

CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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The Missing Generation: 25-45

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Noticeboard

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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:

Amanda Wells (editor)
Telephone: 04 381-8285
Email: candour@presbyterian.org.nz
PO Box 9049, Wellington

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Glen Innis Vacancies

October 9-16	Homestead
October 16-23	Homestead
October 23-30	Homestead/Cottage
October 30-Nov 6	Homestead/Cottage
November 6-13	Homestead/Cottage

To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889. Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

Worship Resource Bank

Many of us who prepare worship are interested in both having access to other people's ideas and to sharing our own resources with others.

One way in which we can do this is through the worship resource bank which is being developed at www.presbyterian.org.nz.

Our hope is that worship leaders will e-mail us the worship resource(s) they have created. We will post it under what seems like the most appropriate category so that others can access and use it. We would also be happy to receive recommendations of worship resource websites which we can also post as a link on the site.

If you go to www.presbyterian.org.nz, then to "minister's resources" and then to the "worship resource bank" you will see the topics which we are hoping to stock with resources and web-links.

- a. Theology of worship
- b. Calls to worship and benedictions
- c. Prayers
- d. Worship and sermon preparation
- e. Communion
- f. Baptism and confirmation
- g. Music
- h. Youth
- i. Children
- j. Drama
- k. Funerals and memorial services
- l. Wedding
- m. Alternative worship
- n. Ordination/induction services
- o. Blessing and other service liturgies

Seasonal resources will also appear on the resource bank. With Advent and Christmas approaching any resources you would be willing to share with others on these themes would be gladly received.

Contributions can be sent to Sharon Ensor ministerwpc@xtra.co.nz or 04 472 6402.

General Assembly 2006

Reports being presented to GA06 are now online.

Visit www.presbyterian.org.nz/ga06 to see the latest news and register for the daily email update.



Where are we?

Amanda Wells

Every month I email members of the editorial committee*, seeking ideas on people who might be persuaded to contribute. When I emailed asking who could write on “the missing generation”, one member emailed me back the next day saying the question woke him at 3am. There’s a lot of concern out there, particularly among ministers, over how to bring this group through their church doors.

It’s worth noting that the majority of writers for this issue are young, passionate Presbyterians. They do exist. And they too are concerned.

Like most of my peers, I’ve thought and talked a lot about the problem. Where have all our Christian friends gone? Why are they either hanging out at a Pentecostal church or nowhere at all? However, a focus on the high numbers of young people in non-traditional churches can obscure their large, revolving back doors. It’s just that the mainstream denominations don’t seem to have even this consolation.

Critical mass is a factor. It’s hard to attend a church in which you feel hyper-visible; where you’re among the handful of representatives of your generation. No one wants to be emblematic. So you perhaps you do try out the more Pentecostal church down the road. And after a while, perhaps, you tire of the hype and just stop going.

The drawback of this definition of the problem is that it doesn’t imply a solution.

Or maybe my generation (X – you’ll see a lot of Xs and Ys in this issue: if they’re unfamiliar terms, look out for the definition at the end of Amber Parry Strong’s article) is just going through a selfish phase; maybe we’ll realise the error of our ways and zoom back to church post-midlife-crisis. If we can.

Most of the writers in this issue of *Candour* avoid making the blatant generalisations I’ve touted in the past few paragraphs. They deal intelligently with a problem that sometimes seems to defy definition, let alone solution. After all, if there were easy answers, we would already be putting them in place.

Nathan Parry draws on his School of Ministry synthesis to provide both a helpful introduction to the issue and

some suggestions of possible paths towards action. Then Emily Wotton takes a hard look at her generation and how the church needs to focus its response. She concludes with one of my favourite quotes, by Howard Thurman. Its sentiment, for me at least, encapsulates why Gen X has abandoned traditional services and why you’re more likely to find me in the hills than in church on Sunday morning. (Yes, I agree that this approach has flaws and I’m both bothered by and brooding on them.)

Helen Harray outlines an alternative model that is working among Dunedin’s students and seems poised to be taken up by forward-thinking presbyteries elsewhere. (The December issue of *sPanz* magazine will feature an in-depth look at studentsoul. For *sPanz* subscription queries, please email spanz@presbyterian.org.nz.)

Next up is Darryl Tempero, who offers something different that fits the spirit of this issue perfectly. Then Amber Parry Strong, Jon Parkes and Mary-Jane Konings explore social justice, Gen X rationalism and worship respectively. The issue concludes with a look by Vivian Coleman and Brett Walker at their efforts to grapple with the problem in practice.

Are any certainties left? Perhaps only that we’re not going to reach out to Gens X and Y by sitting in church waiting for them, offering the same thing that’s failed to lure them in for the past couple of years. And that perhaps giving the problem some air will be a more fitting approach than prescribing solutions. If there’s one generalisation I’m comfortable making about my incredibly diverse generation, it’s that we don’t like to restrict our options.

The next issue of *Candour* will be post General Assembly and present an opportunity to reflect on GA06. I am looking for people who are prepared to commit to writing an article by a deadline of Wednesday 11 October. Please email me, or come and talk to me at General Assembly. If I don’t get enough reflections, I will run some of the media coverage. The October issue will be published later than usual on Friday 20 October.

*If you would like to nominate someone else (or yourself) to join the *Candour* editorial committee for 2007, please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz

How can we bring them back?

Nathan Parry, Island Bay Presbyterian, Wellington

Where have all the 25-45 year-olds gone? Long time passing... And equally importantly, what would keep them and/or bring them back? Who knows? But, being in that age group myself, I have some ideas which I hope will be of help to someone in their efforts to “do church” for our missing generation.

They were here once, especially those in the upper range of that age bracket. Twenty or 30 years ago, many churches still had quite healthy Sunday Schools, but most of those children are no longer with us. However, no one has yet come up with a definitive answer on how to evangelise this generation and encourage them back. If they had, we’d be seeing books like *The Gen-X Sensitive Service* or *40 Days of Post-Modern Purpose* littering our Christian book stores and someone somewhere would be making lots of money! In some deep, dark recess of my heart I still hope that if I think and pray about it hard enough, the answer might fall out of heaven onto my lap, and I’d get to write that book...

The nature of the beast

A few years ago, a new and much vaunted book did come out of Australia by M Frost and A Hirsch titled *The Shaping of things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. It was an interesting collation of ideas and practical examples of contextual mission being done to this generation from around the world: there were pub churches, shop churches, art festival churches... everything under the sun, including their underpinning theologies and missiologies.

But then the stories started circulating. It was said that within two years of writing, virtually every example of an innovative missional church used in that book was no longer functioning as described. This provoked two reactions.

1. Dismissal! It’s all woolly rubbish and not founded on the solid rock of the Gospel; or,
2. This proves what a fluid and constantly changing culture this missing generation lives in. The Church must constantly be seeking to adapt to reach them, or die.

I go with reaction 2. In past times, fluid was bad – we wanted things that were concrete, solid, watertight! Anything else was wet or wishy-washy. Times are changing

though; Christians are trying to reclaim the usefulness of water metaphors (e.g. Leonard Sweet (US) *Aqua Church*, and Pete Ward (UK) *Liquid Church*). We need fluidity and flexibility in our structures, hierarchies and programmes; a three-year life-span for an initiative to this generation is probably quite long.

Another metaphor finding a place is that of the spider’s web. Generally, the culture of this age group is suspicious of certainty and claims to absolute truth – unfettered certitude has been responsible for untold acts of murder, terrorism and injustice over the past 100 years. Knowledge derived from experience seems to be more highly prized now than abstract logic.

In the past we have built towering edifices of systematic theology, reaching to the heavens and even challenging God (as did Babel). The problem with theological towers is that if we remove even a relatively minor building block, the whole structure is in danger of collapsing. I have seen several friends over the years have aspects of their faith challenged in areas such as the Bible, prayer or miracles; this has led to a great faith collapse, and when the dust has settled nothing has remained, not even the most basic faith in God.

