

# Candour



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

ISSUE 03 // APRIL 2010

## A lost generation?



[www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz)

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*Candour* is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership.

ISSN 1171-1027 (Print)

ISSN 1179-402X (Online)

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## Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

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30 April 2010.

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# What are we missing?

Amanda Wells

**It's hard to consider generational absence without being stuck in the context of your own experience. A 20-year-old fully immersed in a youth-oriented church will have a different perspective on age gaps than his or her classmate attending an aging, traditional congregation. Your answer to whether a generation is missing depends largely on where you can be found.**

So reading this issue of *Candour*, you might find yourself agreeing with an article, then finding the following article equally valid, despite their differing points of view. It's very difficult to determine who is right. Margaret Galt's insightful statistical analysis points away from the loss of the current younger generation - but these facts sit uneasily with the tangible experience of worship in a church where everyone has grey hair. One Presbyterian church might have a thriving youth culture and wide age mix in its service; another will not. We are very diverse and definitive answers are elusive.

Two related questions emerge from these kinds of reflections. One is posed by Carlton Johnstone in his essay; "where should I tell my friends to go to church?" The other is posed, perhaps wordlessly, by our aging congregations; "why don't the young people come?" One generation, raised on consumer culture and user-pays, looks for appeal, community and whether their needs will be met. Another generation, upholding institutions and Christian tradition, wants people to participate in its form of worship and fill its leadership roles. There's no natural fit there.

Yes, that's a massive simplification, but Carlton is not alone in struggling with this question. The younger people who happily participate in the forms and functions of a church peopled by those several generations older are in the extreme minority, and this fact must be acknowledged. If churches want to survive and thrive, then change must be faced and embraced.

It's also a fact that any organisation is struggling to get younger people to take up leadership roles. People in their 20s and 30s don't want to take on long-term positions of responsibility (and by long term, I mean a year). I'm not just making this up. Last night, in the context of a discussion about how hard it can be to get people to fill tramping club committee positions, a friend said that her cycling advocacy group had many committee members wanting to stand down but few, if any, hands up to replace them. We know it's because people don't want to commit, because that's what they tell us.

What this generation wants is involvement in projects, preferably in areas relating specifically to their passion. Projects have defined lifespans and definitive goals, unlike the endless and varied obligations of a nominated role. Do we need to reconsider how we do things? Or at least offer some blend of organisation that doesn't waste leadership talent if it fails to fit our prescribed mould?

Worship can become a focal point in our discussions of generational differences, but as Matt Chapman observes in his essay, this can obscure the real point. Younger people will sing hymns and enjoy them - especially if they are sung with passion, at appropriate speed and by a large enough congregation. It's not the songs themselves that matter; it's the emotional context of worship and the experience this generates in the worshipper. Just having a drum kit won't bring in a new generation. Conversely, worship that is just an entertainment event will have a gaping back door.

An institution that tries to lock itself into perfect stasis will necessarily fail, and cause its members pain in the process. If you want a healthy organisation, then change isn't optional; not in your forms of operation nor in your personnel. Change can refresh and renew us, altering our internal focus and expanding our perspective.

You'll notice a change in this issue of *Candour*. There hasn't been a huge amount of feedback as to people's preferences in terms of online and print, which has led to the retention of the status quo in terms of distribution. But *Candour* has been redesigned so that it is easier to read at your PC, and online subscribers have the bonus of receiving the magazine in colour. I hope you like the new look.

The next issue of *Candour* will have the theme "How do we communicate?" and a deadline of 30 April; contributions are welcome to [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

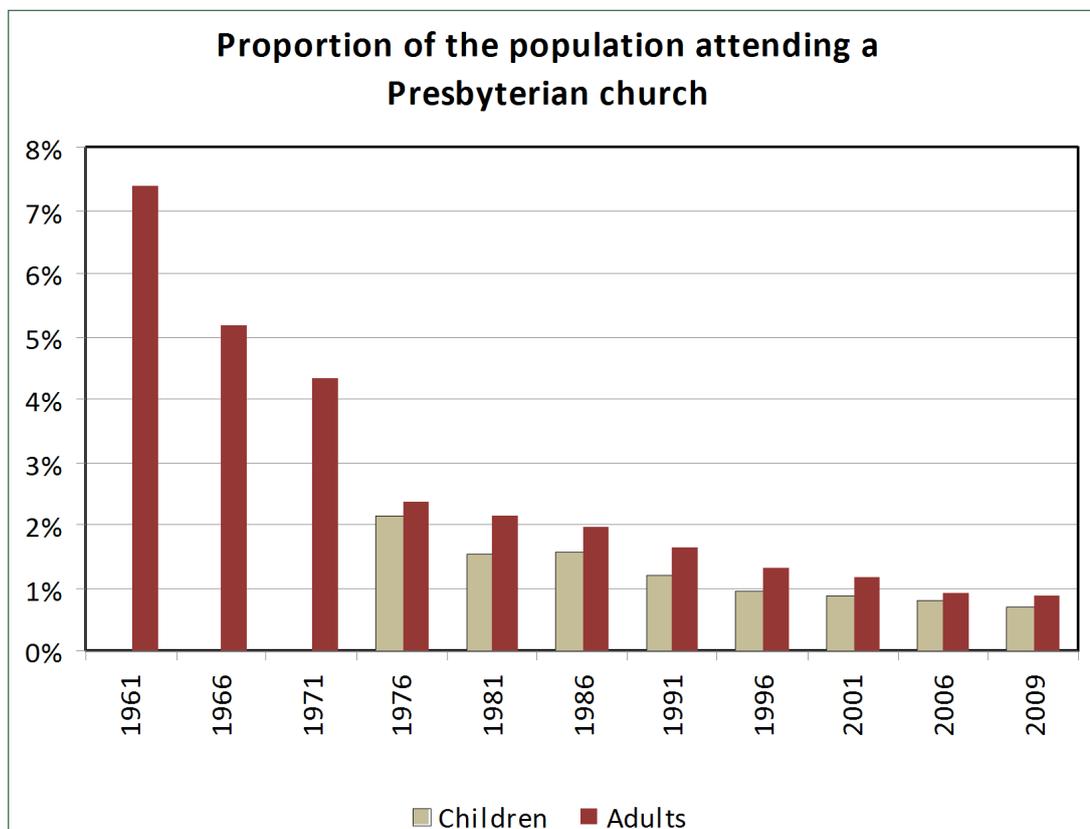
# Lost and found

Margaret Galt\*

**W**hen trying to decide what is really happening to the church, it is often very difficult to judge whether the trends found in one congregation are part of a larger pattern or not. This is why it is sometimes a good idea to look at the overall statistics. While statistics can seem dry, they also offer a helicopter view of what is happening across the whole Church and across all denominations.

This article uses three graphs to illustrate the changing patterns, first in Presbyterian Church attendance and then for all denominations in New Zealand. It tells a story that is neither total loss nor total gain. Rather the story is a mixed one, with generations being both lost and found.

Graph 1: The generation we lost and the generation we found



The graph above shows the number of people attending church as a percentage of the population<sup>1</sup>. The graph shows that we did lose a generation between 1961 and 1976 - but that is now many decades ago. Losing these adults probably had a flow on effect on children in the 1990s. It would seem that through the 1980s some parents continued to send their children to church even if they did not attend themselves, but by the 1990s the grandchildren of those who left in the 1960s to 70s were not sent to church.

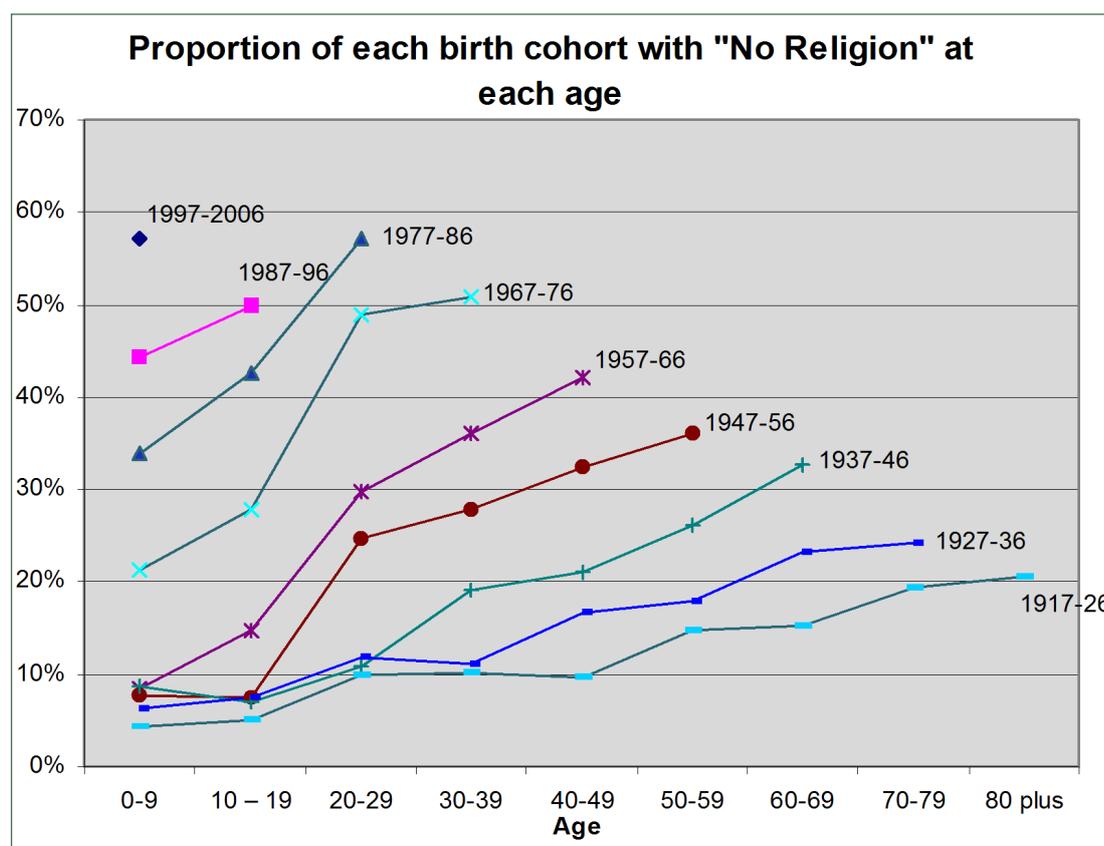
So are we losing the next generation? There is no suggestion in this graph that the church is experiencing another 1960s/70s. Rather there is a persistence of the existing declining trend. So why then might we be noticing fewer children in church? The answer is the “baby blip” – the short-lived increase in the number of children as baby boomers had families. This group has moved through school and is now entering their late teens and early twenties. The effect is not

