

COMMUNITIES OF CREATIVITY:
THE ROLE OF SYMBOLS IN YOUTH FORMATION

by

ANDREW LOCKE KELLNER

A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

ADVISERS: NANCY GOING & TERI ELTON

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2012

This paper may be duplicated only by special permission of the author.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Power To Divide or Inspire.....	1
Social Semiotic Theory & Multimodality.....	6
Diversity in Communion.....	12
The Language of Faith.....	13
A Community of Creativity.....	17
Bibliography.....	22

THE POWER TO DIVIDE OR INSPIRE

“Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary use words.”

This oft quoted epitaph, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, is one that speaks to the reality of our postmodern context. Indeed it says something of the feeling that words can and do remain empty and meaningless unless otherwise supported and filled. This process relies on both the communicator and the audience in the creation of meaning and importance. This relationship, however, does pose certain difficulties and represents one of the more difficult aspects of working with young people; communication. Individuals involved in ministry with young people face an every evolving set of communication norms and pop culture references. Young people by and large have immersed themselves into a new understanding of communication, through the use of personal electronic devices and social networking tools. Older generations, with whom youth worker still must communicate, use a very different set of communication tools, and when they do make forays into newer modes of communication often utilize these modes in different ways than their younger counterparts.

The heart of the matter is that young people communicate differently than adults do, and this by its very nature can be a very isolating factor in the lives of young people. They participate in numerous social arenas where they must communicate with adults, who do not share their communication style or techniques. As frustrated as adults may be with this, it is equally frustrating for the young person as well. Much of what we

construct as ‘adolescences’ can be seen as a differentiation of communication, and increasingly there is a shift to this thinking, away from biological and psychological understandings of adolescence.¹ The duration of adolescences has also changed, and the notion of a neat period beginning with the onset of puberty and ending with the termination of education and beginning of employment, no longer serve as the concrete markers they may once have. Rather, for a number years now research has shown that puberty is beginning earlier in the lives of young people², and young people are increasingly delaying their entry into the workforce either by choice or at times through the influence of outside forces.³

Additionally, the understanding of adolescences as the period in which an individual develops their identity is facing new challenges as well. Firstly, it is by and large not the experience of most individuals today. In contrast the ‘storm and stress,’ which have been thought to possess and differentiate adolescence, is felt throughout the lifespan. Individuals are called upon to wrestle with their identity within the context of “long-term relationship; the responsibility and revelations of parenthood; the chronic servitude of work; the unexpected ravages of serious illness; and the challenges and discoveries of old age.”⁴ The process of identity formation is by and large experienced as being continual in nature and adolescence is but one point of ‘storm and stress’ along the expansive journey of life. The engine driving this continual process is that of language

¹ C. Thurlow & A. Williams, *Talking Adolescence: Perspectives in Communication in the Teenage Years* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2005)

² J. Wyn & R. White, *Rethinking Youth* (London: Sage, 1997)

³ L. Chrisholm & K. Hurrelman, Adolescences in modern Europe. Pluralized transition patterns and their implications for personal and social risks. *Journal of Adolescences*, 18 (1995) 129-158

⁴ Thurlow, *Talking Adolscence*,

and communication. Or to put it differently, identities are formed through relationships, which are constructed through “linguistic, nonverbal, visual or other meaning-making practices.”⁵ Communication then is the tool used to create, define and share meaning.

The communication style and linguistic approaches that adults take in referring to and communicating with young people matter a great deal. This is perhaps felt and realized more so by young people themselves than the adults communicating with them. Conceivably a typical understanding for young people is represented by the following statement reported by a young person: “You’re an adult when they want you to be, you’re a child when they want you to be.”⁶ Young people are usually the last individuals asked to assist in defining or understanding where they are in life. More often than not, adults approach them with an idea or concept of who they are and what they should be doing. Often this is based on the notion of neat developmental categories, but the language associated, with these neat categories, are often unflattering to young people and at times even demeaning. And yet adults may find themselves saying: “I just don’t understand what teenagers are saying. It is like they are speaking a foreign language.” This type of language though does more damage than good, in attempting to build relationships with young people. The language used to describe and communicate with a group has a direct impact on how prejudicial ideas about that group are formed.⁷ Today we continue to wrestle with the heavy influence of the thinking of the 1990’s, which has been described

