I attended the Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza in New Orleans from January 28 – February 1, 2009. One of the highlights was a presentation by Dr Adina Nack from California Lutheran University. She talked about the norms of pop culture. What’s happening? By their senior year, 66% of high school students drink alcohol or are involved in drugs. 1 in 10 hit, or physically hurt others on purpose. 1 in 4 young women, ages 14 to 19, have contracted sexually transmitted diseases. 27% of girls and 18% of boys have sent sexually explicit images of themselves over the internet.

There are many unhealthy trends in pop culture. Cultural norms are very powerful. Norms learned in a social context determine the rules of social behaviors. Young people want to be accepted by their peers. If they conform to the norms, they are rewarded by being accepted. If they don’t conform, they risk rejection.

How do we raise our children to be strong and courageous enough to risk rejection and make healthy choices? Jesus offers an alternative to the cultural norms, a different worldview. One that may not always make sense to us, but one that sets us free to serve one another. Our young people have many challenges to face. A strong faith can help them meet those challenges in a world where making healthy decisions makes them a deviant.

Dr Adina Nack’s presentation at the Extravaganza can be seen by going to www.elcaymnet.org, click on Resources, More Resources, Streaming Video Resources, and then on 2009 Dr Adina Nack. A DVD of the presentation is also available by E-mailing me at Charlieg424@comcast.net. This is a “must see” video for anyone raising children or working with young people in the culture of the 21st century.

deacon Charlie Germain