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Youth Wisdom – Pointing toward Joy and Flourishing By Mary Elizabeth Moore and Yara Gonzalez-Justiniano

Joy is “gozo,” – full of feeling – full of sensation –
Feeling the world, feeling the pain,
 feeling the flow of life with passion,
Joy is pleasure, wonder, delight, rejoicing, jubilation!
It is not a controlled body of emotions,
 numbing the negative, holding only to the positive,
But a state of being that you carry within you
 and share with the world,
A decision you make to *feel* fully, to *live* fully –
 to wonder at the pearl that grows from grit in an oyster;
 to be awed by the potential of celebration and resilience
 in a world compromised by greed and violence;
 to delight in a creation and human family that have capacity
 to repair themselves and to live more fully in joy and hope!

Youth Speak: Joy and Struggle

What can youth tell us about joy? While many people write about youth, young people themselves cultivate wisdom of their own. Youth leaders and researchers need to take heed of their insights. In this chapter, we pay close attention to the wisdom of youth, especially their wisdom about joy – the origins, expressions, and effects of joy. *Our biggest discovery is that joy often emerges in moments of internal struggle or heavy external pressures; yet, in those messy hard places, youth and youth leaders can support and enhance deep inner joy by cultivating opportunities for honest sharing, celebration, service, and acts of resistance.*

To explore youth wisdom with openness to new discoveries, we have drawn on three waves of research – ethnographies, interviews, and a case study of young people in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. Together, the multiple narratives reveal youth’s experiences of joy; their reflections on the struggles and strengths associated with joy; and their wisdom for a fractured society. We draw on all three studies because similar themes run through them, and in the same intensity, in spite of the range of times and locations. Further, each

contributes unique perspectives, and the integrative analysis provides rich insights. The youth narratives reveal how and when youth experience joy; their reflections on the struggles and strengths involved in joy; and the wisdom they offer a society faced with uncertain and potentially destructive futures. We close this chapter with reflections on how communities can build foundations of joy with and for youth; how all of us who care for youth can value and enhance the wisdom they offer; and how we can contribute to their reflection, celebration, service, and resilience.

We have learned from young people that *joy is a mix of feelings and passions that uplift the self or the community, emerging from youth's inner strengths and their decisions as they interact with the world.* That inner strength reflects the image of God within them, which their communities and personal journeys of faith can nurture. The God-given strengths are the “stuff” of joy, shaped by youth’s unique qualities, even in the face of devastating conditions, such as a hurricane in Puerto Rico or daily life with an abusive parent. External conditions can be deeply destructive; however, the youth in our studies often awakened under such conditions to their inner strengths and communal supports, which became lifelines as they struggled to survive and thrive amid tumultuous life experiences. Our understanding of joy has thus arisen from observing and listening to young people as their wisdom peeps out from the soil and sprouts into something beautiful. *We define wisdom as the deep knowing that persons develop as they engage with their experiences, accumulated knowledge, and active interpretations of the world.* We have discovered that the practices of deep reflection, celebration, service, and resistance enhance their joy and flourishing, even in arduous life situations.

Youth Speaking to Joy and Flourishing

What do youth know about joy and flourishing? We need to ask young people, of course, and we need to observe their actions. This section focuses on our first two studies, representing 25 years of youth research. The first project, Youth and Culture (1994- 2005), focused on youth and their ethnically diverse Roman Catholic and Protestant parishes and congregations.ⁱ The later project, Wisdom of Youth (2005-present), focuses on youth yearnings and hopes.ⁱⁱ The first was based in ethnographic studies, the latter in interviews and focus groups. We studied six congregations/parishes in the Midwest and Southwestern parts of the U.S., representing churches that were predominantly African American, Native American, European American, and Korean-American. The interviews and focus groups of

the Wisdom of Youth project are continuing, but they have thus far included 70 young people and 15 adults in youth ministry. We have asked the young people to reflect on significant people, places, and moments in their lives, as well as their major concerns about the church and world, hopes for the future, and personal dreams. In both, the youth have named moments of joy and flourishing. We combine them here to reveal young wisdom, and to share the “joy” themes that grow from the two studies.

