



Why I Believe in the Next Generation

By Marty Cauley

I work *with* young adults. That is to say, when I employ them on my staff, my goal is for them to work *with* me, not *for* me. I have learned over the years that people rise to meet the expectations placed on them. So I raise the bar as high as possible and challenge the young people I encounter to rise. And they do!

I believe in the next generation for five reasons: ingenuity empowers them; injustice enrages them; challenges enthrall them; culture equips them; and hope inspires them. The future they face is not as bright as the one they should have inherited; but I know that they will rise to the challenge!

Ingenuity empowers the young adults I encounter. They are not bound by any pre-conceived ideas or limitations. A simple example is the I-Phone. It was supposed to be a closed system; applications would have to be approved. Young adults took this as a challenge and “hacked” their I-phones and created a myriad of specialized and individualized applications. One author contends that those of us who are older (that hurt since I’m “only 43”) think linearly, but Mosaics (my preferred name for this generation) think in webs. Every line interacts with, informs, and influences every other line. This allows for a previously unheard of level of creativity and ingenuity. Young adults are ingenious. If you don’t believe me, just get to know one.

Secondly, injustice enrages them. This generation seems to have an inherent moral compass that makes them completely intolerant of social injustice. Whether it is the crisis in Darfur, the AIDS pandemic in Africa, or local poverty, they attack injustice. Whereas some might be content to send \$10 to the cause of the day, Mosaics pack their bags and head to Bolivia to dig wells and to India to distribute mosquito nets.

Additionally, challenges enthrall them. Mosaics love to be told what they cannot do and what is “impossible.” Challenges give them the opportunity to utilize all of their resources to attack and discover new ways of beating the system. Mosaics think fast and act fast. They love a fast-paced, challenge-laden environment.

Part of their ability to adapt to any challenge so quickly is that culture has equipped them to be flexible, fast, and focused. The pace of change in our culture is faster than at any time in history. And Mosaics swim in the waters of change almost effortlessly. Culture has taught them to be flexible and keep their options open, to think and act fast because the opportunity will pass you by, and to be completely focused on the emergent problem at hand so that, once it is solved, you can move along to the next one.



Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, hope inspires them. Amidst the rapid pace of change, the challenges of our world, and the injustice that surrounds them, Mosaics continue to manifest hope. They are not blind optimists, but deliberate realists, who still believe they can change the world. They are unwilling to accept the status quo and are ready to make their mark upon the world. It is now our job to help them mold that energy into a synergistic force for good and then get out of their way.

If I were to offer faith-based leaders three words of advice, they would be: 1) expose Mosaics to big ideas; 2) equip Mosaics to lead; and 3) encourage Mosaics to follow their dreams. Never underestimate the power of a Mosaic to be willing to study, research, and grapple with big ideas. This is a generation built upon the idea that intellectual capital is the greatest force on earth.

Allowing Mosaics to lead is risky but rewarding. They will not follow the path of those who have gone before them, but that does not mean they will go astray. Mosaics will try new things, come up with vastly different ideas, and be willing to take risks. So what if they fail as long as they learn and are able to take their experiences and fail forward. Let them lead!

Finally, be a dream enhancer rather than a dream eliminator. Help them grasp the scope of their dream and map out a way to accomplish it. Help them understand the cost of following the dream and the benefit if it is accomplished. One ridiculous dream may be what it takes to save the planet! I believe in the next generation, in their abilities, their ideas, and their values. The future rests in their hands. Let's help them by investing in them with all that we have.

The Rev. Marty Cauley (mcauley@sejumc.org) is director of Ministries with Young People for the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church.

The Right Question

*Leaders do not need answers.
Leaders must have the right questions.*

Michael Slaughter, in his book *UnLearning Church* (Abingdon, 2008), suggests a question for those seeking to reach new generations:

What boomer-era practice could you unlearn in order to better reach younger generations?



Helping Youth Discern God's Call by Brian William

Two months ago, a group from my church attended the Leadership Institute held at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. Pastor Adam Hamilton spoke of his desire to encourage young people to pursue the possibility of ordained ministry and how the church was planning a small group to accomplish this. He then asked all those attending the Institute to turn to the person next to them and name some young people in their churches whom God may be calling into ordained ministry. The youth ministry director from my church was present. She turned and said, "I can think of three names." I responded, "I, too, can think of three names!" It turned out that we were thinking of two names in common, and each of us suggested one person the other had not considered, bringing our total to four.

I have now begun the process of reaching out to churches in my area to see if they might have one or two young people each, with the hope that we could have a total of ten young people to form an ongoing small group. I'm hoping this group would:

1. Engage in biblical study and theological discussion at a deeper level than the typical youth group meeting or confirmation session. In addition to the basics of the Christian faith, it could look specifically at what types of spiritual gifts or characteristics God gives to people who are called into ministry.
2. Offer an opportunity for the participants to exhibit leadership skills within the church. These would not be menial tasks that we sometimes give youth (folding bulletins and lighting candles), but having them help lead worship, assist with sermon preparation, accompany the pastor on a hospital visitation, develop a Bible study lesson plan, etc.

An added benefit of this program is that it permits youth with similar interests and commitments to find a community of theological and vocational discernment not available in any one congregation.

Brian William (pastor@burlington-umc.org) is pastor of Burlington United Methodist Church in Burlington, Illinois.

Unless religious leaders take younger adults more seriously, the future of American religion is in doubt.

Robert Wuthnow