



Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

Volume 6.2

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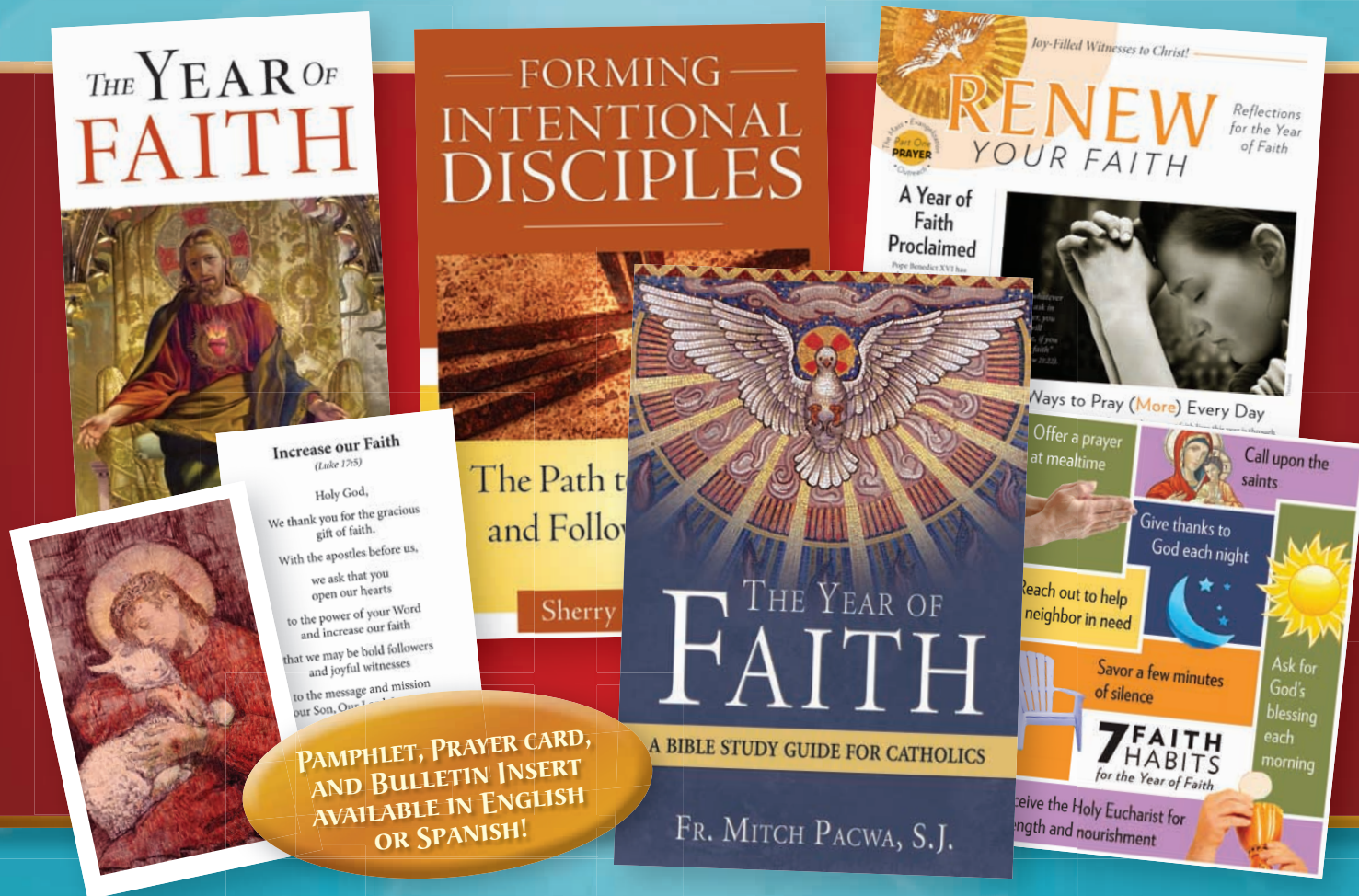
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Lifelong Faith Volume 6.2 – Summer 2012

Welcome to the Summer 2012 issue of **Lifelong Faith** on the theme of “Faith Formation in the First Third of Life.” With our new digital journal you will be able to download the journal, print articles, and share the journal with your staff and leadership team. This issue explores the newest thinking and practices in faith formation with children, adolescents, and emerging adults (20s) and includes resource reviews to help you in your faith formation efforts.

Three articles focus on faith formation with children. The first, **Nurturing the Spiritual Formation of Children** by Karen Marie Yust, Brian D. McLaren, Daniel Jennings, and David Csinos, explores four “big issues” for spiritual formation with children in congregations. **Ministry with Today’s Children and Parents** by Dale Hudson explores the changed landscape of postmodern families and children and offers a series of practical suggestions for ministry and faith formation. **The Future of Children’s Ministry** by Dale Hudson is excerpted from a collection of future visions by leaders in children’s ministry created by Greg Baird of KidMin360.

The next two articles focus on faith formation with adolescents. In **Goldilocks in Our Midst: Ministry with Young Adolescents**, Mary Lee Becker provides a contemporary understanding of today’s young adolescents and offers lots of practical suggestions for ministry and faith formation drawn from her extensive experience in training youth ministers. Frank Mercadante offers new insights into **Engaging a New Generation** of adolescents, drawn from his research, his experience as a consultant to churches, and his new book by the same name.

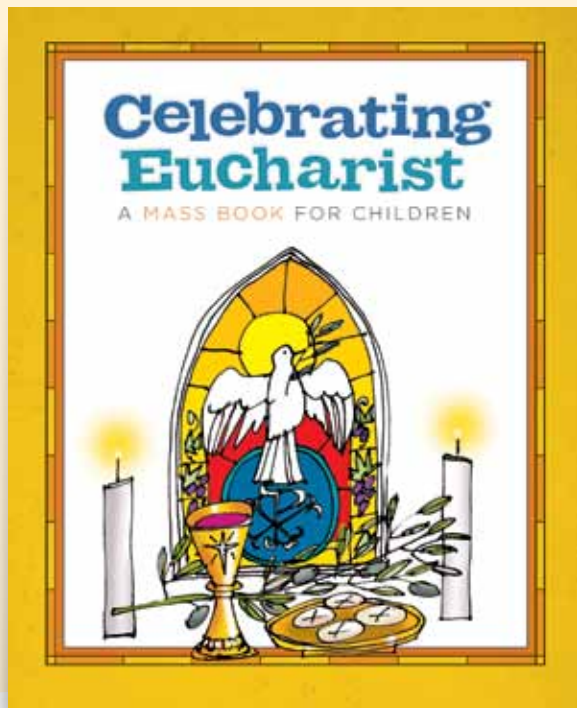
The final three articles focus on faith formation and ministry with emerging adults. **What’s Old is New (Or Three Things I Learned Studying the Next Generation)** by David Kinnaman is excerpted from the final chapter in his book, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church* (Baker Books, 2011), and draws upon Barna research and interviews with thousands of emerging adults. Anthony Robinson, pastor and church consultant, offers suggestions for **How to Reach Young Adults**. In **Greenhouses of Hope**, Dori Grinenko Baker offers three insights about congregations that effectively engage young adults, drawn from her book *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World* (Alban Institute, 2010).

I hope this issue provides new insights and practices to strengthen your ministry and faith formation with children, adolescents, and emerging adults.

John Roberto, Editor

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We gather together as a family of faith.
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and other ministers process to the altar
and bow reverently.

The altar represents Jesus Christ.
The Priest kisses the altar.
Then he goes to the chair.

When the Entrance Song is concluded, we sign
ourselves with the Sign of the Cross, while the
Priest says:

Priest In the name of the Father, and of the
Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People Amen.

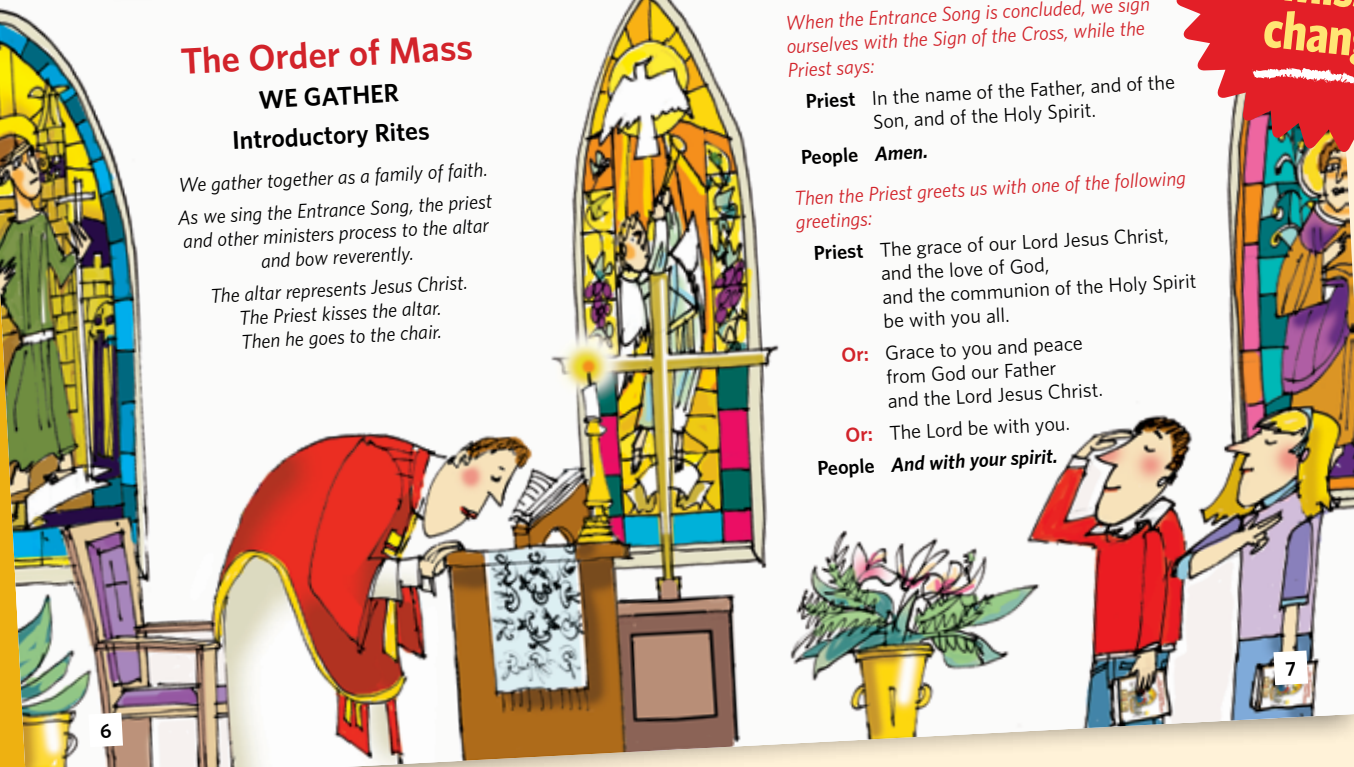
Then the Priest greets us with one of the following
greetings:

Priest The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

Or: Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or: The Lord be with you.

People And with your spirit.



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Nurturing the Spiritual Formation of Children

Karen Marie Yust, Brian D. McLaren, Daniel L. Jennings, and David M. Csinos

This article, originally written for emerging Christian communities, provides foundational practices and approaches for nurturing the spirituality of children in all Christian congregations.

What we wish to present in this essay are practices and approaches to ministry that we believe to be foundational in nurturing the spirituality of children in emerging churches, and passing on the way of Jesus to future generations.

Idea 1. Create an Environment of Inclusivity

There is a tendency in churches to speak of children's importance in the faith community yet also relegate them to separate programs in church basements. While congregations may think they are helping children by providing "age-appropriate" teaching, they are actually doing children a disservice by limiting their contact with the central practices, symbols, and rituals that define the faith community. When churches segregate children, they betray by their behavior a greater confidence in the liturgies of the modern classroom than in the formative practices of the worshipping community.

Karen Marie Yust is Associate Professor of Christian education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA and author of *Real Kids, Real Faith* (Jossey-Bass, 2004). **Brian McLaren** is an internationally recognized speaker and the author of a dozen books including *A New Kind of Christianity* (Harper One, 2010). **Daniel Jennings** is an MTh candidate at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. **David Csinos** is the author of *Children's Ministry That Fits: Beyond One-Size-Fits-All Approaches to Nurturing Children's Spirituality* (Wipf and Stock, 2011)

This article first appeared in *The Journal of Family and Community Ministries*, Baylor University School of Social Work, Volume 23 #4, Winter/Spring 2010. Used with permission.

Christian teaching and learning requires much more than the giving and receiving of the facts, figures, and doctrines often stressed by a “schooling-instructional” paradigm of Christian education. Learning to be a follower of Christ involves a complex process of religious socialization in which children and newcomers to a community form their Christian identity through interactions with several strata of the community. Historic and contemporary religious educators such as Horace Bushnell, George Albert Coe, John Westerhoff, and Thomas Groome have all stressed the importance of learning through socialization in the church community. Groome (1980) writes, “if self-identity is shaped by interaction with a collectivity, then to become Christian selves requires that we have socializing interaction with a Christian faith community which is capable of forming us in such faith” (115). Therefore, in order for such a process of Christian socialization and identity-formation to occur, children need access to the full strata of practices, rituals, symbols, and relationships—whether formal or informal—that define a Christian community within the context of the complete community.

Almost 150 years ago, Bushnell stated that the true notion of Christian education is “That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself [or herself] as being otherwise” (4). This ideal of identity formation through full immersion experiences in a community of Christian discipleship can be embraced by many emerging communities. Even those of a more baptistic persuasion, who emphasize the importance of a conversion moment in life, may appreciate how children’s exposure to many aspects of congregational life increases their desire to know and embrace the God at the center of Christian worship, fellowship, and service. While liturgical churches have typically used a gradual-socialization model of spiritual formation, conversional churches have typically used a decision/follow-up model. It is becoming more clear to us that gradual-socialization churches need to call

children and young adults to intentional commitment and conversional churches need to attend to the gradual identity formation of disciple-making as modeled in Jesus’ three years with his disciples.

Such an approach should not be completely foreign to those familiar with the Hebrew Bible. In Deuteronomy, for instance, God tells Israel to “Impress [the commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9, *Today’s New International Version*). This passage suggests that children are to be taught through their interaction with the adults in their community. Indeed, in the Hebrew Bible, children are seen as important and necessary members of the community of faith (Csinos, 99). Furthermore, the liturgies of the Jewish festivals and feasts speak of children in the midst of the larger faith community. For example, during Passover, the wonderful narrative of God’s liberation of the Israelites from slavery cannot be told until the youngest child asks why those assembled are performing the rituals associated with the feast.

We are not arguing that children should never engage in spiritual formation apart from the larger community. At times, it is appropriate for children to meet separately for instruction and reflection especially tailored to their age-level needs and capabilities. However, the presumed importance of formal instruction has caused many churches, including emerging communities, to regularly exclude children from key congregational practices in order to teach them in “age-appropriate” educational models in spaces that are occupied solely by children. Such practices of segregation implicitly teach children that they are not a part of the wider faith community and that knowing the right information and being an

adult are necessary for a “real” relationship with God.

Learning through socialization occurs as children observe others who model the world views, values, and practices that are fundamental to the faith community. Especially important are contexts in which young people hear older people share honestly their stories of doubt, struggle, and failure, along with their most profound experiences of joy and triumph. Such embodiment of the community’s ethos can be carried out by children’s parents, as well as other adults in the congregation, for it is through encounters with such role models that the identity of children can be further formed and developed.

If emerging churches are to help their children to become devoted followers of Jesus, then it is important for them to demonstrate the practices and values that they want their children to internalize. Joyce Mercer has pointed out that “Every child always exists in multiple and often competing communities exercising formative, shaping influences on the child’s identity” (174). In order for the faith community to become the primary influence on the identity-formation of children, churches can welcome children into the wider community and grant them access to the entire gamut of practices, values, and world views that define the community, as well as adults who embody them. In such communities, children learn that they are valuable to the body of Christ, which, using the words of Jean Vanier, is “called to be a body where everybody is important” (Pascal). Parents are especially positioned to demonstrate the lifestyle of a follower of Jesus, for they, along with other primary caretakers, have a strong formative role in the spirituality of their children. Socialization into a Christian way of life, therefore, requires that congregations teach adults to embody the values and practices that they want to pass on to children. In addition, congregations can intentionally embrace the oath that they take as a child is dedicated or baptized. The

liturgies for such rituals typically include a congregational pledge that all members of the community will take responsibility for the raising of the child in the Christian faith.

Furthermore, it is important for churches to break out of a “Sunday morning is church” understanding of the faith community. If congregations instead define church as the people of God, wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, then children are by definition a part of any practices and activities in which the community engages, such as home churches or cell groups, acts of service or outreach, and congregational meals. By spending a great deal of time engaged with other members of the faith community, children are more likely to identify with and embrace the values of that community.

Idea 2: Return to Catechesis

During the Enlightenment, a dichotomy between epistemology (knowing) and ontology (being) emerged, separating what one knows from whom one is and what one does. Indeed, Thomas Groome (2002) has stated that “the whole Enlightenment enterprise and thus modernity assumed that what we know need have little impact upon our ‘being’. (I mean ‘being’ as both noun and verb, who we are and how we live.)” (589). From a modern perspective, it is entirely possible for one to know about the Christian faith and life without putting any of this knowledge into practice.

As modernity draws to a close, the emerging church needs a model that not only presents faith concepts to children, but also inducts them into a Christian way of life. Speaking about discipleship within the church in general, David Fitch has argued that the church must (re)discover the ancient Christian practices of catechesis. We see great promise in this approach with children.

In the ancient world, the early church used forms of catechesis as a way of instructing those who were new to the

Christian faith. Converts gained an intellectual understanding of key Christian tenets while learning how to live the Gospel and participate in the community's rituals. Catechetical models of education usually lasted at least two or three years and formally ended with participants' baptisms (Torrence, 85). Many of the early church fathers, including St. Clement, St. Basil, and St. Jerome, created models of catechesis through which people were educated and inducted into the Christian way of life.

Throughout the history of the church, theologians have continued to speak of the value of catechesis for the spiritual development of children and newcomers. Such notable figures include St. Augustine, John Calvin, Karl Rahner, and John Westerhoff. The latter (1977) describes catechesis as:

a process that is without apology value laden, a process which aims to initiate persons into a particular community with its value, understandings and ways, a process which aims to aid persons to internalize the community's faith and to adopt this faith as their own.

A primary function of catechesis is to help the faithful individually and corporately meet the twofold responsibilities which faith asks of them: communion with God and communion with one's fellow human beings; that is, to nurture that intimacy of spiritual life which expresses itself in social justice, liberation, and the political struggle for whole community, peace and the well-being of all persons. (356-357)

Since emerging communities are often concerned with showing love to God through authentic worship and showing love to others by working for peace and justice, Westerhoff's (1977) description of catechesis is a welcome model for nurturing children in emerging congregations. It is echoed in the words of a character in *The Last Word and the Word*

after That: "[T]he purpose of the church in our way of thinking. . . is to spiritually form people to love God and others and themselves so that they can live life to the full in God's kingdom" (McLaren 2005, 141).

Catechesis in emerging communities can effectively form disciples of Christ if catechumens (those going through the process of catechesis) are included in the wider community of faith through communal worship. Instruction has a place in emerging catechesis as a supplement to worship, which is the primary activity of newcomers to the Christian community. In what follows, we will describe what catechesis might look like in emerging communities.

Catechesis through Modeling the Teachings of Jesus

David Fitch has noted that "children need to learn the language and see the ways of life [of the church] modeled in community in order to grow" (220). In order for holistic and formational catechesis to exist, the community of faith must examine themselves to ensure that they are modeling the life in which they want their children to be formed. Children often follow the examples of the adults whom they encounter both in and out of the community of faith (Yust, 149). Yet Ron Sider (2005) has noted that many Christians (he focuses on Evangelicals) are not living according to the teachings of Jesus. Rather, they continue to divorce, have affairs, and amass possessions, all while neglecting the poor and marginalized. An environment modeling self-centeredness, exploitation, and narcissism encourages children to take on such characteristics as well.

Therefore, communities of faith might examine themselves with rigor, honesty, and a willingness to change, in order to free themselves of those qualities and characteristics that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the kingdom of God. They can resist the systemic and personal sins that so often infect those within the church. In the place of such

sinful characteristics, they can add equality, love, peace, justice, mercy, humility, and interdependence. And since failure to live up to the ideal of Jesus is inevitable and frequent, they can model a humble willingness to acknowledge shortcomings as individuals and as a community.

Rather than living like the rest of the world, a church committed to effective catechesis of children can be a community in which living the gospel message and the teachings of Jesus is normative; where turning the other cheek is modeled and considered normal for a Christian; where offering hospitality to the “other” (and the Other) is what a Christian does without much inner tension as to whether or not to offer it; where the values of the world are subverted by the values of the kingdom of God. Extending love, shalom, grace, and acceptance becomes what we do because of who we are—followers of Jesus. There is room for great diversity with regard to vocation and understandings of how to live in community, but it is inherent in the emerging church’s idea of authentic Christian living that a community will teach what it is, and thus its way of life is of paramount importance.

Grasping the Story through Catechesis

Second, catechesis can provide an environment in which children can come to understand that God’s Story intersects with and informs their own stories. Catechetical models must place a priority not only on the words and actions of Jesus, but also on Christian narratives and the ways in which children find their places within them. All human beings live by narratives; for example, many people in today’s world live by the story of consumerism, which says “you are what you own.” Christian narratives are culturally specific ways in which God’s people interpret and enter into individual faith stories in terms of overarching and enduring theological themes.

God’s Story is not a distant, otherworldly narrative of individuals and communities that lived thousands of years ago. Biblical stories are part of an overarching Story of God’s relationship with the world over time. It is an ongoing, continuous Story that has the power to be formative, informative, and transformative for children and adults in all times and places.

This power is circumscribed when children’s ministry curricula reduce the biblical canon to a handful of disconnected stories that teach desirable moral stances or behaviors. Children cannot learn to recognize and celebrate the full theology of the church without access to a wide variety of stories from the whole of the biblical canon. Furthermore, children need opportunities to explore the connections among biblical stories and between the interwoven themes of those stories and their own lives. If children’s biblical literacy is limited to VeggieTales videos or the abbreviated lesson cycles of most church school materials, they may not develop an appropriate narrative of faith coherent with emerging church beliefs and practices.

