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From
Generation
to Generation

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AMERICAN BAPTIST HOME MISSION SOCIETIES



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Contents

- 1 EDITORIAL From Generation to Generation
- 2 discipleSHIFT: Young Adults and the Church
- 4 A Contextual Approach to Youth Ministry
- 6 American Baptist Home Mission Societies Strengthens Commitment to Young Adults
- 7 An Amazing Experience
- 8 Young Adults 'Out Front' in Engaging Justice, Advocacy Ministries
- 10 Disconnection: Young Adults and the Church
- 12 The Gifts of *Immerse*
- 13 Young Adults and the Future of the Church
- 14 Youth Leaders as Instruments of Transformation and Hope
- 14 You're How Old?
- 15 Youth Ministry Today
- 15 An Invitation for Youth Leaders
- 16 Preserving the Commitment to Religious Liberty in the Next Generation
- 17 Preservando el compromiso con la libertad religiosa de la próxima generación
- 18 More than Springtime at Purdue
- 19 Missional Immersion in Nebraska
- 20 Transforming Lives through Immersion
- 21 Generations Belong to One Another
- 22 Crossing Boundaries for Social Justice
- 24 A Spring Break for Growth and Rebirth

From Generation to Generation

In December of 2013 something remarkable happened. More than 30,000 people—including many Baptist leaders from around the world—gathered in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, to celebrate the life and legacy of a man and woman they'd never met.

Two hundred years earlier Ann and Adoniram Judson arrived in Burma to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to make disciples. Equally, if not more, remarkable than this celebration is the fact that beginning in 2006, as refugees from Burma began arriving in the United States, many sought Baptist churches in which to continue the practice of their faith. The mission that began with the efforts of the Judsons had returned full circle to the land of its origin.

Ann and Adoniram Judson and their contemporaries helped spark the modern missions movement, provid-

ing an impetus for Baptist association for the support of this work internationally and domestically. This support, in turn, helped broaden the reach and rootedness of Baptist faith and practice worldwide and may yet further its renewal as those who were once the recipients of mission efforts continue as its agents in and beyond the United States.

We, no less than the people of Burma, are the spiritual descendants and heirs of the work of Ann and Adoniram Judson, who once proclaimed, "The future is as bright as the promises of God." The faithfulness of the Burmese Diaspora is evidence of the truth of this confession. Moreover, we, like those who continued the work of the Judsons, labor in fields others have planted. We do so in the hope that, through our life and witness, we will sow seeds that bear fruit in the lives of others—many of whom we will not meet, in this life at least.

Such was the experience of the Judsons. Such is the way the gospel spreads person to person. Such is the manner in which God's mercy extends, in the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, from generation to generation.

As we consider the challenges of evangelism and discipleship among youth and young adults in our own time and context—challenges described in the pages to follow—let us not lose sight of these truths nor of the faithfulness of God and God's steadfast love and mercy.

We may not always, even often, see clearly or understand fully what is needed to raise our own children and grandchildren in the faith. We may be uncertain as we reach out beyond our own families in our efforts to share the faith with other youth and young adults. But God knows what is needed and will honor our effort and correct our mistakes as long as we invite God in and seek God's counsel along the way. Despite the trouble we see and the challenges that give us pause, the future is still as bright as the promises of God. From generation to generation it has been so. From generation to generation may it yet be.

Curtis Ramsey-Lucas serves American Baptist Home Mission Societies as managing director of Resource Development.



discipleSHIFT: Young Adults and the Church

“What is the problem with the American church today?” This is the question I was asked by a producer for “Nightline.” And I responded: “Churches are full of believers but have few disciples.”

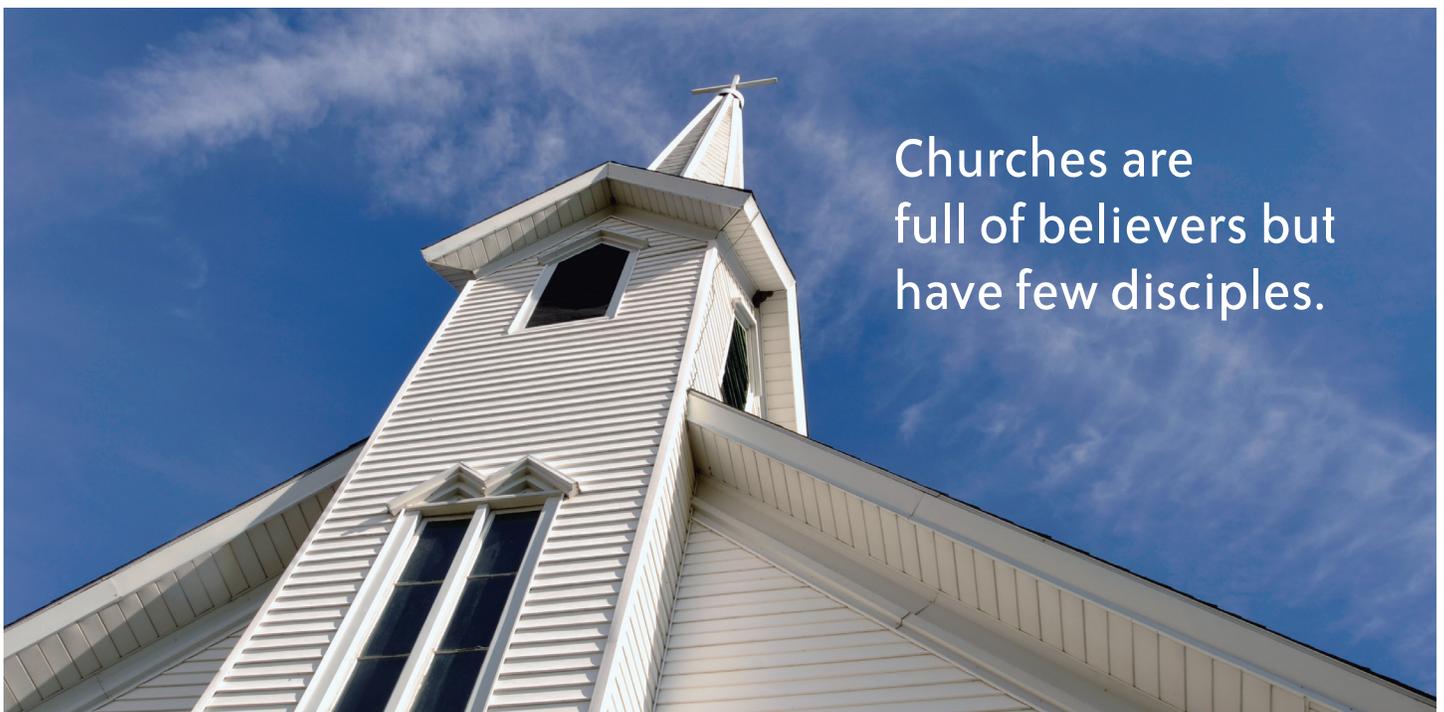
It is clear that, overall, what we have been doing to make fully committed followers of Christ isn’t working. Our efforts have not been successful in creating authentic Christian disciples—followers of Jesus who have the capacity to turn this world upside down as was said of Christ’s first-century disciples (Acts 17:6). It is no longer possible to effectively present the gospel or to nurture believers using the same basic methods as employed in the second half of the last century, a time when many of us were “raised in the Lord.” The days of programmatic discipleship-formation are over—or ought to be. It is clear that we need to make a shift in both the mentality of disciple-making (why we do it) and in the modality of disciple-making (how we do it).

We must shift from a linear to a dynamic model: from the academic to the experiential; the institutional-

focused to the individual-focused; the structured to the spontaneous. We need to move from monologue to dialogue: from talking to listening and from engaged heads to engaged hands; from orthodoxy to orthopraxy; from program to personal; from content to contextual. And especially from *learning* the Book to *living* the Book.

That’s it. What we need in discipleship is a shift—*discipleSHIFT*. Back to the way things were and were done, not in the 20th century, but 20 centuries ago. We live in a world today that resembles the world of the ancient, early church. Most churches want to go back in time anyway. The problem is they want to go back to what they perceive to be their glory days. What they need to do is go back to the days when the glory of the Lord was touching countless lives—back to the time when the first disciples were made, in response to the mandate of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:19, “*Go and make disciples.*”

The world then and the world now have much in common. Both are characterized by huge unreached people groups, spiritual pluralism, the West as a mission



field, international migration, globalization, poverty, urbanization, oral learners, multiculturalism, global economy, moral relativism and a population majority under age 30. If they could do it then, with fewer overall resources than we have now, we can do it today.

The following four basic elements of first-century disciple-making can serve us well in the 21st century.

■ **The biographical:** an understanding, in light of the age's emphasis on the narrative, that everyone had a story to tell and a story to live. Paul frequently told the story of his life before Christ, the tale of his encounter with Christ, and then about his new life since that encounter with Christ. (See, for example, Acts 22-26.) There is a clear expectation of a life of a different sort beyond the faith commitment. That expectation is where discipleship takes place. It is a learn-by-living model—not just Christ living in us, but us living life for Christ by living life for the sake of others.

