



Outreach to Young Adults



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



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Practical Ministry Skills: Outreach to Young Adults

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OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

Leader's Guide

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

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

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

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

To gain insight into the attitudes and thinking of this generation, read "Seeking the iGens" (p. 3) along with the other articles in the first section of the packet under the heading "Understanding Young Adults." To explore ways that your church can connect with young adults, read "Bridging the Generation Gap" (pp. 11–12) and "Give Them Jesus!" (pp. 9–10). "Connector Churches" (pp. 13–14) provides a glimpse of practices used by churches that have demonstrated success in attracting the emerging generation. Other articles in this section focus on approaches your congregation can take to effectively reach young adults for Christ both outside and inside the church.

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

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

To contact the editors:

E-mail BCL@christianitytoday.com
 Mail BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS, Christianity Today
 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**Seeking the iGens**

A sense of self looms large for the emerging generation.

1 Corinthians 9:19

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

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

Mr. Rogers Thinking

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

Sesame Street Syndrome

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

Self-esteem Rising

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

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

— SCOT MCKNIGHT is Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary in Lombard, IL; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2009 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

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

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Postmodern Spirituality

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

1 Corinthians 4:2

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

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

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

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

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

1. Why should I trust you?

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

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

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

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

2. Isn't that just your reality?

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

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

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

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

3. What good is Christianity?

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

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

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

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

— BRETT LAWRENCE; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2003 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

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

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The Myth of the Average Millennial

Don't rely on statistics and stereotypes to reach this generation.

1 Peter 3:5

This morning I had a terrifying realization. I'd started the day in my typical fashion, by skimming my Facebook wall and Twitter feed to find an article worth reading—a friend-approved, literary jolt to motivate the hamster in my head to start its daily run. Scrolling through these articles is a bit like walking through a middle school hallway, with all the usual suspects: the nerds correcting everyone's theological grammar, the goths singing dirges of the church's imminent demise, the cool kids gossiping about some pastor's latest *faux pas*.

I finally clicked on a link to one of those “How to Get the Average Millennial to Come to Church” articles, expecting a satisfying eye roll. Instead, my jaw dropped and I let out a tiny yelp. This average Millennial, the one that everyone's trying so hard to understand—it's me!

My heart started pounding as I read through the descriptors. “Average Millennials hold multiple degrees.” Check. “They are technologically savvy.” Check. “Many haven't been able to find jobs in their fields of expertise.” Check. “They probably have amassed a sizable debt.” Double check.

It was distressing to see myself fitting into the cookie-cutter Millennial mold. Articles such as these don't paint a pretty picture. According to them, Millennials are entitled couch potatoes, suffering from arrested development. They have an inflated sense of self-worth, and they think they can run a company the first day they walk into a new job.

Of course, Millennials have their retorts. “We aren't lazy; we were just dealt a bad hand.” “Our parents told us we could be whatever we wanted when we grew up, and we believed them.”

Back and forth it goes.

But as an “average Millennial,” I don't feel entitled. I've worked as a laborer on a construction site and as an administrative assistant (read: receptionist) for an oral surgeon. I know the value of a hard day's work just to pay the bills. I also don't blame my current struggles entirely on my upbringing. What success I've had, I owe to the generosity of my parents, mentors, and church. How do I rectify these discrepancies?

The answer, of course, is that I'm not the “average Millennial.” Nor is anyone else. I may share a few commonalities with other members of my generation, but I'm also unique.

The truth is, the “average Millennial” is a myth.

Lighthouse or Mirage?

Not every “Millennial” article is authored by a curmudgeon, harrumphing about “kids these days.” I'd like to think this discussion began as a genuine attempt to understand the values of a generation that has confounded expectations. Church leaders, horrified to discover that Millennials were dramatically under-represented in churches, sought ways to bring them back. But how can you attract what you don't understand?

Authors eagerly jumped to the rescue: “You want to know how to attract Millennials? We'll tell you what they are like, what they like, and how you can change your church to draw them in and keep them.”

