

# Intergenerational Outreach: Come Together for Effective Ministry



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



## Practical Ministry Skills:

# Intergenerational Outreach: Come Together for Effective Ministry

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## **Leader's Guide**

*How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.*

*Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.*

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This special theme on **Intergenerational Outreach** is designed to help you connect the generations in your church and unite them in evangelism and service. You may use it either for a training session or to give individually to key people involved in leading and serving. Simply print the handouts needed and use them as necessary.

For an insight into the effects of age segregation and why it is important to connect the generations in ministry, read "Reversing Age Segregation" (pp. 3–4). "Outlooks on Outreach" (pp. 5–11) explains how one church deals with differing views on outreach and evangelism between the generations. For tips on spiritual mentoring that leads to mutual understanding and unity, check out "From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father" (pp. 12–16). "Connector Churches" (pp. 17–18) outlines nine traits found in churches that reach young adults. "Celtic-Style Evangelism" (pp. 19–20) explains why Saint Patrick's outreach methods are especially relevant for today. For practical portraits of three churches that are integrating faith and justice in outreach efforts that unify the generations, read "Three Faces of Graceful Justice" (pp. 21–24).

We hope you enjoy this theme as you discover new ways to engage your church in the spreading of the good news to all people.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

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**INTERGENERATIONAL OUTREACH****Reversing Age Segregation***Why the generations need to be together.*

Exodus 12:26–27

Over the past hundred years, our society has begun to separate families and segregate age groups more and more. Age-graded public education, the movement from extended to nuclear family, and the prevalence of retirement and nursing homes for older persons and preschools for the young have contributed to a widespread segregation of young and old.

Churches have been among the few places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents—all generations—can come together on a regular interactive basis. Yet, the societal trend toward age segregation has entered churches also. Age-based classes for children and adults, teen programs, and separate worship services for adults and children tend to separate family members and age groups from each other, so that many people experience their faith as age-segregated throughout their lives.

**How We Got Here**

Initially, the idea arose in response to developmental concerns about children and education. Jean Piaget's work in cognitive development revolutionized preschool and elementary education in the 1960s and '70s. Educators basically implemented teaching-learning ideas that were more age-appropriate for children (use of the five senses, more body movement, more visual aids, more active involvement)—all excellent ideas.

In the 1980s and '90s, developmentalist concerns were applied to the worship hour. It was deemed age-inappropriate for children to sit through “boring” hymns and prayers when they could be more actively involved in children's songs and activities, which allowed for shorter attention spans and more body movement. Thus, the initial rationale for separating children from the adults during the worship service was for the benefit of the children.

Second, churches that experience phenomenal growth reach the limits of their facilities and simply do not have room for all who come. One fairly straightforward solution is to provide a full hour of children's church. For some churches this has freed up a thousand seats—and what was originally a temporary solution became a permanent program.

Third, church growth is tied very directly to attracting families with children. Offering an exciting, entertaining hour of children's church can be a big draw for those who are church-shopping. As one children's minister says, “We want this hour [children's church] to be the funnest hour in every child's week.” And if the children enjoy children's church (and if the parents do not need to tend to their children), more families will become regular attenders.

The fundamental difficulty is that *spiritual* development is not essentially the same as *cognitive* development. That is, the way children (and adults) grow in their understanding of math or science is not fundamentally the way they (and we) grow spiritually. Children sometimes comprehend spiritual realities far beyond their cognitive development. Therefore applying cognitive developmental principles to a primarily spiritual enterprise could be problematic, even detrimental.

**Faith and Family in the Bible**

Scripture presents coming to know God as a family and community-based process. God's directives for his people in the Old Testament clearly identify the Israelites as a relational community where the children were to grow up participating in the culture they were becoming. In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in and assimilated into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging. The directives for feasts and celebrations illustrate this point best. These festivals were celebrated annually and included elaborate meals, dancing, music, singing, and sacrifices. All of Israel participated, from the youngest to the oldest.

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The purpose of these festivals—which included Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Booths, and the Feast of Trumpets—was to remind the Israelites of who they were, who God was, and what God had done for his people in ages past. As children and teens danced, sang, ate, listened to the stories, and asked questions, they came to know who they were and who they were to be.

Emerging from its Jewish heritage, the early church was also a multigenerational entity. All generations met together, worshiping, breaking bread, praying, and ministering to one another in the context of the home (Acts 2:46–47; 4:32–35; 16:31–34).

Besides meeting with parents and others in house churches, children were clearly present in other spiritual settings. In Acts 16:15, Lydia was baptized “with all her household,” and in Acts 16:33, the jailer was baptized “with his whole family.” Also in Acts is the story of the young man, Eutychus, who, while listening to Paul preach until midnight, fell out of a window (Acts 20:7–12). Luke also reports that children accompanied those bidding farewell to Paul as he boarded a ship at Tyre (Acts 21:5–6).

These explicit intergenerational concepts in Scripture clarify that religious community as described in the Bible included the idea that children were actually present. Separating the children is sometimes necessary and beneficial, but for children to experience authentic Christian community, they must be present with the worshiping community.

As children are assimilated with a deep sense of belonging into the body of Christ, they will make sense of their experiences with God. They will see their parents and others worship, pray with and for each other, minister to others, and be ministered to. They will come to see that all things in their lives are under God. They will be privy to the normal Christian life as lived by the significant adults in their lives. And they will come to know God better.

—HOLLY CATTERTON ALLEN is associate professor of Christian Ministries and director of the Children and Family Studies program at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas; adapted from “Families, Worship, and Children’s Spirituality,” *New Wineskins* (May 2004). Used by permission.

### **Discuss**

1. What opportunities do children, teens, and young adults have to engage with the life of our church?
2. Why do we separate people by age groups in our ministry?
3. How has focusing on age-specific ministries strengthened our church? How has it created challenges?

## Outlooks on Outreach

*Can one church handle two generations' attitudes toward evangelism and service?*

Mark 16:15

Can the outlooks of two generations coexist in one church? James Merritt, 59, serves as senior pastor of Cross Pointe Church in Duluth, Georgia. His son, Jonathan Merritt, 29, joined the church staff in 2008.

In many respects, they couldn't be more different. James represents the Boomer generation's approach to faith in Christ. Jonathan's Christian faith was forged in a postmodern context. When they start talking about theological or political issues, the sparks fly—so much so that James's wife (Jonathan's mother) has to leave the room and let them go at it.

But underneath their intense differences, there's a profound respect for each other. Each has a passionate drive to share the gospel and influence the world for Christ.

