

# connecting with young people



Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is produced by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Special thanks to all those who authored material for the resource including Ryhan Prasad, the Revs Mary-Jane Konings, Judy Te Whiu, and the Rev Dr Graham Redding.

Thanks also to the Revs Steve Jourdain and Geoff King, the Rt Rev Pamela Tankersley and the Ministry of Youth Development who peer reviewed the contents of this resource. *December 2007*

## PRAYER

Dear Lord our God, as we gather to reflect on our changing world may we remember with gratitude and humility that it is your world and your cherished people of whom we speak.

Stir us with new possibility, enlarge us with new understanding, enable us to do the truth, by your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen

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## INTRODUCTION

Why create a resource about young people? Because, despite being linked more than ever before through technology, Generation Y (as those under 25 are known) often struggle to make real connections.

A world full of opportunity and promise is available to Gen Yers, who are more mobile, adaptable and connected than their parents, but unfortunately this promise isn't always realised.

Research shows that among New Zealand's 15-24-year-olds, suicide rates doubled in the 30 years between 1950 and 1980, and then doubled again between 1980 and the mid-1990s.<sup>1</sup> While this trend is showing signs of improvement, New Zealand still has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the OECD.<sup>2</sup>

Parental separation, abuse and violence are known to not only increase the chances of suicidal behaviour, but research also shows that these things make young people vulnerable to developing mood disorders, substance abuse and suicidal behaviour in adulthood.<sup>3</sup> Getting it right with today's young people will have a positive impact on tomorrow's society.

One of the biggest social changes of the past 40 years has been the loss of local community<sup>4</sup>: Gen Yers now call the world their backyard. Their mobility contributes to the difficulty making meaningful connections with others.

Young people also struggle with cultural identity in our increasingly global society, sometimes looking overseas for role models. Some young Kiwis model themselves on American gang culture, for example. And the rise of celebrity culture

has made Gen Yers stars of the reality shows that are their lives, with fame and status becoming highly prized commodities.

What role does the Church have in helping Gen Yers find meaning and purpose in their lives? How do we reconnect as individuals and as an institution with this generation, who make up around 12 percent of our church members? How can we help them to hear the Good News in their language? How can we help them to connect in a life-changing way with God?

Anecdotally, we know that those churches investing in children and families are those that are growing. Ask God how you can best serve your community and the young people at your doorstep?

Better inter-generational relationships and connections are surely part of the answer to helping our young people realise the promise that the world offers. That's why this resource has been produced.

We hope through considering the issues in the studies that follow, that you'll gain a better understanding of the issues facing today's young people, and be inspired to serve, advocate for or mentor young people at your doorstep.

This resource can be used in a variety of settings:

- » As a base for small group discussion
- » Three 45-minute workshops to be held during a morning or similar service
- » A three-hour workshop including "live" two or three minute segments on some aspect of the topic.

## SPEAKING FAITHFULLY

*Rev Dr Graham Redding – Principal, Knox Centre of Ministry and Leadership.  
Reflection on the place of young people in the Bible.*

One of the recurring features of the drama of salvation, as we see it unfolding in the Old Testament, is the prominence given to young people. Time and again we read of the Lord's call being issued to people who are not only tender in years (eg Jeremiah), but also last in the line in terms of family pecking orders (eg Jacob, Joseph and David). In these core faith-narratives the singling out of the young and inexperienced to do the Lord's work is testimony to divine freedom and grace. God is bound neither by human notions of worthiness nor social convention. In the divine economy, the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Less is said about young people in the New Testament, but we do read in Luke's Gospel of the young Jesus lingering in the temple in Jerusalem, and we note the special place that Jesus gave to children in his ministry. Jesus is known to have gathered children around him and blessed them, and referred to them in his teaching about the Kingdom of God. There is also an account of Him healing the daughter of a man called Jairus.

From a biblical perspective, young people matter and are perfectly capable of participating in the *missio Dei*. As the Apostle Paul advises his young co-worker, Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)

At the same time, it is worth stressing that while young people have an intrinsic dignity and worth by virtue of their being made in the image of God, the Bible's primary

affirmation of them is in the context of a covenant community, within which they witness patterns of faith-full living and learn to detect and respond to God's call on their lives. This call (to discipleship) is both personal and communal. It is given not to the autonomous individual, but rather to a person-in-community.

When we allow the Bible to shape our world view and we regard ourselves as persons-in-community rather than autonomous individuals, we come to realise that relationships are not incidental to who we are as human beings; they are intrinsic – even those relationships that lie outside our inner circle of family and friends. Jesus' parable about the Good Samaritan makes that very point.

Moreover, the call to discipleship leads to a distinctive way of living. Whether one reads the 10 Commandments, the Holiness code, the pronouncements of the prophets, the Beatitudes or the Apostle Paul's exhortations to Christian communities, one is struck by just how radical and, indeed, demanding is the way of faith for each generation.

Young people are not exempt from the challenge. Nor are they on their own in facing it. In and through the waters of baptism they are grafted onto a community of faith which, in terms of biblical teaching, is nothing less than the body of Christ. Baptism signifies the bestowal of an identity that supersedes all others. It is an identity that draws us into a life of worship, makes new claims upon our relationships and priorities, and compels us to seek the mind of Christ in all things.