⁵ Thurlow, *Talking Adolescence*,

⁶ A. Wilson “‘Nike trainers, my one true love—without you I am nothing’: Youth, identity and the language of trainers for young men in prison.” in *Discourse Constructions of Youth Identities*, eds J. K. Androutsopoulos & A. Georgakopoulou (pp. 173-196). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003.

⁷ T. A. van Dijk, “Discourse and the Denial of Racism,” *Discourse and Society*, 3(1), (1992) 87-118

as “the most anti-youth period in American history.”⁸ The signs, symbols and language that adults use to describe and communicate to, with and for young people, necessitate for young people the creation of their own system of communication to express themselves in an acceptable manner. This process allows young people to develop an understanding of self and the world, while providing a means to communicate these understandings within their peer group.

It may seem to some that the differences in communication between generations can be marked by the use of new communication tools. The difference in communication between young people and older generation is not merely related to the electronic and instantaneous nature of their communication tools, however. Older generations have and do utilize these same social networking tools and personal electronic communication devices; rather the differentiation is seen most profoundly when the language and meaning that is conveyed across these modes are examined. Young people are involved in a creative enterprise that is leaving many of the tried and true signs and symbols of the past, just there; in the past. Young people are engaged in a major recreation of meaning, utilizing new signs and symbols of their own creation to express the deep meaning they experience and wish to communicate to others. This shift in semiotics most certainly is not a new endeavor, as each generation has across time adapted and created symbols to express the complex realities they experience in the world. The difference can be seen, though through the modes utilized in constructing these new signs and symbols, as well as the weight of meaning these symbols are given.

⁸ Mike A. Males, *Framing Youth: Ten Myths About the Next Generation* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1999)

In 2010 the Pew Research Center, found that 75% of young people, ages 12-17 in the United States, owned a cell phone.⁹ Besides providing these young people with a source and system, whereby to be in constant connection with others, this also provides the means to create, capture, edit and share images and video from their everyday lives. These images, captured largely on cellular devices, with the ability to fit in a young person's pocket, are increasingly serving as the signs and symbols young people utilize to create, store and communicate meaning. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram allow individuals to share images and videos from their lived experience. In addition these and other platforms offer young people the ability to collect, edit and recreate images, music, video, text and practically any form of communication imaginable into meaning caring modes. Due to their electronic and internet based construction, these modes of communication are easily shared, with not only close friends and family member, but are made available for individuals across the world to view, comment on, share and even edit and reshape. These tools have provided individuals with the ability to not only create new symbols based on their lives, but to receive and accept symbols from other's lives in a rapid succession. These symbols then are in constant flux and the meaning they hold is shaped largely by the experience of the individuals creating and viewing them.

For the adult involved in youth formation the complex web of entangled communication styles, modes, and semiotic systems require a constant level of attention. These adults attempt to convey meaning to multiple generational subsets, utilizing multiple modes of communication and semiotic approaches. There is a need for these

⁹ Amanda Lenhart, *More and More Teens on Cell Phones* (Pew Research Center Publications, 2009) <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1315/teens-use-of-cell-phones> accessed 4/20/12

individuals to develop a working understanding of the processes involved in making meaning with these various generational groups, placing special emphasis on young people and their continual invention of semiotic meaning taken from everyday life.

