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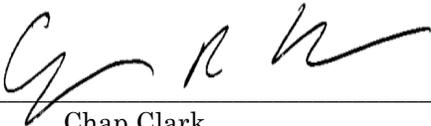
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
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THE CHURCH'S CALL TO ADDRESS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS
IN ITS COMMUNITY

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MARCUS J CARLSON
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ABSTRACT

The Church's Call to Address the Development of Adolescents in its Community

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The research question for this project is: What does it mean for the church at large to address the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents in its community? The target audience for this particular project is the local Lutheran church within the United States and Canada. This project could also serve those who work with adolescents in other contexts and those who are open to examining the issues facing adolescents including a faith perspective. The goal of this project is to develop a strategy for Lutheran churches to better serve and engage the community in addressing the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents.

This project examines adolescent development from historical, theological, social science and practical perspective. In addition to examining both the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescence, this project highlights current cultural and systemic issues related to adolescent development. This project also examines the possible response of the Church to the challenges of adolescent psychosocial and spiritual development today. A variety of leadership, cultural and systemic challenges in the Church will be considered in order to move towards a healthy and theological response to the issues and challenges of adolescent development. Finally, the project suggests a partnership between the church and the community, initiated by the church in order to care for and support adolescents while addressing the developmental and cultural realities and challenges they face today. A possible model for this partnership is proposed.

Theological Mentor: Chap Clark, PhD

Words: 230

To my wife, Jessica and my children, Micah and Abigail, for your constant support, encouragement and confidence you have in me to pursue all God has for me

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I would like to thank my family, friends and all who support, encourage and pour into my life and helped me to think differently as I pursued this project. To all those who have been a part of pouring into me in the name of Jesus over the past two decades, I am grateful for each of you as God has used you to change my life. This project would not have been possible without your ministry to me. To my wife Jessica for proofreading countless papers, projects and other documents and having the patience with and confidence in me to help me become a better writer. I am humbled and honored by the love you all have and continue to show me. You truly have been an expression of the Kingdom of God in my life.

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INTRODUCTION

Even a surface glance at the Gospels points to God's deep love for those who suffer. Adolescents in the Church and culture today are suffering. While this experience is similar to many adolescents in the past, the current scenario is perhaps more difficult because support for them has decreased. One individual's journey demonstrates some of the challenges facing adolescents today.

When Alex was a sophomore in high school, he decided to share part of his life story with his youth pastor. From the outside, he appeared to be a balanced, well-adjusted adolescent who was an extremely successful student enrolled in honors classes and a gifted athlete with potential for college scholarships. Additionally, he participated in extra-curricular and community activities. Alex led Christian groups at his high school and attended service projects and mission trips in his community and beyond. This young man was active in his church and youth group. While adults in the church respected him, his youth group recognized him as a leader demonstrating a deep, mature faith. Alex also had strong family relationships, relating well with his three siblings as well as his parents. He was close to his mother and admired his father, although it was clear he felt a significant amount of pressure from his father to be successful. Alex had access to resources, but was not exceptionally wealthy.

Evidently, the life the young man experienced and perceived was not as positive as what those around him believed. Struggling deeply with self-hatred and feelings of inadequacy, he felt he could not measure up to the expectations of the adults in his life.

Alex struggled with romantic relationships, admitting he used sexual intercourse to cover the pain he experienced. Alex contemplated suicide, struggled with depression and doubted his faith. Sadly, he expressed a sentiment that he was unsure of his identity and did not feel safe expressing this unknown identity. He was engaged in self-mutilation on a regular basis, and his parents were aware of this behavior. This young man was not actually well adjusted, and this conclusion is often the case when the adolescent's life experience does not match what adults observe. Like Alex's scenario, adolescence is often not what it appears to be.

With the help of a community of teachers, youth leaders, other church members, coaches, mentors, parents and family friends, Alex was able to address many challenges he faced and not only continued to be successful, but found greater happiness and wholeness. After all, according to Robert Putnam, children who were "enmeshed in a supportive social network, lived in a socially supportive neighborhood, and attended church regularly" avoided significant problems.¹ This young man's encounter with a loving God in the midst of serving on a mission trip was the beginning of a transformational journey.

The word adolescence relates to the word adult and comes from the same Latin verb, *adolescere*, which means to grow up.² Adolescence is a time of turmoil, and many adults choose to repress memories of those years with few of them desiring to repeat their adolescent journey. Additionally, many adolescents hate adolescence and do not know

¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 299.

² Robert Kegan, *In over Our Heads: Mental Demands of Modern Life*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 19-20.

how to understand or define it. At times, the adults in their lives are even more perplexed, frustrated and terrified and often regard this period as negative.

People who work in organizations, institutions and systems on behalf of adolescents often find their work deeply discouraging, overwhelming and undervalued by the larger culture. The Church, particularly the Lutheran Church in the United States and Canada, continues to fail in their efforts to minister to adolescents and their families. Most resources for adolescents do not focus on what is best for them, and some parents and families approach this period of their collective lives as a time to be survived more than anything else. Adolescence is simply overwhelming, yet adolescence is a critical period of development for the individual child, his or her family, his or her church, his or her future family and the communities in which he or she will live, work and worship.

Adolescence may be the most important time period in anyone's life and comprises more of an individual's lifetime than it ever has before. Aspects of adolescence have changed dramatically over time, while other aspects of adolescence have remained the same. Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verses nine and ten states, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new?' It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time."³ While there is nothing new in the eyes of God when it comes to adolescence, new and old challenges must be addressed for the health of adolescents, families, churches and communities.

The perspective on adolescence must change, and this change cannot be limited to an individual or a handful of individuals; the Church and culture need radical change to

³ *Holy Bible: New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

shift the negative effects of adolescence today. Robert Keagan points out, “Individual change that does not alter the nature of the group mind may be meaningless.”⁴ Lasting social change will come primarily by changing generations not by changing habits of individuals; given the challenges facing adolescents, this change should begin now.⁵ The proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” should be more than a cliché or political slogan; it should be the approach to the care, development and support of all children by parents, families, churches and community organizations. Moreover, it takes a Christ following village to raise a child.

The Church was intended to care for the world’s needy, but the Church, including the Lutheran Church has abdicated that responsibility while bemoaning the results. Not only is this an error of practicality, it is also an error of theology as it deviates from the Lutheran understanding of baptism, which calls the Church to ensure every child is cared for by the Church of Jesus Christ. Not only has the Church abdicated responsibility for the care and support of our adolescents, but so have many systems whose purpose was to care for them: family, schools and the community. It takes a village to walk with a child through adolescence and help them into adulthood. As a whole, the American culture has perhaps moved backwards in the effort to support adolescents at a time when it may be more challenging than it has ever before. Keagan also notes adolescents are unable to meet the expectations the “adult culture holds out for them.”⁶

It will take an intentional effort by parents, the church, community and

⁴ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 242.

⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 265.

⁶ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 37.

community organizations to address unique challenges facing adolescents today so all children have opportunity to grow to be healthy, functioning adults living their identity in Jesus Christ. The examination of adolescent development from historical, theological, social science and practical perspective provides insight into addressing these challenges. In addition to examining both the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescence, understanding current cultural and systemic issues related to adolescent development is vital. The response of the church to the challenges of adolescent psychosocial and spiritual development has the power to enact great change.

A variety of leadership, cultural and systemic challenges in the Church, specifically the Lutheran Church in the United States and Canada, are obstacles to moving towards a healthy and theological response to the challenges of adolescent development. Therefore a partnership between the Church and the community initiated by the Church can better support adolescents while addressing their developmental and cultural realities and challenges. A possible model for this partnership focuses on how to help local Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada partner with the community to best care for adolescents in their congregations and community.

The question for consideration is what does it mean for the Church at large to address the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents in its community? To address this question, the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents must be examined and considered. Additionally, the key issues in adolescent development as well as the societal response to those issues will be analyzed, including a focus on social capital. Finally, church dynamics and a church-initiated community partnership will be addressed.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

There are two ways to examine adolescence; from a sociocultural perspective and religious perspective.¹ A greater understanding will arise from an examination of the nature of adolescent development, psychosocially and spiritually from a theological and social science perspective. Stanley Hall coined the term adolescence, a turbulent period of life filled with change.² This unique period of development is extremely complex and yet is critical to the development of an individual as they move into adulthood. Regardless of one's religious perspective, human beings are not "cars where parts add up, we are a whole."³ There are many unchanged aspects of psychosocial and spiritual development in adolescents over time, yet the nature of adolescent development has also changed dramatically.

¹ James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 231.

² G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, (New York,: D. Appleton and company, 1904).

³ Peter M. Senge, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, 1st ed., (Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning, 2004), 5.

Much can be learned from the past to build upon what is already known about adolescence. The new current reality of adolescence in the United States compels one to take a fresh look at this period of development. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton point out “American teenagers can embody adults’ highest hopes and most gripping fears” and given the immense challenges adolescents face today, all communities must reexamine adolescence and rethink how to engage and care for adolescents.⁴ Peter Senge notes, “Learning based on past is fine when the challenges we face can be seen in the past, but when we face a whole new reality, these things do not work.”⁵ It is critical for those supporting adolescents consider the changing nature of adolescence in order to best care for, guide and support children in this critical period of development.

The Nature of Adolescents and Adolescent Development

Examining adolescent development from a theological perspective means that by considering the nature and person of God, “we will eventually see that the dynamics of development, down to the particulars of language, thought, patterns of affect, and moral judgment,” as well as the nature of ego development “are compelled forward according to a transformational pattern that reflects on a human level” Smith discusses.⁶ An important distinction James Loder makes regarding humanity and God is “although distinctly different in origin, destiny, and magnitude, the human spirit and the God of the universe are made for each other ultimately designed to replicate the divine and the human in the

⁴ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

⁵ Senge, *Presence*, 86.

⁶ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 17.

person of Jesus Christ.”⁷ Human beings are created in the image of God, and although their image is tainted with sin and are not the perfect image of humanity like Jesus Christ, they should emulate God’s design.

The psychosocial development of adolescents is extremely complicated with many factors to consider, and should be approached using insights from multiple sources.⁸ Dawn Eaker and Lynda Walters posit, “Psychosocial development refers to the formulation of a coherent sense of self in relation to others.”⁹ Adolescent psychosocial maturity includes identity, along with interpersonal and social development.¹⁰

Adults observing adolescence find it difficult to comprehend the complex nature of this period in the life of another human being. The nature of development provides insight when considering this developmental period. A constructionist perspective contributes to a more holistic, connected understanding instead of looking at it objectively.¹¹ From a theological perspective, an interactionist perspective on human development contributes to greater discernment of the relationship between theology and development, recognizing that the two not only interact, but theology informs an understanding of development.¹²

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Michael J. Nakkula and Eric Toshalis, *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2006), x.

⁹ Dawn Goettler Eaker, and Lynda Henley Walters, "Adolescent Satisfaction in Family Rituals and Psychosocial Development: A Developmental Systems Theory Perspective," *Journal of Family Psychology* 16, 4 (December 2002): 407.

¹⁰ Ibid., 410.

¹¹ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, x-xi.

¹² Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 19.

The Nature of Development

All normal human development, especially adolescence, is a result of interaction of personality and environment over a lifetime.¹³ Urie Bronfenbrenner concludes that immediate environment is important, but all levels of environment are vital factors.¹⁴ The microsystem is the immediate environment, while the mesosystem is the network of connections between the systems and how each impacts the other, with the ecosystem being the societal institutions that may have influence over the child.¹⁵ The macrosystem is the system of cultural beliefs and values as well as the systems that are built on those values and finally the chronosystem is the changes that occur in developmental circumstances over time and in a particular time.¹⁶

Loder believes what is true of language “is also true of behavior, ego development, intelligence and judgment,” and as a result all understanding of development, including adolescent development must be seen from a broader perspective.¹⁷ Development may never be complete, depending on one’s definition or whether one sees it as a stage or process. Full development means constant presencing,

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach*, (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009), 20-21.

¹⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 18-19.

which is continual in nature.¹⁸ In that sense, development is not a process or stage, but rather an existence. In this way, development is a reflection of Jesus, as the cornerstone of the Gospel is the incarnation, the life of Jesus. The story of Jesus should not be limited to his process or results, but instead his presence and existence should guide an understanding of development.

Jeffrey Arnett notes almost all periods of development, but particularly in adolescence, contain long periods where nothing happens and development by nature is “nonlinear and hard to predict.”¹⁹ Adolescent development resembles the growth of a bamboo tree. A bamboo tree can appear not to grow at all for years and then all of a sudden the tree will grow exponentially. This analogy is true of many aspects of development. In the case of adolescent development, not only does progress appear to stop, but there seems to be some regression.

Defining Adolescence

There are three challenges in defining adolescence: first, one must define the beginning and end of adolescence, second, one must define the time period that makes up adolescence and finally, one must define the markers and characteristics of adolescence. Adolescence is the period between puberty and adulthood when a person makes commitments: commitments to self (identity), others, community and to their creator.²⁰ In the case of adolescence, one of the great challenges is it begins with a physical marker

¹⁸ Senge, *Presence*, 13-15.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 143.

²⁰ James E Marcia, "Adolescence, Identity, and the Bernardone Family," *Identity* 2, 3 (2002): 201.

and ends with social markers; in other words, as Chap Clark notes, “It begins in puberty and ends in culture.”²¹ Physiological puberty and social puberty are different and rarely converge,²² and people assume they are equivalent, which they are not.²³

In the case of the biological marker, the average age of female puberty is used to define the start of adolescence.²⁴ In general, puberty in boys and girls does not start at the same time, and it is often later for boys and is more difficult to measure, which is part of the reason they take longer to mature and reach adulthood.²⁵ Puberty is more than one event; it is many things happening at once and not limited to biological and physical changes.²⁶ While puberty is a powerful and defining force, Hans Sebald concludes that the “cultural view of puberty is more powerful than process of puberty itself.”²⁷ There is some disagreement about the average age of female puberty, but most researchers are within a year of each other, with the range normally between 10.3 to 11 years old.

Adolescence ends socially or culturally when one is perceived as an adult by society and culture. The challenge in urban-industrial societies, as well as technological or global societies means that Sebalds’ early assertion that “social adulthood is not in

²¹ Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a Myspace World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 62.

²² Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (London,: Routledge & Paul, 1960), 65.

²³ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 127.

²⁴ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 62.

²⁵ Peter Blos, *The Adolescent Passage: Developmental Issues*, (New York: International Universities Press, 1979), 101.

²⁶ Barbara Strauch, *The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries About the Teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 96.

²⁷ Hans Sebald, *Adolescence: A Sociological Analysis*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 160.

sync with biological adulthood” is accurate.²⁸ One view is adolescence ends and adulthood is achieved when “integration and differentiation” are a part of personality.²⁹ This process concludes when an individuated person is more aware of self and is accepted by society, and society and culture see and accept the individuated person as an adult based on both internal and external markers.³⁰

There is a lot of debate over the age or time period of adolescence. While most agree on the markers used to define the start and end of adolescence, there is disagreement regarding what age these markers occur. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins believe adulthood can be seen as consisting of five pieces: “leaving home, finishing school, demonstrating financial stability, being married, and having kids,” and while these markers may be helpful and culturally accurate, it is a long and inconsistent list as these five tasks may occur later in life than in the past.³¹ These culturally defined goals and the healthy means of achieving them are vague for most adolescents.³²

All definitions of adulthood are prescriptive, and American society focuses on an individual’s theoretical potential instead of their given characteristics and talents, assuming that unless they achieve certain markers, they are not valuable.³³ Using these

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 380.

³⁰ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 93.

³¹ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church--and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2011), 46-47.

³² Sebald, *Adolescence*, 368.

³³ James E. Côté, *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 51.

markers as determining factors, adolescence does not end at age eighteen. It is more likely to end somewhere between twenty-five and thirty, and for Carl Jung as highlighted by Anthony Storr, individuation does not really occur the your thirties.³⁴

Clark describes the time period of adolescence as a tightrope as the adolescent moves from childhood to adulthood.³⁵ Additionally, there is debate over the markers, stages and process occurring between the beginning and end of adolescence. Peter Blos states there are five stages of adolescence: the initial stage or entry into adolescence, “identity formation,” “personality consolidation,” “character formation” and a “second individuation.”³⁶ While this perspective is helpful and the stages are accurate to the adolescent experience, many of these stages occur simultaneously not linearly. If adolescence is the move from “dependency on adult and family to interdependency in adult community” then it is truly a significant transition for the adolescent.³⁷

Assumptions about Adolescence

There are many assumptions about adolescent development; some are new and others have existed long before adolescence was defined by Hall in the early 1900s.³⁸ Human beings, have a tendency to discount experiences and interpretations different from what they know or trust and as a result, end up being reactive somehow always end up

³⁴ C. G. Jung and Anthony Storr, *The Essential Jung*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 200.

³⁵ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 102-103.

³⁶ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 193.

³⁷ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 102.

³⁸ Hall, *Adolescence*.

perceiving the self to be right.³⁹ In order to truly understand the nature of adolescence from a theological perspective, this is not the approach to consider. It is easier to operate on assumptions because adolescence is so complicated and “understanding behavior of teenagers will never be simple.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, as Denise Clark Pope states, “Our ignorance about adolescence means we trivialize their experience.”⁴¹ Furthermore, many people ascribe the adolescent period as either “mature and high functioning or as in great danger, but never anything in the middle,” Clark notes.⁴²

There is a lot of debate about the nature of adolescence today as well as how it came to exist. Robert Epstein’s perspective states adolescence is a cultural creation, adolescents are a “product of culture” and adolescence itself is “in turmoil” because adolescence is a cultural creation, adolescence and the turmoil that comes with it is not necessary.⁴³ This perspective, although accurate in the sense that adolescence is a cultural creation, is faulty as it admits adolescence is a result partially of the industrial age. This view asserts one of the reasons adolescence emerged from the industrial age is due to the “finely divided division of labor, failure to provide members of culture with ideation that gives strong identity,” Sebald posits.⁴⁴ This idea means adolescence is partially cultural

³⁹ Senge, *Presence*, 10-11.

⁴⁰ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 73.

⁴¹ Denise Clark Pope, *Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xi.

⁴² Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 2.

⁴³ Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: What Every Parent, Educator, and Student Needs to Know About Ending Teen Turmoil*, (Fresno, CA: Quill Driver Books/Word Dancer Press, 2010), 13.

⁴⁴ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 8.

as it has grown and emerged rather than something culture invented out of convenience as the view suggests.

Adolescence cannot be understood as a stage always in existence but is an invention of modern industrialized life and particularly the extension of adolescence, maybe as a result of a globalized, technological world. Either way, adolescence is not universal, but not simply American in nature and existence either.⁴⁵ America cannot be blamed for the inevitable rise of adolescence, but all similar cultures are responsible for the rise of adolescence.⁴⁶

Additionally, it would seem unlikely for nations who have lived through the industrial age to go back to pre-industrial or pre-technological living. An alternate perspective is adolescence is a reality to be understood and addressed in order to assist adolescents while trying to leverage the healthy aspects and mitigate the unhealthy pieces of this period of development. Furthermore, societies have operating systems based on perception and behavior, all of which influences assumptions and perspective on adolescence.⁴⁷

The common assumption that adolescence is simply a time of rebellion and non-conformity neglects that human beings “have a root of non-conformity that is bigger than adolescence or any other stage,” Loder states.⁴⁸ This assumption could be rooted in a misunderstanding regarding the process of individuation. Individuation is not the same as

⁴⁵ Ibid., 501.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2011), 31.

⁴⁸ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 129.

individualism; individuation is natural. Individualism is not natural or healthy as it is a rejection of communal, and unfortunately, the two terms are often confused.⁴⁹

Individualization includes pressure for everyone to become what James Côté defines as a “self-determining” agent, isolated from the whole, doomed to a narcissistic view of self and others.⁵⁰ Independence is individualism, behavioral consistency and primacy of self. Interdependence is esteem for the group and relational interdependence.⁵¹

Interdependence, not independence, is the marker of adulthood. As Sharon Parks notes, individuation is about “inner dependence instead of independence.”⁵² Adolescents may lack self-regulation and self-control over impulses, but those skills come in socialization, and not naturally as a part of development. This process means the responsibility for adolescent’s lack of self-control and self-regulation falls on society and the adults in their lives.⁵³

Given the turbulent nature of adolescence and the frequent, immature and irrational appearance of adolescents, adults assume they are not capable of much, but this assumption has resulted in adolescents not being fully recognized or understood.⁵⁴ Questioning adolescent’s ability to take on responsibility both internally and externally is problematic because it creates a lot of inconsistency when it comes to applying a

⁴⁹ Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 22.

⁵⁰ Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 29.

⁵¹ Susan Harter, *The Construction of the Self, Second Edition: Developmental and Sociocultural Foundations*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 2012), 289-291.

⁵² Parks, *Big Questions, Worth Dreams*, 100-101.

⁵³ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 95.

⁵⁴ Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 190.

universal view of maturity and responsibility. While they are capable of adult responsibility and maturity in their best moments, they are not capable of adult maturity and responsibility as a way of living. The American Psychological Association states adolescents are both as mature as adults in intellectual capacity and expectation and yet not mature in rights or in responsibility, leading some to a misguided application that adolescents should have adult rights. Instead, this conclusion demonstrates the confusion and systemic abandonment of society and culture when it comes to adolescents.⁵⁵

While the immature nature of adolescents may be undeniable, there may be an assumption in American society that adolescents are mini-adults or adults in training. Arnett notes, “Adolescence and adulthood is not dichotomous,” yet adolescents are not adults.⁵⁶ Adolescents need scaffolding to reduce the gap between what they are capable of doing and expected to do,⁵⁷ and adults need to create a scaffold for them,⁵⁸ as it is in scaffolding that humans learn to regulate learning.⁵⁹ For church leaders, this is what Scott Cormode calls the task of interpretation that leaders are called to.⁶⁰ In the past, some of the great tools that helped scaffold were rituals and rites of passage, which are somewhat

⁵⁵ Marie Banich, "Reconciling the Complexity of Human Development with the Reality of Legal Policy," *American Psychologist* 64, 7 (October 2009): 602.

⁵⁶ Arnett, *Debating Emerging Adulthood*, 56.

⁵⁷ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 87.

⁵⁸ Laura E. Berk and Adam Winsler, *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education*, (Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995), 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁰ Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xi.

lost in modern culture. Ritual helps with psychosocial development, but it must be developmentally appropriate ritual.⁶¹

Characteristics of Adolescence

There are many characteristics of adolescence as dramatic change occurs on every level of human existence, which Hall characterizes as a period of “storm and stress.”⁶² While typical, there is debate as to whether or not it is socially or developmentally caused.⁶³ In some ways the debate is irrelevant as development is intertwined with society. Susan Harter notes, “Adolescence represents a dramatic developmental transition, with pubertal and related physical changes, cognitive-developmental advances, and changing social expectations.”⁶⁴ In adolescence there is an ability to engage in abstract thinking, personal or self-reflection, increased relational intimacy and more contextual experiences, which cause a change in the concept of self due to the pressure created when adolescents think about their own vulnerability, goals, future, connection to others and sense of self.⁶⁵

Individuation is one key process of adolescent development that cannot be characterized as a stage, task or goal.⁶⁶ Storr notes that according to Jung, individuation is

⁶¹ Eaker, "Adolescent Satisfaction in Family Rituals and Psychosocial Development: A Developmental Systems Theory Perspective," 411.

⁶² Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 6.

⁶³ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 198-199.

⁶⁴ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 72.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁶⁶ Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 20.

“the process by which a person becomes a psychological ‘in-dividual,’ that is, a separate indivisible unity or ‘whole’” resulting in parting with the crowd.⁶⁷ In fact, Heike Buhl states, “Individuation is described as a complex dyadic process extending into adulthood. A constant degree of connectedness combined with an increase in individuality from childhood to adulthood is assumed.”⁶⁸ There are three pieces of individuality: “emotional-free from anger and guilt, cognitive-perceptual changes, and behavioral, which is connected to influence and structure; all of this is related to the individuation of child from the parent.”⁶⁹ The argument is that to be individuated and truly experience individuality, one needs all three of these pieces, which is difficult for any adolescent to achieve especially on their own.

Chap Clark and Dee Clark note individuation as a process is made up of three aspects: “Identity, which asks the question of ‘who am I,’ autonomy, which asks the question of ‘do I and my choices matter,’ and belonging which asks ‘where do I fit.’”⁷⁰ Each of these tasks present their own challenges and occur simultaneously from the perspective of the adolescent sometimes with one task contradicting or taking greater importance than other. Furthermore, Buhl notes two pivotal dimensions of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 20 and 212.

