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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

DEEPER ROOTS OF FAITH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
THROUGH ANCIENT CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Written by

BRADDON R. BROWN

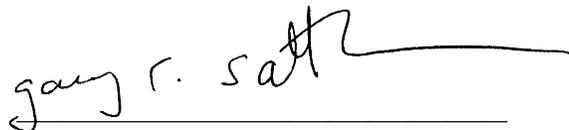
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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Gary Sattler



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Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: April 19, 2013

DEEPER ROOTS OF FAITH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
THROUGH ANCIENT CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

BRADDON R. BROWN  
FEBRUARY 2012



## ABSTRACT

### **Deeper Roots of Faith for Young People through Ancient Christian Spirituality**

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2013

The goal of this study was to develop a Confirmation Program for First Presbyterian Church in San Mateo, California, that connects post-modern young people to God's mission through the ages by teaching ancient Christian spiritual practices. This project attempted to seek a possible remedy for the mass numbers of youth who abandon faith after high school through deepening young people's faith during Confirmation.

An examination of current research projects that help students develop deep and lasting faith was conducted. Confirmation curriculums and ancient Christian spiritual practices were studied. Confirmation class in the context of First Presbyterian Church, San Mateo, was examined, and changes took place in an attempt to make the connection between deeper faith and ancient spiritual practices. The curriculum was revised, resources were added, and the mentor component was changed. Following the completion of the test groups, each youth was surveyed to determine results.

The three main results of this project are deepened faith of Confirmation class students, renewed mindsets and intentionality on the part of youth leadership at FPCSM, and major improvements in the Confirmation program itself. Further research is needed, especially as Confirmation students begin college. This study is only one piece in shaping of a new era in youth ministry with the context of God's mission throughout the ages.

Content Reader: Gary Sattler, PhD

Words: 214

To my precious wife, Yulia, who always encourages me to shepherd  
the hearts of the next generation

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank First Presbyterian Church, San Mateo, for their commitment to youth ministry and love for this generation. Thank you to Yulia, who proofed my work, the youth ministry team, the youth elder who supported this vision, and to each of our members who prayed for and financially supported me through my studies at Fuller.

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## INTRODUCTION

In September 2006, the Barna Research Group sent shockwaves throughout the American Church by announcing that 61-percent of churched teens disengage from faith community as young adults and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, a Gallup Poll and a LifeWay research study concluded that at least 40-percent, and possibly up to 65-percent, of Christian teens abandon faith at some point after they graduate from youth groups. The Fuller Youth Institute, using a compilation of this data, estimates that 40-to-50-percent of high school graduates fail to continue in their faith.<sup>2</sup> These statistics must be evaluated in light of current youth ministry practices.

In the book *Sticky Faith*, these statistics are translated into a practical example. The writers ask readers to imagine seniors in their youth ministries standing in a line, facing them. “Now, imagine that you ask them to count off by twos, just like you used to do on the playground to divide into teams: ‘1 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . 2 . . .’ The 1s will stick with their faith; the 2s will shelve it.”<sup>3</sup> This example helps put names and faces to data and statistics.

The greatest personal heartbreak in youth ministry is seeing young people who knew and experienced God abandon their faith. Whether this abandonment takes the form of wrong choices or results in complete atheism, it is equally heart-wrenching. For the

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<sup>1</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," <https://www.barna.org> (accessed October 7, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 15.

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

past seven years, as a youth minister in San Mateo, I witnessed this abandonment first-hand, too many times. In 2006, Josh McDowell wrote, “I sincerely believe unless something is done now to change the spiritual state of our young people-you will become the last Christian generation!”<sup>4</sup> He wrote about children who were raised in Christian families, attended church regularly, but remained unchanged. This is unacceptable.

This project attempts to seek a possible remedy for many young people who might abandon God in college through deepening their faith during Confirmation. Introducing ancient spiritual practices to youth connects them to *missio Dei*, God’s mission throughout the ages, and the family of God. This connectedness deepens roots of faith in young people and reduces likelihood of them becoming prodigals. The goal of this Ministry Focus Paper is to develop a Confirmation Program for First Presbyterian Church, San Mateo (FPCSM), California, which results in such connectedness.

One of my overarching goals as Youth Director at FPCSM is to connect youth to *missio Dei*, or God’s mission. This is a recurring theme at youth group and retreats. It was first inspired by a message from Mike King at the National Youth Workers’ Convention in October 2007 (Appendix A: Final Project Timeline). King spoke of connecting youth to God’s grand plan. Young people desire to participate in something bigger than themselves. This yearning is captured in movies, books, and, ultimately, in the Bible. King also introduced a variety of ancient spiritual practices and creative ways to teach them to youth.

In formulating the basis of his book *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry*, King states the importance of connecting youth to a meta-narrative. He devotes an entire

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<sup>4</sup> Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006), 11.

chapter to “Connecting Youth to the Story of God.”<sup>5</sup> King gives numerous examples of ancient spiritual practices and exhorts youth workers to apply these personally, as well as teach them to youth and connect students to *missio Dei*.

The National Youth Workers’ Convention inspired me to begin a cohort at Fuller Seminary on ancient Christian spirituality. Throughout the cohort, I was challenged to take ancient Christian spiritual practices, apply them to my life, and teach them to young people. Confirmation class became a venue to delve into these practices and include them in formation of FPCSM eighth graders. Studying research statistics of how many young people flee faith after high school provided motivation to find a way to deepen FPCSM students’ faith and connection to the Church while still in youth ministry. This became an inspiration for the final project.

In January 2011, a newly revised and updated Confirmation program was launched. Curriculum was rewritten and updated to include ancient spiritual practices. It was intentional about connecting students to *missio Dei* and the family of God throughout the ages. Test group one included eleven students from a wide variety of faith backgrounds. Some were raised in the Church while others knew relatively little about Christianity. The following January, test group two was formed with implemented changes based on feedback and learning from test group one.

This Ministry Focus Paper includes specific teaching ideas, activities, and feedback used during two years of Confirmation classes at FPCSM. The context of San Mateo, California, and First Presbyterian Church is analyzed as well. A literature review,

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<sup>5</sup> Mike King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), Chapter 7.

which covers the latest research on this topic, is included. The revised program is described, and a final assessment is presented.

FPCSM members observe more youth participating in the church's various ministries. Young people join other generations for Sunday morning worship as well. This was not always the case. The current FPCSM youth elder notices more youth connected to the body of Christ than before the project began.

In April 2012, test group two completed the program and participated in an annual event called "Celebration of Faith." There, students shared personal statements of faith written during Confirmation with mentors' help. The statements included students' beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, and the Church. They contained faith testimonies and Scripture verses holding special meaning to the students. Family members, mentors, and friends were invited for an informal gathering with the church elders who listened to young people read their statements and prayed for them.

During Celebration of Faith, Claire, an FPCSM Confirmation student, shared her story. She included a personal poem in her statement of faith. Reading the poem was quite emotional for me. God had performed an amazing miracle in Claire's life, and I was privileged to be an integral part of formation of her faith.

In Claire's statement of faith, she was asked, "How will you use your gifts and talents in the church?" Claire stated, "I want to be able to really lead people to the church and bring people to the Gospel or else I want to learn how to start bringing it to them. I want to learn how to keep serving the Lord on my college campus and how to spread the

Gospel.”<sup>6</sup> At the end of test study two, FPCSM youth leaders witnessed students prepared to deepen their faith in college rather than abandon it. The goal set for this program proved within reach.

As an emphasis on how important this research project is, Claire’s poem testimony from her statement of faith is included in the introduction.

By the color of my skin the world told me I was a majority,  
But all my life I’ve felt like a minority.  
Ridiculed and picked on in middle school  
By the kids that were “cool”.  
I lived my lonely life under the shadow of a hood,  
All the while wishing to change my physical appearance if I could.  
When I got to high school things were better, I felt swell  
And started to come out of my hiding shell.  
For years I was still struggling with depression, but I pushed it away  
Until that one day. . .  
That one day when I broke out with flooding tears,  
That one day I surrendered to all my deathly fears.  
I hated myself from being broken hearted by a boy,  
I felt stupid, useless, and alone; like a forgotten toy.  
I was worthless, depressed and desperate, but I thought I could win  
As I put that blade to my skin.  
It felt good and the pain was real, it was addicting  
To watch the red blood run down my wrist with a slight sting.  
This, I thought, was my only way out  
To get rid of my pain and my doubt.  
But little did I know that someone heard my cry,  
Someone who loves me so much, that for me, he died.  
Then at that moment a light bulb went off in my head  
As I looked at the blood on my wrist and the Bible aside my bed.  
Why shed my own blood when he already shed his for me?  
He bared the ultimate sacrifice upon a tree.  
And I asked; but why?  
Why not just let me die?  
I am nothing but sin and shame,  
Still he called me by name:  
“My precious daughter I made you and you are mine,  
I’ve loved you since the beginning of time.

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<sup>6</sup> Claire Mannisto, "Personal Testimony," (San Mateo, CA: 2012).

You are no mistake, you are beautiful, and you are saved  
Because for you I could not stay inside the grave.  
For I am pure but carried the weight of your sin to the cross  
I bled for you, I died for you, I rose for you and you may never know the cost,  
But you are now pure and free  
To enjoy everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven with me.  
The price has already been paid, you will never be alone  
For Heaven is your home.  
I have had a plan for you here upon this earth  
Even before your birth.  
I've given you a new family that will push you to do your best,  
They are the wonderful and amazing people at First Pres.  
Your life will be exciting and wild,  
But my precious child  
Never forget that I am your father, your best friend, your creator, and your savior  
Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mannisto, "Personal Testimony.”

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### SURVEYING THE CONTEXT OF SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA

The morning of August 24, 2009, was filled with a strange sense of foreboding caused by the frightening sound of helicopters hovering above. A simple text message from a parent read, “Hillsdale evacuated, explosion on campus.” Hillsdale High School students’ faces flashed before my eyes, and a silent prayer was lifted up, “Lord, save and protect them.”

Evidently, a 17-year-old high school drop-out stormed Hillsdale, carrying a chainsaw, sword, and ten pipe bombs. The young man planned to take revenge on his former chemistry teacher and cause massive destruction and death on the school campus. Fortunately, after exploding a pipe bomb in a hallway, he was tackled and pinned to the floor by a brave teacher. Over 1300 students were evacuated and the suspect was promptly arrested. Hillsdale High School teachers were hailed as heroes. The students and surrounding community, however, were gripped with a sense of fear and uncertainty.

## San Mateo: A “Nice” Place for “Nice” People

San Mateo is an otherwise picturesque, quiet city and a beautiful place to raise a family. It is situated about eighteen miles south of San Francisco. Gregory N. Zompolis in his *Images of America* series states, “San Mateo is a place where ‘nice’ has stayed ‘nice.’”<sup>1</sup> From the outside, San Mateo is a nice place full of nice people.

The de Anza expedition claimed San Mateo for Spain back in 1776.<sup>2</sup> The de Anza party was strongly Catholic and named the city after Saint Matthew. San Mateo’s history includes much wealth, spread throughout many large estates by rich land barons. Some estates are still in existence, and a region called “Hillsborough” boasts the wealthiest properties. The city continued to grow and expand since the de Anza expedition, and its roughly twelve square miles now host a population of almost 100,000 people.

Located on a peninsula, San Mateo has its own micro-climate. It is shielded from the Pacific Ocean by mountains but is still within a close drive to beaches. It does not snow or get too cold in winter, and it rarely gets hot in summer. Weather temperatures are, usually, an average seventy degrees Fahrenheit. Thunderstorms are extremely rare, and rainfall is limited to winter months. Most typical spring, summer, and fall forecasts call for sunshine and warm temperatures. There is an average of 265 days per year with some sun and only fifty-nine days with some precipitation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory N. Zompolis, *Images of America: San Mateo* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Bert Sperling, "Sperling's Best Places," [http://www.bestplaces.net/climate/city/california/san\\_mateo](http://www.bestplaces.net/climate/city/california/san_mateo) (accessed September 4, 2012).

In springtime, the air is heavy with orange blossoms and jasmine fragrances. Roses bloom through three seasons, palm trees grace the horizon, and lawns stay green year-round. There is a variety of plant life, from tropical banana plants to giant redwood trees. The air is healthy, and often, the salty ocean smell is pungent.

There are several farmers' markets selling locally-grown, organic produce. One local market initiated a contract with FPCSM, and each Tuesday, from May-to-October, the church's parking lot is filled with vendors offering a wide array of fresh fruits and vegetables. Residents have healthy food available year-round and fresh fish daily at Princeton-by-the-Sea harbor. CNN Money ranks San Mateo County number twelve of the top twenty-five counties with the highest life expectancies; it averages eighty years.<sup>4</sup>

Schools are prestigious, and many opportunities abound in this community. They include seven public high schools, two private schools, one alternative school, one adult school, and a community college. There are two libraries, park districts, hospitals, swim schools, parks, and endless educational opportunities. Among such are "immersion" schools, which "immerse" children into a foreign language through an entire day of learning, encompassing every subject.

Homeschool families have boundless opportunities to connect with local support and play groups. Churches offer preschools, language classes, tutoring, daycare, and numerous children's camps. Parents take advantage of summer Vacation Bible Camps, and many children attend multiple camps at local churches. For some, FPCSM's summer

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Amster-Burton, "Best Places for a Long Life," [http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2008/moneymag/0809/gallery.bestplaces\\_lifeexpect.moneymag/12.html](http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2008/moneymag/0809/gallery.bestplaces_lifeexpect.moneymag/12.html) (accessed May 14, 2012).

camp is the third church camp in a row. In some cases of overlapping curriculums, children learn the same songs and stories throughout the summer.

*Bay Area Parent* magazine is distributed monthly to advertise numerous opportunities available to parents in this area. The May 2012 issue took up sixty-two pages and provided the ability to “browse hundreds of kids’ camps.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to international and sports camps, there were aviation, culinary, martial arts, Lego, Karate, ice skating, writing, equestrian, and music camps, just to name a few. An activity calendar encompassed the final eighteen pages of the magazine.

There are creative ways to lavishly celebrate children’s birthdays. Parents hire magicians, princesses, ponies, and even “the Lizard Lady” comes for birthday festivities. The area’s youth announce, plan, and prepare for their birthdays months in advance. One young lady celebrated her “birthday week,” which was packed with activities and celebrations leading up to, including, and following her calendar birthday.

San Mateo’s location allows residents to easily commute north to San Francisco or south to Silicon Valley for employment opportunities. Average travel time amounts to twenty minutes, with availability of various public transportation options and several major highways. Some residents hold a job with the same company for years while others switch positions as new companies emerge and others cease to exist.

Demographically, San Mateo is composed of three primary races. According to the 2010 US Census, 46.5-percent of residents are white, 26.6-percent are Hispanic or of

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<sup>5</sup> Dominion Media, *Bay Area Parent* (Santa Clara, CA: Dominion Enterprises).

Latino origin, and 18.9-percent are Asian.<sup>6</sup> The small percentage of Alaska Native, American Indian, Black, and Native Hawaiian persons reside in San Mateo. The city also includes a rather large Brazilian and Russian constituency. Ethnic groups seem to keep to themselves, for the most part, speaking their native languages and shopping in specialty stores. In a two-block radius of FPCSM, there are stores, martial arts studios, spas, and restaurants, which cater to Chinese, European, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mediterranean, Mexican, Russian, Thai, and Vietnamese cultures.

San Mateo County schools are superb. Hillsdale High School is recognized as having exceptional status. FPCSM youth attend this local high school. In 2008 (a year before the young man tried to take deadly revenge), *Newsweek* magazine ranked Hillsdale in the top 2-percent of high schools in the country. This was a jump in ranking from 717 in 2007 to 423 in 2008, giving it “rising star” status. Dividing students into smaller, more intimate learning communities was noted as attributing to the school’s success.<sup>7</sup> Hillsdale was not the only excellent institution mentioned. Thirty-six Bay Area schools were included in *Newsweek*’s rankings of America’s top schools.

Many area high school students take advanced placement courses to receive college credits for high school classes. Some overachieving students take three-to-four such classes in a school year. These courses are rigorous and require additional studying. They are the most intense and difficult classes a high school student can take. One

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<sup>6</sup> US Census Bureau, "San Mateo, California," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0668252.html> (accessed January 13, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Jay Mathews, "Small Schools Rising," *Newsweek* (May 17, 2008), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/05/17/small-schools-rising.html> (accessed May 5, 2012).

FPCSM youth was accepted into a prestigious middle college program where she took classes on the local college campus while finishing her high school credits.

Campus activities, clubs, sports, and opportunities abound. Area schools have radio stations, laboratories, plays, musicals, bands, and every sporting activity imaginable. High schools even have outdoor swimming pools for students to participate in swimming and play water polo. There is pressure to be involved in these activities, which look appealing on college applications. Each one requires commitment and dedication. Morning, afternoon, and evening practices are mandatory, and weekends are compulsory. Unfortunately, this myriad of amazing activities results in missed church time for families and sporadic youth group attendance.

Financial price to live in San Mateo is high. The cost of living is 93.8-percent higher than the rest of the United States.<sup>8</sup> According to the US Census Bureau, the median household income in San Mateo is \$86,772, and the median value of owner-occupied houses \$740,600.<sup>9</sup> These figures are significantly above the state and national averages. The percentage of citizens living in poverty is a low 5.9-percent, while the California average is 14.4-percent.<sup>10</sup>

Beautifully landscaped houses and driveways are often empty. Residents who are not retired work long hours and are very career-oriented. Extensive working hours and daily commutes characterize many in this city. The overwhelming drive to achieve and

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<sup>8</sup> Bert Sperling, "Sperling's Best Places," [www.bestplaces.net/city/california/san\\_mateo](http://www.bestplaces.net/city/california/san_mateo) (accessed January 12, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> US Census Bureau, "San Mateo California."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

accomplish permeates the area. Even in the Church, there is a tendency to overwork and be spread thin for the Gospel. Some have difficulty taking an actual day off and act guilty about vacation, in which case they are still fully accessible by e-mail and cell phone.

People, for the most part, are private and very busy. After seven years in the neighborhood, my wife and I still do not know our neighbors well. Everyone is “nice,” but no one gets too close. On one occasion, FPCSM pastor tried to set up social meetings with neighbors. Many were unresponsive or offered an excuse not to meet.

The new website called “Next Door 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue Neighborhood” offers residents a virtual way to get to know one another. Next Door is a company based in San Francisco, offering services to local neighborhood residents within their communities. It is a website similar to Facebook, but intended for local-area residents only. One cannot join the group if living outside the local neighborhood. Amongst other things, residents can post information about themselves, inquire about a dentist, and secure a babysitter.

A recent neighborhood posting was titled “Odd Occurrence in Neighborhood This Morning.” Apparently, a woman kept knocking on residents’ doors, asking if they knew Spanish, and then leaving hurriedly. One neighbor alerted police and let local residents know that someone could be casing houses for robberies. Through reading such postings, a feeling of connection to neighbors is gained, although not in a personal way.

### **The Real Price Tag: Youth**

San Mateo community looks picture perfect on the outside; however, the incident with the suspect exploding a pipe bomb at Hillsdale High School reminds residents that appearances can be deceiving. There exists a downside to wealth, abundance, and

opportunity, and there is a price for the “nice” life in the “nice” community.

Unfortunately, youth of this community pay that price.

Area youth are greatly impacted by abundance and wealth. These young people desire to obtain the latest clothes, trips, and technology. Some are even tired of trips to Disneyland. Having been there many times, they find it “the land of boredom” rather than “The Happiest Place on Earth.®” In light of this, mission trips are paramount. They show young people how others live and that people can be happy with much less in their lives.

