

Youth Ministry: The Needs and Problems
It Will Have to Face in the Next Decade.

Religion Senior Seminar
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The idea that today's youth live their lives thinking that the world has a bleak future for them is a terrifying thought to any adult. If the future of the world rests in the hands of youth that do not see a possibility of a brighter tomorrow, than what chance is there in ever changing the grim possibilities of today. Youth ministers all around the United States are plagued with the fact, that there is a sense of apathy that today's youth are faced with.

The goal of the writers of the New Testament was to present Christ in a way that met the needs of the people of antiquity. The goal of youth ministry today is a similar goal, it is first to discover the needs of the group of youth that youth minister is responsible for, and second to try to meet those needs as Christ would, from the teachings in scripture and by trusting in God's guidance to the problems of youth. The present generation of youth have special needs such as hope for a better future; forgiveness (a second chance) for their mistakes and sins, and how to find their place in their environment.

This topic interests me for several reasons. First, I plan to go into youth counselling right after graduation with future plans of going into youth ministry. I want to learn as much as possible about youth and how I can meet their needs. The other reason has already been mentioned in the first paragraph, I find it extremely alarming that youth today don't have much hope in their future. In response to this, I will suggest some ways in which we can put hope back into today's youth. The term youth

will be defined in three ways: by physical developmental changes, by age span (11-19), and by socio-cultural concepts.

This topic should be of interest to anyone in the church because we are all one body in Christ. Youth are a distinct part of that body and they have special needs and concerns that should be attended to. If these needs are not met, then there is a part of the body that is unhealthy and the whole body suffers.

I believe that the body of the church has many parts that need special attention e.g. the poor, the sick, the elderly, and many others, including youth. But this paper centers on youth. I have also limited this paper to the United States and the unique problems of its youth.

I have chosen to concentrate on youth, because, at times, I share the same lack of vision for a brighter future and feel a need for restoring that lost hope. I believe the best way to improve the future is to restore hope in youth, because youth will be tomorrow's decision makers. With hope people can start dreaming, with dreams there is a possibility of improvement, but without hope there is only darkness.

First, I will define ministry and then youth ministry. I will define ministry with the Bible and H. Richard Niebuhr. One difficulty in defining youth ministry is that the Bible and for that matter the Pre-industrial world did not recognize youth as being unique from adults. Youth ministry is a separate part of the church that deals with adolescent's needs in many ways. I will need to also define what directions contemporary youth

ministry is presently headed and where it needs to go in the future.

Second, attention will be paid to the needs of Today's youth. The problems of youth are visible and often not so visible. As for the visible problems one only has to pick a newspaper today to find an article on teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, or teenage suicide just to mention a few. But teenager's problems go much deeper than this.

The less visible problems that youth have are identity, premature adulthood, lack of hope. Everyday teenagers face problems that seem insignificant to adults. But if those same adults think back to when they were that age they probably can remember similar anxiety over what seem insignificant now. Perhaps these memories are repressed, because they were so painful. The unfulfillment of these unseen problems creates more problems such as frustration and anxiety with the following: youth having a lot of unused energy or not having enough time or energy to do the activities they are committed to; they see their education of facts and figures as obsolete, being replaced by a computer that is more efficient and less expensive; and they are coping with trying to fit in. These are just a few of the problems that America's youth face.

Third, I will examine the problems parents and adults face in attempting to help youth through the period of adolescence. Two problems that exist are: not enough time available to provide the special attention that youth need and lack of understanding

to the problems youth face.

Forth, I will examine different social settings to see if there is any difference between urban and suburban settings. My initial belief is that there is a difference. Although a comparison between rural, urban, and suburban would be interesting, I have excluded the rural setting because I do not plan on working with youth in a rural area.

Finally, I will elaborate on what can be done in dealing with youth's needs. I will take into consideration what has previously been mentioned and apply it what can be done.

Before proceeding any further a few definitions need to be made before continuing. The first term that needs clarification is youth. One of the first areas one can consult in defining youth is psychology. Psychologist Erik Erickson's theory of psycho-social development arose out of the Freudian tradition. Where Freud's thinking on human development went from birth to adulthood, Erickson's stages of development runs throughout life, from birth to death.

The most important stage of development for Erickson was the adolescent period of life. In this stage the person established his or her identity. In this stage they would develop the cornerstone on which the individual would build his or her sense of self on for the rest of life.

"G. Keith Olson, author of Counseling Teenagers says, "there are three ways of defining the adolescent stage of development. First, by using physical developmental changes, adolescence

starts with the puberty related growth spurt and appearance of primary and secondary sex characteristics, and ends with the completion of the major physical growth changes. A second way of defining adolescence is to assign a specific age span, for example, age 11-19. The third definition uses socio-cultural concepts like transition from child roles to adult roles and status."¹

Olson further breaks down his definition of youth into three categories; early, middle, and late adolescence. Early adolescence,

This stage begins with the physiological changes that alter hormonal functioning and related psychological changes. This period begins just prior to onset of puberty and lasts usually 18 to 24 months. During this time the young person is becoming far more motivated by peer pressure than by parental pressure. While girls experience menarche..., boys experience their first ejaculations and a sharp increase in the frequency of erections. Both boys and girls develop secondary sex characteristics including increase in body hair, growth, and development. Clumsiness is typical of this age and is caused by the rapid growth spurt prior to and at the time of puberty.²