Enter statistical analysis, the proven cure for whatever ails your church. The surveys poured in, the stats were compiled, and the elusive “average Millennial” started coming into focus. But statistical analysis is limited—economic situations, political affiliations, and other figures only go so far.

So like a geneticist filling the sequence gaps of dinosaur DNA with that of frogs, authors inserted personal opinions into their analysis: I know a few Millennials that seem to have problems with authority, so that must be a trait all Millennials share. Philosophers have a name for this type of reasoning. They call it “the fallacy of composition.” An observer assumes that one member of a group is representative of the whole.

So how did this guesswork so easily influence perception of Millennials?

Thank a psychological effect known as “perceptual vigilance.” Have you ever learned a new word, and suddenly, you start seeing it pop up everywhere? That's perceptual vigilance. The word isn't actually showing up more frequently; you've just become attuned to it. Your brain used to tune it out, but now you recognize it when you hear it, so you think you're hearing it more often.

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Similarly, when you read that all Millennials are entitled, your brain makes a mental note every time an individual under 30 acts that way. Before you know it, you'll see entitled Millennials everywhere, hogging the roads, cutting in line, and demanding more from church services.

In reality, this “average Millennial” isn't a lighthouse leading us to better understanding; it's a mirage, a Siren, drawing us away from the full picture. It only distracts from the truth about Millennials: every single one of us is unique. And who do you want filling the pews of your church, statistical Frankensteins or in-the-flesh human beings?

I don't mean to criticize statistical analysis. It's actually very helpful if used in the right way. But in this case, it's only muddied the waters. If we're looking at the Average Millennial to comprehensively understand this generation, we're missing the point of disciple-making. Besides, the Millennial generation is usually defined as anyone born between the early 1980s and 2000. Do you really expect to find much consistency among a group comprised of 13 to 30-year-olds? That doesn't even take into account gender, racial, and economic differences.

The very conversation over attracting Millennials is demeaning. Nothing makes you feel loved and respected like being quantified as a percentage point in hopes of filling seats. Most of these articles are written as if the Millennials aren't in the room—“Not now, little kid; the adults are trying to figure out how to deal with you.” And what about the many Millennials that already attend churches? Don't lose sight of your current blessings in a culture that demands more, more, more!

No Silver Bullet

So how can your church attract more Millennials without unwarranted stereotyping? You can put down your pen and pad of paper. I'm not going to give you a formula. If you're looking for a silver bullet, let me save you some time—it doesn't exist.

Instead, I'd suggest that you stop thinking of Millennials as aliens from another planet. I, for one, am tired of lying on an operating table, being dissected by scientists in white lab coats. I can almost hear the muffled voices from behind surgical masks: “If you look here, you'll see the gland that makes Millennials prefer service projects over worship programs,” followed by a chorus of, “Fascinating!”

First and foremost, Millennials are people, each one created uniquely in God's image. And they're more like you than you realize. People aren't some kind of codex to solve, if only you knew the password. They're diverse, dynamic, and fragile—try “cracking the safe” one too many times, and they'll lock down, maybe forever.

I'm not saying individuality should trump community in the church. I'm saying that communities are most beautiful when they celebrate the diversity within. Communities were never meant to be homogeneous. Why are we so intent on generalizing away Millennials' miscellany?

Perhaps the problem also lies in the “attractational” mission structure. Church leaders are so concerned with how to lure more Millennials to their congregations (and keep them there) that they've forgotten their prime mandate: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” ([Matt. 28:19](#)). We love to have made disciples; it's more difficult to go make them.

Can you imagine Jesus gathering his disciples the way we try to gather followers? Jesus sees Peter and Andrew and says, “Come, follow me.” They look at each other, not quite willing to take that first step. So Jesus says, “Will you do it for a ... Scooby-snack?”