Since this is an area of constant movement and stimulation, activities are extremely important in young people’s lives, and they fill days and evenings with numerous events, clubs, and sports. One girl was disgusted by a college visit where she felt there was nothing to do. She wants to always be involved in doing something. Youth group students continuously ask for games, beach trips, bonfires, ski trips, camping trips, and other amusements. A previous youth ministries elder once announced that FPCSM youth director was not charged with finding entertainment opportunities, but with promoting young people’s spiritual well-being. Games and activities can crowd out opportunities for spiritual growth, worship, and sharing the Gospel.

The area’s great sensuality affects youth as well. Henri Nouwen describes living in California as both exciting and disturbing. He writes of intense beauty and continuous visual stimulation in this state. Nouwen portrays the area as very sensual, but with little grounding. He writes:

The body is central. The sun, the beaches, the water, and the lushness of nature open up all the senses. But it is hard to experience the body as the temple of the spirit. That requires a very special discipline. To reach that inner sanctum where God’s voice can be heard and obeyed is not easy if you are always called outward. It is not surprising that California has become a place where many spiritual

disciplines are being discovered, studied, and practiced. There are many meditation centers—Buddhist, Christian and nonreligious. More and more people feel a need to discover an inner anchor to keep themselves whole in the midst of a sensual world.<sup>11</sup>

Hillsdale High School holds an annual dance show called Knight Moves. In 2008, an opening number was a scene from the musical *Chicago*. High school girls in revealing costumes danced in cages under red lights. These young ladies bought into modern culture's desire for sensuality and saw nothing embarrassing about their youth director attending such performance. This sensuality includes media consumed daily by students. Movies, television, videos, plays, and videogames provide constant stimulation. Youtube videos are available, even from cell phones, with much uncensored content.

Technology is of utmost importance, and many youth group students receive new cell phones and iPods at least once a year. When new iPhones come out, a line starts forming outside stores the night before. On one occasion, a young lady tossed her cell phone down the youth room stairs, hoping it would break so that her mom would buy a new one. Another young lady's phone was confiscated by her school for continuous usage in class. She was not supposed to get it back for a few weeks, but her parent bought a new one in the meantime. On a recent mission trip, the youth were not allowed to bring cell phones. A student had hers out and continued using it. Shortly after it was confiscated, the truth emerged that she started using a back-up phone.

Text messaging is an obsession for many young people. They constantly send messages back-and-forth. Youth wake up at night to send and answer texts. A young man's parents were worried that he had accumulated over five thousand text messages a

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<sup>11</sup> Henri Nouwen and Robert Durback, *Seeds of Hope : A Henri Nouwen Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Image Books, 1997), 117.

month. He used his phone at family dinners, events, in school, at church, and late at night. The parents decided to take away the phone for some time and set limits on when and how much it could be used.

Text messaging is proven addictive. The source of addiction takes place in the brain. Doctors say texting and instant satisfaction of getting a return text flood the brain's pleasure center with dopamine. Denise Dador reported on the question, "Is Your Teenager Addicted to Texting" in an ABC news broadcast. She quoted brain specialist Michael Seyffert, "Neuro-imaging studies have shown that those kids who are texting have that area of the brain light up the same as an addict using heroin."<sup>12</sup>

As with previous generations, friends are of utmost importance in modern youth's lives. Research posted by the NYU Child Study Center concludes, "Starting young and continuing through adulthood, friendships are among the most important activities in life."<sup>13</sup> Teenagers spend a significant amount of time with friends. Often, this interaction takes the form of Internet chat, Facebook, Skype, and the preferred method of communication, text messaging. Contemporary youth have virtual friends they never met in person. Unfortunately, one young lady discovered that the young man she had been in a year-long Internet relationship with was an older Hispanic male, very different from the posted picture and not who he claimed to be in person.

Three deep personal needs of FPCSM youth are belonging, identity, and spiritual fulfillment. Young people with defined roles at FPCSM and in youth group feel they

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<sup>12</sup> Denise Dador, "Is Your Teenager Addicted to Texting?"  
[http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?section=news/health/your\\_health&id=7625667](http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?section=news/health/your_health&id=7625667) (accessed May 19, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Anita Gurian and Alice Pope, "Do Kids Need Friends?"  
[http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/do\\_kids\\_need\\_friends](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/do_kids_need_friends) (accessed January 13, 2013).

belong and stay connected. If they feel like outsiders, they do not come back. Modern youth look for a sense of identity and discover who they are as individuals. They are drawn to mission trips and service projects because such opportunities give them an identity beyond themselves. Contemporary youth also seek spiritual fulfillment. They are attracted to spiritual experiences and are increasingly interested in ancient practices in search for God.

### **Area Pressures that Youth Face**

The biggest outside pressures FPCSM youth face daily are drugs, alcohol, and sex. This generation, more than any other, faces a peer group and society that see nothing wrong with these pressures. Parties abound, and parents let underage students host them. Beer, hard alcohol, and wine coolers are easily obtained by young people in this area. Prom season, graduations, dances, football games, or just a Friday night, become occasions to party. My neighbor is in his senior year at Catholic high school. A typical Friday night ends with his friends shouting loud goodbyes in FPCSM parking lot for thirty minutes and leaving empty beer cans for church members to find on Sunday morning. This young man's parents also allow a girlfriend to spend the night with him.

Tolerance is the ideology presented in schools and at home. Modern young people are taught that every type of religious and sexual practice is acceptable. One student attends a Catholic private school where she learned biblical arguments that homosexuality is a normal and acceptable practice. Today's youth, unlike other generations, come in daily contact with peers who profess various lifestyles. Hillsdale High School, along with many other high schools, has a LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual,

transgender) club on campus. In 2010, the Hillsdale theater department performed a production called “The Laramie Project.” The play depicted the story of Matthew Shepard, a twenty-one-year-old gay man who was killed. Hillsdale’s performance gained attention of the infamous Westboro Baptist “Church.” They threatened to picket the school and bring a message of hate to San Mateo. Hillsdale responded with a “Love Fest” demonstration, and members of Westboro never showed up.

Other sexual attitudes include living unmarried with a partner. Marriage is considered irrelevant and old-fashioned, although gay marriage is a popular topic. One young lady whose parent supports co-habitation asked a young man if he was going to live with his girlfriend. Additionally, many students engage in pre-marital sex, which leads to aborting an unwanted pregnancy. The pressure to be in a relationship and to find “love” is intense.

There is much recreational marijuana use in this area, along with other drugs. Since 1996, in California, marijuana for medical use is legal. Shops and growers are found where people with a medical marijuana card can purchase enough of the drug to relieve health problems. In 2010, a ballot measure (Proposition 19) was introduced to allow individuals over the age of twenty-one to grow and possess up to an ounce of marijuana for “recreational” use. Ultimately, voters rejected it, but drugs are still easily obtained and grown.

The Cave Smoke Shop is located about two blocks from FPCSM. Purple neon lights advertise its existence, and all windows are blacked out. The store is filled with overwhelming sensations, including the smell of smoke, the sight of neon, and the sounds of Bob Marley’s music. An ATM machine is available at the entrance, and display cases

are filled with “bubblers,” “pipes,” “papers,” and a myriad of other smoking devices. During a recent visit for research purposes, I observed a woman ask the clerk about some bottles in a refrigerated case. She had a drug test coming up the following day and was looking for a drink to mask the drugs in her system and fool the test. He recommended a drink to be consumed an hour before the test.

A sign on the door announced the age limit of eighteen years or older to enter the store; however, this was not thoroughly enforced. A teenage boy and girl came into the store. The boy was clearly familiar with the place. He asked the clerk for advice on the best of something, but the content of their discussion was unheard. A place only two blocks away from the church and home felt like visiting a different world.

Several magazines on the counter advertised smoke shops and places to buy medical marijuana. Some offered coupons for new patients and special promotions from drug shops. Several stores even offered to pay the sales tax on marijuana for customers. (The state of California receives between fifty-and-one-hundred million dollars in revenue from the billion-dollar medical marijuana industry.)<sup>14</sup> Free publications also included organic growers, growing tips, and several recipes.

Another pressure youth face stems from parents. The area’s young people are pushed to excel and succeed. Many youth take two-to-three advanced placement courses per year, not to mention numerous after school sports, clubs, and commitments. Many California universities are now overcrowded, and some admit more out-of-state students to receive higher tuition. School budgets are cut, and universities accept fewer students

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<sup>14</sup> Trish Regan, "Marijuana Inc.: Inside America's Pot Industry," <http://www.cnn.com/id/28281668> (accessed January 13, 2013).

and give out fewer scholarships. The university application process is now more rigorous than ever, and many good students are not accepted into the colleges of their choice. Poor grades are punished, and parents urge children to fill out college applications and visit campuses early in high school. SAT tests and scores are extremely important, although in one instance, a young man left from an all-night laser tag event to an SAT test.

### **Spirituality and Practices**

The San Francisco Bay area is described as one of, if not the most, unchurched areas of the United States. There is openness for and tolerance of all kinds of un-Christian spiritual and alternative practices. A neighbor recently had a wedding in her backyard, which featured prayer to God mixed with Buddhist readings. Psychics and Christian Science reading rooms are mixed with various churches. People in this area seek spiritual experiences and have a great interest in spirituality.

The first church built in San Mateo was Roman Catholic. It was blessed in 1864. Since that time, Catholicism has been the major religion of the area. According to City-Data.com, 41.9-percent of San Mateo residents are affiliated with a religious congregation, almost 10-percent lower than the national average. Of those adherents, almost 70-percent are affiliated with the Catholic Church. Presbyterians make up a meager 3.5-percent, slightly more than the Mormon Church.<sup>15</sup>

FPCSM students talk about Karma, learn Confucian philosophy in school, and are taught a mix-and-match spirituality. Beliefs exist that only parts of the Bible are true, so one can take highlights of various religions and mix them like a personalized Starbucks'

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<sup>15</sup> Advameg Inc., "San Mateo, California," <http://www.city-data.com/city/San-Mateo-California.html> (accessed September 5, 2012).

drink. Youth are taught to choose ideas that appeal and make sense, while leaving out the ones they do not understand or agree with. The prevailing attitude is that it all goes together, heaven is what you want it to be, and all roads lead to God. A young lady at FPCSM startled her church-going family by announcing she did not really believe in the Resurrection because “it seemed like a strange thing,” and she did not know if it could actually happen. Without realizing it, she took out the key foundation of Christianity by removing belief in the Resurrection.

In accordance with national statistics, numerous young people graduate high school, leave youth ministry, and abandon Christianity in college. FPCSM youth leadership team read *Sticky Faith* and utilized its principles in youth group, Sunday school, and a class for parents. These elements (ancient practices and connecting youth to *missio Dei* and the Church) were incorporated into Confirmation classes. If youth do not understand the key elements of faith, and if they are open to pick and choose elements of spirituality and the Bible, then, their faith will not be lasting. FPCSM leadership team and congregation walk hand-in-hand with students as they face temptations and go through difficulties of life. As FPCSM young people develop deep faith, built solidly on Jesus Christ, they will carry it through college and into adulthood.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPLORING THE CONTEXT OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FPCSM was established at the end of World War II out of a Sunday school that met on Twenty-Fifth Avenue. The church's location proved favorable, since the southern area of San Mateo was a place of growth and expansion during post-war years. During the growth period (1965-1971), FPCSM pastor was well-liked, well-spoken, and very active in community. After only five years at the church, however, he accepted a position as president of a college and left. In the early-1970s, the area's rapid growth started to decline, and FPCSM began what was described as a descent from its "golden years."<sup>1</sup>

The gradual slide impacted both spiritual and emotional life of the church. FPCSM decision-makers responded to decline by offering numerous solutions, ideas, and programs, which they thought would bring back prosperity. Many solutions either were not put into effect or did not achieve desired results. The outcome was frustration, distrust, anger, and exertion of power and control.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Allen et al., "First Presbyterian Church of San Mateo Mission Study Report," (2006), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

During the decline years 1972-2000, spiritual life of FPCSM body matured and deepened. The emphasis shifted from a “country club” mentality to a congregation of depth that focused on missions and evangelism. Semi-annual mission teams traveled to Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. FPCSM mission statement during that time was “grow and go.”<sup>3</sup> A weekend visit by Delores Winder in 1985 started a healing prayer ministry. Other important ministries included “Apple of Gold” life discipleship series (1985-1992), “Dunamis” power ministry series (1999-2003), and “Alpha” evangelism courses (1999-2004).<sup>4</sup>

By the late-1980s, decline in membership continued, but a staff of three ordained pastors, a full-time minister of music, and a part-time children’s education supervisor continued employment. The senior pastor from 1992-2004 had many strong supporters, but others found him ineffective in his ability to lead multiple church staff members. During his fourth year as pastor, eleven staff members left. The reason stated by exiting staff was their perception of a lack of support from the pastor.<sup>5</sup> With each staff person’s exit, additional members left the church angry and upset.

Decline in staff and membership led to financial losses and inability to carry out programs. The second worship service was cancelled, and Sunday school program was restructured. FPCSM staff decreased to two ordained members, one of whom also held the position of worship minister. In 2004, both pastors resigned.

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<sup>3</sup> Allen et al., “First Presbyterian Church of San Mateo Mission Study Report,” 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

During the time without a pastor, Session provide strong leadership and congregational care.<sup>6</sup> Pulpit services were supplied by neighboring churches and pastors. Every week two elders were on-call to serve congregational care needs. From 2005-to-2008, an interim (temporary) pastor served the church while a search committee met and interviewed candidates for the position of permanent pastor. The interim pastor commuted from across the bay and was on-campus only twice a week and on Sunday mornings. During the lengthy search process, morale was down, and attendance was low, but stable. Session and staff members used that time to try new ideas and step forward to fill the leadership void.

In 2008, the search committee presented FPCSM congregation with the new permanent pastor. A middle-aged man with young children was chosen, in part, to help attract the coveted demographic of young families. As church membership declined, the main demographic in FPCSM body were the elderly. Upon the new pastor's arrival, several issues, which had been ignored during the interim period, were immediately addressed and several staff members were asked to leave or put on probation.

During the time period from 2008-to-present, FPCSM finally entered a period of slow growth after decades of decline. Several factors contributed to the current period of growth. Stability of the permanent pastor, other staff members, and the leadership team play a significant role. FPCSM pastor is committed to the church, addresses issues head-on, and is dedicated to stay and shepherd the flock through both good and bad times. The pastor is actively involved in the life of the congregation, down-to-earth, and

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<sup>6</sup> Session is the governing body of elders within Presbyterian Church structure.

approachable by church members. He is also open to new ideas and willing to examine why the church does things, as well as end programs if they are no longer working.

The other staff members are also dedicated and have been involved in the church through several seasons of ministry. The children's director has been on staff for nine years, the youth director, seven years, the discipleship director, five years, and the worship director, three years. This stability in staff leads to a sense of trust in the congregation and allows for deeper relationships within individual ministries. There is stability within ministry teams as well. Youth team leaders are consistent. Session members are also longstanding individuals dedicated to the church, some of whom serve multiple consecutive terms.

Children's and youth ministries are flourishing. This results in an ever-increasing number of young families visiting the church, becoming members, and stepping forward in leadership positions. As youth and children's lives are impacted by weekly programs, a ripple effect happens in their families' lives.

There is commitment to truth and sound doctrine, as well as to leading and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. In 2009, the San Francisco Presbytery approved ordination of a homosexual minister. The individual had been seeking ordination for twenty years. This was the beginning of much debate and disagreement among Presbyterian churches regarding fundamental values and beliefs. Although the flagship organization of FPCSM veers from the truth, the church remains committed to following the Bible. The pastor and Session are committed to uphold truth, even if it may mean changing the church's name and, eventually, leaving the denomination.

FPCSM also remained faithful to being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Although some Presbyterian churches, typically, do not emphasize or frequently acknowledge the Holy Spirit, FPCSM sought to be a congregation led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. During the 1980s-1990s, a powerful revival took place at FPCSM. Many people were filled with the Holy Spirit, manifested spiritual gifts, and witnessed miraculous healings take place. The church still relies upon the Holy Spirit for leading, guiding, and empowering.

### **Mission, Values, and Focus**

At a Session retreat meeting in 2011, staff and elders formulated a new mission statement for the church. Previously, it expressed a desire to be “empowered by the Holy Spirit to worship, know, and make Christ known.” After much discussion and prayer, a new, more practical mission statement was created. It read, “The mission of FPCSM is to honor God by helping people become fully-devoted followers of Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> Along with the mission statement, ten values were affirmed. FPCSM values Jesus Christ as Lord, loving God wholeheartedly, God’s Word as foundational, equipping all for ministry, telling God’s Good News, generosity, compassion and social justice, prayer and healing, children, youth, families, and community.<sup>8</sup>

The youth ministries mission statement is similar to the church’s mission. It states, “Our mission is to guide students to develop a relationship with God to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, and train students to worship and serve through

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<sup>7</sup> First Presbyterian Church San Mateo, "Mission & Values," [www.fpcsm.org/AboutUsMissionandValues.html](http://www.fpcsm.org/AboutUsMissionandValues.html) (accessed January 13, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> The corporate goal throughout 2011 and 2012 is “for each youth team leader to stay connected with the youth (particularly outside of youth group), share our life experiences with them and mentor them.”

The theme verse for FPCSM youth ministry is Psalm 24:6, “Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.”<sup>10</sup> It is an aspiration to see this generation of young people not only seek information and knowledge about God, but also know him personally in a face-to-face relationship. The youth team’s desire is for each young person to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

FPCSM always held a high regard and special emphasis on missions, with 10-percent of the church’s offerings going back to the mission field. In addition, each year, a Lenten offering is collected to raise funds for a special mission. For the past two years, this offering was dedicated to an organization called “She is Safe,” which helps meet great needs of women and children in Indonesia. Each year, an amount over \$25,000 was raised. Mission trips are encouraged, and members travel both in groups and individually. Moreover, missionaries regularly speak and give updates on Sunday mornings.

Emphasis on missions exists within youth ministry as well. It is especially needed in this area of wealth and abundance, and it allows youth to focus on something outside themselves. There is, typically, a spring weekend trip and a summer week-long mission trip. Two young ladies in youth group were so excited to participate in overseas mission

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<sup>9</sup> First Presbyterian Church San Mateo, "Youth Ministry," <http://www.fpcsm.org/Youth.html> (accessed January 13, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version Bible (1985), unless otherwise noted.

trips they signed up individually with an organization called “Global Expeditions” and went on a three-week trip to Panama. After enduring a regiment of anti-malaria pills and completing a round of vaccinations, the youth were ready for an adventure. The “Survivor” style trip placed them in an area with no running water or electricity, and they slept in hammocks. In the end, however, both young ladies shared powerful testimonies of the ways God had transformed their hearts.

### **People and Structures**

Although there is an influx of young families and a typical service includes sounds of crying babies, the majority of FPCSM congregation consists of older generation members. The 2011 statistical report listed 299 active members (adults who took membership classes and youth who completed Confirmation). Among them, 120 are over sixty-five years old (40-percent), eighty are between the ages of forty-six and sixty-five (27-percent), and ninety-nine are forty-five and under (33-percent). Ten members passed away in the year 2011.<sup>11</sup> Usually, attendance on Sunday mornings is 185, and this includes regular attendees who are not official members of the church.

College students and young adults are rarities at FPCSM, even though there is a large community college within the city. Many youth leave for college and occasionally come back to visit. The high cost of real estate makes it difficult for young adults to live in San Mateo, and many young families move to less expensive parts of the country. It is also challenging to find leadership for ministry to this age group.

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<sup>11</sup> Melissa Brumbaugh, "Presbyterian Church USA Church Report 2011."

Another section of the report is titled “Christian Education.” It covers the numbers of children and youth attending Sunday school classes and weekly programs. Seventy teachers take care of 376 babies, children, and youth.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that 376 individuals are part of some aspect of Christian Education, while only 185 attend Sunday morning worship.

