

**VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF AUTHENTIC QUALITIES OF COMMUNITY  
VIA THE INTERNET FOR CANADIAN CHRISTIAN YOUTH**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF MCMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE**

**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**MISSIONS AND RENEWAL**

**MCMASTER UNIVERSITY**

**HAMILTON, CANADA**

**BY**

**JEFFREY DAMON CARTER**

**APRIL, 2001**

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Virtual Community and the Millennial Generation: An  
Investigation of Authentic Qualities of Community via the  
Internet For Canadian Christian Youth

AUTHOR: Jeffrey Damon Carter

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Andrew Irvine

NUMBER OF PAGES: 241, plus appendices



**McMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE**

Upon the recommendation of an oral examination committee and vote of the faculty, this thesis-project by

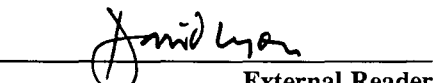
**Jeffrey Damon Carter**


is hereby accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Ministry**

  
First Reader and Advisor

  
Second Reader

  
External Reader

  
Dean

ate: April 19, 2001

## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Evolving Influence of Internet Technology within Youth Ministry in Canada**

Within each of us, there exists a need to be connected with others. The need to belong to someone or something is integral to whom we are as God's creation. In this search to be connected, youth are usually known to be the first on the scene to access the new technologies that bring them closer in touch with each other. Historically, youth have embraced the telephone, the television and the radio, among other various technologies. In the past decade there has been a monumental shift in the way people communicate with each other. With the revolution of the Internet and its related technologies, youth are able to extend their friendship circles far beyond the borders of culture, time and economy.

This dissertation is an examination of the responses of 231 Canadian youth (aged 13 to 23) and their thoughts about the characteristics of virtual community on the Internet as a means of initiating, cultivating and maintaining relationships.

Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski in their seminal work with Project Teen Canada in the early 1980's determined there had been a shift in values from teens highly valuing family and other significant relationships to developing a high value for peers and friends. One of the purposes of this work is to examine the extension of those significant friendships and relationships through the exploding popularity of the Internet. The qualities of community will be examined both from sociological and theological viewpoints. One of the questions in this study is: "Can the Internet provide a forum for authentic Christian community?". Or is it glorified technology that is merely a continuing step in our evolution as a society of communicators?



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many people who assisted me in the completion of this dissertation. For without their support, this endeavour would never have gotten off the runway. I thank God for His strength and the wisdom that carried me through these many months as I tackled this timely subject.

I would like to acknowledge Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada (IVCF) and the incredible gifts they gave to me through allowing me to take the necessary time to complete course work and by granting me a sabbatical year to complete my thesis. I am indebted to Mr. Jim Berney president of IVCF of Canada for being an inspiration to me as a man of God that has exemplified true servant leadership and for his strong, silent encouragement that so often would propel me forward to the next level of my personal development. I am also compelled to thank Tom Balke my supervisor, Hudson Trenholm, who acted as interim during my leave and the rest of the Atlantic ISCF staff team for accepting my long absences for my studies. I thank them for carrying the ball, to which they responded without complaint and rose to the challenge of the extra load.

It took several favours across the country to complete the survey portion of this study. I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to all the youth leaders, pastors, IVCF staff and family members who distributed the 6500 survey cards to their youth groups.

Appreciation to the staff and faculty at McMaster Divinity College that thrust upon me the enjoyable task of expanding my horizons and stretching my thinking on things of the faith. My fellow class members of the incoming class of 1997 who offered

me incredible friendship, support and proved to me ecumenicity can work! Special thanks to my class mates Clarence Bradbury and Owen Black for providing materials whenever they came across them and for going the extra mile in our friendship.

My renderings would not have been nearly as legible without the incredible editing skills provided by Mrs. Bobby Barnes. I am sure her husband Dr. Jerry Barnes, a dear, former professor of mine, was peering over shoulder as well!

A sincere thank you to Dr.'s John and Deborah Bowen for housing and feeding me during my tenure at McMaster during these past three years. I was truly grateful to know that I had a place to rest my head while at my second home!

