



Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin,

I have read two books in the last four years that have had a significant impact on how I see life and how I see the church. The first is **"Younger Next Year: Live Strong, Fit, and Sexy - Until You're 80 and Beyond"** and the second is **"Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church."** Now, the title of the first contains a word we don't normally associate with beyond 80, but the second title throws out this mouthful: *Help Young People Love Your Church.*

What I have learned from reading these books is that while neither is easy, both are possible. They require discipline, sacrifice and sometimes, just hard work. But they are **BOTH** possible. I have recommended the first book to all of our pastors and deacons who are at least 50 years old, which is a bunch of them. Some of them have read it, fewer have followed it, and I fear most have ignored me.

At this year's Synod Assembly, I will be recommending the second book to every church in our synod. Because every church in our synod, or at least they say it, wants to grow young. If there is one overpowering symptom of the congregations of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, it is that they are old. And the second powerful symptom is that they say they want to grow young. My fear is that when the leaders of our churches hear about this book, some will read it, fewer will follow it and most will ignore it. Why? Because it requires discipline, sacrifice and sometimes, just hard work.

But, it is work that God's word says God can do, and God desperately wants us to do with him.

Revelation 21:5 says, ***"And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"***

The one on the throne is God, and I believe that God is at work making God's church new – and God is puzzled and grieved when God doesn't see us joining in this magnificent adventure.

As many of you are aware, my time as bishop of our synod ends on June 30 of 2018. It will not be my responsibility, but it is my dream that 2018-19 would be a year for this synod to Grow Young...for each congregation, for our campus ministries, for our Bible Camps to focus on this one thing.

Now, your next bishop may believe that the Spirit is blowing in another direction, but I've still got six months!

In the book, ***Growing Young*** it says: "...the terms young people and adults use to describe their own churches or parishes (that are Growing Young) , we noticed repeated words such as *welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable, and caring.* We began to call this the *warmth cluster.* (p. 166). Both ***Younger Next Year*** and ***Growing Young*** emphasize that the

changes needed will come out of love and caring. We change, because the people we love, and the people who love us desperately want and need us to change.

God loves us. God sits on the throne and proclaims, "I make all things new." It is time for a change. It is a time to grow young. It is a time for new.

I am asked as I make this transition to the next chapter of my life, "Do you believe our church(es) will survive?" My answer is usually something like, "I don't believe in churches, but I do believe in Jesus." And Jesus says "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26

I do believe in Jesus. May God make all things new in your life and in your ministries this year!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rick N. Hoyme". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

Bishop Rick Hoyme