# STUDY ONE:

## CONNECTING THROUGH IDENTITY

By Rev Judy Te Whiu

### WHO AM I?

It's a frightening thought, not knowing who you are. Yet many Gen Yers struggle to come to terms with their true identity. Unlimited access to the Internet has meant they can go anywhere, anytime. Take, for instance, the huge impact of Afro-American rap music, dance, dress code and gang association on New Zealand youth today.<sup>5,6</sup>

Searching for identity in the wrong places, can often leave one feeling like a man suffering with amnesia, trapped inside a concrete block, desperately seeking to be free and to know his true identity.<sup>7</sup>

*An artist once asked Michelangelo what he saw when he approached a huge block of marble. "I see a beautiful form trapped inside," he said, "and it is simply my responsibility to take my mallet and chisel and chip away until the figure is free."*

God uses afflictions like a hammer and chisel, and chips and cuts to reveal His image and identity in us; the beautiful form, the visible expression of "Christ in you, the hope of glory". (Colossians 1:27) To truly know and understand God, is to know our own identity, of who we are in Him.

"Suicide is a serious health issue in this nation."

### EMPOWERING GEN Y TO DISCIPLESHIP

The story of the Samaritan women at the well is a story of vigorous questioning and sharing of needs and desires leading to unfolding faith. Today's young people more than ever, want room to grow.

Jesus challenged the Samaritan woman to discipleship. But his disciples felt that she was not someone Jesus should associate with: firstly, because she was a woman and secondly, because she was a Samaritan. But Jesus began the relationship anyway by asking her to do something he could not – draw water from the well. (John 4:7)

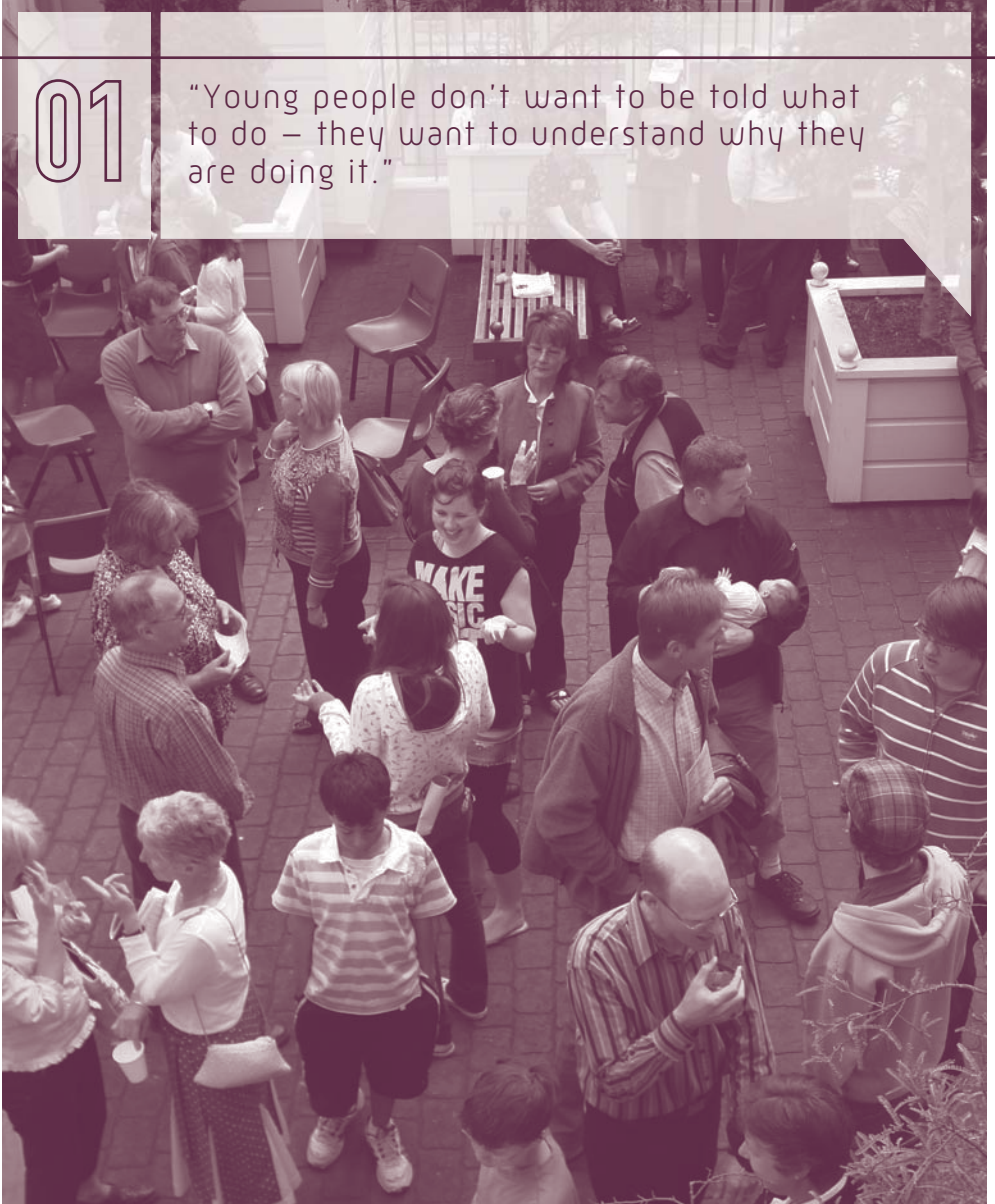
Sometimes we need to take risks when encouraging young people. We need to ask the relevant questions, provoke answers, and we will certainly benefit from asking them to do what we can't.