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately up to 1974 the statistics only record the Sunday School rolls and not the actual number of children in attendance. The number of children is compared to the number in the population aged 0-13. This is not an exact match as a lot of babies were probably not in church (or may not have been counted even if they were) and the church statistics only count children up to the age of 13; however, it was the best comparator that was easily available.

small: since 2003 primary school rolls have dropped every year by 3,000 students and from this year onwards secondary schools will also be declining.

But in part the aging of congregations also reflects that we have gained a generation. A child born in 1960 was expected to live until 71; now life expectancy is almost 81 and those who attend church are known to live significantly longer than the average. In the United States, regular church attendance at least once a month lengthens life by between seven and eight years, and while there is no equivalent research in New Zealand, the information that is available suggests that the effect is probably the same here.<sup>2</sup> We have gained a generation of great-grandparents that we would not have had a few decades ago.

**Graph 2: So is the population as a whole being lost?**

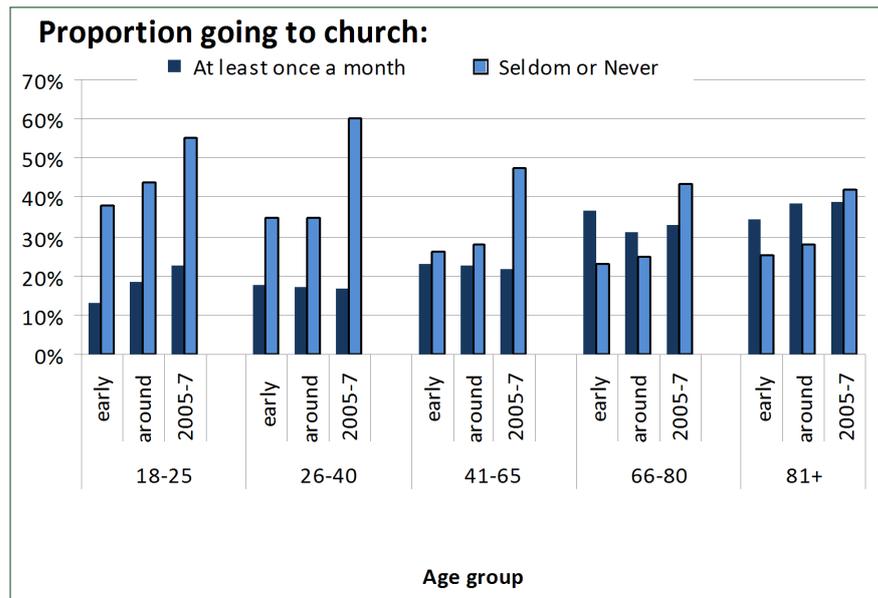


Most newspaper headlines focus on the drop in nominal affiliation; that is, whether people say they belong to a church regardless of whether they attend or not. There is no doubt that nominal affiliation has been declining. If you look at the census figures by cohort (birth groups) then it is clear that each generation is increasingly likely to say that they have “no religion” at any particular age. However, the jump is most pronounced for those aged zero to nine and it turns out this is almost entirely a Protestant phenomenon. Nominal Catholics still call their young children Catholic in the census, but since about 1970 Protestant parents have increasingly said their children are too young to profess any belief. By the 2006 census, almost 60 percent of children under 10 had no religion, whereas less than 10 percent were in this group in the 1966 census. The other interesting thing in this graph is the “kink” in the graph when people are in their 20s. “No religion” tends to come into its own when people leave home, but this increase is not repeated in any later age-group. It looks like the church is losing this age-group, but let’s wait for the final graph before drawing conclusions as it shows an interesting twist to the story

<sup>2</sup> The extra longevity of those who attend church will also show through as an apparent increased enthusiasm for church in cross-section data. If those who wouldn’t be at church are already dead, the remaining population will naturally look like a more committed bunch.

The other group from the census that is sometimes mischaracterised is the rapidly growing group (now about equal in size to the Methodists) that puts themselves down as just “Christian”. Sometimes it is assumed that this group is so marginal that they cannot even name their denomination; however, a recent survey<sup>3</sup> shows this is not the case at all. These people are among the most regular church attendees and have the most conservative beliefs. The best guess is that this is what many who meet in school halls and other such venues are putting down on their census forms.

**Graph 3: So who are we losing, and who are we finding?**



Unfortunately the discussion on churchgoing is focused on those not going to church (the light coloured lines in the accompanying graph)<sup>4</sup>, and it is clear that this group is growing just as might be expected from the increase in “no religion” in the census. However, this misses the fact that there has also been growth in the proportion who do regularly attend church (the dark coloured lines). The real pattern is not a trend towards disconnecting from church but rather a trend towards commitment – either a commitment to go to church regularly or a commitment to stay away. The declining group (which is not shown on the graph) is those who come to church less than once a month – the Easter and Christmas attendees. The most exciting feature of the graph is that for the youngest age-group the trend towards a commitment to be in church regularly is very apparent and has been surprisingly strong since the early 1990s.

**Conclusions**

I would draw the following key messages:

We (the Presbyterian Church) did lose a generation – but that was decades ago. There is still a downward trend, but there is no sign that we are losing another.

There has been a growth in the proportion of the population with “No Religion” in the census, and this is partly reflects the drop in religious professions. But partly it also reflects a changing interpretation of the question primarily by Protestant parents of young children. Years ago they were willing to say that their child shares their faith; now they are far more likely to say that they have no beliefs yet.

There has been a rise in the number of young adults who are never going to church, but there has also been a rise in the number of young adults who go regularly. The shrinking group is the

<sup>3</sup> The International Social Survey Programme; a cross-country survey that in New Zealand is administered by Massey University

<sup>4</sup> The graph uses the information from the International Social Survey Programme, which in most years surveys between 800 and 1,200 people over the age of 18 on some subject. It collects as background information the age of the person, their denomination, and the frequency with which they claim to attend church. I have combined three surveys in each period so that there are 3,228 people in the early 1990s, 4082 in the around 2000 and 2,734 in the 2005-7 group (the most recent available). The few who refused to give an answer were counted as never attending.

occasional attendee. People of all ages are increasingly making a commitment – either to be there or not to be there. They are no longer hedging their bets with occasional attendance. If we (in our particular parish) are yet to see much of this growth, the statistics show that we (the Church universal) are experiencing it nevertheless.

*\*Dr Margaret Galt is an elder at Wellington's St John's in the City. While she is a Church Property Trustee, she points out that this article is written in a personal capacity.*

## Another missing generation?

*Howard Carter, Studentsoul, Auckland*

**I asked some of my former youth group members to answer some questions about the transition they made from living in a provincial town to the main centres for higher education and work (Amanda Wells developed the questions on request). They were not fringe people; rather they were the sort of young people who were in leadership, and most of them have taken on significant leadership in the churches they attend today. One is employed as a youth pastor and is writing his own worship music. Another leads the youth group at her church, another has returned from five years' nursing in Africa. Yet another heads up the men's ministry at his church. One of them no longer goes to church but feels God's prompting to head back. Sadly none of these high-calibre young people have gone to Presbyterian churches when they have moved cities and journeyed into adulthood. This is not strictly scientific research (the sample group is way too small), but because of who these young people are, I feel they have valuable insights for our Church. I hope we have the grace to hear their stories.**

I asked them about their involvement at the church they went to as teenagers and most said that what had attracted them to that church was friendship and involvement. One responded by saying "probably support and hope attracted me, and friends, regularity, acceptance and youth group kept me". Another wrote, "I was originally attracted to church after being pushed through the door by my grandmother to see several of the coolest people from my class inside. They quickly befriended me, and filled that void in my life. The following year I was given the opportunity to move into leadership training. The friendships formed and the roles I played in subsequent years gave me that sense of ownership as well as belonging." Another wrote that when they look back at those years, they are amazed how busy they were and how their lives revolved round youth group, music team, church and a small group formed for art-orientated people; but they do see those days as a warm and positive time.