■ **The conversational:** Similar to today, the worldview was one of no absolute truth. People didn't accept things at face value. It took time to discuss and decide. We see this phenomenon in Acts 17, when Paul speaks in Athens. After hearing him out, the people respond by saying they need to talk it through. They are interested but not immediately invested. Twentieth-century discipleship, especially in the latter half of the last century, has focused on an academic model of information download—the expectation that by simply imparting and implanting truth, a person would grow. Now we know that the individual needs to interact. There needs to be a give and take—a back and forth—working out the dynamics of one's salvation in real-life situations.

■ **The relational:** When people spent enough quality time together, they got to know better not only each other but also the Lord. Acts tells of Paul spending 1½ years in the city of Corinth and then later two years in the city of Ephesus. This was not a single-week crusade designed to bring people to faith but to see people come to faith in Christ and helping them mature. It was about getting to know people, and people getting to know Jesus. It recognized that much is to be learned over the long haul through a process that cannot be rushed or pushed. Extended time together allows for finding common ground, growing faith and increased connectedness with each other—connectedness to something larger than ourselves.

■ **The incarnational:** “Faith without works is dead,” James would write of first-century discipleship. People may or may not remember what we say, but they will definitely not forget what we do. The old



adage “actions speak louder than words” is, indeed, true. Acts 9 mentions nothing that Dorcas said, but it records what she did for the widows, who were a marginalized, disenfranchised group in the first century. Acts 19 tells of Paul using his God-given tent-making skills to connect with other believers as well as non-believers. Paul and Dorcas each used their talents and abilities to mature in their own faith as well as to nurture the faith of others—lived out in daily life. This is hands-on, life-relevant and experiential. People are looking for *service* on Saturday, not *a service* on Sunday.

An intentional shift today to a multifaceted, embedded model of discipleship can result in a converted seeker, a connected believer and a committed disciple. If that is what we want, we need to change our ways, so they can change theirs.

Dr. Jeffrey Johnson serves American Baptist Home Mission Societies as national director of Evangelism and New Church Planting.

A Contextual Approach to Youth Ministry

When I was a youth minister in Anchorage, Alaska, I once observed a small group of teenage boys huddled together at the bus stop on a cold and snowy winter morning. What was unusual on this frigid morning was that these boys, unlike others, were wearing loafers without socks, instead of thickly insulated pack boots. These boys were clearly making a fashion statement at considerable cost.

Arriving at church, I shared my observations with a parent, who laughed and explained that the “sockless” teens were his son and his son’s buddies. It seems they had become fans of the then-current television series “Miami Vice,” in which the main characters—drug-enforcement officers—were fond of wearing loafers with no socks. We shared a good laugh, reflecting on the hazards of “Miami style” in Alaska’s climate.

This story is a parable for what many believe is happening to young people in our consumer culture: Their

Authentic Christian faith, it may be argued, never takes us out of the world, but draws us into the world to participate with God in reconciling the brokenness.

attention hijacked by technological devices, endless sources of entertainment and distraction, and constant pressure to buy commodities, young people often lose sight of the Real—including the ways God calls them to participate in redemptive work amidst history. Moreover, our culture has normalized this view of distracted youth—we expect little more from them.

Such was not always the case. It may surprise most readers to learn that, prior to the 20th century, young people were anything but passive or distracted. According to John Taylor Gatto’s “The Underground History of American Education: A Schoolteacher’s Intimate Investigation into the Problem of Modern Schooling,” David Farragut, the U.S. Navy’s first admiral, was commissioned as a midshipman at age 10 and commanded a vessel at age 12, while Thomas Edison ran his own printing business at age 12. The men who won the American Revolution were barely out of high school—Alexander Hamilton was 20; Aaron Burr, 21; the Marquis de Lafayette, 19. What amounted to a college class rose up and struck down the British Empire. Young people were among those who, in 1789, fomented revolution in Paris cafes and died in numbers on the barricades, with cries of “liberty, fraternity and equality” along with those who marched alongside their elders in the early industrial era, demanding lower bread prices and higher wages.

Before the middle of the 19th century, many youth engaged in serious work, held significant social roles and helped maintain social equilibrium. Many forces conspired to domesticate young people in the United States, including the 1930s high school movement—which removed them from networks of adult mentors and placed them in peer-dominated learning environments devoid of practical experiences—and the subsequent exploitation of these captive youth subcultures by marketers and commercial forces. Today, young people exist in institutions in which they have less than full power for longer than any age-cohort in the history of the world.

Authentic Christian faith, it may be argued, never takes us out of the world, but draws us into the world to participate with God in reconciling the brokenness. Jesus set his footprints deeply into the earth, among the oppressed, suffering and sick. In the Apostles’ Creed, we affirm that “Jesus descended into hell.” Jesus’ ministry was among the poor, widows, lepers, imprisoned, blind, the least and the lost—suffering within a particular historical context, exploited by structural powers and principalities. While there is enormous cultural pressure for young people to remain passive consumers, youth

ministry must not simply cultivate a privatized, spiritual experience; for such an experience does not finally reflect the truth of Christ's own ministry.

For too long, popular youth ministry has assumed that if we simply teach young people right ideas and teach them to pray, they will find their own calling in the world. Since the beginning, Christians have found disciplined ways, through practices of discernment, to attend to God's call upon their lives. Discernment is not intended to replace scriptural guidance or prayer, but instead places these alongside other spiritual practices in an effort to form judgments concerning the way forward in faith. Practices of discernment have normally been reserved for vocational or occupational questions, but also in deciding life partners or other big questions.

Many of us have come to realize that young people need to be taught by precept and model the practice of discernment to find the way forward in partnership with God's Spirit in the concrete aspects of their lives—their work, leisure, political, economic, creative, cultural and sexual habits. Young people require specific and ongoing (not episodic) practices for discerning God's call in their particular contexts and circumstances. Drawing from historic practices, the rhythms of a practice for young people might involve listening, understanding, dreaming and acting.

Listening: Young people need to be taught to listen—to attend closely to epiphanies of compassion, joy, desire and responsibility by which God may speak.

Understanding: They need to be taught practices of understanding—to comprehend those powers and structures which give shape to circumstances by which the world is constrained in suffering or released for freedom or joy.

Dreaming: Young people need to be taught to perceive the world enchanted by God, alive with God's Spirit in their midst—a beacon calling them to serve with Christ a paschal life present to the world's injustice, suffering and loss.

Acting: Finally, young people need practices of action that help them to act faithfully, bringing the justice and beauty of God into its fullness.

Each of these four activities draws from historic practices, including *Ignatian examen* and contemplation, scriptural and theological reflection, and social action models of analysis and action. Taken together, over time these practices habituate young people in discerning a way of life, a way of seeking God continually. The rhythms are flexible and allow for a great many different diverse activities—including journaling, art, drama, story-telling, Bible study and a wide variety of prayer practices. Youth ministry that teaches these practices may help young people reclaim their place as agents of faith in history, not hijacked by entertainment or fashion culture, which finally distract them from love of God and neighbor.

The Rev. David F. White, Ph.D., an ordained United Methodist elder, is currently the Ellis and Nancy Gribble Nelson professor of Christian Education at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His publications include "Dreamcare: A Theology of Youth, Spirit, and Vocation" (Cascade, 2013); "Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture" (Cascade, 2007, co-authored with Brian Mahan and Michael Warren); and "Practicing Discernment with Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach" (Pilgrim Press, 2005).



American Baptist Home Mission Societies Strengthens Commitment to Young Adults

Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. — I Timothy 4:12 (NRSV)

Embracing the words of First Timothy 4:12, American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) is committed to encouraging discipleship among young adults. In fact, ABHMS created two new young adult programs, offering both this past summer in conjunction with American Baptist Churches USA's Mission Summit in Overland Park/Kansas City, Kan.

A four-day program for American Baptists, "Reconnect, Renew, Re-envision" was attended by 18 youth and young adults hailing from throughout the United States. Highlights included relationship-building and thoughtful conversation. Two young women were chosen via an application process to participate in the Young Adult Leadership Experience (YALE), a 14-day initiative for ages 18-29, which featured mission outreach at one of ABHMS' Neighborhood Action Program (NAP) Christian centers.

At Mission Summit, participants of both programs engaged in hands-on mission, packing meals for survivors of the Moore, Okla., tornado. Under the direction of Youth Front, a nonprofit organization in Kansas City, the group formed an assembly line, scooping ground soy meal, dehydrated chipped vegetables, rice and vitamins into approximately 1,200 13.8-ounce plastic packets that would yield about 7,050 reconstituted meals.

"I like that the packets give people the nutrients that they need. They don't have to think about what to cook," said "Reconnect, Renew, Re-envision" participant Stephanie Harvey, 17, of First Baptist Church, Worcester, Mass.

YALE participants Melanie Blain, 20, of Meriden, Conn., and Tashi Vedel, 23, of Alameda, Calif., were happy for the opportunity to aid U.S. residents in need—a concept often referred to as mission "on one's doorstep."

"Home mission is about looking around where you are and asking, 'What can I do to help?'" said Blain. "Chances are that there are people right in your backyard, who have been struggling all along, waiting for someone to ask that question."

In addition to the food-packaging mission activity, Blain and Vedel participated in other hands-on mission, including a week of interaction with elementary and

middle school youth in the summer program at Bethel Neighborhood Center, ABHMS' NAP Christian center in Kansas City.

