

Practical Ministry Skills: Outreach to Young Adults



Contents	PAGE
Leader's Guide	2
Understanding Young Adults	
SEEKING THE IGENS <i>by Scot McKnight</i>	3
POST-MODERN SPIRITUALITY <i>by Brett Lawrence</i>	4
SIX COMMON MINDSETS <i>from Leadership journal</i>	6
Connecting with Young Adults	
GIVE THEM JESUS! <i>by Scot McKnight</i>	7
BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP <i>an interview with T.V. Thomas</i>	9
CONNECTOR CHURCHES <i>by Ed Stetzer</i>	11
THE PERSON BEHIND THE QUESTION <i>by Judson Poling</i>	13
FOUR MYTHS ABOUT REACHING YOUNG ADULTS <i>by James Emery White</i>	15
CELTIC-STYLE EVANGELISM <i>by Jim Henderson</i>	17
Resources	
FURTHER EXPLORATION	19



Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources and Christianity Today International, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This theme on reaching young adults is designed to help your church strengthen its evangelistic impact on the tough-to-reach demographic of 18- to 34-year-olds. You may use it for a training session or give it to key people involved in evangelism. Simply print the handouts needed and use them as necessary.

To gain insight into the attitudes and thinking of this generation, read "Seeking the iGens" (p. 3) along with the other articles in the first section of the packet under the heading "Understanding Young Adults." To explore ways that your church can connect with young adults, read "Bridging the Generation Gap" (p. 9) and "Give Them Jesus!" (p. 7). "Connector Churches" (pp. 11–12) provides a glimpse of practices used by churches that have demonstrated success in attracting the emerging generation. Other articles in this section focus on approaches your congregation can take to effectively reach young adults for Christ both outside and inside the church.

We hope you enjoy this theme as you equip your congregation for building the body of Christ through evangelistic ministry.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**Seeking the iGens**

A sense of self looms large for the emerging generation.

1 Corinthians 9:19

Emerging adults (folks between the ages of 18 and 30) form a generation that is largely insensitive to the potency of the holiness of God, and therefore the magnificence of grace. We can complain about this development, but I doubt very much that ramping up moral exhortations and warning about an endless hell are the proper places to begin with emerging adults. Paul was sensitive to his audience; we need to be as well.

First, it's important to understand this generation. The typical emerging adult, if I can capture the trend in one expression, is a "self in a castle." Never has a generation been more in tune with the self and more protective of the self. How did we get here? What led to the self-in-a-castle condition among this generation?

Mr. Rogers Thinking

I have no desire to blame Mr. Rogers; I like Fred Rogers and his image-of-God set loose in helping young children understand who they are. But Mr. Rogers, for all his good, gave to the current generation a free-standing consciousness that daily says, "I am OK." Whether the current generation watched him or not is hardly the point; he's in the air because of a trend that has been riding the airwaves since the 1960s.

Sesame Street Syndrome

Played out daily for this generation was a show that baptized diversity, sanctified difference, and affirmed the radical uniqueness of every person—regardless of their color, beliefs, or personalities. If Mr. Rogers indoctrinated a generation with the "I'm OK" line, *Sesame Street* focused on the "We are *all* OK" line. Once again, even if current iGens did not directly watch *Sesame Street*, the themes of the show, like those in Mr. Rogers, express a movement that gets at the central attribute of iGens.

Self-esteem Rising

Mr. Rogers and *Sesame Street* are early examples of the self-esteem movement. Please don't get me wrong. iGens may have the healthiest, most robust ego in the history of the West, and some of this self-perception is profoundly good. Nevertheless, this robust self-perception is more than a formidable issue when it comes to the gospel and to church life today. Jeffrey Arnett is perhaps America's most respected scholar of what he calls "emerging adulthood." He identifies five major characteristics of emerging adults. They ...

- 1) Explore their own identities in love and work
- 2) Are in an age of instability
- 3) Are in a self-focused period of life
- 4) Feel that they are between adolescence and adulthood, neither one nor the other
- 5) Are driven by endless possibilities and are exploring them—jobs, travel, love, sex, identity, and location.

