Revitalizing Youth Ministry: A Spiritual Strategy To Minister Effectively To The Millennial Generation

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ABSTRACT

REVITALIZING YOUTH MINISTRY: A SPIRITUAL STRATEGY TO MINISTER EFFECTIVELY TO THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

by

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Title: REVITALIZING YOUTH MINISTRY: A SPIRITUAL STRATEGY TO MINISTER EFFECTIVELY TO THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

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Date completed: July 2005

Problem

The number of young people dropping out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has increased 50 percent in the last ten years. Fifty-seven percent of those who left indicated the primary reason was not doctrines or theological issues, but the lack of relevance of the church to their lifestyle, spiritual needs, and everyday challenges.

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify the spiritual, emotional, and relational needs of a specific generation, such as the millennial; and to develop a biblical spiritual lifestyle strategy to help today's churches to reach and effectively minister to the members of that generation.
Method

The Scriptures were searched to see God’s method to reach and supply the need of His people. Current literature was searched for data collected by experts to help identify the characteristics and needs of the generation.

The four stages of the spiritual formation strategy were developed and recommended for use by youth leaders, beginning with their own journey with God (intimacy), getting to know the generation they try to minister to (identity), making a connection between strategy and young people (integration), and finally implementing the strategy in their own environment (impact).

Lastly, the strategy and insights were implemented and evaluated at the Lighthouse Church in San Juan Puerto Rico.

Results

The central argument was the return of interest and investigation into God’s activity and in His primary target – the human being. Heart-shaping involves both divine and human activity. God does not unilaterally mold and sculpt passive human beings who exercise no role in scripting their life development.

Throughout the Bible it is found that God is more interested in developing relationships than religion. Youth leaders must take into consideration the spiritual journey of the young people who are going through different phases when ministering to this generation. Strategies include creating an effective relational ministry, developing a genuine encounter with God, and offering a safe place where young people can find practical solutions for their daily challenges and develop a servant heart toward the world.
After completing my research, I discovered that the real strategy must begin by placing total dependence on God’s Word and His power. Youth workers must be a godly people before they are able to do God’s work. The youth worker’s first assignment is to be able to humbly recognize that God is the only One who can change the hearts of this generation. Youth workers must therefore look for every opportunity to develop a deep and personal relationship with God.

Next, the characteristics and the needs of the Millennial Generation must be identified and met. The reason young people have difficulties with self-worth, spiritual growth, and maturity is because their true identity in Christ has been distorted. Youth ministers should work towards God’s eternal plan, which is to bring young people back to Him and restore their relationship with Him.

Conclusions

Applied in the local church, the “spiritual formation strategy” included the elements of acceptance and belonging, authenticity and spiritual worship, attraction and involvement, and application to make a difference in the world.

The emphasis on the incarnational ministry of Jesus and the developing of the spiritual life of young people is more than merely programming. It includes mentoring and modeling as well.
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A Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

According to Roger Dudley in his book, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, the number of young people dropping out of the church in the year 2000 increased 50 percent over the prior ten years. Fifty-seven percent of those who left indicated their primary reason for leaving was not doctrines or theological issues, but the lack of relevance of the church to their lifestyle, spiritual needs, and everyday challenges.¹ It is obvious that young people are looking for a place where their spiritual life can be nurtured and their spiritual needs met.²

Statement of the Task

The task of this project is to develop a local church strategy to reach and effectively minister to a specific group of people known as the Millennial Generation, desiring that this approach could be applied in any other churches.

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²Ibid., 207.
Justification for the Project

The Millennial Generation is, in terms of world mission strategy, the largest unreached group of people in the world. This generation offers the church a massive and fertile population for evangelism and discipleship. To maximize the Millennial Generation's incredible potential, church and youth leaders must develop and apply a specific strategy with the purpose of reaching and training these young people. In order to reach the Millennial Generation, it is necessary to first minister to their spiritual and emotional needs. It is imperative that the church discover God’s plans and purposes for this hurting generation.

Description of the Project Process

Current literature was reviewed, including books and articles on principles, strategies, and programs to help pastors and church leaders to develop an effective plan to reach young people.

In order to build the foundation for this spiritual lifestyle strategy, data were collected from experts who have been researching the characteristics and needs of the Millennial Generation for the past ten years. An intentional strategy to reach the Millennial Generation was developed and recommended to church and youth leaders and was tested and applied.

Chapter 1 presents an introduction of the problem that today's churches are facing trying to reach the Millennial Generation as well as the process and the expected result of the investigation.
Chapter 2 develops the First Step on the Spiritual Formation Plan to reach the Millennial Generation, being intentionally focused on the personal relationship of the leader with the Lord, “intimacy,” understanding God’s plan, purpose, and guidelines for Youth Ministry.

Chapter 3 is the Second Step of the process. It identifies the “identity,” a complete set of characteristics that well describes the Generation, giving a specific referral so the strategy can be built.

In chapter 4, the Leader is invited to become an important part of the strategy, following principles that will help to connect him purposefully with programs, activities, and events as tools to complete the process.

Chapter 5 presents the practical application of the strategy in the project called WOW Café, a Christian Pub providing a safe place where young people can find their purpose in life, develop their spiritual gifts, and be ready to serve others.

Chapter 6 is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes the findings of the research study, the second section states the conclusions that were derived from the findings, the third section discusses the appropriate applications of the study, and the final section presents a suggested strategy for applying these principles.

This implementation and evaluation of principles and activities was intentionally created to reach and minister to the Post-Modern mind-set.

Finally, the proposed strategy was implemented and evaluated at the Lighthouse Spanish Church in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
Expectations of This Project

This project will help me to develop my leadership and equipping skills as a pastor in a multicultural conference such as the Southern California Conference.

As a result of this project, youth workers and churches will be challenged to seek God’s truth and to develop a theology of youth ministry based on biblical principles, the Spirit of Prophecy, and an understanding of the Millennial Generation’s characteristics in order to intentionally promote an effective life-style youth ministry in their churches.

This project will also encourage youth workers who see youth ministry as a passion in their lives, helping them to develop a life-changing youth ministry, preparing the next leaders of the church.
CHAPTER 2

INTIMACY: CONNECTING YOURSELF WITH GOD

The challenges in ministering effectively to the Millennial Generation seem almost impossible to overcome. One challenge lies in sheer volume: an estimated 1 billion teenagers – thirteen to nineteen years of age – make up 25 percent of the world’s population (2004). What is even more staggering is that over half the population of second and third world countries is under the age of eighteen. In terms of world mission, the Millennial Generation is the largest, most critical, and dynamic unreached group in the world. This group has a great deal of potential—it will constitute the leadership of the near future.

Figure 1 shows the United States of America population, ages 15 to 24, in millions since 1930 to 2020.1

Another reason it is so challenging to be effective in ministering to this generation is because the teenage population includes a significant number of suffering children. According to the United Nations, 2 million children have died in wars over the last ten years and many more have been injured. In addition, there are the worldwide problems of infant neglect, child abuse, and child prostitution. These young people are crying desperately for some kind of intervention.
Taking these facts into consideration, it is apparent that we are in the middle of a cultural as well as an ecclesiastical crisis. The church, youth leaders in particular, must seek God’s heart for this hurting generation and discover a way to reach them in the midst of their pain.

Where will this intervention begin? It has to begin in our churches, in our youth programs and activities. It is essential that our kids are involved in all church services and functions, which may require updating our style of worship. In order to make our liturgies more interesting, new songs and dramatic programs should be added.

We must also focus on external influences, such as media and music. The material we use and the policies we establish need to be relevant to our young people. Most

importantly, youth leaders need to place their focus on the investigation of God’s activity in His primary target, the human heart.¹

**Youth Work Is a Work of Heart**

According to Reggie McNeal, Jesus turned the leadership equation around. His emphasis was on servant leadership. Instead of establishing leadership positions, He focused on the character of the leader, concentrating on working from the heart.²

Heart shaping needs to involve both God and humanity. God does not mold passive human beings who do not wish to grow in their spiritual life. He requires a response on our part. God shapes the heart of a leader through six basic arenas: culture, call, community, communion, conflict, and the commonplace.

God shapes a leader’s heart through that person’s culture. Culture is defined as different environmental influences that shape the leader’s life and ministry. It is the first and major player in a leader’s development. For this reason, we must presuppose that He will work in each culture, using the leaders in that culture as transformation agents.³

Leaders with attitudes of encouragement and commitment will transmit a message that will be culturally relevant. Maintaining that cultural connection is an essential aspect of fulfilling the Great Commission.


²Ibid., 83.

³Ibid., 72-75.
Youth workers and leaders in general should avoid two misconceptions about cultural relevance. The first misconception is the assumption that young people and people in general are not coming to church because they are not interested in spiritual truth; on the contrary, less than 10 percent of the population in America claims to be atheist.¹

The second misconception is that today's awareness of spirituality always involves Christianity or "God" in the Christian sense. Post-Modernism speaks about spirituality without ever mentioning the God of the Bible. The challenge for today's leaders is that to be culturally relevant they cannot use a soft-sell approach when speaking about God. They need to be honest and give the youth a truthful message of what God is about. Today's generation is looking for God, not entertainment.

Answering a "call" is admitting some sense of destiny, either great or small. It is realizing a responsibility for some life assignment or mission that must be completed. How the leader understands and responds to this mission will give direction to his/her ministry. The call is not invented by a human being who has a life vision or dream; it is revealed to that person by God, who inserts His vision in the mind and heart of His people.

C. Peter Wagner had the insight to identify a leadership paradigm called the "new apostolic networks."² Wagner identified distinctive characteristics in this new model, such as a clear transition from bureaucratic authority to personal authority, from legal

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¹Calvin Reid, Radically Unchurched (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing, 2002), 24-25.
structure to relational structure, from control to coordination, and from rational leadership to charismatic leadership.¹

This “new apostolic leadership model” takes the call of the Great Commission seriously and personally. Modern apostolic leaders seek out where God is working and join Him in the activity. They create a team in order to be effective in their calls, sharing the responsibilities of their ministry. They know how to create a market for the gospel because they are in touch with the culture while at the same time they are conscious of their divine responsibilities. They are in the people-development business, not in the program-development business. The goal of their leadership is to help the saints to discover and develop their spiritual gifts and skills, and to equip them to be effective tools in God’s hand.

Leaders do not develop in isolation. They emerge from within a community that plays a vital role in shaping them. The first community that the leader needs to recognize and work with is his own family. The family is an important tool God uses to shape the heart of the leader. God works through the marriages of leaders to develop a heart more capable of experiencing genuine intimacy and community. God designed marriage to portray the close relationship that He desires with every single human being. In a culture that desperately needs real relationship skills, a spiritual leader’s family becomes a powerful training ground where he or she may learn to influence the culture and live out the calling of ministry. According to McNeal, the difference between healthy and

¹Ibid., 20.
unhealthy leaders often rests in the leader’s willingness or unwillingness to explore these early heart lessons.\textsuperscript{1}

Communion focuses on the personal relationship a leader has with God and is the center of heart shaping. Spiritual leaders deal in spiritual currency. Through communion God can get involved in the hearts of His leaders, teaching lifelong lessons that will strengthen and support the effectiveness of their leadership. Lack of attentions to intimate time with God can produce many spiritual ailments, leading to shallow leadership, which may have method and style but lack substance.

A sense of purpose and assurance can come from a fruitful communion life thus giving strength to a call. This spiritual discipline offers an opportunity to discover God. It enables the leader to explore himself through God’s eyes. Communion is about relationship, not duty.

Post-Modern society has lost the idea of incorporating the Sabbath into their spiritual practice. God established a day of rest, but not in the sense used by people today. His rest is in reality a change of activities. Usually a weekend is full of religious activities and Sabbath has been translated into a day of hard work for God. Spiritual leaders need to recover the true meaning of Sabbath. God established Sabbath to accomplish a recreation of eternity. This recreation has two major activities: the worship of God, and reflection on our work and the direction in which our lives are heading.

Worship is the preparation for eternity, getting us back in touch with our eternal God. Through worship, God works in our hearts: healing our emotions, refreshing our

\textsuperscript{1}McNeal, 117.
purpose, and restoring our soul. This is one function of the Sabbath. The practice of worship leads to the renewal of spiritual leaders by restoring intimate communion with God where heart shaping can occur. The restoration of Sabbath can provide a key to personal and spiritual renewal by enhancing communion between the spiritual leader and God.

Communion is one of the most powerful heart-shaping tools available because it opens up the possibility of becoming God’s friend. Leaders who are in touch with Heaven can move mountains on Earth.

Conflicts are used to demonstrate that even if the leader’s focus is on healing, grace, peacemaking, restoration, forgiveness, and reconciliation, he is not exempt from experiencing trials. McNeal identified eight strategies God uses as tools to shape the heart of the spiritual leader through conflict.

Strategy 1: Get over it. Spiritual leaders must deal with the conflict in a brave manner, come out of denial, and realize that even they will be exposed to trials.

Strategy 2: Choose your pain. Spiritual leaders who work with a sense of direction and mission will be better able to deal with conflicts, pain, and criticism. On the other hand, a spiritual leader without that kind of vision could take conflict as a sign of God’s disapproval or doubt of His call.

Strategy 3: Examine your critics. Spiritual leaders will often take criticism

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1Ibid., 143.
2Ibid., 150-153.
3Ibid., 156-174.
and opposition too seriously. They must understand that the presenting issue is not always the real one and evaluate the motives behind the challenge.

Strategy 4: Look in the mirror. The most important part of dealing with conflict is to be willing to initiate self-examination. The process is painful but if it is done correctly, the outcome will allow the leader the opportunity to make good judgment calls in response to conflict.

Strategy 5: Get good advice. This could be the most difficult step in the process. Where in the world can a spiritual leader find a confidant with whom they can open up their heart without being judged? Three sources can be helpful. Seek out godly people who are willing to tell the truth in a loving way, even if it is painful. Scripture can also provide a wonderful remedy for the soul in difficult times. And finally, prayer is key to the beginning of the healing process.

Strategy 6: Be kind and honest. Leaders must examine themselves, not taking the presence of problems as a sign of leadership failure; and also communicate with the person creating the conflict. Both elements are necessary in order to emerge from the experience strengthened in heart and spirit.

Strategy 7: Forgive. The leader who wants to emerge from conflict as a winner cannot withhold forgiveness. One of the truest evidences of God’s heart shaping shows up in the leader during a conflict, specifically with the presence of a forgiving spirit. The leader can always afford forgiveness but he can never be constrained by a bitter spirit.

Strategy 8: Make a decision. Leaders must make a conscious decision to
grow; it does not occur accidentally. Leaders who make a deliberate decision to
give God access to their hearts grow throughout the conflict experience.

Through these strategies God is preparing the leader for all kind of circumstance
that will need his heart ready to act focus on ministering. This personal preparation is
essential in order to reach a generation that knows crisis and pain.

Commonplace, the fourth place where a lot of heart-shaping activity goes on
during everyday life, when leaders are out of the eyes of the public. Progress has given us
unprecedented affluence, education, and technology to be used in Youth Ministry. But
the commonplace life of the youth worker often seems out of control. Society (including
youth ministers) is being bombarded by pain, frustrations, and serious crises at all times.
This includes emotional, relational, and, of course, spiritual aspects. Pain is a valuable
indicator that lets leaders know something is not right, helping them focus on what is
important. Pain points out that human beings have exceeded healthy limits in their
personal, emotional, relational, physical, or spiritual lives.

How God Works in the Hearts of Biblical Leaders

Moses, a Heart in the Desert

Moses matured in a culture where his relationship with Pharaoh provided him
with the training needed to become the emancipator of the Hebrews. As the future prince
of Egypt, Moses was trained in leadership practices. He learned to lead with authority; he
prepared to become a problem solver and project manager. He was also educated in the
Egyptian religion, an experience that enabled him to later become an ambassador of Yahweh, the God of the slaves.¹

Despite his thorough training, Moses experienced a leader’s ultimate fear—he was rejected by the people he was called to lead. Moses was then sent into exile, allowing him time to learn from his previous mistakes. He had a chance to get reconnected with his call, and his heart was energized with a new passion. The Midianite clan of Jethro became the strongest family community in his life. Moses was fully accepted in this new surrounding, and Jethro became a father figure and role model, providing extraordinary affirmation, encouragement, and guidance.

God’s purpose is always to fill the hearts of His leaders with Himself. God continued to work in Moses’ heart, training him in the art of humility. He carefully shepherded Moses’ life so that he was uniquely qualified for the assignment that He had in mind. God used Moses’ deficiencies to increase his dependence on His power. Because Moses was dependent upon God, when struggles came and fear threatened the mission, he did not worry about his own personal reputation—God was in control, not Moses.

