

# What's Different About Gen Z, Evangelism & Missions

**Who is Gen Z?** Born roughly between 1997 and 2012 (age 10-25) ... oldest just starting to enter workforce

**Most diverse generation:** Minorities topped Caucasians in 2016 kindergarten class for first time in US

**Gen Z defines adulthood very differently than Millennials** – 6 out of 10 identify career, professional or personal achievement as key milestones (least likely to say family is very important to my sense of self) ... Generation raised on technology and social media (perspective very different from teen-agers before them)

**Barna research data:** 1,200 US students, ages 13-18

## Research Findings

⑩ U.S. Christian teens believe how they live their life should be their primary witness to non-Christians

⑩ Teens view sharing their faith as relational, something they do with people they already know and trust

⑩ Majority of Christian Gen Z is having faith conversations with non-Christians

⑩ Faith-sharing is more than a one-time event for American teens

⑩ Teens feel the best outcome of a spiritual conversation would be to better understand one another

⑩ Non-Christian teens prefer to be approached by Christians who let “actions speak louder than words”

⑩ Christian Gen Z see great value in coming to faith in Christ. But 38% say “it is wrong to share one’s personal belief with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith”

⑩ Gen Z, both Christian and non-Christian, are more open to learning about the other person’s beliefs (51% Christian, 58% non-Christian) instead of teaching another person about their own beliefs (31%, 12%)

⑩ In Barna’s 2019 international study of 18–35-year-olds (an intersection of Gen Z and Millennials), 59% of US Christian young adults agreed “it is OK to respectfully persuade someone to believe what you do”

⑩ Christian Gen Z don’t actually want to say that much. Instead of hoping to find the right words, they want their actions to speak, in alignment with Gen Z’s more hands-on definition of evangelism.

⑩ Younger generations are more likely than older Christians to check in with non-Christians

### **Here’s what we don’t know:**

Is Gen Z poised to be the most adaptable and authentic generation of evangelists the Church has seen? Or will their approach to faith-sharing, without increasing gospel fluency and spiritual confidence, veer from being impartial to being ineffective?

## Mission Strategies That Resonate with Gen Z

1). Guide them; don't try to sell them, or try to convince them to do something

- 2). Guide them to their best involvement in the Great Commission, even if it is not with your organization
- 3). Care: be more concerned with the individual above our own desire to recruit them
- 4). Coach them over the long-term
- 5). Let them talk 70% of the time
- 6). Help them discern what God is doing in them
- 7). Help them with indecision
- 8). Teach and model prayer
- 9). Help them to trust you
- 10). Mobilization is more about discipleship than it is about recruitment

**Conclusion:** What inspires students to engage in conversations about faith: **1). active listening,**  
**2). space for doubt, 3). genuine love of others despite differences, and 4). passion for a living faith**

## **Gen Z's Perspectives & Mindsets: Three Global Missions**

### **Implications**

**1). Distrust of Authority:** Among practicing Christians (Gen Z), do you think church leaders can be trusted to help with personal issues, like a relational problem? 1 in 5 says no (19%), deep mistrust of authority. **If we want to mobilize Gen Z, we will have to work really hard to gain their trust**

**2). What emotions does Gen Z experience using social media? Top 3 responses:** Connected to the world ... Connected to others ... Informed. **Missions needs to help meet these needs through social media**

**3). Relational Evangelism:** The majority of Christian Gen Z is having faith conversations with non-Christians. For the most part, faith sharing elicits positive emotions. **Teens feel the best outcome of a spiritual conversation would be to better understand one another**

**Resilient disciples have meaningful relationships:** adult, intergenerational relationships – very important.

Are we fueling meaningful relationships? Resilient disciples have a deep sense of missions

### **Four Main Observations About Gen Z**

**1). We can't overstate the value of intentional mentorship in mobilization.** Walking slowly, intentionally with someone exploring missions ... agencies and churches work together

**2). Prayer is the core of our work and it must be passed on to Gen Z.** Prioritizing teaching and going to God **first**, listen to his Holy Spirit, dwell and listen to Him, quiet places. Mission candidates have to learn how to seek their Heavenly Father first ... abide in Him (John 15?). **Relationship with Jesus more important than doing work for Jesus** (the latter is what Gen Z often thinks)

**3). They must hear about God's work among the nations from pastors and spiritual leaders in their church or from outside organizations invited into the church.** They need encouragement from their spiritual leaders (pastors, youth pastors, etc.). Mobilization begins in the church ... Our voice really carries weight with Gen Z. Gen Z individuals need to let pastors

know in their church about their call to missions

**4). We should examine the crucial role that parents play in a young adult's calling to long-term missions.** Many times they are Christian parents who support missions, but they're afraid to give up their son or daughter to the unreached and going overseas

## **How Youth Leaders can help teens navigate their insecurity and uncertainty**

⑩ **Acknowledge fears & uncertainties:** The fears that youth experience around social rejection and isolation shouldn't be dismissed as irrational. Youth need to hear that fear is a valid emotion but that it need not be paralyzing.

