

Young Pastor's Fast-Growing Church Bridging the Gap to Millennials and Gen Zers is Sign of Hope

Day by day, it seems as if our whole culture in America is becoming more and more ungodly. When you read the statistics, especially from people like George Barna, it sounds as if there isn't even anyone who is saved under the age of 40.

That's where dynamic young pastors like JJ Vasquez come in. The lead pastor at Journey Church here in Orlando, Vasquez has been instrumental in helping to bring the younger generations back to God. He is one of the ministry leaders in the church who is shining the light of Jesus to our youth in a world full of darkness.

Vasquez launched Journey Church in 2016, which already incredibly had 400 members at its initiation. Journey has now become a megachurch and was featured in *Outreach Magazine* this past year as one of the top-10 fastest-growing churches in the United States.

The 35-year-old Vasquez says that the younger generations have developed an unfair label as being apathetic toward the church and to Jesus. It's far from what is happening at Journey Church, Vasquez says.

"So, people have been interested about God," Vasquez says. "I know, I hear the stories; I see all of the reports. But that's not what I see in our church. In fact, one of the big catalysts for growth in our church was that the *Orlando Sentinel* had come to us a couple of years ago to do an article on the next generation in faith. They wanted to come see because they had heard things about our church. They came and

they saw a church full of young people and printed a story about how we were bridging the gap in the generations.

“The front page had a headline about Trump and Congress, but then right next to that was a picture of me on the pulpit preaching in our church and the bridge to the next generation. It made the front page. When they were interviewing me, I kept telling them, I know what you’re hearing in the statistics, but I don’t see it in our church. I see God doing something special. I think a big part of that is who I was, how old I was.

“I think you can reach people with who you are. That doesn’t mean we can’t be multi-generational. That doesn’t mean we can’t be ethnically diverse. I just think you know the language of the world you grew up in. In the beginning, when you start a ministry, you’re going to reach who you are and how you grew up. I think that’s a part of the success of our church and why we reach the people we reach because it’s who I am. And it’s who my friends are.

“Right now, I would encourage believers to make the most of the moment. There’s an old African proverb that says ask for rain while rain is falling. I believe that I believe God is doing something special, significantly spiritual, for our church. We’re going to be walking into 2022 with a vision of going into God’s presence, walking into the cloud, up the mountain and into the glory. We are in the last times and that God made a promise that in those moments, He would pour out His Spirit. If you are downcast or fearful or worrisome, I can’t speak about the natural world. We don’t have much control over that. But in the spiritual world, and in the heavenly realm, God is doing something really special. Get in on it. Come back home if you’re far from God. This is the time; this is the season.”

The younger generation, no matter what time era they were raised in, has always pushed the boundaries of wherever

culture is. It's just part of the human experience.

But every generation, every era, has always needed Jesus. As Vasquez mentioned, the media just assumes that nobody goes to church, and they are shocked when they see young people coming to church and getting turned on for Jesus.

This gives me a lot of hope. The Bible says all things work together for good. Vasquez talked about COVID and, with the shutdowns, the good part is that a lot of people have been open to God during the pandemic. Sometimes things have to get really bad before people are willing to change.

And it's because of that, Vasquez says, people should have hope for the future.

"I would say to those who feel like we are living in a dark age that, wherever there is darkness, light always rises up to meet the darkness," Vasquez says. "What is happening is actually opening people up more to God, I believe, than ever before. I think it's going to look different. Not in truth, because the truth remains unchanged. But I think it's going to look different in the aspect of presentation. It's going to look different in the way we dress truth, but it's going to be truth nonetheless.

"We've never seen God do more things in the last year and a half than we have before. We've never seen more decisions for Christ, more people come to Jesus. We've never seen the church grow this fast. Before COVID we were at 70 percent capacity. But now we're at 80. What God has done in our church has been amazing. I know it has a lot to do with what is going on in the world. I just see people who are hungry and who are ready to make a difference and ready to make a change."

 For more of my compelling conversation with Pastor J.J. Vasquez on how God is powerfully at work in Journey Church, listen to the entire episode of the Strang Report at this link and subscribe to the Strang Report on Apple

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