However, theological webs rooted in experience give strength and flexibility. There are multiple connection points, so if one section must be cut out, the overall structure remains. It is easy to add strands to a web as new understandings or experiences come. Different truths/experiences can be held in tension close together or far apart; one doesn’t necessarily have to flow logically on to the other, mystery can be maintained and paradox tolerated without stunting spiritual growth: the breadth of a web is potentially unlimited.

The web metaphor can also be applied to how we do church. Some previous understandings have seen our church ministries as a tree, rooted in the foundation that is the Sunday service. All other ministries sprout from there and are seen as bearing fruit in as much as they get more bums on seats. The 25-45 group tends to be suspicious of institutions and reluctant to belong to groups; plus there is an attitude that sees the Church as a force for evil in society, despite concomitant positive attitudes to God, Jesus and spirituality.

If we use a web model, then we are trying to make multiple connections with people throughout the week and throughout our communities. We will seek to minister to them where they're at and where they feel comfortable, without any pressure or expectation of seeing them on a Sunday morning. This is important as many in this age group have to work on Sundays, have sport for their children at that time, are in bed suffering hangovers, or just feel really uncomfortable in a church building. Doing church in multiple ways, in multiple places and at multiple times gives us the flexibility and breadth to hold more people, and more kinds of people.

My experience as a Gen-X-er

In many ways I view diversity as the key; in this regard perhaps Presbyterians have a head start.

I looked at this issue for my SOM synthesis last year. Surveying various statistics, it seems that of the young people with us at age 13, only one third are still active in church at age 25 (surprisingly this is also reflected in census figures). This seems to be the general trend across the churches, though some are better at attracting others' young people to make up for losing their own.

This statistic is true of my own youth group peers, and seems to be true of my new parish. With a role of 85, we would have about 10 men and 11 women in this age group attending faith-based activities. Of these, four men and five women grew up here, still live in the area, and have faithfully continued to attend or started re-attending in recent years. But, 20 years ago, the youth group here was relatively large; where did the rest go? Some attend other churches but most have stopped attending.

I'm not aware of any scientific studies done on this, but from my experience and anecdotal evidence, it seems that around a third of former youth group members continue to belong to our churches, a third still believe but without belonging, while the other third have rejected their faith or just stopped thinking about it.

Faith is a gift freely given by God but not forced on anyone; some will always reject and walk away. The shame though is in those who still believe but no longer find current forms of church a relevant or accessible means of expressing their faith. Laziness is a factor as well. Whatever we do, some will still lack the drive to come. How-

ever, the more attractive a service, the more motivation there is to overcome that laziness.

I spent one and a half years of my life as a non-attende, during my OE. I tried various Protestant churches but found them unfriendly, boring and unconnected to the realities of my life at that time. Most of all, there was no sense of God, no moments of transcendence to call me back. My road back came while working on the Continent, stopping every now and then in old Catholic churches to pause and pray. I found God in the quiet and reverent atmosphere of those holy places, which eventually prompted me to again seek out a Christian community.

Ten suggestions

So, coloured by that experience and as a member of this missing generation, I would say *give us transcendence*.

1. Transcendence through silence. Let us be freed from our bondage to words; let us allow quiet for God to speak; let us give room for people to process their faith themselves without drowning out God by explaining everything to them in minute detail.
2. Transcendence through mystery. Science and rationale do not reign supreme in this culture, there is an openness to and love of mystery. So, focus on the mysteries of the faith and allow them to remain mysteries – e.g. creation, trinity, incarnation, atonement, the Body of Christ.
3. Transcendence through “weighty” worship. The term “an ancient-future faith” is becoming popular as there is a growing reaction against entertainment worship. In a world of fake everything, there is a craving for that which is authentic, mysterious, and ancient. Use the ancient symbols, devotional practices, and traditions from our collective Christian history, but mix and match. Use them in new ways.
4. Transcendence through sacred space. It won't always be practical but push back the pews, bring in some candles and crosses, use circles now and then, break out of the lecture-theatre atmosphere dominant in our buildings. When planning our services, let us think of ourselves as creating a space where worship can happen, rather than laying out a prescribed plan that we will lead people through step by step.

The shame... is in those who still believe but no longer find current forms of church a relevant or accessible means of expressing their faith

5. Transcendence through participation. Use as many people as possible in a service, give people more chances to join in than just the songs. Bring back responsive liturgies in fresh new ways, give people a chance to get off their chairs and respond to God in a physical way.

6. Transcendence through the senses. This is a hands-on generation: use video, art, smells, food, touch. This leads on to...

7. Cherish and celebrate the sacraments. Communion is a great missional tool for this generation; do it often, experiment with new ways, but make it weighty. Also, dare I say, be inclusive. Show the people on the fringes of our communities that Christ died for them too and desires to meet and dine with them.

8. Allow our intellects to worship and function as God created them to. Allow people to ask the hard questions and sincerely process issues without feeling judged, or being criticised for back-sliding.

9. Let our church leaders be “fellow pilgrims” — honest, approachable, fallible servants — leading others where they themselves have gone, a model to their congregations.

10. Lastly and probably *most importantly*, change our emphasis from a “right” to a “good” Gospel! As previously mentioned, experience is trusted; absolute truth claims are distrusted. The Church has an image problem with this generation: we are often regarded as evil. So, show them they are wrong! Let us move beyond our Bible wars and start emulating Christ in this world, let us demonstrate our love practically — let’s make a difference, let’s actually *do* stuff!

The application

NB The problem with change is the third who remain. The fact that they still attend shows that they like it fine the way it is, meaning that introducing change could have the effect of upsetting or driving them away. But we have a missional obligation to those who don’t come and some level of innovation is necessary for our outreach to them — we will reap what we sow.

In my synthesis, I suggested three ways of catering for the missing members of this generation in our services.

A) Incorporate some of the above elements into our Sunday services. This has been done to a greater or lesser degree in many churches as part of the charismatic movement; those of us who lived through those days will re-

member, however, that it wasn’t always an easy process! Some churches still bear scars...

B) Set up “boutique” services for them within existing churches, as has often been done for teens. This would give stability, support and \$ from the main congregation, but would require tolerance from the leadership as the natural tendencies of this generation would be to challenge the dominant theologies and practices of the church.

C) Plant new churches/gatherings for them. This has been done for under-25s – e.g. Student.Soul – but has rarely been done for Gen X. Who would lead them, who would resource them? How do we “institutionalize” such an anti-institutional generation?

These are the thoughts of a new minister attempting to do church in a way that is relevant to his peers. Hopefully by God’s grace my ministry will mature and grow over time, and in a few years I will have some wisdom borne of experience to share in this needed area of mission.

Glendowie Presbyterian Church Auckland

Glendowie Presbyterian Church is an enthusiastic congregation in a settled suburb of Auckland’s Eastern Bays. We are seeking an experienced, full-time minister, with a Christ-centred faith who is committed to proclaiming by life practice and preaching, the saving grace of God.

Glendowie Presbyterian Church has the expectation that our new minister will:

- do most of the preaching,
- recognise skills and spiritual gifts in themselves and others
- lead and work alongside the church leadership
- show sensitivity and warmth in relating to people across all ages and backgrounds
- support and foster our mission and ministry, particularly to families and young people in this congregation and community.

If you sense God might be calling you to Glendowie Presbyterian Church please contact the Nominator:

Rev Richard Ward
(09) 528 0137
kohipres@xtra.co.nz

Expressions of interest are sought by Monday 9 October.

Opportunistic cake-eaters?

