

STEWARDS OF YOUTH

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

Teenagers

I once overheard a conversation between two Slovak mothers. They both agreed the teen years were the “shialene roky” (the crazy years). Slovak culture understood the tendency for instability among teenagers. I remember a teen at a youth group meeting once saying, “I sometimes feel like running away from home; yet other times I love it there.” Normally, teens, like fledgling birds, are eager to fly on their own. Others, like some birds, are afraid to leave the nest and have to be pushed to fly. The teen years are times of transition from childhood to adulthood. Concrete concepts are beginning to include abstract ones. Former ideas and values are challenged and tested whether to be accepted, revised or rejected. Peers at times mean more than parents. Teens require parental understanding, patience and loving guidance. It’s a blessing that Lutheran catechetical instruction takes place at the right time just prior to the critical years of teen transition.

Lutheran Youth Gathering

Approximately 25,000 Lutheran youth, adult leaders and others attended the 12th triennial “National LCMS Youth Gathering”, July 1-5, 2013, in San Antonio, Texas. About 2,143 youth completed a poll. Their top five concerns were: Friends, College, Environment, Faith and Family. Poll data regarding family relationships and church life proved quite positive. It was great news that about 1,000 are planning a career in church work. Poll responses, however, regarding social issues were mixed:

- > 55.7% agreed that homosexuality is wrong according to God’s Word. (2007 - 75.8%)
- > 24.9% approved same sex marriage between gay couples. (2007 - 9.1%)
- > 73.4% reported being pro-life and against abortion. (2007 - 71.2%)
- > 71.6% stated they never engaged in sexual intercourse. (2007 - 54.7%)
- > 92% reported never smoking; 94.5% never using drugs; 71% never drinking alcohol.

Some percentage changes from 2007 to 2013 seem to reflect current trends in society influenced by the media and secular culture.

Non-Christian Youth

What about young people who show relatively little interest in spiritual matters - the ones not against God or religion, but have no spiritual moorings? “Pew Research Studies” reports such account for about one third under age 30. Many are plagued with moral-social issues:

- > Confused moral reasoning
- > No absolutes
- > Routine intoxication
- > Materialistic gods
- > Regrettable sexual experience
- > Disengagement from civic and political life

A “Youth Ministry Symposium” will be held in St. Louis, MO, Jan. 9-11, 2014, to explore the world of young adults and what can be done to reach those without a religious base. Every congregation should be asking, “What can we do to witness Christ to non-Christian youth?”

What can Parents Do?

Christian parents are stewards of their children. As spiritual caretakers they should heed God’s mandate: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it.” (Prov. 22:6) Preparing children for their coming teen years should begin when they are still toddlers. Parents should pray with them; read picture illustrated Bible stories; take them to church. Later, Sunday School and Catechism Class are musts. Church youth groups offer Christian peer influences. When the “Shialene roky” arrive, it’s essential parents continue to practice God-like “agapay” love which unconditionally forgives and forgets and does good to those who don’t deserve it. Parental teen conversations should consist of respectful discussions rather stern, authoritative, vindictive persuasions. Positive reinforcement of what’s good and gentle encouragement to correct what’s wrong is the way to go. Parents should be beacons of Christ’s love-light brightly beaming their personal Christian faith and moral values. Example is a dynamo of influence.

RELATED RESOURCES

www.selc.lcms.org - Personal Stewardship
“Family Communication”
“Parental Stewardship”