

IGNITING HOPE AMONG GEN Z

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Abstract

Generation Z is the future of the Church. We need to begin equipping followers of Jesus to welcome them home. This article explores the seven common characteristics of Generation Z. It will also dive into research done among current youth workers from around the country and then provide some strategies on how to engage Generation Z based on that research. About 90 million young Americans fit into the age bracket of Generation Z.¹ As the Church, we need to understand their worldview. As they emerge into adulthood, it will be vital to the health of the Church overall to equip our churches to reach them. We need to adapt ministry strategies to serve them well.

THE SPARK

I remember it like it was yesterday. It was a beautiful spring day. We had crystal clear blue skies with sporadic, puffy white clouds scattered in the sea of blue. It was one of those days where it was cool in the shade but warm in the sun. I sat outside a Starbucks with my dad drinking a cup of coffee. I remember thinking that this should feel amazing, but the reality was that my spirit felt less like that of the beautiful California weather and more like the bitter, dark roast coffee I was drinking. I found myself

¹ Statista. "Resident Population in the United States in 2017, by Generation," accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/797321/us-population-by-generation/>.

frustrated that I wasn't seeing God move in the way I wanted or expected Him to move. I felt completely discouraged and found very little reason to hope. My dad had made the six-hour drive from Southern California for an "emergency" father-son counseling session.

As we sat outside that Silicon Valley Starbucks, I unloaded everything I had been feeling. I had been serving at a small church in San Jose, California. I was starving to see teenagers far from God fall in love with Him. It felt like there wasn't anything that was working. I wanted answers. It was this season in my life that sparked a journey to explore what it was that actually made teenagers want to discover more about Christ and His Church. What was it that gave Generation Z a desire to take a step toward discovering Jesus? I now call it a period of holy discontentment. It was a time, even in the midst of my own brokenness and desire to be "successful," that God would use to impact the trajectory of my ministry and my life.

It was that time that led to this research project as one step along the road in learning about Gen Z. This article reports on a recent research study among youth pastors from around the country and draws from the author's observations from over ten years of ministry experience serving among the generation we call Generation Z. I am blessed to still be serving as a youth pastor so I can take ideas learned at a theoretical/conceptual level and see them play out on the front lines.

WHO IS GENERATION Z?

Who are those classified as Generation Z and what are the common characteristics that define them? While there has been extensive research on millennials, there has been very little done on the emerging generation following them. Generation Z has also been referred to as "iGen." The term iGen alludes to the fact that they are the first generation that has grown up entirely in the age of the smartphone. Barna defines Generation Z as anyone born between 1999 and 2015.² There are some radical differences between Generation Z and millennials, and seven characteristics of Generation Z will be described here. While this is not an exhaustive list, these are characteristics that I see daily as I

² See the Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018).

work with students.

1. Post-Christian Worldview

Generation Z has been considered to be the first truly post-Christian American generation. Having a post-Christian worldview means they think they know what Christianity has to offer and have refused it.³

A larger percentage of this generation would identify themselves as atheist than any other generation. Many teens use negative experiences they had or heard about as reasons for not following the beliefs of the Church.⁴

Unfortunately, much of Generation Z is gaining their understanding of what Christianity is from politicians and celebrity figures.

2. Radically Inclusive

This emerging generation is being characterized by being extremely inclusive. They value unity, and they often classify disagreement with a person's thoughts or opinions as intolerance. This perception leads to less confrontation and more dialogue. It is very easy for them to see others as being too judgmental. David Kinnaman writes, "More than half the young Christians between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine (53 percent) say they believe that the label *judgmental* accurately fits present-day Christianity."⁵

The postmodern thought process of "you believe what you believe and I'll believe what I want to believe," is deeply rooted in the culture of Generation Z. This attitude can present a special challenge to the seemingly exclusive claims of Christianity.⁶

The claims of exclusivity in the Christian faith can be a major problem for much of Generation Z. Young people who are solid and stable in their

3 James Emery White, *Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

4 Kelly Frazier, "Gen Z is the First Post-Christian Generation," World Religion News, February 6, 2018, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.worldreligionnews.com/religion-news/z-gen-atheist-generation>.

5 David Kinnaman, *Un-Christian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 183.

6 See George Barna and David Kinnaman, ed. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Austin, TX: Barna Group 2014), 101.

faith struggle with this tension. They struggle with the fear of offending close friends if they voice their views of Jesus too loudly. It has become one of the biggest hurdles to evangelism within this generation.

