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### *Being a Grown-Up*

What is adulthood? Some of us mark our transitions to adulthood by a graduation ceremony. Others may recall taking wedding vows, buying a first car, landing that first real job, or welcoming a new baby, as their introduction to adult life. Soon our church will proudly welcome a fabulous group of young men and women into membership in the church as adults, when they formally “confirm” their faith in a confirmation ceremony. But do these rites of passage automatically confer upon us the stature and state of adulthood? Some would say, “no.”

Some researchers have noted that perhaps at no time in history has adulthood been less revered and youth for youth’s sake been so admired. We need only to watch TV or read magazines to see that the marketing of cosmetics, clothing, and work-out gear, aimed at keeping us young, is a thriving business. The misguided explorer, Cortez, came to this continent centuries ago looking for the fountain of youth. Judging by all appearances, we’re continuing the search.

But it’s not just our appearances we’re concerned with keeping youthful. Our lifestyles, social analysts tell us, are youthful, as well. For years now, the trends have been tracked for later marriages, delayed child-bearing, and longer dependency on parents. Grown children leave home, but return to the nest. Numerous factors contribute to these trends, of course, but they are trends which distinguish today’s adults from those of generations past.

Perhaps adulthood is in the process of being re-defined. Perhaps it’s not about nose-to-the-grindstone obligation anymore, or independence at all costs. Maybe adult roles of the future will be less confining and less clear, more fluid and flexible – more “youthful.” Surely our society has benefited from the vigor, idealism, and enthusiasm of its youthful attitudes.

But can generations bent on remaining youthful succeed at those essential tasks such as nurturing the family and helping to ensure social stability? Social analysts argue that each generation can and must succeed at those essential adult roles. To fail at those essential tasks would put us all in peril.

But how to succeed? To succeed may require that we adults be as concerned about upholding an unwritten “Bill of Responsibilities” as we are about our written “Bill of Rights.” We must be as concerned about leaving endowments for future generations as about entitlements for ourselves. We must be as willing to give, even sacrifice if necessary, as we are to receive.

Perhaps we can challenge ourselves this spring, as we applaud the graduate we know, or cheer the bride and groom, or congratulate the confirmand we love, to be the role models of adulthood that will spur those young people toward a fulfilling, responsible, and fruitful adulthood of their own. Perhaps we can demonstrate for them that adulthood is not dull drudgery, but a privilege. We can show that it is a joy to grow up!