*Leadership Journal's* Matt Woodley met them in James's famous "Georgia Bull 'Dawgs' room," where he asked them about outreach, compassion, justice, and evangelism.

**Jonathan, you recently wrote that Fred Rogers is a model Christian communicator for your generation. In your words, Mr. Rogers "was a devout Christian who almost never explicitly talked about his faith on the air, but the way his show infused society with beauty and grace was near biblical." James, how would you evaluate Mr. Rogers's ability to reach people for Christ?**

**James:** On the one hand, I love Jonathan's spirit in that article, and I agree that our world is better because we've had positive cultural influences like Mr. Rogers. Television certainly needs more people like Fred Rogers. I also understand that the show wasn't supposed to be explicitly about Jesus.

On the other hand—and this is just an observation, not a criticism—much of what Mr. Rogers communicated in his program could have been communicated by an unbeliever who wanted to have a positive, moralistic, ethical impact on kids and on society in general.

This isn't a criticism of Fred Rogers because I have no idea how he talked about his faith in Christ. However, I will say this: every believer and every church has a sphere of influence. It's incumbent upon us to use whatever platform we have as a God-given opportunity to share Christ with other people.

**Jonathan:** I think the way we view the gospel will impact the way we see Mr. Rogers's influence. My generation tends to emphasize that the Bible isn't just a set of theological propositions. It's also a larger story about what God is doing in our world to bring the restoration of all things in Christ. Based on that story there's a cultural mandate to influence the world with a kingdom mindset.

By preventing a generation of children from growing up emotionally numb, Fred Rogers definitely lived out a kingdom mindset. So I would say that Mr. Rogers's show was a legitimate expression of his faith in Christ.

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But I don't agree with the famous quote that says, "Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words." You can't preach the gospel without using words. Some people like my dad are reapers, but people like Mr. Rogers tilled the soil. Many people in my generation may have been influenced to accept Christ because their emotional and psychological soil was softened and watered by the ministry of Fred Rogers.

**Are you saying that a ministry like Fred Rogers's (not explicitly evangelistic but focused on restoring God's goodness in the world) can become part of the wooing process to bring people to Christ?**

**Jonathan:** Yes. Let me explain it this way: I ask a lot of Christians from my generation about when they came to know Christ. Most of them say something like, "I can't name the day; I just know that for a long time God was pursuing me until I consciously allowed Christ to start transforming my heart." Don Miller said something to this effect in *Blue Like Jazz*. For many people in my generation, Miller said that following Jesus is less like making a decision and more like falling in love—it happens to you and then you recognize it. Yet they definitely have a legitimate salvation experience. This seems to be a normal process for my generation.

**James:** I don't have a problem with that. C. H. Spurgeon once said, "A man can know he's alive without knowing his birthday." I also agree with one of Jonathan's biggest critiques of my generation's approach to evangelism: We often focus on "decisionism" (have you decided to accept Jesus) rather than discipleship (becoming more like him).

But Scripture is clear that at some point we have to pass from darkness to light and from death to life. At some point, there has to be a conscious decision to repent of my sin and place my faith in Christ. So I don't want to get into semantics, but people may fall in love, yet they must decide to actually love.

**Jonathan:** I'm not sure about that. When I was in college, I remember waking up one day and thinking, I'm in love with this girl. I didn't decide to be in love with her.

**James:** All I'm saying is that you can't get away from the biblical model of deciding and acting on the impulse. You don't "fall into marriage" or "fall into having children" or "fall into taking up your cross and following Christ." At some point you have to make a decision—and we have to help bring people to that point of decision.

**Jonathan:** Maybe we should just leave this point alone.

**Actually, there's an important tension here. You two seem to be talking about a shift in how we introduce people to Christ.**

**Jonathan:** Yes, and church leaders have already acknowledged this shift (even if they don't recognize it) because we've gotten away from altar calls and invitations to accept Christ at the end of each service. To me, that change shows a certain flaw in "decisionism"—namely, that it's inconsistent with the way most people have experienced Christ's work in their lives. If that's the norm, we should be presenting opportunities for a decision continually.

**James:** Yes, many preachers have gotten away from presenting the gospel of Christ on a regular basis. And that's a problem. You can listen to some of the most popular preachers in the country for months and never get within a country mile of a gospel invitation.

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After a worship service, I always want to ask, “If I were far from God and had no clue how to connect with him, based on what I heard today, would I at least know how to do that?” And if the answer is no, that’s a real problem. Many popular preachers today will preach on a lot of things, but they’ll hardly ever mention Jesus.

**Jonathan:** That’s an accurate critique of my generation’s approach. We’re often at risk of promoting a Christless Christianity. There’s a lot of talk about loving God and following God, but there isn’t as much talk about Christ. Our generation needs to recover the centrality and supremacy of Christ. That’s the danger of my generation.

I have the opportunity to hang out with a number of young evangelical influencers, and sometimes it’s breathtaking how little we think about, talk about, or seem concerned with personal evangelism.

**James:** Do you think there’s almost a disdain for evangelism among these younger leaders? I’m talking about legitimate evangelism, not just a negative, judgmental, “turn or burn” message.

**Jonathan:** I wouldn’t say there’s disdain for evangelism. But among my generation there’s sometimes a disdain for anything that smacks of the previous generation. People in my generation think the church has an image problem. Everybody thinks we are unchristian. The larger culture thinks the church is hypocritical, judgmental, anti-gay, and too political. Believers in my generation react against that. And since my dad’s generation was focused on getting conversions, they react against that too.

**James:** That’s fair enough. Go ahead and critique my generation’s approach to evangelism. But don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. We definitely had some blind spots, but what you dare not lose is regeneration in Christ.

**Jonathan:** I write about this in my new book, especially the last chapter, “The Burden of Every Generation.” The book begins with Dad and me sitting down the first time I ever had breakfast with Jerry Falwell. It ends with me and my younger brother standing over the grave of Jerry Falwell pondering his legacy. I note that every generation makes mistakes, every generation has blind spots. I see my dad’s generational blind spots because there’s enough road behind them. But I don’t clearly see the mistakes my generation is making. But the burden of every generation is that those who come after us will criticize my generation just as I’ve criticized my parents’ generation. That’s life.

**James:** One of my heroes is Dr. W. A. Criswell, and he used to say, “When you eat a fish, eat around the bones.” Okay, criticize my generation but continuously ask, “What can we learn from your generation?”

### **The interplay between evangelism and social justice is a source of debate. How would you define your differences on that interplay?**

**James:** For me, the evangelistic part is always primary. I agree with Jonathan that following Jesus has many political, social, ecological, and economic implications. But for me the primary role of the church is to proclaim that through faith in Christ anybody on this planet can have a relationship with the God who created them.