Of middle adolescence he writes,

This stage is characterized by additional physical and sexual development and is accompanied, especially in boys, by and increasing sexual desire and responsiveness to sexual stimuli. During this phase there is a decreased interest in same-sex peer groups and an increased focus upon building friendships and dating relationships with members of the opposite sex. Movement away from parental influence is facilitated by adhering to the norms and values of groups and organizations that are on the parents non-approval

1 G. Keith Olson, Counseling Teenagers (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1984) 24.

2 Ibid. p. 25.

list.3

Lastly, Late adolescence,

This stage marks the transition into early adulthood. Major physical and sex changes have been accomplished and the young person is feeling more comfortable living within his or her 'new' body. Energies are now being focussed on future issues. 'What vocational commitments and what relationship commitments should I be making?' 'Does my future look promising and secure enough to really burn my bridges behind me?'⁴

These are two of the kinds of questions that late adolescents are asking.

One can see that to categorize youth as just anyone between the ages of 11-19 would be too broad of a category. But it is should be apparent that anyone who is going to counsel youth should see that these further subdivisions are necessary for adequately dealing with each different stage's unique problems.

The second term that needs examination is ministry. Ministry is one of the obligations of the church. H. Richard Niebuhr sees the ultimate goal of the church is to "increase the love of God and neighbor."⁵ Ministry, however, is necessarily connected to that ultimate goal. Ministry provides healing when there is estrangement between a person and God and, or their neighbor. When estrangement has occurred, this person needs the healing of ministry. The church can again pursue its ultimate

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, ed. (The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, New York: Harper Row, 1956) 28.

goal, when healing has restored the person's relationship to God and man.

"Often the ministry seems to be divided between those who sought to make the gospel relevant by allegorizing it so as to meet the needs of modern men and those who regarded its earlier translations as so literal that any new translation was betrayal."⁶ The position this paper will take is the position of making the gospel relevant. Niebuhr provides two examples of the dangers of taking the bible ultra-literally. One example is "the scene in which the divine human encounter takes place is not, to be sure, a flat earth canopied by a heavenly tent; the scene has become stranger and vaster."⁷ The other, "the human protagonist, in this encounter is not a being that thinks with heart and kidneys; he has become an even more mysterious creature."⁸ With these two examples, one can see the value of getting away from the ultra-literal approach and the need to make the gospel relevant to today. Making the gospel relevant to today is the goal of ministry for this paper.

But before making the gospel relevant, the minister needs to find out the needs of the people (or youth in this paper) in the world. Niebuhr believes that ministers need to be in touch with the world. Niebuhr creates this analogy of a minister's need to

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956) 78.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

direct his or her attention to the world when ministering to people. "As much as the mayor of a city keeps in view the nature and the needs of the cultural and economic society of which his city is a center", so does the minister need to look at the world.⁹ He continues, "But the relations of the Church and world are as unique as they are consistently changing so that no analogy does justice to the situation."¹⁰

The final term needing definition is youth ministry. Youth ministry's ministry is so diverse that it finds itself so broad and covers so many areas that it has many roles: "psychologist, educator, physician, sociologist, and social worker."¹¹

"The one called Youth Minister is a delegate, a deputy, a spokesperson, a liaison, but Youth ministry does not belong to the Youth Minister." Youth ministry belongs to the church.¹²

Youth "will make numerous decisions and commitments, some of which may be lasting."¹³ They make many immature decisions while they are youth, but they feel "a sense of accomplishment by doing so."¹⁴ "It is unfortunate that many young people are decided to death in the church during those junior high school years" and

9 Ibid. p. 91.

10 Ibid.

11 Maria Harris, The Portrait of Youth Ministry (Ramsey NJ: Paulist Press, 1981) 208.

12 Ibid.

13 Wayne Rice, Junior High Ministry (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978) 22

14 Ibid.

senior high school years.¹⁵ "This makes later commitment (to the church) less likely later in life."¹⁶

"It is not our job (as youth ministers) to produce a large number of decisions," says Wayne Rice.¹⁷ He continues talking about youth ministers time with adolescents, "It is not a time for baby-sitting, but for caring and letting each (youth) know that he is significant to Christ, to the church, and to the world around him."¹⁸ "Young minds and growing faiths have many questions that require honest answers. These kids are attempting to establish themselves as individuals worthy of the love of God."¹⁹

In a paper concerning youth ministry one of the most important issues that needs to be examined is the needs and situation of youth. Today's youth are in a different situation than the children prior to the Industrial revolution. Prior to the Industrial Revolution a person between ages eleven and nineteen was either a child or an adult. There really was not a distinct group called youth as there is today. "Belief in the significance of adolescence as a distinct stage in the life cycle emerged in this country when we moved from an agricultural to industrial economy. On the farm, parents viewed children as

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

smaller and weaker adults who could help with the difficult labor of the farm."²⁰

Youth are in a different situation in the 1980's than even twenty or thirty years ago with the close of the Industrial age. The 1980's are a new age according to futurist Alvin Toffler, the Information age. Using the words from the title of David Elkind's book youth are: All Grown Up and No Place to Go. In the past, a "teenager thus received the time needed to adapt to the remarkable transformation their bodies, minds, and emotions were undergoing. Society recognized that the transformation from childhood to adulthood was difficult and the young people needed time, support, and guidance in this behavior."²¹

