, the high cost of living, have taken more and more of father's time. He is not there when the children need him. He is used as a club to intimidate the children into obedience. "Just wait 'till your father gets home!"

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At the same time, the past score of years has witnessed the birth of a new phenomenon, the latchkey kid. While we ask, where have all the fathers gone, the mothers have escaped to the workplace too. There is today, in Florida, a severe shortage of day-care centers. No one is at home to take care of the children. The government is expected to babysit.

The results of such changes in family structure are dramatic. The loss of family causes children to feel a loss of protection. To make up for not being there, parents may well give their children anything and everything they want. When materialism is the god of the parents, it becomes god for the children also. Kids are spoiled with material possessions and enjoy every kind of experience and pleasure before they mature, every pleasure except the presence of their parents.

And so kids lack proper adult examples. A five-year-old who wants to grow up to be like his daddy becomes the fifteen-year-old who doesn't really know who his daddy is. Others take the place of parents and become role models; others, such as rock stars, football players, and their own teenager peers.

Modern kids have also lost the most basic need, the need for security. Many families have become battlegrounds. The most violent place in America is not "crack street" or dark alleys. Violence is commonplace in the home. The insecurity of children who live in violent homes has an effect on children who live in secure homes. They think, "If it can happen at my friend's home, when will it happen in mine?"

Kids have experienced the loss of authority. Secular humanism, which sets man as the measure of all things, has successfully attacked absolutes. What is right depends on what one thinks. Public opinion polls determine what America thinks. What America thinks determines morality. And so if the majority changes its collective mind, morality changes. Then the adolescent asks, "Why listen to the majority of adults who do not understand kids?" The peer group sets the standards.

Kids have lost their heroes. Their teachers, their family members no longer fit the bill. If the one who has the most toys wins, the celebrity must be the hero. And the celebrity is usually on his way to, or just getting out of, the drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility.

Kids have lost their ability to play. It is not unusual to see a three- or four-year-old girl with pierced ears, makeup and a very adult-looking dress. Sex education is being urged on the grade school. What is left for the kid to experience when he becomes an adolescent? Television presents eight- and nine-year-olds as if they were adults, using adult innuendo, being much more

sophisticated than their parents. In fact, our children can see on television things that adults may not have been able to imagine fifty years ago.

These are just some of the changes which make adolescence different today. These are some of the contributing factors which build to crisis in young lives.

II. What have we done in the past? What are we doing now?

In the past our Synod has been active in the area of youth work. It has always been a struggle, but the Evangelical Lutheran Synod did not shrink back in fear. Pastors may not always have felt successful, but they tried. Modern "youth experts" brag that, before Group Magazine, Youth Specialties, etc., came along, no one was doing effective work among teens. Obviously, those people who make such claims were not raised in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

For the first fifty years of this Synod, one paper read each year at convention had youth education for its theme. We ran a high school. Teens were eager to participate in the annual convention of the Lutheran Youth Association. The essayist is grateful to those pastors and lay people who conducted events such as these as well as summer camp. They made a great impact on his life. We need not be ashamed of the past efforts of our Synod.

Recent history is not so beautiful though. The last convention of this Synod declared that the crisis is not only among the youth, but affects youth work in general. "Whereas, The annual budget of the Board for Education and Youth has in recent years been decreased, and whereas, This decrease in budget is indicative of waning interest in youth work, parish education, and Christian education, therefore, A. Be it resolved, That the Board for Education and Youth undertake a one-year study commencing in the fall of 1986 to analyze this trend, and, B. Be it resolved, That the Board for Education and Youth implement a two-year program to reverse this trend on the basis of the aforementioned analysis."³ The theme of this convention is meant to change the trend. A recent survey by the Board for Education and Youth was answered by only 32 of the congregations in our Synod. Of the responses, 18 congregations stated that nothing was spent each year on youth work. These congregations lag behind the Synod only by a dollar or two per teen per year.

