

"... impressive in its brevity and informative in its content. The practical steps outlined in the latter portion of the book are genuinely thoughtful and helpful. The insistence upon relationship building is right to the point and a most difficult hill to climb." **Jerry Ross** – *Minister of Education, Quail Springs Baptist, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

"... well written and my church can use this as a resource for our young adults. I strongly agree with the author about authenticity and how that is what young adults are ultimately really looking for." **Jed Lam** – *Multi-ethnic worship and small group leader – Chicago, Illinois*

"I was challenged and blessed by the book. The comparison of the PC and MAC spoke to me. I learned a very valuable thing about the three groups of young adults, that is, Churched, previously-churched, and un-churched. Another great benefit was learning how to make this a part of my life. I saw how I can begin to do this in my world. This material was spot on." **Dr. Bruce Mason** – *Director of Missions – Craig-Mayes Association*

"... concise, yet thorough in identifying what is important to young adults, and giving specific things that churches can do to reach them. Spend an hour with this book, and what you learn will impact your ministry for years to come." **Randall Adams, Ph.D.** – *Church Outreach Team Leader, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma*

# UNLABELED

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How You Can Reach Your  
Emerging Generation



// CRIS LOWERY





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How You Can Reach Your  
Emerging Generation

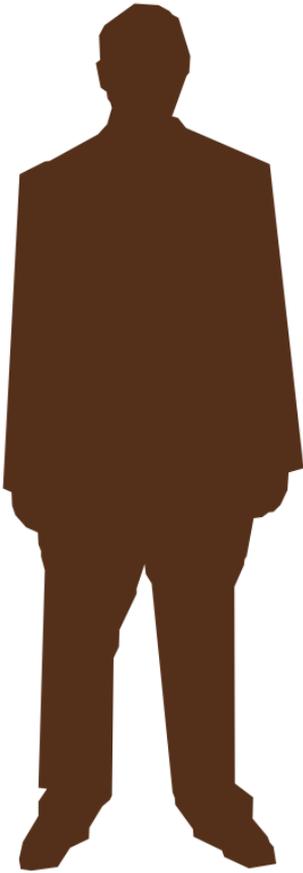
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This book is compiled from a variety of sources, observations, conversations, and young adult studies, along with the input from specialists in a number of fields. Thanks to Bob Mayfield for input in the Sunday school/small group section; Ken Gabrielse in the worship service section; Emerson Falls for writing the implications for Native Americans section; Ted and Jed Lam for insights into the Asian community; Jesús Pacheco and Daniel Caceres for writing the implications for Hispanics section; Tim Gentry, Randy Adams, Jerry Ross, Roy Moody, and Kelly King for their kind and honest evaluations of the content.

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# PC VS. MAC

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Some time ago, Apple Corp aired a series of commercials pitting their Mac computers against the more traditional PC. They depicted PC users as old fashioned and out of touch and the Mac crowd as the ones who really understood what was happening. The interesting thing is that both were designed to accomplish the same tasks they just approached them in a very different manner. In many ways, that's what's happening with young adults, older adults, and the church. The older crowd is waiting for the younger ones to grow up and do things the way they have always done them. The younger crowd is wondering why they should take ten steps to complete a task that can be accomplished in three!

Obviously that's a simplified version of the challenges the church is facing in reaching young adults, but it illustrates the fact that, for many young adults, their worldview is different than their parents or many median and older adults. While they have a desire to change their world and introduce people to a lifestyle of following Jesus, the way they approach this is much different than the generations that precede them. One of the great tasks of the early twenty-first century church will be to understand this group in order to reach them, as well as develop resources to help them reach each other. This guide is written as an introduction to that process. Throughout the writings you will see references to **previously recorded webinars**. The links to these webinars are listed at the back of the book.

One important thing to realize at this point is that every church can reach young adults

if they are willing to make a conscious effort to understand them and work to build relationships with them. Whether a church is running less than thirty or over three thousand, the same dynamics will come into play when reaching out to this group. One common misconception is that churches will have to change everything about how they operate in order to reach young adults. This just isn't the case. Most churches find that the changes they had to make were fairly simple and relatively painless! From the outset it's important to understand that reaching young adults revolves around building relationships, and churches of all sizes can do that effectively.

This book has been designed to be a helpful resource in guiding you to honestly evaluate your present situation and prayerfully consider ways to make these principles fit your community of believers.



# THE THREE TARGET GROUPS

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When thinking about young adult culture, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. It's probably easiest to think about this group in three broad categories when it comes to their exposure to church and Christianity. These groups can be titled *churched*, *previously churched*, and *un-churched*.

The *churched* group is made up of young adults who regularly attend church. They most likely grew up in church and made a commitment to follow Jesus somewhere along the line. They understand church culture and have some form of commitment or ties to the organization or the people

connected to it. This group will probably attend church whether or not changes are made to the present structure. They may be willing to wait until they are in leadership positions to make any desired changes, or they may be completely comfortable with the current structure of the church. Either way, they are attending and will most likely continue to attend church. This group can be valuable when it comes to planning strategies for reaching the other two groups.

The second group is the *previously churched*. This group may also have been raised in church or come to Christ during the time they attended. They understand church culture and most of the Christian beliefs. There are at least two groups represented inside the previously churched. One group can be described as *not interested*. Over time, they simply lost interest in attending church. The reasons can be as varied as

there are individuals, but the bottom line is that they quit seeing church, and possibly following Jesus, as something worthy of their time. The second group can be described as *disillusioned*. These individuals have a desire to follow Jesus but no longer believe that the church will help them accomplish this goal in ways that will change the world around them. They are not necessarily “anti-church.” They simply don’t feel like they have found a church that is doing what Jesus would be doing if He were here physically.

