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IFCA International
Executive Director

Thoughts for My Generation
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   Ben Brown

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Multi-Generational Ministry
Rev. Les Lofquist
Executive Director

From the Editor

In the IFCA International Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals Statements we have adopted a desired course for our Fellowship. We have committed ourselves to the advancement of a common cause: independent churches unified and working together in the spirit of interdependence.

One of our seventeen values is multi-generational ministry. Here's what we have stated in regard to this commitment:

Multi-Generational Ministry

- "We are committed to ministries which will reach, teach, equip and involve people of all ages and groups (men, women, boys, and girls) so that we may present every one complete in Christ. In order to accomplish this task of discipleship we make the following recommendations.

- Encouraging children's and youth ministries within our churches
- Supporting wholeheartedly the work of our IFCA International Youth Committee
- Strengthening the ministries of and to our ladies in the churches and at all other fellowship levels
- Fostering activities for the spiritual development of our men in the churches and at all other fellowship levels
- Developing and supporting ministry efforts designed specifically for people with unique and special needs
- Developing specific ministries and employing methods designed to effectively reach and minister to significant people groups who are or may come to be identified in terms of generation, marital status, etc. (boomers, busters, generation X, singles, college/career, etc.)"

In this statement we have committed ourselves to seeking effective ways of ministering to people of all ages, from each generation. It is our hope that this issue of Voice will inform and challenge our churches to become consistently stronger in multi-generational ministry. Three of the articles are direct challenges to three generations of American adults, while the other articles are informative.

Thoughts for My Generation
Rev. Les Lofquist
Executive Director

I was born nine years after my father returned from air combat in Europe during World War II. I grew up in the 1960s and became a Christian in 1972 at the age of eighteen.

I've carefully watched as the men and women of my generation have grown older, through the decades of the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and into this decade. At times I've been quite disheartened with my generation when compared with my father's.
Of course, sinful tendencies are not exclusively displayed in my generation alone; the sin nature is clearly evident across generational lines. But there are some conclusions about my generation that I've reached based on my personal observations and experience.

I freely admit to painting with a broad brush in the widest of strokes. Certainly not everyone born from 1945-1960 would fit my characterizations (thank God). However, I've seen enough in my culture and in our churches to address the following thoughts to my generation.

WE'RE UNWILLING TO GROW UP

The American "Youth Culture" which was born in the 1950s and exploded in the 1960s is a phenomenon that just will not cease. It won't stop because my generation, like Peter Pan, refuses to grow up.

I shake my head as I see photos of 60-year-old Mick Jagger prancing on stage singing about his continued lack of satisfaction nearly forty years after the Rolling Stones hit the rock music scene. Knowing that Cher, at age 57, continues to slither about with "youthful sexuality" makes me reflect on the Proverbs 31 women I know whose godly lives are in stark contrast and are so refreshingly pure and sweet. The musician who sold the most number of concert tickets in 2002 was 61 years old, ex-Beatle Paul McCartney. Harley riding grandparents hang onto their motorcycles and whatever "cool" they can, despite how silly they may appear. Advertisers on television attempt to lure the AARP crowd into self-deception: "you can reverse the effects of aging." Many aging baby boomers remain trapped in their days of youth.

All of these indicators, and many more, tell me that my generation is unwilling to assume maturity as a desirable destination. The effects on local church ministry and leadership can be most harmful when this mindset controls those who are in the prime years for leadership responsibility…but continue to cling to immaturity.

WE'RE SELF-ABSORBED

It follows that a generation still trapped in the days of their long past youth will also be self-centered. Pampered as children in the post-W.W. II years, today we demand lives of indulgence.

Look at our houses: the normal homes of today are the mansions of the 1950s. Look at our food portions: the King Sized bottles of Coke in my teen years (16 oz) barely would be a Small Size today. Look at our vacations: round-the-world tours to exotic places are now the normal talk in the work and marketplace.

I know of one man my age who led the church he pastored to cut 80% of his church's mission budget at one meeting. This totaled nearly $200,000 a year. His reason? "To reach the people here in our city." I translated that to mean, "I wanted more money for more Worship Staff, a better stage, newer sound equipment and Sunday Morning techno gadgets" (which is just how they spent the money). Decisions like that underscore in my mind how self-absorbed my generation of leaders can be.

WE'RE HESITANT TO COMMIT

Our self-absorption and ingrained suspicions of institutions have caused my generation to hesitate when called upon to make a commitment to lead. "It will cost me too much." "I'm not a joiner." "I'll be away from my family." "I don't like to make those kinds of commitments." All of these were reasons given to me over the years when I reached out to potential church leaders and asked them to pray about considering the next step in their development as a leader.
I can't help comparing my generation to our father's generation. They made the commitment to lead and to sacrifice and to make cooperative effort. They founded mission boards, built organizations, established pioneer ministries, gave of themselves. Many in my generation just cannot commit to such enterprises.

Related to our hesitation to commit is our lack of loyalty. To build requires a persistent loyalty to co-builders, to the effort, to the cause. My generation celebrates the individual, not the organization. One individual can only build on a limited scale while an organized group can do much more. However, loyalty is required in a group in order to achieve the corporate goals. So we maintain our non-loyal, individualistic stance … and we don't build together.

I've never forgotten what one man said to me who is four years older than I am. I asked him to pray about joining our church, and he warmly thanked me. Then he said, "I consider that we have three home churches: we go over there for their Youth Group, over there for their Small Groups, and to your church for your Sunday morning Bible teaching." He meant it as a wonderful compliment for my preaching. I've never forgotten it as an indictment on our generation's lack of commitment and loyalty.

WE RESIST MAKING MORAL JUDGMENTS

Perhaps it's a remnant of the 1960s. Or maybe it's the result of Post-Modernism. Whatever the source, I know that my generation is far too resistant to make strong moral judgments.

We've seen too many news reports where the point/counterpoint format has conditioned us to color everything gray. "On the one hand it appears white. While on the other it could be black. In actuality, both viewpoints are valid because it's gray."

Toleration is the supreme virtue for my generation. Strong moral judgments are undesirable. To me it sounds like the church at Corinth, where they were proud that they tolerated the man who was sexually immoral with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-2).

Of course it's refreshing to be among those who value the Word of God, who prize its moral absolutes, and who seek to obey it in every aspect of life. Thankfully there are many in my generation who are among that number (and I'm certain many are reading this). But this number would not be the majority of my generation.

CONCLUSION

The only answer for my generation is the age-old answer for every generation: the timeless truth of the Bible, God's Word. Through faithful reading, study, and obedience to the Word of God, any person (regardless of their age) who has experienced the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit will be transformed. Old ways of thinking will gradually give way to God's way of thinking. Sins of one's culture will be exposed and, if repented of, will be overcome.

That's the hope for my generation. And so I'm recommitting myself to teaching and preaching the sufficient Word of God. And I'll also pray for opportunities to reach the not-quite-adult Children of the Sixties. My generation. For God's glory.
Thoughts for My Generation
Robert Graves

Life seems to be a series of milestones. The first ones seem to take forever to reach but the longer you travel on the road of life they seem to come faster and faster. In the beginning the birthday milestones were light years apart and it was an entire millennium before your first day at school came. Upon graduation from high school you noted an acceleration in the passage of time beginning to take effect and then in ever increasing order came marriage, the launching of a career, the arrival of children and then suddenly before you knew it you were a grandparent and a retirement celebration was just around the corner. You had arrived at milestone sixty-five and it seemed like just yesterday you were twenty-one with an eternity of years to spend ahead of you. Suddenly you became shockingly aware of the fact that the Psalmist was correct when the Holy Spirit inspired him to write in Psalms 90:10, "as for the days of our life they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow, for it is soon gone and we fly away." In James 4:14 the Scriptures merge the years together as just "a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." Suddenly you realize that time is short and life truly is a precious gift from God.

There are two things for us to consider as we arrive at retirement age. One is we need to remember that one of the dangers of age is the tendency to resist change and the other is the danger as a believer of retiring from Christian service and ministry as well.

