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# MISSIONAL FOCUS

**Missional Youth**

**EQUIPPING GOD'S PEOPLE FOR MISSION**

PRODUCED BY FORMISSION COLLEGE



# MISSIONAL FOCUS

## Editorial Team

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Chris Ducker

Andrew Hardy

Carol Kingston-Smith



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# Contributors



## **DANIELLE FACE**

Danielle is the Elim Missions UK Missions Training and Member Care Co-ordinator and has served in full-time Christian ministry since she was 16. She spent several years as a missionary in Africa, Asia and the Americas and later co-founded Face2Face Ministries in Uganda. Since then Danielle has worked with various Christian organisations helping train missionaries and is a trustee for Release International. She has degrees in theology and contemporary missiology from Regents TC and Redcliffe College / All Nations.



## **EVI RODEMANN**

Evi is based in Hamburg, Germany and calls herself a cheerleader for the younger generation. She leads an organisation, "LeadNow," investing in young leaders in Europe and serves on the leadership team of the Lausanne Movement and the WEA Mission Commission. She is a PhD student researching on sustainable event impact through mission conferences.



## **JEFF FOUNTAIN**

Originally from New Zealand, Jeff has been engaged in youth missions in Europe since 1975, and served as director of YWAM Europe 1990-2009. In 2010 he established the Schuman Centre for European Studies, promoting biblical perspectives on Europe's past, present and future. In partnership with ForMission College, Jeff oversees the Missional Leadership and European Studies masters programme. He and his Dutch wife Romkje live in the heart of Amsterdam.



## **PETE TELFER**

Pete started with TLG in October 2022 after completing his MA in Missional Leadership at ForMission College. He has regional responsibilities supporting churches across the UK deliver their Early Intervention and Make Lunch Programmes. He also supports several regional leaders. Previously he has worked as a youth minister for over twenty years and has been on various church leadership teams in Kings Cross, Uxbridge and Aylesbury. He worked for Oasis College for ten years as a Professional Mentor, Fieldwork Tutor and Associate Lecturer and then ForMission College and Reign Ministries UK for five years as a Campus Leader. Pete is passionate about children and young people with a desire to encourage and empower others to reach their God-given potential. He lives in Aylesbury with his wife Lizzie and their daughter.



## **REV CAROL CLARKE**

Carol has a background in Business and Management: her first degree was in Business Administration at Coventry University, followed by a master's degree in Education at Open University. She is a qualified Chaplain. Since 2017 her passion for education enabled her to establish a private training centre in Christian Studies, Systematic Theology, Worship and more recently in Christian Discipleship and Christian Mission accredited by Open College Network West Midlands. She is the author of 100 *Powerful Prayers: In the Presence of God*. She is the Co-Pastor of Lighthouse Fellowship, Church of God of Prophecy, Nottingham. Carol is currently studying for her PhD in Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of Birmingham. She is married, has three children, and enjoys quality family time.



## **JOHN BAXTER-BROWN**

John Baxter-Brown, or JBB as he is usually known, has previously worked as Consultant to the World Council of Churches (on evangelism), World Vision International (on church partnerships), and Compassion International (on children and youth in mission). He has also worked for the World Evangelical Alliance and Churches Together in England. He lectures in a number of theological colleges, especially at ForMission College. Throughout his ministry, he has worked in evangelism, youth and children's work, theological education and training, and ecumenism, at local churches through to global levels. He has edited and authored numerous books, chapters, journals and articles. He is married and has two young adult daughters and lives in Wiltshire, England.



## **TYLER PATTY**

Tyler, and his wife Lara, desire to see emerging leaders trained and released to participate in God's mission in Central and Eastern Europe. They serve on the International Team of Josiah Venture, and lead European-wide initiatives in theological education. In 2019, they launched the European campus of ForMission College, which offers an accredited BA degree in Theology, Mission and Ministry. Through this, they are equipping emerging leaders across Central and Eastern Europe to be effective ministers of the gospel. They also serve in their local church in Havířov (Czech Republic) through teaching and hospitality.



# Editor's Note

Welcome to the third issue of *Missional Focus*, following on from September 2022's issue that reflected on the Five Marks of Mission.

In this issue, we explore 'Missional Youth', roughly defined as those aged between 16-30 years. We aim to unpack some of the fundamental questions of what mission means - and looks like - to younger Christians across Europe today.

An important question that should be asked by those involved in equipping missional youth, as a key aspect of their missional framework is, what is Missional Youth? 'Missional Youth' refers to young people engaged in mission activities that may very well draw from different methods and approaches, rather than traditional forms of evangelism and church planting.

Missional Youth have grown up just as a new paradigm of mission is being established in the West, and these young missional believers typically have a stronger awareness of global issues, inequalities and injustice, and an interest in creation care, peace initiatives and personal narratives.

In order to mobilize young people in God's mission, missional engagement needs to be much more accessible to the younger generations - God is calling young people to participate with His mission (Jer. 1:5) and this must mean looking afresh at all things related to mission and evangelism.

For young people to actively participate and be effective as young missional leaders in the mission of God, they would do well to consider these 3 big questions (see p.12 for further information):

- **Who am I?** (identity);
- **Where do I fit?** (belonging);
- **What difference can I make?** (purpose).

The articles in this issue provide significant insights into how some of God's people understand and practise mission, demonstrating how young people are engaging with mission in a variety of contexts.

May these articles - written by a combination of younger and older Christians - inform, challenge and embolden us all as God's missional people!

**REV CAROL CLARKE**

**CO-EDITOR**



# The Future Engagement of Youth in Mission

**BY DANIELLE FACE**

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in the engagement of young people (under the age of 30) with missions, both in the UK and overseas. During the last decade, young people have been subjected to an unprecedented global pandemic that has disrupted

their educational plans and their opportunities to socialise beyond the world of online interaction.[1] It is therefore unsurprising that a world of increasing uncertainty, both politically and economically, has influenced attitudes among young people and their willingness

to engage people and their willingness to engage in an often misunderstood concept of overseas mission. Yet even now, God is moving and calling young people to participate with His mission. So how can the mobilisation of young people in God's intergenerational mission be increased?



## Recent Shifts in Mission Trends

### Creation Care

In 2019, young people's passion for justice was publicly displayed during the global warming demonstrations initiated by Greta Thunberg in over 125 countries, when millions of young people left school and marched through the streets demanding government action to secure the future of their planet.[2] Young people are also supporting Greta Thunberg's popularisation of 'flight shaming', meaning they are increasingly hesitant to utilise high emission short haul flights for mission trips. [3] It was strikingly evident that young people are willing to engage in social action: this is not an apathetic generation.

For mission agencies, one of the interesting conversations that is growing in prominence, in line with the 5 Marks of Mission (see *Missional Focus* Vol.1 Issue 2), is the need for sustainable missions.[4] There is a need to consider an evaluated response that incorporates the passion of young people for creation care. There are many ways to do this, such as advertising trips that minimise unnecessary layovers, or utilising alternative modes of transport like intercontinental trains. Placements could also be extended during summer holidays to reduce short haul flights. However, these beneficial enhancements of mission practice need to be expressed in a way that young people will engage with, by promoting them on relevant social media platforms. Mission agencies should not rely on the unspoken assumption that people will somehow stumble across their websites.

### Internships

Another benefit of extending placement options is the additional experience and training opportunities they provide, which is especially advantageous for young people looking to acquire new skills. Covid-19 disrupted international travel, school exams and onward university education. This meant that during and immediately following the pandemic, there was a reduction in young people signing up for Gap Year opportunities as they wanted to 'make up' the lost time. Since then, young people have been re-evaluating their career choices and the opportunity of global remote working has increased. However, there is starting to be an increase in young people seeking opportunities that are more comparable to a tailored internship that contributes towards their CV and enhancement of skills and experience, as opposed to a traditional gap year 'break' from studies.





