

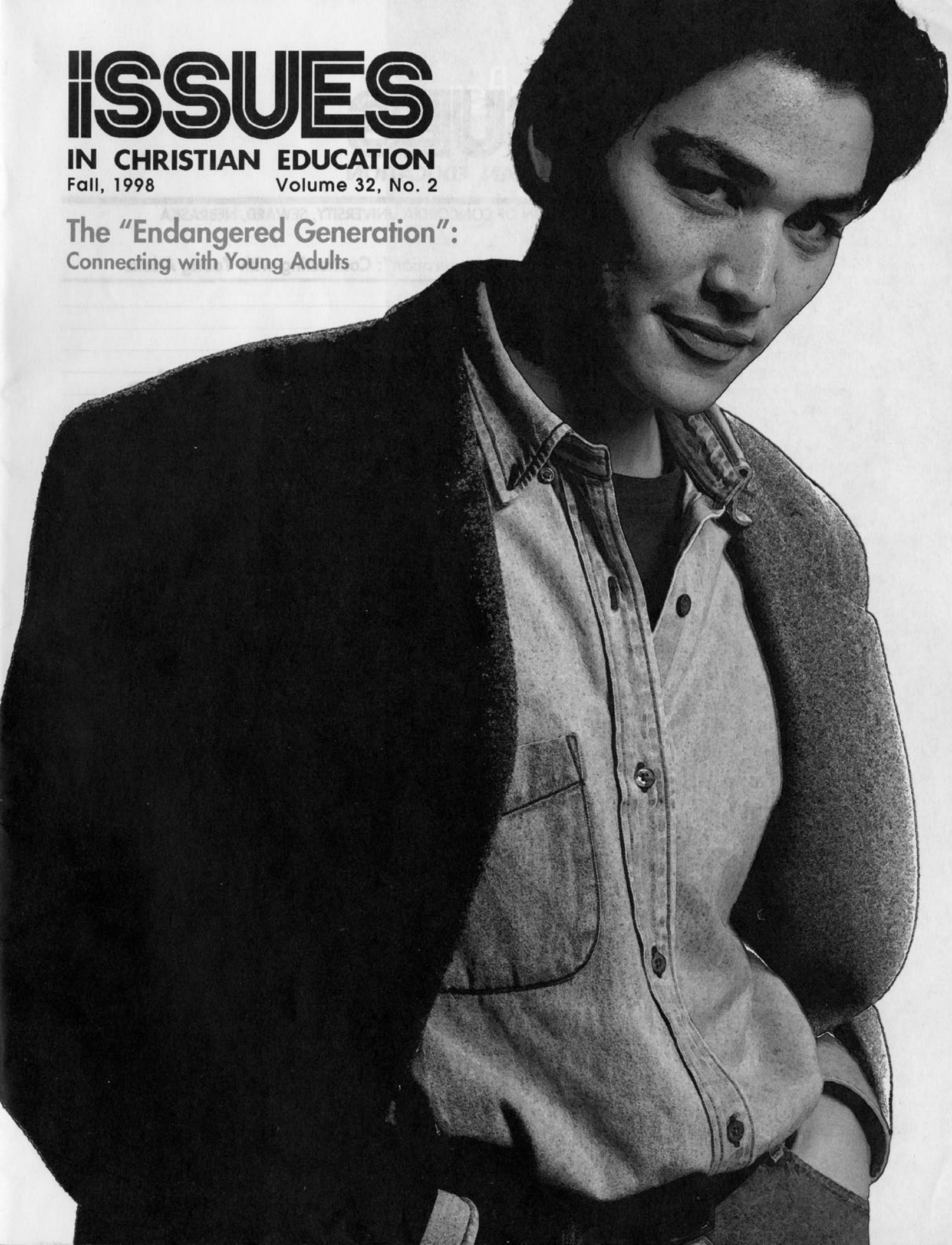
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall, 1998

Volume 32, No. 2

The "Endangered Generation":
Connecting with Young Adults



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The "Endangered Generation": Connecting with Young Adults

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Editor

Marvin Bergman,
Ed.D., Ph.D.

Editorial Committee:

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Editorials

Rebecca Fisher, M.S.
Book Reviews

Daniel Thurber, Ph.D.
Associate

Orville C. Walz, Ed.D.
Associate

William R. Wolfram, M.F.A.
Graphic Design

Marlene Block, B.A.
Managing Editor

We thank three members of the editorial committee who recently completed their teaching ministries at Concordia University: Dr. Larry Grothaus, Dr. Lisa Keyne and Dr. Al Schmidt. Their insights are evident on many pages of *Issues in Christian Education*.

We welcome three faculty named as members of the editorial committee: Dr. Russ Moulds, Professor Rebecca Fisher and Dr. Daniel Thurber. Many gifts and experiences will enable each member to make significant contributions to forthcoming editions of *Issues*.

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reflections

Orville C. Walz, President

HOW DOES THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH today reach out to those who have not heard the Good News that Jesus Christ is our Savior? At times it seems our best efforts fail. I remember a pastor of a small Lutheran congregation in a large metropolitan center telling me about a visitor in a worship service on the previous Sunday. The pastor greeted the worshippers following the service, the visitor thanked him for the excellent sermon and then added, "That was an interesting anecdote about David, but you never mentioned his last name."

The "Endangered Generation," born between 1961–1981, is also known by names such as the "Busters," "The Twenty-Somethings," and the "Xers." These individuals have been described as pragmatic, skeptical, clueless, longing to belong and to believe in something, individualistic, passive, culturally diverse, depressed, devalued, highly educated, technologically sophisticated and owning the future. This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* focuses on characteristics of this generation, what they need and seek from the church, and ways that the church can make connections with this population.

It is my hope that a fuller understanding of the characteristics and challenges of this generation, the spiritual search and faith longings of young adults, and ways in which the church can serve this population can strengthen ministries of the church as we approach the 21st century.

Just what does Generation X need from the church? Said simply, the same thing all sinful human beings need, found in the two great doctrines of Holy Scripture: the Law which shows them their sinful condition and the Gospel message of full and free salvation through Jesus Christ! Author Terry Dittmer states, "The church needs to be very sure that it is telling its story, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be sure that people know what we believe and why. . . they don't have a clue what sin is, what grace is, and what love and mercy are all about." Author Christopher Kratzer emphasizes the same: "Just tell the story . . . but with heart."

Most, I believe, agree on the *what* of the message for the X Generation. More difficult, however, is identifying *how* to share the message. In one of this edition's editorials, David Koch encourages us to consider a customized ministry, even though risky and challenging, which is also part of our tradition. He emphasizes that this is not a new trend. It is that, Koch believes, which sets the Apostle Paul apart as a leader. "I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life" (from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson).

As you read this edition of *Issues*, watch for these quotes in the major articles: "The question isn't, can Generation X get excited about God, but rather, can the Church get excited about them?" (Kratzer). Dittmer quotes Chris Seay, "Xers may have shunned the church, but they haven't rejected the Christ. For the most part, they continue to be fascinated by and long for the person of Christ." In interviewing young adults, Zimmerman observes, "Have you noticed that our discussion always seems to move back to relationships?"

It is my prayer that this edition will answer questions and provide insights into how all of us can more effectively communicate to Generation X the Good News that Jesus Christ died for all.

editorials

The Generation Gap?

MADONNA WILL TURN 40 this year. I find this piece of trivia very interesting for one reason in particular: I will be 40 this year. I always identified Madonna as a person who exemplified the "new" generation. She challenges societal norms. She seems to have an "in your face" attitude that is often attributed to the "younger generation." To see her as a peer (in age) is a bit unsettling.

Remember the "Generation Gap"? For those of us who grew up in the 1960s and 70s, the Generation Gap seemed to exemplify much of the controversy that flared in those decades. The "Who" sang of "My Generation" and hoped that they "die before I get old" (all the members of the band are now over 50). We were not to trust anyone over 30. Those not a part of the new generation were "the Establishment." We were the new way of doing things.

Of course, this conflict existed before the 1960s. Plato and Aristotle spoke of the tensions that existed between the generations. All ages may not have had the social upheaval that exemplified the 60s and 70s, but there were conflicts nonetheless. Aristotle saw these conflicts as a necessary ingredient for change that allowed political life and behavior to be challenged. He felt that norms and beliefs that are embraced by cultures need to be reviewed, assessed and perhaps reinterpreted or re-embraced.

So, where's the "Gap"? Pundits and trend watchers have been searching for it. What is it that Generation X is challenging? What conflicts exist between the philosophical underpinnings of the new generation and the generation that preceded them? Now that the "grunge" look has come and gone, what separates the hopes and dreams of this generation from the Boomers? Yes, they're the MTV Generation, they're the target of all sorts of Madison Avenue marketing blitzes, they are entering their careers within companies that no longer seem loyal to their employees, they stand to benefit from the largest inheritance windfall in the history of the world . . . but these are all things

that are happening to them, not things that they are initiating. What changes are they embracing? Writers speak of their tendency to "work to live, not live to work." Some have seen what they describe as a new focus on spirituality, but it seems to be a nontraditional spirituality, perhaps a combination of Western religion and Eastern mysticism. Whatever feels good seems to be their mantra as identified by those who are seeking a label. But that is not a new mantra. It is the theme of those of the preceding generation.

We should not judge their lack of initiative to rebel too harshly. It is a difficult task to rebel against a society that embraces everything. Trying to find an issue to revolt against in a postmodern world is like going hunting in the desert—there are no easy targets.

So do we (by "we" I mean those who, because of their age or position in life, represent the established order) rejoice in this victory? The realities of a postmodern world have taken the "teeth" out of the threat of revolution by the younger generation. Does this victory mean that proceeding generations will only serve to affirm the notion that a relativistic society best serves a "unified" (unified in *what* I'm not sure) society? Perhaps this lack of a generation gap should instead give us pause and perhaps instill some sorrow and embarrassment.

How does all of this apply to the church? While it is true that Generation X in North America (and those generations that follow) will gather information differently than preceding generations (more technologically oriented, shorter attention spans), that they will reflect an increasing cultural and racial diversity, and that they may even be more cynical than generations that have gone before, it is also true that the 45 million Xers in the U.S. will be like earlier generations in their desire to seek a way to challenge the established norms of the society. Some in the church say that we need to allow for the new diversity of views that are a part of the Buster generation. Acceptance of a level of relativism is seen by some as a simple way to appeal to those conflicts that may be seen as divisive for those whom we hope to bring into our churches. I believe that this perspective does a disservice, not only to our theology, but also to what we can give to the next generation. For a people looking for an opportunity to rebel, we often seem too anxious to raise the white flag and join the "opposition."

Generations to come are not the opposition, they are a group of sinners and saints who need to hear the radical message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They need to hear what everyone needs to hear: that there are sins which all of us are guilty of committing, that this sinful nature condemns us, that we are unable to overcome the burden of these sins on our own, and that Jesus Christ has fully paid for those sins through his innocent sufferings and death. The concept of definitive sins, one path to salvation, and the unselfish work

of one sinless being for the good of all humankind is radically opposed to "the norm" of what we find in the world. The ageless message of the Gospel provides a banner of truth that challenges a postmodern world. The Busters need to clearly see and hear this message preached. Those who seek an opportunity to rebel can find it in the message of salvation.

But there do need to be some changes. One doesn't join a revolution by sitting passively in a pew. These recruits (and all of us for that matter) must hear that they are a part of a royal priesthood in this battle with the ways of the world. Passivity needs to be challenged. Once the armor is put on, the enemy must be engaged. Opportunities to experience their part in this exciting revolt need to be provided.

The church should not dilute its radical message to attract this new generation, for that message provides an opportunity to participate in a reformation of the society in which they find themselves. And the Reformation message of the priesthood of all believers must be conveyed alongside the Gospel message so that these new generations can be welcomed into the battle as comrades and fellow revolutionaries.

