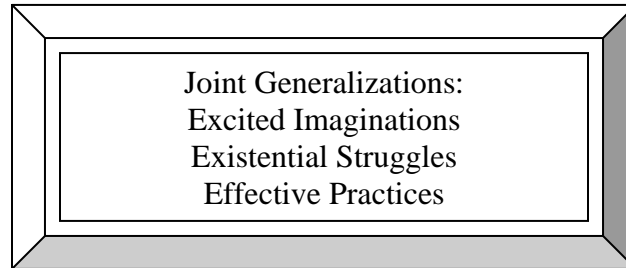
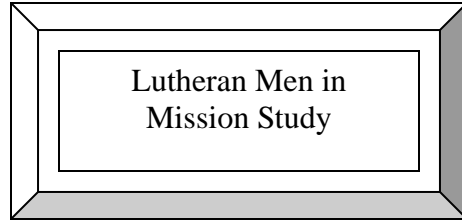


CHAPTER #2

COMPARING THE EARLY ADOLESCENT MALE STUDY WITH THE LUTHERAN MEN IN MISSION MALE SPIRITUALITY STUDY



The Lutheran Men in Mission Study (LMM) was conducted during the winter and spring of 2003. The purpose of this study was threefold; 1) to determine the character and shape of young adult male spirituality, 2) to identify practices in ministry relating to young adult males that help them to develop a life of faith within the church, and 3) to access the world of young adult males. In this sense, it served as a window into their cultures and experiences. Working in cooperation with the Lutheran Men in Mission organization of the ELCA, which also funded the project, a team of three researcher (of which I was one) conducted interviews in cities throughout the United States. The cities included Seattle, Sacramento, New York, San Antonio, Charlotte, Philadelphia, and the Twin Cities areas. Those interviewed ranged in age from 18-35. The average age was 24.8. The interview tools and methodology used in the survey were very similar to that used in the Early Adolescent Male Study (from now on referred to as “EAM”).

It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to fully summarize the LMM study. A more thorough summary and analysis was provided in Project #3 by this writer. For the purpose of this thesis it is important to perform three tasks: 1) briefly summarize the results of the study, 2) compare these results with the EAM study, and 3) review the interview data for reflective comments on the early adolescent years.

Task #1: A Summary of the LMM Results

The results of the study show that eleven factors or clusters of items contribute to describe the character and shape of young adult male spirituality and the missiological practices that help them connect with a life of faith in the church.

1) *As was the case in the EAM study it all begins with relationships.* It is clear that young adult male spirituality is affected by the character, power and shape of a wide variety of relationships. The types of relationships identified vary widely. I was struck by the many references to two significant factors: fathers and the marriage/divorce of parents. The impact of fathers and the character of the parental marriage relationship on these young men strongly shape their lives and their spiritual journey. The following is a list of key relationships identified:

- *Marriage/divorce in the family:* The wounds incurred during a divorce were more often identified and discussed rather than any benefits that might come from a divorce. In like manner, young men coming from homes where a healthy marriage exists commented on how helpful it was to see such a marriage modeled for them. It served as a source of strength for them while

they were discovering their place in the world and settling upon a belief/value system.

- *Spouse and children:* Marriage of a young adult male and the advent of children often play a significant “domesticating” role for these young men. This finding is consistent with cross-cultural studies reported by Stewart Van Leeuwen and Coltrane. “Cultural practices most strongly associated with a decrease in men’s adherence to...codes of honor (a source of violence and disruption in most cultures)...was men’s routine, nurturing involvement in childcare.”¹ The domestication of males through spouses and child rearing is good for boys as well. “When young boys have primary caretakers of both sexes, they are less likely as adults to engage in women-devaluing activities and in self-aggrandizing, cruel or overly competitive male cults.”² A spouse often led them into a life of spirituality. Spouses often introduced these young men into the life of the church.
- *Centrality of family both in the past and present:* The character of the relationship with their family of origin strongly affects their spiritual journey.
- *Parental hopes:* These young men were not immune to having heard the expectations of their parents for them. Whether they are testing these hopes, rebelling or conforming to them, they shape the nature of their spiritual journey.

¹ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *My Brother’s Keeper: What the Social Sciences Do (and don’t) Tell Us About Masculinity*, (Downers Grove, Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2002) 121.

² Ibid.