It is not a huge shift, but significant enough that mission agencies would do well to reconsider whether their programmes of engagement suit the contemporary needs of young people. This would benefit young people and their mission agency by allowing both parties to be more specific about the skills that are required or that could be developed during the placement.

### Long-Term Factors

There has been a gradual decline in viewing jobs as a 'career for life', which has been affecting missionary attrition rates since the 1980s, with significantly fewer long-term missionaries being sent from the Global North.[5] It is important to acknowledge that asking young people to sign up for 'long-term' mission with no specific end date, or a minimum 3-5 year obligation can be a daunting prospect. This apprehension amongst young people is heightened when the British Cost of Living Crisis is taken into consideration. In 2018, house prices were over 4 times higher than the average salary earned by 90% of people under 30.[6] This has only worsened since the pandemic. This difficulty, for potentially over 90% of young people, to get onto the property ladder, or to move out of their parental home, means that long-term mission is considered a colossal next step.

Missional engagement therefore needs to be made more accessible for younger people. For young people with limited independent living experience, opportunities could be promoted with accommodation included on a



missions base alongside other people. Mission agencies could offer a shorter duration of service, for 1-2 years, to give young people an experience of missions before signing up for longer placements. This helps to make moving overseas appear more manageable.

Another important aspect that needs further consideration is resilience.[7] Since Covid-19, there has been a sharp increase in mental health concerns amongst young people.[8] This will inevitably affect many of the young people applying to serve abroad. Mission agencies need to be aware of this during the selection, preparation and training process alongside exploring appropriate avenues for member care that address this area of concern.

### Future Engagement of Young People

There are young adults who are excited, passionate and want to get involved in mission. However, when asked which aspects of missions they would like to get involved in, many

struggle to answer. The answer is often just "mission," with limited understanding of what that is. During the selection process, when young people are considering serving overseas, ask them to explain their understanding of the Gospel and how they would share it with others. This provides an opportunity to discover whether they have a comprehensive understanding of the Gospel and how that influences the work that they could engage in.

Young people need to be provided with ample opportunities to discover the holistic Gospel. This ensures they can present the Gospel through both social action and proclamation, and that when presented with opportunities to share the Gospel they are aware of how to do so, both through explanation and invitation to ongoing discipleship, as helpfully articulated by Bill Hull.[9]

### Business as Mission

With a clearer understanding of what mission and the Gospel are, the next step is to provide young people with

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ample opportunities to engage with God's mission. One of the most prominent ways that has emerged since Covid-19 is the ability to work remotely. This can dramatically decrease the dependency on fundraising, as young people can be encouraged to find financially sustainable remote working options, and provides opportunities for them to build relationships in their new location. Another possibility is studying overseas, which also increases visa availability and potential connections amongst unreached people groups. For mission agencies, this may mean greater flexibility is needed to facilitate part-time placements allowing young people to work or study whilst also engaging in missional opportunities in their new location.

### **Intercultural Mission**

Young people are wary of promoting forms of mission that replicate historic colonial structures, so the shift away from Western prominence towards a healthier intercultural understanding of mission provides young people with opportunities for international mission partnerships. [10] Yet there needs to be a clear articulation of this shift to help young people appreciate the importance of embracing intercultural theology and humility.

This is an approach to mission that cannot be assumed but must be intentionally explored during the selection and training process. For young people, mission practitioners need to be wary of using 'adventure' language that promotes heroic tendencies. Instead, mission agencies should advocate the importance of going to learn, serve and support the ministry of local leadership, even when it looks different to Western ecclesial models.

Mission agencies should also consider how they, and the young people serving with them, communicate their activities on social media and newsletters. It is important that young people are made aware of the dangers of so-called 'poverty porn' that could

increase their social standing online but undermines the dignity of those they are serving. [11] Mission agencies need to be aware of the pressures young people encounter through social media and advocate ways of reporting that show humility and respect, as characterised by Radi-Aid's social media guide. [12]

### **Partnership and 'Reverse Mission'**

Another way to promote intercultural understandings of mission is for agencies to create opportunities for young people to engage in so-called 'reverse mission', by hosting young people of other nationalities to serve and learn together within their own context. [13] This creates intentional moments of collaboration across cultural divides, demonstrating missions 'from everywhere to everywhere.' [14] Partnership and collaboration consequently highlight the issue of healthy teamwork and the relational dynamics that exist within a team setting, especially a multicultural team. Appropriate training for conflict management, self-awareness and team management needs to be in place, together with appropriate member care.

### **Sending Church Culture**

A young person's involvement with international missions should not begin with their first experiences overseas. Instead, mission agencies should partner with local churches to promote engaging with *missio Dei* in different aspects of a young person's life. There is a need for mission agencies to provide resources that youth leaders can use with young people. Missionaries should be invited to share their stories, to inspire and provide a safe environment for young people to ask questions. Missionary mentors could be provided for young people interested in overseas mission. Young people should be encouraged to engage with prayer opportunities for missionaries, the global church and unreached people groups. Local churches and mission agencies need to collaborate on behalf of young people to promote opportunities that embrace partnering with God's global mission and church.

### **Conclusion**

Young people have often been an

underutilised resource for engaging with God's mission. The faith and passion of young people has much to offer those who have been in church for a long time and perhaps lost some of their initial passion and expectancy for God to move in power. Releasing young people in mission means those with more experience may need to step back to allow others to grow, even if young people make mistakes in the process. Those with experience should consider a mentoring role. Additionally, mission agencies cannot assume young people will just apply, as in a world of social media there are so many voices competing for their attention. A strategy needs to be developed to engage young people and invite their greater involvement in *missio Dei*. Younger people will continue to shape the future of mission if they are provided with the right opportunities to get involved.

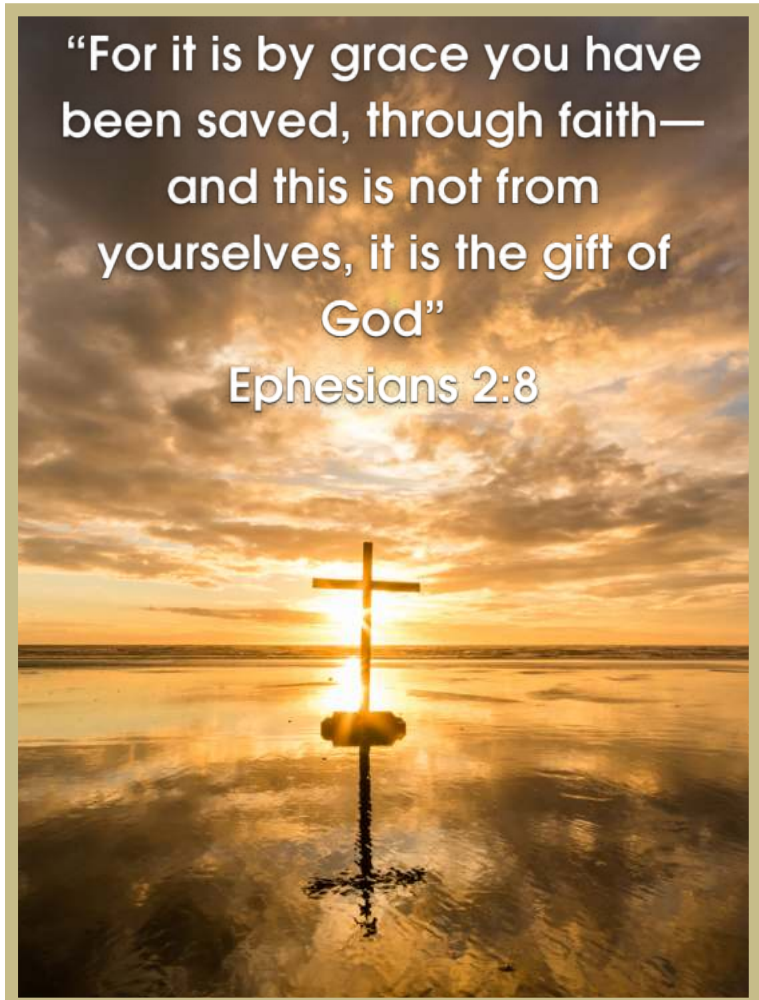
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# WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN A YOUNG PERSON'S LIFE?