⁶⁸ Heike M. Buhl, "Development of a Model Describing Individuated Adult Child-Parent Relationships," *International Journal Of Behavioral Development* 32, 5 (2008): 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁰ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 53.

individuation process are “connectedness and individuality” which appear contradictory, yet are complimentary.⁷¹

In the individuation process, connection to other human beings, particularly parents and other adults, for adolescents is critical. Security in attachment is not just about health, as it is also connected to function when it comes to adult relationships, particularly with parents, in the life of an adolescent.⁷² Interestingly, symmetry in father-child relationships increases over time while with mothers it stays the same.⁷³ The individuation process is work for both parents and the child, and yet the connectedness and individuality of these relationships are often seen as different aspects of the relationship, even though both have value in the relationship.⁷⁴

While needing and affirming connectedness, individuation also requires individuality, which in the case of adolescents is inconsistent as they wrestle with identity formation. When it comes to identity, Clark and Clark note, “The central task of identity for adolescents: to discover the person they are as they attempt to insert and assimilate themselves into adult society.”⁷⁵ In the case of adolescent individuation and identity formation, connectedness to adults and society is stable, when that is rarely the case.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Heike M. Buhl, "Significance of Individuation in Adult Child—Parent Relationships," *Journal of Family Issues* 29, 2 (2008): 266.

⁷² Joseph P. Allen, and Cynthia Moore, "Attachment and Adolescent Psychosocial Functioning," *Child Development* 69, 5 (October 1998): 1406.

⁷³ Buhl, "Development of a Model Describing Individuated Adult Child-Parent Relationships," 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁵ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 65.

⁷⁶ Buhl, "Significance of Individuation in Adult Child—Parent Relationships," 267.

In dealing with both autonomy and belonging, meaning making is part of this task and adolescence in general.⁷⁷ Autonomy is not limited to responsibility, as this view focuses on the externals. The internal application of autonomy is growth of personal power; the internal is far more important when it comes to healthy individuation. The end goal should follow the “unity of existence” where the internal and external are generally unified, and the adolescence has not only become an adult, but has an understanding and experience of who God is and who God created them to be.⁷⁸ The recognition that humanity is created in the image of God is more than a cliché. In the case of adolescents, adulthood is best experienced and achieved when one is connected to God and their identity is found in Christ. Madeline Levine calls this reality the “movement to healthy sense of self.”⁷⁹

Incidentally, the brain experiences dramatic change during adolescence in a wide variety of ways impacting the physical, mental, social and emotional lives of adolescents.⁸⁰ Loder states, the “Adolescent suffers from every psychopathology known to humanity: depression, aggression, manic-depressive mood swings; obsessional guilt and compensation; hysteria; suicidal thoughts and megalomania,” leading them to think that they are invincible and can solve the world’s problems.⁸¹ Alternatively, Peter Blos notes that the “denial of reality and self-idealization, which regulates self-esteem” leads

⁷⁷ Parks, *Big Questions, Worth Dreams*, 93.

⁷⁸ Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 25.

⁷⁹ Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 64.

⁸⁰ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 47.

⁸¹ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 204.

to narcissism, and “the process of adolescent ego-ideal formation is accompanied by disturbed and disturbing mental states of varied severity” that is almost delusional at times.⁸²

The process of entering adolescence creates emotional disturbance when the adolescent begins to separate from parents, even though he or she is still a child in many ways. The severing between child and parents (mothers in particular) is what Nancy Verrier calls “narcissistic wound.”⁸³ This broken or insecure attachment leads to ongoing issues and makes healthy relationship with adults difficult, possibly delaying or preventing healthy individuation.⁸⁴ Adolescent attachment is viewed theoretically, but it is related to a wide range of practicalities,⁸⁵ even though adolescence means moving away from adults.⁸⁶ If adolescence is a tightrope, it is a tightrope where no real turning back is possible.

During adolescence, formal operational thinking begins but is not fully developed, especially in light of other factors. In essence, formal operational thinking is thinking about thinking.⁸⁷ Formal operational thinking makes the concrete objects of its thought

⁸² Bloss, *The Adolescent Passage*, 342.

⁸³ Nancy Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child*, (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1993), 21.

⁸⁴ Allen, "Attachment and Adolescent Psychosocial Functioning," 1407.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Arnett, *Debating Emerging Adulthood*, 6.

⁸⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 213.

the instruments of how it thinks.⁸⁸ Formal operational thinking means that reality is a subset of possibility instead of the other way around in childhood, which explains some of the irrational, inconsistent, unrealistic thinking of adolescents.⁸⁹ Only cognitive operations exhibit logical structures, meaning that while teenagers have the ability to be logical based on the cognitive operations of childhood, logic rarely appears in the midst of formal operational thinking and egocentric abstraction.⁹⁰ Ironically, this reality likely contributes to the intelligence and creativity of adolescents, but can also inhibit their ability to engage with reality. Adolescents also develop ability to think abstractly.⁹¹

Egocentric abstraction is also a marker of adolescence. Adolescents can think and see abstractly but are still vulnerable and cannot recognize complex nuances of life and struggle to reconcile or incorporate the various abstractions they observe and experience.⁹² Adolescents are no longer concrete thinkers, which combined with egocentric abstraction and formal operational thinking, result in an inability to “objectively process multiple factors of life,” Clark and Clark note.⁹³

Adolescents are incredibly intelligent even though adolescents are in turmoil and are able to process information and respond quickly.⁹⁴ This result is connected to the

⁸⁸ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, (New York: Harpercollins, 1981), 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹¹ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 72.

⁹² Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 136-138.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁹⁴ Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 161.

physical development of adolescents, their age and the makeup of their brain and allows many adolescents to appear to be able to respond more accurately and with greater speed than many adults. Adolescents are smart and capable of great contributions, but this intelligence and potential does not equate to maturity nor does it make them adults who should have adult responsibilities and privileges as some researchers might suggest.⁹⁵

Adolescence Today

Chap Clark points to the reality that “adolescence is a fundamentally different thing than it was even thirty years ago.”⁹⁶ Even though the average age of female puberty in North America continues to lower, society has failed to recognize the earlier onset.⁹⁷ Adolescence is becoming longer, especially in advanced societies and has different forms in different cultures over time.⁹⁸ Blos states prolonged adolescence, which was once an anomaly but is now a reality for the majority, “is when the developmental task that is to be left behind is continued, stay in adolescence in a persistent, desperate way; it’s a failure to arrive at a stable place.”⁹⁹

Prolonged adolescence and adulthood is “marked by several contradictory forces.”¹⁰⁰ Côté states prolonged adolescence for the adolescent and their family averts the crisis the rest of the society does not embrace, the imaginary self of childhood that the

⁹⁵ Ibid., 191.

⁹⁶ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 7.

⁹⁷ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 210.

⁹⁸ Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 1.

⁹⁹ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 29.

family may have embraced.¹⁰¹ It also means the authentic self discovered in Christ is subdued as the imaginary self is protected and often worshiped. David Elkind states, “This is a great source of anxiety” for an anxious generation and culture. In the midst of this reality, children are living in a stage of vulnerability for a large portion of their lives.¹⁰²

Developmental life has changed dramatically for all ages especially adolescents who now tend to settle into adulthood in mid to late twenties, or even as late as thirty.¹⁰³ Adolescents are less mature than those from three decades ago, as a twenty-three year old today resembles a seventeen year old in 1980.¹⁰⁴ One of the great challenges of the post-industrial world is the hurried growth and development of children, perhaps in an even more dramatic and unhealthy fashion in postmodern, technological, globalized society. This concept, called “the hurried child” accurately asserts that adults force children to grow up too fast, exposing them to experiences, responsibilities and realities are not developmentally appropriate.¹⁰⁵ This hurrying of children continues into adolescence, often to an extreme that is a major contributor to the extension of adolescence. In trying to force children and adolescents to grow up, the opposite effect is created.

¹⁰¹ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 44.

¹⁰² David Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go : Teenagers in Crisis*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998), 18.

¹⁰³ Kara Eckmann Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 52.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁵ David Elkind, *The Hurried Child : Growing up Too Fast Too Soon*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Pub., 2001), xiv.

Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget (and even Erick Erickson) and their developmental theories reveal each stage builds on the previous stage, even though their theories are not connected to emotion and may be too structured.¹⁰⁶ Whether previous developmental stages are resolved or not has an impact on the other, which is the natural result in the hurrying of childhood and adolescence.¹⁰⁷ Culture forces adolescents into the next developmental stage of living without being ready or having completed the previous stage, resulting in unhealthy development and inconsistent maturity. Not only are children hurried, but it is now more common and an accepted expectation in many cultures.¹⁰⁸ Society assumes adolescents, who are more like children than they are adults, should already be acting as adults. Chap Clark points out children used to be drawn into society by adults in the community, but now children are responsible for inserting themselves into society.¹⁰⁹

To illustrate, Elkind states, “We increasingly treat teenagers as equals, rather than as a young people who, despite their physical maturity, are still psychologically immature.”¹¹⁰ The constant emphasis on external rewards creates a problem in culture, as the overwhelming message to adolescents is that ability and product are more important than effort and process. Furthermore, use of external rewards is a problem.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, xi.

¹⁰⁹ Chap Clark, "Lecture Notes," (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, 3.

¹¹¹ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 273.

Similarly, a fixed mindset instead of a growth mindset complicates a child's maturation. A fixed mindset means human qualities cannot be cultivated and are carved in stone, dooming a child to the pressure to succeed and produce; this will naturally and eventually involve failure that they will not be able to process.¹¹² By embracing a fixed mindset, development is completely rejected. This viewpoint is problematic as adolescents are already highly self-conscious, and this focus on comparison is very unhealthy.¹¹³ The education system is one area where this viewpoint exists. Education needs to be student centered, focused on goals and the individual not content centered, which is focused on material and external measures.¹¹⁴

Adolescents and adolescent culture have also become more isolated in North American culture.¹¹⁵ There is controversy over whether or not there is an adolescent subculture.¹¹⁶ Most reasonable objective and subjective data supports the view that there is an adolescent subculture, one that less is known than in previous generations as adolescents are now “forced to figure out how to survive on their own without adults,” Chap Clark notes.¹¹⁷ Adolescents have a temporary social structure among themselves many view as stable, and while that may be true, stability is inconsistent with the nature of adolescence, leading some to believe adolescent social structure is a stable subculture

¹¹² Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 4.

¹¹³ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 245.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹¹⁵ Malcomb Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), 271.

¹¹⁶ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 198-199.

¹¹⁷ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 27.

of instable individuals.¹¹⁸ Sebald states this adolescent subculture is a “result and reaction to uncertain status among adults, adult world and society at large.”¹¹⁹

The change of parental (and now adult) attachment that has been a natural part of adolescence has moved to an unhealthy extreme and may also contribute to the need for an adolescent subculture for “attachment is linked to social function of adolescence,” better explaining for adolescent behavior and subculture.¹²⁰ The adolescent world may seem healthy and stable, but there is real evidence of pain, loneliness and difficulty, often experienced alone or solely in their subculture.¹²¹ Adolescents need adult relationships, adults who care about them, love them in the name of Christ and will walk with them in an authentic, caring, non-judgmental way even as the roles of adults in their lives change. This kind of relational, guided participation helps scaffolding dramatically.¹²²

As a result of these realities, most adolescents must focus on survival, which slows or negates the opportunity to develop enjoy and experience the joy God has for all of humanity. Adolescents are coping with what Clark terms, “systemic abandonment,” meaning the very systems that are meant to serve and care for them are about anything

¹¹⁸ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 203.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 198-203.

¹²⁰ Allen, "Attachment and Adolescent Psychosocial Functioning," 1406.

¹²¹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 26.

¹²² Berk and Winsler, *Scaffolding Children's Learning*, 20.

but them, and this systemic abandonment is worsening.¹²³ There is a great need for adults who are available, care and do not have a hidden or self-serving agenda.¹²⁴

¹²³ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, xi.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

CHAPTER 2

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

In considering the development of adolescents, most research focuses on psychosocial development, often ignoring the spiritual development of adolescents. Less is known about spirituality and religion as domains of development in their own right.¹ Yet there is a positive relationship between religion and identity as it provides a setting for identity exploration and a commitment through various contexts.²

Spiritual development may be connected to psychosocial development, even for those who do not believe in God or anything spiritual, including the existence of spiritual development. Spirituality is attention to the life one has (in Christ) and is approaching God with open heart and mind.³ Faith and spiritual development cannot be reduced to a

¹ Marie Good, Teena Willoughby, and Michael A. Busseri, "Stability and Change in Adolescent Spirituality/Religiosity: A Person-Centered Approach," *Developmental Psychology* 47, 2 (March 2011): 542.

² Pamela Ebstyn King, "Religion and Identity: The Role of Ideological, Social, and Spiritual Contexts," *Applied Developmental Science* 7, 3 (July 2003): 198.

³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Living Reminder : Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 28.

psychological experience, but it can inform this process of faith development.⁴ Spiritual development must be a component of adolescent and human development.⁵ Flemming and Cannister state, “There is no programmatic shortcut, no curricular alternate and no cutting-edge event that address this God-created need.”⁶

Spiritual development is primarily about transformation. Loder notes, “The developmental history of love connects love to transformation.”⁷ The nature of development is change and transformation, and this process cannot happen wholly outside of the creator. The core issue of development is human freedom; this is eventually transformed by an encounter with Christ.⁸ Galatians 5 presents a powerful understanding of human freedom rooted in Christ, a freedom not centered on choice, but on trusting God. The conscience is “free and quiet because we do not have to fear wrath of God;” it is the only kind of liberty worth mentioning as Christians are free from death, the power of the devil and cannot exaggerate freedom.⁹

The definition of faith is trusting God, but faith is different from belief, as belief is holding certain ideas but faith is trusting not only in those ideas, but the author of the

⁴ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 202.

⁵ Anne C Petersen, "Spiritual Development in Adolescence: Toward Enriching Theories, Research, and Professional Practice," *New Directions for Youth Development* 118(Summer 2008): 122.

⁶ Laura F. Fleming, and Mark W. Cannister, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 9, 1 (2010): 58.

⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 269.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹ Martin Luther, "A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535)," (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949).

ideas, the triune God.¹⁰ Likewise, Fowler posits that faith is a verb and not a noun.¹¹ Theology occurs when God walks with humanity and helps humanity see truth as God does.¹² In thinking theologically, orthodoxy and orthopraxy are applied together and held in tension. Orthodoxy is defined as right belief, while orthopraxy is defined as right praxis. Praxis is more than practice or the performing of tasks; it is the performing of tasks where meaning is discovered.¹³ For example, Christ as light can only be understood in praxis.¹⁴ Most importantly, one must engage in christopraxis, which is about making disciples.¹⁵

Nature of Spiritual Development

Spiritual development in particular happens through the power of Christ and a connection to Christ. Spiritual development is connected to identity development but is more complex and mysterious, as it involves something deeper than can be observed in physical and psychosocial behavior and change.¹⁶ Christian spiritual development is unique because it happens only through a connection to Christ; it is not as clearly a part of the natural order as psychosocial development and is found only in this connection

¹⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 11.

¹¹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 87.

¹² Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁶ Kara Eckmann Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 50-51.

with Christ. Loder notes the connection with Christ is threefold: first, God as creator is creating, maintaining and deepening with the “indwelling presence of Christ” with the end of transforming one into the likeness of Christ, second, the human spirit seeks Christ and finally, it requires sacrifice on the part of human beings to “give love sacrificial with integrity.”¹⁷

The parable of the sower is one of the most powerful texts related to the nature of spiritual development in all people. It points to the reality of spiritual development as well as its process. This parable holds in tension the sovereignty of God and human responsibility.¹⁸ It demonstrates personal responsibility in what to do with the seed, and yet reveals that humanity is not in full control of what happens to the seed. Colossians 1:6 reminds Christians that the seed in the parable of sower is interpreted as the Word, and the Word of the Gospel bears fruit and grows just like a seed.¹⁹ People can choose how to treat and care for the seed, both as individuals and as a community, and even as the Church. Yet even in the case of the seed, it grows and multiplies; there is no guarantee a seed in good soil will always grow and reproduce to such a high degree. There is also no guarantee of the timing of the seed’s growth as well.

Spiritual development involves the primary work and act of God. It also involves choice in individuals; one such choice is the response to the Gospel message. There is responsibility for those who reject the message, and there are those who will not

¹⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 169.

¹⁸ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 141.

¹⁹ Peter T O'Brien, *Colossians–Philemon*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 51.

understand the grace of God.²⁰ The response to the message opens one to spiritual development, but unlike many contemporary Christians might suggest, the initial response is not the most critical part of spiritual development.

Spiritual development is much deeper than eternal destination as salvation is more than forgiveness but a new order of life.²¹ A continued choice is a necessity, a choice represented by posture, attitude and a way of being including receptivity. There is hard heartedness and a lack of receptivity in some, which not only impacts spiritual development, but becomes a tool of the evil one.²² Additionally, one's response must be authentic. There is important recognition and evidence for authenticity.²³ Authenticity is one of the very few human contributions to spiritual formation and development (trust being the primary human act).

John 17 reminds one that Christ cannot be know by intellect alone,²⁴ keeping in mind that the heart is used for emotions as well as reason and intellect.²⁵ One who hears the word and is not deep, intimate or even authentic is represented by the plants that grow up in the thorns, appearing healthy for a while, but not lasting.²⁶ Contemporary youth ministry is built to create this kind of seed as many youth are drawn to Jesus, but in a way

²⁰ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 136.

²¹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 86.

²² Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 138.

²³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer; Ministry in Contemporary Society*, (Garden City, N.Y.; Doubleday, 1972), 33.

²⁴ Barton W Johnson, "John: A Commentary for the People," (1999).

²⁵ Duane L Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2001), 87.

²⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 140.

that does not authentically build discipleship. Finally, there is the seed producing fruit, one that hears and accepts the word, God's grace, and begins the journey of allowing that to shape them not only spiritually but as a whole person. The one who really hears but also understands and acts congruently, living out the Kingdom here and now, is represented by the seed bearing fruit.²⁷

The challenge with the parable is the assumption that spiritual development is predicated on the initial and continuing response and on one's work. This assumption is dangerous and will be addressed further. One must recognize, however, that from the beginning, Christian direction has already been set, predicated on the Gospel's activity and the reality that it is still coming.

Peter O'Brien states bearing fruit includes being "fruity" as well as good works and increase in the knowledge of God.²⁸ It is easy to assume faith and spiritual development are limited to one's individual relationship with God; however, spiritual development is shaped beyond oneself, and it is shaped by others and by the spirit of grace working through others in community.²⁹ It does not happen in isolation.

Adolescents and Spiritual Development

Adolescent development is certainly complex, physically, psychosocially and spiritually. While this is a time of great confusion, adolescents who are foreclosed tend to be more religiously committed, a clear reminder that the psychosocial and the spiritual

²⁷ Ibid., 142.

²⁸ O'Brien, *Colossians–Philemon*, 53.

²⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, xi.

are connected.³⁰ Right or wrong, adolescents are often characterized by their behavior and their spiritual and religious beliefs, the good and bad, making the spiritual development of adolescents a focal point for parents, culture and religious organizations.³¹ While Colossians chapter 3 addresses the idea that thought patterns connect to behavior and Christians should seek the spiritual, adolescents may not be developmentally capable of making this connection on a consistent basis.³²

While adolescent development is complicated due to many factors in operation, all children are a mystery, as are all human beings.³³ Understanding the spiritual development of adolescents is important for engaging them.³⁴ While one can seek greater understanding of adolescent development, there will always be some mystery, which can serve as a reminder of a creator who is the author of all things and who understands all things. Recognizing that not everything can be understood is humbling, and this is especially true in the case of adolescent spiritual development. Adults can encourage spiritual growth in adolescents when it all comes down to the work of the Holy Spirit and the desire of the student to grow.³⁵

³⁰ Bruce Hunsberger, Michael Pratt, and S. Mark Pancer, "Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment," *Identity* 1, 4 (2001): 366.

³¹ Good, "Stability and Change in Adolescent Spirituality/Religiosity: A Person-Centered Approach," 541.

³² O'Brien, *Colossians–Philemon*, 58.

³³ Martin E. Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 1.

³⁴ Petersen, "Spiritual Development in Adolescence: Toward Enriching Theories, Research, and Professional Practice," 122.

³⁵ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 60.

Adults have to look at adolescent spiritual development differently because of the developmental growth point of adolescence.³⁶ Adolescence is the only time when ego and drive regression are a part of normal development, and one of the more profound and unique aspects of adolescence is adolescents can move between regression and progression, causing a dramatic impact on their spiritual development.³⁷ This process characterizes their spiritual development while simultaneously facilitating and impacting it. The theological potential of adolescence is great as they see an underlying void, an unknown future in the midst of social, biological changes, coupled with the sense of the nothingness of human existence.³⁸

Fowler, the most cited faith developmental theorist, expounded on this theory in light of the postmodern context, offering a typology of faith as a supplement to his stages of faith. The types from Fowler that may be helpful in a postmodern context include totalizing faith - faith focused on authority, dogma, and fundamentals; rational critical faith - which connects religious learning with experience; conflicted or oscillating faith - which is characterized by continual existential searching and diffused faith - where there is low commitment to faith and faith ebbs and flows.³⁹

James Folwer's faith development theory is the most often cited source, particularly for children and adolescents. Folwer's work includes six stages of faith: stage 1, intuitive-projective faith, which is filled with and characterized by fantasy and

³⁶ Ibid., 63.

³⁷ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 153.

³⁸ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 206.

³⁹ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166-168.

imitation, stage 2, mythic-literal faith, where the person acquires stories as a way to value experience, stage 3, synthetic-conventional faith, where faith has to synthesize values and information as it is more than about family now, stage 4, individuative-reflective faith, where an individual being takes seriously one's personal commitments and faces tensions and breaks down myth with an acknowledgement of self and meaning that is added to symbols, stage 5, conjunctive faith, that goes beyond the system created in stage 4 and addresses the unconscious factors in self, life and faith that is also characterized by a recognition of truth that is multidimensional, and stage 6, universalizing faith, which is something that many never achieve as they overcome paradox and universally apply a transcendent perspective that goes beyond self-preservation and a personal sense of justice.⁴⁰ Conversion can occur in any stage.⁴¹

Fowler's faith development theory has come under criticism, especially in this postmodern culture. Given the organic nature of humanity in general, and especially the organic nature of faith development in uniquely created individuals each bearing the image of God, it is important these stages not be applied in a rigid or legalist way. Fowler adds his own caution to his work in the current context: "no stage is universal even though many claim it so, there are variations and not everything is sequential and hierarchical."⁴²

Other thinkers categorize stages of faith differently, basing them on individual transformation. These stages include life-changing awareness of God, discipleship, active

⁴⁰ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 349.

⁴¹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 133-134.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 282.

life, journey outward and transformation by love.⁴³ Yet a theory beyond stages is needed, one that crosses stages in postmodern life, and even Fowler argues this.⁴⁴

Synthetic-conventional faith looks at situations hypothetically and then formal operational thinking can work with these propositions and symbols.⁴⁵ This occurrence may be part of the reason so many people come to a faith experience in adolescence. The turbulent nature of adolescence opens up individuals to God and creates a need for something larger than themselves or their experiences. In contrast, personal fable or the personal story constructed over a lifetime becomes “unquestionable truth” for adolescents.⁴⁶ The biblical metanarrative as well as the nature and process of spiritual formation challenge this personal fable often created out of ego, measured and shaped entirely by externals and the culture in which the adolescent operates.

Adolescents sort through faith and life and find a faith identity.⁴⁷ Each stage of adolescent development brings with it varying development challenges and needs. Early adolescence is poetic-conventional faith, where late adolescence is individuating-reflecting faith.⁴⁸ In Fowler’s faith stages, stage 3 is characteristic of adolescents but many stay there as adults.⁴⁹ Early adolescents, primarily those ages eleven through

⁴³ James W Fowler, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges," *International Journal for the Psychology Of Religion* 11, 3 (2001): 164.

⁴⁴ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ*, (New York: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 119-120.

⁴⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 152.

⁴⁶ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, 47.

⁴⁷ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 259.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 152.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 172-173.

fourteen, are still concrete thinkers in many ways and are just getting reasoning skills.⁵⁰ Therefore, they need an environment where faith is felt, seeds are planted and hands on service connect abstract faith, while faith is modeled authentically and an extended, Christ centered family is built.⁵¹

When working with mid adolescents, generally high school students, there is greater need for personal ownership of their faith, encouraging them to ask hard questions, helping them to invite Christ into each setting or self and empowering them to put faith into action, integrating them into adult discipleship relationships.⁵² This critical time for adolescents harbors the tendency to disconnect from faith and religious institutions. Those in late teens and early twenties have low religious participation, and this change often occurs after high school graduation and leaving home, connected to busyness and loss of interest.⁵³

Fowler's fourth stage of faith may come in young adulthood or later.⁵⁴ Late adolescents, generally post high school students, need adults to treat them like spiritual peers, provide unique experiences leading to deeper compassion for others and the world, assist in naming uniqueness of calling and build mutual partnership for the Kingdom.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 63.