First let's discuss the tendency to resist change. When we look back we usually remember only the best of times and blot out the worst. We are prone to think that the way we used to do things is by far the best way. There is also the danger of thinking that any change must be inherently evil, especially when it comes to music and worship. We tend to feel uncomfortable with anything that deviates from our past experiences. We need to remember that in the history of the church there has always been a changing of custom and style of worship and music in the church. An example of a negative reaction to change from scripture is found in the book of Ezra. In Ezra chapter four we read that when the returning exiles laid the foundation for the new altar, all the people shouted with great joy but the old men looking back who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple wept tears of sadness. God had to have the prophet Haggai rebuke them. Haggai 2:3, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem like nothing to you in comparison?" God says stop looking back and rejoice in what I am doing now. He goes on to say look ahead and stop reliving the past. Of course we should never adopt or approve anything that runs contrary to biblical righteousness or morality. Everything in worship or in daily living should be judged by biblical standards. When we look back at age sixty-five we can see many ways in which our lives have been changed. We have adjusted to them and accepted them. For example, in our lifetime we have experienced changes in housing, travel, clothing styles, eating habits, medical treatments just to name a few. Let us be careful to accept change and let God move in our hearts to reach the people of our day.

Secondly let us look at retirement. Does God have a retirement from service at age sixty-five? I am concerned about the fact that many when they retire from secular employment also retire from Christian ministry and service. Our society tells us that now is the time to do all the things that we have dreamed of through the years. Determine to spend these days as free and devoid of responsibilities as possible. While it is prudent at this point in life to be released from business and lifelong responsibilities, what about our responsibility to God and His call upon our life? Is there a retirement program from Christian service and duty before heaven?

The sad truth is that many senior citizens have mistakenly believed that retirement from Christian service within the local church or in any Christian endeavor is part of God's plan for His people.
Nothing could be farther from the truth. Christ addressed this subject when he spoke to His disciples in Luke 19:13, "Do business until I come back." This statement is found in the middle of a parable where our Lord is discussing the ministries of service and rewards. The message is clear. Our Lord expects us to labor for Him until He returns or He calls us home. There is no retirement from Christian ministry here in this life. The time for retirement from Christian ministry is clearly stated in Revelation 14:13, "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes', says the Spirit, so they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" Our rest and retirement from ministry begins when we enter heaven.

As we look at God's servants throughout the Old and New Testament, we see many senior citizens who were active in ministry until God called them home to Himself. Think of Abraham still serving after over one hundred years of age; Moses preaching and writing until the day of his death; David still king and actively serving God on his death bed; Daniel receiving visions and writing and serving in government in old age until God called him to come home and rest until the resurrection; the Apostle Paul in the New Testament writing to Timothy from a dark prison cell and asking for his books; John an exile past the age of ninety still writing letters to the churches and recording the Book of Revelation. These men exemplify and model for us what God expects of us in the twilight years of our lives.

One of the statements that God has given us which relates to this subject is found in Romans 11:29, "for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." Once God the Holy Spirit has placed a spiritual gift in our lives it remains there until He calls us home. He expects us to use it as He opens before us doors of opportunity and gives us the strength and presence of mind to exercise it. Senior folk have much that God can use in ministry. There is nothing more valuable than the wisdom that comes through the experiences of life. I would caution young people to value highly and show great respect for the valuable commodity of godly older people around you in the church. I caution young pastors not to write off the older people in your flock, but rather to encourage them to use their gifts in service.

In Titus 2:2-5 the Holy Spirit speaks directly to the older saints and encourages them to enter into ministries particularly suited to their gifts and station in life, "Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good so that they may encourage the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the Word of God will not be dishonored." First Timothy chapter five lays out a great ministry for the older women of the church. God has tremendous ministries awaiting us in the senior years of our lives and He has given great attention to it in the Scriptures.

I want to challenge older believers to let God use that extra time you now have. You have been relieved from the time constraints of business and raising a family. Put it to work in building the church of Jesus Christ. You have so much to offer. You can be used to visit the hospitals and shut-ins, disciple new Christians, serve as elders and deacons and deaconesses, serve as ushers and greeters, sing in the choir, use your skills and crafts to maintain the facilities, work with youth, help in the nurseries, work in the church office, take short term mission assignments and the list goes on. There is no end to the opportunities you have to be used of God. Take your vacation trips and visit your children and grandchildren, but keep active in ministry as well. Prayer is one of the great ministries you can be a part of no matter where you are and is so important. If you move to a new community, get involved in a church and get involved in service there. Churches should consider making short-term assignments to accommodate some who can't make long-term commitments.
It is a fact that retirement brings opportunities for trips and hobbies and other interests. And age brings new constraints on the body and more rest and attention must be given to it. But, never, and I repeat, never let yourself retire from Christian ministry. Find places to serve wherever you are. Remember our Savior said, "do business until I come."

*Bob Graves has served in local church ministry in California for over 50 years. He remains actively engaged in preaching, teaching, and counseling pastors and local churches. He served as President of IFCA International from 1999-2002.*

**Ministry to Those Nearing the End of Their Lives**

Paul Rosentrater

I know how busy we pastors are. Sometimes we may feel as though we are carrying the whole load of the church on our backs. We also feel pressure from outside our families and churches. We are asked to contribute to so many missionary organizations and different funds, we may feel overwhelmed.

Missionary organizations appeal for help with worthy needs all around the world, but one of the fastest growing mission fields is right here in America, almost right in our own back yard ... the local nursing home. A current report shows over 1.6 million people live in nursing homes in America. After 20 years as a pastor in two Bible churches, I trained to be a hospital chaplain and served in that capacity for another 20 years. Although eligible for retirement then, I felt called to continue in the ministry full-time as a chaplain to residents and staff in four nursing homes. I have been doing this for the past five years. My concern is that few pastors are encouraging their members to become involved in this local mission field.

All The Days Of My Life is a Christian guide to nursing home ministry, helpful to both pastors and lay-workers. Here are some heart-searching lines from that guide about what some nursing home residents feel:

"If you fear death and don't want that fear intensified by seeing it on many faces where I live, don't come."

"If you find it difficult to communicate with people who can't immediately give you a warm, positive response, don't come."

"If you would feel uncomfortable shouting in my deaf ear or talking to my unfocusing eyes, don't come."

"Now that you may understand how I feel -- can you come to see me and keep coming so that I can dare to trust you not to desert me? I have nothing to offer you except my memories, and often they're confused. But perhaps if I can share them out loud, I can begin to think more clearly."

A local pastor may face a dilemma as he tries to work with his outreach committee to get interested and concerned members to want to be trained to go to the local nursing home. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, the weak, the lonely, the poor and the needy. The local needy folks were on his priority list. The gospel-believing church has, I believe, a responsibility to share the gospel of hope to the elderly, soon-going-to-die residents. Luke 14:10, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

Let me tell you about a forty-nine-year-old man, who has had multiple sclerosis for the past ten and one-half years. He had served in the Navy and was discharged with honors. He was married and had a beautiful home in the Denver area when he came down with M.S. The Navy pays a good
sum of money to take care of him in the nursing home. His wife divorced him. His daughter, now also divorced, used to visit him, as did the son-in-law, but they rarely come any more. He has an electric wheel chair with controls on the armrest where his only hand that works can use them. He is also legally blind and is down to about one hundred pounds. He does, out of pride and independence, still try to shave himself with an electric razor. He can no longer hold up his head, but he has now accepted my personal love for him by letting me shave under his chin each week.

Recently he trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. Because of the hurt and anger about his M.S. and his family's abandonment, he felt that he had nothing to live for. While these difficult thoughts were going through his mind, I reminded him that Christ still wanted to take away this bitterness. He was able then, after prayer, to say, "Pastor, thank you for keeping on coming to see me and helping me to accept Christ's love and forgiveness as a continual help out of this dark valley."

Well-meaning Christian groups come to these nursing homes at Christmas time and at other times to provide music and brief devotionals. That helps the active residents and is appreciated by the Activity Directors. However, having a compassionate, understanding lay-worker working among the depressed and lonely, will build trust and warmth. That worker will have many opportunities to lead residents to Christ's salvation. It is helping them from hopelessness to hopefulness. This type of outreach into our communities may not "GROW THE CHURCH" directly, but may reach family members. Your love for their family member may draw them to become interested in learning more about who you really are.

You may ask, "How can we do it in our church?" I suggest that you contact The Sonshine Society (P.O. Box 327, Lynnwood, Washington 98046-0327, phone 425-353-4732) for the very helpful handbook All The Days Of My Life. It is a helpful tool to teach you how to share Christ's love with the residents in your local nursing home. The Sonshine Society will send a free packet to any pastor or lay-worker who is seriously considering getting this type of training. Not all servants are called to a nursing home ministry, but if you are, start praying. Maybe you can find a partner or two, then get the packet and start training from this easy-to-read handbook.

I appreciate when a hospice chaplain comes to help a family at the time of their loved one's last hours on earth, but too often that resident is so sick and unresponsive that the ministry they do is only helpful to the family. If contact could have been made weeks before, that resident could have had a better opportunity to trust in Christ as their Savior from sin. I thank God for the many residents who already trust the Lord for their departure from this life into Christ's holy heaven. I have many delightful visits with these lovely saints.

