

Pastors as Missionaries

Not unlike missionaries going into a foreign culture, it has been suggested that pastors and churches find “key bridge people”. The church leaders need to connect with one or more young adults. These young adults can serve as cultural guides into this new world of post adolescence. The leaders benefit as they are guided into the world of the young adult. The young adults benefit as they gain access to older Christians who can mentor them in the Christian faith.

Cultural Bridges

Whether one intends to target young adults who are already in the workforce or on the college campus, it is important to build relationships with that age group. If there are some young adults who are already part of the church, it is advisable to begin investing time in them. This can be as simple as inviting them to eat on a regular basis with the family. Or it may involve establishing an actual mentoring relationship (of course, men with men and women with women). Just as they will be drawing from the mentor in terms of Christian maturity, the adult will be drawing from the young adult in terms of cultural understanding. This is not unlike missionaries working overseas.

When missionaries move into a new culture, it is important that they learn the language. Language acquisition enables them to understand and be understood. As they learn the language, they also become students of other areas of the culture such as dress, music, food, fears, joys, and family relationships. When morally appropriate, they partake in some of the facets of the culture. The acceptance of cultural differences makes the statement that one cares for the people with whom they are attempting to get to know.

This bridge building paves the way for dialogue, an exchange of beliefs, and increases

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the likelihood of really being heard. When one understands a “foreign culture” as a missionary, it is also more likely that outreaches will be better suited to the targeted audience. This is also the case for churches that want to minister effectively to young adults whether on the secular campus or local workforce. As several pastors in this study admitted, their churches are detached from the younger generation. A result of not understanding them is manifested in an almost-unintentional ignoring of this age group. Once they graduate from high school, many churches simply wait for them to return after they are ready to become part of the family programs of the church. Getting to know the language of the young adult and gaining insight into his/her world and hearts will dispel many fears and allow the church to have a guiding influence in their lives.

As indicated in the research, many young adults do not come from Judeo-Christian backgrounds. Others who have grown up in the church are often bombarded with new worldviews as they enter the work force or the university. This is a perfect time for them to have a Christian mentor. As mature Christian leaders invest in young adults, they help them to live out their faith among their peers. The mentor has the opportunity to help the young adult understand how their faith affects every area of his/her life whether at work, or on the campus or in their leisure time. Just like the missionary that disciples one person at a time, those disciples will become the missionaries to their own culture. How they reach out to their culture will most likely look different because they are a “national.” Often missionaries try to transplant methods and paradigms from their own culture and attempt to make it work in the new. The true work of a missionary is to help the subject to understand the voice of God themselves and develop his/her own vision of how to reach his/her peers. The same concept applies when working with young adults in

America. The greatest task is to help them to develop a biblically strong relationship with God through Christ and trust that God will begin to use them to reach their peers, even if it looks different than the way the previous generation would have done it. This is, in a sense, a releasing of control and a willingness to hand over the keys to a new set of drivers. It requires a trust that God will be with them just as He was with the previous generation of believers.