### Questions for reflection

1. How has growing up in your era, differed from those growing up today?
2. Are the pressures the same, how have they changed and how did you cope with stress?
3. What expectations, values and morals did you grow up with?
4. What are the expectations of young people in society and the Church today?

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"Young people don't want to be told what to do – they want to understand why they are doing it."



5. How can we encourage young people and share our faith with them?
6. How would you prove from your Bible that God is a real, living being to someone who has no understanding?

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN NEW ZEALAND?

The rate of social change and competition for training and job opportunities is increasing the stress on young people. This is reflected in rising mental health issues for this group. Over the past 40 years, the youth population has not shared the health gains of other population groups.<sup>8</sup>

Suicide is a serious health issue in this nation and is the second leading cause of death in New Zealand's young people (after motor vehicle crashes). It accounts for approximately 25 percent of all deaths of those aged 15-24.<sup>9,10</sup>

Despite the significant increase in youth suicide since the 1980s, there are signs that the tide is starting to turn, in particular with male suicides, which have declined by 46 percent in the last 10 years.<sup>11</sup>

Psychiatric illness is the strongest risk factor for suicidal behaviour. The clear majority of young people (around 90 percent) who die by suicide or make serious suicide attempts have at least one recognisable psychiatric disorder at the time of their attempt.<sup>12</sup>

As societal pressures make it increasingly difficult for young people to cope, many are forced to live in a world of despair and cultural isolation. The greatest challenge

for the Church, perhaps, is in finding ways to reach out to Gen Yers, without adding any further stumbling blocks.

**REAL LIFE:** Tame was a young fit, intelligent man of 25 and was unemployed. He had three beautiful children and a loving supportive wife. He loved to dive for kaimoana (seafood) and fish and hunt whenever he could; he played a very good game of rugby too. But Tame also suffered a bipolar disorder, so he was depressed most of the time. He was often aggressive and took it out on those he loved. To calm his mood he became dependent on drugs and alcohol, which only worsened his condition. Hospital drugs put him in a zombied state and he felt that he had no control over his life. Often he would speak of ending his life, but no one really took him seriously. One day, after his wife and children had left him, he took a rope and hung himself on a tree outside the family home.

## Questions for reflection

1. How would you react if someone reached out to you in confidence, and told you that they wanted to end their life?
2. What do you think Jesus would have said and done?
3. Do you think the Church is ready to acknowledge the hopelessness that many young people face today?



### **Urgent Prayer For our Youth: "I'm in over my head."** (Psalm 69:1-5)

Father, it feels like I'm in an impossible situation with no way out. I need to feel Your presence, the encouragement of Your Holy Spirit, and to be reminded that all things are possible with You. On the outside things look hopeless. Bring the answers of Heaven to my situation and touch me with Your grace. Thank you that you are my God and with You nothing is impossible. Amen

### **HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

If we're a Church that reflects the full expression of Jesus Christ on Earth, how can we ensure that the youth of this nation walk the road of life and not stumble?

The Psalmist David answered "By guarding it according to your word". (Psalm 119:9) David continued by saying, "With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments! I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against You." (Psalm 119:10-11)

If the Word of God is a treasure worth hiding, then surely it is a treasure worth finding! To hear the voices of young people in this nation resounding those words from the lament of David, is a future worth hoping for. God has promised that if we train our children in the way they should go, when they are older they will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

This was powerfully illustrated in the life of Daniel, the young prince of Judah who was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel is a good example for young people today. He determined that he would follow the Word of God no matter what. The biggest test for Daniel was when he was offered food that was forbidden in Levitical law. In his heart he knew he would not defile himself with the portion of the King's meat or wine. His humble refusal resulted in respect, and his determination to honour God first, marked him as a young man with a future. (Daniel 1:8)

### **A MESSAGE FOR OUR YOUTH**

A relationship with God can bring understanding, order and power in both physical and spiritual life. When we're connected with God will we discover our true identity and worth. He triumphed over death, and did this so that we might go free, so that we can spend eternity in heaven with Him. Our God is always faithful, even if when we're defeated, fearful or tempted. Even though we may not see God, we haven't been abandoned. His faithfulness can be trusted, offering sure hope for any situation in our lives.

"Come to the Father, though your gift is small. Broken hearts, broken lives – He will take them all. There is power in God's word: everything was done, so you would come".

**CHECK OUT:** the "Getting Involved" section on pg 19 for practical ideas and suggestions about how to support the young people at your doorstep.