3. A Hunger to Change the World

Deeply rooted within the heart and mind of a Gen Zer is a desire to change the world. The idea that each person has something unique to offer the world is commonplace. They have something inside them that says the world as we know it is less than what it could be. Generation Z is quick to jump in on social issues, and it is easy to move them into action if it means that it would really make a difference. I have heard stories of youth pastors actually plugging unchurched teens into outreach and service as a way to introduce them to the “Why,” that “Why” being Jesus and His heart to see all that is broken made whole. For many, this is a shift from the idea that we can only plug “mature” believers into outreach.

4. Strong Multitaskers

Generation Z is made up of strong multitaskers. They have the ability to do more than one thing at a time. It is fairly uncommon to see a young person only doing one thing at a time. For previous generations, multitasking has been an inhibitor, but Generation Z can do it well. This can be seen through the ability to listen and be truly invested in a conversation while also working on homework or scrolling through social media platforms. As a result of growing up in the age of the smartphone, Generation Z brains have been trained to handle multiple things at the same time. Their proficiency in multitasking is a cause for excitement in working with them.

5. Open to Guidance

Generation Z is open to guidance or coaching. They are open to having someone walk with them through learning experiences. Surprisingly, they are open to input on how to do different things. However, it all hinges

on an established trust between the two people. After trust is established they are open to guidance. This presents a huge opportunity for growth of intergenerational discipleship with members of Generation Z. Previous generations have been very closed off to the idea of being coached.

6. Diverse

Generation Z is the most ethnically diverse American generation of all time. According to a study by Pew Research, 48 percent of them are members of racial or ethnic minorities.⁷ Only 39 percent of millennials and 30 percent of Gen Xers are members of racial or ethnic minorities. The globalization of the world has given greater access to worldviews from all over the globe. This makes Generation Z more open to foreign concepts and thoughts. The diversity of this age group and their openness to diversity of thought makes it easier for them to drop into a new culture and connect with people.

7. Hooked to their Screens

Generation Zers are hooked to their screens. This characteristic is not only about the smartphone, but it also includes computers for school, TVs when they get home, and the time they spend gaming. Fifty-seven percent of teens are reported to be using a screen of some kind for four hours a day.⁸ Twenty-six percent of that 57 percent admit to spending more than eight hours per day on their screens. These numbers are staggering. The amount of time they are spending using some form of technology is incredible.

THE RESEARCH

It is important to understand the trends of how Generation Z is

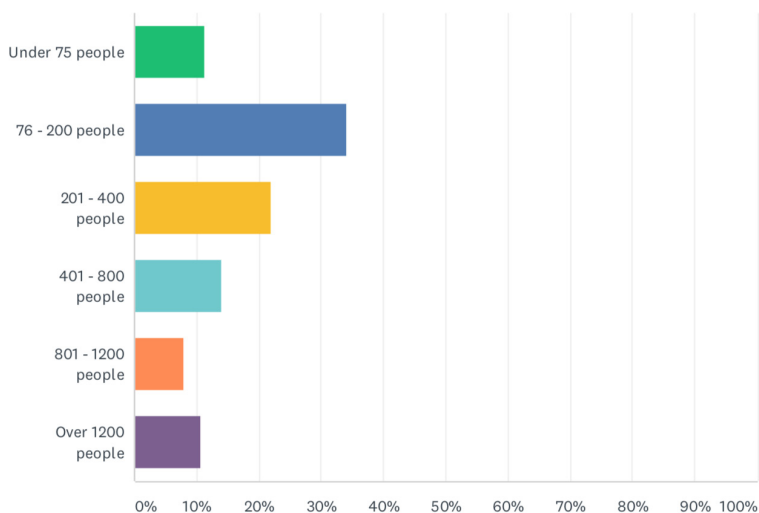
7 Pew Research Center, "Early Benchmarks Show 'Post-Millennials' on Track to Be the Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet," accessed March 25, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/1/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/>.

8 Vicki Rideout, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens," Common Sense Media, 2015, accessed April 4, 2020, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/census_researchreport.pdf.

FIGURE 1.

Q1 What is the average weekly attendance at your church?

