

May 7, 2000, Confirmation Sunday

My dear Confirmands (Alissa, Ashley, Chelsea, Joel, Kyle, Lauren, Leah, Megan, Missy, Molly, Patrick, Trevor, Zach),

CONGRATULATIONS! **Bless you and continue to be a blessing!**

To continue St. Luke's theme this year, **Equipping the Saints for Living**, I have put together this **Spiritual Journey Tool Box**, which contains (1) all of the various charts we used this year during our Sunday Confirmation classes, (2) copies of overheads used in our sessions with parents and high schoolers in March, and (3) a review of some of the highlights of our discussions.

As you know I am a great fan of handouts and references to books, etc. We discussed how General MacArthur said the greatest skill of a soldier is the ability to write, which comes from reading, and how biographers of MacArthur, Eisenhower, and Grant said a key skill to their advancement was their ability to write, meaning doing so in a clear, understandable, and persuasive way. When I was fresh out of the Army, working for the Smithsonian Institution, I participated in the "Ad-Hoc Interagency Committee for Futures Research," a purely volunteer group that met monthly. The norm was to copy articles of interest and share them with the group and to recommend books as well.

I'm also a great fan of coaches (parents, teachers, and pastors are also coaches). My favorite coaches (all in basketball) are Red Auerbach of the Boston Celtics (they won 11 of 13 NBA championships, John Wooden of UCLA (whose teams won a dozen NCAA Final Four Championships, including two with Bill Walton, who led the Trailblazers to their only NBA championship), and Phil Jackson (who helmed Michael Jordan and the Bulls to 6 NBA championships and is now with the LA Lakers). What is so unique about Jackson: he hands out books to his players and then talks to them. They hear what they need to hear from someone not in authority over them. This is why I have given 3 dozen books to my kids and countless articles over the years, as well as two three-ring note books on specific topics (and no, they have not read them all, but seeds are seeds, so I just keep sowing). Indeed, attachment #5 is one page because my son saw I had more pages. He said he would only agree to reading one page.

ATTACHED are the following:

From 1-22-2000: the St. Luke Theme for 2000: "Equipping the Saints for Living":

1. A January message from **Pastor Knapp** regarding "Equipping the Saints for Living" 11

From my 9-14-99 Packet sent home to you and your parents, plus 2 after that:

2. Growing Through Life in Relationship with God # and Each Other..... 12
3. 7 Habits of Highly Effective People/Families/Teenagers..... 14
4. My "What advice for young people" answer for my 40th HS reunion, July 1999 . 16
5. My summary of my "life's lessons learned" for my three sons, August 1999 17
6. Benjamin Franklin's 13 areas for self improvement 18
7. List of Educational web sites for use at school and home 20
8. Added 9-26-99: St. Paul's "The More Excellent Way" 21
9. Added 10/31/00: About the **Reformation** and taking stands for one's beliefs..22

Added in January :

10. The importance of reading books and the kind of association we have with others 24
11. Carnegie's Principles to Follow for "Equipping the Saints for Living" 25
(for action to create an "eager want" in others to help/be with you)

Added in March :

- 12. **Pastor Knapp's** treatment of the Ten Commandments as Ten Gifts..... 26
- 13. **Pastor Blank's** outline regarding prayer, adapted from The Lutheran..... 27

Overheads from 3/5 & 12/00 "Parenting and Pipher" presentation to parents, HS, & Confirmation

- 14. Parenting: How to be up a creek with paddles..... 29
- 15. Equipping the Saints for Living Themes (congregation, Synod, community) 30
- 16. Mary Pipher's Questions 31
- 17. Mary Pipher on culture vs. nature..... 32
- 18. Mary Pipher's list of qualities of Strong families 33
- 19. Mary Pipher's 4 Parental Control Strategies, and the consequences of each..... 34
- 20. Mary Pipher: In Conclusion..... 35
- 21. "Parenting," the outline of the packet of materials prepared for parents 36
- 22. Recommended book reading list of Pipher and others 37

Looking to the future: added for May 7, 2000

- 23. "Transformations," Fred and Mary Ann Brussat, Spiritual Literacy, pp. 434-435. 38
- 24. CO₂RE and LEADing (discussed 4-23-00) 39
- 25. President Teddy Roosevelt's 10 reasons for going to church 40

Consider these attachments and all of the other tools (Bible, Small Catechism, etc.) as "**life lines**" (as in the popular TV shows Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, when contestants don't know the answer) which you can consult whenever you have the need to do so. These are among the best I know, the cream of the crop (with over 6,000 book in my library at home I have a wide choice). They gave us good "hooks" for some of our discussions. Now they are under your control for your discussions.