Moses’ sense of purpose came from the assurance that God had called him for a life mission. At God’s University of the desert, Moses did not focus on his own personal ambition; instead his goal was to defend God’s reputation, and to show His compassion for the people who needed freedom.¹ This is the mark of genuine spiritual greatness. This mark is characterized by the communion that Moses enjoyed with Yahweh, capturing the

¹Ibid., 6.
heartbeat of a God intent on creating a people who would join Him in His redemptive
efforts. Moses stands as one of the greatest spiritual leaders in biblical history.

David, a Heart after God

Looking at David's life, we find that he modeled God's benchmark for leadership.
He was filled with an incomprehensible spiritual presence and exemplified the value of
integrity of the heart. These qualities were strengthened when David received an
anointing from God, and became part of the leadership equation.

One of the most painful moments David experienced as a leader involved the
betrayal of his son Absalom. David gained significant wisdom through this and other
conflicts he faced; God molded David through each personal encounter.

David's communion with God supported his sense of destiny. He was consumed
by a passion to pursue God's heart. He was transparent in his relationship with God to the
point of opening his heart completely to His shaping work.

Like David, spiritual leaders today face challenges from the outside, yet the most
difficult ones always come from within. Leaders need to lead with courage. The problems
they confront require sturdy hearts; they must learn to bravely face the inevitable
conflicts of leadership. To do so, they require a special blessing from God, which they
can then pass on to their followers.²

¹Charles R. Swindoll, Moisés, un Hombre de Dedicación Total (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista de
Publicaciones, 2001), 85-87.

²Ibid., 29.
God’s anointing complements a leader’s efforts, allowing him or her to fulfill the mission mandated from God. A leader can function with a lack of anointing but will also lack spiritual power. Without anointing, fear drives their leadership, and they abandon their position when facing conflicts.

God’s choice of David, a simple shepherd, made no sense to human eyes, but in His eyes, David was the perfect candidate. God was working in his life, preparing his heart for an eternal purpose. David saw God everywhere he looked. This ability to see God at work in the challenges of everyday life is essential to the character of spiritual leaders. The life of David is a reminder to leaders that their ultimate responsibility is to share God’s heart with His people. But in order for this to happen, a leader must know the heart of God. This intimacy is a result of a regular, intentional cultivation of a personal relationship with Him which draws from every life experience.

Jesus, the Heartbeat of God

God also crafted the spiritual environment in Jesus’ ministry. During Jesus’ lifetime, traditional religion was collapsing and people were moving from institutional expressions of religion to the search for personal salvation. Many scholars see Jesus as a champion of servant-style leadership, basing their hypothesis on how He executed His ministry efforts and life relationships. He learned in His earthly father’s shop how to

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accomplish basic human relationships. This is the initial task for all leaders: taking an inventory of their people skills.

Conflicts did not make Jesus' foundation crumble. Instead, He allowed them to test and shape His spiritual life. Jesus passed the test in the wilderness because He knew what His mission was, He was clear on what His purpose was, and He did not deviate from it.¹ Many leaders waste their energies in a multitude of activities that do not fulfill their mission's agenda or their call from God.

Modern spiritual leaders can be guided in their lives and ministries the same way that the Christ was shepherded through His earthly ministry by the Father. Just as the communion between Father and Son shaped the destiny of all humanity, it can shape the destiny of just one person.²

**Youth Work Is a Work of Restoring Margin**

According to Richard A. Swenson, margin is the space that exists between our limits and us. When leaders reach the limits of their resources or abilities, they have no margin left.³ Youth Ministry is characterized by the tendency to add more and more detail so the job can be done well. But adding one more option, one more problem, one more expectation, one more program or one more mission trip can often cause a leader to

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²Ibid., 65.

become overextended. It is impossible to fulfill so many details in just one experience. Exceeding this threshold will result in disorganization and/or frustration.¹

According to sociologist Alvin Toffler, researchers strongly agree on two basic principles: first, man has a limited capacity; and second, overloading the system leads to a serious breakdown of performance.² If we do not move to establish effective priorities, our schedules will continue to overload, keeping us captive. It is time to learn how to set limits, accepting that things have to be done one day at a time. It is necessary not to overdraw on emotional energy. Out of the four margins each leader possesses-emotional, physical, time, and financial-the emotional margin is perhaps the most important.

Managing Emotional Energy

Never before has a generation of people faced so many factors which can contribute to their demise.³ In order to restore the margins of emotional energy, Richard Swenson suggests following certain prescriptions. A selection and comments of other experts of these prescriptions includes:

1. **Cultivate Social Support.** Friends can be good medicine. This is not simply a slogan; it is a state-of-the-art therapy. There is perhaps no more effective way to relieve physical pain, according to Dr. Frederic Flach, than to be in contact with another human being who understands what you are going through and expresses a special kind of...

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¹Ibid., 74.


³Swenson, 110.
understanding.¹

2. **Reconcile relationships.** Broken relationships are a razor across the artery of the spirit. True reconciliation is one of the most powerful of all human interactions. This is not a formula but a principle. Reconciling relationships helps make the presence of God more real and helps people accept God’s grace.²

3. **Serve one another.** Psychiatrist and bioethicist Dr. Willard Gaylin, President of the Hastings Center, states that service is empowering.³

4. **Rest.** Even though being with people and serving them is good, sometimes running away from them in order to relax, sleep and rest can be the best cure.

5. **Laugh.** Laughter is the best medicine. By the time babies are four months old, they are already laughing once every hour.⁴

6. **Cry.** Crying is a form of emotional cleansing. According to some studies, those who cry often are less likely to get sick. A good six-or-seven-minute crying session can release a great deal of emotional pollution.

7. **Envision a better future.** A purpose-driven life is a remedy for emotional

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²"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18); and “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6).

³Willard Gaylin, as quoted by Bill Mowers, *A World of Ideas* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 120.

⁴"By the time they are four years old, they laugh on an average of once every four minutes."

"Laughing Toward Longevity,” *University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*, June 1985, 1ff.
overloads. Expand the vision of modern society by seeking more than just a television program. Having a purpose in life, a dream, gives people something to strive for. Our vision is not something we have concocted to suit ourselves, says sociologist S.D. Gaede, it is a perspective that suits the reality that has been communicated to us. Believing this, we have no choice but to make our vision a central part of the Christian community.¹

8. **Offer thanks.** When human beings recognize and focus on the beauty of the world, on the worth of its people and their respect and love, and remember that God oversees everything life is so much more enjoyable.

9. **Grant grace.** Revenge, bitterness and judging others are forms of emotional and spiritual suicide. On the other hand, grace entails treating people better than they deserve. Grace does not just revive the emotional margin; it lifts it up to Heaven.

10. **Be rich in faith.** “I believe the most vital ingredient to be resilience,” commented Dr. Flach in his book *Resilience Is Faith.*²

11. **Hold fast to hope.** Psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger mentions that it is interesting to see that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* has columns on love and faith but not a single word about hope.³ Nicholi, however, states that psychiatrists have long suspected that hope fosters both physical and emotional health.⁴ Following that same line of thinking, philosopher Diogenes Allen sees great cause for hope.

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²Flach, 259.
⁴Ibid., 40-41.
The Kingdom of God is at hand when it becomes harder and harder to ignore or evade God’s ways. Such convictions enable Christians to continue to work for the common good, to be philanthropic, even in a negative situation. Because of the faith which God intends us to have, Christian hope can survive even the disintegration of culture.¹


12. *Above all, love.* No weapon is more powerful. Dr. Selye observes that the statement inciting people to love their neighbors as themselves has probably done more good, and more to make life pleasant, than any other guideline.²


Emotional energy is crucial to maintain a balanced ministry. The changing and complicated world of the young people will demand this emotional stability.

Managing Physical Energy

A large percentage of Americans are suffering from poor conditioning, sleep deprivation and obesity, factors which contribute to a physical energy withdrawal. The Center for Disease Control estimates that more than 50 percent of all deaths are related to lifestyle choices,³ while Emory University’s Health Policy Project explains that 64.7 percent of the lives lost of those under age sixty-five could have been prevented.⁴


The key to the physical margin is to take proper care of the human body as if it were a sophisticated energy machine. Once again, Doctor Swenson prescribes a few ideas that might help.¹

1. Take personal responsibility. Accept personal responsibility for health conditions.

2. Gain physical margin through emotional margin. Pay attention to the natural connection between the emotions and the body.

3. Change your habits. Physical margins reflect a lifestyle, and this lifestyle is always connected with good or bad habits.

4. Learn the value of sleep. Choose to get enough rest and to develop healthy sleep patterns.

5. Develop a healthy nutrition habit. Decrease fat and sugars and replace them with fruits. Maintain a balanced diet.

6. Exercise daily. There are five aspects to a good fitness evaluation: cardio respiratory endurance, muscle strength, muscle endurance, flexibility, and body composition. All five are important, however, the most beneficial is cardio respiratory endurance. Do not abuse your heart.

7. Be realistic. Focus on the important issues of life. Performing this assignment well will increase body functions, allowing it to work better, which leads to better ministry.

It becomes difficult to be effective when the body does not respond with the

¹Swenson, 128-142.
energy that the circumstances are demanding. The whole reality change and the lost of perspective could ruin the ministry.

Managing Time

Without a doubt, work is required from a biblical perspective and necessary for healthy living. Yet so many people today are driven by a force that keeps them from taking a day of rest. These people are known as workaholics. The reason today’s society is working more is because of financial strains that force people to seek supplemental employment. This fast-paced lifestyle results in an inversion of time priorities that is destroying relationships with families, friends, and God.

Everyone needs to have personal time. According to Robert Banks, “Those who are caught up in the busy life have neither the time nor the quiet time to come to understand themselves and their goals.” Since the opportunity for self-attention hardly ever comes, many people have not heard from themselves in a long, long time. “Those who are always on the run never meet anyone anymore, not even themselves.”

Everyone needs family time, and the lack of it is causing the deterioration of our most important institution. Dr. Dolores Curran has noticed that every study on family stress reveals that time pressures are produced by insufficient couple time, insufficient “me” time, insufficient family playtime, and overscheduled family calendars.

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The ones most affected by this lack of family time are the kids. "The inevitable loser from this life in the fast lane is the little guy who is leaning against the wall with his hands in the pockets of his blue jeans," explains family psychologist Dr. James Dobson. "Crowded lives produce fatigue, fatigue produces irritability, irritability produces indifference and indifference can be interpreted by the child as a lack of genuine affection and personal esteem." Everyone needs to share time together in order to nurture his or her relationships. We are dealing with calendars that are too busy for friends and family.

Another aspect lost in this fast-paced life is time with God. Everyone needs to spend time with God. Society, especially ministerial society, has one foot in the church and the other on the accelerator. That type of speed cannot yield devotion. Here are a few steps to take in order to restore balance:

1. Expected the unexpected. Schedule some time for unexpected activities.
2. Learn to say no. This is not just a good idea; it is necessary.
3. Turn off the television. Use your time wisely doing things that are really important.
4. Prune the activity branches. Spend time periodically reviewing your priorities.
5. Practice simplicity and contentment. Do not buy unnecessary things with money that does not exist in order to fulfill a need that it is not real.
6. Thank God for all things.
7. Be available. Spend time glorifying God and He will pay that time back.

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1James Dobson, Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 27-28.
"Regaining a margin in our use of time is one way of restoring freedom to overloaded lives," says Dr. Swenson. "With time margin we can better enjoy what we are doing, we have a more wholesome anticipation of our next activity, we are more contemplative, we are more in touch with God and with each other, we have more time for service, and we actually delight in looking for the divine interruptions He sends us."¹

Managing Finances

Finances are at the top of the list of stressors in the Millennial Generation.² Rather than being a blessing from a generous God, wealth has become a moral and spiritual curse. The Bible is clear; wealth is not an objective in the spiritual life. Here are some insights on how to regain a margin in finances:³

1. Travel in the right direction. Re-evaluating priorities is a critical step.


3. Counter culture. Break the power money can have.

4. Live within your harvest. Be content and enjoy what you have.


"Every increase of needs tends to increase one’s dependence on outside forces

¹Swenson, 161.

²Curran, 62.

³Swenson, 173-182.
over which one cannot have control.”1

6. Decrease spending. Do not get caught up in “shopping sickness.”

7. Make a budget. This is the most enjoyable recommendation of all financial-margin suggestions.

8. Discard all credit cards.

9. Think of the Kingdom first. All margins ought to fall within this context. All margins ought to first honor God in order to be made available for the purpose of His Kingdom.

Health through Balance

There is no health in an unbalanced life. Balance is not achieved by stacking our priorities one on top of another. Creating a list of priorities does not necessarily bring balance to peoples’ lives. “A list of priorities doesn’t make sense!” observes J. Grant Howard in Balancing Life’s Demands. “No matter how you define and describe your particular approach, if it is a sequential approach, it is loaded with contradictions.”2

In order to restore balance it is important to gain control over the challenges of our daily lives. God needs to be at the center of all things. He is the foundation upon which people need to build. It is important not to try to resolve the problem of imbalance by becoming more imbalanced. Dr. Swenson stated, “Balance is necessary and attainable. It’s not easy, but possible. God expects us to perform well in many areas of life. But

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2J. Grant Howard, Balancing Life’s Demands: A New Perspective on Priorities (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1983), 37.
when He gave us the limits of time and finiteness, at that moment He also built in the need for balance. We work hard to please our Master, but we also rest confidently knowing that He understands our condition. What we do we do well or we do not do it at all.”

Youth Work and the Mission of God

Throughout human history, God has concentrated on working with those who are weak, hurt, oppressed, and, most of the time, confused and lost. His purpose always was and always will be to restore His image within them. The channel through which God most often works is worship. In the book, Let the Nations Be Glad, Pastor John Piper states that “mission is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is.”

God is the ultimate, not man, and worship is the ultimate, not mission. Mission exists when worship does not. Worship is the goal of mission, because mission simply aims to bring the nations into the Holy presence of God for the enjoyment of His greatness. “The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coast lands be glad!” (Ps 97:1). “Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!” (Ps 67:3, 4 NIV).

Since human beings were created to worship God, it is of vital importance to understand what He had in mind when He created them. Given that God does not change what He has established, we must return to Him to find the real identity and solution for

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1 Swenson, 223.

the human crisis. God is willing to cross every boundary in order to establish a relationship with His people. This is God’s initiative and not people’s initiative. But because of the breakdown in God’s original plan, the gospel has to be incarnated in order to reach the lifestyle and needs of this young generation.

**Youth Work Is Incarnational**

The perfect aspect of God’s mission is presented in the life of Jesus. God’s mission focuses on the restoration of the whole creation through Christ’s work of redemption. Jesus’ model of ministry is the perfect example of “incarnational ministry,” in which relationships are at the heart of His work. Young people in this scenario learn to become Christians because they are in regular informal contact with Christian people who model their faith. The value of incarnational ministry is based on personal contact between adults and young people in the routines and activities of the everyday life.¹

Incarnational ministry is not only behaving like Jesus, but also experiencing an inner transformation in which every person shares His love, His value system, His compassion for hurting people, and His true view of justice and righteousness. In the book, *A Theology of Personal Ministry*, Lawrence O. Richards and Martin Bell said about Jesus’ ministry: “There He is, in the temple again. Causing trouble. Speaking very differently from other preachers. Speaking with authority about sorrow, anxiety, sickness,

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and death. Penetrating the dark corners of human existence. Shattering illusions. Make no mistake about it; this is a dangerous man.”¹

The incarnated Christ tells us that there is hope whenever people get involved in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-20), where friendships and relationships are themselves the ministry. Ellen G. White was very familiar with incarnational ministry. She wrote the following about the topic:

Why should labor for the youth in our borders be regarded as missionary work of the highest kind? It requires the most delicate tact, the most watchful consideration, and the most earnest prayer for heavenly wisdom. The youth are the objects of Satan’s special attacks, but kindness, courtesy, and the sympathy which flows from a heart filled with love to Jesus, will gain their confidence, and save them from many a snare of the enemy. . . . There must be more study given to the problem of how to deal with the youth, more earnest prayer for the wisdom that is needed in dealing with minds. . . . We should seek to enter into the feelings of the youth sympathizing with them in their joys and sorrows, their conflicts and victories. . . . We must meet them where they are if we would keep them. . . . Let us remember the claim of God upon us to make the path to heaven bright and attractive.²

Meeting the youth where they are gives us the opportunity to offer them pastoral care as their spiritual guides, as well as their counselors and friends, sharing with them our own similar spiritual journey. When young people are brought to a place where they can meet Jesus as their Savior, spiritual growth is promoted, and the opportunity to work with others is granted. Notice a quote from the Spirit of Prophecy:

When the youth give their hearts to God, our responsibility for them does not cease. They must be interested in the Lord’s work, and led to see that He expects them to do something to advance His cause. It is not enough to show how much needs to be done, and to urge the youth to take part. They must be taught how to labor for the Master. They must be trained, disciplined, drilled in the best methods of winning souls to Christ. Teach them to try in a quiet unpretending way to help their young

¹Lawrence O. Richards and Martin Bell, A Theology of Personal Ministry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 101.

companions. Let the different branches of missionary effort be systematically laid out, in which they may take part, and let them be given instruction and help. Thus they will learn to work for God.¹

The church has the privilege of participating in God’s mission in order to give the Millennial Generation the opportunity to experience Christ’s salvation. Even though the gospel has to be proclaimed afresh in each generation, it is always rooted in Christ’s incarnation, initiated by the Holy Spirit. This experience with God gives young people the opportunity to discover Christ for themselves, to form their own opinion, and to apply it to real situations.

