

How to Reach the Rainbow Radicals

Ministry to the Rainbow People must be out-of-the-box and laced with servanthood.

“Then the Hi-Ho’s and some of the shaman came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread without washing hands, they began to schwaq them. For the Hi-Ho’s and all the hippies do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding to the tradition of the family.”

Believe it or not, that’s a passage from the Bible—Mark 7:1-3 to be exact. Logos Christian Fellowship pastor Chris Ward translated the Gospel of Mark into hippie terms, calling it The Phat News of Mark, or The Hippie Bible. Christian ministers working among the Rainbows say out-of-the-box ministry strategies such as this are key to reaching this countercultural mission field.

Peace-loving and sacrificial, the Rainbow People have much in common with the early church. Their frequent bouts with local law enforcement and forest service personnel have made them distrustful of “the establishment.”

They refer to government authorities as “the Babylonians” and plaster their vehicles with stickers that say: “Don’t steal. The government hates competition.”

In June, The Idaho Statesman quoted Sen. Larry Craig, a Republican from Idaho, as saying the Rainbows were a “radical group” and had a “documented history of destroying the land” in the various forests where they meet. Ironically, Rainbows are more environmentally sensitive than most governmental

agencies.

A report by the U.S. Forest Service said the Rainbow People caused little permanent damage to the fragile central alpine meadow near Boise, Idaho, where they gathered, The (Spokane, Washington) Spokesman-Review reported.

Well-worn cattle paths, however, crossed streams, meadows and hillsides that the forest service had taped off. Local sheriff deputies and Idaho forest service personnel rode horses through the same areas they deemed "environmentally sensitive," the Spokesman-Review reported. This kind of double standard reinforces the division between the Rainbows and government agencies.

Christians who want to work with Rainbows or other counterculture groups must understand their frustrations. Those who have been effective in reaching the Rainbows and similar groups suggest the following guidelines for outreach:

- * Be willing to associate with the lowly. Practice humility.
- * Recognize that believers also needed (and still need) the Savior.
- * Be a doer of God's Word. Be a servant.
- * Don't neglect your neighbor. Reach out even if it is uncomfortable.
- * Be free of judgment.
- * Practice lifestyle evangelism by modeling genuine Christianity.
- * Ignore the external appearance that many young people hide behind.
- * Pursue the heart of God. It is Christ who lives in you.
- * Accept the fact that God brings people into your life for a

purpose.

- * Take risks with your faith.

- * Pray for wisdom to be sure God is directing you to become personally involved.

“The big question is what has caused these people to be like they are?” says Tedd Craven of the Order of the Good Samaritan. “Why are they doing this?”

He says the people are searching for Jesus, but the church’s materialistic attitudes are often a turnoff. If the Rainbow People are to be reached with the gospel, Christians must not force them to conform to the church’s cultural standards.

Jesus’ simple lifestyle and words were an affront to the religious leaders of His day. “‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?’” (Matt. 6:25, NKJV).

Members of the Rainbow People don’t shake hands; they hug. They don’t call one another by name, but refer to one another as “brother” or “sister.”

They practice forgiveness, community, acceptance, kindness, cooperation, personal growth and respect for creation. When disputes arise, their counsel is simple: “Let love settle the differences.”

This all sounds remarkably like the first-century church. Craven offers a challenge to 21st-century believers: “If we have a heart of compassion, we can reach the throwaways of our culture for Christ.”

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