SOCIAL-SEMIOTIC THEORY & MULTIMODALITY

*Signs, signs, everywhere there's signs
Blocking up the scenery; breaking my mind
Do this; Don't do that; Can't you read the signs¹⁰*

The research and work of Gunther Kress, of the Institute of Education, at the University of London, reveals much for the youth worker, in their efforts to communicate effectively and efficiently with individuals across generations. Kress puts forth that first and foremost communication today is both a social enterprise and one that takes on multiple forms or modes. This is in sharp contrast to past understanding of meaning making and sharing. In the not too distant past, linguistic communication was seen as the primary mode of meaning making and transmission.¹¹ Largely based on the print medium of books and articles, individuals would engage with the written word through predictable and largely controlled avenues and direction. In the English language system an individual engages a text from the beginning; or at the upper left hand corner of the page, moving through the text from left-to-right and top-to-bottom. The point of entry and subsequent flow of ideas and meaning were largely controlled by common convention. The power in the transmission lay with the author and publisher of the text,

¹⁰ Les Emmerson, *Sign.s* http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/f/five_man_electrical_band/signs.html accessed 4/20/12

¹¹ Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (London: Routledge, 2010) 56

while the audience was to accept the material largely as presented as a whole.¹² This mode of transmission is still largely utilized today, as this very work is an example of it.

A second linguistic mode that was largely utilized was that of oration or within the context of the Church the sermon or homily. Here the presentation of meaning is still largely controlled by the author and orator of the text being spoken, while the audience remains largely invited to accept the meaning presented as a whole. While an individual may self-select which sections, either in writing or spoken form, to pay attention to, the message is conveyed as a total comprehensive package. Kress contends that there has been a rapid shift away from these singular modes of communication to a multimodal and socially constructed resource for meaning-making and transmission.

Kress puts forth that the multimodal nature of communication is easily discernable, and utilizes the example of parking signs.¹³ Contained in these posted communications are multiple modes; as the signs exploits: text, color, images, and even location. Each mode is used to communicate a part of the message and is taken in as a whole. Each individual is left to construct the meaning contained through a process of piecing together the modes to create a whole meaning for the sign. Some individuals will rely more on images; others will be drawn to the sign by its location or color; and still others will rely on the text of the sign to understand its meaning.

Contemporary individuals can easily ascertain that much of the communication that they engage with is made up of multiple modes, each working to convey a piece of the whole meaning, intended to be communicated. In textbooks, for example, images are

¹² Ibid., 26

¹³ Ibid., 2-3.

used to assist individuals in understanding concepts and ideas. The number of images contained in textbooks has seen a marked increase over the years.¹⁴ The use of such images may not be completely new, but the way in which they are employed to convey meaning and the meaning they carry has largely shifted over time. Today current textbooks often rely on images alone to convey aspects of information that has been deemed more appropriately communicated in this mode, than the text of the book. This is in contrast to the past, where images were largely seen as secondary communicators of the information contained primarily within the body of text.

Perhaps even more revealing are the multiple modes exploited by webpages. Having become everyday sources of communication for many individuals, webpages utilizes not only images and text, but music, video, colors, and a host of other modes meant to assist the individual in connecting and understanding the material. Furthermore, webpages offer an innovative way to access information, as they do not always contain a singular formal entry point or direction of content.¹⁵ The information accessed is largely based on the individual reading the webpage, and their own interests. This marks a clear shift in power away from the author to the audience, holding that communication only occurs if the participants engage in a process of interpretation of the sign being presented to them.¹⁶ Here there is a glimpse of the three assumptions that Kress' theory put forward: "communication happens in response to a prompt; communication has happened when there has been an interpretation; communication is always multimodal."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 47

¹⁵ Ibid., 37

¹⁶ Ibid., 35

¹⁷ Ibid., 36

Kress then combines a multimodal understanding of communication with a social-semiotic understanding, so that an appreciation of why and how each mode is selected to convey the meaning it carries might be developed. This understanding assists individuals in understanding the relationship between author/speaker and the audience/listener. This consideration moves discussion from merely the use of signs in communication, to a discussion of sign-making within a social context¹⁸, and Kress develops an understanding of three key roles in the development, transmission and understanding of multimodal communication or signs: *Rhetor*, *Designer* and *Interpreter*.

