

30 Emerging Voices

Who will lead the church in the next decade? These young Christian leaders, all 40 or younger, represent THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN CHURCH.

WHEN CHARISMA WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1975, some of the leaders profiled on these pages were not even born. Yet today they are steering the church into new territory, armed with the courage and creativity needed to make the gospel relevant to their generation.

They represent a new breed. Burned out on denominationalism, they avoid labels and aren't comfortable with old church models. Turned off by religious hype, they crave authenticity. Products of the digital age, they are more media-savvy than their elders-and they intend to use 21st century technology to reach people who have been turned off by toxic religion.

Today's emerging leaders aren't afraid to push new buttons, sail into uncharted waters or blur the line between secular and sacred. Their faith has been shaped not only by the culture wars of the 1990s but also by reality TV, iPods and instant messaging. They are the first generation to use blogging as an evangelism tool in cyberspace. Today's emerging leaders fully intend to reinvent church, even if it means changing the music, tampering with ineffective church programs and barbecuing our sacred cows.

They are passionate about worship, yet today's leaders also have known pain. Their generation has experienced more than their fair share of divorce and family dysfunction. For that reason they are poised to offer more effective ministry to those who have been overlooked by churches in the past: singles, abused women, sex addicts, homosexuals and the

emotionally broken. They are also the first generation of Americans to move fully beyond institutionalized racism-and they are intentional about making tomorrow's church a place of ethnic diversity.

These 30 leaders certainly are not the only individuals who should be recognized by Charisma. (Our selections were culled from nominations submitted by leaders in charismatic and Pentecostal churches throughout the United States.) But we believe the church has never seen a more gifted group of men and women step forward to carry the torch into the future.

1. Ron and Hope Carpenter Jr., 37, 36

Both raised in strict Pentecostal homes in the South (Ron is from a South Carolina hamlet known as Possum Kingdom), the Carpenters met in Bible college in Georgia and in 1991 planted a church in Greenville, South Carolina, a bastion of racial division. Today, Redemption World Outreach Center is one of the largest congregations in the Southeast (with more than 7,300 members) and is a model of racial inclusion. Although the Carpenters are still connected to the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, they have their own apostolic network that attracts forward-thinking leaders who desire to duplicate the success of Redemption in other regions.

2. Shelley Henderson, 32

A native of Los Angeles, Henderson came to Washington, D.C., in 1999 to work as an intern for Oklahoma congressman J.C. Watts. That job led to an opportunity to develop the first-ever Congressional Faith-Based Summit, which explored partnerships between the government and Christian ministries-and stirred national controversy over the role of faith in public life. She was eventually appointed by President Bush to serve as director of the White House Faith-based Initiative at the Department of Education. A mother of one son, Henderson hosts an annual event for pastors' wives that has featured first lady Laura Bush and

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as speakers.

3. Benny Perez, 40

Perez has never been afraid to take the gospel where it isn't welcome. In the mid-1990s, he caught national attention when he pioneered a youth outreach near Seattle, an area where Goths and grunge rockers outnumber born-again Christians. Hundreds of teenagers were converted and disciplined during that revival, which was based at the First Assembly of God in Marysville. After launching a national conference ministry to train teenagers in radical evangelism, he moved to Las Vegas to pioneer a congregation that is now influencing that city's unchurched culture.

4. Matthew Barnett, 31

The congregation his father pastors in Arizona has 20,000 members. So it was fitting that the younger Barnett should take the helm of the nation's original megachurch, Angelus Temple, a congregation founded in 1923 by Pentecostal pioneer Aimee Semple McPherson. When the Los Angeles church was at the point of death in 2001, Barnett was tapped to revive it-and he spent \$7 million to remodel it into a state-of-the-art urban outreach center. Barnett probably knows more about urban outreach than anyone in the country: His successful, multifaceted Dream Center (housed in an old Los Angeles hospital) offers practical assistance and spiritual aid to addicts, poor families and the homeless, and has now been duplicated in 130 cities worldwide.

5. Jamal-Harrison Bryant, 33

Heads turn these days when anyone figures out how to attract young people to church. In Baltimore, all heads turned in Bryant's direction when his church, Empowerment Temple ., began growing by 60 to 100 people a week. His secret? Bryant has unashamedly replaced staid tradition with Pentecostal fervor, and he doesn't shy away from dealing with taboo topics such as homosexuality, drugs and pornography in his sermons in order to relate to the hip-hop generation. The majority of his more than 10,000-member congregation is under 40, proof that he is reaching African-American Gen-Xers, many of whom view church as

irrelevant.