## STUDY TWO:

### CONNECTING WITH RELATIONSHIPS

*By Rev Mary-Jane Konings*

Counsellors are reporting that New Zealand's Gen Yers are swapping face-to-face relationships for a virtual life, keeping in touch via email, texting and social networking sites on the web. The way that people relate to one another continues to change. The value of a church community where all ages worship and share their lives together is becoming increasingly important. While the web allows virtual communities to gather around common interests, the joy and frustration of the church is that very different people are drawn together by one God.

Relationships, relationships, relationships. Whether they are good, bad or ugly, everyone has relationships, and for young people, connecting in relationship is a key part of life. This study is designed to start some discussion around what the Bible says about relationships with each other and with the creator of the universe.

- » In 2006, there was almost one divorce for every two marriages.<sup>13</sup>
- » Compared to other similar countries, NZ has a high rate of teenagers bearing children.<sup>14</sup>
- » Research shows that people who aren't getting on with their parents have a higher risk of hurting themselves deliberately.<sup>15</sup>

#### **THE GOOD**

The starting point for Christians is a relationship with God. Have a look at these stories, which remind us that God creates us and calls us into relationship through Jesus, a relationship sustained by the Holy Spirit.

#### **Jump-in activity**

(You'll need fat crayons, A3 paper and a decent flat surface to draw on.)

Draw a mind map (a diagram arranged radially around a central key word or idea) of you and your relationships. Draw as many as you can – the good and bad. Remember to put God in your map. Add some words that describe the kind of relationships you have, or maybe draw them as symbols.

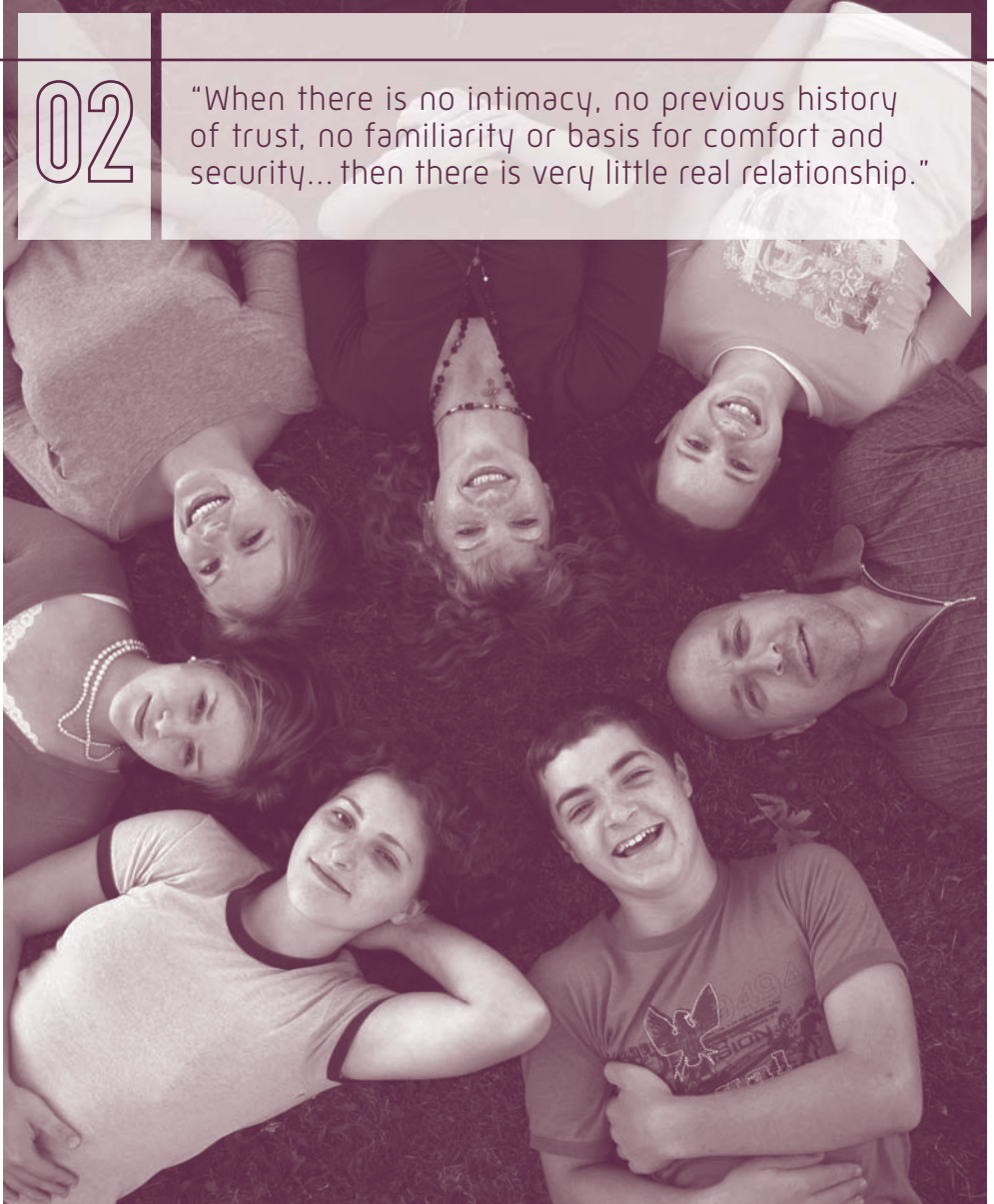
#### **Check out these stories**

- » Adam, Eve and God in the Garden (Genesis 3:1-21)
- » Jesus calls us friends (John 15: 9-17)
- » New relationship in Christ (Galatians 3:26-4:7)

“Gen Y are swapping face-to-face relationships for a virtual world.”