— SCOT MCKNIGHT; excerpted from a forthcoming article in our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2009 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. What would the average young adult think of a typical Sunday morning service in our church?
2. How can we adjust our ministries to welcome young adults without alienating older congregants?
3. How does the large role that the self plays in the young adult mentality shape the way we approach them? In what ways should we appeal to their worldview? In what ways should we challenge it?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS



Postmodern Spirituality

Lessons learned in evangelism and Christianity while serving a cynical generation.

1 Corinthians 4:2

Daniel Hill holds a steady part-time job working one or two shifts a week at Starbucks. It's hardly a career-track position, and it's not that he needs the extra cash or battles a secret caffeine addiction. It's the people. Purple hair, belly-button rings, tattoos, black-painted fingernails—those people.

For Hill, whose day job is ministering on staff with Willow Creek Community Church's Axis ministry, Starbucks provides a context to build meaningful relationships with postmodern, Gen-Next twentysomethings who are far from God.

"Nothing has been more transforming for me than working at Starbucks," says Hill. "These people matter to me."

But the moonlighting gig isn't a free pass to easy evangelism. His coffee colleagues are like a good cup of triple espresso—plenty of steam, a little bitter, and enough kick to knock you on your backside if you aren't careful.

With fingers pointed at Christians, we're obliged to identify the underlying accusations and offer a response. Three questions are at the core.

1. Why should I trust you?

Anyone who claims authority today—politicians, parents, or pastors—will face the question of trust.

Rick Richardson, author of *Evangelism Outside the Box* and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's national field director for evangelism, observes: "When people ask questions about homosexuality, for instance, we're tempted to think they're asking questions about right and wrong. But they're not. They're asking about dominance and oppression."

In other words, the answer requires more than words. Christians, with PowerPoint presentations and four-point evangelistic outlines, have mastered the art of proclamation. But words alone aren't going to answer the trust question. Trust is built by actions, not words.

One of the most fundamental ways to represent God's kingdom is by being kind to the disaffected, even when we have genuine disagreements with the way they choose to live. In whatever way we respond, the one thing we can't do is ignore the trust issue.

2. Isn't that just your reality?

The Starbucks-serving Daniel Hill says that the "whatever works for you" mentality is a foundational part of the postmodern mindset. Still, he says, it can be fruitless to engage that argument directly.

Hill calls the postmodern mindset "kind of the air they breathe" rather than a deep-seated philosophical barrier to faith.

"I've never been able to persuade someone intellectually to abandon the relativistic mindset," he says. "That's never the doorway I get someone to walk through. What's more likely to happen is that they'll see the power of a transformed life in another Christ follower and be transformed."

Hill says we also do well to remember that relativism has its plus side. "People are open to Jesus," he says. "They just don't consider him the only way. I try to engage them in who Jesus is and not that the others aren't correct."

3. What good is Christianity?

Richardson calls this the question of utility and relevance. Does your belief change lives? Does your religion work? Does it help me, whether I'm in your group or not? Or are you just another self-serving group?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

“The question of the uniqueness of Christ is not primarily philosophical,” he writes. “People are not looking for theological comparisons but for attractiveness, relevance, and usefulness.”

In today’s culture there will always be questions and accusations—some fair, others unfair; some informed, others ignorant. As ministers of the gospel, what is our response?

Hill suggests the best way may also be the simplest. “Be intentional and authentic in your friendship,” he says. “Their response to my overtures can’t determine whether we stay in friendship. If it does, then it’s not a friendship but a manipulative ploy to get them to become a Christian. It’s a difficult paradox to reconcile.”

— BRETT LAWRENCE; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2003 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. How can we reach beyond the walls of our church to interact with nonbelievers?
2. How have you combated the “whatever works for you” mentality, and what was the result?
3. What does it mean to present the “relevance and utility” of Christ to nonbelievers?



Six Common Mindsets

Understanding these different types of young people will help you connect with them.

1 Peter 3:5

The development of a global culture—where people in many countries watch the same movies, listen to the same music, and buy the same products—is now producing a global shared-value system. In many ways young people around the world are becoming more alike than different.

