

Handout 20

Faith Development Outline

By Tracey L. Hurd, Ph.D. Based on the work of James Fowler.

Held in the Love of Others: The Basis for Later Faith

Infants and Toddlers: Undifferentiated Faith

- Infants are born with potential but without the ability to act on it.
- Experiences of trust become the basis for emerging notions of faith.
- Trust plants the seeds of hope.
- Pre-Images of others, images formed without language and labels envelope the infant in care. These early relationships are imbued with spirituality.

Faith by Imitation

Preschool Children: Intuitive-Projective Faith

- Faith development is linked to cognitive and social development.
- Knowing what we do as people of faith, nurtures a sense of belonging.
- Imitating routines or rituals of religion, the child learns them first as things to do and later as part of a more complex picture.
- Child sees spirituality in everyday life; they is open to "big questions."
- Experiences of love with others, gets projected more broadly to the faith community.

Young School-Age Children: Intuitive-Projective Faith

- Interest in big questions becomes tempered by beginning knowledge of the literal world.
- Participating in religious activities becomes another building block of "knowing" or authority.
- Children "do" religion as a way of owning religion.
- Jean Grasso Fitzpatrick says the seven year old, spiritually speaking, is like a person from Missouri, "Show me," she demands.
- Inviting young school age children into the life of the faith community lets them know what it is like to have faith.

Joining in Faith

School-Age Children: Mythic-Literal Faith

- Concrete operational thinking—logic of action and an ability to hold actions as mental representations—influences faith development.
- Literal understandings of faith prevail.
- Children develop “myths” or story-like ideas based on logic about big questions.
- Holidays, rituals, community service all become satisfying ways to both “do faith” and “claim faith.”

Discernment

Young Adolescents: Synthetic Conventional Faith

- Belongingness—as an individual— becomes important to a sense of faith.
- Many young adolescents are drawn to religion as they try to make sense and meaning of their lives with newly developed capacities to think about thinking.
- Young adolescents want to find coherence, to put together pictures or concepts of how things work. Some may be drawn to the clarity of creed-based religions.
- Sustained involvement in a congregation can provide comfort and coherence that answers a yearning to matter, to feel unique, and to feel a part of something bigger.
- Engaging adolescents in the life of the congregation and marking their presence (through recognitions, coming of age ceremonies, and involvement) may help make faith alive for youth.

Middle Adolescents: Synthetic Conventional Faith

- Interest in faith can often increase or decrease during these years.
- If faith offers them a sense of coherence, purpose, and meaning then they will be more drawn towards it.
- Faith becomes a base for synthesizing values.
- Religion, however, is still often seen as holding outside authority.
- Questioning of faith can lead an adolescent to hold tighter or to abandon faith during these years.

- Providing meaningful faith-based activities nurtures adolescents spiritual agency and may draw them deeper into faith.

Deeper Understanding, Reflection

Older Adolescents and Young Adults: Individuative Reflective Faith

- Existential thinking and the promise and pressures of becoming adults can help late adolescents explore faith more deeply or abandon their faith.
- No longer trying to belong to faith, the young adult seeks to construct her/his own understanding of it, through crucial reflection, questioning and participating.
- Young adults are supported by knowing that faith offers more than psychological reasoning, but a way of being spiritually connected beyond words and thinking
- Engaging young adults in spiritually satisfying service, worship and spiritual practice can help them deepen their sense of faith.