I have found that a ministry with the elderly who are nearing the end of their earthly life is very rewarding. No, they are not able to serve the Lord very long if they have waited until serious health conditions have brought them to that all-important decision. The Activity Directors in my nursing homes are asking me to recruit some volunteer Christian lay-workers to come and conduct Bible studies and do one-on-one ministry with residents. I am working on that myself. That is why I encourage pastors and concerned lay-workers to help in this great ministry.

My final thought is this verse in I Thessalonians 5:14, "Now we exhort you, brethren ... comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with everyone."

Paul Rosentrater has been an IFCA member since 1961. He pastored two Bible churches in Colorado and is currently a Hospital and Nursing Home Chaplain serving with Hospital Chaplain's Ministry of America, Inc. He is married and has two married children in full-time ministry.
A Family, A Church & A Special-Needs Child
Conrad Baggott

Editor's Note: Desiree is an eight year old with Down's Syndrome and a brittle diabetic child. In September of 2002 she broke her neck on the playground. The following October she underwent her first surgery to repair her neck. This last February, a second surgery was completed and this is when this story was written. At the present moment Desiree is at home healing with a neck-helmet brace. The family will not know if the second surgery was a success until late summer 2003. The family has given permission to publish their story.

In the last six months, our church has experienced life and death crises. We have lost four members or former members to death and have lived with the struggle of Bruce and Stacy Reed and their wonderful special-needs daughter, Desiree, along with many of our folks being in and out of the hospital at various times. Tragedies are not new to the human race and often they can lead to marital discord. However, Bruce and Stacy, have demonstrated to all of us God's faithfulness, love and commitment to His children. They live and breathe a love for family and friends, which is a great demonstration of God's love for the world but especially for His children. They love the Lord and their family and this love is proven as they walk through the daily trials in Desiree's life.

Couples that face cataclysmic challenges can choose to allow God to strengthen them by these events or they can choose to allow the crisis to permanently and negatively scar their lives and the lives of their children. The couple that allows God to walk them through a given calamity is made stronger because of the event or choose to be weakened by the event. The physical, emotional and spiritual strain of a special-needs child or an earth-shattering health related event in any family can cause one of two responses: one, each person can be drawn closer to the Lord -- who through His infinite wisdom has allowed the event to transpire -- and each other, or two, they can allow the event (because of personal choice) to be seen as absolutely overwhelming. Therefore, because of the chaos the man or woman or the couple who are enduring the trial can fail and fall spiritually due to the overwhelming emotional, psychological and physical strain.

Often couples with a special-needs child or couples facing traumatic life and death experiences fail to communicate effectively about the situation, their personal finances, the other child or children or other issues which seem to be kicked to the back burner due to the trial at hand. Recent studies prove that we all struggle with communication when conflict or crisis arises. Solomon said it best when he said "A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger (Proverbs 15:1).

Brian L. Harbour, in his book gives seven positive recommendations on how to respond in a godly fashion when conflict or crisis arise:

1. Be honest with each other;
2. Be clear in expressing your feelings;
3. Listen carefully to each other;
4. Commit to finding a solution;
5. Stay with the issue at hand and do not digress;
6. Avoid confrontation in public; and
7. Be willing to forgive and forget.
Bruce and Stacy have exemplified these seven ideals often. In James 1: 5, God promises to give wisdom to the believer who needs it for any situation. Communication is critical to resolving any given problem or issue when life and death situations happen. Conversely, if conflict is unsolved and communications stall, it can fester and cause a cancer if left unresolved. Thus, "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). On the other hand, "whoever guards his or her mouth and tongue keeps his or her soul from trouble" (Proverbs 21:23). Therefore, Larry Vincent stated, "When faced with a difficult situation…pray about it, and then be careful when [speaking]" because a word spoken in its proper time and spoken in the right circumstance encourages another and uplifts another instead of discouraging another.

The couple that seeks to continually believe and trust God during tragic life and death situations -- such as Desiree's continual illnesses -- will grow in their love for each other and for their Savior. God has allowed this trial to come into their lives not to hurt them but to strengthen them. He wants them to be willing to use their experiences to help others (2 Cor. 1:1-11). This trial is not the end of life. In fact, James 1: 12 states, "Blessed is the man or woman who endures trails; for when he or she has been proved, he or she will receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Moreover, God wants to turn one's sorrow into joy (Psalm 30:5). Each couple must make a decision whether they will allow this trial to strengthen them or embitter them.

We as a church also have a decision to make. Are we going to let these trials discourage us or bond us together? We need to bind together and resolve not to be downtrodden. Let us strive to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the LORD" (2 Corinthians 15:58). Therefore, let us encourage one another -- uplift each other and go forward.

Thank you Bruce and Stacy for demonstrating to Faith Bible Church the path and words which you have chosen during your trials with your wonderful daughter -- Desiree.

Conrad Baggott is the pastor of Faith Bible Church in Evart, Michigan.

Thoughts for My Generation

Ben Brown

"We don't care how much you know until we know how much you care." That is the motto of our generation, Generation X, people in their 20s and 30s, born roughly between 1965 and 1985. Three main issues are sure to come up when ministering to us Busters.

Our Attitude Toward Truth

The postmodern philosophy that truth is relative and personal is a widely held viewpoint of my generation. Many in Generation X--even in Bible-believing churches--do not accept that God's Word is objective, authoritative truth for all people, in all times, and in all places. What has caused so many to question this fundamental truth? Many of my generation say they do not believe in absolute truth because they have not observed that those who do believe in it consistently practice what they claim to believe.

While those in my generation who reject absolute truth feel they have reason to point a finger at other generations, blaming them for their failure to practice what they preach, they need to take a hard look at the fingers pointing at them. My generation cannot blame its rejection of truth on a lack of good models in the generations that preceded us, but must ask ourselves how we've responded to the truth we have received. Are we guilty of trying to drown out the evidence and live for ourselves rather than submit to God's authority in our lives (Romans 1:18-22)? Have we,
like Adam and Eve, fallen into Satan's temptation to think that what God has said can legitimately be denied and questioned (Genesis 3:1-5)?

How can the church best expose the postmodern lie and lead the unconvinced of my generation to believe that God's Word is in fact the ultimate source of absolute truth and the final authority for faith and practice?

1. We must preach and teach God's Word. No matter how a generation responds, faithfully proclaiming God's Word is always our mandate (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2). Let us not join the ranks of those who have all too eagerly accommodated the very thing Paul warned Timothy about—"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3).

It is a sad commentary that the very thing that we as Busters living in a postmodern society most need--the faithful preaching of truth from God's Word--is rarely a part of our discussion about strategy. We allow too many things to squeeze out the time that should be devoted to preaching God's Word. We allow too many things to squeeze out the time we need to prepare expositional sermons with solid applications.

2. We must practice what we preach. We are more likely to give a hearing to a pastor who preaches the Bible as absolute truth when we see him living by it. We are unimpressed by hearing truth concepts declared while not seeing them lived out by those making the declarations. Pastors win a hearing with us when they are not just hearers of the Word, but also doers (James 1:22-25). Don't just tell us to read the Bible. Share with us how God's Word has affected your life personally. Don't just tell us to pray. Share with us how God has powerfully worked through prayer in your life. Don't just tell us to do the right thing. Share with us how God enabled you to do what was right even when it was hard to do so. Show us how the Bible is relevant to our lives by sharing specific, personal applications.

3. We must shoot straight and be real. We are looking for people who will tell us the truth. Gary L. McIntosh says, "Busters don't want 'perfect' Christians or overblown promises about the future. What they do seek is the plain, straightforward truth ... and real answers" from churches and Christians willing to admit their struggles (Gary L. McIntosh, Make Room for the Boom or Bust, page 47).

4. We must show people that we love them. Relationships are of crucial importance to us. My generation demonstrates readiness to sacrifice time and energy to initiate and nurture meaningful friendships. The impetus behind the high priority we give to relationships may come from our own poverty of emotional connections as we were raised. Many of us were raised in isolated environments due to such factors as divorce and our parents' pursuit of career goals to the point of neglecting the needs of family. When we show people we love them, we will have greater opportunities to share the truth of God's Word. In order to effectively reach us with the Gospel, the church must follow the example of Paul, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Our Commitment to Family

An encouraging characteristic of my generation is our heightened sense of responsibility to the family. We take the commitment to marriage and parenthood seriously. We tend to react to our childhood experience by pursuing a totally different path for our own families than what we grew up with. Many (50% or more?) of my generation grew up in fragmented homes, devastated by
divorce. Even if divorce didn't affect us personally, many of us had parents who were virtually absent because of their workaholic tendencies. Generation X is much less likely than our parents' generation to sacrifice family in return for occupational gain.

