

Identify. Invite. Invest.

Utilizing the I-GO Model for Intergenerational Ministry

It has been the assumption that young men will return to churches when they settle down, get married, and have kids. For many years, this was true to a certain extent. But we are entering a time when young men have nowhere to return to. They were never part of the community of believers.

Research is showing something that many of us would like to ignore: many young men ages eighteen to twenty-four are not connected with God through Jesus Christ because they cannot connect with their existing churches. Young men are the age and gender group that is most absent from Christian faith communities. Why is that? And what can we do?

At the same time, major shifts are taking place within society and culture as to how people, especially young people, see the world. Many times these new and different ways of understanding life conflict with values and structures on which our churches are based. Therefore, there is something deep down that just doesn't seem right about many churches to young men. And it goes much deeper than the style of music.

From their perspective, it doesn't make sense to expect young men to come to our existing worship gatherings or men's ministries. Nor will it work to try to develop a new and better program and hope young men show up. We need to put to rest the "you-come-to-us" model and deeply invest in a "we-will-go-to-you" model. The church needs to be sent out into the world.

What does this look like? When we look across the country in our congregations, we see men who have walked with the Lord for more than half a century – men who have stayed married to the same woman for forty years, men who have the wisdom of many years lived, and men who are by no means perfect but who are willing to share their lives. These men have something young men need. Recent research sponsored by Lutheran Men in Mission shows that fathers and other older men in a young man's life are the most significant factors in shaping their adult spiritual identity. However, sometimes these men do not realize how much they have to offer and how much they are needed.

But what if these men – these men who know what it means to walk with the Lord, these men who have the wisdom of many years lived – were empowered to go where the young men are and build relationships? What if the men in our congregations caught a vision of the impact they could have on a young man? What if the lives of young men all over the country were being changed because men of God were talking risks and accepting the call to invest in the life on one young man?

Importance of Intergenerational Relationships

Intergenerational relationships are crucial in the big picture of discipleship due to the following:

1. Young men are the group most disconnected from Christian communities.
2. Young men say they want older men in their lives.
3. Faith and what it means to be a man is passed down from one man to another
4. Many young men don't have fathers because of divorce, death, or because their father is absent emotionally or spiritually.
5. Many young men don't have extended family nearby.
6. Many young men don't trust institutions or organized religion. Faith and masculinity must be passed down organically through relationships. Young men must witness real men live real lives (in all its messiness) with the real Jesus.
7. Many young men are confused over the difference between the way the world should be (the way they want it to be) and the way that the world is. Intergenerational relationships can provide some clarity amid the confusion.

8. Young men have a sense that at some point they will need to step up and make a difference. In other generations this was more defined. Now, young men wonder, how, why and can I? Intergenerational relationships can help answer these questions.
9. Older men are blessed with experience and wisdom to be a blessing. They get to make a difference in young men's lives
10. Young men can be a wonderful blessing in the lives of older men, bringing new purpose, life, and energy.

I-GO

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The I-GO model is a simple organic strategy that provides a three-step process for building relationships with young men. It is based on the three "I"s of relationship building (identifying, inviting, and investing) and upon the conviction that "I will go" and do this. In this model, you don't have to wait to get going. You just go and do it.

IDENTIFY

What young man has God put in your life? With whom do you have a natural connection – a grandson, an employee? Perhaps it's the guy who works at the clubhouse, your neighbor, or your friend's son. Whoever it is, identify a young man with whom you can connect.

INVITE

Take a risk and get to know him. Ask questions. Find out what makes him come alive. Invite him into conversations. Then invite him to do something with you. Maybe it is fishing, maybe it is dinner. Make use of shared interests.

INVEST

Develop an ongoing relationship with the young man. Have a biweekly Bible study, a weekly [disc]golf outing, a monthly time to work on cars together, or a regular invitation to have supper together. Find something that works for you. As you do something together, learn his story, and share yours. Listen and be real. Live your life transparently and honestly, allowing him to see the real you. Let meaningful conversations just happen. Watch as God changes both of you.

Putting The Pieces Together

How does this start? There are a number of ways to go about building relationships with young men. The I-GO model suggest ways to jump start your thinking about what would work in your context and to empower you to make it happen.

We cannot expect young men to just show up at our church buildings. We need to go to them. And that means you need to build authentic relationship. God is raising up men to invest in the lives of young men. You are needed. Will you go?

Conclusions

Young men need a man to listen to them, to believe in them, and to model what life looks like with God. Identify. Invite. Invest. Keep it simple. Just build a relationship with a young man. You don't have to be perfect. You just need to be you: You just need to go to them. God is going to do great things through you.

To find out more, ask Lutheran Men in Mission about intergenerational ministry, and how to reach across generations to build men for Christ.

References

The I-GO model discussed in the paper is out of a Lutheran Men in Mission developed resource in Appendix A, pp201-208 of the book *Coming of Age*.

Coming of Age is available from Augsburg Fortress on their website:

<http://store.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/7329/Coming-of-Age-Exploring-the-Spirituality-and-Identity-of-Younger-Men>

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ABOUT

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Lutheran Men in Mission is a 501(c)(3) ministry with and to men in the Lutheran church and beyond. We work to strengthen men's Christian faith, relationships, witness and service in their homes, congregation and communities.

Our Mission is, by God's grace, to build men's faith, relationships and ministry through men's events, the resources we produce and ongoing leadership development.

Our Vision is that every man have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ through an effective men's ministry in every congregation.

Our Commitment is to assist every congregation in establishing an effective, life changing men's ministry.

