

The original documents are located in Box D32, folder “Fifth Reformed Church Young People's Group, Grand Rapids, MI, December 1, 1971” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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Remarks by Rep. Gerald R. Ford before the Fifth Reformed Church young people's group, 7 p.m., Dec. 1, 1971, at Grand Rapids, Mich.

If ever a dialogue was needed between young people and adults, it is needed today between youth and the so-called Establishment. In my view, however, there should not only be an opening of every possible avenue of communication. There should be a partnership between Youth and the Establishment, a joining of hands toward the solution of society's problems.

There are a number of channels of communication. One is the White House Conference on Youth, which I think should be conducted periodically. This year a White House Conference on Youth took place April 18 through 22 at Estes Park, Colo. This conference not only brought together large numbers of young people--nearly 1,000 delegates--but it was truly representative.

But the White House Conference does not answer adequately the need of young people to communicate with the Establishment. What we need is to bring together the energy of idealism and social consciousness of the young with the experience and money and organizational ability of Establishment leaders.

I think the Establishment needs the ability and enthusiasm of young people today. I happen to know that Establishment leaders are deeply concerned about social problems and would like to make use of young people's energy and idealism to help solve them. The result of a partnership between youth and the Establishment would be more direct and effective action on the problems about which young people, along with adults, are concerned--the problems of our cities, of our environment, of racial injustice, of overpopulation, of poverty and of war.

To bring about this partnership between youth and the Establishment, new programs and institutions must be developed.

One would be what I call "Dialogue Week." This concept involves setting aside a week for bringing young people and community leaders together in a number of communities. The purpose would be to stimulate better communication between the two groups. Business and community leaders would gain a better understanding of youth's point of view and young people would gain more insight into the process of getting things done within the constraints of established institutions.

The dialogue might focus, for instance, on the causes and effects of poverty in each community and the actions needed to eliminate poverty there.

Individual projects would be planned to give young people primary roles in diagnosis and problem identification and adult members primary roles in problem solving. Technical experts could be brought in where appropriate.

Another avenue for youthful communication is supporting candidates for political office. A number of young people's groups are being formed to support political candidates whose views on poverty, race relations, pollution and other issues most closely parallels their own. These groups tend to be bipartisan, to stress specific issues, to emphasize working within the system, to aim at reform of the political process, and to stress communication with the public-at-large via advertising, doorbell ringing and political organization work.

Still another avenue for youth action might be youth group consortiums-- students from several colleges in one geographic location getting together or the youth groups from various churches banding together to work on a single major problem of the region like cleaning up a river, upgrading inner city schools, delivering health services, housing, transportation, crime, drug addiction, job development, or the involving of the elderly in community life.

The project would be organized and directed by the young people--the students in collaboration with faculty and college administrators, the church youth groups with adult leaders from the various churches. Young people engaged in these projects would become involved in community action directed at achieving widespread support and interest for the project and in actual implementation of the program.

Whatever the barriers, the potential for a partnership between Youth and the Establishment exists.

The areas where such a partnership can be most fruitful are poverty fighting, pollution control and political action.

I think young people will find that three out of four adults are willing to join in a partnership between Youth and the Establishment. What is needed most now is for someone to make the first move.

I am anxious that we do it locally, on a State-wide basis, and nationally. Rap sessions at all levels would be useful.

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1971

Youth File

via phone
Office Copy

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