"I had a great time getting to work with the staff and kids at Bethel," said Vedel. "I loved going to pick up and drop off the kids, as they would sing in the back of the vans."

Blain and Vedel joined "Reconnect, Renew, Re-envision" attendees in a Conversation Café, in which the Rev. Trevor Beauford, ABHMS national coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, posed important



questions regarding young adults working in partnership with ABHMS to engage in discipleship, community and justice efforts. The participants conversed at their tables before sharing their answers with the larger group. Among the issues that surfaced is that young people who choose to connect with American Baptist Churches USA would prefer to do so face-to-face. In this age of online communication, they yearn for personal connection, such as that provided at Immerse, the ABHMS-sponsored 2012 national gathering of American Baptist Youth in Washington, D.C.

Participants from both programs were invited to participate in Mission Summit Conversations, which ranged from "Spiritual Discernment" and "Evangelism as a Way of Life" to "Leadership in Crosscultural Contexts" and "Living out Our Cultural Reality." All attended ABHMS' breakfast and luncheon events. During the latter, Blain represented all young adults as she participated in the commissioning of the Rev. Dr. Saw Ler Htoo and Pastor Ronald Charles Nunuk as home missionaries to the Burma Diaspora community in the United States.

Nadine Hasenecz serves as communications associate with American Baptist Home Mission Societies. For more information about ABHMS' youth and young adult initiatives, contact Trevor Beauford, ABHMS national coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, at trevor.beauford@abhms.org or 800-222-3872, x2419.

An Amazing Experience

When I embark on something new, I usually become shy and nervous—a characteristic that I have struggled to overcome and which has held me back in many ways. I had just left a wearing job and had no idea what was going to happen next, when I found out about the Young Adult Leadership Experience (YALE) to be offered by American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) at American Baptist Churches USA's Mission Summit/Biennial in June 2013. I was so excited. I laughed on the phone with my pastor, who alerted me to the opportunity because it fit perfectly with what I wanted and felt called to do. I couldn't believe that God had put this perfect opening in my lap right when I needed it!

When I learned that I had been accepted into the program, I was nervous. This opportunity was something I had never done before, in a place I had never been, with people I didn't know. I was unsure what to expect. When I arrived in Kansas City, I was greeted by the Rev. Mang Sonna, executive director of Bethel Neighborhood Center, where program participants would be volunteering. Mang was so welcoming and kind, answering all my questions about the center.

The first few days went quickly. We helped to organize the food cabinet and assisted senior citizen clients in the morning. The best part for me was riding in the van to transport the children to and from the center. I loved hearing the boys in the back of the van singing along to the radio and seeing how excited they were to come to the center, where they could join friends, play games, exercise and, once a week, go swimming or to the movies.

I also was given the opportunity to sit in on ABHMS board meetings. We were asked our opinions and ideas on various topics. It was amazing to be invited to sit at the table not only to listen but to contribute and be met with genuine interest. It makes me feel that the denomination really cares about, values and wants the involvement of young adults.

At the Mission Summit/Biennial, YALE participants also helped at the ABHMS exhibit booth and joined in conversations about how to connect young adults to



Melanie Blain and Tatiana Vedel (foreground) organize the pantry at Bethel Neighborhood Center.

ABHMS. I was honored to pray over letters that were to be sent to military personnel overseas and to men and women who are currently incarcerated. The best times, though, were when I worked with or shared a meal, ride or conversation with others and heard their testimonies. The number of people with whom we interacted was really amazing.

The experience has given me new ideas and opened my eyes to ministries that I had never before considered. I am truly grateful to ABHMS for the opportunity. It turned out to be a really amazing experience. And, in the end, I realized that there was no need to be nervous.

Tatiana Vedel, who majors in social justice at Berkeley (Calif.) City College, attends New Life Christian Fellowship, Castro Valley, Calif. Currently on the planning team for YouthQuake in the bay area and a member of Ingrid Roldán-Román's Missionary Partnership Team, Vedel has served as a youth leader, camp counselor, co-director for youth camp and an assistant program staff director at Redwood Glen, Loma Mar, Calif.

Young Adults ‘Out Front’ in Engaging Justice, Advocacy Ministries

Vital congregations have a healthy mix of engaged participants across the life cycle. Churches need the gifts of each generation: the long view of history from older members, the energy and investment of mid-life members, and the fresh perspectives and innovation of young adults.

Many mainline churches find one or more generations missing from the mix. Soul-searching members may ask where the young people are. The cynical among us blame cultural distractions or indict young adults themselves, deeming them self-centered and uncaring.

A more faithful response would be to look for signs of God’s love and grace among young adults, and then ask how the church might join in. I’m reminded of the conversation in which the disciples question Jesus about others who are healing in his name (John 9:38-41). They proudly announce their efforts to stop the activity because the healers were not part of their group. Jesus’ response—“Whoever is not against us is for us”—provides the following insight: Those doing the work of love and justice are partners with churches in God’s work in the world.

I have been aware, from the stories I’ve heard, of God working in the lives of young adults, whether or not they are involved in church. So I interviewed a sampling of 18- to 29-year-olds about their social service, social

justice and advocacy work. Those interviewed* were all actively engaged in mainline congregations as adolescents, but most are not presently active in church. I found passionate people engaged in acts of love and justice through their vocations, friendships and communities.

- Judy went to law school intending to work in criminal prosecution or defense because she wanted to work for justice for those without a voice. Instead, she found herself drawn to bankruptcy law. In her work, she listens to people who are at the end of their ropes—people who have been taken advantage of by predatory creditors and pay-day lenders or who find themselves in generational poverty and need help making changes. She knows that nonprofits and church-related organizations do this kind of work, but she wants to help those most in need. A good listener who has always been passionate about helping others, Judy walks alongside the most vulnerable in our society, helping them feel hope and believe in themselves.
- Lindsay works with compromised children in a mental health care facility. She pursued nursing to help people, and she chose her particular job because it allows human connection with frequently overlooked children. She understands that much is dehumanizing

A more faithful response would be to look for signs of God’s love and grace among young adults, and then ask how the church might join in. I’m reminded of the conversation in which the disciples question Jesus about others who are healing in his name (John 9:38-41).



in a pediatric acute mental health care facility, even with necessary procedures and precautions. Lindsay takes special joy in advocating for people whose lives are filled with abuse and pain. She is passionate about ensuring that they have the care they need to take positive next steps toward wholeness. Lindsay is involved in a congregation, as well. The child of a pastor, she developed a unique view regarding the extravagant waste of church buildings at the expense of helping hurting people. The church she attends intentionally has no building so that resources can be spent to help those in need.



and animals in need, or live justly and mercifully simply because it's the right thing to do. These young adults are not waiting for churches to create ministries through which they can volunteer. Instead, they are following their passions and giftedness to share God's love in practical and tangible ways, even if they don't explicitly use those words. In "Learning Mission, Living Mission: Churches that Work," the Rev. Glynis LaBarre, American Baptist Home Mission Societies transformation strategist, offers this insight:

Christians in the missional movement choose to become actively involved in alliances with their community. They have discovered that acting on the truth of Christ's Gospel makes a difference in the world. They form authentic relationships with others—Christian and non-Christian—while addressing community problems. These efforts lead to true partnerships in which love, respect, and dialogue can arise as a natural part of working together (Judson Press, 2012, p. 15).

It can be easy to overlook the ministries of young adults when they don't fit our expectations—such as attending church and working through established programs—but people like the ones I interviewed live and work in neighborhoods all around our churches. Congregations can become healthier and more vital by opening their eyes to these young adult "passionaries" living God's love in unexpected ways.

**Names and identifying information have been changed to protect interviewees' identities.*

The Rev. Denise Janssen, Ph.D., assistant professor of Christian Education at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, is an ordained American Baptist pastor currently serving Laurel Park and Greenwood United Methodist churches in the greater Richmond, Va. area. She is author (with Diane Janssen Hemmen and Sallie Verner) of "Fostering Faith: Teaching & Learning in Christian Community" (Judson Press, September 2014).

- Simone is a special education teacher in a middle school in an affluent suburb. She chose this path because it allows her to advocate for children considered incapable of so much. Using her voice on their behalf, she can help shape vocational and independent living options—plans that develop in middle school. Simone advises teachers about the unique abilities of each child and suggests strategies to help each work to his or her highest level. Simone moved away from the church of her childhood as she struggled with its hypocrisy and authoritarian nature. She and her husband consider reconnecting with a church, but she describes herself as being guided by her internal moral compass, rather than by religious authorities.
- As a child, Michelle found herself befriending the special education children in the inclusion classroom in her elementary school. It was something of a personal crusade to stop other kids from being mean to them. As an adult, she was intrigued by the reasons that the world doesn't seem to work for some children. She recently completed a master's degree in early childhood special education and works as a classroom teacher in a nonprofit preschool with children who have developmental delays and complicated home situations. She describes feeling drawn to early childhood special education because the greatest impact can be made early in children's lives. A passionate commitment to sharing God's love plays a role in Michelle's investment in this work, although she is not presently active in a congregation. Michelle talks about living her faith through her work in this way: "I know that today, for the 3.5 hours I had my kids [in school], they knew they were safe, had the food they needed, and there were people to give them hugs, even if they were throwing sand or cussing. That's a good day. Even on the worst days, there's something good."