Here is where the story of Christ becomes relevant to Youth Ministry. The identity, needs, and dignity of human life stand in the foundation of Christ’s incarnation. Christ is the model to follow in order to grow “in wisdom and years, in divine and human favor” (Luke 2:52). To think about the gospel apart from culture is impossible. Christ’s incarnation is a demonstration of His solidarity with human beings: entering into their world with respect and understanding, sharing their emotions, genuinely empathizing with their challenges in real-life situations.

Throughout Christ’s incarnational ministry the door was opened to enter different cultures. And with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can apply the universal and absolute truth of the gospel to particular generations and situations. Theology is

¹Ibid., 212.
contextualized into the subculture of youth only through incarnational commitment and experience.¹

Keeping up with the changes in our youth culture is not an easy task. We must be careful not to fall into the trap of believing that the methods that worked last year will still be effective this year. When young people are acknowledged as more than just numbers, they will accept our message because we have been in touch with them and their lifestyles. The most effective way to reach teenagers is to live among them, to hurt when they hurt, to be there to pick them up when they fall. This everyday contact is available only to the youth worker who labors at the leading edge of ministry.

Teenagers may look to TV programs searching for heroes, but when it comes time to be touched by God’s Word, or when they need personal help and counseling, young people will want to communicate with someone who is genuine and close to them.² An effective Youth Ministry will enter the life and culture of young people who want to be heard and understood, but who will open their hearts only to those who are there for them and love them.

Youth Work Is Relational

Youth Ministry is not only incarnational, but also relational. The Jesus of the gospels is sociable and values good friendships, as seen in His relationship with Mary


and Martha, and in many other close relationships. All this began with the Creator initiating a relationship with humanity by becoming one of us (Heb 2:11 and John 15:15). As Jesus identified with their sorrows and needs, so should the church spend time understanding and relating to humanity’s needs. These physical needs need to be met before there will be repentance and faith. Arguments are not heard until a friendship is established.

Adolescence is a time when many changes and transitions occur, bringing long-lasting effects. It is in this time when the influence of the youth worker is most relevant. A survey held at a secular high school revealed that the second most important influence on a student’s life during moments of trouble is youth workers. In order to have a life-long impact on the lives of students, it is necessary to develop significant relationships, becoming true role models.

Programs are the frameworks in which ministries exist. However, going beyond programs and genuinely caring for young people is the primary prerequisite for working with them. The youth of the Millennial Generation are tired of shallow programs or creative methods without substance. They are looking for a deep and meaningful experience that is authentic. When building relationships with young people, we become, according to Jim Burns, the hands and feet and even the voice of Jesus in their lives.

This is the reason young people are looking for role models to imitate. The real ministry, for them, will take place not during formal church time, but through

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relationships. Dean Borgman says that we are called to “waste time” with young people by “hanging out” with them.  

Relational youth work values the contact and time spent between adults and young people in everyday life environment. It is also important to love this generation with an unconditional love, without expecting them to be perfect. This unconditional love is demonstrated in the actions of each leader pointing out the solidification of their faith and trust in the love of God. The final goal of this relational journey is to move young people from dependence on the leader to total dependence on the love of God.

**Conclusion**

The task at hand can never be accomplished unless the youth worker is willing to take a close look in the mirror and prepare to face the challenges brought about by attempting to minister to a new generation. Youth Ministry is now more than ever a work of the heart, dealing with spiritual issues that affect young people’s lives. The importance of this mission means focusing on nothing less than the Kingdom of God, which is composed of humanity made in the image of God.

A leader who provides the right answers and the right methods can still fall short of providing the right kind of leadership that expands the Kingdom of God. They must truly experience God in their personal lives and understand how God works in the lives of those they seek to reach. The preparation needed in this ministry will include a daily choice to exercise and develop habits that keep the life of the youth minister in balance –

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1Ward, 56-60.
balance in their spirituality, in their family affairs, and in their emotional and physical lives.

Another aspect of this preparation will include constant evaluation of self and a good planning strategy. The basis for these heart issues can be found in God’s initiative to have a close and personal relationship with spiritual leaders. How each leader responds to God’s initiatives will determine how the story will play out.
CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY: CONNECTING YOURSELF WITH THE AUDIENCE

The purpose of this chapter is to develop an overview of the current generation of youth known as the Millennial Generation in order to reach them. The name "Millennial Generation" was selected from a top-ten list chosen by a TV news program after receiving several thousand suggestions from people all over the United States at www.abcnews.com¹

In order to create a successful evangelism strategy, it is necessary to understand some of the characteristics that define this particular generation. The members of the Millennial Generation are the children of the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers, and are being affected by the Post-Modern philosophy of life.

From Modernity to Post-Modernity

Post-Modernity is a term that appeared in the 1930's and was used to refer to a major historical transition taking place,² mainly in the world of art.³


However, many historians place the birth of the Post-Modern in the era that followed World War II.¹

"The Enlightenment Project," as Juergen Habermas would call it, is the way that humanity is trying to unlock the secrets of the universe in order to master human nature and create a better world. It's the process of giving rational direction to one's life in order to improve it through technology.²

The project of modernity, formulated in the eighteenth century by the Enlightenment philosophers, consists of a relentless development of the objective sciences, the universalistic bases of morality and law, and autonomous art in accordance with their internal logic but at the same time a release of the cognitive potentials thus accumulated from their esoteric high forms and their utilization in praxis; that is, in the rational organization of living conditions and social relations. Proponents of the Enlightenment... still held the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would further not only the control of the forces of nature but also the understanding of self and world, moral progress, justice in social institutions, and even human happiness.³

This philosophy of life came under attack when Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900) began to question it, but it did not officially collapse until the 1970's. Post-Modern philosophers rejected structuralism, which says that all societies and cultures possess a common, invariant structure.⁴ In the Post-Modern worldview, people are not to focus on

²Van Gelder, 413.
the idea that knowledge is inherently good, instead that the continuation of humankind depends on a new attitude of cooperation rather than conquest.¹

Finally, the Post-Modern mind does not accept the objective truth that the Enlightenment Project proposed, and instead focuses on the thought that reality is relative, indeterminate, and participatory. Therefore, the community in which the Post-Modern Generation belongs and participates defines their truth and reality. The church faces a challenge when attempting to minister to disciples of this Post-Modern mind-set.

Defining Post-Modernism

To fully understand the special needs of this Post-Modern Generation, it is important to first define it. “Modernism is the philosophy which states that contemporary man has the ability to solve a problem in the world.” Post-Modernism challenges the belief system found in Modernism. The Millennial “Nexters” see life as continually spiraling downward, leaving them without hope and always searching for purpose. They are trapped in a cynical and self-centered pursuit of living for the moment, even when they pick and choose lifestyles in a way that “no generation has before.”

Young people are products of the spirit of the times. Post-Modernism is not a clear or agreed-upon term. It is more of a style than a philosophical worldview that attempts to be free from classical, medieval, or modern epochs and framework.

A general understanding of Post-Modernism is important for youth ministers because young people are either strongly influenced by Post-Modern thinking and ideas

¹Grenz, 7.
or are reacting strongly against them. To minister effectively in current youth culture, the professionally educated youth minister needs to understand the Post-Modern world. In this Post-Christian and Post-Modern era many have rejected Christian values.

In this high-tech generation, young people are notorious for the lack of consistent, accountable relationships. The lack of face-to-face, real-life relationships produces a generation disconnected and unequipped to face life with a real value system. Because they live in such an insecure environment, young people today are desperately looking for affirmation of their feelings, values, and life style choices. As Sauder and Mohler said in their book: “They look for this kind of affirmation in relationships that are real.”

Ellen G. White talks about this issue: “The youth need more than a casual notice, more than an occasional word of encouragement. They need painstaking prayer and careful labor. Only those whose heart is filled with love and sympathy will be able to reach the youth who are apparently careless and indifferent. Not all can be helped in the same way.”

To reach this generation, it is necessary to develop a special strategy that will deal with the issues, problems and tasks that they are facing. As Tony Campolo writes, “There is no single youth culture in the technological urban industrialized societies of

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2 White, *Gospel Workers*, 207-212.
the western world. Instead, there are a variety of subcultures existing side by side, each with its own language, value system and world view."¹ Ellen G. White wrote,

Very much has been lost to the cause of truth by a lack of attention to the spiritual needs of the young. Ministers of the gospel should form a happy acquaintance with the youth of their congregations. Many are reluctant to do this, but their neglect is a sin in the sight of faith, yet whose hearts have never been touched by the power of divine grace. How can we who claim to be the servants of God pass on day after day, week after week, indifferent to their condition?²

As a church, we need to be sensible and listen to the cry of our youth, understanding their unique characteristics and providing a place for them where they can find a purpose in life.

Because of the rapid media transition from Generation X to Millennial Generation, confusion surfaced about locating the birth-year dividing line; thus, a few characteristics can be used to describe both generations. According to Neil Howe and William Strauss, "Many of the original (1993) Generation Y stories referred to teenagers born between 1974 and 1980, who cohort with those whom today are regarded as the late wave of Generation X. This explains why both of these generations were discussed so soon after Generation X, and why descriptions of Generation Y often sound so much like the descriptions of Generation X, because originally they overlapped."³

This overlap of characteristics can be systemized in eleven sentences:


³Howe and Strauss, 43.
1. Loneliness is their heart condition.

If there is one word that describes this generation, it is loneliness. Loneliness causes this generation to experience high rates of suicide, violence and drug addictions. At the same time, however, that loneliness provides an open door to anyone who wants to touch their lives, if an atmosphere in which they feel loved is first established.

2. Relationships are what matter the most.

This is the number one priority for the Millennial Generation. Trusted friends can influence their lives in very meaningful ways.

3. Music is their language.

Music speaks to the heart and soul of the Millennial Generation. See figure 2.

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Figure 2. Which of the following music do you like?
4. They are struggling with self-worth.

Young people cannot find purpose and worth in their lives until they experience God personally and realize that they were made by Him in His own image.

5. The “anesthesia” is more important than the cure.

Kids want to stop the pain and it does not matter what they have to do to in order to accomplish this. That is the reason why so many of them turn to drugs and alcohol in order to escape their painful reality.

6. They know no boundaries.

One cannot assume that they understand any kind of morality or authority.

7. They want authority.

Kids are willing to share their feelings in order to get answers to their questions. They are looking for authority, yet the leader needs to earn it and not demand it.

8. The present matters more than their future.

They do not care about what could happen tomorrow. They want to know how Jesus can solve their problems today.

9. Commitment is too risky.

Before they can make a commitment to Christ, they need to learn to commit. This can happen only through mentoring.

10. Sex is expected and confusing.

Oral sex is growing every day and at younger ages. Research mentions that two out of five kids will have had sex before they are out of junior high.

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1Rick Lawrence, *Trend Watch* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2000), 50-51
11. Millennial Generation teenagers are Post-Christian.

This characteristic will deeply affect their spiritual life and church attendance. Nine out of ten kids said that they would attend services because of a personal invitation; they want a church where the attitude and demeanor of the people is positive, welcoming, and upbeat.

They expect to receive high-quality teaching and preaching. The friendliness of the people and how much they care about each other is identified as a powerful determinant in their choosing to attend a church.

The Millennial Generation is the youngest of the five generations that coexist within America today (1984-2002). This group of people is sometimes called "mosaic" because their lifestyles are an eclectic combination of traditional and alternative activities.

They are the first generation among which a majority will exhibit a nonlinear style of thinking: a mosaic, connect-the-dots-however-you-choose approach. Their relationships are much more racially integrated and fluid than any we have seen in U.S. history. Their core values are the result of a cut-and-paste montage of feelings, facts, principles, experiences, and lessons.¹

However, in today’s data-rich info sphere, people’s attitudes, together with their behavioral tendencies, can be tracked by birth cohort. According to Neil Howe and

William Strauss, this indicator reveals a clear break between those born in and after 1982, and those born before. This also points to an entirely new generational persona.¹

The Millennial Generation

The Millennial persona has seven distinguishing traits that can be seen throughout the 1980s decade. These traits are:

*Special.* From the precious-baby movies of the early ‘80s to the effusive rhetoric surrounding the high-school Class of 2000, older generations have instilled in Millennials the sense that they are, collectively, vital to the nation and to their parents’ sense of purpose.

*Sheltered.* Starting with the early 80s child-abuse frenzy, continuing through the explosion of kid safety rules and devices and climaxing with a post-Columbine lockdown of public schools, Millennials are the focus of the most sweeping youth safety movement in American history.

*Confident.* With high levels of trust and optimism—and a newly felt connection to their parents and their future—Millennial teens are striving to equate good news for themselves as good news for their country; they often boast about their generation’s power and potential.

*Team-Oriented.* From Barney and soccer to school uniforms and a new classroom emphasis on group learning, Millennials are developing strong team instincts and tight peer bonds.

¹Howe and Strauss, 43.
Achieving. With accountability and higher school standards rising to the very top of America’s political agenda, Millennials are on track to become the best-educated and best-behaved adults in the nation’s history.

Pressured. Pushed to study hard, avoid personal risks, and take full advantage of the collective opportunities adults are offering them, Millennia’s feel a “trophy kid” pressure to excel.

Conventional. Taking pride in their improving behavior and being more comfortable with their parents’ value system than any other generation in living history, Millennials support convention – the idea that social rules can help.¹

All these traits have been measured and tracked (mostly for the eldest edge of this Millennial Generation) and represent a sharp break from the traits that are associated with Generation X.

Understanding Today’s Youth

The adolescent’s world is changing dramatically, not only in their mental and physical development but also in the fact that they cannot keep up with every new fad and movement within the culture.²

The Millennial Generation is the largest unreached group in the world. According to Jim Burns: “In the next 24 hours in America 1,439 teenagers will attempt suicide; 2,795 girls will become pregnant; 15,006 will use drugs for the first time; 3,506 will run

¹Ibid., 43.
²Burns and DeVries, 43.
away; ten will be killed by firearms, 3,544 babies will be born to unwed mothers; 2,911 high school students will drop out of school; 17,297 students will be suspended from school; one young person under the age of 25 will die from an HIV-related infection.¹ These statistics accentuate the challenges of ministering in today's culture.

There is a revolution of change taking place in our youth's culture. A youth worker can make a big difference by understanding this rapidly changing storm in the culture. Let us look at the world of this particular generation and specifically at figure 3 for the rate of drug abuse.

Figure 3. Rate of drug abuse overdose fatalities by age, 1979 and 1996.

Source: U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (1999)

¹Ibid., 43.
Hi-Tech Generation, Low-Touch Generation

This generation is also known as the “E-Generation” or the “Electronic Generation,” spending much of their time in the free world of the Web. With their minds full of over four hours of rock music played every day, more than 14,000 acts of sexual intercourse broadcast on prime-time television, and ten hours per week of MTV in which 60 percent of the music videos played have sexual and violent themes, this is perhaps the first generation to be attacked by this fast world of electronic technology, video games, and MTV mind-set.

Young people today are constantly being bombarded with messages and images from media. Students from the ages of 12 to 17 watch an average of 22 hours of television per week. By the time a student graduates from high school, they will have watched 23,000 hours of television compared to 11,000 hours spent in the classroom.¹

Figure 4 shows the percentage of each grade of school kids who watch four or more hours of TV every day.

¹Walt Mueller, Understanding Today’s Youth Culture (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 138.
An interesting phenomenon occurs as a result of time spent surfing the Web. Young people have less time to spend in real face-to-face relationships. Their lack of emotional ties to the adult world produces an emotional deficit.

"Most child and youth development researchers concur that millennial kids are exposed to more experiences and information once available only to adults and at the same time are protected less by the adults and communities that surround them. In other words, they've been dealt a double whammy. Many of the essential assets which create strong foundations upon which they can build their lives are missing."

