



Young people often get spiritual inspiration from family and friends

By **STEPHANIE JOSEPH LONG**
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While there are endless stories about troubled teens today, there are adults who have faith in our young people. And more importantly, there are teens whose faith, in turn, gives them faith in themselves.

Some young adults' faith came from emulating their parents' and grandparents' examples while others were inspired by friends. What many of these kids have discovered is that faith is not about a specific church; it's a belief system that sustains and comforts them.

Khaki Pixley, a 16-year-old from Traverse City, credits her grandfather for modeling the faith that she now embraces as her own.

"I'm not exactly sure why he impacted my faith. I think I just appreciated his devotion," said Pixley.

Her grandfather has since died, and while it's been hard for her family to return to church without him there, she said, "I'm more committed now, after he died, because I feel like I'm carrying on a part of him, something he gave to me. I like the consistency, the tradition."

She saw how his deep faith served him well and wants that same continuity. She said that she's always had faith, her family has always gone to church, but it was also something she wanted.

When her grandmother was diagnosed with cancer two-and-a-half years ago, it was Pixley's faith that brought her comfort.

"I prayed for her and I still do. She's surviving," she said.

Weary of being viewed as a religious fanatic, Pixley realizes that her faith has just always been a part of her life. Her mother, Cindy Pixley, agrees.

"Khaki was born with good sense and a moral backbone," said Cindy. "She's always been spiritual."

Pixley's grandmother, Gray Wagerson of Torch River, is proud of her granddaughter and credits her recovery in part, to Khaki's prayers.

"I'm very proud of both Elizabeth (Khaki) and Cindy, my daughter," said Wagerson. "So many kids don't want anything to do with church, and they have kept going. They are good, kind and they've learned that through having faith."

Wagerson also pointed out that she doesn't believe that faith is found in any one church. She was not raised in a specific church but chose services that were comforting. Her children were raised Catholic because her husband practiced

the faith, the faith that Khaki eventually came to call her own.

"Faith is more than the religion. It's the way you live your life," Wagerson said.

Sometimes though, it's not always a family's positive influence that leads young people to a faith. Sometimes their influence can turn kids away. Such was the case for Nick Twomey, a pastor in Traverse City, and it was the influence of a friend who eventually brought him back to religion.

As a 15-year-old, rebellious teen, Twomey knew he was floundering. He tried to fill a void with drugs, sports and popularity. Eventually he had to face the fact that he had botched out, and his family's faith wasn't meeting his spiritual needs.

"I felt like I was earning extra credit for sitting through

"If they see someone else with joy and a family life they envy, they'll want it for themselves."

**Nick Twomey, pastor
Bay Point Community Church**

mind-numbing, boring services. I thought then that when I graduated from high school, I could graduate from God, too," he said.

Despite an unpromising beginning, today Twomey is the pastor at Bay Point Community Church. His journey back to God and a personal faith led him to understand that if a family goes to church on Sunday but leads a separate life the rest of the week, the kids are left with a feeling of "spiritual schizophrenia."

"If they see someone else

with joy and a family life they envy, they'll want it for themselves," he said. In many cases, kids then find their own faith through their friends, as Twomey eventually did.

So did Chelsea White, a 16-year-old Traverse City student.

"I was talking to a friend about religion and she told me about hers. I got involved because I was looking for something I could believe in," said White. "Faith gives me ground to stand on and fall back on. It will always be there for me. I

can always believe in it."

Her mom, Pam Dohner, questioned White's faith at first because of the people she learned it from and because it was not the Christian faith she was raised in. After both mom and daughter did some research and reading, they came to respect each other's choices. Twomey seconds that it's important for parents or grandparents to allow for open, honest dialogue, that which needs to make room for questions and doubt.

Whether faith comes from their family or friends, many teens are finding that having a faith, any faith, is what both grounds and guides them.

Stephanie Joseph Long is a local freelance writer.



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