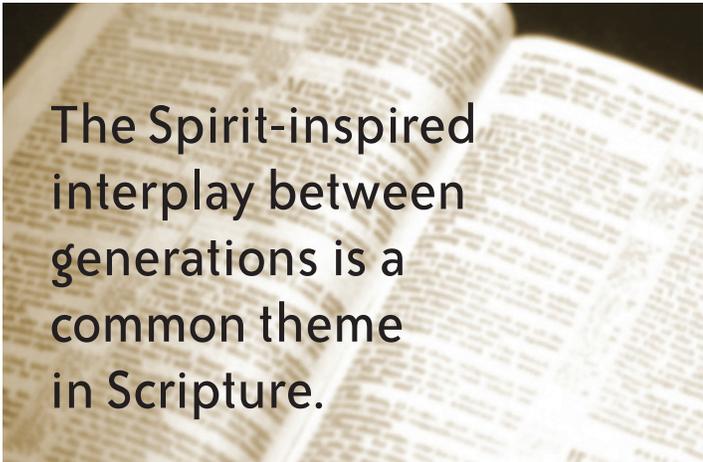
I could go on to tell about others who do the following: provide services for clients regardless of their ability to pay, use their creativity to tell the stories of the marginalized, use their own resources to care for humans

Disconnection | Young Adults and the Church

I suspected that our investigation into why young adults disconnect from the church or walk away from their faith would uncover one big reason—maybe two or three. I expected we would find, for instance, that going away to college is a faith killer—but it turns out that’s just not the case for most young people.

Instead of one or two “biggies,” we discovered a wide range of perspectives, frustrations, and disillusionments that compel twentysomethings to disconnect. No single reason pushes a majority of young adults to drop out. Each person has his or her own set of unique and mundane reasons—that is, both deeply personal and rather pedestrian. Yet the everydayness of these reasons does not make them unimportant or uninteresting. Every member of the Mosaic generation* has a story. And *every story matters*.

While we explore the reasons many young adults disconnect, keep in mind that our research examines primarily their perceptions of what’s gone wrong. Research is not infallible and it requires interpretation. Most peo-



The Spirit-inspired interplay between generations is a common theme in Scripture.

ple are not fully cognizant of what, exactly, causes them to leave church or faith, and part of our job as researchers is to analyze all the responses and look for themes to emerge. In doing so, we use not only our professional expertise but also our spiritual discernment.

In sifting through our research findings and individual stories, we were able to identify six themes that cap-

ture the overall phenomenon of disconnection between the next generation and the church. I want to reiterate that people in every generation may experience similar feelings. However, the combination of our cultural moment and the discontinuity of the next generation make these attitudes among young adults particularly combustible. Many twentysomethings are not hesitating, as have previous generations, to burn the bridges that once connected them to their spiritual heritage.

Here are the broad reasons they offer for dropping out. They find the church to be:

1. Overprotective. The impulses toward creativity and cultural engagement are some of the defining characteristics of the Mosaic generation that are most obvious. They want to reimagine, re-create, rethink, and they want to be entrepreneurs, innovators, starters. To Mosaics, creative expression is of inestimable value. The church is seen as a creativity killer where risk taking and being involved in culture are anathema. *How can church peel back the tamper-resistant safety seal, making space for imaginative risk taking and creative self-expression, traits that are so valued within the next generation?*

2. Shallow. Among Mosaics, the most common perception of churches is that they are boring. Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ. Few young Christians can coherently connect their faith with their gifts, abilities, and passions. In other words, the Christianity they received does not give them a sense of calling. *How can the church nurture a deep, holistic faith in Christ that encompasses every area of life?*

3. Antiscience. Many young Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible. Yet they see the mostly helpful role science plays in the world they inhabit—in medicine, personal technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas. What’s more, science seems accessible in a way that the church



does not; science appears to welcome questions and skepticism, while matters of faith seem impenetrable. *How can the Christian community help the next generation interact with science positively and prophetically?*

4. Repressive. Religious rules—particularly sexual mores—feel stifling to the individualist mindset of young adults. Consequently they perceive the church as repressive. Sexuality creates deep challenges for the faith development of young people. *How can the church contextualize its approach to sexuality and culture within a broader vision of restored relationship?*

5. Exclusive. Although there are limits to what this generation will accept and whom they will embrace, they have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus Christianity’s claims to exclusivity are a hard sell. They want to find areas of common ground, even if that means glossing over real differences. *How can the Christian community link the singular nature of Christ with the radical ways in which he pursued and included outsiders?*

6. Doubtless. Young Christians (and former Christians too) say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that faith doesn’t always make sense. In addition, many feel that the church’s response to doubt is trivial and fact focused, as if people can be talked out of doubting. *How can the Christian community help this generation face their doubts squarely and integrate their questions into a robust life of faith?*

Once we begin to understand the problems the next generation experiences with the church and Christianity, our second task is to determine how these areas of disconnect are challenging the Christian community to change. Are there ways in which the struggles of the

next generation ought to shift our thinking and practice? If we ignore or discount the spiritual journeys of the young, could we be at risk of missing a fresh move of God in our time?

The Spirit-inspired interplay between generations is a common theme in Scripture. As one example, consider the story of Eli (the older generation) and Samuel (the younger generation) described in 1 Samuel 3. You may recall the episode. In the middle of the night, God calls to Samuel, but the young prophet-in-training repeatedly mistakes God’s call for the voice of his mentor, Eli. Finally it occurs to Eli, after Samuel has interrupted his sleep several times, to instruct his protégé to say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Once I heard present-day leader Jack Hayford observe that the younger generation needs the older generation to help them identify the voice of God, just as Samuel needed Eli to help him know God was calling him. Hayford also observed that helping in this way requires that we recognize, as Eli did, *that God is speaking to the younger generation.*

If you are a younger Christian, this means it’s *your* turn to listen.

If you are a “well-established” believer, maybe it’s time to trust in a deeper way that God is working in the next generation.

**Mosaics refers to those born between 1983 and 2003. The Barna Group uses this term because it reflects the generation’s eclectic relationships, thinking styles and learning formats, among other factors.*

From “You Lost Me: Why Young People are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith” by David Kinnaman (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); ©David Kinnaman, pp. 91–94. Excerpted and adapted by permission. All rights reserved. For a summary of the Barna Group data presented in this article, visit www.youlostmebook.org.

The Gifts of *Immerse*

In 2012, I attended Immerse, the national gathering of American Baptist youth. I went to the conference as a peer leader, ready to lead a group of young adults. What I had was an immersion experience.

As a former high school swimmer, I know that if someone wants to get in the race, they can't put merely a toe in the water. They can't wade in waist deep. They have to completely immerse themselves in the water—go all in. I think the same can be said about the relationship with God. Just as with competitive swimming, we can't put in only a toe. At the national gathering, I came to a deeper understanding of what it means to fully immerse myself in God.

Jumping in to anything can be scary—whether it is a sport, a job or a relationship. It can be especially daunting when it comes to dedicating our lives to God. But at Immerse, I received the encouragement I needed to take the plunge. Knowing that I had so many people around to support me helped me see how we are all in this together, providing a community of inspiration.

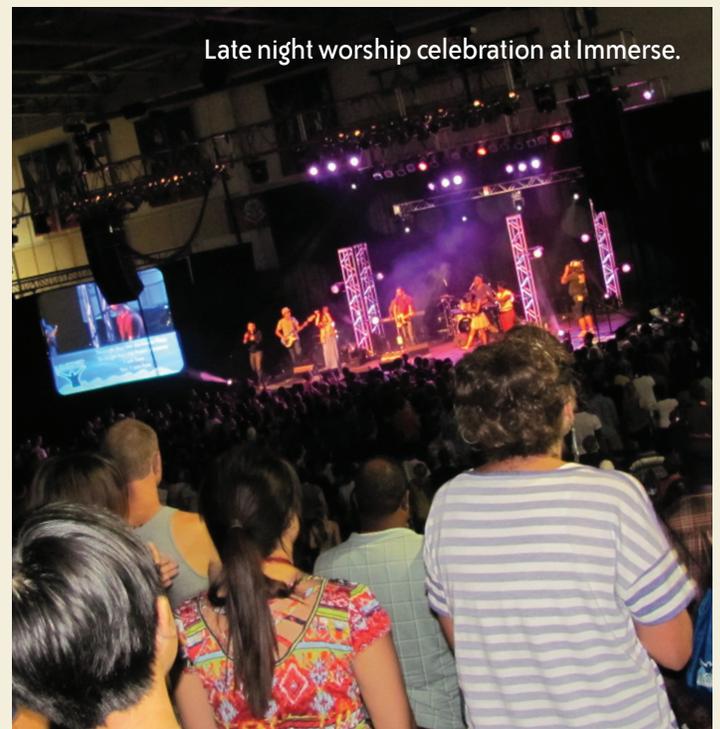
The theme Bible text for the week was Romans 12:1-2.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

These verses challenge us to fully immerse ourselves and let God change the way we think and live our lives. Attending Immerse offered me an opportunity to see and hear others. I went to be a leader and, in the process of being with and listening to others, I learned about myself and my faith in God—just one of the many gifts that I was able to take away from the conference. As I reflect on my experience at Immerse, I can see how my commitment to being a part of that experience led me to a more

profound sense of community. I was further inspired by the verses that followed the Immerse theme text.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness (verses 6-8).