**Jonathan:** I agree with most of that—as long as we don’t reduce it to an individualistic, personal salvation message. So I’d say that while evangelism is central to the heartbeat of what the kingdom is, it’s not the only thing. I like how Tim Keller approaches this subject. He says that the more people are justified in Christ, the

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more they will work for social justice. And the more we work for social justice, and the more people see the fruits of our salvation, the more our witness will become credible to the world.

This is where I'd offer a critique of my dad's generation. In some ways, social justice was given lip service. Personal evangelism eclipsed all other aspects of God's mission on earth. As a result, we often had proclamation without transformation. And that contributed to the present credibility problem that many in my generation have with the church.

It's simply not enough to proclaim the gospel. Our proclamations have to be accompanied by visible expressions of that message's transformative power.

For example, consider the issue of abortion. My dad and I are both ardently pro-life. But my generation tends to express our pro-life commitment in broader terms. For us, it's not enough to be anti-abortion or vote for a pro-life president. Proclaiming that message without expressions of that message's transformative power rings hollow to an already cynical culture. We can't proclaim the message of Jesus if we don't live incarnationally to care about vulnerable people.

**James:** I agree that we need to respond with Christlike, sacrificial, and practical love. We can't just curse the darkness. But I also want to be clear about one thing: Abortion is murder. It always has been and always will be. I'm not saying that his generation wavers on that, but it's definitely a danger.

Having said that, I would respond to the bulk of Jonathan's critique of my generation by saying, "Guilty as charged." Yes, people need to repent and place their faith in Christ. But then we have and ask: Where does this trail lead? In my generation, we often let it stop at the door of individual salvation. Just get people to receive Christ and then move on to the next person.

This is an area where Jonathan has helped me. Motivated by the gospel, we're called to speak out against abortion and to advocate for adoptions. We should be indignant about global sex trafficking. We should protect the environment—not in a politically correct way, but in a theologically correct way. Of all the people on the planet, Christians should be the most passionate people for social justice. That's part of our biblical mandate.

But there's a danger if social justice becomes the all in all, and the gospel may or may not get presented along the way. To paraphrase Jesus, "What does it profit a person to feed the hungry and clothe the naked if they die and spend an eternity without God?"

So I would say that evangelism and social justice have to co-exist. It's a both/and relationship, not either/or. Jonathan's generation has given my generation a needed wakeup call regarding some of these issues.

### Can you think of a specific example?

**James:** Sure, here's one piece of baggage that my son's generation doesn't have to carry—perpetuating the injustice of racism. I never heard the term "social justice" when I was growing up. How can you practice social justice when black people aren't even allowed in the doors of your church? I grew up in a place and time when the N-word was part of our vernacular. My three sons don't have that legacy to carry. They grew up in schools and churches that were integrated.

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**Jonathan:** That’s true—racism was a blind spot for my dad’s generation. But at least now they do see it, and people like my dad have confessed it as a sin. I’m not sure my generation even sees our blind spots yet.

For instance, my generation is addicted to our technology, but we don’t have a clue how this is affecting our spiritual lives.

**James:** But I know there’s one thing we both agree on—the need to present Christ to each generation.

In the spring of 2011 Jonathan and I had the chance to visit Billy Graham at his home. I asked Dr. Graham, “If you could say one and only one thing, what would you say to this generation of leaders?”

**Jonathan:** Dr. Graham had to catch his breath. He’s 93 years old and very frail.

**James:** For about two minutes the old Billy Graham came alive.

**Jonathan:** A flash came into his eyes.

**James:** He raised his fist and said, “Preach the Word!”

**Jonathan:** Yeah, preach the Word!

**James:** So, if you asked me, James, if you could give the next generation only one piece of advice, what would you say? I’d give the same advice: “Preach the Word! Without fear. Without favor. Let it go wherever it takes you.” I’m not going to debate whether you should preach topically, exegetically, or expositionally. Just preach the Word and keep preaching the Word.

**So do you “preach the Word” in your ministries of compassion and social justice? For instance, I know that Cross Pointe Church has an incredible ministry of compassion to refugees and immigrants in your community.**

**James:** Yes, we’ve poured huge amounts of resources—staff time, volunteer time, and money—into our Care Pointe ministries, which include a counseling center, a food pantry, and a clothes store.

**Are you also intentional about introducing people to Jesus through these ministries? If so, how do you introduce people to Jesus as you give away food and clothing?**

**Jonathan:** When someone comes we always sit down and talk to them first. We have small cubicles set up so people can receive one-on-one care before they receive food or clothing. We want to know what’s going on in their lives, not just give a hand-out. Through these conversations, we’ve seen people come to know Christ. As they come to Christ, they have started attending our worship services. As a result, we now translate services into Spanish, and we’re working on translating them into Korean.

**James:** There’s a big difference between a church and a government social ministry. I don’t believe that the church’s ultimate end is to minister to the body. We want to use our compassion ministries to minister to the soul, to bring people to faith in Jesus. So we’re clear about taking a nonthreatening and noninvasive approach to asking people where they are in their relationship with Christ. We start by asking them if they’re interested

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in talking about spiritual things. We're upfront about finding out if there's some spiritual openness. If they aren't open, we treat them exactly the same as the people who are open to Christ.

**Jonathan:** We don't have to share the gospel every time we meet with someone. We never want to imply that someone has to capitulate to our belief system in order to receive help from us. That would undermine the friendship aspect of friendship evangelism. On the other hand, I'd also say that our goal is to love our friends and neighbors, and you can't do that apart from the gospel. But by ministering to the physical needs of people in our community, the gospel gets embodied as it also gets proclaimed.

**James:** Not everyone expresses interest in spiritual things, but we treat everyone the same. Jesus said that when we give someone a cup of cold water in his name it won't go unnoticed by him. Duluth, Georgia, is in the midst of an ethnic melting pot. We also live in an area that has been hit hard by the economic downturn. So we have huge issues with immigration and unemployment—and this has especially impacted children. So we are fulfilling part of our mission by ministering to the whole person.

But we also like to ask, "What does it profit a man or a woman to feed their belly and not feed their soul?" I can't think of a downside to sharing our faith as we provide food and clothing. Let me put it this way: Assuming that there's spiritual openness, why wouldn't a church want to share the message of Christ through their compassion ministries?

