

December 30, 2017 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
 2 Timothy 1:13-14 "From the Heart: Passing the Torch" by Andy McDonald

It happens every time there's a candlelight service. With great intention a candle is lit and then carefully, with intention two people make sure the wicks of each of their candle's connect and the flame is passed and this happens over and over again, and soon the area is well lit by multiple candle power. This may be the simplest picture of the simplest method of passing the torch.

Whether we stop and think about it. Whether we plan carefully what it will contain. Whether we ignore it and just let it happen. Whether we are fighting like crazy to not let some things be part of our legacy. We are all, at this very moment, today, over the past week during the holidays, at work, at home, at leisure, we are moment by moment of every day in the process of creating our legacy, of passing the torch.

Whether the hand off is good and smooth, whether things shift gears to a better world or whether we mess up the hand off and things go poorly and the gears grind to a worse world...either way we have been, are, or will be involved in some aspect of passing the torch, to being part of leaving or receiving a legacy.

Maybe it is some infatuation with the more agrarian times but when I think of passing the torch generationally my mind easily turns to the farmer passing the land and what it can produce to the next generation, passing the torch of the family farm. Or maybe it's not a farm but a trade, one generation apprenticed to the previous then coming of age and the senior becomes the helper while the apprentice becomes the next master!

This can cause some discomfort for the one passing the torch. Feelings of not being as vital to the process. Of being replaced. A sense of being obsolete, not needed, no longer viable. These don't have to be the case but these feelings can arise. Each of us is different enough that we have our own ways of doing things and conflicts may surface as torches are passed, and a legacy is absorbed to be managed differently.

Now this is interesting. This passing the torch stuff, this making-handing off-leaving a legacy reality, makes for good movies about the family ranch. The business and how it changes moving from one generation's style of leadership to the next generation's.

While this may make for a good story in culture, and property, and wealth, and leadership transitions in business and society, when it comes to the spiritual life, when it comes to a Jesus community of faith we call church it is not just interesting it is crazy important because of the eternal significance of getting this torch passing legacy leaving thing right.

There seems to be no doubt that we certainly haven't overthought this issue in the Body of Christ globally or in our local congregation specifically. The truth is that we, the followers of Jesus who call ourselves church, are just one short generation from extinction.

It isn't that big a leap from being the church, practicing faith, living in community, worshipping God to being like the days when Israel had no king and Judges 17:6 described what happened: "...the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."

Our scripture for today is for both those who wish to leave a Godly Jesus centered legacy, pass that kind of torch, and those who wish to be the recipients of a torch consisting of a Christ filled legacy. Paul writes to Timothy, his son in the faith, "Hold on to the pattern of right teaching you learned from me. And remember to live in the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. With the help of the Holy spirit who lives within us, carefully guard what has been entrusted to you." It may seem way counter intuitive because of what we believe it means to "carefully guard" something. Maybe your mind works differently but when Paul writes to Timothy to "carefully guard what has been entrusted to you," my mind goes to something like Fort Knox and all the

layers of protection to keep the United States' Treasury of Gold safe. Or I think of encrypted codes and passwords and locked up things that make them safe but inaccessible.

Too often in the history of the Christian church we have practiced this fortress mentality of carefully guarding what has been entrusted to us.

We have treated truth, and grace, and a connection to God through Jesus Christ as some rare prize that is limited in quantity and quality and if we don't build a wall around it and keep it safe and pure that it will be lost!

But Jesus taught just the opposite. He taught that the best way to carefully guard the faith and love we have in Christ is to LET GO! To open our hand and trust God that he can protect the parts worth protecting, that he can keep pure as necessary the teachings that were shared with us and which we adopted.

It is that same principle that Jesus taught that the one who loses their life is the one who finds it. That which we hold on to disappears, vaporizes, is lost and what we give away, what we freely share with others enlarges and grows and becomes even more.

I've never had to rely on the literal practice of sowing and reaping. It's hard to imagine the paradoxical life of a farmer who harvests the crop. Maybe it's a year that didn't produce that well but still as part of the harvest process, the farmer separates out and sets aside a bunch of perfectly healthy, edible, maybe even needed, part of the crop for seed for next year. Maybe even with hungry bellies to fill it would be tempting to eat the seed stock. But instead of making more porridge for the family he takes that seed and throws it, literally throws it out on the ground he's broken up for planting.

