

# Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

## Undifferentiated Faith

- Infancy: pre-stage, trust of infant

### 1. Intuitive-Projective Faith (*Early Childhood*)

- Limited to children up to about six years of age
- Fantasy-filled, imitative and influenced by examples and stories
- Reflects the attributes of parents and family as perceived by the child
- Accepts parental faith attitudes without question

### 2. Mythic-Literal Faith (*Elementary School Years*)

- Becomes aware of and begins to internalize the faith attitudes and views of persons, primarily adults other than family members
- Has increasing awareness of different faith attitudes in society
- Continues to hold attitudes of family and religious tradition
- Takes on stories, beliefs and observances that mean belonging to the community
- Literal interpretation of beliefs
- Some adults remain in this stage through much or most of their lives

### 3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith (*Adolescence*)

- Peer pressure becomes significant in early teens
- Attitudes and values of the group are major factors in determining values, including those related to faith
- Important to adhere to the "norm" as life's increasing complexities necessitate a set of values held by a significant number of others close to the individual
- Accepts world beyond family
- Needs coherent orientation in the midst of a more complex and diverse world
- This stage often continues into adulthood where large numbers of adults find security in their relationship with their religious affiliation

### 4. Individuative-Reflective Faith (*Young Adult*)

- Authority is relocated within the self, not in the group
- Responsible for own commitments, life-style, beliefs and attitudes
- Tension develops between individual and group
- There is a need to understand the conceptual base of beliefs and to personalize them
- As individuals assume adult responsibility, they often begin to question faith assumptions of parents and/or religious tradition
- For many, the need to question is necessary for faith development

- This questioning and rejecting is not limited to young adults. An increasing number of persons in their middle and late years need to question and rethink their faith

#### **5. Conjunctive Faith** (*Mid-life and Beyond*)

- Involves recognition and acceptance of the paradoxical
- Integrates the past into self
- Usually occurs no earlier than middle years of adulthood
- Reconciles the various elements that have played a part in previous faith development
- Comes to terms with unconscious parts of the self
- Answers come as a part of life experience
- Willingness to “let reality” speak
- Able to understand and integrate the views of others in their own expression of faith that is wholly theirs
- Social consciousness and conscience expanding

#### **6. Universalizing Faith** (*Late Adult and Beyond*)

- Persons in this stage are rare
- They are so attuned to the ultimate meaning of life that their faith expression is beyond self interest
- Exhibit qualities that shake our criteria of normalcy
- Results from a culmination of growth in faith through human fidelity, divine grace and revelation
- Become martyrs for the vision
- Involves participation in the quality of “eternal life” (John’s Gospel)