Emily Wotton, Youth, Child & Family Ministry Co-ordinator for Auckland Presbytery

I fall smack into the middle of “the missing generation” we’re talking about in this issue of *Candour*.... and yet, week after week, I’m still here – part of the Presbyterian church. I gathered early on that my husband and I are pretty rare, as reaching, involving and retaining our age bracket continues to be the hot topic of denominational conferences, newsletters, and training events. It’s also a common lament at session and presbytery meetings and has been the catalyst for many missional myths and unbelievable Christian urban legends. The best summary of conversations, theories, and organised research is that there really is no stereotypical reason or pattern that can explain this situation in which the organised church finds itself.

There are, however, a variety of contributing factors. There may be common threads to generational experiences and expectations of church, but most church leavers have unique features to their individual story. But without further ado, let’s take a generic look at what’s to blame. Firstly, there’s the organised church, most commonly blamed for being too traditional, rigid, and not changing fast enough (or at all). Apparently this actually repels people. Secondly, there’s society, which is at fault for changing too fast. Suddenly we’re working harder, settling down later, have more opportunities on the weekends, reject values and don’t make time to volunteer. We do all this without thinking through the long-term ramifications of these changes. This challenges the church’s normal ingredients for existence. Lastly, we can blame the individual people, because their self-centred, consumerist, postmodern choices direct society’s trends, to which the church is so slow to respond, therefore increasing its lack of relevance and further growing the chasm between Christian and secular culture. Yes, basically, we’re right back where we started, with quite a muddle to work through... so, it’s no wonder the everyday church is struggling to respond. Even the strategic thinkers can hardly get their head around what’s happening.

The majority of my peers who I’ve worshipped with over the years also spend a lot of time talking about this predicament. These conversations take a different angle, less concerned with retention and longevity, and more interested in choices. They happen at dinner parties, round campfires, at significant life events, on Myspace, and in online blogs. These are the places we still spend time with each other, because hardly any of us are worshipping to-

gether in the same place. The friendship connections are still strong, but the originating host of our strong youth church no longer draws us together. A portion has moved to other churches; ones they say are a better reflection of their personal beliefs and preferred worship style. Many are still drifting, not sure if they’ll ever find a church they can completely agree with, but always trying the latest version on offer. The rising trend of churchless Christians seems to start where this quest finishes without solution. Personal relationship with Christ is maintained, but participation in a community of faith is intentionally avoided. And then there are those that reject or change their mind about the faith of their youth. We mourn for their outspoken pain, keep the hand of friendship open, but politely and often unquestioningly allow them room for the path of their personal journey. In several occasions the last two situations are often confused, which can be awkward source of conversation for both parties.

So what are the issues we’re talking about? Really, it’s the lack of the “whole package”. The fact that so many of us feel compromised by what’s on offer at our church choices. Do we tolerate or do we avoid... or better still do we forge our own style, create the community of authentic faith that we dream of?

“I left church not because I do not believe in church, but because what passes for church falls so short of what is possible, and what I hope for, that to go on Sunday morning is simply depressing. After I read Dave Tomlinson’s book *The Post-Evangelical*, I recognised that there are many others, like me, who give up church-going because it seems the church is going nowhere.”

This is from Alan Jamieson’s research for his study on *Churchless Faith*, but I can say I’ve heard these sentiments from many voices at different ages and stages over the years. The difference often is what the different ages *do* about these feelings. This is where generational stereotyping and modern versus postmodern conversation heats up. It seems the whole country is fluent in these definitions and vocabulary now, thanks to Petra Bagust and the current TV programme “The Perfect Age”.

Looking at my generation (Gen X), I see a whole lot of opportunistic cake-eaters. Yes, we’re having our cake and eating it too. As I said before, we want the whole pack-

age; authenticity through and through. We are told this is why the older generations get so frustrated with us. In their day, they would just be proud of providing the proverbial cake and not be so presumptuous as to sample a piece! *“That cake’s being made for the future. It’s the legacy we are leaving, showing our stewardship and foresight. Don’t you like the cake we’ve left you? ... Well then hang on, I just might hold onto it a little longer until you can be trusted with it.”*

If the younger Gen Y is so named because they always ask “why should we bother?”, then my Gen X above them could actually be relabelled “Gen Y Not?” As in: of course, why shouldn’t we expect that, go for that, demand that – we have every reason to believe we can get it ALL at once. We take it, we make it, and we twist it to fit.

There’s little hope of us respecting tradition just for the sake of respect. We’re happy to question and create; it’s all about the experience after all! If the church that we’re going to does not feel or look or act like our ideal understanding of church, ultimately we have no reason to stay. *“Why tolerate the mediocre, make do with the half pie effort, actually do we even want to be associated with something that is so hypocritical to our vision of what it means to be church? I’d rather be it on my own and bump into others along the way on a similar journey, than hang with a hoard of try hards only mimicking the authenticity we crave. If our desires can’t be met in conventional church, we have no reason to participate in the convention.”*

Brian McLaren, founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church, author of *A Generous Orthodoxy*, widely viewed as the leader of the emerging church movement is a well known cake-eater. He describes himself as a “missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/calvinist + anabaptist/anglican + methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished Christian”. His work attempts to find a “third way” between the conservative and liberal camps to better engage with postmodernism.

Forgive the sarcasm and irony, I am from Gen X after all, but McLaren brings me to my favourite “it” words of hot Christian discussion: the emerging church movement

and postmodernism. Supposedly, the emerging church is where it’s at and we need to change the established church in order to connect better with the postmodern world. Well, while we’re busy discussing and getting ready for this, the emerging church is becoming established, and much of the worldview is now progressing *past* postmodern. We’ve missed it, and we’ll keep missing it if we’re simply in reactive-to-society mode and not actively pioneering, dare I say it, “like in the old days”.

Earlier this year, I sat with many listening and trying to take in Tom Bandy’s session on “Tomorrow’s church today”. This session both reassured and saddened me.

I found it reassuring that many of the thoughts echoing in youth ministry circles for the past 15 years were finally being listened to by older generations. The presentation and clarity of sequential thought processing

and diagrams were fantastic. What was sad for me though was that it’s taken so long, and that we’ll miss it all again if the postmodern world is what we try to engage with now.

I’ve decided to call the current trend I see developing “mixed modern” as this is a more polite term than the phrase “cake-eaters” that I used earlier. In looking at Bandy’s seminar workbook, his comparisons between modern and postmodern actually read like a wish list of what my friends are looking for in church life. They don’t fall into the category of one or the other; they want to pick and choose from or have all of *both*. What seem like opposite values are now being desired and trialled as complementary languages of faith and community. Go figure. Well, this rising trend is good news for the Presbyterian Church and other trad denominations. We have the opportunity to maximise the depth of our tradition, forge ahead with contemporary creativity, and welcome the mixed modern. Our clarity in Jesus can be realised in our distinctives — intergenerational, multi-cultural, diverse expression — becoming our strengths

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

— Howard Thurman

The approach of studentsoul

Helen Harray, studentsoul, Dunedin

Firstly, some characteristics of Generation Y (18-25+):

- A maze of contrasts and paradoxes
- A mix of brilliance and apathy
- The “whatever” generation
- Not as mature in some things, yet much more mature in others
- Relationally struggling
- Spiritually gutted by the impoverished nature of the Church
- Wanting to reconnect with their roots
- Optimistic
- Always in debt but not deterred.

“Generation whatever”

I asked some of the students to talk about how they saw this applying to them and their peers:

We discussed the “whatever” mindset, the kind of vibe we get from many people in our generation, e.g. friends at uni, and also aspects of it we see in ourselves. We discussed ways that this mindset can manifest externally. People shrug off important conversations, responding with “I don’t care” or “it’s my life” or literally saying “whatever” to something. We talked quite a bit about some possible issues which underlie the “whatever” mindset.

Not caring

One prevalent aspect of the “whatever” attitude we talked about was not caring about what we do. This means we can distance ourselves from issues in our lives, and not take responsibility for our actions. This is very dangerous as it puts us in a place where we are not receptive to God or his word. Not caring about what is right or wrong could lead to a moral anarchy, where “anything goes”.