It is simple to lay the blame. Those surveyed listed the following as barriers in dealing with youth: "Attendance, lack of inter-

ested adults to act as leaders, competition with the public schools, lack of parental cooperation, worldly activities, work schedules, youth events which cost too much, kids come from different schools and don't know each other, unbelief, too few kids in the church, apathy, and boredom."⁴ If the teens are in crisis, our congregations are at least nearing crisis in youth work.

Our Synod is small. It is composed of many small congregations. We have fewer teenagers. It should not be surprising that their cooperation will not be enthusiastic toward our efforts. Teenagers do not like to appear enthusiastic about anything. It is easy to get frustrated, to give up. It is easy to succumb to the thought, "Since the kids don't seem to care, why should I?" There are other areas of church work that are easier on our egos and self-esteem.

The essayist has talked with few pastors who really want to give up on teenagers, however. It would be difficult to believe that congregations want the church to give up. Parents live in fear of what may happen when their children become teenagers. And as hard as it is to believe, kids do not want us to give up on them, either.

III. What can we do?

The best place to begin is to remember that our work is with young people, and not programs for young people. The youth group may fail, but that does not mean we dare give up on the kids.

We can begin by trying to understand the kids we serve. There are books written which explain adolescence. Remembering our own adolescence may be helpful. Of course, when we were kids, we were not as bad as kids are today. Understanding adolescence in general is important, but our children are more than just adolescents. They are individuals.

Get acquainted with the teenagers in the church. Listen to what they are saying, if you can understand them. If you cannot, learn. Listening is as important as having the answers to their problems. Sometimes, to have someone to talk to who cares is more important than having answers. One youth group expressed unanimously an unwillingness to talk to parents about problems. They thought parents would get angry or parents would not understand or worse, parents would expound on what life was like when they were kids.

One popular Methodist youth leader guarantees at least a 50 percent increase in attendance in your youth group by following his method. J. David Stone suggests the secret is home visitation of the teens. Visit every kid for whom you are respon-

sible. Visit him or her, not his or her parents. Just a short visit is all that is necessary. Tour the teenager's room if you can get into it. The key to this "secret" is concern and growth in understanding the person. The sainted Dean Milton Otto liked this quote, "The house-going pastor makes a church-going people." Kids are people too.

As you get to know kids, do so with commitment. Make up your mind that you are not willing to give up on them no matter how tempting it may be. They will certainly let you down, sometimes as a test of your reliability, and sometimes because something more important to them occurs. Their commitment to your efforts will grow only as they learn how trustworthy and committed you are. Don't give up on them.

They need adults they can trust. The adult they look up to now, rock stars and the like, are not always such good examples. Kids need to see Christian men and women who are real people, who, like them, struggle with sin and problems, but overcome in Christ. They need to see married couples living as Christ commands them in a troublesome world. Whether it be a pastor or lay leader or interested lay person, these examples make deep impressions on young minds. The essayist believes that these heroes need to admit to being human. It is not all that comforting to a teenager who is struggling with all kinds of temptations to think his or her pastor never had such problems. Even the Son of God was tempted like as we are, yet without sin, to convince us that He will understand our struggles.

Another important thing to do to help overcome the crisis in youth and youth work is to remember that teens are a part of the church now. They are not just the future of the church. They are Christians today, with special needs.

The message of the church should be directed to all the members. Preaching should reach people where they live, in their own unique circumstances. The preacher sits in his study with a mental picture before him of the people to whom he will preach. He fashions God's message to the problems people endure and the lives people are living. And there, on occasion, he sees a teen. In his mind he may see the teen disobeying authority, having illicit sex, using drugs or contemplating suicide. And he makes the teen a target of his sermon by shooting piercing arrows of law at his heart. Or he may include young people in sermons only as examples of the evil in the world and the power of temptation. How simple it is to leave them out when it comes time to salve the wound with the balm of Christ's blood.