Researchers at Roper Starch Worldwide surveyed 35,000 consumers in 35 countries, asking them to identify from a list which values they thought were most important. Based on those rankings, six mindsets emerged, offering a glimpse inside the minds of unchurched Harry and Mary—and Henryck and Maria.

Creatives: These are renaissance people who are deeply committed to life, learning, and technology.

Key message: “Challenge my mind, broaden my horizons.”

Fun seekers: Party people stress social and hedonistic pursuits. They focus on excitement, recreation, and technology.

Key message: “Entertain me with fun, friends, and fantasy.”

Intimates: People are concerned with family, home, and personal relationships and value them above all else.

Key message: “Help me relax and enjoy life with those I love.”

Strivers: Workaholics are ambitious, power-seeking, and driven by a desire for status and wealth.

Key message: “Cut to the chase. Don't waste my time. What's in it for me?”

Devouts: Traditionalists have strong convictions about faith, duty, and respect for the past.

Key message: “Respect me and those of my faith.”

Altruists: Humanitarians are proponents of social causes. They place a higher value on social issues and the world at large.

Key message: “Assist me in contributing to the world around me.”

— Excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2001 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Looking at the different types described above, which category do most of the young people that your church currently reaches fall into? What does this say about your evangelistic strategy?
2. What types of young people are in your church's neighborhood?
3. How would your sermons and Bible studies be different if you were trying to appeal to “strivers” as opposed to “creatives”?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**Give Them Jesus!**

The iGen's deep respect for Jesus provides a natural starting point for sharing the gospel.

1 Corinthians 2:2

If this generation likes Jesus, then let's start with Jesus! There are so many things we can say about Jesus that it is sometimes hard to know where to begin. But whether we begin with creation and the Fall, or with Israel's story, or with the birth of Christ or any number of his teachings, the conversation must lead to Jesus—his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his coming again.

Kingdom Vision

Some are awakened to faith and discipleship by the kingdom vision of Jesus. Nothing in my experience mesmerizes iGens like the kingdom vision of Jesus. One approach I use is to move through the Gospel of Luke. I begin with the preliminary expectations of Mary, Zechariah, and John the Baptist. I then focus on what Jesus wanted to bring about on earth (4:16–30; 6:20–26, and 7:18–23). Then I observe that Jesus knew the cross was the way to that kingdom (9:18–27). We move from there into the cross and resurrection, and then we pop up on the other side of Easter with Pentecost and the apostolic church community (Acts 2:42–47).

Discipleship Demands

Some are awakened to faith and discipleship by the discipleship demands of Jesus. I tend to focus on the Sermon on the Mount, and not just because I'm an Anabaptist. This message of Jesus was the church's favorite and it remains a powerful sketch of a moral life that both creates a world of possibilities and—at the very core—unmasks pretence and sinfulness. In fact, the demands of Jesus for a life that matters, the demands of Jesus for a morality that exceeds what iGens experience, and the demands that challenge a person morally to the deepest level can be a luring force in gospeling iGens.

Jesus' Life

Every telling of the story of Jesus is incomplete until it encompasses the breadth of Jesus' entire life—and that means his incarnation, his atoning death, and his resurrection. In other words, embracing the kingdom vision of Jesus is not enough if at the heart of that kingdom vision there is no cross or no resurrection. The life Jesus lived, the life that made that kingdom vision so appealing and so potently penetrating, was the life that ended up on a cross as an atoning sacrifice. The story of Jesus, the only story the church has ever told, is the story that Paul told and that Peter told and that the writer of Hebrews told and that John told. It is a story of the Incarnate Son of God who sketched a vision of a kingdom that God wants for the earth (the Lord's Prayer!) and who made that kingdom possible by willingly surrendering himself on the cross for others. And it was the life of a body that came back to life on Easter to empower us to new life as the new creation.