First, lets go back to the beginning: as I wrote to you and your parents in my packet last September:

What a wonderful group of 7th and 8th graders. Our great challenge and exciting task: to show that it can still be fun to learn important things about life in an "involuntary" context. We know that middle schoolers are at the age where they either "pushing the envelope" to see who cares and to see what the real boundaries are, which lines are drawn in cement and which in sand, or being silent and pensive and not talking.

We parents were like that at the same age (and our kids need to hear that from us). Between home and the class on Sunday mornings, we can all experience and understand the value of Confirmation, and even come to look forward to it, as we share our faith journeys and learning together.

The attached are for use at home, and are meant to be shared by students and parents together. There is no need to bring them to class, as we will have "blow ups" of them on the wall. The class outline is just that: an outline. If anyone wants to discuss something else, we will do so. We will discuss any matter of faith life desired to be discussed.

Recall my excitement **St. Luke's theme for 2000: EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR LIVING**, which, in my view, is **always** what Confirmation and Church should be about, **all** the time. I have immensely enjoyed our time together. I'm sorry to see it end. It culminates my 7th year of teaching Confirmation classes (although it's the first time I've done a "tool box"). I met some of you when you were in the 3rd grade (when I joined St. Luke; two of you were in that group). You have been a real joy to watch grow as you develop into the terrific young men and women that you are becoming.

This **Spiritual Tool Box** is my Confirmation gift to you: a reference resource to use as you see fit as you gather various tools to use to work out your own spiritual/life journeys. This "spiritual tool box" goes along with other tool we have used this year **These are to go with the other tools you have used this year** to equip you, a saint, for living: The Bible, Luther's Small Catechism, Sunday morning worship, Morningside Acres Retreat, water rafting, other youth gatherings, Captive Free concert, and lock-ins. Put this with your other tools where you can find it whenever you ever need them.

Sometimes it is hard to listen to parents. After all, its in the small print of their parenting contract to be the "heavy" (which can also apply to teachers, whether at school or at Confirmation). Thus we sometimes miss the wisdom they have to offer and are sometimes more receptive to that wisdom when it comes from others. And that is why Phil Jackson hands out books to his players. That's why grandparents and aunts and uncles are so important, as well as the brothers and sisters in Christ at church. When you mingle with the members of these two families, you will have a leg up on those who deny themselves the loving and joyful input given to us in these two extended families, who will be there for us when we need them.

As we have discussed in class, the tools in this tool box are not intended to be dictated lock step "how to's" for you on what to believe nor directives for how you should live your lives but, rather, tools to use as you construct your life's path(s). They are the tools used by your elders, if you will, who in turn received them from two uninterrupted chains of tool-developer-and-giver elders who preceded us: one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. We have kept the core and added new things. You are invited to do the same.

These are the tools we and those before us have used in our own faith journeys, journeys which have then influenced how we have done in life, both personally with our families and professionally on the job, leading some of us to be born again several times, to go through several transformations, all the while knowing that "we can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens us," for "as we think in our own hearts, so are we."

Just as our forebears shared their faith journey struggles with us, so too do we share ours with you. We do so with the hope that something of their and our experience and "lessons learned" might be of value to you. Only you can say. As we have discussed in class, the goal has not been to tell you what to believe but rather to share with you what we adults have come to find to be Truth for us in our lives, as we confirmed in our youth what our parents sponsored for us at our baptism, and as we continue to re-affirm every time we worship at church or gather at home in individual or family devotions. We sponsored you at your baptism. **We sponsor you again at your Confirmation, as we now turn over to you the lead role in the rest of your faith journey.**

We merely invite you to continue the faith journey that we have traveled, with all the doubts and questions that go with it, as we pass the baton on to you, as you now come into full membership in the church, eligible to participate in any activity and vote for any proposition at any annual or other special meetings. Your input is as valuable as all others.

Throughout my life, beginning in college, I have always put my words in writing in the form of manuals, readers, handouts of some kind, etc., for my organizations, clients, and students, so that they might have something to carry beyond a class or an event, something to refresh their minds and hearts long after the classes or sessions were over. The attached 8.5" X 11" versions of the wall "posters" we used were originally intended to also be handouts. But, after the aerodynamic design and flight testing urges kept overpowering you, I had to stay with just the posters (to save both trees and runway cleanup). But I have felt badly that you did have the handouts for later reference. They are from some

of the best minds available. Some of you have asked about them. Therefore, I provide them for you now in this **Spiritual Tool Box**.