Another example of the substantial influence of television and technology is found

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in the success of the Comedy Central cartoon, South Park. "In the last two weeks of
February 1998, 5.2 million people tuned in to it, with 23% of the audience under the age
of 18. Characters included Wendy Testabarger, who caused another character to throw up
every time she spoke to him."¹

The computer has a direct impact on the disposition of this generation. According
to a Newsweek poll, 89 percent of teens said they use a computer at least several times a
week, 69 percent surf the Internet, 92 percent think computers will improve their
educational opportunities, 71 percent would prefer to talk into their computer rather than
type, and 98 percent credit computer technology for making a positive impact on their
lives.²

This is one of the reasons why the word "relationship," or even "church," is not in
this generation's vocabulary. Bill Gates himself does not go to church because he has no
time for religion, plus he has a lot of things to do on Sunday mornings.

These statistics place "technology as the main source of influence and connection
in the lives of this generation's youth. By the year 2005 over one billion users will be
connected to the Internet."³

Figure 5 shows the percentage of kids ages 8-17 who regularly go online.

¹David Wild, "South Park's Evil Geniuses and the Triumph of No-Bow Culture," Rolling Stone,


³Mueller, 175.
Music is another reflection of this generation, capturing the spirit of the age: dark, edgy, unresolved, and off key. Nihilism and, in some cases, sadism pervade within this culture’s music, as reflected in the self-mutilation of many of its adherents. Young people today, states David Denby, “are shaped by the media as consumers before they’ve had a chance to develop their souls.”

In December 1997, a few hundred children were hospitalized as the result of the effect of watching “mesmerizing animation.” An action-packed cartoon called *Pokemon* was canceled because the brilliantly flashing scenes were causing convulsions, spasms,

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and nausea in these children. Some of the effects that excessive exposure to an electronically stimulating environment can produce are.¹

Passivity and addiction to speed and shock. Because the media have bombarded American youth with thousands of visual, digital, and other forms of electronic stimulation, psychologists say that they see more stress caused by "information overload" and the "noxious environment of over-stimulation," than any other situation.²

MTV is a perfect example of this. They have now stopped selling ten-second ads to their clients; instead, radio and TV stations are selling ad times for up to twenty seconds.

Isolation. An additional result of this excessive exposure is the tendency to be alone, losing the opportunity to build relationships and form communities. Today's youth are totally disconnected from community, spending their lives in front of a TV.

Mark Dery of the New York Times Magazine writes: "Voice mail and E-mail are gradually supplanting face to face interaction and embodied experience is giving way to electronic immersion in virtual worlds."³

A distorted view of reality. For this high-tech generation, life is all about fun. Life's difficulties are experienced and resolved quickly, and rarely are there consequences to immoral choices. Life is artificial; short-term solutions to problems are preferred and suffering is seen as something to be avoided.

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²Howe and Strauss, 241-243.

Role modeling. As a result of numerous single-parent families, the number of absent parents is also on the rise. This means that boys look outside of their homes in order to find a role model. Figure 6 shows who children, ages 12-14, look up to.

![Graph showing who children ages 12-14 look up to the most.](image)

Figure 6. Of all the people you know or know about, who do you look up to the most?

Expert family therapists are saying that this is a generation in which boys do not know how to be men and watching macho stereotypes on TV will not allow them to function in a healthy way in the future.

The power of the radio

Even though teens spend more than three hours a day in front of a TV, marketers find that FM radio is the most powerful way of reaching them.¹ Almost 95 percent of

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¹Lawrence, 75.
teenagers listen to FM radio for an average of ten hours a week. In his book *Wise up to Teens: Insights into Marketing and Advertising to Teenagers*, Peter Zollo states that young radio listeners are incredibly loyal. When they like a particular program, they stick with it. They also form a chain, passing the information around to other kids about events, concerts, etc.

Nevertheless, online activities are cutting TV and radio time from 36 percent of the teen audience to just 12 percent.  

There are reasons why kids are being colonized by the cyber world. According to a *USA Today* report, the Internet offers this generation at least three essential elements that make them a full-fledged cyber generation:

1. Kids feel lonely and the Internet offers connections.
2. Kids feel judged by their appearance; the Internet does not care what they look like.
3. Kids hunger to try new things as they build their identities; the Internet offers them the chance to be true pioneers.

Cyber kids and the church

George Barna says teenagers will soon spurn traditional churches for Internet “cyber-churches.” As a matter of fact, 16 percent of teenagers expect to use the Internet as a church substitute in the next few years. Currently only 4 out of 100 teenagers use the

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1Peter Zollo, quoted in ibid., 76.
2Lawrence, 70.
3Ibid., 71.
Internet for religious purposes. However, Barna predicts that by 2010 between 10 and 20 percent of the population will be relying primarily or exclusively upon the Internet for its religious input.¹

**Success, Career, and Money**

Growing up in a materialistic society and looking to have a better lifestyle than their parents, this generation is pushed to achieve success, career, money, and images.²

But hidden behind this apparent “top of the world” lifestyle, today’s generation is being attacked by eating disorders, sleeping problems, rising obesity and substance abuse.

On the other end of the spectrum, 49 percent of teens, according to a Gallup Youth Survey, are more concerned with “changing the environment” and have a great deal of concern for the future. To these kids, the goal to obtain a post-high school degree and a job has increased to 47 percent compared to the 29 percent it was in 1974. Of the topics that concern this generation, “crime” and the “decline of moral and social values” are the most important problems to address.³ See figure 7.

²Howe and Strauss, 275.
³Ibid., 263-269
How School Kids Aged 13-17 Spent Their Own Money in 1996

Figure 7. How school kids spent their own money in 1996.

Family Ties

As traditional families disappear, the “E-Generation” is forced to survive the painful situations exposed by the divorce or separation of their parents’ situations which have many different faces, such as breakups, live-in lovers, etc. Consider the following snapshots of today’s family:

Forty percent of kids will go to bed tonight in a home without a father.¹ A 1999 study by the Barna Research Group discovered that only 57 percent of teens live in the same house with both of their natural parents.²

¹Mueller, 41.
In the United States, there is a divorce every 27 seconds approximately 1 million per year. The fastest growing marital status category is “divorced.” The number of divorced adults more than quadrupled from 4.3 million in 1970 to 17.4 million in 1994 as it shows in figure 8.¹

Unfortunately, the church has little or no influence in this area. According to the Barna Research Group, born-again Christians are more likely to get divorced than non-Christians (27% versus 24%). Among people attending mainline Protestant churches, 25 percent have been through a divorce; 29 percent of them are Baptist and roughly 34 percent of them are of nondenominational Protestant churches.²

Marriage is to be entered into very carefully. Most young people are looking for a sense of security in their personal relationships. Values have become a critical issue for parents who try to keep their families together, yet at the same time they lack the opportunity to influence their children as they are rarely home. Figure 9 shows the percentages of children not in two-parent families.

James, a young White man who was bom into a God-fearing family and reared in a traditional church, said, “In my parents’ generation, the sinful nature embodied itself in ‘self’ and the desire to satisfy their self. And because you guys are our parents, your generation’s emphasis on self has made it so that both parents are at work in order to make the most money possible.

¹Barna Research Online, December 21, 1999, http://www.barna.org, quoted in Burns and DeVries, 44.
Figure 8. U.S. rates of divorce and abortion, 1976 to 1996. 
*Source:* U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (2000); abortion numbers are derived from data tabulated by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (1999).

Figure 9. Living arrangement of children not in two-parent families, 1940 to 1998.
So we are being raised without parents in the home, and we don’t have that guidance. We are raised by day cares and television and everything else.”¹

Adults who always complain about kids’ behavior also deserve some blame. A team of Ohio State University researchers concluded that as teenagers get older, adults use more sarcasm, put-downs, and rude, insulting, irritated language towards them.²

Another influence is the rate of labor force participation by women with children as the following describe in percents. See figure 10.


San Francisco psychologist Ross Goldstein, in a USA Today interview, states that Baby Boomers are having tremendous difficulty disciplining their kids.³ Nothing will give this generation a greater moral stability than a functional family. And today, more


²Lawrence, 95-105.

³Ibid.
than ever, the role of the father and the role of the mother working to keep the family together and working in a partnership with the church will provide this generation with the tools to build a better future.

A Sexual Revolution

In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control conducted a national study revealing that half of all high-school students reported having sex. Breaking down the results of the study by grades, we find that 38.6 percent of the kids were ninth-graders; 46.8 percent of them were tenth-graders; 52.5 percent of them were juniors and 64.9 percent of them were seniors.\(^1\)

Approximately 12 million teenagers become sexually active between the time they enter high school and the time they graduate. An alarming consequence of all this sexual activity, as reported by The Allan Guttmacher Institute, is that the suicide rate among teenage mothers is ten times that of the general population.\(^2\)

There are more than 1 million teenage girls who become pregnant in the United States every year that is 10 percent of all young women ages 15 to 19, and approximately 19 percent of young women who have sexual intercourse. Thirty percent of teenage pregnancies end in abortion.\(^3\)

\(^1\)Centers for Disease Control, “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1999,” [http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss4905a1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss4905a1.htm) (accessed September 8, 2003).

\(^2\)Ibid.

There are 3 million new adolescent cases of sexually transmitted diseases occurring every year, in approximately one of every four sexually active teens\(^1\) adding to the high rates of pregnancy, abortion, and birth for girls ages 15 to 17 shown in figure 11.

![Rates of Pregnancy, Abortion, and Birth for Girls Aged 15-17, 1980 to 1996](image)

Figure 11. Rates of pregnancy, abortion, and birth for girls ages 15-17, 1980 to 1996.  
*Source: Alan Guttmacher Institute (1999).*

The church needs to take a stronger stand for morality. In a world of instant intimacy, the church must teach and live out the values of commitment and fidelity taught in the Scriptures.

**Peers, a Relational Generation**

Isolated by the adult world, the Millennial Generation is totally peer-driven. Looking for their own values away from the authority of their parents, they find support

\(^1\)Ibid.
in their peers. Because they are a team-player generation, they are desperate for a sense of belonging. The Office of National Drug Control Policy promoted in a major U.S. magazine the need for parents to get involved with their kids as the most effective anti-drug campaign. It features a full-page ad with a little girl asking her parents to “stay involved in my life.”

This is a relational generation that loves values and truth. The Millennials speak the truth and share opinions without fear, and they will not accept watered-down versions or false, fake, or double standards. Experts describe the kind of leadership this generation expects: although adults do not have all the answers, they can give guidance when by their genuine love they have earned the right to speak into young people’s lives.

Violence as a Lifestyle

One of the most-increasing trends in youth culture is the rise of anger and violence. See figure 12.

According to a study by the American Psychological Association, every year nearly one million students in the United States took guns to school, resulting in one in twelve high-school students being threatened or injured with a weapon each year. We must discover and understand what factors are leading this generation to seek violence as a way of expressing themselves. The following are some of these factors:

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1Sauder and Mohler, 11.

2Los Angeles Times, August 21, 1995, quoted in Howe and Strauss, 155.

1Ibid.
Figure 12. Incidents of fighting at public schools in Long Beach, California. 
*Source: Los Angeles Times, August 21, 1995.*

1. The need for attention or respect (one of the main factors)

2. Constantly being degraded or attacked verbally

3. Feelings of low self-worth/self-image

4. Early childhood abuse or neglect, leaving the student feeling powerless or with a lack of control

5. Peer influence toward violent acts

6. Witnessing acts of violence at home, in the community or in the media.¹

Spiritual Survivors

The spiritual profile for this generation is quite complex. "In place of strict adherence to doctrine, many teens embrace a spirit of eclecticism and a suspicion of absolute truths," reveals a 1999 poll of teenagers by George Barna. Fifty percent agreed with the statement "all religious faiths teach equally valid truths." See figure 13.

![Figure 13. How kids feel. Source: Gallup Youth Survey](image)

After a quick street interview by Wendy Zoba, the definition of church to a teen is reflected in the following statements: 2

"A place where Christians can come together to worship God," said Tony.
"The church is a family. It's somewhere we can fall down on our knees and repent for our sins," said Vanessa.
Mary said it is a place "where we can come knowing that we are weak, where we can encourage one another and receive strength though prayer and communion."

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1Barna, Real Teens, 119-143.

2Zoba, 76-79.
Romane said it is “where people go who believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins.”
James summed it up as: “God’s people gathered around God’s Word declaring God’s glory.”

When asked what Jesus meant to tell them in Matt 16:18, the kids stated the following:

Vanessa said, “We’re safe in the church with His presence around us.”
Romane mentioned, “God is protecting us against the devil. So you’re safe – which is hard to believe sometimes.”
James saw the verse as an affirmation of the doctrine of election: “We’re chosen by God. The gates of Hades are not strong enough to overcome the people He has chosen.”

God, Church, and Other Spiritual Things

Roger Dudley wrote down a formula of why kids end up rejecting their faith. In his book *Why Teenagers Leave the Church* he focuses specifically on Seventh-day Adventist teens. Their response to the question about what were the main reasons that caused them leave the church was clear: witnessing hypocrisy, racism, and dishonesty in the church, alienation and unfriendliness, irrelevance, lack of youth activities and boredom, intolerance and inconvenience. The study also found that those who had abandoned their faith were less happy and more dissatisfied with life.

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1Ibid., 76-79.
Allah versus Yahweh

Another important aspect that this generation is facing is the fastest-growing religion in America, called Islam. What is alarming is that young people from traditional churches are responsible for this growing trend. Most converts to Islam are young men in their early twenties who are looking for spiritual answers to life's confusing questions.¹

The Talking Churches

Trapped behind busy schedules and financial problems, churches are promoting missions and programs as a mere cliché, not as a real challenge. When this particular generation, which is a hands-on service generation and dying to talk about real issues, as the figure 14, stands up and does the work, they need to find support from their parents, pastors, friends, and the church.

Church's Kids Are Different

A survey of Southern Baptist teenagers revealed a big gap between churched and unchurched kids. The survey stated that 72 percent of the kids say that they do not drink alcohol, 85 percent say they have never had sex, 95 percent say they do not use illegal drugs, and 80% percent say they do not smoke.²

Describing God

Group Magazine asked junior-high groups across America what their opinion was

¹Lawrence, 116.
²Ibid., 118.
about God. They answered the following: 1

1. "He will always be there even when you do not think He is."

2. "He is not a man or woman He is a spirit, a light that is everlasting."

3. "Awesome. God is a 100% guarantee of a problem-free life."

4. "Strong, powerful, loving, caring, forgiving, mysterious."

5. "The God who loves us no matter what we do the one, true God."

6. "He loves all people, even me."

7. "Fun, has a sense of humor."

8. "He wants me to obey Him."

When asked what the best thing about Christianity was, they replied:

1. "When I die, I will be in a better place."

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1Ibid., 120.
2. “God is willing to forgive.”
3. “It gives me hope and a goal to live for.”
4. “Knowing God loves me.”

When asked about the worse thing, they answered:

1. “Church.”
2. “Christians who have a tendency to get carried away in their preaching.”
3. “People who call themselves Christians but do not behave like it.”
4. “The pressure to pray loud and long I am shy.”
5. “The gray areas where you do not know what is right and wrong.”
6. “All of the rules like no messing around.”

**Conclusion**

The challenge to minister to the Millennial Generation may seem impossible to overcome. Though the realities of today’s culture may be seen as too big to conquer, however, God is looking for youth workers who want to make a difference, workers who want to develop a ministry that will make a life-lasting change in this generation. Such workers are urgently needed.

As specialist Jim Burns said, youth workers have an advantage over the culture: They have something even the culture cannot offer teenagers, something that cannot be found in computer programs or on TV, or in time spent listening to music. Because of the technological revolution that is happening in today’s culture, our society continues to move toward becoming more impersonal. Youth workers have the advantage in that the relationships that they build with their students can be agents of change.
Chapter 4 deals with the ingredients for developing life-transforming relationships that will help young people find their way through Post-Modern life.
CHAPTER 4

INTEGRATION: CONNECTING YOURSELF WITH THE STRATEGY

In his book *Real Teens*, George Barna provides insight gleaned from studying churches which have impacted teenagers in an effective way. The tendency of traditional ministry is to blur the distinction between what they have to do in order to bring teens to church (i.e., marketing), and what they must do in order to make an impact in their lives for Christ (i.e., ministry). It seems many times we surrender our ministry’s values in order to have marketing impact, giving up our responsibility to facilitate life-change in order to succeed at attracting a crowd.¹

The most meaningful spiritual growth these days occurs when Youth Ministries modify what they have to offer in order to meet the specific needs of each teen. Spiritual growth will happen when youth leaders, in cooperation with their youth, create a spiritual development plan. Setting personal spiritual goals and establishing an accountability process they have all agreed to can make all the difference between having a Youth Ministry that fills an auditorium, and one that changes lives.²

²Ibid., 157.
A strategic spiritual plan that will be able to change lives consists of four important elements: acceptance, authenticity, attraction, and application. These elements can be reached through insights, programs and activities.