Mark Blanke

director of DCE ministries
Concordia University, Nebraska

One Size Doesn't Fit All

MOTOROLA PRODUCES 14,400 different kinds of pagers. Apparently one size does not fit all. The local pizza emporium offers four different kinds of dough, four degrees of thickness, five sizes, four different sauces, eight varieties of cheese and well over 25 toppings. A happy pizza eater can choose hundreds of different pizzas—all made by the same process. Today's customers demand customized products and services.

So do today's believers and potential believers in Christ between the ages of 17 and 33, the Busters. Dubbed the most racially diverse generation in U.S. history, the most entrepreneurial, the first computer generation, and the first post-Christian generation, these 50-plus million people expect options at church, just as they do at the mall, in the classroom and on the job.

And herein lies a problem. Customizing pizza orders is one thing. Customizing ministry is quite another.

For one thing, it is a risky business. The warnings neither to add to nor subtract from Scripture are unmistakable. It is rightly expected that we will pass on the corpus of faith and doctrine that we have received—all of it. However, as soon as we attempt to translate it into a meaningful format that speaks to Busters, we stand the chance of over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing some aspect of the truth.

We also run the risk of encountering disapproval. Paul's efforts to share the Gospel with non-Jews generated discussion and some misunderstanding. We can expect the same. If enjoying the approval of others is important to us, then, possibly, customizing ministry options to reach Busters is not our calling.

Besides, customizing ministry is hard, time-consuming work. When the psalmist prays, "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare Your power to the next generation, Your might to all who are to come" (Psalm 71:18), he is reflecting how difficult it can be to speak the heart language of those who come after us. The fact that religious instruction in the past several decades has emphasized introspection and relational skills at the expense of content reveals just how hard it is to maintain a balance between how we feel and what we believe.

So why bother to think into ministry to the "Endangered Generation"? Why not content ourselves with business as usual, trusting that one size fits all?

Because we have a Savior who forgives us when we try but fail and who promises His Holy Spirit to empower us for hard work. And because, risky and challenging as customized ministry is, it is also part of our tradition. It is not a new trend. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul describes an approach to ministry that sets him apart as a leader: "I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearing in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life" (from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson).

Seven out of ten unbelievers who receive the gift of faith in Christ during their lifetime receive it as children, teenagers and young adults. That is reason enough to accept the fact that one size does not fit all, to roll up our sleeves and set about the joyous task of filling heaven with Busters.

David Koch

pastor, St. Luke Lutheran Church
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Communicating the "Arrogance" of the Gospel

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I saw a talk show in which the host (who was a self-professed Christian) was interviewing several Christians. The host pressed them with questions like: Do you really believe that only those persons who believe in Christ as their Savior are destined for heaven? Do you believe that those who do not believe in Christ are

bound for hell? The respondents, knowing that they were being set up to sound bigoted, sidestepped the questions more than once. Finally, when painted into the interview corner, they admitted that they believed that persons who did not believe in Jesus Christ were in grave danger of eternal separation from God. The host, with all the seriousness and drama he could muster, responded, "Don't you see how arrogant that sounds to other people?" I was very troubled by the host's inability even to consider that issues of truth and falseness might be relevant here, not just issues of social politeness. While his interviewees struggled not to sound arrogant or bigoted, he knew how to make them sound that way.

The same day I experienced some computer glitches. I struggled; I tried a variety of strategies to get the computer to do what I wanted it to do. It did not respond favorably to my struggles. I tried more. They did not work. I was frustrated. I remember thinking, "You arrogant piece of computer." Then I realized the computer was not being arrogant. This was not an interpersonal process I was involved in. I was simply not inputting the correct (true) sequence of 1s and 0s that the computer needed for my expectations to be carried out.

The "Endangered Generation" young adults have been exposed to a plethora of messages, explicit and implicit, that question the validity of religious truths, asserting that all such truths are only relative sociopolitical influences. This generation has been encouraged to devalue the linear, objective thinking used in formulating Christian doctrine. As Gene Veith pointed out in his book, *Postmodern Times*, it may not seem strange for a person influenced by the current postmodern zeitgeist to espouse concurrent beliefs in, for example, Reformation doctrine and reincarnation. It might seem very foreign to them to consider that religious beliefs are more like struggling with an objective computer than, say, choosing their favorite song.

Where does that leave the church in communicating Law and Gospel to a generation influenced to believe that all law is relative? We have a new task, different from that of our immediate predecessors in the faith. The good news is that God, through his Holy Spirit, is able to communicate that Gospel as he wills and has even provided us with enough variety in his word to communicate with anyone. We may not be able to start with Pauline epistles with unbelievers in this generation; epistles may be too linear and logical for many. But we do have Job, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, books that struggle with many issues similar to those of the postmodern worldview. We have the model of Jesus, who frequently chose to communicate the knowledge of God's kingdom via parables, using a process very much like the narrative approaches so in vogue today.

One last thought: it is a fallacy to speak (as I have above) of this generation being somehow of

a completely different mindset from persons born before 1961 or after 1981. Research results, especially those by George Barna, would suggest that the belief differences between this generation and others is only a matter of degree. Perhaps learning to communicate the life-giving Gospel to this generation will aid us in communicating it to anyone who has been influenced by postmodern thought.

Rick Marrs

former associate professor of psychology
Concordia University, River Forest, now
a student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Will We Reach Generation X?

WHO WILL REACH GEN X? I suspect some other church body or a select, few LCMS churches. In order to reach them, you've got to communicate with them like Jesus at the well or Philip with the Ethiopian. You've got to be on their turf, working with a strong sense of identity and in incarnational, missiological paradigm. I ask: does the LCMS fit that bill? I don't think so.

The big issue for Gen X is "my identity in a messed up world." The LCMS is too busy trying to settle our corporate history, heal old wounds, maintain our tradition and nail down our adiaphoras (rather than nailing up our theses).

We can't settle for ourselves what Gen X needs most to settle: questions of identity. I have heard so much about our blessed 150-year history. Right?! And America has 200 years of blessed history, too. But when Gen Xers look at it, they say, "How can I solve this mess? Is there anyone else who cares enough to do something? Where do I fit in? Who am I?" Which leads to...

Second, personalities/dynasties which mean nothing to me or Gen X. I couldn't care less who signed the *Statement of the Forty-Four*, but I do care who can feed the four thousand. I could not care less who "walked out," but I want to know the man who can walk on water. I couldn't care less about *Christian News* and politics, but I want to know the King of Kings and carry his Good News. What have all these issues and personalities to do with Christ's kingdom? Why in the world do we have convention resolutions that single out individuals? Isn't that a sign of fear and inability to trust one another?

Preus, Otten, Mueller, Bohlmann, Hoffmann, yadda, yadda, yadda, yawn. If a corporate body does not have a strong sense of mission, it will take on the personality of its leader. So we look like Preus one day, then Bohlmann another, then Barry another. Who are we? Whose are we? If we can't answer that, then we have little to offer Gen X. As it is, *Forward* says, "I'm of Apollos." *The Reporter* says, "I'm of Cephas." *Christian News*

says, "I'm of Christ." And Gen X asks, "My name is legion, and who will cast out these demons?" Certainly not most of the LCMS. We don't know who we are!

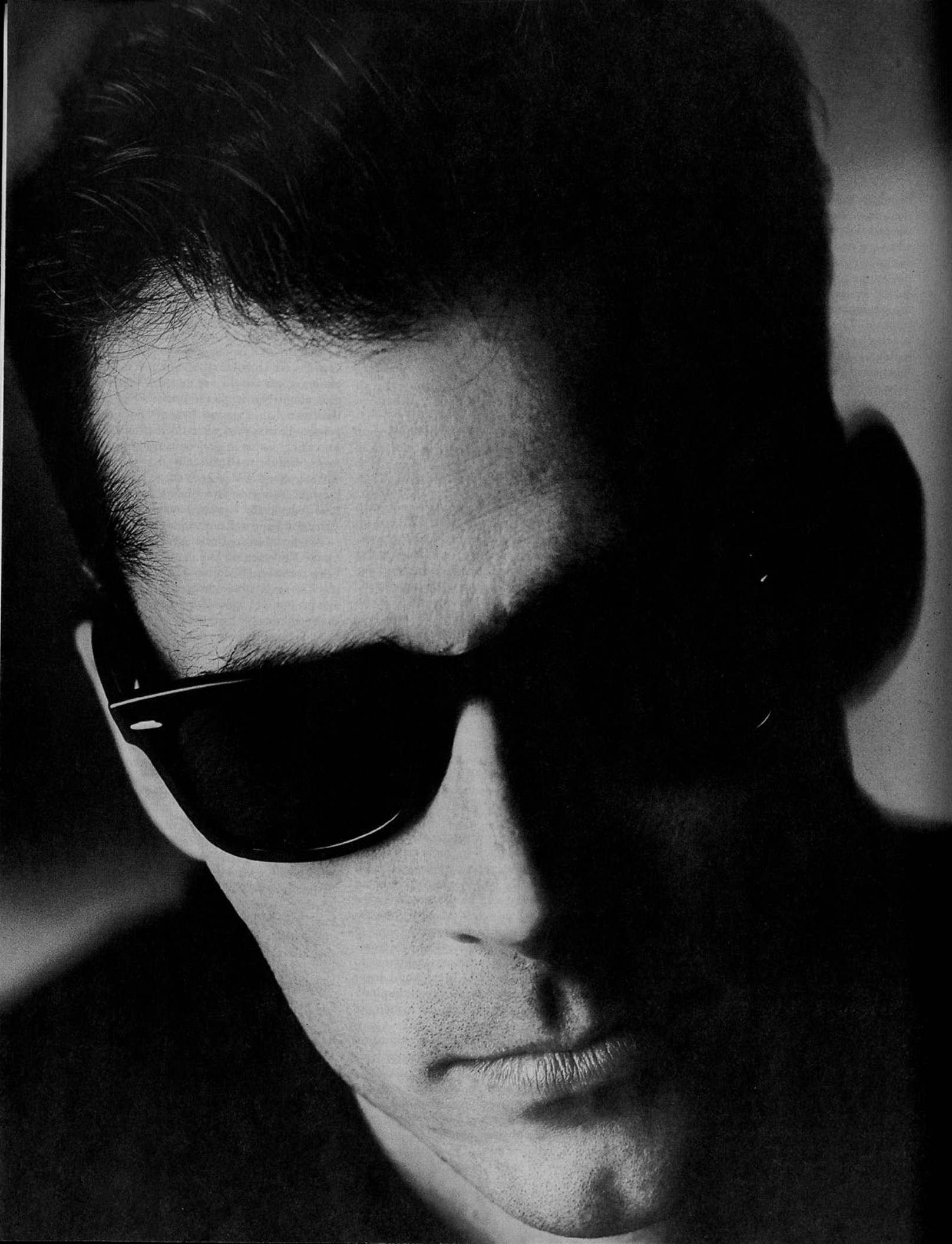
Third, the system is broken. Call it the "fraternal network" of LCMS's sociology. Call it the Concordia University "system" for training pastors. Call it whatever you will. I didn't graduate from a Concordia. I don't have friends in ministry whom I've known for years who can support me. Further, when I look around the California-Nevada-Hawaii District or the Southeastern District pastors' conference, I ask myself: "Where's my generation? Not in the ministry. Where are all these gray-haired pastors (whom I love dearly) going to be in 15 years when I'm halfway through my calling? Either in glory or in a glorious retirement. Will the LCMS still exist in 25 years? Who will be leading? Will we get back to the purpose of a Synod (education and mission), or will we be held together by worker benefits, the Church Extension Fund and our various foundations?"

Fourth, we are so concerned about being soiled by the Reformed, or looking like Rome, or not being considered "Confessional," that we do nothing. The LCMS is viewed as anesthetized, lethargic and paralyzed by most of the evangelical world. I do not ultimately care what evangelicals think, but I do care that we are not considered leaders in the Christian world. If we have a tremendous history, if we have the deposit of sound doctrine, if we are faithful to the Word, then why are we so scared of other Christians? A relationship with the living God is the most infectious thing in the world. We should long to lead and to maximize our contact with other Christians so as to lead in evangelization. Instead, we retreat into our LCMS ghetto. Ghettos are not known for attracting anyone or being the bastion of society's success and security.

