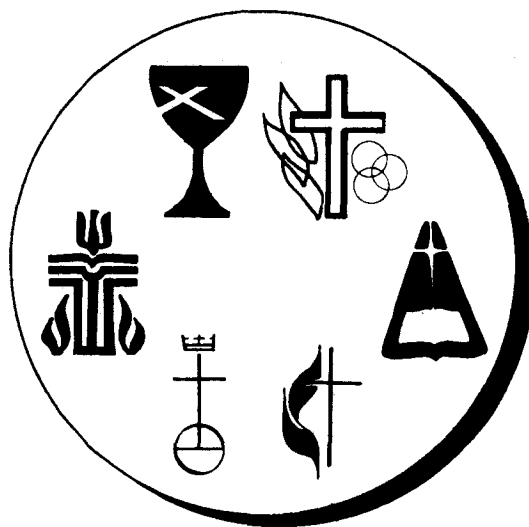


Effective Christian Education:



A National Study of Protestant Congregations

**A Summary Report on
Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life**

A Research Project of Search Institute, Minneapolis

**EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:
A NATIONAL STUDY
OF PROTESTANT CONGREGATIONS**

**A Summary Report on Faith,
Loyalty, and Congregational Life**

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SEARCH INSTITUTE

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This report is the project summary of the study titled *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*, funded by the Lilly Endowment, Indianapolis, and the six participating denominations:

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Southern Baptist Convention
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church

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Contents

List of Figures.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
I. Overview of the Study: Major Conclusions and Methods.....	1
II. Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Adults	9
III. Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Youth	23
IV. The Power of Christian Education.....	37
V. The Nature of Christian Education Effectiveness	53
VI. Reflections on Change.....	65
Notes.....	69
Appendix: Measurement Issues.....	71

List of Figures

Page

1	The Faith Maturity of Adults: National Mainline Averages by Age and Gender.....	12
2.	The Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Faith Maturity: National Mainline Averages by Age and Gender.....	14
3.	Faith Types Among Adults: National Mainline Percentages by Age and Gender.....	15
4.	Faith Types in Six Denominations: Adults, by Age and Gender.....	17
5.	Faith Types Among Mainline Adults: Age by Gender.....	18
6.	Faith Types Among Mainline Adults: By Race/Ethnicity.....	19
7.	Congregational and Denominational Loyalty Among Adults: National Mainline Averages by Age.....	20
8.	Congregational and Denominational Loyalty by Age: Percentage of Mainline Adults with High Loyalty.....	21
9.	Faith Types Among Youth: National Mainline Percentages by Age and Gender.....	25
9A.	Faith Types in Six Denominations: Youth, by Grade and Gender.....	26
10.	Congregational and Denominational Loyalty by Grade: Percentage of Mainline Youth with High Loyalty.....	28
11.	Youth Predictions of Church Involvement at Ages 21 and 40.....	29
12.	Positive Predictions of Church Involvement: Mainline Youth, by Grade and Gender.....	30
13.	Views of the Church: Mainline Youth and Adults, by Age.....	31
14.	The Church as Resource: Mainline Youth and Adults, by Age.....	32
15.	Quality of Life Indicators: Mainline Youth, by Grade and Gender.....	34
16.	At-risk Index: Mainline and Southern Baptist Youth, by Grade.....	35
17.	The Role of Religious Biography in Faith Maturity: Youth.....	39
18.	The Role of Religious Biography in Faith Maturity: Adults.....	40
19.	Adult Faith and Loyalty: By Denomination, Congregation Size, and Region.....	41
20.	The Role of the Congregation in Promoting Faith and Loyalty: Youth.....	44
21.	The Role of the Congregation in Promoting Faith and Loyalty: Adults.....	45
22.	Biographical Deficits in Religious Socialization: Youth 16-18.....	46
23.	Biographical Deficits in Religious Socialization: Adults.....	47
24.	Biographical Assets for Promoting Faith Maturity: Mainline Adults, by Age.....	48
25.	Congregational Factors Related to Faith and Loyalty: Mainline Youth and Adults.....	49
26.	Congregational Involvement in Christian Education: Rates for Mainline Adults, Youth, and Children.....	50
27.	Denominational Differences in Biographical and Congregational Factors Related to Faith and Loyalty: Adults.....	51
28.	Effectiveness in Christian Education for Adults: The Ideal.....	55
29.	Effectiveness in Christian Education for Youth: The Ideal.....	56
30.	Effectiveness in Christian Education for Adults: The Reality.....	59
31.	Effectiveness in Christian Education for Youth: The Reality.....	61
32.	Foundations Needed for Effective Christian Education.....	63

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I.

Overview of the Study: Major Conclusions and Methods

Background

American education is under fire. Since 1980, public schools have been closely examined and found wanting in a number of areas, including academic programming, teacher quality, dropout prevention, discipline, and governance. The resulting call for renewal and innovation in schooling has not gone unheard. Aided by a significant resurgence in educational research on the nature of effectiveness, educators in scores of school districts are clarifying mission, tightening academic standards, improving teacher training, introducing innovative programming, and implementing new approaches in governance and decision-making.

There are signs that a similar effort in self-examination and renewal is needed in congregationally-based education. In a feasibility study conducted for this project in 1986, involving interviews with mainline Protestant Christian education staffs at both the denominational and local levels, leaders expressed a high level of concern about the health of Christian education. Prominent concerns included disinterest by adults in adult educational programs, the failure to maintain the involvement of youth after eighth grade, the increasing difficulty of finding and keeping volunteer teachers, the apparent disinterest of clergy in education, the inability to draw parents into the educational process, and the failure of current programs and educational methods to address the changing needs and interests of adults, adolescents, and children.

Lacking an empirical base either to assess the extent of these problems or guide reform efforts, six major Protestant denominations joined the Lilly Endowment in launching a national, three-and-one-half year study of Christian education. Commencing in 1987, under the direction of Search Institute, the project is driven not only by the specific educational issues noted above, but also by the conviction that revitalized Christian education programming at the local level is a necessary step in helping the mainline denominations regain lost ground. Of particular concern here are the failure to attract young adults and young families, inactivity in congregational life, the loss of members, and the loss of denominational identity.

The Potential of Christian Education

These well-documented problems have spurred a variety of efforts to promote congregational vitality. A clear understanding of the role and potential of Christian education in congregational life has often been lacking in these efforts at reform. If the primary goal of a congregation for its people is a well-formed faith, then Christian education, with emphasis on both learning and doing, is positioned to make a major contribution. We chose as one of our purposes, therefore, to look at formal Christian education as one of a number of aspects of congregational life, with the intent of evaluating its relative impact on the lives of adults and adolescents.

We expected to find that involvement in Christian education is important, although our expectations were muted by the fact that adults and adolescents spend relatively little time in Christian education. In educational language, Christian education represents a case of "low dosage exposure," with most people spending about 30-40 hours a year, at best, in this endeavor.

Christian education matters much more than we expected. Of all the areas of congregational life we examined, involvement in an effective Christian education program has the strongest tie to a person's growth in faith and to loyalty to one's congregation and denomination. While other congregational factors also matter, nothing matters more than effective Christian education. And this is as true for adults as it is for adolescents.

Christian education, then, takes on new importance. Done well, it has the potential beyond any other congregational influence to deepen faith and commitment. Knowledge of its importance makes the need for educational revitalization all the more urgent. There is much work to be done. The fact that involvement in Christian education ends for most Protestants at the 9th grade is only one problem. Equally serious is the fact that those adolescents and adults who choose to participate are not often exposed to particularly effective programming.

Project Description

This report documents these and related conclusions. It is based on a national study unprecedented in size and scope, involving within each denomination nationally representative samples of congregations and their adolescents, pastors, teachers, coordinators of Christian education, and other adults. It includes both quantitative and qualitative methods. More than 11,000 individuals in 561 randomly chosen congregations provided in-depth, survey-based data on faith, loyalty, religious biography, congregational life, and the dynamics of Christian education programming.

To enrich this information, teams of trained observers visited 52 congregations, judged to have strengths in promoting faith. Their written stories about these congregations add considerable insight to defining the nature and power of Christian education.

The study focuses primarily on formal Christian education, defined as the programs and events a congregation intentionally offers to teach the faith to children, teenagers, and adults. Christian education includes Sunday school, church school, Bible studies, confirmation, camping, retreats, workshops, youth ministry and youth groups, children and adult choirs, auxiliaries for men and women, prayer groups, religious plays and dramas,

Vacation Bible School, new member classes, and intergenerational or family events and programs.

Attention is also given to the role of other congregational factors, including what many might call "informal education." Included here are the values, symbols, culture, and patterns of interaction that help describe congregational life.

The project, originally conceived to evaluate Christian education in the mainline churches, initially involved five mainline denominations. They are the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. These five denominations include about 85 percent of the membership in what is commonly called "mainline Protestantism." The Southern Baptist Convention, due to its success in educational programming, was invited by the five original partners to join the project.

In this report, primary attention is focused on mainline Protestants, combining the data on the five mainline denominations to draw national portraits of mainline adults, adolescents, and congregations. At several key points, these composite portraits are compared to corresponding Southern Baptist portraits. In a companion set of six individual denominational reports, denominational findings are explored.

Eighteen Major Conclusions

This report documents 18 major conclusions. In brief, they are as follows, organized into the four major sections of the report.

Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Adults

1. Only a minority of Protestant adults evidence the kind of integrated, vibrant, and life-encompassing faith congregations seek to develop. For most adults, faith is under-developed, lacking some of the key elements necessary for faith maturity.
2. Maturity of faith is strongly linked to age, increasing with each successive decade, and is most likely to be found among those over 70.
3. In every age group from the '30s on, women exhibit greater faith maturity than men.
4. While most adults report strong loyalty to their congregation and denomination, loyalty is less evident among those in the 20-39 and 40-59 age ranges than among those 60 or older.

Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Youth

5. A majority of adolescents fall into the faith type called "undeveloped faith." Faith is least well formed among 9th and 10th grade boys.
6. Less than two-thirds of adolescents express high denominational or congregational loyalty.

7. In each of the six denominations, a majority of adolescents evidence one or more at-risk indicators (e.g., chemical use, depression). Most youth report that congregations place little emphasis on chemical or sexuality education.

The Power of Christian Education

8. In examining the religious biographies of **youth**, the two experiences most associated with higher faith maturity are the level of family religiousness and the *amount of exposure to Christian education*.
9. In examining the religious biographies of **adults**, one of the two lifetime experiences most associated with higher faith maturity is the *amount of exposure to Christian education*.
10. Regarding the impact of congregational life on faith maturity, the congregational factor most associated with helping people grow in faith maturity is the *degree of effectiveness in Christian education programming*. This finding is true for both youth and adults.
11. Effectiveness in Christian education is also associated with greater denominational and congregational loyalty. This finding is true for both youth and adolescents.
12. Effective Christian education is as important for the faith development of adults as it is for youth.
13. Only about 3 out of 10 mainline Protestant high school students (grades 10-12) and adults are actively involved in Christian education. This finding, along with evidence of common biographical deficits in religious socialization, helps to explain the lack of faith maturity commonly found among adults and adolescents.

The Nature of Christian Education Effectiveness

14. Effective education for youth requires particular kinds of process, content, leadership, and administrative foundations.
15. Many of these effectiveness factors for youth are lacking in a large percentage of congregations.
16. As is the case for youth, effective education for adults requires a range of definable processes, content, and administrative ingredients.
17. Many of these effectiveness factors for adults are lacking in a large percentage of congregations.
18. The more a congregation embodies these Christian education effectiveness factors, the greater the growth in faith by youth and adults, and the greater the loyalty to congregation and denomination.

Project Methods

In 1988, in-depth surveys were administered in nationally representative samples of congregations. In each of the six denominations, 150 congregations were randomly selected, with sampling stratified by size of congregation (under 200, 200-499, 500-999, 1,000 and larger) to ensure representative distribution on this key factor. Within each selected congregation, samples of adults, adolescents (grades 7-12), and teachers were randomly selected for the survey study. In addition, in each of the congregations, the pastor (the senior pastor, if more than one) and the coordinator of Christian education were surveyed.

Surveys were administered under the supervision of a project director in each of the 561 participating congregations. Survey sessions were governed by a set of standardized procedures described in a detailed administration manual. Careful procedures were established to guarantee and preserve confidentiality for each respondent. Survey sessions ranged from one-and-one-half to two-and-one-half hours in length.

Congregational participation rates were quite outstanding, exceeding typical response rates for this kind of research. The number and percentage of congregations participating from the original random samples of 150 per denomination are as follows:

Denomination	Participating Congregations	Percent of Random Sample
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) [CC]	102	68
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA]	110	73
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) [PC]	101	67
Southern Baptist Convention [SBC]	68	45
United Church of Christ [UCC]	93	62
United Methodist Church [UMC]	87	58

For the five mainline denominations, the combined participation rate was 66 percent (493 of 750). Non-cooperating congregations tended to be those whose leadership was in transition. The participating congregational samples were compared with the known national characteristics of the participating denominations and found to be proportionately representative on a range of demographic factors. The United Methodist sample tends to overrepresent larger congregations. The Southern Baptist sample, though proportionately small, appears to represent SBC national characteristics. It is not known whether any systematic biases influenced those Southern Baptist congregations that cooperated as compared with those that declined. Since this was an ecumenical study dominated by mainline denominations, it is possible that some strongly independent Southern Baptist congregations chose to decline the invitation.

Overall, 11,122 persons in 561 congregations participated. Below is the breakdown into participant categories:

Adults (Those adults who are not pastors nor involved in Christian education leadership in any capacity)	3,567
Adolescents	3,121
Christian education teachers	3,466
Coordinators of Christian education	499
Pastors	519
Total	11,122

In each of the denominational samples of congregations, about 65 percent of the randomly chosen adults, adolescents, and teachers participated. About one-half of the non-respondents did not participate due to illness or travel during the survey administration sessions. In all six denominations, adult and adolescent samples slightly overrepresent females and slightly underrepresent inactive members.

Data for adults and youth in each denomination were weighted so that the data maximally represents the national denominational population of adults and youth.¹ When results are reported for all mainline denominations combined, an additional weight was added to ensure that each denomination's contribution to the mainline portrait was proportionate to its relative size among the five denominations.

Total survey sample sizes for each of the denominations are listed below.

<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Adolescents</u>	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>Coordinators</u>	<u>Pastors</u>	<u>Total</u>
CC (Disciples)	709	439	583	79	95	1905
ELCA	656	865	752	97	102	2472
PC (U.S.A)	712	431	610	79	91	1923
UCC	473	710	582	80	86	1931
UMC	594	394	519	69	82	1658
Total, Five Mainline Denominations Combined	3,144	2,839	3,046	404	456	9,889
SBC	423	282	420	45	63	1,233
Total, Six Denominations Combined	3,567	3,121	3,466	449	519	11,122

The survey study was augmented in 1989 by site visits to 52 individual congregations judged to have particular strengths in helping members grow in maturity of faith. Twenty-nine of them were selected from the surveyed congregations, based on empirical evidence gleaned from the adult and adolescent surveys. The other 23 were racial/ethnic congregations nominated by national and regional denominational staff as being particularly effective in promoting maturity of faith. At least one of the observers of each of these ethnic congregations was from the same cultural background as the congregation.

Teams of trained observers, composed largely of denominational staff on the project advisory committee, research associates who served as consultants for the project, and Search Institute staff, visited the 52 congregations between February and June, 1990. Each team prepared a site visit report identifying those congregational features, including Christian education, associated with effectiveness.

II.

Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Adults

The primary aim of congregational life is to nurture -- among children, youth, and adults -- a vibrant, life-changing faith, the kind of faith that shapes one's way of being, thinking, and acting. It is this concept of faith maturity that is at the heart of the study. It is the benchmark against which we evaluate the impact and potential of Christian education.

Secondarily, we seek to understand the role of congregational life in promoting loyalty to one's congregation and denomination. Current realities in the mainline churches elevate loyalty to center stage. One of the most important findings in this study is that congregations effective in promoting faith maturity reap the benefit of greater loyalty. By concentrating on their ultimate purpose of nurturing an ongoing growth in faith, congregations appear to gain the kind of commitment that thwarts dropout, switching, and inactivity.