**Acceptance (Integration)**

Young people today are being bombarded by a message which tells them that value, worthiness, respect and love are given to them only if they provide a service. The most important need in the life of a teenager is the desire for acceptance. The best gift that Youth Ministry can give to young people today is the gift of unconditional love and acceptance. Young people are desperate for attention. They are desperate for anyone to spend time with them.

The foundation for this part of the strategy is based on fundamental human needs, the most important being the need for personal relationships. In order to achieve a healthy relationship it is essential to open up the lines of communication, and to develop effective listening skills. Out of 22 million teens in the U.S., nearly 15 million of them have had some exposure to Christianity through youth groups. More than 7 million unsaved kids attend church on a regular basis. Half of them stated that the presence of a friend was the number one reason they went to church. In these cases, the need for personal relationships was three times more important than any other factor listed.¹

Developing relationships should be the basis of any Youth Ministry. The development of relationships depends on first establishing good communication. Using

¹Ibid., 119-131.
communication as a tool for relationship building is much more than just learning a skill. It is based on a process formed by being genuine, honest, accepting, respectful, supportive, empathic, and on having the ability to understand other people.¹

C. Peter Wagner, in his book *Church Growth, State of the Art*, calls the effect in which faith is spread through a social network the “Bridge of God.” This “bridge” is composed of relatives, friends and caring believers and is constructed through the use of communication. Communication is a two-way street that consists of giving and receiving information.²

Real Communication

John Powell emphasizes the importance of communication when he comments on its role in the life of people: “Harry Stack Sullivan has propounded the theory that all personal growth, all personal damage or regression, as well as all personal healing and growth, comes through relationships with others and will be determined by my relationships with those who love me or refuse to love me, with those whom I love or refuse to love.”³


He also mentioned that communication can be divided into five different levels. These levels must be taken into consideration in order to develop a sense of belonging within a youth group. These five levels consist of the following:

1. Talk: shallow conversation is without meaning and often made up of clichés.
2. Factual conversation: only personal information is shared at this level, no personal input is given.
3. Ideas and opinions: intimacy begins here as we expose our thoughts, feelings, and opinions.
4. Feelings and emotions: in this level, feelings, emotions, frustrations and happiness are described.
5. Deep insight: This level of communication is usually the peak experience and it is where something deeply personal is shared. Mutual sharing of personal ideas and feelings occurs, which is the ultimate goal of communication. Relationships rarely reach this peak experience.1

Effective Listening

Nothing is more important in building a deep and honest relationship with this generation than the development of effective listening skills. This is the best way to enter

1Ibid., 54-62.
the hearts and minds of young people, thus opening the door for an effective ministry. Listening effectively, however, is not an easy task. Barry Gane\(^1\) suggests six rules to practice in order to develop effective listening skills:

1. Maintain good eye contact: focus your full attention on the other person.
2. Sit attentively: for a few minutes, act as if nothing else in the world matters except hearing that person out. Block all other distractions from your mind. Lean forward in your chair toward the speaker if necessary.
3. Act interested in what you are about to hear: raise your eyebrows, nod your head, smile or laugh when it is appropriate.
4. Use appropriate phrases to show agreement, interest and understanding: the other person wants to know that you understand the ideas he or she is presenting. Try to think through what he or she is saying and fit it into your own experiences.
5. Ask well-phrased questions: give encouragement by asking questions that illustrate your interest.
6. Listen a little longer: just when you think you are through listening, listen for thirty seconds longer.

When the person who is sharing asks for feedback, communication becomes an instrument that helps change the level of the relationship even more. Everybody reacts differently according to their own background, experiences, attitudes, needs, values, etc. This could open the door for misunderstanding. This is why feedback is so important.

\(^1\)Gane, 119.
Acceptance Insights

The following are insights that can be helpful to transform acceptance into a real and practical way to do youth ministry.

**Personal Relationships Are Not an Event but a Process**

Most young people decide whether or not they are going to come back to your Youth Program in the first thirty seconds. They do not care about the music, the preacher, or the building; they are looking for a place where they feel accepted. In order to begin the acceptance process, leaders must start recognizing young people’s names. Offering a warm welcome will make newcomers more open to becoming part of the group. Make them feel at home. Be careful with the words and phrases that you use. Avoid trite lines such as: “Long time no see.”

Placing a station of youth-oriented greeters outside the church will give newcomers the opportunity to get in touch quickly and easily with their peers. They will also get acquainted with all the activities and programs that your ministry is offering without having to ask for themselves. An important thing to remember is that they are your guests, not your visitors. You want them to stay and be part of your group, not just to enjoy that particular program and never come back.

Make young people feel special and valued all throughout this new spiritual journey. We are good at leading people until they are baptized. After that, many feel abandoned. Seventy-five percent of the people who join a church say, “I did not feel anyone cared whether I was there or not.”
Apply the “72-hour Rule”

This rule states that if you contact the people who visit your church within the first 72 hours you have a 90 percent chance that they will come back. Organizing a team who can take care of the follow-up work concerning your special guests (i.e., send birthday cards, get-well cards, etc.) will help you develop an effective and personal ministry. Divide the task between the leaders. The youth pastor and/or the youth leaders can send welcome notes to people visiting for the first time. The rest of the leadership can send thank-you-for-coming notes to all other visitors.

It is also important to be open and honest with the kids. Let them know that you are aware of any situation, especially those situations that involve difficult times such as sickness, problems, exams, etc.

Apply the “Three-Minute Rule” Effectively

Ask your youth to meet at least three new people in the three minutes immediately following the service. The first people who leave the church are the guests. Be cool but not too cool. Teens are looking for honesty and for people who are real. Train your youth to be intentional with the words that they use when they approach guests. Do not assume that they know where the classes, bathrooms, church building, or even parking lots are.

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1Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 328.
Show them that you are expecting them to come back. Print a simple map of your church along with a simple ministry schedule. By providing all the information about the Youth Programs and other activities going on at the church, you will increase the possibilities for them to get involved. Include things you can offer to their families, especially if they come from single-parent homes.

**Create Specific Opportunities to Build Relationships**

A special lunch or a time for refreshments after service will provide opportunity to establish interaction and a chance to invite guests to come back. Consider inviting ten young people to your home for a special dinner. Hospitality can help grow a healthier church.

**Make Your Services a Friendly Place Where Teens Can Come as They Are and Develop Relationships**

Young people live with the fear of rejection, especially from their own peers. Let them know that they can invite their friends by making it easy to do so. When they are in an appropriate environment, they are more open to your message. Play contemporary ambient music as they arrive. Ensure that the meeting room looks clean, cool, fresh, and attractive and that the seating positions are inclusive and invite participation (i.e., a circle).
Apply the "Ten-Minute Rule"

Everything must be ready ten minutes before the first person arrives. In order to promote fellowship and relationships you must be prepared. Begin with a fun, well-organized icebreaker that will make everyone participate without exposing him or her to the crowd. The use of dramas, games, discussions, and testimonies will help to break the ice.

The Message Must Be Carefully Chosen and Delivered with the Audience and Their Needs in Mind

Use creativity when you choose the name of the event or message (i.e., "Motel Shamu" when talking about Jonah; "Dances with Wolves" when dealing with opposition and criticism). The introduction of the topic must be interesting and catching. Simplify the message without watering it down. This means that you must make it relevant and comprehensible. Use an understandable version of the Bible. Make sure that everybody has access to the passage being read. Provide Bibles if necessary.

Passing out sermon notes and study guides will help students follow your message and keep them connected with your words. The topics of your messages should be focused on giving directions applicable to practical life issues. If they cannot apply your message within the next twenty-four hours, then the message will have lost its purpose.

Authenticity (Intimacy)

This generation wants to get in touch with God by having a real experience with
Him. They are looking for a connection between the supernatural and their everyday life. They are not very interested in theological issues or intellectual arguments because they base their understanding on personal experiences with God. Through that experience, they feel that they have reached the truth and will be able to apply it to their lives, thus reflecting Christ in every decision.

Young people do not only grow through the study of the Bible, but also through a variety of spiritual experiences with God that create spiritual maturity. The Bible strongly emphasizes growth: from the growth of herbs and trees, to the growth of children throughout Scripture. Youth ministers should strive to understand the biblical principles of growth.

Life in the secular world is no longer about helping people achieve maturity. Through technology, people have become tyrannical and view each other as mere objects. God, however, has given parents, educators, and youth leaders the divine responsibility to ensure proper growth and development in youth. Youth workers have to deal daily with young people in cultural transition. For this special task, Christ is the model of growth, the goal of which is to reach maturity.

Most young people will come to faith and maturity only as they share, grow and serve in positive and supportive peer groups. This is the challenge of Youth Ministry today: to see the whole person going through different developmental stages as a part of the global community.
Developmental Stages

Young people develop physically, emotionally, cognitively and morally through a series of stages. Most of those stages can be clearly recognized during early childhood and through the adolescent years. James Fowler developed a tool to understand which of the six stages students may be involved in at any particular moment of his or her life. Fowler’s stages of faith are:

Stage One: Intuitive. At this stage, students have taken on their parents’ faith. They do not have their own beliefs; they just believe what their parents believe.

Stage Two: Literal. This stage moves students from the beliefs of their parents to those of their extended family and perhaps those of their friends. They believe what they believe because of the influence around them.

Stage Three: Conventional. Still having an un-owned faith system, it is the church’s or denomination’s faith they now take on. Students still have not personalized their faith.

Stage Four: Individual. This is when a student’s faith becomes their own. They have left behind the faith of the people who influence them; however they still hold a simple view of commitment.

Stage Five: Consolidating. In this stage a student’s faith becomes relatively complex and reflective. A consistent commitment to their faith has developed.
Stage Six: Universalizing. This is the most complex stage. Students already have a world vision and a mission for life. Their faith, life, and call from God are beginning to make sense. Their faith impacts every aspect of their lives.¹

The first four stages are critical in an adolescent’s life. A youth’s self-esteem is fundamental to his or her psychological and spiritual growth. The elements that compose self-esteem are belonging, worth, and confidence. Belonging comes from relationships. These relationships must begin in the youth group, where the church family must nurture young people with the purpose of helping them develop a mature faith and a strong relationship with Jesus.

In fact, young people need to be immersed in a place where they can find many opportunities to establish their confidence. This will cause them to have healthy emotional development. This is also a period in their lives where building a close relationship with others becomes difficult. For this reason, Youth Ministry should be a channel to supply opportunities where young people can meet their life partners.

According to psychologist Erik Erikson, a belief system that will guide the developing adolescent in shaping his or her life is critical: “Without some ideological commitment however implicit in a ‘way of life,’ the youth will suffer confusion of their values.” In the journey toward maturity, the adolescence stage is the most favorable for developing a belief system that will last for the rest of their lives. John Westerhoff III

points to this period as one in which the faith and value system of parents is put to the test, and they (the adolescents) begin to own their faith.

Adolescents have been showing alienation patterns for generations as a result of ignoring this important stage of faith development. Faith in this context is not only a bunch of rules or beliefs, but it is also a way of behaving which involves knowing, being, and a willingness to change.¹

Every person learns about faith, not as a theological issue but as an experience, and this experience results from interacting with the faith of others. This experience is essential to the development of faith. After this, they begin to search for their own faith. Barry Gane states, "If Youth Ministry is to be successful for those in these transitional stages, it must provide a sheltered environment for discussion of these issues, and must provide an intergenerational context for faith building."² Successful Youth Ministry must be based on this generation’s spiritual needs.

Spiritual Needs

The following list, taken from the book Discovering the Needs and Interests of Young People, will help us grasp the complexity and the importance of recognizing the need for assessment in order to then meet young people’s needs.³

1. Needs change from year to year and from place to place.

²Gane, 42.
2. Needs may be conflicting.

3. Needs may arise from external or internal pressures.

4. Needs may be impossible to fully meet.

5. Needs may be temporary or permanent.

6. Needs may be imagined or real.

David Stones highlights five major needs.¹

1. Self-esteem: how other people look at you and the importance to look good especially with peers and parents.

2. Self-confidence: the assurance to do things well.


4. Self-worth: a need to know that you can make a difference.

5. God awareness: a need to make God real in your life.²

Youth workers must focus on the relationship between parents and students. The purpose of this is to promote healthy faith development in the midst of the family relationship. Through practical involvement, young people will gain their own faith experience, not just the faith of their parents. This experience will help them face the challenges of the daily Christian life.


²Ibid., 1:9.
Because of the constant change in every aspect of their life (i.e., physical, emotional, and intellectual) it is easy to misunderstand and think that young people are not interested in spiritual things. Perhaps their inconsistent lifestyle can lead youth workers to think that their work is in vain. However, the goal of Youth Ministry is to facilitate the move from unowned faith to a real experience with God, bringing maturity and growth through Jesus Christ.

Authenticity Insights

**Focus Your Ministry on Developing Personal Spiritual Habits Not Just Programs**

Focus on the development of the four basic habits of discipleship: personal time with God's Word, prayer, tithing, and fellowship when preparing activities, programs, topics, and events. Spiritual maturity includes having a heart for worship and praise, building a loving relationship with each other, using your gifts in service to others, and sharing your faith with lost people.

**Young People Have a Better Chance for Spiritual Growth within Small Groups**

Every part of your ministry should be carried out as if dealing with a small group. One of the greatest needs of the adolescent is the need for community or relational connection with others. Therefore a healthy, relevant and life-changing ministry is needed, one that strives to develop a deeper sense of community.¹ Bruce Larson made a very interesting statement about community: “The neighborhood bar is

¹Burns and DeVries, 99-100.
possibly the best counterpart there is for the fellowship Christ wants to give His Church. It is an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive, accepting and inclusive form of fellowship. It is unshakable. The bar flourishes not because most of the people are alcoholics but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterpart for the price of a few beers.¹

A great example of a community-building model for Youth Ministry is one developed by Lyman Coleman which moves people from a simple, non-threatening level to a deep sense of belonging and trust. Coleman used the baseball diamond to describe the process. His model for community includes:

First Base: History Giving. It starts by sharing facts about the person in order to develop intimacy.

Second Base: A Sense of Warmth and Affection. When everyone knows the history of one another they begin to feel accepted.

Third Base: Deeper Sharing. At this level, people feel cared for and safe enough to share deeper issues. It’s at this level of community where feelings, frustrations, joys and pains are shared.

Home Plate: The Depth of Christian Community. At this level people are connected to one another. This environment is characterized by a sense of belonging and the kind of relationships that will have an eternal impact.²

¹Bruce Larson, Dare to Live Now (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 110.
Deal with every aspect of your ministry as though you are dealing with a small group going through this model of community. Every youth who is working or helping in a specific task becomes part of a small group. These groups get together not only to prepare activities but also to grow together. Groups (i.e., the Worship Team) should meet at least once a month to worship together and to plan programs and activities for the church. At least once a quarter, the group should socialize and fellowship outside the church. And finally, this group should get together at least once every six months to be part of a mission project proposed and prepared for them.

**Youth Cells (or Bible Classes) Must Be Intentionally Created and Mission Oriented**

Put together a group responsible for providing creative, up-to-date and relevant materials for Bible studies and for generating an outreach project. Bring the group together every week at church to study the Bible and take part in special projects, which involve both internal and external outreach. Internal outreach refers to the youth who for some reason are not participating or attending, or who are going through a special situation. External outreach refers to working with the community.

**Worship Is the Real Experience of Our Awesome God**

Young people today are hungry for real worship, more so than any other generation before. They are looking for a personal and dynamic encounter with the God of the Scriptures. Worship is a tool used to lead young people to be passionate seekers
and followers of God. It plays a vital role in the life of young people today, guiding them on the road to discipline and maturity.

Worship helps students to grasp a little of God's character and guides their mind to fully understand who He is and what He has done for them. It is also an active response to God which demands involvement and participation in response to His unconditional love. Worship will help build a community of faith, and give the group a sense of belonging. Through this community of faith, worshipers will have the opportunity to understand what it is like to be part of something greater than themselves.

Worship should not be based on performance or entertainment. It is a personal encounter with God, resulting in a transforming power which acts in the personal lives of the participants. In order to transform the way that students see worship, it is necessary to first teach them what worship is. Worship is much more than placing together a few songs at the beginning of a program; it is the search for a personal, meaningful, transformational and powerful experience. This type of worship will help young people understand the character and nature of God.

It is a privilege for a youth worker to become passionate about worship; to lead and become a model, practicing it in a meaningful way. Kids need to see their leaders getting passionate about and involved in worship. The result of this will be that the entire group will get more excited about the presence of God. Allowing students to be part of the planning can give them a sense of ownership and the desire to actively participate in worship. Provide enough time for response and do not be a slave to
timing. Let the Spirit lead the moment. Encourage the students to respond to God creatively.