As is often the case, our strength has a tag-along weakness. Our weakness is that we are less likely than any other generation to volunteer time to our churches. A 2001 study by the Barna Research Group indicates that only 12% of Busters report volunteering. Conversely, 25% of Boomers and 25% of Builders volunteered at church in the previous week (Barna Research Group, Ltd., www.barna.org, Research Archives: Generational Differences).

When we are challenged to make a greater commitment to the ministries of our church, a common response we give is, "We can't because we need more time for our family." Unfortunately, we tend to have unrealistic expectations as to what we consider too much commitment.

While our protection of family time is a good thing, our being asked to give two or three nights per week to church activities (Sunday night, Wednesday night, another night of ministry), or to give a few more hours of time each week is not requiring too much of our families. On many occasions, time spent away together in ministry constitutes some of the most meaningful times we can spend together with our families. Also, the hours spent preparing for and involved in ministry to others often serves to teach us how we can better minister to and serve our own families.

We also need to be much more honest with ourselves about what our real reasons are for saying "no" to commitments at church. While our excuse might be that we need to spend more time with our families, all too often the reality is that our "family time" is not family time at all. Many times, our "family time" involves us doing what we want to do at home—i.e. hobbies, work projects, leisure activities, entertainment, etc.—while in essence neglecting our children. If we are really doing something with and for our families, we will be doing things together with other family members and not just spending time around them, while doing our own thing.

We have a great opportunity with Busters to help strengthen families. The high priority my generation gives to the family offers the church an opportunity for outreach and ministry. We are looking for churches that will teach us how to make our families work. Parenting helps, instruction on marriage, small group opportunities for forming relationships with other Busters, and good children's ministries are high priorities for us when looking for a church. Churches with a significant group of people 60+ years old also prove to be attractive to us. We tend to skip a generation when looking for advice. We are more likely to ask for help from someone the age of our grandparents than we are to ask someone the age of our parents. Energetic seniors who love young couples are the best fit when recruiting people to teach and minister to our age group.

Our Approach to Making Commitments

Another strong point we have is that we are careful in making commitments. A corresponding weakness is that we also tend to be fearful of and slow to make commitments. It is unfair to say that we are typically uncommitted people. Once we do make a commitment, we will put our all into it and do our best to make a significant contribution.

Why are we slow to commit? Perhaps the most significant reason for our hesitancy is fear. We are afraid of the commitment of marriage because of the broken marriages we observed growing up. We are afraid of time commitments because of fear that it might take away from time spent with family and friends. We are afraid of making the same mistakes that our parents regret having made with us.

How do we best deal with our difficulty in making commitments? Our greatest need is to focus our attention first and foremost on the call of Christ to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow...
Him (Mark 8:34). This is a commitment we will never regret making. This is a choice we have no good reason to be fearful or slow in making. We need to realize that trying to hold onto physical life at all cost will bring loss, while surrendering our life and losing it for Christ's sake will involve us in the most worthwhile of all pursuits (Mark 8:35).

We need to come to the conviction that the world's goods can never make up for the lost opportunity to follow faithfully after Christ (Mark 8:36). We need to anticipate and by faith focus on the glory of Christ that awaits those who follow Him as faithful, fruitful disciples. We need to join Esther Rusthoi in her conviction that, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus."

How can we help Busters make commitments?

When asking for commitments to church ministry, we shouldn't give Busters the idea we are asking for a commitment to a program or an institution. Instead, we should focus on challenging Busters to make a commitment to follow Christ. We should show how the ministry commitment we are asking for is in keeping with what Christ requires of His followers.

Ecclesiastes has much to say to us. Many in my generation are still struggling to find our purpose in life. We will be encouraged and challenged to learn that a true, lasting sense of satisfaction and purpose can indeed be found, but only when we seek after and obey God (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13). We will be challenged to lay aside the normal human goals that brought such great disappointment to generations ahead of us. Please help us escape the regret and disillusionment that come from realizing too late that the purposeful life we long for is not found "under the sun," apart from God. We will be grateful to leaders who share Solomon's wisdom and show us the dead ends we will come up against if we give our lives to pursue meaning in earthly treasures and pleasures.

Conclusion

Do you want to be a church that attracts the attention of my generation? Show us you care. Shoot straight with us. Celebrate our commitment to the family and provide relevant family ministries. Challenge us to the commitment of discipleship. Help us shift our focus from living "under the sun" to living in pursuit of the Son. And above all, teach us the Word.

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Reaching Across the Generational Divide
David Schroeder

She never let go of his hand.

Tiny, delicate fingers engulfed by large, rugged ones. Vulnerable fragility held by strong security. Youthful vitality guided by aged wisdom. I watched as granddaughter and grandfather frolicked around the parking lot. Apparently this little girl's mom shopped inside the store, while this kind old man enjoyed his grandfatherly duty.

Sitting outside the nearby coffee shop, I found myself riveted to this lovely picture. She was a delightful little three-year-old with tiny black shoes, lacy socks, a pretty dress and a matching bow in her long brown hair. He was a joyful elderly man with a wide grin, twinkling eyes, and gentle laughter … and laugh they did!
As my coffee became cold, my heart grew warm. For a few minutes I shared their love, their joy, their delight, and their connection. Life came into focus again.

You see, this reminds me of a central call on the Christian life: We are to reach out in love to people. No one I know would argue that this truth is at the core of Scripture and the heart of God. People are the focal point of both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

However, here is the rub as I see it. Certainly we embrace the call to love others when we like them and they are similar to us, but when the differences between us are so great that they seem to produce an un-crossable chasm … well … then the excuses begin to flow. I have heard them, and I have spoken them.

Perhaps the most recognizable example of this struggle is the gulf which naturally exists between generations. This "gap" as it is called, can be the source of great confusion, misunderstandings, and pain. Families have divided and churches have split for this reason. Yet, it need not be so. I believe there is hope.

Anyone who has witnessed the unbridled love between grandparent and grandchild knows intuitively that it is not only possible to reach across this divide, but it is imperative. The unity, strength, and witness of the body of Christ is on the line!

Watching the little girl and her grandfather on that morning, my heart stirred with vision and hope for the incredible potential and power of cross-generational relationships. If we are to follow the example of Christ, we will love every generation, no matter how difficult or costly.

And difficult it is. Who hasn't been baffled by the values, attitudes, and behaviors of a person residing in a generation other than one's own? Yet these very differences can either drive us apart as they often do, or they can drive us to a place of humbly seeking to understand and love another uniquely created human being.

The foundation of many relational struggles is our central belief that everyone should be more like us. We don't state this belief, but our actions and attitudes expose us. Is this not one of the main issues between a man and woman in marriage?

I am not exempt from this struggle. I vividly remember the day when I realized that my oldest son was not like me. Returning from a hockey game in which Justin barely watched the action, I told my wife Joyce of my disappointment. She gave me one of those loving "wifely" looks.

"He is not like you, David," she gently said. "He is not into sports and competition. He is highly thoughtful and intelligent, and you need to relate with him for who he is."

The lights went on. I repented and began to get interested in science, math, and chess so I could more deeply connect with my very precious son. Our relationship has since blossomed. I made a common mistake … the very error which keeps generations at arm's length.

I am glad God understands. Where would I be if He hadn't reached out to me in my lost state? Where would I be if He didn't regularly embrace me despite my sin, fickleness, and quirkiness?

I am grateful God modeled this kind of love for me. Not only in Christ's life and death, but also in His birth. The incarnation is a profound example of "bridging the gap." Did ever a chasm exist so deep and wide as the one between holy God and sinful man?

A close look at John 1 and Philippians 2 reveals an incredible display of crossing the divide. God demonstrated these principles of love in the incarnation:
1. Love takes the initiative. God moved on our behalf with our interest in mind. How many relationships wither away while both wait for the other to act?

2. Love sees the need. God saw our state of need and acted accordingly. Some of my favorite descriptions of Jesus in His ministry are that "He saw," "He felt compassion," and "He healed." How often do we judge another generation by their exterior differences, rather than seeing the true heart need?

3. Love sets aside rights. Jesus clearly paid a significant price to become the God-man. Love requires sacrifice. It demands that we set aside our agendas and rights for the benefit of another.

4. Love pursues commonality. No words can describe the wonder of Christ becoming flesh for us. Can a human mind comprehend this miracle?

What I do understand is that Christ's love manifested itself in His becoming like me in order to love me. I am to do the same for others.