However, something has changed. Now, it is more difficult for adolescents. "In today's rapidly changing society, teenagers have lost their privileged position (of having adequate time to mature into adulthood). Instead they have had a premature adulthood thrust upon them. Teenagers are now expected to confront life and its challenges with the maturity once expected only of the middle aged, without any time for preparation."²²

According to Elkind, premature adulthood affects youth in two ways. "First, because teenagers need a protected period of time within which to construct personal identity, the absence of

²⁰ David Elkind, All Grown Up and No Place to Go (London: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1984) 3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

that period impairs the formation of that all important self definition."²³ This self definition gives meaning to the teenager's past while at the same time direction to his or her future. Self definition is the most important defense against stress. Without the self defined the teenager is left vulnerable to all peer pressure.²⁴

"The second effect of premature adulthood is inordinate stress: teenagers today are subject to more stress than were teenagers in previous generations."²⁵ One example of this is the youth of the single parent home, he or she has to make many decisions without the guidance of that parent, because the parent is working and not at home.

Whether premature adulthood is imposed upon teenagers, because adults are too involved with their own lives to provide them with the time and attention they need or because adults feel helpless to provide them with the safe world they need, the end result is the same: teenagers have no place in this society.⁽²⁴⁾

"Before we can counsel a teenager, says Dr. Keith Olson, we must understand the psychology and is less effective and sometimes even destructive."²⁶ Ask any youth worker, teacher, psychologist, or parent to name the most critical things with which teenagers must cope and toward the top of every list will

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Olson. p. 21.

be identity."²⁷ "For one thing, adolescence is a time of transition and change. A teen's self-concept has been molded primarily by his family up to this point. Now it is being defined more by friends. It is important for us adults to:

1. Realize that this is happening.
2. Help our teens understand how this is happening.
3. Assure them that it's o.k. for it to happen. It's a natural and necessary part of their growing into independent persons.

Erickson mentions some interesting characteristics of the adolescent stage in his book Identity: Youth and Crisis. He says of youth, "They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are."²⁸ He feels that "as technological advances put more time between early school life and the young person's final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescence becomes an even more marked and conscious period, . . . almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood."²⁹ He continues, Thus in later school years young people, beset with physiological revolution of their genital maturation and the uncertainty of the adult roles ahead, seems much concerned with faddish attempts at establishing an adolescent subculture with

²⁷ Dave McCasland, The Culture Trap (Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1982) 6.

²⁸ Erik Erickson, Identity: Youth and Crisis (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1968) 128

²⁹ Ibid.

what looks like a final rather than a transitory or, in fact, initial identity formation."³⁰

Erickson believes in youths searching "for a new sense of continuity and sameness."³¹ This now includes sexual maturation, some youth need to come to terms again with the reality of "the earlier years before they can install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity."³² However, to a great extent "adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's identity by protecting one's diffused self-image on another by seeing it thus reflected and clarified."³³ The formation of identity for the youth is a stressful period of life to go through. Erickson calls "the estrangement of this stage is identity confusion."³⁴ He continues "youth after youth, bewildered by the incapacity to assume a role forced on him by inexorable standardization of American Adolescence."³⁵ Examples of this bewilderment occurring are in youth dropping out of school or jobs, staying out late, or "withdrawing into bizarre and inaccessible moods"³⁶ "In general it is the inability to settle on occupational identity which most disturbs young

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid p. 132.

34 Ibid. p. 131.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

people," says Erickson.³⁷

Clarification for youth can come from conversation with other young people.³⁸ "On the other hand, clarification can be sought by destructive means. young people can become clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others."³⁹

"Another reason that identity is difficult for teens is the number of conflicting and confusing ways for deciding who we are."⁴⁰ For example:

CULTURALLY DEFINED Most society operates on the premise that you are one or a combination of the following: pretty, handsome, athletic, intelligent, wealth, sexually aware and/or active, well-dressed, and popular. If you do not fit into at least one of these categories, your value is low.⁴¹

PARENTALLY DEFINED Dr. James Orader, staff psychologist for Young Life says, "For better or worse, the parent is the most important person in the life of a teen." Some parents convince their children that they are of great worth to them, to others and to God. Other parents communicate just the opposite. What parents think, say, and do is still vitally important to teens.⁴²

DIVINELY DEFINED God has made it clear in the bible and in the person of Jesus Christ, that each person is priceless to Him, yet it is helpful to remember that few of us ever get this message just by reading. We come to believe it when others treat us with the same value God places on us.⁴³

"Adolescence particularly the early and middle phases, is an

³⁷ Ibid. p. 132.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ McCasland. p. 7.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

extremely egocentric period in life. Young person's focus is heavily placed on themselves. 'How do I look?' 'Will they like me?' 'Am I too pushy?' 'Will they think I'm stuck up?' 'Will they like me?'"⁴⁴ "The second effect of premature adulthood is inordinate stress: teenagers today are subject to more stress than were teenagers in previous generations."⁴⁵ One example of this is the youth of the single parent home, he or she has to make many decisions without the guidance of that parent, because he or she is working and not at home. Endless streams of self-focused questions flow through their minds, mostly relating to how their peers will perceive and respond to them. This egocentricity, though it appears to be quite the opposite of Christianity's emphasis on loving and valuing others, is really a very important step in the process of developing a stable sense of identity."⁴⁶

"However, by the very nature of their egocentrism, teenagers tend to block out much of the potentially helpful feedback that is offered to them. Responses from adults, particularly parents, are especially subject to being discounted as irrelevant and meaningless."⁴⁷