- *Role of extended family:* In a time of high divorce rates it was not unusual for a young man to identify an uncle, grandparent or surrogate father figure playing a significant role in shaping their spiritual journey.
- *Male peers:* The lifestyle, aspirations and spiritual journeys of these young men are strongly influenced by their friends and peer culture.

Each of these key relationships can serve as a significant entry point to explore questions of faith, spirituality and church.

2) *Male mentors play an enormous role in shaping young adult males.* While relationships play a key role in the spiritual development of young adult males, two types of relationships are very significant and deserve to be identified as separate factors. The reference to fathers has already been alluded to and I underscore that factor here.

- *Fathers:* I often heard the voice of “father respect” and a wishing that fathers were more available and accessible because there is great adoration for fathers.
- *Older male figures and the opportunity to be an apprentice:* The interviewees often identify in their lives the significant role played by a caring older man such as a grandfather, boss, mentor, or coach. Young adult males need to see older men living spiritual lives in order for them to “get it”.

3) *The experience of a crisis serves as a significant factor.* A crisis often presents an opportunity for spiritual growth and religious formation and this proved true in these interviews. When significant Christian male figures engaged these young men at these points of crisis, then their faith life was enhanced. It is important to note what the young men identify as significant crises. Three types of crises surface over and again in

our interviews. These crisis fall into the larger category of existential struggles as identified in the EAM study.

- *Vocation/job*: The search for meaningful work and gainful employment was often interpreted as a crisis and a source of great personal anxiety (Achievement Factor in the EAM study).
- *Void after high school*: Many respondents identified post-high school time as a time of limbo and drifting. The dislocation from the school community, the departure of friends to college, tech schools, or entering the military and new jobs all created a crisis of transition, dislocation, wilderness and economic insecurity. Many reported entering a “wild child” phase indulging in parties, alcohol and some drugs.
- *Relationships*: A number of relational crises were identified such as death of a loved one (often a grandparent, parent or mentor), the break up with a girl friend, or their own divorce.

4) *The allocation and management of time is a critical struggle for these young men*. This is a specific kind of crisis that surfaced often enough to merit its own category. These young men struggle with juggling their time between job, school, friends, significant relationships, and sleep. In this context it is difficult for them to find volunteer time or worship time. It requires flexibility and innovation in worship schedules to attract these young men (i.e., worship on a non-Sunday morning schedule). The young men also reported they found it difficult to find time for themselves. Finding time for themselves meant they wanted to do some recreational activities, most often active sports.

5) *Nodal experiences play a significant role in shaping these young men; they especially serve as a vital bridge to a life of faith.* Male spirituality is often enhanced by significant events and experiences that serve as mountaintop or nodal moments. Young men identify the following kinds of experiences:

- Men's retreats (where they were given the opportunity to share as well as lead)
- Crisis
- Divorce
- Move to a new location
- New Job
- Spiritual events (i.e., Promise Keepers)
- Fights
- Awakenings (i.e., involvement in a recovery program)
- Birth of a child
- Mission trips
- Opportunities to lead

6) *Immersion in nature and the out-of-doors is deeply meaningful and spiritual to these young men.* Nature serves as a specific type of nodal experience. The spiritual vitality of these young men is strongly enhanced by experiences in nature and by doing things in nature. Nature allows them to be kinesthetic in their faith. In nature they make some cosmological connections. These young men are more likely to claim a spirituality that is pantheistic in character rather than transcendental. Their immersion in nature takes some specific forms and meets a number of goals.

- Mastery of skills in nature: (i.e., hunting or snowboarding)
- Just doing things: (mountain biking, canoeing or kayaking, snowboarding, running, etc.)
- “I’m Alive”: There is a sensate connection of being alive when in touch with life in nature.
- Contemplation: Simply sitting in parks or natural settings enjoying the view and sounds of nature serves to provide a deep spiritual connection and is a source for releasing stress and tension.
- Peak experience: They need and want to test themselves, take risks and be on the edge.