To understand the *un-churched*, there needs to be a working definition that describes them. In the Bible-belt areas it is difficult to find people with no previous exposure to church of some kind. Most people surveyed will reveal that they have attended church at some time in their life. Because of the availability of Vacation Bible School and children’s and youth programs, they have

attended at least one church event in their life journey. The term “psycho-graphically un-churched” can be used to describe the majority of the un-churched. They have not been exposed to the church culture and belief system in a way that has made a significant impact on their worldview.

It is important to take these different groups into consideration in the planning process. Each planning step will need to have a target audience identified before it can be strategic. Things put in place to reach the previously churchd may have little or no impact on the un-churched. For instance, changing worship styles may be a draw to the previously churchd and be readily accepted by the churchd young adults, but surveys reveal that it will have little or no impact on attracting the un-churched. They will be attracted first and foremost through relationships. *(See webinar on Oklahoma Young Adult Research.)*

Knowing the characteristics of the different groups will help us put elements in place to reach a specific target audience inside the realm of young adults.



**IRONIC  
WORDS**

# UNDERSTANDING YOUNG ADULT CULTURE

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When traveling to another country with hopes of reaching the residents there for the cause of Christ, it's important to study their culture and understand the things that have helped shape their worldview. This is the same challenge that is faced with young adult culture. While they were raised in much the same environment as the groups before them, their worldview is drastically different in a variety of areas. Many were actively part of a church while growing up, only to step away from that lifestyle in their twenties. What is even more perplexing is that many of them

aren't walking away from their belief in God or their commitment to follow Jesus, just their desire to be part of a traditional church environment.

One church leader expressed his concern by saying, "My daughter just got home from a two-year mission trip overseas. She loves Jesus, but I can't get her to come to church."

Understanding some basic characteristics of young adult culture will help leaders relate to and be prepared for accepting young adults back into the church environment. Some basic characteristics that seem to run through the DNA of young adult culture include:

- A desire to be around people who will be transparent about their life journey.
- A general acceptance of Jesus as someone who made the world a better place and loved people.

- A desire to be part of a loving, accepting community.
- A desire to make the world a better place to live in, especially for the underprivileged.
- A willingness to tell their story to those who will show interest in them.

While there are several more common characteristics, focusing on these few will allow those interested to get a handle on what young adults are looking for and how the church can help provide for these needs.



# BEING AUTHENTIC

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Those who have done much reading at all about this group as a culture have heard the terms “authentic” or “authenticity” as buzzwords for what young adults desire in relationships. This seems to be one of the common cultural dynamics. For a number of reasons this group no longer believes in the credibility of those who give off the air of perfection. They are drawn to those who are willing to admit they struggle with real life issues. This person doesn’t have to be someone who has been defeated by these issues, but they need to be honest about the fact that they are there. This is a group that has grown up hearing leaders, in a variety of venues, say one thing in public and be caught doing another in private. They have developed a cynical view of life, especially toward anyone who seems to be pretending to be perfect.

Many young adults see the church as a place where people with real problems are not accepted or are pointed out as the exception. The set of cultural standards that are set in some church environments can help to drive this fear and resentment deeper when they are taught and referred to in anger rather than in love. Young adults are simply drawn to leaders who are open and honest about their lives, their feelings, and their opinions.

A side note to this dynamic is their acceptance of people with different beliefs. This is a group that, for the most part, will not force their views on other people. Many of them are open to discussion and open to taking in new ideas or ways of doing things, but they won't force someone else to believe the way they do or condemn them for their choices.

Because of this, it is important to be prepared to engage them in conversations that will result in relationships. They are also more likely to be influenced over a period of time, rather than after a one-time encounter.

**...THIS GROUP NO LONGER BELIEVES  
IN THE CREDIBILITY OF THOSE WHO  
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STRUGGLE WITH REAL LIFE ISSUES.**



# THE PERCEPTION OF JESUS

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Another important thing to take into account is the general perception young adults have about who Jesus is. In a 2009 survey of young adults in Oklahoma, almost half the group either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Jesus died and came back to life.” A little over half agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that believing in Jesus makes a positive impact in a person’s life.

Phrases used to describe Jesus in young adult culture will often include things like: kind, caring, fed the poor, and loved the outcasts. There is a basic understanding and appreciation for the social ministry side

of Jesus. This can become a front door for spiritual conversations as churches make a positive impact in their community.

This allows for the opportunity to engage young adults in our mission efforts and fill in the rest of the story about the life of Christ.

Starting with their basic understanding of Jesus and moving to his specific call and purpose is a more effective approach than beginning with a gospel presentation before a relationship has been established.

PHRASES USED TO DESCRIBE JESUS  
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# DESIRE FOR COMMUNITY

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One of the defining characteristics of young adult culture, and one of the greatest opportunities, is their desire for community. Many in this group desire to be in relationship with each other as well as with older mentors. They are specific in how they control who gets into their circle of community.

However, because they have grown up in an electronic culture, much of their communication is done through social media and/or texting. Being invited or allowed into their circle of influence is something to be appreciated. Inviting them into your

world is often more effective than assuming you are welcome in theirs. Personal social networking pages may prove to be more effective than organizational pages, and there are some who feel there is a growing resentment toward organizations that invade the social media realm.