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"When there is no intimacy, no previous history of trust, no familiarity or basis for comfort and security... then there is very little real relationship."



### Questions for groups

1. How can the Genesis story be a resource for thinking about relationships?
2. Does the idea of “respect” make a difference to relationships? What does it look like, feel like or sound like to you?
3. In John 15, Jesus calls his followers “friends” – what does say about the kind of relationship God wants with people?
4. Can you describe differences in the way you relate to people depending on the technology you are using?
5. From Galatians, what makes people children of God? And what does God’s spirit do? What difference does this new relationship in Jesus make?

### Questions for reflection

1. If personal relationships in life are difficult, is there time and energy for spiritual journeys?
2. What were relationships like when you were growing up?
3. When first introduced, commentators said telephones would ruin relationships, but now we can’t imagine life without them. What effects can you see technology has on the way people relate to one another?

**Reality check:** What does friendship mean? Is a friend someone who tells you what you want to hear or the truth, even if it’s difficult, distressing or disturbing....

**Take home the message:** God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to tell us and show us how to be friends with God and to make that possible for us.

### THE BAD

What many people don’t realise about the Bible is that it’s full of stories about people who didn’t get it right. It’s also full of stories about God who keeps doing the unexpected, like forgiving people who don’t really seem to deserve it...

- » Fewer people are getting married AND more people are getting divorced.<sup>16</sup>
- » Research shows that relationship difficulties are common triggers for deliberate self-harm among young people.<sup>17</sup>

**REAL LIFE:** Becoming a Christian changed Em’s whole attitude to relationships. It wasn’t easy, because some of his mates couldn’t handle the difference. But Em discovered that knowing that he was loved and accepted by God made it easier to hang in there when relationships got a bit tricky. He started looking out for ways to be a better friend, rather than asking what was in it for him all the time.

## Jump-in activity

(You'll need a pen, A3 paper and a decent flat surface to draw on.)

Draw a picture of you in the middle of the paper. Now, on the left, use a different colour to draw some of the positive things about being in relationship. And, on the right, in a different colour again, draw some of the negatives.

Step back and look at the page. Can you add in something to help deal with or manage the negatives?

## Check out these stories

- >> Abraham and Abimelech (Genesis 20: 1-13)
- >> The story of Tamar (Genesis 38:1-26)
- >> David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

## Questions for groups

1. Why did Abraham lie? Did it solve his problem?
2. In a culture where women didn't have much power, what is significant about Tamar's action? (What might have happened for Tamar in New Zealand?)
3. David is said to be "a man after God's own heart". What do you think?
4. How can these Biblical stories inform and shape contemporary relationships?
5. What are some of the ways that relationships go wrong in your culture?

Christians talk about forgiveness because when we ask God forgives us, and we're supposed to forgive others. What might this mean today?

## Questions for reflection

1. What expectations did you grow up with about relationships?
2. What impact do you think the way teenagers relate, via texting and online, has on the way they relate to one another and others?
3. The Trinity is an image of a dynamic, interpersonal relationship that we're invited to be a part of through Christ. How does this image change our relationships with one another?

**Take home message:** People, left to their own devices, can get into all sorts of trouble. But this is not the end of the story. God works in broken lives.

**Reality check:** It can be hard to get your head around the things that people do. But even a great king like David made mistakes.

**REAL LIFE:** Tio grew up hearing Bible stories but it was a bit of a shock to the system when he started to read the Bible for himself, especially the Old Testament which was full of sex and violence. It bothered him for a while, although it also made the stories seem, well, a bit more real. Even the heroes had faults – Noah got drunk, Jonah ran away, David had an affair, and God still included them in his plan of salvation.

## THE UGLY

Look around. The results of broken relationships are all around us; hurting people who in turn go onto hurt other people. People are spending more time interacting with technology and as a result, have less experience and less skill in relationships. But what are you going to do? In this study, we look at some resources for relationships.

- » NZ has a high abortion rate, compared to other countries like us.<sup>18</sup>
- » Almost half of all divorces in 2005 involved families with children under 17 years of age.<sup>19</sup>

“The results of broken relationships are all around us; hurting people who go on to hurt others.”

### Jump in activity

(You'll need a pen, A3 paper and a decent flat surface to draw on.)

Draw what happens when young children have an argument over which TV program to watch and it isn't resolved or settled. Now add in some suggestions for defusing the conflict. How might these ideas work for adults in other situations...

### Check out these stories

- » Don't stay angry (Matthew 5:21-24)
- » Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15: 36-41)
- » Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26)

“God works in broken lives”

### Questions for groups

1. Jesus sets a high standard for forgiving people. What happens if people stay angry with each other?
2. Christians aren't immune from arguments – read the Acts 15 story! Do you agree with Paul or Barnabas?
3. Why do you think the writer needed to remind the readers to “keep in step with the Spirit”? (Galatians 5:24) If these verses from Galatians were a measuring stick, how would the relationships you are involved in fare?
4. What are some positive qualities in relationships: Respect? Listening? Always responding to your txt? Make a list and keep it around for a while.
5. Describe some of the good relationships you have seen – what do you really like? What do you think makes those relationships healthy?
6. How do you rate your relationship skills? Fair? Average? Why do you think that is?