Catechesis, as a way of nurturing the spirituality of young people, provides emerging communities with an approach that can be modeled after the words and actions of Jesus and enveloped within the Story of God. Children and new converts need extensive exposure to those who are following Jesus to learn what it looks and feels like to follow Jesus. Effective catechesis requires more than 30 to 90 minutes per week. Quantity, quality, intensity, and regularity are all important aspects of catechesis. Communities need to encourage regular patterns of worship that include weekly gatherings, daily practices and times of retreat and mission that draw children more fully into the catechizing community.

Herein lay the challenges for the church today. First, there is the challenge to move away from separate programs and back to intentional intergenerational communities of

Christian faith. It is within intentional inter-generational community that one learns best what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Such a community, which holds to the teachings of Jesus and knows its place within the Story of God is fit to nurture children through catechesis. Second, the church must accept the challenge to define catechesis in such a way that it does not become just another program. In the end, “catechesis is more than a given approach to curriculum. It is a way of being the church” (Fitch, 224).

Idea 3. Reinvigorate Rites of Passage

Children and young people are in desperate need of rituals and celebrations that mark significant events in their lives. Although some such rituals exist, like baptism within the church, and graduation outside of the church, congregations can continue to develop and practice rites of passage that celebrate and mark significant moments along the precarious journey of growing up.

The omission of rites of passage in the lives of young people is not just an emerging church phenomenon. North American society in general lacks celebratory rituals for significant life events. Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey observes:

We are a civilization without “puberty rites,” without “rites of passage,” without rituals, ordeals, or vigils that the young must pass through to demonstrate that they can now be accepted as men and women among the elders. . . . So our youngsters have devised their own initiation ceremonies. For boys and girls, no longer being a virgin is one such rite of passage. For girls, getting pregnant is another ritual certification that they have attained, by rite, significance in their own right. This is all pitiful and very sad. (10-11)

Since Ramsey made this observation three decades ago, the situation has worsened. Some of the most popular movies among young people feature stories of pregnant teens and adolescents on a mission to have sex. Cathy Gulli suggests, “Unplanned pregnancy is now a pop-culture staple” (40). As a result, the teen birth rate in the United States actually increased in 2006 for the first time in fifteen years (Gulli, 40)!

Emerging communities who wish to nurture their children and help them form an identity within the church can include rites of passage within the life of community. By doing so, the community of faith can become a place where people pause to thank God and celebrate the lives of children. Young people in such a congregation might grow up witnessing and participating in rituals that mark important passages like these: births and adoptions, baptisms, coming of age and church membership or commitment (at puberty), graduation from secondary school and college, moving, going to a new school, starting a new job, engagement and marriage, divorce, unemployment, disability, bereavement, or other major life disruptions, midlife and/or the empty nest (when the youngest child finished high school or college), retirement, recovery from major illness, and death. They would gradually realize that childhood transitions are just as important in the life of faith as are the passages of adulthood. They would know they are truly seen and heard by the church.

Throughout the Bible, there is a recurring theme of God’s love and welcome being bestowed on children (Csinos). In the Hebrew Bible, children were seen as a precious gift from God. In the New Testament, Jesus welcomes children into his arms and affirms their place in the kingdom of God. One way of continuing this biblical message of welcome and affirmation is by celebrating children’s significant triumphs, efforts, and challenges along their journey through life.

Idea 4: Work for Justice in an Unjust World

Many of the current forms and models of children's Christian education and spiritual formation have their roots in the American Sunday school movement of the early nineteenth century. Although this movement began as a response to poverty (especially among children), it focused solely on religious instruction once public schools opened (Lynn & Wright, 14-15). In order to reach children without generating overwhelming conflicts or debates, the movement kept silent on most controversial issues. For example, in the 1830s and 1840s, "the large Sunday school agencies never gave much attention to the black population [and] they were usually silent on slavery itself and abolition" (Lynn & Wright, 36-37). Thus, for the past two hundred years, children's religious education in Protestant America has been more attentive to moralistic religious instruction than social justice.

But as Bob Dylan once sang, "The times, they are a-changing." Many emerging faith communities are concerned with orphaned and impoverished children at home and around the world. They realize that the souls and the bodies of children are valuable in the eyes of God and in need of salvation (or liberation). As such, spiritual formation of children in emerging communities should be concerned with issues of social justice and advocacy for children whose common experiences include the injustices of war, famine, poverty, prostitution, and other manifestations of exploitation. After all, we live in a world in which 30,000 children die from preventable causes—like malnutrition and diarrhea—every single day (Couture, 3).

Nurturing all God's children means that emerging faith communities should be careful not to catch the "bless-me bug" (McLaren 2004a, 96), a virus that causes people to focus solely on how their actions can build up themselves and their church. Rather, the emerging movement should be looking to

catch the "bless-you bug," which infects individuals and congregations with Jesus' concern for the marginalized, oppressed, and poor. These people—the ones who were largely ignored by his society—were those to whom Jesus offered much of his attention. He proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 TNIV). If our gospel is not good news to the poor, it is not the good news of Jesus. So those in need must be of special importance in our communities and in our formation of young people.

How then can emerging communities reach out to children who suffer from injustice, both inside and outside of the walls of churches? How are they to care for poor and oppressed children in our churches, neighborhoods, cities, countries, and world? Since there are many faces of poverty, oppression, and exploitation, it would be ludicrous for us to present a step-by-step "how to" guide for wiping out poverty. Rather, what we offer are two broad approaches that we believe are important for understanding and seeking to eliminate injustice in the lives of children.

Don't Just Pray About It

Praying for the end of injustice in the world is widely practiced in emerging circles. Prayers offered by individual Christians, entire faith communities, and mass gatherings of the faithful are undoubtedly heard by God and are important ways of helping God's kingdom come. But prayer by itself is not enough. We agree with David Fitch, who wrote, "Prayer is good but empty if we separate it from social justice" (153). It is important for those who wish to nurture children to do more than teach them to simply pray for justice; children also need to learn how to embody their

prayers by engaging in practices that bring justice for all children in a world of injustice.

Globally, children make up the largest and most vulnerable people group. In times of famine, war, disease, and hatred, children usually suffer more than anyone else. Just look at the statistics:

- Every year almost ten million children will die from preventable causes.
- An estimated 158 million children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labor—one in six children in the world (UNICEF, “Child Labour,” para. 1). Many of the products made by these children are found in North American homes.
- There are hundreds of thousands child soldiers in the world, in both armed rebel groups and government forces (Human Rights Watch, “Child Soldiers, para 1)
- Each year as many as 1.2 million children are trafficked, with many forced into child prostitution (UNICEF, “Child Trafficking,” para. 1). In North America, almost 300,000 children under 18 years of age are sexually exploited (Estes & Weiner, 11-12).
- Over 46 million Americans are without health insurance (Sider 2007, 173), many of whom are single mothers and their children.
- At the age of seventeen, the average Black or Latino student in the U.S. reads at the same level as thirteen-year-old white Americans (Sider 2007, 194).
- One in six children in the U.S. lives in poverty (Save the Children, “Child Poverty,” para. 1).

These appalling statistics demonstrate that children are at the frontlines of injustices in our home nation and throughout the world. Therefore they ought to be at the forefront of the church’s fight against

injustice. As UNICEF (“Poverty Reduction”) has stated:

Breaking this cycle of poverty depends on investments by governments, civil society and families in children’s rights and wellbeing, and in women’s rights. Spending on a child’s health, nutrition, education, and social, emotional and cognitive development, and on achieving gender equality, is not only an investment in a more democratic and a more equitable society, it is also an investment in a healthier, more literate and, ultimately, more productive population. Investing in children is morally the right thing to do. (para. 3)

Faith communities in the emerging movement need to step up, take responsibility for injustice, and actively fight for the rights of children worldwide. When they do so with, and on behalf of, their own children, they both model the value of social justice and bring all children closer to life in God’s just and peaceable kingdom.

See the Tears in their Eyes

In order to truly engage in ministries which release the oppressed from poverty, disease, and harmful systems and power structures, “we must be prepared to look at the tears of the oppressed” (Frost, 263). In this regard, we should not consider the spiritual formation of our children complete until we have inducted them into a way of life that includes those with special needs, and live such a life ourselves.

Shane Claiborne says the tragedy of rich American (and we could expand to Western) Christians today is not that they “do not care about the poor, but that they do not know the poor” (11). Adults, with their children, need to find ways to engage in regular contact with those who are poor, oppressed, suffering, or disabled. It is not enough to embark on a short-term mission trip during which little

personal contact takes place with those who are being “ministered to,” and patronizing impulses are reinforced. And we do not need to travel across the globe to witness desperate poverty—we only need to walk to the ghettos and projects in our own cities. With this in mind we need to imagine ways that preschool, elementary, middle, and high school children, as well as young adults, are connected with the poor and oppressed in a personal way at deepening levels of intensity. For example, a suburban preschool child might begin with her family sponsoring a child in Africa. In her elementary years, she might experience a summer exchange program with Native American children, leading to an inner-city immersion in middle school, followed by spending a summer among the urban poor in high school. Or a family might affiliate with a single helping organization, such as Habitat for Humanity, and involve their children first in limited contact activities (fundraising, food contributions), then at a moderate level (landscaping and words of support), and finally in full engagement (building alongside family members). This investment in a child’s spiritual, social, and missional education would probably have a greater return than many other investments in religious education.

In *Just Generosity*, Ron Sider states, “[I]f we do not imitate God’s concern for the poor, we are not really God’s people—no matter how frequent our worship or how orthodox our creeds” (70). One of the marks of a true disciple of Christ and child of God is a love and concern for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized that goes beyond mere charity. To truly love our oppressed neighbors, it is important to take the time to get to know them, understand their situations, and work with them to overcome their oppression and poverty. This is the type of action that Paulo Freire called for when he said “Revolutionary leaders cannot think without the people, nor for the people, but only with the people” (131). Children grow in faith when they think and

act with those who suffer injustice and oppression.

Harvard psychologist Robert Coles has noted that “children add up, imitate, file away what they’ve observed” (7); they learn by watching and listening to adults. If we want them to help form a world of justice, we cannot simply preach to our children about God’s concern for the poor; we need to be willing to get our hands dirty as we actively pursue peace and justice with our children by our sides. Only then will they be able to truly know the immense value of those who are oppressed and the great importance of working for justice in an unjust world.

Conclusion: Companions on the Journey

Throughout the Christian church, people are beginning to feel that things are changing. Whatever labels one might use to distinguish and describe this movement, something is undeniably happening: a new kind of Christianity (or perhaps a recovery of an older Christianity, or a combination of both the old and new) is emerging. Yet as people experience these changes and seek to be refreshed by them, children are being left behind.

In this article, we have begun to explore ways that this new, emerging Christian culture can nurture and form children into authentic disciples of Christ. While the four ideas we present—inclusion, catechesis, rites of passage, and justice-seeking—are not exclusive methods for forming the faith identity of children, we believe they are consistent with the values and practices of the emerging church movement.

None of these four ideas stands alone from the other three. Rather, they continually intersect and overlap with one another, even to the point where it is difficult to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. Rites of passage have a key role within practices of catechesis and, like catechesis, they require

children to be included within the wider faith community. Such inclusion is intricately linked with justice, for, as Ron Sider has noted, “Justice includes helping people return to the kind of life in community that God intends for them” (72). Justice requires catechesis and rites of passage, for as Marva Dawn has noted: “Without that mentoring [of catechumenal practices]. . . persons cannot be trained to ‘live’ their focal concerns” (84) of justice-seeking and peacemaking. The approaches that we have presented require one another. By adopting all four foci as part of a holistic religious education ministry, emerging communities of faith can nurture children who love God and passionately desire to follow the way of Jesus.

“Jesus has taught us that the way to know what God is like is not by determining our philosophical boundary conditions/ definitions/delineations before departing, but rather the way to know is by embarking on an adventure of faith, hope, and love, even if you don’t know where your path will lead” (McLaren, 2004b, 184-185). Our job is not simply to fill the minds of children with facts about God and the Bible. The task before us is to walk with children as we together seek to love God and fellow human beings more and more each day. While at times we may lead children along the path, we can also open ourselves to their leadership along this spiritual journey. After all, “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14, TNIV).

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Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity



<http://children-youth.com>

In May of 2012, 450 leaders, ministers, volunteers, parents, and students gathered in Washington, DC, USA to spark conversations about youth and children within a new kind of Christianity. They spoke about innovative practices, critical issues, and controversial topics like violence, racism, and sexuality. They embarked on a journey together to engage in life-giving ministry with young people. And they blazed a new trail for the 21st-century church.

Podcasts of the sessions are being made available on their website at <http://children-youth.com> and on the Wood Lake Books at www.woodlakebooks.com/podcasts.



Ministry with Today's Children & Families

Dale Hudson

The postmodern family is a reflection of the postmodern culture as a whole. To understand the roots of the postmodern culture, you must go to its predecessor—modernism. Modernism developed in the late 19th century in the wake of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities. With the emerging fully industrialized world, modernism felt religious faith was outdated and that mankind could obtain a higher way of living through science, reason, and logic. It rejected the idea of a compassionate, all-powerful Creator and declared that science is the only way truth can be verified.

The failings of modernism were made apparent by two World Wars, the Holocaust, and Vietnam. People begin to question the results of reason and science with its cold technology, pollution, weapons of mass destruction, and intrusive “control.”

After World War II, a desire to be free from any kind of intellectual demand or moral restraint led to the birth of postmodernism. Idealism, pluralism, relativism, and skepticism became the approach to knowledge and understanding.

From the 1980's to the present, postmodernism has accelerated. It claims there is no absolute truth. No one view is uniquely correct. Truth is not found in absolutes but is created in each person's mind. Everything is in the eye of the beholder and any claim of “fact” is the mere disillusionment of a preconceived bias.

Dale Hudson has been in children's ministry for over 23 years and is currently director of children's ministry at Christ Fellowship Church in Palm Beach, FL. His website, www.relevantchildrensministry.com, provides fresh content, ideas, and insight for children's ministry leaders. He is the co-author of *Turbo Charged Children's Ministry*, *Turbo Charged Preschool Ministry*, *Children's Ministry in the 21st Century*, and the *ChurchLeaders.com Top 100* book. Dale's passion is helping children and families discover God's life-changing grace, and encouraging and equipping children's ministry leaders. You can connect with Dale via email (daleh@cftoday.org), Twitter (@dalehudsoncm), or Facebook.

Postmodern culture's mantra is tolerance and being nonjudgmental. It distains religious authority. There is no fixed moral code. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). Whatever works for each person.

The postmodern culture has critical implications for your ministry as you seek to minister to families. We live in a day of unparalleled challenges and opportunities. Family is rapidly being restructured and we must know how to navigate through these changes.

I Chronicles 12:32 highlights the leadership of 200 of Israel's finest leaders: "From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All of these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take."

These leaders understood public affairs, the temper of the nation, and the tendencies of their culture. This helped them know the best course of action to take.

Just as a missionary takes time to study and learn about the culture he is trying to reach, so we must understand the characteristics and tendencies of the culture God has called us to.

Let's explore four key areas of effective family ministry in a postmodern world. It begins by understanding postmodern families.

Understanding Postmodern Families

The "modern" family consisted of a male breadwinner, female homemaker and children. The postmodern family is much more diverse.

The families portrayed on television provide us with a snapshot of the changes in postmodern family dynamics.

Leave it to Beaver embodied the family structure of the 1950's. It was a nuclear family where two parents; a man and a woman, raised their biological children, usually two of

them. The father, Ward, was the breadwinner in the Cleaver family. He was in charge of the household and held an important role as a parenting figure. June, the mother, was a homemaker who stayed at home and did the regular activities of a housewife; she cleaned and cooked.



Leave it to Beaver (1950s)

Wally and Beaver (Theodore) portrayed the two children. The first one, Wally was the teenager in the family. He represented a well-rounded, American boy who got good grades, got along with his teachers, and played sports. Beaver, was the seven year-old who enjoyed playing with his friends, reading comic books, and attending church. Though he got into minor trouble, it was usually easily resolved.

Fast forward to present day. *Modern Family*, seen on ABC, depicts three families from today's culture. First you have the typical family with a wife and husband with their three kids. Though Phil, the husband, is the primary breadwinner, Claire, the wife, is seen as the head of the household.

Next, you have a divorced man, Jay, who is remarried to a younger woman named Gloria. Gloria is also the mother of Manny, a young boy, who Jay takes under his wing as his own

child even though he is not the biological father. Once again, Jay, the male, is the primary breadwinner, but by no means is he the head of the household when it comes to the family.

The last family structure we see in *Modern Family* consists of two gay men and an adopted child. Mitchell, the more masculine of the two, works outside of the home and provides for the family while Cam stays home and cares for Lily, their daughter.



Modern Family on ABC (present day)

Let's delve deeper into the postmodern worldview and landscape of family.

Family Structure

- 34% of people say a growing variety of family arrangements is a good thing; 29% say it is a bad thing and 32% say it makes little or no difference.
- 86% say a single parent and child constitute a family.
- 80% say an unmarried couple living together with a child is a family.
- 63% say a gay or lesbian couple raising a child is a family.

Marriage

- In 1960, nearly 70% of adults were married compared to only 50% now.

- In 1960, 68% of all twenty-somethings were married. Today just 26% are.
- Americans are waiting about five years longer to marry than they did in 1970.
- College graduates are now far more likely to marry (64%) than those with no higher education (48%).
- Marriage is no longer considered a prerequisite for parenthood. Over the past 50 years, the number of children born to unwed mothers has risen from 5% to 41%.
- In 1960, 87% of children lived with two married parents compared to only 64% today.

Children

- 34% of 18 to 29 year olds already have children.
- There were more babies born in 2007 than at the height of the baby boom.
- 39% of households headed by young postmodern parents have children under 18 in the home.

Cohabitation

- In 1981, an ABC News/Washington Post poll revealed that 45% of people disapproved of couples living together unmarried. By 2007, a similar question in a Gallup/USA Today poll revealed the disapproval rate had dropped to 27%.
- Cohabitation has soared 17-fold from 430,000 in 1960 to 7.5 million last year.
- Today's children are much more likely to spend time in a cohabiting household than they are to see their parents divorce.
- 24% of children are born to cohabiting couples, which means that more children are currently born to cohabiting couples than to single mothers.
- Another 20% of children will spend time in a cohabiting household with an unrelated adult at some point in their childhood.

- This means that over 40% of children are exposed to a cohabiting relationship.
- Taxpayers are spending a trillion dollars a year to subsidize non-marriage—75 percent federal and 25 percent by states.

Single Parents

- There are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the United States today, and those parents are responsible for raising 21.8 million children (approximately 26% of children under 21).
- 84% of single parents are mothers.
- The poverty rate among single mothers with less than a high school diploma is over 45%.

Pre-Marital Sex

- In 1969, 68% of the public believed pre-marital sex was wrong. By 1985, only 39% believed it was wrong. In 2009, a CBS/New York Times poll revealed only 32% believed it was wrong.

Divorce

- America's divorce rate began climbing in the late 1960's and skyrocketed in the '70's and early '80's. The rate peaked at 5.3 divorces per 1,000 people in 1981. It has since dropped to 3.6 and is at the lowest rate since 1970. Many experts say the rate is primarily down because of couples cohabitating without marrying.
- 55% of divorced couples share custody of their children.

Family Roles

- 71% of mothers with children under 18 are in the labor force. In 1975, fewer than half of all mothers were working outside the home. Even among mothers of children under 3, 61% are in

the labor force compared to 34% in 1975.

- When asked in 2009 whether they agreed or disagreed that women should return to their traditional roles in society, only 19% of adults agreed while 75% disagreed.
- In 1960, women comprised only 33% of the workforce. By 2009, women made up 47% of the workforce.
- There are an estimated 154,000 stay-at-home dads who care for 287,000 children.
- 62% of people endorse the modern marriage in which both the husband and wife both work and both take care of the household and children. This is up from 47% in 1977.

Same Sex Marriage

- 53% of adults younger than 30 favor allowing same sex marriage.
- 48% of adults ages 30 to 45 favor allowing same sex marriage.
- 38% of adults ages 46 to 64 favor allowing same sex marriage.
- 29% of adults ages 65 and older favor allowing same sex marriage.

Multi-Generational Households

- According to Census Bureau, the number of Americans living in multi-generational households has shot up, increasing to 4.9 million, or 10.5%.
- This includes grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Over 2.9 children are being raised with their grandparents as their primary caregiver.
- The primary reason for this increase is due to the economic downturn. The unemployed are much more likely to live in multi-generational households. It is natural that more people would reach out to family for financial support.

Religious Beliefs

- 70% believe there is more than one way to God.
- 64% believe God is real.
- 55% believe evolution is the best explanation of how we got here.
- Only 28% believe the Bible is God's Word.
- 25% are not affiliated with any religion.

Technology

- One defining characteristic of young postmodern families is technology. They grew up totally tech connected.
- 88% use texting.
- 90% use the internet.
- 75% have a profile on a social network.
- 25% have a video of themselves online.

These findings provide us with insight into the culture we are ministering to. Let's translate this into practical ways we can reach postmodern families for Christ.

Reaching Postmodern Families

It is easy to get bogged down and even discouraged by these statistics. But the good news is postmodern families are searching for the truth. They are looking for something to fill the empty void in their lives that only God can satisfy. God is at work. Churches and ministries that are reaching out to today's families with wisdom and love are seeing God change their hearts and lives—one family at a time. Here are some things churches can do to reach postmodern families.

- ✓ **Embrace Racial Diversity**
Postmodern families are the most racially diverse in American history, yet Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours of the week. Churches must be intentional about making everyone in their community feel welcome

and loved. This includes reflecting racial diversity in communication pieces, staffing, and cultural awareness.

