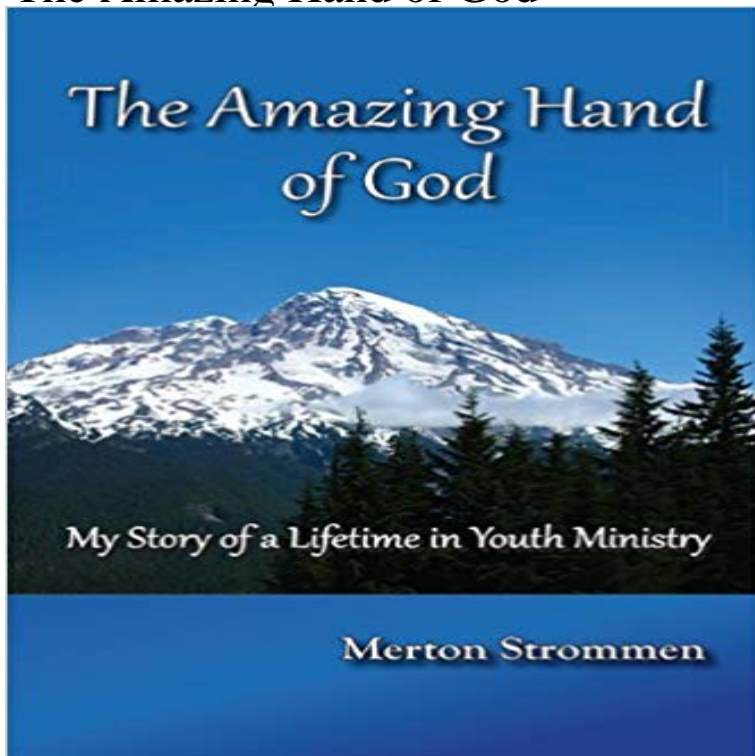


The Amazing Hand of God



When you talk about youth ministry in the church, the studies of Search Institute are primary resources. They comprise a body of work, developed over a lifetime, that has reshaped the church's ministry with young people. And Merton Strommen was there at the beginning, with a researcher's mind and a pastor's heart. Strommen writes of his early parish ministry experience: At this time in my life, I had no idea how a congregational youth program should be organized. With no experience, training, or exposure to youth ministry, I was becoming awed by my youth's response to the ministry of my congregation. . . . In a way that I did not realize, the response of the youth was shaping my life purpose. Youth ministry had caught Strommen's imagination, and that passion propelled him throughout his career and his personal life experiences. It began as early as 1945, when Strommen suggested to the president of the church that a denominational youth director was needed and then volunteered for that position. He directed his doctoral degree work, with the support and cooperation of other Lutheran youth directors, toward a study of youth ministry in the congregations of the Lutheran church, published in 1959. The success of that study led to the establishment of Lutheran Youth Research in 1960, an organization that worked with church institutions to continue scientific, faith-oriented research, nearly always focused on youth. In 1977 the name of the company was changed to Search Institute, reflecting the broadening of its work across denominations and topics. Most recently, in 2010, Strommen consulted on a study of Exemplary Youth Ministry, and the results of that study continue to inform and revitalize youth ministry throughout the Christian church in the current day. His books, especially *Five Cries of Youth* and *Study of Generations*, are classics (in *Time* magazine's words) in the youth ministry

field. Read this account of Merton Strommen's ministry from his perspective. It is, appropriately, packed with questions, a deep sense of responsibility for sharing the faith, wonder at God's providence and timing, and a lingering affection for young people, who in every age bring energy and joy and honesty to the community of Christ. Strommen says: Over my seventy years I have found that the teen years are the most opportune time for a meaningful ministry. And, as our research indicates, it tends to remain that way. For that reason, an ultimate objective of a youth ministry should be to help youth enter into a conscious awareness of Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

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