

Circles...and Stars

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It's about circles. Circles in a pond. Concentric circles. Circles that result from the impact of a stone thrown into the water. These circles have an energy of their own; they rise to the surface, then ripple outward, ever wider.

This weekend eighteen teenagers from our congregation will enter the final initiation phase of the Coming of Age program. They have been preparing for this moment for nine months--they have learned from teachers, from mentors, and from each other; they have tested themselves physically, spiritually, and intellectually; and they have drawn together as a community. Their journey began in canoes paddled down Tully Lake and will end this coming weekend beside a lake in Rindge, New Hampshire. They are ready for this Initiation, ready to take leave of their parents, to go away from the noise and distraction of their busy lives, and to enter into a time of purification and reflection. During their vigil they will think and write and tell the story about the person they have been for the first years of their lives and the person they hope to become as they begin the last phase of their journey into adulthood. This weekend will be a time to mark their passage out of childhood.

In the water, it is the impact of the stone that energizes and sets the circles in motion. Everything begins with the stone; until it breaks the water's surface the pond is still. Coming of Age is about jumping in and making ripples. But before you can jump, you must understand something about who you are in your own center, about what fuels you and gives you the strength to leap. You must find your moral compass, whether you call that your "North Star" or "the little voice within." This year's COA youth have reached for their stars.

We've come to the end of the COA program, and already I can see circles energized and rippling outward. I see eighteen individual youth joined in a circle of caring community. They have learned to place their very lives in each other's hands, but they also have learned to tolerate each other's quirks and weaknesses, and to encourage each other to be whoever they want to be. Each youth is surrounded by a family that has nurtured the child and will celebrate the youth who returns from the initiation vigil. Around these families and youth I see a circle of mentors and program coordinators who have challenged and guided and cheered the teenagers and families in their care this year.

But the circles don't stop there. Around these leaders I see the RE Committee who have supported this Coming of Age program all year, and they are joined by the Board of Management who carry the ultimate responsibility for all of the programs in this church. And beyond the mentors and the Board are all of you--the larger church family who gather this weekend to honor and celebrate the youth from our midst who are moving now towards being adults. I hope you see in them yourselves at their age or your own children as they left childhood behind.

I hope you remember the beginning of your own search for a star to guide you, a search that begins by looking inside, and continues across all the passages of our lives. I hope you bring food for their reception following church--your offering, your gesture that affirms their importance in this congregation. And I hope you take a moment to tell them how magnificent they are, and how very pleased you are to see them getting ready to add their energy and talents into the larger circle that is this church.

It's really all about circles. Circles and stars.