I know I may strike you as cynical or pessimistic (I'm in only my fourth year of ministry), but I actually have high hopes. God is not at a loss. He knows exactly what He's doing. But do we? I haven't even touched on worship styles for Gen X, epistemological processes, etc. So, since I have made a short answer long, the LCMS seems poised and ready to lose a whole generation. But I pray that God can use us or another group to reach them. I trust him to work in me and others to bring them into the kingdom of our Lord.

Christopher Otten

pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church
Wahiawa, Hawaii



Terry K. Dittmer

A Generation Xed Out?

WHO NEEDS THEM? Young adults born between 1962 (or thereabouts) and 1983 (or thereabouts) are disdained, despised and just plain “dis”ed by those who have gone before them. They are a generation nobody seems to have wanted and nobody seems to care about now that they are here. They have been routinely criticized as lazy, slackers, nihilistic, disinterested. There are not a lot of people who have had a lot of kind words to say about them. They have been branded “Generation X,” and most do not mean it in a kind way.

Neil Howe and William Strauss have done enormous work in the area of generational history and have helped to establish who Generation X is and what they are about. For a long time, the birth years of the Baby Boomers were dated 1946–1964. Howe and Strauss in their book, *13th Generation: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?*, suggest a different dating and say that the last Boomer was born in 1960, with the first of the Thirteenth or Generation X being born in 1961. Their framework for Xers extends to 1982.

Growing Up

DURING THAT 21-YEAR TIME period, our society pretty much demonstrated that it did not care for this group of people. Indeed, there seems to have been a societal ambivalence with regard to children during these years. In 1961 the pill became legal, and people could choose not to have children. Many made this choice. 1975 marked the lowest U.S. birthrate in our history. Many of the largely self-indulgent Boomers and the last wave of Silents really did not want to have anything to do with children. In 1983 Congress passed a bill that made children in poverty eligible for Medicaid, at least those born after September 30, 1983. There was no “grandfathering” of any of the children born before that date. It was a new generation, now called the “Millennials,” that was eligible for governmental support. And, do not forget 1973, right in the

The Rev. Terry Dittmer is associate director of the Department of Youth Ministry, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

middle of this generation’s birth years. It was the year abortion became legal following the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe vs. Wade*. Now people who were “stuck” with a pregnancy could terminate that pregnancy.

At the beginning, middle and end of this generation, a lot of kids were being raised in a society that just did not care about them. Children who were born during this era were raised in a curious way. Their Boomer parents, who were more preoccupied with making money and having the things of which they thought themselves deserving, often ended up ignoring their children. The quality of the parenting of many children during the last 30 years has been abysmal. The Xers were the first generation of latch-key kids, left home alone to fend for themselves. They were raised by television sets and computers, nurtured on video games and nourished on high fat snack foods. They rarely exercised beyond the remote control buttons. Their heroes were rock stars, athletes and actors, people who populated the medium that raised them. Their music has a raw edge, a darkness, a restlessness. There is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction.

They are a generation impacted hugely by divorce. Forty percent of Generation X have seen their parents’ marriages break up. Consequently, they have been skeptical about the institution of marriage and commitment. Loyalty is an issue for them. To their credit, once they do marry, they seem to be strongly committed to making the marriage work. As one young adult said, “I am determined not to do to my kids what my parents did to me.”

When people talk about Generation X, many negatives are cited. Descriptors of a generation, of course, are generalizations which call for the recognition of many exceptions. For example, young adults in the church and on our church’s college/university campuses often do not “fit” descriptions of a generation based on surveys. We also need to remember the strengths of this generation.

Generation X is said to be the first generation whose economic prospects stand to be lower than that of previous generations. Boomers stuck in middle management positions due to corporate downsizing have in turn created stagnation in the prospects of Generation X moving up

economic ladders. Xers are the generation that will have to deal with a 14 trillion dollar U.S. debt. They are the ones on whose backs the social security of the huge population of Boomers rests. Consequently, they exhibit a great deal of skepticism about their own futures. They are not likely to hold out much hope for their own "social security."

Their education, too, has suffered. Public education hit the skids during their school years. Standards were lowered in order to raise the curve. School districts cut back on curriculum, extra-curriculars and other services. Xers did manage to rack up huge numbers of college loans, complicated by the fact that many college programs have expanded to five or six years rather than the traditional four. They are now faced with paying off those debts over a period of many years.

Values

MANY MEMBERS of this generation reflect amoral perspectives and non-traditional values. Some suggest that we live in a postmodern and post-Christian world, which simply means that the values and truth we previously held are no longer the standards that anybody holds anybody else to. Everything is relative. Each needs to find one's own truth. What is true for me may or may not be true for you.

As Christians, we find ourselves as recipients of God's divine truth proclaimed to us in His Word having to share the values stage with Buddhists, Hindus, all sorts of New Age aberrations and a great variety of religions, sects and cults. Xers do not know another kind of system. They have been raised in a world that tolerates everything, no matter how bizarre.

As a general rule, Xers will reject any individual, organization or philosophy that claims to be the sole proprietor of absolute truth and goodness. That kind of attitude does not bode well for the Christian church. What does Jesus' prayer mean to this generation: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17)? And what can the words *infallible* and *inerrant* mean to a typical Xer?

Members of Generation X view alternative lifestyles, heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, as suggesting that there is no one right or wrong way. It is simply assumed that every young adult is sexually active in some way, and the expression of that sexuality is not to be questioned.

Four-letter words never uttered in my house when I was growing up are a part of the Xers vocabulary. In fact, it would be an interesting debate sometime to discuss when a swear or curse word and crude and vulgar language are no longer such because they have been totally accepted by and integrated into society. A young adult watching *Def*

Comedy Jam on HBO will not usually see anything unusual or inappropriate in the language and content of the so-called comedians on that show. It is part of their vocabulary. It may be crude. But it is not shocking to them.

Their world is also a violent place, at least in their perception. The proliferation of violence on television, the graphic stories of violence on the evening news, the violent video games they play all lead to a belief that their world is very unsafe. While that is not necessarily true, it is the perception of violence that seems to be ruling hearts and minds.

The Xers are the first truly wired generation. Computer and other technology hold no fears for them. They have their own web pages on the Internet. They are disdainful of anybody not on-line.

Their world is a very diverse place. Racially/ethnically segregated neighborhoods have not been as pronounced in their world as in previous generations. The mixing of races is a part of their world. They have a variety of friends from all kinds of backgrounds. Interracial dating is accepted. They notice the parts of their world that do not represent their real diverse world. That lack of diversity is often reflected in the membership of any church with which they may have some kind of ties. When parts of their world are not "real," they will really think about whether that is something of which they want to be a part.

So what message has the church been sending to these 17-35-year-old adults? We cannot begin to think that we have done any better than any other part of society.

Look at a typical Sunday morning in a typical Lutheran church. Who sits in the pews? The older G.I. generation is there—active, supportive, concerned about their church, and generous. (It has been estimated that by 2020, 16 trillion dollars will change hands through inheritance. This is the money that has, to a large extent, been supporting local congregations and other charitable entities. Interesting questions may be raised about how much of that money will be available for charitable work in the future.) In the pews are also the Silents, reflecting many of the traditions and attitudes of the G.I. generation. The Boomers are there, too, maybe not in number quite as strong as the two previous generations, but trying to process and control things. Children and teens are not seen in huge numbers because so much of the membership of the average congregation is beyond child-bearing years. Almost no Generation Xers are present. The church has shown as little interest in them as has the rest of society.

Broad, generalist stereotypes are always dangerous. For all the stereotypes, there are exceptions. There are churches with burgeoning Generation X populations, to be sure, but they are the exceptions.

Connections

SO, WHERE DOES THE CHURCH go from here? This generation possesses some positive attributes that the church can tap into and support. It is not going to be easy, but it is also not impossible. Remember, nothing with God is impossible, and God certainly has not written off this generation.

First, this generation hungers spiritually, although that is not well-defined. Spirituality can be anything semi-cosmic. More than 95 percent of this generation say they believe in God. But who is God? In their view, one can be spiritual without being religious or subscribing to any creed. Burn a few candles, sit under a tree and hum, and somebody will call you spiritually enlightened.

Still, for all the cynicism in that statement, there is a spiritual hunger. The church needs to be very sure that it is telling its story, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be sure that people know what we believe and why. People today, including lots of church members, do not know the basics about what is in God's Word. They do not know David from Daniel from Deborah. They do not know a judge from a king from a prophet. What in the world is an apostle, and how does an apostle differ from an epistle? Who really is Jesus? What did he really do? And why did he do it?

Perhaps one of the greatest things pastors and teachers can do in this postmodern world is begin to retell basic Bible stories and what they mean for contemporary life. German Lutherans have always reveled in the sometimes subtle nuances of our theological system. We have been blessed in our theology. But too many people today cannot begin to appreciate what fills our theological libraries when they do not have a clue what sin is, what grace is and what love and mercy are all about.

We also need to make known our value system and why we hold to it. We have spent many years being pretty situational, too often allowing the situation to interpret a response. We need to be more directional in what we say we believe. We need to proclaim what is right and wrong. We need to live the values we proclaim.

Teens over the last 30 years have always wanted to know where the church stands, but too many well-meaning youth workers failed to pick up the cues, preferring to be liked over being clear. There is no guarantee that a teen/young adult will buy into what you believe, but he/she will appreciate that you have been up front with him/her.

Generation X has a reputation for being action-oriented, and this descriptor may name a reason why Boomers do not like Xers all that much. Boomers love to process. They will spend hours in a meeting room filling enormous amounts of newsprint with all kinds of words, developing

mission statements, goals, objectives, critical targets and strategies. These will be word processed, printed, bound and filed, and then the Boomer will say, "We have done good work." The Generation Xer will say to the Boomer, "You haven't done a thing."

Do not ask an Xer to sit around in a room processing. They take their cue from Nike, "Just Do It!" If the church needs painting, buy some paint and brushes and go to work. If there is a need, let's fill it, but let's not waste time talking about it. This kind of attitude can be really hard to get past a Boomer audience who may be reluctant to work. Think what things could be accomplished if the church connected with it. Xers love to help. Altruism is one of their biggest assets. Witness the proliferation and popularity of Servant Events in the LCMS over the last 15 years. The participants were, for the most part, Xers sharing from an abundance of personal generosity.

The church can also do a lot to help a generation just entering parenthood. Remember, they were parented badly. Their own children will suffer from that bad parenting because Xers have few good role models. A Lutheran kindergarten teacher identified parenting skills as a real need for the families in her classroom. She set up a parenting class, and 23 out of 24 parental units attended. She shared basic information about bed times, television, diet and nutrition, exercise and more. Afterward, a mother came up to her and thanked her for the tips. "I didn't know I could tell my child when to go to bed," she said.

Give them some help. Parenting classes in congregations and Lutheran schools can be a terrific way to connect this generation to the church. Do not just limit them to members or school families. Invite the community. There is not enough help around.

Speaking of *parental units*, we need to be very careful about displaying any kind of a judgmental attitude with regard to family situations. From the outset we want to affirm the sanctity of marriage and God's design of one man and one woman establishing a household and raising children. At the same time, no community, church or school is immune to today's realities. Children today may live with unmarried parents, dysfunctional parents, grandparents, reconfigured families (step-families). They may live with a gay parent. They may live with a gang. Church folks should never make the assumption that their families are all "normal" in any kind of traditional way.

What about worship? There are lots of views on worship, from the traditional, liturgical school to the "throw-out-the-hymnal-and-let's-do-some headbanger" music school. I am pretty much convinced that neither extreme is really close to being or having the last word.