Teenagers may be encouraged to think of themselves as second-class Christians, not yet fit for the real church. If they

are only the church of the future, we should not be surprised if they decide to wait for that future to take seriously their Christianity.

We all know and believe that Christ's atonement, His forgiveness, motivates His people to change, to serve the Lord. The Gospel is the constant need for all of God's people, young and not-so-young. Gospel sermons, Gospel Bible studies, with the young in mind will help kids through trying times. It was only the unequivocal Gospel, pounded into the essayist's heart, that kept him from despair over the sins of his adolescence, that called him back from the darkness of the lost. The fact that God through Christ forgives sinners, a fact regularly preached to him by his pastor, convinced him of his place in the church, even at those times when the devil worked overtime to make him qualified as a sinner.

Young Christians need to feel important in the church. They need to be integrated gradually into church life through significant responsibilities. At an age when the future is unclear, when they are searching for their purpose in life, the church can give them an eternal reason for living. Stewardship, in the wide sense of the term, is for the young too. Meaningful service to the Lord is healthy and invigorating for the faith of the young.

Few kids believe they can make a difference. "The latent idealism of their youth has been tainted and some researchers are speculating that the nuclear threat (among other things) may be saddling developing egos with despair, producing a sense of powerlessness, cynical resignation, impulsive behavior, and anger at the adult generation."⁵

Christians can make an eternal difference. Teenagers long for this feeling of purpose. They long to be involved in something that really matters. Youth work can, and should, move beyond car washes and pizza parties to real works of service. Faith becomes more meaningful when it is put into practice. Kids can be taught to put their faith into practice.

Children are not alone in their need for education. Many of the children we are trying to help come from disrupted families, as has been shown. Families which escaped divorce, addiction, abuse and incest, nonetheless struggle with communication problems, anger, and disobedience. While it is easy to pass judgment and inflict blame, the point is that families need help from the church. These problems are not going away. They will only get worse. The church needs to become expert in the education and support of families. Parenting and family life should be a part of sermons and Bible studies.

When it is not possible to help the family itself (because the

family is not involved with the church) the church can provide the warmth, acceptance, and love children from disrupted families lack. Christians who simply take time to be interested in a particular child, who talk to him or her on Sunday morning, make a lasting impression on the child. Kids enjoy having adults as friends and they feel special when adults expend the effort to care about them.

These are just a few simple but practical ideas to answer the general question, "What can we do?" If these suggestions do not work in your situation, find another way. Add each teen in your congregation to your daily prayer list. Find a way to befriend and help those teens. They will not forget.

IV. Specific Crises Endured by Youth.

The last section of this paper will discuss specific crises faced by our teens and what we can do to help. The most deadly problem is suicide. The epidemic nature of suicide is documented in newspapers and television news reports throughout the land. Teenage suicide has become national news. Sadly, there are many suicides and suicide attempts which are not reported.

Suicide has been defined as, "Any deliberate, self-damaging act from which the chance of survival is uncertain."⁶ Karl Menninger divides suicidal behavior into three categories: "Chronic suicide, which includes asceticism, alcohol and drug addiction, antisocial acting out and psychoses; focal suicide, which includes self-mutilations, and intentional accidents; and organic suicides, which relate to psychosomatic illnesses."⁷

It is difficult for the essayist to understand what could cause a child to consider self-destruction, but the facts are plain. The following list of motivations will help spot possible victims: "Escape, physical illness, death and loss, avoiding being a burden, revenge, guilt, attention, manipulation, impulse or whim, reunion with a deceased loved one, delusions, mastery over fate, and as an expression of love."⁸ Reasons given for the dramatic increase of adolescent suicide are: "Changing moral climate, society's high mobility, high divorce rate, frequent alcohol and other drug abuse, popularization and glorification of violence in the mass media, easy availability of guns and the already high suicide rate."⁹