All twelve of FPCSM elders are white, along with 259 out of 299 members. There are twenty Asian, seven Black, seven Hispanic, three Middle Eastern, and two African members.<sup>13</sup> It must be noted that a separate Hispanic service meets on Sunday afternoons and a Brazilian service in the evenings. The majority white congregation does not reflect surrounding community. Demographics within FPCSM youth group are somewhat similar, with the exception of an increased Asian representation. There are forty regularly attending high school students and twenty middle school youth. Most young people are white. There are seven Asian, two Hispanic students, and one bi-racial youth.

FPCSM is structured like most Presbyterian churches, with a board of elders and deacons. The Presbyterian Church-structure is led by elders, with the head pastor serving as moderator of Session. They determine the vision, specify the mission, and make major decisions for the church. This structure also consists of various ministry teams led by elders. Deacons are responsible for hospitality and congregational care. FPCSM’s deacons oversee a certain number of members (parish), which is divided equally among eleven of them. They visit sick members and call those within their parish who stopped attending. The youth leadership team consists of one elder, one staff person,

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<sup>12</sup> Brumbaugh, "Presbyterian Church USA Church Report 2011."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

and five other adults, ranging in age from twenty-five-to-fifty. The team members have been in leadership between one-to-six years. There is good consistency in leadership, and new leaders are recruited and mentored.

### **General Ministries and Programs**

Children's ministry at FPCSM is the largest and fastest growing. The children's director has been on staff for nine years. One ministry highlight is summer vacation Bible camp. The camp encompasses virtually every square inch of the church. Every classroom and closet is used to accommodate a vast number of children who enroll for the camp. Last year, the director had to place a hold on registration because the church building and volunteers were at the upper limit. In 2011, 268 children from preschool through sixth grade enrolled in camp. Numerous youth and adult volunteers assist in its operation. The week ends with a well-attended performance in FPCSM Sanctuary that highlights music and stories from the week.

Kingdom Club is the weekly children's program that runs during fall and spring semesters. Each Wednesday night, over one hundred children have dinner, play games, make crafts, sing songs, and learn about the Bible. At the end of each semester, children perform in a musical with songs and skits they learn throughout the year. Kingdom Club is also at full capacity; even "bring-a-friend" nights were eliminated from the calendar. This program provides a good transition for fifth grade students leaving Kingdom Club into youth group. Many middle and high school student leaders assist with various aspects of the program.

Three years ago, the Pacific Coast Farmers Market Association approached FPCSM and requested to use its parking lot for a weekly, local Farmers' Market. Session perceived this as an opportunity to reach community by inviting people into the church's parking lot. In conjunction with vendors selling fresh produce, specialty items, and crafts, FPCSM sets up a jump house and craft tables for children. The church opens the playground area, which was upgraded for this purpose. Volunteers from the congregation are solicited to run children's activities and start conversations with parents while children play. Several families connected to the church through this outreach.

The tagline for FPCSM is "a church for the community." This value resulted from the initial Farmers' Market outreach. The tagline is emphasized throughout various church ministries. FPCSM members are exhorted to come to the Farmers' Market and not only buy produce but also make connections with community. Sermons are given about reaching out to community, which, overall, has a high regard for the church.

The yearly Live Nativity is another gift to community and is held on the front lawn of the church. Local residents look forward to this event and stop by to see Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, angels, shepherds, wise men, and even cows and donkeys. The event held on that evening now consists of an extra component called "Carols and Cupcakes." The sanctuary is filled with families who sing traditional carols, enjoy cupcakes, and watch a puppet show.

A block party was started two years ago to provide another venue for reaching out to community. On the second Sunday in October, the entire business district block of Twenty-Fifth Avenue is closed to traffic. The street is set-up with food vendors, games,

jump houses, live music, a fire truck, and a classic car show. The event is completely free and is another gift to community.

The Alpha program returned in 2012. Many members remember its success from the “golden years” of the church. It is a weekly meeting where members invite their non-Christian friends to join for food and discussions about Christianity. Since Alpha was an effective tool for evangelism in the past, it was re-launched at FPCSM in October 2012.

Several past programs ended or are close to an end. The “Corvettes” group that once consisted of lively young families became a group of retired friends and slowly faded out in 2011. The “Circle” groups of elderly Presbyterian women officially disbanded in 2012. The members were no longer physically able to hold annual luncheons and retreats or regularly meet together. The “Sowers and Reapers” ministry still continues to make handmade quilts for an annual quilt auction. The pastor wisely started a monthly seniors’ lunch forum where the elderly members can come together, celebrate birthdays, and discuss issues they face. It helps this important segment of the congregation feel valued, loved, and cared for.

Young families’ events are now gaining popularity. Various individuals tried to hold outings and activities focused directly on the demographic of young families. One couple is now hosting bi-monthly Bible studies for this age group at their house. Events targeting young families usually involve an element of fun and fellowship. A marriage conference was held in January, 2013, as a ministry to young families.

FPCSM has a part-time director of discipleship ministries on staff. Various adult Bible studies and prayer groups meet at different times throughout the week. During the “golden years,” the Sunday school hour was a prime vehicle for discipleship. A variety of

classes were offered throughout the church campus. Now, the biggest Sunday school attendees are children. Along with middle school students, they stay in the main service for the first twenty minutes of worship. Then they are released to age-based classes for the remaining service time. Typically, there are eighty children in these classes, along with their teachers and nursery workers. There was some success with church-wide Sunday school classes in the second hour, but attendance is not consistent.

College students at FPCSM are a minority. The last several years featured a college Sunday where students on break participate in planning and leading of the service. Leadership for ministry to this age group is difficult to find, and this demographic is hard to reach. Youth leaders continue to keep contact with college youth, and some students are invited back to intern or help in ministry during summer months.

### **Youth Ministry at FPCSM**

Over the years, several youth directors ministered at FPCSM. Each time a youth director left the church, the ministry started to die, and a new director basically started from scratch. Especially during the months between directors, volunteers found it difficult to keep youth ministry afloat. In 2005, it consisted of a few volunteers, three middle school youth, and ten high school youth. It survived for almost a year without a staff person and needed to be reestablished.

Presently, weekly attendance at youth groups averages twenty middle school youth and thirty high school students. The 2012 summer mission trip had thirty-three youth and seven adults signed up for a week to serve Yakama people in Washington. Thirty youth serve in leadership with weekly children's programs. Youth group

participants' background became increasingly more reflective of population as a whole. There is still a number of young people raised in the church whose parents are regular church attendees. In the past two years, as students continued to invite friends to youth groups and events, population shifted to include more at-risk youth from families outside church. Some young people attempt suicide, cut themselves, have abortions, and take an array of anti-depressants.

During a youth group in 2011, a young lady sat in the middle of the street, wanting a car to run over and end her life. This incident revealed a need for leaders to receive more training in crisis intervention. FPCSM youth team invited counselors for training meetings and completed a book study on assisting youth through crisis situations. The team felt ill-equipped to handle new situations students faced. Legal implications, as well as types of situations to be reported to authorities, were also discussed.

Youth group format changed over the past seven years. Initially, there was an expectation that games would take central focus in youth group. Some parents even referred to it as "game night" at the church. A shift away from games took place, and currently, high school students do not have any game time. Middle school youth, however, still need the physical activity games provide. There is emphasis on biblical teaching, discussion, application, prayer, and worship.

In 2010, a youth band emerged, providing worship for FPCSM youth groups. The format was altered to allow middle and high school youth groups an overlapping half-hour of worship together. The worship band survived various leadership changes, and in 2012, welcomed the youngest band members in its history. Current members are focused on and devoted to worship. They truly understand what it means to lead worship and are

committed to leading for God's glory, not their own. Addition of worship changed the entire atmosphere of youth group.

Mission trips represent a key component of youth ministry at FPCSM. Every year, youth register, fundraise, and train for a week-long summer mission trip. They register in the fall and commit to activities throughout the school year and summer weeks prior to the trip. These trips provide great opportunities for bonding within the group and help leaders build relationships with students.

In 2010, leadership decided to drop an annual ski trip and offer an intense, weekend-long mission trip to the inner-city of San Francisco. This decision continued to change the focus of youth ministry from a "games mentality" to worship and service for the Lord. On the first weekend trip, two young ladies rededicated their lives to God and went back to intern in San Francisco at the missions agency. That year, a small group of students attended a local revival conference. Several youth were filled with the Holy Spirit and ignited a new passion for God in youth group. This was when high school games stopped because youth prayed and worshipped, and the group simply did not have enough time to play a game. Youth repented of sin and came to know God in a real and tangible way. They were inspired to worship and share Jesus with friends.

Additionally, the last several years brought forth an increase in student leadership. Presently, there are almost thirty youth serving in weekly children's programs. One mature high school youth directs student leaders during the Wednesday night program. God spoke to him to give up a sports commitment at school and focus on ministry. He and a few friends also help lead middle school games at youth group. Students serve in

the nursery during the Sunday service, at youth group, and on youth Sunday. A few even initiated a small group Bible study that met several times.

The next major transition will take place in the summer of 2013. Currently, many students, including strong leaders, are seniors in high school. When they leave for college, a large void will be left. These young people invited the largest number of friends to join youth group. During the current school year, emphasis is placed on friendship evangelism and providing opportunities for students to bring friends to youth group and personally share the Gospel with them.

The other focus is on transitioning students into college years. Such training will, hopefully, lessen the chance of them falling away from Christ upon leaving youth group. Leadership studies on *Sticky Faith* and curriculum materials in the series are used to assist with this change. Teachings on this transition take place during youth groups and Sunday school classes.

### **Obstacles and Opportunities for a Revised Confirmation Program**

Significant changes in FPCSM's youth Confirmation program will face some obstacles and opportunities. An increase in commitment and extension to the program could potentially cause youth to reconsider joining amid the overcommitted environment. Both young people and their parents are overbooked, and adding another significant commitment may create a roadblock to youth wanting to be confirmed. Overcoming this obstacle would involve showing the value of the Confirmation process to both youth and parents. Some of them, especially those raised in the church, see the value and already

plan to join in eighth grade. As new students join youth group, the concept of Confirmation has to be explained in its entirety.

Another obstacle will be lack of zeal for the Bible and the church by some Confirmation students who join because of their parents' expectations. Some grew up in the church and think they know everything about the Bible and Christianity. In order to overcome this obstacle, it will be important to model zeal for the Bible and present familiar concepts in new and interesting ways. Allowing for questions and discussion will also be helpful. Lack of support for changes to the program by the head pastor, staff members, and parents could present a different problem. Some may want to leave the process as it has always been. The good news is that, presently, support for changes in the Confirmation program is provided on all fronts.

The revised Confirmation program will present opportunities to significantly deepen young people's faith. They will have a chance to grow in their relationship with God and begin to understand the foundational doctrines of Christianity. Students will ask questions, discuss relevant topics, and be mentored in their faith. Finally, they will be challenged to express their beliefs through a personal statement of faith. In addition, the revised program will include an emphasis on *missio Dei*, challenge students to be part of something greater than themselves, and encourage them to connect with the body of Christ at FPCSM.

The results of changes to the Confirmation program will be difficult to measure, especially in the short term. A survey will be given at the end of the class, and as youth begin to head to college, the numbers of those continuing in the faith can be counted. Deepening of one's faith is somewhat intangible; however, an attempt to measure this

will be presented upon completion of two consecutive years of the revised Confirmation program at FPCSM. Ultimately, it will be the Holy Spirit working in these students' lives and deepening their faith.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 2001, much research was conducted and literature written regarding shifts in teenage spirituality and the likelihood of young people abandoning faith, especially upon entering college. In particular, the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), a nationwide study of American youth, was a catalyst behind an entire shift in youth ministry thought and practice. The NSYR project took place from 2001 to 2005 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. It is the largest and most detailed study of teenage spirituality and religion conducted in America to date. The study consisted of a random national telephone survey and face-to-face interviews, which encompassed a broad range of differences in race, age, religion, sex, and region of the country.

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton wrote *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* in 2005. The book is a summary of and response to the NSYR research project. Scientifically, from analyzing the data available from NSYR, Christian Smith draws several conclusions. The first is that religion plays a significant role in the lives of numerous American teenagers. Many are involved in their parents' congregations and communities of faith. By profession,

religious faith shapes teenagers' morality and is important to them. Very few profess to be "spiritual but not religious" or seek alternative religions. They are largely conventional in religious practice.<sup>1</sup>

Although the first conclusion sounds like good news to parents and youth workers, the second conclusion does not. Teenagers profess that faith is important; however, it is not prioritized in their actions. Christian Smith explains, "Religion simply occupies a largely losing structural position when it comes to most adolescents' obligations, schedules, routines, and habits."<sup>2</sup> Amidst busyness of life, a myriad of activities, and various distractions competing for attention, religious practice typically falls below other priorities.

Teens are adopting beliefs that are far from historical traditions and doctrines. Smith describes the religious viewpoint American adolescents follow as "moralistic therapeutic deism." The belief system encompassed by this creed involves five main points. The first belief states that there is a God who created the world and continues to watch over human life on earth. The second one suggests that God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. The third belief asserts that the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. The fourth claims that God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life, except when God is needed to resolve a problem. Finally, good people go to heaven

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

when they die.<sup>3</sup> This religious outlook supplants traditional faith values and doctrines in American adolescents.

In postscript, Smith offers several important implications from the NSYR for youth workers.<sup>4</sup> The first implication is that the best way to connect youth to faith communities is by engaging their parents first. Smith believes that parents have the greatest influence on faith decisions of teenagers. The second implication is that teens are teachable, and faith communities are charged with teaching young people. Faith traditions must be taught and passed on from one generation to the next.

The third conclusion states that teenagers need help to articulate their faith. Some youth interviewed for the NSYR were actually asked to express their faith in words for the very first time. Another important implication is that simple relationships between adults and teenagers provide a better way to connect young people to faith. Teens generally need and crave relationships with adults who ask questions, care for, and take an interest in them. These relationships are instrumental in establishing lasting faith.

The final implication is that regular faith practices (i.e. spiritual disciplines) are extremely important. Youth must be shown how to live out faith since most religious teens engage in few faith practices. Prayer, reading the Bible, and service must be taught, modeled, and encouraged. Smith structures his research implications to present good news, bad news, and once again good news. The good news is American teenagers largely profess Christianity. The bad news is they do not practice faith and embrace moralistic therapeutic deism instead. However, the good news is religious practices and

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 162.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. "Concluding Unscientific Postscript," 265-271.

organizations influence young people's lives in important ways. The implications of NSYR shaped youth ministry in America in the past and continue to do so today.

### **Sticky Faith**

Kara E. Powell, along with Brad M. Griffin and Cheryl A. Crawford, created a resource to help youth workers foster sticky faith that lasts long after high school graduation. *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition* analyzes research from The Fuller Youth Institute's College Transition Project and offers theological framework, as well as practical ideas for sticky youth ministry. Moreover, a special edition of this book is geared specifically toward parents, which includes much of the same information as the youth worker edition. The College Transition Project encompassed six years of research, from 2004 to 2010, and was conducted with over five hundred students. Two goals for the study were to better understand youth group graduates' transition to college and to determine specific steps churches, parents, and youth workers could follow to help teenagers develop lasting faith.<sup>5</sup>

From examining available research, the Fuller Youth Institute estimates that between 40-to-50-percent of graduates do not stick to their faith beyond high school.<sup>6</sup> Along with The College Transition Project, the Fuller researchers conducted learning cohorts and initiated dialogues with various churches. Through these methods, they took each area of research and offered practical and proven ministry ideas for faith that sticks. It was determined that these findings have relevance for not only high school and middle

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<sup>5</sup> Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

school students, but also children of younger ages who should be exposed to sticky faith as well. The researchers conclude, “The reality is that students’ faith trajectories are formed long before twelfth grade.”<sup>7</sup>

There are three basic characteristics defining sticky faith. First, it is both internal and external. Sticky faith is internalized in emotion and thought and externalized in action and behavior through the integration of an entire person. Second, sticky faith is both personal and communal. God has a relationship with individuals within a faith community. Third, it is both mature and maturing.<sup>8</sup> Faith is a process, and spiritual growth occurs over time.

Several faith elements are discussed as they relate to developing lasting faith in students. The first is the sticky Gospel. Kara states that, “when it comes to Sticky Faith, there is nothing more important than students’ view of the Gospel.”<sup>9</sup> The Gospel is not easy to define, but it should be taught and modeled as presented in the Bible. Teens must understand the difference between internalized faith built on trust in Jesus Christ versus what they may perceive as faith based on “do’s and don’ts.” The sticky Gospel “means that instead of concentrating on whether or how our kids are living ‘righteous’ lives, we youth leaders should focus on helping them discover and strengthen their trust and faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Segregation within the Church is considered another factor behind students' abandoning faith after high school. Another research finding is, "Involvement in all-church worship during high school is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college than any other form of church participation."<sup>11</sup> Sticky churches are a key factor in sticky faith. In such churches, teenagers are valued through adults who care about them, provide mentorship, and take an active interest in their lives.

Sticky justice challenges students' understanding of service and justice. The good news is young people want to be involved in service work. Providing opportunities for service characterized more as a process rather than an event is another key to sticky faith. Several days prior to a mission experience can be used to help mentally frame the experience. During the service opportunity, a cycle of experience and reflection gives space to look for sticky meaning. After the opportunity, an initial debrief helps instigate thinking about what both leaders and youth hope will stick in the long term. Finally, ongoing transformation takes place as students are assisted in connecting the service opportunity to their own lives back at home.<sup>12</sup>

Sticky family relationships are essential since parents are the most important influence in a teenager's life. Christian Smith's research is cited supporting his finding that "the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."<sup>13</sup> A challenge is given to help parents develop and talk about their own faith. Parents should be encouraged to make

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<sup>11</sup> Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

time for quality conversations through story-telling and shown that listening and asking questions is far more effective than lecturing. Finally, families can develop sticky faith rituals such as dinners, special experiences, visits, or faith ceremonies.

Sticky youth groups are places where relationships are developed, and students are both supported and challenged. The College Transition Project featured several discoveries regarding church youth groups. The top five motivating reasons teens attend a youth group include liking a youth pastor, learning about God, feeling comfortable, being able to worship, and simply continuing to come because they always did.<sup>14</sup> The top three things youth remember post-high school as being significant are adult leaders, sense of community, and friends.<sup>15</sup> The top five things young people desire in their youth groups are time for deep conversation, mission trips, service opportunities, accountability, and personal time with leaders.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, *Sticky Faith* offers practical ideas for churches and youth groups, especially with seniors in high school. Some ideas include ongoing teaching series or small groups, rites of passage events, and post-graduation follow-up ideas. The key factor is staying connected to students after graduation. Powell writes, “Amid all we learned from the students we studied, one of the themes that painfully emerged from the interviews was that students felt abandoned by youth leaders after graduation.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, 139.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

The premises and practical ideas presented in this book are helpful in developing lasting faith in young people. It is a useful resource for both parents and youth workers. The suggestions and methods are effective and proven to deepen students' faith. After all, a 50-percent success rate in youth ministry is completely unacceptable.

### **Presence-Centered Youth Ministry**

Mike King's pre-seminar teachings at the National Youth Workers' Convention in 2007 were the inspiration for and foundation of this Ministry Focus Paper. His book, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation* suggests that ancient Christian spirituality and practices can effectively shape and deepen modern teenagers' faith. King develops this premise and gives practical examples for application in youth ministry. With a thirty-year background in youth ministry, King has developed deep faith through ancient spiritual practices and passion for sharing the overflow from his life with young people and youth workers.

In the introduction, King confirms the data showing vast numbers of youth walking away from church after high school. The author challenges youth workers to "guide young people into the presence of God."<sup>18</sup> He proposes a shift from emphasis on behavior modification to ministering out of wholeness of youth workers' sense of God's presence. Exposing young people to spiritual practices and walking alongside them in their journey of faith are a few essential principles for a modern youth worker to follow as a spiritual guide.

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<sup>18</sup> King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation*, 11.