First, the contemporary music issue is largely a Boomer issue. Boomers want guitars and drums. It is the music of their youth. They are the ones who are really pressing for it. Guitars and drums should not be rejected. But I am not convinced style of music or liturgy is an issue for Xers. The style of worship at Mt. Calvary, Brentwood, Mo., (see the next article) is pretty traditional, and the church has a strong and growing young adult population. Some anecdotal evidence supports that more traditional liturgy may be a good thing for the Xer. Their world is so turbulent, dysfunctional and dissonant that the traditions of the church exemplified in liturgical worship provide stability and a foundation amid chaos. Perhaps this quote from "Generation X," an article by Chris Seay in *Prism* magazine (Sept/Oct '97) says it clearest: "They want an authentic, unstaged experience of simply worshipping God."

Relationships

FINALLY, THE CHURCH NEEDS to keep in mind one word: *relationship*. People join because they have a relationship with someone or something. For the church, the primary relationship is with Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, Brother and Friend. Jesus gives our lives reason for existence and hope for this life and for the future.

But the church also should not forget the relationships people have with each other. Loyalty and friendship are two key watchwords of Generation X. The number one rated television show among Xers is *Friends*, which is about a group of people who are loyal to one another almost to a fault. Their relationship is binding, and they will do almost anything for each other. They tolerate foibles and faults. They will accept almost any behavior, unfortunately. The most important thing for them is that they are friends.

If the church gave more thought to this concept of relationship, we may experience tremendous growth among young adults. After all, where can young adults meet other young adults, especially if they are Christian and affirm Biblical values? It does not take much to figure out that if my friend goes to church I will be more inclined to go with him. If she is in Bible class, I will be more inclined to attend. If my friends are in a small group, I may value that group as my own. This is a basic, fundamental characteristic of human beings. We usually like being with other people, especially people like us.

What kinds of relationships can young adults find in your church or school community? Is there a place for young parents to be with each other, to share their concerns and to receive guidance? Is there a place for the single young adult to be with others like herself? Are they welcomed to worship? What mentor relationships are offered by older members? Who cares about young adults in your congregation?

For me, that last question is the key to ministry involving Generation X. Who cares about them today when so few have really cared about them in their 17-35-year lifespan? I do not believe they are lost to the church. But I do believe that the church needs to take a real interest in them. Do not think of them as giving units or as statistics to boost church rosters or attendance figures. They are people in need of a Savior, people who need to savor the Gospel and what it means for them.

I have developed a real affection for Xers. That is partly because I have three Generation X daughters. It is also because I love their energy, their willingness to question the status quo, their edginess. I think they have a lot to offer. Xers are the generation that will confront big issues of our society. They are the ones who will deal head on with social security. They will challenge Boomers and probably face us down, and whether Boomers will admit it or not, things will be better for it.

Usually, I do not write about this generation using the Xer moniker because it is usually used in a negative way. I prefer "Thirteeners" because they are the thirteenth generation since the Revolutionary War, and the label is more positive. But "X" can be a positive if we do our job right.

Chris Seay states in his article, "Xers may have shunned the church, but they haven't rejected the Christ. For the most part, they continue to be fascinated by and long for the person of Christ."

The first Greek letter in Christ is "*chi*," X. It is not outside the realm of my imagination that Generation X could come to stand for "Generation Christ."



A Conversation with "Generation Next"

Darrell Zimmerman

THE "BABY-BUSTERS" have arrived at Mount Calvary, and we love it! In the past few years, our 68-year-old congregation, located not far from the city limits of St. Louis, Missouri, has seen a steady stream of 20- and 30-some-things coming through our doors. Most of them are church shoppers, some are Lutheran while many are not, but they all have some strong feelings about life in the church. I recently invited a dozen or so of these energetic young people to our house for an informal discussion about their generation, their search for a church, and the journey of faith. Here's a small sample of the things they had to say.

The Rev. Darrell Zimmerman is pastor of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Brentwood, Missouri.

Unlike many of their Baby Boomer counterparts who like to visit churches anonymously, this generation likes to be noticed and invited to participate fully.

Darrell: What was it that prompted you to return to worship at Mount Calvary after your initial visit here?

Annie: The welcome that I got was not like anything I had experienced in other churches. People said, "Oh, what's your name?" and "Where are you from?" and things like that. Another time I went to the 8 a.m. service, and it was the same situation; people talked to me and wanted to get to know me.

Diane: After my first visit, right after the service, Dan and Jennifer were at my door with a jar of honey (*laughter*) and made me feel like the church really cared that I had been there.

Amy: I didn't get a jar of honey.

Chuck: That's a new thing they do now!

Amy: Maybe I should quit and join again! (*laughter*)

Julie: One of the big things for us was that after the service, you (*Darrell*) were shaking hands and you asked our names, and the next time we came back, you remembered our names.

Chuck: And even the older people at the church, like Ray, everybody, not just the young people, were very welcoming.

Kristen: There's a difference between a friendly, "Hi!" and a friendly, "Hi, why don't you come along and do this with us?" I went to other churches, but I was never invited to join in with other people.

Jennifer: It really meant a lot to me when I came in and you said, "Hi, my name's Darrell," and on the way out you said, "Jennifer, I'm glad you were here today!"

Lisa: I look for a place where you are valued as an individual, a place where people will ask, "How are you?" and really be interested in your response.

Kim: I visited a lot of churches, and this was the first one where people stopped me and introduced themselves to me.

Kim: They showed a real genuine interest in me. The person that I was visiting with and was helping me look said afterward as we were sitting in the car talking about it, "I just really felt something in that church." It was a feeling about being in that church that I loved so much better than in any other church. To me the distance that I had to travel didn't matter any more.

Amy: For me it was an Advent service with the supper before the service, and I didn't have a job, so free food



sounded pretty good. (*laughter*) I know you don't believe this, but I'm a very shy person. (*laughter*) I was about to sit down with someone, and I sat down by Fred and Candy, and they were so nice! By the next Advent service, I saw her serving, and I went and told her, "You won't believe this, but I'm back because you were so friendly." Then some callers came by and asked about me and wanted to know my church background and everything.

Aaron: Did you get some honey?

Amy: No, they hadn't started the honey thing yet!

Julie: The moment you walk in the door, somebody is genuinely interested in you, and when you look at how Jesus led his life, his concern was for the individual. He didn't come across as someone who was going to judge you or condemn you; he was there to help you and to heal you, and I think that can be our focus: learning to love one another.

Kim: I think the attitude becomes contagious. When I see other people comfortable with that, it makes me more comfortable doing the same.

This generation shows a strong desire for integrity and genuineness from the church. They want the church to help them express their faith in meaningful ways.

Chuck: We were going to the church that Julie grew up in,

and it was an older congregation. I don't want it to sound like it was unfriendly or anything, but. . .

Aaron: But it looked like a wake, right?

Check: Well, yeah, yeah. We lived right by Mount Calvary and decided to just walk in one Sunday, and coming in the first time we were like "accosted" by many of the people there and were invited to come along on a few things with people, and it was really good.

Darrell: Isn't there some other reason that you returned for a second visit besides just the friendly welcome? There must be more than that!

Robyn: Well, that's the primary reason for me, too, but there's also the fact that the service was different. In some of our churches you can get into a rut, but as I kept coming back, it wasn't the same every Sunday.

Kevin: I can definitely relate to that, because I grew up Catholic, and it was always the same, with the exception of the sermon, although that was usually the same (*laughter*), but I like someone keeping my attention.

Julie: Definitely the sermon. I've been in places where you could definitely predict it.

Robyn: I like the sermon study sheets and the stories.

Aaron: Mine is kind of the opposite of Robyn. One of the reasons I came back was because I grew up Lutheran, and it was kind of similar to what I knew. I understand your point of what some of those Lutheran churches are like; they're very umm. . .

Robyn: Dry.

Aaron: Right. I like the songs. It's easy to get involved in the singing.

Amy: I look for a church that's alive, where something is happening. It can be people our age who are not alive in their faith. I did go to some churches where I could say, "Yeah, I heard the Gospel, and it was Lutheran, and blah, blah, blah," but it felt like the congregation was dying, and, well, I'm not going to help it come alive by not going there, but going there is not going to help my faith either.

Robyn: I would have to agree with that. I had a conversation with my sister-in-law the other night, and she said, "I've noticed that you've grown so much in the last three months in your faith in the Lord, and I know it's because you have been going to your new church." I don't know if it's because of the sermons or the people or what, but it goes back to the "spirit thing." I know that when I leave on Sunday I'm going to come back because I'm being fed spiritually, and that's why I'm growing.

Clarissa: The church I grew up in was a really small church,

and they still use *The Lutheran Hymnal* nearly every Sunday. The older people in church aren't willing to change, and the younger people in church are leaving because it doesn't really have any meaning for them anymore. I was back there for church last Sunday, and I was thinking, "What was the point of my going? I didn't get anything out of the service." I could do the liturgy by heart and think of something else at the same time because it has no meaning. You have to have meaning with the service, and if you do the same liturgy Sunday after Sunday for years, people aren't going to come back if they aren't finding meaning from it.

Kim: (*to Darrell*) You portrayed a real genuineness and enthusiasm for what you do and what the church is all about, and I think that very much comes through. Unfortunately, that doesn't always come across from pastors.

Annie: I think that some churches treat their people like customers almost, and it's good to bring in a crowd, but pastors need to treat their church with integrity, and they must be genuine.

Aaron: You don't want to not change, but you don't want to change for the wrong reasons.

Kristen: In the Lenten services when we gathered in groups to pray together, there was a real sense of people caring for each other. It seemed natural, and there wasn't a pressure to have to pray, but it was very comfortable.

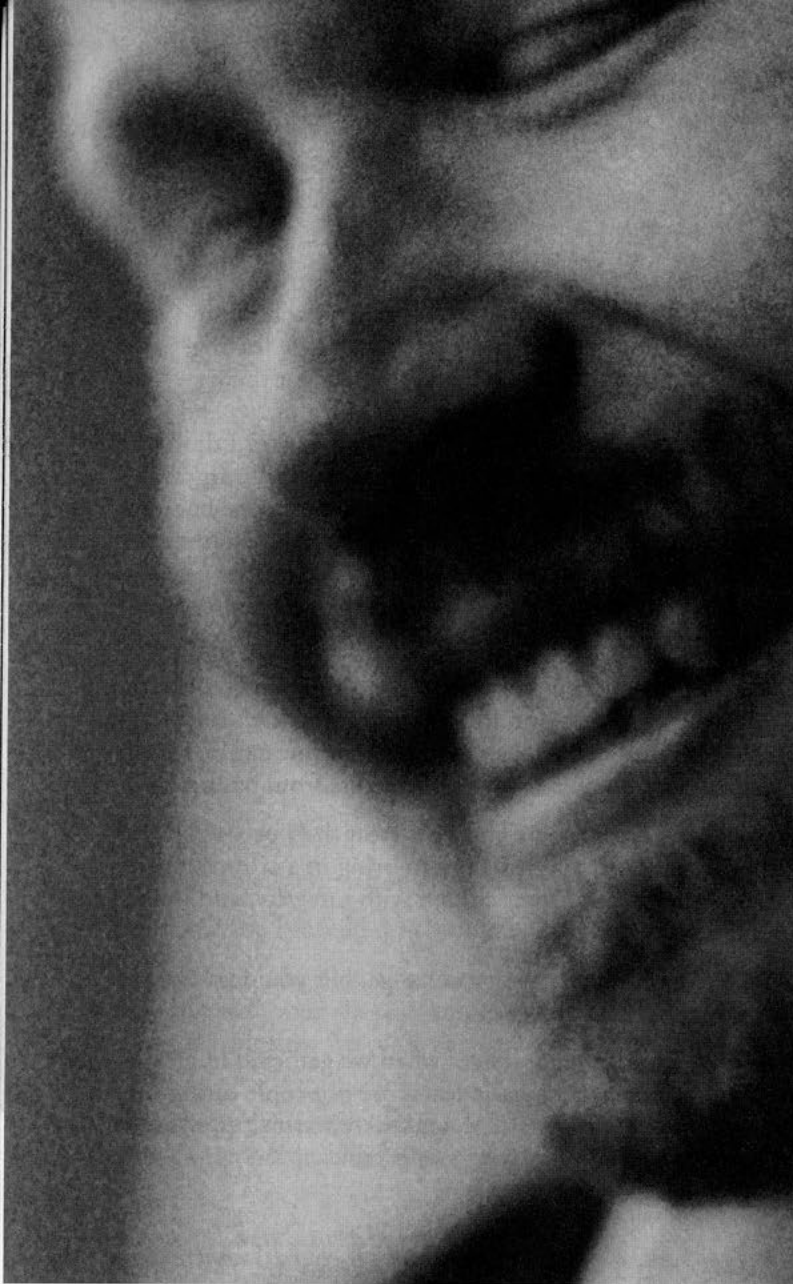
The group was quite concerned about the church's adherence to Biblical doctrine.