⁵² Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 131.

⁵³ Ibid., 147-151.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Lene Arnett Jensen, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 17, 5 (2002).

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182.

Non-religion grows in these years as eighteen through twenty-three typically marked by a decrease in religious practice, but it is not disastrous as most do not walk away from faith or make a radical change; instead faith seems to be postponed or less relevant, but not lost.⁵⁶ Typically in the United States, faith rises again as people get married and have children, settle down and need more religious involvement.⁵⁷

Role of Spiritual Development

Spiritual development plays a critical role in life, development, health and general existence. The nature of life engages the religious and irreligious with issues of faith.⁵⁸ Faith provides structure for understanding identity, a foundation for meaning and direction, and enables hopeful decision-making while providing wholeness and integration enabling one to recognize the unique nature of self.⁵⁹ A consistent, healthy sense of self in today's culture is not possible without attending to spiritual development. Spiritual development at its core is about resulting transformation, reveals human qualities can be cultivated and are not carved in stone and provides tools for this transformation.⁶⁰

Faith is a universal human concern because people are concerned with how they are connected to one another and the world and how they make meaning and how they

⁵⁶ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 162.

⁵⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 142.

⁵⁸ Arnett, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults."

⁵⁹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 57.

⁶⁰ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 206.

live; faith sustains our being.⁶¹ God is within humanity, and self-realization is the goal for life, even for God; however, a full realization of self can only be found in God.⁶²

Erickson, a psychosocial developmental theorist, notes, faith promotes secure identity and the importance of identity formation, and he identifies rituals and rites of faith as helpful and valuable in identity formation; additionally, he observes fidelity as a faith issue since religion provides an opportunity for fidelity.⁶³

In the case of adolescents, the shift from parent to individual results in self-centeredness, self-absorption and a fantasy of independence; the self floods with narcissism and a grandiose sense of power and ability.⁶⁴ However, expectations of others combined with a weak grasp of self that does not allow an independent perspective to be developed can create problems.⁶⁵ Spiritual development, growth and transformation are the only antidotes to the unhealthy aspects of these changes.

People need to know their identity, but more importantly the purpose of their existence, and this knowledge cannot happen within the natural progression of life and psychosocial development.⁶⁶ It requires something more. Psychosocial development can also hinder or slow spiritual development, as in Fowler's fourth stage of faith, one must move beyond tyranny of self and move into an executive ego not based on a previous

⁶¹ Dweck, *Mindset*, 4.

⁶² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 5.

⁶³ Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 20.

⁶⁴ Hunsberger, "Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment," 367.

⁶⁵ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 166.

⁶⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 173.

value system.⁶⁷ This can be difficult in the midst of the adolescent personal fable and egocentric abstraction. As long as an adolescent is not foreclosed, there can be a stronger religious connection. Those trying to conform are not really exploring, but trying to confirm their current belief; those who are foreclosed individuals are committed to their faith.⁶⁸

Even in secular thinking, spiritual development is important and requires effort, as presencing is like going “through eye of needle” and connecting to the true self found in Jesus.⁶⁹ There is always a sense of mystery to all human beings, and while faith provides some structure and answers to this mystery, one must also embrace the mystery. Psalm 139 reveals one cannot fully understand the absoluteness and truth of God.⁷⁰ Faith covers human vulnerability, deals with the mystery and yet is “inexhaustibly mysterious,” recognizing there will always be mystery to humanity.⁷¹

Numerous ideals, customs and institutions help in the growth of faith. Fowler posits, “Shared commitments to the values of truth telling, fairness, non injury, and the practice of procedures that guard and fulfill the common good, help to constitute a viable social faith.”⁷² It is the role of religious leaders and institutions to help facilitate and as

⁶⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 243.

⁶⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 179.

⁶⁹ Hunsberger, "Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment," 369.

⁷⁰ Claus Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future*, (Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning, 2007), 132.

⁷¹ Leslie C Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 73.

⁷² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, xii-xiii.

Scott Cormode points out, serve as “interpreters” in this process.⁷³ Cormode also states, “Religious traditions help to evoke and form commitments of this sort but also call their members to more specific commitments.”⁷⁴ Faith, spiritual development and religion offer other gifts as well, as they can give “moral directives, spiritual experiences, role models, community and leadership skills, coping skills, cultural capital, social capital, network closure-relational ties, and extra community links,” as noted by Fowler.⁷⁵ A person’s choices, habits and character come from faith experience and spiritual development.⁷⁶

Process and Aspects of Spiritual Development

According to Dallas Willard, spiritual development is truly a transformative process where one takes on the character of Christ by guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷ While there may be stages, steps and actions impacting and serving as markers for spiritual development, it is ultimately a process or a journey centered in a transformational relationship with God. Fleming concludes spiritual development is a “pilgrimage that proceeds steadily and incrementally as a Christian gives himself or

⁷³ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, xi.

⁷⁴ Fowler, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges," 161.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁶ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 241-248.

⁷⁷ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 82.

herself more and more over to God's will and is correspondingly recreated more and more in God's character and likeness."⁷⁸

Paul in Galatians reminds Christians that walking in the spirit is similar to a race, but life (and spiritual development) feels a lot more like a creep than a run, yet solid doctrine and a faithful life will provide strength.⁷⁹ Luther states, "What may seem to us a life slow in Christian development may seem to God a life of rapid progression in grace."⁸⁰ Furthermore, Luther conclude the process of spiritual development, unlike psychosocial development is not bound by time or other physical realities; "human wholeness is an ultimate reality that is not bound by time."⁸¹

The action of the Holy Spirit, planned discipline and ordinary events of life make up the "triangle of spiritual growth."⁸² Galatians 5 points to this reality as it outlines the nature of human freedom connected to real life events, calling for a disciplined response only be found in trusting, engaging with and walking in the Holy Spirit. Above all, it is important to recognize God initiates and makes spiritual development possible.

Righteousness is a gift to be received and is God's work, not the work of humankind.⁸³ While people choose to respond, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to serve as

⁷⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁹ John R. Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

⁸⁰ Luther, "A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535)".

⁸¹ Ibid., 103.

⁸² Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 306-307.

⁸³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, 1st ed., (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 347.

guide. The closer a person gets to an idea, the more power it has in that person⁸⁴ and change often comes from exposure to new ideas,⁸⁵ which is why consistent, healthy exposure to God, the biblical narrative and related concepts and experiences is critical.⁸⁶

Faith development theory focuses more on a formal structure than on a story of faith, which is helpful for understanding, evaluating and examining faith, but it should not define spiritual development.⁸⁷ One way to approach spiritual development is to utilize typology. For example, one researcher identified six major religious types in people: committed traditionalists – those with a strong faith, selective adherents—those who pick and choose, spiritually open – those who are not committed yet open, religiously indifferent—those who do not care either way, religiously disconnected—those without exposure to religion, and the irreligious – those who are skeptical.⁸⁸

Adolescent Spiritual Development Today

When addressing the nature of adolescent spiritual development in current culture, adolescent physical, psychosocial and spiritual development must be considered. While the Biblical metanarrative and the power of God are more powerful than any culture, society, system or circumstance, that context matters and there is no one right

⁸⁴ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 90.

⁸⁵ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 59.

⁸⁶ et al. Elizabeth Howell, "Older Adolescents' Perceptions of the Social Context, Impact, and Development of Their Spiritual/Religious Beliefs and Practices," *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing* 30, 1-2 (January 2007): 11.

⁸⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 18.

⁸⁸ Fowler, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges," 163.

way for Gospel to be expressed.⁸⁹ While the Gospel has not and will not change, it is always expressed in context. In order to address adolescent spiritual development today, one must consider context. The complexity of our current context cannot be fully addressed in this background chapter; however, there are some overarching aspects that provide a critical background to an understanding of the current context.

The fixed mindset is now the prevalent mode of thinking in American culture, particularly for adolescents, which means many believe spirituality and spiritual growth like other aspects of their life is predetermined. The growth mindset, however, means basic qualities can be cultivated through effort.⁹⁰ The growth mindset is more consistent with the Gospel. Adolescent spiritual development may be the one place where the growth mindset has the best opportunity to take root, in turn allowing the spiritual development of adolescents to impact the rest of their life. The community of faith needs to embrace, share and live out a growth mindset in adolescents today, not only because it is the right thing to do and is consistent with the Gospel message, but because it gives the church a great opportunity to impact the adolescent as a whole person.

Adolescents and emerging adults who are open to spirituality and spiritual things, are skeptical about religious institutions partially because they think it compromises their individuality, as they do not see the church as a place to develop spiritually.⁹¹ Ironically, the desired spiritual growth and community they desire is found in the church, but adolescents, emerging adults and the church continue to fall short in fulfilling the Biblical

⁸⁹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 350.

⁹⁰ David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your Cq to Engage Our Multicultural World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 34.

⁹¹ Dweck, *Mindset*, 7.

metanarrative in this way. Socialization has limited effects on the spiritual development of adolescents long term, as one study found that there is no relationship between childhood religious connection and connection now.⁹²

This issue is likely a commentary on our culture and society today, a commentary on the value of faith in families and culture as well as a commentary on the role, function and effectiveness of the church. This is not to say adolescents do not see merit or value in spiritual formation, their spiritual lives or spiritual matters; however, adolescents today see religion as good but cannot describe how it has any real consequence or influence in their lives.⁹³ Inconsistency between religious involvement and behavior is not an inconsistency to adolescents.⁹⁴

The skepticism and reduced culture value of religion should force religious institutions, leaders and individuals to reconsider to how to approach persuading adolescents (and adults) regarding the value of faith. True persuasion relies on arguments and works on meaning and behavior while allowing freedom.⁹⁵ The problem is religious culture in the United States has focused solely on persuasion and argument, ignoring the others while completely manipulating and abusing the Biblical notion of freedom in Christ. Religious institutions and leaders have relied on fear, division and the promotion of “guilt and shame” which invariably works against progress—and, more importantly,

⁹² Arnett, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults," 451.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁹⁴ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 218.

⁹⁵ Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*, Patricia Hersch, (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 272.

“weakens ties.”⁹⁶ Persuasion is about communication and creating symbolic meaning and means that one can modify belief and action by targeting thinking and meaning and not forcing our goal or ideology.⁹⁷

Current culture and society, particularly in the United States is very fast paced. People are used to instant information as well as instant results. In an age where what is produced matters more than character, people face a wide variety of challenges dramatically impacting the spiritual development of adolescents. Spiritual development, especially in adolescents, is a journey and a slow process, often lacking tangible, visible progress or results. While people have many tools to make things faster and easier, Trenholm notes a tension where “there are few shortcuts in the journey from being a sin – dominated person to becoming a spiritually empowered, Christ like person; it is not a journey that is made quickly or easily.”⁹⁸

One of the great challenges of adolescent spiritual development today, particularly in the United States, is faith developed in adolescence has not had strong lasting power. This result is due to many issues including the failure of parents, the church and the general immaturity of youth ministry in the United States. Faith that sticks is mature and maturing, internal and external, personal and communal, and otherwise, adolescent spiritual development must be holistic, comprehensive and rooted in the Biblical narrative.⁹⁹ Some of the factors impacting the faith and spiritual development of

⁹⁶ Sarah Trenholm, *Persuasion and Social Influence*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), 4.

⁹⁷ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 139.

⁹⁸ Trenholm, *Persuasion and Social Influence*, 6.

⁹⁹ Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology*, 6.

adolescents include parental importance on faith and religious involvement, importance of faith in the adolescent, personal religious experiences, personal spiritual practices, particularly prayer and reading of the scripture and personal doubt about personal religious beliefs.¹⁰⁰

In many ways, this information is not new as many of these factors have always been significant throughout the history of human existence; however, society has lost sight of the importance of most, if not all, of these factors and how they all must work together. Society must also learn to embrace, invite, celebrate and live with doubt, especially the doubt of adolescents in their own spiritual journey. Smith and Snell found “Doubt is helpful and healthy as demonstrated by the studies.”¹⁰¹ These all may seem like small matters, however, Galatians chapter five verse nine states, small matters can become large concerns. The analogy of yeast has a lot of power and meaning – it is negative here.¹⁰² Hunsberger notes, “For adolescents to grow into the fullness of the spiritual lives to which God has called them, a spiritual caregiver in their immediate, daily world has to be willing to pace with them.”¹⁰³

Human beings are complicated creatures, especially adolescents. Understanding the spiritual development of adolescents is a complicated task as it is truly an unpredictable, inconsistent time. While no one can really understand the mystery of the

¹⁰⁰ Powell et al., *Sticky Faith*, 21.

¹⁰¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 227-228.

¹⁰² Richard N Longenecker, *Galatians*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 167.

¹⁰³ Hunsberger, "Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment," 371.

other,¹⁰⁴ Christian adults need to think about the content of faith: symbols, narratives, practices, communities and the responses to life and how those shape faith¹⁰⁵ in order to truly reach adolescents. Revelation and affirmation are also key in spiritual formation; adults need to connect to our own experience as well.¹⁰⁶

The responsibility for the spiritual development of adolescents falls upon parents, other adults and the community of faith, as modeled throughout scripture, particularly in Deuteronomy.¹⁰⁷ The difficult and complicated nature of adolescent life and spiritual development does not negate this call nor does it change the reality that Jesus wants “single-minded commitment to God,” from all.¹⁰⁸ Hunsberger proclaims, “Until our thoughts of God have found every visible thing and event glorious with his presence, the Word of Jesus has not yet fully seized us.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 88.

¹⁰⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 1999), 62.

¹⁰⁶ Fowler, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges," 163.

¹⁰⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out : The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1986), 100.

¹⁰⁸ Hunsberger, "Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment," 371.

¹⁰⁹ Nouwen, *The Living Reminder : Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ*, 40.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

KEY ISSUES AND RESPONSES TO ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

In order for the church to partner with the community to address the unique challenges of adolescents today, adults must first have a deeper understanding of adolescence and its key issues as well as the societal challenges and responses related to these issues. The big questions of adolescents are not impractical, but have value, because without assigning value to these challenges they cannot fully understand and address them.¹ Adolescent development is a challenging journey sometimes faced with little support from the adults in their lives. For example, children and adolescents are not included in experiences that allow for continuous development and then are expected to make decisions as adults without having the opportunity to practice healthy decision-making during adolescence.²

There are a variety of factors and forces contributing to adolescent development including ecology, identity, ego, self and brain development. While adolescent development is a unique journey for each individual, there are stages of adolescence that

¹ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 225.

² Sebald, *Adolescence*, 161.

provide a framework for better understanding their psychosocial and spiritual development. Families, school, church, culture and society along with the church and other systems have a dramatic impact and influence on adolescent development.

There are many psychosocial and spiritual issues to consider when examining the nature of adolescent development. Examining and addressing these issues require looking beyond the surface to the deeper issues and challenges at hand; it requires both analytical and primary knowledge. Analytical knowledge is what is known and seen, but primary knowledge is sensing and connecting to the present.³

A solution to these issues requires a commitment to a deep understanding. Some individuals focus primarily on the individual adolescent experience and look only to the most obvious, general influences on adolescents instead of looking at the systems impacting adolescents and the nature of development itself. The psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents is a complex puzzle and understanding this puzzle is the first task Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada must undertake in order to partner with the community to address the needs and issues of adolescents today.

Ecology

A key to understanding the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents is ecology. Loder notes, “It takes a universe to create a child,” and ecology considers the nature and impact of that universe.⁴ As Bronfenbrenner states, the ecology of human development is the “progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing

³ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 167.

⁴ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 15.

human being” and their changing context.⁵ Examining interaction between adolescents and their environments is one vital step in understanding development. The relationship between people and environment is transactional, but environment is multidimensional and observed differently; it is not deterministic, but can be circular and reciprocal.⁶ In other words, genes require input from environment to function. It is nature and nurture interacting.⁷

Ecology, environment and genes cannot be fully examined outside of a theological perspective. Loder posits, “The natural order is not the context in which to understand God, but the natural order itself must be understood in the context of what God has revealed.”⁸ The human being is a social animal and needs support biologically and socially throughout life.⁹ Adolescent development does not happen in a vacuum, and healthy psychosocial and spiritual development requires input and support from all aspects of the ecological environment in which the adolescent functions. Ecology is not the only determining factor of development, nor can it never be overcome. While human development is about interaction between human and environment, it is not a “universal mandate for how one will develop.”¹⁰

Adults are not only participants in adolescents’ ecology, but responsible for their care and need to consider how they might impact that ecology. Blos states, “Only via the

⁵ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 21.

⁶ Trenholm, *Persuasion and Social Influence*, 163.

⁷ Dweck, *Mindset*, 5.

⁸ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 32.

⁹ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 3-5.

¹⁰ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 16.

use of wider social surround, in continuation, rejection or revision of customary family patterns, does the adolescent acquire stable, durable, ego-synotic patterns of his own.”¹¹ This process is particularly true for the Church, as the Church is called to care for all people, particularly those in need.

Influencing the ecology of adolescents is not just a biblical mandate; it is essential to a healthy functioning society as well. Bronfenbrenner posits, “No society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings.”¹² All key stakeholders and every part of the ecological system should assist in the healthy psychosocial and spiritual development of our adolescents.¹³ One must look beyond individuals and understand their culture.¹⁴

Certainly, one does not ignore the unique challenges of adolescents or give adolescents a free pass on their behavior. Puberty and the adolescent journey are a powerful force, but are not the only force at work in adolescents; in other words it is more than just ‘a phase.’ Nature and nurture both impact, and while puberty is not entirely to blame, it must be considered.¹⁵ The duplication of character and personality happens in various social settings, and the question is which one is true.¹⁶ It is up to the church to

¹¹ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 6.

¹² Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 53.

¹³ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 80.

¹⁴ Malcomb Gladwell, *Outliers*, (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2008), 11-12.

¹⁵ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 121.

¹⁶ Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 98.

lead culture in helping adolescents experience healthy development for the sake of church and society.

Identity, Ego and Self

Identity, ego and self are three critical aspects of adolescent development, both psychosocially and spiritually. These aspects of any individual are complicated and in the case of adolescents, they are experiencing tremendous change and formation in these areas during their adolescent journey. Ignoring the complexity of these developmental realities is one of the greatest challenges facing those who seek to serve and lead them into adulthood. Upheaval is not necessarily bad, but it directs one away from partial, inadequate and adaptational solutions to knowing and being known by God.¹⁷ There are benefits and opportunities in this upheaval, but left alone, it can have devastating consequences for children and adolescents.

Identity formation is not straightforward or logical.¹⁸ True humanity (personality) has a Christological center, which gets lost in the turmoil of adolescence in many cases.¹⁹

As Clark and Clark state,

One thing we can be sure of is that our identity is not something that eventually emerges out of our temperament or upbringing. The Scriptures make it clear that who we are is decided before we are even born. Our identity, ultimately, is not a consequence of the interaction between the genetic code we inherited from our parents and the family system we grew up in but is rather the result of God's decision to uniquely create us.²⁰

¹⁷ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 232.

¹⁸ Kenneth R. Hoover, J. E. Marcia, and Kristen Diane Parris, *The Power of Identity: Politics in a New Key*, (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1997), 36.

¹⁹ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 30.

²⁰ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 55.

Identity is a complicated notion for adults and is even more complicated in adolescence. The critical nature of identity is often underestimated and seen as superficial when it determines so much about how people live, function and operate. Loder writes, “Identity is a consistent sense of oneself,” and “Identity establishes self-consistency from one social and cultural environmental context to the next, and allows for a balance between resistance to adult conformity on the one hand, and subjective absorption on the other.”²¹ Identity means also the inner sameness and continuity sense in oneself is matched by one’s meaning for others.” People either commit to an identity or do not.²²

Identity formation involves intergenerational mutuality, and children need and rely on adults to help them in developmental tasks.²³ Identity gets more complex the more adolescents grow and interact with the world.²⁴ Ultimately, God knows shape and substance, and this substantial knowledge reminds humanity the Lord’s noticing is intentional.²⁵

The adolescent ego is striving for a balance that transcends the extreme of rigidity on the one hand and diffusion on the other. Loder writes when balance is achieved, “diffusion becomes flexibility and rigidity becomes reliable ego boundaries.”²⁶ Ego formation is not one’s destiny and forms along a different access than spirituality because

²¹ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 207.

²² Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, (Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Polity Press, 1984), 28.

²³ Marcia, "Adolescence, Identity, and the Bernardone Family."

²⁴ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 129.

²⁵ Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 170.

²⁶ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 207.

it is about environment and not about Christ.²⁷ Ego identity is a sense of who one is and who one can be.²⁸

Ego is often misunderstood in terms of pride, yet it is a critical part of developing and maintaining a sense of identity and of self. The particularity of humanity is Christomorphic; it is rooted in the one who defines humanity, Jesus Christ, and the Christ in one can overcome destructive patterns of ego and ego development.²⁹ Anthony Giddens writes, "To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about them)."³⁰ Adolescence mobilizes resources to protect ego—partially because of fixed mindset.³¹

Self is hard to define and hard to measure. Adolescents are not sure what it is, but know it is there and all people have it.³² A self constructed outside of Christ will be limited and incomplete. Psalm 139 states people are most complicated, fearfully and wonderfully made, exquisite and delicate and yet made with all needed for life. People are frail and should depend on God.³³ Yet, unity of self can be compromised in adolescents as they develop multiple selves and cannot identify a singular, true self.³⁴ The

²⁷ Ibid., 72.

²⁸ Marcia, "Adolescence, Identity, and the Bernardone Family," 203.

²⁹ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 41 & 73.

³⁰ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 3.

³¹ Dweck, *Mindset*, 4-5.

³² Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, ix.

³³ Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 170.

³⁴ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 2.

assumption that consideration of self is unhealthy or contrary to Christian teaching is not accurate. Self is a positive thing with positive functions.³⁵

The Adolescent Brain

Understanding the nature of the unique, complicated adolescent brain is key to understanding adolescent development. Recent research and tools have increased understanding of the adolescent brain, and it is clear the brain impacts the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents in a powerful way. The brain goes through a growth spurt in teen years, mostly in the frontal lobe, the place that makes one most human.³⁶ Reasoning ability peaks in teen years as does memory and intelligence,³⁷ but this does not always change the behavior in adolescents as the brain at this stage is not developed, but is a work in progress.³⁸ The cerebellum grows, which is used for math, science, decision making, and this growth continues into emerging adulthood.³⁹

Impulsivity can be connected to brain issues,⁴⁰ which explains the risky behavior of adolescents in some ways.⁴¹ The physical changes in the brain create results extending beyond the physical. Myelination, the blanket over the neuron, is developing and

³⁵ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 13.

³⁶ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 18-21.

³⁷ Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 161.

³⁸ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 19-20.

³⁹ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 86-87.

⁴⁰ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 24-26.

⁴¹ Ibid.

changing, making the brain less flexible and more protected.⁴² Adolescents have to use this underdeveloped part more in midst of passions and relationships and complexity growing and yet the brain is not fully ready.⁴³

In many ways the physical growth of adolescents is an allusion, creating an image of maturity that may not match reality.⁴⁴ It takes the brain ten years (age fifteen to twenty-five) to completely develop and arrive at full physiological adulthood.⁴⁵ The brain takes the longest to fully mature, and it develops at different rates which means the emotional life parts are slowest to mature in late adolescence.⁴⁶

Synapses are necessary for mediating function, and fire rapidly in the adolescent brain.⁴⁷ This connection in the brain is very important and thickens in adolescence, which is called overproduction and happens in the grey matter and concentrated in frontal lobes, which is where judgment, planning and problem solving happen.⁴⁸ Adolescents do not see consequences of actions as a result of prefrontal development⁴⁹ and as a result,

⁴² Ibid., 89.

⁴³ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 86-87.

⁴⁴ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 133.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁶ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 52.

⁴⁷ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: 10th Anniversary Edition; Why It Can Matter More Than Iq*, (New York, NY: Bantam, 2006), 226.

⁴⁸ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 19.