Obviously, that's ridiculous. No, the preexistent Son of God descended to us, meeting us in our small, sinful lives and calling us his own. When he assumed humanity, he wasn't looking for the perfect incentive to draw us to himself; he was giving himself to us.

Many church leaders adopt an “ends-justify-the-means” approach to ministry, seeking the least amount of effort for maximum pay-off, and in some cases people flocked to fill their seats. But not anymore. Many Millennials smell the pandering a mile away. Are church leaders really no better than advertisers, collecting personal data to better advertise to a Millennial consumer?

Stop looking for the perfect mousetrap—“If I turn this crank, the boot will kick the lever, the diver will do a backflip into the pool, the net will fall down on the Millennial ‘mouse,’ and I'll win!”

Also keep in mind, when you tune your service to attract the Average Millennial, you may end up losing everyone else. I remember attending a youth group that served up nothing but silly games and contests to see

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who could eat the grossest food. Many kids ate it up, but my friends and I didn't. We wanted something more, something deeper. So we stopped going. I found new avenues for church involvement—my parents' Sunday school class and working in the nursery.

By doggedly hunting the Average Millennial, you will walk right past the Atypical Millennial, the Unique Millennial, and the Exceptional Millennial. And they'll just go somewhere else.

Greater than Fiction

Do you really want to know what Millennials are like? Stop seeking secondhand information. Go out and meet actual people. Find ways to get involved with a local college. Venture into the community. Have lunch with your 20-something coworkers. I think you'll find the Millennials you meet to be less perplexing than you assumed—and far more interesting and wonderful than that Average Millennial you've read so much about.

Or maybe they'll be shy and self-conscious, in need of loving encouragement. Or maybe they really will be entitled and egotistical, in which case, they'll need an example of humility. Expect to be surprised.

I know Millennials that attend traditional, liturgical services, others who are drawn to smaller house church settings, and many who love the vibrant excitement of a megachurch.

Study of the Average Millennial gives no insight into the real Millennials in your community—the living, breathing people just waiting to have God's blessings poured into their lives. How can you best minister to them? I can't say. But there's no better way to find out than by asking them yourself.

— KYLE ROHANE is Editor at LeaderTreks in Carol Stream, Illinois; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. How have we tried to attract and impact Millennials in the past?
2. How could our church better draw from the Millennials we currently do have in our body?
3. Which generalizations about Millennials are helpful as we think of how to reach this generation? Which are not?

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

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

1 Corinthians 2:2

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

Kingdom Vision

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

Discipleship Demands

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

Jesus' Life

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

Getting from Jesus to the Gospel

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

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

— SCOT MCKNIGHT is Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary in Lombard, IL; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2009 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

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Discuss

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

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

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

Acts 17:16–21

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— © 2009 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

Discuss

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

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Connector Churches

These nine traits characterize churches that reach young adults.

Colossians 2:19

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

Creating Deeper Community

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

Making a Difference through Service

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

Experiencing Worship

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

Leveraging Technology

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

Building Cross-Generational Relationships

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

Moving Toward Authenticity

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

Leading by Transparency

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

Leading by Team

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

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

Discuss

1. What practices from the list above resemble what our church is doing? What things are these churches doing that we are not doing?

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2. In what practical ways can we make our congregation more welcoming for young adults?
3. What obstacles do we currently face that prevent us from implementing practices that resonate with young adults?

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The Young and the Repentant

Help young adults see repentance as a positive invitation.

Acts 3:19

My first encounter with the word *repent* was during college. A street preacher was pointing his finger at me and shouting it. He was very animated and angry. The world was also written on his sign surrounded by bright red flames.

Despite using the word a lot, the street preachers I saw never bothered to explain what repent actually meant. I was left to conclude that it was a terrible thing. I associated it with hell, sin, punishment, and extreme forms of fundamentalist Christianity—making it easy for me, and many other young people, to dismiss.

Now, many years later, I lead a church full of college students and young adults in their twenties, and they often respond very favorably when called to repent—which happens in one form or another almost every week.