Getting from Jesus to the Gospel

A student came by my office the other day to chat. She began by saying she had grown up in the church, done all the right things, gone to all the right conferences, and made all the right decisions. She admitted to being mostly a “good girl” but that she was very materialistic and very self-centered. She said that embracing the Christian faith had been natural and painless for her. But her faith wasn't vibrant or all-consuming until she went to Central America, saw the needy of this world, and realized that Jesus' kingdom vision was bigger than her personal happiness. When she returned to the U.S., she began to cut back deeply on her spending. She was more committed to prayer and Bible reading, serving others, and plotting a life of service. More importantly, she said she realized more and more what the cross meant and how selfish she had become. This young woman has committed her life to Christ and to missionary work. Recently she broke up with a boyfriend because, as she put it, “He doesn't get it. He doesn't want to give his life for others as Christ calls us.”

Like many young people in her generation, what finally led this student to embrace the gospel was being brought into the story of Jesus. Our task, then, in evangelizing iGens is follow the example of Peter and Paul and help them find their place—and themselves—in that remarkable story.

— SCOT MCKNIGHT; excerpted from a forthcoming article in our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2009 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

Discuss

1. When was the last time your church did teaching on Jesus' largest block of ethical teaching, the Sermon on the Mount?
2. How you would rate yourself when it comes to teaching on who Jesus is—not just what he did?
3. What are some great conversation starters to use with young adults who are into Jesus but turned off by church?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**Bridging the Generational Gap**

The fast-changing culture and skepticism of young adults requires a different approach to evangelism.

Acts 17:16–21

T.V. Thomas is the Director of the Centre for Evangelism & World Mission. He travels widely speaking to young people at camps, churches, colleges, seminaries, retreats, seminars, and conferences.

Young people are leaving the church at an alarming rate. Why is this happening?

Christian leaders have not been prepared to deal with the change in youth culture. In youth culture, a few years are an eternity. In the past few years, the whole sense of community has been redefined. Facebook and other social networking sites are community to young people. Coming to a church event used to be pretty natural, but it now it looks very different from the kind of community they are experiencing.

So what's the answer? Should we all be texting and Twittering?

Well, we need to do more of that. We need to be in the spaces in which they are connecting. And since they are more reluctant to come out to events, when we have an event, it needs to impact them and meet actual needs. But we really need to take initiative to get to their turf. The old model was about getting them to come to us. Now rather than come, you go. That isn't always about getting online though. Go sit on the campus, go to the lunch cafeteria, and get out there where young people live their lives.

How has the postmodern climate changed the way we do apologetics?

In the past apologetics has basically been us saying, "Listen here, we've got this great defense of the gospel. We have our reasons all stacked up and you're going to listen." That just doesn't work as well anymore. I think if you were to actually win young people over you have to help them discover the gospel in a relational Bible study. So you don't do historical apologetics: the problem of evil, the existence of God, etc. You make them feel comfortable and lead them to discover the truth piece by piece. So rather than persuade solely with logic, you facilitate discovery, where they see for themselves, and then help them to put it all together. It's like a puzzle, and it's pieced together through facilitated discovery.

What about reaching those who grew up in the church, but have fallen away or even outright denounced the faith?

Tell them about your story. They might say, "Don't tell me anything about Christianity!" But they don't mind you telling them your story, because it's your story. Just because they walked away from the faith doesn't mean they don't admire it. They just haven't figured out how it fits in to their scheme of things. But when they can see that you feel comfortable and are enjoying your faith, they'll respond. And then, of course, it's important that you bring people who are enjoying their Christian faith into your circle. That's very important, that whole idea of exposure. Don't impose, but expose.

A lot of people advocate evangelism through acts of service. But what about sharing the gospel verbally? What's the right balance?

I think the acts of service should be your context, the environment in which you're able to speak into their lives. Young people care about a lot of things, everything from poverty to helping seniors, to caring for the environment, to the problem of AIDS. I think there are a lot of legitimate things that young people are willing to get involved with. And you don't have to be a Christian to be passionate about those things. Participate in acts of service with them and then ask some questions that touch on the underlying principles for service. You might ask them, "Why are we serving?" Well, for one, because of the dignity of humans. That's a value that the Bible spells out clearly. All humans are valuable, but we need to ask them to think, where does that value come? Who gives the value? So I think the starting point of our proclamation needs to change. Instead of starting by talking about sin, we can explore some other approaches.