We asked what attracted these people to the church they are in today? One talked of looking at various churches and groups and ending up not going to a high profile "youth church" but being part of a small Navigators group because of "the friendly family feel". The church they go to now attracted them because of the pastor's preaching (is preaching dead?) and they stayed because the church had a vision they caught. Another of my ex-youth group leaders has started attending this same church and commented on the preaching as giving practical and well thought out (theologically and psychologically) input on life issues. They also mentioned that the church had an emphasis on developing leadership and a vision that was worth catching and, yes, a worship style that was "contemporary and exciting" was a major factor.

Another looked at churches close to their new home that had a good group of young adults. They ended up going to a non-denominational church because they had a "great programme for 18-25 year olds". Another significant reason was that the church "followed me up". Within a year, this person was involved in the leadership of the church's intermediate-school-aged ministry.

Another talks of moving to a new city and not going to church because none of their university friends did. After three years away, they felt God lead them back to church and attended a "youth church" where the things that had attracted and held them to the church they went to as a teenager

were present: they made friends their own age and were invited to be involved in music. This person has moved on to another city and attends a Pentecostal church there. They wrote of their journey,

I didn't deliberately go searching for a certain type or denomination of church. What attracted me to those churches was that they were relevant. That people were genuinely interested in me. That there were many opportunities to get involved for younger people. The Holy Spirit was encouraged and was heavily present in services. The environment is very supportive towards making a difference in your own world, and the world of those around you.

The one person who replied to my request who isn't going to church at the moment said that she had a bad experience at a Pentecostal church she went along to with some other ex-youth groupies. They said that the emphasis was on public displays of faith and not on the depth of one's beliefs. They still have their faith but they do not see the need for organised religion; they say "I find it difficult to reconcile who I am now, and what my relationship with God is, with the teachings of any Church." They still go to the occasional service at a wide variety of churches as the spirit leads.

Another question we asked was, "Did you consider a Presbyterian Church?" The answer from most was "no". One respondent summed it up by saying, "the only reason I didn't try one is because no-one suggested any that were focused on our age group".

One wrote that they had tried four Presbyterian churches in the city they went to and found that they were "fairly set in a traditional mode of service, ie two hymns followed by a reading etc". At least two of them, I disagreed with large portions of the sermon, or at least the delivery of the sermon". They were looking for good effective practical application. The same person also tried a church that was focused on a particular ethnic group and found that because they were not of that group, it wasn't that welcoming. If I can comment here: these people as a generation didn't have that same sense of institutional loyalty that the pre-World-War-II generation, which is the backbone of our denomination, possesses.

It's interesting to see people from this group move churches as they get older. However, it's not back to Presbyterian churches; they move to churches that have a focus on late 20-somethings and 30-somethings. I would suggest that this is another missing generation in our Church, along with the people in my own demographic (40-somethings). If you miss a generation, it has a flow on effect.

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**W**ho would you say your church aims at and how is that shown in who attends?

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I am now involved in a church plant at Auckland University I hear many Christian students talk about their home churches as their parents' church or their family church; and many of them in the process of growing up say they are looking for their own church. It seems to be a natural process and I guess if students in major cities live at home during university years, they need to find other ways to leave home and going to another church is one way to do this. Carlton Johnstone, our Youth Ministry Development Leader, has done some very good research (at a PhD level) on young people who have stayed in the mainline church, which is helpful.

Let me finish with some reflections.

Firstly, you actually get what you aim at as a church. We can focus on a particular age group consciously or subconsciously and we will connect with people in that demographic. Who would you say your church aims at and how is that shown in who attends? Jill Kayser and Kid's Friendly have begun to teach and show us as a church that if we focus on other groups like children, we can grow again. But to do that we need to invest resources in those areas as well as being prepared to

change what we do to allow another demographic to minister to us and provide surprising new directions in leadership.

Secondly, I am amazed at the willingness and capacity of this generation of young adults for leadership. However, if we are simply going to plug them into keeping an existing institution going then we are going to lose them. I heard Brian McLaren recently saying that an institution is designed to defend the gains made by a past movement. We have young people who are looking for leadership in a movement that is designed to make new gains, not simply defend the old ones. I appreciated a discussion with a few colleagues recently about inviting people to provide leadership for projects and focusing on particular issues, and found that this gelled with what I know of young adults. You will notice how some of the youth leaders I wrote to said they found a positive vision attracted them.

Worship and preaching is important: again it was interesting to hear young people talking about being attracted to churches because of the preaching. They were looking for insight and real world application, not a dumbing down of the message or Gospel but rather a smartening up, not only on presentation but the depth of theological and psychological insight and the ability to apply it to their life. One respondent was even more specific saying they valued a preacher/leader/minister who was able to understand leadership and encourage people to develop their leadership potential. These young adults who responded are very musical and so music and worship styles are important. One of the biggest obstacles in growing StudentSoul up here in Auckland is developing a contemporary music feel; musos are golden.

Community is important to young adults. Being part of a group with other young adults was a big factor for all the people who responded to my email request in finding another church. Words like “friendship” are essential to these people. I guess when you think that in this age bracket many people find their life partners, you can understand something of this. Also many of the people in this age group do social things together in groups of singles or with other couples without kids, and this social element is important. They will also invest in projects and causes together. It is why team leadership is an important concept for these people.

Building a sense of community or tribal belonging on a national level I think is important to help teens and young adults make connections with churches that minister to this age group across the country. Connect to a certain extent does this for youth leaders, and the Going Further event piloted this year at Orama, Great Barrier Island, did this on another level. However, when you look back at the Bible Class movement conferences, you can see a great example of how such gatherings can be effective in building that sense of Presbyterian connection across the country.

As an example of how these elements are important and can work together for the church, let me share how I met up with many of my youth group leaders after many years. I reinitiated my relationship with a group at the Parachute music festival, where as a group they had gone to the organisers of Parachute and said that they felt that Parachute had become too mainstream and commercial and there was a need to start an alternative music stage. They were invited by the leadership of Parachute to set it up and run it. They did it as a team, pulling in people who fitted the vision with different skills; they did a lot of the planning and organising by networking over the Internet. The White Elephant stage was born: low tech, cool, diverse music and a real community feel.

Is there hope?

I saw a movie the other day that I couldn't help but see as a sad metaphor for the Presbyterian Church. The film is *A Gun, A Car and A Blonde*. It tells the story of a rich man who is suffering from a terminal disease; he is a paraplegic and is cared for by his African-American male nurse and a Latino house keeper. He is encouraged to escape the pain and grief of his current situation by getting lost in a fantasy past, in this case black and white film noir movies from the 1950s. He can escape the reality of the situation he is in by looking at this idealised past, a past where everything is structured and everyone plays a well scripted role. It helps him deal with the relational and physical pain he goes through and as he finally dies, his experience of the afterlife is stepping through to that black and white world. His resources are left not to his family, but to the two people from ethnic minorities who have supported him in his terminal illness. I hate to say it but that is one future I see for many of our parishes and churches.

Is there hope?

I think there can be but it's going to take some work and doing things differently. Presbyteries need to look at churches and ask the question: do we need a group of small churches doing the same thing in a city or town or do we need to amalgamate and give room for resources to be spent on planting new expressions of church and freeing emerging leadership to church plant for emerging generations? St Paul's Symonds Street Anglican Church is a great example of how this can be done. We need to develop a strategy for youth and young adults that works for us as a church. We need to develop a high grade strategic group round Carlton Johnstone to do this, involving not just today's practitioners. It has to be a case of willingness to give up what we treasure or hold on to strongly for the sake of a new generation, allowing them to develop a sense of ownership as well as belonging.

## Next generation leaders

*Keith Nisbet, associate minister, Howick Presbyterian Church, Auckland*

**I have been asked to write about developing the next generation of leaders. However, I approach this article with a certain amount of reticence. This is not because I believe the subject to be unimportant. On the contrary, I feel that it is a vital and often overlooked topic of discussion. Nor is it because I have little or no experience here. During my 15 years of youth ministry and then six in ordained parish ministry, I have worked in this field extensively. My reticence comes from the fact that this is a very complex subject that I cannot hope to do it justice in one article. As such, all I can say is that I will try and tease out some of the main issues and leave the rest for you to follow up.**

This *Candour* is entitled Have we lost the next generation? Each church needs to work with those whom they have. If there is no next generation, or they are present in such small numbers that there is little they can do, it is no use looking to pass on leadership roles and other tasks. If a generation of younger people are not present, then you have to work with that reality and its consequences.

The second decision is around deciding who are we talking about when discussing the "next generation". I have found the following broad generational categories to be very helpful in this. The basic understanding is that each of these generations, while overlapping at the edges, has many distinct values, attitudes and beliefs. The broad general outline is: Builders - those born before 1945; Baby Boomers – those born between 1946-1964; Gen X between 1965-1981; Gen Y or the Millennials from 1982-today.

