

5 Ways the Next Generation of Spirit-Filled Leaders Will Change the Church

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, an incredible wave of the Holy Spirit swept through young people around the world. The Jesus Movement, as it's known to many, was a key turning point for the Spirit-filled movement. Entire churches, ministries and missions organizations were founded in its wake. Even this magazine, *Charisma*, is in many ways a product of the Jesus Movement. And the movement didn't stop there. In the decades and generations that followed, millions more young people came to faith in Christ and passionately spread the gospel to their peers.

Nearly half a century after the Jesus Movement, many of its young leaders are not so young anymore, as they prepare for retirement and ministry transition. Waiting in the wings to take their place and continue the ministry of the kingdom is a new generation of young people. Many of them even describe this moment as a second Jesus Movement—a modern continuation of what the Holy Spirit began decades earlier.

Charisma spoke to 11 young Spirit-filled leaders about the future of the charismatic movement. The full stories with each leader—including exclusive podcast interviews—will be available in the Winter Bonus issue of *Charisma*, available at this February (in place of the traditional February print issue). But based on those conversations, here are five trends you can expect among tomorrow's charismatics.

1. The next generation will be more Spirit-filled—in unexpected venues.

Since the Azusa Street revival, the Spirit-filled movement has been alive and well—but often not embraced by other

denominations. Putty Putman, who founded and oversees the School of Kingdom Ministry in Urbana, Illinois, says previous generations had to pay a big price and face possible ostracism to embrace the gifts of the Spirit.

“In the past, it was a real barrier,” Putman says. “You were either part of the Holy Spirit crowd or not part of the Holy Spirit crowd. There wasn’t really much of a gray area there. If you weren’t part of it, you were closed [to the gifts of the Spirit].”

But he says that’s changing: “Now it almost feels like the default [among the next generation] is ‘curiously open.’ We’re not so much debating, ‘Are these things real?’ We’re now saying, ‘OK, what level of experience do you have and do you want?’ Almost everybody takes [the gifts of the Spirit] as a given. It’s just some people really want to walk in a lot of them, and some people are OK with the occasional dose.”

How did walking in the gifts of the Spirit go from splitting congregations to “no big deal”? J.J. Vasquez, lead pastor of Journey Church in Winter Park, Florida, says the next generation is more open than ever to the Holy Spirit, thanks to the influence of churches like Hillsong.

“What I do see is the message of the Holy Spirit—when it comes to empowering baptism, signs and wonders, miracles—I see that message becoming a lot more accessible to people than it was probably 10 years ago,” Vasquez says. “... I’m excited for the future, because I think people are open to experiencing God in a supernatural way and not just in a way that makes sense to their reason. [That] probably was the message of the generation before. Everything had to make sense, and it had to be reasonable and rational. And the gospel still makes sense. It’s still reasonable. It’s still rational. But I think there’s another dimension that people are really opening up to, and that’s the supernatural.”

Jen Ledger, drummer for the Christian rock band Skillet, says God has opened doors for her band to minister in some of the darkest places—and that the Holy Spirit moves in those venues powerfully and in unexpected ways.

“Be excited for what God is doing,” Ledger says. “Be excited to see how He reaches into those depths and He touches people’s lives that you would think, *They’d never care about this*. There’ll be the big, scary guy with tattoos, and all of a sudden he’s crying because God’s touched him. It’s just so wonderful and beautiful and miraculous to be a part of something like that.”

And in an interesting twist, because fewer people are opposed to the Holy Spirit, denominational lines and trends matter far less to the next generation. For example, Glenn Packiam, associate senior pastor at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, says his church has been heavily influenced by the sacramental theology of liturgical and Anglican churches. He sees the two streams as walking in tandem with one another: Spirit and sacrament.

“One of the greatest gifts of the charismatic movement to the body of Christ is this conviction that God is at work, even when we can’t see it or can’t feel it,” Packiam says. “God is at work in the midst of the ordinary moments and the ordinary things. Actually, what we’ve stumbled into over the last decade or so is there’s another stream of the body of Christ that tends to say similar things—and that’s this thread of sacramental theology. The idea of sacramental theology is that ordinary things like bread and wine actually become the occasion for an encounter with the presence of God.”