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# A young generation chosen by God to make a difference

**BY EVI RODEMANN**

## **Introduction**

What do you think are common questions for young people across Europe? Your answer might depend on your context and when you last engaged with young people. Their questions might perhaps include: Who loves me? Who cares about global warming? Who helps me when I'm anxious? What can I do to help those discriminated against? Who takes my voice seriously? Who sees the real me? Does politics care about me? What will my future look like? Is there any future?

In their latest research, Kara Powell and Brad M. Griffin came up with three significant questions asked by teenagers in the USA, having interviewed 1200 of them.[1] I have used these three questions in training meetings for youth leaders and found that Europeans are echoing these same questions. They are:

- Who am I?
- Where do I belong?
- What difference can I make?

These questions sound so simple but are deeply profound. Does our church teaching help to answer these questions today?

We need parents, youth leaders and mentors to help young people understand that they are enough in Jesus. That Jesus loves them first for who they are. That they are

made in the image of God. We need to welcome them into our spaces. Theologically they are as much part of God's people as us older ones. How do we make space for them without expecting them to become like the churchgoers of older generations? This question is especially important as this young generation is tired of institutions. Secondly, how do we integrate them well, so they feel they belong and can raise their own voices? And thirdly, what opportunities can churches and mission organisations provide where young people can actually make a difference?

God is inviting young people to take part in His greatest mission ever and that goes beyond individual churches and organisations. It is writing history together as the global church, the family of God. This goes further than anyone could even imagine. Global mission is so immense that it requires everyone to contribute. Young people are drawn to something bigger than themselves. The question arises: do we let them contribute to global missions and how? Andy Stanley said in a 2022 podcast, "Don't be married to a model but to missions." That is a draw for young people.

1 Peter 2:9 provides an answer to the three questions asked by this young generation: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His

marvellous light." Right here we find identity, belonging and purpose. This is our foundation of engaging, supporting and cheering on a young "chosen generation."

From your point of view, what is the answer to these young people's questions? How do churches and mission agencies respond to them in your context? Below, I will describe some encouragements and offer some ideas in response to these questions.

## **Move from identity to missions**

For the first time in 2022, we held a younger leaders' weekend under the umbrella of the Lausanne Movement, welcoming ten Christian influencers from Germany, among others. These were influencers who have thousands of people following them. They are incredible! They are gifted and they are so honest about their own stories and pain. That's why they are loved and followed. They are real about life and pain, which they often do not find the case in other Christian settings. And in some ways, these influencers are extremely lonely.

A few of us have now come alongside them to mentor them and cheer them on. Firstly, it is about their identity and staying close to Jesus even when experiencing a social media disaster or being publicly degraded. This is difficult for anyone to bear but when you are in the limelight, it is even worse.



How do we help young Christians discover who they are and from there move into action, sharing the Gospel in word and deed? What do we influence them to? In some cases, it feels like we pamper the young generation in Europe, trying to fulfil their needs but investing far too little into their identities. The result of this is that many leaders crash in their 30s and 40s, leave leadership and even lose their faith.

As I walk with hundreds of young leaders globally, it always comes down to issues related to identity. I cannot overemphasize this enough. A healthy identity will lead to being involved in God's mission. As God's word says, "Christ's love compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14).

### **Listen before giving your opinion**

"You are the first people who visit us just to hang out and listen to our stories and experiences," said Sajmir from Lushnjë in Albania. "Normally everyone just visits the capital, so we hardly ever get a visit. And if it is a visit, it is about ministry and seldom about us."

We, a team of 7 younger and older

leaders visited younger leaders like church planters Sajmir and his wife Irma on our European Encouragement Tour in July 2022. For 18 days we travelled 7000km in a minivan, visiting 16 nations with a focus on the Balkan region, wanting to encourage young leaders like them. We could also have called this a "listening tour" because it was all about them: listening to their hearts for their region, their faith stories, their struggles as a tiny minority among other faiths or atheism, struggling to serve God in the midst of financial challenges. As we drove home it hit me like never before how powerful listening can be. It can bring healing to a person feeling listened to and understood but also helps the listener be less hasty, jumping to conclusions before knowing all the facts.

Savage writes, "How rare it is to be fully heard by another, to have the freedom to articulate what is good, bad and ugly in our lives. To be listened to this generously is an experience quite indistinguishable from the experience of being loved. Fresh expressions have the potential to offer an intersubjective experience that connects people with God." [2]

The young generation wants to be heard and understood. In their language. So we have to make the effort to understand what they are saying. It requires our learning their language.

### **Provide a compass, not a GPS**

Don't tell young mission leaders how to do things but rather guide them with care and empathy. Let them come to their own conclusions while you read the Word of God with them, engaging around critical ethical questions and talking about global concerns. Help them to find better answers than they could find just on their own. A few years ago, a young North Macedonian missionary called Gale left for Serbia with only 50€ in his pocket, as God had called him to serve there. For the next year he lived on 50€ a month, given to him by another missionary. Gale stayed faithful and God started to provide. Gale planted a church and as he wanted to reach more people, he started to go online in 2021. When I met him in December 2022 he had more than 60,000 followers following his daily Bible message. In the Serbian Evangelical churches, some say there are "only 5000" believers.

Gale reaches many more with his faithfulness! He is motivated by his mission of reaching Serbia with the Gospel.

No one told him what to do, but instead cheered him on to explore what it might mean to share the Gospel in his context. He has two mentors walking alongside him. They act like a compass by asking critical questions about his life and ministry and are there to support him, but they don't act like a GPS telling him left or right, right or wrong. And they are willing to walk alongside him even when they might not agree with all of his decisions as a young leader.

### Belonging means shaping

When a young person feels they belong, they want to contribute with their ideas. They don't necessarily do it the way you have done it, nor might they care how things were done in the past. ECM UK director Kent Anderson said in a meeting with younger leaders a few years ago: "We cannot expect young people to enter our wardrobes and put on our dresses. Like a missionary has retired in Africa and we are looking for a young successor to go there and simply continue the mission station. Instead we need to provide clothes hangers for them where they can come with their own dresses and join our

mission organisations." They don't have to fit into our sizes and styles, they contribute with their own.

As we slowly come out of the pandemic, not only have our churches and youth groups lost members but also mission organisations have seen a huge decline in numbers applying to go on mission trips or committing to a gap year. Now is a unique opportunity to re-evaluate and experiment. What will work for the younger generation of today? Can we learn, for example, from the rise of monastic-style communities across Europe who are sharing life and ministering together?

Chris Curtis, CEO of Youthscape said in a recent conversation, "our problem is not that we don't know what the problems of our young people are. Most of us know, we are just stuck in them and need people to provide us with three first steps to get moving."

Coming back to the crucial questions of young people: "Who am I? Where do I belong? What difference can I make?", I pray you sit down with young people and ask them how they would answer these questions. It might not only lead to more conversations and mutual understanding but also to new opportunities. For Powell and Griffin, it meant writing another book, this

time addressed at teenagers themselves: "3 Big Questions That Shape Your Future" was released in December 2022.[3] What might it mean for you? To reach the world for Christ and reach the impossible, it needs all of us!

### End Notes

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# FIVE DECADES, FIVE GENERATIONS

## Can unreached 'Zoomers' be mobilised for missions?

BY JEFF FOUNTAIN

Five decades and five generations after emerging in Europe, youth missions now face the challenge of recruiting from the 'Zoomers', the unchurched and unreached Generation Z. How have these generations helped shape youth missions? What are the prospects for missions in general with a shrinking resource pool of future missionaries?