For Christian churches today, it is critical to let teenagers come into the presence of God just as they are. It is necessary to let young people be aware that they are always welcome to worship God in their own way. It is imperative to introduce them to the awe of who God is. God is worthy to be worshiped. Young people need to understand the enormity of God and learn to fear, respect and honor Him.

This Generation of Youth Enjoys Worship Services More Than Any Other Generation and They Will Bring Their Friends if the Services Are Relevant to Their Lives

Young people will bring their friends to a service if they can be sure they will not be embarrassed by the quality. Improve the pace and flow of the service by minimizing church announcements to include only the ones that apply to everyone. Avoid appeals for help from the pulpit and do not conduct internal church business during the main service. Offer a disclaimer about the offering. Let the participants know that they do not have to give an offering if they do not feel comfortable doing so.

Another important issue for this generation is to remain anonymous during the service. Allow your guests to feel comfortable by offering a general welcome that relaxes everyone. Be careful with your environment. The design of your building will influence your service as well as the response and the attitude of the people sitting there.
The selection of music is crucial. Match your music to the kind of people God wants your church to reach. Prepare a program with the unchurched in mind. There are five important points to consider:

1. Be Positive.
2. Have Fun.
3. Allow for Participation.
4. Be Relevant.
5. Be Applicable.

Understand the real meaning of your programs and activities. To this generation, worship services are much more than just singing and clapping. They are a powerful witness to unbelievers in whom God's presence is felt and His Word is understood. There are three important elements about the programs that should be considered: treat youth with respect and love, relate the worship service to their needs, and share a simple and practical message.

Students will relate to and understand your message if it brings real solutions to their lives. Worship is not only singing or praying; it is a way of life that brings change. Our young people's lives will change when they have been placed under His control, and they will gain His perspective.

Create a simple youth-oriented worship service. The message does not need to be shallow or compromised to be understood. Do not change the theology; instead, change
the environment. The difference between an average service and an outstanding one is the flow. Make the flow IMPACT your service.¹

1. **Inspire Movement:** This is what we want to do with the opening song. A drama or a skit may be useful.

2. **Praise:** The group seeks to learn who God really is.

3. **Adoration:** The group acknowledges what God has done for us. Testimonies are very powerful in this part of the worship service.

4. **Commitment:** Give the group the opportunity to make a decision through silent prayer, a powerful song, or a moment of Bible reading.

5. **Tie it all together:** Spend an encouraging moment together after the service. Leave an impression in the hearts of the youth. Let them know that God is in control.

Remember to apply the ten-minute rule. Everything has to be ready ten minutes before the first youth walks in.

**Attraction (Impact)**

This is a generation with built-in views towards mission. A missionary call is a powerful tool to help them realize their purpose in life. They need to realize that they can really make a difference in this world. This is a generation that needs to believe that God gave them potential; that through their efforts they can lead other young people to discover their values and significance in life.

¹Warren, 256.
If the Youth Ministry succeeds in getting young people involved in mission and services, then two crucial points will be the key to their Christian growth and maturity: living out their faith and applying God’s Word to their lives.

Mahatma Gandhi put it in this way: “In my judgment the Christian faith does not lend itself to much preaching or talking. It is best propagated by living it and applying it. When will you Christians really crown Jesus Christ as Prince of Peace and proclaim Him through your deeds as the champion of the poor and oppressed?”

Youth Ministry’s goal is to help young people be aware of the needs outside their own world. This will happen when they are taught to see people’s needs through God’s eyes. Exposing students to service experiences that have the potential to impact the lives of others will also provide the students with the opportunity to experience change in their own lives.

Attraction Insights

The following are insights that can be helpful to transform attraction in a real and practical way to do youth ministry.

Expose Them to the Needs of the People around Them; Create an Awareness of People’s Needs Worldwide

Invite a missionary to speak to your group. Have the speaker share his or her activities and experiences. This kind of meeting will motivate young people to understand that there are real needs out there, and to desire to participate in filling those

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needs. These meetings should be reinforced by videos and Power Point presentations. Shocking images of spiritual and physical poverty are hard to forget. Small groups and Bible studies should be developed around these service topics. Be relevant by using today’s publications (articles are full of great ideas for small group discussions).

**Educate through Practical Training in Order to Be Effective**

When participants actually get involved in a service project, they become more aware of the ministry’s possibilities. This is called on-site training. One type of on-site training involves visiting a local ministry and participating in their activities or working on one of their projects. Start simple. Students do not need to begin with a two-week mission trip to Africa; they can grow by learning to be sensitive to the needs of others in their own areas.

Another way to get students involved is the planning of a “teacher training course.” A well-known youth group created a life-changing how-to training which consisted of training, information and seminars. They found that sharing testimonies with other members of the group was just as important as the training.

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1 Sauder and Mohler, 47.

2 DOVE Christian Fellowship International has a practical training tool available through House to House Publication (www.dcfi.org) called a Teacher Training Course.
Embracing Missions Gives the Group a Special Challenge to Make a Commitment to the Lord by Being Part of a Life-Changing Experience

An important step toward mission is prayer. Have your group pick a region, a missionary, or a group of people to support by consistently praying for them. Another way to embrace missions is by partnering with an institution that is already serving. This can be done by sending offerings, supplies, materials, or by volunteering time in order to gain experience. Have the students send letters or get involved in a mission-through-mail event that will give them opportunity of being in touch with people who are far away from them.

Plan a short-term mission project. The group will never be the same after this experience. Whether building a school, a church, or simply working on a clean-up project, short-term mission endeavors increase the participants’ commitment to serving others.

Practical tips for planning:1

1. Teach about missions and service regularly. Students need to know how important missions are to the heart of God.

2. Start small. The smaller the group, the greater the spiritual impact will be for each student.

3. Get key staff and church leadership behind you. The more support you have from your local church, the better the mission will be.

4. Decide where you want to go. Use prayer and discussion to determine

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1Sauder and Mohler, 73.
where God wants your group to serve.

5. Develop a vision. Write a draft of your vision and purpose.

6. Get the okay from church leaders. Share your specific plans with your church leadership.

7. Find a contact. Obtain a contact person from the place where you wish to go. Even when you feel everything is ready, whenever possible, make a pre-trip to the ministry site in order to avoid surprises.

8. Set date and prices. Set a date and a cost for the project.

9. Set a strategy. Find out the gifts and talents in your group and put them to work.

10. Have a team meeting. Meet for prayer and strategy.

11. Raise the money. Work with your budget, and learn ways to gather more funds. Prepare for unexpected expenses, especially if the trip takes place in unfamiliar territory. Financial support is one of the ways that the church can get involved.

12. Training. Be sure to do the necessary training. This will be fundamental for the success of the project.

13. Go.

14. Build a tradition. Building a long-term relationship is essential in helping students see that ministry is itself a long-term commitment.

15. Write a report. Take your camera and document your trip. Create excitement
by showing a video when you return and providing opportunity for students to share their experiences.

Another great idea is to create a summer service camp. Some churches organize service camps in a way similar to summer youth camps, but instead of sports and fun activities, campers travel to inner-city areas to serve and get personal.

**Application (Identity)**

Do not tell them what to do, show them how to do it together. Today's youth are hungry for close relationships, and a ministry that causes young people to feel like numbers within an impersonal program will cause them to shut the doors to their hearts.

**Successful Mentoring**

Young people are looking for role models and mentors who will invest in their lives and point them in the right direction. The calling of youth ministers requires them to provide a working model of what the Christian life looks like in the real world. Discipleship is not a program; it is a real relationship with Jesus.¹

The Millennial Generation is immersed in a world of questions, tensions, and awkwardness. The young people are trying to discover and establish their own identities. If we add to this the aggressive influence of the media as it promotes unparalleled freedom, easy access to drugs, a social attitude filled with unhealthy messages about sex and self-image and the poor input parents are providing, we find a generation without a model to follow.

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¹Burns and DeVries, 56.
Because of this we find that it is imperative to develop a successful mentoring program that can provide results. According to the book *Successful Youth Mentoring* there are three basic commitments that a leader must make to be a mentor:¹

1. **Commitment to the person.** This goes against the idea of the “bigger is better” syndrome. Even if you can impact a lot of people in one shot, when it’s time to share personal experiences, applying your own life struggles to the lives of those who are listening to you will create a deeper and more meaningful approach.

2. **Commitment to the process.** Make a commitment which recognizes that to get from point A to point D requires a few steps in between.

3. **Commitment to the purpose.** Internalize the fact that God has given each young person a unique gift to be used as an instrument in God’s hands.

As a youth leader, the most important investment in the lives of this young generation will be that the lessons learned here on Earth will be carried on to eternity. There will be a legacy left in the heart of the youth.

According to Tim Elmore in his book *The Greatest Mentors in the Bible*, there are seven gifts that a mentor gives the young people whom they are working with. These are:²

- **Accountability:** Your student will expect your confidentiality.

- **Affirmation:** Speak words of encouragement, acceptance, and support.


Assessment: Evaluate and give new assessments to enable them to gain a perspective from an outside viewpoint.

Advice: Help them to work through the consequences of their decisions.

Admonition: Help them to avoid mistakes and pains. Give them the right word to keep them on a healthy path.

Assets: Provide tools and resources.

Application: Provide a safe place where they can apply what they have learned.

According to George Barna in his book, Real Teens, this generation and the way they embrace leadership will determine the future of the church. A godly mentor will help to develop leadership abilities by providing tools for their students. These tools can be categorized as follows:

1. Handles: Present the truth in such a way that they can internalize it and make it practical in their personal lives.

2. Road Maps: A necessary course needs to be chosen in order to reach a specific destination. Talk about the consequences of taking each road and help students to be wise in the decisions they make.

3. Laboratories: Provide a safe place, such as the church, to experiment with ideas and concepts learned so that they can be used again.

4. Roots: Roots provide stability and security in times of trouble. Mentors will provide these roots by communicating in an honest, open, consistent, and loving way. Roots will also help students make a healthy connection with their past, helping them to understand themselves better and find their own identity.
5. Wings: Wings provide the ability to see beyond the horizon, and to imagine a successful future.

Spiritual Gift Orientation

An effective and relevant Youth Ministry should strive to provide opportunities and responsibilities that can help young people develop their gifts and talents to serve God. Jim Burns describes four qualities that gift-developing opportunities should have:

1. They are meaningful. Give students roles and responsibilities that are truly meaningful to the ministry as a whole. They deserve roles that have meaning and purpose.

2. They are appropriate. Provide a role that expresses and develops individual spiritual gifts. Preaching, encouragement, leadership, administration and mercy are just a few examples of gifts that need to be developed.

3. They are timely. Communicate a sense of urgency to their roles. Point out that their responsibilities are crucial to ensuring a smooth running of the ministry. Assign roles and responsibilities that students can look at and say, “We really need to pull through with this. This is important to our ministry.”

4. They are challenging. The responsibilities that we give our students should not be so hard that they give up, yet not so easy that they can do it without relying on God’s strength and power.¹

¹Burns and DeVries, 59.
Plan Intentional Learning

Because today's society is so entertainment-oriented, youth workers have the tendency to mistake a successful Youth Ministry with one that keeps kids entertained. The result is the thought that the more spectacular the program and the bigger the show, the more successful the ministry. However, the impact of Youth Ministry to this generation is not based on how many kids are coming to the program but how the program is molding their lives and characters to be lifelong followers of Jesus.

In addition to a program-oriented approach, another ministry-killer is the natural but frustrating tendency of “counting” how many kids came to the last service. This practice implies that the larger the group, the more successful the ministry. No youth worker can develop a large integral ministry unless it develops smaller units from the whole.¹

The best way to prepare kids for leadership roles is to engage them in the leadership process. Learning “on the job” is the best way to learn. Students will be more receptive if they have a chance to participate in developing and applying the different activities and programs. They need to be assigned roles in order to have a sense of being.

It may be tempting to assign important roles to adults, since adults make a youth worker's job easier, and they are dependable. However, young people need to have serious responsibilities in order to develop their leadership skills. Once they become spectators, they will sit back and expect to be served. This will cause them to grow

¹Ibid., 136-137.
apathetic.\(^1\) Every Christian is born to be a servant. It is the call to selflessness and service. Young people do not need to hear that they are the church of tomorrow. Instead, tell them that their gifts, abilities and services are needed today.

**Application Insights**

The following are insights that can be helpful to transform application in a real and practical way to do youth ministry.

**Teach the Students the Importance of Every Christian Having a Part in the Kingdom of God through Their Spiritual Gifts**

Every believer has the responsibility to share the gospel, including young people. Each ministry is the expression of our SHAPE:\(^2\)

1. **Spiritual gifts:** The Bible teaches that God gives each believer certain spiritual gifts to be used in ministry (1 Cor 12).

2. **Heart:** The Bible uses the term “heart” to represent the center of motivation, desires, interest, and inclinations.

3. **Abilities:** Human beings are born with natural talents and abilities

4. **Personality:** God uses all types of personalities in His Kingdom.

5. **Experiences:** God never wastes an experience. He uses events to help His people draw closer to Him.

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\(^1\)Ibid., 137.

\(^2\)Warren, 365-392.
Take the Risk: Peers Leading Peers
Can Be the Most Powerful Models

Even though this type of leadership approach is risky, it is worth trying, as it often causes rapid spiritual growth among young leaders-in-training. Be creative in distributing the different responsibilities, taking into consideration the students' gifts and strengths, giving them responsibilities according to their God-given talents. Another step that will make a difference in their leadership experience is the support that they will receive. Be there for them, because most of the time they will need your prayers, a word of encouragement, and a few helpful suggestions.

Expect the Best; Accept the Worst

Leadership training can be messy, but if you allow the students to make mistakes and to learn from them, they will gain spiritual strength. You will bring out the best in young people by challenging them in a controlled environment, and giving them credit for their hard work. Teaching leadership skills at an early age will help to avoid distressing situations in the future.

Follow Jesus' Method of Training

When Jesus was training His disciples, He followed a simple method of training, which is explained in the following steps:1

1. I do it, and you watch. Declare: Jesus taught what it was and how it worked. This was the how-to, the training for the tasks His disciples had to fulfill.

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1Burns and DeVries, 111.
2. I do it, and you do it. Demonstrate: This is practical modeling of the Kingdom of God. For example, Jesus modeled healing the sick. Have teens join you for prayer; have them sit with you when you are doing ministry; ask them for their input and ideas.

3. I do it, and you assist. Direct: Jesus told His disciples to go and get it done. Delegating is an important part of the training process. Start with simple things, and then increase to greater responsibilities.

4. You do it, and I do something else. Debrief: Take time to correct. This will show your interest in them personally, giving them the opportunity to understand why (if) they have failed.¹

Let Them Go and Get It Done by Themselves

After the training comes empowerment. Step aside and give students the opportunity to lead for themselves. Here are few easy steps to follow in order to fulfill the process of delegating:

1. Pray: it really works.
2. Recruit: ask them for help.
3. Encourage: tell them they can do it.
4. Train: equip them to do it.
5. Release: let them go and do it.

¹Sauder and Mohler, 47.
Provide the Necessary Support to Ensure the Success of Their Ministry

Provide students with the materials they will need. This is especially important to young people because they do not have access to their own materials. Communication is the best form of support. Always leave a line open for them to get in touch with you just in case any help is needed or if a special situation requires your participation.

Provide them with promotional support. Keep the Youth Ministry visible in the church. (One good way to do this is to prepare an “Annual Review Program” where you can show and recognize the ministry and effort of the youth leaders.)

Provide moral support for them. Express your appreciation in person and in public.

Establish Standards and Guidelines

Establish a clear description for every ministry position. This will help make your expectations known ahead of time, so everyone is clear as to where the ministry is headed. Make sure that your ministry is compatible with the church’s beliefs, values, and philosophies. Allow people to quit leadership positions without feeling guilty.

Renew Your Ministry’s Vision Periodically

Help young people realize that there is no greater reason to live than to build the Kingdom of God. By following the principles found in Neh 6, you will be able to renew your ministry’s vision every twenty-six days. This review will give you the
opportunity to evaluate and make changes to improve their ministry and their leadership.

Ask for the Highest Level of Commitment; Run Your Ministry by Using Commitment, Not Committees

This is an age in which youths must be taught to make wise commitments. Young people are willing to commit to something that gives significance to their lives. This means that we cannot focus our ministry on the needs of the church, rather, on the vision of the church. This way our ministries will give young people a broad perspective of the Kingdom of God and the commitments necessary to establish it.

Build on commitment rather than toward commitment. It is important to start with whatever commitment they are able to give regardless of how weak it may seem. Celebrate each time they achieve a new level of commitment in order to move on to the next level.

