

## **Rev. Tom Beagan, Executive Director of Logos International**

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Tom was our leader for the Program Dean's Event in November. He shared with us what Logos has been learning about youth culture and introduced us to the *Hardwired to Connect* report. Here is a summary of some of that material.

Youth Culture, Authoritative Communities and the Hardwired to Connect Report

### **Tom Beagan on Current Youth Culture**

- Teens are: stressed, over scheduled, hyper-sexualized
- Friends are the new family
- Young teens cherish and desire relationships with their parents
- Top Two Activities for teens: social networking and going to movies
- Diversity isn't something you teach – it is the reality
- They are a Both/And generation - not an Either/ Or generation
  - Peer group and adult relationships
  - Unplugged and high tech
- We must provide meaning and purpose to the whole experience – they are not motivated by activities alone
- Suggested books and Resources:
  - Presence-centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation by Mike King
  - Family- Based Youth Ministry by Mark Devries and Earl F. Palmer
  - Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It by Mark Devries
  - The Heartfelt Newsletter available on the Logos web site: [www.thelogosministry.org](http://www.thelogosministry.org)

#### Discussion Ideas:

- How can we use technology as a relationship enhancer?
- What do we understand about social networking and how might we grow in our understanding of it?
- What are some ways we can create intergenerational community at camp?
- What is the meaning and purpose behind each of our activities?
- How can we be partners with parents in the ongoing lives of our campers?

## Hardwired to Connect

This excerpt from Robert Brooks, PHd website is a very good summary of the Hardwired to Connect report. It can be found at <http://www.drrobertbrooks.com/index.html>

A thought-provoking report was recently released that provides further evidence of the significant role of connections in addressing and preventing an array of childhood problems. The report, "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities," was prepared by the Commission on Children at Risk, a group comprised of 33 prominent children's doctors, research scientists, and mental health and youth service professionals. The Commission details the problems faced by children in the United States, casting the spotlight on the lack of connections in the lives of these youngsters.

The report, which may be purchased by going to [www.americanvalues.org](http://www.americanvalues.org), notes that the crisis in our youth involves the following two areas:

"The first part is the deteriorating mental and behavioral health of U.S. children. We are witnessing high and rising rates of depression, anxiety, attention deficit, conduct disorders, thoughts of suicide, and other serious mental, emotional, and behavioral problems among U.S. children and adolescents.

"The second part is how we as a society are thinking about this deterioration. We are using medications and psychotherapies. We are designing more and more special programs for 'at risk' children. These approaches are necessary but they are not enough. Why? Because programs in individual risk-assessment and treatment seldom encourage us, and can even prevent us, from recognizing as a society the broad *environmental* conditions that are contributing to growing numbers of suffering children."

The Commission then raises the question, "What's causing the crisis?" Their answer is direct and specific: "In large measure, what's causing this crisis of American childhood is a lack of connectedness. **We mean two kinds of connectedness—close connections to other people, and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning.**" The members of the Commission contend that while research from the fields of neuroscience and basic biology indicate that children are "hardwired to connect" to other people and for moral meaning in their lives, "in recent decades, the U.S. social institutions that foster these two forms of connectedness for children have gotten significantly weaker."

To address this lack of connectedness, the Commission advocates the creation of "authoritative communities." (more on that later)

### Discussion Ideas:

- What are some stories we have to tell about the deteriorating mental and behavioral health of our campers?
- Do we have evidence of the increase in medications as a solution?
- They propose that children are missing close connections with other people and to moral and spiritual meaning. What are the implications for our camps?

## Authoritative Communities

The Commission explained its choice of the word “authoritative,” noting, “First the word refers to a strong body of scholarly evidence demonstrating the value of that particular combination of warmth and structure in which children in a democratic society appear most likely to thrive. Second, the word comes from the Latin *auctor*, which can mean ‘one who creates.’ We like that. Authoritative communities just don’t happen. They are created and sustained by dedicated individuals with a shared vision of building a good life for the next generation.”

In order to create an authoritative community, one must understand its features. The Commission lists what it considers to be the 10 main characteristics. They include:

1. It is a social institution that includes children and youth.
2. It treats children as ends in themselves.
3. It is warm and nurturing.
4. It establishes clear limits and expectations.
5. The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists.
6. It is multi-generational.
7. It has a long-term focus.
8. It reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.
9. It encourages spiritual and religious development.
10. It is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor.

In light of these 10 characteristics, the Commission states as a primary goal “to deepen our society’s commitment to those values that build and sustain authoritative communities, and to reconsider our commitment to those values that often replace or undermine them. The former include enduring marital relationships and family connectedness, community action and civic engagement, and concern for the moral and spiritual well-being of all children. The latter include ‘me first’ and consumerism as ways of living, materialism, and the notion of the individual person as self-made and owing little to others or to society.”

### Discussion Ideas:

- How many of the ten characteristics can we claim for our camp?
- Choose one of the ten characteristics and explore in depth how we currently embody this characteristic and how we might improve in that area?
- What is exciting to you about this report?