What next? Continuing with Sunday School? Continuing with Church? Continuing with the high school youth group? Continuing to work out your own actions "to walk the walk? This certainly is our invitation to you, to continue the exciting journey you have begun.

What do you want? Some say it was Einstein who defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over the same way and expecting different results. What do you want and what changes do you need to make to enable you to get it? And will you make those changes? And if you need help or advice from those of us in your church family, will you ask us?

My "magnificent obsession", has been to expose you to ideas and give you a variety of resources to use as you see fit, so that **(1)** you don't have to wait as long as I did to feel that I finally "got it" about life; so that **(2)** you make your own mistakes in life, not ours, and if ours, as few of them as possible, for we know every generation will make some of the same ones; and **(3)** so that, and this is my fervent hope and prayer, that the attached along with all of the other insights and teaching you have received in your Confirmation classes over the past two years will contribute to your achieving spiritual, personal, family and professional success, however you define it, so that you will be able to thoroughly enjoy life and see it as "tremendous."

Always remember that even when you can't enjoy life, and you find yourself in a Job-like situation, you can, with these tool, be able to derive meaning from your pain and suffering, still praise and glorify God, and still love and stay with the family you form after you leave home.

I am delighted to provide you with your own personal copy of the materials we used as we progressed through the year.

Recall that we discussed my hope that you understood that what was taught is a reflection of the doubts and struggles of your elders who went through what you are going through, and what they have found "to work" in their lives, that you have to go through the same process. You too, someday, will be parents and/or uncles and aunts. You too will impact on the growth and development of your kids, just as you are already having an impact on the little kids of Sunday School, the kids from nursery through 6th grade.

Our job as parents, teachers, and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is to equip you for living your life, for giving you the best support we can for your decision making about your lives.

If nothing else, pleas try to keep in mind these SEVEN SUMMARY POINTS that we have discussed in class:

- 1. As we have no instincts for social interaction, we have to create our own instinct substitutes: roles, rituals, routines, rules, because humans cannot live a role free existence.** Accept those give you by others or create your own. In doing so, recognize the truth of "as a man thinketh." Whether you think you can or cannot, you are correct. This is why we must all unlearn our "learned helplessness" and develop life visions that enable us to overcome any adversity, no matter what happens to us. As **Pastor Knapp** reminds us, God has given us many gifts, starting with His creation and the passion of Life itself, not to mention his own Son to die for us, as well as the gifts that are reflected by our selves. We all have gifts. **Pastor Knapp** reminds us that one of the major keys to happiness and success (however we define that term) in life is to develop the gifts that have been given to us.