⁴⁹ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 86-87.

parents need to be the frontal cortex for their adolescents.⁵⁰ Basically, although the adolescent is very smart, the adolescent brain is like the brain of an adult schizophrenic.⁵¹

Stages of Adolescent Development

There is a lot of debate regarding the stages of adolescents, especially how many stages there are as well as what ages they encompass. For the most part, the schools of thought are divided amongst whether there are three stages or four. This discussion adopts the three stage theories, but combines the name and some of the concepts in the third stage from the third and fourth stage of adolescence in each of the theories. Some define adolescence as ages ten to eighteen, which is not uncommon but here adolescence will be viewed through age twenty-five.⁵² Many do suggest eighteen to twenty-five is late adolescence, while others view ages eighteen to twenty-five as emerging adulthood.⁵³

Early Adolescence

The first stage of adolescence is early adolescence, starting at the beginning of adolescence, roughly age ten or eleven, and ending somewhere between age fourteen and fifteen. In early adolescence, the increasingly differentiated self challenges coherence as view of self and sense of consistency are compromised.⁵⁴ During development, the adolescent constructs multiple selves due to what Harter describes as a “proliferation of

⁵⁰ Strauch, *The Primal Teen*, 68.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁵³ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," *American Psychologist* 55, 5 (2000): 469.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 470.

selves” that vary by context.⁵⁵ This changing and fragile sense of self is an important consideration for any individual or system that works with adolescents.

Early adolescents experience concrete cognition in the midst of changing social understandings.⁵⁶ Social and self-awareness increase dramatically as early adolescents try to figure out what others think of self so they can internalize those to create a definition of self.⁵⁷ Self-concept is hard to define and not realistic, and early adolescents cannot figure out what is true, leading to overgeneralization and distortions of self-perception.⁵⁸ An emphasis on comparison ushers in a need to protect the self, even though it is important to express a genuine sense self in the midst of being preoccupied with how others view them.⁵⁹ Additionally, lack of parental support (and peer support) leads to dangerously low self worth along with depression, suicidal behaviors and other issues, challenging the view that parental influence wanes in adolescence. This view is wrong as parental influence and support impacts self and health.⁶⁰

Mid-Adolescence

Given the debate over the ages and stages of adolescence, mid adolescence will be analyzed here as the stage occurring starting at fourteen or fifteen and ending around eighteen years old, previously at age sixteen. Mid adolescents filter thought process

⁵⁵ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁷ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, ix.

⁵⁸ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 76.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

through lens of self-interest and self-protection and as Susan Harter notes, “Are not able to compartmentalize their lives while operating out a personal sense of self.”⁶¹

Adolescents in this stage are very concerned with creating, defining, and differentiating role-related selves, with little overlap between self-attributes and self.⁶²

Mid adolescence is characterized by egocentric abstraction, and adolescents are looking for affirmation but still have no idea of who they are.⁶³ They have the cognitive ability to detect the contradictions so they are more aware and can focus on these contradictions across roles.⁶⁴ As mid adolescents move concrete thinking to abstract thinking, they also develop a distrust of adults and systems.⁶⁵ Additionally, distrust is a powerful force in adolescents’ lives, so this is an important concept to consider when working with adolescents and as the church partners with the community to care for adolescents.

Elkind determines mid adolescence is also characterized by the personal fable and imaginary audience; these concepts are characterized by invulnerability, omnipotence, uniqueness and the notion that everyone is preoccupied and evaluating oneself.⁶⁶ Contradictory messages from social contexts create confusion about self, and differing reactions will change self-worth across various contexts.⁶⁷ Furthermore, contradictions

⁶¹ Ibid., 86-87.

⁶² Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 2.

⁶³ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 100.

⁶⁴ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 63.

⁶⁵ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 100.

⁶⁶ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 133.

⁶⁷ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 105.

between multiple selves create confusion between what selves should be protected and what selves should be enhanced, and adolescents are ill equipped to resolve these various contradictions and may not be effective in self-protection or self-enhancement.⁶⁸ Limited cognitive processing skills can distort the interpretation of the opinions of others, characterized by an inaccurate self-appraisal.⁶⁹

Late Adolescence/Emerging Adulthood

This stage is a bit more complicated given the various theories about stages. Some refer to it as late adolescence and others as emerging adulthood. These periods can also be observed as two different stages and include ages eighteen to twenty-one, eighteen to twenty-five, twenty one to twenty-five, twenty-five to thirty and eighteen to thirty. For this analysis, this stage is one stage, starting at eighteen or nineteen and ending as early as twenty-five or as late as thirty. This stage of adolescence is a key time for formation of mature ego (requiring structuralization), which becomes an aspect of identity.⁷⁰

In this stage, adolescents like to normalize or find value contradictions in personality, but the lack of critical support and scaffolding delay development, as the personal fable and imaginary audience continue.⁷¹ They are not into social contracts, but into karma and avoid true moral dilemmas.⁷² They do not consider themselves adults but are no longer adolescents as well, while failing to embrace adult responsibility and

⁶⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 111.

⁷¹ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 360.

⁷² Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 121-125.

wrestling with doubt at high levels.⁷³ Actually, this stage is characterized by abstract cognition, which is often inconsistent.⁷⁴ Many adolescents in this stage are morally adrift, captive to consumerism, intoxicated to fake feelings of happiness, sexually liberated and civically and politically disengaged.⁷⁵

Most identity formation happens in young adulthood, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, outside of family and without a companion.⁷⁶ There is an unrealistic expectation of maturity and identity formation for adolescents in this. It is also problematic to connect maturity with adulthood. The two terms are not compatible contradiction as maturity means to be fully developed and adulthood means to be seen as an adult.⁷⁷

Exploration is key to emerging adulthood and continues much later now in industrialized societies.⁷⁸ Self-awareness and the development of integrated self are a big challenge of this stage, and awareness of this challenge is essential in working with adolescents in this stage of their adolescent journey.⁷⁹ Smith correctly asserts, “The adult

⁷³ Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44-59.

⁷⁴ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 133.

⁷⁵ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, ix.

⁷⁶ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 22-23.

⁷⁷ Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," 470.

⁷⁸ Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 51.

⁷⁹ Arnett, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults," 452.

world is failing youth and emerging adults in these crucial ways because our own adult work is itself also failing in those same ways.”⁸⁰

Families and Adolescent Development

The family, in whatever form it takes, has a significant impact on the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents. As local Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada consider partnering with the community to serve the needs of adolescents, they must first serve their families and understand the significant impact families have on adolescents, regardless of the health of the family or adolescent. The family is at the center of the developmental process for any child or adolescent. In particular, children mirror their parents and families.⁸¹

Adolescents need their parents and family during adolescence, more than most people recognize during this time.⁸² While adolescents need parents, they do not want to be like them. Therefore, accepting and caring parents are vital to the adolescent journey.⁸³

Blurring of family lines and definitions has an impact on adolescence and adolescent development.⁸⁴ For example, the Old Testament concept of family is less

⁸⁰ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 238.

⁸¹ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional & Modern Options*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 136.

⁸² Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 155.

⁸³ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 173.

⁸⁴ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 16.

narrow than today; then it was much larger and truly communal.⁸⁵ While adolescence is a time of individuation, it does not mean complete separation.

Contrary to what one might assume, adolescents want more time with their parents.⁸⁶ There is a clear connection between adolescent security and the quality of attachment relationship with parents, which points to the significant influence parents and families have on the identity development of adolescents.⁸⁷ Parents have significant influence in lives of adolescents, and the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents does not happen in isolation from parents and family.⁸⁸ The change in family structure has had an impact on adolescent development, and therefore, adolescents are less likely to grow up in a traditional nuclear family than other forms of family.⁸⁹

Family life, parenting and raising adolescents is not an easy task and comes with many challenges and opportunities. One's intention determines the power of the future, and so one must be intentional in the approach to parenting and family when it comes to the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents.⁹⁰

If child-rearing necessarily entails stress, then by hurrying children to grow up, or by treating them as adults, we hope to remove a portion of our burden of worry and anxiety and to enlist our children's aid in carrying life's load. We do not mean our children harm in acting thus---on the contrary, as a society we have

⁸⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁶ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 31.

⁸⁷ Joseph P. Allen, and Erin M. Miga, "Attachment in Adolescence: A Move to the Level of Emotion Regulation," *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships* 27, 2 (2010): 187.

⁸⁸ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, 241.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 10-12.

⁹⁰ Senge, *Presence*, 220.

come to imagine that it is good for young people to mature rapidly. Yet we do our children harm when we hurry them through childhood.⁹¹

Unfortunately, as Levine states, “Raising children has come to look more like a business endeavor and less like an endeavor of the heart” and there is a tendency to focus on what kids produce, do and their success than anything else.⁹²

Connectedness (emotional, cognitive) and individuality and individuation should predict relational satisfaction and intimacy along with conflict, but emotional connectedness does not predict conflict.⁹³ People assume the conflict of adolescence is an indicator of the value of relationship, but this simply is not true. In fact, the opposite may be true. Intimacy is a part of the quality of the relationship and is found in open communication and self-disclosure, and adolescents want and need authentic adult relationship with their parents and family.⁹⁴ With regards to this, the five tasks of parenting are understanding, showing compassion, boundarying, charting/guiding, and launching into adulthood.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 3.

⁹² Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 14.

⁹³ Buhl, "Significance of Individuation in Adult Child—Parent Relationships," 271.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁹⁵ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 14.

The Church and Adolescent Spiritual Development

The church can influence adolescent development, both psychosocially and spiritually, because the Gospel is more than a myth and has power.⁹⁶ In Lutheran baptism liturgy, the church makes a commitment to raise the child in the faith, teaching them about God. While parents should be seen as the spiritual leaders of their children, discipleship and spiritual development is a community endeavor.

The church is to provide tools to culture and context that are theological and spiritual so church leaders can help people find a healthier meaning; the church provides the language for the culture.⁹⁷ One must remember ministry is mystery to be explored, not a problem to be solved.⁹⁸ Kinnaman and Hawkins assert, “The church must also help teenagers recognize that salvation has come to them, and that as a result God calls them to leave behind their egos and take on new identities as disciples,” empowered for ministry and to become practical theologians for the sake of the church.⁹⁹

God is a mystery that cannot be fully understood or contained in social systems, and as a result the role of the church is to point people to God, not to create a social institution that discusses God.¹⁰⁰ The church is more than a social institution or even a corporate body of Christ. Ray Anderson calls the church a “presentation of his own

⁹⁶ Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 207.

⁹⁷ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, 47.

⁹⁸ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 3.

⁹⁹ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church-- and Rethinking Faith*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 121.

personhood” and is “the incarnational community in which Christ himself is present.”¹⁰¹ “Ministry to adolescents for the encouragement of their spiritual formation must be specifically tailored to their developmental understanding,” Flemming states.¹⁰² While the church bears responsibility for the spiritual development of adolescents, it must also consider the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents in shaping its ministry to and for adolescents.

The ministry of the church for adolescents includes caring for families and adolescents and must be seen in terms of youth and family ministry as well as the general ministry of the church. To shape the ministry to adolescents, the Lutheran Church needs theological reflection and ethical principles applicable to the situation, exploring past and present of Christian faith to inform the present.¹⁰³ Root and Dean assert, “If youth ministry is to address fragmented, overwhelmed teenagers as human beings, and not as objects to be won and counted for the church, then we must orient twenty-first century youth ministry unapologetically toward the cross. God’s fidelity in Jesus Christ, demonstrated by the cross, is a sign of love.”¹⁰⁴

Ephesians reminds Christians that ministry is not a temporary institution; it is to continue until the church has reached its goal and calling—unity of faith and knowledge of God, perfect man, and the full measure of stature of Christ.¹⁰⁵ The core truth

¹⁰¹ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 122.

¹⁰² Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 60.

¹⁰³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew T Lincoln, *Ephesians*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 138.

adolescents need is found in Galatians 5: the Christian life is one lived by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, faith is more likely to last for adolescents if they are in church and if the adults in the church develop relationships with them.¹⁰⁷

Adolescents need authentic, genuine and realistic care, not jaded and not without expectations.¹⁰⁸ Above all else, adolescents need adults in their lives who love Jesus and love them, as relationship trumps all other needs and ministry methods. Flemming notes, “The desire for relationship is not just limited to the role that a youth ministry plays in the lives of students. Parents, volunteer leaders, teachers, coaches and peers are all significant relational factors in the life of an adolescent. In order for nurturing relationships to be rebuilt between adult Christian spiritual mentors and students, trust must be regained.”¹⁰⁹

Trust and the Spiritual Development of Adolescents

The essence of faith is trust. Trust is a risk.¹¹⁰ Faith is about trusting and not doing.¹¹¹ Faith is “the relation of trust in and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts or positions—beliefs are fashioned.”¹¹² Trust is critical for adolescents, and

¹⁰⁶ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ Powell et al., *Sticky Faith*, 75.

¹⁰⁸ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 65.

¹¹⁰ Wil Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality of Imperfection*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 318; Stephen M. R. Covey and Rebecca R. Merrill, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*, (New York: Free Press, 2006).

¹¹¹ Powell et al., *Sticky Faith*, 19.

¹¹² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 11.

adolescents will not engage with any adult on a deep level they do not trust; additionally, adolescents need adults in order to achieve health. Loder posits, “The Christian ideology not only provides an adolescent reconstruction of trust; it does what the original trust could not do; provides a reason to live and affirms life itself, not by repression but in the face of death itself.”¹¹³

Fowler asserts, faith “is not a separate dimension of life, a compartmentalized specialty. Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one’s hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions.”¹¹⁴ True freedom is found in trust, and in trust all things are resolved as faith expressed in love, with an emphasis on the dynamic of being in Christ.¹¹⁵

Trust is all about relational priorities, and trust is only built in relationship.¹¹⁶ Trust is built and is a childlike quality in Bible stories, and second only to the quality of dependence, which is characterized by openness, natural reception and no doubt of intention.¹¹⁷ Moreover, faith is a verb; it is always relational. Faith at its basic core is still a covenant relationship and is a relational enterprise.¹¹⁸ Pistis (from Galatians chapter five) is a common term denoting faith and trust; it is also assurance and belief in something or someone.¹¹⁹ “Our commitments and trusts shape our identities. They

¹¹³ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 215.

¹¹⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 14.

¹¹⁵ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 171.

¹¹⁶ Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 139.

¹¹⁷ Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*, 84.

¹¹⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 16.

¹¹⁹ Luther, "A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535)".

determine (and are determined by) the communities we join. In a real sense, we become part of that which we love and trust,” Fowler posits.¹²⁰

If adolescents cannot trust adults, the community or the church, what can they trust? The breakdown of trust adolescents have experienced in relation to adults and the systems function is the greatest crisis of spiritual (and psychosocial) development today. Caring matters and leads to better results. The motive of caring does more to build credibility and trust and should shape how people operate as adults and how church leaders should present the Gospel message to adolescents.¹²¹

The central human quality is the capacity for trust and fidelity.¹²² Perhaps the core issue when it comes to trust and adolescent spiritual development is the tension found in Galatians chapter five between trusting in the law and trusting in Christ. Trusting in something other than Christ, particularly the law, prevents humanity from being “partakers of the knowledge, the spirit, the fellowship, the liberty, the life or the achievement of Christ. You are completely separated from Him.”¹²³

Some aspects of adolescence have changed, while others have not. All of the most powerful ideas in history relate to an archetype; new ideas are just an adaptation.¹²⁴ The

¹²⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 18.

¹²¹ Covey and Merrill, *The Speed of Trust*, 77.

¹²² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 292.

¹²³ Luther, "A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535)".

¹²⁴ Storr, *The Essential Jung*, 16.

reality is adolescents face unique challenges today that need to be addressed. If adults do not share the present reality, adults cannot change it: this is key to vision.¹²⁵

Leadership can arise from anywhere, and the Lutheran church in the United States and Canada has a unique opportunity to minister to their communities in a way that matches the kingdom vision and great commission mandate.¹²⁶ This scenario could bring radical transformation to the community as the church and community partner together on behalf of adolescents. The key task for the Lutheran church is interpretation and the Church must listen within the context of their community.¹²⁷ While a partnership between the church and community may seem like a significant system challenge, small changes in a system determine the future of the system.¹²⁸ The call is to discern, seek God's guidance and sift out the challenges as one looks to Christ and the church for solutions to these challenges.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Senge, *Presence*, 132.

¹²⁶ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 17.

¹²⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 20.

¹²⁸ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 427.

¹²⁹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 137.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIETAL RESPONSE AND CHALLENGES TO ADOLESCENT PSYCHOSOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The challenges facing adolescents are not limited to adolescents alone. These challenges are found at every level of society and culture, and unfortunately, society and culture continue to contribute to some of these challenges. The response of society impacts adolescent development dramatically as well as those systems in society in which adolescents function.

The Family

Parents and the family as a system within society have the most significant role in shaping adolescents. Elkind writes, “Children regard the public presence of their parents as a visible symbol of caring and connectedness that is far more significant than any material support could ever be. The most expensive gift will never replace the parent’s presence at a child’s birthday party.”¹ “The family is the primary context for child and adolescent development,” notes Bronfenbrenner.² This influence is not limited to

¹ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 151.

² Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 17.

psychosocial development. The most important influence in religious life for teens is their parents.³ Marriage and family structures also help one deal with differences.⁴

As one considers some of the trends and realities of the family today as it relates to adolescent development, one must recognize the rapid change of culture and family make it difficult to determine all of the trends and challenges facing adolescents in their family systems. The most common emotionally inept parenting styles are ignoring feelings, being too laissez faire, being contemptuous and showing no respect for feelings.⁵ Additionally, unrealistic expectations of kids hurt parents and kids as well their relationship,⁶ and discipline by control or manipulation is part of the problem.⁷ Children develop emotional problems different from disease: it is always a picture of what is going on in the family.⁸

Teens complain parents fail to give guidance and direction and are too permissive, and they desire a better relationship with them.⁹ Overindulgence and an overprotective approach are unhealthy and unhelpful as are permissive, domineering and child worshipping approaches.¹⁰ Uber parenting, the concept of participating in all aspects of

³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 16.

⁴ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 47.

⁵ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 191-192.

⁶ Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 91.

⁷ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 162.

⁸ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, xxxiii.

⁹ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

children's lives, makes it hard to develop a sense of self, yet adolescents will always find a way to escape adult intrusion.¹¹ Overly involved or controlling parents along with other stressors to perform has a dramatic impact on adolescents and their development.¹²

Two newer parenting phenomenon are helicopter parenting and stealth bomber parenting, and both have a dramatic impact on the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents and are realities Lutheran churches will face as they seek to build a partnership with the community to address the issues facing adolescents in their families and communities. The helicopter parent has overinvestment in child's performance; the stealth bomber is very dangerous because children adapt to this combative approach to parenting instead of engaging with key aspects of development.¹³ This analysis is not to place blame on parents for all that ails adolescents. Parenting is a difficult calling, and parents are trusted with major authority, but have a hard time keeping up and adjusting to social change. Nevertheless, rapid social change has a considerable impact on adolescent development.¹⁴

In addition to natural challenges, the loss of extended family means less choices of models and adults from whom to learn skills.¹⁵ Parents have turned kids over to schools and religious groups for socialization.¹⁶ Yet parents are still the best indicator of

¹¹ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 118.

¹² Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 181.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁴ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

religious participation in adolescents.¹⁷ Consequently, parents must have priorities to create rhythm in family life.¹⁸ Those adolescents with religious parents are more likely to internalize parents' religious worldview, have the practical knowledge to live religious lives, and embody their faith in what they say and do.¹⁹ As Kara Powell and Chap Clark note, the most important factor in adolescent spiritual development is faith modeled by their parents; "parents get what they are."²⁰

Some characteristics of parents and families aid in the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents. Parenting styles can impact adolescent development. The authoritative parent style has the best outcomes: high responsiveness and high demand.²¹ Creating boundaries is another critical task in parenting. Boundaries are helpful when it comes to a sense of connectedness and include high cohesiveness and low intrusiveness, including monitoring activities and providing clear expectations.²² Adolescents need hardship, and their goals have to be about their needs and not the adults in their lives;²³ encouraging autonomy creates greater motivation and achievement.²⁴

¹⁷ Elizabeth Howell, "Older Adolescents' Perceptions of the Social Context, Impact, and Development of Their Spiritual/Religious Beliefs and Practices," 58.

¹⁸ Joiner and Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, 133.

¹⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 232.

²⁰ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 24.

²¹ René M Dailey, "Parental Challenge: Developing and Validating a Measure of How Parents Challenge Their Adolescents," *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships* 25, 4 (August 2008): 668.

²² *Ibid.*, 667.

²³ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 62.

²⁴ Dailey, "Parental Challenge: Developing and Validating a Measure of How Parents Challenge Their Adolescents," 667.

In a supportive environment, challenge aids adolescent development and the family has the best opportunity to be that supportive environment.²⁵ As adolescents mature, parents and family members can assist in their development by treating children like adults while training and providing resources for them as adolescents (but still view them as children), being a committed friend who offers timely guidance, and naming who it is they are becoming.²⁶ Democratic parenting, encouraging self-reliance, respecting individuality and providing opportunity for input and freedom of expression without judgment are helpful approaches to parenting adolescents in the midst of their developmental challenges.²⁷ Adolescents also need admissions of shortcomings from adults, as authenticity is critical to building healthy relationships founded on trust with the adults in their lives.²⁸ Deuteronomy chapter two reminds its readers that for the covenant to continue, it depends on the transmission and the continuity of the relationship with God and the people to each generation.²⁹

Parents and families must also consider their role in the spiritual leadership of their children. Reggie Joiner and Carrie Nieuwhof write, “Spiritual leadership means parents assume the next primary responsibility to help their kids take the next step in their pursuit of a relationship with God.”³⁰ Adults, particularly parents, must have a spiritual

²⁵ Buhl, "Development of a Model Describing Individuated Adult Child-Parent Relationships," 271.

²⁶ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 158.

²⁷ Dailey, "Parental Challenge: Developing and Validating a Measure of How Parents Challenge Their Adolescents," 665.

²⁸ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 21.

²⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 21.

³⁰ Joiner and Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, 92.

life and be engaged with these issues in order to lead adolescents; if faith is not personal for parents, it will not be for the child.³¹

The psalmist in Psalm 78 reminds its readers it is incumbent on adults to pass the message of faith down to their children as it is God's will that all things are transmitted without interruption to the next generation within the family.³² As a result, churches must see parents as partners and encourage parents to trust the Spirit, partner with spouse and invite other adults to help them with the spiritual development of their children.³³ Spiritual leadership is about leveraging adult relationships for children and leveraging community and finding partners in ministry for the sake of the spiritual development of children.³⁴ Some practical options for parents and other adults include teaching obedience in response to trusting God, framing everything as a way to know Christ and responding with grace when failure happens.³⁵ Therefore, parents who are active in their faith create a consistent source of growth for their own adolescents and their spiritual development.³⁶

Education

One cannot consider the full nature of adolescent development without examining education and the education system. The amount of time adolescents spend at school

³¹ Ibid., 162.

³² Marvin E Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 101.

³³ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 192.

³⁴ Joiner and Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*.

³⁵ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 39.

³⁶ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 108.

alone give it a tremendous amount of influence. In the case of education, the state plays a role in development and choices.³⁷ Generally speaking, the state and the educational system does not necessarily consider development.

Understanding education is critical when looking at the challenges facing adolescents as cultural contexts interact to shape human development and each of these shape and influence.³⁸ Unfortunately, the best analogy for understanding education today is found in the movie *The Truman Show*, which demonstrates what happens when one accepts all reality as it is given.³⁹ Our culture is suffering from profound blindness and denial regarding the impact of education on adolescent development and the challenges adolescents face today.

Pope delineates that much of school for adolescents is a game, rather than a source of support. Adolescents “do school” and “play the game” as achievement in the education system has become about doing and not learning.⁴⁰ Bronfenbrenner states, “The development of the child is enhanced through her increased involvement, from childhood on, in responsible, task-oriented activities outside the home that bring her into contact with adults other than her parents,” and in the case of the education system, while task-oriented activities may be present, they are not interactive and do not involve much adult contact.⁴¹

³⁷ Hoover et al., *The Power of Identity*, 40.

³⁸ Nakkula and Toshalis, *Understanding Youth*, 250-251.

³⁹ Senge, *Presence*, 27.

⁴⁰ Pope, *"Doing School"*, 4.

⁴¹ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 282.

Another problem with the educational system is adults do nothing to develop the capacities adolescents need for the world.⁴² The education system may be one of the biggest, if not the most significant, contributor to the systemic abandonment of adolescents today as “one of the hallmarks of abandonment is the cultural shift from a nurturing focus on individuals to a focus on the group, the crowd, the statistics, the record, the program, the institution.”⁴³ The focus on test scores, standardized testing and performance in the educational environment has left the individual adolescent abandoned in a system created for their benefit. Likewise, adolescents are enmeshed in “achievement overload” in schools.⁴⁴

Another challenge with the corporate approach to education is adolescents cannot comprehend the value of education individually or corporately: it is all about personal drive and agenda.⁴⁵ There are many contradictions in education, especially when examined in light of adolescent development. Adolescents need more autonomy, yet there is more control in schools. Just when they need adults the most, teachers shift more to teaching a subject than a holistic approach that includes emotional and psychological support. At a time when they are more self-conscious and evaluating the self based on others, the system focuses more on comparison. At a time when they are increasing in cognitive skills and need challenge, assignments do not fit this need for challenge.⁴⁶

⁴² Scharmer, *Theory U*, 447.