- ✓ **Focus on urban and suburban communities.**
Only 14% of young postmodern parents live in rural areas compared to 29% of Boomers and 36% of the Silent Generation. Yes, we need churches in rural areas, but if we are going to reach the young postmodern family, we must go where they are. Churches must be planted in urban and suburban communities.
- ✓ **Make a good first impression on new families.**
The first impression is a lasting impression. And you only get one opportunity to make it. If families don't have a good experience on their first visit to your church, they probably won't come back, no matter how much you "follow up" with them. Take these steps to exceed their expectations on their first visit.
- ✓ **Have a separate check-in area for guests.**
Even though people are used to having to wait in line, they hate it. Exceed their expectations by taking them out of the normal check-in line and give them an "express line" experience
- ✓ **Give guests a gift.**
They expect to get brochures and "information." Exceed their expectations and give them a gift. Want to really exceed their expectations? Instead of giving them a "church-related gift" like a CD of the sermon, give them a gift that is non-church related like a Starbuck's gift card.
- ✓ **Walk them to their child's classroom.**
They are used to being pointed in the general direction. Exceed their

expectations and “walk” them to the classroom.

✓ **Walk the parents to the adult service.**

Don't just stop at walking them to their child's classroom. Take the next step and then walk the parents to the adult service.

✓ **Show genuine interest in them.**

Good children's ministries are polite. Exceptional children's ministries are personable. Move beyond the “hello” at the door and take time to talk with them and get to know them.

✓ **Bend the guidelines to accommodate them.**

Many times guests will ask for special accommodations such as allowing two siblings of different ages to be in the same classroom. Unless their request violates your safety and security procedures, do your best to accommodate them. Look for ways to say “yes” instead of saying “no.”

✓ **Remember their name and use it.**

It makes an impression on people when you immediately remember their name. Work on techniques that help you memorize people's names instantly.

✓ **Help them after the worship service.**

Most guests aren't expecting you to go the second mile and help them after the service. Exceed their expectations by being there to help them check out their children, answer questions, thank them for coming, etc.

✓ **Make the safety and security of children a top priority.**

Postmodern parents have been psychologically impacted by 9/11, terrorism, and buildings being bombed. They live with a sense of danger in the world. They

have intercoms and security cameras in their child's rooms. We must make the safety and security of their children a top priority while they are in our care. Here are some key steps to take to gain the confidence and trust of parents.

- *Have secure buildings and proper plans and systems in place such as a secure check-in/check-out system. Parents must know that no one else can pick up their child.*
- *Let parents know every volunteer has been through an orientation process, which includes a background check and screening. Put it in writing and regularly remind parents. Knowing there are only approved volunteers in the room will help build trust.*
- *Have a rule that no adult is ever alone with a child and let parents know this.*
- *Issue pagers or use numbers on screen to notify parents when they are needed. This will give parents a sense of security and will help them feel more comfortable entrusting their child with you.*
- *Fill out incident reports. Kids are going to fall down, they are going to get bumps, scratches from other children, etc. Hardly a week goes by without it happening. The key is how you respond and communicate with parents. Have incident reports. Anytime there is an accident, bump, scratch, etc. fill out an incident report. Write down exactly what happened. When the parents come to pick up their child, share the incident report with them and have them sign it. This will build trust. Trust is depleted if they go home and discover a bump or scratch and were not told about it.*

✓ **Be committed to a ministry of excellence.**

Postmodern parents have high expectations of institutions and authorities. Our “competition” is not the church down the street. It’s Disney, Target, or the last business or restaurant they interacted with. We must pay fantastic attention to detail. Excellence is doing the small details well.

This includes keeping children’s rooms clean. When postmodern parents look inside your classroom, they assess its cleanliness. If it’s untidy, cluttered, or dirty, it is difficult to gain their trust. Keep toys clean and disinfected, throw away or repair damaged furniture, keep the floor vacuumed, and the trash emptied.

Another important detail is following proper adult-to-child ratios. A room that is too crowded or understaffed will damage your credibility with parents.

✓ **Foster relationships and create community.**

Postmoderns are highly relational. They prefer circles instead of rows. The larger your ministry becomes, the smaller it must become. Small groups are a vital part of this process. How this is accomplished will vary from church to church. The key is creating environments where relationships are built and people are known and cared for.

Ministry with Postmodern Families

The church is called to be a hospital for the spiritually sick, not a museum where perfect Christians are on display. People come into a hospital bleeding, coughing, and hurting. It is messy—very messy.

And that’s right where Jesus wants us. He was called the “Friend of Sinners.” He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

We must draw people to the truth while not driving them away from it. If we are reaching our community, we will have people attending our church whose lives do not line up with God’s best plan for the family.

Our calling must be to lovingly share the truth with them and then provide pathways for them to move toward it. If we are going to tell people where they should be, then we must provide the steps they can take to get there.

✓ **Interview people before you allow them to teach children.**

✓ **Increase the number of men involved in ministry with children.**

The ever-increasing percentage of children being raised by a single parent can affect the child’s balance of male-female influence growing up. This is especially true with boys. We must bring godly male figures into their lives. Things like a men’s mentoring program or having men lead boy’s small groups makes a big difference.

✓ **Offer support, encouragement, and counseling for children affected by divorce.**

Many children are affected by divorce. I counsel with many families whose children are angry, upset, and acting out at school because of their parent’s divorce. We must be there to offer support, encouragement, and counseling. Programs like “Divorce Recovery For Kids” can help children cope with the pain of divorce.

✓ **Equip couples we marry.**

We must do a better job up front of equipping couples we marry. Churches marry 86% of Americans, but I am afraid we fail them many times. Protestant

divorce rates are actually higher than the unchurched. We must focus on pre-marital counseling at a new level. We must provide the skills they need for success going into the marriage.

✓ **Provide hope and strategies for couples that are having trouble.**

Recent research reports that about 60 percent of divorces are by couples that are no more unhappy than those who remain married and have “low levels of conflict.” Over 2,500 couples were surveyed and found that 40% of those well into the divorce process, say that “one or both of them are interested in the possibility of reconciliation.”

A “Second Chances Act” has been proposed that would set a one-year “cooling off” period before a divorce can become final. It would also encourage spouses to send their mates an “early notification and divorce prevention letter,” warning that a divorce was likely if problems were not resolved. The proposal would also require parents of minor children to attend divorce education classes before they can file for divorce. This would allow churches more time and opportunities to provide help with counseling and reconciliation.

✓ **Provide special attention to cohabitating couples.**

Cohabitation is rapidly on the rise. If we are going to disciple cohabitating couples we must:

- *Be about redemption.* We must be a place where people can discover God’s grace and forgiveness.
- *Speak the truth in love.* There has to be a balance between love and truth. It’s like the two wings of a plane. One won’t fly without the other. Communicate God’s truth about

marriage with a heart of love and compassion. When people know you truly care for them, it will open their heart to receive the truth.

- *Establish guidelines.* It is important to have clear guidelines in areas that are related to cohabiting. Will you allow parents who are cohabiting to serve in children’s ministry? Will you allow parents who are cohabiting to participate in child dedication? These are questions that each church must address and answer for themselves. The biblical reasons behind your guidelines should be clearly communicated.
- *Have pathways in place.* As stated earlier, when you challenge parents to line up with God’s Word, it’s important to have pathways in place that will help them get there. When you explain “why” be ready to show them “how.” Provide them next steps such as a prep-for-marriage course or counseling.
- *Work hand-in-hand with adult ministries.* Partner with adult ministries to create the pathways mentioned above. Many times, the first time parents will share they are cohabiting will come through their interaction with children’s ministry. Being able to easily connect them with adult ministries is vital.

When you minister to parents who are cohabiting, it can be difficult at times. I regularly meet cohabiting couples that attend our church. I am praying it will be the beginning of a journey of them discovering God’s plan for the family. Our job is not to call them “out” but to call them “up.” Some will pull away when they hear the truth, but others will follow God’s Word and you will see their lives and

family changed forever. I've seen both happen, and had the joy of seeing parents who were cohabiting get married. Just remember, we can't change anyone's heart. Only God can do that. It's simply our job to speak God's truth in love.

Partnering with Postmodern Families

The most important factor in a child's spiritual life is his or her parents. No one has more influence. The time a child will spend in children's ministry is a small fraction compared to the time the child will spend with his or her parents.

We must spend as much time focusing on parents as we do children. We have to shift much of our time, energy, and resources toward partnering with adult ministries, toward discipling parents, toward equipping parents to lead their children spiritually, toward helping parents have strong marriages.

If we want to see children's lives changed, then we have to see their parents' lives and marriages changed. ***We don't need more children's ministry. We need more marriage and parent ministry.*** What happens at home is just as important, if not more important, than what happens at church.

The good news is that studies show that young postmodern parents are more focused on their family than their Boomer parents were. A defining characteristic is involvement in their children's lives. They are home more with their children. Consider this. . .

- 76% say they have no interest in gaining their manager's position. Much of this mindset comes from seeing their older bosses spend long hours at the office to the neglect of their families and personal lives. They would rather pass on the promotion that involves longer hours and instead go

home to be with their kids. They have memories from their own childhood of lonely afternoons and early evenings because their parents were working long hours. They want to be there for their children.

- Ironically, they are working more hours than their parents, but the big difference is they are working smarter. Technology is allowing them the ability to work from home a lot more. A recent study shows there has been a 61% increase in people working from home since 2005. This gives them flexibility in their schedule and the ability to spend more time with their family at home.
- 52% say that being a good parent is one of the most important things in life.

The church has a great opportunity to partner with postmodern parents. They want to take the lead in discipling their children. If we place the proper tools in their hands, they will step up to the plate spiritually for their children. Let's look at some effective ways to do this.

✓ Provide parents with easy-to-use discipleship resources and tools.

Many parents feel like they can't effectively disciple their children unless they are a Bible scholar. Encourage parents by providing them simple, user-friendly resources.

✓ Don't program them to death.

Don't add too much to their already crazy, busy schedules and then guilt them for not being there. Families make choices with their time. If you are constantly expecting them to be at the church for extra programs or events, they can become disheartened and overwhelmed. Be strategic in what you do. Work with the

other ministries in the church when planning your calendar.

✓ **Strategically look at family calendars when planning your church calendar.**

Take into consideration holidays, days school is out, 3-day weekends, spring breaks, graduation dates, etc. when planning. Make sure you place key events, classes, etc. at times when it won't be competing with other family events.

✓ **Partner with other ministries.**

Become best friends with student ministry, adult ministry, senior adult's ministry, women's ministry, and men's ministry. Work closely with them and together create a strategy to influence families. Here's an example. We sat down with adult ministries and shared with them the child dedication class dates for next year. They purposely created parenting and marriage classes that will roll out of the child dedication class dates.

✓ **Set up key family milestones you celebrate with them.**

There are key times in a family's life when they swing the doors wide open and invite you to bring influence into their home. Set up classes and celebrations for milestones like child dedication, baptism, pre-teen passage, high school graduation, etc.

✓ **Be just as intentional about building relationships with parents as you are with children.**

Spend intentional time talking with parents, going to adult ministry activities, attending adult worship, etc. When you build relationships with parents, you open their hearts to receive your influence.

✓ **Find out their needs as a family.**

What are they struggling with? What challenges are they dealing with as

parents? What is their home life like? How can you best minister to them? This is done through the step above as you build relationships with families and spend time listening to them. You can also host a parent focus group a few times a year and intentionally ask these type of questions.

✓ **Provide activities and events for families to enjoy together.**

Postmodern families emphasize family activities above material things. Provide shared learning experiences, family picnics, family activity nights, family worship nights, family camps, family concerts, family fall festivals—all great ways to get families together so you can speak into their lives.

✓ **Be prepared to minister to families when they are going through difficult times.**

God wants to work through you to influence families when they are at the hospital, when they are seeking counseling, when they are mourning at the funeral home, when they are in financial crisis.

✓ **Involve grandparents.**

Postmodern parents are in much closer contact with their parents than previous generations. In many families, grandparents are closely attached to helping raise the grandkids. In fact, 25% of young parents have their child's grandparents involved in the child's activities. There are also 5.8 million grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

✓ **Get them involved in serving in children's ministry at church.**

They want to see their children succeed and grow spiritually. They are willing to volunteer in their children's activities.

✓ **Provide opportunities for families to serve together.**

Families can be greeters together. Families can go on mission trips together. Families can participate in community service projects together. Last year we hosted a family yard sale. Each family brought items from home and set up a table in the church parking lot. They raised over \$1,300 that went toward stopping human trafficking. At Thanksgiving, we prepare meals for the needy in our community. It is wonderful seeing families participating in this together.

✓ **Know how to effectively communicate with them.**

Here are some factors to consider as you communicate with young postmodern parents.

- *They are bombarded with information.* The average adult is flooded with over 247 messages a day. With this influx of messages, it is a challenge to get your message through the clutter and into their hands.
- *They have very short attention spans.* The attention span may be an endangered species in the lightning-fast, multimedia society we've become. With media overload continuing to amp up, the ability to grab people's attention and hold it is an increasing challenge.

New research finds that the average political sound bite—defined as any footage of a candidate speaking uninterrupted—has dropped to just eight seconds. (About the time it took to you read that last sentence.) To give that information some context, consider that, during the 1968 presidential election, the average sound bite was a full 43 seconds. And as recently as the 1990s, CBS said it

wouldn't broadcast any sound bite under 30 seconds in an effort to better promote informed, complex discourse. Two decades later, candidates get out about a third of that before cutting them off.

According to the *Pediatrics* medical journal, increased exposure to television and video games causes noticeable decreases in attention spans in children. One study says the average attention span of university students is 10 minutes.

There are three words you will be hearing more often: "It's Too Long." The video—it's too long. The lesson—it's too long. The announcement—it's too long. The brochure—it's too long. The email—it's too long. The advertisement—it's too long.

This means when you are communicating with young parents you must *say it short*. Complexity is your enemy. If you want parents to remember something long term, then make it a simple statement. Great communicators know how to take complex truths and teach them in simple statements.

The fewer the words, the bigger the impact. Here's an example. Finish this sentence. The Few, the Proud, the _____. The reason you were able to finish the sentence is because it is in your long-term memory. It is in your long-term memory because it's six words. If it were 60 words, you probably wouldn't remember it.

Also remember to *show it short*. Keep your training and teaching videos at 2-3 minutes max.

And don't forget to *write it short*. Print pieces should be short and to the point. That long, wordy brochure you created, no one is reading it. Cut out most of the words and use pictures with simple, short statements.

- *They want immediate response.* With mobile devices, text, twitter, and email they are used to getting a quick response. Respond to them within 24 hours.
- *Communicate with them through text.* Did you know that 98% of text messages get read? Every Tuesday, we send out a short text with questions from the weekend lesson that parents can discuss with their child at home. Parents can sign up to receive the text. We've had great response. There are many text services available that enable you to do this. We currently use www.txtsignal.com.

✓ **Provide them with parental advice.**

Postmodern parents are very open to parental advice. Online parenting information has exploded online. Alltop.com contains links to hundreds of blogs and content sites under its "mom's" section. It features perspectives from all manner of moms: single and married.

Facebook has also become a place to share parenting advice. Young parents live on Facebook and this contributes to parenting becoming an increasingly public, not private, experience. Respond by creating online parenting support such as a Facebook page or website. Offer parenting classes at church.

Conclusion

When we reach and disciple a family we make an impact for generations to come. My family is a personal example of this. There was a

time when we knew nothing about God. My great grandfather was an alcoholic and murderer who was sent to prison for life. My grandfather followed in his footsteps with heavy drinking and constant fighting. We had never been inside the doors of a church.

One day, a man in our neighborhood felt burdened for our family. He came and invited us to church. My grandfather cursed him out and told him to leave. But he wouldn't give up. He kept coming back and asking us to come. Finally my grandmother and my father went to church with him. My father sat in church as a 9-year-old boy for the first time. He heard that Jesus loved him and could make a difference in our family.

Soon my grandmother became a follower of Christ as well as my father. After several years of praying, my grandfather also became a follower of Christ and his life was changed. He became a church deacon for over 33 years until he passed away. There are now three pastors in our family as a result of God's impacting grace.

You are surrounded by families just like ours. Families looking for answers, families torn apart that need healing, families that desperately need to experience God's grace. Let's be committed to understanding postmodern families—reaching postmodern families, discipling postmodern families, and partnering with postmodern families.



The Future of Children's Ministry

Dale Hudson

From: *The Future of Children's Ministry*

A KidMin360 Collaborative Children's Ministry Resource

Created by Greg Baird, KidMin360 (<http://kidmin360.com>)

1. The future of children's ministry will be tied to the future of "pop" (popular) culture.

That statement may make your temperature rise a little...but it's the truth. Many of our current practices are direct reflections of the culture in which we live.

Someone asked the president of MTV how they keep up with the culture. His response, "We create the culture." Take a look at your music, imagery, teaching methods, and communication. If it's being successful. . . it's probably synced up with the current pop culture.

I know what some of you are thinking...we must stand against the culture if we're going to change the world. Let me ask you a question. How is it going? Pretty simple answer. . . not too well. You know why? It's going to have to be an inside job.

If we are going to influence the culture and change the world, we must pray God will open doors for children who love Him to become actors, singers, sports stars, writers, and producers. An example is Bailee Madison who is a rising child star in Hollywood. She's not only a star...she's a shining light for Jesus.

I have a close friend who is a producer for Disney and Universal. He trains and places children in key film, television, and musical roles. He is making a spiritual investment in the children who will influence the future.

One of the kids that was in my children's ministry years ago now plays in the NFL. He now has a huge platform to share His faith. We must make these type investments and ask God to raise these children up into roles where they can truly influence the culture from the inside out.

2. The future of children's ministry will become increasingly diverse ethnically and culturally.

Most of the population growth in the U.S. will come from immigrants already in the U.S. or those who will migrate to the U.S. No majority ethnicities will exist by 2050 in the United States. Children's ministries will reflect the wonderful diversity of the body of Christ.

3. The future of children's ministry will reside more and more in urban areas.

By 2050, 90 percent of Americans will live in urban areas. We must invest our time and energies where the majority of children will be living.

4. The future of children's ministry will be multi-site.

The multi-site church revolution continues to grow rapidly. . . taking children's ministry right along with it.

5. The future of children's ministry will show sporadic attendance patterns

As I talk with churches across the country, the norm is for families to attend church once every two or even three weeks. As the pace of life continues to race ahead, families will continue to make time choices.

6. The future of children's ministry will see continued emphasis on family ministry.

Family ministry will not only be focused on partnering with parents to disciple their children, but also discipling parents as part of the process. We will have the opportunity to disciple parents who have very little Bible knowledge or Bible background. They will learn together with their children that Noah's Ark isn't just about the movie "Evan Almighty."

7. The future of children's ministry will involve online children's ministries.

As churches continue to expand their online worship services and discipleship tools, they will develop these same online opportunities for children as well.

8. The future of children's ministry will see us moving from the printed Word to the digital Word.

Just look at the numbers. In 2009 there were about two billion physical books sold in the United States. Sounds like a lot, but that's down nearly five percent from 2008. This year that number is expected to drop another two percent. But e-books? Sales will go from about \$150 million last year to an estimated billion-dollar business by 2012, as new products from tech companies like Apple flood the market. Kids will bring their Bible to church, but it will be in a digital format. The Bible is just as much God's Word on an iPhone as it is on a printed page.

9. The future of children's ministry will move toward mobile work.

Children's Pastors and Directors will be given much more flexibility to get out of the office and work from home or even on the go because of the rapid expansion of mobile work technology. You will see less and less desktop computers and more and more mobile work devices such as laptops and iPads.

10. The future of children's ministry will move from passive learning to active learning.

The days of one-way information download will give way to collaborative, hands on, interactive learning. Children's ministries will realize that children who play interactive video games, learn at school by using new interfacing technology, and help determine outcomes through texting, learn best by participation instead of passivity

11. The future of children's ministry will be ministering to a wide variety of family units.

Single parents, blended families, and grandparents raising their grandchildren will continue to rise. Ministering to children whose parents are living together unmarried will also continue to increase.

12. The future of children's ministry will be affected by the next big issue that churches must face.

The issue used to be divorce, but now it is whether or not homosexuality is an approved lifestyle for a Christ Follower. The decisions that parents, pastors, and church leaders make about this will affect the beliefs of children in the future.

13. The future of children’s ministry will be an increasing culture of pluralism.

Churches will have to intentionally teach children that Jesus is the only way to God and eternal life. But they must also be taught to be respectful to others as they stand for the truth. They must be taught to speak the truth in love.

14. The future of children’s ministry will involve connecting with, communicating with, and training volunteers through technology.

Online training, YouTube and Vimeo videos, Twitter, Skype, and Facebook are just the beginning of tech tools that will be used to accomplish this. These tools will replace much of the “come to church and sit in a room” style training. As technology continues to rapidly progress, so will the ability to use it for these purposes.

15. The future of children’s ministry will involve more variety in teaching.

Media saturated children will push back against the flood of video curriculum that

they are being exposed to week after week. Video elements will still be used, but entire lessons taught by video will be replaced more often by a live teacher.

16. The future of children’s ministry will be anchored in relationships if it is going to thrive.

Kid-friendly buildings, cool music, and funny videos will not keep kids coming. Relationships will continue to be the key. Every child wants to be know individually and cared for by a caring leader. The children’s ministries that make an impact will keep relational connections at the top of their priority list.

Our ministry canoe is not resting in a stagnant pond. Instead it is being carried down an every-changing river. The future is just around the river bend.

We must ask God to give us the wisdom, insight, and courage to make changes—very quick changes at times—to successfully navigate the future of children’s ministry.

“The Future of Children’s Ministry” from KidMin360
Download a free copy from <http://kidmin360.com>



The
FUTURE
of
CHILDREN'S
MINISTRY

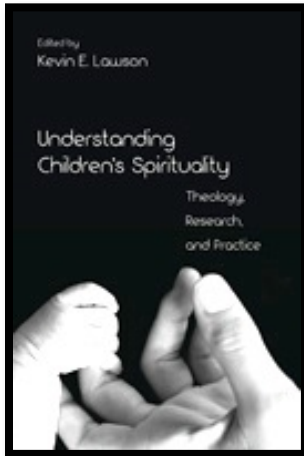
A KidMin360 Collaborative Children's Ministry Resource
Created by Greg Baird, KidMin360

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Resources

Children's Faith Formation



Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice

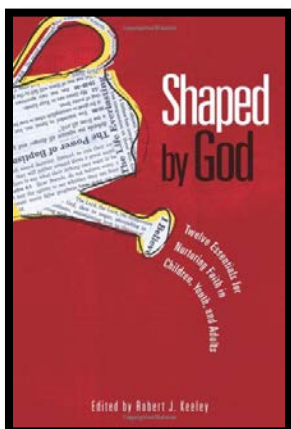
Kevin Lawson, editor (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012)

How important is childhood in the spiritual formation of a person? How do children experience God in the context of their lives as they grow? What does God do in the lives of children to draw them to himself and help them grow into a vital relationship with him? How can adults who care about children better support their spiritual growth and direct it toward relationship with God through Jesus Christ? These are critical questions that church leaders face as they consider how best to nurture the faith of the children God brings into our lives. In this book, over two dozen Christian scholars and ministry leaders explore important issues about the spiritual life of children and ways parents, church leaders, and others who care about children can promote their spiritual formation.