**What would you say to people who criticize the power imbalance in your approach? In other words, your church has all the resources that these refugees need. So isn't there pressure for them to please you in order to get help?**

**James:** That's not the way we look at it. Of course, Christians can be intimidating and threatening, and churches could abuse this opportunity. That's why we're diligent about allowing people to decline our invitation to talk about spiritual things.

But I would argue that it's really a cop-out when we won't do the hard work of offering food for the body and food for the soul. It's really not hard work to give out food or clothing. Anybody can do that. But it is really hard work to give food and clothing and then also to open your heart and ask people if they want to hear about Christ. That makes us vulnerable, because we can't force them to do that. There's nothing we can do to make that happen.

So regarding evangelism amid compassion ministry, I would simply ask: If not now, when? If not here, where? If not you, who?

If the church doesn't do the work of evangelism, then who else will? It's our job to offer people Christ. Personally, when I stand before God, I don't want the Lord to ask me, "Why were you so busy feeding bodies but you never got around to feeding souls? Why did you give them bread but you never offered them the Bread of Life?"

—JAMES MERRITT AND JONATHAN MERRITT; James is author of *God, I've Got a Question* (Harvest House, 2011), and Jonathan is author of *A Faith of Our Own* (Faith Words, 2012).; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2012 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit [www.LeadershipJournal.net](http://www.LeadershipJournal.net).

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### **Discuss**

1. Did you find yourself agreeing more with Jonathan's perspective or with James's? What statements from each stood out to you? What statements reflected your own views. What statements offered an enlightening perspective you hadn't previously encountered?
2. Where in your church or ministry have you seen these tensions about what evangelism means and how it should be practiced? How can you address these questions in a way that will lead to greater unity among the generations and, in turn will strengthen your outreach?
3. What are the beliefs about evangelism and social justice that unify those in your church or ministry? How can you use these to help the generations better understand each other and work toward the common goal of reaching people with Christ's love?

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## From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father

*A new generation is looking for something very different.*

Proverbs 3:1–2

Josh, a 20-something guy in my church, invited me to play basketball at Triangle Park. “A lot of guys from church will be there,” he said. Without much thought, I said yes.

When I showed up in my JCPenney sneakers, I looked around the asphalt court and realized the last time I played 5-on-5, full court, was longer ago than these guys have been alive.

The game started, and I ran the court, filling the lane like my freshman coach had taught back when Dr. J was playing in the ABA. It felt good to go up for a rebound. *I’ve still got it*, I thought. Then I threw up an air ball. The next time I got the ball, it was quickly swiped away. In theological terms, my game bore the marks of the Fall.

After my team lost, new teams were formed (the main goal being to divide up the guys from Indiana, where they start dribbling a basketball in preschool), and my team was designated “skins.” I’m so white and skinny, I look like the Pillsbury Doughboy after he married Jenny Craig. When I peeled off my T-shirt, some of the young guys hooted.

As I drove my minivan home that night, I thought, *I embarrassed myself*. I showed how painfully old and uncool I am. Plus, this wasn’t doing anything in the way of ministry.

The next week, Josh asked, “You coming out to Triangle?”

“I, uh, no, I’m kind of busy,” I said.

“Well, okay, but we’d love to have you.”

*Well, yeah*, I thought. *It’s nice to have someone to score against*. But then Nate stopped me at church and said, “It was great having you play this week. Hope you come again.” Scott, one of the Indiana guys, said the same. So did another guy. I got more positive comments from that lame basketball performance than from most sermons I preach.

That led to other discoveries about ministry among 20-somethings. There are some clear differences between the generation that beat me at basketball and my own.

Baby Boomers tend to ask me about results: “How many showed up last night?” Millennials ask about relationship: “Next Tuesday, can you hang out?”

When we bring loving pastoral discipline to a Baby Boomer, he will often try to squirm out of it; when we do the same with a Millennial, he’s likely to stay and end up closer to the pastors and the church.

Baby Boomers show up for classes and programs; Millennials show up for mentoring. Both show up for retreats.

While Boomers want their church leaders relevant, competent, and efficient, a new generation is looking for a different kind of minister. At my church, 80 percent of adults are under 40, and they seem to want me firm, mature, and relationally present (even if I’m uncool). In short, they want me to be a spiritual father. For some, I’m the Christian dad they never had. For others, I’m the father figure who’s here now.

This is causing me to rethink the way I do ministry. It has driven me back to the Scriptures. For this is far more than mere generational preference. What’s at stake is our very identity as pastors. It’s how we as pastors answer the question: Who am I, and what am I supposed to be doing?

### Pastoral Identity Crisis

In the 1970s, when Boomers began to graduate from seminary, pastors began shifting their role from shepherd to leader. Now, of course, the leader-CEO model is rejected by many. But what will take its place? Pastors seem lost, with little guidance on the core question: What’s my role?

I keep coming back to an ancient answer—one that never seemed so fresh. It’s what the third-century Christians called a spiritual father, an “abba” (or spiritual mother, “amma”). When young believers zealously

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pursued lives of prayer, they knew that amid their fierce temptations, they needed sage counsel. They went to their spiritual father.

To me, our way forward as pastors today involves becoming a spiritual father (or mother). It's an answer that fits Scripture, Christian tradition, and the longings of our time.

The role depends on (1) spiritual maturity, born of prayer and experience; (2) an intimate knowledge of another person's life and spiritual condition; and (3) an ability to speak the truth in love in a personal way: "Warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak" (1 Thess. 5:14-15).

This is the primary way faith is passed on. Older teach younger (Prov. 3:1-2); fathers have sons (2 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 1:4); older women train younger women (Titus 2:4-5). And spiritual parenting transcends the current debate over whether pastors should be shepherds, leaders, agents of cultural transformation, or something else. As a spiritual father or mother, you break free from fads; you don't invest years of ministry in a model soon outdated. Indeed, your ministry can become more powerful, not less, with age.

Whatever your ministry, consider what it means to be a spiritual father or mother. Here are three shifts I'm trying to make, and what I'm learning as I do.

### From Relevance to Depth

In *Christianity Today* Brett McCracken writes, "In order to remain relevant in this new landscape, many evangelical pastors and church leaders are following the lead of the hipster trendsetters, making sure their churches can check off all the important items on the hipster checklist." Including:

"Show clips from R-rated Coen Brothers films (*No Country for Old Men*, *Fargo*) during services.

"Sponsor church outings to microbreweries.

"Put a worship pastor onstage decked in clothes from American Apparel.

"Be okay with cussing."

I'm not against cultural awareness and engagement. For most people today, pop culture is their culture, so it can be an act of love to learn it. But to be a spiritual father means you are definitely not Wholly Relevant. Dads are, by definition, older and not hip. This one hurts. I spent much of my 40s not wanting to accept my age, not wanting to lose my place among the popular and the trendsetting.