Joy Arising from Struggle

One theme in these youth studies is the degree to which joy arises amid struggle. In the interviews, youth most often tell their stories of joy as emerging from their hardest struggles. Similarly, we have discovered that young people often describe their hope as emerging from these same struggles – social isolation, the death of loved ones, poverty, sexual assault, violence in neighborhoods, being too smart or not smart enough. For example, Sandra experienced hope when she felt God speak to her in the midst of a religious ritual. Thereafter, she heard God’s voice calling to her in key moments of crisis. In the case of Hee-Kyung, hope emerged in conversations with other people after a church member raped her. Hee-Kyung decided to report the rape publically (discovering that she was not the only victim but was the only one to report); the man was brought to justice. She remained in the church because she was determined not to give up her church community to avoid him.ⁱⁱⁱ Both Sandra and Hee-Kyung described their experiences of hope and joy as arising from struggles while pointing beyond.

These two youth narratives represent many others, such as the young boy who found God and the church to be places of safety after living a nomadic, violent life with his parents. He described the joy he felt in church, which was the first community to work actively for his safety and to ensure that he and his grandmother had food to survive. Another young woman described the joy that her youth group gave when she faced severe rejection at school. The youth group and its leader accepted her and helped her feel that she “belonged.” In youth stories, struggles continually create sparks of joy.

Wisdom from Tragedy and Suffering

Another striking insight is the way in which experiences of tragedy or suffering evoke wisdom in young people – wisdom about God, Christian community, the world, and

themselves. The young people in our studies did not *need* to face tragedies and suffering (as in redemptive suffering), nor did they need to struggle for the sake of struggle. Life presented them with difficult challenges, however, and they felt the need to interpret and respond to them in ways that helped them cut a path through the hardships. None of the young people jumped from struggle to joy; rather they sought and found wisdom as they faced tragedies, sometimes seeking for a long time. The wisdom they discovered marked turning points in their lives, often toward joy – joy in a new perspective on God and life, or joy in discovering their own value and power to act.

In the earlier ethnographic studies, we discovered similar experiences of joy and wisdom, stirred in times of tragedy. In a Midwestern Scandinavian Lutheran congregation, the young people celebrated the church's presence in times of crisis. One young woman described a crisis when her father was ill and her mother injured in a car accident, and when their congregation responded:

We were new members then and didn't know the people at church that well, but everyone came to help us kids with food and with the farm work ... They prayed a lot for our family at church ... We really got to know how much they cared.

In both the ethnographic and interview studies, the young people drew wisdom from tragedy, but through struggle with hard realities and huge theological and human questions. The wisdom of struggle often opens a pathway to joy and flourishing.

Strength from a Supportive Community

When youth reflect on their lives in Christian congregations and parishes, they often describe their joy in being part of a supportive community that supports them individually and collectively. Though the ethnographic studies date back twenty years, and the churches have themselves changed over time, the themes of the young people are strikingly similar to those of the later interview studies, appearing in 75% of both ethnographies and interviews.

In a Navajo Roman Catholic parish in New Mexico, the youth said that their church was a place to come together to celebrate as Navajo people and to pray for their families and themselves. What they liked best about their religion was "bringing people together" and "helping you inside." Similarly, the young people in a multi-tribal urban United Methodist congregation in California also placed the accent on community. They lauded the elders of their congregation and the way they witnessed to their faith and lived with compassion and

strength in spite of the challenges they had faced. They said that what they liked best about church was: "This is the only place we can come and just be ourselves because everywhere else we go, people think we are Hispanics or part of some other group. We can be Native Americans here – just be ourselves."^{iv} In church, they found support and encouragement that no other community provided. On one Pentecost morning, the teacher read from Acts 2 about tongues of fire descending on each person and their speaking in different languages but understanding one another. The teacher stopped after a few verses and said, "This would be like the spirit coming into the windows this morning. Suddenly, each of us would be able to speak in our tribal language and everyone else would understand."^v The youth (completely lethargic until this moment) began to talk about how cool that would be, especially cool to know their tribal languages and be able to communicate in the words of their people instead of English. Here again we see the spirit of community.