Thanks to Mrs. Marge Geroux assistant to the Director of the DMin. program for countless phone calls and last minute "favours." A most deserving word of thanks to Rev. Dr. Andrew Irvine the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program who also served as my primary thesis advisor and to Rev. Dr. David Overholt, long time friend and youth specialist, who served as my second reader and to the esteemed Dr. David Lyon who acted as my external reader.

While my family comes first in my heart, and it may have not seemed so these past three years, I have chosen to honour the best for last. No one other than myself, will know the incredible sacrifices my dearest friend and life companion has had to endure during these past three years. To my wife Deann; thank you my love for being so patient and for inspiring and encouraging me when there were times I was ready to throw in the towel, thank you for your sacrifices. To my three and half year old son, my dear son Zachary, who has only known daddy to always be working on a "paper" during his short little life. Well my son. It's done. Lets go play ball!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER 1

#### **ENGAGING THE IMPLICATIONS OF VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY ON CANADIAN HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH - HYPERTEXT AND THE NEW VIRTUAL REALITY . . . . . 1**

You Can't Go Back. . . . .	4
The Times Are A-changing . . . . .	10
Relevancy and the Institutional Church . . . . .	12
Ambiguity and the Future of the Church . . . . .	14
Implications for Canadian Youth . . . . .	16
The Problem of "virtual-community" . . . . .	17
Youth Workers and Their Response . . . . .	19

### CHAPTER 2

#### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON YOUTH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY . . . . . 23**

A Theology of Technology . . . . .	24
Historical Reflections of Youth Ministry . . . . .	24

#### **A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY . . . . . 26**

A History of Community . . . . .	26
The Triune God . . . . .	27
The Love of the Triune Community . . . . .	28
Broken Community – The Fall . . . . .	32
Mission and Purpose of a Community . . . . .	35

#### **A THEOLOGY OF YOUTH CULTURE . . . . . 37**

Canadian Culture - A Backdrop . . . . .	39
Christ Against Culture . . . . .	41
The Christ of Culture . . . . .	46
Christ Above Culture . . . . .	52
Christ and Culture in Paradox . . . . .	56
Christ The Transformer of Culture . . . . .	58
Concluding remarks . . . . .	61

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **GENERATIONAL INFLUENCE AND POSTMODERNISM ..... 65**

A Working Definition of the Generations .....	68
Moral Awareness .....	70
Rapid Technological Advances .....	72
The Battle of the Generations .....	75
Generation Who? .....	77
Similar Yet, Different .....	77

### **DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES ..... 81**

Millennial Kids .....	81
Generation X .....	83
Self and Identity Development .....	85
The Differences Between Xers and Millennials .....	87
The Church in Decline .....	88
Youth and Values .....	90
Technology – The Internet and Community .....	92
The Ten Themes of N-Gen Culture .....	93
Moderation in All Things .....	96
An Issue of Trust .....	98

### **THE POSTMODERN DILEMMA ..... 99**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND YOUTH MINISTRY**

#### **- THE SOUL IN CYBERSPACE ..... 103**

Communication and Community in Cyberspace .....	106
How Do We Communicate? .....	107
Sharing a Little Deeper .....	109
Similar Patterns - CD radio and the Internet .....	111
Anonymity - Who am I? .....	112
Trust and Obey? .....	115
To Tell the Truth .....	117
Constructing or Concealed Identities .....	119
Internet Addiction .....	122
Cyber Evangelism .....	124

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **A WINDOW INTO THE VIEWS OF CANADIAN CHRISTIAN YOUTH WITH RESPECT TO THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ..... 127**

Survey Invitation Cards .....	130
On-line Survey Website .....	131
Survey Design .....	133
Data Management .....	134
Survey Criticisms .....	135
On-line Focus Groups .....	136

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN YOUTH IN CANADA (An Analysis of Survey and Focus Group Results) ..... 180**