The key constructs employed in this study, then, are four:

Maturity of faith -- The degree to which persons exhibit a vibrant, life-transforming faith marked by both a deep, personal relationship to a loving God and a consistent devotion to serving others.

Growth in maturity of faith -- The degree to which persons report that their faith has grown in the last two or three years.

Denominational loyalty -- The degree to which persons are committed to their denomination.

Congregational loyalty -- The degree to which persons are committed to their congregation.

Greater detail on how these four are measured, including impressive reliability and validity findings for each, can be found in the Appendix on Measurement Issues.

The Nature of Mature Faith

What are the characteristics of a person with mature Christian faith? Based on interviews with theological scholars and denominational executives, open-ended surveys of several hundred adults from the six participating denominations, and reviews of the literature in psychology and religion, we posited that a person of mature faith integrates eight core dimensions of faith. They are:

1. Trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus
2. Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace
3. Integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one's religious life
4. Seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others
5. Seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another
6. Holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others
7. Advocates social and global change to bring about greater social justice
8. Serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice

These eight dimensions can also be collapsed into two overall themes. A person of mature faith experiences both a life-transforming relationship to a loving God — the **vertical** theme — and a consistent devotion to serving others — the **horizontal** theme.

Within each of the eight core dimensions, we sought to identify representative indicators of mature faith. A total of 38 were selected, in consultation with scholars, executives, and clergy in each of the denominations. Certain works were particularly valuable in identifying the indicators, including Fowler's work in faith development.

For each indicator, a single item was developed. This produced a scale or index of 38 items. The indicators and the items are listed in the Appendix on Measurement Issues.

Faith Maturity Among Adults

The mature faith index provides three types of information useful for describing the nature and vitality of faith among adults and adolescents. In turn, we describe (a) national mature faith scale averages, (b) responses to specific indicators, and (c) faith types constructed out of the mature faith items.

Averages

A person's score on the mature faith index ranges from 1 (low) to 7 (high), derived by averaging each person's answers to the 38 questions. Figure 1 presents mature faith averages by age and gender. One important finding is that faith maturity increases with each decade of age: It is lowest at age 20-29 and highest at age 70 and older. There is a temptation to conclude that faith maturity is developmental in nature — that is, that inherent in the aging process is a tendency toward greater integration of the elements of faith. For this hypothesis to be confirmed, a longitudinal study is needed in which the same adults are followed over a long period of time. A second finding is that women, on the average, demonstrate greater faith maturity than men.

Adults in all age groups coalesce just above the midpoint of 4.0, ranging from an average of 4.40 for adults in the 20-29 age range to 4.96 for adults 70 and older. If we divide the mature faith index into thirds, with a score between 1.00 and 2.99 representing low faith maturity, scores between 3.00 and 4.99 representing moderate faith maturity, and scores between 5.00 and 7.00 representing high faith maturity, we see that the average adult in all age groups falls into the moderate range. Combining all mainline adults together, 29 percent score 5.00 or higher (high faith maturity), and 71 percent score below 5.00 (moderate or low faith maturity).

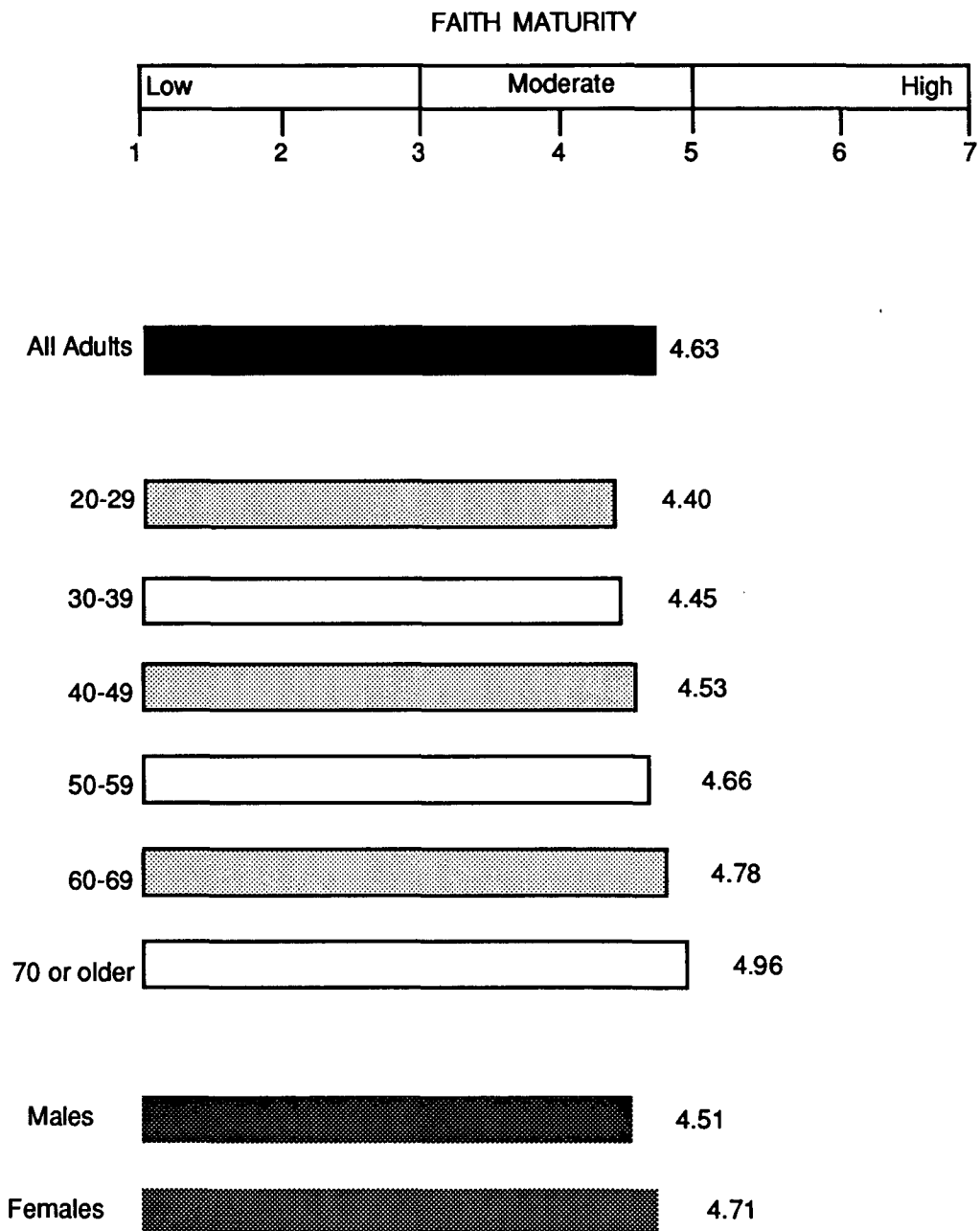
Specific Indicators

Nearly all mainline adults embody some of the 38 elements of mature faith, but relatively few embody most or all of the indicators. About 20 of the indicators are true of the typical adult. The areas of faith maturity that are most problematic are those having to do with seeking spiritual growth (e.g., prayer and Bible reading), talking with others about one's faith, involvement in social service (e.g., helping other individuals), and involvement in the pursuit of social justice. Below are some of the mature faith indicators and the percentage of adults for whom they are descriptive.¹

I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually	45%
I devote time to reading and studying the Bible	34%
I take time for periods of prayer and meditation	50%
I help others with their religious questions and struggles	34%
I talk with other people about my faith	47%
In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs	33%
I give significant portions of my time and money to help other people	39%
I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world	44%
I go out of my way to show love to people I meet	53%
I am active in efforts to promote social justice	13%
I am active in efforts to promote world peace	7%
I try to apply my faith to political and social issues	50%

Other questions in the survey instruments provide additional information about these indicators. During "the last year," for example, 42 percent of adults report that they talked about their faith either never or once, and 72 percent report that they **never**

Figure 1. The Faith Maturity of Adults: National Mainline Averages by Age and Gender



participated in any organized effort to promote social change. During "the last 30 days," 57 percent report they did not engage in daily prayer, and 52 percent gave no volunteer time to help "the poor, hungry, sick, or those unable to help themselves."

What emerges is a pattern in which faith is only partially experienced or lived out. Signs point to faith that is "on hold," restricted, even dormant. One factor that may account for part of this pattern is that a large percentage of mainline adults (67%) evidence difficulty in accepting that salvation is a gift rather than something earned.² From an understanding of this tenet comes the freedom that allows people to move out of neutral, to risk.

Faith Types

To gain a firmer understanding of the vitality of faith, we looked to see how the elements of faith maturity combine into types of faith. Running through the mature faith index are two themes: the **vertical** (having a deep, personal relationship with a loving God) and the **horizontal** (translating this personal affirmation into acts of love, mercy, and justice).³ Each person in the study was placed in one of four faith categories, based on these combinations of responses to the vertical and horizontal themes⁴:

If a person has the pattern below	Then he/she was placed in this faith category
Low on vertical faith and low on horizontal faith	Undeveloped faith
High on vertical faith and low on horizontal faith	Vertical faith
Low on vertical faith but high on horizontal faith	Horizontal faith
High on both vertical and horizontal faith	Integrated faith

Figure 2 shows that for each of six adult age categories, the vertical dimension is significantly higher than the horizontal dimension. There is a tendency for each dimension to increase with age (one notable exception is vertical faith for males 50-59).

Figure 3 presents the distribution of the four faith types, by age and gender. Thirty-two percent of all adults have an integrated faith, in which the vertical and horizontal themes are balanced. This type, representing the most mature faith of the four types, increases with age -- from 16 percent of those in their 20s to 57 percent of those 70 or older.

Among all mainline adults, slightly more than one-third (36%) are in the undeveloped faith category, in which both the vertical and horizontal themes are low. Nearly one-half of adults in their 20s (48%) and 30s (45%) are in this category. A notable percentage (32%) of all adults are in the vertical or horizontal faith types in which one of the two dimensions is present but the other is undeveloped.

Major gender differences exist in all four types, with women much more likely than men to be in the integrated type (38% vs 21%), and much less likely to be in the undeveloped type (30% vs 45%). Men seem to have particular difficulty in the vertical theme: 73

Figure 2. The Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Faith Maturity: National Mainline Averages by Age and Gender

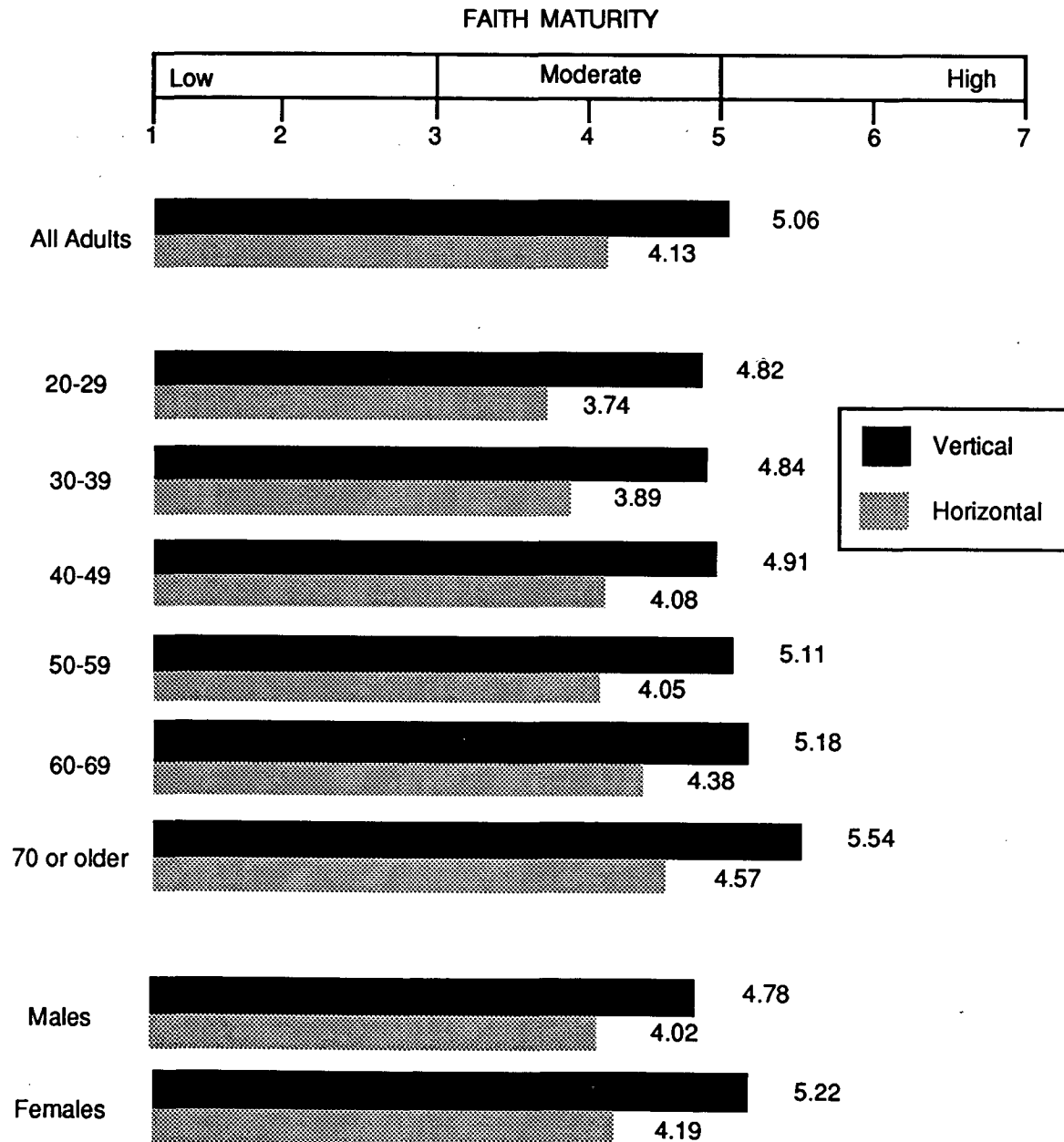


Figure 3. Faith Types Among Adults: National Mainline Percentages by Age and Gender

	FAITH TYPES			
	<i>Undeveloped Faith (%)</i>	<i>Vertical Faith (%)</i>	<i>Horizontal Faith (%)</i>	<i>Integrated Faith (%)</i>
All Adults	36	10	22	32
20-29	48	12	23	16
30-39	45	11	23	21
40-49	39	7	24	30
50-59	37	14	19	30
60-69	27	13	24	37
70 or older	19	6	18	57
Males	45	6	28	21
Females	30	13	19	38

percent are either in the undeveloped or horizontal types, with the vertical theme relatively weak in both.

The age and gender patterns hold true in each of the six denominations (Figure 4), giving added validity to these findings. To restate them: In each of the six, women are more likely than men to be in the integrated faith type -- as are older adults (60 +) when compared to younger adults. Though there are apparent denominational differences in these faith type distributions, it should be noted that denominational affiliation is, overall, a fairly weak predictor of faith type. As we will see in the chapter titled "The Power of Christian Education," denomination is not nearly as important as the dynamics of congregational life for explaining faith maturity.

In each age category (see Figure 5), women, when compared to men, are much more likely to report high faith maturity (i.e., integrated faith). The difference is particularly pronounced in the 40-59 age range (15% vs. 40%). Of all age by gender categories, integrated faith is at its lowest (8%) among men in the 40-49 age range.

Sample sizes are too small to yield reliable estimates of faith maturity by individual race/ethnicity categories. Only 124 adults who are Asian, African American, Hispanic, or American Indian completed the survey form. This represents about three percent of the total adult sample, which is proportional to the actual percentage of minorities in the mainline denominations. Comparing all minorities (although we would like to avoid grouping in this way) to all whites, significant differences in faith types emerge (see Figure 6). Minorities nearly double the percentage of whites in the integrated faith category (57% vs. 31%).

This section on faith types provides another means of describing the condition of faith among mainline adults. In combination with findings presented earlier, it is apparent that for many adults faith is not well formed. For more than two-thirds of adults, faith lacks a strong vertical component, a strong horizontal component, or both. This finding presents congregations with an enormous challenge. And the challenge is even greater in their ministry to men, for whom a fully integrated faith maturity is relatively uncommon.