However, to pursue relevance is to lose your spiritual power. When all you read, watch, and listen to is what everyone else is reading, watching, and listening to, you have nothing to say.

Chris, a young guy in my church who moved to Manhattan for grad school, explained to me: "The highly relevant pastor is bro'. There's certainly a place for pastors to be in tune with culture and to be relatable. But where do I find a man of God who will nurture my spiritual life? That's what I need. Relevance is easy to find. But when I stumble in that same old sin that I keep slipping in, I need someone with wisdom and maturity to go to. It's fine if that person also happens to know about some great new indie bands, but in those moments, I need something else. I need depth."

Since it's always been true that "You reproduce what you are," why would we care more about reproducing relevance than reproducing depth? Why trade the timeless for the trendy? Is it because we don't want to pay the slow and taxing price to actually become someone of spiritual depth?

Martin Luther once said that what forges a minister is prayer, meditation, and temptation. Let's not diminish the role of that third ingredient. It's in temptation that we grow deeper by choosing the way of the cross. It's here, when we fail, that we learn brokenness. Richard Rohr calls this "the authority of those who have suffered."

Here we come to know God's power (2 Cor. 12:9). What people most need in their pastor is someone who's suffered and come through it better, with faith and hope and love intact. That's what a spiritual father or mother can offer.

I, for one, cannot offer this without a life of prayer. Our church asks each senior pastoral staff member to spend one day in prayer each month. (Over the course of a year, that yields 12 days in prayer.) That prayer day is

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paid. Even so, under the tyranny of the urgent, it's tempting to skip this month's prayer day to catch up on e-mail. So we have to ask each other: "Have you taken your prayer day?"

Out of the depth of prayer, meditation, and temptation, I may or may not be able to offer intimate knowledge of contemporary culture. But I can offer genuine interest in each person and his or her culture. I may not have seen the latest movie, but if not, it's fine to say, "No, I haven't seen it. Tell me what you liked about it." And even more than talk about a movie, people want to tell me about their lives, to have me listen and care that "My mom's coming out to visit next week" or "My nephew's still in ICU."

The power to listen with compassion comes not from relevance but from depth.

### From Efficiency to Intimacy

The church-growth movement of the 1970s and 1980s taught pastors that instead of shepherding, a slow and outmoded way of caring for animals, we had to learn the efficiency of ranching. Picture driving your pickup past vast herds.

But if any churchgoer ever wanted to be "ranchled," today's 20-somethings definitely do not.

Sociologist Christian Smith and other researchers tell us that today's young adults walk a long, uneven road to maturity. "There is a new and important stage in life in American culture," he writes in *Books & Culture*, "what scholars call 'emerging adulthood,' the time of life between ages 18 and 30." Not surprisingly, since they don't feel they've reached full maturity, the "emerging adults" in my church hunger for spiritual fathers and mothers to help them get there. And parenting is not a large-group experience; few families have more than eight children.

So I've been experimenting at church with "Transformation Conversations," extended times of listening to another man and then helping him form a spiritual-growth plan for the coming year. (Mature women are beginning to do the same with younger women.) It generally takes two 90-minute conversations before I feel I know the shape of someone's soul well enough to offer a few "pastoral invitations."

In one recent Transformation Conversation, we talked honestly about this young man's vocation, money, relationships, marriage.

We finished, and he said, "Since my wife and I attend worship regularly, serve, and give, it would be easy to conclude we're doing fine. But I need shepherding, too. And I don't think I felt fully shepherded until right now."

At times I look at how much time these conversations take, and I think, *This is painfully slow and inefficient*. The raw truth is that spiritual fathering is something you can't accelerate, microwave, chart, whiteboard, measure, or scale.

But there is no substitute for being known by another. This is parenting, meaningful spiritual intimacy. People say these conversations are changing them, but even if they weren't, I know they are changing me: as I listen deeply to someone, I care more deeply for him, and I can't help but pray for him.

Does this "inefficient" approach to ministry mean you limit the growth of your church? That depends. The answer to more sheep is more shepherds—what the Bible calls "elders" or "undershepherds" (1 Pet. 5), "fathers" (1 John 2), or "older women" (Titus 2).

So your growth is limited by the number of shepherds (whether lay or ordained) who can do this kind of work. I look for the people who are spiritually mature—usually in the second half of life, though not always—good listeners, confidential, loving, and able to restore someone gently (Gal. 6:1).

### From Being Liked to Respected

I like to be liked. Too bad that what church "kids" sometimes need is discipline, a process that generally means I'll be disliked (at least, for a time).

What helps me is to realize that though people resent church discipline and push back against it, usually deep down they know they need it. And even if they don't like it (or me), to be a spiritual father means I must take the risk and plunge into bringing guidance and loving discipline to my spiritual children.

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I've had to ask someone to step down from a ministry he enjoyed; he looked like he'd been kicked. In one case I had to ask someone to refrain from receiving Communion for a season, and that was painful for him and for me. But usually, the discipline is not so formal and public. Instead, it's a corrective word when he's begun to veer but not yet left the roadway.

Over lunch a young man said, "I feel anxious a lot."

"What do you do to help with the anxiety?" I asked.

"I have a couple of drinks."

I could tell he was becoming emotionally dependent on the alcohol, and I knew I needed to address that. But I ducked it, chiding myself for my cowardice.

Thankfully, a few weeks later, we met again, and this time, he brought it up. I lovingly challenged him with my concern. And that conversation became a turning point for him.

When people sense that your correction comes because you know them and you love them, the majority of people accept discipline and grow through it.

Sometimes I shake my head and wonder, *Why do they stay?* My theory: They've never known a world without internet porn and access to strong, compulsive powers. Deep down, they are saying, "Protect me from the forces in my life that are raging out of control and threaten to consume me." Discipline, caringly administered, makes them feel loved and secure.

As Robert Frost put it in *Our Heavenly Father*: "Our basic need from our fathers is one of affectionate authority."

### Becoming a Spiritual Dad (or Mom)

Lest I offer only a paradigm and not the practical steps to enter it, here are three I've found helpful:

**1. Count the cost.** As a spiritual father, there is much I can lose: relevance, efficiency, and being liked (at least, at the moment of bringing correction or discipline). I may lose the cachet of my church growing rapidly. And being a father ties me down: Kids need fathers who stay, so I can't just take my talents to South Beach. Let us count that cost.