Activity and the Internet .....	181
Friends Forever .....	182
Faith and Church Attendance - A profile .....	183
Attitudes and Participation - View of the Church .....	184
Characteristics of Church Community - Analysis of Question # 12 .....	186
Characteristics of Online Community - Analysis of Question # 26 .....	190
Characteristics of the Ideal or Perfect Community - Analysis of Question # 28 .....	195
Side by Side comparison of the Church, Online and Ideal Communities .....	198
Online Focus Groups (session 1 and 2) .....	201

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE FUTURE OF COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNITY: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITY, YOUTH AND THE INTERNET BASED ON A SAMPLING OF CHARACTERISTICS ..... 210**

Encouragement - Be All You Can Be .....	213
Listening - Did I Hear You Correctly? .....	215
A Simple Matter of Love .....	217
Youth Culture and the Internet .....	217
Millennial Christian Youth and the On-line Community .....	220
Suggested Uses for Ministry On-line Community .....	221
Summary .....	225

### **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 228**

### **APPENDICES ..... 242**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **ENGAGING THE IMPLICATIONS OF VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY ON CANADIAN HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH - HYPERTEXT<sup>1</sup> AND THE NEW VIRTUAL REALITY**

This study will endeavor to address the question, “What elements or characteristics of authentic Christian community for the youth of Canada can be facilitated through the Internet?” Numerous personal observations and experiences in my ministry to high school youth, during the past several years have compelled me to embark on a deeper investigation into the growing phenomenon of the interaction between youth and the Internet.

My involvement for the past ten years on the local and national level, as a high school youth specialist with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, has given me the unique opportunity to be connected with many Canadian youth workers in the church as well as in parachurch youth ministries. I have been most fortunate that this position has given me access to youth groups and youth leaders across the country. I have drawn on many of these resources to help develop this preliminary investigation of youth ministry and its relationship to the Internet.

---

<sup>1</sup>The term “Hypertext” is a term designated to a HTML computer programming code that allows one to refer automatically to related citations or forward references; these ‘hotspots’ may appear as highlighted text or icons within a web document. When you touch them with your cursor the system moves you to the pre-programmed reference point.

I have had a personal fascination with computers since the mid-1980's. Since that time, I have considered it a fascinating hobby, even to the point of dabbling in web page management for both ministries and small businesses throughout these past few years. Recently, I started to notice trends with the increased involvement of Christian youth and the Internet. It was becoming increasingly apparent with the acceleration of a “net-conscious” society, that I needed to do a further study, investigating the current and future role of the Internet in the lives of Canadian Christian young people.

Adolescents at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have become increasingly accomplished and involved in the use of the Internet as a means of communicating and building relationships with a whole range of friends. Sociologists in the late 1980's discovered that relationships with peers had become what Canadian youth valued most.<sup>2</sup> This was a dramatic shift from the 1950's where youth valued home and family above relationships with their friends.

An extension or addendum to that shift, that reaches into the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the advent of computer mediated communication (CMC) technology to communicate with those friends. Electronic pagers, cell phones, personal answering services, along with the introduction of the Internet have all facilitated rapid access to these friendship networks. Now for the first time, with relative ease, it is possible to

---

<sup>2</sup>Donald C. Posterski, *Friendship: A Window on Ministry To Youth*. (Toronto: Project Teen Canada, 1986) p. 9



facilitate friendship networks on a global scale not limited by borders or time or space.<sup>3</sup>

The limitations of time are broken down to the degree that youth can “talk” to friends at their leisure and leave instant messages any time of day or night. The internet takes advantage of international time zones. Borders disappear as one student, in the afternoon in Canada, can talk with another in Sweden just before they go to bed, or simultaneously to an Australian that is getting ready to go to school.

Within the last three to five years, high school youth are now entering into a whole new dimension of participating in or extending their community via the Internet.