Loyalty Among Adults

Of additional interest is the loyalty of adults to their denomination and congregation. To some extent, there is more reason for optimism here than is the case with faith maturity. As shown in Figure 7, both forms of loyalty are relatively high, with congregational loyalty higher than denominational loyalty at each age level. Congregational loyalty stays fairly constant between the 20s and 40s, then rises with age. Denominational loyalty stays constant between the 20s and 50s, then rises dramatically.

Figure 8 presents the percentages of mainline adults who report high levels of loyalty. Both forms of loyalty are considerably lower for younger adults than for those 60 and older. The key question, and one not answerable by this study, is whether loyalty naturally increases with age (so that those now in the 40-59 range will grow to the loyalty exhibited by those 60 and older), or whether there is a softening of loyalty among those under 60. It is probably prudent for congregations to assume that loyalty is softening. This course challenges them to pay attention to the dynamics of loyalty. As we will see in later sections, loyalty is promoted by many of the same congregational dynamics that matter for faith maturity.

Figure 4. Faith Types in Six Denominations: Adults by Age and Gender

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Age and Gender Categories</i>	FAITH TYPES			
		<i>Undeveloped Faith (%)</i>	<i>Vertical Faith (%)</i>	<i>Horizontal Faith (%)</i>	<i>Integrated Faith (%)</i>
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	All Adults	38	13	19	31
	20-39	47	15	18	20
	40-59	43	13	21	23
	60 +	28	12	17	43
	Males	41	10	23	27
	Females	35	15	16	34
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	All Adults	47	13	17	24
	20-39	61	11	13	15
	40-59	50	12	16	22
	60 +	25	14	22	39
	Males	58	10	17	15
	Females	40	14	16	30
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	All Adults	37	9	20	34
	20-39	47	9	19	24
	40-59	36	13	25	27
	60 +	30	5	17	49
	Males	44	3	25	28
	Females	34	12	18	36
Southern Baptist Convention	All Adults	23	25	3	49
	20-39	28	38	4	30
	40-59	25	24	3	49
	60 +	15	12	3	69
	Males	23	27	4	45
	Females	23	24	3	50
United Church of Christ	All Adults	38	11	22	29
	20-39	54	13	16	17
	40-59	39	11	25	25
	60 +	27	9	22	41
	Males	48	6	25	21
	Females	33	14	21	32
United Methodist Church	All Adults	33	10	23	34
	20-39	43	11	26	20
	40-59	36	9	22	33
	60 +	23	10	22	45
	Males	43	6	30	21
	Females	28	13	19	40

Figure 5. Faith Types Among Mainline Adults: Age by Gender

<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	FAITH TYPES			
		<i>Undeveloped Faith (%)</i>	<i>Vertical Faith (%)</i>	<i>Horizontal Faith (%)</i>	<i>Integrated Faith (%)</i>
20-39	Males	54	5	29	13
	Females	43	14	21	23
40-59	Males	50	6	29	15
	Females	30	12	17	40
60 or older	Males	32	6	27	35
	Females	20	13	19	49

Figure 6. Faith Types Among Mainline Adults: By Race/Ethnicity

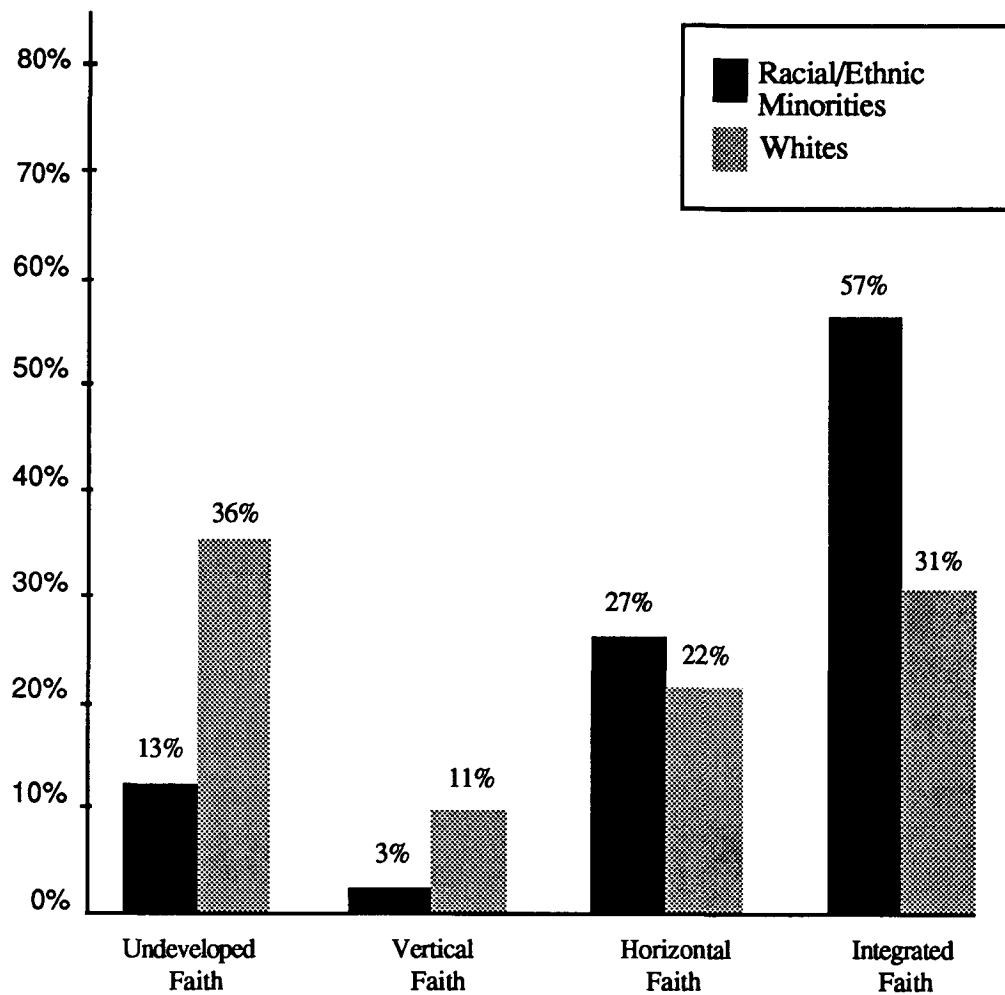


Figure 7. Congregational and Denominational Loyalty Among Adults: National Mainline Averages by Age

Both loyalty measures range from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

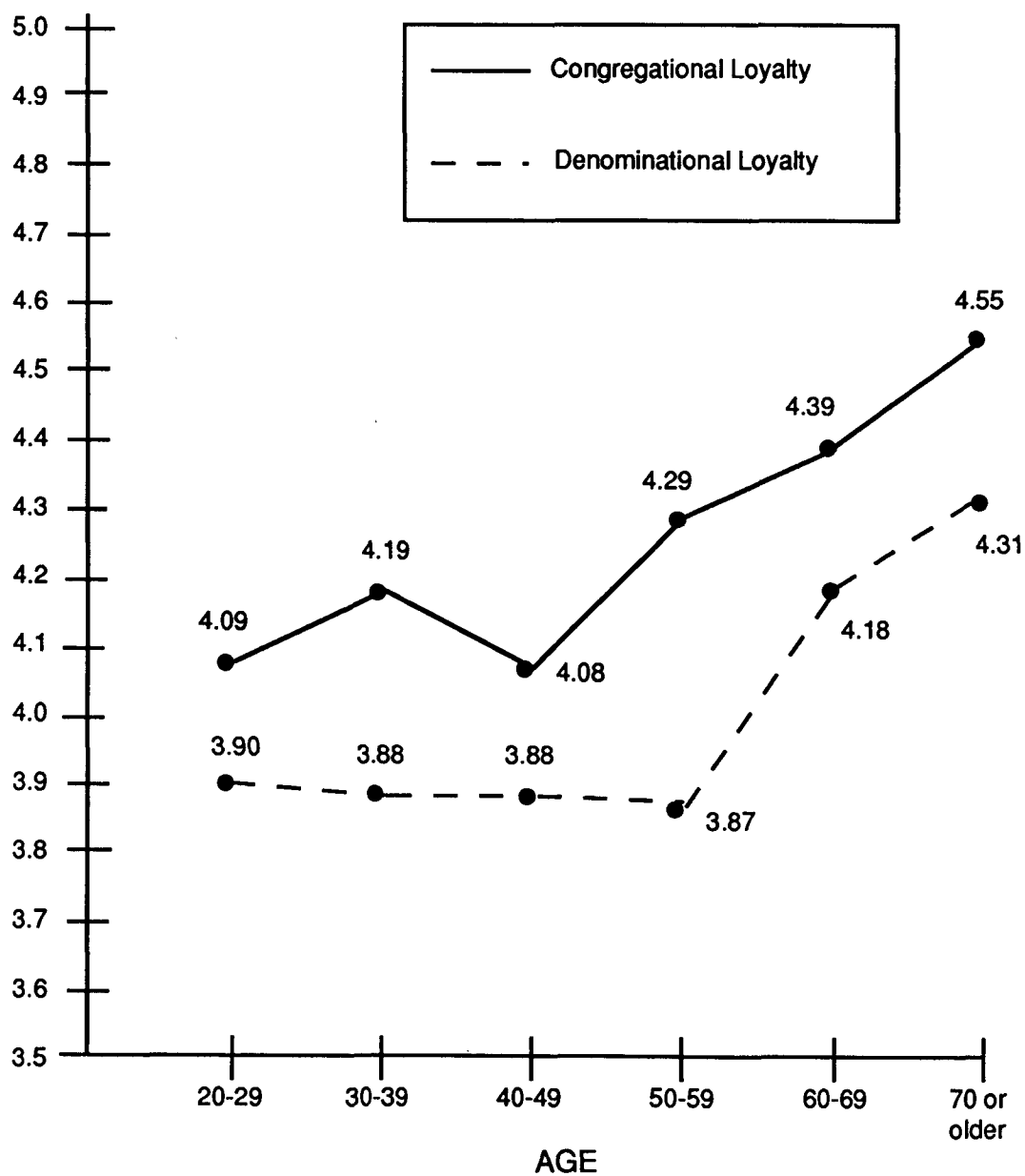
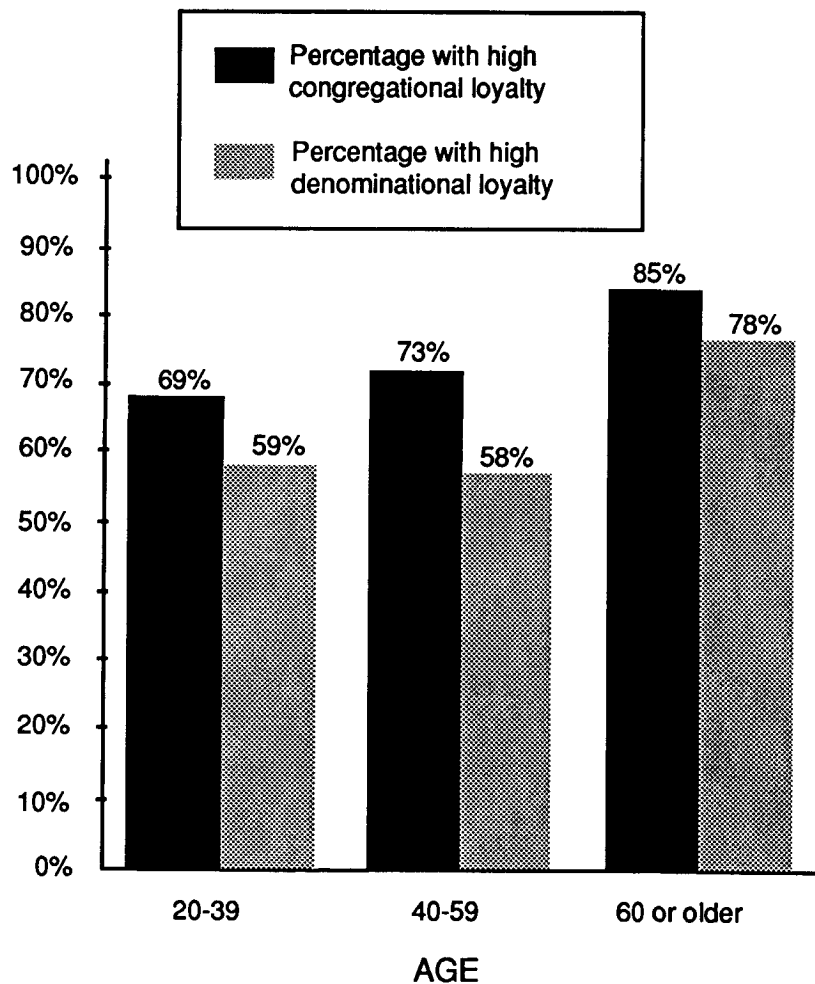


Figure 8. Congregational and Denominational Loyalty by Age: Percentage of Mainline Adults with High Loyalty

Both loyalty measures range from 1 (low) to 5 (high). High loyalty is defined as an average of 4.0.



III.

Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Youth

It is not surprising that the faith of adolescents (grades 7-12) is less developed than the faith of adults (Figure 9). Sixty-four percent of the youth in the study are in the undeveloped faith type category (twice the rate of adults) and 11 percent in the integrated category (one-third the rate of adults).

What is surprising is the apparent lack of movement toward greater integration between 7th and 8th grade on the one hand and 11th and 12th grade on the other. Undeveloped faith is fairly constant (62% vs. 58%), as shown by a comparison of 7th and 8th grade to 11th and 12th grade.

Interesting gender-specific patterns occur. Boys appear to "backslide" in the 9th and 10th grades. In comparing 7th and 8th grade males to 9th and 10th grade males, the percentage in the undeveloped category rises from 66 percent to 83 percent. For girls, "backsliding," though not as pronounced as for boys, occurs in the 11th and 12th grades, with a visible drop in the integrated faith category from 15 percent to 8 percent.

Support for these gender-specific patterns as developmental sequences comes from an examination of current 20 to 29 year old adults. Asked at what age, if any, they experienced a "crisis in faith," men in their 20s are more likely than women to report such a crisis at 13-15, while women are more likely than men to report a crisis at 16-18.

That faith goes through "ups and downs" during adolescence is to be expected. Adolescence can be volatile, as simultaneous cognitive, social, and physical changes create the need to test limits, experiment, doubt, and question.

There is important evidence, however, that the apparent "backsliding" in faith maturity is not inevitable. For two of the six denominations (Christian Church and Southern Baptist Convention), the integrated faith type significantly increases between grades 7-8 and 11-12 (see Figure 9A). One of the key differences between these two denominations and the other four is the relative success they have in involving youth in Christian education during the adolescent years. Listed below are the percentages of 10th to 12th grade youth actively involved in Christian education, by denomination:

Southern Baptist Convention	49%
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	47%
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	40%
United Methodist Church	35%
United Church of Christ	33%
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	32%

These findings suggest that educational involvement during late adolescence helps promote positive movement toward greater faith maturity. This is not to say that "backsliding" is dysfunctional, from a faith development point of view. Indeed, it may be constructive, particularly if congregations provide structured opportunities to help adolescents work through their questioning.