Answered: 150 Skipped: 0



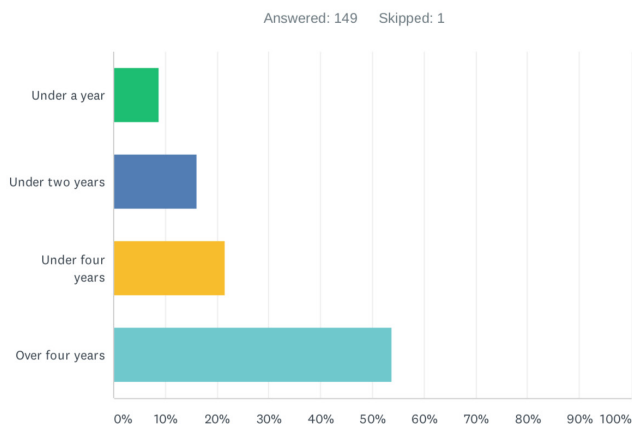
connecting with the Church. What is it that is bringing them in? What is it that is making them stick? What are the things they are hungry for? God has handcrafted each one of us. Each one of us is created to be in community and relationship with Him. What is it that this generation is longing for that will draw them towards Him?

To get the answers to these questions, we surveyed youth pastors from around the country to see what trends could be detected. When completed, 150 current youth pastors had been questioned. The youth workers that were surveyed came from churches of various sizes, including some megachurches. Thirty-four percent of the youth pastors work at churches with an average weekly attendance of 76-200 people. About 11 percent came from churches with an average Sunday attendance of more than 1200. (See figure 1.) The youth pastors surveyed also came from a variety of denominations.

In order to connect with as many youth workers as possible, a convenience sample was used to distribute surveys to ministry colleagues in churches from around the country. In some cases, denominational leaders shared

FIGURE 2.

Q4 How long have you been serving in student ministry at your church?



the survey with their teams. It is important to point out that if members of Generation Z were to be surveyed directly, some of the answers might vary slightly, but this would not be easily done since most members of Gen Z are under 18.

One point that helped to establish credibility among those questioned is that over 75 percent of the youth workers surveyed had been in their current position for over two years and about 54 percent from that group had been in their current role for more than four years. (See figure 2.) Youth pastors often get a bad reputation for not staying in their ministry roles for very long. These percentages actually come pretty close to matching the average tenures of youth pastors being reported by the Barna Group in “The State of Youth Ministry.” The Barna Group reported that 61 percent of youth pastors have been in their current roles for more than four years.⁹

The majority of youth pastors surveyed in this study are seasoned veterans that know their contexts well. We are starting to see a shift in the average tenure of youth pastors in their church positions. This view is confirmed by a survey being done by Download Youth Ministry.¹⁰

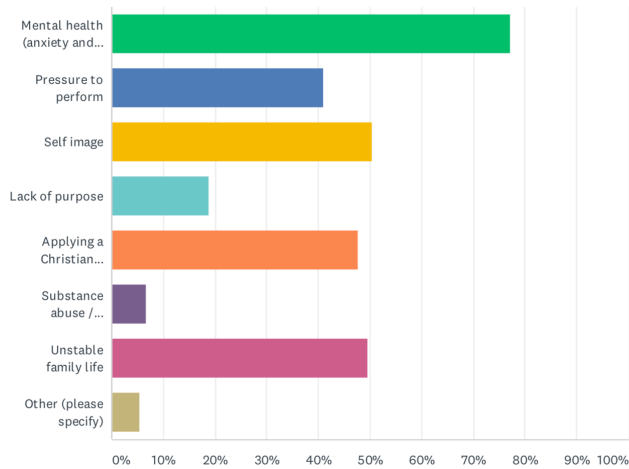
⁹ Barna Group. *The State of Youth Ministry: How Churches Reach Today's Teens — and What Parents Think About It* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016), 56.

¹⁰ Josh Griffin, “POLL: Average Youth Ministry Tenure,” DYM Blog, March 16, 2015, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://blog.downloadyouthministry.com/poll-average-youth-ministry-tenure/>.

FIGURE 3.

Q12 Choose the top three life challenges facing your students? (Please choose only three)

Answered: 149 Skipped: 1



This increase in tenure is an encouraging sign. These youth workers are on the front lines with Generation Z. They are seeing and working with the next generation. I believe they can help us learn and study these emerging people.

PROBLEMS FACING GEN Z

Every generation has issues that seem to plague their generation. Just like previous generations, the emerging generation has its own unique challenges. Many of the challenges have to do with the context in which Gen Zers are being reared. In order to effectively minister to and serve these young people, it is helpful to understand the issues they are facing.