Late night worship celebration at Immerse.

The most profound gift I received from the experience is the knowledge that we all have gifts. More important, however, is how we use those gifts that God has so gracefully given to us. Do we use them for our own personal gain or to help, encourage and strengthen others?

Joshua Greenfield-Tuttle served as a peer leader at the 2008 and 2012 American Baptist national youth gatherings, and was a regional youth representative to the 2011 American Baptist Biennial in Puerto Rico.

Young Adults and the Future of the Church

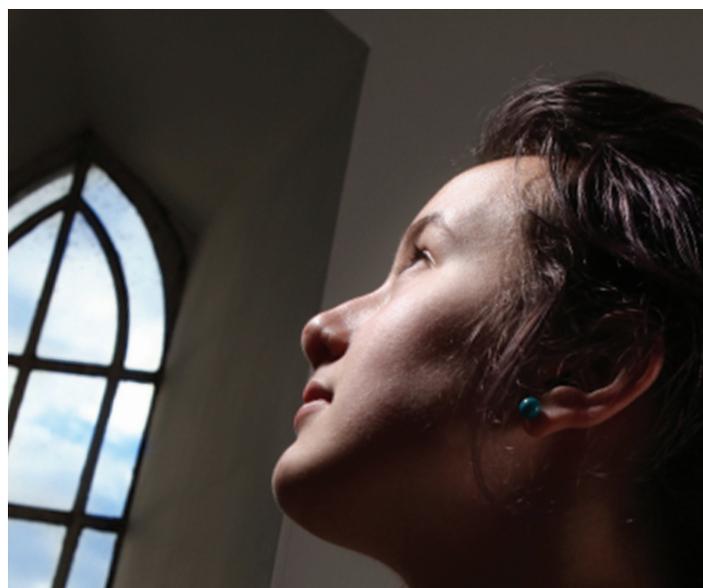
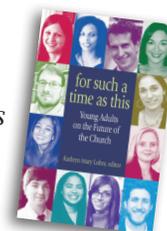
Today the majority of people in the United States self-identify as Christian. Yet the statistics are changing as rapidly as the landscape. In 2012, the Pew Forum released a study titled, “The Rise of the ‘Nones’” (*The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, October 9, 2012). The central finding was that fully one-fifth of the U.S. public—and a third of adults under the age of 30—are religiously unaffiliated. Many of our churches have understandably become fixated on this data because it points to an impending reality: that within a relatively short period of time, perhaps a single generation, the role of Christianity as the majority religion in the United States will slip if not fall completely. Such generational studies have given the churches a window into the unknown future, to be sure, but they have also served to strengthen the generational divide. In 2012 a study entitled, “Can the Church Log in with the ‘Connected Generation?’” [*Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2012*, ed. Eileen W. Lindner (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012)] made the link all too directly between the urgent need to reverse the churches’ membership decline and the untapped potential of young adults. The strategy offered was for the church to “recalibrat[e] its ministry and mission to meet the needs, and quicken the commitment of Millennials to religious institutions.”

I couldn’t agree more with the first part of this strategy, but I reject the second. The super-sized church institutions of a bygone era have become impossible for any generation to sustain. Why? In short, the role of the churches in American public life simply isn’t what it used to be. As a result, the very assumptions upon which such institutions were built must now be called into question. The challenge before us, I believe, is not to create new assumptions about our context for Christian witness, but to change our posture toward that context. The churches will need to learn new roles as conveners and bridge builders in an era marked by the free exchange of ideas and information through local, national, and global networks.

The churches don’t need to be about “hooking” younger generations into the church so that it can

return to a past that no longer exists, but about engaging across generations to shape missional goals for the future to which God is calling us. No matter our ages, our hope as Christians is not a hope for our institutions, but a hope for the church—a living, growing community called to share the Good News with the world of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. The younger among us have more to say and do than to fulfill a demographic void. We want to work on behalf of the least, the last, and the lost. We want to act to overcome the urgent social issues of our time: dire poverty and racism, the devastation of creation, and obscene violence and war. We want to be effective witnesses in today’s world, tending to the scandalous divisions within the body of Christ and the scandalous realities of our broken world. I guarantee you that where this is the focus of the churches, the young people will be there. We are already here.

Adapted and excerpted from the preface to “For Such a Time as This: Young Adults on the Future of the Church” by Kathryn Mary Lohre (Judson Press, 2013).



Youth Leaders as Instruments of Transformation and Hope

The testimonies of youth present a “picture” of leaders and youth ministry that serve as instruments of transformation and hope. The testimonies show that leaders and youth ministry can be—must be—resources for youth development in the form of moral and spiritual strength, positive attitudes, and abilities needed to confront life’s realities. Listen to the youth testify:

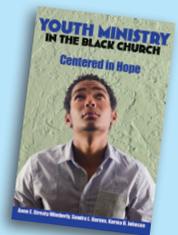


- “My youth leader’s kindness and leniency opened my eyes on how to live a good Christian life; and although I’m not there yet, I am consciously working on it.”
- “I would say it’s really helped me feel confident in myself, knowing that I can speak in front of the church and be a leader in the church. I can be somebody the other youth look up to.”
- “There are some things in this neighborhood that aren’t positive, but the church kept me going. It keeps me connected.”

- “My youth pastor called me in the office and prayed with me at a really hard time in my life, and put me in touch with a tutoring program.... My grades turned into As and Bs.”
- “Since we do a lot of community service, I’m more aware of what’s going on around me now. I’m always looking for opportunities to give back.”
- “Being in the youth program has taught me patience, respect, and tolerance of other people.... That’s being Christian.”

As one pastor observed sagely, “When you see [youth] active in the church, ...it shows that youth are leaders today. We don’t have to wait until tomorrow.”

Adapted from “Youth Ministry in the Black Church: Centered in Hope” by Anne E. Wimberly, Sandra Barnes, Karma D. Johnson (Judson Press, 2013).



You’re How Old?

My first call was as an associate pastor for youth and Christian education. The first comments I received were reactions about my youthfulness.

“Oh, you are so young!”

“Why, you’re just one of the kids!”

I never responded honestly. I was taught during my childhood growing up in a traditional Korean faith community that respect for our elders meant silence and obedience.

At this point in my new ministry, I desperately needed to legitimize my position. Instead, I found myself back on square one, struggling with the same obstacles I did as an actual young person—people who thought I was incapable, inexperienced, immature, and ignorant. I started to wonder if they were right.

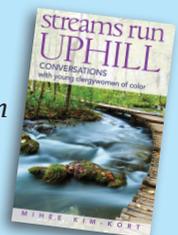
During my second call, I heard the same first impressions again, but this time I discovered that my youth was an asset. I started to see how our culture only *seemed* to worship youth. I saw that my youthfulness could be a

way to stand in solidarity with an oppressed and marginalized demographic.

I wanted to offer a space and ministry to instill in youth the value and power of relationships rooted in a God who seeks to liberate us. It was only in a community that made space for authentic stories that I discovered the courage to step out and be fully me, no matter what the expectation or assumption. I could hardly think of a better attitude to pass on to youth in my church communities: To embrace what God is doing in one’s life no matter what the season and to speak, live, and love boldly from it.



Adapted from “Streams Run Uphill: Conversations with Young Clergywomen of Color” by Mihee Kim-Kort (Judson Press, 2014).



Youth Ministry Today

The face of youth ministry is changing faster than many of us realize. Yes, students still value relationships and being part of a supportive community, but the way those things take place is very different today than it was even five years ago. Students still hang out with one another. They still laugh together and share one another's company. They still meet new people and exchange secrets. The difference is, more and more often, they meet in cyberspace.

These technologies are meeting deep-seated needs experienced by teens growing up in a highly technical world. As youth workers and adults interested in helping young people through the tumult of adolescence, we need to understand how this new way of relating is changing our kids. We also need to understand how these changes are impacting our ministries and, more important, how God can use tools like text messaging and social networking sites to impact the students we work with.

Online communication technology can both destroy and enhance the ideal of community. It can replace true

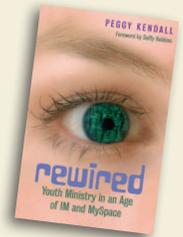
connection with superficial flybys. On the other hand, our teens are comfortable online and have learned to relate to one another online. For most young people, the choice is not either a virtual community or a real one—



they do both. The pull toward community in real life will almost always be stronger than the pull for community found exclusively online. In other

words, Christian community can be experienced on both levels, each interacting with and enhancing the other. Even though the technology may sometimes seem hopelessly overtaken by worldly influences, with the Holy Spirit's help, we can still use the technology to build up God's people.

Excerpted and adapted from Peggy Kendall, "Rewired: Youth Ministry in an Age of IM and MySpace" (Judson Press, 2007), xi-xii, 56.



An Invitation for Youth Leaders

As a leader of youth, you have accepted a crucial calling. Presumably, you accepted this vocation because you want to help the next generation to explore God's call in their lives.