So who is the next generation? Many churches I visit are still run, either upfront or from behind the scenes, by the pre-war Builders generation. In this case, the handover is to their children, the Boomers, who are now retiring themselves. Other churches are struggling to pass over responsibilities to those with young families or Gen Xers. Others are looking to the Gen Yers or the young adults to step up and lead. As newly appointed assistant minister of Howick Presbyterian, one of my tasks here is to help the session, most of whom are Builders although there is a smattering of Boomers, to grow younger in age and in thinking. I am also tasked with developing family and young adult ministries. As such I will be working primarily with the Builders and Boomers as existing leaders and Gen X and Gen Y as I work to develop or enable new leaders. Who are you working with? Who are you looking to?

And why is this important? Because, in these times of rapid change, each generation is so very different. I can't stress this enough. Educational practice, technology, and social norms have led to very different attitudes and values in each emerging generation. One prime example of this is in our attitudes towards the Church. For most Builders, the institution of the Church (local and national) is a very positive thing. Baby Boomers tend to be less enthusiastic but will work with the institution or denomination if it will help achieve their ends. Gen X and Y are not interested in the institution at all. They will strongly identify with a local parish but will usually (there are exceptions) be very reluctant to serve at a regional or national level unless it is for a particular, locally orientated, purpose. When shifting areas, many Gen X and Gen Y will ultimately settle at a church that suits them regardless of its denomination (or lack of!)

Gen X and Y are relationally orientated and pragmatic. They will not serve on a committee or board just to fill a gap; there must be a greater relational connection and an applicable purpose.

How meetings run is another important area. Younger generations think, feel and act relationally. They are therefore turned off by meetings where personal agendas dominate, where conflict is the norm or where it is all about winning the vote, or where the majority are bullied into submission by the few. We are relational people who would rather spend more time in reflection and open, honest discussion than rush a decision through with a divisive vote. For a denomination with a Westminster system of government, this can prove difficult.

Investment in another generation's buildings, programmes or activities is by no means a given. Younger generations will give money first to people, then programmes and then property. They would rather have no institutional property at all than try and maintain a property that is worn out or constantly requires a huge investment of time and energy.

Gen X and Y have been taught to question, to interact, and to think laterally. They will not just go with the voice of authority but will instead, in an attempt to gain understanding and interact, ask questions and discuss issues. Often this is perceived as insolence when in fact it is a younger generation simply being interactive.

Handling conflict is another significant area. Where older generations will battle things out, younger generations, and especially Gen X, will behave differently. If the issue is perceived as worthwhile they will battle; if not they will usually just quietly disengage. Some of this is pragmatism, some of it perception. An example of this: a young mum actively seeking to serve in our church recently spoke to me of not wanting to get involved in a ministry because she perceived that an older generation controlled it. Rather than fighting to gain a stake in the ministry, she just quietly stepped aside and the opportunity of new leadership was lost.

Younger generations, and especially Gen Y, are also global thinkers. Through influences such as education, the Internet, and the multicultural nature of many of our communities, they are thinking far wider than just New Zealand. They will be far more aware of social and global issues such as climate change, environmentalism and the energy crisis than previous generations were at their age. They live locally but engage with a world that is far bigger than our country. As such they will come with these agendas and want to know where our involvement is in these bigger issues.

All of this has very serious implications for the future leadership of the church, locally, regionally and nationally. Just asking younger people to take on roles and do them as they have always been done is a recipe for disaster. So, first and foremost, think through what you are asking the next generation to do. Then think through how they could contribute to the role or task. Allow them to shape the role as they engage with it, rather than just expecting them to take over what already exists and do it as it has always been done.

**W**here older generations will battle things out, younger generations will behave differently

So what are some practical steps, with all of the above in mind, for developing a new generation of leaders? I believe that leaders are born and made. As such they need to be found and encouraged.

First and foremost, identify who your next-generation leaders are and gently seek to nurture them. They won't always be upfront or forward but they will be quietly leading somewhere.

Secondly, give them something to do! Leaders grow as they lead and serve. If they are young, then offer them a small role or task that involves leading others. St Andrew's Howick are doing this very well through their church services, youth and children's ministries. St Columba at Botany Downs proactively utilises their children's holiday programmes, children's ministries and music ministries

to grow young leaders. If the leaders are older and more experienced, they offer them other places to serve. Note, this will involve older leaders stepping aside and making room for newcomers to lead rather than just observe!

Thirdly, stand with your younger leaders. Provide them with active support and mentoring. Don't treat them as someone to get a job done but as disciples to be invested in. I can think of three leaders (two church and one para-church) who were incredibly significant in my development as a leader. They walked with me, actively mentored me, allowed me to succeed and fail, taught me, supported me, and encouraged me. I sometimes wonder at the grace of Greyfriars Presbyterian Church and Scripture Union in letting a young 21-year-old loose in ministry! But they did so, and they did it with very good support and care.

Fourthly, provide them with training, both in-house and from elsewhere. Send your young leaders (or even better take them) to courses and conferences. Give them books to read and then debrief with them afterwards. Invest in your up and coming leaders.

Fifthly, let them shape the role. Let them develop the ministry or have input into the agenda or be involved in the planning process. I keep coming back to this because the biggest problem I have found as a younger leader in the church is older generations expecting things to be done just as they did them. If younger leaders are brought through then things will have to change, or your younger leaders will simply leave.

Finally, encourage them to be shaped also. No one is perfect. There are rough edges that will need to be rubbed off, lessons that will be learnt the hard way and generational norms that may have to be reset. After all, the Internet is not the font of all wisdom and sometimes giving someone a ring might be better than sending a text!

One of the thrills of my ministry has been to see young leaders come up through the ranks and excel in the church and elsewhere. It is an essential, but by no means simple part of our ministry and mission. However, when it is done well and I have stood back and seen a young leader or team in action, I have to say it is one of the most satisfying things I have ever done.

## Part-time minister Union parish

St Anselm's Union Church in Karori, Wellington, is seeking a part time minister. The ideal person will, amongst other things, be ecumenical in outlook, encourage the congregation to explore various styles of worship and interpretations of theology, and bring an awareness of the role of the Christian in today's world. St Anselm's also seeks to develop a more community focussed ministry.

St Anselm's represents a diverse group of Christians, and the minister may come from any denominational background. The congregation participates actively in complementing the role of the minister.

The church is open to negotiation for mutually suitable terms and conditions of appointment. Please refer to the St Anselm's website [www.stanselms.org.nz](http://www.stanselms.org.nz) for general information about the parish and the vacancy. For more detailed information, please contact Keith Ryan by email to [secretary@stanselms.org.nz](mailto:secretary@stanselms.org.nz) or phone (4) 972 1608 (home) or 021 434 500 (Mobile). Expressions of interest are invited by **30 April 2010**

# Some were lost and more were stolen

*Stan Stewart, Minister Emeritus, Auckland*

**A vital ministry with children should lead to an energetic ministry with youth. But it need not. At least that has been my experience in many New Zealand rural and city parishes, both as pastor and adviser over the past 18 years.**

In the 60s, when I was in theological college, there was much talk about the negative influence of the world on young people. Teens would be lured away from the Church by the bright lights of the world, sex, drugs and rock and roll, and Sunday sport. Sadly, in every church I have served that has been the case with some. But this allurements has not been the major reason we have had difficulty building youth groups and churches to which youth want to belong.

From my observation, “poachers” have been the major cause of our poor showing with youth over the Past couple of decades. I hear people talk about our lack of success with youth in terms of “the lost generation” but in my mind I think of them as “the stolen generation”.

## Poachers 1: We can't compete!

The establishment of youth-oriented, fundamentalist, revival churches in every city and almost every town has created competition for the attention of church-nurtured youth. Most established churches of any of the older denominations are not up to the challenge. The contest is too uneven.

These new churches set out to attract youth and, in some cases, young adults up into the thirty-something age group.

They meet in buildings without heritage. What this means is that they can do what they like. They do not have to worry about established practice in liturgy or music, sacred furniture or sacred space. They don't have people complaining about music that is too loud or objecting to drums or rap or hip-hop in their services.

Their worship spaces are designed to attract youth. The big ones all have three key features; amazing sound systems, theatre lighting and state of the art audio-visual facilities.

They all have a highly competent band (or bands) and singers capable of presenting the whole genre of current popular music sounds and styles.

They claim that, in contrast to the established Churches, they preach the Gospel. Certainly their preaching and praying is delivered with an energy and style reminiscent of TV presenters. Their gatherings are full of enthusiasm, emotion and sometimes signs and wonders.

They work at staying up-to-date with youth culture and youth language. All of their preaching, announcements and praying are liberally sprinkled with “hip” terms and phrases. They describe their gatherings in terms like “Where it's at” and emphasise that those who belong will have “awesome fun”. Deliriously happy and wonderfully attractive young people with groovy gear, dazzling teeth and bouncy hair jump out at you from all of their posters, and populate their websites.

Young people who have been nurtured in a traditional church are simply blown away. Never have they seen, heard or experienced church like this. They are instant converts and for most there is no going back to their home church, which now seems incredibly boring and staid.