Rhetor

The rhetor serves as the maker of a message. They are the individual who develops the thoughts and ideas that make up the content, or as Kress puts it they lay out the “ground” from which meaning is shaped.¹⁹ This is the role that the youth worker embodies, as they respond to their mission and the needs of individual young people. They are responsible for crafting a message as a whole, to be conveyed to their audience. The message though is rudimentary as it is largely based on inward signs and symbols that assist the youth worker in understanding the material they wish to convey. These ‘representations’ are again internally focused, “shaped by *my* social histories, by *my* present social place, by *my* focus to give material form through socially available resources to some element in the environment.”²⁰ The rhetor then utilizes their own interests to form a message or sign to be shared with others. For the youth worker, this

¹⁸ Ibid., 54

¹⁹ Ibid., 45

²⁰ Ibid., 51

might take the shape of a word of encouragement for a young person, a Bible study, an informational message to parents, or even a budget proposal for a vestry or church board. The representation created is largely based on the internal interests of the individual.

Designer

The designer works to take this internal representation, of the rhetor, and begin to develop an outward multimodal sign to communicate the internal representation. By and large most individuals will find that they must act as both rhetor and designer, but the operations are distinct from one another.²¹ The designer begins to ask outwardly focused questions about the audience, the platform, and the available modes. Additionally the designer must weigh what each mode can and cannot convey in respect to the internal representation of the rhetor. By and large this process is shaped and motivated by an understanding of likely responses from the intended audience.²² For the youth worker, and for all other communicators, there are specific considerations to be taken into account, as multiple audiences will likely engage with the message created. Each audience and even individuals will respond differently. The youth formation worker as designer must have knowledge of various modes of communication and intimate knowledge of how various audience they communicate with responds to each mode.

Interpreter

The interpreter takes the ‘ground’ created by the rhetor and designer and begins to create their own internal representation. It is only when the audience engages in the process of interpreting, or reading the message and creating an internal representation of

²¹ Ibid., 50

²² Ibid., 43

meaning that communication actually occurs. This understanding of communication balances power between the interpreter and the rhetor, as each shapes the message being passed between the two.²³ Here the message is read through the interests of the interpreter, and the ground provided by the rhetor is reshaped, providing a new message or understanding. The goal in this transmission is not seen as how closely the two messages match, but in the process of internal understanding and sharing of power in communication.²⁴ For the youth worker this is of utmost importance as younger generations take this process as largely normative and apply it across the board to their involvement with all communication.²⁵

This understanding of communication has direct impact on the ministry of the youth worker, as the youth worker must spend more time developing clear internal representation of the messages they wish to convey. This task is further compounded by the need to take seriously the action and place of design in all materials and communication used within the formation program. The overall cohesion of thoughts and ideas will be furthered, if more design is utilized to provide cohesive signs for students to internalize as symbols of meaning for their own lives. As the audiences with which youth workers communicate, take on a larger responsibility and control over their own faith development, there must be a level of openness, to these reshaped messages. The youth worker must work to create an environment that is open to multiple understandings of the faith in relation and dialogue with each other.

²³ Ibid., 37

²⁴ Ibid., 45

²⁵ Ibid., 38-39

DIVERSITY IN COMMUNION

The signs that are created, recreated and shared multiple times over, utilizing multiple modes, create a complex network of symbolic meaning for a community. Each individual can become ingrained and defensive of their internal representation, and outwardly shaped design of that understanding. The appearance can be, and may in fact be, that of a community with a diversity of theologies and understanding of God, self, Church, the world and just about any topic imaginable. This can cause issues for communities of faith, which have over time valued cohesion and uniformity of creed. Kathryn Tanner offers some insight and understanding into this situation. She puts forward that even more than the place of “tradition”, the diversity of views is worrisome to Christian communities, because Christianity itself holds that an individual can be greatly mistaken in their understanding of what it means to be a Christian.²⁶ The world of communication that Kress presents therefore places stress upon the youth worker and the community as a whole, as it raises up and celebrates the reshaping and multiple understandings of the message of faith. Tanner though does not see this process or reality as necessarily a negative event. For Tanner this is in all reality a normative function within Christianity as individuals across cultural boundaries seek to make their life “Christian.” The individual uses materials they encounter in their cultural experience to develop an understanding or way to be Christian within their cultural milieu.²⁷ This process yields variation, even as individuals with equal commitment and knowledge of the Christian faith engage in the process. The individual Christian must *interpret* the