"Adolescence is a time for dramatic movement of the focus of power and control from external sources (like parents and

44 Olson p. 29.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

teachers) to the internal domain of the young person.⁴⁸ How youth accept and start to experiment with the increasing power depends on the interaction of several factors, including physiological rate of maturation, parents attitudes and parenting ability, quality of the family relationship, cultural backgrounds and expectations, peer group actions and expectations, and his or her own self evaluation.⁴⁹

During early adolescence the most significant movement is from parents and family to peers as a reference group."⁵⁰ This movement is vitally important, because the adolescence starts looking primarily towards his or her peers for feelings of acceptance, confirmation of being O.K. and for agreement of values, beliefs, ideals, and feelings.⁵¹

There are three types of stress. First, teenagers today are confronted with more freedoms than previous generations. This freedom creates stress contrary to first thought, especially in households that do not provide adequate guidance. Second, teenagers are experiencing losses to their basic sense of security and expectations for the future that in the past were not experienced by youth e.g. teenage pregnancy and suicide. Third, they must cope with the frustration of trying to prepare for their life's work in school setting that hinder rather than

48 Ibid. p. 30

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid. p. 37.

51 Ibid.

facilitate this goal."⁵²

One last not so visible problem that youth is that youth suffer from a lack in hope for a better future. In a way lack of hope is visible in the first visible problem that will be noted, suicide. Dr. Jerilyn Pfeifer says that five percent of Americas youth believe they do not have a future.⁵³ These children live daily with the thoughts of: the nuclear destruction and or the realization that the "American Dream is dead"⁵⁴ (that hard work and money do not mean they will live happily ever after the message they hear from the adult world of commercials and advertisements).

Teenagers today have some very difficult problems to face. Some of these problems are new and some are old that have become more extreme than they were in the past.

Suicide is the most horrifying of all the problems of youth. "Suicide rates for teenagers have climbed at a fearful pace. Five thousand teenagers commit suicide each year and for each of these suicides fifty to a hundred make an unsuccessful attempt.⁵⁵ Data from Dr. Barb Simpson given at the North Central Meeting of the National College Health Association reveal the following data.

⁵² Elkind p. 5.

⁵³ Jerilyn Pfeifer, "Teenage Suicide" Phi Beta Kappa, Gustavus Adolphus, 12 Nov. 1986.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Elkind p. 7.

Suicide ranks second as a cause of death among adolescents and young adults. Between 1957 and 1981, the suicide rate increased from 4/100,000 to 12.4/100,000. Approximately 2000 persons under age 19 committed suicide in 1982. Suicide accounted for about 14 percent of all deaths among children aged 10-19. Very few children under age 12 commit suicide. Suicide rates are higher among rural than urban dwellers.⁵⁶

Betsy Hoover, mother of a 29 year old daughter that "had it all", commented after her daughters attempted suicide,

Then I looked back on her years of growing up. Succeed! we had told Clare. Compete! we had told her. I had read books and articles by many child psychologists to learn how to motivate my child for success in a harsh and competitive world. But none of them had mentioned that love should be independent of success or failure, that it should be freely and unconditionally given, rather than something to be earned. Consequently, Clare had interpreted my love as just another reward for successes.⁵⁷

Crime is not only a problem in the adult world, but it is a problem in the adolescent world as well. "Crime rates have increased dramatically among juveniles. Every month secondary schools experience 2.4 million thefts, almost 30,000 assaults, and 100,000 robberies. Criminal behavior starts early, usually in school, and peaks quickly."⁵⁸ "More 17 to 20 year old males are arrested for virtually every class of crime (including homicide) than males in any other age group. But the record of children under 10 (55,000 in 1980) is itself sobering and it gets

⁵⁶ Barb Simpson, "College Student Suicide" North Central Meeting of the National College Health Association, Mankato, 18 Oct. 1985.

⁵⁷ Betsy Hoover "When the American Dream Isn't Enough," The Lutheran Standard 27 (3 Apr. 1987): 7.

⁵⁸ Elkind p. 7.

seven times worse by age 14."⁵⁹

Another problem today's youth are faced with is drug abuse. The term drug abuse here is used loosely to include not just hard drugs such as marijuana and cocaine, but also cigarettes and alcohol. "According to a recent survey of junior high school students 65 percent of the 13 year olds had used alcohol once that year, some 35 percent used once that month and 20 percent used it once a week."⁶⁰ "Substance abuse is now the leading cause of death among teenagers and accounts for more than ten thousand deaths each year. Although the use of drugs has leveled off after a three fold rise in the last decade and a half, alcohol use is becoming more widespread and appearing among younger age groups."⁶¹ Even for the most hardened youth minister, these are sobering statistics, one in five thirteen year olds drink weekly.

In that same study, "Thirty-five percent of the thirteen year olds queried said that it was fun and alright to get drunk."⁶² The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports, conservatively, that 1.4 million teenagers between the age of twelve and seventeen have serious drinking problems."⁶³

Dealing with one's sexuality is a common need for all

⁵⁹ Ibid p. 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid p. 6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. p. 7.