What can traditional churches do about this? Very little! A traditional congregation with its heritage, both local and historical, and the expectation that it minister to an all-age congregation with a large number of older people, is in a different league. It cannot compete.

Some may think that my use of the word “poachers” as applied to these new churches is too harsh. I don't think it is. The new churches know exactly what they are doing. They are after young people who have grown up in traditional churches. It is young people who are already inclined towards Christianity who are amongst their most highly prized prospects. It is notable that much of the

leadership, especially the youth leadership, of these new churches is made up of young people whose families are cornerstone members of traditional congregations.

The way these new churches function is rather like narrow-band health insurance companies. These only insure the young, the fit and healthy. Because of this focus they can offer to this age group better policies and premiums. They don't have to worry about the problems of the aged and the infirm. I note that President Obama is trying to outlaw companies that operate on this basis. He believes this is an unfair business strategy for organisations that should be concerned about the whole of life.

## Poachers 2: The elephant in the room.

With Presbyterians you get the impression that these days no subject is taboo. You can talk about anything – death and dying, addictions and obsessions, sexual orientation, and no one turns a hair. But there is one subject that no one will talk about. I should know because I have raised it on a number of occasions and, whenever I do, a deathly hush descends on the gathering.

For local parishes, “an enemy within” is church schools. As they have operated in recent years, denominational church schools have significantly contributed to the decimation of the youth ministry of local congregations.

Here is how it works.

Quite understandably schools are self-centred. Their primary focus is on their school community and its culture. Even church schools with their emphasis on Christian education and worship are like this. Despite the fact that they involve their students in social action and overseas-aid programmes, they generally they do not seem to have a sense of responsibility towards the local churches from which their students came. Occasionally or regularly, they will put on a show or lend a choir to a local congregation. These forays impress the churchgoers as to how wonderful the school is. However, they do little to build up the local church.

The problem here is not the content of Christian education and worship in these schools. It is the context in which the teaching and worship services are positioned that creates difficulties. Somehow the student's local church seems to be irrelevant to the theory and practice of Christianity as encountered in church schools.

As a minister and as an advisor to many congregations, I have seen the result of this attitude again and again. For many students, the move to the church school only comes at the end of primary school. Children who were fully involved in their local church (enthusiastically participating and contributing to their church's worship and fellowship life), prior to moving to a church school, disconnect from it within the first term in their new school. This applies to day-students as well as boarders.

This disconnect is seldom noticed by the students or their families.

The students who are caught up in the new and demanding world of a school where they have more religion than they have ever had in their lives, don't have time to miss their local church. The parents are delighted at the high standards of the new school. But, they quickly find that the new “quality” school makes many demands on family time, with all kinds of extracurricula activities in which children, and in many cases parents, are expected to participate. Busy weeks are suddenly more busy and something has to give. Even for churchgoing parents, it becomes increasingly difficult to meet the demands of the school and their commitment to their home church.

Churchgoing parents assume that all the extra religious instruction and chapel services are moving their child towards faith. Whether or not that is true, it is observable that the church-school environment does not move the young person towards their local church, or for that matter, any traditional church.

In some schools, children of a certain age are confirmed. Obviously I don't know what the practice is in all church schools, but I know what happens in some. Neither the school nor the chaplain contact the student's home church to inform them of significant service.

I think of confirmation as a personal-faith milestone. In confirmation, promises made by parents of behalf of their small child are owned by the person being confirmed. Central to these promises is a

commitment to follow Christ and worship and serve him in the fellowship of the church – and for me, that always must be a local church. A church school, no matter how fine it is, is only a stage on the way. The promise made in confirmation implies that where ever I am, whatever age, in sickness and in health, being part of the fellowship of a local church will be central to my life. A confirmation in a school with none of the home church fellowship present does not give that message.

It is not just the number of children who go to church schools that hurts local churches. Frequently, the children who make it to church schools come from key families. These are from families who are providing leadership in the local congregation and it is reasonably expected that their children will continue in this tradition. But, because of the dynamic of the church school, this does not happen. The expected new tier of leadership never emerges.

In contrast to this, children who move to government intermediate and high schools stay connected with their local church. But, because of the pull of the world and the new churches (as discussed above), we generally have not done as well with these as we should have. However, the door of opportunity to continue to relate and involve these young people is not so firmly shut as with the students of the church schools.

“Christian Schools” are another case again. These schools seem to operate from a very conservative theology with which I am not comfortable. However, what I have noted is that they send their pupils back into their local churches. Participating and serving in your local church seems to be part and parcel of the Christian teaching that is central to the life of “Christian Schools”.

The problem created by denominational schools should be fixable. I don’t for a minute think they deliberately set out to hurt the local churches of their denomination. It must be possible to re-contextualise the Christian education life and the worship life of these institutions to include the central place of the local church. They could help students come to see their home-base churches as key components to their past and future spiritual growth. There must be myriad ways they could make it clear that relating to a local church will always be part of the life of the Christian. And, in the student’s present situation, this starts with their continued involvement (as far as practical) with their local church.

I know there are exceptions to the overview I give above. However, sadly I have only come across a couple. In the cases I can bring to mind, these exceptions were the results of the influence of a family dynasty and not because of the urging of the school.

Somehow the student’s local church seems to be irrelevant to the theory and practice of Christianity as encountered in church schools

PS Despite all of the above I have found five areas in which local-church ministry can be appealing to some contemporary young people.

Our secret weapon – older people and old people. By and large the new churches don’t have any. Meaningful cross-generational relationships are valued by both generations. Not easy to get going, but when they fire these relationships can have a powerful influence on individuals and the church they belong to.

Music – playing and singing will keep young people involved. Don’t forget, classical styles can work just as well as pop.

Hi-tech - boys and girls love to work the buttons Sunday by Sunday. Powerpoint and video production is fascinating to them and gives them opportunities to express their points of view.

Mission trips to overseas countries help to build youth groups. They take a year to fund raise, and then after their time away they are often keen to form a continuing group that will be flavoured by

the insights they gained through their mission experience.

Encouraging young people to participate in the leadership of worship and educational forums. Generally traditional churches encourage young people to speak their minds and to raise questions and debate. This is often not the case in the “new” churches where supporting the party line is the thing to do. The freedom to think for themselves is valued by some young people and this can be a plus for traditional churches.

## ‘To the adolescent I became like an adolescent for the sake of the Gospel’

*Carlton Johnstone, Youth Ministry Development Leader, Assembly Office*

**In some ways this issue of *Candour* follows on from the July 2009 issue on “Being youthful”, which I recommend you download or re-read if this is an area you are interested in.**

It is an interesting question, “Have we lost the next generation?” And what generation exactly are we talking about or is this question referring to? The question is referring to young people and young adults. But we could be talking about Gen X, the children of the Baby Boomers and Silent Generation; Gen Y, the children of both Baby Boomers and Gen X, or even my son Max’s generation, the most recent one – apparently labelled the Alpha Generation - and the first generation to be born completely in the new millennium. Go Max you good thing! Have we lost Max and his friends? Too early to tell as he hasn’t even hit four months yet and has not made up his mind. He was baptised not so long ago. So time will tell, but I certainly hope that we “the Church” will not lose him as he grows up. And if we do, I hope somebody in the Church, besides his parents, will make the effort to go and find him. Because you see, when young people leave our churches, not many of them are followed up. We just let them leave and by implication signify that we don’t really care.

The brief I was given for this issue identifies the “next” generation as youth and young adults and students within a framework of “they’re not here and they’re not coming”. But I want to push back at this assumption or bold, generalised statement from the start. Young adults have been described as constituting a black hole in congregational life. Talk of the “missing generations” and young people who are no longer interested in church is becoming increasingly common. But let’s be clear here, such talk obscures reality and perpetuates a myth based on assumption rather than fact.

Research, including my own, demonstrates that the salience of religious belonging and the Christian faith is embodied by young people and young adults. So, it is more accurate to say that we don’t have as many young people involved in our churches as we would like. They are underrepresented as a demographic in relation to New Zealand’s population. Young people are “missing” from 40 percent plus of our Presbyterian congregations. The flip side is that 60 percent of our congregations throughout New Zealand have young people. True, that might only be one or two for some congregations. For others, however, the numbers are over 100. My point is, let’s not overstate the situation we are trying to describe.

Sarah and I are members of Gen X by virtue of our birth date, and the Church has certainly not lost us. But the Church has “lost” some of our friends. It is probably more accurate to say that they intentionally left the church. But the churches they were a part of certainly helped and influenced their decision to leave. To put it more bluntly, it was, for some, their experience of church that resulted in them leaving.

### Lost?

I’m not sure I like the word “lost”. I like the TV series *Lost*. But how do we lose someone? If we

lose them, how much effort are we making to find them? I think of Jesus' parable of the lost sheep or lost coin. Both the shepherd and the woman made a huge effort in finding what they had lost. When they did, they called friends together to celebrate. In order to lose something, you need to have had it at some point to begin with. Like a sheep or a coin, or a wedding ring. When I lost my wedding ring in Vietnam, I searched for it frantically, turning over anything and everything. I even began filing a police report for insurance. Not an easy or straightforward process in Vietnam, I can assure you.