### 20th century youth mission movement

George Verwer (Operation Mobilisation, OM) and Loren Cunningham (Youth With A Mission, YWAM) pioneered youth missions in Europe half a century ago. Both Verwer and Cunningham are North Americans from the so-called Silent Generation (born 1928-1945). Their first 'mission' recruits were westerners (North Americans, Western Europeans and Australasians) from the post-Second World War Baby Boomer generation. Youth missions thus emerged in Europe in the early 1970s, riding the wave of the Jesus Revolution and (for YWAM) the Charismatic movement.

An unprecedented one thousand young people from around the world joined YWAM's first Olympic

Games Outreach in Munich in 1972, with many continuing on into longer-term missions. Of the fifty Dutch participants, for example, thirty continued into long-term Christian ministry.[1] While traditionalists initially considered the mission deployment of untrained young people to be irresponsible and unprofessional, other mission organisations and denominations followed over time with their own versions of youth movements and short-term mission opportunities. Youth missions were here to stay.

### Tracing generational shifts in mission

The widely accepted (albeit imprecise) theory of generations is premised on the idea that whole cohorts or generations are significantly shaped by major events and shared experiences.[2] Each generation has its popular name tag – Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials and now Gen Zers- or Zoomers.

Boomers were generally described as being self-assured, optimistic achievers, ready to grasp the opportunities of post-war prosperity and reconstruction. They were also ready and keen to travel. Jumbo jets and cheaper tickets made it possible for young people to fly to foreign destinations for short-term mission engagements, evangelising and

offering practical support to local churches and long-term missionaries. International communication, however, was still clumsy, via telex (teleprinter machines), and expensive, through pre-digital telephones.

Having lived through an ongoing technological revolution and pioneered a network of mission training and mobilisation centres across western, and since 1990, eastern Europe, most Boomers in YWAM have now reached retirement age. Their successors, the Gen Xers (born 1965-1980), have moved into the vacated senior mission leadership roles. Gen Xers are sometimes called



the 'sandwich' generation, squeezed in between the larger Baby Boomer and Millennial generations. Coming from more single-parent households, divorced parents and dual-income families than the Boomers, they aspired to maintain a better work-life balance than they observed in their parents' generation. Growing up as digital technology began to permeate western life, their generation transitioned missions from the analogue into the digital era.

The new millennium dawned just as the oldest of Gen Yers or Millennials (born 1981-1996) were entering adulthood. Now aged between 26 and 41, they form the bulk of the two thousand full-time YWAM staff serving across Europe. More accepting of ethnic diversity than previous generations, Millennials were a great match for missions 'from everywhere to everywhere', which by now characterised global missions. The centre of gravity of the world-wide church was no longer in the North and West, but in the majority world of the South and the East. Greying and shrinking western churches had become totally outnumbered by the youthful and multiplying majority world churches in both church attendance and number of congregations.

Millennials grew up with the internet, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, and have an intuitive knowledge of technology. They connect digitally and identify with their peers across geographical borders via social media. They value collaboration, teamwork, innovation and creativity. YWAM's offer of entrance into missions through collective, multi-ethnic experiences such as youth-led schools and team outreaches with specialist focus including the arts, music, sports, justice and the environment has proven attractive to Millennials.

Their demand for authenticity (being 'true to yourself') and tolerance (celebrating diversity) bring challenges along with the opportunities. The desire to identify with one's own 'tribe' can encourage a 'bubble' mentality, making engagement with the larger world

sometimes an extra hurdle. 'Authenticity' can balk at evangelistic 'sorties' out of the mission base, or 'hit-and-run' evangelism tactics. This forces a healthy re-evaluation of how relational our missional engagement is.

'Tolerance' is yet another challenge for this generation, the prevailing concept of the word implying acceptance and celebration of diversity. However, it is intolerant of the original meaning which made room for ideas and practices one may not agree with. Millennials, however, have been schooled in post-truth thinking which rejects absolutes. Sharing the 'good news' about Jesus as the *only* way to the Father makes relationship-based mentoring, teaching on biblical worldview and theological understanding vital for the Millennial generation.

### **The Zoomers and mission: A YWAM analysis**

Enter the Gen Zers or Zoomers (born 1997-2012), now the primary focus for missions recruiters. YWAM colleagues more engaged with Gen Zers than myself have helped formulate the following analysis. While Zoomers share the same or even greater concern for authenticity and 'tolerance of diversity' as Millennials, they do not share the altruistic 'chase your dreams' optimism of Millennials.

Zoomers have grown up in a 'dangerous, scary world' in recession, with parents anxious about coping with life. They give priority to safety and security. Brexit, Trump, Black Lives Matter, the rise of illiberalism, unemployment, COVID and climate change have conspired to make them look at life through dark, pessimistic glasses. They follow dystopian film sagas featuring poverty, hunger and oppressive governments, like *The Hunger Games*, *Maze Runner* and *World War Z* (Z for zombie). They have only known a polarised society with global suffering streamed 24/7 via the internet, smart phones and other devices.

They feel that previous generations have stolen their future. Like Millennials, Zoomers are heavily suspicious of institutions and organisations they feel have failed them. They are the Greta Thunberg generation who are fearfully aware that an ecological timebomb is ticking. They are an activist, strike-back, self-starting generation wanting to get their message across to the whole world. They are also the least churched and least reached with the Gospel western generation for centuries. They have been raised by non-Christian parents, are biblically illiterate and do not know the gospel story. They are not militant atheists, secularists, nor hostile antagonists, yet many young believers among them can feel isolated, ridiculed and even ostracised for their faith.

Gen Zers have been raised in a 'post-many-things' era: post-modern, post-Christian, post-science, post-truth, post-absolutes... Left with nothing to define their identity but their own emotions, they are forced to build their own identity, choosing between a thousand options. If I am not created in the image of God, what and who am I then? This identity struggle causes loneliness and mental health problems, heightened by screen-obsession and lack of eye-to-eye social contact. While being the most individualistic generational cohort ever, they long for family.

They are sexually fluid, and view labels like 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' as repressive. As part of being 'authentic', they expect to be free to follow their desires, moment by moment, unrestricted by sexual convention. Gender is something they need to figure out themselves. Am I a boy or a girl? Or something else?

### **The challenge for mission**

Zoomers are effectively an unreached people group (UPG). Missions agencies and training institutions need to approach them as they would any other UPG. Their spiritual situation demands immediate attention from church and mission leaders. They require a radical departure from our business-as-usual training programmes based on the needs of past generations.

We must learn their language. We must try to understand their customs and rituals. We must study their films and



literature (i.e. social media posts). We must translate the gospel into language and concepts they understand. We must look for communication bridges into their culture. We must listen to and engage Zoomers, developing participatory learning environments rather than simply delivering information from the front of the class.

We must demonstrate that the gospel is good news for every area of life impacted by sin, including the environment, gender, race, poverty, migration and justice. Zoomers demand a much more holistic approach to missions and evangelism, a broader *missio Dei*, including creation care, for example. They will not be satisfied by pat answers and shallow responses to deep issues. We have not been convincing in the past about these dimensions of the gospel. Yet we do have some real answers to their questions.

In short, this means **WAKING UP TO THE NEXT BIG CHALLENGE IN MISSIONS!** It means designing new training programmes, commissioning new research papers and launching new efforts at educating church and mission leaders. Christian Gen Zers don't want dogmas. They want to experience God. How then can mission movements encourage healthy and sound experiences of God that can open teaching moments about a real God who is absolute, who created the world with a purpose, with boundaries and love?

The reality is that mission organisations cannot rely on churches any more to provide many recruits. Mission communities such as YWAM centres will need to recruit directly from mission outreaches. They will need to embed themselves more in local communities, engaging directly in community needs, building authentic relationships of trust and offering friendship and 'family' to lonely Zoomers. Short-term

mission engagements, even for those still journeying towards faith, can offer the participation, experience and relationship through which Zoomers best learn.

