

Why Teens, Young Adults Are Leaving American Churches

Over the last decade, churches in America have felt the effects of a mass exodus of younger members. For Christians who wish to return America to a more Bible-friendly atmosphere, there are deep conflicts and symptoms to be recognized. The following list is gathered from three books: *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . and How to Bring Them Back*; *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*; and *The Last Christian Generation*, as well as from LifeWay Christian Resource Surveys from 2007 and 2010.

- Many young people say there aren't good reasons given for holding biblical beliefs other than "the preacher says so" or "your parents say so."
- Kids are routinely kept out of "grown-up church." First they're in the nursery. Then they get "children's church" with a short Bible lesson. For teens, there's a separate youth service with "their" music. By eighteen, they've never been expected to sit through a whole Sunday service, and it's culture shock.
- Young people can see that the church in general hasn't yet been able to conquer issues like racial reconciliation, domestic abuse, and the rampant divorce rate—sometimes in their own families.
- Sometimes the church feels pressured to impress their younger members with new technological avenues, so they discard all the old hymns that were written out of peoples' struggles with life, pride, and suffering. Thus, the newer generations don't hear about how God can help them through hard times.
- Young parents raised in the last twenty years grew up under the pop psychology of never receiving or deserving any discipline or criticism. They've seen church become irrelevant. Now, as parents, they're hesitant to make their kids go, or even ask them to.

This Month You Can . . . See Your Church as a Visitor Sees It *By Jim Kraus*

Last summer, while on vacation at our cottage, I attended a small church in a nearby town. I've gone to church all my life, so I knew what to expect, more or less. But the service confused me. *When do I stand? Where's the hymnal? What door do I use? (Oh, that big door is only for weddings—everyone uses the side door.)*

Since Easter is a time for visitors, it would be wise for churches to take a hard look at how their church appears to outsiders. Do you have a greeter staff? Are the stand-up/sit-down instructions clearly explained? Is your child-care/children's-church experience easy to navigate?

There are a number of websites that address the issue of how your church presents itself to outsiders—and provide helpful tips and advice. Statistics indicate that only one in ten church visitors ever return for a second visit. See what you and your church can do to reach out to the newcomer and improve that statistic in your congregation.

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CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO CHRISTIANS

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Please read with discernment. Watch and pray.

Focus on . . . *Somalia*

By almost every evaluation, Somalia is the most lawless country in the world. Decades of war and anarchy have left hundreds of thousands dead and have traumatized the entire East African region. More than 3.5 million Somalis are living as refugees in neighboring countries, and 1.1 million more still live within Somalia's borders but have been displaced from their homes. The work of missions has been limited, and the environment is dangerous for aid workers. A few missionaries have been able to witness, and some Somalis have accepted Christ as a result, but the native Somali church has been driven underground—some believers have been martyred and others have been targeted for execution. Estimates place the number of Somali Christians at no more than 500, or less than 0.005 percent of the population. Pray for

- Christian aid workers, for their safety and for their tactful witness.
- Ministries to have an impact and for viable churches to be planted in Somalia.
- Christian radio, one of the only ways to bring the truth to much of the area.

Freedom Threatened in Somalia

Somalis say Islamist insurgents have banned unrelated men and women from shaking hands, speaking, or walking together. Residents of the southern Somali town of Jowhar said that the al Shabaab

insurgents threatened to whip, imprison, or execute anyone found breaking the recent edicts. Jowhar resident Hussein Ali says he will no longer greet women he knows for fear of punishment. Student Hamdi Osman reports that gunmen are searching buses for improperly dressed women or women traveling alone. She says she was once beaten for wearing traditional Somali dress instead of the long, shapeless black robes favored by the fighters. The insurgents have already banned women from working in public, leaving many families completely destitute.

In a year in which Islamic militants from the al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab group killed more underground Christian leaders, civilian Muslims also claimed at least one victim. A 17-year-old Somali girl who converted to Christianity from Islam was shot to death last fall in an apparent "honor killing." Nurta Mohamed Farah had fled her village to live with relatives after her parents tortured her for leaving Islam. Sources said they strongly suspected that the two unidentified gunmen were relatives or acting at their behest. Nurta's parents had severely beaten her and regularly shackled her to a tree after she embraced the Christian faith and had taken her to a doctor who prescribed medication for a "mental illness," but none of this had any effect in swaying her from her faith.

Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. —1 THESSALONIANS 5:17-18

UK's YWCA Drops "Christian" from Name

The British branch of the Young Women's Christian Association has dropped "Christian" from its historic title, citing its need to evolve to reflect the changes in society and the needs of women. After 155 years, one of the UK's oldest charities changed its name to "Platform 51," saying that the original name "no longer stood for" the organization's identity and purpose.