The opportunity to build relationships with young adults will prove to be one of the most effective tools in reaching out to this age group. The ability to walk alongside them as they travel through life will allow the opportunity to influence their worldview in a variety of areas, including the spiritual realm. It's important to realize as well that this is not an opportunity to lecture them on what is right and wrong with their life or the world, but to experience life with them, listen to their opinions and struggles, and provide insights and support as needed. The key to this kind of dialogue is to focus on having discussions, not arguments or lectures!

THE OPPORTUNITY TO **BUILD**  
**RELATIONSHIPS** WITH YOUNG  
ADULTS WILL PROVE TO BE ONE  
OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOLS IN  
REACHING OUT TO THIS AGE GROUP.



# MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

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Another driving force in young adult culture is their desire to make the world a better place in which to live. Organizations that do this have found young adults to be a loyal, compassionate, and giving group.

They've bought shoes so that people without them could get a pair, provided money to dig fresh water wells, provided drinking straws that filter out impurities, and supported celebrities that support these kinds of causes. This is a group that wants to do ministry!

The challenge for the local church is to honestly evaluate their current situation to see if their priorities are attractive to this generation. If the majority of time, attention, and budget appear to feed the organization without impacting the community and/or world for Christ, it will not be attractive to young adults.

This is not a generation that is particularly interested in funding more buildings at the expense of making a positive impact on the community. They are much more focused on going out into the community than on compelling the community to come to a particular building in order to experience life change. Churches that are impacting lives outside the four walls of the church are seeing young adults walk alongside them on their journey.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE LOCAL  
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THEIR PRIORITIES ARE ATTRACTIVE  
TO THIS GENERATION.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

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One final characteristic we need to look at is their desire to be heard. Young adults seem to love to tell their story to anyone who will listen and be genuinely interested in them. Often they don't desire advice, approval, or disapproval, just a listening ear. This can easily become the beginnings of a relationship that will allow you to become the most influential spiritual person in their lives. Learning to listen while resisting the immediate urge to tell them how to fix their problem is a trait that is helpful in the long run. It is a part of the trust-building process that is essential in reaching young adults. *(See webinar on Understanding Young Adult Culture and Worldview.)*



# THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVING

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The 1960s and early 1970s had a certain number of young adults motivated to serve people around the world who were in need of food, shelter, fresh water, and education. The motto was often, “We don’t care if we ever make a dime; we just want to make a difference in our world.” This emerging generation has been compared to the sixties generation in their zeal to impact people in need.

One major difference seems to be their desire to be financially independent as well. Many of them desire to be rich and to use some of that money to help alleviate suffering around the world.

This should be a major consideration when planning for young adult work in the local community of believers. It is even becoming evident more and more in the workplace.

Companies who want to attract and keep younger employees are implementing community-based ministry projects as part of their normal routine. Some are using money saved through utility conservation to donate to special projects. Others are allowing employees to use some of their paid time to engage in community-based relief efforts. A growing number of companies are helping their employees engage in community relief efforts by sponsoring an event and using it as a team-building activity. These are all strategies the church needs to consider if they are going to reach and keep young adults.

The great benefit with these kinds of ministry events comes from connecting the love of Jesus to them which provides spiritual as well as physical relief. It is pretty amazing how informed this generation is about the needs of people around the world. Many understand the inequity of the caste system that rules the culture in India, the impact of micro-financing projects, the need for fresh water wells in many places in our world, the need for food to get to those that are suffering from malnutrition, the brutality of women and children trapped in human trafficking, and the list goes on. Because this group wants to make a difference in the world, they are not content to hear about these issues without responding with decisive action. They are willing to commit their time and finances to causes that will show the world the love of Christ in real and tangible ways.



# STORIES FROM OKLAHOMA

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By looking at church attendance and listening to church leaders, it is apparent that there are a number of churches effectively reaching young adults. Some started by focusing on reaching them through a Sunday School class or other small group experience, others through a worship service, and some through ministry opportunities in the community. In talking with these leaders, there were several characteristics that kept surfacing.

The first was a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. The idea that you need to dress and talk a certain way to be accepted was foreign to each situation.

This characteristic ran much deeper than setting up a coffee bar at the back or using a certain type of music. Each leader described an attitude of acceptance that defined their group.

Relationship was also a key factor in their success. As leaders described their experience, they continually talked about lives that were impacted because someone from their group became actively involved in another person's life. This acceptance and interaction resulted in a non-judgmental atmosphere that fit well with the needs and desires of the young adult community.

An initial fear might be that this kind of atmosphere doesn't allow for any kind of hard truth or life-correcting message to be presented. However, the opposite seemed to be the end result. Each leader described the process of what we used to call "earning the

right to be heard.” By being open and honest with each other, real issues were addressed in large and small group environments. Things too personal to be dealt with in public were handled one-on-one.

Spiritual transformation was the second characteristic that seemed to be present in each successful situation. Because of the accepting atmosphere, people were more open to be honest about who they were all the time not just on Sundays. People who had never attended church regularly, or had not attended in a long time, felt at home when they connected with the group.

As they began to live life together, physical and spiritual needs were discovered and dealt with. Caring for each other’s needs, as well as the needs of those outside their group resulted in a sense of community that formed a lasting bond between many in the group.

The third characteristic revolved around a deep teaching of the Word with the opportunity for life application. The opportunity to discover truth and then live it out was a powerful dynamic that kept the group focused on what was important.