Continuing this line of thought - of losing what we had at some point - to the next generation, which for the purpose of this article is made up of young people/young adults, (because this is when they predominantly leave Presbyterian churches), certain questions need to be asked: firstly, do we notice? Do we care, when we notice? And if we care when we notice, what are we doing about the person we have "lost" or who has left?

So, for example, Alice, a 16 year old has been attending St Calvin Presbyterian for five years. But for one reason or another stops coming. How long does it take before anyone notices that Alice is no longer coming to church or any of the youth programmes? It might take two or three weeks before someone notices that Alice has not been turning up. Does a youth leader call her up, or the minister visit her? This of course is a pastoral care issue. How much responsibility should ministers themselves take in following up why a young person or young adult leaves their faith community? Have they handed over full responsibility to a youth leader?

### Reflexive ecclesiology

I wonder whether if ministers actually did take the time to follow up why people leave, especially why young people leave, they might actually begin to rethink some of the cultural and stylistic aspects of the church's gathering on a Sunday morning. And from there, extend this out to an exploration of what sort of faith community they need to be for emerging generations. Such reflection is what Jackson Carroll has called "reflexive ecclesiology". Reflexivity is to reflect on what one is doing, such as preaching, or the worship service as a whole, and incorporate collective knowledge of congregational engagement into the reflection and change one's practices accordingly.

Churches need to develop a deeper self-understanding of their congregational make up. One way for churches to evaluate their congregations' faith maturity and knowledge, as well as discovering how many within the congregation are connecting or disconnecting with religious practices such as preaching is to engage in "reflexive monitoring of their situation" (Carroll, 2000, 554; see also Giddens, 1984, 3). The number of conversations I have with people about their experience of disconnecting with preaching and worship (both as singing and more broadly the worship service) seems to suggest that there is very little reflexive ecclesiology going on.

**H**ow long does it take before anyone notices that Alice is no longer coming to church or any of the youth programmes?

If we young people are leaving our churches for reasons of disconnection and because of the way we do things, then it is very likely that our churches are not places that young people with no church affiliation are going to find welcoming and attractive.

### The elusive community

One of the consequences of age-segregated services is that people can, and do, grow out of the targeted audience (a particular demographic) as they move into another stage of life. Participants often described this occurrence as "no longer fitting," or a growing sense of "disconnection". The stage-of-life disconnect illustrates the fluid dimension that can characterise community, which is

never fixed or static. This is the fragile nature of community identified by Bauman (2000; 2001), part of “liquid modernity”, where traditional life-long loyalties and commitments are a thing of the past. As Marx (1967, 83) observed about modern life, “everything that is solid melts into air”. Or as Bauman (2001, 14) has written,

*Community of common understanding, even if reached, will therefore stay fragile and vulnerable, forever in need of vigilance, fortification and defence. People who dream of community in the hope of finding a long-term security, which they miss so painfully in their daily pursuits, and of liberating themselves from the irksome burden of ever new and always risky choices, will be sorely disappointed. Peace of mind, if they find it, will prove to be of the “until further notice” kind.*

This “liquidification” of which Bauman speaks has profoundly affected the stability of community, including faith communities, as is evident by the significant religious mobility that we have already mentioned, which in turn generates a desire for community that Bauman argues is a way of seeking safety in an insecure world. Eric Hobsbawm (1996, 40) argues something similar when he writes,

Never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense become hard to find in real life. Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain. And they find it in an identity group.

Those I interviewed do search for a faith community to belong to. But their multiple switching suggests that when they find it, it does not last, at least not in the way they first experienced it. And yet, because they want their faith to be embedded in a church community, they continue to search for one even as they recognise that it might not last.

A number of Presbyterian young adults I have spoken to recently have had a strong sense of belonging to what they would describe as their home church. However, they too have experienced the elusive nature of community when they have moved geographically. They have searched diligently for a church. One young woman I was talking to the other week has tried all three Presbyterian churches in her area with her husband and did not connect with any of them. She also tried the other churches as well, but to no avail. It was the culture of the churches that put them off. There was a disconnect with both the style of worship and the preaching. What advice would you give my friends who have struggled to find a church to belong to?

**W**hat advice would you give my friends who have struggled to find a church to belong to?

### The search for home

The search for home is a search for a place - a church - to embed faith. It is about finding and having roots in an otherwise mobile and transient society. The alternative is “rootlessness”, or to continue with the metaphor of home, “homelessness”. The yearning and romanticisation of home are evident in popular sayings about it:<sup>1</sup> “Home sweet home”, “There’s no place like home”, “A man’s home is his castle”,<sup>2</sup> and in New Zealand musician Dave Dobbyn’s song “Welcome Home”. But as U2’s frontman Bono sings, “A house does not always make a home,” a song that expresses his own upbringing by his widowed father, and Bono’s longing for his mother, who knew how to turn a house into a home. The point being that the feeling of home felt in some churches is not guaranteed, and as some participants found, can be hard to find. To paraphrase Bono, “A church does not always make a home.” And even when it does, home as a fixed location or something permanent, is now confined to the realm of poetry for most, and not reality, as Toffler (1970, 83) has argued. Under such conditions, to find a church that feels like home – however, that might feel in

<sup>1</sup> I am building on Toffler’s (1970) observation here.

<sup>2</sup> As was humourously conveyed in the film *The Castle*, about a man’s battle to save his home from being demolished by greedy developers.

contemporary culture – is almost something quite extraordinary.

Finding a place to embed faith has its challenges, but once found it is often accompanied by a willingness to get involved in the life of the church community. But I feel for those who continue to struggle to find a church that they want to be a part of. Part of what they are wanting is a passionate church where adults are passionate about their faith, which is reflected in how they live their lives. Young people want to see a faith worth dying for – which really means a faith worth living for. Do people that make up your faith community reflect such a faith?

## Concluding thoughts

Have we lost the next generation? From my vantage point in a national role that comes with the privilege of travelling around New Zealand, I would answer “no”. There are so many good things happening with young people in our churches in the major cities, provincial towns and rural areas that answer “yes” to this question. Maybe we could reframe the question; “How are we serving emerging generations, many of which have never had any church affiliation in their lives?”

The elusive community and the sense of homelessness is the experience of some young people who switch churches – often due to a geographical move. But what about those young people who have never darkened the door of a church? This is another matter all together. In this final section I want to raise some more questions as conversational starters. How much do you really want young people (those aged 11-25) in your church? Enough to change some of what you do for their sake? Are you prepared to take financial risks and make financial investments in emerging generations? Are you creating space for young people to be involved in leadership and the decision-making processes of church life? What are you prepared to give up if it meant more young people would feel welcomed? The apostle Paul, it seems, went to great lengths for the sake of the Gospel – which remember is supposed to be good news:

1 Corinthians 9:

<sup>19</sup>*Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible...*

<sup>21</sup>*To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.* <sup>22</sup>*To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.* <sup>23</sup>*I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

Could we add: “To the adolescent I became like an adolescent to win them for Christ”. What would this look like for your faith community? Among other things, it would be a faith filled with passion, risk, idealism and adventure; unless our vision for young people continues to sell them short. What are we prepared to do for the sake of the Gospel? For the sake of young people? What lengths are we prepared to go to? My experience and observation is when something matters to us, we make it a priority. And by the way, for those that are interested, I found my wedding ring the day before Sarah and I flew out of Vietnam. And yes, I celebrated and rejoiced with my friends.

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# You city folk have never had it so good

*Chris Konings, Timaru Presbyterian Church, South Canterbury*

**H**aving spent most of my time in city churches where a university resides nearby, it has been a bit of a head spin to not have their services, enthusiasm and energy.

A bit of my youth ministry history: I went to university in Hamilton and helped with youth group (for three years), went to Bible College in west Auckland and helped with youth group (for four years), worked as a youth worker in east Auckland (for five years). Nearly all of the youth leaders I worked with were involved with university or polytech, or had been and were now working. I then worked in Lower Hutt for six years, where there was a young adult population that were very much a part of the church and contributed (about half went to university or polytech and the rest were working). This seemed also true for the regional events also. More recently, I observed Dunedin's youth ministry scene for four years, where the likes of Samstock, Faith Fest and Easter camps happened. There were lots of university and polytech students involved in making these events happen, as well as providing the spark that made them cool. However, I don't want to minimise the fact that there were other older adults, as well as the paid workers involved in all these places, who injected some invaluable balance and wisdom along the way.

What I am pointing to is that it has been our young adults (those aged 20-30 years) who have had a major input in running youth ministry (for those aged 10-19 years) in the cities. I would guess, because I am not old enough to remember, that the Bible class movement of the 60s was also fuelled by many enthusiastic young adults, many of whom went on to become ministers even. This has been an awesome effort by this age group and I think we, as a church, have underresourced them, undervalued them, and hampered their efforts locally, regionally and nationally.

You just need to look at some of the new churches around and how much time, energy and resource is being poured into youth and young adult ministry. If we want to hold onto or regain the "next" generation then we need to put the effort in; that is, time and money. We need to take the young people around us seriously and ask them to work for us, pay them and train them to start youth groups. We need to listen to them and work with them to solve the issues that come up.