2. **Always ask yourself:** is what I'm **doing**, how I'm behaving, **creating an "eager want"** in the other person (people/parent/teacher) to give me a fair hearing about what I want to say or do?
3. **The MOST important** thing is **not what happens** to us **but how we respond** to what happens to us. If we have goals/dreams, and turn them into a workable vision (develop a plan), and then endure the pain that is possible when you have vision, then you can respond with what will serve your goals/dreams and you will overcome whatever adversity is in your path. "As a man thinketh" is still true. Control your mind and you control your response. Control your response and you control your success.
4. Remember **Jesus' words** that "as you **do it unto the least of these** you do it unto me." In this context, remember what Albert Schweitzer said: "You will not find **meaning in life** until you search for and find ways to **serve others**." George Lucas, in his Young Indiana Jones TV series, has young Indy meeting with Schweitzer, who says to Indy: "I don't know what your destiny is, but I can tell you this; you won't find meaning or happiness in life until you first seek and find a way to help others." Isn't this what Jesus means by "Bear one another's burden?"
5. **God is love. God is in us.** And in terms of how we spend our time, ask Brandon's question: "Am I confident that this is the way I want to **invest my time and life?**" In my terms, what is your daily GPA, **Goals Per Action** (is what you are doing helping to meet the goals you have set for yourself in life?). A good way to keep track is to make a daily **list** of what you want to accomplish that day, listing at the top the **3 most important "to do's"** to get done before any of others on the list. Think of your "To Do" lists as the "**recipe**" for your day. Periodically review your lists to see how you are doing. Are their ingredients missing to your day which should be included? Doing this will greatly help you achieve your goals.
6. As Hannah Arendt reminds us, it's the "**human condition**" (not some political or religious or ideological position) that requires us to **keep our promises**, as that **keeps chaos at bay**, and it is the human condition which suggests we be quick to **forgive**, for once people have **said or done** something, it is **irreversible**. Thus, to prevent feuds and conflict, we need the miracle of on-going forgiveness (Jesus' 70 X 70 times). Remember the clue concept: this is part of the human condition. Arendt laments that people dismiss forgiveness as merely a Christian thing when it is a human thing. A compiler of the 100 greatest people of all time book said he didn't list Jesus first because his most important contribution to human ethics, the concept of forgiveness, is not followed by those who claim to follow him. He therefore listed Newton first.
7. **Have a focus. Is Jesus in your focus?** Develop an ongoing relationship with Him. Have you asked to be filled by the **Spirit?** Like Nicodemus, have you been **transformed** or **born again?** How do you understand the phrase "accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?" My son Eric told me that the one thing he found to be causing problems with youth he encounters on tour is their lack of focus on what is central to life: their relationship with Jesus. Can you **sing** with gusto and conviction the **old hymns**, and **feel** "What a Friend We have in Jesus," "Beautiful Savior," "A Mighty Fortress is our God?" "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," "Jesus is All the World to me," "Amazing Grace," "Christ, The Lord, Is Risen Today," "Just As I Am," "Take My Life And Let It Be," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," "Blessed Assurance," "How Great Thou Art!" "Rock of Ages," "That Old Rugged Cross," "The Lord is My Shepherd." Obviously, my son Eric and his Captive Free band would add songs with a rock beat. Fair enough. But the idea is still valid. What song or hymn titles would you add that mean something to you in your spiritual journey, and which can provide

background music to match your steps in life, that you can hum or sing along to in your head for comfort or inspiration?

As noted I have also read some of the books on the list with my kids, and have given them dozens of other books and many articles. Do my kids read all the stuff I give them? As I said: **No**. But that is not the point. I consider the books given as **seeds** that have been planted, to go along with the seeds planted at church. And they hear me speak the words, even as they see me struggle in my own attempt to walk the talk, even when I fail. This gives you an opportunity to also sneak a peak when you are looking for a spiritual tool. I believe that having the choice of a Spiritual Tool Box available, even if not used, is better than no choice at all. However, one of Kyle assignments will be that he **will read** this Spiritual Tool Box. **We will** go over it together as a final review and sendoff for high school.

Long term: these materials are effective tools for anyone who chooses to use them. I have also used some of them with the Wilson High School leadership group and, five years ago, with leader groups and classes at Jackson Middle School. I've also used some of it to teach adults (in my NYC days) in all day business seminars and workshops as well as to young adults in part-time college teaching, as well as in Sunday School classes I've taught ranging from 2nd to 6th grade. Two years ago at St. Luke I led two 8 week sessions on Steven R. Covey's The 7 Habits for Highly Effective Families, one for a joint youth/parent study group at Wednesday Church Nights and one for adult Sunday School on Sunday mornings, and I've given three presentations, at church and at Wilson High School, on the work of Mary Pipher, and I gave a presentation before both St. Luke and St. John Fisher Youth for the "Silent Witness on Domestic Violence" program. I have also arranged to have assemblies on violence and drinking and driving at Wilson and Jackson. Thus, these materials have evolved over a 30+ year consulting career. So, they have not only been "time tested" by the above groups for 30 years, they have also been "time tested" for the last 2000 years. **Much of what is attached comes from authors who are Christian**, who are translating timeless truths into truths for our time. What that means, simply, is that these are **good tools**, tools you will find sharp and steady, tools to use as you shape and chisel the life that will be yours during your walk on this earth.

At the March 5 and 12th joint session with adults and high school, I discussed Mary Pipher's book , **Revising Ophelia: Rescuing the Selves of Adolescent Girls**. I recommend that you read her book and Sean Covey's **7 Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers**. And when you want to, engage your parents in a discussion of any part of either book with you. The Coveys urge us to develop a "Habit 4,5,6 culture" (4 = "seek first to understand, then to be understood"; 5 = "think win-win"; 6 = "synergize: value different opinions, viewpoints, and perspectives of others when seeking solutions"). Some of you felt that because only 3 adults showed up they were not interested. They are interested. In fact, some are scared regarding your moving on to high school next year. But you sometimes give them the impression you don't want them present. Maybe this is a good time to let them know you want them involved. In my view, kids need the support of their parents more during high school than any other time. Now would be a good time to build a strong bridge together to your future. What eager want are you creating in them to enable them to do so with you?