⁶³ Ibid.

adolescents. A common myth among parents is that their children are overwhelmed by their sexual desires and they are helpless to their sexual desires. " This reaction comes from insecure narcissistic parents who feel threatened at an sign of their maturing child."64 Keith Olson says, "We chuckle and welcome the titles of books about teenagers, such as: Adolescence Is Not an Illness. Many typical behaviors of teenagers probably be judged as sick at any other age, but for adolescents they are appropriate."65

Although sex is often misunderstood, it should not be ignored or neglected as an issue when dealing with adolescents, rather it should be examined for the facts. "Sexual activity, at least among teenage girls, has more than tripled over the last two decades."66 "In contrast to the 1960's when only about 10 percent of teenage girls were sexually active, more than 50 percent are sexually active today."67 "By the age of nineteen at least 70 percent of young women have had at least one sexual experience."68 "Among young women who are sexually active, four out of ten will become pregnant will become pregnant before they leave their teens."69 Currently about 1.3 million teenagers

64 Olson p. 63.

65 Ibid.

66 Elkind p. 7.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid p. 7-8.

69 Ibid p. 8.

become pregnant each year, more than a third of them are choosing to have and conceive an infant, the pelvic girdle does not achieve its full size until age seventeen or eighteen."⁷⁰ This puts the teenage mother at physical risk. It has also been found that teenage mothers are more at risk for child abuse.⁷¹

Interrelated to problem of pregnant adolescence is adolescence who choose abortions as a solution to the first problem. In a study from U. S. News & World Report, "one million adolescent girls become pregnant. About 400,000 have abortions. Of those who give birth, half are not yet 18. This is alarming to think that all the sex education that is going on in our schools is not helping."⁷² This is a frustrating problem, because if we make methods of birth control available there is the fear that this will give children the open gate to a promiscuous life. On the other hand, if birth control is not made less fear provoking to obtain, the possibilities for improvement are dismal. There is no easy solution to this problem.

Divorce is another problem that youth face. There is a call for some optimism though, in a study in U.S. News & World Report, it was found that the divorce rate dropped .49 percent in 1984. Although this is a small percent it is still 24,000 fewer that in

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Susanna McBee, "A Call to tame the Genie of Teen Sex," U. S. News & World Report (1 Sep. 1986) 20.

1983.⁷³

The divorce rate is still at an alarming rate even with the slight decrease. Divorce affects children in many ways, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Without a doubt, divorce is a traumatic whether for the better or the worse. A youth minister's job is to help the youth this traumatic experience.

Another way that divorce affects youth is the creation of the single parent family or in the future, the awkwardness of a step-parent relationship. With the prevalence of divorce, the youth minister must also be prepared to help the youth in this situation.

Poverty is a very sobering problem to examine in the problems of youth. Sara Rosenbaum, of Health Division Children's Defense Fund says,

Today's adolescents will face challenges that we adults can grasp only in general ways. Unless major efforts are made to address to serious quality-of-life issues that now confront millions of American children, a substantial proportion may be defeated before they even begin -- left behind by the effects of poverty, deprivation disadvantage.⁷⁴

In 1985, more than one-fifth of America's 62 million children under age 18 live in poverty.⁷⁵ Even though these

⁷³ "Divorce Rate Drops," U.S. News & World Report, (21 Oct. 1985) 12.

⁷⁴ Sara Rosenbaum, "The Juvenilization of Poverty in America," Eighth Annual Adolescent Medicine, University of Minneapota, 27 Sep. 1986.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

statistics are frightening, "Lying beneath them are disturbing currents that carry grave implications for both poor children and the nations future."⁷⁶

A more detailed examination of childhood poverty statistics indicates that the nation has been experiencing not merely a growth in, but also a widening and deepening of, childhood poverty. Between 1959 and 1979, childhood poverty rates fell 40.5 percent for white children and 37.7 percent for black children. Between 1979 and 1984, however, childhood poverty increased by 31.3 overall, 41.2 percent for white children. 13.2 percent for black, and 39.7 percent for hispanic children.⁷⁷

Contrary to what one would think, "the greatest poverty increases occurred in families other than female-headed families, although female-headed families were more likely to be poor."⁷⁸

Rosenbaum continues,

One indication of the deeply ingrained nature of childhood poverty in America is that of the more than 3 million children who fell into poverty during 3 years between 1979 and 1982, the recovery which began in 1983 had, by 1985 lifted only 600,000 children out of poverty. At the rate of improvement that took place during this period it will be another 12 years before the nation simply returns to the childhood poverty rates it experienced in 1979, when nearly one out of every nine children, over two out of every five black children, and more than one out of every four hispanic children was poor.⁷⁹

With the following somber statistics, any prospective youth minister can see that poverty will most likely be a problem that he or she will have to face.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Looking at things from the other direction, what are problems that parents and adults face in dealing with youth?

"Many adults are too busy retooling and retraining their own job skills to devote any time to preparing the next generation of worker."⁸⁰ "The media and merchandisers, too no longer abide by the unwritten that teenagers are a privileged group that require special protection and nursing."⁸¹

"It is important to acknowledge what we cannot do. We cannot, for example, turn the clock back to an earlier, less complex, and less terrifying time."⁸² "We cannot change the pace of technological change, diffuse the knowledge explosion, or fight the computer revolution."⁸³ "Likewise the threats of nuclear war, environmental degradation, pollution, and cancer-causing chemicals in the food chain will remain a menace that we have to contend with."⁸⁴ Even though "these stresses" add to the problems of youth, we have to accept them as part of reality.

One more thing that parents/adults do not have control over is the generation gap. Olson says of the generation gap,

There has probably always existed a generation gap between teenagers and their parents. It does seem however, that in our society it is widening and that it is showing up

⁸⁰ Elkind p. 3.