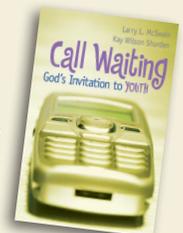
A call is essentially an invitation. The invitation comes from God. And an essential part of recognizing God's call is the lifelong task of getting to know yourself. Before you undertake the daunting task with your students, take a few minutes to become aware of the strengths, expectations and motivations you bring to the task. Such awareness will make you a more effective leader. So set aside all the "doing" for a moment, take a deep breath, and consider the following questions:

1. What was adolescence like for you?
2. What things do you wish people had told you, offered to you, or allowed you to do during your adolescence and young adulthood?
3. As you envision working with youth, how do you see yourself interacting with them? What are your hopes? What would "success" look like to you?

4. How do you feel about "call" in your own life? What are your joys? your frustrations? your fears? your dreams?
5. In what ways do you see working with youth as part of your call?

Youth ministry that is authentic and transforming is *empowering*, characterized by trust, hope, openness, confidentiality and respect. It is also *narrative*, seeking the intersection of the stories of God with human experience in the world. By exploring the answers to these questions in your life, you may feel more empowered to help your young people to find their own intersections—and their own calling.

Adapted from "Appendix for Leaders" by Cassandra Carkuff Williams in "Call Waiting: God's Invitation to Youth" by Larry L. McSwain and Kay Wilson Shurden (Judson Press, 2005).



Preserving the Commitment to Religious Liberty in the Next Generation

Religious liberty is always one generation away from extinction. Protecting it demands our utmost vigilance, including a targeted approach to the education of young people.

For more than 75 years, the Baptist Joint Committee (BJC) for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C., has fought to uphold the historic Baptist principle of religious freedom. Our organization engages in various arenas to defend and extend religious liberty for all people, including in the courts, in Congress and in the executive branch of the federal government.

As the BJC's education and outreach specialist, one of my tasks is to cultivate the same level of commitment to our mission in the next generation exhibited by previous generations of advocates. Fortunately, a passion for justice and freedom is not something we must create in the next generation. It already exists. Every day, I see younger generations taking an interest in defending those who cannot defend themselves. As they champion the rights of all people and fight for social justice, we can work together behind the belief that every individual is important in God's eyes.

At the BJC, education is at the core of our everyday activities. Our leaders continue to be called upon by churches to preach, teach and facilitate discussions concerning church and state relations. Executive Director Brent Walker and General Counsel Holly Hollman are eager to engage young advocates, and college professors often request them as speakers. The annual Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest challenges high school students to research and evaluate specific religious liberty issues, while allowing us to connect with students far and wide. We received entries from 46 states in 2013, as well as from China and Sweden. The BJC also reaches future advocates with the annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State. The event brings to a college, university or seminary campus a speaker who can inspire and call others to an ardent commitment to religious freedom.

The BJC understands that our high expectations for the next generation must be matched with new ways of reaching them. With the opening of our Center for Reli-



gious Liberty on Capitol Hill in 2012, our capabilities for religious liberty education increased dramatically. We now host groups who visit Washington, D.C., in our own state-of-the-art facility and use various video means to reach groups who are unable to visit the area. Our new interactive whiteboard gives us the capacity to tailor presentations to each audience and helps us illustrate how religious liberty impacts their role in the community.

We, at the BJC, understand the vital roles future generations play in the defense of religious liberty, and the creation of my position speaks to that commitment. We plan to engage the energy and passion for justice of younger generations and unite that with the enduring heritage of religious liberty. We believe whole-heartedly that the result of this union will be the empowerment of future advocates in our churches, our courts, our community and our government, ensuring the Baptist tradition of religious freedom continues today and tomorrow.

Charles Watson Jr. is the education and outreach specialist at the BJC. To learn more about the BJC's education programs or to schedule a visit, contact him at cwatson@BJCOnline.org.

Preservando el compromiso con la libertad religiosa de la próxima generación

La libertad religiosa está siempre a punto de extinción en la próxima generación. Protegerla requiere nuestra máxima vigilancia, incluyendo un enfoque dirigido a la educación de los jóvenes.

Por más de 75 años, el Comité Bautista Unido por la Libertad Religiosa, BJC por sus siglas en inglés (*Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty*) en Washington, DC, ha luchado para mantener el histórico principio bautista de la libertad religiosa. Nuestra organización se involucra en diversos ámbitos para defender y extender la libertad religiosa para todas las personas, incluso en los tribunales, en el Congreso y en el Poder Ejecutivo del gobierno federal. Como especialista en educación y extensión del BJC, una de mis tareas es la de cultivar en la próxima generación el mismo nivel de compromiso con nuestra misión que vimos en generaciones anteriores de defensores. Afortunadamente, la pasión por la justicia y la libertad no es algo que tenemos que crear en la próxima generación. Ya existe. Todos los días veo a las generaciones más jóvenes mostrar interés en la defensa de quienes no pueden defenderse a sí mismos. A medida que defienden los derechos de todas las personas y luchan por la justicia social, podemos trabajar juntos y juntas en la convicción de que cada



individuo es importante a los ojos de Dios. Nuestros esfuerzos en la educación son el centro de nuestras actividades cotidianas en el BJC. Nuestros líderes continúan siendo invitados por iglesias para predicar, enseñar y facilitar debates sobre las relaciones entre iglesia y estado. El Director Ejecutivo, Brent Walker, y la Consejera General, Holly Hollman están dispuestos a involucrar a personas jóvenes interesadas en la defensa de la libertad religiosa, y profesores de la universidad a menudo les invitan como conferencistas. Nuestro concurso anual de becas a través de un ensayo sobre la libertad religiosa reta a estudiantes de secundaria a

investigar y evaluar temas específicos relacionados a la libertad religiosa. El concurso nos permite conectarnos con estudiantes de todo el país. En 2013 recibimos ensayos de 46 estados, así como de China y Suecia. El BJC también llega a futuros defensores con nuestra conferencia anual titulada Walter B. y Kay W. Shurden sobre la libertad religiosa y la separación entre iglesia y estado. El evento lleva un/a conferencista a un campus universitario o seminario para inspirar y llamar a otros a un compromiso ferviente con la libertad religiosa.

El BJC entiende que nuestras altas expectativas para la próxima generación deben coincidir con las nuevas formas de llegar a ella. Con la inauguración de nuestro Centro para la Libertad Religiosa en el Capitolio en 2012, nuestra capacidad para la educación sobre la libertad religiosa aumentó dramáticamente. Ahora recibimos grupos que visitan Washington, DC, en nuestras propias instalaciones de alta tecnología y usamos varios medios de video para llegar a los grupos que no pueden visitarnos. Nuestra nueva pantalla interactiva nos da la capacidad para adaptar las presentaciones a cada público y ayuda a ilustrar cómo la libertad religiosa impacta su rol en la comunidad.

En el BJC entendemos las funciones vitales que futuras generaciones cumplen en la defensa de la libertad religiosa, y la creación de mi puesto habla de ese compromiso. Queremos captar la energía y la pasión por la justicia de las generaciones más jóvenes y unirlos a la herencia perdurable de la libertad religiosa. Creemos de todo corazón que el resultado de esta unión servirá para empoderar a los futuros defensores y defensoras en nuestras iglesias, nuestros tribunales, nuestra comunidad y nuestro gobierno, asegurando que la tradición bautista de la libertad religiosa continúe hoy y mañana.

Charles Watson Jr. es el especialista en educación y extensión en el Comité Bautista Unido por la Libertad Religiosa en Washington, DC. Para obtener más información sobre los programas de educación de la BJC o para programar una visita, póngase en contacto con él en cwatson@BJCOnline.org.

More than Springtime at Purdue



It's a Saturday morning in early spring and students from various groups on the Purdue University campus are arriving at "The Found"—Baptist Student Foundation (BSF)—in work clothes. Soon about 120 of these students will be sent out in teams to homes of the elderly and people with disabilities to clean gutters, rake leaves and wash windows.

This is the second annual "Springification," a campus-wide service project that resulted when a small group of BSF students participated with me in the Missional Church Learning Experience (MCLE) offered by American Baptist Home Mission Societies in the American Baptist Churches of Indiana/Kentucky region. The experience has taught these students that—even if they are a small group on a campus of nearly 40,000 students—they can make an impact for the Kingdom of God.

Although the involvement and scope of Springification has nearly doubled from its first year to its second, and planning is well underway for the third annual event, by far the greatest impact of MCLE has been the



We discover that God will use anybody—not just Christians—to accomplish Christ's mission.

change in the way we approach ministry on campus. In an age when, according to the Pew Research "Religion and Public Life Project," the largest and growing religious preference among 18 to 29-year-olds is "none," a small group like BSF is forced to rethink what it means to be a part of Christ's mission in everything we do.

Instead of deciding what the world around us needs, we begin by conversing with our neighbors. We've learned to listen and not just talk. We are forced to build partnerships with people and groups—even those that are not religious—who have a common passion for change. The result is that we "look" for where God is at work, and we join in. We discover that God will use anybody—not just Christians—to accomplish Christ's mission. We find the magnitude of impact is not dependent on the size of our group. In the process, our new partners often explain that they didn't know that there were Baptists who are "into justice" or Christians who "care about the same things we care about."