The tools that youth use to access this “virtual-community”<sup>4</sup> are through the assistance of e-mail<sup>5</sup> and chatroom programs.<sup>6</sup> Chat-type activity is becoming the virtual den or rec rooms of the Friday-night-get-together instead of the homes of teens as in the 70's and 80's. Today there are increasing amounts of youth that are entering into this new

---

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregal Publications, 2001), 40

<sup>4</sup>*Virtual community* or even virtual reality are terms often used to describe computer-mediated communication on the Internet. The word virtual gives an impression of something unreal, not really existing. A definition of virtual is to have the effect of being such without being such. However, the best way to understand the virtual interaction present within the computer mediated system of the Internet is to describe it as a form of human-computer interaction in which real or imaginary environments are simulated and users interact with and are able to manipulate those environments.

<sup>5</sup>*E-mail* has been the most common term used that describes the electronic sharing of files in multiple formats. It has been the primary source for exchanging electronic mail on the Internet.

<sup>6</sup>A *chatroom* is the commonly used term to describe an on-line forum that is facilitated by a host web page or service, that allows real time typewritten dialogue or the sharing of files between one or more participants.

forum for the purposes of seeking or maintaining relationships, hence, establishing community.

Howard Rheingold, one of the first to study the impact of communities on-line offers this working definition: "Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form Webs of personal relationship in cyberspace."<sup>7</sup> Today with the advent of virtual technology there seems to be an increasing amount of "millennial"<sup>8</sup> youth that are entering into this new forum for the purposes of seeking out relationships, hence, establishing community.

### **You Can't Go Back. . .**

Two years ago I experienced a technological epiphany. I had just returned to my old university campus after an eleven year absence to do some research for a paper only to discover that the campus had been "hard wired" for internet access and data transmission. The communication highway had literally ploughed its way through the historic and picturesque campus of my alma mater. Every classroom, dorm room, and area in the library now had access to a communications data drop every ten feet. I also learned with envy, that each student as part of their tuition package upon registration, was given a state-of-the-art laptop to download class notes, submit papers and to do research.

---

<sup>7</sup>Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 5.

<sup>8</sup>The term *Millennials* is becoming one of the most predominant terms in academic literature to describe the generation of youth born between 1982 to 1997.

I hearkened back to my first computer that I bought with my own money while studying at the same institution in the late 1980's. It boasted two large 5 1/4 inch floppy drives, nothing for on board memory and I considered my self blessed to have evolved from an old typewriter that I had used in my undergraduate studies. The progress in such a short period of time was indeed amazing.

As I entered the library, I noticed the old card catalogue card cabinets positioned over in an obscure corner. Each wooden drawer stood holding hundreds of meticulously handed type written cards laden with information, sitting at the ready for the next eager treasure hunter, looking for that elusive hidden reference. They were replaced by banks of computers and study kiosks (with data drops of course) with instant access to local and international library resources, complete with the power to cross-reference and index in milliseconds.

As I wandered over to the student union building, fond memories flooded back as I reflected on this social hub of the campus. It was always buzzing with activity as students chatted loudly in groups over steaming cups of coffee, catching up on the news and bemoaning class schedules and temporarily ignoring impending due dates for papers and assignments. I pushed through the big hewn doors and entered the building, it was at that precise moment that I encountered the source of my Orwellian experience. Instead of the crowded and bustling centre that resided now only in my memory, it was replaced with a deathly quiet. There were groups of students all sitting in solitary silence, in little huddles or facing walls with their faces lit up by the blue luminescent glow emanating from laptop monitors. There were no raucous discussions, just the tapping of keyboards

and the occasional cough that echoed through the building like I was standing in an empty cathedral.