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OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

Discuss

1. Is your church going to the places where young people are? Where is that in your community?
2. Does your church put more of an emphasis on rational arguments or relational study?
3. What areas of service in your church could be good to direct younger people to?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS



Connector Churches

These nine traits characterize churches that reach young adults.
Colossians 2:19

Let's look at some examples of churches that are actually reaching young adults. We surveyed almost 200 churches to search for trends and found a series of nine common characteristics in these churches that are effectively reaching young adults. Here's what they're doing:

Creating Deeper Community

Churches that are effective at attracting and developing young adults place a high value on moving people into a healthy small group system. Young adults are trying to connect and will make a lasting connection wherever they can find belonging.

Making a Difference through Service

Churches that are transforming young adults value leading people to serve through volunteerism. More than being pampered, young adults want to be part of something bigger than themselves and are looking to be part of an organization where they can make a difference through acts of service.

Experiencing Worship

Churches that are engaging young adults are providing worship environments that reflect their culture while also revering and revealing God. More than looking for a good performance, young adults desire to connect with a vertical experience of worship.

Leveraging Technology

Churches that are reaching young adults are willing to communicate in a language of technology familiar to young adults. Young adults sense that these churches are welcoming churches that value and understand them, engaging them where they are.

Building Cross-Generational Relationships

Churches that are linking young adults with older, mature adults are challenging young adults to move on to maturity through friendship, wisdom, and support. Young adults are drawn to churches that believe in them enough to challenge them.

Moving Toward Authenticity

Churches that are engaging young adults are reaching them not only by their excellence but by their honesty. Young adults are looking for and connecting to churches where they see leaders that are authentic, transparent, and on a learning journey.

Leading by Transparency

Churches that are influencing young adults highly value an incarnational approach to ministry and leadership. This incarnational approach doesn't require revealing one's personal sin list so much as it does require that those in leadership must be willing to express a personal sense of humanity and vulnerability.

Leading by Team

Increasingly churches reaching young adults seem to be taking a team approach to ministry. They see ministry not as a solo venture but as a team sport—and the broader participation it creates increases the impact of ministry.

— ED STETZER; excerpted from *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (B&H Books, 2008). Used by permission.

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

Discuss

1. What practices from the list above resemble what our church is doing? What things are these churches doing that we are not doing?
2. In what practical ways can we make our congregation more welcoming for young adults?
3. What obstacles do we currently face that prevent us from implementing practices that resonate with young adults?



The Person Behind the Question

Address what people are really wondering about Christianity.

Acts 28:24

My ministry has brought me into contact with thousands of curious, questioning people. I've discovered that people ask spiritual questions because something in their lives isn't working. Uncertainty, fear, and pain provoke their questions. What they really want isn't information, but relief.

Most seekers' questions, whether intellectual or emotional, indicate underlying issues. Choosing to believe in Christ carries major internal ramifications. Snappy, pat answers don't satisfy these inner struggles. Nobody wants a two-cent answer to a million-dollar question.

Behind every question is a person asking that question, and we need to minister to that person.

What Do You Think?

A great irony in Scripture prompted me to rethink how I answer seekers' questions. When the Son of God walked the earth, people came to him with dilemmas, doubts, and questions. He had all answers available to him. And yet he met their questions with questions of his own.

- **Luke 10:25–26:** “An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”

Jesus didn't give the answer. Instead, he asked a question in return. “‘What is written in the Law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’”

- **Matthew 18:12:** Jesus asked, “What do you think? If a man owns 100 sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go look for the one that wandered off?”

The heart of the parable is nothing but two questions!

- **Matthew 22:41–46:** “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”

Jesus conducted a little Bible study on Psalm 110 with the Pharisees. Through this conversation Jesus affirmed that the Christ would be more than an earthly son of David, but also the Son of God. Jesus' answer was to recite one verse and ask four questions. He responded not to the question, but to the person behind the question.

What to Ask

I've found several specific questions to be effective at reaching the underlying issues. Now, when someone asks me a spiritual question, I almost always reply, “That's an interesting question. What do you think?”

