

What the research says...

It's All About Relationship

"To grow up healthy, our youth need to be supported and known by at least five adults in addition to their parents or caregivers who are willing to invest time with them personally and spiritually."

Eugene C. Reohlekpertain, Building Assets, Strengthening Faith: An Intergenerational Survey for Congregations, Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2003

Why Relationships Matter

- Young people who experience strong developmental relationships are more likely to report a wide range of social-emotional strengths and other indicators of well-being and thriving.
- Young people with strong relationships are more resilient in the face of stress and trauma.
- Young people do better when they experience a strong web of relationships with many people.

Relationships First: Creating Connections That Help Young People Thrive, *Search Institute* (<http://www.search-institute.org/blog/new-research-report>)

"By the time our adolescents graduate from high school, they will have become so much a part of their entire church family that when they're out on their own they will want to seek out a similar church family to enfold and nurture them (and vice versa) in adulthood."

"This cannot happen if their youth group experience — even the strongest youth program — operates in isolation from the rest of the church/faith community. Because then, in adulthood, they will seek out the types of relationships they had with their peers rather than the types of relationships they could have formed with all of the ages in the entire congregation, and they will never find a church that 'feels like' the youth group they remember."

Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith*

The Critical Importance of Intergenerational Ministries

- ❖ Thirty years of research: The active presence and engagement of an intentional and consistent adult relationship (parent, grandparent, mentor, minister) is the single greatest influence on a young person's faith.
- ❖ Personal relationships form a heart-connection to the desire to grow in one's faith. (See www.StickyFaith.org)
- ❖ "Faith development does not occur in a vacuum, but rather is cultivated intentionally by a community of faith-filled people." (Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, lead researchers for the U.S. Congregational Life Survey)
- ❖ Many of today's parents do not feel equipped to model prayer, worship, and biblical understanding for their children. Thus the support and commitment of all ages to follow their congregational baptismal vow — to raise children in the Christian faith — must be present in congregational life.
- ❖ Faith is caught more than it is taught.

What the research says...

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Confirmation – when a Christian claims a relationship with God and place in the community of the church with the help of the Holy Spirit – is perhaps best expressed through relationship, in walking with and learning from each other. Intergenerational mentoring relationships can help young people to claim their full participation in the body of Christ and enrich the faith lives of entire congregations.

"I just hope that it will help me start to build a personal relationship with Jesus and God because it's just a really hard thing to start if you're just thinking about it by yourself and it's really good to connect with people and to try to build on that throughout your life. So I feel like it's really a start or more deep thinking about religion. Like not just go to class, get confirmed, and be done, but it's really the start of making your religion the center of your life and really helping it drive you."
–Teen confirmand, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, Colorado Springs

The Importance of Modeling

When Jesus teaches his disciples about their task as Christians in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he does not present a theological treatise but instead he shares a story of a person who cared for a hurting and neglected neighbor and then tells his followers to “go and do likewise.” While our default thinking about confirmation preparation typically involves questions of content and curriculum, social science research backs up Jesus’ teaching methods.

That research shows that learned spiritual behaviors, such as compassion, forgiveness, or devotion, come from seeing those behaviors modeled by trusted people with whom they have a lasting relationship. This modeling of care for the other, illustrated by mentors in their care for confirmands, also teaches confirmands that we are not independent Christians, but part of an interdependent body of Christ. Christians cannot be followers of Jesus alone.

As a model of incarnational discipleship, which is supported by both our scriptural tradition and social science research, mentoring allows adult members of the congregation to live more fully into their own baptismal call. They are given the time and space to share their lives, their stories and their brokenness with young people who are in the process of learning to claim their own embodied faith and identity. The passing down of faith from one generation to the next enriches the faith lives of both the confirmand and the mentor, which then enriches the whole church.

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