

# A Church for the Youth Culture

by Dan King

“Shakespeare’s immortal tale of star-crossed young lovers gets a music video-style updating in this hip, Florida-set, pistol-packing adaptation.” That’s what a review said about 1996’s *Romeo and Juliet*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes and directed by Baz Luhrmann. The movie stayed true to the original language and plot of the Shakespeare play, yet it transported the story into the context of the rough ganglands of the ‘90s. This is, in its simplest form, what youth ministry has to accomplish as it enters a new millennium of proclaiming the mystery of the gospel to the next generation (minus all the guns and teen suicide, of course).

It has always seemed odd to me that the church should be so interested in seeing young people join its ranks, and yet, do little in the way of adapting to the culture in which those young people exist. Terms like “seeker-sensitive” or “seeker-friendly” are so often thrown about, and yet the focus of these terms always seems to be about adults in the local community of believers.

Imagine, though, if a number of middle-aged and older adults caught a vision like the one David hints at in Psalm 71: “Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.”

Imagine if we began to see a number of church plants occur in the midst of youth culture itself, rather than inviting youth into adult expressions of Christian faith and practice.

Imagine whole families, retired couples, singles and other adults not only relocating to form the prayer and financial foundations for these new church plants, but also allowing themselves to become the adults, grandparents and loving mentors most young people today do not have. The risks would be high and the relocation uncomfortable, but it all sounds like something that might just happen in the upside-down Kingdom of God.

Many sacrifices would occur along the way for the adults: The music won’t seem to be very worshipful-- but then, worship is about lifestyle and the heart more than noise, right? The clothes the youth might wear would not be what one would consider Sunday-best-- but then, the Lord does not look at the outward appearance, but at the heart, right? The venue might be a warehouse with a cold floor to sit on-- but a few chairs could be found if needed, right? Most of the sermon would include illustrations that relate to youth and young adults and may seem irrelevant, but let’s be frank here-- if mature Christians are relying on Sunday morning (or Saturday night, for that matter) to fill their spiritual need for the week, something is dreadfully wrong.

Here’s the point, and the possibility: There are youth pastors all over who know that what we are doing in churches right now is just getting by. Very few new believers are being added to the Kingdom of God through our evangelism efforts, and those who do accept Christ often do not continue in the church after they graduate from high school because the only church body they know stops ministering to them the moment they graduate. Something has to change, and the exciting thing is that it doesn’t have to exclude everyone else. Think of it: Expressing an inter-generational church in the midst of youth culture, for youth culture!

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