6. Tessie Güell de DeVore, 39

A Cuban-Puerto Rican, DeVore got her start in Christian publishing in Miami and eventually landed a job at Strang Communications, the parent company of Charisma. In 1993 she launched Vida Cristiana, and the magazine has since become the largest Spanish language Christian magazine in the United States,

serving the fastest-growing minority group in the nation. Two years ago PR Newswire named her one of the top 100 Hispanic journalists in the nation. Last year she was named president of the Spanish Evangelical Products Association and is the first woman to hold the position.

7. Rory and Wendy Alec, 39

Although not Americans, we included this couple in our list because their influence is set to reach millions of American homes in this decade. They are founders of God TV, Europe's leading Christian broadcaster. Not only are the Alecs taking their message far (God TV now reaches a potential 270 million viewers, with stations in Israel and Africa) but they also produce programs that are hip and sophisticated for younger viewers who can't stomach most other religious programming. Unless other broadcasters figure out a way to reconnect with younger viewers, it is likely that God TV's debut in the United States will send channel surfers in the Alecs' direction.

8. Kevin Turner, 36

To a generation that lacks heroes, Turner offers a fresh model of courage. Discipled by revivalist Leonard Ravenhill, Turner launched his Strategic World Impact ministry in order to aid persecuted Christians in the world's most dangerous hot spots. Turner has redeemed Christian slaves from Muslim warlords in Sudan, aided refugees in Afghanistan and distributed relief supplies to tsunami victims in Indonesia. He and his team send aid into dozens of nations from their base in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

9. Nicole C. Mullen

Some Americans got their first glimpse of Mullen during the Republican National Convention a year ago, when she sang the national anthem in her unique, soulful style. But her diehard fans have been following her career since she toured as a backup singer with Amy Grant and eventually won Dove Awards for her solo albums. What sets Mullen apart from the money-driven music industry is her ministry focus. Both of her grandfathers are Pentecostal preachers in Ohio, she attended the charismatic Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas, and she works with an international aid organization to free African girls from slavery and ritual sacrifice. (She doesn't tell her age, but we know she's under 40.)

10. Cameron Strang, 29

You could call him the philosopher of the revolution-and he buys a lot of ink (and bandwidth) to promote his new ideas. Strang's growing company, Relevant Media Group, started five years ago and already has caught the attention of USA Today and Publishers Weekly. His Relevant magazine, with 60,000 subscribers, has grown by tapping into the most underserved age group in the Christian market-20-somethings-who, according to Strang, are "hungry for God but disenfranchised by traditional religion." Edgy and sophisticated, Relevant applies the gospel to contemporary issues in a nonthreatening manner, and it doesn't offend the sensibilities of younger adults who have a low tolerance for hypocrisy.

11. Gerard Henry, 33

After getting his start in ministry as a campus evangelist at the University of Maryland, Henry went to Bible college and got connected to an employee at the Black Entertainment Television (BET). After working at BET for three years he presented a concept that became one of the most popular shows on the Washington, D.C. based cable channel. His talk show, Lift Every Voice, which features interviews with top gospel artists, athletes and preachers, was increased from a half-hour to an hour and is in its fifth season. As the show's host, Henry has gained national

notoriety even while boldly proclaiming his faith on mainstream airwaves.

12. Jeremy Del Rio, 30

Not too many law school graduates quit their legal careers to do street ministry.

But that is what Del Rio did after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A native of New York City, and the son of unconventional preacher Rick Del Rio, Jeremy helped found the Ground Zero Clergy Task Force, which administered aid and pastoral care to the residents of New York most affected by the World Trade Center disaster. He also runs Generation Xcel, a volunteer-run organization that operates two youth

centers in lower Manhattan, a youth theater in the heart of East Village, and after-school and summer programs for more than 125 at-risk youth.

13. Todd Bentley, 29

Though he is Canadian, Bentley's impact on American churches is impressive. A former drug addict from Vancouver-and now a confessed "Holy Spirit junkie"-he was saved at 18 and launched his Fresh Fire Ministries at age 25. Today he is probably the world's youngest as well as busiest healing evangelists with a schedule that rivals that of Benny Hinn (Bentley preaches 30 to 50 times a month and has ministered in crusades attracting as many as 100,000 people). His revivalist style is not for everyone ("Some think I am too loud," he told Charisma in 2002), but numerous healings that have occurred in his meetings have been documented.