Embedded in these incarnate principles are both the motivation and the method for reaching across generational lines. It takes initiative, insight, humility, and the pursuit of understanding to powerfully love someone very different from you. But it can be done. It must be done.

One of the privileges I have in my role with our ministry to the military is to literally travel around the world and see our staff "share the gospel and their lives" in powerful ways with people. I am greatly impacted by our older staff as they reach out to these young soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines. These second-career and retired people become spiritual parents or grandparents to young, eager, and needy military men, women, and dependent family members. No generational gap exists here, only a beautiful and potent example of incarnate love. This is why Cadence is always seeking mature believers to come and mentor these young people in our armed forces, either for a few months or for the long term.

As you consider the multi-generations of people God has placed in your life, who might He be calling you to courageously love in a new way? Look both directions, for it is not just about the older loving the younger.

I also remember the day I realized my father was an elderly man of another generation. In that moment, I determined I would no longer let our differences negatively impact our relationship. I decided to initiate, seek to understand, set aside my desires and expectations, forgive when needed, and deeply love this father of mine. Our relationship blossomed.

That was over ten years ago. Ten months ago I watched my father take his last breath from his cancer-ravaged body and depart for heaven. I wept in sorrow and awe of God, but not in regret. For I had crossed the chasm between us in love, and subsequently God gave us a beautiful relationship.

It is not always easy to love someone of another era, but it is always worthwhile. Not only has God given us an example to follow, He has also given us His empowering Spirit. Christ in us is our only hope of loving this way.

Now think again about the person across the aisle at church, about the neighbor across the street, about the co-worker over the office cubicle, about the family member across the living room, and ask God to give you the courage to reach your hand across the divide.

Do not forget, God's hand is always extended to you. Sure, it is the hand of a powerful King, but it is also the tender hand of a Father. Your name is engraved on its palm. It is the hand of love and
grace … extended for you, and me. Now as you reach out to another in the name of Christ, remember…

He will never let go of your hand.

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**One Church's Statement on Educational Choices**

Editors Note: The issue of educating our children (Christian School? Public School? Home School?) is an important one facing our churches and families. The elders of Byron Center (MI) Bible Church have adopted the following position statement. It demonstrates how one church has addressed this issue.

**Introduction**

The purpose of this position statement is to address the issue of God's individual leading in the families of our congregation with reference to what educational methodology they deem best for their children. We do not advance this statement as a comprehensive treatment of each position. The advantages and disadvantages of each choice exceed what can be addressed here. However, our purpose is to provide demonstration that each position has both advantages and disadvantages with reference to seeing God's purposes fulfilled in our children's lives. Since children are a blessed stewardship with which parents have been entrusted by God, each set of parents has the individual responsibility before the Lord to fulfill their stewardship in the fear of God. Although God does not require uniformity among His people, He does command that we strive for unity in the midst of our diversities. Thus, regardless of the different choices that individual families make regarding education, there ought to be mutual respect and the diligent preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. God can use different avenues to adequately prepare His people for their lives of service to Him. Throughout history, He has chosen to bless through a variety of educational methodologies to promote His purpose for individual servants. This statement looks at some of the benefits as well as dangers of each approach and provides a corresponding admonition from the elders as to biblically responsible parenting.

**Christian Education**

We recognize that there are some believers whose choice of overseeing their children's education will include utilizing the Christian school opportunities afforded by believers who have established evangelical Christian schools. It is the priority of many of these parents to cooperate with the biblical principle taught in Luke: "A pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). These parents see the advantages of placing their children under teachers who share their values and convictions and who will promote biblical truth in each discipline being taught. Those who choose to educate their children by using Christian schools must recognize the critical need to be constantly engaged in mentoring their children spiritually. Without such parental mentoring, students in Christian schools can respond to the pressures to conform while failing to internalize the truths that ought to be transforming them. This can contribute to a heart that is hardened to truth. The Bible declares: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew
and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.
Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who
built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed
against that house; and it fell -- and great was its fall" (Matthew 7:24-27). Thus the elders of
Byron Center Bible Church urge parents who feel directed by the Lord to delegate a portion of
their children's academic training to the Christian schools to remain aggressive in providing
spiritual leadership to their children. We call on them to remain attentive to the potential
hardening of their children's hearts to the Holy Spirit by keeping Christ Jesus and His Word
central in the home -- Deuteronomy 6:4-9. An illustration of a biblical character for whom the
value of this particular methodology is demonstrated is Saul (who later became known as the
Apostle Paul) who was reared in the context of the rabbinical training afforded to the children of
the Rabbis and Pharisees. God had a particular purpose for Paul to perform and prepared him
for that purpose in the institutions of Israel -- cp. Acts 22:3.

Home Education

We recognize that there are some believers whose choice of overseeing their children's education
will by conviction consolidate the process within their own homes. Many of these parents believe
that the biblical principle that teaches that "you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall
talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down
and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7) limits their freedom to outsource their children's
education. Those who choose to home educate believe that the responsibility to train their children
includes academics as they seek to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord"
(Ephesians 6:4b). Those who choose to educate their children at home must recognize the critical
need that exists to preserve a dependency upon the Holy Spirit to do the work of sanctifying their
children. The danger of this choice is a reliance upon protective care and the absence of peer
dependency to insure the spiritual safety of their child. Because of the protection afforded by
limiting the influences of peers and the lures of culture, some parents may relax their concerns for
their children's spiritual well-being, believing the dangers to be external. However, as God's Word
does declare: "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2
Timothy 1:7). As will be demonstrated during the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ, even the
most desirable settings will not produce genuine godliness. Thus, the elders of Byron Center Bible
Church urge parents who feel directed by the Lord to personally educate their children at home to
remain sensitive to the dangers of developing an excess in withdrawing from others in order to
protect a child from negative influences. Such excess can lead to a lack of passion in reaching the
lost and thereby hinder the child's ability to ultimately fulfill God's purpose for their lives
(Matthew 28:19). Throughout most of the world's history, only the wealthy were able to gain a
formal education while the average man gained whatever education was available through friends,
parents and self-motivation. Until the modern era, home education was the most common means
by which the majority of people were educated.

Public Education

We recognize that there are some believers whose choice of overseeing their children's education
will include utilizing the public school opportunities afforded by local communities. It is the
priority of many of these parents to cooperate with the biblical principle that their family serves
the Lord by representing Him within the community through this educational method. The
Scriptures teach that it is the heart of Christ Jesus that we serve as salt and light; salt -- in that we
provide a means by which lawlessness is restrained and morality is preserved; and light -- as a
means by which the Gospel message is clearly seen in the contrasting lifestyles of believers among
those who do not believe. Jesus stated in His prayer to the Father just prior to His crucifixion that
His followers would be able to properly represent Him in the world -- "I do not ask You to take
them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am
not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:15-18). Those who choose to educate their children by using the public schools must recognize the critical need to be constantly engaged in mentoring their children spiritually — cp. Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The danger of this choice is for the child to be overwhelmed by a secular culture that is hostile to the holiness of God. The Bible declares: "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:5-6). Thus the elders of Byron Center Bible Church urge parents who feel directed by the Lord to represent Him in the public schools to remain aggressive in providing spiritual leadership to their children, remaining attentive to the encroachments of the world in the worldview of their children, keeping Christ Jesus clearly central in the home. An illustration of a biblical character for whom the value of this particular methodology is demonstrated is Moses who was educated from his earliest days in the secular institutions of Egypt (Acts 7:22). God clearly had a specific purpose for Moses and therefore had him educated in a secular environment in order to prepare him for that purpose.

Conclusion

It is the position of the elders of Byron Center Bible Church that the heart of a child is not shaped primarily by his or her environment. The particular educational choice that is made is not the deciding influence in the preparedness of a child to serve the Lord. God can and does lead individual families to pursue any of these methodologies depending on His purposes for that family and the individual child. At times, He may even lead one family to utilize an assortment of these methods depending upon the individual needs of the children. The determining factor in all three methods is the attentiveness of the parent to the spiritual well-being of the children that focuses on the Gospel. Thus the only genuine parental issue that is indispensable to successful parenting and education of a child is the integrity of the parent relying upon God to produce godliness in the lives of their child by pointing them to Jesus Christ. Any methodology that replaces one's dependency upon God to produce godliness in a child is not of faith and is therefore deficient, regardless of its technical merit. Scripture goes so far to say that "whatever is not of faith is sin"— Romans 14:23b. Therefore, if parents are truly relying upon the Lord and providing spiritual leadership to their children, God can and will bless. The Holy Spirit will do the work necessary to produce godliness in the lives of our children regardless of the specific educational methodology used.