The idea of being a follower of Jesus seemed to motivate this group more than the idea of being a good church member. The end result seemed to reveal itself in a desire to know about God, Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Jesus follower. The relaxed atmosphere came into play as well in the way information was delivered. Most of the leaders described a more personal method of teaching or preaching less lecture-like and more conversational. Careful attention was given to explaining some of the elements of church culture, such as the invitation time, baptism, Lord's Supper, offering, and the like. It wasn't assumed that

people understood what was going on just because they had been attending for some time. Connecting the event of the day to its scriptural origin gave it a sense of meaning and purpose.

A final characteristic that seemed to run through each experience was that of being intergenerational. This played itself out in a variety of ways. Several leaders saw a noticeable connection between their young adults and their median to older adults. One group said their church was made up mostly of people in their twenties and fifties. Another leader commented that their church dismissed at 11:30 every Sunday morning, but that they didn't close the doors until 12:30 because of the conversations happening between the younger and the older adults. Stories of meals in each other's homes and service projects done together and for each other were just the tip of the iceberg.

One young adult couple who were in a small group that had a thirty-plus age span commented that they didn't want to be part of any other group. They had found their family and were sticking with it. One particular young adult group adopted their senior adult counterparts and did a number of service projects for them, as well as for some of their un-churched friends.

The end result of these interactions was incredibly positive for both sides. Whether in small groups, large groups, or one-on-one, these characteristics continually rose to the surface in each discussion with church leaders in their efforts to impact those involved in young adult culture.

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BEING A GOOD CHURCH MEMBER.



# USING SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUPS

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Beyond the characteristics mentioned above, there were some other dynamics that were particular to reaching young adults through Sunday School and small groups. The first, which was mentioned earlier as well, is the importance of mission projects. Implanting the idea of serving others into the DNA of a young adult small group or Sunday school class is one of the keys to its success. Choosing the right kind of experience to get involved with is also important. For a group that wants to change the world, ministry projects performed on the church grounds are a viable option but should not be the only type of opportunity offered.

Ministry that will impact people is an important key to fulfilling their desire to show the love of Christ in tangible ways. These opportunities or “missions experiences” help build a sense of community in the group of believers and provide a front door for un-churched and previously churched young adults to be brought into the group. Having the church be part of this process is beneficial in connecting young adults to the community of believers as a whole. The church that helps young adults plan and carry out missions experiences will be seen as relevant and has a much better chance of being an important part of their lives.

A second dynamic is that of teaching style. This group is drawn more to a discussion format than a lecture, and more to a facilitator than to someone who will tell them what the application should be for their lives.

The International Mission Board uses the concepts of “oral learning” in reaching people groups around the world. Many of these same principles work well in young adult settings. Presenting biblical truth, including the cultural implications of the day in which the passage was written, asking good questions, and then listening well are keys to success in the learning portion of the small group experience.

Questions that work well are:

- What do we learn about Jesus from this passage?
- What did you *like* about the story?
- What did you *not like* about the story?
- What did you *not understand* about the story?
- What did you *learn* about God from the story?
- What do you personally *need to do* from the story?

*(See webinars on using narratives.)*

A final key to an effective young adult Sunday school class or small group involves leaders who care about the group and connect with them outside of the regular meeting time. Leaders who open their lives as well as their homes to young adults find themselves becoming mentors as well as friends. Age of the leader is not as important as the interest level they take in the individual.

The Oklahoma young adult survey project found that young adults respond well to those who take an interest in them. The key is not to try and fix them or tell them where they went wrong, but rather to listen.

Young adults who want input will often end their story with an invitation question such as, “What do you think I should do?” or “What do you think?” Listening with a caring and interested attitude will result in relationships that are real and impactful.

This open and honest relationship is one of the most important elements in creating the kind of community young adults are drawn to.

As mentioned earlier, the age of the leader isn't as important as their willingness to build relationships. Many churches are finding an interesting connection between leaders in their fifties and young adults in their twenties.

Because mentoring is an underlying desire in young adult culture, older leaders can be extremely impactful. By combining their life experience with their knowledge of young adult culture, older leaders can not only reach young adults, but they can find great satisfaction as God uses their gifts and talents in meaningful ways.

**STRUM  
-&-  
SING**

# YOUNG ADULT WORSHIP

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A number of Oklahoma churches decided to use a worship service that was designed with young adults in mind as the front door to their community of believers. The type of presentation varied from video feeds of the pastor to live presentations by the pastor or a staff member. In the live settings, the preaching/teaching style was more personal and relaxed. The content was biblical, and depth was a word used to describe the intent of the preaching style. Again, the idea of the speaker being real or authentic was extremely important in how the audience received the message.

Music styles varied from setting to setting, but there were some trends that seemed prevalent. Bands were used more than piano and organs. A lead singer was more often used than a praise team. Hymns were often adapted to be more conducive to the style of music used in the rest of the service. Music seemed to play an important part in the planning of each service from the leader's point of view. The 2009 Young Adult survey mentioned earlier found similar results. Style of music was an important part of the worship experience for the churched and previously churched young adults. It wasn't much of a factor in the un-churched category. Relationship was still the key to whether or not they would attend a church service.

Another aspect of young adult-oriented worship services included use of the arts. While this wasn't the mainstay of young adult services, each church used some kind

of art supplement during at least one of their services with good feedback. Young adult culture in our day is not only aware of, but is deeply connected to the arts and art community. Because of this, it only makes sense to include these elements into the worship experience when appropriate.