²⁶ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 156

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158

message of Christianity with their interests and social situation in mind. For Tanner this is the basic element of being Christian; to engage in theological judgment.²⁸ Even during this process of theological judgment the individual takes into account the response of others according to Tanner. The individual is engaging in *design*, as they shape their internal understanding, so that it can be best received by other Christians.

This process of reshaping the message of Christianity, so as to be understood within a given cultural context, largely mirrors the process which Kress proposes in his multimodal social semiotic theory. The individual must engage in the process of interpreting the message of Christianity, with the traditionally held view serving as the ‘ground’ from which to proceed. The individual’s own interests and experience will shape the outcome their internal understanding and they must then design this representation of Christianity so it can be shared within their faith community. Thus the process of shaping and reshaping messages can be seen as being intrinsic in the faith tradition of Christianity. For Tanner this diversity of views and understanding can be of value for faith communities who accept it honestly with openness. This she proposes can strengthen the bonds of fellowship, which exist between Christians as they seek truth together.²⁹ The youth worker may find this to be true for their own group of young people and even more so between generational groups.

THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH

²⁸ Ibid., 160

²⁹ Ibid., 175

*The language of faith is the language of symbols.*³⁰

While the discussion to this point has focused on the formation of the multimodal signs used within communication to share ideas and concepts; their significance within a theological discussion now comes to the fore. Paul Tillich proposed over 60 years ago that the appropriate way to approach our understanding of God and all matters of theology was through the use of symbolic language. This can be seen as much in the quote above. For Tillich the idea of faith as belief was inconsistent with experience, and he proposed that faith was to be “ultimately concerned.”³¹ Faith then is that which an individual holds as the ultimate source of concern, whether that be their career, national identity, or God and eternity. This definition speaks to how an individual truly orders their life, and what motivates their actions, thoughts and understanding of the world around them.

From this understanding Tillich is able to produce an appreciation of the importance of internal, as well as communal dialogue around the elements of faith. He does this through the contrast of faith and doubt. With his understanding of faith, there is not a need for blind belief in the object of faith, but rather a wrestling with the ultimate concern as a witness to its importance.³² The dialogue between faith and doubt is an essential element in faith, as the individual develops understandings of their ultimate concern as they encounter various challenges to it, or attempt to understand its place in shifting sociocultural contexts. The same is true for a community of faith as they will

³⁰ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper One, 1957) 51

³¹ *Ibid.*, 21

³² *Ibid.*, 25

necessarily work through much of the same dialogue, as individual members go through this normative examination and experience. Much like Tanner, Tillich perceives variation and dialogue as inherent in a lived Christian faith.

Tillich sees this dialogue playing itself out in much the same way as Kress' understanding of communication. The individual must develop an understanding or internal representation, but it is only seen as holding deeper meaning and significance when it has been communicated in the community.³³ The community must take the elements of the symbol presented, and interpret it, developing their own internal representation or understanding. For Tillich this process is important because: "religious language enables the act of faith to have a concrete content."³⁴ The centrality of religious language, communication, and the role of community in the life of faith spur a lively and creative faith, which deepens the individual's and the community's commitment and understanding of their ultimate concern.