The way we best live in the faith and love that we have in Christ Jesus. The best way, with the help of the Holy spirit who lives within us, to carefully guard what has been entrusted to us is to throw it into the lap of others. Others in our family, others in our community. If we get protectionist in the traditional sense of the word and want to have and hold the faith and love we have in Christ Jesus that whole heritage can be gone in just one generation.

One little candle might get blown out but when we reach next to us and light another, and then another and then another, the light becomes less and less at risk as it is shared. A wind might come along and cause a flicker or even blow some candles out but not all of them at once, and then there can be a relighting because there are candles everywhere.

The most significant part of passing the torch, of leaving a legacy, is to have a torch to pass and a legacy worth leaving! Too often we've thought of passing the torch as something parents do with their kids, and this is true. But really at every stage of life there are people who need the torch you can pass them. Seriously, whether you are in your mid 90's or you are just getting old enough to follow well the message, it is critical to build a strong connection with Jesus so you have a torch to pass.

Jesus, not me, simplifies it: I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. . . I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love. . . I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow. I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it—the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends.” John 15

The paradoxical nature of the good news of Jesus is that laying down our lives, spending our lives for others to share the good news of Jesus and to love people in our world is the path to greater life. Jesus said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.” In a very concrete way passing the torch and leaving legacy is letting go of your life for yourself, and giving it to another.

What will it mean for FHC for us, to become a torch passing congregation? What will it mean for a 1st or 2nd grader to become a torch passer to those little Kindergarteners? How will a 7th and 8th grade class pass the torch to the 5th and 6th graders. How will our collegiate students pass the torch to our high school youth. You early career people how to you hand off the torch of faith to our post high school group? Adults from young parents to the oldest grandparent how do we let go of our hold on how things should be done and pass with joy our torch of faith?

We've already established that the huge first step in passing the torch is to have a torch to pass!! So building your faith walk. Anchoring your practice of life in scriptural teaching. Paul wrote to Timothy to hold to the pattern of right teaching you learned from me. Foster in your life at every stage of life a pattern of right teaching that is scripturally based and rooted in love expressing itself in service to others.

I've got to be really candid here about the reality that there are some patterns of teaching and life practice I don't want passed to the next generations. If your Christianity, if your practice of Christianity in the Seventh-day Adventist Tribe, is talk without action. If doing nothing on Sabbath is more important to you than doing something! If your Christian practice is one that is prideful rather than humble. If yours is a faith that seeks to exclude rather than include. If you prefer to judge more than empathize; if you like to hold power and prevent others from becoming empowered; if you are fearful of a church being too warm and accepting; if you prefer to talk about how bad the world is rather than being a good neighbor to the world then, PLEASE don't pass the torch.

But if you crave seeing the next generation flourish and grow and expand God's kingdom in ways we've never imagined; If you are excited about your relationship with Jesus and it is growing and you are open to being pushed out of your comfort zone for kingdom of God benefit, then let's do whatever it takes to pass the torch successfully.

Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin have done amazing research about what we in the church can do that will help young people discover and love our church. Six strategies that will make it much more likely that we will have a torch worth passing and that young people will be drawn to taking that torch and running the next leg of God's story of saving humanity.

They talk about these six strategies as six commitments a church can make to help ensure a Jesus centered community in the next generation. Before I share the six I want to just remind you scripture is clear. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ then the Holy Spirit has gifted you in special ways, not for your own benefit but that the Body of Christ might be built up and come to full maturity, not as individuals who have it all together, but each of us like living stones, we become part of the living thing the church, the body of Christ, and as a body, with each part doing what it is intended and gifted to do the body will come to unity and grow up to the full measure of Christ. (Eph 4)

Those who have been in the church for a long time we hold the keys, literal keys to the facility and metaphorical keys to leadership, decision making, finances—we must unlock what these authors call Keychain Leadership. We must decentralize authority and empower others especially our young people, we must hand them the keys. Those around our office have heard me say it and I mean it, "Trust the youth." "Trust young people."