⁸¹ Elkind p. 7.

⁸² Ibid. p. 199.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

when our children are at a younger age than before.⁸⁵

Adolescent are becoming increasingly sophisticated, more powerful, and freer to express themselves openly. This increased assertiveness, though in ways very positive, adds more stress to family living which is already quite demanding. In many families the times that parents and teenagers spend together become filled with frustration, outrage, humiliation, sullenness, resentment, and despair.⁸⁶

However parents and adults do have control "in the home, at school, and in the media."⁸⁷ "It is in these domains", says Elkind, "that we have to look for ways to prevent or at least lessen the amount of teenage destructive stress behavior."⁸⁸

"It is true, of course, that many parents and other adults are still committed to giving teenagers the time, protection, and guidance they require to traverse this difficult period."⁸⁹ But those well meaning adults are faced with almost "insurmountable barriers" in today's society, and many feel helpless in trying to provide the kind of guidance they believe teenagers need."⁹⁰ Elkind continues, "Because we are reluctant to take a firm stand, we deny teenagers the benefit of our parental concern and we impel them into premature adulthood."⁹¹ "We say, honestly, "I

⁸⁵ Olson p. 59.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Elkind p. 199.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Elkind. p. 4.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 13.

don't know", but teenagers hear "They don't care".⁹²

"Parents. . . would like to protect and shield their offspring feel overwhelmed by the pressure to accept the new social code."⁹³ "If they openly challenge the new values, they are sure to be labeled, and dismissed, as old fashioned and stuffy."⁹⁴

"The quality of parenting has a great influence on a person's adolescent experience. Unfortunately, children go through adolescence at about the same time parents go through their mid-life crisis."⁹⁵

According to Elkind, "In today's society we seem unable to accept the fact of adolescence, that there are young people in transition from childhood to adulthood who need guidance and direction. Rather, we assume the teenager is a kind of adult."⁹⁶

They are not adults capable adult responsibilities and not children whose subservience can be taken for granted.⁹⁷

"Psychological research tells us that both too much and too little parental involvement in adolescents' lives will hamper their growth toward autonomy and adult maturity."⁹⁸

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 12.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Olson. p. 61.

⁹⁶ Elkind. p. 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Olson. p. 69.

The place of residence makes a difference on what kind of needs youth have. Two different settings will be examined: urban and suburban. The first setting to be examined is the urban setting. The examination of youth in urban life will come from notes from an interview with Brad Kinder. Kinder is an assistant director of The City inc., which is an inner-city residential group home for youth in Minneapolis.

Kinder felt that the major problems facing urban youth today were: drugs, education, employment, and family dissintergration.⁽⁴¹⁾ Kinder echoed the feelings of Elkind's premature adulthood in saying, "the adolescent is not allowed to be an adult in the city."⁹⁹ He felt the largest need for youth in the inner-city was the need of education, because the Minneapolis public schools have failed with giving the kind of education that today's youth need.¹⁰⁰

He offered several possible solutions. First in education, smaller class sizes were needed, because in today's society urban youth do not get the kind of attention they need.¹⁰¹ He feels that with smaller class sizes the teacher will be able to have more one-on-one interaction that youth are not getting at home.¹⁰² This is because the parent does not have the time for the youth because he or she is either a single parent or they

⁹⁹ Brad Kinder, interview, The City inc., 31 March, 1987.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

work more than one job to support the family.¹⁰³ He also felt that public education had failed, because inner-city youth see secondary education in public schools teaching them irrelevant things for later life, (e.g. history, calculus) things they will probably never use after high school.¹⁰⁴

He felt the current trend of alternative education to be a good one, because it teaches things that will be relevant instead of irrelevant, for those youth that want only to learn about things that will prepare him or her in later life.¹⁰⁵ He felt that a lot of youth would like to have this kind of education, if the opportunity were there for them.¹⁰⁶ Examples of alternative education would include: money management skills, classes and day care for adolescent mothers who drop out, and communication skills that would aid the youth in obtaining a job.¹⁰⁷ But alternative education is still in its infancy and lacks the necessary government funding.

Kinder was not optimistic for the improvement of urban youths problems: drug abuse, teenage mothers on AFDC, and Adolescent crime.¹⁰⁸ He felt that several trends needed to

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

change before things would improve for the urban youth.¹⁰⁹ These trends are: increasing numbers of families below the poverty line, poor families depending on society (welfare), and irresponsibility in the poor's lives (drug use and lack of birth control).¹¹⁰

The second setting that will be examined is the suburban setting. The information on the suburban setting will be taken from an interview with Hal Weldin, head youth director at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville Minnesota.

Weldin felt that the issues that suburban youth were: family pressure to succeed, the lie of living the perfect life for happiness, dating, finding their individual identity, and the pressure of their peers image of them.¹¹¹ Although these are not the life threatening issues that urban youth face they are still very real and important.

Weldin suggest several ways that he helps youth face these issues. First he realizes that he is role model for the youth. He feels that a role model should present themselves as one who is also struggling and not as one who is perfect.¹¹² Second, probably the most important thing is to just be available for the

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Hal Weldin, interview, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville MN 13 March, 1987.