## Questions for reflection

1. What do you know about relationships now that you wish you knew when you were a young person?
2. What resources did you have growing up that aren't around these days?
3. Where do we experience forgiveness in our society?

**REAL LIFE:** Ted was pretty unhappy at his sister's choice of friends, especially when she starting spending more time at the boyfriend's house than at home. The whole group thrived on creating dramas. Then his sister became pregnant, and the arguments started. Abortion? Move in together? Everyone had an opinion, but in the end, Ted watched the friends fade away and his sister came home...

**Reality check:** Some people seem to have the skills needed to build and maintain good relationships and others, well, don't. But there are some skills for good relationships that can be seen, learnt, practised and shared around. Jesus gives us a few clues – don't stay mad at people, go and sort it out, forgive one another.

**Take home message:** Relationships are complicated. However, God invites us to be reconciled with Him and with each other.

## THE LAST WORD

A relationship with the living God isn't a magic wand that fixes everything, but God has gone to extraordinary efforts so that people can be in relationship with Him, and love one another.

World peace may be out of our reach today, but what we can all commit to is having decent relationships, so far as we are able to. Good relationships don't just happen, they are built by investing time, patience and a whole lot of love, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**REAL LIFE:** Tala knew she was taking a risk marrying out of her culture. But she and Matt were determined to make their relationship work. They worked on listening to each other, talked about the niggles before they became explosions and invested in marriage enrichment books and weekends away. 'Lots of our friends are divorced now' she says 'but we're enjoying each other. We've put lots of time and energy in. Good relationships don't just happen.'

**CHECK OUT:** the "Getting Involved" section on pg 19 for practical ideas and suggestions about how to support the young people at your doorstep.

# STUDY THREE:

## CONNECTING WITH DECISION-MAKING

*By Ryhan Prasad*

The previous two studies have looked at the identity of New Zealand's Generation Y and how important relationships are to them. This study will bring together elements of both these areas because both identity and relationships have a direct translation on how young people make decisions. This study will focus on how we can positively support Gen Y to make good decisions on their journey through life. It'll look at ways young people make decisions, and look at the place the Church needs to be to offer the most support it can to our young people.

### **WHAT IS GEN Y'S WORLDVIEW?**

#### **Check out these stories**

- » Keep your eye on the highest goal (Philippians 4: 4-8)
- » Log in our own eyes (Luke 6: 39-42)

Sometimes we assume that young people's worldview is the same as ours and this influences how we relate to them. This assumption impairs our efforts to create real lasting relationships with young people. Gen Yers are more connected to information now than they've ever been. This means they may hold a very pluralistic view of things, which is especially true of unchurched young people.

The Church's young people have their own values, which in many cases are not the same as ours. These days, young people know a lot more about the "hard" issues than we give them credit for. If we don't think about this when we relate to them, we run the risk of turning them away by telling them what's right and wrong rather than exploring the issues alongside them.

#### **Questions for reflection**

1. What shapes your own worldview?
2. What influences this study group's world-view?
3. Thinking of the Luke 6 story, can you identify something that might be a "log" in your eyes?