Darrell: How important is it for you to be a part of a church that has Biblical, doctrinal integrity?

Kelly: My second time back was because I, too, grew up Catholic, and it was my first time in a Lutheran church, and I really enjoyed it. I liked the fact that you could follow along easily and the sermon was very neat and it peaked my curiosity about what the Lutheran church was all about.

Robyn: I could tell right away, too, that your focus was on the Gospel. I think that in some churches it gets watered down, but at Mount Calvary you constantly hear that Christ died on the cross for us and that it's nothing that we did, but what God did.

Jim: As someone who shopped not only for specific churches, but also denominationally, one thing I look for is denominational integrity. The reason I stayed at Mount Calvary was because the trappings were right, the critical mass of young people, but also because of doctrinal things. After I decided I was going to leave my parents' church I attended for about three months a church that had a music



Jennifer: I became a Christian at 17, and I've checked out other churches. I'd never consider another church than The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod because I'm a Christian by God's grace and a Lutheran by God's grace and also by choice.

Kristen: My father always said, "Go to a church that preaches what the Bible teaches." I go along with that.

If there is one overriding expectation from the church among this age group, it is the desire for meaningful relationships and a community that fosters intimacy among people their own age. We discussed many topics, but this theme kept surfacing. Observe how the conversation keeps going back to relationships in these brief examples.

Darrell: How important is your Christian faith in your daily life?

Amy: My first thought is, I want it to be the most important thing in my life, and most of the time it is. But there are times when I'm saying, "How am I going to pay this bill?" and then I think, "Well, God's gotten me out of this before. He'll think of something!" But that's like what you were saying, that's why we have this faith community, the Care Groups and the church and the intimacy. I can come to the Care Group and say, "These people, they draw me back." That's why God put us in these groups and said it's not good for us to be alone, because when I'm alone, I start listening to my thoughts. I'm thinking, "How am I going to fix this, how am I going to get out of this?" But when I'm with other people, the community, the body of Christ, they remind me that it's not me, and that has helped my faith to grow and become more important in my life. There are still days, yeah, way more than I would like, but I can see my faith grow because of that.

Kim: People are tired of looking inside of themselves. They want to be connected to something.

Darrell: Connected to what?

Kim: Connected to people.

Diane: I think that among people our age, what I see is that there aren't as many human connections.

Kim: I think we're talking about people who are out of college now. When you're in college, you're kind of trapped on campus with a couple of thousand people. Then when you leave college, those opportunities sort of dwindle, because you're not going to the same places, you're not going to the bars or college sports events as much. Your chances to meet people your age who share some of the same religious and spiritual beliefs that you do are fairly limited.

program that was the best. There were things I liked about it, but this particular denomination has been tossed about by the wind. I may have a lot in common with them, but if the seminary is going another direction, I'd have to come to grips with that.

Kim: I think it's important that it is put in terms I can understand. In certain churches I attended there was a foundation for the teaching, but there were never very many attempts to teach you about it in ways that you could understand.

Julie: It's like they say, "This is the way we do it here, so get used to it."

Kim: Right.

Kelly: Some things are lost when churches try to change things to meet the needs of people. There is doctrine and there is the reason why we do things we do at church, and it may not be the trend at the current time, but it's the constant that has to be there.

Annie: I think it has to do with the way that careers are changing these days, too. I mean, it's very typical for people to pick up and move every few years or so, and it's just harder to meet people, the kind of people you really want to be with.

Darrell: Have you ever dropped out of the church? Why did you return?

Chuck: Yeah, I sort of dropped out for awhile, but what got me back in was Julie. When she invited me, I was never against it, but I never had really gotten much out of it. It's funny that if you hang around bad people, nothing good is going to come of it, right? But if you hang around with good people, you're going to emulate them or be like them and pick up the good points. So as she (wife Julie) grows, I'm growing along with her, kind of like being dragged along by the bumper of a car. As she grows, I kind of grow at the same time, not really vicariously, but because I have to, I mean, I kind of learn by a contact high. I learn stuff from her.

Julie: I'm learning stuff right now. *(laughter)*

Chuck: But because of our own experiences, we can come back together and talk about it and have deep theological discussions.

Darrell: When you were looking for a church, did you have a list of priorities, things you were specifically interested in?

Jennifer and Kristen: *(in unison)* People our age! *(laughter)*

Jim: A critical mass of young people. *(laughter)*

Darrell: What major issues are you facing in which you believe a faith community could be of help?

Jennifer: The church could help us learn to deal with relationships, dating . . .

Lisa: A real issue for me is dating a person who is a Christian.

Jennifer: We want to learn how to foster a relationship with someone so that we won't end up like our parents.

Chuck: One of the biggest things is day-to-day interaction with other people in its simplest basic form.

Julie: When you focus on interaction with people, the general concern is for that person, and that's different than trying to make someone else believe what you do. I don't think that's possible to do. You know, people will come to their beliefs because of their own adaptations of what they've learned, but that's still their decision. I think that just your caring for someone is going to go a lot further than pointing out your doctrines and what you believe about this or that topic.

Aaron: Modeling can also be seen in how you deal with conflict in your life and how you work on the attitude you have. The Care Groups have been a huge benefit for me in that. You get to know these people better and better, week after week and month after month. You take so many things for granted when you know someone, versus *getting to know* them that you don't have to think about it. I see Amy do certain things, and I know why she is doing them. *(to Amy)* I don't know you as well as I know other people, but that history we have helps me to know how and why you deal with things the way you do. And when I see you deal with problems, I say, "Wow! There's a different way to deal with that problem." Instead of just having that idea, you have someone to go back to and talk to a little bit more and actually have them help you do it, instead of having the thought and then feeling alone to deal with it.

Kim: It's kind of like we're not just a Sunday congregation, but dealing with things all week through.

Krista: I think there is a deeper intimacy in the Care Groups, too, deeper than you get on a Sunday morning. You can share things that you can't share on a Sunday morning. I'm thinking especially about the prayer time. There's a deeper intimacy in those relationships.

Darrell: If you could change one thing about Mount Calvary, what would it be?

Heidi: Name tags. We haven't been members for all that long, but it's hard to learn names.

Kevin: I learn some people's names from the attendance cards as they pass them down the row. I peek before I give it to the usher! *(laughter)*

Chuck: Expanded foyer, because so many people do meet together before and between services where we all agree that that was one of our best experiences, meeting people and stuff like that. You do feel that it is kind of crowded there. That could be expanded. Then you could feel like you could talk longer without feeling crowded out or getting pushed out the door. I think that would benefit us, everybody, especially if you had to ask someone a question, like, "Aaron, come here a second; I want to ask you something; come on over in the corner."

Kelly: But there is something kind of nice about that area where everybody congregates, because there's not a big huge open space where people can get lost. It's cozy. I can see both sides—there's a downside and also a plus. People may not go up to others as easily or as often and introduce themselves.

Darrell: Have you noticed that our discussion always seems to move back to relationships?

Amy: It tells me that God had a good idea: community.

Julie: I think that's where God shows himself, especially when we start to have real intimate relationships, and in that atmosphere, you start to see God in the other people.

The group discussed the perceived spiritual journey they see in others of their generation and related it to their own experiences of faith development. They spoke of integrating into adult life the faith taught in childhood.

Kathy: So many things are thrown at people that it makes you question the truth that is in the Bible, causing people to search for something that means something to them on a personal basis.

Darrell: So how would you describe the importance of your faith in your life?

Julie: I'm not sure I can find anything more important. It pretty much drives everything else.

Kelly: I definitely think about my faith all the time. Sometimes it's a daily thing, sometimes an hourly thing, sometimes every 15 minutes. It just depends on what I'm involved in and how I am with whatever it is I'm dealing with.

Jim: If I postulate it in the negative, I think, "What would be the absence of faith?" and I'd say it ultimately would end in meaninglessness. I'm trying to work on the positive expression of it, but it's not there yet.

Kelly: I can't tell you how many people my age are seeking something. I wish I could tell them, "I wish you knew what I know!"

Kim: If you tell someone that you go to church, they have an immediate stereotype, "You go to church?"

Kelly: We need to break the stereotype so that they can say, "Wow, that's kind of cool!" It's giving them a chance to give it a second chance, and I think it goes back to the fact that growing up they may have had a negative church experience.

Aaron: Or they've seen some television preacher, and we're all lumped in with them.

Chuck: You never hear about the Billy Grahams or people who've been around awhile, and so they focus just on the negative examples of air-conditioned dog houses and stuff. Maybe when you were a kid you were just dragged to church. The first time you don't have to go, you won't. But you're looking for something. What you said about focusing our attention on the very young and on parents of these little ones makes a lot of sense.

Robyn: I think everything goes back to the home, and sometimes it's hard to target the home because the parents

aren't believers either, but that's where a lot of your beliefs are formed when you're very young. I just see our generation as lost because they're not ready to take responsibility. I don't know what that's going to be like down the road, but we have to just keep the faith that we can get through to our peers so that their kids and our kids will know Christ.

Kelly: I'd say that I agree with that to a point because just within my own family my sister and I went to the same church each week as a family, and we were taught to have Christ as a part of our life growing up, too. She fully understood what it meant to be a Christian, whereas I didn't catch that. It wasn't my time yet. I literally had to stop and do whatever it was to make me wake up. You're right. Without the firm foundation my parents supplied for me. . .

Julie: I can relate to that, because I grew up in the church, but when you really realize what Christ means to you, zoom—it just takes off!

Kim: I realized that this whole process of coming to Mount Calvary has been a growth experience. It's the first time I've chosen a church of my own, one that was not my parents' church. It's a real independence, and I've had to get a handle on what I believe. Secondly, God has thumped me on the head and said, "You need to put me first in your life, not last."

Julie: We were talking before about a church that's alive compared to a church that's not, because until you feel personally that one-on-one appearance just doesn't happen.

Diane: I think that part of the spiritual search of people our age is that we are at the age or have recently been at the age where we separate from our parents or our parents' beliefs. There came a point where you decided to stop going to their church or to choose another denomination. We're asking the question, "What about what I believe?"

Kim: There was a time for me when it was not as big a priority. During college we never went to church that much. The reason for coming back is because I knew there was something missing.

Kevin: I went on a wild search for awhile. Church seemed meaningless.

Kelly: There was a time when I dropped out. Like someone else said, it was something that I was raised with, and then there was a time when I figured out that I could tell my parents that I went to church when I really didn't. That was my decision, and that's what I did until I hit bottom. In a way I had all I wanted, but I was still searching for something. That's when I turned back to my foundation and everything that I learned growing up. I can remember driving down the street and singing a song I had learned

growing up and saying to myself, "Now, what does that mean?" I went back to church on my terms as opposed to my parents', because I knew why I was going.

Diane: I stopped going for awhile. I was finding my niche on the career path, but I realized I wasn't going anywhere, and when I started going to church, I realized that this was the right path.

We also uncovered an activism and a desire to live out the faith in ways that make a difference in the world around us.

Darrell: How do you think the church must change to meet the needs of your generation?

