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every young person...*

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RESILIENT IDENTITY
IN CHRIST**



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Like a tree deeply rooted, youth who understand their Baptismal faith have a strong base from which to grow as Lutheran Christians in this world. But even the most solid tree is tested by weather from time to time. Healthy youth ministry prepares youth to expect and persevere through those storms of life. Challenges may come through celebrated transitions like graduation, moving, and entering the work force. Others come suddenly and bring turmoil like divorce, sickness, or break-ups. Healthy youth ministry fosters youth who can face the challenges of the world with humble confidence, staying rooted in Christ.

Resilient youth remain humbly confident in their Christian identity in the face of crisis and transition. Transitions create positive opportunities for new relationships, opportunities for identity building and vocational roles. They also create openings for youth, passively or actively, to step away from the church and lose out on Christian community and receiving Christ's gifts. LCMS Youth Ministry research shows many congregations do not intentionally support youth during transition, especially in the transition out of high school. This is a time when many young people shift away or out of the Church. Parents and congregations should teach and display the value of regular worship and Christian community. They can actively equip young people and walk with them to ensure they stay engaged during transitional times.

Crises are also critical times for youth as their faith and the relationships within their congregation can be tested. Regardless of the type of crisis, it can bring overwhelming anxiety, doubt, and concern. This is a vital time for youth to encounter the Word of God and Christian relationships at home and in the church. Reminders of God's promises in Baptism can help provide a much-needed anchor when circumstances, thoughts and feelings fail to bring comfort. Adults and parents should take the time to listen well, empathize, pray for and invest in youth at this critical time.

Resilient youth not only understand their Baptismal faith, but the importance of the life and mission of the Christian church. Their faith is not private or only for Sunday mornings. Instead, they recognize that their faith in Jesus Christ connects with the larger church they attend and with the whole Christian church. Out of this deep understanding of what God has done for

them, they find ways to serve those around them.

When resilient youth seek to share the Gospel and identify with the mission of the Christian church, they are inevitably going to come across resistance. In a divisive, sinful world, youth need to be prepared to navigate disagreements in a humble, loving way. Parents and supportive adults can help youth appropriately engage and understand when non-Christian worldviews challenge their faith. This ability to navigate a post-Christian culture is urgently needed as students approach the transition to college where parents and supportive adults are not available.

Resilient youth can embrace the diversity of our world, appreciate the breadth of God's family, and embrace others in the name of Christ. As they explore our increasingly diverse and accessible world, they can encourage careful listening, asking good questions. With confidence, they can share the Law and the Gospel in a balanced way. Youth can be emboldened to share truth in love and treat others with compassion, as love was first shown to them in Christ.

Resilient faith encounters each day knowing that God is faithful and present; His mercies are always new. Resiliency is not a quality that is easily maintained. The world, sin, and the Devil will continually seek to throw doubt and challenge at us. Resilient youth are lifelong learners who face doubt and challenge by turning to God's living and active Word. In each age and life circumstance, the simple message of God's love and forgiveness given to us through Jesus needs to be on their minds and lips. By God's grace, resilient Christians take the questions, new ideas, and struggles back through the "filter" of their baptismal faith and truth known in God's Word.

Youth ministry must be focused on connecting young people to the Word of God as they are on the frontline of a changing world. As they face the storms of this world, they need authentic and trusted relationships with Christian adults, peers and parents. They need help to take their Christian instruction into their everyday life. Youth and families can be encouraged to rest in Christ our Victor and use His armor (Ephesians 6:10-20) in all things, as they seek to serve and love their neighbor who need to know Christ's love and forgiveness as well. ■