



What Do Teens *Really* See In Us?

Rev. Dr. Fr. Stépanos Dingilian © 2011

Very often we try to impart our wisdom on our offspring, especially our teens. It is a way for us to make sure that they know how to make wise decisions and navigate better through the difficult choices and relationships in life. Yet, how do we know whether they grasped what we told them or not? How do we know that they see what we mean? Whether our offspring or not, what do teens *really* see in us?

In the Riverside Armenian Apostolic Church we have a program where young people respond to parents' and other adult community members' sharing of their experiences as teens, and these young people in response share what they see in the older members of the community.

For instance, parents spoke about growing up in the United States, Armenia, and Republic of Georgia. They spoke of gas prices when they were growing up, football and baseball teams, movies and movie stars, pop-stars, and their favorite cars. They also spoke of the moonwalk and famous Armenians of the time. This was great for the parents to share their memories and even brought the community together.

But perhaps the most immediate benefits came when the young people started sharing what they heard and saw in these presentations. The insightfulness of these young people was amazing. For example, one young person stated, "I learned that the world in which my parents grew up was much safer than today's world." The issue here is not simply that the young person noticed that the world has become more tumultuous, but that "safety of the world around him" is an important issue for this young person. This type of insight, of understanding what a young person is anxious about is not easy to find out, and yet this type of sharing brings out this extremely valuable insight.

There were other insights that told those present about the anxieties and worries of these young people. One stated, "Families did not move a great deal then, and classmates became friends." Today's youngsters in public schools have to change classmates every year, so it is hard for them to establish long term connection and friendship.

Very insightful comments came from a number of teens when they said, "Now we know that our parents were not born perfect. They too had to learn and grow like us. This means that we have a chance too." Of course, a great deal could be gathered from such a comment, but a most important result is that a young person feels hopeful that he or she can develop and grow, and strive for perfection, even if it takes years to accomplish. This is what Christ wanted us to understand when he said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (St. Matthew 5:48)

Understanding the depths, the joys, and the worries of our offspring when they are young is very difficult. However, sharing on the part of the parents and other adult community members helps the youth identify, form, and express their views and concerns early enough and in ways that help the parents and the Church community give them the hope and the confidence they need to excel in life in a Christian way.