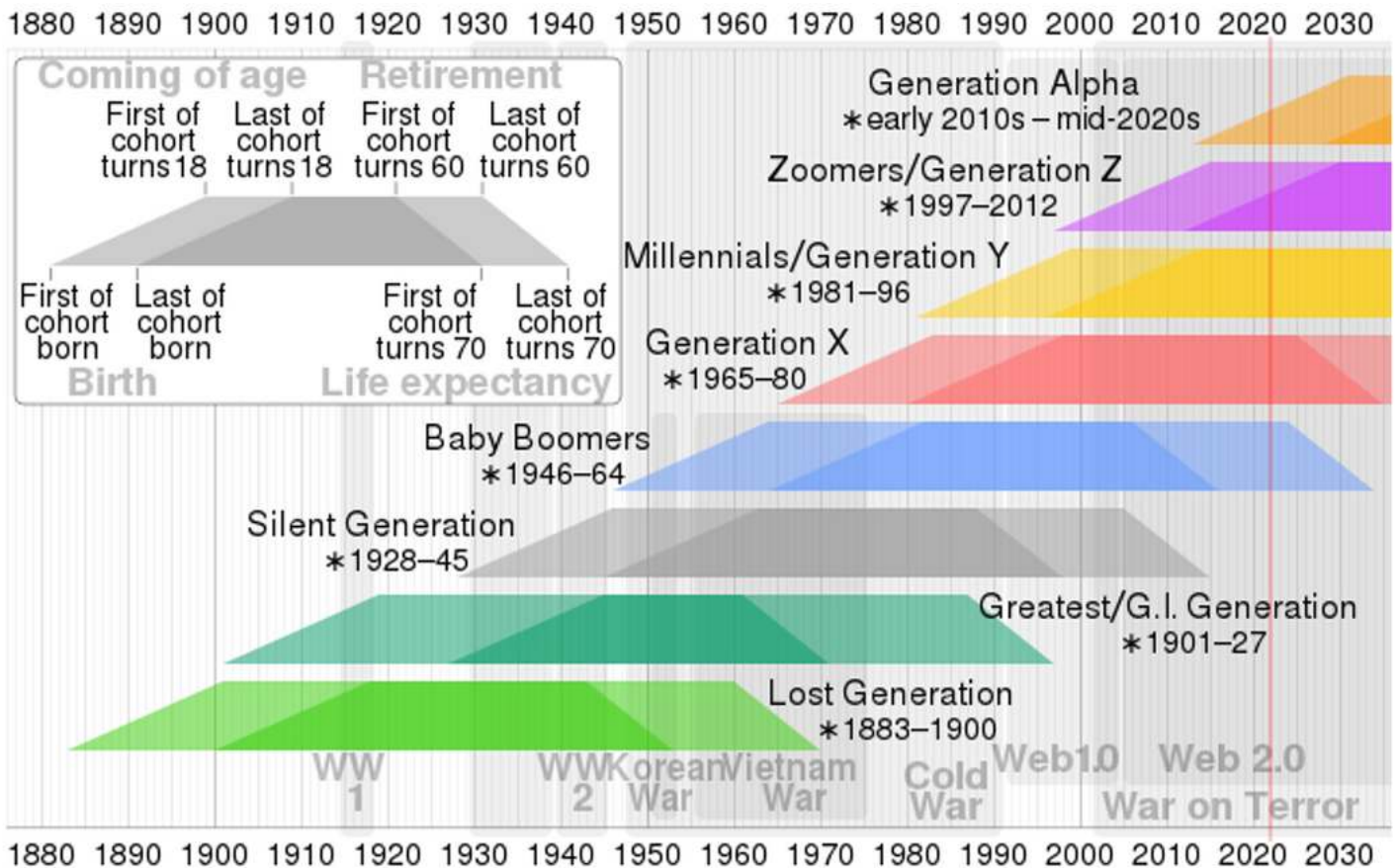
Half a century ago, a new wave of mission leaders in Europe came off the streets through the Jesus Revolution – former hippies, world travellers and social drop-outs – to reinvent missions as it was then known. Youth missions was born.

Why could not the Spirit of God, with the support of young members of a dynamically-growing global church, once again harness the passions and giftings of youth, this time Gen Z, to make a difference, to think outside the box, to tap into their global virtual network to mobilise, to find creative solutions for the big issues of our day and to discover the true meaning of freedom: not 'to do what you want', but 'to do what you ought'?

### End Notes

- [1] Fountain, R. (2013) *Avontuur met God, de geboorte van jeugdzending in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Ark Boeken, p.13.
- [2] Proposed as early as 1928 by Karl Mannheim.

'Generations' diagram taken from Wikipedia:  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation>.





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# Developments in Youth Ministry: An Interview with Pete Telfer

**Pete was interviewed by Missional Focus co-editor Carol Clarke in December 2022.**

**Carol Clarke (CC):** Pete, thank you for agreeing to take part in this *Missional Focus* issue, which is focusing on the theme of 'Missional Youth'. Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

**Pete Telfer (PT):** Sure. I have been leading youth ministry for over twenty years. I have also been involved in missional education for 16 years. I started off as a professional trainer for Oasis Trust in 2007, then I became a Professional Mentor with Oasis College, for approximately 6 years, as well as a Fieldwork Tutor for 3 years. Then I became a Campus Leader for Reign Youth which works in partnership with ForMission College. I recently achieved an MA in Missional Leadership (with merit) at ForMission College. I am now a Network Support Manager at TLG ([www.tlg.org.uk](http://www.tlg.org.uk)) where we partner and support churches to reach out to the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK and seeing hope spread.

**CC:** In the context of your ministry, what approaches to mission have helped in proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God?

**PT:** Different approaches of mission have helped to shape the way I proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. I was brought up with theology of 'bringing Jesus to People' and it sometimes was quite pressured. What I mean by this is, going on to the streets and handing out tracts; in certain context this may work, but that represents a

kind of theology where we are the ones that are responsible because we have been given this task and we must just do it. However, over the years I've discovered the beauty of *missio Dei* in that mission is about joining in with what God is already up to and in a more natural and normal way.

**CC:** Pete, what are some of the ways you have engaged in missional praxis?

**PT:** To demonstrate missional praxis, I started youth ministry from scratch in Aylesbury. I also worked with Intercontinental Church Society (ICS) at a small church in Zermatt in Switzerland (skiing mission) which had a profound impact. My time at ICS approximately 20 years ago would mean spending time intentionally praying for each other and for missional opportunities, having a meal together and sharing within the community. God just did stuff! It was so simple but profound because the challenge was always about how I apply what I had learnt. Going through missional leadership reinforced this experience.

The challenge for us all is we have our different lives, and it is so easy to lose that rhythm. We were intentional about the skiing holiday, but there was an openness and willingness and I believe this is how it should be when it comes to mission. Mission need not be complex; it is quite simple. The issue is, we make it complicated and there are many barriers that can get in the way of that, such as routines, church methods or culture, temptation, a lack of regular connection with God – all kinds of things can get in the way.

**CC:** What things are shaping the missional context for young Christians today?

**PT:** From a society level, there is a greater recognition of the choices the government makes. These choices don't just affect older people, but also young people. For example, let's think about climate change – young people recognise the choices that are made will affect them in later life. Young people also hate hypocrisy; there is a great level of distrust and young people are not afraid to speak out. Young people can be very passionate, desiring to impact and change lives. We must support and encourage them to do this. In order to be effective missionaries, whether that be home or away, they need to be effectively disciplined, just in the same way that Jesus modelled with His disciples.

**CC:** Pete, what developments are you aware of in training young Christians for mission?

**PT:** I believe Covid has challenged everyone and has caused organisations and churches to pause, re-evaluate and rethink the way they do things. This presents a great opportunity for mission and the way we do church. For national Christian training organisations, Covid has been a factor. I believe Covid has generated a culture and a norm for this season, and it will take time because people are still trying to adapt to the new normal. There is still an apprehension to return to how things were.