Our job as parents/teachers/fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is to **equip you** for living your life, to **give you the tools** you need, just as it will be **your job to do the same for your kids** when, years down the road, you assume our roles. We have not tried to set your life goals, which is your job, but merely to give you the tools which will enable you to better construct the road way of your life to fit the choices you make.

And so we come to another paradox of life (at least I do): the joy of reaching another benchmark in life's journey (the end of Confirmation, which opens the door to the rest of your spiritual journey) and the sadness of having to disband and move on. I will miss you. But we can still "meet" in these pages

that follow, as you pick and choose the tools you want to use to build your own mental and spiritual and relational habitats. As we don't have instincts for that (their lack is God's gift to us, as it is what makes us free) we have to create our own "instinct substitutes," our own "recipes" for living from which we develop our daily routines and habits.

To mix metaphors, we need ingredients for the **recipes** and we need cooking **implements** or **tools** to use with the **ingredients**. That is what this Spiritual Tool Box is all about providing.

We are, as **Pastor Knapp** teaches us, "**a transformational people**." Yet we can't achieve change doing the same-o, same-o. **We need tools and roles** to enable us to successfully emigrate from one reality to another (home to school to church to neighborhood to sports teams to extra-curricular activities, to social settings, etc.), each of which is a stage, each with its own roles, costumes, and behaviors, as we play our various roles and experience the various changes that occur on each stage, We want to do the best we can.

In his book **Adversity Quotient**, Paul Stoltz addresses the need to use the tools he proposes. What he says applies to the tools you have received over the past two years also, and, indeed, over your entire young lives, first at home and then at Sunday School and church, and then at school. Stoltz writes "As you **use the tools** and concepts presented [in his book and in this reader], gradually, almost **imperceptibly your relationship with life transforms**." And as that transformation takes place, **your greatest reward** for using these tools will be "**your sense of mastery over your life** and [your] **ability to maintain your emotional and spiritual reserves no matter what is thrown your way**" (pp. 281, 282). I enjoyed your challenge two weeks ago when you told me you knew everything I knew and that I had nothing new to say, and dared me to talk for the final 15 minutes without repeating anything I had said during the year. I did so by writing two acronyms of Stoltz on the board: **CO₂RE** and **LEADing**, which is outlined on attachment #24. I also discussed his sense of **vision**. Happily, you were pleased. I was pleased to because all I did was discuss ideas we had already discussed but in a different, new form. That is why I believe that your generation and mine are not so far apart that we can't find common ground on which to communicate and on which to be in community.

These tools to equip you for living will always be available to you. They will enable you to make yourself, **with the help of your home and church families**, as emotionally, physical, and spiritually whole as can be. this will help you, your relationship with our friend Jesus, your relationship with your future spouse and children, and the legacy you leave them and the world as a result of your journey here on earth. There will be little that you cannot withstand and overcome.

Recall our discussion about being **sharkproof** (the title of a book by Harvey Mackay on job hunting). I read to you explanation of sharkproof from his book **Beware The Naked Man Who Offers You His Shirt**, which is a kind of "how to" book on how to "do what you love, love what you do and deliver more than you promise": in other words, a personal development book. Mackay essentially says that we start out as **sharks** (in diapers, in total control, being totally serviced and waited on) and then move on to being **shark bait** for the two decades we are out of diapers (the "sharks" being parents, schools, authority, etc.), and then we come to a fork in the road where we can choose to either **(1)** stay shark bait, **(2)** become a shark again, or **(3)** most preferred and recommended, become **sharkproof**, so that you neither treat others as shark bait nor are seen by others as being shark bait. My point is that all of the tools you have used in Confirmation can help you make the choices which will make you sharkproof.