14. Alan Chambers, 33

He once frequented gay bars in Orlando, Florida, before he surrendered his life to Christ. Yet today Chambers is the gay community's worst nightmare. He rejected

Homosexuality after becoming a Christian and then married a woman from his church. Today, as president of Exodus International, the nation's leading ex-gay

ministry, he brings a decidedly conservative perspective to the airwaves during his frequent interviews on mainstream media. Chambers' youth has

brought a fresh perspective to the 30-year old Exodus group-and he is bringing needed attention to the problems facing teens who struggle with homosexuality.

15. Danita Estrella, 40

She isn't Catholic and she doesn't wear a nun's habit. But this former promotional

model is carrying on a crusade for the poor that has caused some people to compare her to Mother Teresa. Estrella ventured to Ouanaminthe, Haiti, in 1999 to work for a small Christian school. Eventually she bought a building and began an orphanage, and more children began to arrive-some of them HIV positive. "Pastors began to bring me children when their parents died," she told Charisma in 2001. Today, with the help of American churches that fund her work, Estrella feeds and educates more than 500 children, and she has personally adopted 72 of them as her own.

16. Zachery and Riva Tims, 36, 34

Mentored by inner-city megachurch pastors Randy and Paula White, the Tims' 6,000-member New Destiny Christian Center in metro Orlando, Florida, has grown at a fast clip, thanks to their savvy use of media (including lots of billboards that compete with theme park advertisements in the city's tourist corridor). A former

cocaine addict from Maryland, Zachery Tims now reaches rich and poor with the gospel and is building a ministry complex called the City of Destiny on 21

acres his church recently purchased.

17. Jason Upton, 31

One of the freshest voices in contemporary worship today, Upton has been compared to Keith Green because his music is deeply spiritual and carries a prophetic edge. What sets him apart from so many Nashville, Tennessee, artists is his unconventional spontaneity and a childlike reliance on the Holy Spirit's presence to make worship come alive. He also understands the younger generation. He told Relevant magazine: "There is something in our generation that is repulsed by doing something just to do it. There

is a real heart cry in our generation for intimacy. Worship ... is what we're looking for." If his recent recordings Key of David, Trusting the Angels and Great River Road are any indication, Upton's career will likely skyrocket.

18. Margaret Feinberg, 31

If there is a spiritual revival stirring among 20-somethings in this country, Feinberg is best prepared to write about it. With more than 14 books under her belt, the Alaska-based writer has accomplished more than most authors twice her age. One of her most recent books, Twentysomething: Surviving and Thriving in the Real World (W Publishing), calls young adults to discover their spiritual mission (with a chapter on how to conquer what Feinberg calls "your quarter-life crisis"). Her next book, due from Tyndale House, is aptly titled What the Heck Am I Going to Do With My Life? and is aimed at career-minded young adults.

19. Ben Cerullo, 29

His face resembles his evangelist grandfather, Morris Cerullo, but the similarities stop there. This younger Cerullo who admits he wandered away from his faith as a teenager and messed with drugs and alcohol-is now an evangelist of a different sort. He has launched an impressive, high-tech outreach to youth by using extreme sports as a backdrop. The Charlotte, North Carolina-based ministry he launched in 2000, Steelroots, produces a half-hour program aired on the Inspirational Network (which is owned by his father, David Cerullo). The Steelroots show mixes faith with profiles of popular skateboarders, surfers and snowboarders-and Cerullo has released a magazine designed to hook more viewers.

20. Juan and Tracy Galloway, 35, 32

He started a Christian punk band called Sanctified Noise while a teenager. She was the youngest person to attend Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas. When they married, both knew they were called to reach the fringes of society. In August 2003 they established the East Coast School of Urban Ministry in Elizabeth,

New Jersey and they teach trainees everything from counseling skills to outreach techniques (including how to use junk percussion instruments for evangelism). Now affiliated with the Foursquare denomination, the Galloways also have started City Tribe Church, an urban congregation that features hip-hop, reggae, house, Latin and rock music during worship. Juan is blunt in describing his focus: "We as the church in America need to get away from the gospel of the American dream and get back to healing our communities."

21. Robert Stearns, 36

He is part worship leader and part revivalist, but more than anything he is a prayer warrior and his main concern is Israel. Stearns' passion for the Jewish homeland is so strong, in fact, that the New York-based minister last year single-handedly launched one of the most ambitious prayer projects ever organized for Israel. With backing from more than 500 Christian leaders and numerous Israeli political leaders, Stearns' Eagles Wings ministry sponsored the international Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem last October 3-and mobilized an estimated 50 million believers to pray. The event will be held annually every first Sunday of October

"until the Messiah returns," Stearns says.