Section 1. Theology, Historical, and Social Science Research Perspectives (9 articles)

Section 2. Contexts of Children's Spirituality: Family, Church, and Community (12 articles)

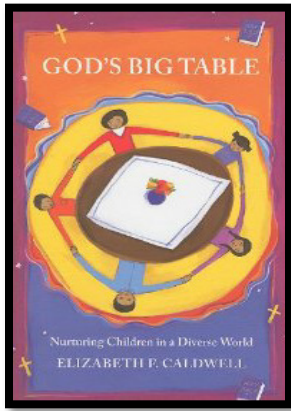
- Be sure to check out the articles by Marcia Bunge, Eugene Roehlkepartain, Holly Catterton Allen, Karen Marie Yust, and Scottie May, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns



Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults

Robert J. Keeley, editor (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2010)

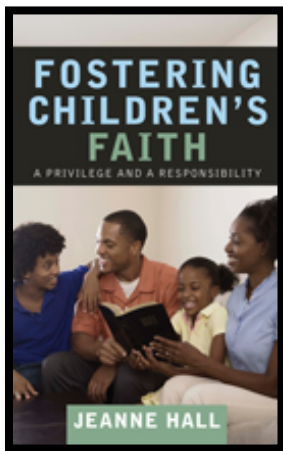
Faith formation doesn't just happen—it's a Spirit-led lifelong process of shaping and reshaping. In this accessible anthology, twelve experts share their perspectives on faith formation at home, in worship, in education, in intergenerational contexts, in people with developmental disabilities, and more. Chapters include: Biblical Foundations of Faith Formation, Faith Formation through Faith Practices, The Importance of Story in Faith Formation, Faith Formation at Home, Faith Formation through Worship, Sacraments and Education, Fostering Intergenerational Christian community, Faith Formation and People with Developmental Disabilities, Recent Research, and Faith Formation in the Postmodern Matrix.



God's Big Table: Nurturing Children in a Diverse World

Elizabeth Caldwell (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011)

God's Big Table: Nurturing Children in a Diverse World uses the imagery of the table as a metaphor for the ways our churches engage differences and diversity through a biblical background of welcoming all God's children. In the 21st century, faithful Christians are being challenged with the topic of why living with diversity of faith and culture is important, the ways that it is impacting church communities, and why education for church members is essential. This is an encouraging guide for clergy and church families who want to be open to a diverse faith community.



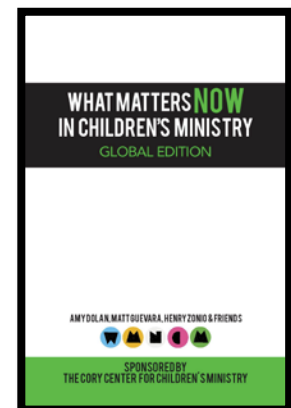
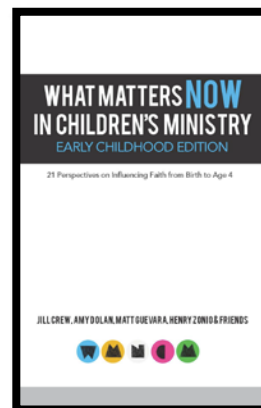
Fostering Children's Faith

Jeanne Hall (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2012)

Fostering faith in children is a shared privilege and responsibility of parents, godparents, and the church community. We promise our children at baptism that we will support them in their faith formation—in the formation of their relationship with God. This book succinctly explores many ways we can support children's faith formation, including our day-to-day interactions with children, the images of God we share with them, how we pray together, the rituals we create, service opportunities we provide, music we share together, the stories we tell and listen to, our celebration of the sacraments, and more. While this book has a distinctly Roman Catholic orientation, much of the content will be relevant for a wider Christian audience. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, this book is rooted in the conviction that the God we seek relationship with and that we hope to foster our children's relationship with is one who is infinitely loving, welcoming, and always yearning for deeper connection with us.

What Matters Now in Children's Ministry

What Matters Now is a collaborative conversation centered on how best to influence children's faith. The project began in May, 2010 with Matt Guevara, Amy Dolan, Henry Zonio, and the amazing contributions of children's ministry leaders all around the world. Download these free publications from their website: www.cmwhatmatters.com.



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- **Comprehensive:** Easy-to-use tools, tips, family activities and advice for all ages and stages
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- **Customizable and Personal:** Special tools help you match your needs with the available resources
- **Interactive:** Take part in blogs, forums, and numerous other ways to interact with our authors and other **VibrantFaith@Home** users

FEATURES

- Simple, easy-to-use **faith-forming activities** linked to the events of everyday life
- **Advice and support** for parents, grandparents, families and young adults
- **Learn the basics** of prayer, faith and the Bible
- Special activities designed **just for children**
- **How-to videos** for sharing faith at home

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What Our Online Community is Saying:

"It was easy to navigate, easy to register, and easy to access content on the site. That is high praise from a web immigrant. The content was superb."

"I would definitely recommend this site to parents, grandparents and godparents. I think it's intuitive and will be a great resource for families!"





Goldilocks in Our Midst: Ministry with Young Adolescents

Mary Lee Becker

Recently I volunteered to help set up for our church's Vacation Bible School week. When I arrived I found myself in charge of creating the "environment" for the program, which meant transforming a room with blank walls and gray carpeting into a "National Park" setting. Although I enjoy watching HGTV, an interior decorator I am not! Fortunately for me I had the assistance of four young adolescents. Armed with several boxes of artificial plants, rolls of colored plastic, a few bird houses and various miscellaneous items, we began. The greatest resource was not the objects, but the youth themselves. After a quick brainstorming session I assigned them various sections to be "in charge" of creating. Their creativity and enthusiasm was a delight to watch. In ninety minutes they transformed the room into a scene with a picnic area and pond that included lily pads, cattails and strategically placed stuffed animals nestled in the bushes. And they did it all without cell phones or computers – simply using their God-given gift of imagination!

This experience reminded me of the three keys to working with young adolescents: *understand* them, *engage* them, and *empower* them. These elements are critical to success in both what we provide (content and format) and how we interact (process and relationship) with young adolescents. All the innovate ideas, approaches and resources will be useless unless we first understand the nature and needs of this unique age.

Understanding Young Adolescents

Young adolescents (age 10-14) are a bit like Goldilocks, trying to find what's "just right" for themselves at an age when they are "too old" for this and "too young" for that. They are too old for Kool-Aid and too young for coffee, too old for daycare and too young for dating. Our

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challenge as church is to find the “just right” strategies that will assure young adolescents are connected, cared about, contributing members of our church before they enter their high school years. Church and faith need to be integral to their life before they get a driver’s license, a job and a dating life.

Ministry Inside-out

When I ask the average group of adults what first comes to mind when they hear “middle schooler” I often hear the following words: trouble, moody, loud, energetic, messy, out-of-control, disrespectful. But when I ask them to recall their own experience of being twelve or thirteen years old their descriptors are typically: awkward, confusing, wanting to fit in, lonely, unsure, frustrating. The first list typically describes what we observe from the outside, but the second list describes the thoughts and feelings found occurring within. This captures one of the dilemmas of this age: external appearance and behavior do not necessarily reflect the internal reality! To effectively minister to young adolescents we need to minister inside-out. Our starting point is to understand the nature of this age, what’s going on within them—and then help them understand and navigate the rollercoaster experience of adolescence on which they have embarked.

Years of Change in Changing Times

The early adolescent years are a unique time in a person’s lifespan. They are the bridging years between childhood and adulthood; a time of constant change and crucial identity formation. At one point we were all that age, however we were never *their* age. We all went through adolescence, but not in the world in which young adolescents live today. Today’s world is changing at an unprecedented rate, particularly in terms of information and technology. The latest digital device becomes “obsolete” nearly as quickly as a new car depreciates the moment it is driven off the

dealer’s lot. And yet in this constantly changing world one thing that remains relatively unchanged is the process of human development. Although the onset of puberty is occurring at an earlier age today and we are gaining new scientific insights into human development, the process of human development itself has remained relative the same as described by Erik Erickson in the 1950s. In other words the external environment and influences of today are significantly different compared to past generations, but the internal process of human development is the same.

The “theory of two’s and three’s” suggests humans deal with similar developmental issues at the ages of two and three, twelve and thirteen, and twenty-two and twenty-three. The primary issues involve **autonomy** and **belonging**. There is a tension between the need to be independent and self-sufficient (autonomy), while at the same time needing to matter and know someone cares (belonging). Consider a toddler who exerts her independence by releasing her grip on mom’s hand while announcing “I can do it myself” and then dashes down the grocery store aisle—only to turn around and be assured that mom is still nearby and watching him.

Fast-forward ten years and you may find a young adolescent who views “public shows of affection” from his parents as something to avoid at all costs, especially in front of his peers, yet he still relishes a loving hug goodnight in the privacy of his home. Another ten years and you may find the young adult who has moved out of the house and across town to live on his own, but frequently stops back home for use of the laundry and to take his rightful place at the family dinner table. (However, in many cases today young adults are moving back home due to more serious economic reasons.)

Balancing autonomy and belonging has particular importance and impact during the young adolescent years. These years, generally ages 10-14, are some of the most fascinating,

fun, frustrating and significant years of human development. Adolescence is a time of critical identity formation, exploring the questions of Who am I? What can I be? Where do I belong? How can I make a difference? These years can set the trajectory of life for a young person.

One word describes these years: **change**. Outside of infancy, humans grow most rapidly during the early years of adolescence. This explosion of growth involves all aspects of development: physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Therefore our approach to faith formation needs to be *holistic*, recognizing that spiritual growth happens within the context of all other aspects of development. The rate of growth varies between different aspects of development within one individual: there may be rapid physical growth and slower intellectual growth (stereotype: jock), or rapid intellectual growth and slower social development (stereotype: nerd).

Each young person develops at his or her own rate and manner resulting in a tremendous level of diversity within a group of young adolescents, more so than any other age group. There can be as much as a four year developmental difference among a group of seventh graders, at times some may function more like fifth graders and others more like ninth graders. Typically we would not plan programs that include elementary (5th grade) and high school (9th grade) participants as peers, but that is often the developmental dynamic when working with young adolescents. And the nature and rate of development is not predictable. In fact the one thing that is predictable about young adolescents is that they will change next week! Some adults find this fascinating and fun, while others find it a source of frustration.

One thing is certain, working with young adolescents will never be boring! The important thing is that adults remember that young people have no choice and no control over the process—adolescence is something

that happens to them. When adults comment that the middle school youth are so “out-of-control” I affirm them in their astute observation, and remind them that it is due to God’s design of human nature, not the conscious choice of the youth! Our role is to accept, affirm, encourage, support and guide young adolescents as they discover and develop into the persons God created them to be.

What is Important to Remember When Working with Young Adolescents

1. Lacking Judgment: Developmental “Brain Freeze”

Have you ever asked “*What were you thinking?*” only to hear the young adolescent respond “*I don’t know.*” In fact, their response may be surprisingly accurate. Or have you ever heard someone say to a young person “*If you want to be treated like an adult, then act like one.*”? This statement is not only absurd in its logic, but sadly reflective of our times. Young adolescents are not adults, nor should we expect them to act like adults. In fact, they are literally incapable of functioning as adults—yet!

Brain research has shown that the pre-frontal cortex of the brain is under major construction during adolescent years, and into young adulthood. The pre-frontal cortex (PFC) functions as the “CEO” of the brain—the center for decision making, planning, impulse control, and weighing options and consequences. Just when adolescents need it most, the PFC’s ability to act rationally and think through problems and challenges breaks down.

Even though the adolescent PFC is much closer to being mature, it is no match for the overwhelming hormone-driven impulses during these years. As David Walsh describes

it, during adolescence “the brain gets the gas before the brakes.” It is normal for adolescents to act without thinking of the consequences, to react impulsively, and to display raw emotions and mood swings. For boys impulsive behavior can be aggressive and angry. For girls it can show up as amplification of a wide range of emotions. At times this can produce adolescent “drama” deserving of an Oscar statue!

Although they clearly lack the judgment capacity needed for adult responsibilities, adolescents will often mimic what they perceive to be “adult” behavior (perhaps expecting to be treated as adults in the process). Imitation may be considered a high form of praise, but it also can reveal some painful truths and traits. In today’s technology, internet, and media driven world young adolescents are exposed to adult-like issues and situations rarely faced by previous generations. In some ways, young adolescents are the “mirrors” of our society. When we are surprised or outraged at their actions it might serve well to consider where they have seen the behavior modeled in the world around them.

During early adolescence congregations need to create a “safety net” for young adolescents and their parents as they navigate these formative years of new-found autonomy and vulnerability. We need to provide positive role models for young adolescents; adults who strive to live healthy and holy lives that reflect gospel values. Not perfect people, but authentic people of faith willing to be companions on the journey with youth. Adults who will set healthy boundaries and patiently guide young adolescents in their choices as their brains are growing toward maturity.

2. Concrete Thinkers: Cornerstone to Learning

Young adolescents are just beginning to develop abstract cognitive abilities; for the most part they are still concrete thinkers. For

something to be understandable, it needs to be tangible – which means they need to experience it through their senses. When the content of a learning experience is beyond an adolescent’s capacity to comprehend, the result is frustration for everyone involved. Sometimes when young adolescents demonstrate disruptive or distractive behavior it is simply because they do not understand the abstract concepts being presented. Given the choice of being perceived by peers as either “stupid” or “bad” many will opt for the latter to save face. When we make the message tangible and understandable we increase the odds that young adolescents will be attentive and engaged.

Taking abstract concepts of faith and values and translating them into concrete terms can be challenging, especially for adults who tend to naturally think in an abstract fashion. An effective strategy is to turn abstract concepts into concrete sentence starters. Here’s an example. When it comes to adolescents the issue of “respect” is a high concern for adults. However, respect, like all values, is an abstract concept. To simply ask young adolescents to be respectful of others will not necessarily produce the outcome you intend. Framing it as a sentence starter will help make it tangible for them: “You know you are being respectful when. . .” By completing this statement the abstract value of respect becomes a tangible list of attitudes and behaviors which young adolescents are more able to understand and practice. The same strategy can be used for all faith concepts: “You are being a forgiving person when. . .” or “You know you are being compassionate when. . .” In addition, incorporating analogies, symbols and stories into formation sessions will help young adolescents grasp concepts more readily.

3. Active Not Passive: Make it Real and Relevant

Young adolescents don't want to be spectators, they want to participate. Think of a circus. When you take children to a circus they can sit fascinated by what they are watching. However, young adolescents would much rather get a chance to actually swing on the trapeze, ride the elephant or attempt to juggle the six objects at once! I suggest a 20/80 rule when organizing programs for young adolescents: 20 percent passive listening or observing and 80 percent actively participating. Active learning not only increases understanding, but also increases retention. Effective interactive learning allows participants to explore a faith topic, discover the message and connect it to life in a hands-on manner that makes it both real and relevant to them. Active learning engages the learner through dialogue, role plays, video, demonstrations, creative expression with art and music, real-time involvement or other participatory options.

This is the age to shift from "information" to "formation." To shift from the head (cognitive) toward the heart (affective) and hands (behavioral)! Our focus should be on helping them make sense of the information they have been receiving up to this point on their faith journey. To literally "bring faith to life" and help them make the connections between what we profess as our beliefs and how we practice those beliefs in daily life. Young adolescents don't want to "hear" more about faith, they want to "do" what people of faith do and with the people who are doing it!

4. Social Beings: Spirituality of Relationship

Friends are a high priority with young adolescents; making, meeting and maintaining friends is a major focus in any setting. Their affinity for relationships shapes their spirituality as well. Providing avenues

for social interaction with peers and addressing relational issues is integral to effective faith formation. God created us as relational beings. As young adolescents become conscious of their capacity for relationships, it is an opportune time for us to encourage them in establishing and/or deepening their relationship with Jesus as their ultimate friend. This involves both a cognitive understanding and a relational experience. During adolescence, the relational aspect of spirituality is most impactful. As is often said, adolescents don't want to know about Jesus, they want to know Jesus. We can explore with them what Jesus taught about being in relationships: Gospel values of human dignity, inclusion, compassion, forgiveness and what it means to truly "love one another" as God loves us.

These years are also a prime time to emphasize what it means to belong to a faith community and explore the purpose and value of congregational life. We cannot expect them to be "the future of the church" if we don't engage them as valued young members of church today. What they experience as young adolescents shapes lifelong habits: being involved in the congregation today can become a pattern for adulthood.

Tending to the healthy social development of young adolescents takes on even greater significance in today's world of social networking and cyber bullying. Young adolescents do not understand the concept of "public and permanent" in the digital world. In many cases they are exposed to information and situations not appropriate for their age, and without the awareness or supervision of their parents. This is an issue church ought to address with both youth and parents through intergenerational efforts.

5. Gifted and Growing: Engage Their Strengths

Young adolescents bring with them many gifts that are inherent to being young adolescents—those things that come into the

room with them simply because of their age. Their natural gifts include: energy, enthusiasm, curiosity, creativity, idealism, desire to learn, humor and unedited honesty. I once heard it said that sometimes a behavioral “problem” can simply be a gift over-used or out-of-control. That can be the case with young adolescents as well. When “over used” or “out-of-control” their energy can become an undisciplined distraction, their curiosity an annoying fixation (the never-ending question of “why?”), and their creativity unwanted graffiti! But the gifts themselves are priceless and invaluable to the mission of church.

Our challenge is to channel their natural gifts into an exploration and expression of faith. We need to involve them in the mission and ministries of congregational life, for where they are so will be their gifts from God! We may believe that young adolescents need the church, but more importantly we need to acknowledge that the church needs the gifts and presence of young adolescents. Consider where your church’s ministries can use some enthusiasm, creativity and humor—then find a way to involve the young adolescents.

Young Adolescents Want & Need

1. To be respected and accepted for who they are at this stage of life.
2. To be involved and active (physically, mentally and socially).
3. To know the expectations and guidelines in a clear, concise and concrete manner.
4. To understand the “why” of matters: they are curious beings, often questioning and yet still struggling to comprehend abstract concepts.
5. To be challenged to grow and stretch their abilities, with the guidance and support of caring adults.
6. To matter to someone and know they matter; to feel connected and cared about—relationships are a priority.
7. To be acknowledged and valued for who they are as well as what they do.

8. To contribute in positive ways and given opportunities to share their gifts and make a difference for good.
9. To be affirmed and appreciated in their attempts, successes and even failures.
10. To express themselves through ideas, opinions, preferences, doubts, and dreams.

The Importance of Family Partnerships

Recent research on adolescents and religion concluded that parents are still the primary influencers in the lives of youth, and often serve as the predictors of adolescent faith practices.² During the early adolescent years, the role of parents is magnified by the sheer fact that young adolescents are highly dependent on their parents even though they are striving for independence. We no longer live in a society where young adolescents can ride their bike to a nearby park and play with friends until it’s time to eat or sleep. As a result, much of their time involves organized activities, supervised recreation and scheduled social time. Young adolescents cannot participate in all these activities without parental approval. And since they are not old enough to have a driver’s license or job, they need parents to provide transportation and necessary finances. It’s no wonder the early adolescent years can stretch and stress family life. Parents today face many challenges in their role as “provider,” often with a limited network of support.

Congregations need to partner with parents: encouraging their faith growth as adults, helping them embrace their role as primary catechists to their children, and providing resources to support them in their parenting responsibilities. One strategy is for the church to become a clearinghouse for information, resources and programs that can assist parents with young adolescents. One resource is the Search Institute whose mission is to provide breakthrough knowledge and

innovative resources to advance the health of children, youth, families, and communities.³ Search Institute has identified “assets” for youth and for families that will promote positive development and healthy living. The online resources are designed to assist both churches and families alike: search-institute.org. ParentFurther, the Search Institute website dedicated to parenting, can be found at ParentFurther.com. Another great resource, Vibrant Faith @Home, offers a variety of articles and practical strategies and tips for families: vibrantfaithathome.org.

Create Parent Connectors

Maximize the opportunities when parents are already in contact with the church.

1. Since young adolescents need parents to transport them, create a “parking lot” ministry. Example: One church distributed a “packet” to parents as they dropped their child off for a retreat: it included a prayer for support, highlights of the retreat content, and suggested “conversation starters” for at-home follow-up to the day.
2. Offer parallel programs: if youth are gathering for a program, offer a parent session at the same time. Parents can gain from the time spent at church rather than driving back and forth. The session can be educational by design, or simply a parent-to-parent networking opportunity.
3. Include a brief parent-youth segment within a program: ask parents to participate in an opening activity before leaving, or to arrive fifteen minutes before the end of a program to join in a closing prayer service with their child.
4. Integrate parent sessions within the yearly program schedule: once a quarter designate a session as a “parent session” when youth stay home and parents attend; or a youth-parent session where both participate together.
5. Provide parent materials and family at-home resources (paper and/or digital):

overview of program content, parent-teen conversation starters, at home activity suggestions, online resources, etc.

6. Create parent networks that connect families with young adolescents for faith sharing, support, and shared parenting strategies

Creating an Effective Ministry for Young Adolescents

As you assess current ministry efforts, consider revisions, and explore new opportunities, the following questions provide a helpful framework for a congregational conversation:

- *How do we view young adolescents?* How we view young adults influences how we value them: are they problems to solve or disciples to empower; are they trouble to avoid or treasures to unwrap.
- *How does our perspective regarding young adolescents align with their reality?* Just as Jesus did in his ministry, we need to meet them where they are at and address their needs and concerns before challenging them to grow in discipleship.
- *What are our hopes for them?* As Stephen Covey suggests “begin with the end in mind.” We should know what we want for them and why; and the young adolescents and their parents ought to know as well.
- *What do we expect of them?* Young adolescents are eager to meet our expectations, if they are reasonable, understandable, and attainable based on their developmental traits.
- *What can we learn from them?* The Holy Spirit speaks volumes to us through the questions, concerns, insights and unedited honesty of

young adolescents: Where do we hear their voices? How well do we listen?