The spirit of community is not always smooth, as seen in a Korean American urban United Methodist congregation. The youth themselves had formed into an in-group and out-group, based largely on the history of the congregation and the original families. Further, cliques had formed within both groups. The tension was a major concern for the youth, but efforts to change the situation had not been effective. The youth were concerned because they needed a supportive, undivided community, even though they themselves participated in the divisions.

This theme of community continued in the interviews. Young people expressed longing for supportive community, what Moore describes as "yearning for home."^{vi} The young people often express gratitude for safe places – friends, family, or church – where people will always (or almost always) love you and stick by you. As concluded in an earlier work, "Home is known in experiences of loving relationships, and also in their gaping absence. Home is also associated with a safe place."^{vii} For many young people, that safe place was the church, or the church's youth group.

Power from Being Real with Others

Another striking insight is the power that youth express in being real with others. Some communities of faith foster such realness. In a Roman Catholic African American urban parish, one youth described her experience of the church's youth group: "Our class was really close. We could speak our mind. We knew our friends would always be there for

us." Another youth likened the group to "brothers and sisters," saying that she can "talk about stuff in the youth meeting and it won't go outside the group." In this church, the youth's actions spoke as loudly as their words. They regularly shared their life experiences, such as visiting mothers and fathers in jail, losing a job, finding a girlfriend, and getting a college scholarship. Conflicts sometimes arose, but the young people learned ways to navigate the conflicts. One young man said: "People pull together when they need to get through something or get something done. They stick together and work things out most of the time." Sometimes youth encourage each other. One young woman said she had "to talk to her [friend] sometimes about her attitude."

The power of being real also echoes in our recent youth interviews; the young people name at least one person who is a "safe harbor" in their lives. The circle of people whom they name most often are parents and grandparents (usually one special one); followed by teachers and youth leaders; followed by church youth groups, bands, and friends. They describe these people as mentors, friends, and groups with whom they can be themselves: people who listen intently and value them, and people who offer honest guidance without tearing them down. The youth speak with joy about these relationships in which they can be real with themselves and others. In sum, young people find ways to draw joy from struggle and wisdom from suffering and tragedy, but with the support of communities and individuals with whom they can be "real."

Youth Pointing toward Joy and Flourishing in a Storm

The two studies described above were often located in situations of struggle; however, we saw a need to engage a third study (a case study) in Puerto Rico after a national catastrophe and in the face of life-threatening issues related to Latinx immigration in the United States. We sought to learn if and how joy emerged in these contexts of struggle. We begin here by giving some background regarding the situation, and then we move to what we learned from the youth.

Context

Demographic statistics from 2016 show that, amongst the Latinx immigrants to the United States, the majority is younger than 18 years.^{viii} In Puerto Rico, there were 3.4 million people before Hurricane Maria.^{ix} After Maria's passing, over 250,000 people have migrated to the

United States.^x Most of these populations are young families that have been establishing themselves in multiple States, predominantly in the State of Florida. Although there are multiple faith and religious traditions in the island of Puerto Rico (Jewish, Muslim, Santería, among others), the majority of the population, according to statistics, is Christian.^{xi} This gives a glimpse of the influx of Puerto Rican peoples who face heavy struggles both in Puerto Rico and in the U.S. The challenges for young people and for the church's ministries are vast.

Before the Hurricane on September 20, 2017, Puerto Rico's economy and socio-political situation was already in dire conditions; Maria exacerbated the situation. Forty of 78 municipalities had reported over 50% of their populations living in poverty in March 2017.^{xii} After Hurricane Maria, suicide rates went up over 17%^{xiii}; over 200,000 homes were destroyed^{xiv}; and unemployment rates doubled.^{xv} More than half of the island was still without power and running/potable water six months after the hurricane. The experience was ongoing at the time of this study, and it had repercussions on the collective as well as the individual. The hurricane and aftermath have been a collective and personal trauma in which all aspects of life, routine and systemic enterprises, are impacted. The situation has required the attention of the whole community, and particular attention to the needs of particular people. For example, the elderly and the youth have needed particular attention, as have some regions of the country even more than others.