A caring church will want to join the rest of the country in awareness of the problem, alertness for possible victims, and knowledge to help stop these tragedies. The end notes contain a list of warning signs for which to look for potential victims.¹⁰

The secular world attacks this epidemic with education and counseling. Certainly this is part of the answer. A list of dos and

don'ts is also given in the end notes.¹¹ The church has additional and powerful resources at her disposal, beginning with understanding. If the kids quoted earlier are typical of teens, i.e., reluctant to speak to parents about problems; someone in the church, (pastor, youth leader, elder, or caring friend) must open doors of communication with the teens. Understanding and empathy will also help. Being there for kids will help. Caring and loving kids will help. Being willing to listen without being shocked at what the kids may say, will help.

We also teach the truth about death and suicide, a truth the world does not understand. We can frequently emphasize the value all people have in God's eyes, since He redeemed us all, as we are, with the holy, precious blood of His only-begotten Son. We can emphasize the concern of our God for all our problems, (Matthew 10:28-31, Hebrews 4:15) and His power to overcome them (Romans 8:35-39, I Corinthians 10:13). We can overwhelm the teenagers with their importance in the eyes of the Holy God. The world may have suggestions to help us open communications with troubled kids, but only the Gospel can give them an eternally significant reason for living, along with the hope necessary to overcome seemingly overwhelming problems.

Substance abuse has become a national concern also. This problem has been with us longer than the teenage suicide epidemic. Some pietistic sects might point their finger at us in this area. After all, where would we be as a Synod without our caffeine? Our children are not immune to drug and alcohol problems. All too readily we categorize abusers as delinquents, the kids we do not have to deal with in our circles. The essayist has served parishes in rural America and now urban America. The kids in country and small town congregations are not immune to abuse. It is a myth to think that growing up in the country is the answer to drug abuse. The essayist remembers teens in a small northern farm community who had planted acres of marijuana for their own use and sale.

How difficult it is to deal with substance abusers! What can we do as parents? What can I do as a youth worker or pastor? It might be surprising to some of us, but some of our children may not be aware that drug abuse is a sin. The Bible condemns drunkenness, but what does it say about marijuana, heroin or crack cocaine? But we know that simply talking about the problem will not make it go away.

The essayist has had extensive experience, both personal and professional, in dealing with alcoholic teens and drug-abusing teens. He has relied heavily on organizations such as A.A. as well as treatment centers for abusers. He believes strongly in

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encouraging addicts to submit to such treatment. There is no question that the power of God overcomes sin. This sin needs extra work because it is a life-dominating sin.

There is something the church can do in addition to this. We can learn a lesson from the prodigal father of Jesus' parable. We can tell our children we love them no matter what they do. We can convince them that even though they stray, we will be waiting with open arms to receive them when they return. We can lavish them with the same undeserved love of our heavenly Father in which we rejoice.

It is heart-rending to witness our children and the children of our church frying or picking their brains, slowly killing themselves. Our frustration may lead to pent-up anger, which is unleashed at the smallest problem. Our anger is justified and it is honest. But through our anger, love and acceptance should shine forth. The child should know we care and are waiting to help. We are not willing to become a part of the problem. We will not be permissive and enable the abuser to continue abusing. We will be there to help when they are ready.

The final specific crisis to be considered is the new morality.¹² Again, the church approaches the problem from a different perspective than the world does. The world is concerned about unwanted results of sexual conduct, namely venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy, the expense of caring for poor teenage mothers and their babies. The world would solve the problem by means of education concerning biology and birth control devices.

But has it worked? Does it solve the real problem or has this education become a part of the problem? One study, admittedly biased, argues, "The evidence shows then, that increased exposure of teenagers to contraception, at least during this five-year period, has led to more premarital pregnancies, more illegitimacy, more abortion, more promiscuity, more venereal disease and more cervical cancer. The obvious cause of all these problems has been the enormous increase in sexual activities among teenagers during this period."¹³ Another study, quoted by this same study, states, "The current belief that illegitimacy will be reduced if teenage girls are given an effective contraceptive is an extension of the same reasoning that created the problem in the first place. It reflects an unwillingness to face problems of social control and social discipline, while trusting some technological device to extricate society from its difficulties. The irony is that the illegitimacy rise occurred precisely while contraception was becoming more, rather than less, widespread and respectable."¹⁴ Many of the less popular politicians of the day have been saying much the same thing to deaf ears.