Figure 9. Faith Types Among Youth: National Mainline Percentages by Age and Gender

	FAITH TYPES			
	<i>Undeveloped Faith (%)</i>	<i>Vertical Faith (%)</i>	<i>Horizontal Faith (%)</i>	<i>Integrated Faith (%)</i>
All Youth	64	6	19	11
Grades 7-8	62	5	18	15
Grades 9-10	68	6	17	9
Grades 11-12	58	7	26	8
Males, grades 7-8	66	2	20	12
Males, grades 9-10	83	4	11	1
Males, grades 11-12	57	1	34	8
Females, grades 7-8	58	7	17	18
Females, grades 9-10	56	7	22	15
Females, grades 11-12	60	13	20	8

Figure 9A. Faith Types in Six Denominations: Youth, by Grade and Gender

Denomination	Grade and Gender Categories	FAITH TYPES			
		Undeveloped Faith (%)	Vertical Faith (%)	Horizontal Faith (%)	Integrated Faith (%)
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	7-8 Male	80	0	14	5
	9-10 Male	84	1	14	2
	11-12 Male	50	4	35	10
	7-8 Female	70	9	16	6
	9-10 Female	50	3	34	14
	11-12 Female	61	6	11	22
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	7-8 Male	75	1	21	2
	9-10 Male	81	4	12	3
	11-12 Male	82	5	10	3
	7-8 Female	57	2	23	18
	9-10 Female	58	4	24	14
	11-12 Female	63	7	29	1
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	7-8 Male	68	1	26	5
	9-10 Male	68	3	24	5
	11-12 Male	76	4	6	13
	7-8 Female	50	2	31	18
	9-10 Female	29	7	45	20
	11-12 Female	79	2	14	5
Southern Baptist Convention	7-8 Male	54	19	11	16
	9-10 Male	46	17	14	23
	11-12 Male	50	15	8	27
	7-8 Female	35	18	20	27
	9-10 Female	51	15	7	27
	11-12 Female	15	27	2	56
United Church of Christ	7-8 Male	64	2	28	5
	9-10 Male	73	1	21	5
	11-12 Male	90	0	4	6
	7-8 Female	69	1	26	4
	9-10 Female	70	2	26	3
	11-12 Female	59	3	29	8
United Methodist Church	7-8 Male	62	3	19	16
	9-10 Male	86	5	9	1
	11-12 Male	50	0	41	8
	7-8 Female	59	11	10	20
	9-10 Female	58	9	17	16
	11-12 Female	56	17	18	9

Like their adult counterparts, adolescents tend to exhibit difficulties in those faith maturity dimensions having to do with seeking spiritual growth, talking with others about one's faith, social service, and commitment to social justice. During "the last year," for example, 64 percent of adolescents report that they talked about their faith with others either never or once, and 51 percent report that they **never** participated in any organized effort to promote social change. During "the last 30 days," 72 percent report they did not engage in daily prayer, and 58 percent gave no volunteer time to help "the poor, hungry, sick, or those unable to care for themselves."

Loyalty to Congregation and Denomination

Adolescents express less loyalty to their congregation and denomination than adults do. And, unlike the adult findings, loyalty does not increase with age. As shown in Figure 10, the two forms of loyalty hover in the range of 56 percent to 65 percent across three grade combinations.

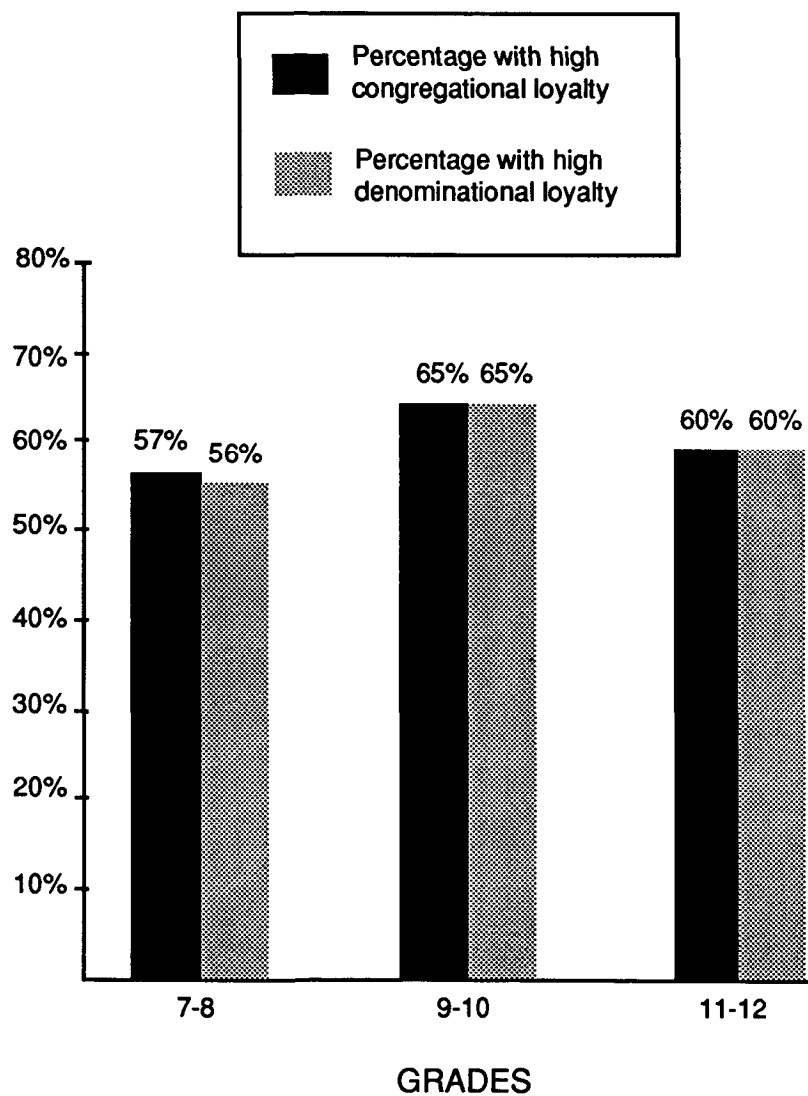
A more indirect way to look at the importance of church is to ask youth to forecast their church involvement at ages 21 and 40 (Figure 11). Most adolescents report the chances are "good" or "excellent" that they will be active as adults. When we look just at the percentages forecasting an "excellent" chance for adult church involvement, we see that girls are much more likely than boys to anticipate involvement, particularly at age 40 (Figure 12).

How do we evaluate these findings on youth loyalty? Some will argue that they look quite positive, while others will worry that they signal continuing problems for the mainline churches in holding onto their youth. We have no historical benchmarks against which to compare adolescent attitudes toward the church. To a certain extent, adolescent loyalty to things institutional is always lower than adults hope it will be. As a young person grows and experiences the stresses and challenges of adulthood, this kind of loyalty often will emerge.

Evidence exists, though, that current adolescents evaluate some dimensions of congregational life less favorably than adults do. In Figures 13 and 14, we compare attitudes by ages 13-15, 16-18, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, and 70 or older. Note that adolescents are less likely than adults to claim "I gain more within the church than outside it," my congregation "feels warm," in my congregation "I learn a lot," and my congregation "expects people to learn and think." And in Figure 14, note the significant drop, between ages 13-15 and 16-18, in positive perceptions of the role of church in helping with meaning, purpose, and religious questions. None of these age differences are overly dramatic, but large enough to warrant concern about the kinds of memories of their church experiences today's teenagers will carry into adulthood.

Figure 10. Congregational and Denominational Loyalty by Grade: Percentage of Mainline Youth with High Loyalty

Both loyalty measures range from 1 (low) to 5 (high). High loyalty is defined as an average of 4.0.



**Figure 11. Youth Predictions of Church Involvement at
Ages 21 and 40**

	AGE	
	13-15 (%)	16-18 (%)
When you are 21, do you think you will be active in a church?		
No chance	2	0
Small chance	8	12
Fair chance	18	22
Good chance	48	40
Excellent chance	25	25
When you are 40, do you think you will be active in a church?		
No chance	1	0
Small chance	6	5
Fair chance	17	18
Good chance	44	41
Excellent chance	32	36

**Figure 12. Positive Predictions of Church Involvement:
Mainline Youth, by Grade and Gender**

Percentages reporting that the chances they will be active in a church at ages 21 and 40 are excellent.

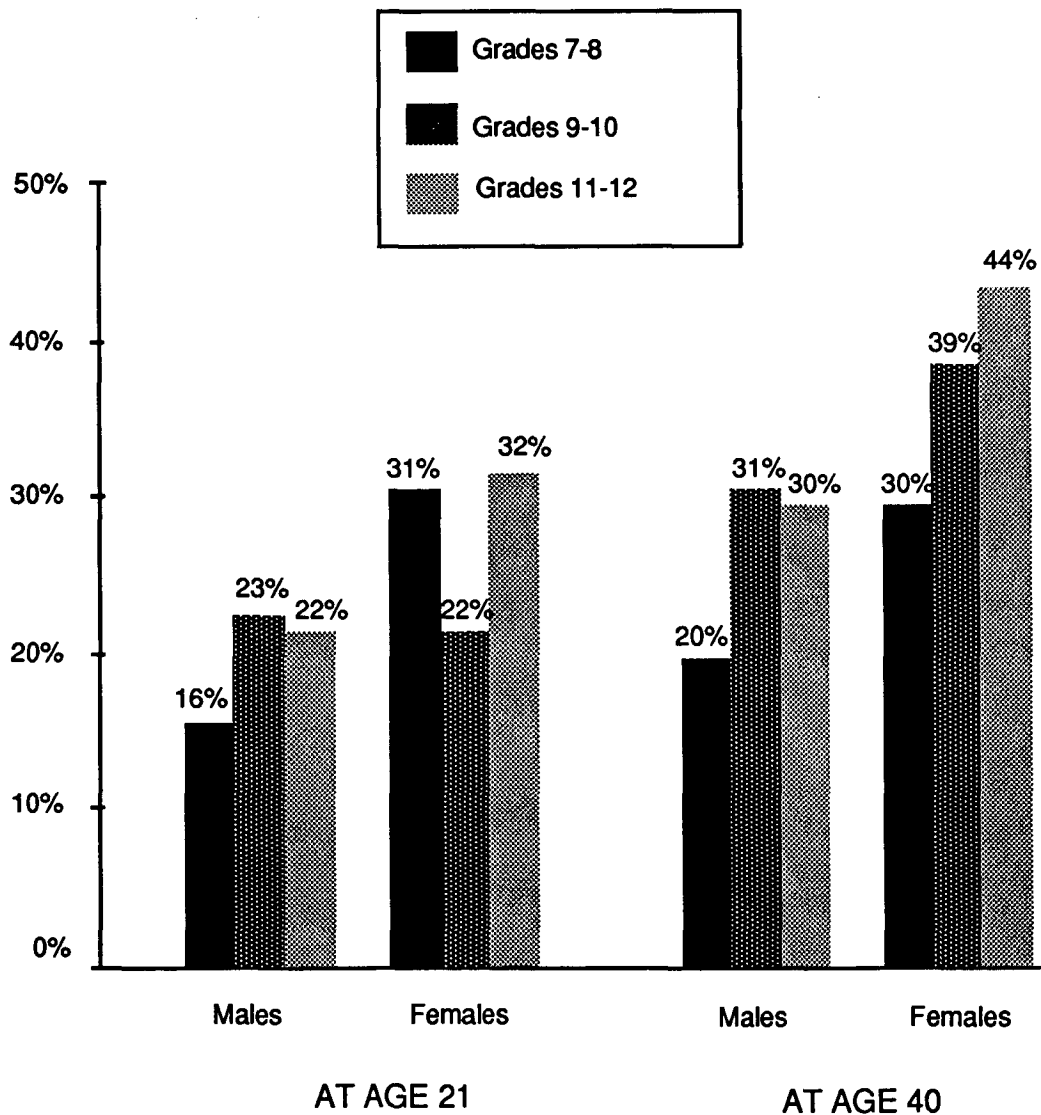


Figure 13. Views of the Church: Mainline Youth and Adults, by Age

	AGE							
	13-15 (%)	16-18 (%)	20-29 (%)	30-39 (%)	40-49 (%)	50-59 (%)	60-69 (%)	70 or older (%)
Spiritually, I gain more within the church than outside it (<i>agree</i>)	57	57	58	80	81	81	91	90
For me, religious insight comes more from my own personal experiences than from what I learn through the teachings of the church (<i>agree</i>)	44	30	43	27	30	35	34	33
An individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church (<i>agree</i>)	42	48	42	28	27	29	26	34
How true of your congregation are each of these (<i>quite true</i> or <i>very true</i>)								
It feels warm	59	65	71	71	65	67	79	86
I learn a lot	46	50	62	51	54	63	68	72
Most members want to be challenged to think about religious issues and ideas	41	38	43	37	27	32	36	56
It challenges my thinking	43	40	38	39	42	51	50	59
It encourages questions	43	46	30	36	34	38	49	47
It is boring	11	13	8	4	6	2	1	2
It tries out new ideas	53	43	48	46	48	60	65	69
It expects people to learn and think	44	49	56	52	44	62	68	69

Figure 14. The Church as Resource: Mainline Youth and Adults, by Age

	AGE							
	13-15	16-18	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 or older
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Which of these most helps you find meaning and purpose in life?								
• Religious TV/radio programs	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	1
• My own private religious experiences	22	33	50	40	28	26	22	22
• My church	60	48	44	53	57	66	72	75
• Religious groups outside my church	17	18	5	7	13	7	5	1
Which of these gives you the most help with religious questions?								
• Religious TV/radio programs	2	0	1	2	1	1	4	1
• My own private religious experiences	22	33	45	28	32	24	30	37
• My church	59	44	43	61	57	70	59	59
• Religious groups outside my church	17	23	11	9	11	5	7	3

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Quality of Life

Mainline youth bring to congregational life many of the same issues, challenges, and stresses that American youth in general experience. The church is no more immune to current adolescent realities than are schools. In building effective youth educational programs it is crucial to understand these dimensions of adolescent life. Figure 15 presents certain quality of life indicators. Several overall conclusions follow.

- Most adolescents in our churches are relatively uninvolved in service to other people, an experience which can serve not only as one antidote to at-risk behavior but can also be an important opportunity for spiritual growth.
- Feelings of sadness and depression are frequent for all youth, peaking among 9th and 10th grade females. Note also the high percentage of 9th and 10th grade females reporting that "I needed help but had no one to turn to."
- Two congregation-related indicators are lower than we might hope. Less than one-half of mainline youth report that they "learned something important at my church," 10 or more times in the last year, and less than a third report that "I felt the care and support of an adult in my church," 10 or more times in the last year.
- Alcohol use is a common experience in all adolescent age groups, with 42 percent of boys and 46 percent of girls claiming to have drunk to the point of intoxication at least once in the previous year.
- Among those 11th and 12th graders who continue to affiliate with mainline denominations, a number of "problem" behaviors are reported more often by girls than boys, including marijuana use and sexual activity.

Figure 16 defines a 10-point at-risk index and lists the percentages of youth by denomination for whom 1 or more, or 3 or more, of the 10 indicators are true. The percentage of all mainline youth with at least one at-risk indicator increases from 66 percent of 7th and 8th graders to 80 percent of 11th and 12th graders. No denomination is immune from these significant trends.

We will see in the next two sections that many congregations do not address these adolescent realities in particularly powerful or significant ways. Only a minority, for example, place high emphasis on service to others, sexuality education, or chemical education. By missing these opportunities to connect faith to life, congregations may thwart the development of faith and loyalty.