Continue to expect more crossover between denominations and movements in the years to come.

2. The next generation of women is ready to lead.

Women in leadership have been an integral part of the

charismatic movement from the beginning, from Amy Semple McPherson to Kathryn Kuhlman to Marilyn Hickey. The next generation is hungry to walk in those same footsteps.

Bianca Juarez Olthoff—who pastors The Father’s House, OC in Orange County, California—says that when she was growing up, the concept of a woman leading was foreign to her, and the concept of a female pastor felt downright heretical.

“My entire life I felt like maybe there was something wrong with me—like I was in the wrong for doing what I felt God had called, equipped and gifted me to do,” Olthoff says. “There is and has been opposition. ... [But] one day when I come face to face with God, and He asks me what I did with His Son, I want to unashamedly, unabashedly say, ‘I preached Him to anyone who would listen, no matter the age, the stage, the gender, the socioeconomic status.’”

That trend looks likely to continue, with men and women alike voicing the need for women to embrace the spiritual gifts God has given them. When Sharon Hodde Miller first told friends she would be serving as the teaching pastor at Bright City Church in Durham, North Carolina, she wasn’t sure if people would judge her for it. Instead, she was blown away by the reaction.

“I was shocked by how many people’s eyes just lit up,” Miller says. “They would say, ‘Finally. Finally! We have needed this.’ We have sat across from men who have openly wept and said, ‘It is time. It is time.’ It feels like the Spirit has been going before us in a lot of ways and just readying hearts for this. ... I don’t think that we’re doing something new. I think we’re trying to restore the radical place that women actually occupied.”

Circuit Riders’ Yasmin Pierce says many women simply need to hear they have permission to use their voice and their gifts for God’s glory.

“I think for a lot of the young women on college campuses, it’s simply a question of permission a lot of times,” Pierce says. “Do I have permission to step out? Do I have permission to use my voice? And so for us, our job is really easy. It’s really bringing together women, looking at examples in the Bible like Deborah, and saying, ‘Hey, the Lord’s given you permission. You don’t have to wait for someone to give you direct steps on what to do. If your heart is broken for your campus, if your heart is broken for your city, look at these scriptural examples where God used women to see a breakthrough, where God used women to see a deliverance, and go for it and step out.’ So [at] our gatherings, the message and the call are very simple in that way. And it’s always astounding, to me and our team, how needed that message of empowerment is for women on campuses.”

3. The next generation will be racially diverse.

Racial demographics are changing—not just in the world but in the church. In 2019, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson reported for the Religion News Service that in the last 10 years:

- Africa has become the continent with the most Christians.
- White membership in the Assemblies of God has slightly declined, while nonwhite membership increased by 43%.
- One in five American churchgoers attend a multiracial congregation.

Pastor Tyler Burns—vice president of The Witness, a black Christian collective—says the church is rapidly changing, and we need to reconsider our biases.

“In the American Christian context, the voices of authority are always those who come from our immediate locale—who come from our context, our culture, our country,” he says. “What we need to do is take a step back and say that the average global Christian is a woman of color from the global south, and she

is poor, typically. We have to take a step back and say, 'Why are we privileging [and] elevating voices that come from one context?' If you elevate voices from one context, you will only get one perspective."

Burns says that for young believers, racial justice and activism are a key component of God's call throughout Scripture to carry out justice for the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. It's a biblical mandate, on par with loving your neighbor and forgiving one another. That means this is no passing trend for young charismatics.

"We do have the Spirit's power, and that Spirit power gives us the energy and the strength to move in activism to correct the injustice that has been put on those who are oppressed and marginalized," Burns says.

It's not only minority leaders who are making this issue known. White leaders are seeing the need for racial justice and making intentional diversity a priority at their churches. Miller says there are steps every church can take to become more diverse.

"Read from folks who are talking about this," Miller says. "Listen to what your brothers and sisters of color are saying, and then really take it seriously. That's super important. And then, honestly, hire people of color—just that really practical step of hiring people of color and having them on-stage leading is important."

4. Mental health will be a priority for the next generation.

Chelsea Hurst, a Christian YouTube creator and author, says mental health is the biggest issue facing teenagers and young adults today, even in the Christian world. She says she has even struggled with depression herself, which she says only eventually was healed following a combination of therapy and "praying my guts out."