Also, the financial issues have been a concern. Students must think about whether they would want to take out a huge loan in the context of the financial situation. There can be a tendency in young people to buy now and pay later. The financial constraints have been a factor. Also, students are reassessing their employment options – do I really want to go through all of this studying, if I won't get a job at the end? This is causing a lot of apprehension in young people. Colleges are, therefore,

struggling across the board with trying to attract and appeal to people – intake for Christian training has reduced. The recruitment of volunteers within churches can also be a struggle, which can impact youth ministry.

Despite these challenges there is hope and a desire to see change. As adults, issues like the above can prevent us from seeing potential in the future. However, young people can be great at seeing beyond such obstacles. We must harness this and learn from them!

**CC:** What recent developments or shifts have you seen in how churches approach mission and youthwork?

**PT:** One of the good things that has happened is that churches have had to review the way they do things and not just focus on what is happening inside the church building. Due to Covid, churches have been forced to do just that. The danger now is, churches return back to their old ways. We must learn and we must continue to adapt by going forwards. It is a great lesson of God being able to use something so negative, such as Covid. 'For God works for the good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Churches have been forced to focus outside the building as opposed to just inside. Churches have reviewed their methods and approaches but I believe the danger is returning back to old ways as a default. We must learn from having to adapt and continue in mission.

**CC:** How important is it to equip young people for mission in the 21st century?

**PT:** I believe that Missional Youth are essential for the 21st century. It has been said that young people are the church of tomorrow; well, actually they are the church of today and tomorrow! We must reach out, effectively disciple, whilst encouraging, empowering and equipping. Young people are best placed as missionaries as they can reach people that many churches would struggle to reach.

**CC:** Pete, thank you for sharing your insights and experience.





**Psalms 119:105**

**Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.**



# Missional Identity: Mary as a Model for Youth Formation/Discipleship

**BY JOHN BAXTER-BROWN**

Three women, separated by centuries, culture and age. The first, an old woman who helped her two brothers found a nation and followed them in celebrating the destruction of their enemies (Exod. 15:1-21). The second, younger and desperate for a child of her own; the child, offered to God, became a kingmaker and king-breaker, and saw the nation forge its identity under a legendary King (1 Sam. 2:1-10). The third woman, younger still – perhaps in her mid-teens – centuries later, in a quite distinct cultural context (Lk. 1:46-55). The most radical of them all, for God’s promise now extended beyond a single nation to the entire world.

Each woman is associated with a song, and each song reveals a development in the depth of understanding of God and God’s purposes in and for the world. There is a progressive nature to this theological development, showing both continuity with the past, but also a radical discontinuity.

## **The Youngest of These**

Yet it is the youngest of these women who arguably demonstrates the most mature faith, who has the clearest vision of God’s character and purposes. It is Mary who can see with the eyes of faith a future in which justice, mercy and humility are realised.

## **Faith and Identity**

For Mary, the role of faith has become explicit. It was the core aspect of her people’s identity; you could not be Jewish without having a faith-identity, which in turn shaped the cultural and political identity. It united all Jews at the time and thus it was part of her core narrative. In a sense, despite faith being publicly practised, it was hidden in the same way that my male, white, educated, European, heterosexual privilege is public and yet, for so many white, Western, educated, heterosexual males, it remains hidden from themselves. We can all be so blind to our own cultural influences and our own prejudices and privileges. Yet for this young woman, this was not the case: for her there was a definite and personally aware dimension to her faith. She displayed her engagement with her faith at both spiritual and practical levels, with the Scriptures of Israel as the narrative through which she understood her life. Thus, her engagement with the Bible was life-enhancing. Upon hearing that she would bear a child, the young woman

declared, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord” (Lk. 1:38). To her relative Elizabeth she narrated her life and the works of God through texts from her sacred Scriptures. The Bible both guided her thoughts and her actions such that God through her obedience made the world a better place. Mary is an embodiment of faithfulness and Bible engagement.

## **Mary and Bible Engagement**

Mary quoted from the Old Testament in the Magnificat. It has resonance with Hannah’s song (1 Sam. 2:1-10), but there is a different focus. Ackroyd notes, “the themes of rejoicing, of the power of God, of the reversal of fortunes, of the prospect for God’s people, draw the two together.”<sup>[1]</sup> Yet Mary’s language lacks the strident military language of Hannah’s psalm: the Lord is still all powerful and mighty, yet Mary’s language is more gentle and graceful. There is a topsy-turvy upside-downness to Mary’s understanding of power compared with the way Hannah talks. An example of this is the way the poor are raised up: for Hannah they are raised and lifted up to “sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour” (1 Sam. 2:8); their position is reversed such that they become as one with princes and placed in honourable positions. Not so with Mary: in the Magnificat there is a dual reversal of position. The lowly are lifted up, but not to be like princes in places of honour, for those in such lofty positions are brought down (Lk. 1:58). Again, the adult Hannah makes use of military metaphors (enemies, victory, bows, gird up, the Lord kills and guards). She rejoices in her victory over Peninnah, her ‘rival’ (1 Sam. 1:6). The child Mary makes only one ambiguous (possibly military?) reference: God “has shown strength with his arm” (Lk. 1:51). Mary’s psalm is more personal, intimate and graceful. It is about the God she knows, not only the God who has done good things for her. The child Mary has a personal relationship with God because of who he is; the adult Hannah’s relationship focuses upon what God has done for her.

## **Loving Submission**

Thus, Mary is a submissive young woman. Submissive: this is such a troublesome word! We usually understand the word in the context of power relationships, of one with limited or no power submitting to one with greater or absolute power, with little or no choice; the word is analogous with oppression. In many cases that is precisely what happens: the vanquished submits to the victor; the victim to the bully; the poor to the rich; the slave to the master; youth to the elders; the powerless to the powerful. But that is not the dynamic at work as far as the young woman Mary is



concerned. She stands in stark contrast to, for example, Jonah, a most troublesome adult.

The dynamic at work with Mary is not one of submission from fear or force, but the submissiveness of love; God is not oppressing but empowering. Mary is especially favoured, and the Lord is with her (1:28); she has found favour with God (v. 30); she has been chosen for a specific task: to become the bearer and mother of God. Zechariah wanted proof of the angel's words in v. 18. It is a masculine approach: "prove it!" Mary, however, points to the obvious problem (her virginity – which implies lack of husband, lack of social and economic power, and youthfulness). The angel explains how the conception will be achieved and Mary accepts his word. God's capability overcomes human incapacity.

### Reimagining Power

There is this upside-downness of Mary's story – God incarnating himself through the obedience of a girl, of one of the 'least of these.' It is not simply that the weak become powerful in the kingdom of God, as if tables have been turned, but that power itself is reimagined, redefined in the weakness itself. Mary is the archetype precisely because she grasps this. Perhaps she does not understand it all, but she certainly gets it more than the adults and the powerful ones around her. She is the one who treasures these things in her heart (Lk. 2:51) – these glimpses of the kingdom that have come in her son are what enable her to maintain her stance of obedience even as a grown woman and as she watches him die on that cross. Could the teenage Mary have imagined the agony of watching her own child die? I do not know, but she did not desert him at the cross, even as she had not deserted him when he was born. She shows us what it means to want a child, to give a child life, even in the harshest circumstances:

"In contrast to Zechariah, Mary holds no official position among the people, she is not described as 'righteous' in terms of observing Torah, and her experience does not take place in a cultic setting. She is among the most powerless people in her society: she is young in a world that values age; female in a world ruled by men; poor in a stratified economy. Furthermore, she has neither husband nor child to validate her existence. That she should have found 'favour with God' and be 'highly gifted' shows Luke's understanding of God's activity as surprising and often paradoxical, almost always reversing human expectations." [2]

Thus, Mary's inner life shapes her response to God's call upon her life; she responds in faith, in willing submission. There is both continuity with the story of her people, and

yet discontinuity as her Son reinterprets the reign of God, inaugurating the 'now and not yet' Kingdom of God. Mary lived in the time between times, the end of one era and the beginning of the new.