Figure 15. Quality of Life Indicators: Mainline Youth, by Grade and Gender

	Grades 7-8		Grades 9-10		Grades 11-12	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
3 hours or more, last month						
Donated time helping people who are poor, hungry, or sick	15	17	8	15	8	20*
Donated time in your town or city helping children, youth, or families	27	32	13	34*	16	31
Helped friends or neighbors with problems they have	35	58	38	64	47	65*
Spent time promoting social justice or peace	12	13*	8	10	6	13*
10 times or more, last 12 months						
Felt really proud of yourself	75*	54	60	65	73	70
Felt very sad or depressed	48	62	58	73*	57	66
Felt the care and support of another adult in your church	17	19	19	32	28	35*
Learned something important at your church	36	45*	36	34	34	44
Did something nice for someone at your school	31	50	43	54	56	61*
Had a conversation with someone of a different race than you are	47	44	57	60	96*	69
Felt like no one loved you	17	24	8	27*	8	22
Needed help but had no one to turn to	3	22	8	26*	5	12
Once or more, last 12 months						
Thought about killing yourself	19	37	38	54*	46	42
Stole something from a store	17	20	23*	7	22	12
Cheated on a test at school	57	61	79*	69	72	72
Hit or beat up someone	66*	44	62	39	37	23
Drank alcohol while alone or with friends	21	25	60	46	70*	69
Got drunk (i.e., 5 drinks in a row)	7	7	37	23	42	46*
Used marijuana	7	1	6	4	15	22*
Used cocaine	2	1	1	<1	2	3*
Have had sexual intercourse, 1 or more times	9	2	13	16	23	37*
Have had sexual intercourse, 6 or more times	<1	<1	7	3	10	23*
Have never had sexual intercourse	91	98*	87	84	77	63

* Highest percentage of six grade and gender combinations

Figure 16. At-risk Index: Mainline and Southern Baptist Youth, by Grade

Listed below are ten at-risk indicators, each of which potentially compromise a young person's well-being. While many adolescents survive these departures from desirable behavior, a significant and growing percentage of American youth do not fully escape the long-term scars these behaviors can inflict. The ten **at-risk indicators** are:

Depression: Felt sad or depressed, 20 or more times, last 12 months

Suicide: Thought about suicide, once or more, last 12 months

Alcohol use: Drank alcohol, six or more times, last 12 months

Binge drinking: Got drunk (5 or more drinks in a row), three or more times, last 12 months

Marijuana use: Used marijuana, three or more times, last 12 months

Cocaine use: Used cocaine, once or more, last 12 months

Aggression: Hit or beat up someone, six or more times, last 12 months

Theft: Shoplifted three or more times, last 12 months

School: Got into trouble at school three or more times, last 12 months

Sexual intercourse: Have had sexual intercourse, once or more

	<i>OC</i> (%)	<i>ELCA</i> (%)	<i>PC</i> (%)	<i>UCC</i> (%)	<i>UMC</i> (%)	<i>SBC</i> (%)
Percentage reporting one or more At-risk Indicators						
Grades 7 and 8	62	70	74	68	64	64
Grades 9 and 10	70	82	74	80	74	73
Grades 11 and 12	81	80	77	71	80	70
Percentage reporting three or more At-risk Indicators						
Grades 7 and 8	17	25	25	28	9	11
Grades 9 and 10	25	29	29	24	40	26
Grades 11 and 12	38	54	39	27	39	19

IV.

The Power of Christian Education

Great variability across individuals occurs in faith maturity and loyalty. Are there discernable differences in biography, or in congregational life, that distinguish those with greater faith maturity and loyalty from those reporting less?

To address this issue, we constructed the survey instruments to measure each of the factors listed in the models below.

Biographical Characteristics

- *Family religiousness*, including the practices of mother and father, the degree of conversation about faith with parents, and family religious practices, for ages 3-4, 5-12, and 13-18
- Amount of *church involvement* across one's lifetime
- Amount of *involvement in formal Christian education* at a church across one's lifetime
- The *religiousness of best friends* (and spouse, for adults) across one's lifetime
- The degree to which one experienced the care and support of other members at a church (*Caring Church*) across one's lifetime
- The amount of involvement in religious organizations and events outside of church (*Non-church Religious Activity*) across one's lifetime
- The frequency with which one was involved in giving help to others (*Serving Others*) across one's lifetime
- Age
- Gender
- Geographical region
- Income
- Education

Characteristics of the Congregation One Attends

- Quality of *worship*
- Degree to which one's congregation has a *climate of warmth* (friendliness, hospitality, openness to diversity)
- Degree to which one's congregation has a *thinking climate* (encourages questions, expects people to learn, challenges thinking)
- Degree to which members support, care for, and love each other (*Caring Church*)
- Degree to which one's congregation has a *service orientation* (i.e., getting members involved in helping others locally, nationally, or globally)
- The average degree of *faith maturity and loyalty* among adults and youth in the congregation
- The *quality of the Christian education program* (i.e., the degree to which the formal educational program embodies a series of effectiveness factors described in the next chapter)
- The congregation's *denomination*
- The congregation's *size*

The major finding is that the Christian education factors consistently and powerfully rise to the top. That is, persons toward the higher end of the faith maturity and loyalty indices tend to be particularly distinguished by their connection to Christian education.

The Role of Religious Biography

As shown in Figure 17, factors with the two most powerful connections to faith maturity for youth are family religiousness and lifetime exposure to formal Christian education. Faith maturity also increases as others of these experiences increase, but not as strongly. These more modest relationships include lifetime church involvement, the religiousness of best friends, the lifetime experience of a caring church, lifetime involvement in serving others, and non-church religious activities. All of these factors, then, appear to promote greater faith maturity, with family and Christian education at the very top.¹

Age and gender have weaker connections to faith maturity than any of the factors listed above. And there is a rather minor connection to geographical region.²

Of the two strongest connections to faith maturity, family religiousness is slightly more important than lifetime exposure to Christian education. The particular family experiences most tied to greater faith maturity are the frequency with which an adolescent talked with mother and father about faith, the frequency of family devotions, and the frequency with which parents and children together were involved in efforts, formal or informal, to help other people. Each of these family experiences is more powerful than the frequency with which an adolescent sees his or her parents engage in religious behavior like church attendance.

Similar findings hold for adults (Figure 18), except that lifetime church involvement replaces family religiousness in the "strong relationships" section. Again, we see that one of the two strongest connections to faith maturity is lifetime involvement in Christian education.³ Age, gender, income, and education have relatively weak relationships to faith maturity. Faith maturity rises with age and is greater for females; it declines slightly as income and education rise.

In summary, for both adults and youth the amount of involvement in Christian education is strongly tied to greater faith maturity. It is not the only factor that matters, but it is particularly strong in its connection to faith.

Congregational Factors

What is it about congregational life that matters for faith maturity and loyalty? Adult averages for the faith maturity and loyalty scales are listed in Figure 19. All averages within a category tend to occur in a narrow range (for example, faith maturity by denomination ranges only from 4.50 to 4.93). Note that denomination, size, and region matter less for faith and loyalty than the dynamics of congregational life.⁴ This is important news because denomination, size, and region cannot be altered. All of the congregational factors that **do** matter are alterable. Hence, any congregation — regardless of demographics — has the potential to increase its impact on faith and loyalty.

**Figure 17. The Role of Religious Biography in Faith
Maturity: Youth**

Each of the factors listed below has a significant relationship to the level of faith maturity among adolescents. That is, the greater the factor, the greater the faith maturity. The factors, however, differ in the intensity of the relationship: Some are strong, some modest, some weak.

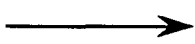
The Biographical Factors That Predict
the Faith Maturity of Youth

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS



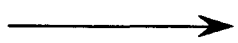
Family Religiousness, *lifetime*
Christian Education Involvement, *lifetime*

MODEST RELATIONSHIPS



Church Involvement, *lifetime*
Friends' Religiousness
Caring Church, *lifetime*
Non-Church Religious Activity, *lifetime*
Serving Others, *lifetime*

WEAK RELATIONSHIPS



Age (grades 7-8 and 11-12 higher
than grades 9-10)
Gender (females higher)
Region (South and North Central higher;
Northeast and West lower)

Figure 18. The Role of Religious Biography in Faith Maturity: Adults

Each of the factors listed below has a significant relationship to the level of faith maturity among adults: the greater the factor, the greater the faith maturity. However, the factors vary in the degree of their relationship to faith maturity, as shown below.

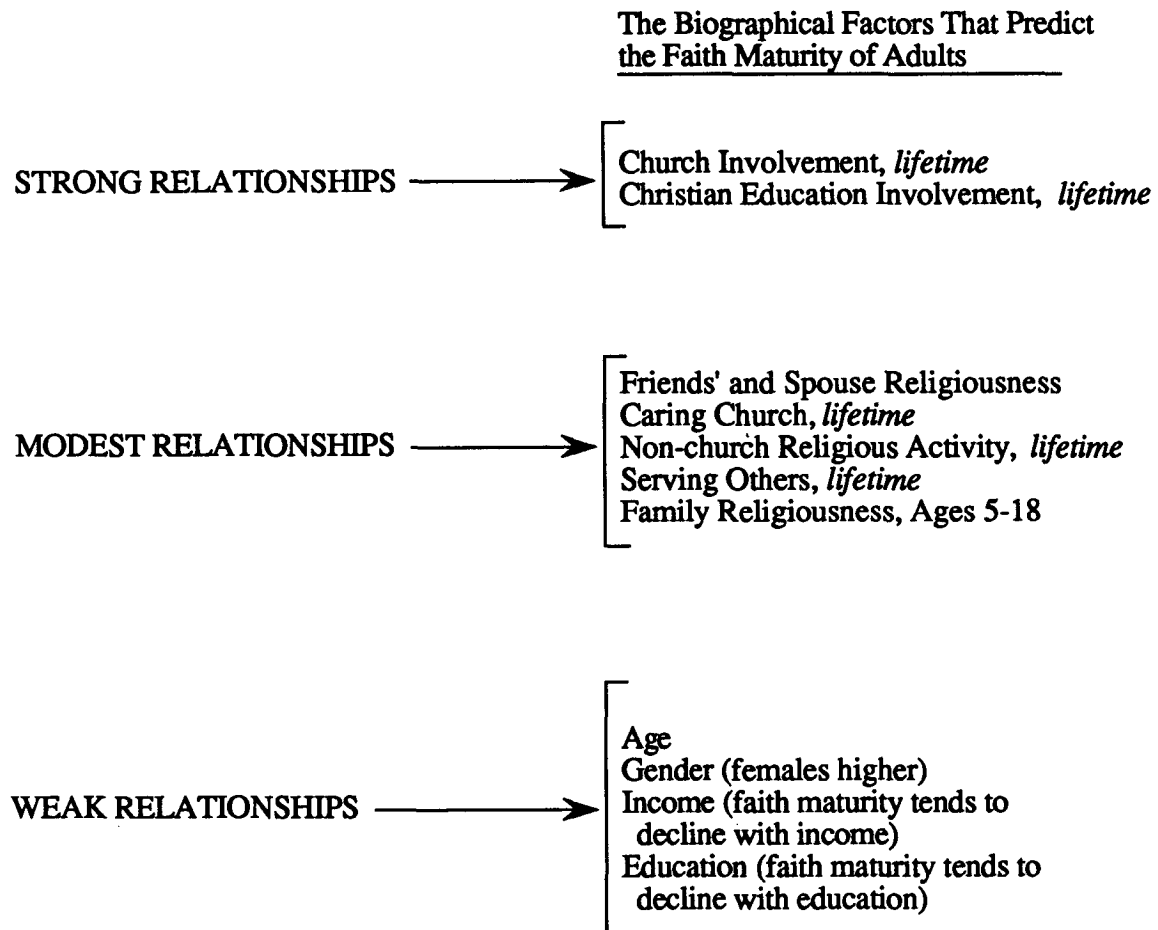


Figure 19. Adult Faith and Loyalty: By Denomination, Congregation Size, and Region

	<i>Faith Maturity</i>		<i>Growth in Faith Maturity, Last 2-3 Years</i>		<i>Congregational Loyalty</i>		<i>Denominational Loyalty</i>	
	1 = low, 7 = high		1 = low, 5 = high		1 = low, 5 = high		1 = low, 5 = high	
Averages by 6 denominations, in rank order	SBC	4.93	SBC	3.80	SBC	4.40	SBC	4.32
	UMC	4.66	UMC	3.42	UMC	4.31	CC	4.11
	CC	4.64	PCUSA	3.40	CC	4.30	ELCA	4.04
	PCUSA	4.64	CCC	3.38	UCC	4.24	UMC	4.01
	UCC	4.56	ELCA	3.28	PCUSA	4.18	PCUSA	3.89
	ELCA	4.50	UCC	3.24	ELCA	4.03	UCC	3.80
Averages by congregation size, in rank order: 5 mainline denominations combined	201-500	4.69	501-1000	3.41	1000+	4.27	1-200	4.05
	1000+	4.67	1-200	3.39	1-200	4.27	501-1000	3.95
	501-1000	4.66	1000+	3.38	201-500	4.26	1000+	3.92
	1-200	4.60	201-500	3.36	501-1000	4.21	201-500	3.91
Averages by region, in rank order: 5 mainline denominations combined	South	4.68	South	3.45	South	4.35	South	4.04
	Northeast	4.68	West	3.36	Northeast	4.26	West	3.99
	West	4.60	Northeast	3.36	West	4.24	NC*	3.98
	NC*	4.58	NC*	3.36	NC*	4.18	Northeast	3.93

NOTE: All averages within a category tend to occur in a narrow range (e.g., congregation size on faith maturity varies only from 4.60 to 4.69). Overall, denomination, size, and region have very weak relationships to faith and loyalty.

* North Central

For both youth and adults (Figures 20 and 21), the power of Christian education is again clear. On all three scales (growth in faith maturity, the two forms of loyalty), the quality of the Christian education program rises to the top.⁵ The greater the quality of Christian education (with quality meaning the degree to which the program embodies the effectiveness factors listed in the next chapter), the more members report loyalty and growth in mature faith. Though growth in faith and loyalty also rise with all the factors listed under "modest" relationships, they increase the most with an increase in the quality of Christian education.

In the last decade, institutions have placed a great deal of emphasis on promoting a climate of warmth. This research suggests that congregational warmth is related to faith growth and loyalty. But it is important to note that in the cases of growth in faith maturity and denominational loyalty, a thinking climate rivals warmth for impact.

Although we find that the quality of formal Christian education is powerful, a case can also be made for the power of informal education. In congregational life, people learn the faith in a variety of ways. Often it comes through informal patterns of interaction. Thus we note that warmth, caring, and service, in combination, contribute to growth and loyalty.

In summary, Christian education matters. We see its power in the area of both life biographies and current congregational life. And we see it in both faith maturity and loyalty. The practical implication is clear: If a congregation seeks to strengthen its impact on faith and loyalty, involving members of all ages in quality Christian education is essential.

Explaining National Findings on Faith and Loyalty

Figures 22-26 help to explain why faith maturity and loyalty among adults and adolescents are not as strong as they might be. They document how well the biographical and congregational factors associated with faith and loyalty are actually present in the lives of individuals and in congregations.

Figure 22 shows that many youth lack some of the biographical factors linked to faith maturity, particularly conversation with one's father about faith at ages 13-15, family devotions, family helping projects, experiencing a caring church, and service to others. These "deficits" are also evident among adults (Figure 23), with the added finding that only a small percentage of adults were active in Christian education during their 20's and 30's.

Figures 22 and 23 provide a number of program clues for Christian education. Since family, friends, service, and receiving care are all important for promoting faith, programming efforts to increase these experiences will pay rich dividends. These efforts might include teaching parents skills necessary to promote the faith of children, teaching adults and youth how to show care and concern to others, and introducing meaningful, structured opportunities to serve others.

Although we do not know to what degree childhood memories are influenced by aging, on face value Figure 24 raises a new concern. Some of the key biographical ingredients related to faith maturity are reported most by adults 70 and older. This finding is particularly true for memories of the teenage years (13-18). The pattern suggests, pending further research, that since World War II, religious socialization has not been as strong as it

was for those born between 1900 and 1920. It is a tentative point, but one that may help to explain the current conditions of faith and loyalty.

Figure 25 documents the degree to which mainline youth and adults experience congregational characteristics that have significant links to faith and loyalty. The three areas of congregational life that receive particularly low ratings are **thinking climate**, **caring church**, and **service to others**. Again, as these increase, so does faith maturity and loyalty.

Perhaps of greatest significance are the findings on Christian education involvement (Figure 26). We noted earlier that lifelong involvement with Christian education is a key factor in both faith maturity and loyalty. Active involvement in Christian education is particularly weak at grades 10-12 and during adulthood. If nothing matters more than Christian education, then the weakest link in promoting faith and loyalty occurs here -- a failure to draw adolescents and adults into the sphere of Christian education.

A Final Word About Denominational Differences

At a number of points in this report and the companion denomination-specific reports, denominational differences have been downplayed. In the larger context, denomination is a fairly weak influence on faith and loyalty. Nevertheless, though denominational differences are weak, it is useful to address whether these small differences are indeed real differences, or whether they are due to problems in sampling. Could it be, for example, that the slightly greater faith maturity and loyalty seen in the Southern Baptist Convention is due to the fact that the congregational response rate for this denomination was relatively low? This introduces the possibility that the Southern Baptist Convention sample is biased to congregations that are particularly strong in faith maturity and loyalty. And could it be that because the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has the best response rate that its findings are affected by inclusion of some struggling congregations whose counterparts in other denominations declined participation?