Since this is the case, we believe it to be unacceptable for the leading of the Lord in individual families to be called into question by others. If a family feels led by the Lord to utilize Christian education, other families ought to respect God's leading. If a family is led to use home or public education, God's leading in their family should likewise be validated. No one method is a guaranteed success. In addition, no one method is a guaranteed failure. Division among believers that is based on educational choices is unacceptable and will be rebuked. We are to accept one another even as Romans 14:10 declares: "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."

It is our prayer that the children in all of the families of Byron Center Bible Church will have the benefit of parents who, regardless of their educational choice, will seek to fulfill the admonitions of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 with faithfulness relying fully upon the grace of God as they point their children to the hope found solely in Jesus Christ.
The Four Essentials That Make a Church Evangelistic
R. Larry Moyer

Every church leader who walks closely with the Lord wants his church to make a difference. He wants his church to impact the community with the message of the gospel--the one message that changes a person's eternal destiny.

What makes a church evangelistic? What characterizes a church that, year after year, grows through conversion?

Based on 30 years experience traveling worldwide, I can emphatically tell you there are four common denominators that characterize those churches.

Evangelistic Leadership

Church leaders who are evangelistic are keenly aware that people are more impacted by what leaders do than by what they say. For that reason, their example is even more important than their exhortation. When it comes to evangelism, their life emphasizes, "Do as I do, not just as I say."

Traveling has shown me firsthand that after five years a church takes on a pastor's personality. If he is warm and friendly, the church becomes warm and friendly. If he is cold and aloof, his people become cold and aloof. The church also takes on his priorities. If he is all teaching and no evangelism, they will be all teaching and no evangelism. Their Bible will be full of notes but their lives will not be full of conversations with lost people. If he is all evangelism and no teaching, the people will tend to reach out socially but not grow up spiritually. If he is balanced with evangelism and teaching, the people will love the Word and the lost. After five years, the pastor produces what he is.

Any leader who wants his church to be evangelistic must examine himself by asking, "Is evangelism something I talk or is it something I walk? How many conversations have I had with lost people this month with a view to introducing them to the Savior?"

You might ask, "But won't that give believers the impression that, 'Evangelism -- oh, that's the pastor's job'?" Only if you overlook the second common denominator in churches that are evangelistic.

Evangelism Training

Encouragingly enough, surveys reveal that a significant number of believers desire evangelism training. It is disappointing how few receive it.

The two reasons believers don't evangelize are the same as they have always been. They are either afraid or they don't know how. Churches that are evangelistic solve those problems by offering a training program that is available the entire year. It is the kind of program that takes believers one step at a time, teaching them how to build relationships with the lost, talk to the lost, turn conversations to spiritual things, present the gospel clearly, and follow up new believers. With prayer and accountability, the right program causes believers to lead their first person to Christ.

That "right" program has to contain two things. The first is a clear explanation of the gospel. Even when they have opportunity, many believers still do not share the gospel. Instead, they try to share the entire Bible. The Bible has 66 books. The gospel, as defined in 1 Corinthians 15, could be expressed in ten words -- Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. The second thing a right program contains is a simple method of sharing the gospel. Any believer consistent in evangelism has a basic method he uses. It is important to keep that method so easy to remember that a
believer can recall it when he is frozen in fright in front of lost people. One reason people like EvanTell's Bad News/Good News approach is because as they put it, "I learned and remembered it so quickly."

Train and keep on training. Believers need to know not only what they need to do but also how to do it.

**Evangelistic Opportunities**

Please note that I said opportunities, not opportunity.

D. L. Moody was asked, "What is the best way to reach the masses?" His answer was, "Go for them." Churches that are evangelistic don't spend their time asking, "What is the best way to reach the masses?" Instead, they "go for them," using any and every way possible to reach them.

Personal evangelism necessitates personal contact. Therefore, churches that are evangelistic assist their people in providing meaningful contact with the lost. Some do it through a church picnic where you spread your blanket on the ground along with a blanket spread for a lost family. Some do it through a volleyball game where, in order to play on the court, you must bring a lost friend with you. Being a hunter, it's been exciting to see churches have outreaches to the lost with a wild game dinner. One church offered a gift-wrapping service where people brought their Christmas gifts to the church where they were wrapped free of charge. It was a great opportunity to share that when God wrapped His gift, He wrapped it free of charge. As one person has observed, "Ways of evangelism are as diverse as those to be reached and those who reach them."

Is the gospel presented at every event? It depends on what is natural. It's best to do what seems appropriate. Either way, contacts are made and opportunities given--opportunities that sooner or later result in conversations and conversations that often result in conversions.

The fourth common denominator is as important as the first three.

**Consistent Evangelism Emphasis**

Churches that are evangelistic don't emphasize evangelism just one month of the year. They emphasize it every month of every year. Nor do they do it the same way month after month. One Sunday, they do it through the testimony of a relatively new convert -- a testimony that has been carefully prepared and given beforehand to one of the leaders. Another Sunday, they do it as they introduce a new song. Perhaps the history behind the song reminds everyone of the need to get the good news out. Another Sunday, it is done through the pastor's personal example God just gave him in evangelism. Another Sunday, it is done through the "kick off" of the church's evangelism training program.

Such monthly emphasis helps people keep as a priority on their minds what is a priority on His. The lost not only can be reached -- they must be reached and the time is NOW.

**Conclusion**

Will these four efforts make a church evangelistic overnight? No! But they do make a church evangelistic. Why haven't I emphasized prayer? Prayer is not a fifth denominator. It must undergird all the above. Satan will attack. Emphasizing fellowship among Christians is not a direct attack upon his kingdom. Outreach is. We are assured, though, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Talk to God as you practice these four items that make a church evangelistic. You will experience firsthand the working of an Almighty God.

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Youth Ministry in the Town or Country Church
Ron Klassen

An area of concern for many pastors in town and country settings is youth ministry. With only five teenagers in the church—three in high school and two in junior high, no youth pastor, and no gym, how can one possibly have a youth ministry? Perhaps part of the answer is to look at youth ministry from a whole different perspective. Doing so might lead us to conclude the small-town church has an advantage!

Introduction: A swimming or running church?

David Ray, in The Big Small Church Book, tells a story about a duck hunter who got a new retriever that, when commanded to fetch a stick thrown out on a pond, ran across the water. Wanting to show off his remarkable dog, the hunter took his partner, George, out for a demonstration. He threw the stick, gave the command, and his dog ran across the water and retrieved the stick. The hunter glanced proudly at George, who returned a noncommittal look. The stick was thrown again and retrieved, but still George didn't seem impressed. Suppressing disappointment and irritation, the hunter asked, "What do you think of my new dog?" With a rather disinterested tone George answered, "Your dog can't swim very well, can he?"1

Many today believe there is a "problem" with the town or country church: it doesn't "swim" very well. Some think that in order to be a good church it has to be a good swimmer. City churches swim--they're good. Small-town churches don't swim--they're not as good.

Could it be that the small-town church is a different dog, but not an inferior dog? Small-town churches may not swim well, but what if they can run? And what if by running they get the job done just as well as churches that swim, though a different way?

Another question: Should we try to teach that dog how to swim? A lot of time and effort is devoted these days--particularly at schools and conferences and in books--to trying to teach non-swimming churches how to swim. But maybe swimming isn't the best way for some churches to get the job done. Maybe some can do it differently but with equally good results.

This could be applied to a number of facets of church life, from worship to preaching to evangelism. But perhaps there is no better illustration than youth ministry.

Application: Youth ministry

When asked what is needed for a good youth ministry, answers would likely include: programs, money, big events, lots of kids, a band, and elective classes on a variety of subjects. With this definition, how many town and country churches can have a "good" youth ministry?

Might there be a different way? What if the small-town church can get the job done by running instead of swimming?

A personal ministry. Joani Schultz wrote2 about a small-town pastor who, when asked about his youth ministry, paused, chuckled, and then said, "You must be mistaken. We don't even have a youth group!" But as his story unfolded, it became apparent that he did have a youth ministry. He knew every youth by name. He attended their ball games. He was intentional about talking to every teen each Sunday at church. Almost every week he spent one-on-one time with each teen. He helped a single father plan a birthday party for his teenage daughter. In the article Schultz quoted one teen who said this about his pastor: "Some of the best talks I had with my pastor were times we'd meet downtown while I was running errands for my mom. Pastor Johnson always acted interested in me and took time to talk. He cared about me outside the church walls."
Did that pastor and church have a youth ministry? The pastor concluded they didn't because they didn't do it like big churches. Their method was running instead of swimming. But might it be possible to accomplish the same end another way? Can one lead teens to Christ or help teens grow in their faith through a personal ministry instead of a program- or event-oriented ministry?