Rebellion

We also discussed how our “whatever” mindset can be a rebellion against authority and a rebellion against God. This rebellion may be due to past experiences or just the culture we see around us (e.g. punk rock or rap). This “whatever” mindset puts walls up between us and our friends and family, and a wall between us and God. We may put this wall up to “protect” ourselves from being affected by what other people say and do, as we don’t want to be vulnerable. In this way, a “whatever” mindset can also be a kind of self-defense mechanism against getting hurt.

Individualism

If we don’t care about issues and morals and shut other people out, how can we rely on anyone but ourselves? We have no motivation to get out of our comfort zone and do the right thing. We think everything is ok, so we don’t help other people out when we think they are going wrong, because it’s their life, and they have rights, and it’s not our responsibility anyway. The paradox is that if we just do whatever we want because we have rights, we are actually a slave of the world, and we are “set free to be heirs of the kingdom” when we give away our independence.

Studentsoul attracts largely Christian young people from the ages of 18-30. Let’s be realistic about this, **most of those who attend are from a church background.** And what we have provided is definitely a space for **your** young people to connect to a Presbyterian church, while they are studying in Dunedin, where previously they would have gone to Elim or Apo or DCBC or nowhere at all. **This is a good thing.** What we have also experienced on a growing scale is that other young people who have gone to Apo or Elim are now coming to studentsoul in their third, fourth or later years. This is perhaps because what they find at studentsoul is more respectful of their thinking and integrity.

I believe more and more that studentsoul is an emerging church. It is not intentionally modeled on anything around the world but nevertheless now bears some of the characteristics of such churches. These new churches are not arising out of an old model but are somehow being shaped in a whole new framework. They are not there yet, but the Holy Spirit is causing the birth of something organic and satisfying which gives Generation Yers hope that the church can be what Jesus intended. I have heard them express it like this: *I see what real community is about and how it is possible for the church to really be the church and why would we want to leave something that is so good and so important to us? Studentsoul has made me believe in the church. People keep saying that we will move on and leave Dunedin, but why, when we are experiencing something so important to us, would we want to leave it?*

What we have sought to do at studentsoul is to create a space for God on campus and therefore for the students to find God in their own culture and generation. My role

as the minister is to hold a space for the students to both find themselves as people and as a church.

This means holding on to them lightly. I work with them where they are. I always hope to raise their maturity but I take them as they are. Sometimes they will attend two or even three churches. That is ok. What I continue to do is plug and hold at the “home” base, a community style of church where people “hang out”. There is a Presbyterian emphasis on thinking about theology and issues of faith, and an holistic approach to identity, integrating the social, mental and emotional with the spiritual and the physical. It is very much a parental role. A parent is a container, holding onto the big picture while the child is safe to explore and encouraged to find their way of being in the world.

One of the initiatives that have come forth this year is “Soul Sessions”. Led by three students and in particular Gareth Bedford (son of the famous Chris), this is a weekly event in a local bar in Dunedin. It is basically a “hang out” place but every week two bands or soloists or even poets are given space. Neither the audience nor the bands are just Christian people either. Soul Sessions has become so popular that all the spots are filled from now till the end of the year, the venue is packed out (delightfully so for the bar owners!) and there is trickle effect back into the Sunday evening services at studentsoul.

The other highlight of the year was the musical, entirely written and performed by studentsoul members. More than 1,000 people saw this over five days. The author, theology student Malcolm Gordon, has just been accepted for Ordination training. The ministers of studentsoul simply held a space, encouraged, mentored and provided the safe context for the students to express their amazing talents. It seems that if you give the “whatever generation” a safe environment and trust them with their incredible leadership, they stop being apathetic and take responsibility. Their brilliance lies untapped.

Over time, a student who attends a Gel group (a Group of Emerging Leaders) will learn how to interact on several levels in a group setting (facilitating discussion, leading an ice-breaker and study, different levels of listening, how group dynamics operate), and explore their identity in relationship to their learning style, their spiritual pathway, their personality style (MBTI and the Enneagram), their spiritual gifts and something of how they are best suited to sharing their faith with others. They will also learn about self care, supervision and spiritual direction, the nature of boundaries and a variety of other skills and applications. They will lead services in other churches

and lead one of a variety of small groups within student-soul, Rock Solid and Youth groups.

It doesn't take a lot to equip them like this; the lights go on real quick when you help them to be honest and demonstrate how that works. The difference between those who have been in a Gel group and those who have not is obvious. I think investing in leadership and particularly this generation of leaders is a core task of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church today.

I suspect my way of seeing this generation has probably been a key to what some call the “success” of student-soul. I think we are doing important stuff through studentsoul, but if you look at this in terms of reaching the wider campus, we have a long way to go. That would take more resources, more leadership and more time to equip those who attend currently. In the end, really only a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit will bring the bulk of Gen Y into the church.

What we do at studentsoul is encourage, empower and parent this generation. We make them think by involving them in every sermon through discussion and as many sensory media as possible. We try to be real and grounded and offer practical ways to interpret and apply scripture. We celebrate the sacraments regularly and we value our Presbyterian heritage. In the long term we want to see the best of it still a part of this emerging style of church. We take seriously the need to teach and equip them as people and as leaders, by being practical and concrete. We allow evolution of their way of being church in and beyond services. We stretch them and admonish after we have gained their respect and loyalty. Above all, we listen and try to walk in their shoes.

We are blessed to have had the funding and trust of the Church to start from scratch and grow this ministry. We are also blessed to be able to narrowly focus on this age range, although we distinctly miss the availability of mature leaders to call on, and the students miss the range of ages. However, they can and do attend the morning services at Leith Valley where these needs can be met, and our partnership with Leith Valley is critical.

There is a need to let this ministry happen on campuses throughout NZ. Think about how vital it is to capture Gen Y into the church where they really feel they can make a difference, and we will see the Presbyterian Church in the future standing strong. If your church is interested in partnering with the studentsoul model of planting a ministry on a campus, we would like to hear from you.

The mustard seed — a story

Darryl Tempero, Hornby Presbyterian, Christchurch

“He’s late,” Dave thought as he checked his watch again. “Never mind,” the conversation in his head continued. Dave was starting to enjoy watching the people around him while he waited. This place had changed so much in the last few years. He still hadn’t got used to the fact that the table he was at seemed to be right in the middle of where everyone walked.

He noticed a young couple walk past, seemingly quite content, laughing, enjoying each other’s company. They ordered two “trim lattes with a caramel shot” and sat down nearby. Dave looked at the flat white he was cradling and wondered how cool his choice of coffee was.

His attention went back to the couple. As he watched he wondered, half praying, “what do we offer that they need? Is what I believe relevant to them? Of course it is,” he argued. “That’s why I’m doing what I’m doing – following the call. The Gospel is relevant to all....” His thoughts trailed off.

“Where are you?” Dave was startled as he looked up at the guy across from him. “Sorry – hey Mike, how you doing?” Mike was a 25-year-old graphic designer, grown up in a church family, and now someone Dave would call a casual attendee at worship.

“Good... sorry I’m late,” Mike said in a way that made Dave wonder if he really was.

“No worries – I was just thinking about this place – this mall and all these people. Wondering how we can reach out to them. They appear to be pretty happy – has our church got anything to say to them?”

Mike looked around. “I guess so,” he said politely, at the same time a little uncomfortable; aware that he wasn’t in church much, and here he was meeting the minister for coffee.

Dave sensed his feelings, and said, “I’m really pleased you said yes to having a coffee, Mike. I need your help.”

“Oh?” Mike was puzzled – what could he possibly help with?

“I want to talk to you about church. I know I haven’t seen much of you lately, but I want you to know that’s OK.

That’s not what today is about.” He noticed Mike relax. “I think you can help me... us... try and grapple with young people leaving, or not coming to church”.

“Wow,” Mike said. “Well, um... I’m not sure. I don’t think there’s anything really wrong with church.”

