

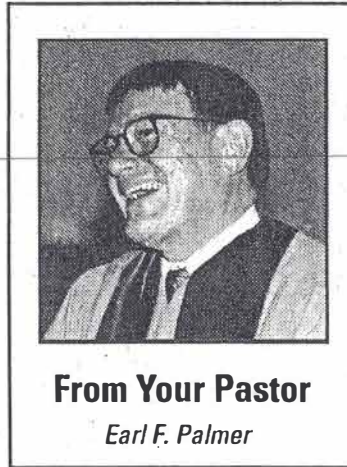
We all can serve as friends of youth

Early in September here at UPC we prayed at all worship services for our corps of Sunday school and midweek teachers. We also asked that men and women who serve youth in various volunteer ways or as public or private school teachers join our teachers for prayer and so another large group stood with our church youth leaders. It showed me how many people in UPC are investing in the lives of boys and girls either as volunteers or as professionals.

It also brought back the memory of our own three kids as they grew up during our years in Berkeley, Calif. Our daughters and our son were each given marvelous gifts by public school teachers who challenged them to think and learn and to grow their own self-confidence throughout the years of K through 12. The other gifts they received came primarily from adults and youth leaders in our church who invested in their lives.

I think that two things my wife and I did right with our kids were first to really stay supportive and involved in the schools where our three youths were enrolled. We tried to volunteer for everything where parents were asked to help, we tried to never miss school events, games, plays or musicals where our kids and their friends were involved. We tried to stay wide awake to what was happening in our schools so we could be an encouraging influence.

When things did not seem right to us we were as proactive as possible to find solutions. What we discovered as parents



rators to help them fulfill the mandate to educate an encourage youth as whole persons.

One other thing we did that proved a blessing to our family was to become friends of the friends of our kids, the friends they made at church, in the neighborhood and at school. It isn't really that hard if there are things to eat around the house and if we adults learn to listen when we are talked to and do the small things that help our sons or daughters really be friends to their friends. Most of all it means loving these people who are loved by the people in your house.

was that most teachers were earnestly committed to youth and that schools are groups of people who have the same needs and include the same weaknesses as all other parts of the social fabric that makes up the tapestry of America, the America where our kids would have to live and work when they became adults. The adults who worked with youth needed friendly collabo-

It takes a lot of prayer for wisdom and for skills too, especially when the time comes for working through the meaningful boundaries for a young man or woman growing up and catching their own stride and discovering their own spiritual, intellectual and moral life values. It made me realize that when you come right down to it every one of us is a youth worker and a friend of youth whether we teach at a school or not.

Youth today must face the challenges of our Lord's parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13: 24 - 30). Jesus said in the parable that the wheat would need to grow up along side of the weeds. The weeds are just there and we must cope. If it is public or private school there are weed-like experiences that challenge the growth of a healthy plant. If it is home schooling then we the parent/teacher may be the weed.

The point is that it is possible to grow up, to catch your stride, to become a strong young Christian wherever you grow up and wherever you go to school, but every boy and girl needs encouragers they can borrow. The age of an encourager has nothing to do with it; love and trustworthiness, and character have everything to do with it.

The mystery of it all is that Jesus Christ is able to draw to Himself youth during the key teen years. He is very good at it. He also is able to make use of us as parents, grandparents, borrowable young adults or older adults to become mentors and to become friends of the next generation.