7) *As was the case in the EAM study, sports play a huge role in the life of young adult men.* Young adult males are enormously kinesthetic. Their spirituality goes through their bodies, it has a physical character. Through sports they bond, feel the power of themselves, push their limits, learn about themselves as physical men and test their character. Sports provide a discipline for them that they often desire. Most of the young men interviewed see sports as more than a physical outlet; sports touch who they are. Specific sports include running, basketball and weight training. When they do sports in nature, they report having a great sense of satisfaction and joy. Other benefits of sports they identified include:

- Mastery of skills
- Power of self
- Experience
- Chemistry of sport

- Discipline/ritual/story
- Fun
- Friendship
- Connect with nature

8) *These young men recognize that they have a spiritual hunger.* This hunger takes the form of feeling the need to be on a quest, pursuit or adventure. Many have a yearning for a sense of nobility defined as living morally, living with integrity, and showing respect. Many reported that when they do a good job at work they feel great amounts of satisfaction. This spiritual hunger needs to be eminently practical. For example, they want serious Bible study wrapped in meaningful communal life. The fruits of this spirituality must show outwardly (i.e., walk the talk). Many report a spiritual life of private prayer. These young men do not necessarily see the need or connection between prayer life and congregational life. A guaranteed turn-off is to force spirituality upon them. They unanimously report that they want to engage in dialogue not monologue. Interestingly, although some list certain preferences for music in worship life, what seems more critical is that they feel comfortable in worship. “Comfortable” is defined as “come as you are at a time when I don’t miss sleep and be informal in style”. This response echoes some of the five Effective Practices Factors identified in the EAM study as being attractive to those early adolescent males who do attend church.

9) *These young men are willing to do service and they report a sense of great satisfaction when they do service.* Given their tendency to be physical and kinesthetic, service projects that require movement, construction, tools and group activity are most desirable. However, it may require a number of invitations before a young man

will engage in a service project. It is significant to note how they define service. Often they say they want “to be a good person”. And a good person does service for family and friends. This more parochial understanding of service can be expanded to include mission trips if significant mentors invite them in. Often they will not use the language of service, rather they’ll talk about “giving something back” and that is what it means to be a good person.

10) *To understand the spiritual nature of these young men one must connect with their passions and avocations.* Nearly all these young men have something they love to do. Often it is related to sports or a hobby such as art, or music. They love having permission to pursue their passions. The church needs to recognize these avocations and creatively connect them to the larger mission of the church. This means that helping young men identify their gifts, and naming and framing these gifts theologically will be very significant if they are to engage in the spiritual life of the church.

11) *Music and media serve as “white noise” in their lives.* The wide variety of interests in music and media was surprising. There does not seem to be one form or style that dominates over another. Music and the media are very important to them, but it is an importance much like white noise. It is simply the background sound and milieu in which they live their lives and it is a given. This finding is consistent with what one would expect in a post-modern culture.

Task #2: Comparing the LMM Study with the EAM Study

A close comparison of the two studies reveals many points of contact and common ground. Specifically the six factors that excite the imaginations of early adolescent males are nearly identical with those of their older counterparts. I have

included the achievement factor as a part of the excited imagination as well as the existential struggles of early adolescent males as described earlier.

- The power and influence of relationships are very important in their lives.
- The role of males as mentors and role models is identified in both cohorts.
- The power and influence of fathers in their lives is recognized. Fathers have the potential to do great harm or great good, but they are never neutral.
- Friendships are vitally important to both groups. The shape and character of these friendships will vary (peer buddies, spouse), but no matter the age, friends are important.
- Action and kinesthetic opportunities serve both as recreational and spiritual outlets in both groups. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this action factor in the lives of early adolescent males and young men. Congregational practices that do not provide appropriate outlets for this factor bias their ministries against early adolescent males and young men. As a part of this action factor, the role of nature is also very important. Congregational practices that do not incorporate First Article opportunities bias their ministries against the incorporation of early adolescent males and young men.
- Opportunities to explore their avocations and to experience achievement play a critical role in the personal and spiritual development of these cohorts. Congregational practices that are not sensitive to these avocations (i.e., hunting or singing in the choir) bias their ministries against this cohort.

How these six factors take shape will be quite varied; however, all congeal to provide multiple nodal moments that have the potential to awaken, nurture, and shape faith formation in early adolescent males and young adult males.

In regard to existential struggles, the two groups share much common ground. Under the general rubric of personal crises, we see many of the five factors identified in the EAM study. I note the following as examples.

- In the LMM study, finding new jobs, moving to a new location, deciding a career, managing and allocating time, and establishing a good marriage/family are equivalent to the Achievement Factor in the EAM study.
- In the LMM study, divorce is equivalent to the Family Issues Factor of the EAM study.
- In the LMM study, fighting is equivalent to the Annoyance Factor in the EAM study.
- The void after high school identified in the LMM study could be equivalency to the Self-Coping Factor in the EAM study.
- The stresses of college, tech school, and developing a career in the LMM study are equivalent to the Schoolwork Factor in the EAM study.