“Thanks for the encouragement, Mike, but the stats don’t confirm your thoughts”.

Mike looked at his minister. “Well, I don’t want to offend you, but seeing as you asked — people I know usually say something along the lines of ‘irrelevant, maybe a bit boring’.” That wasn’t new to Dave. “I was talking to a friend recently who didn’t like the services — it reminded him too much like a lecture theatre and he gets that all week. I was also part of a group the other day and in the conversation it came up that the church is always saying ‘don’t’, or ‘wrong’. I just sat and listened, a bit embarrassed – but you know Dave, that’s been a little bit of my experience as well”.

“And mine,” Dave admitted to himself. “Are you talking about worship style, and how we should change it?”

“Maybe that’s the common reason given,” Mike suggested. “Maybe that’s the easiest thing to identify ‘cause it’s so public and tangible.”

“Music and worship style have always been controversial, and I’m starting to wonder if people are not as concerned about the model or style of worship services as we think,” Dave added. “Someone in our congregation said to me recently that young people don’t want to sing anymore.”

“Yeah, that’s probably got some truth in it,” came the reply. “Although in saying that, I don’t know how many parties I’ve been too lately that have got PS2 Sing Star going – even the guys seem to get into it!”

“Do you?” Dave teased. “Of course not,” Mike lied, smiling, “although I’d have to admit some of those 80s rock songs are pretty cool”. “Now you’re talking my kind of language” laughed the minister. “I know at the U2 concert in a few months time I’ll be singing with thousands of others. I also remember the day a couple of seasons ago when I was on the banks at Carisbrook before the Crusaders played the Highlanders, and everyone was

singing “I’m a Southern Man” at the top of their voices – sure, they had had a few drinks but that tells me that singing is part of our nature, and there is something about singing together that is special... anyway we can talk about that another day”.

“Maybe that’s the answer” Mike laughed. “Having some refreshments before the service...” Dave joined in the laughter as he imagined the reaction he would get.

Mike continued, with his passion growing, “I don’t think it’s time to throw singing out, and I’m not convinced that it’s a reason why people don’t come to church. It may be. What seems more important is to have a style and expression of music that people can engage with, and use as a tool in their expression of worship – that along with other art forms”. Dave was amazed at some of the thinking that was going on in this young man.

“I think what is more important — and maybe one of the keys to the problem — is to teach young people how to think, not tell them what to think. I want to know — how is this faith I grew up with relevant? How does it relate to us as a community, and to me as an individual? I want to be part of something bigger than myself, maybe see some action in social justice, what about all the talk about binding up the broken hearted? How do we do that? I want to grow spiritually...” Dave was surprised to hear some of this come out of Mike’s mouth – he had made so many assumptions about why he had not continued on at church. “What makes us different? What makes us who we are? Give me ownership of something exciting, let me participate, why not experiment, give me a place to belong, be safe and accepted, it needs to be authentic and real, and vibrant – you know... a place where people want to be there. At the end of the day, I think people – at least I want to, be with and experience God”.

“Sounds to me like an Acts 2 church” Dave mused, feeling a little defeated because that’s all he ever wants as well. He thought about all the stuff he had read about the emerging church, and quickly remembered all the failures he felt that he had had. “What about the lecture theatre comment. What do you think about the teaching?”

“You know, it’s interesting, I notice that there’s been some attempts at exploring other forms of worship expression and teaching, but people still want to study Scripture and hear from someone who knows what they’re talking about.”

“So you mean someone in authority?” Dave asked a little cynically, while trying to be polite.

“I guess, but maybe more like a facilitator – someone to help people learn how to discover, how to walk to journey of faith. I think people want to be included, so somehow the teaching could be more participatory, more like a dialogue”.

Dave thought back to when he was training for ordination, and the tension he felt with that in a culture of anti-institution and a growing suspicion of authority. “You know, I wondered for a while about the point of being ordained, and have come to realise it’s about serving, not power or control. It’s about being trained to provide leadership and guidance when required, but with a motive of serving. That model fits well in the type of faith community that you’re describing...” his thoughts drifted off again.

After a while, Mike asked, “what are you thinking?”

“Well, it reminds me of the parenting training for teenagers – you know, the parent grows into a coach and a friend. It’s really quite a servant role”. He paused, and Mike noticed Dave’s eyes light up. “I can do that...” he whispered. “I can change the way I teach and preach, not be prescriptive, maybe ask more questions than give answers. We can work on building a community, a place to belong and a place to ask all the big questions... to explore spirituality...” he looked at Mike. “I can help them do that – I’m in a great position to serve in that way.” Mike was enjoying seeing his pastor get fired up.

Dave stopped and looked at Mike again, “I want you to run it for me Mike.”

“What? Me? Yeah, good one” Mike laughed incredulously.

“I want you to lead it – be the captain. Make decisions, take the lead, raise up other leaders, serve the congregation and help them be part of something bigger than themselves... I’ll be in the background, coaching. I’ll be the coach - just call me Graham...”

“Who? Oh...” Mike laughed. The he hesitated. He had never considered anything like that before... do something in church? “I hardly even go” he said to himself. But there was something about it that was very attractive.

They started talking some more. They watched the young couple stand up and leave and imagined a time that they would invite them to ‘church.’ As they talked, as they got excited, a mustard seed began to sprout in the middle of that Kiwi suburban mall.

Social justice and moral codes

Amber Parry Strong*

In the *Guardian Weekly* a few months ago, there appeared a small snippet entitled “A young world without sin”. It reported on a Church of England study into beliefs of Gen Yers¹ that discovered people aged 15-25 do not have a sense of sin. Sin, as defined by the Catholic catechism, they report, is “humanity’s rejection of God and opposition to him”.

Reading between the lines, this implies that Gen Yers are godless and find the notion of sin irrelevant. But what is sin and how does each generation, shaped by their environment and circumstance, understand it? One could argue that everyone has a sense of right and wrong, and that if it’s wrong, it’s also sinful. But right and wrong may not necessarily equate to sin that way, as right and wrong describe a moral code that does not take into account God’s will.

The *Guardian* article goes on to say that popular culture helps Gen Y to understand everyday life and that young people still follow a moral code that is “good”. Gen Y is into making poverty history (with the help of popular culture in the form of Live8 and Bono), fair trade, environmental issues and animal conservation.

So, at 27, sitting on the cusp of Gen X and Gen Y (and in Gen Y according to some definitions), I went looking to see what differences really do straddle the generational gap. A Reboot study in the US found that exactly the same number of people in Gen X and Gen Y did not believe in God. So maybe belief in God isn’t waning; maybe it’s how we believe. The same survey found that Gen Y was more liberal and progressive than Gen X on issues such as gay marriage and immigration (Christians and non-Christians alike). But they also worried about catching STDs from having extra-marital sex.

Which brings me to the next point: many in Generation Y would see sin as specifically describing a sexual moral code – who you can and cannot have sex with, and what bits of sexual activity are permitted when. And perhaps one could decide that is what Gen Y have rejected, rather than God per se. Gen Y have broadened the subject of

sin to take into account sin against other humans, the environment and the other creatures that share this planet with us. If the seven deadly sins are sloth, greed, anger, lust, gluttony, envy and pride, then maybe Gen Y is trying out a more holistic view of sin. Sure, there is still a place for sexual sin (lust), but our views on this have loosened up and we are looking to the rest of the list to figure out God’s will. Greed, gluttony, envy and pride are all sins that fit well into the corporate sin box.

And corporate sin is what Gen Y have woken up to. Personal morality that says “I don’t smoke, do drugs, drink or sleep around” fails to acknowledge the damage done by humanity in the pursuit of wealth. Poverty and environmental destruction unarguably come about through the rampant use of resources by one group on the planet at the expense of the rest – and that’s what we are protesting against.