This is the approach Jesus used when he asked, “What's written in the Law? How do you read it?” It gives me an opportunity to understand the person. It also affirms that I care for him or her, even more than I do about having the “right” answer. Often, exhibiting care for the questioner is a greater ministry than answering the question.

Another good question: “What situation in your life makes you wonder about that?”

Sometimes, however, a seeker's questions and thoughts do require challenge. For instance, many seekers struggle with Jesus' claim to be the way, the truth, and the life. “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Many times what keeps people from faith is fear of the consequences. Many of my college friends were living with their girlfriends. They knew if they accepted Christianity, they'd have to stop. So they put up

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

diversions. As long as they could keep God looking silly and Jesus looking less than divine they could continue their unexamined lives. Their doubts had little to do with theology and everything to do with morality.

Once the objection is uncovered, it can be addressed with compassion and truth. “In Hebrews 11,” I might say to one who fears what God will demand, “it says they who seek God must believe that he is a rewarder. He rewards, not tramples, those that serve him. His character is not to make you miserable, but to bless you.”

— JUDSON POLING; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2002 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. What questions have you asked unbelievers in the past, and what were the results?
2. Why is it important that evangelism involve an exchange, not just a one-sided conversation?
3. Describe a time when you worked at uncovering a person’s objections to Christianity. What happened?



Four Myths about Reaching Young Adults

Engaging the next generation means throwing out everything you've learned, right? Not so fast.

Matthew 6:33

"Tell me what's working."

That's a question I'm asked frequently. Pastors want to know what's working in evangelism, not theories or ideas from out on the fringe, but news from the front lines. We need insights that are new but tried, and transferable.

So here's a report from the front lines at Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Some quick background on Meck: More than 80 percent of our growth comes from those previously unchurched. We know where they have come from, how they got to us, and we have a snapshot of the state of their spiritual life before attending. We're reaching the unchurched at a rate that has astonished even us. And they're young. Mecklenburg is a church of young boomers and older busters, in their twenties and thirties. From our experience, let's bust a few myths about reaching people in this new era.

Myth #1: Generation X has radically different needs from boomers.

Conventional wisdom is that the insights gained in the past on reaching unchurched boomers are of little value in reaching the generation that followed them. Not so.

We have found that once twentysomethings get married and have a child, they begin to look and act very much like boomers. When they start a family, those who wanted the music café and coffee bars become much more interested in the nursery. I cannot overemphasize the massive change that occurs in the Gen-Xers' tastes, demeanors, schedules, and priorities when they walk the aisle and start a family.

This shouldn't shock us. After all, it was the Woodstock generation that grew up and gave us the Reagan era.

The profound cultural changes that have shaped the mindset of today's spiritual seekers have less to do with their being Generation X than with society as a whole. The postmodern mind is real and here to stay. But there is a difference between the philosophical moorings and their sociological pilgrimage. We must understand the philosophical change, but hold loosely to what it takes to reach them stylistically at the various stages of life.

In practical terms, the music and worship styles of Generation X are not that far removed from those of younger boomers, and their ministry needs grow more alike as they age, get married, and have children.

Myth #2: The key is to be really, really hip.

In the movie *Field of Dreams*, the character played by Kevin Costner is told to build a baseball diamond in the middle of a corn field. "If you build it, they will come," a mysterious voice promises him, meaning the reappearance of Shoeless Joe Jackson and the 1919 Chicago White Sox.

Many assume that's true of building a church: fashion one that is fashioned to the tastes of the next generation and young people will come. They think that if you offer topical messages, casual dress, drama, drums, and Starbucks coffee—then the church will grow.

It's a myth.

The reality is that cool services, which Mecklenburg itself offers, are nothing more than a tool in the hands of those who are doing the inviting. Apart from that, they're meaningless. If unchurched seekers want Starbucks, they'll go to Starbucks. The idea that such things themselves will be a draw is ridiculous. It's about carefully creating entry points to support the evangelistic and invitational efforts of believers attempting to fulfill the Great Commission through the local church.

