

Family on the Move

Ron and Katie Luce have inspired thousands of teens to serve God. They began by practicing at home with their own kids what they preach in public.

If anyone knows something about teenagers, it's Ron and Katie Luce. They founded Teen Mania Ministries in 1986 with a mission to "provoke a young generation to passionately pursue Jesus Christ and to take His life-giving message to the ends of the earth."

Since then, they have traveled the globe fulfilling the Great Commission and reaching teens in huge stadium events called BattleCry and Acquire the Fire, at which 10,000 to 25,000 kids gather to dedicate their lives to Christ and accept the challenge to reach other teens with the gospel. Their own children—Hannah, 19; Charity, 18; and Cameron, 14—are a testament to their personal commitment to practice at home what they preach in public.

When the Luces started Teen Mania, they had no idea it would have such a widespread impact on teenagers, who today make up one of the fastest-growing demographics in the country. Teens in the U.S. number some 33 million, and by next year that number is expected to reach 35 million.

They are tomorrow's pastors, doctors and missionaries, although for now many of them are fixated on less loftier goals that include mastering hand-held video games, texting and buying up trendy songs such as "I Kissed a Girl" by Katy Perry, which they made a megahit.

Teens growing up amid the current digital revolution spend huge chunks of time in cyberspace; and when they are not socializing on networking giants MySpace and Facebook, they are flocking to malls and spending billions a year on everything from clothes to iPhones to MP3 players, according

to , a marketing research site that tracks youth trends.

But when Ron started taking kids with him on ministry trips, he quickly discovered the personal needs many of them have go deeper than a craving for the latest iPod or cell phone.

For example, the number of adolescents who abuse alcohol, use illicit drugs and are sexually active is increasing, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Marijuana is No. 1 ahead of cocaine and methamphetamine as the illegal drug of choice among youth.

The CDC says that of the nearly 19 million new sexually transmitted infections detected each year, almost half of them occur among young people 15 to 24 years old. The agency also reported that in 2007, 48 percent of high school students had already had sex.

But Ron and Katie are energetically hopeful—they believe the key to raising kids unscathed by premarital sex, drug abuse and other problems is to not allow the culture to raise them. *Charisma* sat down with the couple to discuss the importance of instilling values in teenagers that will sustain them until eternity, and to see how God is using them to raise up a generation of spiritually radical teens for Him.

Family Values, Media Culture

When Ron and Katie graduated from Oral Roberts University, they were both already baptized in the Holy Spirit and had a commitment to spreading the gospel. They got married in 1984. Uncertain of God's assignment for their lives, they felt in 1985 they should purchase two airline tickets and take a trip around the world to spread the gospel.

While in Indonesia, the couple fasted and prayed and realized that God was calling Ron to a specific area of ministry. "God was putting a love for teenagers in his heart," Katie says.

“The Lord told Ron, ‘Build Me an army of goers.’ ”

But Katie was called to focus on the couple’s newborn baby. She quickly realized the difficulties of juggling both motherhood and ministry.

“I was traveling one night with Ron and some of the kids we were taking on a ministry trip, and Hannah cried most of the night. I was sitting there thinking, *This is so hard*. I looked at her, and in my heart I said, *You are ruining my ministry*.

“The Lord said, ‘*Your ministry?*’ God told me, ‘*She is your ministry.*’

“I looked into her precious brown eyes and thought, *I have really, really missed it*. The Lord began then showing me that each person has a right, a God-ordained right, to be loved and cared for. I know my ministry flows out of my family.”

The Luces are grateful for the divine wisdom they have received over the years. In fact, the couple decided early in their marriage to teach their kids godly principles by developing a list of core values that they as parents would subscribe to.

“We didn’t want the culture to raise our kids, so we created a culture in our home that was stronger than the culture in the world,” Ron told *Charisma*.

When the children were very young, the couple created a list of core values and gathered the family together to discuss what they called “The Character of the Luce Family.”

The poster-size document was written in calligraphy to resemble the U.S. Constitution and included a place for each member of the family to sign his or her name. The kids thought they were getting a new toy or a pony, but after Ron and Katie unveiled the new document, they explained to their kids what each value meant:

"Honor. Each of us should learn to control ourselves in a way that is holy and honorable (1 Thess. 4:4); Respect. Show proper respect to everyone (1 Pet. 2:17); Honesty. Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth (Ps. 86:11); Responsibility. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men (Col. 3:23)."

Today Katie admits that she was sometimes a little critical of her kids but says God would quickly remind her of the covenant she made with Him and the children to abide by the values of the Luce family. When she would point the finger at her kids, she says, the Holy Spirit would convict her.

"The Lord told me if I want them to respect me and respect each other, then I need to treat them with respect," she recalls. "Mothers set the tone and temperature in the family, and they have to embrace, be loving and have the law of kindness."

Growing up in a home free of negative cultural influences meant the Luce children could not own cell phones or iPods, have televisions in their bedrooms, or listen to music whenever they wanted until they were older; but Charity, who is a student at ORU, says she and her siblings are better for it today. "It wasn't always easy, but my parents would always listen to what we had to say, and we have a strong relationship because of it."

"I sometimes slip away with my dad to go for a run or have breakfast. And my mom is so amazing to be able to pull out the best in people."