### Mary as an Archetype for Discipleship

Mary offers a glimpse of one young person, shaped by her society and family, and – above all – by the God she loved. She is highly favoured, and Luke sees her as an example from whom we can learn. Mary is a model of faith, courage, and humble submission: an archetype of discipleship. She is the unexpected and surprising person chosen by God, the young person whose voice is seldom heard, the woman-child on the margins of society, the one whose prophetic imagination and commitment to justice is desperately needed by today's church.

The example of Mary reminds us that we overlook young people to the Church's detriment, for they may have a vision for the future that is informed by their life experiences and by God, but which lacks the jadedness or rigidity that can come with age.

### End Notes

[1] Ackroyd, P. (1971) *The First Book of Samuel, The Cambridge Bible Commentary*. Cambridge: CUP, p.30.

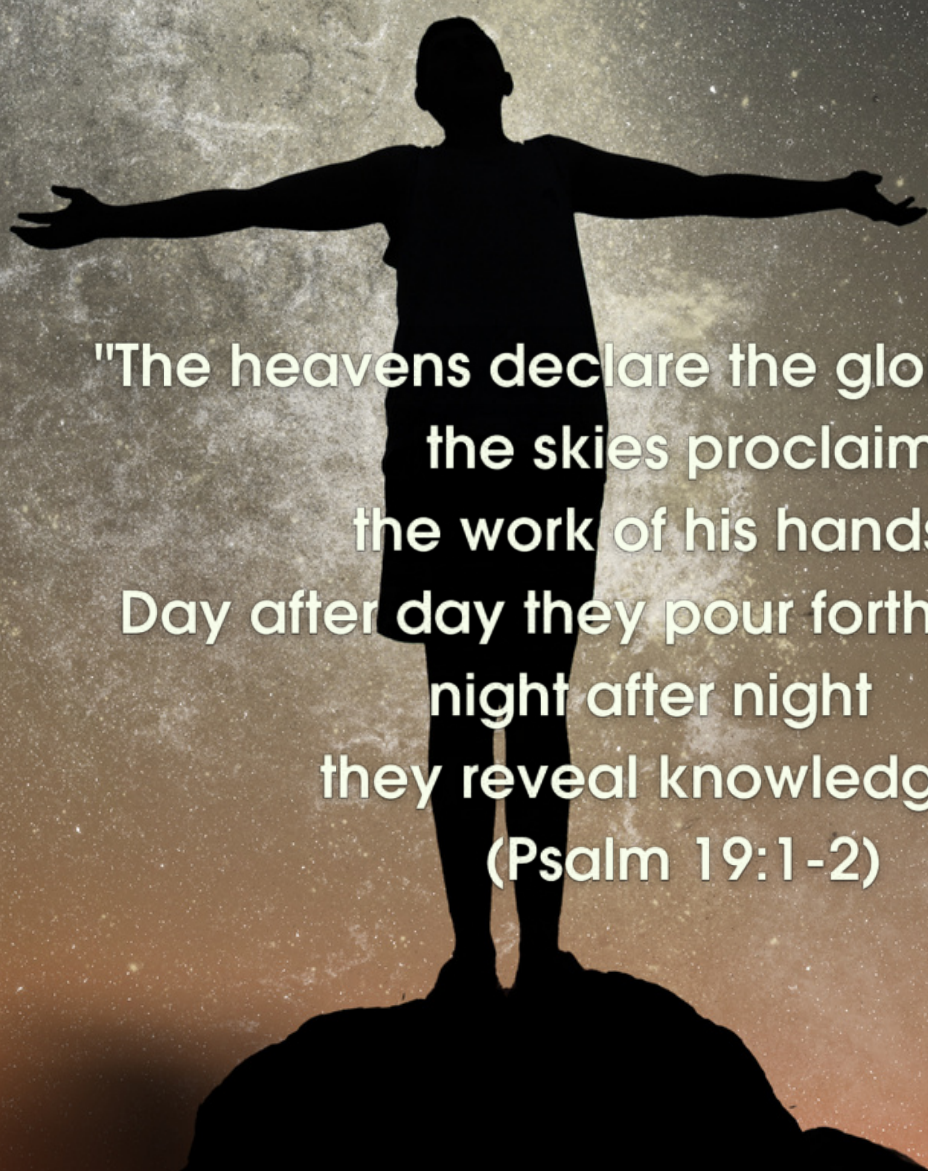
[2] Johnson, L. T. (1991) *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, p.39.

### Further Reading

Baxter-Brown, J. (2017) 'Children Can be Called by God and Hear His Voice' in *Mission To, For and With Children-at-Risk: A Kairos Moment for the Whole Church*, Baxter-Brown, J. (Ed.) Lausanne Issue Network on Children-at-Risk, Limited edition eBook, pp. 401-414.

Greener, S. (2013) 'Raising Samuel: Releasing Children to Discover God's Purpose', in *Children and Youth as Partners in Mission*, Brewster, D. & Baxter-Brown, J. (Eds.), Compassion International, pp. 161-181.





"The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim  
the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night  
they reveal knowledge"  
(Psalm 19:1-2)





# MISSION AND YOUTH IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AFTER 30 YEARS

**BY TYLER PATTY**

When the walls fell, the youth led the way. Over 30 years ago, the social and political landscape of the former Soviet bloc changed dramatically as nations shed the yoke of their communist overlords and fought for democratic renewal. For a country like Czechoslovakia, the bloodless Velvet Revolution of 1989 was sparked by student protests, which were themselves inspired by a student uprising in 1968.[1] These youth called for a radical break with the past, a reckoning with past injustices, and the appointment of leaders with high moral character. Although thrust into politics unprepared, young people set the tone and agenda for the renewal of society.

The opening of the borders brought new opportunities for Christian mission. In 1993, Dave and Connie Patty and Dan and Laura Hash moved to the Czech Republic and Poland to begin a ministry called Josiah Venture. Inspired by European youth movements and the biblical story of reformer king Josiah, they formulated the ministry's vision as "a movement of God among the youth of Central and Eastern Europe that finds its home in the local church and transforms society." [2]

By 2002, the ministry had outgrown its original organisational structure and was established as an independent mission organisation. Currently, Josiah Venture has over 300 staff in 16 countries across Central and Eastern Europe, partnering with over 750 local churches to disciple the next generation of Christian missional leaders.[3]

After nearly 30 years of ministry in the post-communist European context, Josiah Venture can offer a unique perspective on mission. This article will explore two dimensions of mission and youth in Europe: Christian mission directed to unbelieving youth, and Christian mission performed by believing youth.

## **Mission to Youth**

Evangelism has been a central component of mission to youth since the beginning of Josiah Venture's ministry. While the spiritual context differs from country to country, the secular anti-religious agenda of the communist regime left a significant mark on society. In the early years, Josiah Venture missionaries encountered young people who had

perhaps never met a born-again Christian. The challenge, as well as opportunity, was to evangelise with little to no preconceived ideas about the Gospel or Jesus Christ. Using English as a bridge to spiritual matters was a strategy that worked particularly well in the early years, with summer English Camp ministry being launched in 1994. Students were invited to attend a week-long intensive in conversational English led by native speakers in partnership with a local church and were slowly introduced to the Gospel and encouraged to engage in dialogue on spiritual topics.

Rachael Davison, Josiah Venture's current International Camps Director, says that the spiritual landscape has changed significantly since those early years. "Fifteen years ago, we would not even mention God on the first night [of camp]. But now, in all our countries, young people are willing to engage with the Gospel."<sup>[4]</sup> With the increase in exposure to different cultures and viewpoints, students are more curious to hear about another person's spiritual journey. This makes evangelism both more honest and more personal. Students seem to be wary of manipulative attempts at spiritual engagement, but value a straightforward and respectful invitation to engage in reflection on God. Students also rarely experience significant transformation after only one encounter. Ongoing connection with believers and the church is critical in the spiritual exploration of young people. In an internal study conducted 8 years ago, the Camps team found that 90% of the students who stayed connected had been personally contacted within 3 days of the end of camp.<sup>[5]</sup> While the specific data may have changed

since then, the principle of follow-up still plays an important role in mission to youth today.