⁴³ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 191.

⁴⁴ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 151.

⁴⁵ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 84.

⁴⁶ Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 245-246.

The education system discourages caring dialogue between teachers and students, further adding to systemic abandonment as well as hindering perhaps the most important need in adolescent development, healthy adult interaction and relationship.⁴⁷ When every member of a system participates in joint activities, the developmental potential and individual is enhanced greatly.⁴⁸ Scaffolding is essential to adolescent development and scaffolding happens in adult-child collaboration.⁴⁹ Sadly, the harm caused by the reduced adult-student interaction in the education system is underestimated, if not ignored completely.

An institutional environment is damaging (to people and their development) when: “children and caretakers have little to no interaction through various activities, there is not a lot of opportunity for physical activity and interaction with objects that is also spontaneous,” this impact is greatest on children.⁵⁰ Therefore, smaller schools are better, and schools getting larger have not helped with these challenges.⁵¹ Adolescents need to learn to behave a certain way in a wide variety of contexts in order to survive adolescence,⁵² and institutions like the education system have established regular impersonal connections.⁵³ As a result, school is no longer a safe place for socialization.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Pope, *"Doing School"*, 139.

⁴⁸ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 223.

⁴⁹ Berk and Winsler, *Scaffolding Children's Learning*, 26-28.

⁵⁰ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 143.

⁵¹ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 285.

⁵² Pope, *"Doing School"*, 158.

⁵³ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 178.

⁵⁴ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, 146.

The factory model of education and the departmentalization hurries children as it ignores individual differences and needs.⁵⁵ Similarly, forcing anything universal on adolescents is very disruptive.⁵⁶

Culture and Society

The life of an adolescent “resembles nature, from which neither the individual nor the society stands independent.”⁵⁷ Culture and society influence and impact adolescence and create some of the unique challenges adolescents face. Social systems are regularized social practices across time.⁵⁸ Careful consideration must be given to the impact of society and culture on adolescents, yet it is also important not to assign too much power to society and culture, as one cannot depend on solutions that are about the symptoms.⁵⁹ Half of adolescents are at risk for something serious,⁶⁰ yet adults lack a clear picture of adolescents because of lack of presence.⁶¹

Adults are overwhelmed and disinterested in youth.⁶² Many laws are confusing and destructive to children and adolescents, some treating them as children and others as

⁵⁵ Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 50-75.

⁵⁶ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, 179.

⁵⁷ Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 3.

⁵⁸ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 83.

⁵⁹ Senge, *Presence*, 204.

⁶⁰ Hersch, *A Tribe Apart*, 12.

⁶¹ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 3.

⁶² Hersch, *A Tribe Apart*, 96.

adults.⁶³ Additionally, the extreme focus on the individual creates a loss of common sense, common goal or common family life.⁶⁴ Community is critical, as knowledge happens in community.⁶⁵ Furthermore, people tend to internalize the cultures surrounding them.⁶⁶ According to Sebald, this happens “while the rapid physiological changes create adjustment problems for the young teen-ager, the American culture tends to ignore or evade giving adequate explanations for these changes, thus leaving the youth unaided in his attempt to cope with the new growth pattern.”⁶⁷

Levine notes, “Anxiety and its frequent companions, over involvement and intrusion, combine to make a particularly lethal combination.”⁶⁸ Adolescents are experiencing tremendous overscheduling in their lives according to Levine.⁶⁹ Additionally, “Capitalism’s conquest of American culture” has altered the nature of adolescence “creating new forms of identity and (im)maturity,” according to Côté.⁷⁰ Adolescents are consumed by mass culture and this impacts identity formation.⁷¹ Furthermore, society encourages materialism in our adolescents in subtle ways.⁷²

⁶³ Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 35.

⁶⁴ Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, *Family in Transition*, (New York: Longman, 1997), 5.

⁶⁵ Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 197.

⁶⁶ Senge, *Presence*, 138.

⁶⁷ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 160.

⁶⁸ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 74.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁷⁰ Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 77.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷² Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 41.

A more open, prominent and available media broadens and impacts the views of adolescents.⁷³ The influence of media on adolescents is the source of much speculation, but the greatest challenge lies in adults' unwillingness to help adolescents discern the message of mass media in a healthy manner. The increasing sources of information and influence without adult assistance in processing this information adds to the challenges adolescents face. In this postmodern culture, the postmodern identity for adolescents is made up of "diverse elements that do not form a unified, consistent self."⁷⁴

The self-esteem movement did not work; it blurred lines between encouragement, praise and more, and the notion that every kid gets a trophy has not produced more well-adjusted kids, but just the opposite.⁷⁵ Elevating adolescents' feelings and removing the pain of consequences from their lives has hindered healthy psychosocial and spiritual development. Levine writes, "When we mitigate natural consequences for our kids, we deprive them of one of life's most important lessons: that we are held accountable for our actions."⁷⁶

Mutuality means finding ways to learn in reciprocation, and society cannot expect its adolescents to mature without relationships with adults who are willing to engage in reciprocal learning.⁷⁷ Epstein asserts, "Peers are the last people on earth from whom they

⁷³ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 343.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁵ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 141.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁷ Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 224.

should be learning.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, our adolescents spend more time alone than ever before and technology may be deskilling them when it comes to relating to others.⁷⁹

Adolescents need to belong, be a part of a tribe; community is important because of what it provides and what it requires.⁸⁰ Elkind notes, “When adolescents live in a world where adults place their own needs ahead of those of the young, young people act out against themselves or against society.”⁸¹ Careful consideration of the impact current society and culture has on adolescents and their development must be seriously examined and addressed in a comprehensive and thoughtful way.

The Church

The Church continues to play a role in the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents in culture. Like other systems, the church has helped, hindered and contributed to the challenges facing adolescents. The Lutheran Church in the United States and Canada has struggled with a consistent, biblical approach to youth ministry, and the vast majority of churches do not consider development in their ministry to adolescents. The church is too preoccupied with its own survival, yet youth ministry is the place where change can happen.⁸²

Some of the great challenges facing the church is its imitation of society and becoming part of the problem. The same issues of culture are now issues of church:

⁷⁸ Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 315.

⁷⁹ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, xvi.

⁸⁰ Joiner and Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, 67.

⁸¹ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, xiv.

⁸² Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*.

power, relevance and popularity connected to temptations of Jesus.⁸³ The Lutheran Church in particular has a tendency to be internally focused and may not be considering the real needs of adolescents when considering what shape their ministry may take. Church leaders cannot make ministry or the care of adolescents about the adults; adults tend to respond too soon to the challenges facing adolescents and the ministry becomes about the church and the adults in the church and not about Christ.⁸⁴ Churches need to rethink how discipleship occurs and find a way to value wisdom more than information in the ministries and also rethink the view of calling.⁸⁵

One must also recognize the work and the ministry of the Church as dependent on God's action. A Christian's one action is to trust, while God does the rest. The truth the Church teaches depends on the grace of God, and ministry to adolescents is a seed-planting mission; one must cultivate the seed and give it the best possible exposure to the right amount of support, but it is ultimately God who creates the growth.⁸⁶ Kinnaman notes, "Youth are practical theologians by calling not by proficiency" and the Church must value their role, calling and place in our church communities.⁸⁷ In order to consider the role of the church in adolescent psychosocial and spiritual development moving

⁸³ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 207.

⁸⁴ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus : Reflections on Christian Leadership*, (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 4.

⁸⁵ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 19.

⁸⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 181.

⁸⁷ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church-- and Rethinking Faith*, 201-202.

towards a church initiated partnership with the community, adults must carefully discern, reflect, observe and then apply what they have learned.⁸⁸

There are many challenges the Church faces when considering the needs of adolescents and the current nature of ministry to adolescents in the Lutheran Church. It is easy to get stuck in traditions, particularly in the Lutheran Church in North America, and while Lutheran theology focuses on grace alone and justification by grace through faith, the church has struggled with a legalistic, law based approach when it comes to adolescents. When Christians embrace the law as the guide for life and faith, they reject Christ and while the law is still valid, it is not required and the fulfillment of the law comes in loving others.⁸⁹ In this case, the church has embraced what Dallas Willard calls the “gospel of sin management” in ministry to adolescents.⁹⁰ Youth ministries have become about behavior modification and performance, and the goal of the church is to eliminate sin from adolescents while honoring the parent’s vision that the church fix their adolescents.

Theologically, it is dangerous for the church to become the manager of its adolescents’ morality as a “moral religious system robs Christ of his honor.”⁹¹ One must be careful not to worship boundaries, but still have them in terms of the gospel message as well as healthy accountability in the midst of a supportive environment for

⁸⁸ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*.

⁸⁹ Chap Clark and Kara Eckmann Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings About Youth Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 25.

⁹⁰ Powell et al., *Sticky Faith*, 31.

⁹¹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 152.

adolescents.⁹² The Lutheran Church is struggling in the area of youth ministry and failing to retain adolescents and young adults in their churches. The problem is not just this age or generation, but the church as well.⁹³

While the Lutheran Church faces great challenges in its ministry to adolescents, families and young adults, these challenges can be met.⁹⁴ The failure to reach adolescents, family and young adults and understanding this dropout as the death of the church is a premature reaction.⁹⁵ There is a problem of hyper connectivity in the Church and the focus of the Lutheran Church on the individual and individual rights along with the rejection of dependence is a significant problem that ironically damages the community.⁹⁶

Church leaders must re-evaluate the way they understand spiritual formation for children and adolescents.⁹⁷ Adolescents perceive the church to be shallow, overprotective, anti-science, repressive, exclusive and doubtless.⁹⁸ While perception may not be truth, it is a reality and must be addressed for the sake of the ministry to adolescents and their families. Sadly, fifty percent of adolescents who are active in the

⁹² Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 63.

⁹³ Powell et al., *Sticky Faith*, 143; Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*.

⁹⁴ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church-- and Rethinking Faith*, 194.

⁹⁵ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 6.

⁹⁶ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church-- and Rethinking Faith*, 33.

⁹⁷ Parks, *Big Questions, Worth Dreams*, 101.

⁹⁸ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 88.

church will walk away from their faith in college.⁹⁹ Religious organizations are not widely successful in bringing clarity to faith for adolescents, but the adult relationships adolescents experience, including parents, exert huge influence on the lives of adolescents when it comes to faith.¹⁰⁰ In any case, youth group attendance alone is not a predictor of faith as people evolve.¹⁰¹

Most religious adolescents embrace a theology called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that there is a God who exists that created, ordered and watches over the world and wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other as taught in most religions. The goal of life is to be happy, have high self-esteem and be good so that when one dies one goes to heaven. God is not involved in one's life unless needed to solve a problem.¹⁰²

God is simply a divine therapist who created human beings to be free and happy. This is the basic theology of most of the adolescents and their parents in Lutheran churches today. This theological problem is not healthy Christian or Lutheran theology.

The prevailing view of adolescents is God creates and gives the law but is not active, relational or trinitarian; God is not personally involved in the world or in human lives.¹⁰³ The church has contributed to this in the complacent attitude towards adolescents characterized by the "kids these days" mentality.¹⁰⁴ An unhealthy view of parents by

⁹⁹ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church-- and Rethinking Faith*, 92-93.

¹⁰⁰ Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 15.

¹⁰¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 28.

¹⁰² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 19.

¹⁰³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-165.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

youth workers not only contributes to this theology, but it also prevents a much-needed partnership between the church and parents in the psychosocial and spiritual development of their adolescents.

Youth workers see parents as the enemy, and parents see the church and its youth ministry as a place to send their adolescents to be fixed. This situation creates an even greater breakdown in adult relationships adolescents need while decreasing trust and causing more of the systemic abandonment that is one of the hallmarks of adolescence today.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, attending worship does cause teenagers to think, and they do not see worship services as boring, but as unwelcoming.¹⁰⁶

When it comes to meeting the unique needs and challenges adolescents face, the Lutheran Church in the United States and Canada needs transforming practice in all areas of life and ministry.¹⁰⁷ The Church (and therefore its people) are always reforming and the Lutheran church needs to embrace reform in its ministry to adolescents in its churches and communities.¹⁰⁸ Adults must have high levels of “cultural intelligence” in working with adolescents, understanding both their developmental challenges and the culture in which they operate.¹⁰⁹ If Lutheran Churches in the United States and Canada want to reach adolescents, the Church cannot operate by ignoring the issues, but must seek

¹⁰⁵ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 80.

¹⁰⁷ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 65.

¹⁰⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 154.

¹⁰⁹ Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 56.

understanding instead. Instead of power, relevance and popularity, the Lutheran church needs to embrace powerlessness, authenticity and rejection.¹¹⁰

Christian youth in the United States are not seekers and desire depth.¹¹¹ Additionally, the role of youth ministry as practical theology is important.¹¹² Young adults are drawn to places that nourish them.¹¹³ Most adolescents who go to church see it as a good place to learn, and most want to learn more about their faith.¹¹⁴ No longer can the church embrace the mentality of youth workers as entertainers or program directors, but instead must be authentic shepherds and spiritual guides pointing kids to the presence of God.¹¹⁵ Most importantly, all are ministers, and it is God's action that brings about transformation.¹¹⁶

The brokenness people experience needs to be held up to the light, knowing Christ's light can ultimately heal this brokenness.¹¹⁷ The model of discipleship in the church is not about going to youth with love and acceptance then inviting them into the community of faith, but this needs to be the mentality.¹¹⁸ What adolescents need in their

¹¹⁰ Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 206.

¹¹¹ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus : Reflections on Christian Leadership*, 4-6.

¹¹² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 82.

¹¹³ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 21.

¹¹⁴ Parks, *Big Questions, Worth Dreams*, 200.

¹¹⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 65.

¹¹⁶ Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 54.

¹¹⁷ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 81.

¹¹⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press.), sound recording.

own spiritual development are faithful presence, honesty and transparency, mutual submission, confession and forgiveness, joy, listening and empathy and an attitude of gratitude.¹¹⁹ The personal experiences that impact faith are mission trips, summer camps, trials, seasons of learning, mistakes, fear, facing of death and sickness as well as the spiritual highs like camps, conferences, and other gatherings meant for transformation.¹²⁰

Rites of passage also aid in the spiritual formation of adolescents. The Lutheran church historically has many rites of passage, but many churches have drifted from these rights of passage out of relevance. Rites of passage, liturgy and other forms of worship and ministry that create order and remind adolescents of their identity in Christ are essential. There is more reinforcement in a known community when it comes to rites of passage.¹²¹ Perhaps the most important truth in considering the response of the Lutheran church to the needs of adolescents is parents and youth workers need each other.¹²²

Generational Considerations

When examining the development of adolescents in society, one must consider the impact of generations. For the first time in the case of the church, at least six generations coexist with very different needs and makeup, including the GI generation, the Silent generation, the Boomer generation, the Generation X, the Millennial

¹¹⁹ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 79.

¹²⁰ Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 50.

¹²¹ Fleming, "Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England," 75-80.

¹²² Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 33.

Generation and the newest generation born in the past decade.¹²³ Forming and resolving conflict between generations is a part of adolescence, but now there is no commitment or tools from the generations before them to resolve these conflicts; yet maturity comes through conflict.¹²⁴

Some have also pointed out that a distinct, creative class has arisen from within the generation of young adults. The “creative class” engages in complex problem solving that requires judgment and values creativity, individuality, difference and merit and requires much education.¹²⁵ The values of this group are still emerging and some are not new: individuality, meritocracy (like hard work, challenge and simulation), diversity (but out of self interest) and openness.¹²⁶

This generation is incredibly anxious, and this anxiety undermines intelligence; those who are anxious more likely to fail.¹²⁷ Anxiety and trust are factors that limit objectivity and create reflexive reaction, because the basic security system cannot handle the massive quantity of modes created by anxiety.¹²⁸ While this creative class are still narcissists,¹²⁹ there is a limited ability among adolescents in the midst of their

¹²³ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 98-100.

¹²⁴ Peter Menconi, *The Intergenerational Church: Understanding Congregations from WWII to WWW.Com*, (Denver, CO: CreateSpace, 2010), xiv-30.

¹²⁵ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 14.

¹²⁶ Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004), 8.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹²⁸ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 66.

¹²⁹ Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 51-58.

development to deal with this anxiety.¹³⁰ Outsourcing and globalization has increased creativity and for this creative class, creativity is multi—dimensional and experiential.¹³¹ Church leaders need to value and use the offerings of each and merge it somehow in order to connect each generation, as doing so would be a powerful witness and help fulfill the call of the church to be the light of the world.¹³²

¹³⁰ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 196.

¹³¹ Hoover et al., *The Power of Identity*, 87.

¹³² Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 33 & 53.

CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Humans have been created to be in relationship with one another, with God and the created world. If one examines the scriptures, there is clearly a call to greater community.¹ Nowhere is this need greater than in the life of adolescents who are more isolated than ever before. This isolation creates developmental impacts as every child needs significant social capital to develop.² In order to not only assist adolescents in their transition into a health and whole adulthood, but to address the unique challenges of adolescence, a greater emphasis on social capital is essential in culture and organizations that serve children and the church.

Social capital is one of the most critical tools in addressing the developmental needs of adolescents. If the primary goal of adolescence is individuation, then one must consider what is required in assisting this process rather than assuming this process will unfold on its own. Anderson asserts, “Individuality as a form of being is a result of

¹ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 134.

² Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 179.

differentiation through relation with another.”³ In other words, individuation is impossible without relationships with others. In many cases, individuation through relationship is occurring primarily if not completely through peer relationships in the lives of adolescents given the dramatic absence of significant, healthy adult relationships in their lives.

Perhaps the greatest difference in the adolescent journey in the current American and Canadian culture from previous periods in modern history is the lack of adult relationships adolescents experience. While this may be understandable to some, it is inexcusable as Anderson writes humans have an “ethical responsibility” for one another.⁴ Adults must consider the amount, nature and quality of social capital provided to adolescents in order to best address the issues they face.

Defining Social Capital

Capital is a concept understood easily in the United States, as well as in the Church. However, living in a capitalist society, we often lose sight of the true meaning of the concept as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Social capital is different from political or financial capital, and it is far more important. Social capital can best be summarized as relationship capital. Social capital is individual and personal, but it is also communal as well. Social capital is individual and collective, public and private.⁵

³ Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 20.

People need and value relationships and cannot forget humanity was created to be in relationship with the world, one another and most importantly, Jesus. Robert Putnam writes, “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”⁶ People have lost sight of social capital in culture today, particularly when it comes to adolescents.

The Church, including the Lutheran Church may be an even bigger contributor to this problem as social capital has decreased in the institution that needs it the most but should be the primary model of healthy social capital to the world. It is ironic in a time in the world where people crave community more than ever, the church has it least: the church was formed to create and model healthy, Christ-focused community and has lost sight of its purpose.

Social capital—that is, social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity—comes in many different shapes and sizes with many different uses. Your extended family represents a form of social capital, as do your Sunday school class, the regulars who play poker on your commuter train, your college roommates, the civic organizations to which you belong, the Internet chat group in which you participate, and the network of professional acquaintances recorded in your address book.⁷

Social capital is hard to define because it is broad and can include so much, and yet is more philosophical than practical in nature, especially when compared to financial capital. The reality that social capital is primarily about relationships is both a gift and a challenge. Relationship is the most meaningful aspect of life, but it can be the most

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

complicated. Relationships are critical to health and well-being, even more so for adolescents.

Healthy development is impossible for any adolescent without strong, consistent, authentic social capital. Genes require input from environment to function; it is nature and nurture interacting.⁸ Relationships are built on trust, and trust is the essence of faith as revealed in Galatians 5. Trust is essential and the trust of others (adults in life and culture) impacts the ability for everyone, adolescents in particular, to trust self and use good judgment.⁹ People were not meant to live in isolation, and people need one another not only to survive, but also to thrive and find identity in the world and in Christ.

The Necessity of Social Capital

Social capital is not a luxury; it is a necessity, as it includes relationships, networks and communities, all of which are needed for a healthy existence. For Christians, life cannot be lived outside of relationships, and community is to be experienced, expressed and demonstrated in community. Anderson notes, “The very nature of human personhood is linked to the human community as a determinative of its existence.”¹⁰

Over the last decades a variety of social, economic and technological changes have rendered obsolete a significant stock of America’s social capital” and the “growing social capital deficient threatens education performance, safe neighborhoods, equitable tax collection, democratic responsiveness, everyday honest, and even our health and happiness.”¹¹

⁸ Dweck, *Mindset*, 5.

⁹ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, (New York: Norton, 1980), 63.

¹⁰ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 156.

¹¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 367.

For adolescents, ego identity happens in a social reality.¹² Identity and ego formation are two of the most critical tasks of adolescents and cannot happen without social capital. Social capital has a significant impact on physical and mental health of people, particularly children and adolescents.¹³ Adolescence and the adolescent culture have become more isolated.¹⁴ Regarding this, Putnam states, “Child development is powerfully shaped by social capital.”¹⁵

Regardless of matters of faith, social capital also impacts our general moral values as well as our culture identity as “the values of the world we inhabit and the people we surround ourselves with have a profound effect on who we are,” Malcomb Gladwell notes.¹⁶ Robert Kegan notes the demands on children and adolescents has changed and “the mental demands we make of our children, have been extended beyond the school to the wider culture itself” and adults have not “given childhood its due.”¹⁷

An important aspect of all individuals is morals, and morals are more significant than intelligence in determining success and contribution to community and culture.¹⁸ The Church as the community of God is custodian and steward for the mystery of life.¹⁹ Conversely, postmodern culture has rejected absolutes, so moral teaching will be limited

¹² Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 22.

¹³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 326.

¹⁴ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 271.

¹⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 296.

¹⁶ Gladwell, *Outliers*, 11.

¹⁷ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 4.

¹⁸ Gladwell, *Outliers*, 75.

¹⁹ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 153.

to individual want and needs if adolescents do not have relationships to develop this area of their lives.²⁰ In fact, when one has to depend on self, one depends on values created within the self.²¹

Social capital is not limited to moral challenges. Putnam writes, “A society characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society” as “trustworthiness lubricates social life.”²² There is a difference between honesty and trust based on personal view and honesty, and trust is based on a communal norm further increasing the need for social capital and human connection.²³

Without connection to one another, people live in distrust, lacking faith in God and one another, unable to function in healthy community. Anderson notes, “Humanity is a determination of the Word of God, a determination of being with others, and the determination of one person with the other.”²⁴ The breakdown of social capital has not only been felt in culture and in the church, but also in families as well. Considering the lifestyle of the modern family, Putnam writes, “Beyond mealtime, virtually all forms of family togetherness became less common over the last quarter of the twentieth century.”²⁵

When it comes to adolescence, there is little as important than social capital. In order to help adolescents transition into healthy, functioning adults within community

²⁰ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 325.

²¹ Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 84.

²² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁴ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 45.

²⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 101.

adults must invest healthy, consistent, authentic social capital in their lives. The psychological demands on adolescents from culture and the nature of puberty along with a need to individuate and develop a sense of self is simply overwhelming, even with consistent adult support, which lacks in contemporary culture.²⁶ Simply put, adults are asking adolescents to do things they are not physically and psychologically capable of without support, which is in fact impossible. Basically as Putnam writes, the “Correlation between high social capital and positive child development is as close to perfect as social scientists ever find in data analysis of this sort” and social capital is “second only to poverty in the breadth and depth of its effects on children’s lives.”²⁷

History of Social Capital

Social capital dates back to creation, as God desired to create humanity. Humans are created in image of God as Genesis 1:26-27 indicates. People were created to be in relationship with God, one another and the world God created out of love. It is God’s delight to be in relationship with those he created out of love, and this glory God receives from humans is a reflection of himself in those humans.²⁸ Concerning this, social capital started in the Garden of Eden. Throughout history, both in the scriptures and beyond, one understands the unfolding story of social capital in the people of Israel, in culture, in the church, in the disciples and beyond.

Throughout history in various cultures, people experience and express social capital in a variety of ways. Looking at the United States and Canada, many changes in

²⁶ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 27.

²⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 297.

²⁸ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 69.

community and social capital have occurred throughout history. Certainly, community has been a critical aspect of life in the United States, but the nature of community has changed. Bonds of community have grown and weakened, with ups and downs, yet growing in some strength now.²⁹ As it relates to adolescence, the self-esteem movement emphasized the wrong kind of social capital, which created superiority and entitlement and an inability to handle failure.³⁰

The rapid and dramatic shifts concerning community in culture are undeniable. For example, looking at one aspect or issue related to culture and social capital, one could examine the growth of women in the work place, which is an economic necessity and has great value, but does have an impact on social capital and community. With regards to this change, women who are more likely to work are less likely to engage with social capital outside of the family.³¹ By the same token, the nature of community is changing, as is social capital, and the trend is not positive, especially for the church and for adolescents. Florida notes, “Neighborhoods, cities and society as a whole are losing the strong sense of community and the civic-minded spirit that were the source of our prosperity.”³²

Trends in Social Capital

One must consider the various trends in social capital, to identify and address the challenges, but also because for any person, going through the process of identity

²⁹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 25.