Kristen: We want some action! Let's do it! Let's organize a food bank or do something for a sister congregation that needs assistance. Do something!

Jennifer: Yeah, anything! Help with Special Olympics or something.

Julie: A great experience for me was Stephen Ministry and a growing awareness of how people are hurting, just because life hurts. So many people that you meet every day are hurting.

Amy: I was thinking just the other day about my Care Group and the relationships I've developed and how they

have made a big difference for me. Also, Stephen Ministry, giving Christ's care and receiving Christ's care, has made a big difference.

Kim: I think you could almost ask the question in reverse, "What things does our generation need to do to change the church?" You need to ask both things. Even doing this means a lot to our generation, just asking the questions about what we want. But we also have to ask, what can we do? I would like to see people of our generation do more things for the community.

Darrell: That's my next question. What can we do to utilize the gifts and energies of your generation?

Kim: That's a wonderful word, "energies." That's one thing that everyone feels we have, like when we set up the church for a program and everyone says, "Look at the energy they have!"

Amy: One thing the church has to do is find out what it is that we are energized about. Too often people who don't know us will say, "They wouldn't be interested in this or good at doing that," but they should find out by just asking us. Sometimes we don't know, like when you were talking about spiritual gifts. Sometimes we are not aware that we're good at something. Sometimes we are good at something but might be surprised to hear you say that what we like to do might be useful for something.

Darrell: So what should we be doing?

Kim: I think that we have a need to be in service to the elderly people, because there are many of them in our church, and I don't know what they might need, doing some things at their homes or with their yards.

Robyn: Or give a listening ear to the elderly if they are alone.

Julie: I think we begin by finding what the needs are. Imagine being among the hundreds of people we all meet each week and thinking, "What is the need here?" Then we become a place to address the need and ask who can meet the need. That's how the church starts to reach out into the community.

Diane: It's not just the elderly, but remember we were talking about the young people and the teenagers. We can find ways to share our insights and experiences with them, so that maybe they won't make the same mistakes. And they have a lot to give, too!

At Mount Calvary, we're learning to listen to the people whom God is bringing us from this generation. I hope you are, too!



E. Christopher Kratzer

Making the Connection: Ministry with Generation X

Introduction

GENERATION X MINISTRY is one of the most exciting waves that God is sending to the shores of his church today. Watching God connect with persons of Generation X is indeed a miracle in motion. The potentials are limitless, and the power of this ministry is extraordinary. For those who are surfing this trend in the church, connecting with Generation X is truly an art inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. Making the connection with Generation X involves a tapestry of dynamics, but yet, at the heart, it is really very basic. As Anthony Hopkins suggests in the movie *Amistad*, "Just tell the story." It is my prayer that the following will inspire and help enable you to make the connection with Generation X and the great love of Jesus Christ.

Questions of the Heart

"BUT THE LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'" (1 Samuel 16:7)

As it was for David, the beginning of every effective Christian ministry begins with God's calling, a call that reaches and discerns the heart. Connecting with Generation X in ministry begins and ends not with programs, but with the heart. It begins first with sensing from God that you or those you lead are being called by God to reach Generation X with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to work together in ministry. To be sure, as Moses did not have it all together when God came knocking at his door, ministry with Generation X does not begin by having it all together, but by having a heart for God and Generation X.

The Rev. E. Christopher Kratzer serves as pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church, Wesley Chapel, Florida.

Ministry with Generation X begins by looking at the generation not through the eyes of pre-conceived notions and biases of all that you have read and heard, but rather through the eyes of God—God who looked at David's heart, God who peers into your heart and mine and the heart of this generation, God who looked at Peter's heart and asked three times, "Do you love me?" and in so many words replied, "Okay, if you do, then feed my sheep."

Too many congregations dive into Generation X ministry without an honest discernment as to "why" they are wanting to minister or to be in ministry with this generation. Some begin not so much wanting to feed them, but to feed themselves. Before you begin, pray to God as David did asking God to "Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Prayer should always be the first choice, not the last option.

Having a Heart that is Willing to get "Fleshy"

"THE WORD BECAME FLESH and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14)

In the beginning verses of the Gospel according to John, we discover something of God's heart. God's heart desires to connect with us, so much that God becomes flesh. It is God's number one priority that we are connected with him, not just temporarily, but eternally, so much that He died so that that connection would be guaranteed. In the heart, God is about removing any and all barriers that keep us from having a relationship with Him. To be sure, this is why Jesus taught using parables, stories ordinary people can understand and connect with. To be sure, this is why Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9:19, 22, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." It is only out of having this Christ-like heart to connect people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in simple, practical and relevant fleshy kinds of ways, no matter the cost, that an effective ministry connection with Generation X can be made.

Know your Target better than Yourself

"O LORD, YOU HAVE SEARCHED ME and you know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways." (Psalm 139:1-3)

As God desires so passionately to connect with us that he became one of us, being in effective ministry to and with Generation X requires that one has an intimate understanding of Generation X.

We are a Generation

ONE OF THE GREATEST QUESTIONS asked in Generation X ministry is who is Generation X? That all depends on whom you ask. Some have named them the "Baby Busters," those born between 1964-1983. Based on demographics, this title is an inappropriate label because of the fact that numbering 75 million, Generation X is the second largest American generation. Therefore, the title "Baby Busters" better describes the inferior attitude of previous generations toward Generation X. The title "Generation X" emerged from the attempt to describe in title form the inability to define this generation, thus Generation "X." As Bethany Ericson, age 22, from Brighton, Massachusetts, put it, "We're a secret generation. Nobody knows what we think."¹

There are two distinct events that mark the beginning and ending dates of Generation X (1960-1980). The first is the appearance of Enovid 10 in 1960, the first marketed birth control pill. This event epitomized the ever-present "unwanted" attitude toward those who would later become Generation X. The second is the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, symbolizing the restatement of the importance of values and tradition and an appeal to go back to placing children and family at the top of societal priorities, thus moving away from the chaos of the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s.²

We are a Product of Attitude

"THEY WOULD NOT BE like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him." (Psalm 78:8).

There is a formula in behavioral psychology that goes like this: *Thoughts produce feelings which produce attitudes which lead to behaviors.*

With the onset of the 1950s and 1960s, many had ambitious *thoughts* of moving away from the strict traditions and values of previous generations. There was a *feeling* of constraint and rebellion among Boomers and the Silent Generation that led to an even deeper desire for experimentation.

For them, there was the freedom of post-war economic growth and unlimited possibilities. But as this freedom and move away from tradition and values were realized in their *behavior*, this new-found freedom did not come without a price.

In 1961, according to the Department of Education, there were 375,000 divorces involving 500,000 children. By 1975, America saw a spiraling growth in divorce, with one million divorces affecting the lives of more than one million children. In 1974, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, only 8.3 percent of children with two parents lived in poverty, while a startling 51.5 percent of children living with their mothers grew up in poverty. The absence of the father in a pro-divorce world became the *behavior* of choice for the parents of Generation X.³

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by the year 1980, 61 percent of mothers in two-parent households were working outside the home. So how was Generation X raised? Barbara Bergmann in her book, *The Economic Emergence of Women*, states that in 1977 two-thirds of the children whose mothers worked outside the home were taken care of by an outside caretaker.⁴

Perhaps the year 1981 served as a wake-up call to the parents of Generation X. On July 17, 1981, a young boy named Adam Walsh and his mother were shopping in a local store, when after leaving him alone for a few minutes, she returned and discovered that he was gone. Adam's body was later found in a ditch about a hundred miles away from the site of his disappearance. The killer was never found. Generation X grew up seeing the faces of missing members of their generation pasted on the cover of over 2.5 million milk cartons and 20 billion grocery bags.⁵

From the *behaviors* of their parents and adult role models, Generation X soon realized they had better grow up fast. In his book, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, David Elkind summed it up best when he wrote, "They have had a premature adulthood thrust upon them. Teenagers now are expected to confront life and its challenges with the maturity once expected only of the middle-aged, without any time for preparation."⁶

With the pre-occupying *feelings* of fear of the real potential for nuclear war, the thought (derived from their parents' obvious *attitudes* and *behaviors*) that they didn't want or love them, the realization that all the free behaviors and providence of the previous generation have left them with an abused environment as well as a higher rate of crime, divorce, child-abuse and sexually transmitted diseases than ever recorded in U.S. history, members of Generation X were developing some thoughts, feelings and behaviors of their own. For example, William Strauss and Neil Howe in *Generations: The History of America's Future: 1584 to 2069*

suggest that in the 1980s, 135,000 children were bringing guns and 1,000,000 were bringing knives to school each day.⁷

For many Generation Xers growing up, their number one job was just to survive. In many cross sections of Generation X one can see these basic attitudes and behaviors of survival in self-centeredness, pessimism and "live for the moment" ways of thinking.

However, while most who study this generation stop there, the reality is that Generation X is well on its way out of a "survival" mode and into the "make a difference" mode. The tragedies that showered upon Generation X's introduction to the world have now become the trigger for the emergence of a diverse, spiritual and passionate generation ready and able to rekindle all that which is real and true for the future of this world. All they need is to be connected to a relationship with God who loves them deeply and people who have a genuine love and commitment to them and their potentials: people who are willing to *think* like them, *believe* in them (attitude), *feel* with them, and *commit* to them (behavior). Yes, people who are willing to "make the connection."

We are Diverse

"CAN YOU FATHOM THE MYSTERIES of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know?" (Job 11:7-8)

Many people have tried to place Generation X in a box. To be sure, a lot of those boxes seem to be wrapped in toilet paper. *The Washington Post* called them, "A Generation of Animals." In George Barna's book, *The Invisible Generation: Baby Busters*, the author cites some positive aspects of Generation X in the beginning of the book. However, in the brief biographical sketches of various Generation Xers at the beginning of each chapter, not one of these portrayals casts a positive light on Generation X.⁸

To draw an accurate picture of this generation and make a real connection with them one needs to realize up front that your canvas will never be big enough. Though some of the negatives are true to a certain degree, they are only true for a portion of this generation and are not an accurate categorizing of the whole.

Ministry with and to Generation X must begin with an accurate understanding and informed perspective of their diversity. Generation X is diverse in almost every aspect, but mainly in two basic ways: personality and ethnic origin.

At one side of the spectrum of Generation X, you will find some individuals who have different shades of laziness, cynicism, low self-esteem, selfishness, disloyalty and lack of

values. Of these negative traits, cynicism and low self-esteem are the most commonly found, at one level or another, throughout the Generation X population, even in the very successful. If you look at the context of Generation X's formative years briefly described previously, it is easy to understand the origin of their cynicism and low self-esteem.

However, on the other side of the spectrum you will find many more who place deep value upon morals, integrity, service, loyalty and even tradition. Many in Generation X are far beyond playing the self-pity role of the "victim," and are ready to take responsibility. In fact, Smith and Clurman in *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing* write, "Generation Xers embrace the values of the Matures because they, too, have lived through uncertain formative years." Perhaps it is a prevailing insecurity among Boomers that has blocked many from a willingness to see the positive diversity of Generation X.⁹

The book, *Rocking the Ages*, goes even further to say that "Diversity in all its forms—cultural, political, sexual, racial, social—is the hallmark of this generation, a diversity accessible to everyone, that transcends even national borders."

Ethnically speaking, Generation X provides a diversity not seen in previous generations. Demographically, Generation X is 69 percent Caucasian, 13 percent African American, 13 percent Hispanic, three percent Asian American and one percent Native American.¹⁰

Though some have cast Generation X into a mold of indifference, perhaps the sleeping giant has been awakened and what had always been in the hearts of Generation X, but perhaps constrained in fear, is a sense of hope that things can be different.

We are Spiritual

"DEAR FRIENDS, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have come into the world." (1 John 4:1)

Perhaps one of the blessings of being raised in an unsure environment is that it tends to thrust a person or even a generation into exploring matters of the soul. If you look at the plight of the African American, you can see clearly the dramatic effect their oppressive experiences have had on the deepening and expression of their spirituality.