But in being a spiritual father or mother, there is much to gain. You gain depth, intimacy, and being respected. What a joy it is to have a spiritual son or daughter call, stop by, or send a Facebook message, just to let you know how things are going, to share a worry or something to celebrate. It's the spiritual equivalent of a child bringing home a picture from school for you to proudly display on the fridge.

**2. Be fathered (or mothered) yourself.** When I was in elementary school, my dad's commute was two hours each way. In those formative years, every Monday through Friday, I never ate a meal with my dad. That left a gaping hole in my soul, and I sometimes wondered, *How can I be a father to others when I hardly know what it means to be fathered myself?*

My answer was born out of crisis. As I neared age 40, I struggled with a loss of meaning. That was humbling: I'd always told myself that because of my faith in Christ, I would never experience a midlife crisis. My wife finally said, "I can't help you. Why don't you go see Doug?"

That began an 11-year journey in which Doug and I have met almost every month. Doug listens, asks questions, cares, prays. Twice in those 11 years he has firmly warned against a decision I was about to make. But mostly, he has just shown up, and somewhat silently and mysteriously, his steady, caring presence in my life strengthens me to father others.

**3. Rethink your calendar.** You probably already have a few people in whom you feel a spiritual interest, and you sense that if you parent them, they will be able to parent others ([2 Tim. 2:2](#)). Then make time to get to know them, to show up, to be a steady presence.

Appointment by appointment, you slowly enter the joy Spurgeon once expressed: "What position is nobler than that of a spiritual father who claims no authority and yet is universally esteemed, whose word is given only as tender advice, but is allowed to operate with the force of law? ... Lovingly firm and graciously gentle, he is the chief of all because he is the servant of all."

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—KEVIN A MILLER is associate rector of Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2011 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit [www.LeadershipJournal.net](http://www.LeadershipJournal.net).

### Discuss

1. Where in our church or ministry do we see the older generation adapting or conceding to the younger generation, and vice versa? To what extent do we value and exercise spiritual leadership?
2. How might spiritual fathering and mothering relationships help unify our church for outreach? What role does shepherding play in preparing people for outreach?
3. How can our church encourage or facilitate spiritual fathering and mothering relationships? How could they be tied to evangelism or outreach?

**INTERGENERATIONAL OUTREACH****Connector Churches**

*These nine traits characterize churches that reach young adults.*

1 Corinthians 9:19–23

Let's look at some examples of churches that are actually reaching young adults. We surveyed almost 200 churches to search for trends and found a series of nine common characteristics in these churches that are effectively reaching young adults. Here's what they're doing:

**Creating Deeper Community**

Churches that are effective at attracting and developing young adults place a high value on moving people into a healthy small group system. Young adults are trying to connect and will make a lasting connection wherever they can find belonging.

**Making a Difference through Service**

Churches that are transforming young adults value leading people to serve through volunteerism. More than being pampered, young adults want to be part of something bigger than themselves and are looking to be part of an organization where they can make a difference through acts of service.

**Experiencing Worship**

Churches that are engaging young adults are providing worship environments that reflect their culture while also revering and revealing God. More than looking for a good performance, young adults desire to connect with a vertical experience of worship.

**Leveraging Technology**

Churches that are reaching young adults are willing to communicate in a language of technology familiar to young adults. Young adults sense that these churches are welcoming churches that value and understand them, engaging them where they are.

**Building Cross-Generational Relationships**

Churches that are linking young adults with older, mature adults are challenging young adults to move on to maturity through friendship, wisdom, and support. Young adults are drawn to churches that believe in them enough to challenge them.

**Moving Toward Authenticity**

Churches that are engaging young adults are reaching them not only by their excellence but by their honesty. Young adults are looking for and connecting to churches where they see leaders that are authentic, transparent, and on a learning journey.

**Leading by Transparency**

Churches that are influencing young adults highly value an incarnational approach to ministry and leadership. This incarnational approach doesn't require revealing one's personal sin list so much as it does require that those in leadership must be willing to express a personal sense of humanity and vulnerability.

**Leading by Team**

Increasingly churches reaching young adults seem to be taking a team approach to ministry. They see ministry not as a solo venture but as a team sport—and the broader participation it creates increases the impact of ministry.

— ED STETZER; excerpted from *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (B&H Books, 2008). Used by permission.

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### **Discuss**

1. What practices from the list above resemble what our church is doing? What things are these churches doing that we are not doing?
2. In what practical ways can we make our congregation more welcoming for young adults?
3. What obstacles do we currently face that prevent us from implementing practices that resonate with young adults?

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# Celtic-Style Evangelism

*Saint Patrick modeled a style of evangelism that is especially useful in our time.*

Philippians 2:14–16

In AD 432 Saint Patrick led a small band of Christians into Ireland. At that time the Emerald Isle was a land of barbarians. Patrick's team had to be creative and fast on their feet. According to professor George Hunter, the Celtic Christians had several methods for connecting the gospel. What does a fifth-century saint have to teach us about connecting with young adults? More than you might think.

### The Celtic Christians Treated Outsiders Like Insiders

“The number of cultural adaptations they managed was unprecedented,” Hunter observed. Celtic Christians believed that people should “belong before they believe,” so Patrick and his partners included the outsiders in the life of their fellowship. Rather than plant their monastery away from the village (the traditional approach), Patrick established the community within walking distance of the village. Then Patrick and his team simply invited people in so they could see what the Christians life was all about.

### The Celtic Christians Talked About Everyday Issues

Hunter points out that Christians today usually avoid talking about the very things people are most concerned about. The Celtic Christians didn't make this mistake:

Hunter writes, “The problem is that Western Christianity usually ignores the middle level that drives most people's lives most of the time ... Western Christian leaders usually focus on “ultimate issues.” The Celtic Christians addressed life as a whole and may have addressed the middle level more specifically, comprehensively, and powerfully than any other Christian movement ever has.”

It wasn't simply a matter of speaking the dialect of the local population. Patrick and his partners talked about things Celts liked to talk about, and they used Celtic icons and symbols as spiritual bridges into God-talks. The three-leaf clover is associated with Ireland because Patrick used it to talk about the Trinity.

### The Celtic Christians Looked for the Good

“Celtic Christianity viewed human nature not as being radically tainted by sin and evil, intrinsically corrupt and degenerate,” Hunter writes, “but as imprinted with the image of God, full of potential and opportunity, longing for completion and perfection. Patrick started with the assumption that people would be receptive and he treated them that way.”

Patrick was very high on God's love for missing people. He assumed that God liked human beings, and he began conversations around anything good he could find in people. Their kindness, loyalty, sacrifice, earnestness, interest in others, anything! For Patrick, the goal wasn't to wrestle people theologically to the ground. The goal was to nudge them across the starting line toward Jesus.