The idea of touching as many of the five senses as you can during a worship service is an important concept to consider. Because people respond differently to a variety of stimuli, using a varied approach increases the chance that the message will be received. Churches used art, poetry, pottery, drama, sign language, smells of baked goods, scripture reading, monologues, duets, and on-screen visuals to connect their audience with the truth in the passage that was being studied that day. The idea was to create a moment of discovery or reminder about the greatness and glory of God that would result in a time and attitude of worship.

Many pointed out the fact that once they began thinking this way in their planning, they began to discover talents in their own congregation that had gone untapped for years because they had never been seen as elements of worship before.

As in the small group experience, ministry opportunities were an important part of the worship experience. Many of the leaders kept these opportunities or needs in front of their group. They went a step beyond as well and offered tangible ways for people to be involved in meeting those needs. Sometimes that was physically meeting the need, sometimes it was financial, but there was always a way to become involved. A second important aspect was their celebration of past missions experiences. They were careful to report on the success of past efforts and applaud their people for being involved.

An attitude of service was prevalent in the make-up of their community.

Another element that seemed to be effective in these young adult services was the celebration of baptism. In the majority of cases, baptism was seen as a community celebration and treated as such. While done in a variety of ways and places, the key elements included testimonies from the person about his/her conversion, affirmations from those who knew them, an explanation of what baptism means, and some kind of celebration as part of the event. In several instances, the service was dedicated to baptism, and there was a party that followed. Family members were invited, both churching and un-churching, which seemed to add importance to the event in the spiritual life of the individual as well as the family.

A final element that seemed to run through many of the worship experiences, as well as the Sunday school and small group environments, was that of prayer. This went beyond praying for the health needs of the community and included needs of people around the world.

Opportunities for individuals to pray with someone looked different from place to place but were an important part of the prayer time. These times were not only important and strategically placed, but also served as a key component in the community building process for individuals and families.

**TOUCHING AS MANY OF THE  
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IS AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT TO  
CONSIDER... CHURCHES USED  
ART, POETRY, POTTERY, SIGN  
LANGUAGE, SMELLS OF BAKED  
GOODS, SCRIPTURE READING, AND  
ON-SCREEN VISUALS TO CONNECT  
THEIR AUDIENCE WITH THE TRUTH  
IN THE PASSAGE THAT WAS BEING  
STUDIED THAT DAY.**



# SHARING THE JESUS STORY

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Evangelism for young adults is a process rather than a one-time event. Most will come to Christ as a result of an existing relationship they have with a Christian they trust and interact with. This doesn't have to be someone their own age; in fact, in many cases they are very open to informal mentoring-type relationships with people older than themselves. Our 2009 survey revealed that un-churched young adults who had a spiritual question were very likely to ask a spiritual person they knew to help them find the answer.

That means if you establish a relationship with an un-churched young adult or young adult couple in your neighborhood or circle of influence, it is likely that you will become the person they will turn to as spiritual questions arise.

Relationship is the key to introducing young adults to the truth of the Scripture and their need for Jesus. Because this generation has grown up with the world at their fingertips, they are rather skeptical about the idea of someone being an expert in any field or knowing for certain what is always true. They can get on the internet and find five highly qualified individuals who will disagree with any point another expert in that field will voice. Because of this, they are more likely to believe something is true because they heard it from someone they trust and have a relationship with.

It is always important to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit when dealing with young adults. This allows us to know where they are in their spiritual journey and what we can do to help them in a positive way. *(See webinar on “I Once Was Lost” and “Listening Evangelism Basics.”)*

**RELATIONSHIP IS THE KEY TO  
INTRODUCING YOUNG ADULTS TO  
THE TRUTH OF THE SCRIPTURE AND  
THEIR NEED FOR JESUS.**



# SO WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

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Understanding culture and looking at the successes of others is only the beginning of efforts to impact the young adults in a community. Every community and church is different, and understanding your unique gifts, abilities, and opportunities is a critical first step. The following ideas will help you clearly evaluate what you have to offer young adults at present, as well as determine where you need to focus your efforts. By using the following evaluation process, you will be able to determine which target audience you intend to pursue first, what you currently have in place that will connect with this group, and what areas you need to focus on to be most effective.

**DISCOVERY**

**EVALUATION**

**DREAM THE DREAM**

**EVALUATION**

# PLANNING: FROM START TO FINISH

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## **Phase One: Discovery**

Knowing what your community looks like is important as you begin your task. You can start by looking at your church rolls.

Are there people in this young adult age group who are on your rolls but not attending? This is a great opportunity to find out what they think an effective young adult community should look like.

Listening skills are important here as you ask good questions and hear what they feel like is important.

Some simple questions you might use are:

- What is one thing you would want from a small group experience?
- What is the most important thing a church can be involved in?
- What is one thing that would attract your friends to a local church?
- What do you think is the biggest reason young adults decide not to be involved in church activities?
- If you were going to start a new church, what would it look like?

As you listen to the needs, thoughts, and desires of the young adults who have some kind of connection to your church, you will be more equipped as you make plans to reach them.

The next step might be to find out the demographics of your area. Knowing how many young adults are in your community is an important step in the process.

A good starting point for this information can be [www.zipskinny.com](http://www.zipskinny.com). Once you know this, you can begin the process of determining how many represent each of the three target areas previously mentioned.

### **Phase Two: Evaluation**

The evaluation process is next as you determine how prepared you are for young adults to attend your church. As previously mentioned, some churches have chosen to focus their “first touch” efforts with young adults on a worship service experience, some through small groups, and others through community missions efforts.

