

Borgman, D. "Where is the research on young people's worship?" S. Hamilton, MA: Center for Youth Studies.

"They" all say that youth ministry should be determined by needs. And "we" know that needs are determined by relationships and surveys of young folks. Then, where is the research on youth's interest in and needs for worship? It is just not around! No one has done it!

In terms of their general religious faith, U.S. teenagers believe in God and go to church. Both Gallup and Search Institute, among others, have done some study of youth's religious faith. Gallup youth surveys show that from 1977 to 1988:

- * Believe in God or universal spirit 96%
- * Believe there is life after death 66%
- * Have ever prayed 87%
- * Approve of prayer in the schools 55%
- * Attended church last week 52%
- * Have confidence in organized religion 52%
- * Believe religion is increasing in influence 40%
- * Consider own religious beliefs very important 35%
- * Consider religion more important than parents do 26%

Youth leaders around Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Boston, and the Northeast will immediately dispute the optimism of these figures. In these areas, belief in God may be down to 80% or lower, and church attendance in the past week down around 20%.

Beyond these measurements of general belief and religious attendance, what can one say about the needs of and interests in worship among teenagers? More serious research is very much needed.

Initial surveys have been conducted by students of Gordon-Conwell Seminary (S. Hamilton, MA 01982):

- * Teenagers do not have very clear ideas about the nature of worship.
- * Worship is primarily a service developed by adults and in which primarily adults participate.
- * Age maturity brings better idea of the purpose of worship.
- * Young people with specific Christian commitment have a better idea about worship than uncommitted youth.
- * Those with Christian commitment feel that worship gives them a good opportunity to communicate with God.
- * They do not like to feel forced into worship.
- * Spiritual maturity brings better greater sense of enjoyment.
- * Singing is a very important part of worship for teens-for some a preparation, for a few the main part.
- * "If no one else is singing/participating I will not."
- * Teenagers like to begin with fast-paced songs.
- * Young people like to worship in a close group.
- * These surveys-admittedly superficial, narrow and limited-reveal that the seminarians who developed and administered the tools need clearer and more comprehensive ideas about worship.

The author's personal surveys also confirm the sense that young people lack clear understanding about worship. Respondents differed in what they appreciate most in worship-some highlight music, others prayer, some communion, and some even point to the sermon.

Some research suggests that adults play an important part in leading adolescents into worship. (Hoge, D.R. & Petrillo, G.H. [1978, December]. Detriments of church participation and attitudes among high school youth. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17, 359-379. Di Gaicomo, J.J. [1979, October 13]. *Evangelizing the*

young. America, 141, 187.) Charles Shelton (Adolescent Spirituality. [1983]. pp. 152ff) interprets these studies:

The focus on sacraments presents a notable challenge for both adults and for the adolescents to whom they minister...people become accustomed to receiving sacraments (or going through worship services)without regard for what the message of Jesus really calls us to be... Far too often we work with adolescents for whom the Eucharist has no attraction...We need to convey to young people...the fundamental need that we have to worship. For adolescents the experience of Jesus is central. The Eucharist will hardly be of interest or meaningful if a relationship with Jesus is not an important focus for the adolescent.

The Christian life IS difficult. This leads us in turn to the Eucharist, which provides support and strength. If we want to give to others, we need sustenance, and the Eucharist provides this nourishment. The most important point...is for the adult to share with the adolescent the meaning and strength that the Eucharist provides for the adult's life. Not that every liturgy is exciting or emits a message of profound personal meaning.

Sometimes I am not in the mood, I may be tired or distracted, but I know that I am weak and that I need the strength and nourishment and that the Eucharist provides this, because Jesus shared himself-his very self-with me, and it is in the Eucharist that I find the strength to live out the commitment I have made to Him.

Shelton (1983) also points to the important growth from personalized faith to the community of faith, which is a necessary aspect of growth toward maturity. When we focus on this personal relationship with Jesus, it is (also) important for us to stress that this relational commitment should be lived in a believing community of faith, where the person lives in relation to others, called first in baptism, and then nourished and sustained by the Bread of Life, the Eucharist. (p. 214) Today's youth need and want a participatory faith and worship. In too many paraprochial youth ministries, they are spectators of wonderful program and proclamation. In most churches they sit at the periphery-overlooked and bored.

The challenge is to lead youth of the 1990s and the 21st century into a personal relationship with God in Jesus. If the next step-from personal into corporate life and worship-is not taken, they will be like a smoldering log removed from a camp fire. Participatory adolescent worship must see worship as love and offering. Adolescents readily understand love as needing Presence, Word, Gesture, and Gift. Nowhere are these qualities more fittingly celebrated than in the Communion service. Attending Eucharist must be seen as coming into a Presence, hearing the Word, offering up our gifts, seeing them blessed, and receiving them into ourselves as God's great Gift. Youth today need and want to participate in mystery. If they cannot do so in church, they will turn in other directions.

IMPLICATIONS

1.What is needed, first of all, is more information about youth's need and propensity for worship. What should follow is clear instruction of young folks as to the nature and possibilities of worship.

2.Youth leaders who understand the meaning of worship and are finding it significant in their own lives need to share its significance with young people.

3.Worship retreats in which young people have a chance to be away, enter into a community of love and faith, discuss worship, "construct" a liturgy, and celebrate the offering of themselves and their lives up to God are needed.

4.Adolescents must play an important part in the service of a church that wants to be a whole congregation.

5.The nature of this instruction should not be heavy, dogmatic, and didactic. Adolescents respond most to discussion. This is part of the research process. Questions should be tossed to the group:

- * How was church and worship good for you in your earlier years?
- * Is there still a place for organized religion and churches?
- * How may the church and worship be important to you in the future?
- * What do you understand worship to be?
- * What does the Bible teach about worship?
- * How important is the Lord's Supper?
- * From where did the Lord's Supper come? What aspects of what took place among Jesus and the disciples

came from the Old Testament?

- * What was the Lord's Supper called in the book of Acts and how was it celebrated?

- * What is the significance of the Eucharist today?

- * What would be your suggestions for worship? How could it become more significant for you and your friends?

cCYS