Although we cannot know for sure, this is another reason, in addition to the empirical one, to minimize denominational differences. However, certain patterns in the data suggest that the denominational findings may have validity. Again, this is **suggestive**, not **conclusive**. Figure 27 displays some denominational differences in the biographical and congregational factors that matter for faith maturity and loyalty. If they are real differences (even though slight), we should see parallel differences in the background and congregational factors that matter. To a certain extent, these parallel patterns emerge, particularly in characteristics of congregational life. Southern Baptist Convention adults, for example, are higher on "climate: warmth," "climate: thinking," and "caring church" than the other denominations, while Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adults tend to give relatively low marks in these areas.

Ultimately, this project says more about the common realities facing denominations than differences. As we review all the data on biographical and congregational factors that matter for faith and loyalty, no denomination can claim that all the key elements are in place. A look at any of the elements connected with faith and loyalty — whether family religiousness, congregational climate, the caring church, involvement in Christian education, or effectiveness in Christian education — reveals that each of the six denominations has great but untapped potential to increase its impact on faith maturity and loyalty.

Figure 20. The Role of the Congregation in Promoting Faith and Loyalty: Youth

FAITH AND LOYALTY OF YOUTH			
	<i>Growth in Faith Maturity</i>	<i>Congregational Loyalty</i>	<i>Denominational Loyalty</i>
STRONG RELATIONSHIPS →	Quality of Formal Christian Education	Quality of Formal Christian Education	Quality of Formal Christian Education
		Caring Church: Current	
MODEST RELATIONSHIPS →	Climate: Thinking	Climate: Warmth	Climate: Thinking
	Climate: Warmth	Climate: Thinking	Climate: Warmth
	Quality of Worship	Quality of Worship	Quality of Worship
	Caring Church: Current	Service to Others	Caring Church: Current
	Service to Others	Loyalty of Peers and Adults	Service to Others
	Faith Maturity of Peers		Loyalty of Peers and Adults
WEAK RELATIONSHIPS →	Denomination	Denomination	Denomination
	Congregation Size	Congregation Size	Congregation Size

**Factor 21. The Role of the Congregation in Promoting
Faith and Loyalty: Adults**
FAITH AND LOYALTY OF ADULTS

	<i>Growth in Faith Maturity</i>	<i>Congregational Loyalty</i>	<i>Denominational Loyalty</i>
STRONG RELATIONSHIPS →	Quality of Formal Christian Education	Quality of Formal Christian Education Climate: Warmth	Quality of Formal Christian Education
MODEST RELATIONSHIPS →	Climate: Thinking Climate: Warmth Quality of Worship Caring Church: Current Caring Church: Current Service to Others Faith Maturity of Peers	Climate: Thinking Quality of Worship Caring Church: Current Service to Others Loyalty of Peers	Climate: Thinking Quality of Worship Caring Church: Current Service to Others Loyalty of Peers
WEAK RELATIONSHIPS →	Denomination Congregation Size	Denomination Congregation Size	Climate: Warmth Denomination Congregation Size

Figure 22. Biographical Deficits in Religious Socialization: Youth 16-18

	<i>Youth, Ages 16-18 (%)</i>
Family	
Talked to mother about faith or God, 5-12: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	38
Talked to mother about faith or God, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	35
Talked to father about faith or God, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	56
Talked to other relatives about faith or God, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	63
Had family devotions, 3-5: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	54
Had family devotions, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	64
Had family projects to help others, 5-12: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	66
Had family projects to help others, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	63
Friends	
Talked to best friends about faith or God, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	47
Caring Church	
Experienced caring adults at church, 5-12: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	43
Experienced caring adults at church, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	47
Experienced caring youth at church, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	41
Service to Others	
Participated in projects to help other people, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	47
Participated in projects to promote social justice or peace, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	47

Figure 23. Biographical Deficits in Religious Socialization: Adults

	<i>Adults (%)</i>
Family	
Talked to mother about faith or God, 5-12: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	26
Talked to mother about faith or God, 13-15: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	29
Talked to father about faith or God, 13-18: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	58
Talked to other relatives about faith or God, 13-18: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	51
Had family devotions, 13-18: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	60
Had family projects to help others, 5-12: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	44
Had family projects to help others, 13-18 % <i>Never or Rarely</i>	45
Friends	
Talked to best friends about faith or God, 13-18: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	35
Talked to best friends about faith or God, 20-29: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	60
Talked to best friends about faith or God, 30-39: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	48
Service to Others	
Participated in projects to help other people, 13-18: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	40
Participated in projects to promote social justice or peace, 13-18: <i>Never or Rarely</i>	82
Christian Education	
Active in Christian education at a church, ages 5-12	76
Active in Christian education at a church, ages 13-18	73
Active in Christian education at a church, ages 20-29	21
Active in Christian education at a church, ages 30-39	37

**Figure 24. Biographical Assets for Promoting Faith
Maturity: Mainline Adults, by Age**

	CURRENT AGE					
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 +
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
(H denotes highest, L denotes lowest)						
When 5-12 years old, often...						
Talked with mother about faith	35 ^H	17 ^L	17 ^L	20	19	28
Talked with father about faith	5 ^L	12	10	6	12	15 ^H
Had family devotions	19	18	10	9 ^L	21 ^H	19
Had family projects to help other people	9	11	14	8 ^L	18	19 ^H
Attended Christian education classes/events	85 ^H	83	70 ^L	79	72	73
When 13-18 years old, often...						
Talked with mother about faith	17	17	12 ^L	13	15	33 ^H
Talked with father about faith	10	16	7	6 ^L	14	17 ^H
Had family devotions	14	12	9 ^L	10	21 ^H	15
Had family projects to help other people	11	10 ^L	13	10 ^L	20	22 ^H
Attended worship services	68 ^L	71	79	78	72	82 ^H
Participated in church youth group	61	56 ^L	68	68	58	71 ^H
Attended Christian education classes/events	64 ^L	72	71	79	68	81 ^H
Felt that adults at church cared about me	49	46	51	40 ^L	55	59 ^H
Read the Bible, prayed by myself	34	21 ^L	21 ^L	28	27	44 ^H
Felt that other youth at church cared about me	26 ^L	39	44	37	41	44 ^H
Read/studied about Christian faith	20 ^L	33	33	32	28	40 ^H
Went to church camp	21	23	27 ^H	20	19	4 ^L
Participated in church choir or musical group	37	37	44 ^H	39	38	27 ^L

Figure 25. Congregational Factors Related to Faith and Loyalty: Mainline Youth and Adults

Below are listed representative indicators of five areas of congregational life related to faith maturity and loyalty. The more that each of these factors exists in a congregation, the greater the growth in faith maturity and loyalty.

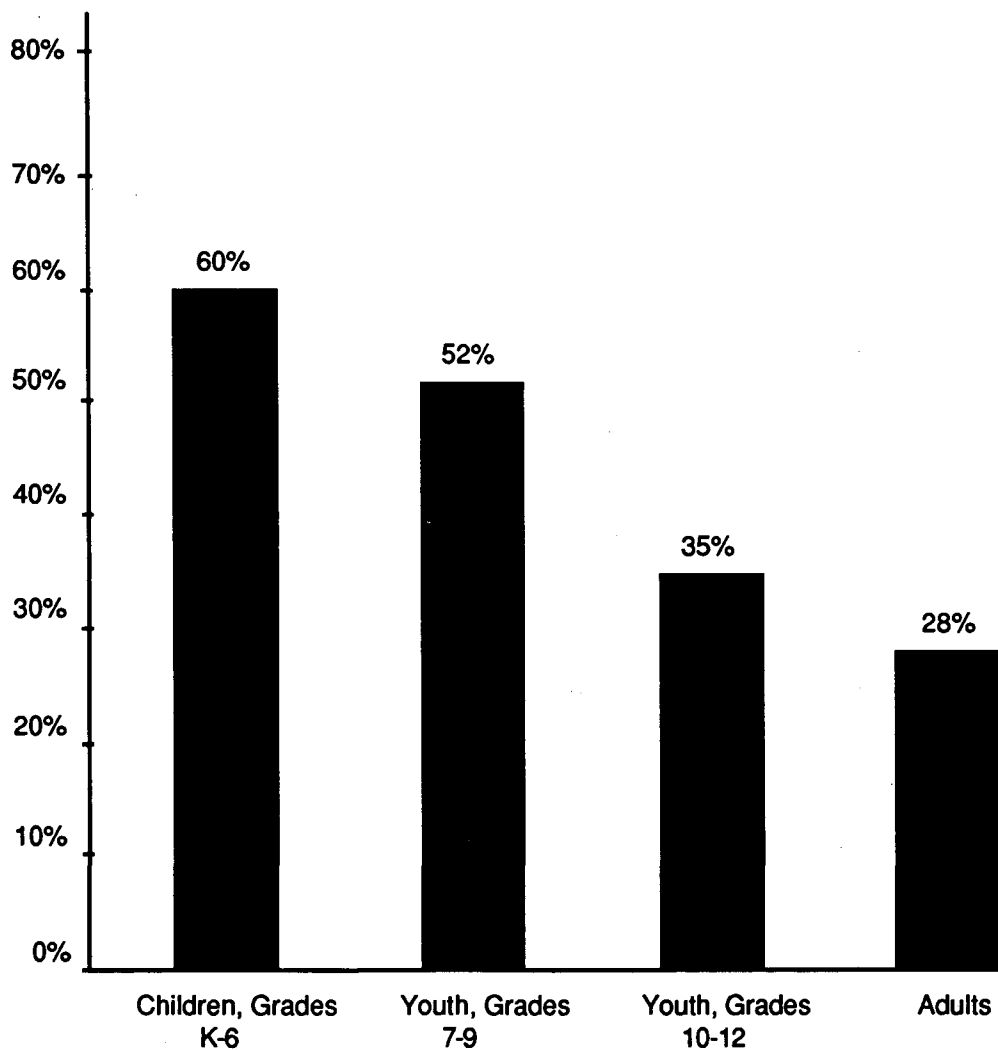
MAINLINE YOUTH AND ADULTS REPORTING THE CHARACTERISTIC		
	Youth (%)	Adults (%)
Climate: Thinking*		
My church challenges my thinking	42	46
My church encourages questions	45	40
Climate: Warmth*		
My church feels warm	63	73
Caring Church (current)		
Other youth at my church care about me (<i>Experienced often</i>)	38	—
Other adults at my church care about me (<i>Experienced often</i>)	—	57
Service to Others**		
Congregation gets you involved in helping other people in your city	41	—
Congregation gets you involved in helping people who are poor or hungry	36	—
Congregation gets members involved in community service	—	43
Congregation gets members involved in peacemaking and social justice activities	—	14
Congregation helps members become more loving and compassionate	—	57
Worship**		
Congregation provides spiritually--uplifting worship services (<i>Good or excellent</i>)		70
Congregation provides spiritually--uplifting worship services (<i>Excellent</i>)		29

* Percentages combine "true" and "very true" responses

** Percentages rating congregation as "good" or "excellent"

Figure 26. Congregational Involvement in Christian Education: Rates for Mainline Adults, Youth, and Children

The percentages charted below refer to the average rates of active involvement in Christian education for the 493 mainline congregations.



AVERAGE CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT RATES

Figure 27. Denominational Differences in Biographical and Congregational Factors Related to Faith and Loyalty: Adults

	ADULTS					
	CC (%)	ELCA (%)	PCUSA (%)	UCC (%)	UMC (%)	SBC (%)
Religious Biography						
<i>(Never or Rarely)</i>						
Talked to mother about faith or God, 5-12	30	27	28	29	25	27
Talked to mother about faith or God, 13-18	30	28	30	32	29	27
Talked to father about faith or God, 13-18	60	59	58	60	57	50
Had family devotions, 13-18	65	65	63	67	58	59
Had family helping projects, 13-18	48	50	50	47	43	49
Current Congregational Life						
My church feels warm*	77	66	75	75	73	76
My church challenges my thinking*	49	36	48	50	48	61
My church encourages questions*	45	32	45	41	40	62
Often experience that other adults at my church care about me	61	38	55	55	60	72
Congregation gets members involved in community service**	42	32	44	46	44	30
Congregation gets members involved in peacemaking and social justice activities**	11	9	21	15	13	11
Congregation helps members become more loving and compassionate**	59	42	58	51	59	68
Congregation provides spiritually-uplifting worship services**	72	62	64	66	73	76
Percentage active in Christian education	35	23	31	22	29	49

*Percentage responding "true" or "very true"

**Percentage rating congregation as "good" or "excellent"

V.

The Nature of Christian Education Effectiveness

We have learned that involving adults and youth in effective Christian education is essential if congregations are to increase faith maturity and loyalty. The key question now is: What makes Christian education effective? Does content matter? process? leadership?

Both the survey results and the site visits to effective congregations give strong clues as to the elements of Christian education that, when present, are linked to growth in faith maturity.¹ For both adults (Figure 28) and youth (Figure 29), twelve findings about effectiveness are important:

- The effectiveness factors are additive. That is, the more a congregation has them in place in its adult or youth program, the greater the growth in faith maturity.
- The effectiveness factors are associated with growth in faith maturity even though the average time adults and youth spend in formal Christian education programs and events is fairly minimal. Even when youth or adults spend as little as 15 to 20 hours per year in Christian education, exposure to effective programs produce greater faith growth than exposure to less effective programs.
- Involvement in effective Christian education has as positive a benefit for adults as it does for adolescents, in part because faith development is best understood as a lifelong process.
- For both adults and adolescents, effectiveness factors can be grouped into categories: teacher characteristics, pastor characteristics, educational process, educational content, peer interest in learning, and goals/objectives. These categories are reminiscent of the effectiveness literature on academic learning. There, too, empirical findings show that the same categories have an effect on achievement. Even the category of pastor characteristics applies if we substitute "principal" for pastor.
- For both adults and adolescents, effective Christian education programs are associated not only with greater faith maturity, but also with greater loyalty to congregation and denomination.

- The importance of educational process, in tandem with educational content, suggests that the effective program not only teaches in the classical sense of transmitting insight and knowledge, but also allows insight to emerge from the crucible of experience. (Experience can be fostered by either reflection and interpretation of personal religious experience or involvement in the faith stories of others.) Both ways of learning are powerful, and the two combinations produce stronger growth in faith than either one alone.
- Effective programs for adults and adolescents include both strong pastoral leadership and pastoral involvement.
- Effective programs for adults and adolescents require strong educational expertise on the part of teachers, as represented in both Figures 28 and 29 by the factor "knows educational theory and methods."
- Effective content for both the adult and adolescent programs blends biblical knowledge and insight with significant engagement in the major life issues each age group faces. To a certain extent, these life issues have a value component in which one is called upon to make decisions. For adolescents, the issues include sexuality, chemical use, and friendship. For adults, they include global, political, and social issues, and issues related to cultural diversity.
- It is significant that in neither the adult nor adolescent lists of effectiveness is quantity of programs visible. Though we looked hard at the issue of program quantity, it does not appear to matter in any systematic way. This suggests that effective Christian education can be transmitted through a small number of programs and events, as long as, in combination, they have effective leadership, process, and content. Accordingly, what matters is how things are done rather than numbers or range of programs. This finding should be especially encouraging to the small congregation.
- Clear mission and clear learning objectives matter. They have power, in part, because the process of determining and evaluating them builds shared purpose and a sense of team.
- And, finally, for both adolescents and adults, the faith maturity of teachers matters. The greater the faith maturity of teachers, the greater the growth in faith maturity of participants.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Educational Programs

One way to evaluate the health and vitality of congregations' Christian education programs is to look at the extent to which these effectiveness factors are in place (Figures 30 and 31).

On only a few of the effectiveness factors can we say that most congregations are successful. In adult education, these factors include emphasis on biblical knowledge and understanding (74%), encouragement to raise doctrinal and theological questions (71%), pastor commitment (75%), and pastor expertise in theory and practice (83%).