³⁰ Dweck, *Mindset*, 30-31.

³¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 201.

³² Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 16.

formation, continuity of self and ego is impossible without social interaction.³³ Nevertheless, every generation is just as engaged in social organizations and social capital, but each successive generation is investing less in social capital.³⁴ This trend combined with the increasing challenges culture faces and the extension of adolescence creates a significant issue to be addressed.

The Lutheran Church in the United States and Canada should be especially attentive to the trends in social capital, as it is the responsibility of the church to lead the culture in caring for all people, including adolescents. David Entwistle writes, “All persons are ‘characters in search of an author,’ that is, fundamentally worshipping beings, who if not committed to the one true God, will inevitably end up revering some substitute within God’s creation.”³⁵ Despite this, the church impacts trends in social capital, and those same trends have an impact on the church as well. For example, religious activity is a strong predictor of connecting, volunteering and giving in the community.³⁶

The Lutheran Church is in decline and the decline of social capital will not help reverse this trend, nor will ignoring the needs of culture and the adolescents within these congregations. Social capital is an issue for personal faith as well. Privatized faith may be

³³ Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 94-95.

³⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 62.

³⁵ David N. Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity: An Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations, and Models of Integration*, 2nd ed., (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2010), 230.

³⁶ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 67.

compelling and fulfilling, but “it embodies less social capital,” and “knows little communal support.”³⁷

Putnam concludes, “Across a wide range of activities, the last several decades witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbors. We spend less time in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less often, we engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction, we spend more time watching and less time doing.”³⁸ People have lost their connection with one another in homes, churches, neighborhoods and communities. While moving forward in resources, tools and technology people are moving backwards in relational connections. Florida concludes, “We crave flexibility, but have less time to pursue the things we truly desire” and the technologies that were supposed to liberate us from work have invaded our lives.”³⁹

May people now rely on things other than relationships to solve conflicts and crisis, using formal institutions such as the law and legal means to accomplish what people used to do through networking, relationship and social capital.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the boomer generation impacted social capital greatly as they disengaged from politics, marriage, parenting and religious participation and as a generation are highly individualistic.⁴¹ The breakdown of community and social capital is often linked to how transient culture has become and how much more frequently people move. In spite of this

³⁷ Ibid., 74.

³⁸ Ibid., 115.

³⁹ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 11.

⁴⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 145.

⁴¹ Ibid., 258.

trend, the evidence suggests moving has not eroded social capital, but the locations where people have moved erode social capital as people move to large cities and suburbs that report less community engagement than smaller towns and rural areas.⁴²

The lack of social capital and community connection contributes to a fixed mindset in children, which means children are being defined before they have an identity.⁴³ Furthermore, more social capital and networks exist at home than in the neighborhood due to more working parents.⁴⁴ In addition, family mealtime has dropped dramatically further dividing culture and modeling a destructive dynamic to adolescents who desperately crave and need social capital and community.⁴⁵ Authenticity is a core value for adolescents and this generation in particular, but it is impossible to experience the kind of authenticity needed outside of relationships through social capital in one's community.⁴⁶

Social capital and community involvement are linked to time and while many studies differ in their conclusions about the availability of free time today compared to the past, two things are for certain. Putnam observes, "The last three decades have seen no general decline in free time" and people "who report the heaviest time pressure are more likely" to be engaged in their communities.⁴⁷ Additionally, among a variety of

⁴² Ibid., 205.

⁴³ Dweck, *Mindset*, 4-5.

⁴⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 85.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 100-101.

⁴⁶ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 228.

⁴⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 190-191.

factors predicting social participation, the most consistent factor is dependence on televisions for entertainment.⁴⁸ The good news is there has been a dramatic increase in volunteerism in this generation that Putnam describes as “without parallel.”⁴⁹

Future of Social Capital

Weak connections are not helping people; connection to people and ideas not only indicate a level of health in the area of social capital, but determine whether or not people can address the challenges they face.⁵⁰ The future of social capital is uncertain, and negative trends may continue, unless a reversal or cessation is possible. With this intention, people can and must address the challenges related to social capital. If Christians want something and have the chance, but do not do anything about it, they are failing to honor their call as Christ-followers as well as failing the children and adolescents; this would be heartbreaking.⁵¹ Lastly, it is within the power and ability of a culture to reverse the trend of social capital decline.⁵²

While relational in nature, social capital impacts all areas of culture beyond emotional health and personal happiness, as “human capital is key to economic growth,” according to Florida.⁵³ Good living is not just about genes and choices; it is also about

⁴⁸ Ibid., 230-231.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁰ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 54.

⁵¹ Dweck, *Mindset*, 44.

⁵² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 25.

⁵³ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 223.

community, especially for adolescents.⁵⁴ Likewise, the extended trajectory of adolescence is very concerning and appears to grow in its challenges while decreasing in support.

Regardless of one's perspective on adolescence and adolescent culture, it is difficult to deny the many great challenges as it relates to adolescents. The greatest challenge and the most significant solution to these challenges are identical: the quantity and quality of social capital. The challenge is cultural, systemic and environmental. Kegan writes, "Environments that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic," which defines the current culture.⁵⁵

One significant question Putnam notes relates to technology and social capital and whether or not "virtual social capital is itself a contradiction in terms."⁵⁶ While there may be varying perspectives on this issue, there is no doubt a contradiction in terms for adolescents who need genuine social capital with human interaction. While the impact of technology on community and relationships is significant, there is a lot of division over the nature and significance of this impact. Christians must consider how technology impacts social capital as the Church moves into an even more technology rich future.

In the Church

Whether the Church chooses to be involved in addressing these challenges it is a part of the future of social capital, and it does impact social capital inside and outside of its walls and faith community. Adolescents are overwhelmed and in need of greater social capital in the midst of increasing challenge. It is acceptable for adolescents to be

⁵⁴ Gladwell, *Outliers*, 10.

⁵⁵ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 42.

⁵⁶ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 170.

overwhelmed beyond their capacity, provided they have support, best found in a holding environment.⁵⁷ Local Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada should ensure they are a holding environment for adolescents and are simultaneously working with the community to create additional holding environments. This process is essential, because church participation is a significant predictor of children avoiding a high degree of problems.⁵⁸

The Church cannot define itself based on culture, nor should it allow culture to dictate its approach to social capital. Similarly, social capital is not a social issue; it is a biblical and theological issue. Yet, the church is a community of faith, and community is impossible without social capital.

The church is to be more than community for the sake of community. The church should be a community in relationship with Jesus Christ, growing in trust of God and serving the community in which they have been placed. Anderson states, “The community which serves as the context of human personhood must define itself in accordance with the theological and liturgical framework of its own existence as the people of God.”⁵⁹ Whether out of fear, isolationism, or lack of faith, the church underestimates its role in social capital in the culture. Putnam asserts, “Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 43.

⁵⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 299.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 158.

⁶⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 66.

In Society at Large

Society is becoming more disconnected and isolated from one another and is experiencing both a decline in healthy community as well as social capital. Fractured and incoherent society creates weak economies.⁶¹ News and entertainment, along with technology, have allowed people to become more individualized.⁶² People are more loosely connected and less committed to one another. For example, adults spend more time at work, which means it accounts for more of their social capital, but it may not have the depth needed and desired.⁶³ Indeed depth and commitment are significant factors in the nature and impact of social capital. Contingent commitment impacts social capital.⁶⁴ Sadly, the practice of entertaining in homes has diminished to the point of almost disappearing.⁶⁵ Although volunteerism has increased dramatically amongst recent generation, they will have a lot to make up for previous generations.⁶⁶

The reality is there is a need for the healthy integration of the social, psychological and theological to be fully human.⁶⁷ People cannot be fully human outside of relationship and community, and community is more than a need to be met. It is a reality to be experienced and enjoyed. This is particularly true for adolescents. Adolescents mobilize resources to protect ego—partially because of fixed mindset, and if they do not have

⁶¹ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 323.

⁶² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 216-217.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁴ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 323.

⁶⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 100.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁷ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 62.

adult resources, then they will suffer and will likely not be able to meet the demands of life in a healthy way in the midst of the change in adolescence.⁶⁸

Everything is intertwined, and adolescents need greater social cohesion, which must come through social capital.⁶⁹ Will the culture and social sciences rise up and create a “third force” to address the issues facing adolescents?⁷⁰ While they may, the church should take the lead in caring for adolescents partnering with social science, families, community organizations and the larger community to not only address the mental demands and challenges adolescents face, but the lack of social capital that prevents them from facing these challenges and also contributes to them.

Partnering in Social Capital

In order to address the need for greater social capital in the lives of adolescents in an effective and lasting way, it requires the church to take responsibility for the challenge and to partner with the community. This charge is a matter of calling and of faith, and the Lutheran church in the United States and Canada must take responsibility for the care of children and adolescents and honor the words a congregation offers to every child in their baptism vows. Anderson writes, “One is responsible to do the will of Christ; but that is ordinarily not for the individual to decide, but for the community itself- or for its members who act in complicity with each other.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Dweck, *Mindset*, 58.

⁶⁹ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 323.

⁷⁰ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 9.

⁷¹ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 158.

The burdens of adolescence belong to the church, for Christians “are in this together” and if Christians do not recognize this and live differently as a result, the very fiber of our families, church and culture are in danger.⁷² Putnam writes, “Social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids,” something the church should care deeply about.⁷³ The call as the Church of Jesus Christ and the Lutheran Church is to serve the communities. The church does this not for institutional gain, but through faith, because of the blessings received and in light of the love of Jesus for each and every human being. The Church must address this epidemic, keeping in mind that “an epidemic can be reversed, can be tipped, by thinking with the smallest details of the immediate environment,”⁷⁴ Gladwell notes.

Christians need to be open to change and transformation as individuals and as a church. Additionally, Christians must believe things can change, as communicated clearly in the scriptures and in the life, message and ministry of Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ However, transformation does not happen by accident, nor does it happen without an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. Every covenant community (the church) is responsibly for what Anderson calls the “serving as the custodian and steward of the mystery of human life.”⁷⁶

The lack of social capital in culture and the lives of adolescents is a massive problem to undertake. So often modern culture and the Lutheran church is focused on

⁷² Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 276-277.

⁷³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 296.

⁷⁴ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 146.

⁷⁵ Dweck, *Mindset*, 156.

⁷⁶ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 154.

“‘Band-Aid solutions’ that have low effort and cost,” but this cannot be the approach to the challenges of low social capital.⁷⁷ To make this kind of shift would be a new social movement for a local Lutheran church body in the United States or Canada and for other community organizations. The great news is “social movements also create social capital, by fostering new identities and extending social networks,” Putnam writes.⁷⁸

Putnam notes the Church can “support a wide range of social activities well beyond conventional worship.”⁷⁹ Beyond activities, the Church should always have a vision for connection to its community. The question for every Lutheran church is ‘why has God placed us in this particular community, and what are we called to do to serve this community in the name of Jesus in this season of our ministry?’ The impact of social capital is emotional and spiritual in nature. Entwistle writes, “Psychology and theology may describe the same thing in different words or to different degrees, but they are correct only to the degree that they accurately reflect the single reality of how the world functions based on God’s design.”⁸⁰

Community problems are the church’s issue, just as the emotional, physical, financial, social, theological and spiritual problems of people should be the focus of the church as well. For most Lutheran churches, this belief represents a change in operation and mindset, but is an incredibly opportunity for growth as individuals and as a

⁷⁷ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 256.

⁷⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 153.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁰ Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity*, 296.

community of faith. Opening up to growth enhances rather than diminishes and this is true both for individuals and the church and is the gospel message of transformation.⁸¹

While this change of mindset may be difficult, partnering with the community and organizations should not be. Humans are all capable of relationship and religious people “seem to simply know more people,” Putnam notes.⁸² Christians must see this situation as priority and make a commitment to partnership for the benefit of adolescents, even if it leads to personal discomfort. While it may be uncomfortable at times, this kind of partnership can transform the church and its ministry in ways never achieved by any other initiative or program. Certain situations are so powerful that they can overwhelm predispositions and this is one of them where the Holy Spirit can speak to both the church and the culture.⁸³

The closer a person gets to an idea, the more power it has in them.⁸⁴ Therefore, a shift in mindset and practice by adults is critical. Putnam writes, “One distinctive feature of a social-capital-creating formal organization is that it includes local chapters in which members can meet one another.”⁸⁵ This is the very definition of the local church and the call of the local church as they serve their community. The church needs to be the leader in a movement like this for a variety of reasons.

⁸¹ Dweck, *Mindset*, 226.

⁸² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 67.

⁸³ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 154.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 51.

The church is called to lead culture, especially in creating community. Additionally, true and abundant life can only be found in the source Jesus, and the church should be the living representation of Jesus. The church is also called to be a translator, and translators are needed in order to get the word out.⁸⁶ Scott Cormode refers to this practice as being an interpreter for people, the Church gives people a theological frame and lens by which to see and interpret life.⁸⁷ Furthermore, social networks help people stay healthy,⁸⁸ and people need a climate that is more than a corporate climate or a business climate; they desire community.⁸⁹ Florida notes, “What people want is not an either/or proposition,” but to experience health and abundance and the church should look to serve people in a way that they can find health and abundance, pointing them to Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

The church is capable of leading this kind of partnership and transformation in their communities for adolescents as well. Those who succeed in the end are not necessarily the best, but those who have the opportunities and seized them.⁹¹ Every Lutheran church in the United States and Canada should seize the opportunity and partner with the community and community organizations to meet the changing needs and challenges adolescents face through the building of social capital. Churches should

⁸⁶ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 203.

⁸⁷ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, 10.

⁸⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 331.

⁸⁹ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 283.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁹¹ Gladwell, *Outliers*, 267.

embrace this opportunity not for their own gain, but out of love for adolescents and the furthering of the Kingdom of God.

Kegan writes that society desires adolescents to become “employable, a good citizen, a critical thinker, emotionally self-reflective, personally trustworthy, possessed of common sense and meaningful ideals. This is a lot to want,” and people seem to want it quickly, consistently and without much effort or support from the adults and systems that are supposed to help adolescents become these ideal individuals.⁹² Furthermore, Kegan notes adolescents may be in over their heads, but “their situation is all the more dangerous for being misunderstood by those adults whose expectations they are disappointing.”⁹³ Putnam writes, “It is undeniable that religion has played a role in every period of civic revival in American history” and so it is time for the church of Jesus Christ, and the Lutheran church to lead a great awakening in the area of social capital in our churches and communities.⁹⁴

Finally, Putnam asserts, “Social movements and social capital are so closely connected that it is sometimes hard to see which is the chicken and which egg.”⁹⁵ What is being suggested is a social movement starting with the church addressing the social capital challenges faced as a culture. Most people in this culture, particularly adolescents, feel isolated and disconnected, and the cost of this isolation and lack of social capital is

⁹² Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 38.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 409.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 152.

high. According to Putnam, while creating social capital is “no simple task,” it is a crisis that must be addressed.⁹⁶

The challenges facing adolescents today, along with the lack of social capital in particular, is significant. Resolution to these challenges cannot happen outside of Christ and community.⁹⁷ In order to move forward, the Lutheran church must embrace a growth mindset, seeking to constantly improve and focus on facts and resources to move forward.⁹⁸

Society has lost the trust of adolescents in families, churches, communities and lives, and must rebuild that trust and become the healthy support systems they need. Erickson notes, “I have referred to the relationship of the problem of trust to matters of adult faith; to that of the problem of autonomy to adult independence in work and citizenship.”⁹⁹ The Church must find a way to address the lack of social capital in the lives of adolescents, and Gladwell writes, “True answers to problems have to be comprehensive,” however one can make a lot out of less if one finds the tipping point—the small thing that makes a big change.¹⁰⁰ May the church be committed to children and adolescents the way adults of the past committed, and above all may the commitment be rooted in Jesus Christ.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 402.

⁹⁷ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 201-205.

⁹⁸ Dweck, *Mindset*, 110.

⁹⁹ Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 100.

¹⁰⁰ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 257.

PART THREE
MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

CREATING A DYNAMIC IN THE CHURCH THAT EMPHASIZES COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The very nature of adolescence has changed dramatically in the United States and Canada. While one can learn from the past and build upon the knowledge of adolescence, the new current reality of adolescence in the United States compels a fresh look at this period of development. Smith and Dean state, “American teenagers can embody adults’ highest hopes and most gripping fears”¹ and given the immense challenges adolescents face today, the church must rethink how to engage and care for adolescents. What does it mean for the church at large to better serve the community in addressing the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents? How can local Lutheran churches within the United States or Canada partner with the community to address the needs of adolescents today?

Those who work with adolescents in a local church context as well as other contexts who are open to examining the issues facing adolescents can partner together to better care for, serve and address the unique challenges adolescents. Many local Lutheran church bodies are well positioned to partner with their communities and local

¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*.

organizations to serve adolescents, but few are likely doing so. There exists an incredible need as well as opportunity for many local churches to further the gospel by serving the real needs of adolescents, physical, psychological, social and spiritual, in partnership with community organizations, even those without a religious foundation. Loder notes, “Although distinctly different in origin, destiny, and magnitude, the human spirit and the God of the universe are made for each other,” and are “ultimately designed to replicate the divine and the human in the person of Jesus Christ.”²

Humans are created in the image of God, and although the image is tainted with sin and is not the perfect image of humanity as found in Jesus Christ, to be fully human is to be as God designed us. The church should lead the effort to help adolescents discover their identity in Christ and as individuals created in the image of God. This may best be achieved by serving the real needs of adolescents in partnership with community organizations, putting aside an agenda of conversion or assimilation into the local church to focus on serving the holistic needs of all adolescents in the community in which they serve. There exists a desperate need for change in the culture, systems and institutions, in churches and the lives of adolescents. Scharmer posits, “The crisis of our time isn’t just a crisis of a single leader, organization, country, or conflict. The crisis of our time reveals the dying of an old social structure and way of thinking, an old way of institutionalizing and enacting collective social forms.”³

Cultures and systems can change within the church with the goal of creating a cultural dynamic within the church emphasizing community partnership. Mental models

² Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*.

³ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 2.

are significant to these changes, and adaptive leadership will help lead to a change in mental models and church dynamics. The end goal of this work is to create a culture of community partnership within the church. While the responsibility for leading this kind of change may fall on the leader(s) of the local church, ownership by the congregation is essential to the success of an endeavor such as this.

Leading change is perhaps the most important, significant and difficult task a leader will face. This is particularly true in a church setting and perhaps even more so within the Lutheran context as change is often seen as suspect and is met with great resistance. It is critical that those who care for and support adolescents, parents, family, friends, schools, churches and other groups and individuals consider the changing nature of adolescence in order to best care for, guide and support children in this critical period of development.

Assessing Current Church Dynamics

Ronald Heifetz states, “The practice of leadership, like the practice of medicine, involves two core processes: diagnosis first and then action. And those two process unfold in two dimensions: toward the organizational or social system you are operating in and toward yourself.”⁴ In order to lead change in partnership with the community, leaders must first create the necessary change in their own church setting. In other words, adaptive change involving the church begins with diagnosis of the church culture as well as the adaptive challenge being faced.

⁴ Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 6.

The most important skill in adaptive leadership is diagnosis.⁵ In order to best diagnosis the problem as well as the church culture, leaders must “get on the balcony” and gain perspective in order to diagnose and lead in the midst of an adaptive challenge, especially in a local Lutheran church context.⁶ In Lutheran church settings in the United States and Canada, reflection is rarely utilized but perhaps more essential than in an average situation.

In order to lead change in any organization, including a local Lutheran church context, one must be able to assess the church and the current dynamics, particularly the health of the church and its culture. Patrick Lencioni writes, “The single greatest advantage any company can achieve is organizational health. Yet it is ignored by most leaders even though it is simple, free and available to anyone who wants it.”⁷ Lencioni further notes, “The health of an organization provides the context for strategy, finance, marketing, technology, and everything else that happens within it, which is why it is the single greatest factor determining an organization’s success. More than talent. More than knowledge. More than innovation.”⁸

Church health is often overlooked in the United States and Canada, particularly in the Lutheran church context, as the inability to deal with conflict is deeply rooted in the theological and cultural roots of the Lutheran tradition and creates an environment where the health of the church is not addressed. Artificial harmony is a danger in many

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 1.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

churches. In fact, “Nowhere does this tendency toward artificial harmony show itself more than in a mission-driven nonprofit organizations, most notably churches. People who work in those organizations tend to have a misguided idea that they cannot be frustrated or disagreeable with one another,” according to Lencioni.⁹

In order to assess church health and the culture dynamics, leaders must observe, reflect, plan, and react.¹⁰ This plan includes assessing the programmatic, theological, spiritual, emotional and institutional health of the church and its culture. Individual local churches each have their own culture and many are also made of up sub-cultures within the church based on interest or relationships. Additionally, it is important to understand political relationships in the church and community.¹¹

Besides the relational and cultural aspect of the church, the structure should also be examined. The structure is a key indicator of organizational strengths, challenges, culture and health. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal write, “At any given moment, an organization’s structure represents its best effort to align internal workings with outside concerns.”¹² In addition to addressing structure, behaviors and practices within the church culture must also be evaluated and addressed in facing an adaptive challenge. Behaviors become patterns, and patterns can become entrenched, deeply ingrained, self-reinforcing and hard to change.¹³

⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 30.

¹¹ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 89.

¹² Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 97.

¹³ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 50-51.

Leadership in the Church

Leadership and management are different, and yet, much of the work pastors, staff and other leaders are doing in Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada is focused on management and not leadership.¹⁴ Cormode notes, “The first duty of a Christian leader is to provide a Christian perspective, an interpretive framework for people who want to live faithful lives.”¹⁵ This work of interpretation is difficult, is not always linear but must always be theological in nature, rooted in an orthodox understanding of the Christian faith and consistent with the message of scripture. In leading a communal response to the needs of adolescents today, adaptive leadership is required. Leaders must carefully consider the cost of this work as Jesus commends all those who choose to follow him to do. Heifetz states, “Leadership is dangerous, with or without authority, because the stresses of adaptive work can be severe.”¹⁶

The successful church pastor, staff member and leaders should not evaluate their success based on finances, attendance or programming, but rather on the health of the church they are leading and serving. Lencioni writes, “At its core, organizational health is about integrity, but not in the ethical or moral way that integrity is defined so often today. An organization has integrity—is healthy—when it is whole, consistent, and complete,

¹⁴ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, vii.

¹⁵ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, xi.

¹⁶ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 223.

that is, when its management, operations, strategy, and culture fit together and make sense.”¹⁷

Building a healthy church culture is not an easy task, but it is one of the most essential tasks of leadership in the current cultural context, particularly in the Lutheran Church in North America, as the Lutheran Church continues to experience division, decline and yet, a theological renewal. Lencioni states, “There is just no escaping the fact that the single biggest factor determining whether an organization is going to get healthier—or not—is the genuine commitment and active involvement of the person in charge.”¹⁸ Church leaders must see ministry, as what Andrew Root writes, “The encounter of a human person to a human person, sharing deeply in relations as the way to encounter to presence of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹

The leader must be careful or reacting, which is natural human response and all too common amongst church leaders, especially in the midst of leading change; however, “In reacting, we lose sight of our interests,” according to William Ury.²⁰ Adaptive leadership and leading change require a lot of internal and external change and work by the leader, both as a model to the congregation, but also for the success of the adaptive responses utilized to address adaptive challenges. Otto Scharmer notes, “The essence of leadership is to shift the inner place from which we operate both individually and

¹⁷ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁹ Andrew Root, *The Relational Pastor: Sharing in Christ by Sharing Ourselves*, 17.

²⁰ William Ury, *Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations*, (New York: Bantam Books, 2007), 36.

collectively.”²¹ Furthermore, Scharmer posits, “The high point of being a leader in an organization is wrestling with difficult decisions and situations. Truncating those high points just doesn’t make sense” and will not provide resolution to the challenges being faced.²²

Leadership requires an ability to see the whole. Scharmer notes, “Leadership is about being better able to listen to the whole than anyone else can.”²³ Looking to the whole cannot be limited to the local church organization or even the local community, but must consider the unfolding of the Kingdom of God in the past as well as the present. Root writes, “Ministry is nothing more and nothing less than joining in God’s continued action in the world. But God’s continued action happens in the world, therefore the pastor or minister is always seeking to discern God’s action in a time and place.”²⁴ These challenges are significant and must be addressed in leading change.