The authors of this study conclude, "For generations, parents taught their children moral responsibility and gave them the foundation on which to build their own families. This system was not perfect, but it produced infinitely better results than the current programs. It gave children reasons for preserving their chastity and it supported them in doing so until they were mature enough to make responsible use of their sexual faculties. Indeed many parents still are doing it, in spite of the general permissiveness around them. But if parents are to be effective in giving their children the moral training they so desperately need, they will have to be supported, not undermined, by their churches, schools, government agencies, and the medical profession."¹⁵

Children are sexual, but they need not be sexually active. While the rest of the country has surrendered their children to sexual promiscuity, we need not and should not surrender the children of God to this sin. We could assume that worldly children have few reasons to remain chaste, but our children have very significant reasons for doing so. Many of them want help and support in their struggle to remain pure.

Scripture abounds with instructions, commands, and encouragements in this area.¹⁶ Scripture is open and honest about sexual matters. The church need not fear teaching the truth about sex as well as giving proper and effective motivation for chastity; i.e., the love of God which constrains us. We can encourage our teens that they are not freaks just because everyone else seems to be promiscuous. And even more importantly, we can still love them and forgive them with the divine love and forgiveness of Christ when some of them fail, when some of them get caught in this tempting trap of the evil one.

The church which dares to tell the kids the truth about sex will help those children. The church which declares clearly God's will and way, which clearly teaches why God gave these laws, will serve its youth. The same church will strive to give teens the good example of marriages which are blessed because they followed the will of the Lord.

Conclusion.

The Church of Jesus Christ is well-equipped to help its members face any crisis. The power of God stands behind us. The grace and mercy of God encourage us. The Word of God guides us. The church has always faced difficult tasks. Helping teenagers meet and conquer their crises is no more difficult than the assignment Jesus gave to His church in the Great Commission. It is no less important either. Those teens are a major object of the mission work of the church.

While we busy ourselves with mission work in foreign lands, while we work to spread the Gospel in this country, while we continue to support higher education in our excellent institution, may we also fight to keep our kids as a part of the church of today. May we expend as much energy and time with kids as we do with adults. May we love them and be there for them. May we find a way, any God-pleasing way, to serve them.

These words of Dr. Luther serve as an unofficial theme for our Synod's youth letter, "Youth Branches." "If an injury that really hurts is to be done the devil, it must be done through the young people who are reared in the knowledge of God, spread God's Word and teach it to others."

Soli Deo Gloria!

END NOTES

1. David Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place To Go* (Addison-Wesley).
2. One out of every three marriages ends in divorce today, and between 1966 and 1976, the rate of divorce in the United States increased 113 percent. Nearly 1 million couples divorce each year, and about 65 percent of all divorces and annulments occur in families with children under eighteen. Since 1960, the proportion of children who live with only one parent has doubled.
 - 1 out of every 6 children in the United States is living in a family in which the father is absent.
 - About half the children under eighteen living in families headed by the mother had a standard of living below the poverty level.
 - Since 1960, families headed by the mother living alone with her children have increased by 81 percent.
 - Some 6.4 million children live in stepfamilies.
 - 1 out of every 100 adult women was sexually molested as a child by her father or stepfather.
 - 1 out of every 10 families may be involved in various forms of incest.
 - At least 20 million children live with at least one parent with a serious drinking problem.
 - Alvin Rosenbaum, *The Young People's Yellow Pages*, Perigee Books, 1983.
 - 3. Report of the 69th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, p. 84.
 - 4. 1987 survey taken by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Board for Education and Youth.
 - 5. Psychology Today, *When Kids Think The Unthinkable*, April 1984.
 - 6. Dr. G. Keith Olson, *Counseling Teenagers*, (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1984) p. 368.
 - 7. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
 - 8. *Ibid.* pp. 370-373.
 - 9. Bill Blackburn, *What You Should Know About Suicide*, Word Books, Waco, Texas 1982, p. 24.
 - 10. Warning signs of adolescent suicide by Joseph Teicher, M.D. and Jerry Jacobs, M.D.