Participatory Action from God's Calling and the Community's Invitation

In this case study, we discovered a fifth theme that was less obvious in the earlier studies. This is the *theme of participatory action*. Alongside base community organizations, the Church and other religious organizations have mobilized and responded to the needs of the people in the aftermath of Maria.^{xvi} The church people have rolled-up their sleeves and gotten to work by distributing food and supplies, helping rebuild homes and communities, and working through advocacy. This work has revealed a sense of God's call to work together and to include every church member. Many of the volunteers are youth and young adults who have been getting involved and taking initiative in the endeavors of these communities to survive and rebuild. Pastors in the island have reflected on the need to involve youth in all of this work, emphasizing their need to be included, to participate.^{xvii} This sense of purpose and usefulness in the face of hopelessness and loss, we argue, fosters

joy in young people. It also echoes the themes presented above, especially the potential of drawing joy from struggle and the strength that emerges from community.

As the Puerto Rican youth took part in what was happening around them, they discovered the importance of their agency as significant contributors. Their active participation ignited the youth's flourishing, and it sustained a joy that moved far beyond self-gratification, as stated both by the youth and by the youth leaders. Beyond their beliefs or theologies, they were seeking purpose and joy in their distinctive situations and active participation; they were also growing in wisdom and shaping their deeper understandings of joy. Thus, a critical dimension of ministering with young people is to understand their contexts and the particularities of each young person's situation.

To speak about joy and flourishing in this context, as in any context of struggle and despair, is a form of resistance. I (Yara González-Justiniano) conducted this study while spending the Holidays with my family in Puerto Rico. Although for many celebrating the Holidays was a privilege – which means they had access to enough food, electricity and a job – this did not diminish the sense of sorrow, nor did it cover up the social realities in our country. Nonetheless, people found joy in fiesta in whatever ways and to whatever degree they could muster. They found joy in the celebration of Christmas, in the celebration of family, community, and resilience. Joy in a context of struggle does not mean to alienate oneself from the present material realities but to be empowered to choose and to act on behalf of the community as well as to imagine other possibilities in the midst of struggle. Some youth, like Ana, expressed the joy she found in the strength she received from God. In places of struggle and devastation, the affirmation of God's presence and the resilient actions of the people produced joy, together with a sense of agency.

Joy as Theology Game-Changer

What is the meaning of joy in young lives? What do youth reveal about God? The themes in young lives overflow with theological insight, to which we now turn.

Joy Arising from the Wisdom of Struggle

One theme that arises from ethnographies, interviews, and our case study is that joy often arises from struggle. This theme is surprising in the context of common sense logic, which associates joy with superficial happiness. Joy, however, follows a more profound logic,

found in such notable religious leaders as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In the Introduction to their collaboration in *The Book of Joy*, the narrator Douglas Abrams says:

Their courage and resilience and dogged hope in humanity inspire millions as they refuse to give in to the fashionable cynicism that risks engulfing us. Their joy is clearly not easy or superficial but one burnished by the fire of adversity, oppression, and struggle.^{xviii}

The youth similarly show uncommon courage, resilience, and dogged hope in the face of adversities, oppression, and struggles. They, like the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu, draw from life experience and discover that joy takes many forms.^{xix}

One also finds echoes of the youth's experience of joy and struggle in Ada María Isasi-Díaz, for whom struggle is the place where she and many in her community relate with God.^{xx} Her theological insight, and the insight of the youth, is that struggle is a place to meet God, to meet the world in a more profound way, to make meaning, and to find the deeper layers of joy.

Wisdom from Tragedy and Suffering

The young people in our studies not only learned to seek wisdom in their struggles, but they discovered wisdom breaking in unexpectedly. Wisdom can emerge in youth from religious experiences of the transcendent, from deep inner reserves that they did not know they had, from crisis moments, from the people and communities that value them, or from calls into action. The young people in our studies discovered that God was working in many ways in their lives and that one was no more important than another. They discovered the uniqueness of their own relationships with God and with other people and ecological life, as well as their unique callings to be and to act in directions toward which God was nudging them.

