

Editorial

IT'S a common thing to hear parents or grandparents say, with reference to youth and children, that things were different when they were young. They believe the music was better, the discipline stricter, the books worth reading and the technology easier to understand. And families did more together.

To that, of course, we could add that there were fewer blended families, mum usually didn't have a paid job and stayed home to run the house, and you didn't live in constant anxiety that your children/grandchildren could be exposed to porn or cruising pedophiles with the click of a button.

Youth of the 21st century have a lot to live up to, and a lot to deal with. It's easy for those from different generations to misunderstand or treat them with derision. Can we remember what it was like to be their



age? If we can't, we should try. And can we really understand what it's like to be young in such a super-fast era — with such high expectations placed upon you?

Work to find a window into the lives and hearts of younger people. Go to the latest Harry Potter with your kids or grandkids (if they'll let you); read books such as *The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers* by Gary Chapman and have your eyes opened to the possibilities, as well as the pits you can fall into. You can also consider how to love and engage with Gen Y and teens by having a look at our reader's essay below and Jenni Stoddart's story on page 27.

A social researcher told a recent conference for Sydney Anglicans that generational difference was the biggest cause of conflict in the office. I hope that will not be the case in our families or churches.

Reader's essay of the month

Generation Y for Jesus

The latest clothes, the hottest gadget, the newest film — word is out on the networking sites, so waiting for them is out of the question. **TIM HAWKINS** asks how we can get Gen Y to be just as excited about the gospel.

WHO are these “Gen Y” people anyway? How come they are different? How can we engage them for the cause of Christ?

Gen Y describes people born from about 1980 to the mid-1990s — in other words, people aged from about 16 to 31. They are different from the generations before them (Gen X and the Baby Boomers) in that they were born into far more prosperous times, have had a plethora of digital gadgets available to them from an early age and generally come from family backgrounds where they are more likely to have been indulged, rather than ignored. The word that describes their world is “instant” and their motto for life is “lifestyle matters more than everything else”.

Many leaders and employers have dismissed Gen Y as lazy, uncommitted, disloyal and incapable of planning. Many church leaders have found their tried and trusted methods have failed to engage this emerging generation. And yet many of us who have worked with them for the past 15 years find them to be a beautiful generation who are capable of achieving magnificent things!

Here are three things that Gen Ys will respond to:

1. INSTANT RESULTS

We might have learnt that patience is a virtue but patience is a learnt behaviour. Babies are not born as patient people! We learn patience by having to wait.

Gen Ys have grown up in a world where they have never had to wait for anything. Instant photos, instant downloads, instant

messaging, instant purchases... this has led to two key questions for Gen Y:

Why should I wait?

Why should I plan?

The world is changing so rapidly. Gen Ys have no idea where they'll be in five years' time. So why plan when things change so fast? Most Gen Ys don't even know where they'll be this weekend! In addition, 80 per cent of jobs that will be available in 2020 don't exist yet because the technology has not yet been invented. How do you plan for that?

We can engage Gen Y by:

- Setting short-term goals. Many of our goals are way too long-term!
- Most Gen Ys expect to achieve things quickly. We need to structure things to help them see some immediate results.
- God's kingdom is essentially a long-term deal. As we teach this truth, we also need to show its immediate and tangible benefits.

2. AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Gen Ys won't believe you or trust you because of your position in the hierarchy. It's your relationship that matters! For Gen Ys, respect is not automatic. It has to be earned — and is always reciprocal.

The older generations are often very loyal to institutions — many will stay with the same bank, the same employer and the same church denomination for life. Gen Ys are incredibly loyal but not to organisations — they are intensely loyal to people.

If you want to engage Gen Ys with authentic relationships, then go with the things they love:

Social connectedness They need to know that they belong — and that they matter.

Working in teams They are far less individualistic than the preceding generations. They are very collaborative and co-operative. We need to adjust our learning environments to reflect this.

Fun environments Is your church — or your ministry — a fun place to learn and grow?

3. A CAUSE TO COMMIT TO

How do you motivate Gen Ys to give passionate and wholehearted support to their work or ministry? Simple: they are passionate about having a cause to commit to. Volunteerism amongst Gen Ys is now the highest it has been since “The Builders” generation (those now aged 65 plus).

Gen Ys have grown up with recycling, fair trade and multiculturalism — they are the least racist and most accepting of any generation. If you give them a cause that they can commit to, you will have a willing worker who will sacrifice everything for that cause.

The kingdom of God is the greatest cause ever — a cause worth living and dying for. So don't just put Gen Ys on a roster. Sit down with them and enlist their support for the greatest cause ever.

I keep finding Gen Ys to be a beautiful generation. They have huge potential and hearts of gold. They have much to teach the older generations about life and relationships. The challenge for us is: are we ready to sit down with them — and listen?

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READERS' ESSAYS

We would like to encourage readers to submit well-considered essays in response to issues raised by *Southern Cross*.

Please email your (700-word maximum) submission to: newspaper@anglicanmedia.com.au