- *How might they contribute to our church's mission?* Young adolescents will be drawn toward places where they can be actively involved; they want to make a difference for good, how might they do that with us.
- *What do they bring to our congregational life?* God has given young adolescents some specific charisms, if you want to renew your church simply unleash the natural gifts of young adolescents into every aspect of your congregation's life!

A Framework for Purpose-Driven Ministry

Ministry is driven by the mission of Jesus and the Church, and ministry responds to the needs of those being ministered to. The "possibilities" for ministry are endless and can be overwhelming. There is no "one right way" to develop ministry with young adolescents, but it helps to know these three things: why choices are made, the outcome intended, and how it will be achieved. Here is a "formula" to help clarify the what, why and how:

"Because. . . Our congregation needs to. . . So that. . . By. . ."

- *"Because. . ."* identifies the current needs, issues, concerns, or interests that form the real life situation of young adolescents and their families; and/or identifies the biblical or congregational mission being addressed.
- *"Our congregation needs to. . ."* describes strategies that could respond to the current reality in a manner that supports, engages, equips and/or challenges youth and families in their faith growth.

- *"So that. . ."* defines the outcome or objective that is intended—what we hope youth and/or families gain from their experience.
- *"By. . ."* identifies the specific ways the strategies might be implemented. There may be multiple ways a particular strategy is developed within the congregation both through its programs and its members.

Here's an example:

Because *families with adolescents are often stressed, stretched and scattered*
Our congregation needs to *strive to reduce stress and increase support for families; and become a companion on their journey*

So that *parents and youth experience the Christian faith as life-giving and integral to family life, not in competition with life*

By *offering intergenerational activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships; providing parents information on understanding adolescent development and resources for parenting teens; providing resources for at-home faith activities including online options; creating support networks of families with teens; offering multiple program scheduling options to meet diverse family schedules.*

Developing Viable Programs: A Formula for Success

First, we need to recognize "one-size-fits-all" is a myth! It doesn't work with clothes, airplane seats, and especially, not with young adolescents. There is no perfect program or perfect time that will attract all the young adolescents of our congregation, and yet any program at any time will attract some, if we meet three simple criteria. Here is a "formula" for determining if a program is viable:

interested youth
+
caring adult leadership
+
resources needed
equals
program

As we apply the formula we need to address three important questions:

1. *How will we know what will capture the interests and desires of the young adolescents?*
2. *Which adults are best suited to understand and enjoy working with this age?*
3. *What resources are best suited to our needs?*

Clarifying the answers to these questions will assure that programs provide a positive experience for all involved. If one element of the formula is lacking, the effectiveness of the program will be in jeopardy.

It is a simple formula, but not necessarily easy to achieve. It changes the “numbers” game and challenges us to relinquish the “bigger is better” mindset. At the same time it frees us from the “too few to make it worth it” limitation. You may find you can increase your capacity to reach more youth with several small and diverse programs rather than striving to form one large youth group to satisfy everyone. If even four young people want to study the gospel of John, and you have two adults interested in leading them, then why not offer it as one option? Or if six youth want to help serve at the next church festival, why not find a place for them to do so? In fact, Jesus taught us ministry is grounded in faith and rooted in relationships. And our experience teaches us that personal relationships develop in small settings much better than with crowds at a sports arena. Jesus spoke to the masses, but he ministered directly through personal relationship. Even amidst the crowd it was the direct personal

contact that healed the hemorrhaging woman, and the personal invitation that changed the heart of Zacchaeus.

If you are a large congregation managing hundreds of youth, the formula still holds true: to be viable there needs to be adequate adults and resources for the youth involved – or you may need to limit attendance to match the committed leadership. And remember that being a large congregation does not mean all programs have to be large. Smaller groupings and individual apprenticeships have value in any size church.

Technology and Ministry

In the 1990s “media literacy” became a topic of great interest, especially for those working with youth. The Center for Media Literacy became a leader in promoting and supporting media literacy education as a framework for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, creating and participating with media content.⁴ The emphasis was clear: “media” itself was value-free, not “bad” nor “good,” but rather a vehicle to convey a message. The explosive growth of technology in the last decade has increased the saturation level of media in our lives, especially for young people. I believe the same is true of technology today—in itself it is simply a “tool,” how we choose to interact with it defines its value and determines its influence on shaping our values.

Here are four strategies to consider regarding technology and ministry with adolescents:

1. *Incorporate technology within ministry:* use technology to enhance the message of your ministry. Help youth and parents use technology as a resource for growing spiritually and living as disciples
2. *Use technology as one tool* to reach and evangelize young people in innovative ways. Become digital-friendly without

excluding those who are limited in technology resources.

3. *Empower youth and parents* to become conscious of the role technology plays in their lives (“technology-literate”) and how to manage technology as a tool for living rather than be defined or controlled by it. Address issues of personal privacy and healthy boundaries of disclosure. Be aware of the generational differences in understanding of and comfort with technology.
4. *Provide opportunities to disconnect* from technology, to experience God and others in face-to-face moments. Encourage a balance between “on-line” contacts and “in-person” encounters.

Technology is a tremendous asset in communication, education and connecting people around the world. However, the call to “be still and know that I am God” can provide a healthy balance. In my retreat work I often see young adolescents react in near panic when I ask them to turn off all digital devices and cell phones for the duration of the retreat. And yet as the retreat progresses and they become engaged in the experience of reflection and personal interaction the devices become unnecessary.

A Voice, a Choice, and a Chance

In summary, young adolescent want a **voice**, a **choice**, and a **chance**. As they become more self-aware they need an outlet for self-expression, to speak their mind and know they are heard. As they grow in autonomy and discover personal preferences they want to make choices, not have them made for them. And as they discover their gifts, talents and passions they want to contribute and to know

they can make a difference. Congregations need to:

- provide ways for young adolescents to express their needs, opinions, ideas and concerns.
- provide a variety of appropriate choices and let the young adolescents and families choose what best meets their interests and availability.
- provide opportunities for young adolescents to participate and contribute to the life of the congregation, to share the gifts God has given them and be affirmed in their value to the church.

Congregations need to respond with opportunities that give young adolescents their voice, their choice and their chance.

End Notes

- ¹ *Why Do They Act That Way?—A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*, David Walsh, Free Press, 2004.
- ² The National Study of Youth and Religion (youthandreligion.org), *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- ³ Search Institute, 615 First Avenue NE, Suite 125, Minneapolis, MN, 55413 (www.search-institute.org)
- ⁴ Center for Media Literacy, 22631 Pacific Coast Highway, #472, Malibu, CA 90265, (www.medialit.com).



A Voice, A Choice, A Chance

Mary Lee Becker

Young adolescents want and need. . .	Congregations need to provide. . .
A Voice	Ways for young adolescents to express their needs, opinions, ideas and concerns and know they were heard
A Choice	A variety of appropriate choices and let the young adolescents and families choose what best meets their interests, needs and availability
A Chance	Opportunities for young adolescents to actively participate and contribute to the life of the congregation, to share the gifts God has given them and be affirmed in their value to the church

Suggestions

1. **Provide ways for young adults and families to express their needs, interests, and suggestions.**
 - Create surveys (digital and/or paper) and distribute through a variety of methods. Incorporate feedback strategies: assure participants are asked to comment on their experience of the overall ministry as well as specific programs and events.
 - Create “suggestion boxes” (physical and digital) that allow young adolescents to express their ideas and opinions. Example: One church asked the young adolescents to determine which charities would benefit from a church fundraiser. A team of young people were given the selection criteria and a list of possible organizations. After a designated time for research, the youth presented their recommendation and became co-sponsors for the fundraiser.

2. **Create “apprentice” roles in which young adolescents can assist adults and grow in both their understanding and experience of being an active member in the congregation.**
 - Provide a tangible way to “identify” them in their role: designated badge with title, special T-shirt, pin, etc. Some churches ask all their organizations and ministries to consider how young adolescents might be involved in their activities, and then create a special “youth time and talent” form that outlines the specific roles designated for young people. These forms are distributed to youth as part of the church’s volunteer involvement campaign. Examples: assistant ushers, greeters, teacher assistants, servers at congregational events, game organizer for younger children at church festivals, assistants at Vacation Bible School, choir members and musicians for worship services, youth volunteers in service activities, prayer partners and “pen pals” to the home-bound, chore assistance for elderly members, and child care providers for parent programs.

3. **Acknowledge their contributions.**
 - Use the church bulletin, website, emails, pulpit announcements, etc. to acknowledge the contributions of young adolescents when appropriate.
 - Organize a special appreciation event for youth volunteers (ice cream social, pizza party, taco bar, etc.). Invite parents to join the event for a closing segment at which organizational leaders and staff acknowledge and thank the young people for their contributions. It is a great way to also affirm parents in their effort to support the spiritual development of their adolescents. (If an adult “volunteer appreciation” event is organized, include adolescent volunteers if possible.)



Engaging a New Generation

Frank Mercadante

In the 2007 motion picture *The Invasion*, Nicole Kidman plays Carol Bennell, a Washington, DC psychiatrist who observes changes in the personality of a client, her ex-husband, and finally the general population. In the course of what appears to be a routine morning, Bennell is uneasy. She says, “Something is happening. I don’t know what it is, but I can feel it.” She then turns to her companion and asks, “Have you noticed anything?”

We could ask the same question about 21st century teens! Although the teens physically resemble adolescents of the past (excluding expansive ink and multiple piercings), do they seem to think and see life differently than those of a generation ago? When it comes to church activities, does it seem like what was “tried and true” for teens is now “fried with few?”

Feeling less sure, and a bit off balance may well capture the pulse of the times for many of us. Something has distinctly changed among 21st Century teens. We can’t always name it or articulate it profoundly, but we can feel it.

The world has changed. Teens have changed. Their responses to our past programs have changed. However, many of our congregations, their faith formation approaches, and youth ministry offerings have remained the same.

Over the past several decades, two tributaries of change have formed and converged into a Niagara Falls’ force of transition. First, we are experiencing an epistemological transition. Our world is moving from a modern to a postmodern understanding of truth. Secondly, we are knee deep in generational change. We are transitioning from youth ministry and faith formation practices founded on Baby Boomers and Gen X teenage sensitivities to approaches and practices rooted in a Millennial Generation understanding of the world.

Whether we are a professional or volunteer leader, making sense of these foundational cultural changes can help clear the haze around the disconnect many of today’s young people

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are experiencing with the church. Moreover, it paves the way for an effective pastoral response to a new generation. This article attempts to overview each of these cultural transitions and their related ministerial implications.

From Modernism to Postmodernism

On March 27, 1964, the largest recorded earthquake in North American history ravaged Alaska. Lasting a full five minutes and measuring a 9.2 on a seismograph, the earthquake not only caused extensive damage, but also twisted the terrain. Neighborhoods located off the coastline before the quake boasted of ocean views afterwards. Similarly, over the past several decades, an epistemological earthquake has shaken our understanding of truth, our views, and our life perspectives. As our culture is transitioning from a modern to a postmodern world and as a result we are seeing and understanding the world very differently than before.

Postmodernism can be best described as a worldview or lens in which one understands and interacts with the world. Originating in Western Europe after World War II, postmodernism is a rejection of modernism, the dominant worldview for the past 500 years. After two world wars, the threat of nuclear destruction, the Jewish Holocaust, and industrial pollution, the means and promise of the modern age were being questioned. The world was not uniting in agreement and progressing in the most important arena of life: the service of humanity.

Postmodernism emerged from the apparent failures of modernism as a means for human progress and a moral framework for culture. Postmodern thinkers challenged the tenets of modernism by replacing reason for experience, absolutes for opinions, universal truth for diversity of truths, certainty for

humility, propositions for realities, and linear thinking for random thought.

Because postmodern truth is based in practical reality, it is also related to a preference for authenticity. Instead of focusing on what one should be, and therefore, creating distance between one another, people should deal with their honest realities and open the door to experience greater connection and intimacy. Post-moderns are not looking for something to believe in as much as a community in which to belong.

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges to reaching the younger generation resides in the fact that we are living within an epistemological parenthesis. Our culture runs on two operating systems, an older modern platform and a newer postmodern version. Generally speaking, young people tend to be the early adopters, while older folks may stay with a system that's familiar and comfortable. More specifically, although highly concentrated in present day teens, post-modernism's cultural influence spans multiple generations. With two languages to describe and understand the world, the present generational disconnect should not surprise us.

An Emerging Spirituality

As challenging as this epistemological shift is to the church, it equally brims with opportunity. The struggle to reach a changing world is a reoccurring theme throughout the church's history. In his book *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch demonstrates how the theology of mission was defined and redefined with every paradigmatic shift over history.

A new spirituality is emerging as we increasingly view our world through a postmodern lens. In the book, *Finding Faith*, Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller describe this emerging spirituality among Post Boomers as "expressive communalism."

Expressive Communalism places an emphasis upon embodiment and community. People desire a deep, personal faith experience within the context of a close-knit and meaningful physical community. There is a hunger to belong, serve within the community, and serve others through social outreach outside the community. Moving away from a strictly rational faith, many Post Boomers hunger for a more holistic expression of faith that makes cognitive sense, but is more an embodied experience through worship, teaching, and concrete forms of service. Valuing organic grassroots leadership, they respond well to a participative style.

Addressing the contours of this emerging spirituality requires a retooling of our modern forms of evangelization. Perhaps, we move from modern evangelizing to postmodern *immanuelizing*.

Immanuelization

Framing a new evangelization around the concept of the “Immanuel” (“God with us”) is critical because it fundamentally roots its expression in the theology of incarnation. The incarnation is so profound and radical, it becomes the primary impulse for all God’s working in the world. As it defines Jesus’ mission, so it gives shape to the church’s continuation of that mission today.

Modernity led by abstraction. Postmodernity leads by concretizing. To incarnate, actually means to make something concrete and real. The word literally means embodied in flesh or taking on flesh. Because postmodern truth arrives through the world of experience, the church must communicate the gospel experientially. In other words, we must operate as the embodied and experiential presence of Jesus. We can’t just talk about God’s love; we’ve got to *be* God’s love.

Immanuelizing means coming to grips with the fact that *the medium is the message*. It means living up to our billing as the Body of Christ. Jesus said the world will know us

because of our compelling lives of love (John 13:35). It means as individuals, and even more so as communities, taking on the character of Christ by exemplifying the fruits of the Spirit in all our dealings with others (Galatians 5:22, 23). In other words, our presence to the world is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The Shift from Modern Forms of Evangelization to Immanuelization

Additionally, moving from modern evangelization to immanuelization entails several essential shifts. (Note: *By shift, I mean added emphasis, not substituting one for the other.*)

Modern Evangelistic Expressions	Postmodern Immanuelization Shift
Individual belief as evangelistic entry point	Community belonging as evangelistic entry point
Emphasis upon rational argument as the primary apologetic	Emphasis upon the life of the church as the primary apologetic
Emphasis upon individual questing (Good news for me)	Emphasis upon service evangelization (Good news for others)
Appeal of “having it all together”	Appeal of being together in our brokenness
The mission and agenda of evangelization	The mission of accompanying people

Entry Point Shift

In a postmodern world, there is a shift from a focus on individual belief to community belonging as the evangelistic entry point. A modern evangelistic approach primarily leads with an emphasis on the individual and personal belief. The individual made a choice of personally accepting Jesus and then moved into full membership in the community. The map to a modern expression of faith often followed the sequential route of believing, belonging, and behaving. Driven by

personally believing a certain set of religious truths, one then joined a community that shared the same individual beliefs, and then adopted the behaviors of the community.

As much as community is in the very DNA of Christianity, we had the theology but often lacked the experiential reality. Over time we adopted an understanding of community as a disembodied theological truth that mostly fell short of authentic experience. Practically speaking, many of our congregations became assemblies of individuals rather than authentic experiences of community.

Our evangelistic approach needs to shift from believing, belonging, and behaving, to belonging, behaving, and believing. If belonging is the evangelistic entry point, then evangelization must be rooted and expressed through the life of the community.

In the past, we've followed the believing, belonging, and behaving sequence: One embraces the faith in a rational and cognitive way, sacramentally joins the community, and then adapts the behavior of the faith community. Mission or service was on the tail end and a mature response to one's belief.

However, in reality, a faith journey is too rich and complex to be artificially packaged into a neat, predictable order. Young people today tend to hyperlink their way through life. Evangelization is not confined to particular evangelistic activities, but occurs in every corner of parish life as one is welcomed and participates in the overall life of the faith community. Because young people seek belonging, possess an embodied spirituality, and a propensity towards active participatory activities, concrete and communal acts of participation and service may be the most effective evangelistic activity.

An Apologetic Shift

A second shift is from rational argument as the primary apologetic to the life of the church as the principal defense of the truth of the Gospel. This is not to say that we no longer need a reasoned argument for our

faith. We do. However, even if we win the day intellectually, most people will ultimately reject our message as a result of our inability to embody or live our truth.

When it comes to discerning truth, today's young people speak a new language. The Christian Church, as "the treasury of truths" leaves many of them shrugging their shoulders. Truth has to be real or work in real life to be true because they place more confidence in what they experience than what is merely said. In other words, truths are not judged by words and what makes rational sense, but by how well those words match up with real life experiences. In order to effectively evangelize young people today, the life of our congregations must become our most convincing apologetic. The credibility of our message is directly tied to the quality of our love. Jesus was definitive about our identity and reputation in the world. He said, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. *"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34, 35 italics mine).

The early church understood that it was impossible to love and serve God without loving and serving God's creation. In the second century, the Christian apologist Aristides tried to win over the emperor Caesar Hadrian with the conduct of the Christian community. He spoke of how the Christians lived honestly and upheld the highest moral standards by comforting their oppressors and even making them their friends, doing good to their enemies, reaching out to widows, advocating for the safety of orphans, carefully burying the poor who have passed from this world, treating strangers like family, ministering to the prisoner; and fasting several days in order to get enough money to feed the hungry. If that wasn't amazing enough, he added that the Christians never announced their good deeds in public, but actually tried to conceal them, trusting their reward would come from their Messiah. He concluded by saying, "And verily, this is a new

people, and there is something divine in the midst of them.”¹

Who can deny that there was something divine about these Christians? They so embodied the life and teachings of Jesus that he was truly present through them—the Body of Christ on earth. They were immanuelizing.

Service: The New Face of Evangelization

A third shift is from emphasis on individual questing to service evangelization. Evangelical campaigns in the seventies and eighties featured slogans such as “Born Again” or “I Found It.”² The messages of retreat movements and evangelistic conferences primarily appealed to the individualism of the age. Even the U.S. Army understood this, recruiting with the motto, “Be All You Can Be.” Evangelization was primarily about “you” as an individual, and about your getting your eternity and inner self in good order.

The spirituality among young people today moves away from the individual questing that characterized many of the evangelistic approaches geared toward Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. The inner spiritual focuses hold less meaning, especially if outside the context of an authentic experience of community and concrete expressions of one’s faith. Today young people prefer to express their faith in concrete and embodied ways. Inclusivity propels the heightened concern for justice among young people today. Justice and service provide teens with opportunities to address the needs of those pushed to the margins of society or those who have no voice. As a result, service is becoming the new face of evangelization.

Teens profoundly encounter Jesus in two ways as they serve. First, through the eyes of those they serve. With intentional theological reflection before and after serving, many teens recognize Jesus in the engagement—and are powerfully transformed as result. If evangelization is about facilitating an encounter with Jesus, there is no better place

to find him then in the poor (Matthew 25:37-40).

Second, young people fall in love with Jesus through his mission. They find the Great Lover as they love alongside of him. While joining him in his mission, they discover he’s the real deal, the one Person who has truly placed everyone else before himself, and they can’t help but fall deeply in love with him.

From Eternal Kingdom to Present Kingdom

Earlier forms of evangelization catered to an individualistic spirituality. The evangelistic content was centered on the individual finding God’s plan for their life and securing their own eternal salvation. The Enlightenment placed the human mind at the center of truth and removed religion from the public square of life. In turn, religion leaned towards a rational, cognitive understanding of faith and a focus on the heavenly Kingdom. Believers worked towards their eternal destiny, understanding their faith through universal propositions, and expressing their faith through personal morality. The “spiritually together” person was so caught up in the heavenly realm that they were unaffected by and independent of their surrounding historical circumstances.

Today’s teenagers do not want to be evangelized to a set of ideas or rational truths, but to a practical reality. A faith that’s mostly about you and your eternity isn’t communal enough or concrete enough to warrant much interest. It’s not that young people are uninterested in heaven or don’t care about eternity. Rather, a life with little investment in loving and serving those around you seems pretty unworthy of heaven. The Kingdom of God is as much a present reality as an everlasting one. An evangelistic message that calls young people to sacrifice on behalf of others is an authentic message worthy of investing one’s life.

Connecting On Brokenness

Modern teens accepted a humanity characterized by independence, autonomy, and self-reliance. These highbrow notions trickled down into everyday cultural expectations. Fonzie, from the 70s television series “Happy Days,” was the poster child for the “together individual.” The Fonz was cool, confident, and independent. He had it all together and had little need for others. Any fears or insecurities he may have harbored were safely masked beneath the image of his black leather jacket and Harley. The church had spiritual Fonzies. Holiness was defined by possessing a personal spiritual togetherness that separated you from others. Being holy meant having it all together, or at least projecting it. The holy person was busy with heavenly matters and less concerned with the contingencies of everyday, earthly business.

When gathering as a community, we connected on what we should be, not on what we were. One had to possess evangelistic credibility in order to bring people into this life-changing experience. That meant projecting an image of “having it all together” in order to attract those who didn’t. Evangelization was about pretending you were complete in order to attract others to a “community” that pretended the same.

Instead of being transformed into the “together individual,” the emerging spirituality seeks to be “together with others.” Instead of connecting on being ideal believers, today’s young people connect on their common brokenness. They lean away from overconfidence and certainty, and towards humility and mystery. Any display of religious swagger or moral superiority garners negative reactions. Practices that secrete even the slightest trace of religious arrogance—even with a benevolent exterior, are dismissed as toxic. Furthermore, any evangelistic approaches joined with narrow mindedness or intolerance are quickly shown the door. Equality and allowing everyone a place at the table is one of the highest postmodern values.

Our brokenness keeps us all on a level playing field.