Not long ago a 20-year-old student approached me after a worship gathering. He sat down on the floor of the storage room we use for prayer and said, “I just prayed for forgiveness and I wanted to tell you.” It was his first time at our church and I’d never met him before. His emotions poured out as he confessed his sins which had become obvious to him during the worship gathering. He came to see how Jesus paid for his sins on the cross, and he expressed belief in God’s love for him.

As I listened to this broken young man on the floor, I sensed repentance. But it didn’t come through shouting, finger pointing, or by painting large letters on red flaming signs. He saw repentance as something beautiful to embrace, not something dreadful to fear.

There are some who believe young people in our culture are not interested in repentance. They think speaking about truth or sin is taboo, and a call to “repent” is too negative. I disagree. I have found it very easy to express the reality and need for repentance among the emerging generation. And many of them don’t require much convincing. The key has been helping them understand repentance as something positive rather than negative.

We recently showed a clip from *The Shawshank Redemption* where Tim Robbins’ character escapes from prison through a sewage pipe. It was a great metaphor for the messes we’ve made of our lives. But then he bursts out of the pipe and dives into the river. He rises from the water cleansed and lifting his hands to heaven. I used the image as a symbol of repentance. “When we repent,” I said, “we are washed by God through what Jesus has accomplished on the cross. Acts 3:19 says ‘Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.’”

Rather than presenting repentance as a scary, negative threat, I want them to see it as a positive invitation: a call to align ourselves with Jesus and his ways and to turn away from the things that are destroying our lives.

When they understand repentance this way, as part of God’s love for us, I’ve found that many young people desire it. They want “times of refreshing.” They want a clean start. They want change in their lives that only God can bring. In fact, they want to repent so much that it has become an ongoing practice in our church. During Communion we will invite people to kneel as a posture of surrender to God’s will and to express their repentance. They use the time to examine their lives and return to his way if necessary. They don’t see repentance as a single action for salvation, but as an ongoing part of the Christian life.

I wonder if those who believe the young are turned off by talk of repentance have tried to redefine it for them. Like me, some may associate repentance with images of angry street preachers holding flaming signs. But if this image is replaced with a vision rooted in God’s kindness and Jesus’ healing power, you might be surprised by how many young people are ready to repent.

—DAN KIMBALL is pastor of Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, California; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2010 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS

Discuss

1. How do you think young adults view the importance and meaning of repentance? Where do these ideas come from?
2. How does the church think young adults view the importance and meaning of repentance? Where do these ideas come from?
3. What does it look like to communicate repentance as a positive invitation? Why is this especially important when reaching out to young adults?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**The Justice Generation**

Young people are drawn to injustices, and this is an opportunity for life-shaping discipleship.

Matthew 6:33

Sabari, his pregnant wife Ammani, and their two-year-old daughter Chissa are the property of another person. They live and work in a rice mill in South Asia, facing brutal beatings, starvation, and grueling labor every day.

There are missionaries and thriving churches in their region. There are also ministries that provide food, shelter, and medical care nearby. There are Christian schools where children can receive education and have an opportunity to hear the gospel. But slaves like Sabari and Ammani do not have access to these opportunities and never will under their slave masters' violent captivity.

The last 60 years of evangelical mission has focused primarily on spiritual salvation with a growing emphasis on mercy ministries—efforts to provide basic needs like food, clean water, shelter, and medicine. But the past 10 years has also seen a surge of involvement in ministries that seek to bring justice to those suffering oppression—people like Sabari and Ammani, who cannot benefit either spiritually or physically from the church's mission until they are free.

The rising concern for justice is seen most dramatically among the younger generation in the church. Christians in college, high school, even middle and elementary school are putting extraordinary emphasis on justice as part of their Christian witness, and established churches and ministries are taking notice. Even ministries that have been deeply committed to evangelism through the spoken proclamation of the gospel have begun including issues of global justice. Ministries like Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth With a Mission (YWAM), InterVarsity, the Passion movement, and scores of church youth ministries are now leading the way in mobilizing students to not only proclaim the gospel but also to work for justice in the world.