It is critical to tap into all of the capital of the organization in order to achieve success in any effort. Unfortunately, most organizations only tap into “a fraction of the knowledge, experience, and intellectual capital that is available to them. But the healthy ones tap into almost all of it,” according to Lencioni.²⁵ Leadership must be a team effort in the church, and while Lutheran theology of leadership points to all people as ministers, the continued contradictory propagation of the pastor as priest and sole leader inhibits the building of a strong team.

²¹ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 11.

²² Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 183.

²³ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 20.

²⁴ Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 24.

²⁵ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 11.

Responding to adaptive challenges, especially cultural and systemic challenges such as the issues facing adolescents today requires a community of leaders. Leaders must build their teams, but must do so focusing on relationship and trust. Lencioni concludes, “The kind of trust that is necessary to build a great team is what I call *vulnerability-based trust*. This is what happens when members get to a point where they are completely comfortable being transparent, honest, and naked with one another.”²⁶ Lencioni notes, vulnerability is “one of the most undervalued and misunderstood of human qualities. Without a willingness to be vulnerable, we will not build deep and lasting relationships in life.”²⁷

The kind of partnership that must exist between the church, the community, and community organizations is not possible without the depth of relationship from those leading and working with one other unless vulnerability is practiced. Henri Cloud writes, “In the end, as a leader, you are always going to get a combination of two things: what you create and what you allow.”²⁸ For leaders to change, the key to that change is self-management.²⁹

Leaders must deal with their own health and leadership in order to best lead their congregations. To lead effectively, one needs to build and maintain quality relationships. Heifetz states, “Leadership is necessary when logic is not the answer” and being present

²⁶ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 27.

²⁷ Patrick Lencioni, *Getting Naked: A Business Fable About Shedding the Three Fears That Sabotage Client Loyalty*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), vii.

²⁸ Henry Cloud, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life*, (Philadelphia, PA: Miniature Editions, 2004), 7.

²⁹ Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*, (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 145.

with one's heart is required.³⁰ Steven Covey writes, "Relationships of all kind are build on and sustained by trust. They can also be broken and destroyed by lack of trust and trust involves great risk."³¹ Trust, however, is a quality not just practical in nature; it is deeply theological as well. In Galatians 5:4-5, the essence of faith is trust. With this foundation, authority can be constraining when leading change as those in authority must provide "direction, protection and order" which can be difficult when considering adaptive challenges.³²

Pastors must embrace change as leaders, individuals and Christ followers. The difficult work of adaptive change in any local Lutheran church must be embraced and modeled by the pastor. Pastors must reevaluate the current notion of what the vocation of pastor means and return to a more theologically rooted understanding instead of the cultural understanding of pastoral work prevalent in the United States and Canada today. For instance, Eugene Peterson posits, "The vocation of pastor has been replaced by the strategies of religious entrepreneurs with business plans."³³ As a leader, one must consider one's mental models and preconceived notions. Kegan and Lahey write, "Consciously or unconsciously, we all have a direction, an agenda, a stance, a strategy and analysis of what is needed, a prior context from which our communication arises."³⁴

³⁰ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 38.

³¹ Covey and Merrill, *The Speed of Trust*, 12, 318.

³² Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 125.

³³ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 4.

³⁴ Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 19.

Community Partnership and the Church

The notion of partnership with outside organizations is foreign to most Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada, and in the places where these partnerships exist, they are either limited or come out of a social perspective rather than a theological one. The church has “reinterpreted the worship of God as an activity for religious consumers. Entertainment, cheerleading and manipulation were conspicuous in high places. The entertainment model for worship is pervasive,” according to Peterson.³⁵ In order to best care for the unique challenges adolescents face today the church and the community, including the organizations that serve children and adolescents, must function as much as a team as possible. In this manner, Lencioni posits, “Teamwork is not a virtue. It is a choice—and a strategic one.”³⁶

Leadership can arise from anywhere, not just from the top. However, if the church is not leading the effort to care for adolescents, who will?³⁷ Even if communities and community organizations rise up to take the lead in addressing these challenges, their leadership will not be rooted in Christ who is the only true source and solution to the difficulties people.

An effective partnership that cares for people must begin with the church and within the church. Ensuring a congregation views people in a healthy, caring Biblical way is essential before endeavoring to partner with the community in caring for adolescents. Peterson writes, a “Congregation is composed of people, who, upon entering

³⁵ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 254.

³⁶ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 21.

³⁷ Scharmer, *Theory U*, xvi.

a church, leave behind what people on the street name or call them. A church can never be reduced to a place where goods and services are exchanged.”³⁸ The ministry of the church to the community and adolescents should be about what Peterson writes is “staying in touch with people in despair, knowing them by name, and waiting for resurrection” for all.³⁹

There are four things one needs to consider about organizations as one reflects on the nature of the local church and community organizations as one moves forward towards partnership. First, organizations are complex. Secondly, organizations are surprising. Thirdly, organizations are deceptive. Finally, organizations are ambiguous.⁴⁰

Leaders must understand the complexity of the church as well as the other community organizations they may attempt to partner with. The nature of organizations is powerful and the surprises and ambiguity that comes when a group of people gather to create an organization will present a great challenge to any effort to partner in addressing the needs of adolescents. More importantly, the real problem will not be coming up with a plan for a partnership; it is getting the plan to work.⁴¹

Mental Models

To even begin to identify, address and change mental models, one must first engage with three capacities, an open mind, heart and will, and do so with authenticity.⁴²

³⁸ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁰ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 31-32.

⁴¹ Henry Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders: Take Charge of Your Business, Your Team, and Your Life*, 1.

⁴² Scharmer, *Theory U*, 41.

If leaders reflect on the greatest commandment, to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength, they can examine their willingness and capacity for change in terms of listening to God in each of those areas of their lives by examining their mental models. Mental modes are framed in a language, and even that language needs to be evaluated and considered.

While language and personal perspective limits analysis, Christians are connected to God whom is able to transcend human limitations. Leaders must submit ourselves to the “spirits formation,”⁴³ Additionally, leaders must suspend habitual patterns individually, communally and institutionally in order to create lasting change.⁴⁴ Language is important, Peterson notes, “words are not just words, words are holy” and one must allow for new language for mental models of the past.⁴⁵

Three systems of meaning contribute to mental models according to Kegan and Lahey, “the socialized mind, self-authoring mind, and self-transforming mind,” and each system allows us to step back from personal understanding to a certain level, with the self-transforming mind allowing one to step back from ideology which is most critical in changing a mental model.⁴⁶ One cannot limit thinking to social systems and perceptions, nor personal notions or predispositions, which can happen in the case of the first two systems of meaning. The individual self-transforming is not only more likely to receive information well, but they are more likely to be given more information because this

⁴³ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 128.

⁴⁴ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 36.

⁴⁵ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 85.

⁴⁶ Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 17.

posture causes more people to share information with them.⁴⁷ This is essential for leaders and particularly helpful to anyone engaged in the work of evaluating their own mental models. One of the great challenges related to mental models is “we tend to draw conclusions based entirely on our past,” according to Scharmer.⁴⁸

Lee Bolman and Terrence dually note, “In any situation, there is simply too much happening for us to attend to everything.”⁴⁹ This is true not only of the real challenges we face, but in addressing mental models. Leaders must be able to do both simultaneously to lead adaptive change. Adaptive leadership requires both “reality testing” as well as weighing problems, solutions and outcomes.⁵⁰ Heifetz writes, “Adaptive challenges are difficult because their solutions require people to change their ways.”⁵¹

Leaders must be able to see from the inside and outside of the organization⁵² and shift the inner place from where the system operates.⁵³ It is one thing to try to change the system; it is yet another to change the place from where the system operates. In order to create a sustainable partnership with congregational ownership, this level of change is required. Leadership that impacts mental models has to “create the environment, experiences and opportunities where your best people can attend in order to innovate and think for themselves. As a result, their brains will do what they are designed to do: create

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁸ Scharmer, *Theory U*, xiv.

⁴⁹ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 39.

⁵⁰ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 24.

⁵¹ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 69.

⁵² Scharmer, *Theory U*, 169.

⁵³ Ibid., 167.

new ways of doing things, and totally new things to do,” Cloud notes.⁵⁴ This process will allow for the depth of change needed for the Lutheran church to lead the effort in partnering with the community to address the needs of adolescents today.

Changing Mental Models and Church Cultural Dynamics

In addition to addressing and opening mental models to change, changing church cultural dynamics may need to be addressed depending on the organization in order to create an adaptive response. Evaluating the core purpose of a Lutheran church is the first step. For instance, Lencioni states, “An organization’s core purpose—why it exists—has to be completely idealistic.”⁵⁵ Many churches are not idealistic at all, and even if they are, their ideals may not be Kingdom focused or could be internal in nature. They may also not be compatible with an effort to engage in a partnership serving adolescents. Scharmer writes, “Leadership in this century means shifting the structure of collective attention—our listening—at all levels.”⁵⁶

There are three levels of organizational and systemic change: structure, process, and thought.⁵⁷ Change must be addressed on each level in order for the change to last. In each case, a leader must carefully take steps to create the change without reactivity or action, which is often the case in Lutheran churches. With each, leaders we must initiate (listen), sense (observe), presence (connect) and create (do).⁵⁸ The listening and

⁵⁴ Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 45.

⁵⁵ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 82.

⁵⁶ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

observing should be repeated even if it is identical to the steps taking in accessing the culture of the church, as the work of change is communal in nature, while the work of assessment is more likely to be limited to one individual or team.

To change mental models and church culture, a leader, perhaps even the pastor, needs to change. Church leaders cannot see relational ministry as a strategy to success, a way to leverage or win influence.⁵⁹ Leaders must focus on the call to relationship demonstrated in the incarnation of Jesus Christ rather than the professional benefits of relationship. Self-protection and preservation are the greatest barriers to personal change.⁶⁰

The pastor becomes the one—and this is not easy—who invites each person to be vulnerable with others, to beloved and known through their vulnerable. As individuals with interest, we're often unwilling even admit our vulnerability, believing that to be vulnerable will keep us from getting what we want. The pastor's job is to offer his people the gift of union by opening the space for people to be vulnerable with one another.⁶¹

Church culture can often be a culture of 'no' that must be overcome in changing every mental model. William Ury offers five steps to overcome the 'no' that will often come in the midst of attempted change. These steps include suspending one's own natural reactions, overcoming the opposing side's negative feelings, tackling the problem together, bridging the gap between one's position and the opposing position and using one's power to educate.⁶²

⁵⁹ Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 17.

⁶⁰ Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 47.

⁶¹ Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 130.

⁶² Ury, *Getting Past No*, 11-13.

Resistance is normal and should not be seen as negative, but it should be addressed carefully with more than just reflection. Reflecting alone on the past will not help deal with the future; instead leaders must reframe assumptions⁶³ and focus on human beings and not systems.⁶⁴ If facing resistance, the best way to neutralize the impact is to recognize the resistance and the tactic for what it is⁶⁵ and resist the temptation to argue as argument is rarely effective with someone who is not receptive.⁶⁶ This requires personal discipline and small steps to address the resistance, and in the case of many Lutheran churches, requires many small changes instead of a set of smaller more significant changes initially. It is the small changes in a system that determine the future of the system.⁶⁷

Anxiety is a huge factor in resistance to change and is the “least understood—private emotion in public life,” according to Kegan and Lahey.⁶⁸ This is one of many reasons leading change can be difficult, especially in the church. Heifetz notes, “Getting people to pay attention to tough issues rather than diversion is at the heart of strategy” as “attention is the currency of leadership.”⁶⁹ Cormode notes, “The pastor can only provide legitimated cultural tools—theological categories and spiritual vocabulary that people can

⁶³ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 51.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁵ Ury, *Getting Past No*, 41.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁷ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 427.

⁶⁸ Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 48.

⁶⁹ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 113.

use as they each make their own meaning.”⁷⁰ When considering how to best facilitate change, consider Parson’s work on changing expectations which found three factors in changing expectations: “severity of adaptive challenge and stress it generated,” resilience and support systems, and strength of holding environment for “containing and channeling the stress of the challenge.”⁷¹ Heifetz notes, the challenges and “pains of change deserve respect”⁷² and pastors and leaders must be sensitive to the resistance and real and perceived loss expressed within a congregation seeking change.

Creating a Culture of Community Partnership

Every organization needs a thematic goal, a rallying cry that creates meaning and passion.⁷³ Leaders must identify the adaptive challenge, which in this case is the changing issues facing adolescents and the lack of resources, support and solutions. Heifetz writes, “Adaptive challenge consists of a gap between the shared values people hold and the reality of their lives or of a conflict among people in a community over values and strategy.”⁷⁴

Leaders must recognize there is a huge gap between the spoken value of adolescents and the reality of the lack of value demonstrated for adolescents through the lack of relationships, support systems and social capital. The values within the local church are to build up youth as indicated in Lutheran baptismal commitments, yet the

⁷⁰ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, 47.

⁷¹ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 109.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁷³ Patrick Lencioni, *Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars: A Leadership Fable About Destroying the Barriers That Turn Colleagues into Competitors*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

⁷⁴ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 254.

church lacks a strategy to do this effectively in almost every local Lutheran church setting. Every organization needs to decide what is important to the organization. Simply, for every church and organization, something must be important, but not everything can be important.⁷⁵ Root states, “The incarnation is the ultimate act of sharing as it is the giving of the relationship that makes us persons. God becomes incarnate so that we, through Jesus’ humanity, may share in the relationship of the Father to Son, the relationship that makes God God.”⁷⁶

Most importantly, the Church is a place “where a person is named and greeted, whether implicitly or explicitly, in Jesus’s name. A place where dignity is conferred.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, Bolman and Deal write, “Shared belief and liturgy tie believers together and bestow legitimacy.”⁷⁸ Above all, people must believe the organization is doing something worth doing—a calling that adds something of value to the world. Significance is partly about the work itself, but even more about how the work is embraced.

In order to find a way to agreement, one must also consider “five important points along the way to a mutually satisfactory agreement: interests, options for satisfying those interests, standards for resolving difference fairly, alternatives to negation and proposals for agreement,” William Ury writes.⁷⁹ Ignoring the interests, options and standards of those in a church or community for any reason including Biblical and theological ones

⁷⁵ Lencioni, *Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars*, 203.

⁷⁶ Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 116.

⁷⁷ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 40.

⁷⁸ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 293-294.

⁷⁹ Ury, *Getting Past No*, 11-13.

will not lead to change. So often in local churches leaders take a combative stance to interests and opinions that conflict with their own or those they believe to be of God.

In creating change in the church as well as creating a new partnership, the church needs all key stakeholders involved at every part of the process and system.⁸⁰ People do not resist change; they resist loss, and as a result, one needs to consider and manage potential real and perceived loss.⁸¹ People and organizations must change; yet change is difficult. There is a lot of debate as to which should come first, but it should be simultaneous with the change people experience leading the change an organization needs.

Lencioni writes, “An organization has to institutionalize its culture without bureaucratizing it.”⁸² This is tremendous challenge for the Lutheran church in the United States and Canada as there is a deep history and ingrained habit of this practice. This is common to any movement, but perhaps more so in the church as change seems to come more slowly.

There is a need to help people who are part of any movement or effort to focus on what they can control. One gets results and changes the mental models of those involved.⁸³ In order to lead a culture of community partnership, trust must be built, extended and explored mutually as one cannot lead without mutual trust.⁸⁴ Covey and

⁸⁰ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 80.

⁸¹ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 22-23.

⁸² Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 154.

⁸³ Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 127.

⁸⁴ Covey and Merrill, *The Speed of Trust*, 222-223.

Merrill write, “To foster real change and development, both the leader and the organizational culture must take a developmental stance, that is, they must send the message that they expect adults can grow.”⁸⁵

If there is not a culture of teachability or openness modeled, implemented and celebrated, then change will be limited. For instance, Cormode posits, “A hearer’s expectations are more powerful than a leader’s intentions.”⁸⁶ One cannot assume one’s intentions will carry one’s leadership of others, especially when partnering with other organizations. In this sense, the openness and teachability of the church and the organizations involved in the partnership is essential.

This is an adaptive problem, which requires looking “beyond authoritative solutions” as “authoritative action may usefully provoke debate, rethinking, and other processes of social learning, but then it becomes a tool in a strategy to mobilize adaptive work toward a solution, rather than a direct means to institute one,” according to Heifetz.⁸⁷ Bolman and Deal write, “Creating roles and units yields the benefits of specialization but creates problems of coordination and control—how to ensure that diverse efforts mesh.”⁸⁸

Essentially, leaders need to think and operate differently as leaders, churches and organizations if they are to create the kind of change necessary to address the unique problems facing North American adolescents in today’s complex and quickly changing

⁸⁵ Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 308.

⁸⁶ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, 17.

⁸⁷ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 87.

⁸⁸ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 53.

culture. To create a culture of community, relationship is of utmost importance. Given that there may be no formal relationship or authority, the church and its leaders must recognize that “relationships of informal authority” are “derived primarily from trust,” Heifetz describes.⁸⁹ Leaders of a movement such as this one may not always come from people in position of authority.

Regardless of whether or not there is authority, relationship built on trust should be the main focus of anyone seeking to lead the level of change from a community partnership for adolescents. Heifetz states, “The scarcity of leadership from people in authority, however makes it more critical to the” adaptive challenges being faced that “leadership be exercised by people without authority.”⁹⁰ There is certainly a lack of leadership in churches, organizations and culture, but this lack of leadership must not become an excuse for inaction, rather a motivation for change and action amongst those who are called and gifted to lead, regardless of whether or not they carry authority in their organizations or community. Influence and leadership is built through relationship and is no longer simply granted by our culture as a function of authority.

Heifetz posits, adaptive leadership “means engaging people to make progress on the adaptive problems they face. Because making progress on adaptive problems requires learning, the task of leadership consist of choreographing and directing learning processes in an organization or community.”⁹¹ Adaptive leadership is not a natural

⁸⁹ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 106.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

response, but it is essential to create change in culture today, especially the change required for a church to partner with the community.

Some key steps to motivating sustainable change and an adaptive response to adaptive challenges include: strengthening relationships, scoring early wins, addressing interests not connected to the adaptive challenge at end and selling small pieces of the idea first.⁹² Keeping each of these steps in mind and constantly engaging with and evaluating the need for and implementation of each is essential. Lutheran churches must be adaptive organizations, which means elephants are named, responsibility for the future of the organization is shared, independent judgment is expected, leadership capacity is developed and reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.⁹³

An effort like the one suggested cannot be taken lightly and the cost of not being successful is very high. As Patrick Lencioni points out, the difference between mediocrity or failure and success is not about how good, smart, or resources and organization is, “it has everything to do with how healthy they are.”⁹⁴ The movement to lead change and create a Lutheran church setting focused on adaptive change starts with creating an healthy organization. This is not possible without the most comprehensive understanding of the church and culture.

Once there is room for an adaptive, growth mindset, the mental models of the leader, the organizational culture and those within the organization can be addressed. More importantly, there is a need to see inside, beyond and across organizational

⁹² Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 135.

⁹³ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁴ Ury, *Getting Past No*, 17.

boundaries as there are strategy, structural and cultural gaps between reality and institutions.⁹⁵ The partnership must come from seeing the community and community organizations as partners in caring for adolescents. In any case, Bolman and Deal write, “High-performing teams shape purpose in response to a demand or an opportunity placed in their path.”⁹⁶ As a church does this work, then they can begin to move towards a culture of community partnership in addressing the issues facing adolescents.

⁹⁵ Scharmer, *Theory U*, 303-314.

⁹⁶ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 111.

CHAPTER 7

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN ADDRESSING DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF ADOLESCENTS

Elkind notes, “We as a society have abrogated our responsibility to young people” and the church in the United States and Canada is not an exception to this reality.¹ After examining the nature of adolescent development, the current cultural challenges, a response to adolescent development and social capital as well as a culture of change in the church, some potential solutions offer lasting change to the challenges adolescents face today. If the Lutheran Church in the United States and Canada is going to address these challenges, the best approach would be to do so in partnership with the local community.

Putnam writes, “Over the past generation, America’s communities have undergone profound social and cultural changes, which meant that as the new millennium dawned, we were no longer building the dense webs of encounter and participation so

¹ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, xiv.

vital to the health of ourselves, our families, and our polities.”² There are no simple or quick solutions to these challenges, and while some possible solutions and a model for partnership may be a credible option, the solution will continue to evolve, requiring commitment and leadership from Lutheran Churches. Heifetz writes, “Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways”³

The Purpose and Benefit of Partnership

There are many reasons, purposes and benefits to a partnership initiated by a local Lutheran congregation for the various stakeholders. After examining the issues facing adolescents, it is hard to deny the great need. Adolescents are experiencing systemic abandonment, which adults bear responsibility for. Furthermore, the adults who are charged with caring for adolescents want respect but do not give it themselves. Finally, every system for kids has left them and is no longer about them.⁴

Culture has lost sight of the reality that adolescents need adult support, guidance and direction to get to healthy adulthood.⁵ In the midst of this disconnect, adolescents are forced to try to change environment to create harmony in midst of their own

² Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein, and Don Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 294.

³ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 2.

⁴ Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 70-79.

⁵ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, xiv.

disharmony.⁶ This circumstance, among the other challenges already considered (and some not considered), has led to an unprecedented increase in adolescents seeking formal mental health assistance.⁷

Yet, Elkind writes, “There is no place for adolescents in American society today—not in our homes, not in our schools, and not in society at large.”⁸ Smith and Denton state, “Every teenage problem is finally rooted in and perpetuated by the adult world problems. In their often very real troubles, American youth are normally acting out problems ingrained in the grown-up world into which they are being socialized.”⁹ Simply, adolescents are facing many challenges; some unique to this generation and many others not, yet perhaps for the first time in North American history, society has isolated adolescents from meaningful adult connections, withdrawn support and increased the pressure they must face, adding adult challenges to the challenges that children are already facing. Additionally, the “anti-child spirit is loose in the land,” according to Neil Howe and William Strauss.¹⁰

The abandonment of children and adolescents has created a response many churches and other youth-oriented organizations criticize even though these very organizations created this response. Putnam notes, “During the last third of the twentieth

⁶ Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 34.

⁷ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 37.

⁸ Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go*, 3.

⁹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 87.

¹⁰ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 97.

century involvement in many religious communities across the country slumped, just as more secular forms of community involvement did.”¹¹ While the culture proclaims to be more pro-child and children and adolescents are provided with dramatically more resources, these very things have created a new danger and are a part of the systemic abandonment of children and adolescents.

This “pro-child” culture has emerged with a danger; where the generation X parenting books focused on “mutual independence of parent and child, the Millennial generation literature focuses on “attachment parenting,” which takes parental involvement to an unhealthy level, Howe and Strauss write.¹² Sebald notes, “Most modern teenagers are both typically confused adolescents in the adult world and relatively self assured and status-conscious members of their peer groups—depending on the set of interactions being analyzed.”¹³ This reality of adolescence has always been challenging, perhaps more so now given the various issues in culture today, but especially given the lack of healthy, adult social capital available to children and adolescents.

While these challenges are certainly daunting, there are many positive aspects to this generation and adolescents today. This generation of adolescents is “unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better

¹¹ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 120.

¹² Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 125.

¹³ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 203.

educated, and more ethically diverse,” according to Howe and Strauss.¹⁴ Loder notes, “Value commitments made during this time seem to have remarkable staying power,”¹⁵ increasing the opportunity for the Lutheran church to have a significant impact on adolescents, families, the church and culture. Howe and Strauss state, “more important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on team work, achievement, modesty and good conduct.”¹⁶

This generation is capable of great things, but also committed to doing great things. Howe and Strauss write, “This generation is going to rebel by behaving not worse, but better. Their life mission will not be to tear down old institutions that don’t work, but to build up new ones that do.”¹⁷ Certainly those organizations whose purpose is to care for, support, and serve adolescents should partner with them instead of becoming an irrelevant and perhaps even unhealthy institution that will need to be replaced by them.

A universal need among children, adults and adolescents must be considered.

Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger write:

Overall research has found that three types of goals that people strive for are consistently related to well-being. The first type involves intimacy, the desire for close, reciprocal relationships. Fundamentally, these kinds of goals involve creating connections with others. The second type involves spirituality. These

¹⁴ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 4.

¹⁵ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 214.