⑩ **Model frankness about your own shortcomings:** Youth who are terrified of not having the right answers or of feeling awkward in a social situation may just need reassurance that they aren't alone. As a leader, share stories from your own experience of when faith-sharing has gone well or when you have felt uncomfortable or uncertain.

⑩ **Encourage good listening:** For youth who may be scared of not having all the right answers, equip them to practice careful listening to understand what their peers are processing and the questions they may still have. Frame uncertainty as an entry point for authentic dialogue with their friends.

⑩ **Build confidence through practice:** Consider how your gathering might be a time for students to practice articulating elements of faith. Give youth a space to find their voice in leading prayer or communicating stories from their faith in a welcoming church context.

⑩ **Create intentional spaces for belonging:** Many youth are craving more individualized, one-on-one relationships or small groups to learn alongside. Look for ways to integrate small-scale discipleship models (such as personal spiritual direction or mentorship) into larger gatherings you may hold.

## **Church Testimonials & Ten Questions to Consider**

**Practitioners tell Barna about some of the conversational tips they give to young people who are inclined toward evangelism:**

⑩ “We have worked from the strategy of purely sharing your own story relationally. It doesn't have to be a formal thing, but sharing life with non-Christian friends and bringing up how belief in Jesus has changed their own lives personally.”

⑩ “This generation won't evangelize because they are told to, but if they are excited about something they will naturally talk about it. So I get them excited for their faith and point them toward the open doors they can lead their friends to. They rarely disappoint in their fervor.”

⑩ “Anything that's built around a ‘we are right, they are wrong’ approach seems to increase walls and obstacles. Leading students away from having all the right answers and toward simply sharing personal stories seems to be an important pivot for how students embrace evangelism. It's less rooted in an aggressive ‘win the conversation’ mindset. Students want to experience

great unity rather than division, so removing whatever obstacles seem like they will cause division or argument seems to be valuable.”

⑩ “Practically speaking, we have a regular youth night called ‘invite night’ where we encourage students to pray and invite friends who don’t know or have a relationship with Jesus. Our hope is to create a space that helps facilitate and open doors to having real conversations about faith.”

### **Questions to use as a guide to consider needs within your church in working with Gen Z:**

- 1). What unanswered questions or lingering doubts do you most encounter in young Christians? Do you or the youth themselves see these as barriers or “deal-breakers” in their faith journey? What questions do you most urgently want young people to be able to answer?
- 2). How can you present the act of sharing faith—unanswered questions, awkward moments and all—as a spiritual growth process in itself?
- 3). How does your church equip and support families to better disciple Gen Z teens at home? How are you teaching parents and guardians to navigate faith conversations with their teens, preparing them to have similar conversations with their peers?
- 4). What are ways to build confidence on the receiving end of dialogue, coaching Christian teens to be active and considerate listeners?
- 5). How are you encouraging youth to take risks in sharing their faith and not just staying in the most comfortable or neutral space?
- 6). Being a consistent, contributing part of a church is connected to faith-sharing. How are you both calling Gen Z to a deeper church life and sending Gen Z out to love, serve and share with their community?
- 7). How might different contexts (church engagement, camps, small groups, etc.) embrace dialogue, impart wisdom and shape the confidence youth need to share their faith?
- 8). What tools and resources does your church have in place to equip youth for evangelism? Are they working? Why or why not? Do these resources and tools allow teens to be taught in a relational context, just as they desire their evangelization efforts to be relational in nature?
- 9). How does intergenerational discipleship factor into sharing lasting faith through your church? Where are the differences and the common ground in approaches across age groups?
- 10). Gen Z teens are interested in a faith that is lived out through their actions and is a force for advancing the common good in society. How do your current church programs meet this desire for teens? Does such a program even exist?

*Source: Barna: “Reviving Evangelism in the Next Generation” sources: Barna: “Reviving Evangelism in the Next Generation” ... Center for Mission & Mobilization Ideation webinar: “Best Practices for Mobilizing Gen Z” ... MissioNexus session: “Mobilizing Gen Z: Observations, Obstacles & Opportunities”*