### **HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE DECISIONS?**

#### **Check out these stories**

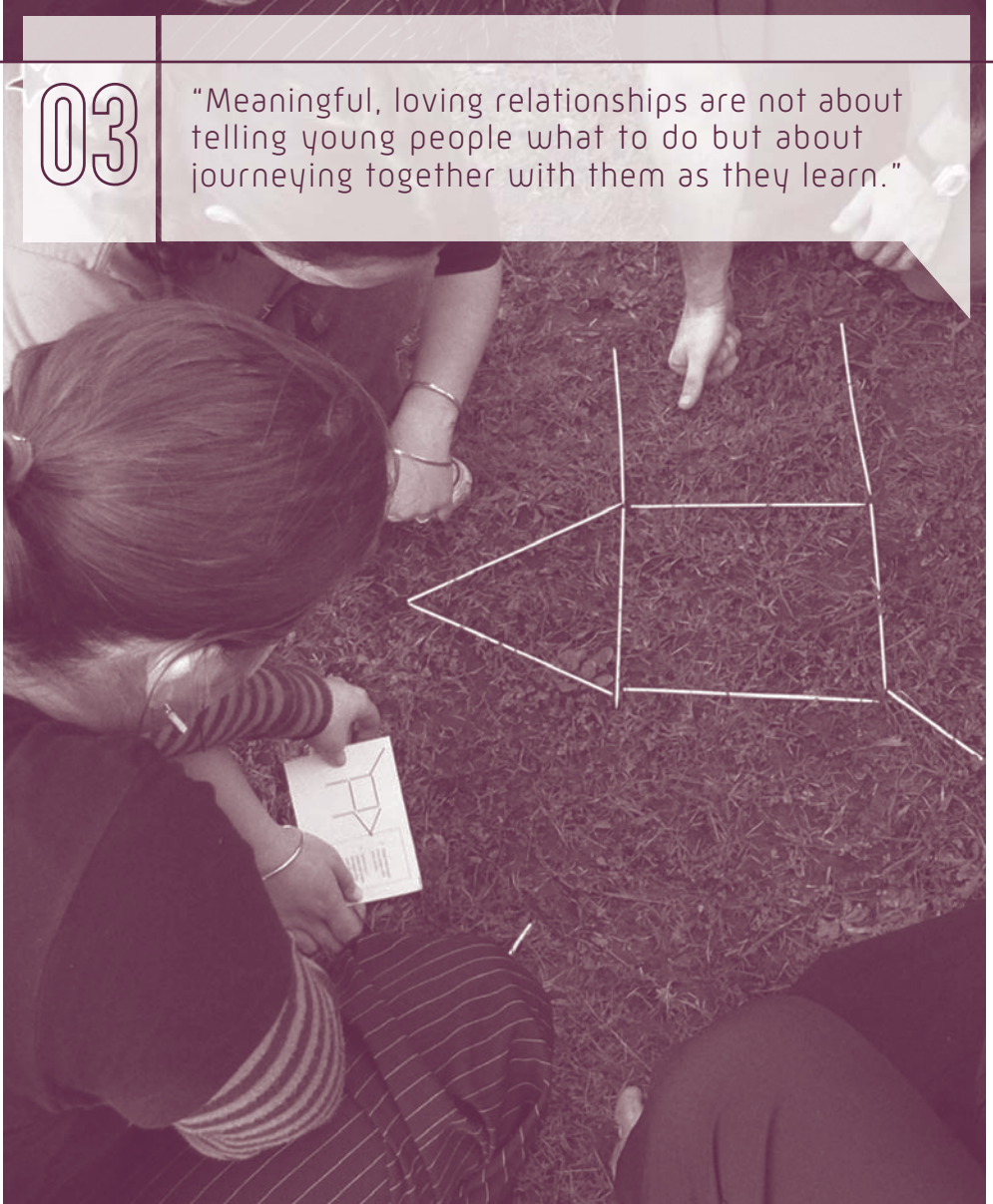
- » Chosen people (1 Peter 1: 9-2)
- » Doing in Jesus' name (Colossians 3: 15-23)

The decision-making skills of older adolescents are far from perfect, as are those of adults. Indeed some researchers have recently found that adolescents and adults do not differ in their decision-making skills<sup>20</sup>. It's the factors that contribute to the decision-making process that we need to look at and understand.



# 03

"Meaningful, loving relationships are not about telling young people what to do but about journeying together with them as they learn."



Young people:

- » Make decisions relationally
- » Fear judgement and resent being told what to do
- » Aren't stupid – they just have different priorities than adults, which gives them a more short-term focus. ie. What's the best thing for me now?
- » Are emotional and passionate.

### Questions for reflection

1. Think for a minute, would you listen to anyone telling you what to do if they weren't interested in you as a person?
2. How do you gather information to make good decisions? Do young people do it any differently?

**Reality check:** There aren't many differences in how young people and adults make decisions: whether we're young or old all of the above factors influence us in differing degrees. The area where adults often get tripped up is in assuming that young people's wants and needs are of secondary importance to what we're trying to share with them.

**Last word:** Young people respond to relationships based on mutual love and respect. That's why youth work is relational in nature and takes time. The love and a respect of a child for a parent comes with time spent together and not simply by a parent-say and child-do mentality.

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

### Check out this story

- » Building foundations (Luke 6: 46-49)

Relationships play an important role in how Gen Yers make decisions. Young people will usually consult with their closest friends and people they trust before they make decisions.

There are potential high-risk situations where this is not always the case and they can include decisions where:

- » Judgment is impaired by alcohol or drugs
- » Peer pressure is present
- » Emotions are running high.

Young people are better able to manage these situations if they've previously been impacted positively by good relationships. If relationships are so key in the decision making of young people, what are we doing as a Church to build strong key relationships with them?

Gen Yers need both strong peer and adult relationships – in fact young people need to have at least six adults in their life that think the world of them<sup>21</sup>.

### Questions for reflection

1. Think of some of the young people you know, do they have six loving adults in their lives?
2. According to Jesus in Luke 6, what is the foundation for building your life on?

## HOW CAN THE CHURCH HELP?

### Check out these stories

- ›› He called a child (Matthew 18: 1-7)
- ›› Setting a good example (1 Peter 5: 3)

If we're trying to help our young people make positive decisions we need to make sure adults are forming good relationships with them. This can be hard in a society where single parent families and a lack of extended family are now so prevalent. This is why trained youth workers are so important: they help many of our young people form strong positive relationships with adults.

Youth workers can be volunteer or paid but the most important thing is that they are **trained**. Together with the many other adults who influence our young people – teachers, sports coaches, work colleagues, extended family – youth workers can be an important part of the decision-making process for Gen Yers.

**Reality check:** With good relationships we can more effectively engage with young people. By understanding their world (or at least empathizing with it!) and by treating their situations with respect and sentiment, we can connect with them as we would any other adult. We aren't there to tell them what to do: we're there to support them, share and to help them make good decisions. Young people want to be loved and respected.