Youth workers in this study chose the top three life challenges their students are facing. To that question, the most commonly identified problem was mental health (anxiety and depression). Seventy-seven percent of the youth workers selected that as a top issue. Both self-image and an unhealthy family life were selected 50 percent of the time, applying a Christian worldview was selected 47 percent of the time, and pressure to perform was right behind that number at 41 percent. These numbers,

especially concerning the issue of anxiety and depression, are being seen across the landscape of Generation Z. (See Figure 3.)

Stress levels being reported among Generation Z are also climbing. According to a recent study published by the American Psychology Association, 91 percent of teens between the ages of 18 and 21 said that they experienced at least one physical symptom related to stress within the last month.¹¹ There have been a few times in my youth group when I have asked students to raise their hands if they feel stressed out. Every time I have done this, almost every hand shot up. Teenagers do not know how to handle and manage their stress levels. Another major issue facing Generation Z is loneliness. Recent studies are showing that 79 percent of Generation Z is struggling with loneliness.¹² They are feeling isolated, and outside of their family unit, they don't have people who really know them. They possess a hunger and a desire to be in community, and that need for community is not being fulfilled. Many psychologists are speculating that this trend is partially due to their screen usage. Online relationships through social media platforms have been substituted for real, true relationships.

One final terrifying trend is the rise in suicide attempts among Generation Z in comparison to previous generations. In 2017 there were 6,200 suicide deaths among adolescents, ages 15-24.¹³ The 2017 Youth Behavioral Surveillance System reported that 17 percent of high school students considered suicide while 7 percent actually attempted suicide.¹⁴

The reality is that when someone is dealing with anxiety or depression, their stress levels are through the roof. If they feel alone and isolated, it

11 American Psychological Association, "Stress in America: Generation Z," October 2018, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2018/stress-gen-z-pdf>.

12 Cigna, "Loneliness and the Workplace," accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combating-loneliness/cigna-2020-loneliness-factsheet.pdf>.

13 American Health Rankings Analysis of CDC WONDER Online Database, "Teen Suicide," accessed 2020, <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/teen-suicide>.

14 Laura Kann, Tim McManus William A. Harris, et. al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance-United States 2017," "Surveillance Summaries, June 15, 2018, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/ss/ss6708a1.htm>.

can often lead to hopelessness. This hopelessness can cause a person to feel that there is only one way to ease the pain. This presents the Church with a generation that is hurting and needs what the Church offers. Members of Generation Z need the Church to step into some of these areas and point them toward the One who brings hope to the hopeless, community to the lonely, peace to the stressed, and calmness in the face of anxiety.

HURDLES TO REACHING GEN Z

The need among members of Generation Z is great. Christians have been commissioned as followers of Jesus to make Him known. Christians should also know that they are in the midst of a battle and that the enemy will do all he can to keep a generation from coming to our Lord. We asked youth workers what they are hearing and seeing from students on some key issues.

We asked, “What is the greatest obstacle for students plugging into weekly programming?” Sixty-one percent of the youth workers surveyed said sports and clubs. The next response at 11 percent was simply a lack of interest, and the third most common answer at 10 percent was unsupportive parents. As a student pastor, I see this time and time again. To teens, sports and clubs are not optional while church is optional.

That led us to the following question: “What are the most common reasons students stop coming to your student ministry?” The responses to this did not come as a surprise: 46 percent said students say they have too much school work, 42 percent said they had to get a job, and 40 percent said they had to stop coming because of sports. It was surprising that in this study, only 6 percent said that a common reason students stop coming was based on disagreement on social issues that were being taught.

That led to the question concerning how members of Gen Z view the Church before they engage either on Sunday mornings or through student ministry. Thirty-seven percent of the youth pastors said that their students’ view of the church was that it was simply irrelevant, and 31 percent said that students viewed it as something for their parents but not for them. These results show that we are dealing with a post-Christian generation. They believe they know what the Church has to offer, and they aren’t interested.

REASON FOR HOPE

All of this sounds pretty daunting, like a looming summit that refuses to be taken. There have been moments in ministry where I have felt like this is an impossible task, moments where I am tempted to throw in the towel and give up. How do we introduce to Jesus people who have been so influenced by popular culture, who are so entrenched in what the world views Christianity to be, and who have gained most of their opinions of who Jesus is from current politicians and celebrity personalities? What is it that would entice them to give their lives to Jesus in complete surrender?