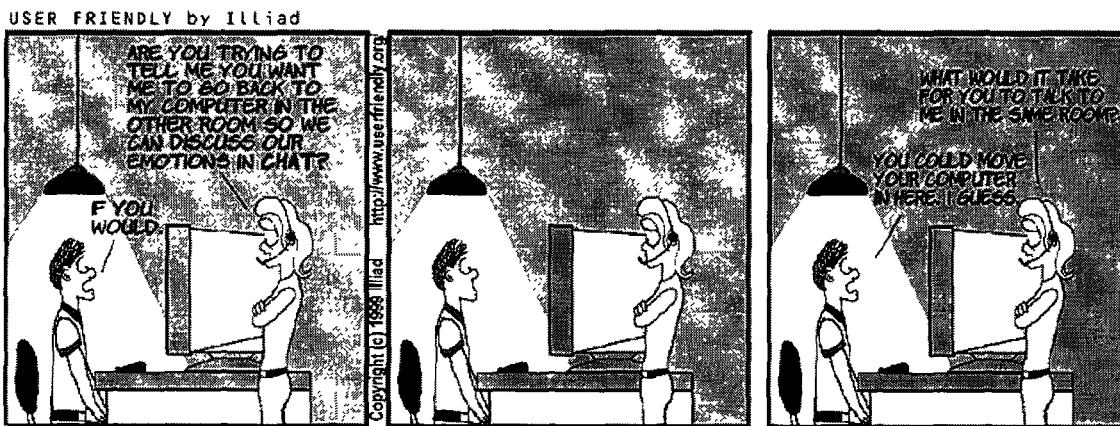
That experience opened my eyes to our increasing dependence upon computers and the pervasive forays into cyberspace via the internet. As I have listened to youth over the past two years, I have noticed that there is an evolution in the way they think, feel and talk about technology. It is decidedly different from the way that students of my era were used to interacting with it. For those of us who were late boomers and emerging Gen X'ers, we were enthralled with what technology could do for us. It was a glorified toy, an ever spiralling upward experience to enjoy the sheer novelty of technological advancement.

The internet was not readily accessible to the public less than a decade ago. Yet, we were tinkering with the emerging tools that were to be used to usher in an era of unprecedented access to a world beyond our wildest dreams. In general terms, youth today have embraced technology and the internet as a part of their everyday existence. It is not a glorious toy so much as an integral part of their day to day routine. I doubt that most students today would even know what a typewriter eraser or correction tape looked like.

I was recently accessing some information at a Christian liberal arts university computer lab. In the space of about one hour I was educated once again to just how entrenched youth today are in making technology and computers a part of their life. As I was sitting at my terminal, a girl next to me gave a nervous shriek and put her hand over the monitor so that no one could see the contents of the screen, apparently one of her

friends had sent her a questionable picture with graphic content as a joke. I remember when good practical jokes included taking someone's car and putting it up on blocks, or putting cologne in someone's mouthwash in the dorm. Practical jokes on campus are advancing to include cyber-spam.

In that same hour, two girls were having a "conversation" from opposite sides of the room using the university's intranet<sup>9</sup> system. As one girl logged off and proceeded to leave, the other girl hissed to her, "hey get back on there I am not finished talking yet". The first girl replied, "I'm too tired, let me just come over there." As she moved towards her friend, the girl anxiously berated her friend, "No, no go back to your computer, its better that way!".



(Used with permission. Copyright (c) 1999 Illiad)

I can cite numerous examples of signs of how technology and emerging youth culture are blending together. We are finding ourselves entering a unknown realm that we can speculate what the outcome will be in the next five to ten years.

---

<sup>9</sup>The term *intranet* refers to an internal connectivity service that links computers to each other within a certain confined business setting or building. Not to be confused with Internet even though based on the same concept only for an specific environment.

I pride myself on being somewhat involved and connected with the latest technology. I have spent the better part of the past three years developing and maintaining a web site for our divisional ministry. As I began preparing for my sabbatical to write this paper, a replacement had to be found to take over my labour of love, by keeping the site updated and perhaps “tweaking” it while I was gone. My replacement was highly motivated and experienced in the ways of the net and computer lingo. The examples of his work were impressive and showed that he was particularly gifted in the field, especially for being all of fifteen years old!

Secular experts and other noted authors (mostly adults) are painting a panacea or golden era for the youth of our world. They tout examples of teenage “dot-com”<sup>10</sup> geniuses, and promote the internet as an incubator for international good will, as we watch the global village shrink to a mere cursor point. In light of this revelation of the new utopia, we are left with a few nagging questions. Are we as youth leaders, parents and teachers willing to accept this promotion without questioning the ramifications? The internet arguably, seems to be the “place” to which people are gravitating to find community, fellowship and friendship. What are the qualities of this type of community? Perhaps youth see this medium as the answer to being accepted unconditionally with little risk of being rejected. Being accepted is an enormous driving force among youth today. What place does community have in the lives of youth, in the church, their youth groups and even the internet? While many questions are being raised at this point, the answers

---

<sup>10</sup>The term *dot-com* is referring specifically to those web sites on the Internet that have a ‘.com’ extension. . . often refers to business related or commercial sites that exist on the World Wide Web on the Internet.

will be addressed later in Chapter Six and Seven.