As noted earlier, the Achievement Factor serves as a two edge sword/factor for this group. It is both exciting and represents new opportunity, but it can also be a great source of anxiety, frustration and uncertainty.

Task #3: Reflective Comments on Early Adolescence taken from the LMM Study

Rear view mirrors are wonderful things because they show us where we have been. In many ways they are our only source of wisdom and insight. In scouring the

interview data from the LMM study, I looked for rear view mirror reflections and observations made by the cohort to determine what further insights they might provide to our inquiry regarding the excited imaginations and existential struggles of early adolescent males. I have organized these data by congregational participation category as described earlier in this thesis. I will report the responses that surfaced in the LMM study and then I will comment on what they might mean in understanding early adolescent males.

Responses from Category #1 of the LMM Study:

- His mother and father shoot archery, go camping and shoot rifles with him.
- He dropped out of school in 9th grade. His family often moved. His mother divorced twice. He experienced many different religions.

Commentary:

With only two responses no real conclusions can be drawn; however they are indicative of two factors: the Action Factor and the Family Issues Factor.

Responses from Category #2 of the LMM Study:

- He saw the hypocrisy of the church up through age 15 and so he left the church.
- He was close to his father and grandfather and they were shamed by the Catholic Church.
- He is a pastor's kid and dad was a big influence on him as a man of faith.
- His family formerly went to church every Sunday with grandparents.
- His mother died when he was in fifth grade and then he had step-relations.
- Church, Sunday School and confirmation were good, but then he left after a pastor

alienated him. He liked his SS teachers, but their own son murdered them.

- He liked youth group and finds fishing with his father as central to him.
- His parents took him to church.
- His best friend was active and this friend's father mentored him. He left when the friend and father moved and were no longer a part of his life.

Commentary:

Three of the respondents left the church in early adolescence because of the lack of caring adults or perceived insults from church leaders.

- Caring Adult Factor: 3

Three of the responses point to the power and influence of the family, especially the father, in shaping the faith life of early adolescent males.

- Father Factor: 3

Two of the responses show how the disruption of vital relationships can negatively impact early adolescent male participation in the life of the church.

- Relationship Factor, Male Factor: 2

Responses from Category #3 of the LMM Study:

- He was hyperactive so he did sports with his father and older brother.
- His parents divorced when he was 15.
- A friend took him to confirmation and he loved the intellectual inquiry. His youth worker was influential as was the church peer group and the surrogate Christian family he joined.
- His parents divorced when he was 12 and he was an angry teen who was in many fights.

- His mother was abusive and beat him nearly daily. He was locked out of the house. He hasn't seen his father since he was 15, but they talk on the phone.
- He became a writer at eleven and was strongly influenced by his teachers.
- He said his father was an "M and M" (hard on the outside and soft on the inside).
- His father, youth group and grandfather influenced him.
- The youth group, youth leader and mission trips grabbed his attention.
- He attended a parochial school and decided at age 9 he would live by the Golden Rule.
- At age 14 he decided to be an artist; this was his call. His father supported him in this decision.
- He spent time in a juvenile detention center. A pastor became a life changer for him by visiting him in juvenile hall and sharing the faith.
- His parents divorced when he was in junior high.
- He grew up in a Christian home and the youth group really helped him.
- He went to CCD and was one of the few kids from the tough part of town who went. His grandmother shaped his faith when he was young.
- His family went to church and he was "the black sheep". He lived on the streets.
- He went to church through confirmation and then quit. He said a bridging ministry between confirmation and adulthood is critical.
- He was Christian because his parents are Christian. It never went beyond Sunday attendance.

- His family went to a large Catholic Church and he never felt a part of it.

Commentary:

Confirmation of the results from the EAM study is clearly noted from these data. A summary of the various responses falling under the rubric of excited imaginations shows the following:

- Action Factor: 2
- Friendship Factor: 1
- Father Factor: 4
- Male Factor: 3

A summary of the various responses falling under the rubric of existential struggles shows the following:

- Family Issues Factor: 4
- Annoyance Factor: 2
- Achievement Factor: 3
- Self-coping Factor: 1

Finally, a summary of the responses falling under the rubric of effective practices shows the following:

- Caring Adult Factor: 2
- Family Practices: 3
- Friends/Peers Factor: 4

Some of the individual responses contain more than one factor and have been counted more than once when this occurs.