Generation X has had, though perhaps not as pronounced, a similar spiritual formation. George Barna's research indicates that 91 percent of Generation Xers believe in God or a higher power. Of this 91 percent, 54 percent say they have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. There is, at the very least, a curiosity present among Generation X regarding spiritual matters if not a longing for their souls to be filled.¹¹

However, there is a diversity among Generation X as to their belief of who God is and what it means to be spiritual. The biggest trend that has captured the attention of many in Generation X is the "new age" religions and philosophies. These types of religions and Eastern philosophies are appealing to many in Generation X because of their openness to individual ideas, beliefs and ways of living. Some of these "new age" religions like "New Thought" have advertised themselves as being even Christian because they incorporate Jesus' teachings in their philosophy. For the Generation Xer, this is alluring as it provides a deviation from "traditional religion" without seemingly negating Christianity.

There is a great deal of speculation toward organized religion among Generation X. They have seen the hypocrisy of the church all too well, and some are even victims of its abuse. They have seen their parents and grandparents go through the motions Sunday after Sunday, only to come home teaching racial prejudice, destroying the environment, and as Monte Python said, "Blowing thy enemy to smithereens." To be sure, they do not want to hear any more voices from society telling them how illegitimate they are.

These "new age" religions allow for an escape from accountability and a "Be your own god" attitude that for some in Generation X is a very fresh, appealing way of being spiritual. The reason? These "new age" religions tend to emphasize openness, world peace and harmony, areas that other generations seemed to fail to address, and therefore of great interest to Generation X.

There are many in Generation X who have never been a part of the church and have no real convictions about God. For these persons, "organized religion" has organized Generation X out of the market because they refuse to make a place for Generation X with relevant, culturally sensitive and inviting ministries.

It is most important to know that Generation X, in terms of spirituality, is in a "searching mode," and the jury is still out. As the classic U2 song suggests, they "still haven't found what they're looking for."

Generation X is too smart for the inauthentic types of religious expression they seem to be enticed by now. Generation X is searching for the truth, and, I believe, they have merely paused along their way to make sure that when they do make a commitment to Christ, it is real, and so will be the church.

The beauty of Generation X is that they are willing to try and test everything in order that when they do find "the thing," it will be right, true and authentic.

The question is not, can Generation X get excited about God, but rather, can the church get excited about them?

We are Passionate

"IF I SPEAK IN THE TONGUES of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13:1)

Webster's Dictionary defines passionate as "Having or capable of intense feelings." This is surely an accurate description of Generation X. It has been said that Generation X has merely stepped onto the experimental shoulders of the Boomers and "bungee jumped" off. For most Generation Xers, the worth of something is based much upon the experience or feeling it provides. However, this attention to feelings does not cast out value and reality; rather it defines it. It is not like the search for "feel good" methods for the sake of escaping reality that blanketed the 1960s. Rather, for Generation X, it is more of a test for the presence of reality. If it does not somehow evoke feelings, if it does not give an inspiring experience, if it does not cut to the soul, then perhaps it is not real, nor can it be trusted.

It is this kind of pursuit of the truth, through experience, that provides the energy behind postmodernism. What was previously modern in terms of belief systems and ways of thinking for Generation X is not necessarily cast aside, but is open for examination. It used to be that beliefs were a given, that if you were to talk about faith, everybody's bumpers were in the same basic parking lot. But with the move into postmodernism, the belief in beliefs is no longer a given. As thoughts and ideas used to define reality, now feelings and experiences are the yardsticks to which all things must measure up.

For Generation X, the importance of ideas, thoughts and beliefs are still very much alive, but they become true to Generation X only when they reach the soul and not before. For Generation X what touches the soul is that which reaches their feelings and provides a tangible experience, which in turn gives motivation for action.

Generation X has a deep passion for the care of those in need, especially those who are hurting in the world. As their passions mature, ideas, thoughts and beliefs will not only become a source of their passions but a way of focusing and preserving these passions. In a recent *Star Trek, The Next Generation* movie, the character "Data" who, because he is mechanical and has no feelings, is given a "feelings" computer chip so that he can experience feelings. At first "Data" is overwhelmed and intoxicated by these feelings until the wise Captain Picard helps him realize that one of the most important things about feelings is knowing how to control and focus them.

Becoming a Leader who Connects

"IN EVERYTHING SET THEM AN EXAMPLE by doing what is good." (Titus 2:7)

Connecting with Generation X requires leadership. I believe there are three key aspects of effective, connecting leadership in Generation X ministry that when in place will truly inspire those involved to go "A.P.E." for Generation X ministry: 1) Authentic in Heart 2) Positive in Attitude 3) Enduring with Patience.

Authentic in Heart

THE HALLMARK OF GREAT LEADERSHIP is authentic love. Having an authentic love for God and for connecting persons of Generation X into a relationship with Jesus Christ is the bottom line for Generation X ministry.

There is a saying that goes like this: "They won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This is true for Generation X perhaps more than any other generation in history.

As you read previously, Generation X has had to walk through a lot of jungles. After you have walked through enough jungles, your senses become trained in knowing what looks and sounds dangerous, always being on the watch. Like the eyes of a tiger, Generation X can spot a phony miles away. They have their guards up and will not let you in without a good sizing up. It is almost as if they have little "real or not real" detectors running all the time.

For Generation X, authenticity means that what is in the head is also in the heart. These two must always match. It is not enough to just talk the talk. Words are found to have truth only when they are seen or experienced in action. Most important, these words, ideas and thoughts must be spoken from the heart.

A Generation X ministry will never grow beyond the heart of the leader. If the leader is not passionate in prayer, neither will anyone else be; if the leader is not passionate about connecting people to Christ, do not expect that others will be; if the leader's heart is not set on living a Christ-centered lifestyle, neither will those to whom he or she has influence. In this postmodern world, which is so sensitive to experience, perception and what is real or not, being inauthentic will not cut it. Allowing ourselves to be exposed to the point of revealing our heart is not always easy, especially if we are embarrassed or confused as to where our heart is. The heart of a Generation X leader seeks the truth and desires to get the heart-level, even if this means stumbling over thoughts and feelings until you finally arrive.

Positive in Attitude

JOHN MAXWELL in his book, *Developing the Leader Within You*, suggests that life is 10 percent of what happens to you and 90 percent attitude. A positive attitude that is based on

the hopefulness of God is the soil upon which Generation X ministry must grow. All other ground is sinking sand.

Generation X is already pushing the limits of diversity, experience and expression. A small dream attitude will only hinder the big dreams of Generation X.

This is not to say that anything goes; certainly not! A philosophy in ministry that has worked for me is, "I will say 'no' only when there is no way I can say 'yes.'" To be sure, there are several areas where the church is saying "maybe" when it really should be saying "no." There will be areas of Generation X ministry where your "no" must be very clear and firm.

In Generation X ministry, continually sending out the yellow light will only lead to skepticism and distrust. For the hopefulness of God to be realized, Generation X needs clear signals and boundaries. As much as possible let your "yes" be "yes!" and your "no" be "no!"

The parable of the mustard seed is a lesson on hopefulness. To the one blessed with the hopefulness of God, the mustard seed is seen not for what it is, but what it can be when planted in fertile soil, protected and given what it needs to grow. Generation X is in many ways that small seed. Not too many see them as having much potential; not too many see much hope in their ideas and attitudes; not too many want to make room for them in their garden. But for those who love Generation X and have the hopefulness of God, that small seed looks a lot different, and for them there is plenty of room.

Leadership with Generation X must be based upon God's hopefulness and ability to change lives, a hope that seeks to find ways to say "yes" and is faithful enough to say "no." At times this requires the ability to endure with patience and to have faith in God.

Endure with Patience

GENERATION X MINISTRY takes time. Many in Generation X do not understand the church or what it means to be a Christian.

They come with their own preconceived perceptions, whether realistic or not. For many, accepting the fact they are loved and that they are gifted human beings is not easy. It takes time to pull down the walls and to build the trust needed for an intimate relationship with God and others. To be sure, there will be times of failure when what one thinks is a great idea never gets off the ground. But we need to endure with patience.

The "survival mode" of many in Generation X has become a security blanket which is difficult to let go. The life of simplicity that many in Generation X prefer sometimes leaves no room for the more involved aspects of life that

lead to higher senses of purpose, meaning and accomplishment. For Generation X, the grass *is* seen as being greener on the other side, but some do not want to have any part of what may be harder to mow.

Generation X is not very afraid of death; they know what that is all about, seeing death every day on television, the movies, Internet, workplace and college campus. What scares them most is life.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge of ministry to Generation X, because what we are all about, connecting people to a relationship with Jesus Christ, is about new life. For that new life to be found by Generation X will require time, with God being in charge of the timing.

Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Church* describes leaders who need to be skilled in riding a "spiritual wave" that God sends and knowing when to get off.¹² Sometimes what makes the pot of impatience boil the hottest is when we are still trying to ride spiritual waves that God stopped sending a long time ago. God is sending a lot of great waves into the church, and many of them have Generation X written all over them. As Rick Warren suggests, the more one is willing to ride God's waves, the more he will send you.

When I Make the Connection, What Will it Look Like?

Connecting with the S.P.I.R.I.T. of Generation X

MAX DEPREE in *Leadership is an Art* states, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." This means making an honest and thorough study of your resources, needs and context. Every Generation X ministry will and should be different.¹³

The following model for ministry is not in any way meant to limit possibilities, but to give some guidance as to what a Generation X wave may look like when it comes across your shore.

Focus through Vision

THERE IS A SAYING, "If you don't know where you're going, you probably won't get there." Ministry without vision is like a sailboat without a keel; one never knows which way one is going next. Vision that includes a simple vision statement with specific goals is essential to reaching God's potential for one's ministry.

I believe God has a specific vision for every ministry and congregation. A vision statement should be Biblical, clear and concise. Here is an example of some "vision" thoughts pertaining to Generation X ministry.

A Definition of God's Will: God's Greatest Gifts Meet our Greatest Needs

PREFACE. Generation X knows more than perhaps any other generation the *needs* of this world. They see an environment that is falling apart, families that are broken, jobs that are uncertain, values that are confused and beliefs that are founded more on fear than truth. Generation X is confused not about their needs but about their *gifts* from God. Throughout their lives, the impression that Generation X has been given is that they are not gifted, they are not valued and they are not worth the truth.

STATEMENT. Generation X ministry passionately seeks to communicate and move persons of Generation X to embrace, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God's gifts and presence in their lives, making the connection between God's greatest gifts and their greatest needs a reality in their lives, and affirming that their gifts can make a difference.

VISION. Effectively connect persons of Generation X to a relationship with Jesus Christ and his church.

The **S.P.I.R.I.T.** of Generation X: A Model for Building Ministries for Generation X

"I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 4).

- S**imple
- P**ractical
- I**ntegrity
- R**emodeling
- I**ntentional Service
- T**ruth

Simple

Generation X ministry must be simple, easily understood. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:2, we are to "set forth the truth plainly." God's Word must be presented in simple terms that do not detract from its message. Jesus taught in simple terms, and so should we. Issues of faith should be modeled and taught in ways that are easily understood and applied to daily life. There is a saying in jazz music, "less is more." Generation X ministry, in all its aspects, benefits from being kept simple. There is a much better chance of being simple and still very effective than there is of being complex and effective.

Practical

Ministry with Generation X must be practical and experiential. God's Word must be communicated to them in ways that are immediately relevant, enabling them to identify, develop and use their God-given gifts, and, most

of all, be connected to and experience the love of Christ. The underlying motto of Generation X is "Be it, do it, live it." Generation X ministry should show them how to *believe* Christian, *do* Christian things, and *live* the Christian life.

Integrity

Ministry with Generation X must be based on integrity. It must be Biblically-based and uphold the highest standards of faithful living. The gifts of Generation X need to be nurtured in an environment of authentic Christian love and the power of the Gospel in order to grow and flourish.