While Josiah Venture's early evangelistic attempts used tools like English as a gateway to spiritual conversations, their outreach ministries take a more holistic approach today. Alongside English language, other so-called "Evangelistic Highways" include Sports, Arts and Music, and Schools. <sup>[6]</sup> When Casey Yorman, Josiah Venture's International Sports Director, trains youth leaders to run football clubs, he encourages them to not separate skills-coaching from spiritual coaching. "Having a relationship with God is the best thing for young people. But it is also honouring to God to build people up as good athletes."<sup>[7]</sup>

Yorman notes that young people are rediscovering the relationship between their body and their soul. They are increasingly motivated to grow in holistic ways. Students coming out of the pandemic with mental health crises are realising that they need physical solutions to their problems: exercising, going out and being with friends, putting their phone down. Sports ministry has been particularly fruitful in war-torn Ukraine, where students are desperate for personal agency and community. Missionally-minded Christians need to reflect on how the Gospel relates to the whole person, which includes their spiritual, emotional, and physical lives.

As part of a renewed holistic vision for mission, Josiah Venture considers evangelism as the first step in one's spiritual journey toward maturity in Christ. The goal in mission is not just conversion, but an ongoing walk with Jesus in community. Discipleship and disciple-making has always been a core part of Josiah Venture's ministry

strategy but became crowded out in the 2010's by the efforts required to develop evangelistic programmes. Dawid Werner, national missionary in Poland, reflects: "We realised that what we were doing for the last 10 years was Plan B. We decided we need to go back to the roots, back to discipleship."<sup>[8]</sup> Thanks to the new capacity created during the pandemic, they returned to "Plan A." They resolved that all missionaries on the Poland Team would prioritise one-on-one discipleship, building into a "Timothy" twice per month, as well as finding a "Paul" to guide them in their own walk with Jesus. Teams in other countries have made similar shifts in the past four years. The team in the Czech Republic has moved away from a "programme-first" approach in partnership with local churches and focuses instead on training up regional leaders to coach and be a resource to youth workers in their region. In 2020, this allowed the Czech regional team to be personally invested in 229 youth leaders in 108 churches.<sup>[9]</sup> These types of shifts in practice are essential to keeping discipleship as a core missional commitment.

### Mission by Youth

At its core, Josiah Venture sees itself as an equipping organisation.<sup>[10]</sup> The goal is to find, disciple, equip and release young European leaders for mission. Josiah Venture utilises a five-part model to conceptualise the discipleship process as modelled by Jesus in the Gospels: "Come and see" (EXPOSE), 'repent and believe' (EVANGELIZE), 'follow me' (BUILD), 'I will make you fishers of men' (EQUIP), and 'I am sending you' (SEND).<sup>[11]</sup> Mission is not the responsibility of so-called professionals, but is the challenge to every follower of Jesus (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). This framework





offers the Josiah Venture team and their partners common language when helping young people progress from unbelief to maturity in Christ.[12] The goal of maturity is not perfection, but participation.

Alongside the fruit of the Spirit and abiding in Christ, a sign of a healthy disciple is that she/he makes multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ.

Toward the end of the pandemic, Josiah Venture piloted an innovation called Youth Ministry Recharge as a means of encouraging youth groups to restart their disciple-making activity. In lieu of gathering youth leaders from across Europe to a single location, missionaries organised day-conferences for youth leaders in their vicinity. The 2021 Recharge had over 1200 participants in 79 locations across Central and Eastern Europe.

Ela Muhameti in Albania reported that “Recharge has been manna in the time of a desert... People have recovered the passion for discipleship, and it has taught them to love youth again, and to understand the vision for the ministry.”[13] While these Recharge events had formal teaching, they also provided ample space for ministry teams to discuss, reflect, pray and plan. This

encouraged greater ownership over the mission fields of the participants. Personal ownership of mission is a key part of releasing young people for mission in Central and Eastern Europe.

But equipping young leaders for mission also has its challenges. Based on her work with Summer Camps interns, Davison has noticed a tension between young leaders’ missional desires and the demands of education and careers. Often, emerging European leaders are only able to commit to being an intern for one summer, so as not to limit their career options for the future.[14] The benefit is that they are forced to integrate their call to ministry and their everyday life, but this is not always successfully achieved. This tension is heightened in contexts that are more economically deprived, such as Albania, where disciplined young people often move outside the country in search of career opportunities. Another challenge is in the case of a first-generation believer, who may experience pressure from her/his parents to minimise engagement in Christian vocational ministry.

Full-time ministry positions are already quite limited in this part of the world, which means that a large number need to engage in bi-vocational ministry. Jakub Vejmlka, Assistant Director of the Czech team, says that the average length of service for the main youth leader is about

3 years.[15] There is a lot of turn-over in bi-vocational youth ministry, and burn-out is not uncommon on ministry teams. This challenge presents an opportunity to help these leaders engage in a more holistic and integrated approach to mission. Reflection on the role of human flourishing, suffering and Sabbath could be significant in articulating a broader Kingdom view of mission.

Mission to young people will always involve meeting them where they are. Young leaders need to be equipped to think not only about the Bible and theology, but also about the cultural context of their mission field. This is one reason for the partnership between Josiah Venture and ForMission College to launch the European Online Campus, through which European Leaders can study for a BA in Theology, Mission and Ministry while staying rooted in their local context.[16] But not every youth leader can enrol in a BA degree. Leaders will need to be equipped with tools for contextual missional effectiveness, and that will likely require some on-the-ground research.

There are two examples I would like to highlight. In the summer of 2020, the team in Croatia conducted research on the attitude of youth regarding their future, motivations, influence, and spirituality. After several years of experiencing roadblocks in ministry to unbelievers, the team realised they needed to get a pulse on the current generation. By using targeted Facebook ads, the





missionaries were able to meet 40 students over Zoom with whom they had no previous contact. Ema Kreko reflects, "I would spend maybe 3 hours with students, and they would open up with all sorts of details about their life... Young students want to be heard."<sup>[17]</sup> Students seemed to exhibit a large degree of spiritual confusion, regardless of their religious background.

Many shared that they had rarely been asked questions about spiritual matters, and don't feel like they have anyone to talk to about the deep questions of life. Creating a safe space for spiritual conversations could be a significant missional opportunity in this part of the world. Similarly, but on a larger scale, Josiah Venture's Czech team recently partnered with a social research firm to conduct a qualitative study on the religiosity of Czech youth.<sup>[18]</sup> The study showed that religious sensibilities are very low among Czech high school students: 76% exhibited signs of low religious engagement, 19% average religious engagement, and only 5% strong religious engagement. However, nearly half of the respondents claim that they are searching for life's meaning. Additionally, half exhibit agnostic beliefs, claiming that there is a higher power, but they aren't able to say for sure what it is. While at first glance Czech youth may seem closed to religious topics, these findings give some suggestions for bridges to spiritual matters.

## Conclusions

After 30 years of missional activity in Central and Eastern Europe, Josiah Venture still believes in the potential of youth to change society. In order for youth to lead the way forward,

mission must first start with evangelism. Evangelism must be done in a bold yet relational way, and follow-up plays a key role in the long-term commitment of spiritual seekers. It will become increasingly important for missionaries to relate the Gospel not just to the soul, but to the whole person, and to articulate a broader Kingdom vision of the Gospel. Additionally, recovering disciple-making as a core practice is essential to setting up the next generation of young leaders for missional success. If these leaders are able to become disciples who make disciples, integrate mission with their everyday lives, and grow in their understanding of the context of their mission field, we just might see another revolution.

## End Notes

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