Deciding where you want to place the major focus of your efforts is an important part of the process. Once you’ve done that, you will be able to determine if you have the resources in place or if you will need to get them in place before you start your outreach efforts.

For instance, if you decide to put the majority of your effort into the Sunday school or small group approach, you will need to make sure you have:

- A good place for them to meet.
- Leaders who are willing to invest their lives in the group and are trained in leading discussions rather than lectures.
- Inform the rest of the church that this group will also be involved in community missions' experiences that may take them away from the building some Sunday mornings. (Sunday morning projects don't have to be part of the small group experience, but this is a much more effective way of involving un-churched young adults than inviting them to a Bible study. It's much easier to discuss these things before the small group starts than to do it once it's established.)

If you choose to use the worship gathering approach, you will need to answer a few questions as well.

- Is your environment welcoming to people as they enter?
- Are regular attendees expecting to make new friends every time they come to church?
- Will the service be engaging rather than mostly a listening session?
- Will the communicator be able to talk with the people not down to the people?
- Will you have on-going or several one-time missions' experiences people can become involved in either through hands-on work or through giving?
- Will your service include interactive prayer times as well as creative supplements to the message?

It's best to answer as many of these questions as early in the process as possible.

There also needs to be an openness to make changes as you go along. What works for your friend across the state in their young adult experience may not work as well in your situation. Keeping an open mind and getting honest feedback from your group will be essential in creating a service that is able to build a sense of community within your group.

Whether you're using small groups or worship gatherings, having a purpose bigger than the group is another key to being effective. Keep a mission experience in front of the group and celebrate stories of people who are helping to change other people's lives. As people come to Christ because of the love of your community, let those stories be told and celebrated. Baptismal celebrations are a great way to bring these stories to the spotlight.

### **Phase Three: Dream the Dream**

What do we want the ministry to look like?

**Target Audiences:** Keep in mind the three basic target audiences, determine which group or groups you intend to attract, and set the order you intend to pursue them. Make sure the strategies you choose fit the needs and desires of your intended audience as reflected in the “*Understanding Young Adult Culture and Worldview*” webinar.

**Touch Points:** How will you make first contact with young adults in your community? What do you have to offer that they feel they need?

**Sunday School or Small Groups:** What would you like the small group environment to look like? Will it be held at the church, in a public setting, or in someone’s home? Who will intentionally work to build community within the group? Who will become trained in using a discussion approach to learning for the small group environment?

**Worship Gatherings:** What elements will you place in your worship service that will be intentionally targeted toward young adults? How can you involve them in the worship service experience? This is a group that responds well to the arts. How can you capitalize on this information as you plan your services?

**Community Involvement:** What specific ministry projects and mission experiences will you keep in front of your people to let young adults know that you care about the needs of the community?

Gather any necessary resources to carry out the plan. Most of the information you need to begin your work is already available online in the form of recorded webinars. Those links are provided for you as part of this book. Other help and consultation is available through the Emerging Generations office of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

## **Phase Four: Evaluation**

Systematically meet with leaders to evaluate effectiveness. Survey participants periodically for input and evaluation.

### **Links to previously recorded webinars:**

- Oklahoma Young Adult Research  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/p74412310/>
- Understanding Young Adult Culture and Worldview  
<http://bgco.adobeconnect.com/p48t880gqb8/>
- Reaching Young Adults from a Pastor Viewpoint  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/p36776580/>
- Using Narratives to Reach Young Adults, Part 1  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/p65088507/>
- Using Narratives to Reach Young Adults, Part 2  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/p98011329/>
- Using Narratives to Reach Young Adults, Part 3  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/p36283617/>

- I Once Was Lost  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/witnessing/>
- Listening Evangelism Basics  
<http://bgco.na4.acrobat.com/p48915132/>

Additional resources are available on the BGCO website under the Evangelism/ Emerging Generations' section.

# NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY APPLICATION

//EMERSON FALLS

Overall, what is applicable to the general society would also be true in the Native American (NA) Young Adults. However, there are some cultural differences.

1. The three target groups (churched, previously churched, and un-churched) would also apply to the NA community. It seems logical that the ratios are different, with the largest group being the un-churched. The churched and previously churched groups are very small.

2. Relationships are also important to NAs. In a group culture, it is important to focus on reaching people in the context of their group. One-to-one relationships that take people out of their group are less effective.
3. Regarding the DNA of young adult culture, there may not be a “general acceptance of Jesus” among NA Young Adults. There are three groups: (1) those who accept Jesus as someone good, (2) those who are indifferent (and Jesus is irrelevant), and (3) those who are antagonistic.
4. Regarding “their circle of community,” the rural and reservation NA young adults are greatly influenced by the extended family, and the urban NAs are less so, but the values of extended family are important. Reaching key family members (or people of peace) has a strong impact on the young adult NA.

5. The idea of “serving” is also important to young adult NAs (p. 11), but the greater interest is on social justice issues. Some of these may see personal wealth as an elusive dream until social justice issues are resolved.
6. Because traditional NA culture is oral, oral is the preferred method of learning. Assimilation and western education is a factor.
7. Evangelism is also a “process” for NA young adults. They are more comfortable being in a process with their group rather than a one-to-one that takes them out of their group.

The degree of assimilation into Anglo culture and the degree of isolation from Native culture is a key factor. Many NAs will live in both cultures. Therefore, it is difficult to make generalizations. Each ministry setting must be evaluated in its cultural context.

