Editorial

As I write this I am sheltering-in-home in order to avoid the ravages of the covid-19 virus that is now threatening the lives of all but the most isolated in this world. In my part of the world we have been sequestering for almost a week now with no clear sense for how long it will be before we can return to normal or what we will have lost at the other side of this crisis. We are confident that many people will surely escape sickness or death, and yet some will not be so fortunate. We are told that there will eventually be a vaccination to cure or treatments to alleviate suffering caused by the virus. Meanwhile, this crisis has revealed some of our stark global and psychological divides, for example, between governments centrally controlled and laissez faire governance; rich and poor; young and old; fear and love; generosity and scarcity; those who can take healthcare for granted and those who are left to fate. It has been shocking how quickly our world has succumbed to a threat we didn't even know existed. How quickly our sense of normalcy is threatened. How quickly financial markets nosedived wiping out billions upon billions in wealth. How quickly stable livelihoods have disappeared. We are reminded once again of our fragility. We are struck anew by truth of the Lenten lesson that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

On the other hand, because of our enforced social distancing we are reminded anew of the forgotten treasure of the touch of a friend, the face of a smiling stranger, singing together robustly, the joy of passing the peace of Christ, and joining at table with each other. Those of us who are teachers are reminded how crucial it is to see the faces of our students and to hear ideas spoken from their mouths and refracted anew in their experience. We are learning in vivid relief that we are all interconnected, that we cannot escape this virus because of national boundaries, ethnic identity, politics or theology. We are learning anew the dangers of autonomy and isolation. And, in those moments when we can suppress our fear, we are reminded of the goodness of sabbath rest. And for a wise few among us this crisis does not bring despair, but

is comprehended in a season moving inexorably toward the hope of Easter's resurrection. These are unexpected gifts.

During the U.S. President Obama's first term, which was forced in his first days to navigate the 2008 financial crisis that could have brought a worldwide depression, his administration often evoked a saying "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste." Crises are surely a time of fear and suffering, but they can also hold the potential for reflection, remembrance, prayer, and innovation. While many congregations, families and ministers are prayerfully responding to the needs of youth in the midst of this crisis – and our first thought ought surely to be safety, comfort and care—still it is possible that this crisis represents a unique opportunity to remember our theological wisdom. Along with all of the other ways of considering this crisis—its environmental causes, economic aftermath, deficiencies in healthcare, public and private constituencies, etc.—theology must be one of the ways to frame our situation as we find our way forward. Where is God in the midst of this crisis? Where do we see God speaking in the many acts of kindness and advocacy? How is God at work redeeming this world? What is the Church's role in the face of the cultural, economic, generational, and social divisions manifested in this crisis? How are the gifts of youth suited for such a time as this? These are some of the questions that we and our young people will ask. How and whether we find ways of engaging young people in the grammar of Christian faith will be one way of determining whether we have wasted this crisis. For those of us who are scholars of youth and theology this will be a time of learning. I don't know when our next conference will be possible, but I look forward to hearing of your observations about youth, ministry and theology. I can almost hear the grants being written. For now, be safe.

In this issue of the journal, we have four articles representing the global reach of our journal.

In the first article *A Journey Not Walked Alone: Who are the Influential Adults Identified by Catholic-Raised Young Adults during their Religious Identity Development?* authors Danielle Vaclavik, Kelly Velazquez, Jakob Carballo from DePaul University observe that Catholic youth ministry efforts are struggling with retention and disaffiliation, with only half of Catholic teenagers still identifying as Catholic after ten years, and 74% leaving the Catholic Church between the ages of 10 and 20. The authors explore the quality of adult relationships and their role in formation and retention of youth.

In the second article, *Fighting the Tide: Youth with a History of Migration Living Religion in a New Context*, Amy Casteel, from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium, offers a timely article exploring the effects of migration on the faith and identity of young immigrants. In her research she employs

practical theological methods, moving back and forth between empirical interviews, social science and liberation theological reflection. She offers an interesting model to account for the dynamics of change in immigrant youth.

In the third article, *The Struggle of Conversion*, David Bosma, from the University of Otago in New Zealand, explores the experiences of Christian conversion among Maori New Zealand youth. The author interviews young people and chronicles some of the challenges of traversing from secular perspectives and traditional Maori families to majority European congregations. He investigates these challenges especially in comparison with Andrew Root's 'place-sharing' Lutheran approach, which he thinks holds promise but which can be adapted.

In the fourth article, *A Leadership Development Program for Young Men*, Don Smith from Malyon Theological College in Queensland, Australia, explores the motivation for young men to complete a leadership program to deepen spiritual maturity and identity as men. Utilizing a grounded-theory qualitative approach, the author discovered the power of a sense of community, solo wilderness experiences, friendships, fostering a sense of purpose and hope, and teaching relevant skills for their journey. Researchers propose these as elements of part of liminal rites of passage, especially for young men.

In the final article, *Double Denominational Belonging among Youths in Nigeria: Implications on Christianity* authors Lawrence N. Okwuosa, Favour C. Uroko, Michael Mokwenye, Uchechukwu Monica Agbo, Stella Chinweudo Ekwueme from the University of Nigeria explore the phenomenon of denominational diversity in Nigeria, including how young people participate in multiple traditions, and for various moral and experiential reasons. Their reflections on the role of Pentecostal movements is particularly enlightening in view of adolescent developmental capacities. We are seeing these trends in many places across the globe and their research will make an important contribution.

It is my deepest hope that the questions these authors explore, and the conclusions they reach will spark your imaginations about greater possibilities for youth ministry in your context and for God's inbreaking reign.

David F. White

Editor-in-chief