Both views of sin are demonstrably Biblical – many Biblical injunctions about sex exist, as do many exhortations to look after the poor and see that justice is done. And beliefs tend to cycle through phases, so perhaps as our emphasis on sexual morality wanes and gives way to an emphasis on justice, this is a natural order of progression. Eventually we’ll figure it out.

Which reminds me; the sin Gen Y probably should be more worried about is sloth. After all, we really do care about poverty and injustice, it’s just that the next song on my iPod is a really good one...

References

¹Generations are often defined in this way, though alternative definitions also exist:

- Gen Y – born between 1980 and 2000
- Gen X – born between 1966 and 1979
- Baby boomers – born between 1946 and 1965

*Amber Parry Strong attends Island Bay Presbyterian Church in Wellington

Maybe belief in God isn’t waning; maybe it’s about how we believe...

Where have all the Gen Xers gone?

Jon Parkes, minister within the bounds, Bay of Plenty*

“I see [the church] as an elderly lady, who mutters away to herself in a corner, ignored most of the time.”¹

“[The church] is like manure. Pile it together and it stinks up the neighbourhood; spread it out and it enriches the world.”²

Where have all the Gen Xers gone? They are at the local flea markets buying and selling, at cafés having brunch, at McDonald’s reading Sunday morning newspapers while the kids play, out on the water fishing or wake-boarding or whatever, sleeping in after a very hard week at work or recovering from the night before, at various sports events participating, watching, or supporting their kids, at the bach for the weekend, lying on the beach, at the gym, overseas working, at the cinema or shopping in the mall, or they are at work so everyone can do the above. One thing for sure is they don’t need church because there are plenty of other things to do. Add to that we live in a nation with a high TPI; God is not needed.

TPI is known as the Toilet Paper Index. In Vanuatu over just over 75 percent of the population live in remote places where there is only one kind of toilet paper – coconut husk – hence the TPI is very low. At the same time, regular church attendance in these remote places is often above 50 percent of the local population. In the larger centres the TPI increases and church attendance decreases. In Luganville, one shop even sells three different brands of toilet paper; head to the capital Port Vila and you will find the main supermarket sells a handful of different brands. In Luganville, regular church attendance would be less than 40 percent and Port Vila perhaps less than 20 percent. Could it be a high TPI results in low regular church attendance? (NB this metaphor does not work in countries where there are other alternatives to the old white roll).

In New Zealand, go to a supermarket and you will find an excessive assortment of toilet paper brands – the TPI is very high and at the same time regular church attendance is very low. Also in high TPI NZ, those who go to church regularly attend about one Sunday in three (especially in the case of Gen Xers). So it would seem if a country has

a low TPI, God is needed and church attendance is high. And if a country has a high TPI, God is not required and church attendance is low. GenXers don’t go to church regularly in NZ because they don’t need God.

I know the following data is way old and not NZ-based, but perhaps it gives a little insight. In North Carolina in 1992, J E White commissioned a survey of unchurched people asking a single question: “why don’t you attend church?”

The results were as follows:

- There is no value in attending (74 percent)
- Churches have too many problems (61 percent)
- I do not have the time (48 percent)
- I am simply not interested (48 percent)
- Churches ask for money too frequently (40 percent)
- Church services are usually boring (36 percent)
- Christian churches hold no relevance for the way I live (34 percent)
- I do not believe in God, or I am unsure that God exists (12 percent)³

Obviously some of the unchurched’s perceptions are wrong but it would seem 74 percent interviewed say they don’t need God. Sure, around 88 percent believe God exists, but so what?

Yep, God is out there but so what?

If one is sick then go to a hospital; if depressed then take some Prozac; if stressed

then go tramping or sailing or fishing or watch a DVD; if in need of social contact then go mountain biking with your mates or play sports or have friends around for a BBQ; if having relationship problems then find another partner or seek a councillor; if broke then visit a food bank or borrow some more or get a government hand-out; if needing to contribute to society then join a service club; if a baby is born then someone can do a naming ceremony; if there is a death then the funeral director will take care of it. Yep, God is out there but so what? One can go to a supermarket or mall and get whatever they want – there is no need for God.

But what God is it that is not needed? Missionary to France David Bjork outlines what he calls a typical French person’s belief and perhaps his statement gives an

insight into a GenXer's perception of God. "I am French. I am Catholic. I believe in reincarnation. I am a Christian. I am an atheist. I am a scientist. I go to a healer when I am sick. I am a rationalist".⁴ Of course this thinking is as flawed as it is illogical but it is the current worldview held by a large group of people. The ultimate conclusion generated by that world view can only be that there is no need for a God as we are God.

So why go to church? It would seem we spend a lot of time in church trying to offer people what they want. Whoever is reading this, why do you go to church? Is it for what you can get out of it? "This church gives me the teaching I want... it feeds me... it has the music I like." Or is it for what you can give to church? "If I serve in church I get a sense of satisfaction... I get a buzz... I feel good about myself... God will love me more." Both streams of thinking are wrong as they centre on what "I" get out of church. Surely the reason one goes to church is because of God. I know on a Sunday morning I'd rather be out fishing or brunching, but I put up with church because of God, of who God is, because of what God has done, because God is worthy of heartfelt singing, of study, of devotion.

As a Gen Xer I go to church because of God. Whether other GenXers will go to church because of God – who knows?⁵ But if they are to keep going to church after they start, the God they meet will have to be worth meeting and not some "gentle Jesus meek and mild". Remember, Gen Xers think they don't need God. The kind of God that continues to draw me to church is not some New Age, "nice" being, designed to make me feel good and self actualise, or some wimpy, gutless, wonder not bothered to confront injustices, or some impotent, powerless God unable to heal in the here and now, or some illogical, capricious God who loves war and to see innocent suffer. No, the God I am devoted to is the God who is revealed in the Bible, who is knowable, existent and anyone who seeks after this God will be found by this God.

One problem with church is we have made God so unknowable and pompous that Gen Xers have had to make up their own weird understanding of God (as mentioned earlier). Our religious talk has become so slippery – like soap in the bathtub – that Gen Xers have not been able to get hold of God.⁶ If we present the God of the Bible, if we are authentic, totally dependant on the historical events of Jesus of Nazareth, GenXers will understand God. It is because of this God I keep going to church, it is because of this God I put up with the *culture of arguing* in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Because of this God I work my butt off trying to make church a better

place so people can learn to touch base with the Creator and learn to be Christ's hands and feet in the street. A place where our individual 24/7 worship cumulates in gathered community worship and, in turn, sends us out inspired to worship 24/7.

I know my thinking is not perfect – no one's is – but a good place to start transforming church to be Gen X-friendly is by making church more interesting, relevant and to have better quality music with way more variation (including laments). But ultimately the best thing we can do is present to people the God who is, not some God made in our own image. We have to let God be God because even in a society with a high TPI, this God is worthy of our devotion and worship.¹⁵ *And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.* (2 Co 5:15 NRSV)

References

¹ George Carey, referring to the Church of England. In *Reader's Digest*, (Bloomsbury, Mar 1991).

² Luis Palau, cited in Philip Yancey, *Church: Why Bother* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) p33.

³ James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997) p18.

⁴ David E. Bjork. *Unfamiliar Paths* (California: William Carey Library, 1997) p13.

⁵ A good book that strips away the one-size-fits-all spirituality by exploring different ways people meet with God is written by Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Personally I think churches have to begin offering many varied ways for people to touch base with God. Perhaps similar to Multiplex Cinemas where there is a central foyer to buy popcorn but in the 'theatres' there are 10 different church services happening at the same time. Some with chanting, some with coffee, jazz and discussion, some with high church liturgy and some with silence, some with rock and roll and some with whatever.

⁶ The soap image comes from Michael Green & Alister McGrath, *How Shall We Reach Them* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995) 187-190.