# ASIAN COMMUNITY APPLICATION

//TED AND JED LAM

1. With regard to Asian specific ministries, I would be very cautious to distinguish between young adults who are Asian American and Asian (from Asia). Their perspectives and life experiences/ expectations are going to be quite different, particularly with respect to some of the things Cris has suggested would attract this group. For example, while I agree that young adults are hypersensitive to social justice ministries and helping the underprivileged, I think

this is largely a western or American phenomenon. That is, while young adults who have grown up in America, American Born Chinese (ABC), would have no problem with doing volunteer work or helping with a charity, I don't think that same type of culture exists in China or other major Asian countries.

2. Another key difference is in terms of how Asians relate to inter-generational ministries. Again, it is very important to make a distinction between ABCs and Overseas Born Chinese (OBC) here. Community and respect for elders are major tenants in the Asian experience. As such, any ministry focused on age or generational differences will inherently bring "baggage" from their experiences growing up and how they interacted with those older than them. For example, while I can imagine an ABC eventually becoming comfortable enough to call

someone one or two decades older than them by their first name, I very much doubt that an OBC could overcome this cultural practice. Not to say it is right or wrong, but if we expect intergenerational ministries to work in this context, you can see how an OBC might have serious problems truly opening up to someone significantly older than them. That is, they would not be able to overcome the inherent cultural respect and deference that is paid to those older than them.

3. I would suggest that for OBC young adults it's actually more important to provide them, not with community that includes older generations, but rather community that does *not* include older generations. These young adults need space apart from the cultural obligations that come with respect and deference to elders. They need a place, or a small group, where they can express their deepest concerns

and desires without fear of being judged, dismissed, or reprimanded by their elders. On the other hand, for young Asian American adults a multi-generational approach could be very successful and appealing, particularly as they may not have had good role models or strong relationships with their main examples of elders, that is, their parents. ABCs have seen, through their friends, the potential for relationships with older adults, but they have rarely experienced this for themselves. Thus, setting this up can be very appealing to them.

4. Another area of distinction in reaching OBCs versus ABCs is in relation to their openness and willingness to engage in religious discussions. As the author points out, tolerance is the key theme for ABCs, and thus any discussion with them will at times be difficult to guide toward deeper absolute truths.

There may also be some reluctance to talking about how faith actually impacts their heart. Sure, they are willing to talk about volunteering somewhere and doing well, but really talking about their sins? No way. On the other hand, OBCs are much more open to this, and some find a discussion of “truth” to be much more “normal” and even expected. We experienced this in our missions’ trip to China, and I see it when students first come here from overseas.

5. One final thought on distinctions between ABCs and OBCs is in relation to the drive for success, either academically or financially. While I agree with the author’s assertion that today’s young adults strive for financial independence, potentially so they can provide financial help to charities and other organizations, I would say again the OBC versus ABC perspective is quite different. OBCs

have a sense of familial obligation and a responsibility to provide for and assist their parents in a way that ABCs do not. Their drive for success is as much rooted in a desire to bring pride to themselves individually as it is in helping the family name. Most ABCs do not have an appreciation for this, but rather are much more individualistic.

Finally, one point I would strongly agree with the author is his point about authenticity and how that is what young adults are ultimately looking for. I think this cuts across both ABC and OBC experiences and is one example of why testimonies about changed lives and baptisms are such a key strategy to reaching young people. Ultimately what we need are people who are sold out for Christ, people who are true, authentic followers of Christ who are willing to give up everything for His sake. Then we just need to provide and create

the time and space for these people to build relationships with others not in an artificial way, but rather within the context of them exercising their faith and inviting others to come join alongside them.

One anecdotal example of this is if you ask someone to meet with you so you can talk to them about their faith, odds are this time can feel manufactured and unauthentic. However, if you invite someone to come alongside you and join you as you help feed the poor or volunteer somewhere, then within that context there will be opportunity to ask honest, deep questions about faith (Why are you here? Why should we help the poor? Do you think this makes a difference?).

1. All Asian youth, especially the second generation desire to have their own community.

2. Doing good deeds the tradition of salvation by works is in their blood. They love to serve and get involved with making the world a better place.
3. Once they understand the reason and purpose of giving, they are willing to commit their time and finances to the causes.
4. They are more patient in listening but like to learn the life application from preaching and teaching.
5. They tend to like a balance of music styles hymns with modern music, not just praise choruses.
6. They love to give testimony that shows their faith experience. They don't mind being introduced as a guest during the welcome.
7. Respect to older leaders is still a part of their make-up because they have grown up in that culture.

# HISPANIC COMMUNITY APPLICATION

//JESÚS PACHECO

The Hispanic population in Oklahoma is mostly young; the average age is about thirty years. About 60 percent are first-generation Hispanic with low education and low income. There are some professionals and skilled workers, around 20 percent. The second-generation Hispanics are around 30 percent, and the third generation 10 percent. The second generation can communicate better in English, and their education level is higher. A youth worker can easily minister to them in English. The third generation does not speak Spanish and prefers American food.

First-generation Hispanics tend to respond better to the gospel, and the best time to reach them is when they arrive, the sooner the better, because they have more needs. Any missionary effort to reach the first-generation Hispanics should involve service evangelism, and they expect a positive response they can trust.