The communication that occurs during this process takes on a variation, from the multimodal semiotic understanding of Kress. The communication that takes place in the discussion and development of faith is that of symbolic language, which outwardly resembles the semiotic resources of Kress' understanding, but inwardly hold more meaning and significance. Outwardly a sign and a symbol can be composed of the same modes, utilizing: color, image, text, video, music and much more. In addition the role of a sign and a symbol can be largely seen as being the same, as they are both tasked with pointing to something beyond themselves. Symbols however go one step further as they

³³ Ibid., 49

³⁴ Ibid., 27

share in that which they represent. Tillich uses a nation's flag as an example of this, as the flag "participates in the power and dignity of the nation for which it stands."³⁵

Where signs can be changed in short notice, a symbol contains a piece of the life of what it represents.

This living nature of a symbol, gives the symbol a level of power and authority. This living nature is experienced by individuals, as the symbol is able to reveal or make present levels of reality that would otherwise have remained closed to us. The symbol is able to make sense of reality in ways that science or thought cannot, which allows the symbol to also reveal aspects of our soul which correspond with these aspects of reality.³⁶ Poetry and music, for example, open up a deeper understanding of humanity and sheds light on hidden aspects of our being. These areas of reality and of our own self only become clear to us through symbols. But just as these moments of revelation cannot be forced, neither can a symbol be purposefully created. The symbol is rooted in these deeper realities and can only come into existence through the acceptance of them as symbols by the collective unconscious of the group.³⁷ In this respect the symbol, begins its life as a created sign, but evolves as it opens to individuals and the community new understandings of their reality and selves.

As a consequence, of their not being deliberately created, symbols have a lifespan. They are birthed and grow, when they speak to the depths of the community, but they too will die when their time is done.³⁸ Symbols shed light on the ultimate

³⁵ Ibid., 48

³⁶ Ibid., 48-49

³⁷ Ibid., 49

³⁸ Ibid., 49-50

concern in a specific way and allow the community and individuals to encounter it through their specific lens, but new lenses and new understandings will come into existence. The birth of new symbols does not necessitate the death of older symbols, and older symbols can take on renewed meaning and reveal new understandings. But each symbol, as it takes on a life, becomes like a living thing with a birth and a death. As the community engages in communication and dialogue the semiotic resources they create, can serve as the fertile soil for the birth of new symbols to assist individuals in experiencing and understanding their ultimate concern; God.

A COMMUNITY OF CREATION

With an understanding of multimodal social semiotic communication, coupled with an appreciation for the place of symbols as the heart of faith and faith formation, the individual youth worker will be prepared to engage in developing an overall approach to their ministry. This enables them to communicate effectively with multiple generations. The youth worker will need to work with their ministry team in developing a community that appreciates the diversity of understanding that dialogue and creativity invite. The youth worker will play a key role in serving as a bridge for other team members, in designing and communicating the messages of the larger community in an effective way to young people. This communication however will go far in assisting young people to feel valued as members of the community and assist the community as a whole in developing an understanding of the communication styles and technics of young people. The goal is not to mold young people into the current structures and forms of

communication, but rather to broaden the communication of the community to include elements young people can easily connect with.

A good place to begin with this work, is for the youth worker to spend time talking and observing the communication techniques of the young people with which they work. The youth worker will be greatly assisted in the design element of their message if they are familiar with and understand the various modes utilized by young people. The youth worker will also need to familiarize themselves with what symbols hold meaning and significance for the faith community, keeping in mind words such as, “God” are symbols as well. Discovering how young people engage with these traditionally held symbols will enable the youth worker in better developing an appreciation for the understanding of the faith that young people possess. It is important for the youth worker to keep in mind that the use of a symbol does not directly connote how it is understood. A symbol can be used as a sign, but then has lost the life of a symbol, and therefore its ability to reveal new parts of reality and the self. As well the youth worker must remain open to new symbols which hold similar meaning as traditional ones, but may be radically different in style and modality. An overall analysis of the communication and use of signs and symbols within the community, across generations will be of great benefit for the ministry team as they develop their overall approach.