We have *GREAT* reason to hope!

We serve the same God that concealed a baby in the reeds of the Nile, the same baby that would eventually stand tall against Pharaoh to lead a nation toward a great promise. We serve the same God that used the youngest, overlooked son to slay a giant who left people quaking in their boots. We serve the same God who came and lived a perfect life, defeated death, and started a redemptive movement for broken people. We need to remember that our God will prevail! I have found comfort in the reality that as bad as I want the next generation to fall in love with our Lord, He wants it even more.

We are seeing signs of change. God is moving in ways that give us reason to hope. In a recent article by Greg Stier entitled, “3 Signs the Next Great Awakening Has Begun,” he gives us some reason to hope. The three reasons follow: “1. Prayer is being prioritized.” . . . “2. Believers are being mobilized.” . . . “3. Unity is being maximized.” These three signs point us to the fact that God is moving and is doing something new. Stier closes his article by saying, “A movement of God has begun. Let’s not screw it up.”¹⁵

Sam Kim gives us even more reason to hope in a recent article published by *Christianity Today*. In his article, “Why the Current Loneliness Epidemic Is a Historical Gospel Opportunity,” he explains that the loneliness that Generation Z is experiencing presents an opportunity for the Church.¹⁶

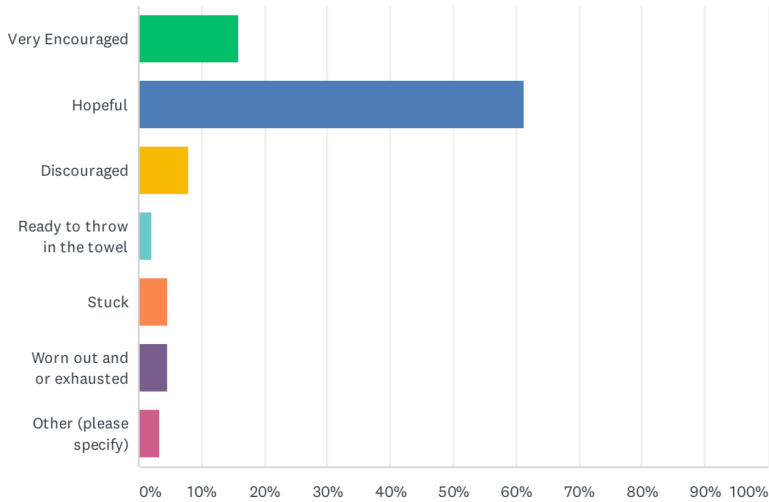
¹⁵ Greg Stier, “3 Signs the Next Great Awakening Has Begun,” *The Christian Post*, accessed February 23, 2020, <http://www.christianpost.com/voices/3-signs-the-next-great-awakening-has-begun-235270/>.

¹⁶ Sam Kim, “Why the Current Loneliness Epidemic Is a Historical Gospel Opportunity,”

FIGURE 4.

Q18 Personally, how are you feeling about your ministry?

Answered: 150 Skipped: 0



In fact, many of the issues they are facing present us with a massive opportunity. Young people are struggling with anxiety, depression, and loneliness. This puts the Church in a good position. We serve a God that promises true community and true peace. Let me ask this question, “What area of life can the Gospel of Jesus not reach?” The Good News promises something to every area of life that feels broken. The fact that there is a generation that is hurting and searching for answers presents a huge opportunity and should give reason to hope.

A few years ago, I was personally having a hard time finding hope. I felt like nothing was working. I found myself asking the following questions: “What am I doing?” “Why am I wasting my time?” “God, where are you?” Concerning this conversation, it is important for us to know how other youth pastors are doing.

The perceived difficulty of youth ministry points us to new questions. How are youth pastors feeling in regard to their ministries? Are they feeling hopeful, worn out, or unsupported? Are they ready to give up and start

Christianity Today Blog Forum: The Exchange with Ed Stetzer, February 20, 2020, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/february/why-current-loneliness-epidemic-is-historical-gospel-opport.html>.

new careers? In our research, we came across something quite remarkable. Youth pastors were overwhelmingly feeling hopeful about their ministry: 77.33 percent of them said that they were feeling either hopeful or very encouraged. Only 19.34 percent said they were feeling discouraged, ready to throw in the towel, stuck, or worn out and exhausted. The fact that so many people on the front lines are feeling generally positive and encouraged should give us some encouragement as well. (See figure 4.)