### What Does the Celtic Example Teach Us?

Conversations are fragile things because people are constantly “sniffing” to see who is safe and who isn't. This is especially true of young people. Like ants sensing one another's pheromones, we use small talk to decide which relational trails we should take. Conversations are emotional on-ramps we provide one another to signal our potential interest in moving closer.

When a friend at work tells you about his weekend and mentions that he and his girlfriend spent Saturday night together getting drunk at a cabin on the lake, it could easily trigger your sin-o-meter. You might feel compelled to mention that since you're a Christians, you “aren't into that sort of thing.” If you're a really on-fire Christian, you might even add that “God doesn't like drunkenness and premarital sex.” While both statements are true, neither one signals to your colleague that you care about him as a friend. Instead, those statements signal, “I don't want to talk to you until you change and become like me.”

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Jesus gave people an experience of love and reality, not a speech about it. When people experience our attention, love and genuine interest in them, they begin to feel differently. And some will want to know what that means. Like Patrick did, let the missing come among you. Invite them to serve with you, in part so they can see up close what Christians are like. Let them watch you as you live life with other Christians. When they see the body of Christ in action, they won't walk away unchanged.

— JIM HENDERSON served as a pastor for 25 years before forming Jim Henderson Presents, a production company that produces live events and television specials that look at the important role of religious spirituality in our lives; adapted from *Evangelism without Additives: What if sharing your faith just meant being yourself?* (Waterbrook Press, 2007). Used by permission.

### Discuss

1. What are some of the ways our church can encourage unchurched people to serve alongside us? How can we affirm the good in those we're trying to reach with the gospel?
2. Why might the principles in this article be especially appealing to the young adults in our congregation?
3. How can we apply these principles to our own outreach programs? Which of our younger leaders could we call upon to help us apply these principles?

## Three Faces of Graceful Justice

*Combine justice and evangelism to engage the interests of multiple generations.*

Micah 6:8

People are drawn to the gospel when they see Christians acting like Christ. This is the impulse behind many churches engaged in ministries of justice and mercy.

Julie Clawson, author of *Everyday Justice*, says, “Justice is not about causes or issues. It is about people. It is about loving our neighbors as ourselves. When you are acting like Jesus with people they begin asking questions such as, ‘Why are you doing this for us? Where is this love coming from?’ Unfortunately so many people have developed such a negative perception of Christians as all talk and no deeds, that in these days if you just start talking about Christianity they will shut you down. But when we lead with acts of mercy, acts of justice, and acts of love, and we do it in Jesus’ name, it opens a whole new realm of conversation.”

Here’s how three churches are putting justice, mercy, and the gospel into practice.

### Ginghamsburg Church

Since 2004, Ginghamsburg Church, a multi-site body of believers with a weekly attendance of over 5,000 in Tipp City, Ohio, has built schools and child and protection programs in Darfur serving 24,000 children, sponsored a sustainable agricultural project that has now helped to feed more than 100,000 Darfuris, and built systems to provide clean water and sanitation for 219,000 people.

Ginghamsburg’s work in Darfur has not been without risk and danger. In 2010 they have had one staff member shot and another kidnapped. However, the sacrifice and work is yielding fruit. Pastor Michael Slaughter tells of sitting with a group of Muslims just after the completion of a school. “Their question to me was, ‘Why are you doing this? You’re the church.’ Now, by this time, we had been working there for three years ... before the question was ever asked. We can’t preach the gospel there, but we can demonstrate the gospel, and this question gave me the opening to say, ‘As a follower of Jesus this is what we believe ... that God loves you and your situation is our situation.’”

Slaughter continued to explain that he is now into a several conversation explaining what Jesus Christ taught about himself. His position is that in a pre-Christian or post-Christian world, evangelism is by demonstration before proclamation. Proclamation comes after they’ve seen the gospel in action.

“To Jesus, the church was an active verb and not a passive noun,” Slaughter said. “Jesus’ followers practiced mission evangelism. The heart of God’s mission is serving, and ultimately we must bring people to faith and new birth in Jesus.”

### The Renew Community

J. R. Briggs is founding pastor of the Renew Community in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, a handful of house churches that gather twice monthly for corporate worship in a small borough 30 miles northwest of Philadelphia. With a weekly attendance of 150, The Renew Community is a prime example of a small church getting big things done.

Many of the church’s ministries have been initiated by partnering with other groups and agencies: for instance, Manna on Main Street, a soup kitchen and food pantry, and ACCESS Services, which serves people with mental and developmental disabilities. As a result several folks with disabilities have become members of the

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Renew community. The church also works with the local Boys and Girls Clubs, especially with single-parent homes.

Evangelism through justice is at the heart of this congregation, Briggs says. “It might be easy to label these ministries as compassion ministries, but they are justice issues if you consider that no child or adult should be hungry in the midst of our community, with the abundance the rest of us have in the cupboards and refrigerators of our homes. Not having food is wrong.”

As the leaders of Renew sought where they might become involved in global ministry, they chose to focus on Southeast Asia. This led to a partnership with Daughters, a Christian organization based in Phnom Penh that rescues girls out of human trafficking in Cambodia.

Another cause Renew champions is adoption. “To open our home to an orphan is to act out the very thing God did with us,” says Briggs. “The metaphor of our sonship in Christ is based on the spirit of adoption.” Briggs and his wife have adopted two boys, and several families within their church have adopted children as well. He said there are currently 100,000 orphans in the U.S. while there are 350,000 churches. Briggs reasons that if one family in just one out of three churches would adopt an orphan, the orphan issue would be eradicated in the United States, at least for a while.

Asked if social justice is part of the day-to-day vocabulary of the Renew Community, Briggs said, “Very seldom do we use the term *social justice*. We just use the word justice because if you put the word social in front of it then it all seems to become political jargon. To me, justice is justice. We always need to remember from Micah 6:8 that justice must always be balanced with mercy and humility.”

Renew Community identifies its ministry direction by continually asking: If Jesus were here in Landsdale, on today’s date, what would he be doing? How can we be allies and advocates in the name of Jesus? And simply, how can we help?

“We look for how we can join God on missions of redemption and renewal in our community,” Briggs said. “I think if we are trying to be like Jesus, justice will show up because that’s what he cared about. So we’ve never really tried to focus on ‘social justice’ because that seems to be political jargon. We just use the word justice, the biblical word. From Micah 6:8 we remember that justice must always be combined with mercy and humility.