King boldly states, “Presence-centered youth ministry is about deconstructing the big business of North American evangelicalism and returning to the missional nature of ministry in the way of Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> He describes certain problems with evangelical youth ministry such as lack of tradition and age segregation. King proposes a return to classic Christian formation. This return must be long-term and should involve an entire congregation as a whole.

A key chapter within *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry* is “Connecting Youth to the Story of God.”<sup>20</sup> King states that youth are drawn to God’s metanarrative (*missio Dei*). This metanarrative includes God’s all-encompassing story of his work in the world. Recovering the role of tradition is one of several ways to make this connection.

Teaching historic creeds is instrumental in recovering the role of tradition. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed present important doctrines concisely and help young people express faith to others. These creeds connect single individuals to the collective story of God. King writes, “Reciting creeds help our youth understand crucial doctrine. They condense truly important issues in a way that emphasizes the web of core Christian beliefs. More than that, creeds tether us to the story of God.”<sup>21</sup>

King includes a chapter on using sacred prayer practices to connect modern teenagers to *missio Dei*. Adolescence is a key time to develop lifelong prayer practices. The author describes silence and solitude, imaginative prayer, examination of conscience,

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<sup>19</sup> King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-111.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

respiratory prayer, prayer rope, prayer postures, the sign of the cross, praying with icons, and praying the hours.<sup>22</sup>

Another chapter introduces ways of using Scripture in presence-centered youth ministry. The Bible is the primary tool in spiritual formation. It is a powerful way for youth to experience the presence of God. King describes various ancient ways of incorporating Scripture into youth ministry. These include reading the Bible devotionally, considering the Bible as sacred text, storytelling, sacred reading, and *lectio divina*.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, King encourages youth workers to master the art of the long view. Christian formation, as described through ancient practices, goes contrary to today's instantaneous culture. Teenagers with deep, lasting faith are not formed overnight. King concludes, "Learning to practice the presence of God in their lives will sustain adolescents in their journey long after they are gone from the youth group. Equipping them with the skills to hear the Holy Spirit speak through Scripture, to care for their souls and to commit to a community of people who are on the same journey- are essential for long-term faithfulness in the pursuit of Christ."<sup>24</sup>

Spiritual formation in teenagers' lives is only the beginning of a lifetime journey. King's practical emphasis on tradition and ancient spiritual practices helps develop deep faith in leaders and students. His book is useful for youth workers seeking to deepen young people's faith.

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<sup>22</sup> King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation*, 112-138.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-150.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

## **Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life**

Tony Jones, in his book *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, describes history, theology, and practice behind the most common ancient Christian spiritual practices. Jones, at a point of desperation and spiritual dryness in his life, turns to ancient spiritual practices to reconnect to God. The author's goal is to introduce others to the quest for God and incredible richness of spiritual practices that proved beneficial in his own life and resulted in a deeper relationship with God.

Jones describes sixteen ancient spiritual practices, which are divided into two sections. Section one explains practices that rely on bodily stillness and silence called *Via Contemplativa*. Section two outlines practices that entail engaging the body called *Via Activa*. He includes the history of each practice so that readers can learn the story behind it. The theology of each practice is included for readers to decide if it is defensible within their tradition. Finally, a section on practice is presented, giving guidelines adaptable to modern life.

The contemplative approaches to spirituality consist of silence and solitude, sacred reading, the Jesus prayer, centering prayer, meditation, the Ignatian examen, icons, spiritual direction, and the daily offices. The bodily approaches include the labyrinth, the Stations of the Cross, pilgrimage, fasting, the sign of the cross, Sabbath, and service. To conclude the study of spiritual practices, Jones uses a quote from Thomas a Kempis, "All cannot use the same kind of spiritual exercises, but one suits this person, and another

that.”<sup>25</sup> Some practices hold deep meaning for one person, but not for another. Thus, teaching and modeling a variety of practices is helpful.

This book is a useful primer on ancient spiritual practices. It can be used by individuals for learning purposes and practical application. In addition, it is beneficial to youth leaders seeking to expose students to spiritual exercises. The practices are described in detail, and the inclusion of history and theology is valuable for teaching and modeling these practices to students.

### **Journey to Discipleship**

Harvey G. Throop’s *Journey to Discipleship: Confirmation/Commissioning Curriculum for Presbyterians USA* was chosen as a main resource for FPCSM Confirmation classes. Throop is a third-generation Presbyterian minister whose desire is to strengthen the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel through equipping and training young people. His books are used by hundreds of churches for Christian education. Throop wrote this curriculum out of concern for the steady decline of young people participating in church life. He believes, “young people need a faith community to which they can belong and from which they can receive guidance and support during their formative years.”<sup>26</sup>

Throop’s curriculum is divided into five units and twenty-six lessons. Unit one asks the question, “What is the Church?” The governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church are briefly described along with the process of electing elders. The Church is

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<sup>25</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 197.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey G. Throop, *Journey to Discipleship* (San Diego: Dimensions, 2001), 1.

defined as more than a building. Throop writes, “The church is people. It exists to minister to people and to proclaim in word and deed the love of God first shown to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>27</sup>

Unit two is titled “God Calls a People.” The Old Testament is summarized in eight lessons. The Creation story from Genesis is retold along with some interpretations of a creation “day.” Throop seems to favor the view of a figurative understanding of a “day.” Adam and Eve, the first disobedience, the curse, spreading of sin, and the flood are described. Topics covering Abraham’s family tree, a chosen people, Moses, the Exodus, and the Ten Commandments follow. Lastly, the kingdom, its division, and the exile are discussed.

Unit three consists of six lessons about the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The four gospels are presented along with Jesus’ temptation, disciples, message, and miracles. Key themes are considered with an emphasis on the parables. Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, and Resurrection are given attention. Atonement is mentioned briefly, but key doctrines such as sanctification and grace are not included.

Unit four contains three lessons titled “God Empowers the Church.” Ascension and Pentecost are presented along with brief discussion on the Holy Spirit. This is the only place where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. The early church beginnings are recounted, as well as the destruction of Jerusalem and Christian persecution. The Reformation is commented on, including sections on Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The final unit contains six practical lessons on living out Christian faith. The elements of a worship service are defined, and an explanation of worship as a lifestyle is

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<sup>27</sup> Throop, *Journey to Discipleship*, 14.

given. A detailed and helpful section on the Sacraments is found in this unit. Prayer and a basic prayer method are included, but no references to any ancient prayer practices are made. The final lessons focus on the Great Commission, being salt and light to the world, and church membership.

Throop's curriculum is comprehensive and complete. He does an excellent job at giving an overview of the Bible, Church history in general, and the Presbyterian Church in particular. Throop lacks in discussion of key church doctrines and terms such as sanctification, Incarnation, and grace, and there is only minimal information on the Holy Spirit. Throop gives no description of any ancient Christian spiritual practices, and not much is written in regards to spiritual disciplines. The concept of the Trinity is also strangely absent. The curriculum is useful and helpful, but it needs to be supplemented if used for Confirmation classes. FPCSM Confirmation program relies heavily on sections from this curriculum, as well as material from the following two books.

### **Presbyterian Specifics**

A useful resource to supplement knowledge on key doctrines and questions related specifically to Presbyterian faith is the book by Donald K. McKim, *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. McKim seeks to give brief answers to basic questions pertaining to Christian faith. He does not shy away from difficult questions or provide "easy" answers. His premise is that "a vital faith is one that asks questions and seeks answers."<sup>28</sup> This book is divided into thirteen doctrinal sections. Each one contains seven important questions and answers related to a particular topic.

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<sup>28</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2003), xi.

McKim's answers include various Scripture references, definitions for relevant terms, and traditional, as well as modern, views wherever applicable.

Discussion of God's Word includes valuable explanations regarding the purpose, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible. The section on God tackles complex mystery of the Trinity and practical aspects of believing in the Trinity. A commonly asked question within this section is, "Does God will evil and suffering in the world and in our lives?" Evil, in this case, is viewed as choices people make that are contrary to God's will.<sup>29</sup> Romans 3:28 is mentioned, as well as God's ability to use even wickedness for good. The section on Jesus begins with the mystery of Incarnation. McKim gives reasons for Jesus' coming to earth and dying on a cross. The final question discusses Jesus' Resurrection. Scripture references abound, and ultimately, McKim points readers back to Incarnation in closing the chapter.

The topic of the Holy Spirit's role in a person's life and in the Church is presented in a well-balanced manner. McKim addresses the gifts of the Spirit, baptism in the Spirit, and whether or not speaking in tongues is a necessary sign of the Spirit. He concludes this section with the Spirit's role in evangelism and ministry. In the segment on salvation, McKim begins with a great definition of grace. He states, "Grace is God's giving us what we don't deserve; and grace is God's not giving us what we do deserve."<sup>30</sup> The meaning of the term "saved" is defined, and the doctrine of predestination is analyzed. The author's final question in this section expresses a common concern for young people, "Can I lose my salvation?"

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<sup>29</sup> McKim, *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers*, 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

McKim's easy-to-read, question-and-answer format makes this book simple to use for young people. In 2010, each Confirmation student was given his or her own copy, and during several meeting times, the class went through various sections together. In 2011 and 2012, the book was used as a resource and springboard for conversations. The most relevant topics were discussed during class in preparation for students' time of questions from FPCSM Session and pastor. This resource was particularly helpful in explaining difficult doctrines and answering hard questions during Confirmation classes. The book was also used for the adult new members' class as FPCSM. This material contains important information for anyone seeking knowledge about Church doctrine, answers to tough questions, and description of what it means to be Presbyterian.

### **How to Practice Spiritual Disciplines**

A practical and informative guide for spiritual practices was published as part of the "Ancient Faith Series." The easy-to-read guide is called *Sacred Life: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Living*. In the introduction, Mike Kipp explains that spiritual practices have no value in themselves but are rather instruments of grace. They put people in a position to draw closer to God and grow in faith. Kipp challenges readers to approach each discipline as an experiment and warns that not all practices are useful for all people.<sup>31</sup> Nine practices described in this book are: the Ignatius examen, the Jesus Prayer, praying Scripture, *lectio divina*, solitude/meditation, journaling, confession pilgrimages, and Imago Dei. Each section includes the history of the practice and an appropriate example.

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<sup>31</sup> Mike King et al., *Sacred Life: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Living* (Kansas City, MO: Barefoot Ministries, 2008), 7-8.

The section on *lectio divina* is particularly helpful. The practical example involves an exercise in Psalm 23. A participant is asked to read, meditate, pray, and contemplate.<sup>32</sup> A supporting chart is also included, showing the differences between practicing this method individually and as a group.<sup>33</sup> Barriers to this spiritual practice are examined, and the conclusion exhorts readers to look to God’s Word as God speaking into one’s life. Kipp states, “*Lectio divina* is a way for you to read the Bible with such an approach as to understand what God has to say and, through the Holy Spirit, allow His Word to speak to you and transform your life.”<sup>34</sup> This guide is an important supplement for inclusion of ancient spiritual practices into a Confirmation program. It keeps the presentation of each practice concise and practical. Sections of this guide are instrumental in introducing ancient spiritual disciplines to modern young people.

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<sup>32</sup> King et al., *Sacred Life: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Living*, 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF FPCSM AND CONFIRMATION

FPCSM belongs to the Presbyterian Church, USA, and is largely proud of its rich Presbyterian heritage. The church holds dearly confessions and tenets of the Reformed Faith. This is why this body continues to be part of the Presbyterian Denomination. The origins of the Presbyterian Church are traced back to the Reformation. Theologians such as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox were critical of Roman Catholic Church practices. As their opposing beliefs began to spread, a form of governing churches or “presbyteries” came into existence.<sup>1</sup>

A key distinction of the Presbyterian Church concerns the role of the pastor and representational government. The Greek word for elder is “Presbuteros,” from which “Presbyterian” is derived.<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Church is governed by elders, elected church members, who make up the governing body called Session. Elders are individuals who the congregation believes are mature in faith and can successfully oversee ministries, as well as make major decisions regarding the church. The Presbyterian form of church

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<sup>1</sup> McKim, *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Throop, *Journey to Discipleship*, 7.

government is called “representative democracy.” It is neither entirely a democracy nor a dictatorship.<sup>3</sup> Session is charged with leading the church, creating vision, and making major decisions. Elders lead ministry teams with church members who are also responsible for the church’s mission and ministry. Deacons are elected to carry out the charitable ministry of the church. In addition, the congregation, as a whole, is encouraged to actively serve and lead so that the entire body of Christ becomes God’s hands and feet on this earth.

As part of the Reformed tradition Presbyterians are proud of, confessions of faith are of great value. It is considered important for people of faith to be able to adequately express their beliefs. These statements of faith and creeds are essential for identification purposes and for teaching the next generation. The early church used these short statements of faith to summarize basic Christian truth.<sup>4</sup> Some of the most significant confessions of faith are the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The most crucial creeds include the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. These statements of faith summarize Scripture and present ways of expressing one’s faith. Portions of them are used in teaching Confirmation, as well as in middle school Sunday classes.

There are several important distinctions of the Presbyterian Church when compared to other Protestant churches. The Presbyterian Church believes in infant baptism while the Baptist Church does not. The Presbyterian government consists of elected members empowered with decision making. Presbyterians hold different views

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<sup>3</sup> Throop, *Journey to Discipleship*, 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

about the presence of Jesus in Communion and regarding issues of “free will” and predestination.

Many areas of strength exist in Presbyterian Ecclesiology. There is an emphasis on doctrine and truth. Confessions and creeds help members express these truths and remind them of their essential beliefs and core convictions. Thoughtful reading and interpretation of Scripture also helps reinforce this emphasis.

Another area of strength is decentralized locus of power within each Presbyterian Church. Active participation in ministry and worship by all members of the body is greatly encouraged. Ministry takes place within the membership of the church, not in a single power head or privileged board of decision makers. Members serve to provide leadership and direction for the church, as well as perform various aspects of the church’s function. Potentially, the church’s ministry can include every member. It is not a building, but rather “the church is people.”<sup>5</sup>

The final strength of Presbyterianism is in the value placed on teaching and Confirmation. New members undergo a training course while teenagers participate in Confirmation. Children, teenagers, and adults receive teaching through various classes, in addition to the ministry of the Word during Sunday worship. Preaching and teaching are two main functions of the church. Such instruction is especially needed today since the new generation of children and young people is, for the most part, biblically illiterate and has little or no knowledge of basic doctrines.

A weakness of the Presbyterian Church, in general, is lack of teaching and reliance on the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. While some denominations

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<sup>5</sup> Throop, *Journey to Discipleship*, 11.

seem to overemphasize the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit, he is not mentioned or taught in depth in the Presbyterian Church. However, FPCSM is still considered an exception to this denominational drawback. Another weakness of the Presbyterian Church is its very structure. Although orderliness within the system of representational government presents a strength, it is viewed as a weakness if it stifles movement of the Holy Spirit. Decisions must sometimes go through task forces, committees, and meetings, and such structure can quench passion and flexibility.

FPCSM is proud of its rich Presbyterian heritage. During the past year, a task force of three elders commissioned by Session met to investigate the possibility of a name change for the church. The reasoning was that the word Presbyterian (besides being difficult to spell) has little meaning in modern culture. The goal was to opt for a name more attractive to community. After many months of meetings and reporting to Session, the task force came up with several ideas for a new name. A survey for FPCSM members was created. It inquired about input on the name change and listed suggestions for new names. When the idea was announced and the survey distributed, many members became upset. The very thought of removing “Presbyterian” from the name, as well as everything the denomination title suggests, was unacceptable to some. At least one family called the pastor and threatened to leave the church if its name was changed.

Only fifty surveys were filled out. They were divided proportionally between support for a name change and opposition to it. A week later, an all-church discussion took place, and the following Sunday it was announced that the committee was closed and would not pursue the idea any longer. Overall, many core members of FPCSM are committed to and proud of their Presbyterian heritage.

## History and Theology of Youth Ministry

Protestant youth ministry in America came into existence as modernity ushered in a new period of life called adolescence. At one time, clergy believed that the common worship service was sufficient for spiritual growth of young people. Senter writes, “Youth ministry was an attempt to sustain God’s presence and activity in the lives of young people. Responding to the changing challenges of the societies in which they lived, church leaders created or re-created youth groups in order to design environments that were conducive to youth experiencing God’s presence.”<sup>6</sup> Church leaders realized that a distinct period of life required a specific ministry geared toward this age group.

Mark H. Senter, in the book *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, chronicles three main eras or cycles of youth ministry. In the first cycle (1824-1875), the focus was on organizing societies for young people to encounter God. Organizations such as the YMCA, Sunday school association, and juvenile temperance movement were formed. Over time, the outward lifestyle became of great importance, and the expectation of God’s actual presence was forgotten. In the second cycle (1881-1925), the goal was set on education as a means of experiencing God. As activities became routine and rote, however, the actual presence of God was lessened and even nonexistent. In the third cycle (1933-1989), the focus shifted toward relational outreach and youth fellowship. Unfortunately, games and entertainment began to replace a deep search for God’s presence.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark H. Senter, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), xii.

The fourth cycle, which began in the 1990s, has characteristics of both old and new practices but is still largely undefined. In this cycle, “a desire among young people to experience God’s presence persists, perhaps even intensifies, as young people continue to gather in youth ministry settings.”<sup>7</sup> Clear descriptors of this time period are yet to emerge. Thus far, it appears to combine both old and new ways and emphasizes a clearly defined effort to experience God. Youth are in a prime position in life to encounter God. During adolescence, young people search for identity, which can be found in Jesus. This is a crucial point in their lives, a unique opportunity to seek spiritual truths.

The theology of youth ministry can be found in three key verses. In Luke 2:52, Jesus is described in his youth as growing in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men. Paul instructs Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because of his youth, but instead to set an example “in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (I Tim 4:12). Finally, in Ecclesiastes 12:1, young people are exhorted to remember their Creator while they are still young. Teenage years mark a distinct period of life with numerous opportunities to begin a life of service to the Lord. Youth ministry offers the Church a challenge to meet students at this point in their lives and introduce them to God.

### **Confirmation History and Practice**

Catechesis is defined as religious instruction given before baptism or Confirmation. Catechesis is an introduction to God and initiation into the body of Christ. Robert W. Jensen explains that:

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<sup>7</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, xii.

Catachesis' is what one does with "catechumens." And the existence of a group of people identified as "catechumens" is the mark of the church. The existence in the church of a group precisely of those being instructed, and the church's possession of a special terminology for them and for the activity of instructing them, should remind us that the church's instructional activities have their own specific origin. The church did not start to teach just because everyone does it, but because she had a specific need to do it, peculiar to her own life.<sup>8</sup>

The Church has a specific role to teach the Gospel. Especially in a society that knows progressively less about basic biblical ideas and doctrines, the Church is needed to teach the Gospel. However, church members are not able to clearly communicate the Gospel to others if they do not have a firm grasp on the truth or were not taught themselves.

The biblical foundation is located in Acts 8:26-40, when Philip encounters an Ethiopian in need of catachesis. The man sits in his chariot, reading Scripture aloud. He does not understand a passage from Isaiah. The Holy Spirit directs Philip to ask the man if he understands what he is reading. "How can I," he says, "unless someone explains it to me?" It is through Philip's teaching that the Ethiopian begins to understand the Gospel. Philip explains that the Isaiah passage is a prophecy about Jesus Christ the Messiah and proclaims the Gospel to the man. The Ethiopian reaches a point where Philip's teaching prompts him to desire baptism. Once the man, through catachesis, understands the Gospel, he longs to act upon it through baptism. Baptism is now meaningful to the man who was taught, whereas before catachesis, it did not have any significance in his life. After the Ethiopian's baptism, Philip is suddenly taken away, and the man is left rejoicing.

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<sup>8</sup> Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, ed., *Marks of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 138.