The Found is not a place, therefore, for Christians to come and be safe from the "evils" of the world. Our students are making The Found a safe place for anyone who comes: a safe place to ask hard questions; a safe place to discover and be who we are; a safe place to find out that we are loved by God. And their friends are coming. They may not join a Bible study right away—or ever—but they have philosophical conversations in the kitchen, or they share why they don't like church, while playing the latest world-domination board game. They find people who will listen and understand.

For a long time, we, in the church, have been teaching people to be disciples, and then we do everything that we can to push them through the front gate into the world to serve. With a missional perspective, we realize that the gate swings in both directions. As we join in partnership with people who have a passion for justice and a commitment to service, is it possible that maybe some of those "nones" will take a serious look at Jesus? We will see.

The Rev. Dr. Shawn Zambrows is in her 30th year of campus ministry—her 15th at Purdue University.

Missional Immersion in Nebraska

In 2011, American Baptist Churches of Nebraska invited the Rev. Glynis LaBarre, American Baptist Home Mission Societies transformation strategist, to share Missional Church Learning Experience (MCLE) training with the churches in its region. Twenty churches in Nebraska participated. An MCLE guideline is that a church include at least one young adult on its team to serve as a guide to the United States' ever-changing cultural landscape.

Young adult involvement went beyond serving as guides, however. Young adults drove many ideas, and many clung to missional principles like drowning persons to driftwood. These young adults crave God, yearn for justice, are desperate for community and want to do something. These concepts of MCLE provided them with hope:

- God works outside the walls of the church—some times more effectively than inside the walls.
- Partnership with organizations and people already doing Kingdom of God work is vital.
- Listening to your community is key to understanding where God is moving.
- Reading Scripture is foundational.

The genius and power of MCLE is that it is nothing new. It serves as a reminder of how Christ moves through the power of the Holy Spirit in our communities. Young adults now make up half of the Nebraska regional general board. Through young adults who participated in MCLE, our churches have begun to see things once again as Jesus intended—not as church boards, committees and ivory-tower thinkers would have them see things. For example:

- Young adults in Scottsbluff helped their church create the Diaper Depot, which donates hundreds of diapers and baby supplies to single, teenage and poor mothers each month. This ministry led the church to work with local food suppliers—who provide meals to

these families and other poor families in the county—and with the local fire department, which supplies temporary housing and basic home furnishings to fire victims.

- While listening to their community, young adults in the rural farming community of Gibbon learned that,



despite the abundance of produce in the commercial farms all around them, many families do not have enough to eat.

They also found that ministering is all about partnerships and relationships. So the church joined with commercial farms and local businesses to host two events in which hot meals and several weeks' worth of food were provided to families.

- In Norfolk, young adults joined with their local junior high school to provide events for dads and their children. In North Platte, they work with their local grade school to provide tutoring and mentoring. Omaha churches provide basic living supplies for elementary school students.
- Hastings young adults perform in a band at every major community event.
- Benson young adults are learning skills to be the next generation of church leaders.

These examples and many more have been the outflow of young adult involvement in MCLE and ministry to local communities. A passion flowing out of these churches is being kindled by the Holy Spirit and fanned by young adults. They are asking great questions about ministry, are the first ones to volunteer for new ministries and are actively seeking ways to serve. It is an exciting time to be a young adult in Nebraska.

The Rev. Greg Mamula is associate executive minister of American Baptist Churches of Nebraska. Read his blog at Shapedbythestory.blogspot.com.

Transforming Lives through Immersion

Franklin College offers an intensive four-week, inner-city mission course each January. The class, which I have taught a couple of times, is designed to teach students about poverty and, specifically, homelessness. The class examines how individuals and society contribute to homelessness, and what can be done to proactively solve the problem. Many of the students enter the class with preconceived notions. Several believe the homeless population is lazy, or that, for the most part, homelessness is the result of alcohol and other drug addictions. During the month-long immersion course, students often learn their pre-suppositions are wrong.

The students spend four days weekly working at Indianapolis sites that play various roles in assisting the poor and homeless population. One week, some of the women in the class work at the Julian Center, which serves women and children who have been displaced, most often by domestic violence. They learn about the struggle these women face as they look to reconstruct their lives and rediscover their own self-worth and dignity despite their broken dreams. Others in the class focus on providing immediate assistance through organizations that offer food, clothing and counseling services.

A true immersion experience occurs one Monday through Thursday, when students sleep and spend all day

at shelters, interacting with residents and staff. On Friday, the class reconvenes to reflect on the experience and learn about ways to address poverty and homelessness.

The class has been such a success that Indiana Campus Compact, directed by Doug Grant, used it as a model for leading an effective service-learning course for other campuses. For the June 2013 “Assessment of Immersion Service Learning,” Indiana Campus Compact surveyed 252 students who have taken the course since its inception in the late 1990s. The assessment includes the following comments:

- *I cannot begin to fully explain the impact that the Inner City Missions Course had on my life. Taking that course was truly life-changing for me—not to mention it was the reason why I changed my major. The course helped me identify my passion for serving people, especially the ones in our communities who are so often ignored and pushed aside.*
- *The Inner City Missions course was probably the most valuable, memorable and impactful thing I did at Franklin College, specifically the overnight portion. I had always been involved in community service, but this took it to a whole new level. I learned a lot about myself as well as others. I learned why people ended up in these circumstances and how many variables come into play. . . . I learned how to relate to other people and how deep down people are people and all want the same thing—health, happiness, support and stability. It really opened my eyes to things beyond my little world.*

Education through immersion experiences has the power to radically transform students by providing them with an opportunity to understand community needs and to develop a passion for meeting those needs.

The Rev. David Weatherspoon is campus minister at Franklin (Ind.) College, where he has been for the past 10 years. He also serves on the board of the Baptist Campus Ministries Association.



Generations Belong to One Another

From generation to generation, we worship you.” This one line from a worship song by Israel Houghton encapsulates Christianity at its finest: generations coming together to worship the Creator with their spiritual gifts, brokenness from past experiences and strength from the joy in their lives. However, what plagues many of our congregations is the scary chasm between generations. We ask ourselves: “How can individuals possibly come together with a much younger generation that is only interested in video games and themselves, and an older generation that is only interested in talking about the good ol’ days?”

One solution we have turned to at First Baptist Church, Haddonfield, N.J., is GenOn Ministries (www.genonministries.org). I had many of the same fears and questions that congregations face when trying to reach younger people. However, the staff, materials and support offered by GenOn Ministries helped our church flourish with this intergenerational initiative.

The “structural bones” of this ministry include:

- Christ-centered: A saving relationship with God through Christ is more important than anything else.
- Authentic relationships: All persons strive to intentionally model Christlike relationships in the way they think, care and decide about others.
- Called to serve: God calls people, equips them and is present with them as they enter into the task.
- Congregational worship: Worship is not just for adults! It is essential to the spirituality of every person.
- Four parts every week: Worship skills, Bible study, recreation and family time.
- Clergy support: Ongoing clergy leadership and participation, which communicates to the congregation and the young people the importance of this weekly ministry.

Mother Teresa said, “The problem with the world is that we forgot that we belong to one another” (www.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Teresa). When dealing with a group that spans generations, interests, skills and commitment to faith, it is best to take a



biblical approach that values each person as a child of God called into a challenging life of discipleship. Doing so involves capturing the interest of learners through varied teaching approaches,* while including generations in all activities. Each person’s gifts and skills must be acknowledged through a kind spoken word, a gentle smile or a warm hug—all the while the Gospel is being shared across a span of generations, and the light of Jesus Christ is shining bright.

Adults were challenged to introduce themselves to each of the youth in the church, learn their names and talk to them about their daily lives before or after each worship service. The youth were now the focus of our fellowship, instead of being on the outskirts of the congregation. The young people reacted with a visible and growing sense of self as members of the church. They felt valued! Adults were engaging the youth and, in return, the youth were sensing the commitment of adults. Hugs were exchanged, and God’s love was shared from generation to generation.

* The article “Teaching Does Not Equal Talking: Learning Styles and Christian Education” is accessible on American Baptist Home Mission Societies’ website at www.abhms.org > Ministries & Programs > Discipleship & Christian Education > Resources.

The Rev. Erin Phillips is currently serving the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey as an associate regional pastor.

Crossing Boundaries for Social Justice

Youth group service projects are a standard fixture in many churches. They foster community, expand exposure and facilitate meaningful work in the world. In many ways, these projects help churches carry out their mission. Service projects, however, fall short of the personal and social transformation that is at the heart of churches' work in the world and reflect a focus on a narrow or constrained view of Jesus.

Healing, giving and welcoming were as much vehicles for connection between Jesus and people who were different as they were acts of help. Many of those connections were forbidden. While Jesus' message has been interpreted by some as "help others," those stories of helping are also stories of *crossing boundaries*—models for growing close to people who have been culturally, religiously and economically separated from us. In a world of hierarchies and inequality, boundary crossing challenges a status quo that holds people apart. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), for example, the Samaritan helping the Jew is crossing boundaries of culture and religion: This is what it is to be a neighbor, Jesus explains.