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

Myth #3: Everyone needs small groups.

Okay, let's all say it together: "We don't want to be a church with small groups, but a church of small groups." Everybody says it. Well, everybody but Mecklenburg.

We have found that small groups are very much needed by those who need small groups. Read that sentence again slowly. The truth is that many do not need them, and may not be best served by them.

We initially rebuffed this idea. Somehow it was sacrilegious to even verbalize the thought. In fact, small groups can become just as much a sacred cow to the contemporary church as Sunday school was to earlier generations.

We discovered instead that it is community that is taught in the Scriptures, not a programmatic methodology for achieving it. Yes, there were house churches in the New Testament, but this is a narrative insight, not a didactic teaching from Scripture. Early cell groups have more to do with the nature of the growth and culture of the early church than they do a methodological mandate.

We are not anti-small group. But small groups are not the answer for everything for everyone. We have had to learn to think beyond (read "in addition to") small groups for assimilation, community, and pastoral care. Specifically, we're rediscovering the lost art of one-on-one mentoring. We also encourage a team mentality and community spirit built around ministry activities.

Myth #4: Young people don't want to say anything, sing anything, or sign anything.

The most commonly held idea is that when seekers come to church, they want as little "church" as possible. This was true 20 years ago, at least in terms of the cultural trappings of church that stood in the way of understanding and appropriation. But today seekers want to experience the sacred, to encounter the Divine, to participate in the transcendent. They crave neither the purely presentational nor the sacred couched in secular vessels. They are ready to engage the holy unencumbered.

This has been an area of great change for us. When we started the church, our experiential element consisted of one short chorus that we tried to get in and out of as quickly as possible. Anything more in a seeker service would have been anathema.

Today, we turn over an eight to ten-minute segment of each weekend service to our pastor of worship. He crafts a high-energy experience that involves the spoken word (often an explanation of worship) and two or three songs with lyrics on screen, ending in a time of interaction ("take a moment and greet those around you"). Very simple, but powerful.

Young people are on a search for the spiritual, and what they are looking for is far more experiential than cerebral. Instead of thinking their way into feeling, they often feel their way into thinking. As a result, believers need to express themselves like never before, and seekers need to see a life engaged in the spiritual like never before. Thus our services involve many more moments designed to directly engage the soul and expose it to the holy—and allow it to respond in kind.

—JAMES EMERY WHITE; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2001 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Has our church bought into any of these myths about reaching young adults? Which ones?
2. How can we challenge young people who come to our church to get more involved?
3. What are some ways we can reach out to young adults without being phony and changing the essence of what our church is all about?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS



Celtic-Style Evangelism

Saint Patrick modeled a style of evangelism that is especially useful in our time.

Romans 10:14

In AD 432 Saint Patrick led a small band of Christians into Ireland. At that time the Emerald Isle was a land of barbarians. Patrick's team had to be creative and fast on their feet. According to professor George Hunter, the Celtic Christians had several methods for connecting the gospel. What does a fifth-century saint have to teach us about connecting with young adults? More than you might think.

The Celtic Christians Treated Outsiders Like Insiders

"The number of cultural adaptations they managed was unprecedented," Hunter observed. Celtic Christians believed that people should "belong before they believe," so Patrick and his partners included the outsiders in the life of their fellowship. Rather than plant their monastery away from the village (the traditional approach), Patrick established the community within walking distance of the village. Then Patrick and his team simply invited people in so they could see what the Christians life was all about.

The Celtic Christians Talked About Everyday Issues

Hunter points out that Christians today usually avoid talking about the very things people are most concerned about. The Celtic Christians didn't make this mistake.

The problem is that Western Christianity usually ignores the middle level that drives most people's lives most of the time ... Western Christian leaders usually focus on "ultimate issues." The Celtic Christians addressed life as a whole and may have addressed the middle level more specifically, comprehensively, and powerfully than any other Christian movement ever has.

It wasn't simply a matter of speaking the dialect of the local population. Patrick and his partners talked about things Celts liked to talk about, and they used Celtic icons and symbols as spiritual bridges into God-talks. The three-leaf clover is associated with Ireland because Patrick used it to talk about the Trinity.