Another element of catechesis is that of passing on the faith and teachings of God from one generation to the next. In ancient times, this typically involved storytelling, memorization, and the oral tradition. This is how catechesis began. A group of stories and sayings were passed down from one generation to the next. “Teachers” would tell what they had heard from their parents, who had heard it from their parents, and so on. Parents were the ones charged by God with instructing children in his ways. As God’s Word became written, catechesis was formalized. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 gave instruction to parents on the importance of formal catechesis in their homes. This took place through repeating God’s commandments, talking about them, and even writing them on the doorposts and gates of the home. Catechesis was not considered a weekly class, but a daily lifestyle of learning that began in the home.

Jensen, in his essay, “Catechesis for Our Time,” stresses the need for catechesis in today’s world based on major differences between culture at large and the Church. The differences are so vast that they are described as “shocking” to an individual. To fully integrate an individual from an alien culture into the body of Christ, catechesis must take place, especially in light of the cultural shock an individual might face.<sup>9</sup> Jensen connects the instruction the “catechumen” receives as an introduction to God. The individual is not only given knowledge and instruction but also brought to God himself and initiated into the body of Christ. Just as the Ethiopian received the Good News through Philip’s teaching and testimony, so can an individual from the worldly culture learn about God through catechesis conducted by the Church. This process can not be cut short and must

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<sup>9</sup> Braaten and Jenson, ed., *Marks of the Body of Christ*, 142.

be taken seriously as a mark of the Church, as well as its opportunity to continue on from one generation to the next.

One way this catechesis takes place is through Confirmation classes. In the early Church, Confirmation was considered a sacrament. It was celebrated by adult catechumens in the same ceremony as baptism and the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. In “The History and Development of Confirmation,” the writer explains, “Baptism was the sacrament of the initial gift of the Spirit while Confirmation was the sacrament of the fullness of the Spirit with his seven gifts.”<sup>10</sup> It was in the Middle Ages that the practice of confirmation moved from adulthood to adolescence, and theologians began to teach that maturity was associated with Confirmation.

Confirmation continues to be an integral part of the Catholic Church today where it is still valued as a sacrament. The writer says, “According to the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, through Confirmation Catholics are ‘more perfectly bound to the church’ and are ‘as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed.’”<sup>11</sup> Other denominations value Confirmation as well, although not as sacramental. These include Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. The Presbyterian theological model of Confirmation is best summed up by Kathy L. Dawson. She states, “Confirmation, then, may be defined as (a) the reaffirmation of baptism (b) by a covenant

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<sup>10</sup> Sisters of Notre Dame, "The History and Development of Confirmation", Loyola Press <https://www.loyolapress.com/history-and-development-of-sacrament-of-confirmation.htm> (accessed June 22, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Sisters of Notre Dame, "The History and Development of Confirmation."

commitment (c) through a public profession of faith.”<sup>12</sup> First, being too young to remember infant baptism, adolescents uphold these vows to renounce evil and turn to Jesus at the age of maturity. Second, Confirmation is a commitment made in community by confirmands, parents, mentors, pastors, teachers, the invisible host of saints, and the Trinity. Finally, the act of public proclamation of faith is an essential element of Presbyterian Confirmation.

The challenge for FPCSM and the Church today is to evaluate the theological meaning of Confirmation in light of post-modern culture. During modern years, Protestant churches attempted to take traditional catechetical approaches and adapt them to modernity, which weakened their effectiveness. The Gospel must not be watered down or simplified, but the theological approach and mindset must be evaluated in light of post-modern learners. Through Confirmation, the Church has a unique opportunity to teach students about the Gospel and *missio Dei*. Contemporary young people carry hope that Christianity will continue to the next generation. Confirmation class is a place where they can learn about God, his plan and their role in it, as well as develop and deepen their relationship with him. A renewed theology, incorporating catechetical tradition, helps equip and educate young people for Christian service and lifestyle into adulthood.

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<sup>12</sup> Kathy Dawson, *Confessing Faith: A Guide to Confirmation for Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2006), 11.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

There is an inner yearning in the hearts of modern young people to be connected to something larger than themselves. Marjorie Thomson writes of this spiritual longing and calls it hunger that haunts people's hearts and lives. She states, "Both within and beyond traditional faith communities, a hunger for spiritual depth and integrity is gaining momentum."<sup>1</sup> In youth ministry, this is seen through countless teenagers connected to a cause, issue, or mission to such a degree that they are willing to sacrifice leisure, comfort, and personal gain to be part of it. FPCSM annual youth mission trip is a place where this yearning is evidenced most clearly. Self-absorbed young people are transformed into self-sacrificing servants through a week in a less than fortunate environment. On mission trips, students sleep on the floor, pick up trash, and spend time with the homeless. They put away iPods and put on the nature of Christ. A theme that came out of the previous mission trip was "the blessing of being uncomfortable."

This yearning was profoundly displayed through a young lady named Mary. Her life was changed after watching the movie *Invisible Children*. It was filmed by several

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 1.

college students who bought a video camera from eBay and flew to Africa to document children on the run for fear of being kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army. The movie inspired a movement of young people raising awareness and financial aid for the desperate situation in Africa.

The young lady started an Africa club at her public school and arranged for the makers of *Invisible Children* to speak and show the film during a school day. Her high school was involved in a ninety-day fundraiser for this organization. She also arranged for this film to be viewed at FPCSM. In addition, her friends organized a benefit concert, which raised \$10,000. Seeing the desperate situation kindled a desire within her to be part of something bigger than herself.

*Missio Dei* is the basic theme and theological basis for Confirmation class. Students are introduced to God's plan since the beginning of time. Young people see how their lives are part of this plan. The culmination of the class is to connect learners to *missio Dei* by challenging them to take an active part in God's mission in a tangible way. This could be through daily disciplines, church service, or missions.

A basic assumption behind *missio Dei* includes the idea that God is missionary in his very nature. Within the Trinity, God demonstrates relationship and mission for us to see and understand. The next assumption is that the Church extends from the Trinity as sent, and it joins in God's mission. Therefore, mission is the Church's basic identity.<sup>2</sup> The three moves of *missio Dei* include Spirit-centered mission (through joining justice efforts in the world), Jesus-centered mission (through following in the way of Jesus), and Incarnation-centered mission (through extending the presence of Jesus into culture and

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<sup>2</sup> David Fitch, "TM716 Course Documents," Fuller Theological Seminary, June 2011.

joining what God is already doing).<sup>3</sup> The preferred outcome for Confirmation class is practical, Incarnation-centered mission.

Upon being confirmed, a student should be able to step into Incarnation-centered mission. After understanding *missio Dei* through Confirmation class teachings and grasping God's plan through the ages, a learner comprehends his or her role in this grand plan. God is working all around the world, and a student is invited to step into what is already taking place. The learner thus extends the presence of Jesus into culture. *Missio Dei* is a regular theme in youth ministry and the basic core of Confirmation. If young students are able to see the world that does not revolve around them, but around God who created and has a plan for them, then the entire outlook on life becomes God-centered. This is the basic goal of Confirmation class and youth ministry.

### **Prayer as an Ancient Christian Spiritual Practice**

Drawing youth to God through prayer is a key component in connecting them to *missio Dei* and God himself. In his book *Raising the Bar*, Alvin Reid describes spontaneous prayer revivals taking place on school campuses and an explosion of prayer among youth. He proclaims, "But as we survey today's society, some signs of hope and new life can be spotted on the horizon- in the vibrancy and passion of Christian youth. These praying young people may be the precursors to one of the greatest movements of

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<sup>3</sup> David Fitch, "TM716 Course Documents."

God's Spirit we've seen."<sup>4</sup> Youth are tired of what the world offers and are hungry for the things of God. They want to be close to the Creator and are passionate about it.

A way to inspire young people to pray is by introducing prayer practices handed down from ancestors and ancient traditions. Tony Jones explains, "there is incredible spiritual richness in the spiritual practices of the ancient and modern Christian communities from around the world. Incorporating new ways of praying . . . have fueled my faith and my passion for spirituality in ways I have never thought possible, and have, without question, brought me into a closer relationship with God."<sup>5</sup> Young people are attracted to these practices, and, for many, such experiences are new. There is freshness about these traditions, and often students do not realize the practices are ancient. Sometimes, old hymns set to modern music are perceived by youth as new songs.

The Bible contains practical advice on prayer and its methods. Prayer is a cornerstone of the Bible itself. God wants people to pray, prayer is communication with God, and prayers are answered. The Bible records many godly people's prayers and communication with God. Jesus prayed at his baptism, in solitude, and, at times, through an entire night (Luke 6:12). His disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). Jesus responded with the prayer model still used today by believers around the world. The Lord's Prayer is essential in teaching youth how to pray.

The Lord's Prayer begins by addressing God as "Father," honoring his name above all names. As God's children, people occupy a special place of relationship with

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<sup>4</sup> Alvin L. Reid, *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 90.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, 17.

him. By “hallowing” his name, they humble themselves before God and worship the Father. The prayer moves on to the coming of God’s Kingdom, which will replace human kingdoms driven by selfishness and greed. God’s Kingdom indicates God’s rule and reign. People submit themselves to God’s wisdom and authority. Then they ask for basic needs as human beings, which God generously supplies. Believers plead for forgiveness of sins and are reminded of the need to forgive offenders. They conclude by asking for God’s protection and guidance and, finally, acknowledge his supremacy and power. This is a simple and powerful prayer model young people can use.

Another prayer model directly from the Bible is found in the Psalms. The Psalms are a compilation of Hebrew hymns and prayers. They display honesty in expression and inspire believers to praise God in the highest. The Psalms were an essential part of Israelite worship and constituted worship aids in regard to activities at the temple. Tommy Lane writes, “The Psalms were the prayers Jesus prayed every day. There are 150 Psalms and Jesus would have known most of them by heart.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus’ final prayer appears to be from the Psalms. Psalm 22:2, “O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent,” sounds very similar to Jesus’ cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). The Psalms contain great wealth of wonderful prayer material.

The Psalms were written by several authors over a long period of time and are classified according to various categories. One way to classify the Psalms is a typology that includes Wisdom, Praise, Repentance, Thanksgiving, Lament and Entreaty, and

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<sup>6</sup> Tommy Lane, "Homily for the Thirteenth Sunday Year C," [http://www.frtommylane.com/homilies/year\\_c/13.htm](http://www.frtommylane.com/homilies/year_c/13.htm) (accessed June 9, 2010).

Royal and Messianic.<sup>7</sup> A broad range of expressed emotion and writing styles give the Psalms unique standing as material for prayer. Variety and candid content present an unlimited resource and model for prayer.

God calls Christians to a life of prayer. In the Bible, he included a prayer model to assist his followers and 150 Psalms to inspire them to pray. Prayer is vital communication with God, essential to Christian life. It is amazing that medieval church prayer traditions are the traditions of Christ himself. In the modern world, it is refreshing to revisit traditions and reconnect to God, Christ, and the Saints. Amazingly, these traditions carry on in churches and monasteries around the world. Believers not only participate in the communion of Saints, but also join the body of Christ on earth today.

Both the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms share rich history. They were of utmost importance in the medieval church. In churches and monasteries around the world, these practices are still used to draw closer to God in prayer. Since they lost meaning to many modern youth, examining their usage during the medieval period is beneficial.

Gabriel Bunge, in describing the history of prayer practices, states that believers recited the Lord's Prayer three times a day since apostolic times. This simple prayer taught people what it meant to be a Christian, even before there was a creed to summarize the Christian faith. Bunge suggests one should pray the Lord's Prayer often during the day, without repeating it mindlessly. He also believes it should be the climax of each prayer time.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jeanne Kun, *The Psalms: Gateway to Prayer* (Frederick, MD: Word Among Us Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 202.

There is much material about the Lord's Prayer written during the medieval period, especially by women. Apparently, during that time, women were only allowed to write on this topic, and it was their catechism. Teresa of Avila composed an entire treatise called *Eternal Majesty*. In the Lord's Prayer, women felt included with all humanity as God's children before "our Father." The discrimination of the day was demolished in the Lord's Prayer, which put all God's children on level ground.

Evelyn Underhill addressed this topic in *The Spiritual Life*. She called the Lord's Prayer, "the one perfect summary of man's Godward life and call."<sup>9</sup> Underhill expounded on the particular phrase, "thy kingdom come." She described the dynamic nature of these words and the call to action involved. Underhill writes, "It is useless to utter fervent petitions for that Kingdom to be established and that Will be done, unless we are willing to do something about it ourselves."<sup>10</sup>

The Lord's Prayer was also addressed by St. Benedict. An excerpt from *The Rule of St. Benedict* states, "The Office of Lauds and Vespers (Morning & Evening Prayer), however, is never to end without the Lord's Prayer being said aloud by the superior, so that all may hear it, because of the thorns of scandal which are wont to arise; that the brethren, by the covenant which they make in that prayer when they say: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,' may cleanse themselves of such faults."<sup>11</sup> St. Benedict found particular significance in the Lord's Prayer and appreciated

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<sup>9</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life* (Atlanta: Ariel Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict and Pinocchio, *St. Benedict's Rule for Monks: Selected Passages from the Rule of St. Benedict*, Cistercian Studies Series. No. 99 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 22.

its place in the monastery. Today, it is still an integral part of monastery life. It is prayed with the daily hours and at other times of the day.

As modern youth recite the Lord's Prayer, they participate in the communion of Saints, for whom this prayer was crucial in daily life, and join believers around the world who follow the same traditions. Bunge describes the process as "the preservation of a living fellowship."<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, as students pray the Lord's Prayer, they are joined by thousands around the world, praying the same words at the same time. It is a definitive way to fellowship with the body of Christ both present and past.

Praying the Psalms is another opportunity for modern youth to preserve the living fellowship of their predecessors. The Psalms were of utmost importance in the medieval period, second only to the Lord's Prayer. They were arranged in a book called the Psalter and used for prayer. Psalms are usually listed in the order they appear in the Bible, but are read based on the church calendar. In the Middle Ages, psalters were first produced for average individuals to use privately. Later, this evolved into praying the hours, which included the psalms and other prayers.

In his *Letter to Marcellinus*, Athanasius discusses the Psalms in detail. He writes to Marcellinus, who frequently reads the Psalms and shares fervor for them in his letter. Athanasius proclaims that all Scripture is inspired by God but believes the Psalms possess "a certain winning exactitude for those who are prayerful. Each sacred book supplies and announces its own promise."<sup>13</sup> He makes thirty-three points about the Psalms. Athanasius describes the arrangement of the Psalms and various themes within

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<sup>12</sup> Bunge, *Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Athanasius, *The Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 101.

them. The letter's style is characteristic of an elder, gently teaching or mentoring someone he cares about.

Athanasius gives examples of daily situations Marcellinus might face and suggests applicable Psalms. Some examples are, "Let us say you stand in need of a prayer because of those who have opposed you and encompass your soul; sing Psalms 16, 85, 87 and 140. Or you want to learn how Moses offered prayer-you have Psalm 89."<sup>14</sup> Further examples include, "If you witness worthless people committing numerous lawless acts and exalting themselves against humbler people, and you wish to exhort someone not to devote himself to their service...say the thirty-sixth psalm both to yourself and to the others."<sup>15</sup> The Psalms are practical in everyday life, and Athanasius shows that for every circumstance or emotion people face, there is an applicable Psalm to recite, pray, or sing.

With both ancient prayer practices, various sources stress the importance of maintaining the spirit of prayer and not simply reciting words. Bunge suggests splitting longer psalms into sections, emphasizing quality over quantity. He writes, "Therefore [the Holy Fathers] consider it more useful to sing ten verses with understanding and attention than to rattle off an entire psalm in a disorderly way."<sup>16</sup> In practicing these traditions, one faces danger to recite words mindlessly, without maintaining a heart of prayer. Fortunately, to many contemporary young people, these ancient prayer practices are new, fresh, and meaningful.

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<sup>14</sup> Athanasius, *The Letter to Marcellinus*, 115.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Bunge, *Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer*, 200.

## Sacraments as an Anchor to Tradition and Ancient Christianity

An important step in connecting youth to *missio Dei* through Confirmation is to anchor them to foundations and traditions of the past. In recent years, the Church strived to be modern and reinvent itself, but a strong foundation in the traditions of the past offers hope and security to the turbulent present. Youth are “ready to reexamine the church’s God-directed past, and this includes an appreciation for the sacraments as they have been practiced by the saints.”<sup>17</sup>

Earlier in history, the word “sacrament” meant an oath of allegiance. When Roman soldiers were inducted into the emperor’s army, they took an oath of allegiance to the emperor called a *sacramentum*. A soldier dipped his right hand into a container of blood from a sacrificial animal and took an oath, promising to serve the emperor faithfully unto death. The word “sacrament” now stands for “any solemn promise which accepts obligation.”<sup>18</sup> Protestant churches around the world value two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

In particular, Communion is the greatest tradition the Church can pass on to modern young people. It is a sacrament at the center of much debate throughout history as to its practice and method. Understanding its origins and developing appreciation for it in the present day are essential in connecting youth to Christian tradition and encouraging a transformative relationship with their Savior. Youngman writes, “At the core, Holy

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Youngman, "Teaching through the Sacraments," [www.ileadyouth.com](http://www.ileadyouth.com) (accessed August 25, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Throop, *Journey to Discipleship*, 87.

Communion is about the work of God in Christ, dependent upon God's Holy Spirit to convey the fullness of God's grace."<sup>19</sup>

Jesus introduced the first Christian Communion to his disciples at the Last Supper two thousand years ago. Mark and Luke record Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper in their gospels. John mentions the supper but does not describe it in detail. In Luke's account, Jesus' words, "do this in remembrance of me" are included to indicate that this meal was not a one-time event, but would be an integral part of Christian tradition (Luke 22:19). This unique invitation was for Jesus' disciples and for all followers to come. Two elements of the Lord's Supper are the bread and the wine. The bread represents Jesus' body given on behalf of his disciples. The wine represents his blood shed at crucifixion and the new covenant that brings salvation to those who accept his offer of life.

There are various theological interpretations regarding the physical and spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper, which may be taught to young people. Around 1540, three great men of faith expressed different views regarding Communion. Each man was a great leader and influenced several mainline denominations. Pope Paul III, Martin Luther, and John Calvin held strong opinions regarding the nature of Communion, and their views often conflicted violently.

Pope Paul III began a series of reforms and restoration to the Church, leading up to the Council of Trent, which settled several doctrinal issues. One issue involved the Roman Catholic Mass. It was established that during the Lord's Supper, a literal transubstantiation took place. This is a belief that the bread and the wine are actually

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<sup>19</sup> Youngman, "Teaching through the Sacraments."

transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus. This change does not alter the outward appearance of the elements, but their substance or essence.

As written in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: ‘Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood.’ This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.<sup>20</sup>

This doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church teaches that when an ordained priest blesses the bread, it is transformed into the actual flesh of Jesus. When he blesses the wine, it is transformed into the actual blood of Jesus. This “real presence” of Christ in the elements is derived from a study of John 6:32-58, Matthew 26:26, Luke 22:17-23, and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. John 6:53, 55 is referred to most often to support transubstantiation and interpreted literally as Jesus tells his disciples, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”

Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic priest who could no longer endure abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. He wanted to reform the Church and bring it back to its roots. Luther was familiar with the doctrine of transubstantiation. As part of the Reformation, he rejected the idea of transubstantiation and placed emphasis on spoken words as the most important element of Communion. Luther created a doctrine called

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<sup>20</sup> The Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), Section 1376.

Consubstantiation. He believed that the elements of the bread and the wine were not changed during the Eucharist but rather existed side by side with the substance of the actual body and blood of Christ. Since no physical change to the elements could be observed, this doctrine helped those struggling with transubstantiation to understand the change as spiritual, not physical. In consubstantiation, Christ is present with and under the elements of Communion. The elements of the body and the blood remain as co-existing with the bread and the wine in observance of Matthew 26:26-28 and Mark 14:22-24. Consubstantiation did not become universally accepted but is still practiced by eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches.