¹⁶ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

types of goals involve a concern with ethics and lead us to seek the divine in daily life. The third type involves a commitment to and concern for future generations.¹⁸

Each of these needs at their core is relational in nature and is best addressed primarily in relationship. This process is another reason social capital is essential, especially for adolescents today. For example, “The benefits of social capital spill beyond the people immediately involved in the network and can be used for many other purposes. The more neighbors who know one another by name, the fewer crimes a neighborhood as a whole will suffer,” Putnam writes.¹⁹ It is easy to assume media, celebrities, and other powerful adults have the greatest opportunity to influence adolescents, but this is not the reality. Kielburger and Kielburger write, “It’s clear that the world’s most powerful people aren’t presidents and CEO’s. They’re the parents and teachers who interact with children every day and shape the values the young will carry with them through to adulthood.”²⁰

Partnership from a Practical Theology Perspective

The church must consider the need for, nature and application of a partnership led by a local Lutheran church with the community to address the unique challenges facing adolescents from a practical, social science and theological perspective. These challenges are not isolated to theological or spiritual realities, nor can they be fully understood from a social science perspective alone. Kielburger and Kielburger posit, “No person can live

¹⁸ Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, 1st Fireside ed., (New York: Fireside, 2006), 188.

¹⁹ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 269.

²⁰ Kielburger and Kielburger, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, 170.

alone; it is not possible. We need each other. When we come together we are powerful. We too belong together.”²¹

Psalm 139 points to an important truth that humanity are most complicated, fearfully and wonderfully made, exquisitely good and delicate, yet made with all needed for life. Humanity is frail and depends on God.²² A comprehensive, effective, lasting solution to the challenges facing adolescents today cannot exist without God. Root and Dean write, “The church must also help teenagers recognize that salvation has come to them, and that as a result God calls them to leave behind their egos and take on new identities as disciples,” empowered for ministry and to become practical theologians for the sake of the church and the world.²³

The church, community organizations, parents and culture must examine the current philosophy and approach as it relates to adolescents, relationships and community. Current politics are focused on the individual and a need to link individual motivation or need with the powerful forces of the social nature of humanity, individuality, autonomy and social environment.²⁴ Unfortunately, society has abandoned an understanding and practice of community both in church and culture. In doing so, relationships are negatively impacted, and while many adults have found a way to survive this reality, adolescents are not as easily able to adapt.

²¹ Ibid., 97.

²² Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 132.

²³ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 77.

²⁴ Hoover et al., *The Power of Identity*, 45.

While every human being was created to be in relationship with God, one another and the world, adolescents cannot develop easily into healthy, fully functioning adult members of society. In regards to this outcome, Putnam writes, “The trust relationships and norms of reciprocity that characterize social capital depend on a reasonable measure of equality and mutuality: ‘one-sided relationship’ is an oxymoron.”²⁵ Given that the church, its message and ministry should be primarily rooted in relationship, challenges are serious. Scott Wilcher writes, “If churches intend to reach and keep the next generation as lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ, their members must renew the way they think about young people, the role of adults in their lives, and the role of the church.”²⁶

Impact of Partnering Together for Adolescents

The local Lutheran churches and community not only have the opportunity to impact adolescents and their families but their communities, culture and the world. Kielburger and Kielburger write, “Social capital involves investing in community in the same way bankers invest in the economy. The returns form social capital, however, produce results far more valuable than money. They help us achieve unifying goals.”²⁷ Churches provide an incubator for civic skills and community interests and activity and are more likely to be involved in the community formally and informally.²⁸ This is one of

²⁵ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 25.

²⁶ Scott Wilcher, *The Orphaned Generation: The Father's Heart for Connecting Youth and Young Adults to Your Church*, (Chesapeake, VA: UpStream Project, 2010), 10-11.

²⁷ Kielburger and Kielburger, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, 208.

²⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 66.

the many reasons the church should naturally lead an effort to create a partnership with the community.

The church has an obligation to serve the local community, and God has placed individual Lutheran churches (and all churches) in their communities for a purpose. Not only has the church failed to notice or address the issues facing adolescents, it has failed to embrace its calling to be a community of faith serving and leading within their community. It is time for the church to once again lead through service to others. The church and the community at large are not the only institutions to benefit from social capital and partnering together for adolescents. In a highly broken and competitive education system in the United States, communal social capital and relational trust give schools the best edge.²⁹

The failure to engage children and adolescents before adulthood has and will continue to have an impact on communities. Putnam writes, the “Long-term significance” of communal disengagement by adolescents is “heightened by the fact that civic activism early in life is one of the strongest predictors of later adult involvement.”³⁰ Additionally, children learn to live into the labels that society gives them, and the systemic abandonment and lack of social capital invested into the lives of children and adolescents sends a harmful message that not only impacts them and their families, but their communities both in the present and future.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 304.

³⁰ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 145.

³¹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 173.

Putnam concludes, changes to social capital have “included the privatization of leisure time that accompanied the explosion of electronic entertainment; the labor market changes that drew even greater numbers of adults out of home based unpaid work and into long hours of paid employment; and the suburban sprawl that bifurcates our communities of residence from our communities of work.”³² Without social capital in their homes, churches, schools, other institutions and their communities, adolescents are forced to look for support, values, morals and identity from their peers, unhealthy adult relationships, media, popular culture and other sources. Given the detached nature of adults in their lives, adolescents are forced to look outside of communities and society during their development.

In group interactions, people learn about one another, create trust and feel a shared sense of responsibility for the well being of the collective group.³³ This generation of adolescents and young adults are looking at various cultures across the globe and selecting aspects of those cultures in creating their own understanding of family values, taking what they see as the best of each and applying them in their own lives.³⁴ The failure to invest in adolescents has impacted their families, which results in an impact on communities. Kielburger and Kielburger conclude, “Together, a collection of strong families makes for stronger and more vibrant communities. It’s a natural progression.”³⁵

³² Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 294.

³³ Kielburger and Kielburger, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, 207-208.

³⁴ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 299.

³⁵ Kielburger and Kielburger, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, 119.

While children and adolescents are seen inaccurately as powerless in societies, it is difficult to deny their impact on society in the future. Howe and Strauss write, “Only a few years from now, this can-do youth revolution will overwhelm the cynics and pessimists. Over the next decade, the Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged—with potentially seismic consequences for America.”³⁶ This generation may cause culture to consider “greater global risks” and may be “more inclined” to “embrace a world-saving role,” Howe and Strauss conclude.³⁷ While this is good news for the future and the challenges humans face, if the current trends are not addressed, communities will have little to no impact or influence on how adolescents address these challenges in the future.

Suggestions for Churches and Community Organizations

Putnam posits, “Groups define themselves not only by who is inside but by a common view of the outsiders who oppose them.”³⁸ Keeping this reality in mind, both churches and community organizations must move beyond their limited view of their own organizations, other organizations and adolescents in order to serve adolescents and partner together. An inability to evaluate mindset, philosophy and assumptions hinders a culture’s ability to serve adolescents. Minor changes in external environment have a dramatic effect in identity, meaning that one of the first steps should be to consider the minor changes people can make in churches, organizations, and in the environments in

³⁶ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 348-349.

³⁸ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 181.

which adolescents function.³⁹ If local Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada want to partner with their community, they must be open to and lead change, keeping in mind it begins with minor changes in environment and a major shift in mindset.

First and foremost, children and adolescents need more healthy adult investment in their lives. Interaction with adults has a huge impact on the health and enhancement of development at various levels.⁴⁰ Putnam states, “If America’s social-capital deficient is to be addressed, it is hard to imagine how that can be done without carefully considering the links between workplace and community,” in addition to the connections between education, religion, sports, the arts and other systems in which adolescents and adults function.⁴¹ Identity formation involves intergenerational mutuality and children need and rely on adults to help them in their developmental tasks, psychosocially and spiritually.⁴²

An increase in mutuality is one aspect of increasing positive, healthy social capital in the lives of children and adolescents. This phenomenon does not require a compromise of values for churches or other organizations, nor does it require entitlement. Challenge and support must go hand in hand; the current reality, however, is a focus solely on challenge and offering of unhealthy support or ignoring both.⁴³ Additionally, the lack of rites of passage hinders an ability to create meaningful community for

³⁹ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 183.

⁴⁰ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 202-203.

⁴¹ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 208.

⁴² Marcia, "Adolescence, Identity, and the Bernardone Family," 199.

⁴³ Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 322.

adolescents. Lacking rites of passage reflects and contributes to the uncertainty and instability of adolescents.⁴⁴

Faith-based organizations are central to social capital, including Lutheran churches, other Christian churches, para church organizations and other faith-based non-profit organizations.⁴⁵ A partnership between churches and other faith-based non-profit organizations would be a tremendous first step in creating a transforming effort to care for adolescents in communities. Putnam states, “Religious communities are today, as in America’s past, very important repositories of social capital.”⁴⁶

While religious communities have, can and should play a significant role in developing social capital for children and adolescents, religious communities have failed to honor this role. Fifty-four percent of all teens and sixty-one percent of US teens connected to churches have supportive relationships with adults who support their faith development.⁴⁷ While this may seem like encouraging news, this number should be significantly higher, and it demonstrates the church is failing to provide social capital to almost half of adolescents. The more relationships teenagers enjoy with nonparental adults in their church, the more likely their involvement, and additionally, the more enjoyable the involvement. Therefore, they will be drawn into the congregation more.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Sebald, *Adolescence*, 198.

⁴⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 68.

⁴⁶ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 120.

⁴⁷ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 61.

⁴⁸ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 233.

So often, Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada express a desire for greater adolescent presence and involvement in their churches, and while they are often willing to provide resources and staffing to meet this goal, there is an unwillingness to invest in meaningful relationship with the children and adolescents in their congregation and communities. Healthy social capital requires authentic interest and investment, so when churches build relationships with children and youth for the sole purpose of gaining their participating in the church, this does not create healthy social capital. A simple and healthy focus on rituals, rites of passage, and the practice of the spiritual disciplines by the church with and for adolescents could make a significant impact on the lives of adolescents while also building social capital. Rituals make behavior stable and predictable over time and provide the needed safety and security during adolescent development.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the practice of the spiritual disciplines will become more automatic, and create habits and tools for continued formation as followers of Christ.⁵⁰

A Model for Partnership

Clark notes, “Society has let go of personal and individual commitment to the young.”⁵¹ While minor change can make a significant impact, there is a great need for significant change in culture, communities and in the church if adults are to address the needs of adolescents and help them become healthy, functioning adults in communities.

⁴⁹ Eaker, "Adolescent Satisfaction in Family Rituals and Psychosocial Development: A Developmental Systems Theory Perspective," 408.

⁵⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 138.

⁵¹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 2.

Senge writes, “If the future is going to be different, we have to go far beyond these little piecemeal gestures and begin to see the systems in which we are embedded.”⁵² The Lutheran church in partnership with their community needs to address their needs from bottom up, starting at the individual and not the institution.⁵³

There is no perfect solution, model or approach to a challenge of this nature. Root writes, “The problem with a model is that it doesn’t live, or better, it poses a reality of its own. It’s a mere replica, a scaled-down, less dynamic simulation of the thing itself. Models have a purpose: it is helpful to have a model of a building before constructing it. But in the end the model is not the thing itself, just a reproduction.”⁵⁴ As culture and the nature of psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents continues to change, and change at a rapid pace, any approach or model must be based on an adaptive approach, rather than a static or technical approach.

Education and dialogue are essential to any community partnership to address the unique needs and challenges facing adolescents today. Heifetz states, “Progress often demands new ideas and innovation. As well, it often demands changes in people’s attitudes and behaviors. Adaptive work consists of the process of discovering and making those changes. Leadership with or without authority requires an educative strategy.”⁵⁵ Addressing the unique challenges facing adolescents, especially in partnership, will

⁵² Senge, *Presence*, 24.

⁵³ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 193.

⁵⁴ Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 113.

⁵⁵ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 187.

“depend on our ability to create new spaces for recognition, reconnection, conversation and debate. Creating these spaces will require innovated uses of technology, creative urban and regional planning and political will,”⁵⁶ Putnam writes. “What people want is not an either/or proposition,” but a relational solution that transcends differences in ideologies, philosophies or political perspectives according to Florida.⁵⁷ Putnam posits, “Reweaving social webs will depend in part on the efforts of dedicated local leaders who choose to pursue their goals through the sometimes slow, frequently fractious, and profoundly transformative route of social-capital building.”⁵⁸

Putnam notes, “Building social capital must be an essential part of our strategy,” because unlike other efforts to organize unions, run large companies, build churches or improve reading skills it is a willingness to “understand and emphasize the centrality of relationships and interpersonal connections.”⁵⁹ Any model must have at the forefront a goal of creating greater, more significant, meaningful and healthy social capital in the lives the children and adolescents in communities. Smith and Snell write, “If communities of other adults who care about youth wish to nurture” the lives of the adolescents in their midst, then they must “do better jobs of seriously engaging youth from early on and not cut them adrift as they move through the teenage years.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 294.

⁵⁷ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 233.

⁵⁸ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 294.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁶⁰ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 299.

Wilcher writes, “The solution is not organizational; it is relational. The most powerful retainer of young people” in any environment is not a model or program.⁶¹ Wilcher states, “It is a loving network of family, peer, and adult relationships that are valuable, relevant, and safe.”⁶² While the solution is relational, building process, structures, systems and creating environments that enable greater relational and social capital is essential to both the short term and long term effectiveness of any model or strategy aimed at addressing the unique needs of adolescents. To this end, Putnam states, “Building social capital depends both on the actions of protagonists and on key enabling structural conditions in the broader environment.”⁶³

Any partnership between churches, community organizations and the community must reject competition, fear and disunity often common in organizations and culture. Many of the success stories around building social capital “involve organizations that work hard to avoid demonizing ‘the enemy,’ even in tense and conflict-ridden situations,” Putnam notes.⁶⁴ The best approach to building social capital is communal and should be focused within individual and unique communities. Lutheran churches in the United States and Canada must focus on their own communities rather than any kind of regional, national or global effort in order to best reach adolescents in an effective and contextual

⁶¹ Wilcher, *The Orphaned Generation*.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶³ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 271.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

way. Putnam posits, “Social capital is necessarily a local phenomenon because it is defined by connections among people who know each other.”⁶⁵

One of the challenges to building social capital and creating a partnership model is a consistent, incremental progress. For example, Putnam notes, “We see no way that social capital can be created instantaneously or en masse.”⁶⁶ Society needs process that it honors, but also needs deep change in the system, especially those systems whose objective is to assist adolescents in their developmental journey, particularly the church, schools, and additional activities in which adolescents participate.⁶⁷ Putnam posits, “Creating robust social capital takes time and effort. For the most part, it develops through extensive and time-consuming face-to-face conversation between two individuals or among small groups of people.”⁶⁸ Likewise, joint activity has great power both in learning and observation and is critical to healthy social capital.⁶⁹

Social capital from a communal perspective is “establishing bonds of trust and understanding, building community. In other words, they all involve creating social capital: developing networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities,” Putnam states.⁷⁰ Suggestions for increasing social capital entail trust in public democracy, participation in cultural activities, support from mass media,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 206.

⁶⁸ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 9.

⁶⁹ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 59.

⁷⁰ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 1.

leadership by the church, connections with neighbors and community, family friendly employers, smaller schools or schools within schools.⁷¹ Relationship must be at the center of all people do to build, enhance and sustain social capital, for creating a climate that allows for vulnerability and trust builds connection. People must build trust first, as trust is essential to healthy relationship, particularly with adolescents.

Trust is the essence of faith as well. Galatians 5:5 informs Christians about the nature of faith and trust.⁷² Through the work and initiation of the Holy Spirit, Christians by trusting in God are able to find and experience the righteousness, the right living, right circumstances and right relationship that comes with the abundant life God intends. Otherwise, any attempt to build social capital outside of trust will fail.

In any case, any effort to help organizations, families and adolescents experience a healthy, meaningful existence is impossible outside of willingness to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This does not imply any partnership must be religious in nature, whether overtly or secretly, but it does assert Lutheran churches seeking to lead an effort to create partnerships must do so with this truth as a foundation of their efforts. Galatians 5:6 states the ministry to and with others is simply faith expressing itself in love, with an emphasis is on dynamic of being in Christ—focus on trust and walking in the Holy Spirit.⁷³ In this vein, healthy psychosocial and spiritual development

⁷¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 402-412.

⁷² Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 89.

⁷³ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 231.

of adolescents requires building trust physically, emotionally and spiritually. Heifetz writes, “To build trust, we need to know what generates it.”⁷⁴

In addition to building social capital, any partnership or model must also focus on developing, enhancing and supporting the families in which children and adolescents function, no matter their makeup. There is a difference between supporting and fixing that must be honored. Family is the most intimate environment an adolescent participates in.⁷⁵ Keilburger and Kielburger found research over the past five decades continues to verify the often forgotten truth that “shared moments around the kitchen table, fun games in the summer evenings, quiet chats with our parents after school, camping, picnics, sports events, family volunteering—all these rituals created one simple equation: quality time equals strong families.”⁷⁶

Rather than demonizing the state of the family in culture and communities, people must seek to encourage and support the families within communities. Unfortunately, the breakdown of social capital is perhaps most profound in families due to a variety of forces and factors. The change in family dynamics and social capital comes at a time when greater social capital is needed for children, adolescents and their parents.

Root writes, “Ministry is the gift given to us by God to share in God’s life, to participate in God’s action as we share in the person of others.”⁷⁷ The ministry of the

⁷⁴ Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 107.

⁷⁵ Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 80.

⁷⁶ Kielburger and Kielburger, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, 119.

⁷⁷ Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 125.

church is not limited to the walls of individual churches and their members. The primary call of any Lutheran Church is to serve the local community. One of the greatest needs and opportunities for any local Lutheran church to serve is to seek to care for and address the unique needs and challenges facing the adolescents in their communities. The assumption that children and adolescents are the future of the church is a faulty one. They are the present and future of the church, community and culture.

The first role of the church in creating a partnership with and within their community should be education. Putnam states, “Education itself is often the most powerful predictor of high levels of social capital” and is essential to an effective partnership as well as change within our churches and communities.⁷⁸ Secondly, the church must humbly seek to know and serve the organizations that may become possible partners in this endeavor. The goal should not be building the church; rather, it should be serving the community and caring for the families, children and adolescents of their community. Churches should encourage all worshippers to participate in service outside of the church not for the sake of the church, reputation, or any other personal gain, but rather out of love and a call to care for the community in which God has placed them. Lutheran churches should meet with leaders of schools, religious and non-religious organizations that serve families, children and adolescents as well as other community organizations and ask where and how they can serve.

Beyond education and humble service rooted in love, the church should be hospitable outside of its own walls, practicing radical hospitality in and with its

⁷⁸ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 272.

community. For instance, hospitality is creating a free and friendly space.⁷⁹ A related aspect of the Lutheran baptismal theology, covenant and liturgy is a commitment by the congregation to raise children and adolescents in the faith and in Christ-centered relationship with them. Churches should enlist organizations and individuals interested in a partnership on behalf of adolescents. Considering context, needs and resources is also essential and can be a part of the way in which the Holy Spirit speaks to Lutheran churches as they partner with their communities to care for the adolescents within those communities.

A failure to recognize context will result in a failure to reach the goals of a community partnership. Gathering data on the community and its needs both from a secular and religious perspective will be helpful as will surveying the church, community and individuals and organizations within the community. For example, at St. Mark's Lutheran church in Auburn, Indiana, leaders consider the needs of the context as the congregation begins its discernment of how and where it is called to serve within its community. Based on the large town and rural nature of the community along with economic and educational context, two possible programs of a partnership within the community for children and adolescents might include a low-cost daycare and preschool for those who are not able to provide early childhood education for their children. The lack of community activity and resources for adolescents might warrant the need for some sort of community youth center. The challenging reality is there are no easy answers or one size fits all programs or models. A healthy partnership will require

⁷⁹ Nouwen, *Reaching Out : The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, 71.

healthy relationship, building of social capital, support of families and discernment as to the needs, resources and opportunities within the given context of the local Lutheran church considering leading such a partnership.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is hard to deny the challenges in culture, particularly as it relates to children and adolescents. The lack of support, connection, social capital and healthy psychosocial and spiritual development in a highly individualistic culture is undeniable. As the new area of the individual began to emerge,

Americans understood that they were "living in a newly individualistic era, and they liked the openness, affluence, and lifestyle freedom it seemed to bring into their lives. Yet poll after poll showed that they also worried about America's weakening sense of national cohesion and looked with special alarm at how unmet community needs were endangering the lives of their children."¹

A number of decades later, there is no denying the lack of cohesion and the dramatic increase in unmet needs. Clark and Clark state, "There is no place for adolescents in American society today—not in our homes, not in our schools, and not in society at large."² The way to stop the cycle of issues facing our adolescents today is as Howe and Strauss write, "to pick one generation of children, draw a line in the sand, and say 'This is where it stops.'"³

Society faces a significant crisis that has and will continue to impact the entire society both in the present and in the future. The church is not exempt from these challenges and is called to be a part of the solution rather than a participant in the problem or an inactive bystander. While society faces a great crisis when it comes to the

¹ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 97.

² Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 65.

³ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 37.

healthy development of adolescents, it is a crisis to be engaged with. Putnam notes, “People pull together in a crisis; they are unified and energized by a fight, as the long, angry history of wars and political and religious disputes has shown.”⁴

The church, community organizations, individuals, families and communities must act together to address the unique and deeply harmful challenges facing adolescents. People need to rethink the philosophy, approach, models, habits and attitudes regarding children, adolescents and the obligations to the children and adolescents in communities. Learning based on the past is fine when the challenges faced can be seen in the past, but when faced with a whole new reality, these things do not work.⁵

This problem is systemic instead of personal, yet leaders must engage one another as well as adolescents in a personal way.⁶ Organizational efforts are not without some value, but they will fall short, unless there is a heart change in the congregation or in a portion of the congregation.⁷ Kenneth Hoover writes, “The problem is not with the market as a device but with the substitution of market devices for other social and political processes that are essential to human development.”⁸ The leadership required to address these challenges is significant and even technical, practical, programmatic and corporate approaches to solving problems must be discarded. The solution cannot be found in program, policy or market device alone.

⁴ Putnam et al., *Bowling Together*, 181.

⁵ Senge, *Presence*, 86.

⁶ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 115.

⁷ Wilcher, *The Orphaned Generation*, 25.

⁸ Hoover et al., *The Power of Identity*, 50.

Adaptive leadership is the “practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges” and is about change enabling capacity to grow and thrive.⁹ It is adaptive leadership that is required, and “only a high Christology will bear the burden of the world’s redemption and reconciliation,” according to Carl Braaten.¹⁰ For example, grace transforms humanity, and society has lost the image of humanity, especially adolescents. Additionally, Christians have forgotten their created image, the image of God, the image God affirms.¹¹

Finally, if people can change behavior, then people can change outcomes.¹² Christians must think and behave differently in the church and communities. Howe and Strauss write, this generation of adolescents “resemble a fully charged rocket—or, to use Ortega y Gasset’s classic definition of a generation, ‘a species of biological missile hurled into space at a given instant, with a certain velocity and direction.’”¹³ Smith states:

Teenagers and emerging adults desperately need other mature and concerned adults who genuinely care about and for them. Young people need to be loved as plainly as possible. They need to be engaged, challenged, mentored, and enjoyed. They like every human being, need to be appropriately cared for, no matter how autonomous and self-sufficient they may think they are.¹⁴

⁹ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 14.

¹⁰ Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 88-89.

¹¹ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 35.

¹² Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 160.

¹³ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 28.

¹⁴ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 7.

Howe and Strauss add, “What America has, at long last, a young generation ready to accept elder leadership, the quality of that leadership will matter far more than before.”¹⁵

The necessary network of relationships will not happen for adolescents unless adults think and behave differently, which requires a renewed and transformed mind.¹⁶ Adolescents have great potential and even greater worth, worth that should be recognized culturally and theologically. Consequently, this generation of adolescents “can heed moral exemplars, and respond to principled leaders, far better than most of today’s adults could when young. That’s the opportunity side,” according to Howe and Strauss.¹⁷ There are challenges to leading this generation of adolescents, but these challenges should become motivations, rather than excuses. Howe and Stauss state, “Yet these new youths might decisively oppose nominal leaders who fail to provide real direction, and they might be inclined to support misguided leaders if better alternatives aren’t available. That’s the danger side.”¹⁸

Palmer writes, “Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path to authentic service in the world.”¹⁹ This statement is true not only for individuals, but for every Lutheran and Christian church and every organization, family and community

¹⁵ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 264-265.

¹⁶ Wilcher, *The Orphaned Generation*, 25.

¹⁷ Howe and Strauss, *Millenials Rising*, 264-265.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 16.

within the world. Adults within society have an obligation to care for the children and adolescents in communities.

The Church, including the Lutheran Church, has a responsibility, opportunity and call to serve and lead its community and to care for the needs of all people, including adolescents. It is time for communities, their individuals, organizations and churches to partner together to care for adolescents in the way they need. Together, along with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church can give children and adolescents the opportunity of healthy psychosocial and spiritual development, undergirded with adult relationships they so desperately need and deserve.

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