*Jon Parkes is spending 2006 as visiting lecturer at Talua Theological College, Vanuatu

Worship and Generation X

Mary-Jane Konings, *ordinand, Dunedin*

I am, of course, completely the wrong person to be writing about Generation X and worship; first of all because I am utterly passionate about worship, and therefore biased, and secondly because I am an atypical Gen Xer. I actually go to church, regularly. And by regularly, I mean every week, sometimes three services, not just once or twice a month.

Here is where most of us go wrong. Most of us leading and organising worship are church people. This is our home and we arrange it to suit us. We use a language of songs and symbols that are part of our DNA. We are socialized and enculturated into church.

If we do an excellent job, we might attract more people, but if they are simply coming from another church, then that is not really growth, in terms of more people living out the Good News.

My background, for instance, comes from years of leading worship in churches, mostly in which Gen X is under-represented, and from helping young people “do” worship. The first experience is perhaps less than helpful. I know about leading worship for church people. I speak their language. But Gen Xers, by and large, are not church people, at least, not now.

Some of them are ex-church people. I can sort of relate to them, although they still want to sing those songs written in the 80s that I have moved on from. They have some vague memories of the Bible, and they might at least come to a regular service, and not feel too out of place. If our team does a good job, some of them even come back.

But what about the other Gen Xers who are not church people? Church culture and by extension church worship are a bit of a mystery to them. That is not to say they are not interested in spirituality, because they are. But community, corporate worship? This is a different kettle of fish. Working with this group is a step back from working with the youth – at least the youth are turning up on a Sunday. Worship for Gen Xers who don’t come to church yet requires a radically different approach, I believe.

There is an assumption here. I am convinced that worship is part of being human. It is how we are wired. The only questions that remain are who or what do we worship,

and how do we shape that worship. The question of who we worship is a theological one. The question of how is a sociological or cultural question.

We need to keep thinking about what worship is and what church is, in terms of reaching people beyond our current church communities. Our challenge as church leaders is to resource Gen Xers in discovering how to worship authentically for themselves, as well as providing excellent role models ourselves. This means thinking about worship in two contexts. It means doing some research, both in terms of global trends and our local context.

The issues that missiologists are writing about are the same issues that worship leaders need to work through. Generation X is in some ways a cross-cultural mission field. Expressions of worship are expressions of culture and it is just wrong to expect Gen Xers to change their culture in order to worship. There is a widely recognized growth in the articulation of a spiritual dimension to life in popular culture. It’s just that Gen X is not that interested in the way Boomers are doing church.

I think that we can and should be more hospitable and arrange our worship to suit “the other”. On the other hand, there is no point wasting scarce resources on people we imagine might come. We need to work with the people who are actually here, whatever age, and help them to worship appropriately. The place to start is by asking what helps these people to worship and what hinders them.

Here is one example. We are the Walkman generation; you know, portable cassette players, the step before iPods and discmans. Of course we shouldn’t make generalisations but music is a big factor. OK, so we can’t all have the Parachute band playing every week, well, maybe not live, but we can use CDs in a variety of ways, before and after services, as part of a reflection time. This is a generation that uses music as wallpaper; as a background that creates an atmosphere. Singing together? Well, we might have to work on teaching songs well.

Underpinning this exercise are some questions about the underlying nature of worship.

Reformed worship is a child of the Enlightenment and the intellectual, knowledge-based form is a key part of our tradition and identity. But for many Gen Xers, words alone

are just not enough. At the very least, images are essential and film clips are better. In worship, many of us value experience more than knowledge. We want to encounter God and be changed by that encounter. At the same time, many also want to know why and understand.

The rest is up for negotiation. What is it that constitutes worship? Is worship an activity or an attitude? Is it a particular set of rituals carried out in a certain manner at a particular time and place, or is worship that which draws us closer to God? If we are serious about enabling this generation to worship, then we need to think about worship in some different ways. We also need to find ways to let people experiment with worship on their terms rather

than ours. We all value different aspects of worship, but the question is: can we support a group who will not worship as we would?

That begs the question, how do we decide whether something is authentic worship? For me, authentic worship flows out of community. In order to find a way where generations can worship honestly and with integrity together, we need to grant one another the space to find our own voices in worship and work towards integrating the unique and vibrant expressions of us all. In terms of resourcing Gen Xers, the journey begins with conversation; with listening to those within and without.

A late night spiritual conversation

Vivian Coleman, minister within the bounds, Auckland

“I felt God tonight when I was singing, it was like I binged on him up there — for the first time ever.”

This text message was sent to me by a young woman who had been in our church since her early teens, and a communicant member for eight years. She was one of the vocalists at our evening service, targeted at youth and young adults. The theme was contemporary Christian music and the sermon was an excellent little talk from one of our drummers who is a programmer and presenter for LifeFM. He talked about the meaning of “contemporary” and how we might define “Christian” in the musical realm. He gave us some excellent insights into how he judges what to use in the playlists – and he owned up to the fact one of his major strategies is the “gut feel dimension” which he believes the Holy Spirit uses to guide him. He finished by sharing four or five of the thousands of written testimonies that Rhema Broadcasting has received from people whose lives have been touched and transformed by music they heard on the radio.

The music we sang last night was not my preferred genre, I’m 55 – so it’s not my style. But as its minister, I have been worshipping at this service every week for the past 12 years, so I have embraced it. I can both honour God in it and hear His Word through it. It is heavy on guitars and drums, and light on melody and harmony. It is much more about feeling than thinking. It focuses on the individual’s faith journey almost to the exclusion of the history of salvation. There is little theological content, and what there is can be a bit dodgy to Reformed thinking.

The song that touched this young woman was a composition by one of our own youth leaders; it had three lines and three chords and was delivered in a singing style that I personally find quite blaring. But it connected her with God in a way she says had never experienced before. To bowdlerise Eric Liddell, this young woman found, “when I sing, I feel God’s pleasure.”

What does a Presbyterian minister, trained in “modernity” – to care deeply about theology and be concerned about the rampant individualism and consumerism in worship – say to this? Do I say, “ignore what you feel, God has always been there for you, that is his covenant promise, and you need to be wary of trance-inductive heartbeat music and vacuous lyrics full of clichés that feed your feel-good factor?” Do I sternly remind her that worship is about giving glory to “the God who is there” and doesn’t depend on what she feels, what she brings, what she wants? Do I recommend she embarks upon some deep Bible study to engage her mind and train her thinking, so that she will see this shallow subjectivity for what it is?

Or do I acknowledge that people her age in our community today are yearning to be connected with God, and that the kind of music they listen to on radio, video and iPod is a tool the Spirit is using? (and actually always has, from the Hebrew psalms through Handel’s repetitive use of Hallelujahs, to the power of 17 verses of “Just as I am”). Most people today like contemporary music with lots of rhythm - percussion, guitar and creative instrumentation; it gets their attention and stirs their passion. The mission to

the Gentiles, described in the book of Acts, intentionally espoused forms of popular culture in order to communicate the message of Jesus. But many congregations today are almost addicted to using un-popular music; not just pipe organs but five-verse formats and beautifully metrical poetry, which, apart from the National Anthem, are found only in mainline churches. The mega-church phenomenon, with its neglect of ecclesiastical traditions and preference for a populist entertainment style, has a growing attraction for our pluralistic younger generation. Their deep cynicism of institutions and widespread inclination towards eclecticism is a powerful challenge to those of us who still adhere to a denominational identity.

This is not bad news! Young people today don't dismiss spirituality in the name of empiricism, as their Baby Boomer parents did. For the post-modern pilgrim, all data is valid, including your experience and mine. The "spiritually-yearning but institutionally alienated" are looking for organism not organisation, for testimony not

teaching, for images and symbols, not words and facts. They long for experiences not propositions, for reality not theory. They can feel connected with multiple faith communities because for them it's not either/or; it's both/and. They want to feel alive, sense the holy, be changed, be motivated. For them, authentic worship is not objective; it's all about feelings, senses, and inspiration. So what? Isn't Jesus interested in the whole person? Would we rather our faith never affected our emotions, touched our hearts, or changed our lives? If contemporary, albeit subjective, worship helped this one person experience the transforming power of God, and motivates her to walk daily with Jesus, then surely it is worth the sacrifice of our traditional preferences. Surely it is worship "in spirit and in truth".