“People are more depressed than ever and are just really seeking to fill that lonely void they have,” Hurst says. “Although we’re the most connected generation, we are the most disconnected generation because of the invention of social media and how it’s impacted us. ... What I’m hearing all the time [from fans] is, ‘I don’t even know what I believe anymore, because I’m so sad and I’m so lonely. I don’t have any friends in person. The only people I talk to are people in my DMs [direct messages] or on Twitter.’”

Perhaps as a result, Blanca—a Christian singer—says the next generation craves greater vulnerability and authenticity from one another.

“I think there is a hunger for authenticity and vulnerability and being able to encourage one another through these places, rather than feeling like it might make us a lesser Christian to really be honest about the things we struggle with,” she says. “So I think it’s a beautiful thing because, from my experience, I’ve learned that when I’m able to open up these places to the Lord or to community and people, that’s where true light shines in and healing happens.”

Burns says that shining a light on mental health is not just a trendy thing to do—it’s vital to living out Matthew 22:37.

“With the mental health issues that we see continuously arising in the church, we’re going to see the importance of taking care of our minds, our emotions, our bodies—everything holistically,” Burns says. “We have to love the Lord with all of us. We bring our full selves even to our ministry. ... We need counselors. We need spiritual directors. We need therapists. We need to be emotionally healthy while being theologically precise and Spirit-led in our powers as well.”

5. The next generation still needs the wisdom of previous generations.

Pastor Andy Croft speaks for many young leaders when he says,

“When I started out in leadership, I knew an awful lot about leadership. Ten years down the tracks, I don’t know anything about leadership. It’s amazing how stupid I’ve gotten as the years have gone on.”

Though the next generation may be taking on leadership, they still desperately crave the wisdom and guidance of previous generations. Some lessons only come through decades of ministry—and it’s up to the older generation to teach those lessons.

In recent years, Croft became the co-pastor of Soul Survivor Watford, a charismatic Anglican church in the U.K. founded by Mike Pilavachi. Croft says Pilavachi has become a friend and spiritual mentor to him, modeling both wisdom and humility in leadership.

“With succession and things like that, there’s so much potential for it to go wrong and there are so many bad examples of it,” Croft says. “The way that Mike and I do it is we do it as friends—and we really are friends. He and I are involved in each other’s lives to a ridiculous extent. ... We prefer each other, and we submit to each other. And that’s one of the reasons why it works very well.”

Burns, who pastors New Dimensions Christian Center in Pensacola, Florida, says his church is in the middle of a transition from his father’s leadership to his. He says sometimes it can be frustrating for both the older and younger generations to work together, but it’s necessary for the body of Christ.

“We’re trying to work through what I’m calling generational appreciation—what does it look like to take the best of the past and the best of the future?” Burns says. “To work together in the present to accomplish the vision that God has given to us? Working through those is going to be tricky. You know, Millennials [and] Generation Z, we must have the

patience and honor to sit under older leaders. Older leaders have to have the humility to listen to younger leaders, because we know the landscape. So [there's] a push and pull."

One way Croft says Pilavachi helps to pave the way for the next generation is by being quick to give Croft praise for things that go right and take the blame himself for things that go wrong. Croft says it creates an environment where young leaders are safe to try new things, fail and learn from mistakes—rather than being driven out of ministry altogether. The next generation needs spiritual fathers and mothers who can model what true Spirit-filled leadership looks like.

"What [Pilavachi has] said to me constantly and what he's modeled to me in his life is that God's power is made perfect in our weakness," Croft says. "We can think from the outside that what leadership's about is knowing what you're doing and having it all together. It's not that. ... Leadership is about intimacy with the Lord and obedience to His voice, and trusting that anything that is of eternal worth is going to come as He works through you."

Curious to learn more about tomorrow's charismatics? Good news! This year, each issue will have a story about young Spirit-filled leaders who are advancing the kingdom and doing ministry in exciting new ways. Watch for the "Tomorrow's Charismatics" label on stories, starting in the March 2020 issue of Charisma.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: If you liked this story, you can read more about the next generation at .

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