

The Youth

Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.-- 1 Timothy 4:12

The context of this passage is that the great evangelist and Apostle Paul found young Timothy in his work starting churches in the first century. He was impressed by his faith and gifts, although a young man. Paul brings Timothy along to be his assistant, and gives him great responsibilities. In this letter Paul encourages him to be confident in his God given gifts and not to let people dismiss him just b/c he is young. Be an example and you will be followed.

This passage is just one of many examples of in the Holy scriptures about God's special love for young people. In the stories of Joseph, David and the prodigal Son, a young person is favored by God and given great responsibilities. Jesus himself gave many examples of the importance of working with children and bringing them into his mission.

It is my opinion that we as Armenians have a mixed record when it comes to building up our young people, our next generation. While we love our children and do everything for them, many times we have not been good at giving them responsibilities in our institutions; at generational transfer. This happens not just in churches but political organizations, student organizations or anything Armenian. Why?

Perhaps because a constantly threatened people like the Armenians had little freedom for young people to learn, grow and make mistakes since the consequences of outside take-over and invasion were always at hand. Perhaps it comes from a difficulty of Armenians generally to let go, for fear of losing control of the few things they have control over.

But today we must recognize our different reality. We are not threatened so much from the outside, by hostile neighbors or overlords, lurking to destroy us if we show weakness. Today the threat is inside. If we don't pass on leadership, if we don't invest in our young people, we are finished. In the old country, you can just have kids and they will eventually become something in the Armenian community. Today it is a choice whether to be Armenian and whether to be involved in Armenian institutions or not. If we don't spend time with a young person, they are lost. It is that simple.

Our scriptures offer three ways that we can make sure we don't lose our young people:

1. RECEIVE(SUFFER)THEM...DESPISE THEM NOT

Bring young people in and have patience with their learning. Hitting wrong notes, or making questionable decisions or wearing strange dress is nothing to be upset about. Help develop their leadership style, decision making ability, and judgment. Endure all things and raise them up to do better. It is what God does with all of us.

B. DON'T PLACE STUMBLING BLOCKS IN THEIR WAY...

Perhaps the biggest reason that young people aren't involved is that someone treated them badly or they saw someone treating someone else badly in church. If Armenian Christians behave like this, I don't want to be part of it. We must reflect first on our behavior before we have any hope of influencing anyone else's'.

C. ENCOURAGE THEM...

If a young person shows up for anything, this is already reason for encouragement; the last thing they need is for us to discourage them!

If we can follow this principals here at St. Hagop, I have great hope and optimism, that our young people will rise to the occasion...

This is why I always feel good going to direct St. Nersess as I will after church this sunday. I will stay up all night getting kids to go to bed. I might deal with sick kids and worried parents. But all this melts away when I see the energy and enthusiasm kids have in learning Armenian, singing folks songs, discussing Bible passages, learning to worship. These kids many times have a greater understanding and love of their faith and heritage than even their parents. This is truly hopeful.

Our message today is simple and clear. In every aspect of our church's life, altar, women's guild, choir, parish council, emphasis is on learning and growing—being built up for the future. We have some good signs in our church; especially in Fall and Winter. Youth on our altar. Sunday school and ACYOA groups. A record 12 young people attending St. Vartan and St. Neress. But as always, so much more could be done, if parents, church leaders and youth make it a priority.

Today let us make a solemn commitment to each other to follow Paul's advice to Timothy in all of our dealings with our next generation, saying together with him "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

Now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.