One country church pastor's youth ministry consisted of inviting teens to his home every Thursday night. He and his wife did personal discipleship (she with the girls, he with the guys) followed by food and games, often while sitting around their kitchen table. Is this an inferior way to do youth ministry? Perhaps this question can be answered by another: How many big-church teens have a personal relationship with their pastor?

An intergenerational ministry. There's a general rule of thumb: as churches get bigger, the likelihood increases that there will be more age-segregated ministries, with youth ministry being Exhibit A. When teens enter the building of a large church, they head to the youth wing and their "subchurch." When was the last time a youth in a large church had more than a few seconds conversation with someone 20 years older?

Yet listen to this youth pastor who once served a big-church youth group but left that for a smaller-church situation:

Teenagers who experience only the youth group and never bond with others in the church are almost guaranteed to drop out [of church] after high school. If it's only the youth group that drew them, then only the youth group can hold them. No more youth group, no more kids. That's why I worked so hard to get our megachurch kids interacting with the rest of the church. But it was nigh unto impossible. Large churches tend to have an age-division paradigm that controls everything.

As we observe all the neat stuff that big-church youth ministries do, they may appear to have an advantage. But maybe their advantage is only temporary. Over the long haul the small church, with less programming and less glitz, may actually have the advantage.

Are there advantages to age categorization? Undoubtedly so. Should a church never categorize by age? Not at all. The fact is that, in many small churches, it just isn't possible to separate by age. Perhaps this should not be viewed as inferior. Both ways have their advantages. One person has observed that "the grass is greener on both sides."

The mixing of ages offers many pluses. The small-town church is one of the few places left in American society where intergenerational relationships still exist. This small-church characteristic actually has considerable biblical support. The word picture that the church is most often compared to in the Bible is that of a family (e.g., see Gal. 6:10, 1 Tim. 3:15, 5:1-2). Think about biological families: God's design for our upbringing is to be in a family where there are older and younger brothers and sisters that relate to each other. There's a mom and dad who are a generation older than the kids. There are grandparents who are another generation older. There are uncles, aunts, and cousins. In a family you might be the only one your own age. Families are designed for inter-generational relating.

So also God desires that church families have intergenerational relating. Yet as churches get bigger, unless there is real intentionality about doing otherwise, there tends to be less of this aspect of God's design present.

Can you see benefits to intergenerational relating? The younger are being mentored by those who've been there. The old provide stability, wisdom, history, and stories. The young provide joy, hope, a future, idealism, enthusiasm, and energy.
My daughter is a hugger. In particular, she hugs senior ladies at church. Some time ago after she broke her arm she got a card from one of the senior ladies saying, "I'm going to miss your hugs." My son has a special relationship with a 70-something grandfather-type in our church. Does intergenerational relating sound inferior?

Mark DeVries says, "If you take a quick summary of the youth ministry books from the last decade, what you'll find is an almost across-the-board agreement that the primary challenge facing young people in this generation is their extensive isolation from the world of adults." Yet in most town and country churches it is abnormal for this kind of age separation to occur. Could it be that this is an advantage?

So, what's your answer if someone visits your church and wants to know about the ministries you offer for youth? Instead of stuttering or apologizing, perhaps you could share how your church values being an intergenerational family.

One pastor expressed his fundamental philosophy with these words: "Our church has a youth ministry, not a youth group." He continued, "When our youth invite others, they don't say, 'Come to our youth group.' They say, 'How about coming to church with me?''"

A participative ministry. One Texas pastor was lamenting that his church had virtually no youth program. But 15 of the 18 youth in his church were active in some ministry of the church on a weekly basis: ushering, singing in the "adult" choir, helping in the nursery, making banners, playing an instrument, reading scripture, or assisting in children's Sunday school classes. This church, without even planning to do so, had created multiple opportunities for its young people to serve. Does it have a youth ministry? DeVries says, "If this church is ever able to create a 'successful youth program,' it may destroy its youth ministry."5

Town and country churches often involve their youth in most every facet of church life. Doing so integrates youth into the church, which in turn makes them much more likely to stay long past the last high school ski retreat.

One small-church observer said, "I see grandmas and kids working together. There may be only five or six young people, but they each have a job. It's like any other family: 'Here's your chore.' What incredible training for living out what the church is all about!"6

In fact, the small-town pastor should constantly remind his congregation that "our church is a church that trains young people." Let them know that a high percentage of vocational Christian workers come from smaller churches. The small church is a great place to encourage involvement of all ages, which in turn instills in them a ministry bent that lasts a lifetime.

Ben Patterson says, "It is a sad fact of life that often the stronger the youth program in the church, and the more deeply the young people of the church identify with it, the weaker the chances are that those same young people will remain in the church when they grow too old for the youth program. Why? Because the youth program has become a substitute for participation in the church .... When the kids outgrow the youth program, they also outgrow what they have known of the church."7

Same purposes, different means

Having the kind of youth ministry described above doesn't mean that town and country churches should try to accomplish different purposes than bigger churches. The swimming and running dogs accomplished the same thing—they both retrieved the stick. So also small churches and big churches should work toward fulfilling common purposes, but they might do it in different ways—one running, the other swimming.
Saying this is not meant to be a value judgment. It's not saying the small-town church shouldn't emulate the big city church because the big city church is doing it wrong. It's not saying the small-town church's methods are better, any more than one would say a swimming dog's method is better than a running dog's. It's simply saying that small-town churches are unique. Being unique, how they best accomplish God's purposes might differ from how big city churches accomplish the same purposes.

The small-town church advantage

Small-town church pastors are often heard to speak wistfully of what they could do if some sort of dream-maker transported them away from the constraints of their small situation into the romanticized possibilities of big numbers, big budgets, and big facilities. They want their church to swim, not run.

The secret to good youth ministry in the town or country context is to focus on what you have, not on what you don't have. All of the youth in your church fit in one car. They all fit around your dining table. They all know each other intimately. They can all participate in the worship services. They all have a relationship with their pastor. They all regularly and frequently interact with adults.

Certainly large churches have their advantages. But with many aspects of the church, especially youth ministry, it's surprising how underrated the small church environment is. The real measure of an effective youth ministry is not how many programs or events a church has or how many kids. It's lives that are impacted and changed. It's youth who continue on in their Christian walk beyond their teen years. It's youth who become Christian leaders and workers.

One should not attempt to measure the effectiveness of a youth ministry while kids are still in their teens. It should be measured after kids leave the youth group—three, five, ten years later. When measured this way, the environment town and country churches provide for youth is a real contender.

One pastor well pointed out, "The Bible doesn't even have a word for teenager. So when visiting parents come up to me or call the office and ask, 'What programs do you have for teenagers?' I smile and say, 'We have church!'"

3 Dave McClellan, "The Small Church Advantage," Group (Jan/Feb 1999), p. 34.
5 Mark DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), p. 68.
7 Mark DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, p. 117

Ron Klassen is the Executive Director of Rural Home Missionary Association in Morton, IL and is the General Editor of SmallTalk.
"God's Blessing in Lives when Deployed"

by

Chaplains Matthew Kreider, USA and Jason Peters, USAF

Army CH (CPT) Matt Kreider, is deployed to the Middle East. He shares with us just one example of God's blessing in lives through the missionary ministry of Chaplaincy. [Warren Dane, Director of Chaplaincy]

Please pray for Ray Bolanos, our Task Force BMO. After two and a half hours today in my office, he is very close to accepting the free gift of salvation offered him by God's perfect provision through the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have been meeting with him once a week for about the last six weeks. He is a native of El Salvador.

He came to my office today all shook up about a dream he had. In his dream he was taken captive by terrorists and they were going to execute him. He woke up sweating and his heart pounding because he has not been to confession for several years. He was not prepared to die. What an opportunity to share with him how to be at peace with God, not afraid to die, knowing beyond a shadow of doubt that the grave is but a doorway into the presence of the Lord!

Two weeks ago I gave him a Bible in Spanish (his first ever) and since then he has read all of the Book of John and half of Acts.

The old saying is true, "There are no atheists in foxholes."

FOLLOW ON EMAIL...

You may recall a couple of weeks ago I asked for prayer concerning one of our Warrant Officers, Ray Bolanos, from El Salvador. Two weeks ago I asked him how sure of his salvation he was. His answer was, "Well, nobody knows for sure until you die, right?" This lead to a wonderful discussion about Gospel and the assurance of salvation one can have once they have placed their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. I met with him again this past Friday afternoon. I asked him the same question about his salvation. He answered with confidence, "If I die today I will go to heaven!!" When I asked him why he was so confident, he replied, "Because I believe!! Just like in the book of John. I believe that Jesus died for my sins." Praise the Lord! I spent the next two and a half hours reinforcing through the Word of God the assurance of salvation we have in Christ. This deployment opened Ray's eyes to his own mortality and God used it to draw Him to Himself. Please continue to pray for growth in Ray's spiritual walk as I meet with him weekly.