Briggs wants people in Landsdale “to know that God cares about what is happening in our community. And that is where the evangelism part comes in. People are constantly asking us why we do what we do. This opens the door for us to share that we are living out the gospel, the good news that Jesus came with.”

### Metro Community

Metro’s vision began when Willow Park Church was helping AIDS/HIV orphans in India. Members of Willow Park evaluated their own city of Kelowna, British Columbia, and became aware of the growing drug culture and rising tide of homelessness. They discovered that Kelowna (pop. 120,000) had the most disproportionate homeless population (500–600) of any Canadian city of a similar size. The core members viewed this as a justice issue relating to a lack of dignity and hope. They wondered how Jesus would respond. For the members it meant a decision to not just serve the poor but to live among the poor. This was the beginning of Metro Community.

Laurence East, who is now Metro Community’s lead pastor, was Willow Park’s missions pastor when this community first launched as a satellite campus of Willow Park (in April 2011 it joined the British Columbia Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches). Living in North America for just three years (having grown up in Asia, the Middle East, and England), he was caught off guard by this commission (he calls it his “Nineveh.” He was a reluctant missionary).

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Beginning in a local homeless shelter, the group sponsored a weekly coffee-shop-type ministry. “We started with about 15 drunk guys hanging out, and after about 9 months we had about 75 guys on a Saturday night,” East says. “We had outgrown the place. Across the street was a nightclub that we decided to rent on Sunday mornings, and we began a worship service. Word got out, and a whole bunch of middle-class people showed up to join us.”

At first, East was concerned that the new mix of people would change the dynamics and cause the people they were initially trying to reach to stop coming. Happily, he was wrong. “What I had not figured out from a justice perspective is that brokenness is not the preserve of the homeless or the poor, but there is a deep brokenness among the middle class who are looking for a place where they don’t have to hide their own brokenness.”

Today Metro Community is a mix of street people, the working poor, and middle class. The church asks, “What does it mean to create an environment where people can feel broken but accepted?”

The leaders are very careful to define themselves as a church and not a social agency. They do lots of things not typically identified as church activities, such as their art studio, community kitchen, coffee shop, and offering small business loans and a matching savings program in partnership with local banks and credit unions.

How does evangelism come in? “The people we are trying to reach would say, ‘We have a lot of churches that come down here and try to convert us. But this is our church, where we are accepted for who we are,’” says East. “And many times I have heard them say, ‘But now our need for Jesus is something we understand because of this community of Jesus followers.’”

Much of the justice aspect centers on advocacy. They call it navigation. Navigating through the social and government system. The town’s strict rules against loitering in various places often result in significant fines for the homeless. Often a homeless person begins a rehabilitation process that results in freedom from drug and alcohol addictions, and the first thing he needs in order to obtain employment is a driver’s license or government identification. If they have unpaid citations, it is impossible to obtain a driver’s license.

East said, “We believe that kingdom justice calls for us to advocate on behalf of these people because they are voiceless and oppressed. They don’t know what they are entitled to because the system is so confusing.”

East is quick to acknowledge the danger of swinging the pendulum so far that the focus becomes all about social justice, with evangelism and discipleship getting shortchanged. He said, “The message of Jesus cannot be delivered among the poor, the dispossessed, and the voiceless without clearly addressing justice.”

He reasons that good news to a homeless person is to have a home. “So, for us, our journey has been to create a home for the homeless.” He continued, “What is good news for a person that has no friends? It is that I belong to a community. That is good news. When you join that with the message of who Jesus is and what he wants to do in your life and through you, the two become one in a very powerful way, and the people it affects don’t separate them, and they don’t want to separate them.”

East’s message to his congregation is that if you choose to live your life among the poor and marginalized, you cannot function without the message of Jesus. He said, “We are not interested in downplaying the gospel. If there is one thing the street community knows, they know a fake when they see one. So if the words aren’t accompanied by action, and heart, and conviction in terms of a life direction, they aren’t interested. They get plenty of propaganda elsewhere.”

—LANCE FORD is the co-author, with Alan Hirsch, of *Right Here Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People*, (Baker Books, 2011); adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2010 Christianity Today. For more articles like this one, visit [www.leadershipjournal.net](http://www.leadershipjournal.net).

**INTERGENERATIONAL OUTREACH****Discuss**

1. How do you think each church in this article would define the term “social justice”? How are the definitions similar? How are they different? What can you learn from these three churches about the important balance between justice and evangelism?
2. What aspects of these three churches’ justice ministries could your church most easily mirror? Which aspects would be hardest to pull off?
3. Why might this article be especially appealing to the young adults in your congregation? What in this article might make our older members uncomfortable? What aspects could the various generations in our church resonate with?

## Further Exploration

*Resources for more on intergenerational outreach.*

- 📖 **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.
  - “Reaching Every Generation” – Assessment Pack
  - “Outreach Amidst Changing Demographics” – Case Studies
  - “Intergenerational Ministry” – Practical Ministry Skills
  - “Practicing Biblical Justice” – Practical Ministry Skills
  - “Outreach and Senior Adults” – Senior Adults’ Ministry
  - “Strategic Outreach” – Short-Term Missions
  - “Becoming Outward Focused” – Training Themes
  - “Intergenerational Ministries” – Women Leaders

- 📖 **LeadershipJournal.net**: Our sister website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

**The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West. . .Again** by *George Hunter*. Explores why Celtic Christianity was one of the most successfully evangelistic branches of the church in history. (Abingdon Press, 2000; ISBN 0687085853)

**Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News** by *Rick Richardson*. The national coordinator of evangelism for InterVarsity Fellowship USA offers ways to spread the gospel in a postmodern age. (InterVarsity Press, 2000; ISBN 0830822763)

**Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith...and How to Bring Them Back** by *Drew Dyck*. Young people today are not just sprinting away from the church, but they're leaving the *faith* as well! Drawing on recent research and in-depth interviews, Dyck identifies seven categories of "leavers"; offers advice on how to connect with each type; reveals communication land mines to avoid; and equips *you* to reawaken the prodigal's desire for God. (Moody Publishers, 2010; ISBN 9780802443557)

**The Slow Fade: Why You Matter in the Story of Twentysomethings** by *Richard Joiner*. Coauthors Reggie Joiner, Chuck Bomar, and Abbie Smith—a senior pastor, a college pastor, and a twentysomething—rethink one-on-one mentorship as the way to end the slow fade of youth ministry graduates who gradually disconnect from the church and never return. They offer insights and suggestions that will help anyone get started fighting the fade. (David C. Cook, 2010; ISBN 9781434764799)