God is on the move, and I believe that God is positioning His Church to be a place that welcomes this generation home. The Good News of Jesus offers hope to the hopeless. The Church offers community and belonging to the lonely and isolated. So as followers of Jesus, let's pursue this lost generation with a Holy swagger, walking in the confidence that we know the One who can provide everything that they are longing for, everything that they were created for.

HOW TO REACH GEN Z

Through the history of world missions, we have seen missionaries give up everything and actively pursue the people that God led them to. We have seen the examples of William Carey going to India, Hudson Taylor to China, and Jim Elliot to Ecuador. We have seen the example of A. B. Simpson, who would stand and preach at the docks in New York City as people arrived in the New World. We even saw Paul's desire to get to Rome. Time and time again Christian leaders have placed themselves in places and positions to reach people with the Good News of Jesus. What does that look like here and now as we try to reach Generation Z here in America?

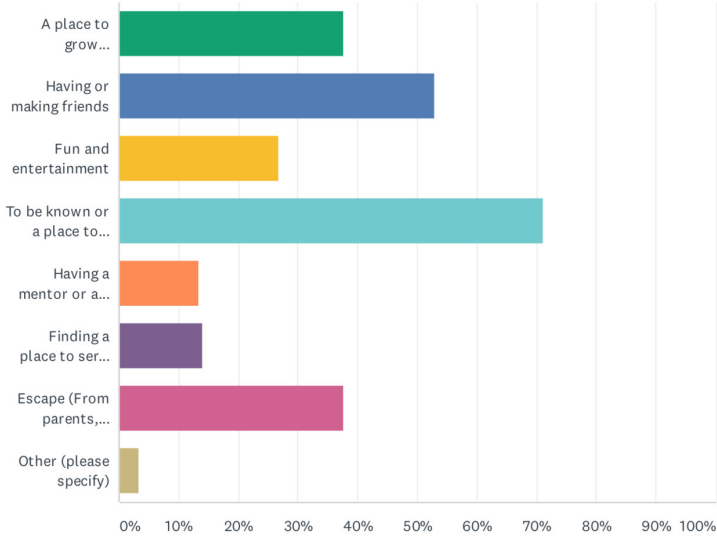
We must discover what it is that could capture the heart and mind of Generation Z. How could these barriers be removed so that Gen Zers would reframe their current understanding of Jesus and the Church? In this research study, key questions were addressed to these youth workers. What are they seeing, and what do they believe is working? Uncovering these trends allows us to reshape and adapt our church ministries to serve them.

Starting at the beginning, student pastors were asked, "What are students looking for in a student ministry?" We know that the majority

FIGURE 5.

Q11 What are students looking for most in a student ministry?

Answered: 149 Skipped: 1



of young people are not actively looking for a student ministry, but for those who are coming through the front door, what is it that initially brings them in? We asked them to choose the top three reasons. Seventy-one percent of the respondents said that students are looking for a place to be known or belong, and 53 percent of them said that students are looking for a place to make friends. (See figure 5.) This reality is backed up by recent research from Barna that says the most effective way to get students coming in the door is an invitation from a friend.¹⁷ It speaks volumes and confirms that students are longing and hungry for relationship and connection. God has designed us to be in community with one another. This is something that Generation Z is feeling. George Hunter in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* says that “evangelism is now about ‘helping people to belong so that they can believe.’”¹⁸

Generation Z would likely agree with his sentiment. As students come

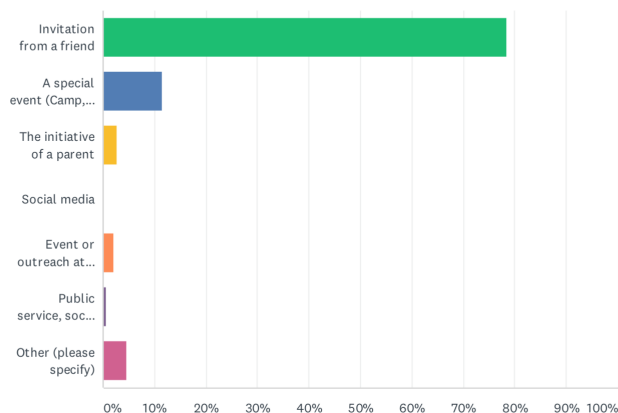
17 James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017).