John Calvin, who was also critical of abuses in the Church, proposed a midline approach to the Lord's Supper. He believed that with partaking of the bread and the wine, both a spiritual and physical transformation took place. Calvin thought Luther claimed too much through the doctrine of consubstantiation. He also believed the liturgy words were important, but not primary. Calvin stressed a mysterious element of Communion, which is difficult to understand.

John Calvin's beliefs and views are recorded in vast detail in his famous work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He writes, "I say, that the sacred mystery of the supper consists of two parts: the corporeal signs, which, being placed before our eyes, represent to us invisible things in a manner adapted to the weakness of our capacities; and the spiritual truth, which is at the same time typified and exhibited by those symbols."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, Two vols., vol. II (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1930), 534.

Calvin rejected the corporeal presence of Christ in Communion, and his views are still upheld by Presbyterian churches around the world.

Calvin also stressed the importance of experiencing Christ in Communion. Jesus Christ and his blessings are transferred to believers through union with Him. Christ is received by believers through faith and is present at the Lord's Supper as a host. Calvin believed that people could receive from Christ regardless of their actual understanding of the method. He did not try to explain the sacrament of Communion or claim to understand it completely. Calvin emphasized a certain sense of mystery to the Lord's Supper the mind cannot fully comprehend. He wrote, "If anyone should ask me how this (partaking of the whole Christ) takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare...I rather experience than understand it."<sup>22</sup>

Another aspect of Communion debated much throughout church history is the question of who the table is open to. In the sixteenth century, while Pope Paul III, Martin Luther, and John Calvin debated the nature of Communion, the Church sought to initiate a system wherein it could be decided who was eligible to receive Communion. John Calvin began a token system to address irregularities found in connection with the Lord's Supper. Calvin wrote, "Each person should receive tokens of lead for those of his household who were instructed; and the strangers who might come, on giving testimony

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<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 534.

of their faith, should also receive tokens, and those who had none should not be admitted to the tables.”<sup>23</sup>

Without a token, a person was not allowed to participate in the Eucharist. The Presbyterian Church adopted a token system where elders collected tokens they had distributed days before the service. At the end of the nineteenth century, rules regarding participation in the Lord’s Supper began to ease. However, the token system remained in place for many years.

Today, the Presbyterian Church states that “all baptized Christians who rejoice in so great a gift, who confess their sins, and who draw near with faith intending to lead a new life, may receive the Lord’s Supper. This includes baptized children who have expressed a desire to participate, and who have been instructed in the meaning of the sacrament in a way they can understand.”<sup>24</sup> FPCSM has an “open” table, and all people who believe in Jesus are invited to participate. FPCSM does not enforce the criteria of baptism, and parents may choose to let children of any age participate. The Church has certainly changed since the token system.

The sacraments and prayer practices are ancient traditions the Church can pass on to modern young people. Understanding the ways in which they were practiced throughout history is crucial. Appreciation for these traditions is fundamental in

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<sup>23</sup> The Glens of Antrim Historical Society, "Presbyterian Church Communion Tokens" [www.antrimhistory.net/content.php?cid=55](http://www.antrimhistory.net/content.php?cid=55) (accessed September 5, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Special Committee to Write a New Presbyterian Catechism and Presbyterians for Renewal, *The Study Catechism: Full Version with Biblical References* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterians for Renewal, 1999), 45.

connecting youth to missio Dei. Through this connection, students develop deeper faith and are less likely to abandon Christianity later in life.

PART THREE  
MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 6

### CONFIRMATION GOALS AND CONTENT

In the 1960s, questions and concerns were raised by the Episcopal Church regarding a decrease in Confirmations and an increase in the number of confirmed teenagers leaving the church. As a survey of twelve parishes indicated, 50-percent of confirmed young people left the church. The most substantial recent research on the long-term effects of Confirmation was done by three sociologists, Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald Luidens. They followed five hundred people confirmed in the Presbyterian Church who were born between 1947 and 1956. In 1989, the same group of people was surveyed. Only 29-percent of confirmed Presbyterians remained in the Presbyterian Church. Moreover, only 43-percent regularly attended church at all.<sup>1</sup> The current state of Confirmation practices must be evaluated in light of this research.

The Confirmation program at FPCSM remained constant yet underwent certain changes throughout the years. In 2004, the program was relatively lengthy and included a weekend retreat. The sessions were taught by various youth team leaders and elders

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1994), xii.

within the church. In 2006, the course was simplified and shortened by the youth elder to make it more accessible to modern youth.

In 2013, at FPCSM, eighth grade youth (and high school students who did not take the class previously) receive catachesis through Confirmation class. If baptized in infancy, students view it as an opportunity to profess their faith as young adults and receive instruction in the sacraments. Adults obtain training through a separate series of membership classes or instructions before baptism. The church's goal is to be more intentional about catachesis and integrating individuals from culture at large into the body of Christ. FPCSM extended the youth training process and raised the commitment levels for baptismal classes in order for proper instruction to take place.

Confirmation is an important value for FPCSM youth leadership team, as well as for parents, congregation, Session, and pastor. Session looks forward to hearing statements of faith by the confirmands each spring. Some elders consider that day their favorite Session meeting of the year. Parents see value in the practice and encourage teenagers to participate. The pastor places great value in Confirmation. He gave helpful feedback for the program and encouraged a longer, more in-depth course that is truly instrumental in forming fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Confirmation is not a value to most young people, and the concept itself is poorly understood. In the past, Confirmation class consisted of individuals baptized as infants within the church and raised in Christianity through elementary and middle school. A Confirmation student was, typically, a son or a daughter of parents who were active in the church, attended Sunday worship regularly, and, possibly, served as elders or deacons. The student attended Sunday school and children's programs regularly. He or she

participated in a sacraments class and was familiar with basic doctrines of Christianity. In addition, the student had familiarity with the books of the Bible and basic doctrine.

Some Confirmation youth still resemble the above picture, but there is an increasing number of students who look quite different. Post Christendom students have little to no knowledge of the books, major people, or events of the Bible. Their parents attend church irregularly or not at all. These youth may even have parents who belong to other religions or are atheists. The students display little familiarity with the Church or with the worship service. They do not understand the sacraments and were not baptized.

As FPCSM youth invited friends to youth group and it grew, the young people of the church increasingly began to resemble culture at large. At times, it seems two distinct youth groups coexist as one. One group grew up in the Church, while the other is biblically illiterate. As the second set of constituents decided to take Confirmation and learn more about Christianity, a typical student in the class changed. Presently, youth leaders no longer assume that students possess certain basic knowledge of Christian terminology. It is likely that a learner does not yet have a relationship with God, or even understands what that looks like. Therefore, the challenge is to adequately train students of varying levels of knowledge together.

In light of this context, a modern student must be taught the necessity of the Church as the body of Christ. Some young people participate in youth group and youth events but do not attend Sunday worship. Part of Confirmation teaching must include the importance of the Church and reasons for its existence. Holding the class on Sunday afternoons helps encourage students to attend the service beforehand. Post Christendom

young people do not necessarily see value in church attendance. Introducing youth to mentors within FPCSM congregation helps connect them to the body of Christ.

Confirmands learn about the role of pastor, elder, and deacon and discover that each person in the congregation is responsible for ministry. Students meet and get to know the pastor as a person. At the conclusion of Confirmation, learners are encouraged to become involved in service within the church. They usher, play music, assist with sound equipment, help with children, and serve as part of a larger metanarrative.

Additionally, in this context, universal language is not assumed. The basics of each doctrine must be taught before learners are introduced to deeper concepts. The skill of finding information in the Bible, the books' order, and major themes are covered in the first session. In addition, the class must allow for plenty of question-and-answer time. Sometimes, half the class period is spent on such discussion. The questions range from, "What is Communion?" and "Why are there so many denominations?" to "What is heaven like?" and "What is speaking in tongues and being 'slain in the Spirit'?" There are no easy or simple answers.

The preferable future for Confirmation class at FPCSM is that it becomes a vehicle for deepening young people's faith and keeping them connected to God and to the Church more securely. It can also be a place to further the mission of FPCSM, in general, and its youth ministry, in particular. Therefore, the goals for Confirmation class are based on FPCSM youth ministry mission statement. The first goal encompasses the most basic aspect of Confirmation, which is that a student develops a relationship with God. One of the early questions each mentor is encouraged to discuss with a confirmand is regarding his or her personal relationship with God and understanding of what it entails. If students

do not already have a personal relationship with God but started taking Confirmation classes, they are challenged to begin that relationship. Young people's understanding of it will assist them in expressing their statement of faith and sharing their testimony with family and friends.

The second Confirmation goal is to develop fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Discussion of theology, traditions, and the Bible is based on this goal. Students are challenged to develop daily, personal disciplines that increase their devotion to Christ. A portion of the teaching is focused on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the prophecies regarding him in the Old Testament. The Incarnation, crucifixion, and Resurrection are discussed, along with personal implications of these beliefs. Jesus himself is presented as the greatest treasure, worth forsaking all else for, to inspire students in becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus.

The third Confirmation goal is to train students in worship. Teaching is given on the elements of a worship service, and an emphasis is placed on connecting young people to an intergenerational worship service. Youth who are connected only to youth group are far less likely to participate in the life of the church later in life. Viewing worship as a lifestyle is taught. During one session, a spiritual exercise which involves worship of God in nature is completed.

The fourth goal is to train students in service. Youth take an inventory of spiritual gifts to determine their role in the body of Christ. They are exhorted to serve the local church body through ushering, child care, worship band, children's ministry, or a variety of other leadership opportunities. The Great Commission is discussed, and ways to serve

locally and globally are encouraged. Mentors are instructed to participate in service opportunities with their mentees as another part of the Confirmation process.

The fifth goal is to incorporate the power of the Holy Spirit in students' lives. Each class and meeting time with the mentor is sought to be guided and led by the Holy Spirit. Teaching is given on the role of the Holy Spirit and the definition of a Spirit-filled life. Students learn about the gifts of the Spirit and discover the spiritual gifts God gave them. Through applicable examples, youth are challenged to listen to the Holy Spirit and be led by him.

The final goal of Confirmation class reflects the practical aspect of this Ministry Focus Paper. It involves the development of deeper roots of faith that will help young people hold on to it for a lifetime. Students leave the class with a maturing faith that is more likely to last. Although difficult to measure in the short term, this foundational goal pervades youth ministry at FPCSM and, particularly, in Confirmation class. The confirmed young people who graduate from FPCSM youth program are connected to the family of God throughout history, anchored to faith-building traditions of the past, well-versed in spiritual disciplines and practices, and keenly aware of their role in *missio Dei*. These youth enter a vibrant relationship with God and become fully devoted followers of Jesus. They are led by the Holy Spirit and committed to fulfilling the Great Commission. Finally, the students are connected to mentors who will continue to participate in their lives, even through college and beyond.

## Content of the Strategy: Prayer Practices

As part of Confirmation classes, various prayer exercises are included. The opening activity is from Abingdon Press' CONNECT series. It involves reading pairs of words aloud and having students choose which word they prefer. Some examples are "Holy Father/Daddy," "distant/close," "aloud/silent," "eyes closed/eyes open," and "formal/informal." The activity inspires youth to think about ways of praying and share individual thoughts on prayer. To stimulate discussion, various questions are asked such as, "What pictures come to mind when you think of prayer?" "What do you pray about?" and "Why do you pray?" The purpose is to show students that "In prayer, the relationship we have with God is more important than the words we say."<sup>2</sup>

After the opening activity, Matthew 6:5-8 is read aloud as prelude to the Lord's Prayer. Discussion focuses on various suggestions the passage makes about prayer. Students are encouraged to generate ideas and make connections independently. The first line of the Lord's Prayer is examined. It begins with the words, "Our Father." Students are invited to contemplate how this phrase establishes the relationship in the beginning. Then, through suggestions found in the verses, the point is reinforced that the relationship behind prayer is more important than the words. A comparison is made to a time students would spend with a close friend. They would not use formal, impressive words, but simply communicate in everyday language. At various times in Confirmation classes, as well as at youth group, the Lord's Prayer is recited together.

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<sup>2</sup> Ron and Celia Whitler, *The Lord's Prayer*, Connect: Life and Christian Faith for Young Teens, vol. 15 (Abingdon Press, 1999), 6.

Confirmation class continues with teaching on the Lord's Prayer from the Bible. Students are inquired whether they use "trespasses" or "debts" in the prayer (some youth go to a Catholic Church, which uses "trespasses" instead of "debts"). The difference stems from how the word was translated into English, and both versions have, basically, the same meaning. As young people examine the prayer line by line, the focus of each section is established. Meaningful conversations take place within each Confirmation class. Typically, youth participate in group discussions well and offer good thoughts, ideas, and questions. The lesson separates the prayer into three major portions: glory to God, petitions for the good of humanity, and praise to God.

A humorous poem called *The World's Prayer* restates the Lord's Prayer from the world's viewpoint. It reads:

Our Father, who watches from a distance,  
We use your name pretty casually around here.  
Your kingdom is so far away that we can pretty much do what we want to.  
We have no time to do your will.  
We are in charge of our own needs, help us get all we can.  
We want to be forgiven, but you know how hard it is for us to forgive others.  
We can handle temptation and evil.  
Bring it on; we can fight it alone.  
If we work hard enough, ours will be the kingdom, the power and the glory.<sup>3</sup>

This poem is useful in emphasizing that the words of a prayer are less important than the relationship. Many ancient practices do not even involve words. The Lord's Prayer is presented as a model. Students are challenged to recite the Lord's Prayer daily and are held accountable. Encouraging daily prayer time is important. Youth realize that praying the Lord's Prayer connects them to rich traditions behind it and enables them to participate in the communion of the Saints.

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<sup>3</sup> Whitley, *The Lord's Prayer*, 31.

An interactive version of the Lord's Prayer helps students with practical, personal application. The use of added questions assists in keeping the prayer from becoming a recitation. The prayer with interactive questions is presented as follows:

“Father, hallowed be your name.”  
How can you keep God's name holy in the way you talk this week?  
“Your kingdom come.”  
Do you really hope Jesus comes back this week?  
“Give us each day our daily bread.”  
What can you do this week for people who can't count on daily bread?  
“Forgive us our sins.”  
What have you done wrong that you haven't confessed?  
“For we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”  
Who do you need to forgive, and will you do it?  
“And lead us not into temptation?”  
What sights and sounds should you avoid this week because you know they'll tempt you?<sup>4</sup>

Several Psalms are incorporated into Confirmation classes as prayer exercises.

One particular exercise uses the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Appendix B). The background of a shepherd taking care of his sheep who recognize his voice is discussed. As part of this exercise, an interactive prayer based on Psalm 23 is used. The prayer reflects on each verse and encourages participants to create visual images, which stimulates thinking about the verse.

This activity proved successful even with middle school youth, despite the fact that it involved much pausing and silence. Silent time was given to meditate on the questions interspersed throughout the psalm's reading. Learners stayed serious during the entire exercise. At the end, each young person received a copy of the prayer to assist with

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<sup>4</sup> Stan Campbell et al., *Quick Studies: Luke & John* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing, 1992), 50.

personal prayer time. It was a successful exercise because modern youth crave silence and reflection in a life that is bombarded with constant stimulation and activity.

Another teaching session stresses using the Jesus Prayer and praying without ceasing. The objective is to establish constancy and focus to prayer in lives that are distracted and disjointed. The Jesus Prayer offers simplicity in form, but it challenges believers to pray constantly. The opening discussion involves analyzing I Thessalonians 5:17 and pondering how one can pray without ceasing. The Jesus Prayer is introduced in its short form, “Lord, have mercy,” and long form, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This prayer is commonly used in monasteries and in the Orthodox Church, but modern youth are not familiar with it. Some benefits of the Jesus Prayer include refocusing on God, placing oneself in humility before God, and relaxing the body.

The class analyzes the actual words of the Jesus Prayer because repetition of words without understanding them is meaningless. Special attention is given to the word “mercy” since it is the key element of the prayer. The root of “mercy” means olive tree. Discussing an olive branch brought by the dove to Noah and olive oil used by the Good Samaritan to heal the traveler’s wounds helps with understanding of the word “mercy.” The analysis of breath prayer and how the Jesus Prayer is said in rhythm with breathing follows. A Russian peasant in the *Way of the Pilgrim* seeks to literally pray without ceasing. He encounters a monk instructing him to first pray the Jesus Prayer three

thousand times a day, then six thousand, then twelve thousand. He also tells the pilgrim of the great peace the prayer would bring to his life.<sup>5</sup>

The class concludes with praying the Jesus Prayer and discussing its application to the modern world and people's lives. Silence and meditation are concepts many contemporary youth are not familiar with, but they present ways to still the commotion of their lives. The most important part of the lesson lies in applying this ancient practice to today's world. Appendix C contains a teaching hand-out for the lesson.

### **Content of the Strategy: Sacrament of Communion**

The goal in teaching the sacrament of Communion is to cause students to rethink the Lord's Supper and experience it in a fresh way by examining historical views of Communion upheld by the Pope, Luther, and Calvin. Young people learn Presbyterian traditions and history involving the Lord's Supper. Ultimately, they encounter Christ in a deeper way through their experiences at the Lord's Table and deepen their connection to the tradition. Appendix D contains a teaching outline and hand-out for the sessions included in this portion of Confirmation. Some of this information was initially used during middle school Sunday school classes.

The best discussion during the first session included sharing of each person's experiences from participating in Communion at other churches and in other denominations. One young lady recollected how the priest had placed a communion wafer in her mouth. Students pondered the idea of transubstantiation, even though the

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<sup>5</sup> Helen Bacovcin, *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way: A New Translation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1978), 21-23.

topic was not scheduled until the second session. Communion wafers and churches that serve actual wine instead of grape juice were mentioned.

Students and leaders examined how the Lord's Supper is celebrated at FPCSM. There is monthly variation between traditional methods and intinction where congregants come to the front of the Sanctuary, tear off a piece of bread, and dip it into a cup of juice. The bread and juice are held by elders. The elder usually says, "Christ's body broken for you" and "Christ's blood shed for you," and the people respond with "amen."

The class commented on the human elements of Communion as well. Once, an instance occurred when an elder carrying a tray of juice almost took a tumble down the platform steps. A quick-thinking man grabbed the back of her shirt and saved her from falling. On another occasion, a participant expressed that, when trays were passed around, he was fearful of dropping one and spilling the juice everywhere.

At the end of the class, students were challenged to fully enter the experience of Communion at the following worship service. Learners participated in reading the biblical account of the Last Supper and the events that took place with Jesus and his disciples that night. Young people considered what it might have been like for the disciples to experience the first Christian Communion. In conclusion, everyone agreed to fully enter into the following week's Communion service and truly seek to commune with Jesus himself.

During the following week's service, I was distracted and found it difficult to focus on students' encounter with Jesus during Communion. After much discussion on the topic, I personally felt excited to take Communion and was greatly attracted to the mystical element that would take place during the sacrament. Deacons had decided to try

a new kind of bread for the intinction service. On that day, instead of soft Hawaiian Bread, they used a crusty, round sourdough bread.

Our pastor, during his Communion reading, reached the part about the bread and, as usual, proceeded to tear the loaf in half. Unfortunately, it was not tearing easily. He struggled with the bread for a few seconds and then had to apply his full strength to forcibly rip it in half. I tried once again to refocus and fully experience communing with Christ at his table. Finding myself near the end of the line, I finally approached the pastor only to discover him still struggling with the crusty sourdough that would not tear. We laughed a little bit, and there went our “mystical” Communion experience.

During the following class, each person was asked to describe his or her experience in Communion from the previous week. An example of a comment from youth was, “the bread tasted really good.” Admittedly, Calvin was correct in acknowledging great mystery within Communion. It lies in the fact that simple and fleshly human beings somehow spiritually connect to their Creator and Savior through a bite of bread and a drink of juice.