"Our new name more accurately represents who we are and what we do: 51 percent of people are female, and girls and women use us as a platform to have their say and as a place from where they can move into the next stage of their lives," the Oxford-based organization said in a statement.

World YWCA Communications Director Sylvie Jacquat said that YWCA will remain the "official and legal title" for all of the group's 125 branches worldwide. Jacquat acknowledged that the YWCA was founded on a Christian basis but serves those of all faiths. Furthermore, volunteers come from many faiths, backgrounds, and cultures. However, she

admitted that "YWCA England & Wales' change of operating name to Platform 51 has raised strong public debate."

A spokesperson for a British evangelical organization that promotes conservative Christian values was concerned that the YWCA's decision to rebrand itself is further proof of the increasing marginalization of Christianity in the public sphere. "Many believe there is an anti-Christian bias among those who decide which charities get state funding," Mike Judge, head of communications at The Christian Institute, said. "It was the Christian character of the YWCA that made it great. It is a shame that it's turning its back on those values."

The YWCA was founded in the United Kingdom in 1855 by Lady Mary Jane Kinnaird and Emma Robarts to provide young women in London with the same spiritual and social support afforded to young men in the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association).

Last summer, YMCA of the USA rebranded its title and logo to read "The Y."

Billboards Marking Jesus' Return in May "Misguided," Says NT Scholar

Dr. Thomas B. Slater, professor of New Testament at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, says billboards claiming that Jesus will return on May 21, 2011, are inherently "misguided." Like most Christians, Slater believes that while Jesus' return is taught in the Bible, no one can know the day or hour apart from God. "The end of times is something that we all expect and hope for and look forward to, but most Christians aren't in the business of trying to predict that date. They are working toward that date," he said.

The Christmas-themed billboards appeared in Omaha, Detroit, Nashville, Atlanta, and other cities. The ads featured images of the three magi and the star of

Bethlehem, telling people that "He is coming again."

Allison Warden, whose family runs the website WeCanKnow.com, points to 1 Thessalonians 5:4 (KJV), which states, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief," to justify the campaign. Warden and her family are followers of Harold Camping, known for his controversial teachings on his station Family Radio Worldwide, which sponsored the billboards in Nashville. Camping, who teaches people to leave their churches ahead of the end date, says that he arrived at May 21, 2011, by using a mathematical calculation showing that day to be exactly 7,000 years since Noah's flood.

Evangelicals Warned That Atheism is Becoming the New Religion

In South Africa last October, evangelicals gathered at the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization heard the call to be guardians of the truth in the face of widespread indifference to religion and the denial of Scripture within parts of the church. Carver Yu, president and professor at the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong, spoke of the challenges of pluralism and atheism. Yu said that "confusing ideologies" were creating emptiness and alienation among people, while indifference to religion was

"tightening its grip." He cited the recent advertising campaign by Richard Dawkins and other atheists on London buses as a perfect example of the "enthusiastic zeal" with which atheists were campaigning against Christianity and religion. "Atheism is about to become the new religion," Yu said. "Christians must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ fearlessly because he is the way, the truth, and the life. Only he can lead us away from the present state of godlessness."

Lao Officials Arrest 11 Christians

Following the arrest of 11 Christians at gunpoint, three house church leaders remain behind bars for "holding a secret meeting," according to a local human rights advocacy group, Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF). The charge against the three church leaders is a political offense punishable by law. Authorities first detained the 11 Christians after they gathered for delayed Christmas celebrations. In December, the pastor informed authorities

that church members would gather at his home to celebrate Christmas, in line with official celebrations by the government-approved Lao Evangelical Church scheduled between December 5 and January 15. Eight of the detainees were released within three days after the arrest. HRWLRF has called for leniency, on the grounds that the political offense officials have charged the Christians with may lead to harsh prison terms.

Study Finds Few Millennials Interested in Religion

Millennials, those born between 1980 and 2000, are not anti-Christian or anti-religion, but they are, in general, just not interested in religion, says a new book based on a survey of members of this generation. An apathetic attitude towards religious and spiritual matters is common among members of this generation, according to *The Millennials* by Thom and Jess Rainer. Members of this generation are likely to care less about spiritual matters than those from previous generations, the Rainers wrote. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of this generation rarely or never attend religious services. And spiritual matters were ranked sixth, below friends and education, in a list based on an open-

ended question on what is important to respondents.

Thom Rainer suggested that the church has become less effective in reaching the Millennials because members of this group tend to be a high-commitment generation and they see most of what takes place in churches as low commitment, so they are not interested. Another possible reason is that three-fourths of these Millennials come from an unchurched context, meaning they have no Christian faith background. "They are not anti-religious or anti-Christian, but they tend to be totally ambivalent towards anything religious or Christian," he said.