From Agenda Driven to People Driven

Finally, there exists a shift from a mission agenda to one accompanying people. I had a friend during my college years who was so focused on the achieving the “great commission” that he was oblivious to his own “great omission”—the care of the very people at the center of his ministry. He loved evangelization more than the people he was evangelizing and they knew it. People often felt they were a means to end, secondary to something greater, an achievement of *his* work. They felt quantified, objectified, and in the end emptied by the experience.

His approach was not uncommon. People were reduced to numbers, and programs replaced relationships. Furthermore, relationships were a means for “more important” agendas or were treated as a prerequisite for evangelization. Relationships, established as strategies of influence, left young people feeling demeaned as “projects.”

Today’s youth insist on inserting humanity back to the forefront of ministry. “Drive by” approaches have to give way to establishing genuine and trusting relationships with young people. Skeptical of ubiquitous marketing, many young people smell insincerity or ulterior motives in a stranger’s attempt to strike up a spiritual conversation. Instead of just inviting teens to our programs, we need to invite them into our lives. The immanuelizer is present and accompanies young people. The agenda is to love and walk with teens within the context of an embodied faith community. Proclamation occurs as a natural result of genuine accompaniment. A person remains loved whether they become a friend or enemy of the gospel.

2. From Generation X to the Millennial Generation

In addition to an epistemological revolution, we are transitioning generationally. The Millennial Generation teens (born from 1982 to 2002) arrived in high schools in 1995.

The fact is Millennial Generation teens are very distinct from their Boomer and Generation X predecessors. Many of our common assumptions don't work with this cohort. Furthermore, many of our established and current youth ministry practices (built on those assumptions) were developed during the late Baby Boomers (born 1943-1960) and Generation X (born 1961-1981) teen years. The result is the polite disinterest and disconnect from our present ministerial efforts.

The Millennial Generation heralds an impressive array of descriptive titles such as the "Good News Generation," the "Sunshine Generation," and the "Next Great Generation."

The "Good News" title is not without warrant. Most of the negative trends of previous teenage generations have declined with Millennials. Actually, it should come as no surprise.

The Millennials arrived during a time when America was quite positive about children. The "No Children Allowed" warnings surrendered to the minivan alerts of "Baby on Board." Many educational and social initiatives were launched in order to reverse some of the negative trends that besieged the youth of previous generations. Churches got on board by hiring youth ministers and developing youth ministries. Schools developed policies that ensured that every student had equal access to an education. The Millennials enjoyed unprecedented focus, protection, and positive opportunities.

Core Characteristics of Millennial Teens

So, what makes the Millennial Generation different? There are some core traits of Millennials that distinguish them from past youth generations. The following section will describe three characteristics and the practical implications for those ministering to youth. It must be noted, however, that these are general traits and may not be true for every Millennial teen.

1. They are Special and Hovered Over

Millennials have been conditioned to feel special. They routinely received trophies for participation. They are accustomed to being hovered over by their parents, and American society as a whole. They grew up during a period when children were the dominant political agenda and over time they absorbed that message. Not surprisingly, many Millennials have come to understand and expect that the parents' purpose in life to be centered around the child's well-being, education, and future success.³

Moreover, Millennials grew up during the advent of reality television. Celebrity became accessible to commoners through shows like *Real World*. Throw in *YouTube*, and everyone's a star!

Implications

For many Millennials, going to church and sitting passively is not enough. A part of being "special" is having a special purpose or role in the community. Millennials believe that they have an important individual and collective purpose in the world. Parishes who fall short of offering teens ample opportunities for meaningful involvement will find an increasing number of disconnected youth. They are not content to wait until adulthood to be active in their faith communities and world.

Most parishes are failing to capitalize on the Millennials' collective call to make a difference in the world. Let's face it—teens are not bursting out of our pews, complaining, "You are asking too much from me!" We are guilty more of under-challenging teens—asking so little that we've bored them out of the church. Successfully connecting with today's teen means planting seeds for big dreams. We need to challenge young people, giving them a platform and the tools to be world-changers.

Furthermore, teens are not impressed or persuaded by impersonal and routine invitation, which tends to be convention for many churches. Their parents and much of society—who've paid special attention to their needs, have conditioned them to higher expectations. When a church doesn't behave similarly (or a step above), teens may perceive it as uncaring. Our invitations must be personal and even better, given within an established relationship.

2. They Are Close To Their Parents

Millennials tend to like their parents! More than one in three teens (35%) characterize their relationship with their mothers as "extremely close." Over 41% of teens report feeling "extremely close" to their fathers (Christerson, et al., 32). Their parents are more likely to be reported as their heroes than any other person. Most identify with their parents' values. Contrast that with the teenage Boomers, when in 1974, a whopping forty percent said, "That they would be better off living without their parents" Christerson, et al., 42).

The conversations parents are having with their teenage children are not the same conversations they had with their own parents when they were teens. Today, parents and their teens more freely discuss issues and topics that almost seemed taboo when they were growing up. A 2008 Teens Research Unlimited survey reported that 75% say the "like to do things with their family" and 59%

say family dinners are "in" (USA Today, April 14, 2008).

Intergenerational and Family Ministry

Much of present day youth ministry is functioning on a Boomer and Gen X teen assumption: youth are rebelling against adult and parental authority and need a place to gather with one another in their own subculture. Segregating teens from the adult population is an unexamined, default practice for many churches. However, Millennials are not a rebellious generation who are seeking freedom from out-of-touch adults. From early childhood their lives were highly organized, supervised, and coached by adults. They have grown accustomed to their parents' involvement and adult presence in their lives. The Millennials are a generation who are more open and receptive to intergenerational and family-oriented programs. Most parishes would benefit by offering more of these kinds of activities. Additionally, we should include opportunities for young people to get involved in roles of leadership and ministry that have been primarily reserved for the adult population of our parishes. This might include roles within councils and committees, and worship, service, and educational ministries.

Ministry to Parents

Few youth research studies have had the kind of earth-shattering impact as the *National Study on Youth and Religion*. A key finding of the NSYR's is that teenage faith generally mirrors parental faith. Again, this should come as no surprise. Millennials share a strong connection with their parents.

Yet the implications are clear: The borders of youth ministry need to be expanded to include outreach to parents. It means collaborating with the pastoral staff members in order to more effectively equip parents in their role as primary religious educators of their children. It means working together to

better evangelize the entire parish community. It means not doing youth ministry in an adolescent vacuum. Instead of building disciple-making youth ministries, we need to work collaboratively to grow disciple-making churches.

3. They Are Stressed Out

Millennials are high achievers. They spend more time studying and take heavier course loads in school than previous generations.⁴ They are painfully aware that their present performance directly impacts their future opportunities. Past generations were anxious about nuclear war, violence, and AIDS. Today, the greatest source of anxiety for teens is their grades and getting into a good college.

With fierce competition for the best colleges, many teens overload on a four-course menu of academics, extracurricular activities, sports, and volunteerism. Many teens choose their multiple involvements based upon how it will look on their college resume.

The amplification of involvement and achievement has come at a cost: tension and stress. Combining the pressure to get into the best colleges with today's technological opportunities, a concerning number of teens resort to academic cheating. A 2010 survey of 40,000 senior high students, reported that 59% admitted cheating on a test at least once in the past year, while 34% did it over two times. One in three reported that they used the Internet to plagiarize an assignment.⁵

In 2010, UCLA's annual freshman survey found the self-rated emotional health among incoming college freshman to be at its lowest point since they began asking the question in 1985. Almost one in three seniors reported being frequently "overwhelmed by all I had to do." Young women reported experiencing stress in greater numbers than young men. Only 17.6% of the boys reported feeling "frequently" overwhelmed, while 38.8% of the girls felt this way.⁶

Ministry Implications

Many teens suffer with tension, pressure, and busyness as constant companions in their lives. It's critical that we don't multiply their stress by heaping on more meaningless demands, burdens, and requirements. In a similar context, Jesus said to a spiritually overburdened audience, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Maybe the best way to evangelize Millennials is by personally introducing them to a God who is bigger than their successes and failures within an authentic church community that offers refuge for their weary bodies, minds, and souls.

Additionally, a contemplative prayer tradition maybe the best remedy for a busy and stressed-out teen. Not only do overstressed and under-rested Millennials need the spiritual rooting that a deep prayer life provides, but also cultivating these practices during the teen years is one of the most significant factors in developing a strong and committed young adult faith later. Christian Smith with Patricia Snell in *Souls in Transition* write, ". . . Emerging adults who as teenagers engaged in frequent and regular personal prayer and reading of scripture prove more likely than those who did not to continue on as more highly committed believers, more capable of resisting countervailing forces and mechanisms that would reduce their religious commitments and practices" (Smith and Snell, 235).

Taking the time as a community to learn, develop, and support one another in spiritual practices such as solitude, silence, centering prayer, adoration, Sabbath-keeping, *lectio divina*, etc., may be the most important investment we make for producing present and future dividends.

The Crossroads

Youth ministry stands at a crossroads. As we stand at the intersection, may we be reminded of Jesus' words, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:35) Trying to go back to an earlier era and save the Church as we know it may mean losing a generation that doesn't relate any longer to our approaches and methodologies. In many ways we are presented with an incredible opportunity to become more real, loving, tolerant, community-oriented, and service-focused. Leonard Sweet poses the rhetorical questions "Will we live the time God has given us? Or will we live a time we would prefer to have?" (Sweet, 47).

How will we respond?

End Notes

- ¹ *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher*, cited from www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/aristides-kay.html.
- ² Many Baby Boomers were evangelized through campaigns that with slogans such as "born again" or "I found It." Even the U.S. Army utilized a similar approach with a "Be All You Can Be" recruiting slogan. Such approaches appealed to the individualism of the times.
- ³ This is more true of white Millennials than African American, Latino, Asian teens, who tend to carry on with greater reciprocity. See: Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Richard Flory, *Growing Up in America: The Power of Race in the Lives of Teens* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 13.
- ⁴ Comparing 1980 to 2002 in amount of time doing homework. In 1980 29% of students did more than 5 hours of homework per

week. In 2002 that percentage jumped to 63%. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2007/section3/table.asp?tableID=697>.

- ⁵ Josephson Institute for Ethics. Accessed at: http://charactercounts.org/programs/report-card/2010/installmento2_report-card_honesty-integrity.html.
- ⁶ The American Freshmen: National Norms Fall 2010. Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the Higher Educational Research Institute at UCLA. "The percentage of students reporting that their emotional health was in the "highest 10%" or "above average" when compared to their peers dropped 3.4 percentage points from 2009, from 55.3% to 51.9%. Women were far less likely than men to report high levels of emotional health (45.9% versus 59.1%, a difference of 13.2 percentage points), although both dropped similar amounts from 2009." Quoted from page 6.

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Getting Practical with the New Generation

Frank Mercadante

Based upon both epistemological and generational cultural shifts, here are several practical expressions for engaging a new generation.

- 1. Concrete expressions of faith speak to young people with a postmodern perspective.** Look at service from an evangelistic lens (in addition to a catechetical and outreach ministry lens). Integrate evangelistic reflections into each service event by asking questions such as: Where did you see Jesus or sense God's presence in this experience? In what ways is Jesus speaking to you through this service experience? How will you respond? Integrate prayer responses to these reflections.
- 2. Millennials hunger for and respond to relationships.** Intentionally build a friendship culture within religious education and youth ministry gatherings. Integrate into every gathering an opportunity to meet new people and build on existing relationships. Treat relationships as a concrete expression of formation by setting standards such as making warm eye contact with the person sharing, or learning how to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn during life and faith sharing (Romans 12:15). Treat the process of forming a genuine Christian community with the same intention as faith or catechetical content.
- 3. Intentionally foster the development of a rich, intergenerational affiliative faith** by making meaningful connections with families by capitalizing on every opportunity as early as possible, such as marriage preparation or baptism. These

events in their lives represent critical access points into the faith community. We not only need to make a connection from families to pastoral leaders, but from families to families, and children to children. For instance, baptismal preparation should include intentional community building within any classes or gatherings. Keeping those connections alive by later organizing baby-sitting co-ops, small groups, annual baptismal anniversary celebrations, and activities for their children will contribute significantly towards transforming a parish from being event driven to being community driven.

- 4. Because parents are the greatest influence in children's faith lives, it's essential that we build an active ministry with, to, and for parents.** Whether an arm of the youth ministry or by way of collaborating with other parish ministries, we need to expand our borders beyond a age segmented approach. We can do this in three specific ways:
 - 1) Support parents in their role as primary evangelizers and disciple-makers of their children within the context of everyday family life. Consider hosting gatherings and supplying resources that help mentor, support, and develop skills in parents.
 - 2) Provide practical, family-friendly, take home or downloadable resources and ideas that parents can use in their homes.
 - 3) Promote parent-teen relationships by offering gatherings, programs, service opportunities, and retreats that deal with common parent-teen issues, help develop productive communication, and provide

opportunities to grow in their faith together.

5. Young people hunger for a purpose worthy of their energies and efforts.

Youth hunger to experience the adventure of Christianity. It's not enough to go through the motions of religious education or Confirmation. Teens need a compelling vision—a spiritually discerned, visual picture of what God desires for their community and world—and practical avenues to live out this mission. Establishing local outreach and/or connecting to larger missions will appeal to young people's desire to make a difference in their world. Fostering vision, and building youth-led ministries will also result in deeper investment and ownership

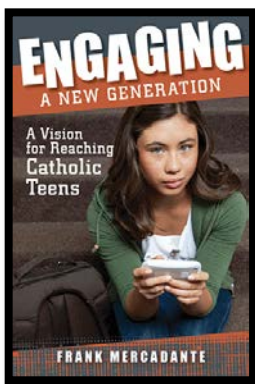
6. Today's young people understand truth as more personal and practical, than objective, and propositional.

When experience serves as the primary sifter for truth, real life becomes the lab for determining it. In other words, young people want to know if this stuff works. The onus is on us to demonstrate that it, indeed, works. Taking this position doesn't mean that we embrace the notion that "truth is simply what works." Nor does it imply that we do not recognize God's innate authority. It simply means providing teens with a good look under the hood of God's ways, helping them

recognize that love motors all of God's motives. For instance, when speaking of God's commandments, we might address young people's need for practical truth by saying, "Behind every negative commandment of God stand two positive and practical purposes: protection and provision. Every "No" is undergirded by a big, fat, emphatic "YES!" Yes, God wants what's best for us. God's commandments, like riverbanks, provide protective boundaries. When a river flows within those boundaries, communities flourish. When waters exceed their boundaries, like a flood, they wreak pain, havoc, and destruction." We might then provide practical examples of God's protection and provision undergirding the specific commandment.

7. While preparing for meetings with teens, we would do well to ask ourselves "So what?" and "Who cares?"

The very act of asking these difficult and challenging questions prepares us beyond any catechetical resource. They drill through to our own being, penetrating the depths of our hearts, striking and releasing the wellspring of our own passion for what we believe, and the stories that incarnate those beliefs. Rather than pontificating on impersonal truths, we witness to their personal reality in our lives—a perspective young people need today.



NEW

**Engaging a New Generation:
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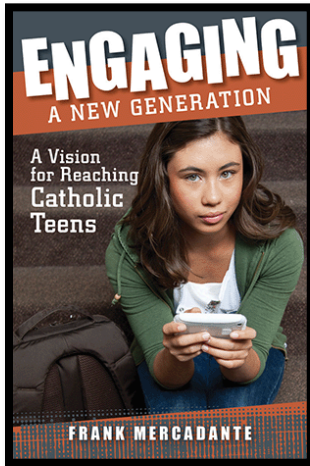
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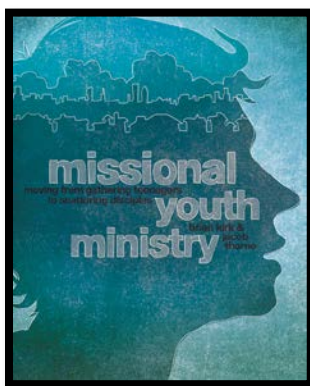
Engaging a New Generation: A Vision for Reaching Catholic Teens

Frank Mercadante (Huntington: OSV Books, 2012)

Engaging a New Generation critically examines our commonly held assumptions as well as our often-used models and methodologies initially developed to reach late Baby Boomer and Generation X teens. It then introduces you to the core characteristics of the Millennial Generation teens and the pastoral implications, where the operational and ministerial borders are expanding far beyond traditional youth ministry. Chapters include:

1. We Don't Have a Youth Problem
2. Millennials and Gen Z
3. The Missing Link
4. The Young-Engaging Parish
5. From Evangelizing to Immanuelizing
6. Rethinking Adolescent Catechesis
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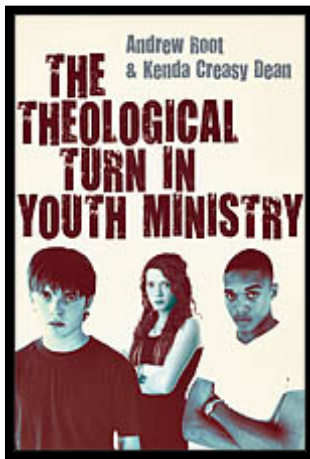


Missional Youth Ministry: Moving from Gathering Teenagers to Scattering Disciples

Brian Kirk & Jacob Thome (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

The program-driven model of youth ministry has failed to help youth find their place within the mission of the Church. *Missional Youth Ministry* offers a new paradigm for youth ministry. Using blog entries and responses, authors Brian Kirk and Jacob Thorne invite readers into a conversational, engaging, and compelling discussion about why program-based, entertainment-focused ministries fail to develop young people into life-long participants in the mission of the church. They also propose a new way forward. For all those working 'in the trenches' of youth ministry who long to offer teens a deeper, more substantial, more active role as members of the body of Christ, *Missional Youth Ministry* is a practical and theologically-sound guide for building a ministry grounded in prayer, worship, community, education, mission, and spirituality.

➤ Visit the authors' website, *Rethinking Youth Ministry*, at: www.rethinkingyouthministry.com

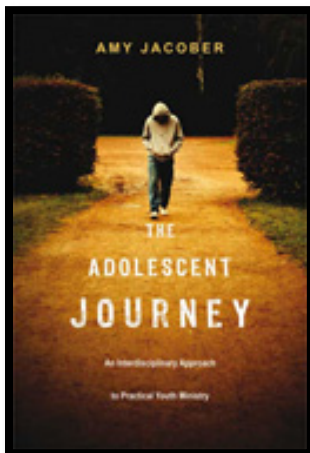


The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry

Andrew Root & Kenda Creasy Dean (Downers Grove, IVP Books, 2011)

The questions young people have are often the same ones that perplexed the great theologians, driving them to search for God in the places God didn't appear to be—places of brokenness, suffering, and confusion. What if we let these questions drive our search for God too? Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean invite us to envision youth ministries full of practical theologians, addressing the deep questions of life with a wonderfully adolescent mix of idealism, cynicism and prophetic intolerance for hypocrisy. Follow them into reflection on your own practice of theology, and learn how to share that theology through rich, compassionate conversation and purposeful experience.

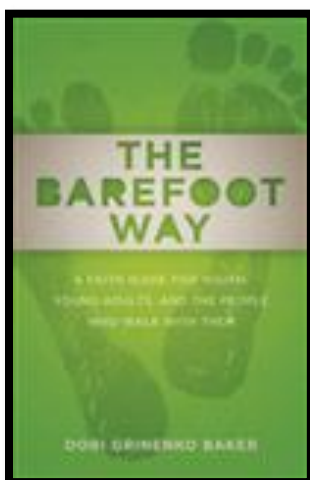
- Listen to Andrew Root and Kenda Dean discuss each of the chapters in *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* on *blogtalkradio*. Go to: www.blogtalkradio.com.
- Check out Kenda Creasy Dean's website at: <http://kendadean.com>
- Check out Andrew Root's website at: <http://andrewroot.org>



The Adolescent Journey: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Practice Youth Ministry

Amy Jacober (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2011)

Adolescence is a time of individuation—children are slowly finding their identity as adults, separate from their parents and other adult influences. Such a critical time of psychological development is complicated by cultural influences that shape their expectations of adulthood and color how they relate to other people and even God. The task of the youth pastor becomes to help adolescents navigate this often treacherous journey, helping young people reconcile their experience of childhood to the reality of their impending adulthood, and rooting and establishing them in a faith that can sustain them through their adult journey as well. Drawing on the insights of sociology and psychology, Jacober reveals youth ministry to be an act of practical theology, and helps youth pastors find their footing as they guide young people through adolescence.



The Barefoot Way: A Faith Guide to Youth, Young Adults, and the People Who Walk with Them

Dori Grinenko Baker (Louisville: WJK, 2012)

We each have our own faith journey replete with stories. Some stories may be funny, tragic, uplifting, or heart wrenching. They help us to connect with God-and each other-as we journey together and share our experiences. *The Barefoot Way* is about our spiritual journeys. Inside you'll find an array of stories from others, from writers young and old, who have found God in the most unexpected places: a walk on the beach, a conversation with an old friend, a bus ride to school, and so much more. Walk with them, share your own story through journaling, and reflect on these experiences in this twenty-one day field guide through the realities of life.

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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS



What's Old is New

(Or, Three Things I Learned Studying the Next Generation)

David Kinnaman

*In his book, *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman describes three ways people get “lost” on the journey of faith: 1) Prodigals disavow their faith entirely, ripping up their roots to become ex-Christians; 2) Nomads wander from the institutional church and put all of their church connections on ice, but still consider themselves Christian; and 3) Exiles are still invested in their Christian faith but feel caught between culture and church. Exiles feel that their faith does not fit in the world they inhabit, and feel stuck between the comfortable, predictable world of faith and the culture that they hope to influence. In this concluding chapter from his book, Kinnaman offers three areas we need to renew our thinking about ministry with young adults.*

T church in the West is struggling to connect with the next generation. We are dealing with the immense technological, spiritual, and social changes that define our times—the changing nature of access, new questions about authority, and increasing relational and institutional alienation. We are learning how to pass on a faith worth claiming in a new context. How can we prepare the next generation to live meaningfully and follow Jesus wholeheartedly in these changing times? And how can the next generation rise to the challenge of revitalizing the Christian community for our mission to and in the broader culture?

Allow me to share three things I have learned from studying the next generation: (1) the church needs to reconsider how we make disciples; (2) we need to rediscover Christian calling and vocation; and (3) we need to reprioritize wisdom over information as we seek to know God.

