

Scandinavian Youth Lead Movement To Evangelize Public Schools

Started in 1996, New Generation has more than 10,000 participants in schools throughout Norway and Sweden

In an increasingly secular Europe, an energetic band of young Christians is aggressively evangelizing students in Scandinavian schools.

Nordic society has drifted far from its Christian heritage. Fanned aflame in past years by powerful revivals, church attendance today has waned, and many Scandinavians grow to adulthood without ever hearing the gospel.

However, a movement called New Generation is changing that. Young students are viewing their schools as their mission field.

Generally, each principal determines how much evangelistic freedom students are given, though invitations for salvation must be done one-on-one. Students have been able to lead outreach events and hold prayer meetings on their campuses because they already are part of the school milieu.

Eli Skimmeland, 22, a Norwegian, was a New Generation member in her hometown near Bergen. Her membership continues today at her university. "Our youth pastor encouraged us to take responsibility for our school," she recalled. "We started by openly bringing our Bibles. We also prayed daily before school for classmates, our teachers and our mission."

“God really got our attention when He saved one of our main antagonists among the teachers ... one that we had really been praying for. That teacher is now a Christian missionary.”

In Sweden, 16 year-old Sara Victorsson started a New Generation group with three other students shortly after she became a Christian. But within months, she was diagnosed with cancer. She told a New Generation leader: “OK, the Bible says God can heal me. But even if I die, I’ll take as many with me to heaven as possible.”

Her group became one of the most radical in the country, reaching individual students 10 times as often as the national goal of once annually. Through music, drama, one-on-one evangelism and prayer, their group grew from four to 35 within the year. They even saw a satanist in the school get saved.

Students said Sara exhibited great joy throughout her cancer ordeal. Today she is a county coordinator for New Generation—and healed.

One key New Generation distinction is that students are the Holy Spirit-fired “motor.” Adult leaders provide guidance for school leaders, but not control.

New Generation students seek creative ways of evangelizing. Swedish national leader Joakim Lundqvist said that one team raised more than \$12,000 in three weeks—enough to purchase Bibles as Christmas gifts for all their schoolmates. A donor matched their hard work and sacrifice, and 6,500 students received a Bible. Not content to just hand out Bibles, the group wrapped each Bible and included a personal greeting.

Lundqvist said these gifts continue to bear fruit as students read God's Word—many for the first time.

The New Generation concept started at Oslo University in 1996. The organizers quickly realized that the plan was relevant not only on their campus but also throughout Norway. Today more than 7,500 members of New Generation in 200-plus Norwegian schools are actively spreading the gospel.

New Generation kicked off in next-door Sweden in 2001. With encouragement from the Norwegians, the Swedes ran with it. After two years, New Generation Sweden had grown to more than 3,400 members in 230 school groups in nearly every county.

"We have a basic statement of faith, but we do not take a stand on denominational and church-movement distinctives," Lundqvist said. This interdenominational approach has helped New Generation enjoy widespread acceptance among Scandinavian church organizations.

Seeing this effectiveness, other Europeans want to get onboard. The ministry even spread to Russia after New Generation leaders from Sweden preached at a youth conference in Moscow in 2002. The first New Generation International Conference—scheduled for Sept. 29-Oct. 3 in Gothenburg, Sweden—may fire even global interest. More details can be found on the Sweden New Generation Web site, .

"Our goal in Sweden is to present Jesus to every student, every year," Lundqvist said. "School is where everyone is; the whole coming society is there. We want to see New Generation in every school."

David M. Johnson in Uppsala, Sweden