The Celtic Christians Looked for the Good

"Celtic Christianity viewed human nature not as being radically tainted by sin and evil, intrinsically corrupt and degenerate," Hunter writes, "but as imprinted with the image of God, full of potential and opportunity, longing for completion and perfection. Patrick started with the assumption that people would be receptive and he treated them that way."

Patrick was very high on God's love for missing people. He assumed that God liked human beings, and he began conversations around anything good he could find in people. Their kindness, loyalty, sacrifice, earnestness, interest in others, anything! For Patrick, the goal wasn't to wrestle people theologically to the ground. The goal was to nudge them across the starting line toward Jesus.

What Does the Celtic Example Teach Us?

Conversations are fragile things because people are constantly "sniffing" to see who is safe and who isn't. This is especially true of young people. Like ants sensing one another's pheromones, we use small talk to decide which relational trails we should take. Conversations are emotional on-ramps we provide one another to signal our potential interest in moving closer.

When a friend at work tells you about his weekend and mentions that he and his girlfriend spent Saturday night together getting drunk at a cabin on the lake, it could easily trigger your sin-o-meter. You might feel compelled to mention that since you're a Christians, you "aren't into that sort of thing." If you're a really on-fire Christian, you might even add that "God doesn't like drunkenness and premarital sex." While both statements are true, neither one signals to your colleague that you care about him as a friend. Instead, those statements signal, "I don't want to talk to you until you change and become like me."

Jesus gave people an experience of love and reality, not a speech about it. When people experience our attention, love and genuine interest in them, they begin to feel differently. And some will want to know what

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

that means. Like Patrick did, let the missing come among you. Invite them to serve with you, in part so they can see up close what Christians are like. Let them watch you as you live life with other Christians. When they see the body of Christ in action, they won't walk away unchanged.

—JIM HENDERSON; excerpted from *Evangelism without Additives: What if sharing your faith just meant being yourself?* (Waterbrook Press, 2007). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. When was the last time I engaged an unbelieving stranger in a casual conversation?
2. What are some of the ways our church can encourage outsiders to serve alongside us?
3. How can we look to affirm the good in those we're trying to reach with the gospel?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**Further Exploration**

Books and other resources to equip your church for evangelism.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- “[Evangelism](#)” Assessment Pack
- “[Doable Evangelism](#)” Practical Ministry Skills
- “[Engaging Evangelism](#)” Training Theme and Power Point

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christians ... and Why it Matters by *David Kinnaman*. This book provides comprehensive research revealing what young people think about today’s expressions of Christian faith. (Baker Books, 2007; 978-0801013003)

Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts by *Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III*. This book explores what kinds of churches have proven effective in connecting with young people who have drifted away from the church. (B&H Publishing, 2008; 978-0805443929)

a.k.a. Lost by *Jim Henderson*. A handbook on how to make meaningful connections with the “missing,” who are the people formerly known as “lost.” (WaterBrook, 2005; ISBN 978-1578569144)

Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism by *Mark Mittelberg*. This book anchors evangelism in the local church. It reviews Mittelberg’s thinking in *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Zondervan, 1996) and expands it into a church plan. (Zondervan, 2000; ISBN 978-0310221494)

Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News by *Rick Richardson*. The national coordinator of evangelism for InterVarsity Fellowship USA offers ways to spread the gospel in a postmodern age. (InterVarsity Press, 2000; ISBN 978-0830822768)

Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them by *Ed Stetzer*. Contains practices from churches that have been particularly effective at attracting young adults. (B&H Publishing, 2009; ISBN 978-0805448788)

They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations by *Dan Kimball*. Describes the views of Christian faith of young people. (Zondervan, 2007; ISBN 978-0310245902)

Share Jesus without Fear by *William Fay with Linda Evans Shepherd*. This book is an antidote to argumentative and antagonistic approaches to evangelism. The foundation is solidly biblical and the method refreshingly relational, offering clear evidence that one-on-one evangelism is easier than it seems. (Broadman & Holman, 1999; ISBN 978-0805418392)