The turn to joy in the Yale project uncovers similar insights. Consider the relation among tragedy, suffering and human wellbeing. As Mary Moschella has pointed out: "Joy seems to be a comparatively lightweight topic, unrelated to human suffering and the need for pastoral care. Yet, as I have found in my research, lived experiences of suffering and joy are not polar opposites, but often close companions." Our youth research supports her insight.

As in pastoral care, young people often struggle to pull meaning from their hardest experiences, but they often persist to the point of deep wisdom.

In the “joy” discussions of the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu, the two described “eight pillars of joy.” They named four as “qualities of the mind: *perspective, humility, humor, and acceptance*,” and another four as “qualities of the heart: *forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity*.”^{xxi} They close their book with what they called “joy practices,” or spiritual practices that foster these qualities.^{xxii} For the young people in our studies, joy emerged in struggle, but really in the wisdom of struggle. The young people made meaning – both personal and communal – in the midst of their struggles, and they often attributed this meaning to God. God, moving in their unique life experiences, roused in them the qualities of mind and heart to be resilient, and often to discover joy in the midst of their tragedies.

Strength from a Supportive Community

The intimate relation between joy and supportive community is one of our central findings. The young people of Puerto Rico found joy in working together to respond to the tragedy of Hurricane Maria, complicated dramatically by the failure of the United States to provide adequate support in the wake of disaster. The young people were drawn to the church communities and others that were providing aid and active recovery and rebuilding. These communal actions emerged from a spirit of hope and evoked some degree of celebration in the community itself. The actions echo Mary Moschella’s assertion that joy is critical to “attentive and engaged human living.”^{xxiii} The young people we experienced in Puerto Rico were fully engaged in living, in spite of the horrific circumstances of their country. They are awake to the situation and to the power of community in addressing the critical human and ecological needs.

Theologically, the power of supportive community is not just to respond to human need and provide physical and psychic support for people who are suffering, raging, and fearful. It is also to embody joy, which can transform a community. Jesus’ disciples found community with Jesus and one another, filled with abundant work alongside Jesus, even when they did not fully understand him and his ministry. The Jesus community was also filled with joy – moments of inspiration, learning, and gathering over food – which supported and shaped their lives. Mary Moschella describes joy as opening “pathways toward compassion and connection, otherwise known as the love of God and neighbor.”^{xxiv}

We see such compassionate pathways in young lives – moments of joy that build supportive communities, or living embodiments of God’s love.

Power from Being Real with Others

The power in being real with others is freedom to be honest and open (within careful boundaries), and freedom from unrealistic expectations. This practice can expand and deepen young people’s understandings of life and their relationships with God. The practice needs to be done with non-invasive care, but it can provide a pathway to wisdom, where people discover that some questions do not have answers. “Being real” relieves young people from unrealistic ideals that demand perfection; instead, the youth seek to understand. Being real relieves youth leaders from having all of the answers; instead, they travel with young people into their questions and struggles. It deepens their relationships with the youth while offering a space for honesty and transformation.

Participatory Action as God’s Call into Joy

The study of young people in Puerto Rico reveals the significance of participatory action as a calling into joy. Following Hurricane Maria, island pastors recognized how important it was to include youth in responding to emergencies and rebuilding their country. The young people rose to the occasion; they were valued enough to participate in significant work for their communities. We found similar patterns among youth in the other two studies, revealing the desire of young people to be included in the work and well-being of their communities.

Theologically, this reveals a close relationship between God and the people of God. God creates people in God’s image to work toward the flourishing of the larger community. God’s grace is a powerful gift to human beings, which evokes the joy of Divine connection and empowers people to participate in the ongoing work of God in the world. God, as Source of Power, calls God’s people into action for the sake of joy and flourishing throughout creation.