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(This article is excerpted from Chapter 11 in *You Lost Me*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011. Used with permission of Baker Books.)

The Christian community needs a new mind—a new way of thinking, a new way of relating, a new vision of our role in the world—to pass on the faith to this and future generations.

As it turns out, this “new” mind is not so new. After countless interviews and conversations, I am convinced that historic and traditional practices, and orthodox and wisdom-laden ways of believing, are what the next generation really needs. This may sound like great news, and it is—but it is not a shortcut. Walking the ancient pathways of faith together in this new environment will not be easy. Yet I also believe that as we dig deeper into the historic Christian faith to nurture younger generations, the entire Western church will be renewed. Young Jesus-followers need older Christians to share the rich, fulfilling wine of faith, and the established church needs new wineskins into whom we can pour the church’s future. We need each other.

Let’s take a closer look at the three areas in which I believe God is calling us to renewed thinking.

Rethinking Relationships

Our modern idea of generations is overrated and may even distort our vision of how the church is designed to function. While generational demographics will remain an important way of approaching what I do as a market researcher, I have come to believe that we in the church must recapture the biblical concept of a generation. Chris Kopka is the one who turned my thinking upside down in this area. “David,” he said one day, “you seem to assume that the church is a collection of separate generations, with the older generations given the responsibility of raising young people.”

“Yes, I think that’s true. Don’t you?” To me, this way of thinking was obvious.

“That may be part of the picture, but there is a much bigger reality. A generation is every living person who is fulfilling God’s purposes.”

Chris paused, probably because I looked confused. “In other words, while it is true there are different age groups represented in the church, the Bible seems to say that everybody in the church at a particular time make up a ‘generation,’ a generation that is working together in their time to participate in God’s work.”

The picture Chris painted that day was an aha moment for me.

- *Original assumption:* The church exists to prepare the next generation to fulfill God’s purposes.
- *New thinking:* The church is a partnership of generations fulfilling God’s purposes in their time.

What does this mean? The Christian community is one of the few places on earth where those who represent the full scope of human life, literally from the cradle to the grave, come together with a singular motive and mission. The church is (or should be) a place of racial, gender, socioeconomic, and cultural reconciliation—because Jesus commanded that our love would be the telltale sign of our devotion to him (see John 13:35)—as well as a community where various age demographics genuinely love each other and work together with unity and respect.

Flourishing intergenerational relationships should distinguish the church from other cultural institutions. The concept of dividing people into various segments based on their birth years is a very modern contrivance, emerging in part from the needs of the marketplace over the last hundred years. As goods were mass-produced, marketers sought new and effective ways to connect a given product or service to a specific niche or segment. Age (or generation) became one of those helpful “hooks”—a way to pitch, advertise, or attract a certain kind of buyer to one’s wares.

In a misguided abdication of our prophetic calling, many churches have allowed

themselves to become internally segregated by age. Most began with the valuable goal that their teaching be age appropriate but went on to create a systematized method of discipleship akin to the instructional model of public schools, which requires each age-group be its own learning cohort. Thus many churches and parishes segregate by age-group and, in doing so, unintentionally contribute to the rising tide of alienation that defines our times. As a by-product of this approach, the next generation's enthusiasm and vitality have been separated from the wisdom and experience of their elders. Just to be clear, I am not saying that we should suddenly do away with children's Sunday school or programs for youth. I am saying that our programs need to be re-evaluated and revamped where necessary to make intergenerational relationships a priority.

Rather than being defined by segregated age groups, however practical they may seem, I believe we are called to connect our past (traditions and elders) with our future (the next generation). Christians are members of a living organism called the church. In Scripture we find the infinite variety and eternal cohesiveness of this organism described in mind-blowing detail:

You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven.

You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people. (Hebrews 12:22-24 NLT)

Intergenerational relationships matter on earth because they are a snapshot of Zion, a small but true picture of the majesty and

diversity of God's people throughout the ages, who are citizens of the new reality God inaugurated in Jesus Christ. How can we recapture that sense of historical continuity, of a living, breathing body of Christ—of a divine assembly of the saints alive today and throughout the ages?

If you are a young Christian, whether a nomad or an exile, pursue wisdom from older believers. I want to really emphasize the idea of pursuing wisdom. One of the overriding themes of Proverbs is that wisdom is elusive. It's like love. It seems obvious and easy at first but then turns out to require patience and long-term commitment. Likewise, finding a wise and trustworthy mentor doesn't happen by accident. Knock on doors, send emails, make calls.

If younger generations are to avoid the mistakes of the past, young leaders desperately need a sense of what has gone before—and you can only get that sense from soul-shaping friendships with older Christians. Often I am surprised at how teenagers and young adults believe they are the first to think of an idea, a cause, or a way of doing something. (I know because I have thought this very thing.) Eventually most find that their idea was not so revolutionary after all; it just seemed hip and new. Meaningful relationships with older adults who are following Christ will help to ensure that your fresh ideas build on the incredible work of previous generations and that your passion to follow Jesus in this cultural moment is supported and upheld by this whole, living generation of believers.

If you are a Boomer or an Elder, I encourage you to come to grips with the revolutionary nature of the Mosaics' cultural moment. Young Christians are living through a period of unprecedented social and technological change, compressed in an astounding manner, and the longer we take to acknowledge and respond to these changes, the more we allow the disconnection between generations to progress. Ask yourself how available you have been to younger

Christians. The generation gap is growing, fueled in part by technology, so it takes extra effort to be on the same page. Frankly, deep relationship happens only by spending time, and big chunks of it, in shared experiences. I encourage you to be ready for a fresh move of God, buoyed by young adults. Are you open to “reverse” mentoring, wherein you allow younger leaders to challenge your faith and renew the church?

If you lead a faith community, prioritize intergenerational relationships. For the most part, these connections won’t happen by accident. You will need to catalyze them in your community and model them in your own life. This means you may have to challenge prevailing assumptions of “cool” ministry or chasten elder Christians focused on traditionalist preferences.

- *Overprotective → Discernment*
We cast out fear by discerning our times and embracing the risks of cultural engagement.
- *Shallow → Apprenticeship*
We leave shallow faith behind by apprenticing young people in the fine art of following Christ.
- *Antiscience → Stewardship*
We respond to today’s scientific culture by stewarding young people’s gifts and intellect.
- *Repressive → Relational*
We live by a relational sexual ethic that rejects traditionalist and individualist narratives of sex.
- *Exclusion → Embrace*
We demonstrate the exclusive nature of Christ by rekindling our empathy for the “other.”

- *Doubting → Doing*
We faithfully work through our doubts by doing acts of service with and for others.

The relational element is so strong because relationship is central to disciple-making—and, as we’ve said, the dropout problem is, at its core, a disciple-making problem. As we rediscover the centrality of relationship, I believe we must be willing to reimagine our structures of discipleship. Not all the programs we have put in place should be abandoned, but as we identify systems that are not effective, will we be willing to give them up?

God-centered relationships create faithful, mature disciples.

Rediscovering Vocation

The second thing I have learned through the process of our research is that the Christian community needs to rediscover the theology of vocation. There is confusion about this term, the use of which is often limited to trade or “vocational” education. But in Christian tradition, vocation is a biblically robust, directive sense of God’s calling, both individually and collectively. Vocation is a clear mental picture of our role as Christ-followers in the world, of what we were put on earth to do as individuals and as a community. It is a centuries-old concept that has, for the most part, been lost in our modern expressions of Christianity.

For me, frankly, the most heartbreaking aspect of our findings is the utter lack of clarity that many young people have regarding what God is asking them to do with their lives. It is a modern tragedy. Despite years of church-based experiences and countless hours of Bible-centered teaching, millions of next-generation Christians have no idea that their faith connects to their life’s work. They have access to information, ideas, and people from around the world, but no

clear vision for a life of meaning that makes sense of all that input.

I believe God is calling the church to cultivate a larger, grander, more historic sense of our purpose as a body and as individuals. Let me illustrate with baseball.

I was privileged to meet the lead architect of PNC Park, the new stadium that the Pittsburgh Pirates call home. Talking about his design, David Greusel said, “The old Tree Rivers Stadium was built the same basic way as the donut-style, industrial-looking stadiums in Philadelphia and Cincinnati. It was a very cookie-cutter design. Even though it required enormous amounts of engineering and architectural planning, there was this sense that doing it the same as everyone else would save money and make for a congruent look to all these stadiums. But none of these stadiums were built to look like they belonged, embedded in the cities and contexts where they were built. They looked like alien ringed saucers, just landed from outer space.

“In designing the new ballpark, I spent weeks and weeks on the ground, walking downtown Pittsburgh, thinking about how the new stadium could belong. I wanted it to fit the work ethic and beauty of this city.”

David accomplished that, as anyone could tell you who has seen Pittsburgh’s skyline from the iconic yellow bridge that spans the outfield gap. I asked David about that picturesque view.

“We wanted fans to be able to see the city, the bridge, the river. The irony is that old Three Rivers Stadium was originally designed to have an outfield gap, which would have had a similar panorama of the city. But the owners at the time told the architect to take it out. You know why?”

“More seats?” I guessed.

“Exactly. It was all about getting more paying customers into the stadium. I am convinced that if Three Rivers had been built with that gap, it would still be here today. Sure, it would have needed refurbishing. And yes, the owners would have had to make do

with fewer seats to sell,” he said. “But it would have lasted. Their vision for what a stadium should be was shortsighted, and it cost the people of Pittsburgh more in the long run to build, tear down, and rebuild. PNC Park is a stadium that will last, not simply because of its beauty, but because it takes into account the city of Pittsburgh, its unique geography and ethos, and the people who built it.”

Why do I tell you this story? Because I think we have a shortsighted vision for our ministries to young people. I think we are constantly building, tearing down, and rebuilding our youth and young adult development regimens based on the fallacy that more is better. The more “disciples” we can cram in our programs, the better. The more seats we can fill, the more good we will do, right?

We need new ways of measuring success. If you are in church ministry, one metric of success might be to help young people make one or two relational connections, younger to older, that lead to significant mentoring bonds that will last for several years. These relationships would not be solely focused on spiritual growth, but should integrate the pursuit of faith with the whole of life. What would it look like to begin measuring things like teens’ and young adults’ knowledge of and love for Scripture, their clarity about their gifts and vocation, their willingness to listen to the voice of God and follow his direction, the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, and the depth and quality of their love and service to others?

I can almost hear you saying, *Kinnaman, are you kidding? How could we ever measure those things?* I think it is possible to make accurate assessments, not in a mechanistic way, but from a place of relationship and apprenticeship. A mentor knows intimate details about the progress of his or her protégé. An effective, discerning parent has a pretty decent sense of what’s working and not working in a child’s life. Jesus was in close enough contact with his disciples that he was

able to shape the rough-hewn edges of their faith and ministry. Jesus knew his followers.

If our churches are too large to cultivate this type of knowing, then our ministries are likely too large to disciple as Jesus did. If you are a parish or church leader or direct a faith-based institution, think about how the story of PNC Park also shows the importance of discerning institutional decision makers. Our work at Barna Group has given me an up close and personal look at the power of great leadership to transform lagging businesses, churches, and other organizations. And even though one factor in the you-lost-me problem is that we have tried to mass-produce disciples, this does not mean that institutions are unimportant or should go away; nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that the reinvention of our colleges, schools, ministries, and local churches will play a significant role in helping the church as a whole develop our “new mind.” Whether you influence a civic organization, ministry, church, business, or nonprofit, your wise, intentional choices can produce different and better outcomes for the next generation. We need new architects of faith formation within our established (and soon-to-be initiated) institutions.

If you are an older believer, become a mentor who is committed to nurturing the faith and life of a young Christian. When you spend time with the teen or young adult whom you are mentoring, don't just talk about the Bible (though that's important). Get together because you enjoy each other's company and friendship. Be attentive to what matters to the young adult. Help him or her get into the right school. Offer money for tuition. Be ready to guide decisions about gap years and dating relationships. Humbly share your struggles and your wisdom. Avoid impatience and the intent to control. Help the young person find God's unique and empowering vision for his or her life.

If you are a parent, cultivate your own sense of vocation and calling. Your life should reverberate with the rhythms of a life in

pursuit of God's presence and mission. Sadly, many young people do not have a sense of vocation because millions of Christian parents have a vision of following Jesus that avoids anything more demanding than faithful church attendance. Our children can't “catch” what we don't already have. I pray that God will give us a vision for our lives and for theirs.

If you are a young person, take responsibility for your life and your future. Whether you are a prodigal, nomad, or exile—or on some other kind of journey—God isn't done with your story. I urge you to open your imaginative spirit to a larger, historic vision of the church, the one depicted by the writer of Hebrews: an assembly of saints, past and present, of angels, of God, and of Jesus Christ. You are called to be a part of that assembly, empowered by the Spirit to work alongside your sisters and brothers to serve and restore God's world.

Following Jesus means finding a vocation.

Reprioritizing Wisdom

Finally, I have learned that the Christian community needs to reprioritize wisdom in order to live faithfully in a discontinuously different culture. Submerged as we are in a society that values fairness over justice, consuming over creating, fame over accomplishment, glamour over character, image over holiness, and entertainment over discernment, we need a blueprint for what life is meant to be. How can we live in-but-not-of lives in the world that surrounds us? In a culture skeptical of every kind of earthly authority, where information is dirt cheap and where institutions and leaders so often disappoint, we need God-given wisdom.

Wisdom is the spiritual, mental, and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others, and to our culture. We become wise as we seek Christ in the Scriptures, in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, in the practices and traditions of the church, and in

our service to others. As we come to know and revere God—which, according to Proverbs 9:10, is the beginning of wisdom—he will make us wise. But this is often a painful process.

Through this research project, I have interviewed many young adults who are not yet willing to submit their lives to Jesus or to commit fully to the church. As one young nomad, Hannah, wrote: “It wasn’t until five years after leaving home that I finally found my way back to God. Those five years were life changing and devastating. I told the church that they lost me, that this was somehow their fault. But really, I lost myself. I lost the sense of who I was in Christ. I stopped seeing that it mattered. If I couldn’t even find myself, how could church leaders? I might blame other people for the mistakes I made, the choices I made, the friends I made—but in the end, the only pronoun I was using was ‘I.’ This was between me and God.”

Hannah may have seemed lost along her faith journey, but she is on the path toward wisdom, toward a right relationship with God, with others, and with the world. We can all learn from Hannah, even those of us who have been faithful. When the Holy Spirit speaks to us as we read Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son, for example, we may see ourselves in the rebel younger brother or the hypocritical older sibling.

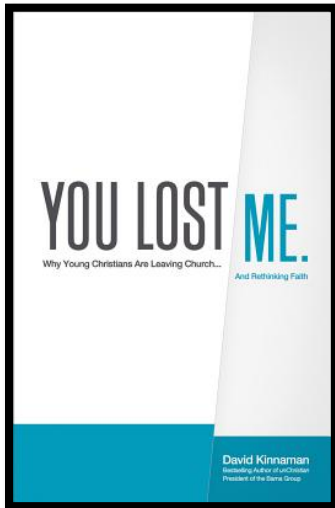
If you identify with the younger brother, ask God if it’s time to “come to your senses” as the wayward son did (see Luke 15:17). If you’re a nomad or a prodigal, I urge you to search your heart with the help of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it’s time to return home. If you’ve experienced the ugly side of Christian

community, I hope that you will ask God to help you forgive those who hurt you—and that hurts from the past will no longer keep you from reconnecting with those who are stumbling along behind Jesus. These Christians, like me, are trying their best (but sometimes doing their worst) to follow him.

Perhaps, after some soul-searching, you discover yourself in the older brother’s story. I have interviewed older churchgoers who lament the disrespect of teens and twentysomethings in their congregation but have never bothered to learn the names of those very same young people. Like the “older brother,” we may find comfort in the rules and regulations of religion while inwardly nursing offense toward those who are accepted by the Father even when they fail to follow the rules. Let’s be honest with ourselves and release the resentments that have kept us from celebrating God’s children in the next generation. If you identify with the older brother, your faithfulness is to be commended, but only so long as it is not a roadblock to reconciliation. Will you let go of anxiety, fear, control, and impatience and enter joyfully into the feast God has prepared to welcome home his lost ones?

In this iconic parable, Jesus offers a glimpse of the Father’s heart. Through his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus pulls back the curtain of heaven to show us the very face of God. As we follow Christ, teach and study God’s Word, live in the Spirit, and practice community with the saints, we will become the kind of disciples who make disciples.

Wisdom empowers us to live faithfully in a changing culture.

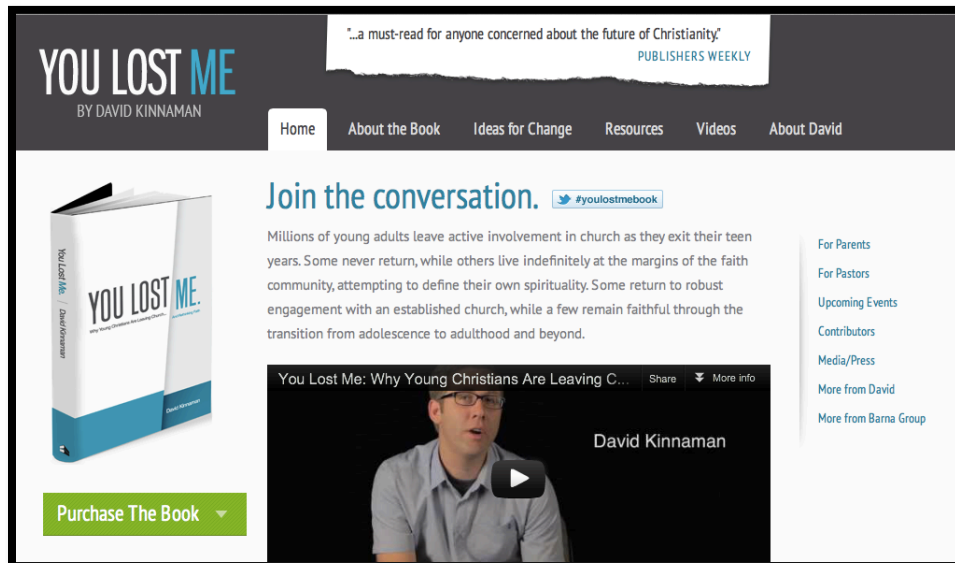


You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church

David Kinnaman (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011)

Millions of young Christians are disconnecting from church as they transition into adulthood. They're real people, not just statistics. And each one has a story to tell. Now the coauthor of *unChristian* reveals the results of a new nationwide study of 18- to 29-year-olds with a Christian background. Discover why so many are disengaging from the faith community, and renew your hope for how God is at work in the next generation. Based on new research conducted by the Barna Group, *You Lost Me* exposes ways the Christian community has failed to equip young adults to live “in but not of” the world—to follow Christ in the midst of profound cultural change. This study debunks persistent myths about young dropouts and examines the likely consequences for young adults and for the church if we maintain the status quo. Kinnaman, with the help of contributors from across the Christian spectrum, offers ideas for pastors, youth leaders, parents, and educators to pass on a vibrant, lasting faith, and ideas for young adults to find themselves in wholehearted pursuit of Christ.

Website & Videos: <http://youlostmebook.com>



Video: Prodigals, Nomads, and Exiles: www.qideas.org

No previous generation has experienced such dramatic, compounded cultural change. With that as the backdrop, the faith journeys of the next generation are playing themselves out. Millions are cutting their connection to church—and even their faith—during their young adult years. Kinnaman will describe the three types of spiritual journeys that young people take, how their anti-institutional mindset is different than that of young adults in the past and how organizations and churches could respond effectively to today's prodigals, nomads and exiles.

How to Reach Young Adults

Anthony B. Robinson

From: *Faith & Leadership*, June 19, 2012

(www.faithandleadership.com)

In my travels as a speaker and consultant working with congregations and their leaders, I am often asked, “How can we reach 20- and 30-year-olds?” Probably most folks would like to say, “How can we get 20- and 30-year-olds?”—but “reach” sounds a bit less self-interested.

My first general thought is that our enthusiasm for our church and confidence in the Christian faith needs to come through. That attitude is likely to make us more interesting and attractive to those who might be looking for a church.

If we feel bad about ourselves, if we are anxious about our future or our survival, that tends to come through -- and not in a positive way.

Churches and their leaders also need to dare to challenge folks in their 20s and 30s (along with everyone else) with the height and depth, length and breadth of the gospel and the Christian faith.

Sometimes we seem inclined to kowtow to youth. So we file off faith’s sharp edges and pull our punches. But that’s counter-productive. The best of the 20- and 30-somethings I know seem more interested in a challenge than in a faith that is dumbed-down or lukewarm.

Beyond these two general comments, let me offer eight suggestions for congregations that want to be hospitable to the next generation.

1. **Make it spiritual.**

The core business of religion is— surprise—religion; we’re not a social club, civic organization or political party. Honestly ask, “Are we growing spiritually, in faith

and discipleship?” “Are we offering others opportunities to deepen faith?”

2. **A corollary: Make it about God.**

People want to experience the holy, the divine, the sacred. They are dying for want of grace, wonder, mystery -- not for want of bylaws, committees or sign-up sheets. At least, they don’t want those things instead of God.

3. **Make it personal.**

Faith has to mean something in my daily life. If church deals only in vague pieties and abstractions without personal connection, forget it. If phrases like “Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior” or the Lord’s Prayer are just the liturgical version of Muzak, you have a problem—and an opportunity for change.

4. **Make it real, authentic.**

We no longer live in a world where many people go to church out of a sense of social obligation. Just going through the motions, checking off boxes on the “to-do” list won’t do it. What are the issues and questions people are facing and struggling with? What light does the gospel shed on them?

5. **Value the power of cross-generational community and relationships.**

Increasingly, we live in mono-generational enclaves. Speak of the importance of friendship and contact across the generations and then live that out in the way you do church.

6. **Make it work for busy lives.**
Time is the new currency; don't ask people to waste it. This is particularly true in many young or single-parent families, where people are working full time plus. Offer more short-term ways to engage, such as one-day mission projects, two- or three-week study series. Offer activities for parents to do with their kids.
7. **Get over the idea that every member has to be on a committee.**
Or otherwise involved in management, programs or policies. Remember the old Reformed teaching that the first call of laity is to "present Christ to and for the world," through their work, their relationships and their citizenship. The primary job of those in the congregation is

not to manage the church (though we need some people to be involved in that way). Their primary job is to live their faith in home, workplace and community.