I say this because I'm your pastor today because there were people in my life who trusted youth. There were church members, youth group leaders, pastors and youth pastors and teachers who were open to giving responsibilities and privileges to me when I was young. I say trust youth. I was 29 years old when I became senior pastor in this place, a place filled with senior citizens, we had a funeral a month for the first three years I was here. And I ask myself would I be willing to pass the torch to a 29 year old? Why not? Our faith is not in people our faith is in God. Church this one and all of them are to be God's church not just ours?

We all think of ourselves as 10-20 years younger than our true chronological age. But age is not the issue our being surrendered to God seeking his will not ours is critical. But if the church is to thrive into the future we must unlock doors and hand off keys and empower others to act.

Second we must empathize with today's young people. Instead of judging or criticizing, we have to go on real or at least psychological empathy tours.

I became familiar with empathy tours working with Florida Hospital's Innovation Lab. Before trying to solve a problem we are challenged to immerse ourselves in similar situations. Visit, tour, ask questions, learn needs, see other's solutions, etc.

Do you know what ranked the highest in a young person feeling like a church was their church? Not the coolest, newest, not the hippest programming it was when an adult showed interest in them. How hard is that? If we can let go of our self absorbed worlds for just a minute and ask a person younger than us a question and then shut up and listen we will be actively engaged in anchoring them to the faith community.

First Hand off the keys empower others. Second Empathize
Third, take Jesus' message seriously. This one is so vital. BE REAL!
For the sake of the kingdom of God, don't talk faith and not walk it. We are better off to set the whole faith thing aside. Young people can sniff out fakery really fast. Live a Jesus centered way of life and invite them into that same Jesus centered life.

Fourth-Fuel a warm community. The warmth or another way of saying warm community-accepting, welcoming, loving, forgiving, open—warmth of the congregation trumps everything else they might be trying to do. If it feels warm they want to be there and will be open to receiving the torch we wish to pass, feels a little chilly a little prickly they're gone.

Fifth-Prioritize young people and families everywhere. We must support, invite, involve resource young people in all facets of our congregation. There must be no corners of church life which we do not wish to have young people speak into. This is one of the primary ways it becomes "their" church.

Sixth- Be good neighbors. Practice a non-world condemning way of life. This doesn't mean we can't speak against evil but we may want to put a whole bunch of energy into overcoming evil with good rather than with rant against evil. We need to model the way to be a good neighbor in our local community and in our world globally.

Listen we must take seriously our responsibility to pass the torch. We can have all the light we want. True light that give light to everyone but if we aren't willing to reach out and extend our candle our torch and if what we have seems like darkness rather than light and we can't get those behind us in age to reach their candle towards us then we can fail in passing the torch.

What we've talked about today isn't for someone else, it is for each of us.
We are all, at this very moment, today, over the past week during the holidays, at work, at home, at leisure, we are moment by moment of every day in the process of creating our legacy and passing the torch.

This week as we start a new year we will be launching into a year of passing the torch whether we acknowledge it or not. So let's become intentional, let's give it some thought, let's take this responsibility seriously. 1-Unlock opportunities for others, empower especially the young, 2-Empathize with a young person 3-Live Real-take Jesus Message seriously 4-Be warm, accepting, welcoming, 4-Make opportunities so young people are part of every facet of church 5-Be the best neighbor to enable the next generation to be good neighbors.

And when we practice these six core commitments I believe the next generation will be happy to have the torch passed and Jesus centered communities will continue to flourish.



When you hear “passing the torch” what comes to mind?

What are some stories (movies) about passing the torch?

When can torch passing become life dictating?

How important do you believe it is that Christians do a good job at passing the torch?

What are some things you’ve seen or experience in Christian circles that you think should die out and not be passed on?

What do you think about the concept of carefully guarding what has been entrusted to us by throwing it into the lap of others?

The book “Growing Young” gives six commitments churches need to make to “grow young” we’ve applied to enable the passing of the torch:

1. Give “keys” that open and empower others
2. Empathize with today’s young people
3. Take Jesus message seriously
4. Fuel a warm community
5. Prioritize young people and families everywhere
6. Be the best neighbors

How will practicing these six enable better torch passing?



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