

How a Spiritual Father Is Reaching the Next Generation

Paul Anderson, a 66-year-old charismatic Lutheran, has started a discipleship revolution in Minneapolis.

Paul Anderson doesn't act his age. I hope he never does.

A father of the charismatic renewal movement among Lutherans, the 66-year-old minister could be settling down to retire. Instead, he's pioneering a new outreach to young adults in Minneapolis—and reaching hundreds of 20-somethings who are bored with traditional church.

"I am proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks," Anderson told me last weekend when I interviewed him in his home in north Minneapolis.

"Anderson believes mentoring is God's strategy, and he reminds Christians that effective leaders in the Bible poured their lives into younger leaders: Moses had Joshua, Elijah had Elisha, Mordecai had Esther, and Paul had Timothy, Titus and other disciples."

After pastoring in California for many years, Anderson and his wife, Karen, moved to Minneapolis in 1995 to lead International Lutheran Renewal (ILR), an organization that has revitalized countless congregations by introducing them to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But as soon as Anderson began his new assignment, he became concerned when he saw the lack of young people and the amount of gray hair in his audiences. Eventually he told the ILR board that he felt called to focus on reaching young adults.

And thus Communitas was born. The outreach started in 2005 with a handful of young people meeting in the Andersons' suburban home. Before long, as many as 50 kids crammed into the place every Tuesday night. They sat on couches and chairs or sprawled out on the floor of the kitchen or den. Police showed up regularly because of parking problems, so Paul visited his neighbors and asked permission for the kids to park on adjoining streets.

Today, as many as 100 people attend Communitas on Tuesdays for a time of vibrant worship, Bible teaching, fellowship and lots of food. The house is being remodeled to create a bigger meeting room, but Paul knows the group will eventually have to split in order to meet the needs.

The whole experience has put a new spring in Anderson's step. "From the start it was an organic move of God," he says.

What energizes this man is the opportunity to be a true spiritual father to a new generation. Besides facilitating the Communitas meetings (he lets young people do

the work while he coaches from behind the scenes), Anderson also meets with a small group of guys on Mondays and also does one-on-one mentoring with several men each week. Other leaders lead similar groups for men and women.

When I chatted with Anderson at his kitchen table on Sunday afternoon, two younger men, Dave Hasenburg and John Tolo, listened to their mentor and added some perspective. Both guys spend a lot of time with Anderson and consider him an approachable role model.

“I had a serious substance abuse problem and then my marriage fell apart,” said Tolo, now an evangelist who works closely with Anderson and North Heights Lutheran Church, a charismatic congregation. “The person I can always go to for help is Paul. God used him to equip me.”

Said Hasenburg: “I can trust Paul with my heart, and I can talk things out with him. It’s like talking with a dad. It helps me grow.”

When Anderson isn’t discipling young adults or expanding his house to fit more people, he finds time to teach older Christians about the necessity of passing the baton to the next generation. He believes mentoring is God’s strategy, and he reminds Christians that effective leaders in the Bible poured their lives into younger leaders: Moses had Joshua,

Elijah had Elisha, Mordecai had Esther and Paul had Timothy, Titus and other disciples.

“I realize now that I couldn’t be more strategic by focusing on young people,” Anderson says.

His new focus has a side benefit: It is keeping him young. Although he is 66, he’s in perfect health. His daughter, Erikka, gives him a trendy haircut every month and acts as his fashion consultant. (“My kids won’t let me get older,” he says.) Already blessed with a basketball player’s physique, Anderson works out, plays tennis regularly, shoots hoops and is hoping to run a marathon one day.

When I asked him about his future, he grinned and said he hopes to pour his energy into young adult ministry for the next 30 years. “When I’m 96,” he says, “I think I’ll stop and take a break.”

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