Conclusion

Many people believe that evangelism today is at a crossroads. The old ways of doing things in missions no longer apply; therefore we are faced with a new paradigm. The need for a new strategy to reach the Millennial Generation is great. We must begin by establishing a new and honest way of doing ministry. Young people are not easily fooled, and if we cannot be real, reaching them will be an impossible mission. We have to earn their trust and their openness.
The second step we need to take is to state the truth in a bold new way. Youth ministers who desire to reach this generation have to learn to balance being relevant and not compromising the truth of the Bible. Another step in this process is perseverance. If the world is facing difficult times, teenagers, who are trying to grow up in this extremely complicated society, see it as ten times harder. They are searching for significance and seeking to discern meaning, purpose and truth in their lives. Their standards and values may not be like ours; but by understanding, listening, and persevering we will see positive results to our efforts.

Finally, Jesus, through His ministry, gave us the best example on how to be relevant, need-oriented, and effective in expanding the Kingdom of God. These principles are timeless.
CHAPTER 5

IMPACT: STRUCTURE, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION
OF THE STRATEGY

As we have demonstrated in previous chapters, a new strategy is necessary to reach and minister effectively to the MILLennial Generation. The project established to achieve this goal is called Warehouse on Worship Café, or WoW Café, a Christian Pub open for ministry every Friday night. Its objective is to provide a safe place where young people can find their purpose in life, develop their spiritual gifts and be ready to serve others. This ministry will work in direct connection with other ministries of the church, providing the participants with support, council and a place where they can grow both spiritually and as leaders.

The initial portion of this chapter will consist of a brief history of the Lighthouse Church, giving a background of its structure and ministry. The second part will present a strategic plan to reach and minister to the Millennial Generation through WoW Café. An effective Youth Ministry will be developed and then applied at the Lighthouse Church. Finally, the plan will be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses.

A Brief History of the Church

The Lighthouse Church in Puerto Rico was established in 1997. It began as a special ministry with the purpose of effectively reaching Generation X. For a couple of
years, the church was on target and highly effective.¹ The church started with about twenty pioneers and grew to a total of eighty members in a period of two years, having more than 150 visitors every Saturday service.²

After the second year, the church reached a plateau in their membership, even though the number of visitors was always high. The church was still attractive to visitors due to the high quality of the music, the contemporary approach of the services, and the innovative way of executing the programs. The church also provided a place where visitors could become part of the crowd. The ingredients for growth were there but various setbacks hindered the church from reaching its full potential.

Internal strife between members as well as other problems produced division within the church and caused key leaders and a few members to leave the ministry. Another important issue was that the leadership was focused on programs rather than on the needs of the people. Program-oriented ministry had caused the church to lose the focus of its mission, which had been to reach others – especially the younger generation.

The Lighthouse Church also suffered from inconsistent leadership. Three pastors led the church in just four years; and during two six-month periods, the church ran without a pastor at all. Without a doubt the church was programming relevant activities but was not being effective in ministry. Visitor attendance remained strong, but the church was not retaining the people it needed in order for its ministry to grow.³

¹Pedro Lopez, pastor of the church, interview by author, March 2003, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
²Brenda Baez, church’s secretary, interview by author, October 2002, San Juan, Puerto Rico
³Zuleika Estevez and Dehuel Vazquez, members of the church, interview by author, February 2003, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
The church leadership faced a new crossroads: how to reach a totally different generation of youth than the one they had previously targeted. Though the times had changed around them, the leadership had remained unchanged and had lost touch with the needs of the coming generation.

Developing a Strategic Plan

In chapter 4, insights as well helpful and practical ideas were presented as important elements needed in a strategy to reach the Millennial Generation. Those insights and ideas are now to be implemented in a strategy that can meet the needs of the Millennial Generation. The focus of this section is to develop a strategic plan based on those insights in order to help the church fulfill its mission. This plan will be applied to the WoW Café project.

Developing a Strategic Vision

WoW Café Mission Statement

The Mission Statement reads: *To help the youth of this generation reach spiritual maturity and be ready to become instruments of God, able to take on life’s responsibilities.*

WoW Café Purpose

The Purpose Statement reads: “*To connect college students to God, through a worship experience to other youngsters, developing a sense of responsibility to the world, by being instruments in the hands of God.*”
WoW Café Core Values

1. Our biblical beliefs are not for sale. The church must be culturally relevant without compromising the purity of its doctrines and beliefs.

2. God is the only one who uplifts the church and its ministries by the power of His Spirit and our commitment to do good.

3. An environment of love, acceptance and forgiveness will prevail in all our ministries.

4. College students are of great importance to God; therefore they are of great importance to us.

5. We will protect the spiritual, physical and emotional growth of our families with great jealousy.

6. We will intentionally focus on supplying the needs of youngsters beyond protocols.

7. We sincerely believe that prayer makes a marked difference in the execution of objectives.

8. We believe that God challenges our youngsters to live spiritual lives of growth and maturity.

WoW Café Dreams

It is our dream that the WoW Ministry will reach 250 youngsters, who will make a commitment to keep a pact that will involve:

1. Having time to worship God on a personal basis.

2. Supplying tithes and offerings on a weekly basis.
3. Participating in their cell of action weekly.

It is our dream that the WoW Ministry will develop ten groups of youngsters that will provide Bible studies, support, courage and confidence, while allowing the spiritual growth of each member.

It is our dream that the WoW Ministry becomes a Community Help Center, mainly focused on children, offering programs that will help families grow strong together, providing them with:

1. Spiritual growth—Bible studies
2. Emotional support—counseling
3. Health programs—seminars and food
4. Family resources—programs for families

It is our dream that the WoW Ministry transforms into a group of youngsters who will accept the invitation to be used by God and serve as His instruments to touch the world in a loving, healing and assuring way in the wake of Christ’s second coming.

**WoW Café Goals**

1. To create an environment of love, acceptance and forgiveness.
2. To intentionally encourage the process of spiritual maturity based on biblical principles.
3. To enable members to become instruments of God, developing their spiritual talents.
4. To learn to share the joy that comes from a Christian lifestyle.
5. To glorify the name of God, offering ourselves as living sacrifices of gratitude.

**WoW Café Strategy**

1. To provide an inspiring worship service to draw youth into the presence of God.

2. To create a practical and useful connection between WoW Café and the already established ministries of the church.

3. To promote everlasting friendships and Christian accountability through Christian fellowship.

4. To empower the leadership structure to fully develop their potential and their youth leadership skills.

5. To train the leadership not only to create programs, but to develop other leaders, preparing them to take on the responsibilities of future churches.

6. To promote a loving-relationship environment, developing a compassionate heart and a love for the lost youth.

7. To encourage passionate spirituality in order to develop a genuine life of faith and a relationship with Jesus.

**WoW Café Implemented Strategy**

1. **Because we believe in the “Great Commission”**
   We will fulfill our mission by becoming a contagious ministry.

2. **Because we believe in the “Great Commandment”**
   We will develop the heart of a servant.
3. Because we believe in a loving relationship ministry
We will become a personal, friendly, and safe place
  by acting in love toward other members,
  by creating an environment of acceptance and forgiveness,
  by being committed to building strong families that can work together.

4. Because we believe in a need-oriented evangelism
We will become a friends-and-family-oriented ministry
  by developing a love for lost people,
  by warmly welcoming those who visit,
  by inviting the unchurched and our family and friends to attend.

5. Because we believe in a passionate spirituality
We will trust in God to build His church using us as His instruments
  by praying for its growth,
  by having regular personal time with God,
  by attending regularly,
  by giving regularly.

6. Because we believe in an empowered leadership
We will keep our structure simple, functional, and practical
  by becoming a partnership-oriented leadership,
  by mentoring and producing leaders,
  by being equipped to serve.

7. Because we believe in a gift-oriented ministry
We will minister as an expression of our SHAPE
  by discovering our spiritual gifts and talents,
  by developing a servant’s heart.

8. Because we believe in an inspiring worship service
We will worship based on supplying the spiritual needs of the people
  by preaching with purpose and encouragement,
  by spiritual and healing music.

9. Because we believe in holistic small groups
We will provide life-changing experiences
  by fellowshiping with believers in small groups,
  by developing different types of small groups.

10. Because 80 percent of all people accept Jesus before their eighteenth birthdate
We will challenge youth to be mature and equipped for ministry
  by providing leadership opportunities,
by developing a personal mentoring plan,  
by developing a purposeful calendar event.

Developing a Purposeful Program

The Teams

Wow Café ministry is divided into eight different ministry teams. Sample ministry descriptions for some of them are as follows:

The Topic Team

The Topic Team is in charge of suggesting a topic to be discussed at the next Wow Café meeting.

This team is responsible for bringing in all information possible so that the facilitators for that night can have material to bring to the audience. These materials consist of current news about specific topics as well as illustrations that will support that topic.

The Promotion Team

This team is in charge of promoting programs, events, special community services, mission trips, concerts and all the activities that the Café may do.

The tools for promoting may consist of flyers sent to a database of recent guests, mass e-mailing, street banners for special events, church bulletin inserts, as well as Christian radio announcements for events such as concerts.

The Administration Team

The Administration Team is responsible for the maintenance of the space used.
This team is in charge of setting-up, tearing-down and getting the place ready for the next meeting. They are also responsible for bringing the refreshments.

**The Audio-Visual Team**

This team is in charge of running the sound for the worship team and the band, as well as running the Power Point projector and any videos or photos.

**The Facilitators Team**

The Facilitators Team is in charge of the dynamic discussions in the meeting. Their responsibility is to make the topic relevant and accessible for everyone. It is imperative for them to help everyone participate.

**Preparation**

Planning programs with purpose takes a lot of time and preparation. For this reason it is recommended to plan events a year in advance. This includes all activities and weekly meetings. Planning ahead will give the youth workers and volunteers the opportunity to be creative in their programs.

**Personal and Spiritual Preparation**

Strategic planning begins with the personal and spiritual preparation of the staff. This requires them to develop the right attitude in order to be instruments in God’s hands. Every Tuesday night the WoW Staff, which consists of about 35 young people, has a meeting with the purpose of having an experience with God through a small group Bible study and worship time.
The most important part of the programming preparation is the personal preparation, so that every young person is aware and ready to be used by God, not relying on their talents or skills but on the power of God. The format of these spiritual meetings includes three radical and non-negotiable elements. They are simple, spiritual and spontaneous.

The format is simple because it does not take a lot of preparation. The preparation time should be spent on the search for a specific Bible story or passage that will meet the need of the group, two or three songs accompanied by a guitar, a moment of sharing and the Bible study. It is spiritual because the whole study is based on the Bible and its practical applications on the daily challenges of each person participating. And it is spontaneous because the only result expected is that the group will feel comfortable to speak out about what is going on in their spiritual lives and how Jesus has impacted them, and is provided with practical solutions to their troubles.

Another important part of this spiritual preparation is prayer for the next meeting, asking God to bring young people with specific needs to the next Café so that they can be ministered to. The staff does not only pray for God to bring those youths, but also for the youth group to be ready and alert, giving visitors the assurance that they are in a safe place where they can speak out about their struggles in life and they will be understood.

Programming Planning

On Thursday nights, the Staff Team meets to discuss and get ready for the coming Friday Night. This meeting is held in order to evaluate, brainstorm and prepare for the next event. The meeting begins by assessing the previous program. All members can
provide input in order to improve the program and avoid making the same mistakes. This is also a time when new ideas are put on the table.

After the evaluation, the Topic Team brings in a couple of suggested topics for discussion at the next program. If the Topic Team brings a series of topics, enough for the next five or six Fridays, then that particular meeting should be used to discuss and prepare the topic for the upcoming Friday only.

The preparation of the topic should be based on a group discussion, making sure it is relevant to the target group. Ideas must be shared with the Facilitators Team, a suitable ice breaker chosen, and an appropriate biblical application prepared. Each program must end with a spiritual and biblical application of the topic. At the close of the program it must be emphasized that the Bible is the only alternative, giving the participants tools so they can experience this fact for themselves.

Ambiance

The program’s success depends on the environment. Most Youth Ministry events take place in sterile church rooms with uncomfortable chairs lined up in rows. This gives the meeting a classroom feel. The WoW Café, as the name implies, takes place in a café environment, with small tables and chairs set up all around. The lights are appropriate to this surrounding and are adjusted according to the situation. For example, if there is a special singer ministering, the place turns dark with a spot-light on the singer.

Refreshments should be free of charge for the audience and placed in a corner of the room. The decoration of the room should also fit this café environment. The audience should be placed in the middle of the room and two stools should be provided for the
facilitators since they are setting the pace of the program. The WoW Café band should be playing ambient music from start to finish, not just during worship time.

The room should be decorated in an attractive and relevant way in order to appeal to the Millennial Generation. A big sign hanging from the roof with “WoW” written on it and decorative illuminations on the walls are great attention getters. The Café should be totally high-tech, with all multimedia projected on a big screen, or in the case of WoW, through four TV’s hanging from the roof.

Play Christian music videos during fellowship. Computers with Internet access should also be available as an information tool. The opening page should have all kinds of positive information about the ministry’s programs, topics, concerts, etc. A large piece of paper hanging on one of the walls allows young people to “speak out,” writing their opinions about specific topics.

Case Example

On February 14th, WoW Café presented a program about love, and the “speak out” section was set as follows: “Love for me is” and the students finished the sentence. Another wall, the “wall of events,” displayed photos of prior events as a way to promote activities.

Any special guest who appears at WoW in any capacity is invited to leave their mark at the place. This is often done by painting their handprints on the wall and listing their name underneath.
The most important part of the youth meeting is the interaction that takes place before and after the program, fellowship time. After the program is finished, the Café remains open so that young people can “hang out” with their friends.

Music

Music is one of the most important forms of expression that the Millennial Generation has. It is a powerful media for communicating their emotions and developing their mood. For this reason music is very important at WoW Café and to the WoW way of life.

The live band is one of the attractive parts of the program. The band plays ambient music for fifteen minutes before the program begins and again at worship time.

Worship songs are chosen with the goal of leading young people to personal reflection and commitment. The music is more of an evangelistic tool than a form of entertainment. Worship-centered reflection has a mission mind-set. The purpose of the worship team and the band is to lead people to have genuine moments of worship in which they can actively participate by singing, praying, reflecting, asking God for miracles, feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit, and becoming a witness to their friends and other young people around them.

Sections

An important truth for Youth Ministry is that it is always better to have young people asking for more rather than begging for less. The attention span of the average
A teenager is approximately ten minutes. This means that we need to keep the pace moving, change regularly and keep the meetings short and powerful.

At the Café, three sections are non-negotiable: the icebreaker or interaction time at the beginning, the worship time and the reflection time. Other than those sections, variation is the key to every program. The audience should not be able to predict what the next section of the program will be. This is an important way to keep their attention and to generate excitement about what is coming next.

Working with the quick-paced MTV generation is challenging. Sessions need to be short and to the point, moving seamlessly from one section to the next. The difference between a good service or program and a poor one is the way it flows. The topic must be presented in the most creative way possible in order for it to remain interesting, placing the audience’s need for personal investigation first. Being creative is essential if the audience is to go home musing over the topic presented.

There are different ways of adding creative sections to your programs:

1. Use “dramas” as a creative tool to present the topic.

2. Short clips of actual movies will help the audience to understand the mindset of society concerning a specific issue.

3. Use talking-pictures. This is where a topic of discussion is established by the audience’s interpretation of a specific picture. This picture could be actual news clipping from the media or just a powerful image that motivates the audience to talk.

4. Use Yes or No Groups. This is where the audience is divided into two groups,
each one defending a particular point of view, either yes or no, about a topic. The students must present facts and convincing arguments in order to win the "battle."

5. Use Testimonies. There is no more powerful element in the life of the Millennial Generation than real people talking about their real-life experiences.

6. Secular songs provide a great pool of topics for discussion. These songs are not only well known to the Millennial Generation but also reflect the ways of thinking in their culture.

Closing

Each program must finish with a spiritual and biblical application of the topics. The purpose of this ten-minute chat with the audience is to place before them the fact that they have a lot of alternatives in life. They can turn to many sources in order to get answers to the issues of their daily lives. WoW Café invites them to experience what the Bible says about these alternatives.

During the time in which the topic is being presented everybody's comments are welcomed without fear of being judged or embarrassed. After fifteen to twenty minutes of discussion and interaction, the facilitators will turn the floor over to a young person who will close the topic with a Bible reading.

The purpose of this closing is to let the audience understand that we respect everyone's opinion but that we feel the responsibility to share with them something that has really worked for us at WoW. This is the moment in which the biblical truth is presented as an alternative but emphasizing that for us, it is no longer an alternative, it is the only answer.
Developing a Servant Group

Following up with Your Friends

The greeting is one of the most important and impacting parts of WoW.