Recall our discussion of living life as "**burdens**," that we start out as "**burdens**" (on our parents and siblings, as babies, as teenagers), continue as "**burdens**" as grown ups (on our spouses, neighbors, employees, supervisors), and then as "**burdens**" in old age (on our children: "turn about is fair play"; didn't they care for us when we were helpless?). Then recall the wisdom of Jesus' words: "**Bear** one

another's burden." **Burdens are beautiful. Burdens are love's offerings. Burdens are how we find meaning in service. Burdens are blessings.** This gives us a better understanding of Arendt's notion of the "human condition." No one can escape this progression of burdendom. **Everyone** will go through it. Isn't it wonderful that we have a Lord and Savior who gives us a meaningful way to enjoy even this as beautiful, as love, as a blessing to us? It helps us make the **best** out of what might otherwise be considered the **worst**.

Charles Dickens opens A Tale of Two Cities by saying it was **the best of times and the worst of times**. You have agreed, with some saying we live in **the best of times**, others that we live in **the worst of times**. I commend to you, if you are interested in exploring these poles further, the new book **The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty**, by David G. Myers, with a foreword by the noted Lutheran theologian, Martin E. Marty. On pages 1-5 he explains why these are "the best of times," and why, on pp. 5-8, these are also "the worst of times." What we as concerned Christians can do about this is discussed on pp. 8-12 and 292-295. This discussion helps us develop an analysis framework with a "**calculus of meaning**" and a "**calculus of pain** (Peter Berger's terms).

Myer's book presents an excellent set of discussion questions for you and your parents or for you and the St. Luke Youth Group. A film that reflects this "best of times, worst of times" theme is **American Beauty**. Surely their material comfort displayed the best of our times. But their spiritual bankruptcy and lack of moral moorings reveal the worst of our times.

I have enjoyed being your chronicler. I have nothing new to say although I have, on occasion come up with new ways to say what others have said. They say you learn more by teaching a topic than by studying it. You have given me a wonderful opportunity this year to learn even more about my own self and my own faith journey. I feel blessed to have had your class this year.

We, as your parents, pastors, and brothers and sisters in Christ **pass on to you** the knowledge that has taken us decades to learn just as others millennia before us, passed it on after them. We wish you well and Godspeed in your own journeys to find meaning and purpose in your own lives as you tap into the Spirit within and loose into the world the love of God that is within you.

So, what is next? We discussed the need for "**sovereignty**" by both kids and parents, using the King Author/Gawain/Dame Ragnell story, as told by Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn, in their book Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting. I told you my story giving my son Eric "senior sovereignty" when he was a senior in high school, so he could appropriately practice being on his own, as I will also do so for Craig and Kyle. This is what I read in class from the Kabit-Zinns:

As the "answer" to the riddle, the *knowledge* of sovereignty saved Arthur from certain death. But a deeper *feeling* for sovereignty, that came out of Gawain's empathy for Ragnell, solved (actually dissolved) a dilemma that no amount of thinking could have ever done. By giving the choice back to her, he accorded (opened his heart to) her sovereignty, and out of that came transformation.

This is the key to mindful parenting. In honoring our children's sovereignty, we make it possible for them to do two things: show themselves in their "true seeming," and find their own way. Both are necessary to come to full adulthood. [emphasis added]

And this is **what Mary Pipher is saying too:** that girls, boys, all of us, want to become who we can become. It means not just seeking our own sovereignty, but **also** granting it to others, for we speak not of external power seeking but the attempt to empower others to internally become what they can.

The current issue of Newsweek (5-8-2000), has this on the cover:

God, Sex, Race & the Future: What Teens Believe

The Table of Contents pages states **The Teen Years: A Special Report**. The cover story inside is headed:

A World of Their Own

The sub heading is:

They're spiritual, optimistic and ambitious. How teens want to shape the future.

One of the highlighted quotes from a 17 year old young man is: "There's a lot of anger in my generation. You can hear it in the music. Kids are angry for a lot of reasons, but mostly because parents aren't around." Nonetheless, the future is yours to own and construct. Most kids are doing well How will you do it? How will the others? Add the tools here to your existential tool box.

As we said in class, we live at a time unlike any other in history. It is still a work in progress. This is why St. Luke does so much on your behalf, to help provide for the needs that families, in our atomized society, often cannot provide themselves but which the wider community can. This is why I urge you to continue coming to church and to attending SLY (St. Luke Youth). It will now be your group. Make it what you want it to be for you if you don't like the way you find it. After all, it is **your** youth group. Make it so.

In another Newsweek article of the same issue, "**Searching for a Holy Spirit**," the article notes that "**Young people are openly passionate about religion--but they insist on defining it in their own ways.**" This has been our goal: to give you the tools to better enable you to think about God, to communicate with God, in your own terms.