18 George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, Tenth Revised Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 45.

FIGURE 6.

Q14 What is the primary mechanism that brings unchurched students to your ministry?

Answered: 149 Skipped: 1



through the doors we need to be equipped to welcome them home and plug them into deep, caring relationships with both peers and leaders. One other encouraging finding is that 38 percent of the youth workers actually said that incoming students are pursuing a place to grow spiritually.

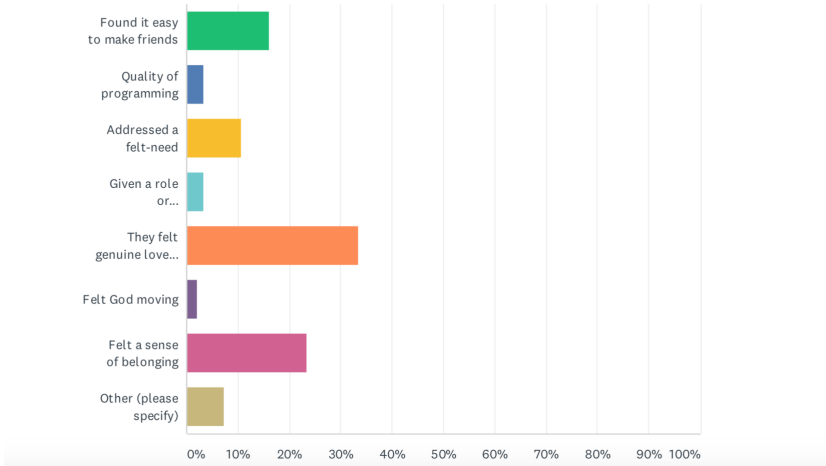
Youth workers were then asked, “What is the primary mechanism that brings students into your ministry?” The results were extremely lopsided. Seventy-nine percent of the youth pastors said that the number one mechanism was an invitation from a friend. (See figure 6.) It was not outreach effort, it was not camp, and it was not a crazy off-the-wall event. It was a simple invitation from a friend. This creates somewhat of a catch-22. If the number one reason an unchurched student will come is a simple invitation, but the vast majority of Generation Z has a fear of being viewed as intolerant or a fear of offending someone, and it can be very difficult to get students to actually invite their friends. As church leaders, we can leverage the crazy off-the-wall events and the camps as a way to get students excited enough about what is going on that it makes it easier for them to extend the invitation.

Let’s say you have some students that came in the front door. Either they were invited by a friend, or they were simply hungry for spiritual growth. We wanted to know what it was that made students have a desire to go deeper into the student ministry. What was it that really made new

FIGURE 7.

Q15 What is the main reason most students decide to go deeper in your ministry after their initial visit?

Answered: 149 Skipped: 1



students stick? Thirty-three percent said that students would go deeper if they felt genuine love and care; 23 percent said that if students felt a sense of belonging, they would take a step deeper; and 16 percent would take the next step if they found it easy to make friends. This means that 72 percent said that the reason for students taking steps toward the Church and sticking there has to do with relationship and community. They want to be known. (See figure 7.)

All three of these questions seem to run along the same thread. Generation Z is starving for real connection. This hunger presents a huge opportunity for the Church. We need to be actively pursuing young people and inviting them into relationships. We need to do the hard work of finding ways to empower the Church to find creative ways to establish long-lasting friendships and discipleship among members of Generation Z. If they trust us and respect us, then we will have access to them.¹⁹ They are open to discipleship once they know and can trust Christians. The Church needs to establish platforms where laypeople can use their God-given gifts and unique abilities with the emerging generation. This led to one final research question. Youth workers were asked, “What two