112 Ibid.

youth or "just be there for them" in Weldin's words.¹¹³ He feels that youth ministers should reach out to youth in the same way as they do with adults, to gain their respect.¹¹⁴ He also feels that it is important for youth ministers to be "who they say they are" or authentic in his or her existence as a role model.¹¹⁵ He feels the greatest accomplishment he can make with his youth work is "to make 'a loser' (in society's eyes) into someone successful. One way that Weldin feels that a youth minister can help youth as a group is to take them on youth retreats. He says of retreats, "retreats provide a fertile environment for youth to find a healthy identity."¹¹⁶

There are changes that can be made to lessen the pain of adolescence and improve the possibilities of a brighter future. One example is to make Christ relevant to the needs of today's youth. To pretend that one could be exhaustive on this topic would be idiocy, but several important examples to the lives of youth will be mentioned. The first way to make Christ relevant to the youth of today is provide Christ as example to youth's lives.

First Christ can be looked at as an example when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert. These were three temptations that still exist for teens today. For the temptation story the

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

account in Matthew will be used. The first temptation was the temptation of bread. But Jesus replied, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the God.'" (Mt 4:11, NIV) The example that this verse has to offer is that teens must put their trust in God for spiritual feeding like Jesus did in this verse and like the Israelites did in the Old Testament. Teens must not look for spiritual feeding in bread, power, money, or any other earthly way, but must look to the Lord.

The second temptation was putting God to the test. But again Jesus refused to give into the temptation of Satan. Testing God is a very easy for the immature faith of the youth. The test they might pose to God might go like this, "If you really love me Lord you would find a way for me to have a brand new car or let my football team win the state championship." Jesus shows them that this wrong, by his example in this temptation.

The third temptation was the rejection of God as the lord of Jesus' life. Brought into the present, the youth's ultimate concern needs to rest with God and not with the concerns of this world. The teen must not let power and wealth become his or her ultimate concern and corrupt his or her life.

Jesus is also an example of ministering to other people. The story of Jesus with the Samaritan woman in John 4:4-38 is an example. On the surface of this story Jesus tells the how she should change her life. But there is the amazing part in this

story is that Jesus is even talking to her. According to the Jews she is the lowest of the low in social status. This would be something like West Side Story. A boy and girl from opposing gangs falling in love. These things just are not socially acceptable. But a christian is supposed to transcend social rules when they get in the way of brotherly love. The Christian youth living according to Jesus' example will feel called to befriend all people, regardless of cliques or wealth.

Another example for the Christian youth's life is related to the previous example. Jesus loves all people unconditionally. Stated another way, Jesus loves people no matter who they are or what they can do in return for his love. One example of Jesus' unconditional love is that he heals many people without ever asking for a reward for himself e.g. Simon's mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31) and Lazarus from death (Jn 11:43-44).

One more act of love by Jesus was that he washed the disciple's feet.(Jn 13:5-10) This love act is one of servant. Jesus sets forth this example so that all will be servants to one another. Not only does Jesus not get anything in return for his act of service, but he receives humiliation, because just after his example the disciples argue who is the greatest among them.(Lk 22:24) Jesus again has to tell them that in order to be great one has to become a servant.(Lk 22:25-26)

Then of course there is Jesus' greatest act of unconditional love: the death on the cross for the sins of the world, those who rejected him. Even the disciples rejected him.(Mt 26:69-75)

There is no greater act of love greater than this, than to die for those who reject the servant.

The second way to make Christ relevant to youth's needs is to present the teachings of Christ for guidance. The first example of this is in Matthew 7:15-20. Jesus shows here how teens can know who are good people. Jesus says, "Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." (vs. 20, NIV) Brought into language of today for youth, by what their ultimate goal is. This is important for youth to think about. Drug pushers do not care about the adolescents they sell drugs to. They only care about themselves and how much money they can make.

A second example are the people that judge people by the earthly position they hold. This is a common occurrence throughout the junior and senior high school years. These people will do anything to gain social status. They will use their brothers and sisters to get ahead of them and then reject them once this has been accomplished. These bad trees bear the fruit of power and wealth in earthly positions, which are nothing is the sight of God.

Youth have so many places and options to "sow their seeds" (Mt 13:1-23), or put in contemporary language, to put their faith in e.g. money, themselves, others, television, music, and or drugs. What is needed is to make the right decisions on where to put one's efforts. Youth ministers need to make this message clear to the youth, that Jesus is the fertile soil.

The other part to this parable is that if the seed is not

sown in the right soil not only will it not grow, but it will wither and die. In the language of today, if youth chooses not to live their lives by putting their efforts towards the example of Jesus, then youth will live a life that will be full of disillusionment and false hope. If youth do not live according to the example, then they will either die in faith because of; lack of understanding(the seed on the path), lack of conviction(the seed on a rocky place), lack of trust(the seed among the thorns). It is the youth minister's job to explain to the youth the good example of Christ and that it is an example worth following.

Another teaching of Christ is how to live in a harsh world. Youth live with a social ladder that can be ruthless at times. In order to fit in with the other youth, the youth have to play the game of the social ladder.

This game is much like the social ladder that adults have, but if adults choose not play the game, they are respected for their decision. Youth on the other hand, if they choose not to play the game are looked upon as being abnormal (in fact they are abnormal) and are regarded as social outcasts. As one can see this is not an easy life to live. In order for youth to live a life in Christ teachings, he or she needs good role models and a good support system e.g. family, friends, or church.