Practices for Those Who Love Youth

Drawing from these several insights, we suggest five practices that foster joy and flourishing in young people. The list is daunting because no one has all of the gifts needed in youth ministry; however, youth ministry “takes a village.” Many leaders are needed, both

adults and youth, and others in the community are needed. No one can or should try to carry this alone.

1. *Encourage young people to live into their struggles*

Young people need mentors and friends who will travel with them in their struggles, rather than deny or try to “solve” the struggles. Just as Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to face arrest and crucifixion, and just as Jesus made no easy promises about easy lives to his disciples, we find ourselves traveling rocky roads with young people. Latinx theologians acknowledge that to live is to struggle, *la vida es lucha*. To live into struggles is not to glorify suffering. *Lucha* has a connotation of pushing through. Many youths in our studies shared hard experiences that eventually strengthened their faith, their selves, and their understandings of God’s accompaniment in struggle. When youth ministry creates spaces that build trust and values holistic well-being, youth can share their struggles and ask hard questions; they are traveling toward understanding and joy.

2. *Create opportunities for young people to draw wisdom from tragedy and suffering*

Tragedy and suffering rarely arise from understandable realities, but they cry out to be interpreted. Young people seek to make meaning and create life-giving responses to the injustices and difficult situations around them. Youth leaders need to foster conversations that question harsh realities and reveal the systems that fuel those realities. In the case of Puerto Rico, the island was affected by a natural catastrophe; however, the difficulties with recovery are the result of poor planning and public policies on behalf of local and US authorities that hinder the country’s move forward. These are the human-made realities that require our social and theological interpretation if wisdom is to arise.

In youth ministries inside and outside of the church, youth need opportunities and encouragement to be theological explorers: to question, reshape, and deepen their theologies. Youth naturally have many questions, and the traumas and struggles of their lives evoke more. They are hungry to rethink how God can be present when the world is still in tatters, or how God cares for the poor, whom the world ignores and mistreats, or how God can love creation even while people suffer and the globe warms. Young people need opportunities to ponder what it means for God to suffer *with* us, or for God to work in and through us, and for God to endure even when people have unraveled justice and compassion. Thus, youth need to be encouraged in their theological questing, and to know

God and other people accompany them. They will never have all the answers they seek, but their theologies can expand and deepen and the quest will go on. Such a theology is not a weak theology, but a strong one, recognizing that God is much bigger than all theologies put together. The Mystery of God is a reminder of God's Wonder and our own human limits in understanding.

3. Invite youth into communities that support resilience and joy with celebration

The practices named here invite young people to search for strength and joy and to appreciate them when they emerge. The search is hard, but it invites youth to hope and to celebrate along the way. As we look into the ecological, political and socioeconomic future of the United States or Puerto Rico, we recognize huge impediments to a just and sustainable world. The potential for resilience and joy can awaken hope in young people. Unlike false optimism, passivity, or nihilism, hope is a determination to thrive, even in the face of devastation. Celebration (*fiesta*) is a marker of joy on the journey, and not a final announcement of "all is well" or "all is solved." Communities of faith can help young people experience the gifts of joy (*gozō*, translated also as full feeling) and resilience, even in the midst of great challenge.

4. Encourage youth people to be real with themselves and with others

In the face of trauma and struggle, young people need to share honestly, both with themselves and with one another. This can lead into uncomfortable conversations that youth leaders are reluctant to engage. Yet, the conversations can be moments of release and turning points for faith. Honest sharing allows youth to discover and work through their struggles, and see that they are not alone on this journey. Thus, leaders, within their own limits of ability, need to support these struggles: to create spaces in which youth can speak honestly and confidentially, but without attacking other young people. Such spaces can contribute to deeper understanding of God, deeper understanding of challenging situations, and, by God's grace, deeper relationships with God and each other.