The Luces' son, Cameron, traveled with his father to Uganda in June to visit orphans, and to meet with key leaders in hopes of starting a Battle Cry event in Africa. "I have had many adventures with my dad," Cameron says.

Ron and Katie admit that their unconventional method of raising their children is somewhat unique compared with

society's, which favors letting young people do what they want.

Ron believes the new perpetrator preying on teenagers today is as close as the family computer, cell phone or television. "Every time we let unsupervised media into our homes and into our kids' minds, we invite a terrorist into our homes," he writes in his book *Recreate: Building a Culture in Your Home Stronger Than the Culture Deceiving Your Kids*.

Hannah, who also attends ORU, says it will require some getting used to for families to pull away from a culture saturated with media but that parents must set the standard in the home.

"You have awkward moments in families because you are not used to being together and talking. Parents have to ask themselves how much media they are watching."

Many parents don't realize they are turning over the parental reins to their children by not knowing their kids' viewing habits, where they go online, and the friends they hang around with when they're at school or away from home.

But the failure to parent allows kids to discover all sorts of influences that can lead to a life of negative consequences, says the Rev. Dwayne Lewis of Pine Hills Community Church in Orlando, Florida.

Lewis supports the Luces' stand because he knows all too well the state of teenage America. A youth minister for more than 10 years, Lewis says the ill effects of a generation high on media show up every Wednesday in youth groups all across the country. Parents simply don't realize the battle that's going on in the lives of their children, he says.

"Parents must determine how much access their kids will have to the Internet and the broader culture. They must draw the line and set a standard in the home. Parents are the first

line of defense in the culture war.”

Says Ron: “We see brokenness and depression in teens, and at that age you’re at the center of your world. We have a culture that teaches us that, really, you are the center of your world and whatever feels good, whatever is fun for you, whatever is convenient for you is OK because you have the right to be happy.

“Parents without hope should cancel a bunch of things and spend nonconfrontive time with their kids ... and woo their hearts.

“Every time I hold a hurting kid, I feel like I’m holding teenage America in my arms.”

Now Ron and Katie are helping to raise another generation of kids—who also want to go against the grain of culture. And many of them come every year to the Luces’ rolling east Texas property to fulfill that purpose—to be transformed by God and equipped for spiritual battle.

Raising an Army of ‘Goers’

At first glance, the Teen Mania campus north of Interstate 20 between Dallas and Shreveport, Louisiana, looks more like a youth resort than a spiritual boot camp. It is equipped with four dormitories; an auditorium; a cafeteria, gymnasium, swimming pool and weight room; as well as football and soccer fields, and more. But make no mistake about it—the 700-plus kids who reside here have learned that training to do God’s work is no easy task.

They come from all across the country to be interns at the Acquire the Fire Honor Academy, where they commit at least one year of their lives to the academy immediately after high school. They either postpone or forgo traditional career paths to train for missions, evangelism and other areas of ministry.

Charity works with her father at some Acquire the Fire and Battle Cry events, leading worship and helping in other areas, and sees the needs of her peers. "I want to be the hands and feet of ... Christ. I know many of the people who attend the events are hurting, and I'm called to help hurting people."

The Honor Academy offers classes in character development, leadership, men's and women's development, and more. Interns undergo hands-on training designed to challenge them physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and to prepare them for life-transforming events, such as working in the regions of the world least influenced by the gospel. Ron says the preparation can be challenging at times, and sometimes interns discover they are not cut out for the job.

But intern Jenny Hull remained at the academy and eventually helped a young person named Beth find freedom from depression. "I began praying and fasting for her on a regular basis, talking to her through e-mail almost weekly.

"At times, deliverance and freedom seemed very distant, but I knew that the Lord was hearing my prayers. By the time I met Beth months after I began communicating with her, she had experienced healing and freedom from the depression she'd struggled with for so long. It is exciting to see God use me to minister to my own generation."

At the campus' huge call center, some 300 interns work to organize Acquire the Fire and BattleCry events all across the country. Interns put in 31 hours a week at one of several ministry areas. Each one takes a career test to help determine the area of ministry he or she is best suited for.

Some interns enroll in the academy's Center for Creative Media, which provides hands-on education in film and television, including production, acting and production management. Others register to attend the School of Worship or Global Expeditions, which prepares interns for foreign

missions and evangelism. The BattleCry Event is designed to establish a support structure for local youth groups across the country to help them grow.

Because the Luces believe the church must be involved in the future of America's youth they offer, through Teen Mania, training to churches and youth pastors at the grass-roots level. Their resources provide instruction in evangelism and discipleship; directing youth groups, global expeditions and Extreme Camps; and more.

"We must show teenagers the way to the truth and train them to be leaders who will share this truth with their generation and the world," Ron says. "With the battle for their hearts and minds more fierce than ever before, this generation is at a crossroads moment that will shape the future of our country."

The church, parents—and young people themselves—have a huge responsibility, say Ron and Katie, to raise up a generation of goers—teenagers who will confront the culture, be witnesses for Jesus, and bring God glory.

Valerie G. Lowe is associate editor of *Charisma*. She traveled to Garden Valley, Texas, to file this report.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Hear Ron and Katie Luce elaborate on their family and ministry [here](#).