Part of the game of the social ladder is to seek revenge when a person has used him or her to climb the ladder. In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus speaks out against revenge. He says, "You

have heard the it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (vs. 38-39, NIV) To be a peaceful person is not an easy task for a person in the youth world. But with a good support system and some healthy role models it can be accomplished.

By not striking the person that struck them or abused them in any way verbal or physical, the youth can be an example to others as Christ is to them. This action would be like what Paul said to the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (I Co 11:1)

The period of youth is a brutal time for self-esteem. It is a very difficult time to go against the norm of gaining acceptance of peers without stepping on your brother or sister, as was already mentioned. In the beatitudes, Jesus says that it is o.k. to be meek, mild, and maker of peace. It is not an easy thing to do, being a christian, one tends to stick out. Again the solution is the example of Jesus and others that make it possible for the youth.

By Christ death on the cross, he takes away the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29 & Lk 24:25) This one the most important messages that a youth can hear, for they have many sins to forgive: the sin of lust from the overactive hormones present in their body, the sin of drug abuse, the sins of social ladder climbing and many more.

Jesus forgave some of the worst sinners of his time: the criminal on the cross (Lk 24:43) and the adulteress (Jn 8:4-11). Hearing this, even the youth with many sins can have confidence that their sins are forgiven and that they can have a second chance in life.

With the realization of the second chance, youth can have hope for tomorrow. There is hope in being able to start a new, with the clean slate of a rectified life.

There is also hope in Luke 12:22-31. Jesus tells the people not worry about the food they will eat or the clothes they will wear, for God will provide for them, if they seek the kingdom of the God. This passage is a passage of hope, because there is hope in the knowing that the things of necessity will be provided for. The other message found here in Luke, is of course the message not to worry or be anxious for tomorrow. A mature Christian, however, does not just rely on faith for the provisions of life. But as it is in the saying God will help those who help themselves.

Another possible change is looking at the youth's self wholistically. This is a current trend in youth ministry, as in many other treatments of people in need is wholism. Wholism is treatment of the Body in which all parts of the Body are treated at once. Wholism sees the Body as having three distinct parts; the somatic body, the psychological mind, and the spiritual soul. The idea of wholism is that the different parts of the self, the physical, psychological, and spiritual parts of the body are

necessarily interconnected and dependent on each other. The church already has a belief in wholism with the view of the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection is not a spiritual resurrection as in greek thought, but is a resurrection of the whole body. This concept needs to be carried into youth's needs. Treating somatic, psychological, and spiritual together, because of their necessary intertwinement.

This idea of looking at the body as a whole unit not just the physical body is not a new one. It has been with the Hebrews since biblical times, but has been rediscovered by the medical industry and is spilling over into youth ministry. Hulme says,

We were designed to be whole, right. (However), we are not and when people think they are, we correctly think they are conceited, arrogant, or just plain phonies (or hypocrites). Something has happened. We are not whole, righteous, or holy. There are things we do that rob us of wholeness. Yet we are on a journey that follows a program toward wholeness. Now do you see why it is so difficult to "be oneself"? It means we have to accept ourselves in an imperfect condition and that is not easy to do.¹¹⁷

Today, many youth ministers in their pursuit or dealing with teenagers are dealing not with the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs separately, but trying to treat them all at the same time, because of the interaction. "To be yourself you have you have to be true to your body, true to your mind, and be true to your soul . . . Wholistic medicine maintains that good health involves the interplay of the three components of self. If one

¹¹⁷ William and Dale Hulme, Who am I, and Why am I Here, (St. Louis MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1984) 14.

of these is not doing well the others are affected."¹¹⁸ Can you separate the way you feel about yourself from the way you feel about your body? That is, can you feel good about yourself if you are ashamed of your body for some reason or other?¹¹⁹ One can see how the bulimics life is going to suffer not just physically, but also mentally and spiritually.¹²⁰

One last change that can be made is in education. The two changes of: alternative and class size have already been mentioned earlier. But a few additional comments can be made to add weight to Kinder's claims on reduction of class size. Elkind agrees with Kinder in answering the question, what can schools do to improve education? With some new important ideas, he says,

Reduce classes to 18 or fewer students. In some countries like England and Japan, large classes still work, but these children are living in homogenous society and children come to school already heavily conditioned. In the U.S. this is not the case.

But in our society, where the parental authority is unlikely to be firmly established and young people are subject to numerous claims on their allegiance, large classes lead to anarchy.¹²¹

The benefits are obvious. The small class size means less paperwork and more time for student and children get to know each other better and this promotes social growth.¹²² Elkind says, "many research studies support the beneficial effects of small

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p. 11.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Elkind. p. 207.

¹²² Ibid.

class size."¹²³

In analyzing my paper I am finding that the problems that I have mentioned are just the tip of the iceberg of the problems that youth are faced with. There are many other examples that have not mentioned that are equally important as the examples that I have cited e.g. running away from home as an option to family tension, teenage prostitution, and the communicable diseases of sex, just to name a few.

One thing that needs final qualification youth ministers should not try to meet all the needs and solve all the problems that youth have, for that would be impossible. But youth ministers needs to be acquainted with the needs and problems that youth have, so when the time arrives the youth minister is as prepared as he or she can be, to help a youth face their specific problems and needs, so that the two of them can sit down and work out some workable options and choose the best one.

The youth minister's job is not tell youth to pray about their problems and God will take them away. But is to teach them the example of Christ, pray with them, and help youth face their problems and needs in a Christian way.

¹²³ Ibid.

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