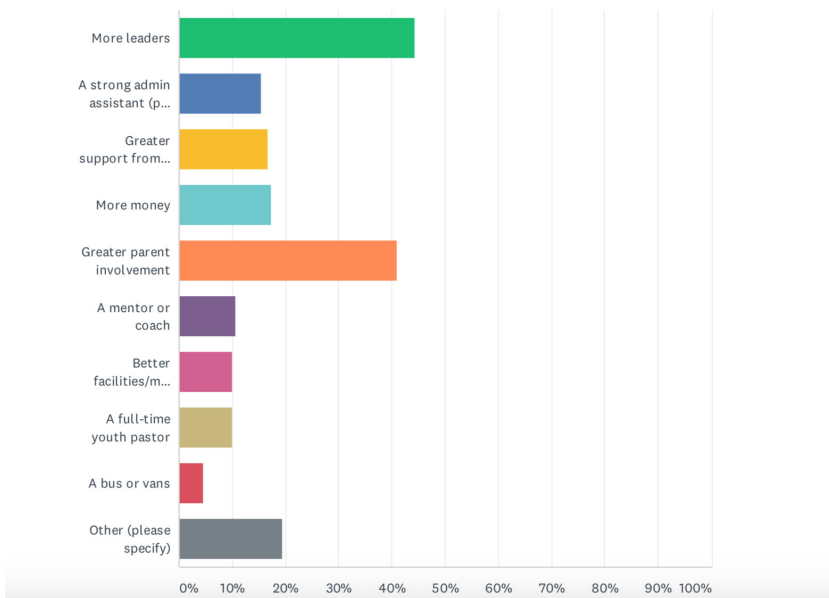
¹⁹ Kinnaman, 192.

things would you need to take your ministry to the next level?” The most common answer was more leaders. (See Figure 8.) Youth workers know that students are longing for relationships. They know students are open to coaching. They know that the main influences that cause a student to take a step deeper are community and belonging. The biggest need of youth workers is to have more Jesus-lovers to walk with and do life with these students.

FIGURE 8.

Q19 What two things would you need to take your ministry to the next level? (Please only choose two)

Answered: 149 Skipped: 1



BUILDING TRUST WITH GEN Z

If a generation is hungry for belonging, relationship, and connectedness, then churches need to adapt and learn how to establish trust. Having served in student ministry for over ten years, we have seen time and time again the truth of 2 Corinthians 12:9: “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I

will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (ESV). As leaders, we need to be willing to take the risk. We need to be willing to take the first step off the edge of security by sharing some of our darkest moments with God. We need to be willing to boast in our weaknesses. Chris Kainu says it like this, “To communicate the highest of truths, you must stoop to the lowest of lows.”²⁰ If we are hoping that the people we lead will share their doubts and their questions, their failures and their fears, then we must be willing to lead them into that state of trust. I have seen that when we invite young people into our journey with God, they will in turn invite us into their journeys with God.

Generation Z values honesty and transparency. They need you to be vulnerable. When you establish trust and respect, you will have access.²¹ Walking with students for so long, I have certain “go-to stories” that help establish trust. First, there was the day my parents found out that I failed my high school photography class. You may be thinking, “He failed photography?” Yes, I found a way to fail one of the easiest classes you can take in high school. Second, there was the time I started sixth grade and did not know anyone. I had feelings of loneliness and of being an outsider who didn’t belong. Then, on a more serious note, there was the time my wife and I went through a miscarriage. There were moments as a pastor when I questioned God’s goodness and even wondered about His existence.

I believe that God is in the process of redeeming all that is broken. We do not need to pretend like we have it all together. When we release and share our darkest moments, it allows our followers to connect. It gives them space to be broken. It is in those moments that the truth of the Gospel really brings hope.

On top of that, Generation Z is living under a worldview that tells them that they need to be perfect, that they need to work and strive, and that their personal value drops if they fall short. If we, as leaders, model that it is okay to fail and to have questions, then it shows what walking with Jesus is really like. As disciple-makers we need to show our disciples that walking with Jesus is not always a mountaintop experience, that there will be hills

²⁰ Chris Kainu, “Speaking to Youth,” in *Impact: Student Ministry That Will Transform A Generation*, ed. Steven Patty and Steve Keels (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 117.

²¹ Kinnaman, 192.

and valleys and that our true hope is yet to come. We need to model faith through the valleys.

A CALL TO THE CHURCH

The potential of Generation Z is unimaginable. They are the largest, most diverse, strongest multitasking, and most adaptable generation ever. I believe that their capacity to truly change the world is greater than any previous generation. There is one problem. They are hurting. The enemy is waging war against them through isolation, anxiety, and depression. They need Jesus followers who can help guide the way by sharing their lives. They need people who are willing to risk and share their journey with God, including both the good moments and the worst moments. Generation Z needs seasoned Jesus followers to help them recognize and unlock their true potential. Let's build our churches so that they will be ready to welcome them home; home to a Father that is sprinting shamelessly towards them.

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