8. **Make congregational leadership a spiritual-growth and relationship-building experience.**
That means preparing people to serve as spiritual leaders, then allowing them to function as spiritual leaders. Make room for new people and new ideas. Sometimes in opening up to others we open up to and for God.

It's not easy to engage Generation Next. But it's important. And who said being the church was going to be easy?



Greenhouses of Hope

Dori Grinenko Baker

From: *Greenhouses of Hope:
Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World*
(Alban Institute, 2010)

Take something barren and slowly tend it with the right amounts of water, sunlight, and nutrients. In time, green shoots emerge.

I have been looking for green shoots lately, what I call Greenhouses of Hope. I have been scanning the landscape of mainline congregations where youth and young adults want to be, where young people are heard to say, “If *this* is church, bring it on!” Despite somber news about the demise of denominations, I hear whispers of other realities. A Greenhouse of Hope is a Christian congregation freeing itself to experiment with both newly imagined and time-honored ways of following the path of Jesus. Its members respond to God’s love through practices that genuinely embrace the gifts of youth and young adults. Out of these greenhouses emerge young leaders who want to change the world.

Mainline congregations that are thriving and surviving into the next generations with strong young leaders will be like renovated greenhouses in three particular ways.

First, they will see an “architecture of possibility” within their infrastructure. Like renovated greenhouses, denominational churches have at their disposal centuries-old structures of grandeur and beauty. Because of the cost of maintaining old buildings, the word infrastructure usually has negative connotations in congregations. Plumbing, pipe organs, and stained glass windows need maintenance. That costs money, which drains the life out of aging congregations and away from missional opportunities that young people might heartily embrace.

Other more powerful, if less tangible, infrastructures are in place: denominations with a generation or more of global grassroots connections in places like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tasmania, and South Korea; thriving partnerships that dig wells and provide mosquito nets to fight malaria; church folk who can respond meaningfully with speed and flexibility to an earthquake in Haiti, because they have spent decades making real friends there. This kind of infrastructure can be of use to young people who want to change the world.

At the ground level, I see an **architecture of possibility**. Sometimes that refers to a spectacular piece of real estate located where young people are drawn to form community in collaboration with the economically vulnerable, such as Broad Street Ministry in Philadelphia or Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church in Washington, DC. Both of these were mainline churches on the brink of closing: now they are thriving centers for art, spirituality, worship, mission education, and outreach ministries that collaborate with neighborhood organizations. But often, the architecture of possibility is quiet. It can be a church where a generation of aging activists share their stories of the Montgomery bus boycott with a youth group made up of Goths, hip-hop artists, and slam poets. Deep infrastructure is a valuable inheritance already being put to good use by young people who want to make a difference in their world.

Second, thriving congregations will learn to look and listen closely to their context in order to ground themselves in what is organic and indigenous.

Greenhouses of Hope are learning from the Emergent Church movement that if you want to start a new church, you go hang out at the local coffee shop to hear what people care about. You hang out in the bar around the corner and make connections with lonely people who are longing for a deeper sense of community. If you want to be an old church that has new life emerging within it, you will listen to your closest neighbors. Vibrant churches that are raising new young leaders from within listen and learn what ancient Christian practices are already close at hand, and then everywhere and always invite young people to climb into those practices with them.

Sometimes, abandoned greenhouses are filled with debris. I remember the closet in the educational wing of a local United Methodist Church where I organized the vacation Bible school one summer a few years ago. It was filled with filmstrip machines, egg cartons, and 1950s-era drawings of shepherds tending their flocks. This debris from a long-ago time needed to be removed to make way for the office of the church's first paid youth minister. Removal of debris can be painstaking because of the human stories associated with it. Removal becomes easier once one recognizes that the debris may be antiquated and even harmful theology or rigid institutional structures that no longer serve human flourishing.

Third, thriving congregations will be attentive to how they provide just the right nutrients for the young lives in their care. An actual greenhouse is a seedbed. It provides the conditions for successful growth. In a greenhouse, young growth goes through a gradual process of hardening off. This is a time of slowly increasing exposure to harsh conditions outside the greenhouse, allowing the plant to become ever more able to sustain itself before it is transplanted to bring life to

other places. If congregations grow their people to feed the world, then Greenhouses of Hope ask the question: How are we nurturing the young lives in our care so that they might go forth from us to change the world as agents of the transforming power of Jesus Christ? Hardening off takes many shapes and forms. It involves mission trips that expose young people to living conditions they never imagined, and then asks continually how this new knowing gets incorporated into their daily lives. Hardening off involves cultivating spiritual practices such as discernment, storytelling, contemplation, silence, Scripture study, conflict resolution, and community building that help young people embrace a distinctively Christian hope in the midst of suffering and despair.

Churches with deep roots and ancient ways are catching glimpses of the future reflected in the eyes of their young. Teens and twentysomethings are seeing visions. When adults who love them embrace this glimmer, when they nurture that young leader, churches engage in God's good work of making green a desert place.

(Excerpted from *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World* edited by Dori Grinenko Baker, © 2010, Alban Institute. All rights reserved.)





Changing SEA: The Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults Project

www.changingsea.org

Who are emerging adults? and *What churches do they like?* This project has assembled a team of expert researchers, assigned them specific tasks, and present their answers online at: www.changingsea.org. The Changing SEA project, funded by a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., was the final project of the late Dean Hoge, Professor of Sociology at Catholic University of America. It was his desire to conduct research on young adults both in and out of churches, and then communicate that research to ministry practitioners.

Part 1. Who Are Emerging Adults? *An essay forum with 15 essays on a range of topics related to the lives of emerging adults, written by highly regarded scholars, which synthesize an array of academic articles, summarizing key points and making them accessible and useful for your ministry.* Go to: www.changingsea.org/papersyn.htm.

Part 2. What Churches Do Emerging Adults Like? *An ethnographic investigation that explores: What kinds of churches do emerging adults attend? Why do they go? How involved are they? How do churches engage emerging adults in meaningful ways? What are the best practices in effective congregations?* Go to: www.changingsea.org/studies.htm

1. The Emerging Church Movement and Young Adults - Gerardo Marti
2. Engaging Young Adult Catholics in D.C. - Kathleen Garces-Foley
3. Clay United Methodist Church - Justin Farrell
4. Consolidated Baptist Church - Walt Bower
5. The Crossing: Worship, Community, and Action in Emergent Episcopal Ministry -Hillary Kaell
6. Diversity and Spirituality Drive Young Adults at New Life Fellowship - Richard Cimino
7. Engaging Young Adults at a Catholic Mega-Parish - Tricia Bruce
8. Middle Collegiate Church - Grace Yukich
9. St. Peter's Catholic Student Center - Ashley Palmer

Reflections on the Changing SEA Research

Anthony Pogorelc

Anthony Pogorelc of The Catholic University of America is a project coordinator for the Changing SEA research project and website. The following is an excerpt from an on an interview conducted by Louis B. Weeks for the website Resources for American Christianity (www.resourcingchristianity.org).

Video & Interview: www.resourcingchristianity.org/interview

Tell us about some of the findings from the studies presented in Changing SEA.

A few general findings: We find that the markers for adulthood—financial independence, marriage, beginning a career, having children—all are now (happening later) for most people in our American society than they used to.

I was talking with someone recently about a résumé of an emerging adult. I commented on the number of different jobs that showed, and he said “That’s typical for a young adult these days. In fact, if there are too few job changes on the résumé they may be considered, ‘Not industrious.’ ‘Not adventuresome.’” Where once upon a time showing a single job in which you stayed a long time might be seen as virtuous, it might now be seen as “risk averse.”

Again, the religious landscape is different today. A lot of churches still focus ministry on the traditional, nuclear family. They operate out of the assumption that singleness is a short term, temporary phase. Emerging adults defer marriage. As a result they are single for a long time, and the churches that most effectively work with them respond and accept them in their singleness. They invite them into the church to feel like real members, real participants and sometimes leaders.

You also find that Protestant evangelicals do the best job generally of reaching out to emergent adults. Catholics would come next, and then mainline Protestants. Catholic

congregations tend to be the most diverse ethnically.

Emerging adults usually gravitate toward larger congregations. They want to meet and be with other emerging adults, so there can be a real connection for seeking spirituality but also for gaining social relationships.

Another theme in many of our essays is the shift regarding work and finances. The high-risk economy has a profound effect on their lives. So does the instability in wages and benefits. They like being “tinkerers” in the work situation as well. They like for work to be fun and flexible. And they also like structure. Their parents have brought them up arranging for them to be with other children. They have always been told that they are “special.” And they like to be successful. They expect to be creative. All these factors influence their choice of work situations.

On the other hand, they are also usually constricted in their financial resources. College debt and health care have continuing effects on their ability to choose agreeable work locations and jobs. Many have to return to live with their parents as emerging adults — a difficult situation most of the time for all involved.

Tell us about congregations that are effective with emerging adults.

The second group of essays focuses on congregations and parishes successfully drawing emerging adults and assimilating

them as participants and leaders. Most of these are ethnographically-oriented studies, from mainline Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism. You can read these essays and they can help people who work with emerging adults in congregations and parishes—mega-churches, city churches, emerging churches, and suburban congregations.

Congregations that provide a “home” for emerging adults are most effective. For young adults, it is a very transient time of life, and especially with geographical relocation. The family and groups of friends that nurtured them earlier are no longer available. Where older adult members are very welcoming to young adults, invite them into leadership and participation as well as attendance—there the emerging adults feel fulfilled and at home.

Older adults in churches successfully including emerging adults show they appreciate the younger people—their ideas, their work, their prayers. But they also appreciate the limits of emerging adults. Most young adults don’t have a lot to put in the collections. Often they don’t have a lot of time, especially for long range projects. So short term, significant things—ad hoc projects—are welcomed.

Young adults like diverse communities. That is one place Catholic churches excel. And they don’t like the combination of church and right wing politics. That makes

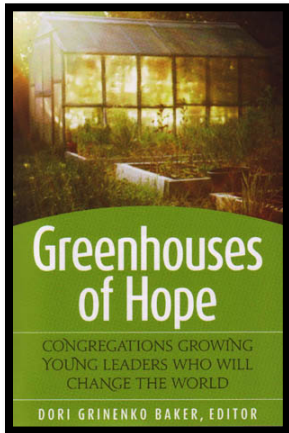
them nervous. Inclusivity is a positive value. Media is good, and the use of social networking. A good congregational web page is a plus. But don’t use technology as a gimmick. They can smell gimmicks and are wary of those who employ them.

Emerging adults respond well to the ministry of a strong pastor—one who is fatherly or motherly in a nurturing way. They like good preaching and teaching. They like pastors who have a vision of the work of the Gospel in that congregation—someone who can address problems but also assemble teams of people to meet challenges. And someone who has a good sense of outreach—doesn’t wait, but steps out to meet people.

They respond well to worship at times they can come—a late Sunday afternoon Mass or a late morning service with hospitality times accompanying—wine and cheese after a late afternoon Mass, for example, or some breakfast or brunch after a morning time of worship. And they like to be where there are other emerging adults, so it can take a “critical mass” in their cohort and word that they are welcome. Set up the opportunity for people to meet one another. Things off campus are popular too—in a coffee house or a home or dorm. “Theology on tap” something held in a bar. Off campus, people who are more religious can invite those less religious to share equally in the events—neutral ground.

Resources

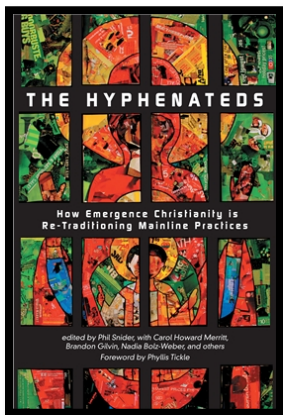
Young Adult Faith Formation



Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World

Dori Grinenko Baker, editor (Herndon: Alban, 2010)

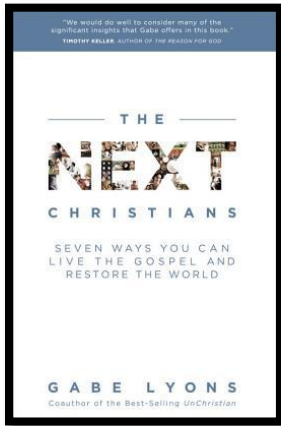
Do you know a church where young people regularly shape the liturgy with words that speak their truth in ways that also inspire their elders? Do you hear about congregations that reach out in quirky new ways to their ailing neighborhoods? Do you find churches creating hospitable space that invites the live wriggling questions and doubts of young people? Do you see congregations where young people's gifts are brought forth and celebrated? The authors of this book launched a quest for such vibrant, life-giving, greening congregations and observed the diverse practices that grow there. They named these churches "Greenhouses of Hope." A Greenhouse of Hope is a Christian congregation freeing itself to experiment with both newly imagined and time-honored ways of following the path of Jesus. Its members respond to God's love through practices that genuinely embrace the gifts of youth and young adults. Out of these greenhouses emerge young leaders who want to change the world. In *Greenhouses of Hope*, the authors tell the stories of these remarkable congregations, helping others think about how they can create space for the dreams of young people to be grafted into God's dreams for the world.



The Hyphenateds: How Emergence Christianity is Re-Traditioning Mainline Practices

Phil Snider, editor (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011)

Can emergence Christianity help established denominations understand that radical transformation means more than a new worship service? When hearing complaints that church is irrelevant, can mainliners understand that reclaiming relevancy means more than changing meeting locations from church buildings to coffee shops? Yes, say the writers of *The Hyphenateds*, as they show you how they've done it. As an increasing number of mainline communities wonder how the emergent church influences their own structures and practices, this book brings together the perspectives of several of the most prominent "Hyphenated Christians," i.e. those with one foot in the emergent conversation and the other foot in the mainline church—Presbymergents, Anglimergents, Luthermergents, Methomergents, etc. With a passion for both mainline traditions and the emergent conversation, "Hyphenateds" offer a vibrant and contagious vision of the ways in which the church might undergo the transformation necessary to faithfully embody the love of Christ in the midst of an ever-changing postmodern world.

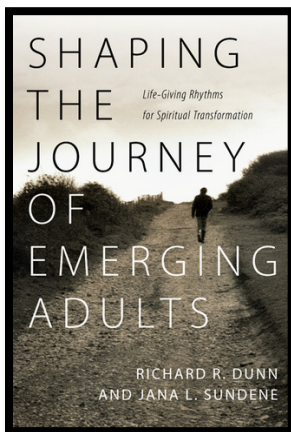


The Next Christians: How a New Generation Is Restoring the Faith

Gabe Lyons (New York: Doubleday, 2011)

In the wake of the stunning research from his book, *UnChristian*, which revealed the growing disenchantment among young generations of Christians, Lyons has witnessed the beginnings of a new iteration of the faith. The Next Christians eposes a whole movement of Christians—evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Orthodox, Pentecostals, and others—who desire to be a force for restoration even as they proclaim the Christian Gospel. They want the label “Christian” to mean something good, intelligent, authentic, and beautiful. The next generation of Christians, Lyons argues, embodies six revolutionary characteristics: 1) Provoked, not offended; 2) Creators, not critics; 3) Called, not employed; 4) Grounded, not distracted; 5) In community, not alone; and 6) Countercultural, not “relevant.”

➤ Visit the website at: www.nextchristians.com



Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults

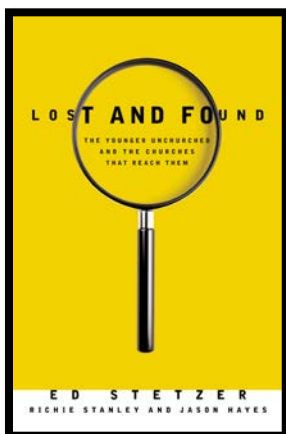
Richard Dunn and Jana Sundene (Downers Grove: IVP Book , 2012)

Between adolescence and adulthood is a new stage of life: emerging adulthood. Those in their twenties and early thirties find themselves in transition. This “provisional adulthood” is a time of identity exploration and instability in which one’s vocation, purpose, relationships and spirituality are all being renegotiated. Many emerging adults lose sight of God and experience significant confusion and brokenness. Others unexpectedly reconnect with the Christian faith and seek deeper discipleship, yet lack helpful mentoring and direction. Rick Dunn and Jana Sundene offer concrete guidance for those who shepherd and care for emerging adults. Dunn and Sundene emphasize relational rhythms of discernment, intentionality and reflection to meet emerging adults where they are at and then to walk with them further into the Christlife.

Part 1. Simplifying Our Vision: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation

Part 2. Applying Life Giving Rhythms to the Challenges of Early Adulthood

Part 3. Emerging Adults and their Disciplemakers



Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them

Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, Jason Hayes (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009)

In *Lost and Found* the research team analyzes three Lifeway Research studies to identify four types of unchurched young adults in their 20s and four key markers of young adult ministry: community, depth of content, social responsibility, and cross-generational connections. *Lost and Found* also researches 149 churches that are reaching extraordinary numbers of young adults by paying close attention to the four key markers identified in the research. The stories and insights from these churches will provide direction for faith formation that develops authentic faith in Christ in emerging adults.



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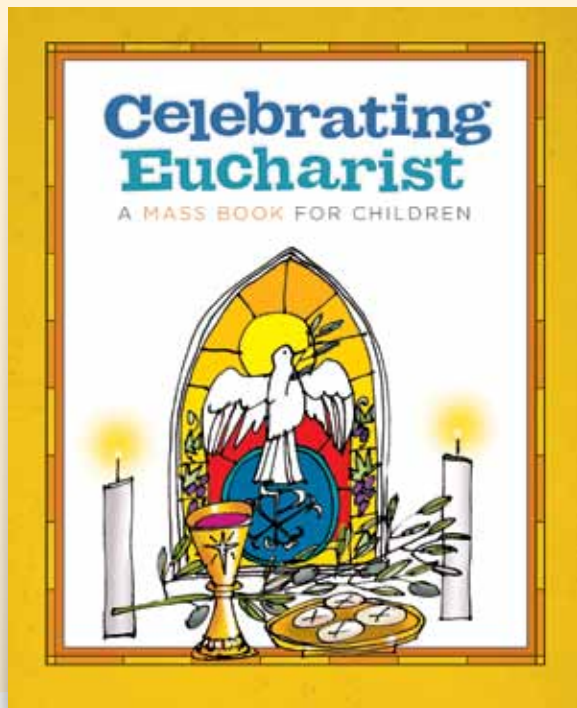
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The Order of Mass

WE GATHER

Introductory Rites

We gather together as a family of faith.
As we sing the Entrance Song, the priest
and other ministers process to the altar
and bow reverently.

The altar represents Jesus Christ.
The Priest kisses the altar.
Then he goes to the chair.

When the Entrance Song is concluded, we sign
ourselves with the Sign of the Cross, while the
Priest says:

Priest In the name of the Father, and of the
Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People Amen.

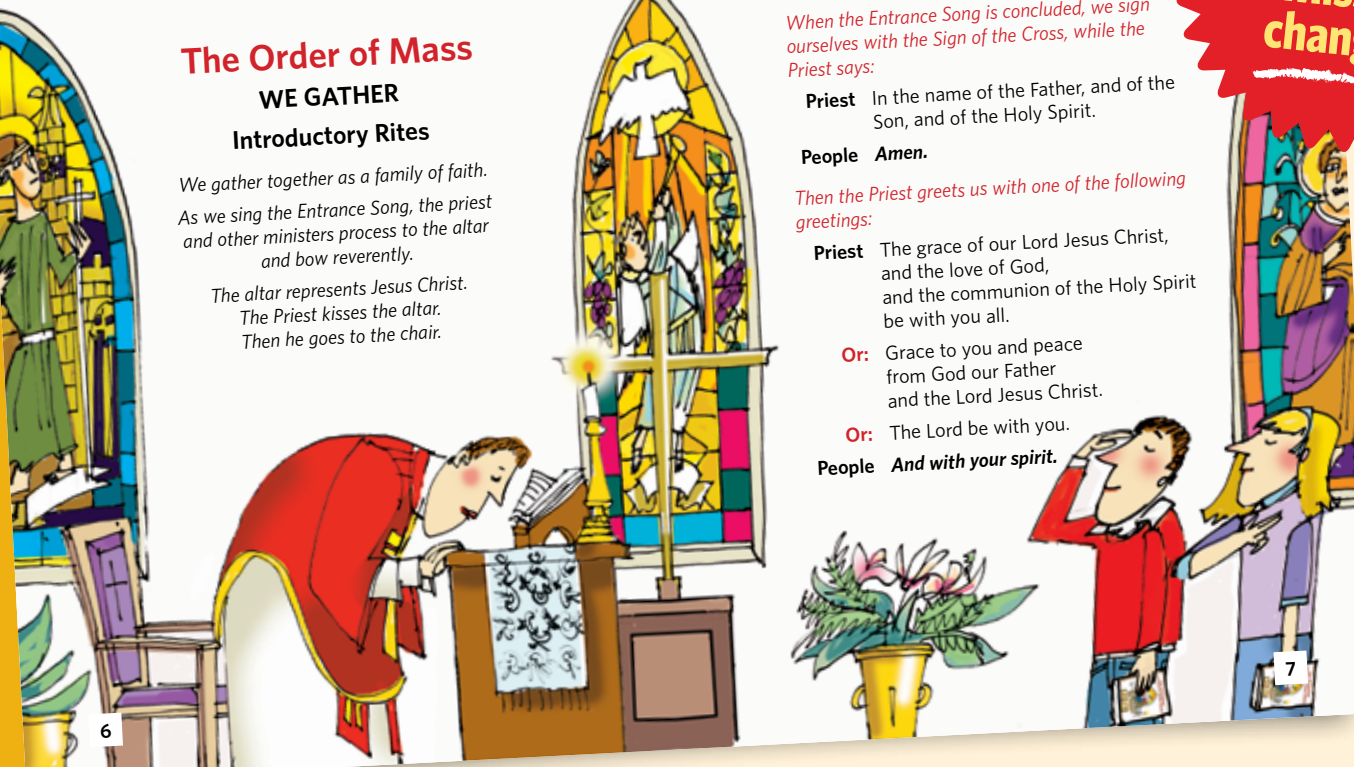
Then the Priest greets us with one of the following
greetings:

Priest The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

Or: Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or: The Lord be with you.

People And with your spirit.



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