Figure 28. Effectiveness in Christian Education for Adults: The Ideal

Research findings based on both the survey and site visit methods show that the way *Christian education is done* matters as much as, if not more than, any other area of congregational life. Listed below are a number of characteristics of Christian education programming for adults, each of which is positively associated with growth in mature faith for those who participate in Christian education activities.

Teachers

- Are high in mature faith
- Know educational theory and methods for adults

Pastor

- Has high commitment to educational program for adults
- Devotes significant hours to adult Christian education program
- Knows educational theory and practice of Christian education for adults

Educational process

- Emphasizes building understanding of faith applied to political and social issues and understanding of oppression and injustice
- Emphasizes life experiences as occasion for spiritual insight
- Creates sense of community in which people help each other develop faith and values
- Emphasizes the natural unfolding of faith and recognizes each person's faith journey as unique
- Strongly encourages independent thinking and questioning

Educational content

- Emphasizes biblical knowledge and understanding
- Emphasizes multicultural awareness
- Emphasizes global awareness and understanding
- Emphasizes moral decision making

Peer involvement

- Has high percentage of adults active in Christian education

Goals

- Has clear mission statement for adult education
- Has clear learning objectives

Figure 29. Effectiveness in Christian Education for Youth: The Ideal

Research findings based on both the survey and site visit methods show that the *way Christian education is done* matters as much as, if not more than, any other area of congregational life. Listed below are a number of characteristics of Christian education programming for adolescents, each of which is positively associated with growth in mature faith for those who participate in Christian education activities.

Teachers

- High in mature faith
- Care about students
- Know educational theory and methods for adolescents

Pastor

- Is highly committed to the education program for youth
- Devotes significant hours to youth program
- Knows educational theory and practice of Christian education for youth

Educational process

- Emphasizes intergenerational contact
- Emphasizes life experiences as occasion for spiritual insight
- Creates sense of community in which people help each other develop their faith and values
- Emphasizes the natural unfolding of faith and recognizes each person's faith journey as unique
- Strongly encourages independent thinking and questioning
- Effectively helps youth to apply faith to daily decisions

Educational content

- Emphasizes education about human sexuality
- Emphasizes education about chemicals (alcohol and other drugs))
- Emphasizes involving youth in service projects
- Emphasizes moral values and moral decision making
- Emphasizes responsibility for poverty and hunger
- Effectively teaches the Bible
- Effectively teaches core theological concepts
- Effectively teaches youth about how to make friends or be a good friend
- Effectively helps youth develop concern for other people

Peer involvement

- Has high percentage of 10th to 12th graders active in Christian education

Parent involvement

- Involves parents in program decisions and planning

Goals

- Has clear mission statement
- Has clear learning objectives

More troublesome are adult program effectiveness factors in the areas of teacher knowledge of theory and practice (44%), most of the educational process factors, most of the educational content factors (including multicultural awareness, global understanding, and moral decision making), peer involvement, and mission/objectives. The average success rate for the 17 factors listed in Figure 30 is only 46 percent for the five mainline denominations.

Of the 25 effectiveness factors for youth (Figure 31), only four factors are in place in two-thirds or more of congregations. These factors are teacher caring, pastor commitment, pastor knowledge, and content emphasis on teaching church beliefs.

In common with the adult program, we see a lack of effectiveness in the areas of teacher knowledge about theory and practice, educational process, educational content, peer involvement, and mission/objectives. The average success rate for the 25 factors in Figure 31 is 47 percent for the mainline denominations.

The percentage of teachers with high faith maturity (defined as the percent in the integrated faith type) is of concern. The integrated faith percentages for teachers is as follows:

Grade K-6 teachers	32%
Grade 7-12 teachers	40%
Adult education teachers	55%

In part, these percentages are due to differences in teacher age. Grade K-6 teachers tend to be in the 30-39 age range, grade 7-12 teachers in the 30-39 and 40-49 age range, and adult teachers in the 50-59 and 60-69 age range.

In neither program are pastor involvement rates particularly strong, with involvement greater in adult education (62%) than youth education (51%).

Effective educational programs also require a set of basic administrative and governance procedures listed in Figure 32. These areas include teacher training, teacher faith formation, planning, governing body support, pastor training, evaluation, and teacher recognition. One other factor we place here is coordination of study across age groups (where all ages study the same issues). This latter program feature has the advantage of giving parents and children common reference points for conversation.

Other than for teacher recognition, several evaluation strategies, and annual teacher in-service training, these foundational factors are not particularly prevalent. The average success rate across the 18 factors in Figure 32 is 49.6 percent.

In review, the good news is that most of the factors making for effectiveness in education are within the control of congregations. With the right support, commitment, and energy, effectiveness can be greatly enhanced.

The gap is large, however, between the real and the ideal. One problem is the deeply entrenched proclivity for youth and adults to avoid Christian education. The other is

the quality of education programs. There could well be a link between the two: Increased effectiveness may ultimately increase involvement.

Christian education in a majority of congregations is a tired enterprise in need of reform. Often out-of-touch with adult and adolescent needs, it experiences increasing difficulty in finding and motivating volunteers, faces general disinterest among its "clients," and employs models and procedures that have changed little over time.

Effective Christian education has the potential, as much or more than any other congregational influence, to deepen faith, commitment, and loyalty. Its revitalization must therefore move to center stage.

Figure 30. Effectiveness in Christian Education for Adults: The Reality

Given below are the percentages of congregations in each denomination whose educational programs for adults incorporate the essentials of effectiveness listed on the previous page.

	Mainline Total	CC	ELCA	PC	UCC	UMC	SBC
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Teachers							
Teachers are high in mature faith (<i>Demonstrate "Integrated Faith" --see section on faith types</i>)	55	50	49	60	49	65	55
Teachers/leaders know educational theory and practice	44	35	45	36	33	49	29
Pastor							
Pastor shows a deep commitment to Christian education for adults	75	69	79	81	72	73	69
Pastor is involved in doing Christian education	62	61	69	69	65	57	64
Pastor knows theory and practice of Christian education	83	77	83	75	83	85	68
Educational process							
Program emphasizes understanding social, political & cultural contexts of human life	17	12	7	25	20	17	12
Program encourages theological reflection on human experience	61	51	60	61	66	62	35
Program works toward developing a community of faith where people create shared values and rituals	16	12	12	12	14	18	27
Emphasis is placed on the individual's faith journey, respecting uniquenesses	25	25	16	29	16	28	36
Teachers encourage participants to raise doctrinal and theological questions	71	78	71	67	65	73	67
Educational content							
Emphasizes Bible knowledge and understanding	74	75	75	64	62	77	72
Emphasizes multi-cultural awareness and understanding	24	26	15	25	20	26	18
Emphasizes global awareness & understanding	31	25	26	35	35	32	23
Emphasizes moral decision making	44	54	45	43	39	44	64

	<div> <div> Mainline </div> <div> Total </div> </div>	CC	ELCA	PC	UCC	UMC	SBC
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Peer Involvement							
Adult Christian education program involves 60 percent or more of adults in congregation	13	24	8	11	13	13	26
Goals							
Church has a clear mission statement for adults' in Christian education	53	47	45	28	37	66	46
Church has a set of clear learning objectives for adults in Christian education	38	32	40	25	43	32	49

Figure 31. Effectiveness in Christian Education for Youth: The Reality

Given below are the percentages of congregations in each denomination in which the essentials of effectiveness in Christian education are incorporated into the Christian education program for youth.

	<i>Mainline</i> Total (%)	CC (%)	ELCA (%)	PC (%)	UCC (%)	UMC (%)	SBC (%)
Teachers							
Teachers are high in mature faith ¹	40	34	36	38	47	52	36
My teachers and adult leaders care about me	79	80	67	84	67	82	84
Teacher/leaders know educational theory and practice	34	23	35	35	19	37	27
Pastor							
Pastor shows deep commitment to Christian education for youth	73	68	71	79	73	72	69
Pastor involved in doing Christian ed for youth	51	52	68	48	54	46	56
Pastor knows Christian ed theory & practice	80	75	79	66	77	85	61
Educational process							
Church promotes intergenerational contact	20	31	20	20	29	17	28
Program encourages theological reflection on human experience	36	33	36	43	32	34	21
Strong emphasis on community of faith	31	28	34	34	28	29	38
Strong emphasis on spiritual development	47	47	39	48	32	52	58
Leaders encourage raising questions about doctrine and theological ideas	62	59	56	59	59	66	55
Helps apply faith to everyday decisions	49	52	48	53	42	48	73
Educational Content							
Emphasis on sexuality education ²	27	22	12	24	21	31	34
Emphasis on drug and alcohol education ³	20	19	11	17	12	23	36

¹ Percent of teachers or leaders of youth who demonstrate Integrated Faith

² Based on percentage of youth reporting 11 hours or more study of sexuality through the church, lifetime

³ Based on percentage of youth reporting 11 hours or more study of drugs and alcohol through the church, lifetime

	<i>Mainline</i> Total	CC	ELCA	PC	UCC	UMC	SBC
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Emphasis on service projects ⁴	29	25	22	27	25	31	29
Emphasis on moral values & decision-making	60	70	56	56	62	60	73
Emphasis on poverty and hunger ⁵	30	25	21	26	29	33	26
Helps learn about Bible and its meaning for life	66	61	65	64	60	67	83
Teaches church belief about God, Jesus, Bible	74	72	79	70	60	75	81
Help make friends and be a good friend	65	60	61	63	61	67	71
Help develop concern for other people	66	64	60	66	63	67	66
Peer Involvement							
In 10th-12th grades, 60% or more active in youth program	21	33	16	28	24	19	33
Parent Involvement							
Involves parents in program decisions and plans	26	19	12	22	23	32	39
Goals							
Has clear mission statement for Christian education of teenagers	55	37	49	32	32	68	49
Has clear learning objectives for teenagers	38	32	40	25	32	43	49

⁴ Based on percentage of youth reporting 11 hours or more involvement in service projects through the church, lifetime

⁵ Based on percentage of youth reporting 11 hours or more of study of poverty and hunger through the church, lifetime

Figure 32. Foundations Needed for Effective Christian Education

	<i>Mainline Total</i>	<i>CC</i>	<i>ELCA</i>	<i>PC</i>	<i>UCC</i>	<i>UMC</i>	<i>SBC</i>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Teacher Training							
Teachers given in-service training at least annually	78	58	57	80	65	88	75
Teachers given instruction in effective teaching methods at least annually	53	53	42	51	42	59	75
Teachers given instruction in denominational theology and tradition at least annually	21	18	19	20	8	24	46
Teacher Faith Formation							
Teachers gather for spiritual renewal and growth 3 or more times annually	8	11	7	7	5	8	26
Planning							
Teachers meet to discuss goals and objectives at least annually	79	76	77	78	83	79	79
Teachers meet to coordinate and plan, one full day, annually	18	11	8	13	13	24	33
Governing Body Support							
Governing body has thoughtful discussions about Christian education 3 or more times annually	49	48	43	54	41	51	44
Pastor's Training							
Pastor has taken four or more seminary courses in Christian education	28	34	25	19	35	29	56
Pastor has taken three or more days of continuing education over last three years	40	48	41	34	37	40	77
Evaluation							
Teachers evaluated annually	21	23	15	25	16	22	62
Children's program evaluated annually	80	72	82	72	86	81	79
Youth program evaluated annually	81	67	78	76	79	85	85

	<i>Mainline</i> Total (%)	CC (%)	ELCA (%)	PC (%)	UCC (%)	UMC (%)	SBC (%)
Adult program evaluated annually	76	66	67	71	61	84	77
Children's needs and interests studied annually	42	46	19	38	33	51	55
Youth needs and interests studied annually	59	48	37	57	49	69	63
Adult needs and interests studied annually	57	45	47	46	44	67	54
Teacher Recognition							
Teachers are named and given recognition in worship service	87	78	92	85	90	88	85
Coordination of study							
Christian education is coordinated so that all ages study the same issues or Bible passages at the same time (responses include <i>quite a bit</i> and <i>a great deal</i>)	16	12	4	10	13	22	40

VI.

Reflections on Change

Changing the way congregations think about, plan, and implement Christian education programming is a complex task. The successful change strategy will employ several key elements. It will celebrate the power of Christian education and its importance to congregational life. It will encourage both "bottom up" and "top down" change strategies, in which congregations feel empowered to generate change, supported and encouraged by national and judicatory level resources. It will alter the priorities not only of congregations but also of denominational offices and seminaries. It will be a long-term, sustained effort, in which the revitalization of Christian education is held up as an ongoing national priority.

Congregations will need a number of resources to assist them in the revitalization process. Resources may include consciousness-raising and motivational tools to assist governing councils, pastors, and other educators to understand the importance of revitalization and to develop a commitment to change; self-study resources to evaluate the effectiveness of current educational efforts and to identify the needs of children, youth, and adults; planning tools which assist educators in developing a vision for education, clear objectives, and a plan of action; on-going access to relevant innovations in Christian education; regional centers for the training of volunteers and for review of effective curricula; resources to promote the faith formation of teachers; tools to train teachers in the theory and practice of effective education; access to Christian education experts who can counsel congregations on the dynamics of change; and evaluation resources to monitor progress.

For denominational offices to play a much-needed enabling role, Christian education divisions will need a clear mandate for action and cross-division support. This role may require additional funding and staff. Seminaries will need to strengthen Christian education curricula and requirements, assist in the development of regional training centers, and place additional emphasis on continuing education for pastors.

This study suggests a number of challenges and opportunities for Christian education. Those with the greatest faith maturity--ages 70 and older--are an underutilized resource who should be connected in a meaningful, relational way to children, adolescents, and younger adults. Given the power of family religiousness on the faith development of youth, priority should be given to the faith formation of parents and the teaching of faith development skills. Given the importance of faith maturity for teachers, a major challenge is to pay significant attention to the faith formation of those who teach and lead. And Christian educators can--both through their own work and their interaction with other

congregational leaders--support, nurture, and promote a congregational climate marked by warmth and "thinking."

The experience of serving others, through acts of mercy, compassion, or the promotion of social justice, is an important influence on the deepening of faith. The research evidence suggests that many youth and adults are uninvolved in such actions. Some of the best religious education occurs in these moments of giving, of connection, of bonding to others. Service needs to be a cornerstone of educational programming, partly because it is educationally-rich, and ultimately because, as people of faith, we are called to serve.

Two research findings coalesce to suggest that educational emphasis needs to be placed on developing caring skills. One is the commonly-found avoidance of service to others. The other is the relatively low ratings given to how well members show concern and support for each other (**caring church**). A necessary ingredient for both service to others and caring are a set of relational or social skills that make giving both comfortable and natural.

In our 52 site visits to congregations with strengths in Christian education, we observed many of the Christian education effectiveness factors in action. These congregations provide a message of hope to all congregations as they look to new directions.

Take, for instance...

- The congregation in Brooklyn, New York, that has an evaluation system for teachers and classes. The Christian education committee visits every class and on each one prepares an evaluation document that includes student evaluations. The committee, in a supportive fashion, then discusses the document with the teacher. Also, in this congregation, teachers and students share responsibility for learning.
- A Missouri City, Texas, congregation whose goal is to reach out to others. The topics discussed and wrestled with in Christian education classes deal with issues, ethics, and relationships that are important to them and challenge them to look beyond themselves to the struggle of people everywhere.
- The congregation in New Castle, Pennsylvania, where members are trained in skills for caring ministries, with a focus on how to care for other people and how to be effective listeners and visitors.
- A Los Angeles congregation with a leadership development program that undergirds all educational efforts. To be a member of this congregation is to be called into some form of service and to be expected to participate in worship, a fellowship program, and Sunday school. This expectation is true for youth as well as adults.
- The congregation in Baker, Montana, where junior and senior high youth share leadership in a Thursday evening program that deals with issues such as peace, self-esteem, living with one's parents, and values. The programs give opportunity for youth to explore their faith and struggle with problems that concern them, in a supportive atmosphere.
- And a Cincinnati, Ohio, congregation that provides an intentional program of faith formation for its teachers, understanding that their teacher training programs are important but that nurturing teachers in their spiritual development is even more important to the effectiveness of their programs.