5. Reshape youth ministry to fit your community, and encourage young people into actions that fit the needs and hungers around them

We observed above that young people thrive when invited to participate actively in the work of the community, whether in emergencies, as in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, or in daily situations in which people and the earth cry out with need and hurt. Youth long to be useful and they long to be trusted with significant work. They need opportunities

to serve and to enter into advocacy campaigns so they can actually make a difference in the hurting world that surrounds them. The need is not just for the youth, but the need for genuine and respectful service and advocacy that transcends “do-gooding” and enters the realm of doing *real* good *with* others. That “real good” may best be done behind the scenes, or in forms that are less common than the once a year mission trip or a one-time visit to a retirement home. The very effort to discern the best avenues for service and advocacy are themselves important forms of participatory action

One insight from the study of youth within their congregations and parishes (the first study) and the study of youth in Puerto Rico is that youth ministry can and should take many forms, and those forms do not stand still. Youth, youth leaders, churches, and youth organizations need to rethink and reshape youth ministry continually. Elizabeth Tamez argues that communities need to return to the drafting table to reshape and rethink approaches to youth ministry that listen to the times.^{xxv} Tamez speaks particularly about creating models for Latinx ministry that are “our own.”^{xxvi} She is addressing Latinx youth ministry, but the same principle holds for others; ministry needs to fit the youth’s communities, cultures, and life situations.

Curricular Suggestions for Deep-Joy Youth Ministry

To embody the practices described above, we offer three curricular suggestions, developed more fully on the website.

1. Invitation to Significant Conversation – through youth conversations with one another
2. Invitation to Theological Questing – through film, daily news, or music
3. Engaging Youth with Hurts of the World and their own Callings to Serve and Advocate – through action projects with others
- 4.

Conclusions: Celebration, Contemplation, Conversation, Action

The stories and practices offered in this chapter turn us back to traditional Christian values and practices: celebration, contemplation, conversation, and action. Celebration calls forth the practice of praise; contemplation, the practice of being still, searching, and waiting for God; conversation, the practice of living together in community and accompanying others on their journeys; and action, the practice of participating in the work of God. Youth

awaken us to these traditional Christian practices and to the possibility of reshaping youth ministry into a path toward joy and flourishing.

Questions for Reflection

1. What deep struggles do you see in the young people in your community? Who is available to accompany them on their journeys of struggle?
2. What wisdom do young people express in your community? What opportunities does your church provide for young people to express themselves? Do young people in your community know their input is valued?
3. When have you seen your church or organization provide a supportive community, and what can you envision for the future? Let your imagination run wild.
4. Where do you think youth find opportunities to be real with themselves and others? What is needed to be more intentional and encouraging of deep thinking and sharing?
5. What opportunities do young people in your community have to serve and advocate for others? What changes might be needed in your approach to youth ministry to enable young people to do good with others?

Additional Resources

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ⁱ Mary Elizabeth Moore, Youth and Culture Project, Claremont School of Theology, 1994-2005, with collaborators David White, Christelle Estrada, Randy Litchfield, Kathlyn Breazeale, Vernon Jahnke, and Russell Moy.

ⁱⁱ Mary Elizabeth Moore, Wisdom of Youth Project, Boston University School of Theology, and earlier Emory University, 2005 to present. We appreciate support by the Boston University School of Theology and its Center for Practical Theology, with support from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., as well as the Center for the Study of Law and Religion, Emory University, with support from Pew Charitable Trusts.

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ⁱⁱⁱ The two young people cited here are described in more detail in: Mary Elizabeth Moore and Francisca Ireland, “Pivoting toward Hope: Interplay of Imagination, Fear, and Life Experience,” *Journal of Youth and Theology*, in press. The analysis of joy in this chapter interplays with the analysis of hope in that article, which is why we refer to the two young women again here, albeit with less detail.

^{iv} Field notes, Native American Congregation, Youth Sunday School class, Pentecost 1997.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Desires of the Young,” in *City of Desires – A Place for God?*, eds., R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Rein Brouwer, & Bonnie Milller-McLemore (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2013), 101-110.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Eileen Paten. “The Nation’s Latino Population is Defined by its Youth.” *Pew Research Center*. April 20, 2016. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/20/the-nations-latino-population-is-defined-by-its-youth/> (Accessed December 8, 2017).

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