I praise God for the opportunity to serve Him in the military. It is certainly not easy being away from my family, but God is good to us and He gives us the strength to persevere.

Thanks again,
CH (CPT) Matt Kreider (USA)
For God & Country!

Air Force Ch, Capt, Jason Peters is assigned to Bolling AFB in Washington D.C. He recounts one incident of God's blessing when deployed to the Middle East.

The ministry in Washington, D.C. has been phenomenal, especially in light of 9/11 and it is always a pleasure to serve as an Air Force Chaplain.
I was recently deployed for three months to a tiny British Island in the Indian Ocean called Diego Garcia. It is always difficult to be separated from family (Tiffany, our third child, was only 10 days old when I left), and it is obviously uncomfortable to live in a tent for three months. But, amid all of the chaos and strain, there were wonderful opportunities for ministry!

I prayed with B-52 crews before combat sorties, led Bible studies, accountability groups and worship services and baptized 19 people in the Indian Ocean. One of those baptized was a lieutenant named Reis.

Near the beginning of the deployment, he seemed hostile toward God. I maintained minimal contact but covenanted with a brother to pray for him every day. After four weeks, he started asking some tough questions. I told him that we had been praying for him and he said that he had noticed something drastically different about the Christian officers during the deployment. I clearly shared the story of Christ and outlined the response He demands. Reis asked me to pray with him that night! He hurried back to the camp to call his wife and his parents because he couldn't wait to tell them the good news--Jesus Christ was now his Savior and Lord!

JASON E. PETERS, Chaplain, Captain, USAF
11 WG/HC
Bolling AFB, Washington D.C.

God Doesn't Waste Our Pain
Lois Huseby

Helplessly I stood at the top of the basement steps watching the brilliant flames and thick black smoke shoot up toward me! My first stunned thought was, "This is a bad dream and I'm going to wake up any second!" An instant later the reality that an uncontrollable fire had started in the basement came over me!

I discovered the fire on an early Sunday morning in June of 2001. That particular Sunday we got up very early because our 16-year-old daughter, Tara, and her friend, Cara, were leaving with our church youth group for the IFCA Youth Convention. Mike was going to drive them to the church as soon as they were ready.

Mike had gone out into our front yard while he waited for the girls. I looked at the clock and saw that it was about time for the girls to leave so I decided to go to my daughter's basement bedroom and hurry them along. As I walked down the hallway from our bedroom toward the kitchen, I noticed a haze in the air and just then the smoke alarm went off above my head. I rushed into the kitchen and saw black smoke seeping through the heat registers on the floor. I quickly ran to the basement doorway. The flames and black smoke were eerily shooting up the steps so that I couldn't see to Tara's bedroom doorway. I frantically began screaming to Tara and Cara that there was a fire and to get out of the house. I continued to scream until the flames shot to the doorway where I stood.

They didn't answer me! Did they hear me? Were they already dead? With terror in my heart I ran for our cordless phone. I opened the patio door and ran hysterically out into the backyard as I dialed 911. The connection lasted only a few seconds but just long enough for the fire department to get an automatic reading of our address. The pitch black smoke and blistering flames shot out the patio doors! Fear for the girls' safety was so immense I almost collapsed onto the ground. "Lord, please help us!" I prayed.
Just then Mike came running out of the house through the patio doors bending low to avoid the hot flames. He had heard glass breaking and rushed into the house through the front entrance discovering the fire. "Where are the girls?" he yelled. I told him I didn't know and that they never answered me when I yelled to them to get out of the house! We both ran toward Tara's bedroom windows at the other end of the house. Just then the girls came running around the corner of the house. They had broken one of Tara's bedroom windows at the end of our home and crawled out. Praise God! They were safe!

As we stood watching our home burn we felt the anguish of losing all that was ours and yet so very grateful that we were all alive and safe. With arms wrapped around each other we prayed and wept before God. In my heart I prayed that God would please help us to understand why this was happening and to trust Him to take care of us.

By the time the fire was put out the inside of our home had been destroyed and we'd lost 90% of our belongings. It hurt deeply as we sifted through what was left and I grieved for the loss of so many memories. We'd lived in our home for 26 years and enjoyed many precious family times with our children and grandchildren.

I turned to the Lord and His Word for the comfort and strength that I knew only He could give. In Deuteronomy 33:12 it says, "Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in Him, for He shields him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between His shoulders." In the days that followed I would just imagine climbing up into God's lap each night and resting with my head on His chest as He held me in His arms while I cried. He was there during those dark, weary hours of the night when my fears and uncertainties were at their worst. He calmed my fears and gave me peace as I rested in Him.

My prayer life became essential to my daily peace. "You will keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because He trusts in You" (Is. 26:3). I found that peace in the midst of struggles only comes from a lifestyle of prayer. I became more passionate about God's Word and it became my anchor when I felt so overwhelmed by what had happened. In Ps. 63:1 it says "...my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water." That was how I felt! The Word of God was my thirst quencher and became sweeter than honey to my mouth (Ps 119:103). His Word revived my soul and it became more precious to me than anything in my life.

God's faithfulness was shown to us in so many ways in the days following the fire. Dear friends took us in and I believe they were God's way of embracing us through their loving care. Family members, neighbors and friends from church came to help us clean out our belongings from the house. A few weeks later we found a place to live temporarily and began the process of rebuilding our home. We sensed God's presence more fully and were humbled by His goodness to us.

Five months later we moved back into our home that was even lovelier than before. We began to enjoy normal living once again, but held less tightly to our possessions and their security. We knew how easily they could be taken.

It's been said that God doesn't waste our pain. I believe God used the fire to help us focus more clearly on Him and to be humbly sensitive to His unforeseen call. In May of last year, my husband was contacted by President Nelson Miles at Frontier School of the Bible in regard to filling the position as Dean of Students and asked if I would consider assisting as the Dean of Women. From the time we received the call we realized this was what God had been preparing us for. He helped us to let go of the things that would have held us back from saying yes to this life-changing decision. After prayerful consideration we stepped out by faith and accepted the position. Mike left his profession as a food broker; we sold our home, and moved to LaGrange, Wyoming in August, 2002.
Today as we serve the Lord at Frontier School of the Bible our joy is full and His blessings are abundant for He's taking care of our every need far above what we could ever envision. When we humbly seek Him even in painful situations and entrust our lives to Him, His blessings are incredible. He gives us just what we need for the journey He takes us on in this life. God didn't waste our pain but used it to deepen our faith in Him and to prepare us for His call to ministry at Frontier. To God be the glory!

Lois lives in LaGrange, Wyoming with her husband, Mike, and daughter, Tara. Mike is the Dean of Students and Lois assists as the Dean of Women. They are graduates of Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music. Also, effective July 1, 2003 Mike will serve as the Chairman of the IFCA Youth Committee.

Book Review

Holiness to the Lord, A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus

For most of us, delivering a pure expository message from the Old Testament is more challenging than from the New Testament. Often it is easy to surface biblical principles from the OT text, but our message cannot really be called expository. Of all books to present a model for expository preaching, Leviticus would be the last place we would go, yet Allen Ross has captured the essence of Leviticus passages in his book, Holiness to the Lord.

This is not a commentary, nor does it claim to be, yet the reader will be delighted with the abundance of footnotes explaining difficult passages and concepts. What the reader can expect from Ross are 50 pages of extremely beneficial comments covering introductory matters and then 400 pages of expository ideas uncovering Leviticus section by section.

Each chapter highlights the theological ideas of the passage, structural outline of the passage, an expository outline, and concluding observations which include a suggested main focus. Most chapters provide this in no more than eight pages.

Ross's development of the five sacrifices and their relation to the believer's walk today is the best I've seen. Also his handling of the Day of Atonement is worth the price of the book. The author's dispensational roots from Dallas Seminary are clearly obvious, and his continual demonstration of how the death of Christ is pictured by certain elements in Leviticus is a marked focus.

I can predict that after a simple glance through this volume, you will consider delivering a series of sermons or a Bible study on Leviticus.

By the way, if you have not been exposed to Allen Ross's book on Genesis, Creation and Blessing, done in the same format, sell your garment and buy one!

Reviewed by Ken Hornok, pastor of Midvalley Bible Church, Salt Lake City, UT.