[8]

- A. Abrupt changes in personality
- B. Giving away of prized possessions
- C. Previously attempted suicide
- D. Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- E. Eating disturbances and significant weight changes
- F. Sleeping disturbances
- G. Inability to tolerate frustration
- H. Withdrawal and rebelliousness
- I. Inability or unwillingness to communicate
- J. Sexual promiscuity
- K. Neglecting personal appearance
- L. Theft and/or vandalism
- M. Depression
- N. Exaggerated and/or extended apathy
- O. Inactivity and boredom
- P. Carelessness and/or accident-proneness
- Q. Unusually long grief reaction
- R. Sadness and discouragement
- S. Hostile behavior—unruliness in school
- T. Neglect of academic work
- U. Truancy
- V. Difficulty concentrating
- W. Family disruption (divorce)
- X. Running away from home
- Y. Abrupt ending of romance
11. Some do's and don'ts in working with suicidal adolescents
 - Do's
 1. Always try and take away accessibility to means person has chosen to kill oneself.
 2. Be positive—suggest most desirable alternatives.
 3. Remain calm and work at being "empathetic"—feeling your pain in my heart!
 4. Use constructive questioning to help separate and define person's problems and remove confusion.
 5. Emphasize that suicide is a *permanent* solution to a *temporary* problem.
 6. Stay in touch—literally and figuratively.
 7. Urge professional help when beyond your ability—know your limitations.
 - Don't's
 1. Don't sound shocked by what the person tells you.
 2. Don't stress the kind of pain it would cause the suicidal person's family or friends—or even yourself.
 3. Don't call the person's bluff. It may work on T.V. but this is real life.
 4. Don't get in a philosophical debate.
 5. Don't belittle or try to shame.
 6. Never try to physically remove a weapon from a suicidal person.
 - Remember—In order to effectively commit suicide, you must have a:
 1. Time
 2. Place
 3. Method

If all three are present, the person is lethal and must be helped! Taken from Seminar on Youth Leadership by Youth Specialties, Inc.

12. "The facts"
 Nearly 6 out of 10, 16-18-year-olds have had sexual intercourse.
 Nearly 1 out of 3, 13-15-year-olds have had sexual intercourse.
 The average age for first sexual experience is between 15 and 17.
 Nearly 6 out of 10 sexually active teenagers do not use birth control methods, or use them only some of the time.
 Nearly three-quarters of today's teenagers have never discussed birth control with their parents.
 Almost all teenagers want more information about intercourse, birth control, and venereal disease (in that order).
 Only 13 percent of teenage girls would marry the father of the baby if they became pregnant. Nearly 3 out of 10 would get an abortion, and the rest would keep the baby or give it up for adoption.
 90 percent of teenagers surveyed believe in marriage, and 74 percent say they would live with someone before or instead of marriage.
 Twice as many girls as boys fear that marriage would interfere with the freedom and career plans.
 Statistics taken from, *Private Life of the American Teenager*, Norman and Harris, Rawson-Wade, Publishers.
 13. *Linacre Quarterly*, *Birth Control for Teenagers: Diagram for Disaster*, James H. Ford, M.D. and Michael Schwartz, February 1979, p. 77.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
 16. Pastor John Stellick, *How to Keep our Young People Moral in the Age of the New Morality*, Paper delivered to the Redwood Falls Conference of the W.E.L.S., October 7, 1975.

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