

Dallas Conference Seeks to Reactive the Faith of Young Adults

Hosted by Bill McCartney, the Fusion+Dallas event is one of several efforts aimed at reaching out to GenXers

The man best known for mobilizing men to be the godly leaders they were called to be is working to reactivate the faith of another group noticeably absent from many church pews: 20- and 30-somethings.

Promise Keepers founder and former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney has teamed up with his GenXer son, Marc, to host Fusion+Dallas at the Dallas Convention Center Nov. 13.

Among the invited guests are Los Angeles Pastor Erwin McManus, Breakaway Ministries founder Gregg Matte, missionary Heather Mercer, poet Amena Brown, worship leaders Shane & Shane and Christian rap duo GRITS.

The event is part of a larger trend toward reaching GenXers with a relevant gospel message. In recent years, 20- and 30-somethings have been planting churches, writing books and engaging other forms of media to help their peers sort through their spiritual questions and connect with like-minded people of faith.

Organized in part by Marc McCartney, 31, and Brian Mosley, the 25-year-old founder of , an interactive Web site to help 20-

and 30-somethings connect with ministry opportunities worldwide, the Fusion event is designed to be interactive and experiential. Instead of the traditional conference fare, Fusion will incorporate film, drama and Bible “discussions” that will encourage group participation.

Making the connection between faith and real life is key to reaching GenXers, leaders say.

Younger generations are drawn to what theologians label the postmodern emerging church, pastors say. They call for “authenticity,” go for “community” instead of “church,” and gather for a worship “experience,” not a worship “service.”

“It’s less a generational thing than it is a massive cultural shift; not as much about age group as it is about mind set,” said Chris Seay, founder of Ecclesia, a nontraditional church in downtown Houston.

Ministries that relate to that mind set already are reaching GenXers in large numbers. Frontline Bible Church in McLean, Va., began 10 years ago as a ministry of McLean Bible Church because the elders saw no church in the area successfully reaching out to young adults, said Frontline small-group pastor Mike Hurt. Today, Frontline averages 2,000 18- to 35-year-olds each Sunday night.

“We don’t believe in spectators for ministry but in everyone using their gifts to make a difference in the cause of Christ,” Hurt said. “I think the future of the church depends on how well it can figure out how to pass the baton.”

Former Lutheran pastor Karen Ward founded Church of the

Apostles in 2002, and gathered her congregation into a renovated beauty parlor in what could be described as the seamy side of Seattle.

“Our goals are more modest than the megachurch,” she said. “We average about 500 and enjoy the intimacy of smaller numbers. We don’t believe in programs and never will have Sunday school. The early church did not have programs. We’re not trying to be different; we’re trying to speak the message and language of our generation and culture.”

By hosting the Fusion event, McCartney is proving that young adults aren’t the only ones who can reach out to 20- and 30-somethings. Bishop T.D. Jakes, pastor of The Potter’s House Church in Dallas, said his church continues to see an influx of young people who are seeking God.

“I have noticed that they come in, rather than have stayed in, our ranks. That is to say that many of them have had their prodigal son experiences before returning back to the flock,” he told Charisma. “There seems to have been an erosion of the ‘raised in church, stayed in church’ crowd. I think our parents who raised us in the church did a better job of instilling faith values in us than we did for our children.”

Jakes said he sees the need for church to remain cutting-edge in order to engage and communicate with this generation, like the Internet access to worship services The Potter’s House provides to those who aren’t coming through the church doors on Sunday.

To help pastors and relevant new churches communicate effectively with his generation, Cameron Strang, at age 24,

founded Relevant Media in 2001. Strang said he noticed his peers were leaving for college and leaving church, and he found himself spiritually searching, but the church was not answering.

He said today his company sends multimedia kits to 300 subscribing pastors and church leaders each month through its Relevant Network, and publishes Relevant magazine and Relevant Books. Recent releases include The Relevant Church and Kary Oberbrunner's The Journey Towards Relevance.

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