**I**f we want to hold onto or regain the 'next' generation then we need to put the effort in; that is, time and money

So what am I doing differently now that I am in a provincial town with no university and have no young adults ministry? Well, the first thing is to start the leadership training earlier with the younger children. From age 10 I am giving them a go and encouraging them to have a go, asking them what they think and how we could solve the issues we have. We're using 10 year olds to contribute to our music teams: 14 year olds run the sound desk and 16 year olds are in charge of the data projector.

This year we have one youth intern doing Praxis, and I'd like more. I think we need to put more resources into doing church for young people, or helping them to be the church. At the moment, our most highly trained resources, our ministers, are spending most of their time with people who have already been the church for quite some time. If we've been doing our job properly, shouldn't they know how to be the church and continue to operate it without our ongoing help? Or do we have a vested interest in creating a dependency? Shouldn't we be investing those scarce resources in people who have not yet heard the Good News?

It has always been the case that you just get a young person trained up the way you like it and they head off to something else but in the provinces it is even more pronounced because a lot go off to university and so are physically not here.

But it all comes back to your attitude. They are not lost, they are hopefully going to bless someone else, probably in the city, if that's where they are heading. So if you are a city church, you better be ready to look after them and not burn them out or put them off church. They are on loan.

One of the big differences I perceive in the approach to youth ministry and "other" ministry is that I assume I have young people for a limited time. So part of my role was to equip them and challenge them to think for themselves, to discern, and to learn how to feed themselves. I'm not sure how successful I was, but that aim was always there. If the command is to disciple people, doesn't that suggest we want them to mature? Too often, it seems we assume adults are there for the duration.

I don't think that young people are disengaging from church, as the church is people; what they are disengaging from is the traditional structures of the church, which as Presbyterians we have had a vested interest in maintaining.

I think there are key reasons that keep us engaged in a particular church:

1. The "place": the building if you like; people's faith can be tied up in the place because it's where they encountered God, it's where they grew up in the faith and these good experiences hold them to the place.
2. The "people". They are the significant aspect of what keeps them in a particular church group. These are the people they have journeyed with. The feelings for those people are what hold them in the place.
3. The "style" of the worship. It is how they know how to connect with God, where they feel most at home. The problem here is that that feel-good atmosphere is not traditional church as most of our aging congregations know it.
4. Opportunities to "serve". Most of the people who are my age and involved in church have significant experience in either youth ministry or worship, because that is where they can serve. Many people are looking, consciously or unconsciously, for a place where they can make a difference.

So you can see that when people move to a new location, there are a number of reasons for a disconnect to occur.

On their travels, they encounter many different styles. Their leaning to one of those four aspects will determine where they put down the anchor, till something changes and they sail off to another place. If they've been taught well, they'll exercise a bit of discernment and not end up in a cult of some sort.

Our problem is that more and more we are only offering one worship style that appeals to a particular group. We know one younger couple who looked at five different Presbyterian churches in their town, but finally found a home in a Pentecostal church, because they offered contemporary worship, they were friendly people, and they provided a place for them to serve.

People under the age of 40 have been brought up with a different range of music, education and travel opportunities from the previous generations. They simply have more options and have learnt to exercise choice.

Each new generation needs to discover what is "church" for them. We can't dictate what that might be but we can help and support them in the exercise if we want them to still be connected in 20 years time.

What would the Church be like now if when those young people, who wanted to do church differently, asked to have a band playing in the sanctuary area, and the elders had said "ok"?

# Have we lost the next generation?

Ryhan Prasad,

**W**hen asked to write a response to this question, I was a little bit unsure of whether to say yes. Firstly, because like a lot of issues in the Church I think the question is poorly phrased to begin with; and secondly, because I seriously wondered whether anyone would reflect and actually act on what I think the answers are.

This question in my mind is an attempt to address the numerical lack of young people in our Presbyterian Church. And it begs a response more comprehensive than an outright “yes” or “no”. My answer to this question hinges more on positive change and relational ministry than anything else. It is not so much about new programmes or new leaders (though both these elements may be needed). It is more about realising that the Church is not the major player in people’s lives that it once was. I think this is because the Church has not responded well to societal change and because we have failed to embrace a relational aspect to ministry. The Church no longer has a captive audience and thus relational ministry is now key to proclaiming the Good News.

I hear of so many people saying we need to get young people back in the Church but then not offering or wanting to embrace any answers to that question.

Because the answers can be uncomfortable ones.

Answers that don’t sit well with us.

Answers that call us to change.

The problem with the question “have we lost the next generation?” is that the question is still set in a Christendom context: a context that views the church as the focal point of community life; a view that is no longer true. There. I said it; the elephant in the room is now clearly visible. I think any answer to this question as it is phrased currently will result in a very inauthentic response.

To quote Dr Andrew Root, Assistant Professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary in the United States.

*How many realise, before we do, that a relationship built on influencing another is not a relationship at all, and is therefore unworthy of reflecting God’s own ministry in the world through Jesus Christ?*

When we begin a relationship with the baseline principle that we want a person or group of people to be a part of our Church, then we are engaged more in marketing than we are in ministry. Strategies and tactics can be employed with young people that may lead to numbers rising and bums on seats but the foundational understanding of the relationship will always be inauthentic.

If, however, we start with the idea that we are wanting to share the Good News, then suddenly the way we do that needs to be contextual if it is to be effective. I believe the heart of relational ministry is focused on meeting people where they are and beginning a conversation. This is similar to our Reformed understanding that it is God who first met us and initiated a relationship with us.

My viewpoint on this has been formed primarily by my ministry context and work as a youth worker. Last year I led a team of people that established an evening service at St John’s in the City, Wellington. This experience gave me a lot of hope that the traditional Church does not have to cease its function to be effectively engaging all people from all walks of life.

The service was formed and created by a team of young people from our faith community as well as some wise old heads. The discussion and decision making was shared and empowering throughout the process, and the end result was a sustainable contemporary service that focuses on young adults but appeals to a wide age range and is still integrated into the life of the church. This really showed that when the form of church is explored contextually and held loosely, with the focal need being to carry out the function of church, then a positive result can be found. Therefore, the form of the Church may need to change but the function of the Church is the very essence of what we need to keep.

Ask yourself a question. Do you value the form of the Church more than its function? If so, why?

This discussion of changing the form of church is important because often the form of church that we use is not engaging the young people in our communities.

I think young people find it hard to stay connected with a church community when fundamentally they may have no understanding of how church develops their faith journey.

Lack of teaching about the form of the Reformed tradition often leads to a disconnection and loss of ownership, or a feeling that it means nothing so why engage with it. How we package and present the story of who we are as a Presbyterian Church can often not be an exciting narrative to sit down and listen to. Thus the importance of a contextual form of ministry.

Perhaps the Church isn't seeking hard enough or sacrificially enough to reform its form of ministry.

Often lip service is given to change but effort and resources are not representative of the voiced expression of support.

Another challenging area is the whole way we do youth ministry. Initiatives like Kids Friendly are great for teaching children, and the transition from Sunday school to youth groups is, I think, on the whole strongly established. However, the transition from youth group to adult church participation is a huge struggle for us. Why?

I have a few observations:

*Q: Are we preparing young people in youth ministry for becoming members of our church as adults?*

*A: I don't think we are at all. The basis of most youth ministry is a youth group time based around fellowship and teaching. But the fellowship and teaching time is so far removed from our general adult service of worship that it almost seems to be a different world. It is generally less formal, more question-and-answer based, more varied experientially and a lot more FUN!*

It would be hard to expect a young person to go from a ministry that does not expose or teach them about the reality of the adult church context and then to automatically connect as a young adult with that reality.

So either our youth ministry intentionally prepares young people for church life after youth group or the form of church changes to be more like our youth programmes – otherwise we maintain a disconnect between our wider church life and our youth ministry.

**A**sk yourself a question. Do you value the form of the Church more than its function? If so, why?

Another interesting saying that I often hear bantered about is the whole "these young people are the future leaders of our Church". Forget about the next generation: look around the current leadership of your Church. How many young people from the previous generation are leaders in your Church now? How many session elders do you have under 40? (Let alone under 30?)

How are we empowering our young people to be leaders? We need to stop saying they are leaders of a tomorrow that never comes and start supporting them to lead today.

I asked some young adults what their thoughts were on this question and the following quotes contain some of the responses I received.

### **Q: Have we lost the next generation?**

*First of all, I don't think we can lose something we never had. I'm big on free choice and I do believe it is (for the most part) ultimately up to the individual to decide whether or not to be a part of something. I think what we should really be looking at is how we relate to future generations, or making ourselves*

*accessible for them to be able to relate to us. Less philosophically, I don't think we have lost touch with the next generation. Generations before us may have been more active churchgoers than we are today, but how much of that was societal pressure? It was the norm to call yourself a Christian then; now it's the norm to be anything but. Have people's hearts actually changed, or is it just that their actions are now more reflective of their attitude?*

*Finally, answering the guts of the question, I think it will be more challenging to reach out to the next generation as (massive, sweeping generalisation coming up) they don't have that background of understanding what Christianity is, or what they do know is heavily influenced by the media or being dragged off to grandma's church to get some God into them before they're shipped back to their parents.*

I don't know if WE can ever lose a generation or a person as such, because it's not us who "find" them, it's God, so my thought is that even though it might seem as though we aren't getting through to people, we should pray that God will reach them through us, and enable us to find a way to relate to these kids. Also I know young people who have a strong faith, so if we say we've lost the next generation, does it mean we are just discounting them? .....