22 & 23 Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer, 33, 28

At a time when few American women were heading to the mission field, these two missionaries made international headlines in 2001 when they were abducted

by Taliban soldiers during the war in Afghanistan. Their courage became the subject of a 2002 book, *Prisoners of Hope*, which recounted the hair-raising account of their incarceration in a Taliban prison and their rescue by American forces. Both women now challenge Americans-particularly those in their age group-to embrace the Great Commission. Currently they are using money

raised from their book royalties and speaking fees to train missionaries. (We won't be surprised to see them return to the Middle East when the

political situation there changes.)

24 . Russell and Ana Maria Schlecht , 35, 24

Four years ago this couple made the decision of their lives when they picked up and moved from Seattle to start a church on the Harvard University campus in Boston. "The last place I wanted to be was next to Harvard," Russell admits. But he moved across the country anyway-obeying what he says was a call from God. Today, their Grace Street Church is one of the only congregations located in walking distance to Harvard dorms and classrooms. It offers Spirit-filled ministry to a growing congregation of 150 attendees-a large church by Boston standards, and unusual because young people form its core. The Harvard Crimson's 2003 profile of the church quoted one student saying of pastor Russell: "He's not old and boring." Few churches in America get such good advertising.

25 . Brian Mosley, 26

Though this graduate of Baylor University is one of the youngest leaders on our list, Mosley made a big splash when he founded , a ministry that is harnessing the energies of 20- and 30-something Christians. The Web site gives young adults a fast track to the mission field by listing immediate job openings with dozens of missionary and relief organizations, and it is sponsoring several conferences this fall and next year. Says Mosley: "We want to help connect this generation to hands-on opportunities to live out their faith." Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney and his Gen-Xer son, Marc, 31, helped launch Mosley's first Fusion conference last fall in Dallas.

26. Philip and Sharon Smethurst, 37, 35

If the apostle Paul were ministering today, he would probably enjoy traveling with this South African couple, who base their ministry on the east coast of Florida. Philip Smethurst's motto is: "Any Road, Any Load, Any Time." Armed with satellite phones and GPS devices, he and his teams

of young adult evangelists travel to the most remote parts of the planet to reach isolated tribes that have never heard the gospel. Since the Smethursts founded Overland Missions in 1999, they have taken hundreds of 20-somethings on difficult, month-long missions in Africa and South America. "We are raising up young adults as young apostles," Smethurst says. "We are demanding from them apostleship, not just evangelism."

27. Matt Sorger, 32

Revivalists typically don't come from New York-at least not since the days of Charles Finney. But Sorger is an exception. A product of Zion Bible Institute in Rhode Island, he served as a coordinator for The Call New York, a massive prayer gathering held in the state in 2002. As an itinerant preacher- with a proven track record of miracles he raises hopes that the Holy Spirit is thawing one of the most spiritually bleak regions of the country. Says his mentor, revivalist Lou Engle: "Matt carries the heartbeat of God for this generation. He possesses a deep passion for the Lord and a hunger for true revival."

28. Michael A. Stevens Sr., 35

Pastors in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) who want to move up the ranks in their denomination can get frustrated-since senior leaders often stay in power until they are in their 80s. But Stevens has focused his work not on climbing a ladder but on transforming the inner city of Charlotte, North Carolina and his work has caught the attention of city officials. His 1,100 member congregation, University City COGIC, offers 45 different ministries to help people outside the church walls-including classes on economic empowerment. Stevens believes Charlotte will be changed one person at a time, and he lives the message: When he was held up at gunpoint in 1996, he led his assailant to Christ and refused to turn him in to the police. Today the man is an active member of the church.

29. Greg Russinger, 34

The church this young Foursquare pastor started in Ventura, California, will never fit in the traditional mold. Hey, this is California! Known as

The Bridge, it is one of the few congregations in the United States with an art gallery and a music lab. But Russinger believes young people today want to connect with one another and explore their creativity in a deeply spiritual environment. His congregation of 250 meets on Sunday nights in a downtown venue. Worship is sometimes led by a full band and other times by tribal drums. Every month the congregation washes clothes for street people. We expect Russinger's concepts to catch on as younger pastors discover they too can venture outside the box.

30. David Cunningham, 34

This man knows what he wants. "My life's mission is to challenge and shape culture through film," says Cunningham-son of Youth With a Mission founder Loren Cunningham. He grabbed Stephen Spielberg's attention after releasing *To End All Wars*, a \$14 million War World II movie that got limited box office exposure but critical praise. The film was violent enough to earn an R rating, yet it was laced with a Christian message of forgiveness. Insiders expect Cunningham to eventually direct a film that will take evangelical faith into mainstream theaters. We are ready to buy some tickets.