Many of the young adult second-generation Hispanics have a different worldview from their parents. They also feel like they are neither Anglo nor Hispanic. A first-generation Hispanic pastor will not be challenged to understand and to minister effectively to a second-generation Hispanic. We have an urgent need to train and develop second generation youth leaders. If a church does not have a second generation youth leader, a possible solution is for them to get involved with some youth activities of the Anglo sponsoring church.

Evangelism as a process of building relationships and ministering to their needs in a holistic way is the best approach to reach the growing Hispanic population. Social and recreational special events for the family are a good way to start, as well as the English as a Second Language program.

The target group is the unchurched, since less than 10 percent of the Hispanic population in Oklahoma (350,000) attends church on a regular basis. Even though most of the Hispanic people are coming from a Catholic background, it is just a cultural tradition that they are not practicing, especially the younger people.

# ADDITIONAL HISPANIC COMMUNITY APPLICATION

// DANIEL CACERES

As Hispanics we face another Group: the ones who do not feel welcome in a Hispanic church or in an Anglo church because of their ethnic background, and they decide not to attend church. These usually are Hispanics of second or third generation. They are dealing with two or three cultures at the same time.

There is a vast variety of Hispanics; usually they love the family environment. The young adult Hispanics that just arrive from their countries feel lonely, they miss this kind of environment, they miss their countries and the way they do things, especially they want to keep their religion (generally Catholicism). At the same time they are eager to belong to a Hispanic community. Second and third generations feel at home in an Anglo church, some of them have never been in the countries from where their ancestors came. They prefer to speak English, but still keep some of their own culture.

First, second and third Hispanic generations are drawn to authenticity.

Hispanic youth are very religious especially when they first arrive in the USA. They know that Jesus is God, but only in their mind.

When young adults come to the USA they are quick to connect to a Hispanic community where they are very friendly. Second and Third generations prefer a more diverse community, but at the same time they are loyal to their own people. There is a big risk for the new comers to get involved with a wrong crowd.

Hispanics in general are good workers and they take pride on doing their jobs the best they know how.

Hispanics love to be heard, but they do not like to be lectured. They want to find answers for themselves.

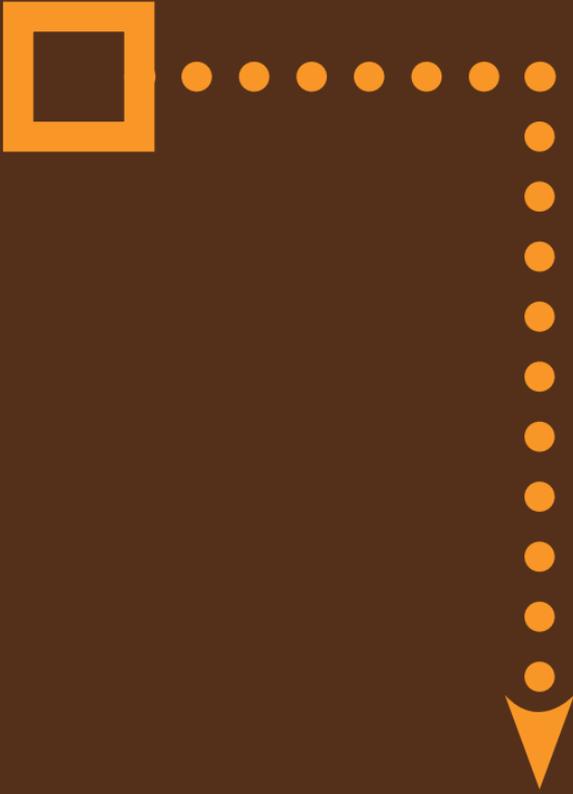
Hispanics are very helpful, they like to help their own countries. Second and third generations are more involved in projects in their communities here in USA, because it's home for them.

Hispanic Young adults love the story telling teaching method.

Regional Hispanic music, Spanish movies, and regional food attract first Hispanic Generation. Contemporaneous English music, junk food and English movies attract Second and Third Generation.



**EVERY COMMUNITY AND CHURCH IS  
DIFFERENT, AND UNDERSTANDING  
YOUR UNIQUE GIFTS, ABILITIES,  
AND OPPORTUNITIES IS A CRITICAL  
FIRST STEP.**



TAKE THAT STEP.





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This publication is made possible by your gifts through the Cooperative Program.

## HI, I'M CRIS LOWERY.

I gathered this information to give church leaders a quick overview of the challenges we face in reaching young adults and to encourage them with the reality that any church can reach young adults if they set their mind to it. It was also intended to provide some simple actions churches could use as they plan to reach the young adults in their community.

This book was designed to be short enough to read in one sitting, and in-depth enough to give a realistic picture of young adult culture and worldview. It's a great starting point for learning about the unique challenges the emerging generation provides and ways to effectively use that information.

**My hope is to see churches consciously make a choice to reach young adults, no matter where they are in their spiritual journey.** This information will help churches design Sunday morning experiences that will relate well to young adults, including the Sunday school and worship experience. It will also motivate church leadership to reach out and make a positive impact for Christ in their community.

## CRIS LOWERY



Cris is a Specialist for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and a missionary with the North American Mission Board, serving as the Emerging Generations Evangelism Specialist. His focus is to assist churches in reaching young adults with the gospel by developing resources and strategies and providing training for leaders who have a heart for young adults.

Cris earned his bachelor's degree in Communication from the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, and his master's degree in Religious Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Cris served as Minister to Students at Cherokee Hills Baptist Church in Oklahoma City and Gracemont Baptist Church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma before becoming a campus ministry specialist and later the Emerging Generations Specialist.

Cris and his wife have three children.