The best sermon is a good example. To be sure, Generation X learns more from what they see than what they hear. When you really love someone, you want them to become the best person they can be. Generation X needs love that will challenge them to become the people that God has called them to be. Living and upholding a ministry of integrity is an essential expression of this kind of love. What my mother used to tell me really applies to Generation X ministry: "If you're going to do something, do it right, or don't do it at all." Uphold integrity.

Remodeling

Ministry with Generation X must provide healthy models of the important aspects of life which they missed out on. For example, Generation X needs to see models and be taught how to raise a healthy family and marriage. They need to see exemplars who teach what it looks like to have a balanced and organized life, career and family. They need exemplars who demonstrate the relevance of the life principles which they have seen abused and confused by other role models. They need to see and believe that they are God-gifted people.

Intentional Service

Ministry with Generation X must provide faithful ways in which their gifts can be used for ministry in making a positive difference in their homes, schools, work places, congregations, college campuses and marriages. Generation X is global-minded and sensitive to the ills of our world. Ministry with Generation X must be global-minded and willing to reach within and beyond geographical, racial and social borders. In so doing, as they serve, they will discover new gifts and experience an affirmation of their importance and relevance in this world, and that, indeed, they are gifted!

Truth

Ministry with Generation X must be grounded in the truth of Jesus Christ. It must be Christ-centered and Christ-

inspired. Generation X has been shown everything but the truth. There are so many choices and options beckoning their souls. To be sure, Generation X is searching for the truth. Ministries with Generation X must provide for the truth of Jesus Christ to be known, realized and applied to their lives. Though it is last on many lists, this is job number one in Generation X ministry.

Six Spirited Ministries Ideas

Worship

Generation X desires a relationship with God that is real and tangible. Designing an inspiring worship service that is culturally relevant in music, technology and content can provide a ministry that is *simple, practical* and experiential, centered in connecting persons to the *truth* of Jesus Christ.

Café Fellowship

Relationships, especially friendships, are vital to Generation X. Providing a café style setting where people can meet, have Bible studies and small group ministries, chat on the Internet and plan activities can provide a ministry that is *intentional in service*, inspiring *integrity* and a *practical* relationship with Jesus Christ and others, and providing a source of *remodeling the truth* in their lives.

Small Group Ministries

Generation X places priority on community and fellowship. Different kinds of small groups covering a variety of topics, needs and interests can provide a ministry that is *simple, practical*, centered on the *truth* of Jesus Christ, *intentionally serving* and connecting people to Christ, and helpful in teaching and *remodeling* a life of *integrity*. Bible studies, sports groups, support groups, service groups, prayer groups and mission teams are some of many examples of good small group ministries involving Generation X.

Christian Talk Show

Generation X learns best through relationships, dialogue and example. Developing a talk-show type program that presents relevant topics and issues relating to faith and daily life can be a powerful ministry that provides *simple, practical* and *experiential* ways of growing in the *integrity* of the Christian faith and ways of being in *intentional service* in their communities and world.

Concert Series

Music is at the heart of the spirituality of Generation X. Scheduling a regular series of culturally relevant, Christian musicians and musical groups can provide an inspirational

ministry that is *simple* and *practical*, remodels the truth of Jesus Christ, and provides the participant with an opportunity to be connected in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Mission Ministries

Generation X desires and is able to make a difference. Developing a ministry of mission that reaches out to the church, community and world can provide an exciting, experiential ministry that enables participants to use their God-given gifts in *simple* and *practical* ways. As they serve, they will experience the blessing of being a part of the spiritual growth of themselves and others by connecting to the *truth* of Jesus Christ.

Notes

- 1 Neil Howe & William Strauss. *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* (New York: Random House, 1993), pp.11-13.
- 2 Geoffrey T. Holtz. *Welcome to the Jungle. The Why Behind "Generation X."* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 2-3.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 26, 28.
- 4 Barbara R. Bergmann. *The Economic Emergence of Women.* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 284.
- 5 Geoffrey T. Holtz. *Welcome to the Jungle. The Why Behind "Generation X."* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 60-61.
- 6 David Elkind. *All Grown Up and No Place to Go.* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1984), p. 3.
- 7 Neil Howe & William Strauss. *Generations: The History of America's Future.* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), p. 326.
- 8 George Barna. *The Invisible Generation: Baby Busters.* (Oxnard, Calif.:Barna Research Group, 1992).
- 9 W. Smith and A. Clurman. *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing.* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 78-85.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 11 George Barna. *The Invisible Generation: Baby Busters.* (Oxnard, Calif.: Barna Research Group, 1992), pp. 154-155.
- 12 Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 13-22.
- 13 Max DePree. *Leadership is an Art.* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989), p. 11.



book reviews

Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation by Jimmy Long. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

DRAWING ON HIS 25 years of campus ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Gordon Conwell Seminary-educated Jimmy Long describes the philosophical and sociological changes occurring within Generation X and suggests strategies for effectively communicating the Gospel to Xers. Long chronicles the shift from the rational objective self-centered view of the Baby Boomer generation (Boomers) shaped by the Enlightenment to the emotional subjective community-oriented postmodern view of the members of Generation X (Xers). As is apparent in history, generals who prepare for the next war as if it were the previous one suffer defeat. Likewise, Long warns of the folly of ministering to Xers as if they were Boomers. Drawing on the church of the New Testament, he provides numerous suggestions for the church's response to the challenges posed by the first postmodern generation, Generation X.

One of the strongest components of Long's book is his presentation of the differences between Boomers and Xers. Besides giving an overview of Enlightenment and postmodern philosophy, Long helpfully compiles numerous lists of contrasting

phrases which illustrate how these competing philosophies have shaped Boomers and Xers. For example, many Xers no longer receive the benefits of the traditional, stable, two-parent home (*Father Knows Best, Ozzie and Harriet*) due to the rising number of dysfunctional families, but instead seek love, acceptance, support and values from their peers (*Friends, Seinfeld*). At times Long's distinctions appear to blur and to become a matter of mere semantics, but a close perusal of this book results in a clearer picture of the contrasts between Boomers and Xers.

Faced with Generation X, the church, according to Long, should not change or abandon key theological truths or practices, but emphasize certain aspects of these truths or practices which will strike home with Xers. Small group faith communities which nurture the heart as well as the mind are very effective in reaching Xers, providing the family structure many Xers lack. Objective theological concepts suitable for Enlightenment-influenced Boomers such as guilt and justification should be stated in terms of shame and adoption, terms more relevant for Xers. Finally, Long advocates moving away from presentations which answer the Boomer/Enlightenment question, "Is it true?" to an emphasis on narrative evangelism (testimonials) and embodied apologetics (living the faith as a witness), answering the main postmodern Xer question, "Is it real?" Long remains firmly rooted in the Bible throughout and underscores repeatedly how effective and timely the models for Gospel proclamation provided by Scripture can be.

While not essential reading for those coming to grips with Xers, Long's book is a very helpful introduction to the shift from an Enlightenment-influenced society to one shaped by the tenets of postmodernism. A reading of his book can lead to a more effective ministry to and positive understanding of many of the Xers in the church and world.

Mark Meehl, associate professor of theology
Concordia University, Nebraska

Generation X Goes to College: An Eye-Opening Account of Teaching in Postmodern America by Peter Sacks. Chicago: Open Court, 1996.

SACKS, A FORMER JOURNALIST, now college professor, portrays the generational and cultural clash that he has observed as Generation X has gone to college. Sacks' anecdotal account is at times disheartening but also confirms the experiences of professors with students who expect high grades but rebel against the course requirements and, indeed, the professors themselves.

Sacks portrays Generation X as filled with

contradictory impulses. They want to trust, but doubt authority, institutions and knowledge—elements higher education provides. They recognize learning's value but expect education to be entertaining. They seek high grades but display little motivation to work for them.

Sacks doesn't lay all the blame on Generation X's shoulders. Students are part of "symbiotic game-playing in the institution" where colleges, in need of higher enrollments, have catered to the whims of this generation. Thus, the mark of a "good" teacher is "customer satisfaction."

Sacks conducted his "Sandbox Experiment" in order to determine the problem's extent. He altered his teaching approach to see if he could get better teaching evaluations and approval for tenure. Sacks emphasized entertaining activities and awarded "outrageously good grades" for mediocre work. Instead of disseminating knowledge, he became "a partner in facilitating the learning process" through the use of small groups and individual projects. Sacks' experiment proved a success.

In the section titled "Education in Postmodern America," Sacks overviews the roots of the clash between modernism and postmodernism. He argues that educators must adapt to the postmodern world in order to survive, but they must also strive to maintain educational standards. He suggests the following:

- Abandon the role of professor as classroom monarch.
- Offer alternate classroom forms where students work with raw materials of learning, creating something new (being able to *do* something with their knowledge appeals to Generation Xers).
- Don't use technology to simply enhance lectures; students should make their own presentations using technology.
- Professors should guide students in information gathering and imaginative interpretation of materials.
- Include course grade averages on student transcripts so levels of achievement can be gauged.
- Stipulate a meaningful grade distribution for all courses, such as no more than 10 percent "A's" in a class.
- Stop printing instructor names on registration materials to reduce "grade shopping."
- Re-address the role of student evaluations in tenure decisions.

Sacks' descriptions of higher education are disturbing, yet they speak to many teachers' frustrations. His ideas are important contributions to the discussion of American education's future.

Lisa Ashby, assistant professor of English
Concordia University, Nebraska

Continued on back cover

Reckless Hope: Understanding and Reaching Baby Busters by Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.

THESE AUTHORS waste no time in their book, as they immediately indicate the problem to be addressed regarding the Baby Buster generation (also known as "Generation X"). Basically, they identify this group as the "first completely post-Christian generation." As Busters search for spiritual reality, the crucial problem to be addressed is that they are "not finding it in the church."

Hahn, a pastor of outreach at Forest Hill Church in North Carolina, and Verhaagen, a Ph.D. in psychology, identify themselves as Busters and own both the good and bad of the generation as discussed in the book. Thus, they are able to connect and articulate thoughtful solutions found solely in the Bible, offering theology that speaks to the needs of this generation as opposed to methodology and marketing.

The 11 chapters of this book are organized in three sections. Part 1, "Description," examines the demographics of those born from 1965-80

and the characteristics of the generation, providing a framework upon which to fashion the implications. Next, Hahn and Verhaagen offer reasons why current strategies have "missed the generation," as asserted in chapter three. They indict tactics such as marketing, suggesting that it allows a "corrupt culture to dictate what it wants to hear" (page 54).

The book reveals a "Prescription" for a new approach in Part 2, predicating that witnessing strategies must develop from a well-reasoned understanding of the questions Busters are asking. Hahn and Verhaagen further argue that Paul sets up a paradigm in the first chapter of Ephesians under which we can best minister to Busters: Christ will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head" (v. 10). They suggest we are consequently able to address the Busters' experience of shattered relationships with God, the environment and other people, thus relating a more comprehensive Gospel to this group.

Finally, Part 3 calls for a story. The authors contend that this generation is one without a story, and therefore it needs to hear one with a theology that is fully informed. Herein lies one of

the book's key strengths. Hahn and Verhaagen unapologetically advocate that it is the story of the Gospel that will best speak to the problems and questions that the Busters face.

Any frustrations that the reader might harbor because of lack of specific tactics are addressed in this book. The authors admit they use overarching themes; yet, they illustrate quite clearly the need for understanding the big picture. However, the book does offer several examples which show this mindset reflected in witnessing programs.

Being a Buster myself, I have a great deal of respect for this book as I would for a teacher who shows respect to my peers and me. I feel the key strength is the authors' understanding of this generation which allows them to more aptly respond with Scripture. Ultimately, it is the power of Scripture that truly offers hope to Busters and anyone who shares in the human condition.

Micah Gaunt, student, secondary education major, Concordia University, Nebraska



CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

800 North Columbia Avenue
Seward, Nebraska 68434

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