After a quick pillow fight was broken up, the class delved into the second lesson, covering three main approaches to the Lord’s Supper. This lesson centered on Pope Paul III, Martin Luther, and John Calvin’s views. Youth seemed to understand the viewpoints. Students looked at some Scriptures supporting and disproving transubstantiation in order to get a better insight into the Catholics’ point of view (John 6). Such examination led to greater understanding of the way Communion is celebrated in churches upholding transubstantiation. It was mentioned that the Catholic priests are only allowed to touch

the wafer, and the extra wine has to be disposed of carefully because it is believed to be the actual blood of Christ.

For the third teaching component, the focus remained on those able to participate in Communion and on the token system from church history. The pastor had mentioned tokens in his sermon on the previous Communion Sunday, so it was fitting to cover that topic in more depth. Discussion began with pondering a hypothetical situation. It was suggested that Session proposed a new rule at FPCSM, allowing only youth sixteen years or older to participate in Communion. Students thought this was terrible discrimination. They called it “unfair” and claimed that, “Jesus died for and loves all people everywhere.” The notion that some people would not be allowed to take Communion was unacceptable to them.

It was inquired of students if there should be any requirements regarding those eligible to take Communion, and the question about younger children who may not understand it was raised. Several youth shared stories about their younger siblings who tried to get the biggest piece of bread and misbehaved during Communion. Discussion on the appropriate age for a child to receive Communion followed. At FPCSM, this decision is made exclusively by parents. The church offers a class on the topic, with a separate session dedicated to parents and children together. However, the ultimate decision on when children are ready for Communion lies with parents.

Confirmation class continued, and the token system was addressed. It was instituted by John Calvin and followed by Presbyterian churches for many years. Without a token distributed by elders, a person would not be allowed to take Communion. Youth could not fathom this, especially in the present age of tolerance and acceptance for all. It

became apparent this essential element of history needed clarification. Communion held a different meaning to people during the Reformation and, especially, before that time. They truly believed that they would go to hell without receiving the Eucharist prior to their passing. If someone had to be excluded from Communion, it was a very serious thing. Communion was, literally, a matter of life and death.

The class ended for lack of time, but the original lesson plan included incorporating a reader's theater skit, which originally appeared in *Reformed Worship*. The skit presents an imaginative conversation between Pope Paul III, Martin Luther, and John Calvin from eternity. It would have been the perfect ending to this series. A piece of the dialogue appears below:

*JC:* Perhaps we have divided Christ because we haven't listened to God or to each other. We have been swayed by other considerations. We always need forgiveness for that.

*ML:* But what does unite us, really? Doesn't Christ's poured-out blood flow over all of us? Don't we all believe that it is God who saves? God makes us right—we don't do that ourselves. We are utterly dependent on God.

*Paul:* Martin, you are still preaching that! You're worse than a dog with a fresh bone. But you are right. We disagree about the function of the church. We disagree about how God gives us salvation. But we have come to agree that it is God and God alone who gives it. Thank God for that!

*JC:* And we have come to that because we have read the same Scriptures. We come to that agreement only when we trust first and last in God's Spirit to guide our hearts, our reading, our study, our worship.<sup>6</sup>

### **Content of the Strategy: Scripture**

Another key component of Confirmation class is connecting young people to Scripture in ways that are both relevant and engaging to the whole person. For that purpose, ancient spiritual practices are used along with applicable and simple methods.

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<sup>6</sup> James C. Decker, "Luther, Calvin, and the Pope Meet," *Reformed Worship*, 2000.

Once again, practicality of these methods, in today's world, must be shown. On one occasion, FPCSM staff experimented with a group *lectio divina* exercise during a staff meeting. Initially, the exercise felt uncomfortable. It involved silence and resembled a guided imagery practice. Nevertheless, it proved enjoyable at the end. Through *lectio divina*, a worksheet was followed, and the passage was read clearly and slowly. In attendance were children's director, worship director, accountant, spiritual formation director, computer consultant, and youth intern.

One staff member liked the imagery and visual aspects of the exercise and was able to focus nicely. Another one, being an extrovert, really enjoyed doing *lectio* as a group because he felt there was energy in ideas bouncing off other people. Someone else felt it would have been more difficult to try *lectio divina* on her own due to lack of concentration. Another person did not like the exercise at all. She preferred practicing *lectio* on her own and did not benefit from the group time. Someone else liked the fact that the Scripture was repeated several times throughout, and, for her, the key was keeping her eyes closed during the experience. The intern thought the exercise would be considered weird by college students unless they had been exposed to it before. One positive characteristic of the exercise was that it really required participants to be away from distractions. Throughout its course, almost everyone's cell phone went off at least once, and the main office phones were ringing as well. Silencing the phones beforehand would have eliminated a lot of distraction.

Youth actually enjoy and are able to gain much from group exercises such as *lectio Divina*, which require an element of silence or introspection. They are bombarded with technology, information, and images daily. Young people are, typically, playing

music, a game, are texting, and checking Facebook simultaneously. A shift away from so much Internet access starts to occur since technology overload is on the horizon. A recent survey was conducted for Common Sense Media by Knowledge Networks regarding young people's use of social media. Nearly 36-percent of young people wished they could go back to a time when there was no Facebook, and 43-percent longed to be able to "unplug" sometimes.<sup>7</sup> Some young people, especially girls, deleted their Facebook accounts because using the website lowered their self-esteem. They felt inferior comparing themselves to exciting personas on their friends' Facebook pages. Youth were pressured to create a false Internet identity, and sometimes that included posting a photograph of someone else and using a pseudonym.

The impact Bible study methods have on students varies. Each young person, based on his or her personality, benefits from different types of exercises. Some methods correspond better to introverts and others to extroverts. It must be noted that students are more comfortable with methods they are accustomed to. The key is exposing young people to the Bible and challenging them to a daily reading of the Word.

The book *Enjoy the Silence* was chosen as a devotional resource for 2011 Confirmation class. In it, Maggie and Duffy Robbins include thirty *lectio Divina* exercises for young people. An easy-to-read introduction briefly describes the origins of this practice and explains it simply. The purpose of the book "is to invite you into the

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<sup>7</sup> Common Sense Media, "Social Media, Social Life: How Teens View Their Digital Lives," <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research> (accessed June 28, 2012).

presence of God, to help you find a practical way to listen and speak to the One who desperately wants a deeper relationship with you.”<sup>8</sup>

In theory, this material appeared to be a great component in connecting teenagers to ancient spiritual practices. The exercises seemed appropriate for this age group and served as a practical introduction to *lectio divina*. A copy of the book was given to all members of 2011 class, as well as to their mentors. Four readings were assigned for each week of Confirmation class. Mixed participation marked the exercises. Weekly accountability questions and introductory comments were based on the book’s content. It must be noted a few youth and mentors failed to do any readings. The survey questions and analysis of this portion of the class is listed in chapter seven.

In 2012, the class was not given copies of *Enjoy the Silence*. Instead, both students and leaders were asked to participate in a church-wide Bible reading plan through the book of Luke. Five readings per week were scheduled, and each reading consisted of a short portion of a chapter. The commitment level was considerably smaller than during the previous year. Additionally, the pastor’s teaching on one of the week’s readings during the sermon time provided reinforcement each Sunday.

Based on the answers to accountability questions, it became evident that participation among both students and mentors was higher than in 2011. Each class opened with a great debate regarding thoughts, questions, and insights from the week’s readings. Daily exercises were simpler and better reinforced. One young lady never completed the assignments, and she informed the class of her dislike for reading as an activity. In response to this situation, a recording of the New Testament was offered for

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<sup>8</sup> Maggie Robbins and Duffy Robbins, *Enjoy the Silence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 10.

her to listen to in a car. Creativity in Bible study is paramount, since there is no one-size-fits-all method.

Scripture is the essential foundation upon which Confirmation class is built. As a result, each session involves looking up and discussing numerous passages. Class periods allow enough time and assistance for every student to find a passage in his or her own Bible. Some youth find it quickly, while others struggle. Many FPCSM youth do not have basic knowledge to locate even the most common books of the Bible. The more time is spent in the Word, the more comfortable and familiar it will be.

Students practice reading aloud from the Bible regularly. In some places, such as Sunday morning worship, the Bible is read to the congregation by an individual, usually the pastor. Everyone else is expected to follow along silently. In youth settings, there are opportunities for participation by all who are comfortable reading aloud. Youth can engage directly through reading and become more actively involved in the passage. Creative types of readings such as drama and skits are also good ways to include youth in reading Scripture.

As the Bible passages are discussed, it is important to keep the entire Bible in mind and not read certain verses out of context. This is where the knowledge of *missio Dei* as it applies to the metanarrative of the Bible is helpful. The entire first session of Confirmation class presents the big picture of the Bible. Consequently, viewing *missio Dei* as a theme continues throughout each class.

This concludes the analysis of sample sessions, as well as overview of the resources used in Confirmation classes at FPCSM. Appendix E contains the schedule of classes and topics from the 2012 class. Undoubtedly, new interest in ancient Christian

spirituality emerged, and many useful resources and curriculums were published in the past few years to connect modern individuals to the past.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Confirmation takes place over the course of twelve classes, usually held on Sunday mornings. Topics range from the basics of Christianity to Presbyterian Church structure. Each young person is assigned a mentor who meets with him or her over the course of training, helps answer questions, and shares a personal story of faith. The culmination of Confirmation class involves writing a personal statement of faith, which is presented before FPCSM Session in a ceremony called “Celebration of Faith.” The elders lay hands on the youth and pray for them before they are received into church membership. Those who were not baptized receive baptism on the Sunday morning they are presented to the congregation.

Classes range in size from three-to-twelve youth, depending on the year. The class usually consists of eighth grade youth. However, it often includes older students who were not part of the church in their eighth grade year. As youth director, I teach most classes, but at times, guests or the pastor are invited for that purpose. The class usually runs from January-to-March. Three additional sessions have been added, and the program continues to be lengthened.

The final project timeline is listed in Appendix One. Confirmation study group one started in January 2011. This class was the largest in recent history, with twelve students participating. Over half the participants were senior high school youth who had not previously taken the class.

Students' background was quite varied. There were church youth who knew much about the Bible and doctrine. Three young people came from the Catholic Church and had many questions about the differences between Protestant and Catholic beliefs. One youth had relatively little church experience and had never heard of Communion.

Students in class one were close friends and felt quite comfortable around each other. At times, they had to be separated due to difficulties in staying focused during class. Closeness and openness in this group led to many good discussions. Students were encouraged to ask any question they had ever wondered, and they took full advantage of the opportunity. Some classes involved much discussion. At other times, questions were saved and carried over into the following week's sessions.

Confirmation study group two began in January 2012. This class was comprised of five youth: three eighth grade students, a junior, and a senior in high school. Three youth were raised in the church and had a strong biblical background. The other two had relatively little knowledge of the Bible or Christianity. One had a Jewish mom, and the other had atheist parents.

Class two was less talkative than class one, but students were willing to go deeper into Scripture and share more personally from their lives. This may have been due to a smaller class size. Many excellent discussions over the week's Bible readings from Luke took place. Young people were also open to accountability questions and application

from the readings. In this group, the majority of mentors decided to attend classes together with their mentees to learn alongside them.

### **Mentoring Component**

Each student in Confirmation class is paired up with a mentor for the duration of the class. The mentor is always of the same gender as the mentee and is a mature member or a regular attendee at FPCSM. The mentor does not have to be perfect, but he or she must be considered a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ and be above reproach. Some basic qualifications for this position include having love for God and a committed personal relationship with Jesus. In addition, youth mentors are expected to have love for young people and a desire to see this generation of youth grow in their faith.

It is important for young people to feel comfortable around their mentors. In many instances, mentors are recruited directly from the youth leadership team. This provides an opportunity to deepen relationships that already began forming. However, taking the Fuller Youth Institute research from *Sticky Faith* into account, it may be useful to encourage a variety of intergenerational relationships within the congregation with individuals who are not already part of youth ministry.

The mentoring component is one of the most important aspects of the program. The purpose is for a mentor to form a relationship with a Confirmation student in order to welcome that young person into the life of the church, provide spiritual guidance, and help him or her write a statement of faith. Several youth shared the impact the mentor made on their lives, which lasted years after Confirmation was over. One young man, who will soon graduate from college, clearly remembers how his mentor invited him to

play laser tag and shared his personal testimony of faith. It impacted the young man greatly, and he is still a strong follower of Jesus. Appendix F includes specific guidelines distributed to mentors in Confirmation class of 2012.

The mentoring component provides another opportunity for youth to connect with people in the church. *Sticky Faith* describes the importance and significance of godly adults in young people's lives. The book advocates a 5:1 ratio of adults involved in the life of one youth. According to the research, "the more adult mentors seek out a student and help the student apply faith to daily life, the better."<sup>1</sup> A direct correlation is made between maintaining contact with at least one adult from the church during a young person's first semester of college and an increase in the likelihood of sticky faith. Some of the feedback from FPCSM youth regarding their mentors is given in the survey assessment portion of this chapter.

### **Survey Assessment**

Assessment of long-term results of the changes made to Confirmation class and depth of spirituality is difficult to measure. Whether or not confirmands attend youth group or worship services can be an outward sign of the lasting results of Confirmation class. A survey and its analysis for each confirmand also help measure results. On the last day of Confirmation class, each student is given an extensive survey to complete. The analyzed results belong to case study one, class of 2011. Appendix G summarizes the answers compiled from ten surveys collected on the last day of the class.

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<sup>1</sup> Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, 89.

In regards to content, five students thought the variety of topics was excellent, four found it very good, and one considered the variety good. Comments given on topics students would like to see added to the curriculum include, “leadership, trust, guidance,” “I liked the topics we went over,” “other denominations,” “nothing,” and “what we can do for this church.” The depth of material presented during Confirmation class was rated by five students as excellent, three as very good, and two as good. Three answers for “a topic I still don’t understand” are “Resurrection,” “how the Presbyterian denomination is different from others,” and “nothing.”

As the length of time for Confirmation varied from year to year, it was interesting to note that many students were willing to take Confirmation classes for a longer period of time. Three youth were content with the given time frame of three months. Three young people were willing to meet four-to-five months, one student eight-to-nine months, and two confirmands for two years. Such information is helpful in knowing that FPCSM can continue to extend the time frame of Confirmation classes. A series of courses scheduled throughout an entire school year would allow more topics to be covered in greater depth, as well as time for mentors to fully engage with their protégés. Deepening of faith is a process, and the more time is intentionally devoted to it the better.

Aside from *lectio divina* assignments and writing the statement of faith, no additional homework was given. Seven students felt that regular homework would not be beneficial while three young people expressed such possibility. In response to the question, “Would you have been willing to memorize Creeds, books of the Bible, or other information?” four students answered “maybe,” three replied “yes,” two marked “no,”

and one said “probably not.” It is beneficial to challenge students without discouraging them, which is a delicate balance.

Several questions were asked about the devotional book, *Enjoy the Silence*. One young man indicated he had completed the book. Another student read three-quarters, two covered one-half, four read one-quarter, and two finished only a few pages. Answers to the question “What were the greatest hindrances to regular reading of the book?” included “laziness,” “long and I forgot to read it,” “did not have much time due to school,” “the timing, the way it talked about it, and the silence you needed,” and “forgetting.” Half the students mentioned discussing the devotionals with their mentors, which proved valuable. Mentors received copies of the book as well, and they were asked to complete the same assignments.

Answers to “What was something that you got out of reading the devotionals, if anything?” were “good lessons,” “a good way to read the Bible,” “why and how to pray,” “I learned more about the Bible,” and “that God loves you and is always there with you.” Seven students were able to successfully define the practice of *lectio divina* when inquired on the survey. Ultimately, it was valuable to expose youth to the practice and give them an avenue to practice this ancient Christian discipline. However, a book with thirty readings proved to be too lengthy. One activity per week would have been more useful and feasible.

In 2012, case study two did not include any readings from this devotional. Instead, the class participated in weekly readings from the book of Luke as part of a church-wide Bible reading plan. In both cases, there were students who did not, refused to, or forgot to do the readings. However, those who completed the assignments began to

form a daily habit in their lives. It was important for the teacher not to be frustrated with young people who failed to complete the task, but to remember the fruit of those who benefited from the assignments and grew in their spiritual lives.

In regards to the mentoring component, all ten youth enjoyed having a mentor through Confirmation and were happy with their particular one. Students expressed a desire to continue meeting with mentors after the end of Confirmation. This portion of the program is a key component to spiritual growth and understanding of faith. Mentors are advised to help students write their statements of faith. Two young people wished their mentors assisted them more.

One student was assigned a college youth as a mentor. The student begged for this young man and idolized him. Unfortunately, it was a mistake to pair them up. The college youth was rather immature in his faith. During the course of Confirmation, he did not meet with the confirmand even once. Both parties were hard to reach and blamed each other. This incident highlights the importance of recruiting mentors who are responsible adults, strong in faith. Moreover, it is not always best to place youth with mentors they suggest or even beg for.

Six students indicated they had not met with their mentors often enough while four young people said the time spent in meetings had been sufficient. None indicated they had met too many times. Scheduling is the biggest hindrance to these meetings. Busy mentors and youth attempt to meet several times during a three-month period, which is a difficult task. Meetings that happen, however, become some of the most remembered and beneficial experiences in the Confirmation process.

On the final page of the survey, a series of subjective statements was given. Students were encouraged to rate whether or not they agreed with a statement on a scale of one-to-ten, with ten meaning “very strongly agree,” five “neutral,” and one “very strongly disagree.” Two statements that received the most tens were, “I feel that because of Confirmation I will want to be part of a church once youth group ends,” and “I feel more confident in my faith.” For both statements, five students (half) indicated the strongest agreement. The statement that ranked just below, with four students indicating the strongest agreement was, “I want to participate in the life of this church and in Sunday morning services.”

In response to the statement, “I now feel more connected to church traditions throughout the centuries,” seven students expressed moderate-to-strong agreement, and three students indicated neutrality. After contemplating the statement, “I feel that because of Confirmation I will be less likely to fall away from God later in life,” four students offered strong agreement, four showed slight agreement, one remained neutral, and one strongly disagreed. One possible reason for strong disagreement could be that the youth felt he was already committed to God regardless of participation in the class.

Eighteen months after the Confirmation class of 2011 was completed, nine out of ten students continue to grow in faith and have strong connections to the Church. (One of the nine is reconnected to his mom’s Catholic Church where he was also confirmed). Of the remaining nine, there are variations in church and youth group attendance. Several within this class are strong leaders. Some usher, several help with the youth and adult worship bands, others have grown in their prayer lives, and some are active leaders in children’s ministry. Some youth also walked difficult paths over the past year, including

relational and family issues, school struggles, addictions, and an abortion. Strong connections made to leaders, mentors, and each other helped these young people stay on God's path of healing and restoration. Instead of becoming isolated and falling away, they stayed connected to *missio Dei* and the family of God.

One confirmand is currently questioning his faith. He also stopped attending FPCSM. As a participant in Confirmation, he displayed the least knowledge of Christianity. His father was Muslim before he passed away several years ago. Moreover, the young man's mentor was rather ineffective in showing him what a relationship with Jesus is truly like.

Time will tell whether members of this class will remain connected to faith or fall away. Through prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible. No students from the Confirmation class of 2012 went away to college yet. They will have more opportunities for faith to deepen before high school graduations.

### **Confirmation Class of 2013**

Several major changes mark Confirmation Class of 2013. Over the last several years, the program increased by several classes and weeks. The class of 2012 began in January and lasted through the end of March. The class of 2013 began in October, 2012, and will continue through the end of March, 2013. Classes are held on Sundays, after the worship service. Extra sessions include prayer and *lectio divina* activities conducted in class. In addition, each meeting time is extended by 30 minutes to include practical exercises and adequate question-and-answer sessions.