*My initial two cents is, no, we haven't lost them - the question is whether we have the will to reach out to them in a relevant manner, and put the energy into exploring ways of doing this while maintaining the truth of our faith and the great things of our tradition.*

I reckon so - all the different things that churches use to attract young people only work on one sort of young person. Traditional services are often too full of jargon for people who haven't grown up in the church

*Well, considering how things have been going with my youth group in the recent years, I could easily say yes to that question - as nothing we do seems to really capture the minds of our youthies... But then I go along to things like Easter camp and it's just bursting at the seams with young people that are just totally on fire for God and can't seem to get enough... I can only conclude that God really is working out there in the minds and hearts of the youth. So I'd have to answer, no, we haven't lost the next generation. It's full of plenty of young souls just wanting to love and know God more. And as for those that find themselves in similar situations to my youth group, well, maybe we just haven't found our groove yet, maybe we need to think further outside the square of how we can connect with these guys. There's no easy answer to that one but maybe we just need to put our faith in God that all our efforts aren't in vain (as we can sometimes feel) and that God has something huge in store for them somewhere down the track - whether we get to be around to see that change or not...*

So in conclusion I want to leave you with some questions that may help bring some focus and clarity to the discussion of what to do next in terms of engaging with the next generation.

If sharing the Good News with young people is the aim, how far are you willing to go to see that aim through? Can you see the challenge presented therein to some forms of church that you may hold dear?

Do ministers feel the same amount of pressure for numerical growth as a youth leader? This is a passion-killing reality that most youth workers face and is often not talked about; have you thought about supporting your youth leaders in this area?

How well do we equip our youth leaders in what we say is a key strategic area of Church ministry? How many youth leaders have the same level of training as minister of Word and Sacrament? Why not?

Does the level of equipping and resource reflect what we really think about youth ministry?

When you really think about it, to do lasting, effective ministry to young people takes a lot more than words and good intentions. It takes resourcing, long-term planning and the support and encouragement of a congregation open to change.

Is that your kind of church?

# Are we losing the next generation?

*Matt Chapman,*

**F**irst, I would say that Christian faith in the life of youth and young adults in New Zealand is certainly not fading out when we look at the wider Church. In many other denominations, there is a huge amount of growth in this area. The question is, what is happening in our Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand context?

Let me speak about some of the friends I grew up with. The identity of being “Presbyterian” was not hugely important to them. They were just glad to be part of a community of people who were doing their best to love God and love others. We enjoyed doing things with other churches; Baptist, Pentecostal, AOG, Anglican. It didn’t really matter; we were just excited to be meeting other Christians.

In the same way, if you moved out of town, sticking to your denomination was not important. What was important was finding a warm, caring church with people who were vibrantly living out the faith.

Worship style has a lot to do with why many of my friends ended up attending other churches. For many, contemporary expressions of worship help them connect with the faith in a new way. It’s not that traditional approaches are no longer useful; more so that contemporary approaches are providing another way to express their faith. Some will prefer contemporary, some traditional, and some will desire to be part of communities that celebrate in both ways.

The critical component is always that things are done in a meaningful way. I will worship in any context, traditional or contemporary. My hope is that the body would be drawn in to a genuine encounter with Christ, through worship, the opening of Scripture, our fellowship with each other, and the mission it calls us to live out in the world.

People often look at me as a “younger person” in the church and assume that I don’t like hymns, that I don’t enjoy liturgical services, that I don’t enjoy fellowshiping with people outside of my demographic. They often assume I only like contemporary music, and that it has to be played as loudly as possible; that I need an entertainment-based worship service.

For me, this couldn’t be further from the truth. And I think this is the case for many people in my demographic. Indeed, many postmodern approaches to church and worship today that are appealing to our generation involve going back to more traditional models of worship. I believe in a healthy balance of affirming where we’ve come from, and looking forward to how we can better communicate the Gospel in today’s world using the tools of today.

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Young people are looking for a genuine experience of the Kingdom of God. We are happy to be involved in traditional worship, but it has to be driven purposefully. I have heard some people reflect that traditional worship has often felt practised out of a sense of traditional obligation, or the “it’s what we’ve always done” mentality. On the other side of the scale, many of us have found contemporary forms of worship to be too driven by popular culture, and this is also a put off.

Our generation will often ask, “why do we do the things we do?” “Why do we worship this way?” “What is the desired response we are looking to encourage in people, and is this actually happening?”

I don't believe that in order to hold onto our young people in the Presbyterian Church, we need to give them flashing lights, loud music, and pop culture, (though for many this does connect well!) What they want is a genuine encounter with the living God who has called them to know and follow him. They want to know what it means to be the people of God today. They are looking for a loving community in which to live out the faith.

We must also recognise though, that our young people live in a world different from that of their parents and grandparents. Many of them will respond more to contemporary faith expressions, than to traditional. That's why I believe it's important that we provide both in some shape or form. If we don't, we will continue to lose a lot of our young people to the other churches that do provide contemporary forms.

We mustn't be afraid to look at what other churches that are successfully reaching this generation are doing. We could learn a lot from them. Of course, we will not always agree with everything they do, but this must not stop us seeing the good things they are doing and learning from them.

At the end of the day, service style aside, it is the community of believers and the love they have for each other and for God that will be the greatest drawcard to a particular church. Contemporary approaches alone will not keep young people in our churches.

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# What's behind a wall of sound?

Martin Baker

**W**e find no shortage of verses in scripture supporting a view that says that silence should have a central place in our worship. In the Apocalypse, the whole of heaven falls silent for “one little hour” before the Lamb can “break the seal” that will bring on judgement day. In the poetry of the psalms “the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him” or “be silent all flesh before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling”. Of course, there are also verses that tell of bringing joyful noises and sounds of praise. But what if we have neglected the ancient view that sees silence as being the most appropriate response to awe and wonder and the wordlessness of encountering the majesty of God?

I am preparing to conduct worship, and before me I have a scattering of hymn books, song books, and a guide of “what the music group knows”. All of us probably have done this hundreds of times. We’ve experienced the fulfilment when music has captured the message and the sinking feeling when, musically, things haven’t quite worked out. However, I am also aware that while we may allow for a “moment of silence” sometime in our worship, I (and I am speaking for myself here) also have a desire to plan for and fill every moment of the hour or so with something. Maybe it is not so different from the awkwardness we might feel about that gap in a dinner party conversation when no one speaks. The art of small talk seems to be a quality of all those who are seen as being socially accomplished.

I am reading Sara Maitland’s *A Book of Silence*. A woman of Christian conviction, better known perhaps for her writing on fashion, Maitland reflects on her years spent actively seeking out and exploring the place of silence, both in the development of her own faith but also the role that silence plays in society and in the phenomenology of religion.

In picking up a theme developed in C S Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*, Maitland writes

*In the Middle Ages Christian scholastics argued that the devil’s basic strategy was to bring human beings to a point where they are never alone with their God, nor ever attentively face to face with another human being. In the Christian tradition Satan has always been hampered by her inability to create anything new - she lacks both imagination and artistry. The mobile phone then seems to me to represent a major breakthrough for the powers of hell - it is a new thing which allows the devil to take a significant step forward in her grand design. With a mobile, a person is never alone and is never entirely attentive to someone else. What is entirely brilliant about it from a demonic perspective is that so many have been persuaded that this is not something pleasurable (a free choice) but something necessary.*

A few people in my life fully appreciate how badly I can sing and understand my fear of leaving the lapel mic on during a hymn. I nevertheless have huge admiration for those who seem, in my view, unimaginably blessed with the talents required to play organs, guitars and pianos, lead the worship band or even join heartily in singing through our worship songs and hymns. When I hear a good singing voice behind me in church, I want to listen and turn and congratulate or thank the person who has been blessed with such a gift.

Interesting for me is the experience of attending worship, especially worship in larger congregations and often led by a band or even choir, where I hear almost no one around me singing. When does the moment come when we turn from being a worshipping congregation to becoming an audience? Though it may be difficult, silence is something we can all do.

When I walk down Cuba Street for a coffee at Fidel’s, I notice at least half the people walking in front of me are wearing headphones or earphones. I know the value we place on music, the cost of keeping the organ going, and the countless hours of practice for our music groups. Supported by the testimony of our Scriptures, from the need to affirm the holiness of worship, or perhaps out of simple pastoral concerns for the impact that noise may have on our communities, it may be a good time to look at the place silence has in our worship. I wonder whether silence and the associated attentiveness to the presence of God and one another may have an increasingly important role in identifying worship as an event within, but also apart from, the daily and increasing din of our mostly urban lives.

Thanks for your support of our Church. I am off to climb a mountain over Easter. Maybe that is the best place to find silence and enjoy God’s presence.