The elements of design will be important for the team to utilize in developing their message and overall feel for all parts of what could be called the faith community’s ‘brand.’ Careful consideration should be given to providing an overall cohesive message, while promoting individual and communal innovation and exploration. By selecting key

components such as color, font, layout and key images, the team will ensure an overall experience of unity of message. The worship of the community should be inclusive of these symbols and elements of the worship that do not share in the symbolic communication of the community need to be reevaluated. Of particular interest to the youth worker would be language, overall structure, preaching and music. Each of these elements, rooted in deep traditions, do not always share a modality which speaks to young people. Additionally the elements of the overall message need to be extended and shared with each member. If a piece of the message is hospitality the community becomes the living brand and must incarnate this aspect of the brand for each other, as well as newcomers. This work will assist the youth worker in developing a core curriculum in assisting the young people in embodying these symbols. The community and youth worker must pay special care to ensure that the brand includes not mere signs, but the valued symbols of the community, which participate in the life of their ultimate concern.

Identifying and even developing the core symbols of the community of faith can take on more than an analytic shape. Programs should be developed, which are modeled after creative problem solving programs such as; *Odyssey of the Mind*®, or *Destination Imagination*®. Here young people would be invited to solve an open ended problem or question regarding the ultimate concern of the community. Groups of young people would engage in a friendly competition as they sought to create answers which produced multimodal signs. These signs may take the shape of songs, skits, images, sculpture, or a combination thereof. The signs created may not be in themselves true symbols, but they should be utilized in developing new symbols for the community, keeping in mind that

each symbol has a lifespan. On a larger scale a diocese, synod, or even a denominational office could facilitate this competition on a larger scale in and between faith communities.

The youth worker may also wish to encourage young people to share the images and video they capture and create in their daily lives. The symbolic meaning that these images have can play an important part in assisting young people in connecting with the symbols of faith. They may also come to serve as a symbol of faith for not only the individual young person but the group as a whole. A youth worker may send a text message to young people on Saturday inviting them to send the most meaningful images and videos from their week. These could be displayed in a variety of ways around a worship or meeting space. Perhaps they could surround the altar, serving as a kind of reredos connecting the worship of the community with the lived experience of the young people. These images could also accompany and shape the language of a sermon assisting this difficult sign in caring more meaning and modalities of communication. An application for cellular based devices could be created to assist in the creation and sharing of these signs and symbols.

This project has sought to develop an overall understanding to the diversity of communication a youth worker faces, while simultaneously understanding the importance of this varied communication in the life of faith. Each community and each youth worker will need to assess their community carefully and honestly, to determine what symbols carry meaning for the community, and how these might be shared with young people. The project has attempted to stand outside the realm of stylistic difference and personal preference, as will be an important practice for the youth worker engaged in this work. It

is hoped that through the development of creative communities the life of faith will be strengthened by the creation, discovery and sharing of symbols.

Bibliography

- Chrisholm, L. & Hurrelman, K. Adolescences in modern Europe. Pluralized transition patterns and their implications for personal and social risks. *Journal of Adolesences*, 18 (1995) 129-158
- Emmerson, Les. *Signs*
http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/f/five_man_electrical_band/signs.html
 accessed 4/20/12
- Kress, Gunther. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (London: Routledge, 2010)
- Lenhart, Amanda. *More and More Teens on Cell Phones* (Pew Research Center Publications, 2009) <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1315/teens-use-of-cell-phones>
 accessed 4/20/12
- Males, Mike. *Framing Youth: Ten Myths About the Next Generation* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1999)
- Tanner, Kathryn. *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997)
- Thurlow, Crispin & Williams, Anita. *Talking Adolescence: Perspectives in Communication in the Teenage Years* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2005)
- Tillich, Paul. *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper One, 1957)
- van Dijk, T. A. "Discourse and the Denial of Racism," *Discourse and Society*, 3(1), (1992) 87-118
- Wyn, J. & White, R. *Rethinking Youth* (London: Sage, 1997)
- Wilson, Anita. "'Nike trainers, my one true love—without you I am nothing': Youth, identity and the language of trainers for young men in prison." in *Discourse Constructions of Youth Identities*, eds J. K. Androutsopoulos & A. Georgakopoulou (pp. 173-196). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003.