The need for change in Christian education parallels, in urgency and complexity, the need for change in public education. A recent review of public school reform efforts occurring since 1985 suggests that schools have taken two different approaches to change.¹ One approach is called "tinkering," in which schools attempt to increase effectiveness by adding one or two new program features without modifying the underlying educational assumptions, structure, and format. The other approach is called "restructuring," in which schools introduce new models of teaching and learning. The report argues that the national effort to reform schools has largely failed because most schools have opted for "tinkering."

Ultimately, each congregation must choose which of these paths to follow. It is not unreasonable to surmise that restructuring will, in the long run, promote the most sustained advances in educational effectiveness. If so, now is the time to dream dreams about the way education should be done, to embrace possibility, to risk innovation, to pray for courage, and to give thanks for the challenge ahead.

Notes

I. Overview of the Study

¹ In obtaining the original sample, each individual denomination randomly sampled 150 congregations, stratified by four size categories: 1-199, 200-499, 500-999, and 1000 or more. Thus, if 4% of a given denomination's congregations had 1000 or more members, then 4% of their sample (6 congregations) would be randomly chosen from congregations of that size. When weighting the data for analysis within denomination, we calculated the likelihood that any given individual would have been selected in a given congregation (based on the total number of individuals in that congregation) and the likelihood that any given congregation would be selected (based on the total number of congregations in that denomination). The product of these two probabilities is the probability that any given individual will be selected out of the entire denomination, which is the appropriate weight, and was used for all within-denomination analyses. When we analyzed across all five mainline denominations, an additional weight was added to insure that each denomination was represented proportional to the number of congregations it had in comparison to the entire group of five.

II. Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Adults

- ¹ Percents combine responses for "often true," "almost always true," and "always true."
- ² Based on the finding that 67% affirm the statement "I believe I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved."
- ³ Each of these themes are measured by 12-item subsets of the mature faith scale. See the Appendix on Measurement Issues for more details.
- ⁴ Category placement was based on median splits for both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. The adult median for vertical was 5.26; for horizontal it was 4.05. All other faith type percentages cited in this report (e.g., for youth and teachers) utilize median splits based on the adult medians.

III. Taking Stock: Faith and Loyalty Among Youth

- ¹ Percentages are average congregational rates for involvement, based on pastors' estimates of the percent of members "who are actively involved in Christian education."

IV. The Power of Christian Education

- ¹ Employing stepwise regression procedures to assess the connection of each model component to faith maturity, R^2 for those components labeled "strong relationship" in Figure 18 are above .30; for "modest relationships," in the range of .10 to .29; and for "weak relationships," below .10. An age and gender model attains an R^2 of .02. The R^2 for all models combined is .49.

² The R^2 for region is .02.

³ The R^2 for "strong" is in the range of .30 to .46 across adult gender and age subgroups, .10 to .29 for "modest," and under .10 for "weak."

⁴ The R^2 for a model including denomination, size, and region is .02 for faith maturity, growth in faith maturity, and congregational loyalty, and .01 for denominational loyalty.

⁵ The regressions were run on the subset of adults and youth who have been members of the same congregation for 4 years or more, and who have at least minimal contact with Christian education (2 hours a month for youth; 11 hours a year for adults). "Strong" refers to R^2 of .30 or greater, "modest" to R^2 of .10 to .29, and "weak" to under .10. The quality of Christian education models included most of the effectiveness factors described in the next section.

V. The Nature of Christian Education Effectiveness

¹ Effectiveness factors are based on four sources of information. In most cases, factors contribute significantly to explaining growth in faith maturity, based on a series of regression analyses involving 16-18 year olds or adults. These are occasionally augmented by site visit findings, regressions based on aggregated data, and correlational findings. The individual-level regressions are based on a data set in which teacher, coordinator, and pastor data is attached to adolescent and adult data records.

VI. Reflections on Change

¹ Shanker, A. (January, 1990). *The End of the Traditional Model of Schooling*. Phi Delta Kappan, 71, 344-357.

APPENDIX

Measurement Issues

Data presented here includes a listing of the items included in the six key measures of this study, as well as information on the reliability of those measures and a discussion of their validity. The six key measures are as follows:

- **Maturity of faith.** This measure contains 38 items, with one item representing each of the 38 indicators conceptualized to be an element of faith maturity. Each of the 38 items is scored from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). The scale score is the mean of completed items. Hence, the scale ranges from 1 (low) to 7 (high). The conceptual framework is listed in Table 1. The 38 items are listed in Table 2.
- **Maturity of faith: The vertical dimension.** These 12 items are a part of the 38-item mature faith index. The scale score is the mean of those 12 items. The scale ranges from 1 (low) to 7 (high). The items are listed in Table 3.
- **Maturity of faith: The horizontal dimension.** This measure is a 12-item subset from the 38-item mature faith index. The scale score is the mean of completed items. The scale ranges from 1 (low) to 7 (high). The items are listed in Table 4.
- **Growth in faith maturity (During the last 2-3 years).** Containing 18 items, this index covers the same dimensions as the faith maturity scale. The response options are rephrased to refer to the change in each faith element occurring "in the last 2-3 years." The scale score is the mean of completed items, and ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The items are listed in Table 5.
- **Denominational loyalty.** This 3 item index ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high) with the scale score constructed as the mean of the three items. The items are listed in Table 6.
- **Congregational loyalty.** This three item index ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high) with the scale score constructed on the mean of the three items. The items are listed in Table 7.

Table 1: Indicators of Mature Christian Faith
--

The person with mature Christian faith:

A. Trusts and believes

1. Sees God as both transcendent and immanent
2. Accepts both the divinity and humanity of Jesus
3. Reconciles God's love and human suffering
4. Accepts God's love as unconditional
5. Experiences God's guidance in daily life

B. Experiences the fruits of faith

6. Feels liberated, set free
7. Experiences meaning and purpose in life
8. Experiences a sense of peace
9. Has a deep sense of personal security
10. Experiences self-acceptance

C. Integrates faith and life

11. Faith informs daily decisions and actions
12. Faith dictates moral principles and guidelines
13. Feels obligation to share personal resources with others
14. Commits life to Jesus
15. Applies faith to political and social issues

D. Seeks spiritual growth

16. Affirms that faith is a journey that necessitates continuing change in belief and meaning
17. Seeks to increase biblical knowledge and understanding
18. Frequently engages in private prayer or meditation
19. Seeks opportunities for spiritual growth

E. Experiences and nurtures faith in community

20. Seeks to nurture the faith of others
21. Shares his/her own faith story
22. Experiences God in interpersonal and social encounters
23. Seeks opportunities for communal prayer and reflection

F. Hold life-affirming values

24. Pursues a healthy lifestyle
25. Feels responsible for promoting human welfare
26. Affirms religious diversity
27. Embraces gender and racial equality
28. Is accepting of other people
29. Affirms the sanctity of creation

G. Advocates social change

30. Is committed to reducing poverty
31. Advocates social and political change to improve human welfare
32. Believes faith demands global concern
33. Believes the church belongs in the public sphere

H. Acts and serves

34. Responds to others with compassion and sensitivity
35. Engages in actions to protect the ecology
36. Devotes time and energy to acts of social service
37. Devotes time and energy to promoting social justice
38. Devotes time and energy to promoting world peace

Table 2: The Mature Faith Index
--

How true are each of these statements for you? Mark one answer for each. Be as honest as possible, describing how true it really is and not how true you would like it to be.

Choose from these responses:

- 1 = Never true
- 2 = Rarely true
- 3 = True once in a while
- 4. = Sometimes true
- 5 = Often true
- 6 = Almost always true
- 7 = Always true

- 85. I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor
- 86. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again
- 87. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day
- 88. I help others with their religious questions and struggles
- 89R. I tend to be critical of other people
- 90. In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs
- 91. My faith helps me know right from wrong
- 92. I do things to help protect the environment
- 93. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible
- 94R. I have a hard time accepting myself
- 95. Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world
- 96. I take excellent care of my physical health
- 97. I am active in efforts to promote social justice
- 98. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually
- 99. I take time for periods of prayer or meditation
- 100. I am active in efforts to promote world peace
- 101. I accept people whose religious beliefs are different from mine
- 102. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world
- 103. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes
- 104R. I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have
- 105. I give significant portions of time and money to help other people
- 106. I speak out for equality for women and minorities
- 107. I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people
- 108. My life is filled with meaning and purpose
- 109R. I do not understand how a loving God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world
- 110R. I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved
- 111. I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis no matter how serious
- 112. I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world
- 113. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues
- 114. My life is committed to Jesus Christ
- 115. I talk with other people about my faith
- 116R. My life is filled with stress and anxiety
- 117. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet
- 118. I have a real sense that God is guiding me
- 119R. I do not want the churches of this nation getting involved in political issues
- 120. I like to worship and pray with others.
- 121. I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony
- 122. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation

Note: R refers to reversed scoring.

Table 3: Mature Faith-Vertical Dimension

- 87. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day
- 91. My faith helps me know right from wrong
- 93. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible
- 95. Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world
- 98. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually
- 99. I take time for periods of prayer and meditation
- 103. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes
- 108. My life is filled with meaning and purpose
- 115. I talk with other people about my faith
- 118. I have a real sense that God is guiding me
- 120. I like to worship and pray with others
- 122. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation

Table 4: Mature Faith-Horizontal Dimension

- 85. I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor
- 90. In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs
- 92. I do things to help protect the environment
- 97. I am active in efforts to promote social justice
- 100. I am active in efforts to promote world peace
- 102. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world
- 105. I give significant portions of time and money to help other people
- 106. I speak out for equality of women and minorities
- 112. I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the U.S. and throughout the world
- 113. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues
- 117. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet
- 121. I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony

Table 5: Growth in Mature Faith Index
--

Have you changed in the last 2 or 3 years? For each of the following, tell whether it is true to a greater or lesser degree for you than it was 2 or 3 years ago. Give your best answer for each.

Choose from these responses:

1 = Much less now

2 = Somewhat less now

3 = About the same as 2 or 3 years ago

4 = Somewhat greater now

5 = Much greater now

- 174. The degree to which my faith shapes how I think and act
- 175. The effort I make to get involved in activities that help me grow spiritually
- 176. The time I spend talking to others about my faith
- 177. The amount of time I spend working for peace and social justice
- 178. The degree to which I accept people who believe differently than I do
- 179. The degree to which my life has meaning and purpose
- 180. The degree to which I apply my faith to political or social issues
- 181. The amount of time I spend reading and studying the Bible
- 182. The time I spend worshiping and praying with others
- 183. The degree to which I show love to people I meet
- 184. The sense of personal responsibility I feel for reducing pain and suffering in the world
- 185. The degree to which I feel that God is guiding me
- 186. The degree to which I care about hunger and poverty in the world
- 187. The amount of time and money I give to help other people
- 188. The degree to which I am convinced that God is active in the world
- 189. The degree to which I let God into my life
- 190. The importance of my spiritual life
- 191R. The amount of stress and anxiety in my life

Note: R refers to reversed scoring.

Table 6: Denominational Loyalty Index
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205. How important is it to you to attend a church of the denomination you marked above?
- It is extremely important to me.
 - It is important to me.
 - It is somewhat important to me.
 - It is not too important to me.
 - It is not important at all. I could just as well attend a church of another denomination.
206. How satisfied are you with the denomination you marked in question 204?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Somewhat satisfied
 - Dissatisfied
 - Very dissatisfied
207. If you moved to another city that had many churches from which to choose, would you attend a church of the same denomination you now attend?
- Yes, absolutely
 - Yes, probably
 - Maybe
 - Probably not
 - No

Table 7: Congregational Loyalty Index
--

For each of the following, indicate how much you agree or disagree.

Choose from these responses:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Not sure
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

192. If I had to change churches, I would feel a great sense of loss
193. I feel at home in this church
- 194R. I would change churches if my church developed major leadership or financial problems
195. The church I attend matters a great deal to me

Note: Refers to reversed scoring.

Table 8: Scale Reliabilities

	Respondent Type				
	Adults	Adolescents	Pastors	Teachers	Coordinators
Faith Maturity	.88	.87	.85	.88	.89
Faith Maturity: Vertical Dimension	.87	.88	.86	.87	.87
Faith Maturity: Horizontal Dimension	.83	.82	.84	.83	.85
Growth in Faith Maturity	.88	.86	.85	.88	.86
Denominational Loyalty	.75	.74	—	.77	.75
Congregational Loyalty	.81	.80	—	.80	.73
N	3744	2613	513	3382	444

Note: Pastors did not respond to the two loyalty scales. Reliability estimates based on Cronbach coefficient alpha. Reliabilities for all six denominations combined (unweighted).

Validity

Considerable evidence supports the validity of the faith maturity, growth in faith maturity, denominational loyalty, and congregational loyalty scales. A summary of this evidence is as follows:

Known Groups

It was predicted that mature faith mean scores should occur in this order, from high to low: pastors, coordinators of Christian education, teachers, adults, and youth. This prediction is confirmed, with mean scores as follow:

	<u>N</u>	<u>X</u>
Pastor	519	5.35
Coordinator	499	4.90
Teacher	3466	4.77
Adult	3567	4.63
Youth	3121	4.10

It was predicted that congregational loyalty and denominational loyalty should occur in this order: coordinators, teachers, adults, youth. These predictions are confirmed.

It was predicted that national denominational executives should score higher on denominational loyalty than coordinators or teachers. In a national survey of 62 mainline Protestant executives conducted in May, 1988, this prediction was confirmed.

Expert Raters

In May, 1988, 10 mainline pastors and 10 denominational executives rated a total of 123 persons on the four outcome variables. For each variable, raters provided ratings on a 1-10 scale based on their previous knowledge of a person's level of mature faith, growth in mature faith, denominational loyalty, and congregational loyalty. These ratings were then correlated with subjects' scores on the outcome measures. In all four cases, the level of prediction is substantial. The ratings to survey score correlations were .61 for mature faith, .40 for growth in mature faith, .54 for congregational loyalty, and .55 for denominational loyalty. This pattern of high correlations held also when splitting the total group into youth and adult subgroups.

In May, 1988, 48 married adult couples also completed the survey instrument. Each spouse also completed the survey a second time, according to "how you think your spouse will respond." The correlations of self-report with spouses' predicted responses were extremely high on all four scales (.50 or higher).

Relationship with Age

It was predicted that mature faith, congregational loyalty, and denominational loyalty will increase linearly with age. The first of these predictions is based on developmental theory (Erickson, Selman, Fowler) suggesting that both taking the perspective of others and sacrificing for the common good are cognitively advanced psychosocial perspectives requiring both cognitive readiness and experience. Predictions were confirmed, particularly for mature faith and congregational loyalty.

Other Correlations

The case for validity of the four measures is strengthened by these relationships among adults (with all correlations significant, $p < .001$):

- *Mature faith* correlates .58 with intrinsic religion and is unrelated to extrinsic (based on a field study with 102 adults in the fall of 1987, using Feagin's eleven-item index of intrinsic and extrinsic); .57 with self-reported importance of religion; .47 with frequency of prayer; .47 with frequency of reading religious literature other than the Bible; .65 with a four-item Good Samaritan index; .48 with a measure of support for racial equality; and .34 with frequency of social justice behaviors.
- *Growth in mature faith* correlates .45 with the degree to which "I have let God into my life during the last 2-3 years"; .44 with the degree to which "I have grown in the importance of my faith during the last 2-3 years"; .40 with the frequency of reading about and studying the Bible during the last 2-3 years, and .47 with the frequency of "talking with my best friend about faith" during the last 2-3 years.
- *Congregational loyalty* correlates .51 with a pro-church orientation, .38 with congregational participation, .45 with "my congregation feels warm," and .40 with "I learn a lot at my church."
- *Denominational loyalty* correlates .32 with expressed interest in learning about one's denomination and .26 with "how well does your church now teach about your denomination's traditions?"

There is also strong evidence of validity in the overall empirical patterns within the data set. For example, the same denominational differences in scale scores tend to be found across all respondent types. Predictions about determinants of scale scores (e.g., family religiousness, congregational warmth) are strongly supported and patterns of relationships among predictors and the four outcome measures are consistently demonstrated in this subgroup (e.g., denomination, region categories, congregation size categories).

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