**Take home message:** It's quite a radical shift in thought for many of us, and it's

easy to fall into the trap of thinking once we have achieved adulthood we know all there is to know and that young people should listen to our answers. This isn't the way Jesus thought about it though.

Gen Yers have a different perspective from older people, so being vigilant about not placing our own agenda on them is important. We must constantly humble ourselves in order to receive young people in the name of Christ. Sometimes stumbling blocks – like worship style – make it difficult for Gen Yers to become involved.

A strong factor in worship for young people today is music, especially the more contemporary style. Hymns are not something that today's young people have grown up with, so hymns are not what they connect with. Could we be meeting young people where they are and provide some form of music that they connect with?

**REAL LIFE:** Jo was pretty unhappy. She was getting a hard time from her mates at school and couldn't understand what was going on. Then someone pointed out the difference between "acquaintances" – people who you hung out with, and "friends" – people who care about you, the way God loves people. She realised that her mates were "acquaintances" who were using her as entertainment. She started to change who she spent time with. Life is a lot sweeter when you haven't got people pulling you down all the time.

### Questions for reflection

1. How much are we willing to humble ourselves?
2. What stumbling blocks are present in your parish that may stop young people getting involved?
3. Would you rather sing five hymns and have no young people or four contemporary songs and one hymn and have young people present?

**Last word:** Having a truly servant heart and putting our own worship needs behind us will help young people become involved. It will enhance their church experience.

Mature Christians are able to find God in all forms of worship, so take up the challenge and consider how things could be changed to make room for the preferences of others.

Make the needs of young people a high priority for our Church, which is in a state of decline with most members over the age of 50. We need to urgently address this gap in our Church community, because without young people in our Church where is our future?

**CHECK OUT:** the "Getting Involved" section on pg 19 for practical ideas and suggestions about how



## GETTING INVOLVED:

### *Suggestions for further action and reading*

- » **Mentor a young person** – think about establishing an intentional mentoring relationship with a young person in your life – listening, teaching, acting as a sounding board and allowing mistakes. Scripture gives us plenty examples of mentors, like Ruth and Naomi and Moses and Joshua. Check out the Mentoring Guide available from the Presbyterian Youth Ministry office for practical ideas about mentoring a young person.
- » **Prayer** – Strengthen young people with your prayers.
- » **Volunteer** at a local agency that supports or assists young people – community organisations always need extra hands. Some great organisations include:
  - **Project K** – a programme designed to inspire 14-15-year-olds to maximise their full potential. See [www.projectk.co.nz](http://www.projectk.co.nz) for more info.
  - **Presbyterian Support** offer a variety of pro-programmes for young people that help build self-esteem, conflict resolution and relationship skills. See [www.ps.org.nz](http://www.ps.org.nz) for details of programmes offered in your region.
- Check out the Youth **Mentoring Trust New Zealand** website for information and programmes in your area <http://www.youthmentoring.org.nz>
- » **Build intentional, trust-based relationships** with young people around you. Listen and act on their concerns, even if it may involve some sacrifice on you're part. Visualise their dreams. Respect their uniqueness. Put yourself in their shoes.
- » **Be a role model** – exhibit behaviour you'd like to see the young people around you exhibit. Be intentional about it.
- » **Support your youth leaders** – invite them to dinner, ask them questions about the kids in youth group, or offer to help. Interact with them on their terms and on their turf by showing genuine interest in their activities.

» For your safety and that of any young people you may become involved with through mentoring or other support, it is vital to ensure that appropriately trained people are available to provide advice should a situation arise that is outside your field of expertise. Refer to the Church's Code of Conduct for working with Children and Young People. When appropriate a referral to a professional service provider should be given.

- » **Be a positive parent** – young people benefit from loving relationships with their parents. Link in with positive parenting organisations in your area and find out how you can support their work, or host a programme at your parish.
- » Identify the pressing issues facing young people in your area, and **develop a mission project** to help – do young people need somewhere safe to congregate? How about building a closer relationship with a local high school?
- » Employ a **youth worker** to help build bridges with the young people in your community through schools and other places young people congregate. Consider funding the youth worker by joining together with another local parish.

## FURTHER READING

Konings, Mary-Jane and Chris (2007) *Mentoring Guide: (the Penguins Guide)*, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, Wellington. (Available from the Presbyterian Youth Ministry office by emailing [youth@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:youth@presbyterian.org.nz))

Maxell J, Dornan J (1997) *Becoming a person of influence: how to positively impact the lives of others*. Thomas Nelson

Stewart S Rev (1991) *How to keep the young people you have and get more*. Presbyterian Church.

Hawkins T, *Fruit that will last*. Hawkins Ministry Resources.

[www.nzahd.org.nz](http://www.nzahd.org.nz) - New Zealand Association for Adolescent Health and Development (NZAHD) is a national network organisation for people who work with those aged 12 to 25.

[www.youthtrain.com](http://www.youthtrain.com) - sources New Zealand and international information and reading around youth work.

[www.myd.govt.nz](http://www.myd.govt.nz) - information about issues, programmes and services for young people.

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16. See Note 13.
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Published by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

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