A book we didn't have time to get to (because I have only read Jon Katz's on-line review) is **Virtual Faith**, by Tom Beaudoin, about the faith of your generation, which suggests, as reported by Jon Katz, that "Generation-X Americans, especially those online, are on spiritual quests inspired and fed by their CDs and local megaplexes. **And that stuffy, top-down churches will have to change radically to reach them.**" That's why I suggest you actively participate in making SLY what you want.

This has been our quest in Confirmation: to reach you. Sometimes I've been clumsy. I've made mistakes. But you have always been gracious to correct me and to bring me back to center when I've been clumsy. The list of web sites to help with school provided you in the Fall is a significant tool, and demonstrates our embrace of the latest technology to serve high minded purposes, as well as be entertaining. As we have discussed in class, Christians, especially Protestants, and particularly Lutherans, have always been interactive and fluid with the sacred texts in order to bring them to life in the present (whatever century that might be). And here you will have to help us. Beaudoin points out that much that adults don't like about popular culture are actually "serious expressions of a new generation's need for a faith they can believe in, rather than one thrust upon them." Much of pop culture, with its own religious content, has often played the role of the pastor to the young.

Beaudoin points out, as Katz continues in his on-line report, that "**Popular culture is the universal reference point of the young, a new measure of community.** People understand one another by the music they like or loathe, by the movies they embrace, and the TV shows that mirror their lives. X-Files's fans share one set of values, while Ally McBeal lovers treasure another."

But culture cuts both ways. Culture can also stultify and grossly distort the reality of real, day to day living. We need to develop a better way to analyze popular culture and develop the skills for knowing how to evaluate it so we know what to embrace (what will be OK for us) or what to reject (what will not be OK for us, as so well detailed by Mary Pipher). Indeed, it was hard for me to understand my son Eric going off on a year long band ministry tour of primarily rock music. But, as I told him, I didn't have to understand it. All I had to do was support his decision, as he exercised his sovereignty, and all he had to do was to be patient while we worked together for mutual understanding.

St. Luke has been on the cutting edge of this because St Luke has not strayed from the core of what the gospel is all about. St. Luke's support of many agencies working with "the least of these," having a full-time youth minister, demonstrates that St. Luke has shunned the trappings of privileged social status and has always sought to serve, not be served, which, of course, is the example of Jesus.

Your generation is the first to have experienced unprecedented freedom of expression and access to diverse points of view, much of it through the Internet. You resist embracing someone else's dogma and revealed word. **St. Luke respects this** and conducts its Confirmation classes accordingly. This Spiritual Tool Box is to provide you with the tools you need to better enable you to use your new found freedom of expression and to better understand the diverse points of view you will come across, so that you can evaluate them better than if we did not expose you to all that we did in Confirmation. The result, says Beaudoin, will be that as you age, you will reinvigorate the church in a manner not seen since the Reformation, and not only the church, but politics and the media as well.

Thus, the challenge to you is this: the 20th century was the century of your grandparents. **The 21st century** is your century (at least the first half of it). We, your parents, straddle both. **What will you do with your century?** Who will you be in it? We can't answer these question for you. It is for you to answer. **Its your century, not ours.** Help us to leave you the best tools to work with.

We have shared with you how we approached our last third of the 20th century, which was different from the manner in which our parents approached their middle third of it. We believe that the tools in the Spiritual Tool Box we pass on to you will benefit you. Use them as you see fit. **We sponsor you** but we cannot be you. We really don't even raise you (you are not potted plants or veggies in a garden). You are rapidly becoming your own persons, with your own sense of sovereignty, with your own ideas and your own wills. Hence, we sponsor your life and your living, just as we sponsored you at baptism. These materials will stretch you. But they are not above you. The schools used to cover material like this but now conflicting political agendas keep them from doing. We in the church can do so.

Remember to keep the tools you like in good shape so you can pass the Spiritual Tool Box onto your kids when they are ready, **as you will be their sponsors,** as they prepare for their roles in the 21st century, in their part of it, the second half.

Again, this is not goodbye. Only congratulations. We will still see each other. Contact the pastors, me or any other member of St. Luke any time you want. It is what being a "church family in Christ" is all about. As we serve and learn together in Christ, let us pray for wisdom and guidance, and for comfort and grace, and affirm/confirm/validate that for each other daily.

God bless you! Best wishes to all of you. And in your own daily walk, continue to be a blessing to others.

Peter Jessen