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PRESENTING THE ISSUE

The editors of *JITC* are pleased to present this theme issue: "Persons, Culture and Society: The Challenges of Transition and Transformation." The emphasis is the discernment of our mission with children and youth, understanding the changes that transformed modernity and shifted children from the center of religious concern to the margin. Since children are underrepresented in academic circles, theological and religious education is mandated to explore their transitions and transformation.

Marsha Snulligan Haney in her "Introducing the Theme" engages us in understanding that children are the most vulnerable members of society during times of transition. The critical invisibility of children in the last decade is a subject for consideration by the religious academy.

Marsha Snulligan Haney in the lead article, "The Urban Child, Congregational Ministry and the Challenge of Religious Diversity," frames our central thesis from a womanist theological perspective with three primary foci: missiological, pastoral, and academic. She asks this question: What do we know about the urban child and congregational ministry related to religious pluralism? For Haney, the processes and consequences

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described in her essay demonstrate the need for urban congregations to respond to the contemporary felt needs of children and youth holistically in words, deeds, and lifestyle.

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan in her song lyric, "I Cry for You," describes the anguish unwanted children feel in their daily struggles. She appeals to adults not only to love children but to look deep inside themselves and see the children there—all need love.

Zvi Shapiro explores the Torah's Passover and instructional commandments in understanding the prominent role of children and the Seder. His article, "Children and the Seder," examines the Torah's narrative of the Jewish experience in Egypt, the Haggadah's reading of the Torah's narrative, the Torah instructions to observe the holiday of Passover, and some of the Seder's legal practices.

Marcus Powell, one of our beginning students at ITC, in his poem "Helping Street Children in Brazil to Live" delves into the deplorable conditions under which the street children in Brazil survive. He vividly captures their pathos when he writes: "I am a street kid from Brazil. I have to run everyday to survive from being labeled or criticized."

Mark Ellingsen's "An Augustinian Approach to Parenting for the New Millennium" offers insights into an Augustinian viewpoint when rearing children. The African Father insisted that children need consistent discipline and instruction in values. Ellingsen postures that the entire American community takes its responsibilities for children in our neighborhoods more seriously.

Steve Raser's "Our Children and Welfare" examines welfare: its definition, effects on children, mixed feelings Americans have about it; how our government makes things worse, ways we can help individually and collectively, and a

particular theological position that relates to and for children. Rasor advocates that children are our responsibility; we need to recognize this fact and work for the common good.

Christine Chapman in her "A Public Team Ministry for Teen Mothers and Their Babies" investigates organizational capacity, performance, and perception of the social impact upon organizations in which four sectors (faith-based, nonprofit, public, and private) interact in attempting to provide a home for teenage mothers and their babies. Increasingly, faith-based organizations are emerging as significant voices in building alliances across groups; organizational differences can be challenges for faith-based initiatives new to collaborative efforts.

Elizabeth Walker's "Pastoral Counseling with African-American Male Youth Offenders" delineates the three stages of the pastoral counseling process (discernment, interpretation, and reconnection and reunion) in which the self structures meaning and healing. A theoretical rationale for counseling African-American youth that considers destructive issues (gender and race images in the socio-cultural context) is addressed, which is essential for an in-depth understanding and vulnerability to the self-experiencing of African-American youth in particular.

Bridgette Hector critiques the attitudes of Black middle-class women toward poor, Black female youth in her "Womanist Model: Crossing Class Barriers: Middle-Class Black Women Relating with Inner-City Black Female Youth." The locus is with specific contextual situations framed within the womanist paradigm that demands critical analysis of women in their "particular" life dilemmas. Four issues—morality, sexuality, age, and rap—are identified as systematic ways to order the seemingly chaotic lives of inner-city females.