The Greeting Team is ready to greet young people in a way that they feel welcome; respecting their individuality and understanding their emotions and fears associated with being in an unknown place. The goal of this team is to get to know young people by their names as soon as possible and to make them feel a part of the group. A friendship card is provided to everybody walking into the Café. It is a simple guest information card to be filled out by the audience. This information is used for follow-up contact with guests during the next week and on special occasions such as birthdays, etc.

During the week, the Follow-Up Team contacts guests through a post-card, e-mail, or phone call letting them know how wonderful it was to have them as a part of WoW, and inviting them to the next meeting.

Case Example

The postcard is designed in a way that encourages kids to come back and present that card so they can claim a WoW prize such as a shirt or other gift. The data from the friendship cards are downloaded into a database. The Fellowship Team contacts guests at least twice a month, reminding them how important they are to us, that we are waiting to share time with them again, and that if they need anything they can count on us.
Because Millennial’s are a “hands-on” generation, WoW Café provides many opportunities to get involved in community service. Every Friday night WoW presents to the kids a challenge for the next day. This challenge is based on a community project in which everybody can participate.

Case Example

WoW challenged the group to bring twenty baskets full of kids’ stuff and baby items to take to the Children’s Hospital for Kids with cancer. The next Saturday afternoon over ninety young people showed up with baskets, guitars, face paint, stories to read, refreshments and a great attitude. After they spent the whole afternoon in the hospital with these kids, they came back to the Café and shared their experiences with everyone.

Every Saturday afternoon, WoW Café promotes a community service event, giving young people the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others.

Case Example

Christmas is a great opportunity for family time and to help the needy. WoW Café prepared a program for one of what the government calls “Special Communities”; special communities are needy communities, the poorest in Puerto Rico. During the week before Christmas over thirty-five young people were involved in this special community project. A nightly Christmas Vacation Bible School was organized. Crafts, games, stories, a lot of
fun and an incredible time of worship and praise were developed for the kids of the community.

The program concluded with refreshments for the kids, and when the parents came to pick them up, a special moment of reflection was presented to them. This project concluded with a Christmas dinner for the entire community. Every kid in the community received a toy.

Mission Trips

WoW Café also organized and promoted a Mission Trip.

Case Example

From November 20 through 29 a mission trip was organized to Argentina, South America. Over thirty-five young people were directly involved in the project. Not everyone was able to go, but that did not stop them from getting involved in the preparation for the trip – more than 100 additional students helped contribute indirectly to it is success. The whole WoW Café participated by holding car washes, concerts, and other activities in order to raise money for the trip. The objective of the mission trip was to do community service with street kids in an Indian community near the capital of the country.

During the days in Argentina, the group was divided up. While one group was doing a Vacation Bible School in a needy elementary school, other groups visited children’s hospitals bringing medical supplies and a children’s program. Another group provided supplies and food to a school cafeteria which gave free food to kids who came
from low-income families. At night the students worked at the local mission, holding a series of spiritual revivals which included live worship, a warm welcome, prayer and a message.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes the findings of the research study, the second section states the conclusions that were derived from the findings, and the third section discusses the appropriate applications of the study, and the final section presents a suggested strategy for applying these principles.

Summary

The purpose of this research project has been to identify the needs of the Millennial Generation, and to apply a spiritual formation process to the Youth Ministry of the local church in order to meet those needs. The process focused on external issues such as the materials being used in order to facilitate renewed interest in investigating God's involvement with His primary target, the heart of the leader.

We found that God shapes a leader's heart through six significant areas. These include culture, call, community, communion, conflict, and the commonplace. These six areas were then explored in the lives of three of the greatest leaders in the Bible: Moses, David, and Jesus.

As we studied this process and explored the six different areas as well as the spiritual discipline of the individual leader, we found that God uses the same approach
with today's leaders as He did with the three biblical leaders. The principles used in the lives of these great leaders were:

1. Developing God's heart in the leader
2. Exhibiting godliness when working with others
3. Restoring balance in the lives of His leaders
4. Bringing the leader to a personal and intimate relationship with Him in order to empower them to do His work
5. Following Jesus' incarnational model of ministry and the patterns He used with His disciples
6. Developing a relational ministry, emphasizing the concept of servant-leadership, placing the focus on mission

Leaders with the right answers and the right methods can still fall short of providing the kind of leadership that expands the Kingdom of God. They must truly experience God in their personal lives and understand how God works in the personal lives of others. Youth Ministry is now more than ever a work of the heart dealing with spiritual issues that affect young people. This work is so important because it must focus on nothing less than the Kingdom of God, composed of creatures made in the image of God.

To create a successful lifestyle evangelism strategy, it is necessary to understand some characteristics that define the Millennial Generation. This generation faces issues that no other generation has faced before. They include family problems, a high-tech society, an uncontrolled sexual revolution, school violence, the influence of the media, plus the concerns any other sector of society faces. The challenge to reach the
Millennial Generation seems impossible since the realities of our culture seem too big to overcome, however, God is looking for youth leaders who want to make a difference. Developing a ministry that will make a life-lasting change in the Millennial Generation is urgent. Young people are longing to be heard and understood, but will only open their hearts to those who love them and reflect the presence of God. An effective Youth Ministry will enter the everyday lives of these young people.

Ministering to the Millennial Generation requires more than an attractive program and entertaining activities. It is being able to open young people’s hearts so that God may mold them. This generation is looking for God, not another form of entertainment. The tendency of traditional ministries is to blur the distinction between what they have to do in order to bring teens to church (i.e., marketing), and what they must do in order to make an impact in their lives for Christ (i.e., ministry).

The strategy of this spiritual plan consists of fulfilling four important needs. They are: acceptance, authenticity, attraction and application, which are fulfilled through insights, programs and activities. This plan was tested with the creation of a project called Warehouse on Worship Café (WoW Café), a Christian Pub with the purpose of reaching the Millennial Generation every Friday night. Its objective was to provide a safe place where young people can find a purpose to their lives and develop their spiritual gifts.

Conclusions

A spiritual formation process was developed throughout the research in this project. This process will be the foundation of a Youth Ministry in which the local church
will use their own strategy after considering the specific needs of their audience. The process must begin with the personal lives of the youth workers.

This personal spiritual formation process is initiated by God in the lives of His leaders, shaping their hearts and using them as His instrument to touch the lives of young people. The characteristics identified by expert youth workers and sociologists regarding the needs of the Millennial Generation and their hunger for spirituality and significance have exposed the need for change in the way we execute Youth Ministry.

Churches must focus on the Millennial Generation's desire to make a difference in the world, their deep interest in spiritual things and their loud cry to survive the spiritual mess in the world today. In order for this process to be put to work it is necessary to implement a set of biblical principles that will help in the spiritual formation process. These principles are: intimacy with God, identifying the generation, integrating the audience, and impacting the community and the church.

**Application**

The reason for developing the WoW Café project was to provide a model for the local church to create its own place where the spiritual formation process could be accomplished. It was proposed that the local church create their own version of this program following the biblical principles of the spiritual formation process.

The model proposed provides a series of insights applied to a particular Youth Ministry that the local church can adapt and implement, creating an effective strategy to reach and minister to the Millennial Generation. The advantage of the proposed model is that it is not limited by the size of the church or by the environment surrounding it,
because the Youth Ministry insights presented in the program are adaptable and can be implemented in any scenario.

Practical steps, however, are necessary in order to create an appropriate scenario in which the strategy may be developed, restructured and changed in a friendly environment.

**Spiritual Process, a Suggested Strategy for the Millennial Generation**

This section will present a series of sequential steps necessary to implement the strategy in all kinds of Youth Ministries. It can be adjusted to fit the needs of the local churches.

Step 1: God's power in the life of the leader.

Youth Ministries are often seen as babysitting programs done while the church is conducting serious business. This mistaken point of view has affected the importance of the Youth Ministry and has guided the leaders to look into activities that will give their youth group a “holy” moment of entertainment.

Leaders spend most of their time looking for the latest and coolest idea, longing to be creative all the time and training their groups to put on super productions or programs. The result is visible in the lives of the youth workers. They become frustrated and exhausted because their real expectations were not fulfilled. They suffer identity crisis and begin to feel inappropriate as leaders having a deep sense of failure and doubting their call. They compare their ministries with other apparently successful ones, trying to copy and compete with these programs.
Finally, they begin to concentrate on the numbers their ministries are producing, holding “show” oriented programs and fulfilling youth activities calendars without paying attention to the eternal results in the lives of the youths. The real strategy begins by placing our total dependence on God’s Word and His power. Youth workers must be a godly people before they are able to do God’s work. God does not need a program to reach young people. What He really needs is a Youth Ministry that transforms lives. Nobody can resist coming to a youth group where the lives of the people are being changed dramatically. No amount of good programming can compete with the power of God working in the lives of people.

The youth worker’s first assignment is to be able to humbly recognize that God is the only one who can change the hearts of this generation. He does this by working with the heart of the leader, turning him or her into an agent of change. In this program, youth workers are not just babysitters; they are truly in charge of the program. They become more than social activities coordinators. They become an instrument in God’s hand to reach, touch and minister with power and effectiveness.

When youth leaders realize that nothing they have to offer is good enough to fulfill the enormous task ahead of them, they will become dependent on God and His power, eliminating all job frustrations. Youth workers will then look for every opportunity to develop a deep and personal relationship with God. They will be free to focus their ministry goals not on pleasing everyone or producing a big program, but on waiting to see how God uses their weaknesses as powerful instruments to change lives.
The purpose of this Youth Ministry is more to become a godly person than to do God’s work. The Millennial Generation is looking for real people who can talk about real experiences with God.

Step 2: Identifying the characteristics and the needs of the Millennial Generation.

This generation’s identity goes beyond what we can see on the outside. The Bible teaches us that our hope for growth should be placed in being like Christ and understanding who we are as children of God. Life has been so tough for the last generation, that what we often see on the outside is a facade designed to cover up the secret disappointments they feel about their identities and unfulfilled needs.

The Millennial Generation is dealing with a false equation of life. Society and the media have mistakenly led them to believe that good looks plus popularity equals a whole person. Another false belief is that a star performance plus great accomplishments equals a happy person. Because of this, youths tend to buy into the negative side of popularity. They believe that if a person has nothing, they have no hope for happiness.

One reason young people have difficulties with self-worth, spiritual growth and maturity is because their true identity in Christ has been distorted. They believe that what they do makes them what they are. Youth ministers today should work towards God’s eternal plan, which is to bring young people back to Himself and restore their relationship with Him.

God wants to restore the relationship He had with Adam at the Garden of Eden that was lost because of sin. That restored relationship is found only in Christ and should be the basis of our identity.
Significance: As Adam was in the beginning, the Millennial Generation is extremely significant to God. God gave Adam a divine purpose, to be responsible and rule over all the other creatures God had created.

Safety and Security: In the garden, Adam enjoyed safety and security. He was completely cared for and lacked nothing. We have the riches of His Kingdom at our disposal and His promise to supply all our needs.

Belonging: Adam and Eve experienced a sense of belonging in that perfect garden. Adam enjoyed an intimate, one-on-one relationship with God. Then God introduced him to another level of belonging by creating Eve. The need for belonging is fulfilled by having an intimate relationship with God, which is what we have in Christ and also relationships with each other.

After the Fall, the physical process of death was set in motion and even though they lived on for several hundred years they instantly died spiritually. They lost their relationship with God, were thrown out of the garden and banished from God’s presence. The result of their sin was that they lost the true understanding of God, not just information about God, but the ability to love God and experience a deep friendship and intimacy with Him.

This broken relationship caused mankind to become fearful and anxious. Today’s generation hides their inner selves in fear that others will see who they really are and reject them. The sense of acceptance was trashed and replaced by rejection, therefore we have a need to belong. Here is where peer pressure has its greatest hold on young people. They are willing to do whatever it takes just to be accepted.
After the Fall, our innocence was replaced by guilt and shame, so we need to have our self-worth restored. Self-worth is not an issue of talents, intelligence or beauty; it is an identity issue. Our sense of personal worth comes from our relationship with God and knowing who we are as children of God.

Our sense of authority was replaced by weakness and helplessness, so we have a need for strength and self-control. We may think we are in charge, but we are not created to rule ourselves. Sinful behavior is a false attempt at meeting our basic needs.

The more we understand the Millennial Generation’s identity in Christ, the more we will be able to minister to them and help them to grow in maturity. The more mature they become, the easier it will be for them to choose what is right.

Identifying with the characteristics and needs of young people, and having a total spiritual approach in the way we supply those needs should be the next step in putting this strategy in motion.

Step 3: Setting the strategy in motion.

The approach needed to reach and minister to the Millennial Generation must take a turn in a new direction if we want them to join the church. We must agree with other effective Youth Ministries and base this strategy on a few important key perspectives.

These include the following:

1. Enter into Youth Ministry with an understanding of the world of the teenager. It is necessary to make an effort to connect with their world, without expecting teens to abandon their connections with it totally. Youth Ministry today is risky and youth workers have to be willing to pay the price and understand the cultural context of the young person without watering down biblical principles.
2. **Enter into Youth Ministry with a worldview perspective.** Biblical principles must be relevant to the Millennial Generation so that they can apply them to their daily lives. For this reason once they have been exposed to the truth in a relevant and practical way, it will make a life-long change in their lives.

3. **Enter into Youth Ministry with a set theology.** Youth workers today must have a clear vision of what God wants from them in their ministry. The most successful Youth Ministries are those which concentrate not on entertaining the audience but on carefully praying and working on their ministry’s vision and theology, taking into consideration human development, young people’s culture and the influence that biblical principles have on them.

4. **Enter into Youth Ministry wanting to make a difference.** Successful youth leaders are not the ones who tell teens what to do; instead they become their friends and help them through tough and challenging moments.

5. **Enter into Youth Ministry with a modeling attitude.** Youth leaders who want to impact the lives of teens must be consistent and practice what they teach. It does not matter how good a preacher you are or how many cool and extreme activities you can provide, you must walk the walk and talk the talk.

6. **Enter into Youth Ministry with creativity.** The most effective way to teach teens is to incorporate them in the learning process. Youth Ministry today must emphasize participation, interaction, hands-on activities and a personal experience with God. This kind of learning is the tool that God will use to transform and change their lives forever.
This is what it is all about. Youth workers are instruments used by God to reach and minister to a whole new generation.
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EXPERIENCE:

- 2003- to present  Southern California Conference Glendale, CA  
  **Senior Pastor**  
  Maranata-Norwalk SDA Church – Temple City SDA Church  

- 2002- 2003  Misión Puertorriqueña del Norte  Puerto Rico  
  **Church Planter, Co-Founder and Senior Pastor**  
  Youth Evangelism Project. Planting a new Church.  

- 2001 – 2002  Southern California Conference Glendale, CA  
  **Senior Pastor**  
  District Burbank Spanish and Lancaster Spanish Churches  

- 2000 - 2001  Southern California Conference Glendale, CA  
  **Spanish Youth Department Coordinator**  
  Planning Leadership Seminars, Running Youth and Young Adult  
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  Organizing Youth Evangelism Crusades  

- 1995 - 2001  Southern California Conference Glendale, CA  
  **Church Planter, Founder & Senior Pastor**  
  Lighthouse Bilingual Youth and Young Adult Church – the First  
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- 1992 - 1995  Southern California Conference Glendale, CA  
  **Youth Pastor**  
  San Fernando Spanish Church  
  Bible Instructor, Youth Activity Coordinator, Preaching, Counseling,  
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- 1990 - 1992  Los Angeles County  Los Angeles, CA  
  **Therapy Counseling**  
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- 1990 - 1992  Southern California Conference Glendale, CA  
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SPECIAL EXPERIENCE:

Keynote Speaker for Youth Events
- *Youth Congress:* Union Peruana, Inter FJA Veracruz, FJA Oaxaca, Mexico, Florida, Oregon, Texas, Tennessee, Southern California Conference, Southeastern California Conference, Central California Conference, and Northern California Conference
- *Youth Evangelism Crusades:* Puerto Rico, Monterey and Oaxaca, Mexico, and Mega, Los Angeles, Lima, Peru.
- *Youth Week of Prayer:* Phoenix, Arizona; Tampa, Florida; San Diego, California, and Southern California Churches

Church Planting Speaker for NAD
- *Planting Church Conference Presenter:* Seeds 1999 and 2001
  "How to Reach the Generation X"
  "How to Reach the Millennial Generation"
  1996, Ministerial Hispanic Council

Kids' Mentoring Program
- *Founder of a Sport Mentoring Program* working with communities and families.
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2001 - to present Andrews University Berrien Springs, MI
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