The second major change involves the mentoring aspect of the program. Mentors received a training class prior to Confirmation. Along with their protégés, they were given a resource guide by Jessie Schut, *I Believe: Getting Ready to Profess My Faith*. It consists of eight sessions to be completed together. Meeting times with youth and mentors are already built into the Confirmation schedule. This helps equip mentors and addresses difficulties in scheduling meeting times. Such improvements are already useful in overcoming challenges of the previous mentorship programs.

Once a month, instead of a typical class session, mentors and mentees meet to discuss the material within the resource guide. The guide includes exercises useful in getting to know each other and facilitates writing the statement of faith in several portions. During these class sessions, mentors have the freedom to decide whether to meet on FPCSM campus, at a coffee shop, or a food venue. It may be possible for mentors and mentees to meet on campus for the first portion of their time together and then go out for ice cream or food for more personal aspects of the relationship. The revised Confirmation class schedule can be found in Appendix H.

As mentors work closely with students on their statements of faith, new opportunities arise for guidance and thoughtfulness in the writing. One section of the statement is written per month. There is more space for creativity in the statements, allowing young people to write a poem, use a symbol, or create a banner. These ideas are listed within the resource guide students and mentors use together.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jessie Schut, *I Believe: Getting Ready to Profess My Faith* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 2004).

Finally, in conjunction with writing the statement of faith and teaching on the creeds, youth will write down their beliefs as a group. This group creed will be presented on the Sunday they are received into membership. It will help young people put their beliefs into words, which will continue to anchor them to the creeds and traditions of the past. FPCSM continues to lead and guide confirmands from the previous classes through mentoring, teaching, and service. Half the class of 2012 will start college in the fall of 2013, and their deepened faith will help them remain connected to God and *missio Dei*.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Admittedly, no easy method can be offered as a solution. There is no formula for youth workers around the world to use. No packaged program is in place to deepen the roots of faith in young people, and there is no guarantee that youth will stay connected to the Church upon graduating from youth groups. Richard Osmer reminds us that, “the challenge before the church in regard to Confirmation is not merely one of improving its teaching methods, timing, or format.”<sup>1</sup> One will not find a faultless curriculum or a perfect teaching format. Renewed understanding of the theological mindset and purpose behind Confirmation is necessary. This framework carries over into every aspect of the program, youth ministry, and the body of Christ.

The current project sought a possible remedy for many youth who abandon God in college through deepening faith during Confirmation. The premise is that introducing ancient spiritual practices to young people connects them to *missio Dei* and the family of God. This connectedness deepens the roots of faith in students and reduces the likelihood that they become prodigals.

There is no simple way to connect youth to the traditions of the past. Moreover, what is proven effective in one particular youth ministry context may not carry over into another. However, the same Holy Spirit dwells within and unifies youth shepherds around the world. God provides wisdom for those who earnestly seek him. Even after all the research conducted through the Fuller Youth Institute, Kara Powell admits that there are no easy answers. She reminds her readers that it is the Holy Spirit who develops deep

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Robert Osmer, *Confirmation: Presbyterian Practices in Ecumenical Perspective* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996), 3.

faith in young people, and youth leaders need to depend on God for wisdom. She writes, “We are full of suggestions. But our *top* suggestion is this: Trust the Lord with your kids and continue to ask- maybe at times beg- the Lord to build Sticky Faith.”<sup>2</sup>

This is a new and undefined era of youth ministry. In the present time, youth ministers have a unique opportunity and ability to shape and define the future of youth ministry. Reliance on the Holy Spirit and unity as God’s shepherds is required. A new theological mindset and willingness to try new methods, while retaining powerful elements and traditions of the past, are key components in shaping this era.

Remembering the wisdom of the past can be a key for the future. In Deuteronomy 6:12, God cautions his people not to forget him when they reach the Promised Land. When the Israelites are settled in beautiful cities they did not build, have houses full of good things, possess plentiful vineyards and trees, and have eaten their fill, there is danger of forgetting the God who provided their abundance. In the city of San Mateo, filled with beauty and wealth, the same danger and warning apply. Teenagers of this area live in a place of abundance where every need, want, and worldly desire can be filled. This is a city that has forgotten its provider.

In Deuteronomy 4: 9-10, God gives the Israelites a key to helping teenagers remember their provider. God instructs adults to remember his works and keep his words in their hearts. He further commands them to teach these things to their children and grandchildren so that each generation would know God and obey Him. Adults are instructed to teach the next generation about God and connect young people to the past and *missio Dei*. Through this connection, youth will grow deeper in faith and will not

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<sup>2</sup> Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*, 25.

abandon their Creator. Young people will serve and obey God in their youth (Eccl 11:9) and will be like shining lights in a dark, depraved world (Phil 2:15).

Today, parents, leaders, ancient practices and traditions, the Saints of the past, and the Trinity join together to anchor young people to faith in the turbulent waters of modernity. There is an opportunity for youth leaders and mentors to shape a new era of youth ministry and write modern history through remembrance of and connection to God's story. The connection is only a generation away from being forgotten, which is why this generation is so important.

The current project began at the 2007 National Youth Workers Convention, during teaching seminars on ancient Christian spirituality given by Mike King. This led to pursuing a degree in Christian spirituality through which FPCSM youth have been connected to *missio Dei*, especially through Confirmation. The three main results of this project include deepened faith of Confirmation class students, renewed mindsets and intentionality on the part of FPCSM youth leadership, and major improvements in the Confirmation program itself.

Connecting modern youth to the past through Confirmation does seem to make a difference in deepening of their faith. The post-Confirmation survey shows that students feel more confident in their faith. In addition, they want to continue to be part of a church once they graduate from youth group. These young people assert that they feel more attached to church traditions and will be less likely to fall away from God later in life.

Further research is needed to prove whether these students keep their faith through college and beyond. Typically, the first few weeks of college determine much about what groups students will join and what their identity will be. FPCSM youth

leaders will maintain contact with students, especially during the critical first months of starting college, and encourage them to seek out Christian fellowship groups and churches. Half the 2012 Confirmation class will begin college in the fall of 2013, when further findings can be made on whether students keep their faith.

This project resulted in changed attitudes and mindsets within FPCSM youth leadership team. Through the study of *Sticky Faith*, changes were made in the way leaders teach and connect with students. One team member put a plan into place to stay in monthly contact with a new college freshman. Another team member plans intergenerational events for FPCSM youth to be part of the larger body of Christ.

These renewed attitudes also reach parents and the rest of the church body. Parents took a sticky faith class in the fall of 2012 taught by FPCSM youth leadership team. Intentional ways to deepen children's faith were discussed. Young people and their families made sticky faith goals to intentionally focus on mutual spiritual growth.

As a result of this project, numerous improvements were made to FPCSM Confirmation program. The revised sessions include ancient Christian spiritual practices. They focus on traditions and are taught within the framework of *missio Dei*. The class sessions are longer, and the program itself now spans seven months.

The mentoring component grew and expanded as well. Mentors meet with their students more often, and the meetings are more in-depth. Each session has a specific topic to discuss, and mentors help develop young people's statements of faith. Mentors also receive an expanded training session and are chosen more broadly from the congregation as a whole.

This project made a difference in the faith of young people at FPCSM and, hopefully, beyond. It is a work in progress, and much of the fruit still remains to be seen. This attempt is a small piece in shaping a new era in youth ministry history and in God's mission throughout the ages.

During one youth group meeting, a young man who graduated from high school three years ago shared stories from his mission trip. He led twelve college students on their journey to parts of India and the Himalayas to encourage the underground church. The young man talked about the prayer walks he had organized and inspired youth group students by pointing to the power of prayer. During the trip, he met Christians disowned by their families and a teenage girl beaten by her parents for embracing Christianity. The young man shared his vision and plans to return to Bhutan and start a school for children abused by monks. But most importantly, he displayed the result of a life deeply connected to God and *missio Dei*.

## APPENDIX A

### Final Project Timeline

October 2007	National Youth Workers Convention, San Diego
June 2008	Fuller Seminary Christian Spirituality Cohort Begins
September 2010	New Curriculum Written for Confirmation Class
November 2010	Final Project Approval
January 2011	Confirmation Class study group one begins
April 2011	Confirmation Class one received into membership
January 2012	Confirmation Class study group two begins
April 2012	Confirmation Class two received into membership
September 2012	Final Project Completed
October 2012	Confirmation Class study group three begins
April 2013	Confirmation Class three received into membership

## APPENDIX B

### Psalm 23 Interactive Exercise

The Lord is my Shepherd, Psalm 23

**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.**

How has God provided for you recently?

**He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.**

Where can you go and spend quiet time with God to be calm, read His Word, and pray?

What area in your life is stormy, and where do you need God to calm the storm?

**He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

Is there something in your life that you know God probably isn't pleased with?

What can you do to get on the right path?

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

Do you remember a time when you were unsure or afraid and God brought you comfort?

Describe that time.

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

What are some of the good things God has given you or done for you?

**Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

Write a short prayer of thanks for God's goodness in your life.

**Amen.**

From: Doug Fields, *Creative Bible Lessons on the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. 65.

## APPENDIX C

### The Jesus Prayer- Pray Without Ceasing

What are various ways to interpret I Th. 5:17?

How close are we to praying without ceasing??

An ancient prayer called the “Jesus Prayer” or “Prayer of the Heart” is based on the biblical prayer of the tax collector from Luke 18:13.

The simplest version is “Lord, have mercy.”

The longest version is “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God have mercy on me, a sinner.”

This prayer is more commonly used in orthodox churches and in monasteries. It is used to help focus the mind.

*The Way of the Pilgrim* is a book about a Russian peasant who tries to pray without ceasing. He first tries to pray it 3,000 times a day, then 6,000, then 12,000.

Some say the Jesus Prayer sums up the whole gospel. To pray it, we must understand it.

The key word is “mercy.”

What is your understanding of the word mercy?

What does it mean to pray “Lord have mercy”?

The root of mercy means olive tree. Think of the olive branch after the flood and olive oil which was used as a healing balm (Good Samaritan).

Breath prayer is recited in rhythm with your breathing.

Breathe in “Lord, Jesus Christ, son of God”

Breathe out “have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Prayer ropes keep track of repetition. This was especially useful before clocks to recite a certain number of repetitions.

How can this ancient practice help us in our modern world today?

## APPENDIX D

### Communion Teaching Curriculum

#### The Sacraments: Communion- Part One

The word “sacrament” meant an oath of allegiance. When Roman soldiers were inducted into the emperor’s army, they took an oath of allegiance to the emperor called a *sacramentum*. The soldier would dip their right hand into a container of blood from a sacrificial animal, take an oath, and promise to serve the emperor faithfully unto death. (*Journey to Discipleship*, Harvey G. Throop, Dimensions, San Diego, 2001)

\*What are the sacraments of the church?

\*How much do you know about each of the sacraments?

\*Do you think the sacraments are administered pretty much the same way in all churches?

\*Have you seen them administered in any other churches? Describe the experience.

\*Going back to the origin of the word “sacrament,” does this help us better understand the practice of communion?

Communion is also known as the “Lord’s Supper” and “The Eucharist” (a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving”). Jesus gave us this sacrament so that we would remember his death for our sins and that by participating in it, we would have fellowship or communion with him.

What does the words “commune” or “communion” typically mean?

READ- I Corinthians 11:23-26. This passage includes the “Words of the Institution of the Lord’s Supper.”

RESPOND-

\*How do you think the disciples felt during the Last Supper?

\*How would you have felt?

\*What do you think of the phrase “this do in remembrance of me”?

\*What was the old covenant?

\*How significant was your last communion experience?

APPENDIX E

**Confirmation Class Schedule 2011**

Jan. 9	Parent meeting / Introduction
Jan. 16	The Bible / God's Mission
Jan. 23	How do I read the Bible?
Jan. 30 J	Jesus: Birth and Teachings
Feb. 6	Jesus: Death and Resurrection
Feb. 13	The Holy Spirit / Spiritual Gifts
Feb. 20	The Church: More than a Building
Feb. 27	Sacraments and Creeds
Mar. 6	Your Time, Talent, and Treasure
Mar. 13	Prayer and Worship
Mar. 20	Grace/ Statements of Faith
Mar. 27	Christian Life / Service
Apr. 3	Presbyterian Q and A
<i>April 26</i>	<i>Tuesday, Celebration of Faith</i>
	<i>Elder's Meeting, 6:30-7:15pm</i>
<i>May 8</i>	<i>Received into membership</i>
	<i>Sunday Service, 9:30 am</i>

## APPENDIX F

### Confirmation Mentoring Program 2012

#### Purpose:

\*For a mentor to form a relationship with a Confirmation student in order to welcome that student into the life of the church, provide spiritual guidance, and help the student in writing his or her statement of faith.

#### Qualifications:

\*A mentor loves God and is committed to a personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior.

\*A mentor is willing to share portions of his or her personal journey of faith and salvation story.

\*A youth mentor has love for young people and a desire to see this generation of youth grow in their faith.

#### Responsibilities:

\*Meet with your Confirmation student a minimum of four times before April 24 and one time after this date (scheduling this will require phone calls, texts, and flexibility). Do not give up; it may not be easy to schedule times.

\*During meeting times, be a good listener, ask good questions, and pursue deeper conversation and spiritual topics.

\*Help and guide your Confirmation student in writing his or her statement of faith.

\*Participate in the Celebration of Faith (April 24) and membership Sunday (May 13) with your young person.

#### Ideas for Meeting Times:

\*Plan to meet together for *approximately* one hour.

\*Get to know your student by asking good questions and listening well.

\*Share details about your own life and your faith journey.

\*Ask about school, sports, activities, family members, friends, and other important elements of a young person's life.

\*Ask about what the young person is learning in Confirmation class, Sunday school, youth group, devotionals and personal Bible reading.

\*Please, talk about God and the student's relationship with Jesus.

\*Ask challenging questions.

\*Relax, be yourself and enjoy this time together.

#### Meeting Places:

\*Meet in a public place such as Starbucks, Snowee, Baskin Robbins, or pretty much any place that serves food.

\*Meet for a fun activity such as Laserquest, arcade, Sky High, mini golf, etc.

\*Go together to the teen's favorite store- sporting goods, clothing, computers, etc.

\*Do not meet in your home or in a room completely alone with the youth.

\*You may try to meet for lunch, coffee, Snowee, or snack on 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue after one of the Confirmation classes on Sundays (class is from 11am to noon in the youth room). You are also welcome to attend Confirmation classes or to just stop by to meet or greet your student.

\*You may try to meet before youth group starts at Snowee Frozen Yogurt on 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue (middle school youth group starts at 5:30pm; high school youth group starts at 7pm).

## APPENDIX G

### Confirmation Survey

Class of 2011, Ten students

The variety of topics that were chosen for Confirmation class was:

Excellent (5) Very Good (4) Good (1) Needs Improvement (0)

I would like to see these topics added: “leadership, trust, guidance,” “I liked the topics we went over,” “other denominations,” “nothing,” and “what we can do for this church.”

The depth of material presented during Confirmation class was:

Excellent (5) Very Good (3) Good (2) Needs Improvement (0)

A topic I still don’t understand is: “Resurrection,” “how the Presbyterian denomination is different from others,” and “nothing.”

The following questions are about the devotional book, *Enjoy the Silence*:

I have read this much of the book:

All (1) Three-Quarters (1) One Half (2) One-Quarter(4) A Few Pages (2)

What were the greatest hindrances to regular reading of the book?

“Laziness,” “long and I forgot to read it,” “did not have much time due to school,” “the timing, the way it talked about it, and the silence you needed,” and “forgetting.”

Have you discussed any of the devotionals with your mentor? Yes (5) No (5)

If so, was it a valuable conversation? Yes (5) No(0)

Were the devotional readings easy to understand?

Always (2) Usually (6) Sometimes (2) Rarely (0) Never (0)

What was something you got out of reading the devotionals, if anything?

“Good lessons,” “a good way to read the Bible,” “why and how to pray,” “I learned more about the Bible,” and “that God loves you and is always there with you.”

What is *lectio Divina*?

Seven students were able to successfully define this practice.

Do you feel that regular homework assignments would have helped you during Confirmation?

Yes (0) No (7) Maybe (3)

How long would you have been willing to be in weekly Confirmation classes?

Three months, as it is (3) four to five months (3) six to seven months (1) Eight to Nine months (1) two years (2)

Would you have been willing to memorize the Creeds, the books of the Bible, or other information?

Yes (3) Probably Not (1) No (2) Maybe (4)

Did you enjoy having a mentor through Confirmation?

Yes (10) No (0)

Were you happy with your particular mentor?

Yes (10) No (0)

Do you feel you met with your mentor:

Just the right amount of times (4) Too many times (0) Not enough times (6)

Would you like to continue to meet with your mentor after Confirmation ends?

Yes, regularly (1) Yes, sometimes (9) No (0)

Evaluate the following questions on a scale of 1 to 10.

10 is "very strongly agree," 5 is "in between," and 1 is "very strongly disagree."

Confirmation class has helped me begin a new relationship with Jesus

10-3 9-1 8-1 7-2 6-1 5-1 4-1

Confirmation class has helped me grow an existing relationship with Jesus.

10-3 9-2 8-4 5-1

My mentor has helped me grow in my faith.

10-2 8-3 7-2 6-1 4-1 1-1

The weekly teaching sessions have helped me grow in my faith.

10-2 9-1 8-4 7-1 6-1 5-1

The devotional book *Enjoy the Silence* has helped me grow in my faith.

10-1 9-1 8-4 6-1 5-2 4-1 3-1

Writing a statement of faith is helping me grow in my faith.

10-2 8-4 7-1 5-1 4-1

I am excited about church membership.

10-4 9-1 8-2 7-1 6-3

I wish Confirmation classes weren't over and kept going longer.

10-1 9-1 7-1 6-1 5-4 4-1 3-1

I feel more connected to First Presbyterian Church after Confirmation classes.

10-3 9-1 8-1 7-1 6-2 5-2

I now feel more connected to church traditions throughout the centuries.

19-2 8-3 7-2 5-3

I feel that because of Confirmation I will be less likely to fall away from God later in life.

10-2 9-2 7-2 6-2 5-1 1-1

I feel that because of Confirmation I will want to be part of a church once youth group ends.

10-5 8-2 5-3

I want to participate in the life of this church and in Sunday morning services.

10-4 9-2 7-1 6-2 5-1

I feel more confident in my faith.

10-5 8-2 7-1 6-1 5-1

I feel better equipped to share my faith with other people now.

10-2 9-2 8-4 7-1 5-1

## APPENDIX H

### Confirmation Class Schedule 2012-2013

Oct. 21	Introduction & mentor meeting (session one)/ mentor training
Oct. 28	The Bible / God's Mission
Nov. 4	Mentor meeting (discuss session 2)
Nov. 11	How do I read the Bible?
Nov. 18	What is the Gospel?
Dec. 2	Jesus: Birth & Ministry
Dec. 9	Mentor meeting (discuss session 3)
Dec. 16	Jesus: Death & Resurrection
Jan. 6	Mentor meeting (discuss session 4)
Jan. 13	The Holy Spirit / Spiritual Gifts
Jan. 20	The Church: More than a Building
Jan. 27	Mentor meeting (discuss session 5)
Feb. 3	Sacraments
Feb. 10	Creeds and Spiritual Practices
Feb. 17	Mentor meeting (discuss session 6)
Feb. 24	Your Time, Talent, and Treasure
Mar. 3	Prayer and Worship
Mar. 10	Mentor meeting (discuss session 7)
Mar. 17	Grace/ The Christian Life
April 7	Mentor meeting (discuss session 8)
April 14	Presbyterian Q and A
April 16	<i>Tuesday, Celebration of Faith</i> <i>Elder's Meeting, 6:30-7:15pm</i>
May 12	<i>Received into membership</i> <i>Sunday Service, 9:30 am</i>

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