What would it look like to put aside the helping narrative for a moment, and focus on the boundary-crossing narrative? After all, helping relationships often place us in boundary-crossing situations that are exciting, challenging and confusing. Boundary-crossing involves looking inward as well as outward, paying attention to the blocks within ourselves as well as power systems that perpetuate and exacerbate divisions. The segregation and polarization that racks the United States today indicate that we have a long way to go in learning how to cross boundaries. It is often said that Sunday is the most segregated day of the week—cause for despair for congregations like mine, who would like very much to be more diverse. Given the challenges of crossing boundaries, how can we hope to guide our young people in living out this part of spiritual community? Perhaps we should let them be our guide.

The story of the Civil Rights Movement, as portrayed in the movie "The Children's March," opens with Martin

Luther King Jr. speaking in a Birmingham church, urging African-American citizens to come and get arrested with him, fill up the jails and change the racist system. People stay quietly in their seats. But the young people start standing up. King and other movement leaders forbid

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the young people from getting involved. But the children already got the bit in their teeth: The young people of Birmingham, including children as young as 6 years old, mobilized. Days later, they left school, marched downtown and were arrested by the thousands. The "Children's March" set the stage for the March on Washington and helped to shape the principles, the energy and the actions of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole.

The young people were crossing boundaries that their parents couldn't, yet. They were defying the rules, limits and expectations of the adult world. This defiance, the Civil Rights Movement came to understand and proclaim, was deeply rooted in Jesus' radical work of

overturning established conventions and assumptions. Are our churches today supporting the potential of our young people to fight forces of division and inequality?

Youth group parent leaders at my church are experimenting with changes in our approach to community life with our youth group, and exploring the possibility that these changes could also breathe new life into youth programming. We are questioning our assumptions about what we expect of our young people. Does our church tap their energy, creativity and resilience? Where do these qualities intersect with the theological questions and community life that occupy our church? Namely, what would it mean to walk with our young people in the tradition of social justice?

We decided to develop a social justice project focused on crossing boundaries, spending the year visiting other houses of worship (temples, synagogues, mosques, churches of different denominations and nationalities) and meeting the youth of those congregations. Everywhere we go, we ask: “What is social justice in this community?” and “What is the role of your religious community in living out the meaning of social justice?” Crossing boundaries not only carries a political charge, but also sparks inquiry. It puts us in the territory of questions, dialogue and the unknown. We are hoping this inquiry will help us learn from one another—Christian from Muslim, adult from adolescent, individual from

group—and begin to reconstruct for ourselves what the tradition of being a neighbor, as Jesus described in the story of the Good Samaritan, means for us today.

We are at the beginning of our journey, but one thing is clear so far: The defiant Christian is a very different proposition from the pious Christian. We began with a trip from the far north of Chicago to the far south of the city, to visit St. Sabina Church, whose priest is a boundary-crosser of tremendous stature. Father Pflieger, a white pastor in an African-American church, lives out his Christian faith through civil disobedience, breaking the rules, challenging the status quo. He challenges Catholic hierarchies and white Christian piety from the pulpit. Our young people are standing in a space from which they had been separated by unwritten laws of segregation, participating in unfamiliar rituals and listening to what people in St. Sabina say is being a neighbor. They are not doing service. They aren’t helping anyone. They are experiencing boundary crossing. And we adults will be listening when they tell us what it means to them.

Shanti Elliott directs the Community Connections program at Francis Parker School in Chicago. Her work focuses on youth leadership and facilitating connections between young people from different neighborhoods, cultures and languages.



A Spring Break for Growth and Rebirth

In March 2013, University Baptist Church, East Lansing, Mich., pursued a spring break service project in the Metro-Detroit area. Through lots of prayer and planning, it became clear that our student population was in need of growth and renewal. At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, our church had no ministry focused on college students. Being so close to Michigan State University, we felt a calling to reach students.

Throughout summer and into early fall, we asked churches in the Metro-Detroit area whether we could serve alongside them in the community. Our hope was to pursue our church vision “to see all peoples of the world

know, worship, and grow, as disciples of Jesus Christ.” God was faithful in answering prayers for church partners that graciously provided housing, helped identify service projects and offered support. Our activities included participating in an interfaith dialogue at an Islamic center, working in a community garden, assisting at a food bank and learning about the history of Detroit.

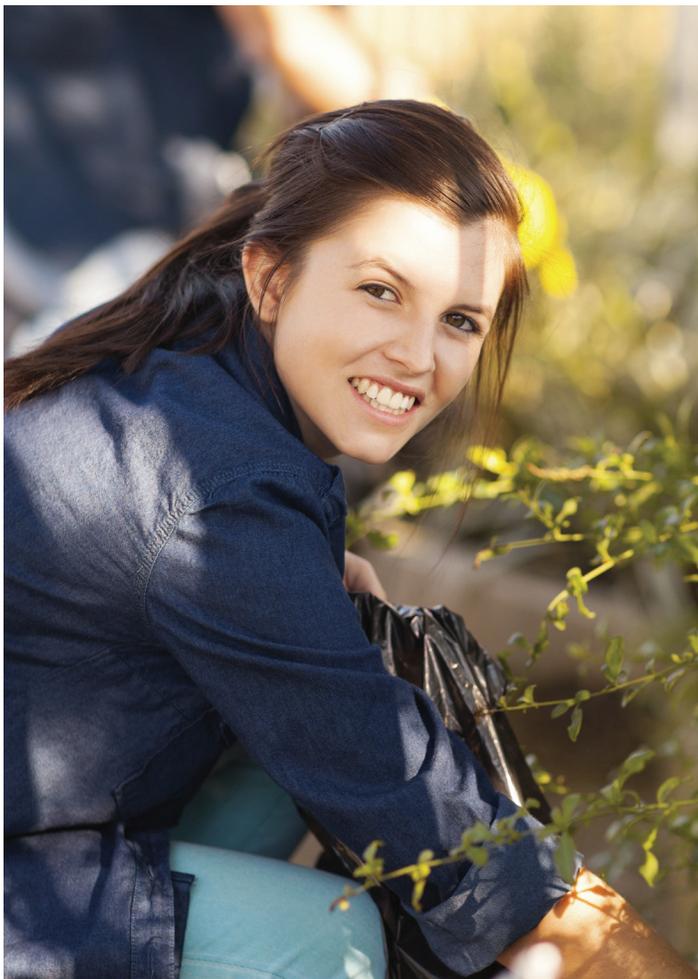
It was a great privilege to engage in the interfaith dialogue at the Islamic center, learning about the Muslim faith while sharing about Christianity. Being able to share our faith with non-Christians was a blessing to our group. Hearing their faith shared in a respectful way, considering the differences and thinking more deeply about our own beliefs provided a great start to the week.

The community gardens where we worked produce fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods that may not have access to healthy food at affordable prices. We put into practice the biblical principle of gleaning: a portion of the crops were left for local people to collect for themselves as needed. It was extremely encouraging to see communities working in partnership with local churches to meet the needs of the people and to demonstrate God’s love for the city of Detroit.

The task at the food bank was to guide people through the building to obtain the food that they needed for the week. The recipients’ gratefulness was humbling, as was the realization that many of us take much for granted. It was a blessing to watch the students offer help.

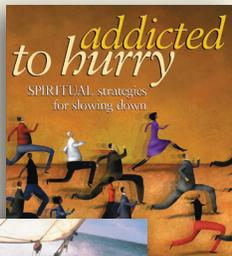
God’s love and mercy is visible among the inner city churches that are moving forward in partnership with the community and influencing lives wherever possible. With the support of American Baptist Home Mission Societies, American Baptist Churches of Michigan and the many churches that have joined us in this effort, much is happening in and around Detroit. God is at work, changing lives through ministries woven into the fabric of neighborhoods and communities throughout the city.

Jeffrey Chan is campus minister at University Baptist Church, East Lansing, Mich.



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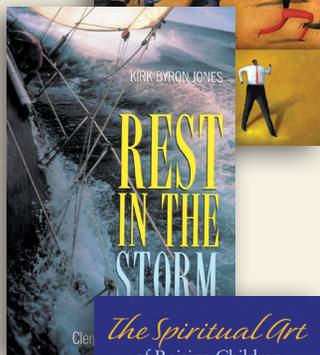


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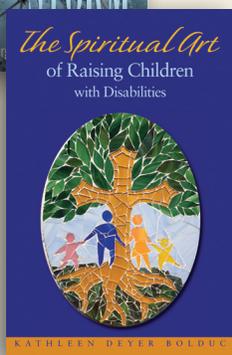


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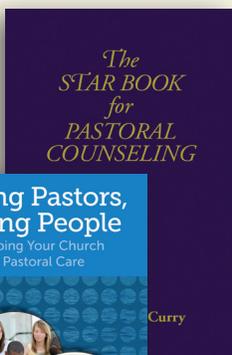
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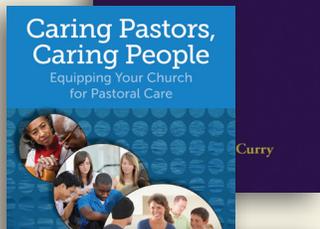


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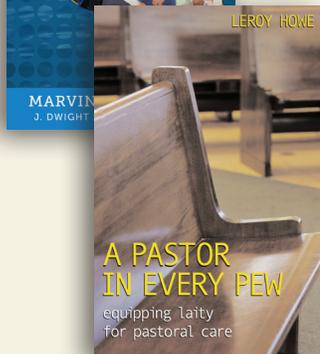


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