Responses from Category #4 of the LMM Study:

- He is active because he has ADD and his family supports him. He liked going on a retreat with old people. His father is influential.
- His family attended church regularly.
- His drum teacher engaged him in the church where he plays. He went to a Lutheran school and his family is active.
- He went to a Lutheran camp at 13 and saw an avalanche. He concluded God was in the avalanche. The youth gathering was also significant to him.
- His parents divorced when he was in 7th grade and the church became his surrogate home. He had mentors and good peer friends.
- He has a real sense of family at his home church.
- He is a pastor's kid and has no sense of passion for the church. He goes out of habit.
- He was strongly affirmed in his church in 6th grade. He is part of the youth group, enjoys the contemporary music, camp, Bible study and his mentor.
- He was raised Lutheran but knocked heads with his dad after his divorce. The Baptist pastor visited him and welcomed him back to church.
- He went on mission trips, was a youth group leader and led worship.
- His family regularly attended. He was an Eagle Scout and two teachers pulled him in.
- His uncle brought him in.
- When he was in 8th grade his mother had an affair and left the family. Church became his sanctuary and it energized him.

- His parents are part of the John Birch Society and he attended a private Christian school.
- He was made a deacon in 9th grade and his grandfather strongly influenced him.
- He was affirmed as having the gift of language and was made a deacon. His SS teacher was influential, plus he went to a Quaker school in a ghetto neighborhood. Others saw his gifts and lifted them up to him.
- He grew up in a Christian home with a good environment.
- He accepted Christ in 7th grade because of the “campaigners” group.
- He is a pastor’s kid who grew up in church.
- He grew up as the good son. Prayer was a regular part of his upbringing. His mother died when he was four, and he became part of a step-family of seven. He has so much respect for his dad that he weeps.
- He was strongly influenced by the Boy Scouts where he was given a Bible and he read it. This became a turning point for him. His pastor was also a big influence.
- His family raised him in the church. It has always been a part of their life.
- His parents divorced when he was 11 ending a stressful marriage. His father was absent when he was growing up. His father is on the fourth marriage. He is very close to his mother. He went to church a lot with his mother. Confirmation camp was particularly influential on him.

- He grew up very close to his father. They used to work on cars together. His grandparents were key as well. He has been in church his whole life. Confirmation didn't mean anything to him.
- He grew up in a family that attended church and he went to SS. Involvement in the youth program was critical for his faith. He felt he could talk to his pastors anytime. Camp helped him pull his faith together.
- Bible camps have been a spiritual high for him. Confirmation helped him own his faith. Being able to talk to his parents really helped him in his faith. He was involved in dramas and productions of the church from 4th grade on. His pastor is an important faith role model to him.
- Confirmation taught him a lot and helped him understand the Lutheran church. Drama projects have also been very helpful. Discussions with him as a young person were important.
- He did a lot of things with his grandfather and father in the woods including hunting. He attended the Catholic Church and remembers confirmation and first communion as significant. He really liked the priest as well.
- His family insisted he go to church. Confirmation was important to him. He made good friends who were Christians and they talked about faith a lot. He felt he could talk to his pastor a lot as well.

Commentary:

The responses from this group are particularly helpful and reinforcing of the conclusions drawn from the EAM study. The reader should note, once again, that an

individual respondent may make responses that fall into more than one factor category. Therefore, there are more responses recorded than there are respondents in the cohort.

Under the rubric of excited imaginations the responses show the following:

- Relationship Factor: 2 (Many of the other responses could have fallen into this factor category as well.)
- Father Factor: 5
- Male Factor: 8
- Achievement Factor (in the positive sense): 7
- Action Factor: 8

Under the rubric of existential struggles the responses show the following:

- Family Issues Factor: 4
- Annoyance Factor: 1

Under the rubric of effective congregational practices the responses show the following:

- Family Practices Factor: 14
- Caring Adults Factor: 17
- Friends/Peer Factor: 6
- Worship that Relates Factor: 1

Summary:

The LMM study clearly reinforces the conclusions drawn from the EAM study. The ten factors that identify the excited imaginations and existential struggles of early adolescent males are legitimate insights into their world. The comparison of the two studies also clearly demonstrates that the factors identifying effective church practices are evangelical and faith formative.