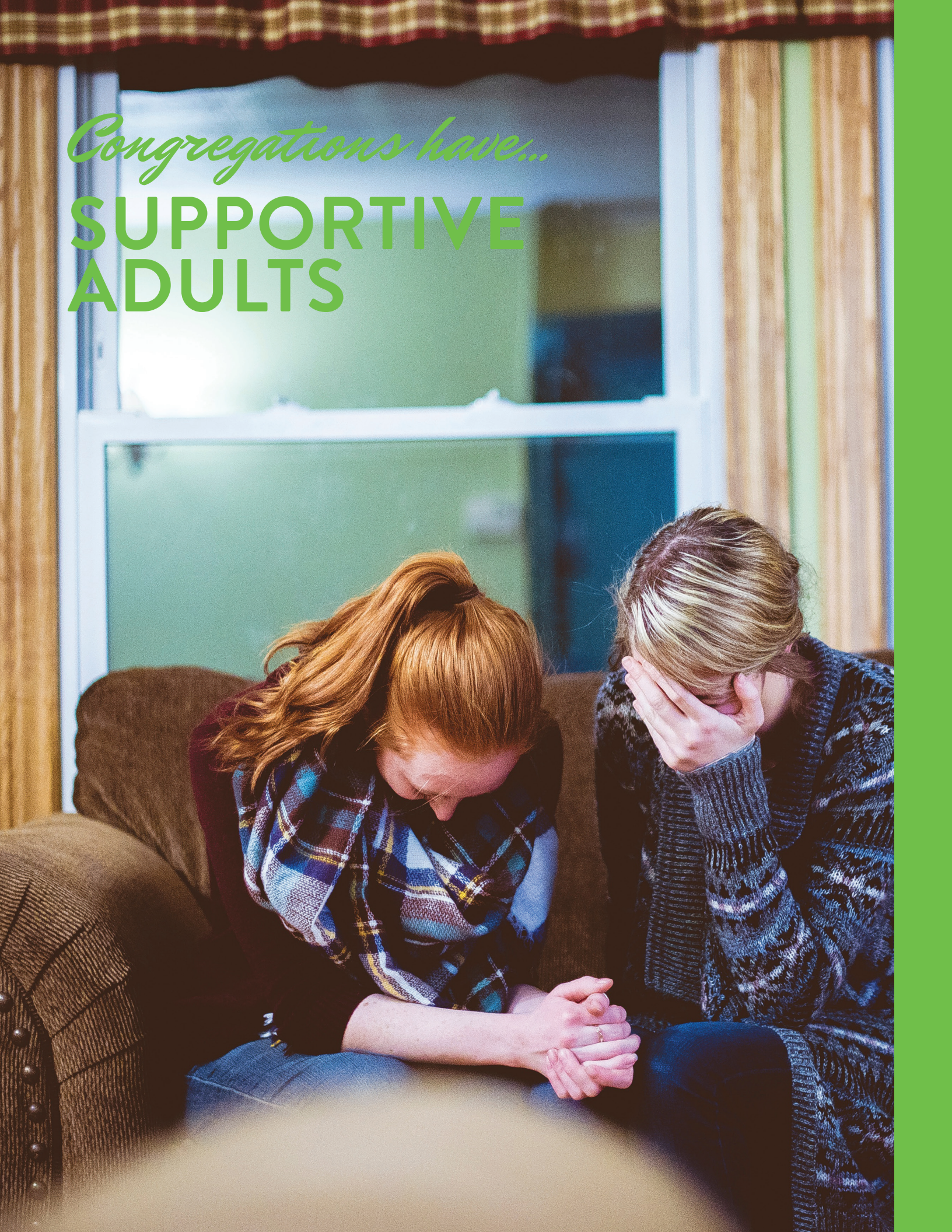


Congregations have...

SUPPORTIVE ADULTS



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In Baptism God brings us into His family and engages His people in a community of believers. While parents may be the most critical person in a youth's faith life, other supportive adults can play a significant role in encouraging, challenging, and walking alongside youth throughout their lives. The Holy Spirit can work powerfully through supportive adults to be a Jesus-focused listener, leader, and example of faithful practice. Significant adults may be an older adult who seeks them out each week before worship, the parent of a peer, or a volunteer youth leader who takes the time to get to know them. They may be a pastor, church worker, staff, or invested lay leaders. These adults celebrate milestones with joy and are present in times of stress, crisis or transition. Each teen should have a supportive circle of faithful Christian adults who desire for them to remain in the Christian faith throughout their life.

Congregations should seek to engage each youth with five long-term supportive adults. A supportive parent or parents can be included in this number along with baptismal sponsors. The role of supportive adult does not need to be complex or time consuming. Youth need to know that these adults care for them, are in regular prayer for them, and desire God's very best for them. The relationship is not forced but developed over time. Supportive adults take many forms, yet each is investing time and energy in the life of a teen.

Supportive adults should keep the line of communication open and remind the teen regularly they are willing to talk whenever it is needed. It is powerful for teens to know someone is celebrating their accomplishments and is available in crisis or transition, even if they never take advantage of it. Supportive adult relationships should be intergenerational. Grandparents and older adults can provide much needed perspective and support from a wealth of wisdom and experience. It also provides the older adults energy, and a fresh perspective.

Some supportive adults may be around only for a season. A church worker may take a Call and move. A teacher may be around only for a school year. However, the best relationships are not just short-term, but long-term. Long-term relationships mean the adult is prepared to invest not just for a season but for years. This may mean that no one adult can invest in every teen in their congregation. Adults must be deliberate and focus on the few youths for whom they want to play a significant role. Congregations can help to systematically connect adults with the right capacity to help maintain quality in the relationship and focus over time.

The presence of a long-term supportive adults allows for youth to be engaged and re-engaged during transition or crisis. When a teen is struggling, there is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to deepen connection to Christian community or for sin and the devil to cause disconnection. God can use supportive adults as tethers to tie a youth to the church when they may have otherwise disconnected. These adults provide stability and a safe place for speaking Law and Gospel at appropriate times. Crisis and transition will happen, and supportive adults can be prepared for that time. Knowing resources, encouraging timely conversations, and keeping communication open can be power tools that God uses to keep youth in the community of faith.

As youth seek to better understand who God is and what God has done for them in Jesus Christ, they do not need to walk alone. God has blessed youth with many adults who can share their experiences, help support their faith practices and encourage them to stay faithful. The investment in each youth by faithful Christian adults is powerful for congregations and youth ministry. ■