References

I have liberally sprinkled phrases from Tom Bandy, Leonard Sweet, and Wade Roof.

Reaching a younger generation

Brett Walker, St Columba's Taradale, Gisborne-Hawkes Bay

I started my six weeks' study leave at the beginning of this year with the hope that I could resolve our challenge at St Columba's of reaching 25-45 year-olds. Ideally I would find a nice prepackaged programme — follow these five steps and, hey presto, more young attendees at Church. I was all excited to read about the emerging church, to visit some churches trying new things and interview some of the Mainly Music parents who don't darken the door of our church. At the end of my time, I have more questions than answers as well as a few things I won't be doing!

The bottom line seems to be that the old things still work. Build authentic relationships with people, encourage your congregation to work on its hospitality, and share the Gospel in natural ways that answer the questions people are asking. I don't think it's about the style of service or the type of music; it's about the quality of the relationships. So there is my answer — "love people and speak the truth".

I interviewed a dozen parents associated with our Mainly Music programme. The standout learning from this was how superficial our relationships with them were. They enjoy the programme. They cope with me turning up to

chat most mornings over the cuppa but rarely do we get beyond meet and greet. I thought I was building bridges, but the reality was we were just waving at each other from opposite sides of the river. Spending an hour talking about their spiritual lives was great but still we needed more.

Two things have been highlighted. We have tried inviting them to special events or services in the church - they don't come. But in the interview, they said they would come if their friends were going to be there (obviously not me and the MM leaders!) Secondly, I have very little time set aside in my diary for deepening these relationships. I make time for the sick, the dying, the bereaved, the squeaky wheel who is whinging about the services or that they haven't seen the minister in a while but not much for the unchurched or even for the families we do have attending. I am convinced that where you spend your time, there you see the fruit. Maybe we don't have many families in the church because we don't spend much time with them.

Now I have a few hundred words more, and since I rarely know when to stop, I will give you two of the best quotes I read while on my study leave.

Why use poetry and images?

If you have a girlfriend and you list some specifics about her on a piece of paper — her eye colour, her hair colour, how tall she is — and then give her this list over a candlelight dinner, I doubt it will make her swoon. But if you quote these ideas to her in a poem:

She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes

then she is more likely to understand the meaning; the value inferred by your taking notice of her features. The same ideas, expressed in poetry, contain a completely different meaning. She would understand you were captivated by a certain mystery in her aspect, in her eyes and her stride and the features perfectly met upon her face. And while our earlier conceived list of features might have been accurate, it certainly wouldn't have been meaningful.

It makes you wonder if guys like John the Evangelist and Paul and Moses wouldn't look at our systematic theology charts, our lists and mathematical formulas, and scratch their heads to say, "well, it's technically true; it just isn't meaningful".

From www.allelon.org/articles/article.cfm?id=215 (There are some excellent articles on this website.)

The Emerging Church – the next big thing?

Angie Ward, in an article on the Leadership website, summarises well my own conclusions:

Just as the commercial world is being increasingly divided into a land of big box retailers and niche marketers, the church seems to be undergoing a similar movement to either end of the continuum: either one-stop megachurches or niche congregations.

...Churches are becoming one of two things: large, multiple-staff, full-service churches; or niche churches. Both kinds of churches are needed, both are valuable, both are going to be used by God, and both are going to meet needs. The more we have of each, the better.

By and large, the emergent church movement is a niche church movement at this time. And that's a very good thing. "There's a segment of every society that will be reached by a niche church, that

won't be reached by a large church. Maybe we ought to stop shooting at each other and just realise we're called to different ministries."¹

References

¹ From "Looking for Leaders: What does leadership look like in the emergent generation?" by Angie Ward at www.christianitytoday.com/le/2006/002/2.19.html. Also see her website www.innovativechurches.org

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Brewin, Kester. *The Complex Christ: Signs of emergence in the urban church* (SPCK 2004)

Reviewed by Fyfe Blair, Highgate Presbyterian, Dunedin

This book comes as a significant work, offered by Kester Brewin, to provide some reflection upon the emergent church scene. There are some key questions being asked around the web regarding the emerging, emergent church and the need to define it in some fashion. As the introduction states, “this is a book about change”. Indeed, this is the basis for teasing out some of his chapter themes in two parts: advent; incarnation; emergence; the city; gift; dirt; with an interlude on the character of the emergent church. While some may regard his remarks as scathing of the church today, his aim is to “resource” the church with a fresh understanding of change and how it happens, based upon emergence theory and ways this might be applied to faith. Brewin interacts with Biblical, detail, urban theory, art and social theory.

In his introduction, he makes use of Fowler’s stages as a framework for what follows. In particular, he wants to suggest that there is a shift in the emergent church to stage five and the conjunctive, that is “the ability to hold opposites together in a single frame” (p14). Essentially, this is his paradigm for the emergent church.

The many facets and challenges of change upon us have on the whole given rise to a super-hyper-activity and we speak far too much in “driven language terms and references”. I was especially delighted to find someone else does share my long-held and growing perspective on church and mission in change. Brewin advocates that before all else is advent – a waiting! On incarnation, I equally applaud his sense that it is not about revolution taking place as much as a re-emergence; an evolution (though I am not sure if that is a word I would want to apply here). I do, however, appreciate that there is no “speedy” revolution “in the process of gestation and development; only slow, sure, stable growth” (p48).

Furthermore, the chapters on gift and dirt shared insights that I found of further interest.

While he provides some understanding of chaos and emergence theories, it may have been more helpful to have had these explained in simple scientific terms that were then applied. This would have perhaps provided the emergent theory as a hermeneutic of his bringing together of theology, art, theories of emergence, sociology and notions of the city space. Brewin shares something of Vaux

(an alternative worship community he is part of) and how they developed a spirituality that engages with the city. The Complex Christ offer some rich insights and reflections, inviting reflection and action aided by a useful resource of further reading. You can also visit his website: <http://thecomplexchrist.typepad.com>

Wallis, Jim. *God’s Politics: Why the right gets it wrong and the left doesn’t get it*. (Harper: San Francisco, 2005)

Reviewed by Jane Bloore, research assistant, Presbyterian Archives, Dunedin

What a stimulating and extraordinary book this is. It should be made compulsory reading for everyone involved in politics, and even more for those who claim to belong to the Christian Church. Though *God’s Politics* deals primarily with the American religious and political landscape, its relevance to a country like ours will not be lost on perceptive readers. Jim Wallis is familiar to many as the editor of the long running *Sojourners* magazine, covering issues of faith, politics and culture in the United States. He is an evangelical Christian with a strong commitment to social justice; a public theologian who believes that talking about religion and politics is the best thing we can do in the world today.

The key sentence in the book for me was “God is personal, but never private”. It is a rallying call for the prophetic tradition in the Christian Church, a tradition that Wallis sees as the only answer to the false choice currently presented by Right and Left as that between ideological religion and soulless politics. He argues that separation of church and state does *not* mean that moral and religious values have to be banished from public talk; quite the opposite, if what we mean by a just society is to flourish.

This integral link between personal ethics and social justice underpins all of the chapters in the book, whether Wallis is discussing the war in Iraq, economic justice, social values or spiritual change. Chapter headings like “Isaiah’s Platform” (budgets are moral documents) and “Amos and Enron” (what scandalises God?) give a flavour of the nature of his approach. Of especial interest are the documents Wallis includes, such as the letters written to George Bush by the American Churches concerning the war in Iraq and poverty, and the statement “Confessing Christ in a world of violence” initiated by many leading theologians in the United States.

God’s Politics is not an easy read but it is an immensely rewarding one.