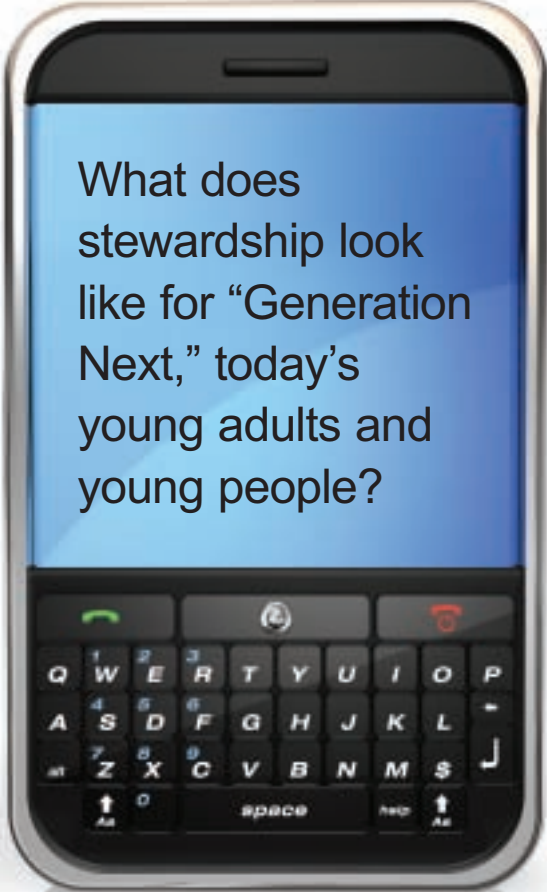


Stewardship with “Generation Next”

By Rodger Nishioka



What does stewardship look like for “Generation Next,” today’s young adults and young people?

No one can say for certain what stewardship looks like for today's young adults, but when we look more closely, themes emerge that bring the picture more into focus.

Nicole, thirty years old and fresh out of law school, spent several years after college working as a young adult mission volunteer tutoring at-risk youth in Oakland, California. She now lives in Minneapolis because she likes the "vibe" of the Twin Cities area and is hoping to be hired by a firm that sees part of its responsibility as providing legal counsel to underserved populations.

Kyle, twenty-two, has a business degree and works for a national bank's headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina. In his second year of work, he has been through two cycles of layoffs and one corporate merger. His future plans have changed radically. When he was first hired, he expected to rise quickly in the company and figured on earning a six-figure salary within five years. Now he is just glad he still has a job, although he is not sure how long that will last.

Nicole and Kyle represent the two generations of young adults that follow the Baby Boom generation. Nicole is in the youngest group of "Generation X," people who are currently in their late twenties through their mid-forties. Kyle

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is on the leading edge of the "Millennial" generation, people now in their mid-twenties and younger.

Together, these two generations of young people are twice the size of the Baby Boomers, and their disposable income already exceeds \$300 billion annually. And while they consider themselves to be "spiritual" in near record numbers (most surveys report nearly 90 percent), remarkably few of them participate regularly in faith communities of any kind.

Technology

The Internet is a way of life for these youth and young adults. Both Nicole and Kyle are on Facebook and use it not only as a social networking site but also as a communications tool.

"I keep connected to everyone through Facebook," Nicole says. "And when one of my friends went on a mission trip, she



Personal Connection

As technologically savvy as these young adults are, there is still no replacement for person-to-person relationships. Person-to-person may not be the most efficient way to connect, but it leaves a lasting impression. In fact, more and more young adults are rejecting fast food for slow food and high tech for high touch.

"I think it just means more today when a person takes the time to relate to you," Kyle says.

"I have this boss now who I never talk to face-to-face. I mean, she's in her office not ten yards from me and she never comes to my cubicle to talk to me. She always sends email. My

invited us to follow her journey and to contribute prayers and money. I sent her a few dollars just to help her out. I ignore any group asking for money, but when a friend writes to me and asks me to help out, I do what I can."

Kyle says he is less inclined to give money online, but he researches everything. "Last week one of my co-workers who attends this mega church talked about how their pastor asked them to support this ministry for homeless women and children. I went online and looked at their mission statement and then looked at this site that rates charitable organizations and discovered that a huge percentage of donations goes to overhead. A lot of the money doesn't even reach the women and kids themselves. It felt like a scam. I forwarded all of that to her so she could see for herself."



last boss, he always made it a point to check in with us in person. I didn't realize it then, but it makes a difference."

Emails and bulletins and a "minute-for-mission" appeal are fine in a congregational setting, but there is still no replacement for actually talking with people or personally experiencing the impact of one's own giving. More young adults seem willing to give their time to rehab a home or tutor a child because they end up relating to another human being in a meaningful way.

Making a Difference

A consistent theme among young adults is their willingness to give time and money when they are sure it makes a difference. These youth and young adults have often been betrayed by institutions. The challenge for the church today is to be as "un-institutional" as possible.

"I'm not naïve," says Nicole. "I mean I totally get that institutions have to exist, but you can't blame us for being skeptical. Institutions are really out for their own survival. If I am going to give my time and money and energy, I want to know I am making a difference somehow. It may sound sort of selfish, but that's really the bottom line."

Communication is the key here. The reason for giving must be stated clearly and specifically. The location can be local or global, but the effect must be clear. If young adults can be given a sense of participation in decision making as well, all the better.

What does the future hold for stewardship with these next generations? They will continue to demand accountability and transparency so that they can be sure that their giving will actually make a difference. But here is the hope: when they see a difference happening, they appear to be more than willing to give of their time, their money, and their lives.

Some researchers are saying they may end up being more generous than their parents and even their grandparents. ■

Background

Over 4.8 million people maintain a Facebook page, a social-networking website. View a sample page at www.facebook.com/facebook.

Resource

See the article "Stories of Generosity from Younger Generations," by Michael Meier, in Volume 7, page 4, of *Giving: Growing Joyful Stewards in Your Congregation*.

Listen

Listen to Carrie Newcomer's humorous song "Don't Push Send," which includes the phrase "A dangerous form of information, and the perils of instant gratification."

For Reflection

Where have you witnessed "young adults rejecting fast food for slow food and high tech for high touch"?
Where have you experienced this movement in your own life?

Statistically Speaking

Most important issues facing young adults (ages 22–28):

- Making better money management decisions: 52 percent
- Strengthening family relationships: 18 percent
- Protecting the environment: 11 percent
- Balancing work and personal life: 10 percent

Michelle Healy and Keith Carter, "USA Today Snapshots: Most important issues facing young adults," www.usatoday.com (4-22-09)