



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

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THEMES OF THE EMERGING "CHURCH ON THE NEW EDGE"

Last fall, more than 500 young leaders spent four days listening, learning, dialoguing and praying about the church and ministry in a radically changing world as part of the National Re-evaluation Forum hosted by Leadership Network. Six themes emerged from the forum that represent a framework for discussing the church of the future, the church on the New Edge. This issue of *NetFax* will highlight the themes of community, experiential and mystical. In two weeks, *NetFax* 119 will highlight the themes of telling the story, leadership and the missional church.

COMMUNITY. Community is central to the 21st century church. Today, we are a culture of fractured families and changing social structures. We are time-starved and isolated by distance, work, individualistic pursuits and even our neighborhoods. Yet, we were created for community. Community in the church of the future is more than just making relationships or being in a small group. It is an expression of the Gospel. It is both our hermeneutic and our apologetic. The church has nothing to show other than the exhibit of how we live in community with Christ at the center. Community is not an extra or bonus. It is the essence of what Christians have to offer.

EXPERIENTIAL. People long to experience an intimate relationship with God. The relationship between knowledge and experience has shifted. In the emerging culture, experience now precedes and validates knowledge. People experience something first and their experience then creates the context for learning. This is changing the way churches do everything from evangelism to discipleship, from leadership development to teaching and preaching. The role of the leader in this setting is changing to that of a guide and interpreter of experience rather than simply the deliverer of information. The unique role of the Christian leader is to do this in the context of church history and scripture. There are at least four dimensions of the experiential nature of the emerging culture: (1) the personal nature of experience and the ability to share in the experience of others, (2) a shift from representation to participation, (3) hands-on involvement, and (4) multi-sensory, because the emerging culture engages all the senses and taste, touch and smell become as important as hearing and seeing.

MYSTICAL. Why is mysticism re-emerging today? The emerging culture is less dependent upon a scientific and rationalistic way of thinking and has moved to a time when people want to experience God for themselves. The mystical nature of the emerging culture is leading many churches to focus in three areas: (1) an acknowledgment of people's spirituality...the issue facing many pastors today is how to lead already spiritual people to become followers of Christ. We are entering an era when society as a whole is more spiritual in nature and yet less Christian. (2) an appreciation of mystery and wonder...Christians are recovering a sense of the mystery and awe of God. (3) a return to the creative arts...when Martin Luther nailed his theses to the door, it inadvertently inspired Reformers to correct the church's ills by destroying many statues and paintings and throughout the Reformation, Christian knowledge increased while interest in the arts dwindled. By the nineteenth century, pious Christians abandoned the arts and deemed them "worldly." The arts and faith were torn apart. Today, leaders of churches in the emerging culture welcome the arts as part of their worship, recognizing that creativity always points to and glorifies the Creator.

For a complete discussion of the six themes and a report on the forum, watch for a special edition of *NEXT* in the mail this week. To be placed on the mailing list for *NEXT*, call 1.800.765.5323.

Audiotapes of the forum are available by calling 1.800.468.3316.

The full special report will be available online after March 10 at www.youngleader.org.

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