Will this passion for justice continue, or will it fade like so many other trends? And will this generation be dispirited so that their zeal for justice isn't a fad, but flows above all from their zeal for God himself?

From Trend to Training

Communications technology, travel opportunities, and the forces of globalization have meant that young people in the church today have had more exposure to the reality of suffering and injustice in our world than any previous generation. But as my colleague Wayne Barnard, International Justice Mission's director of student ministries, has said, "The needed solutions to address [students'] passion for justice require a long-term commitment, which is challenging for a generation who cut their teeth on convenience. We've not taught them to delay gratification, so why would we expect that their passion for any issue would last beyond the first taste of disillusionment?"

The opportunity is ripe for church leaders to guide this generation beyond fits of emotion-driven passion and the inevitable disillusionment that comes as the hard obstacles to bringing justice are encountered.

While some ministries may use justice projects as a convenient lure to reach a socially aware generation, there are some who are doing the hard work of spiritually forming these young adults for the long haul. Cathedral of Joy in Richland, Washington, is one example. They intentionally guide their students into a lifestyle of justice ministry through laying deep biblical foundations and intentional spiritual formation.

High school seniors at Cathedral of Joy enter an intensive study and action experience. Each Sunday they attend meetings led by fellow students to work through a book on the intersection of faith and justice, and the youth pastor teaches on subjects such as the role of prayer in justice ministry. The seniors are guided to take sermon notes, engage in weekly devotions, contribute to service projects in their local community, and write reflection papers on what they are learning about themselves, God, and the world.

Throughout the year they also lead events for their church community such as "The Justice Fast" and "The Weekend to End Slavery." Thus the students help the entire church understand biblical justice and create ways to take action. Their year culminates with a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with IJM staff, provide volunteer help, and attend IJM's Global Prayer Gathering.

By incorporating justice into the spiritual formation program for their students, Cathedral of Joy is making justice more than a fad. By combining Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and practical experiences, they ground

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students' interest in justice more firmly. This means these students are more likely to bear fruit for decades as they lead the church's mission effort beyond their high school years.

Tim Keller teaches that "justification by faith leads to justice, and justice leads to people coming to faith." As we disciple this generation to embrace both justification and justice rooted in Scripture and the character of God, it will result in the advancement of the gospel.

Slaves like Ammani and Sabari need justice in the form of freedom before they can access the remarkable resources that exist all around them—resources that include the gospel ministry of the church in their region. Ammani and Sabari, and the 27 million other slaves in the world today, are why we must be intentional about making justice a part of discipleship training for this generation.

— BETHANY HOANG is director of the IJM Institute for International Justice Mission in Washington, D.C.; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2010 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. What justice issues are we currently addressing through our existing ministries? Why is this an important issue to our church? How are we communicating that?
2. How have we connected the call to justice to the process of spiritual formation? How could we strengthen this?
3. What are some ways we could draw Millennials (both within our church and outside) into, and perhaps even to lead, our justice efforts?

OUTREACH TO YOUNG ADULTS**Celtic-Style Evangelism**

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

Romans 10:14

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

The Celtic Christians Treated Outsiders Like Insiders

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

The Celtic Christians Talked About Everyday Issues

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

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

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

The Celtic Christians Looked for the Good

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

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

What Does the Celtic Example Teach Us?

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

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

Jesus gave people an experience of love and reality, not a speech about it. When people experience our attention, love and genuine interest in them, they begin to feel differently. And some will want to know what that means. Like Patrick did, let the missing come among you. Invite them to serve with you, in part so they can see up close what Christians are like. Let them watch you as you live life with other Christians. When they see the body of Christ in action, they won't walk away unchanged.

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

Discuss

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

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Further Exploration

Books and other resources to equip your church for evangelism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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