Technological factors are exerting great change upon our culture. Some of these changes are being caused by the access and use of the Internet as it becomes more entrenched in everyday life. Change is not always a bad thing. If it were possible, it would be helpful to predict where change may occur in our culture so that we might better prepare ourselves. Since crystal balls do not exist that can predict where technology will take society, we need to continue to co-evolve along with it. Mark Stefik, offers insight into the effects of change, especially with the addition of a new technology:

Although a new technology changes things, its effects are not always immediately evident; often its initial form is not at all like the one in which it later appears so influential. At first, too, a new technology is likely to interact with rather than overthrow existing social processes and the installed base of earlier technologies. There can be a long period of co-evolution during which society and technology mutually influence each other. New technologies inspired by dreams such as the “global village” often start with only with the crudest of implementations. They are promoted by enthusiasts but discounted and criticized by many others. As they are used, they are improved. During an ensuing period of change and confusion--often lasting decades--society and technology co-evolve to create a new order which is eventually replaced by the next one. The struggle is between the old order and the new, between what society is and what it is becoming. The Internet is now at this stage of becoming, a period of rapid growth and change. It is still being invented and is characterized by open options, unknown possibilities, confusion, and imperfect technology. Our social structures, cultural assumptions, and legal structures are co-evolving with the Internet. <sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Mark Stefik. *The Internet Edge: Social, Legal, and Technological Challenges for a Networked World*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 5.

## **The Times Are A-changing**

As Christians we must examine existing cultural influences around us to understand what is going to shape the future of youth culture. After examining these facets of a Canadian Christian young persons life, perhaps we can then begin to discern what stances or strategies we will need to take to engage this purported “new era” of the postmodern smorgasbord -- which will be defined later in this dissertation.

With each passing generation there appears to be an continuing exodus from the institutional church in Canada with the exception of a few conservative churches.<sup>12</sup> Accompanying that religious exodus is the persistent departure from traditional values, practices and the understanding of faith. This dispiriting reality is illustrated by several social researchers such as Reginald Bibby, Dean Hoge, David Roozen, Benton Johnson and Donald Luidens.<sup>13</sup>

It would appear that gone are the days of the uniform, nuclear family packing into the family car on a Sunday morning to trundle off to the local church down on the corner. Blended, single parent, and alternative family arrangements are an increasing norm in

---

<sup>12</sup>A notable exception would be the conservative churches that seem to be experiencing an increase in those responding attending “almost every week” or more: conservative churches: 1957 - 51% ; 1975 - 40%; 1993 - 59% (Source: Reginald Bibby, “The Ten Key Findings” in *Transforming our Nation*, (Richmond, BC: Church Leadership Library, 1998): 270.)

<sup>13</sup>Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987); Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994); Dean Hoge and David A. Roozen, *Understanding Church Growth and Decline* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979).



recent years.<sup>14</sup> Marriage is now no longer seen as a prerequisite for having children, since one in three babies born in Canada are to unwed parents.<sup>15</sup> The only significant resurgence the church is seeing at this time is a less than overwhelming return of the Boomers. Perhaps it is possible that they are seeking to introduce their young families to the values of their earlier childhood.<sup>16</sup> This is interesting, as many boomers did not appear to be interested in church as youth themselves. In 1996, George Barna reported that church attendance by Boomers in the United States was actually losing ground:

Church attendance has dropped most significantly among Baby Boomers - the generation of Americans born between 1946 and 1964. According to the survey, only 3 in 10 Boomers (31%) had attended church in the last seven days. In the years 1991 through 1995, more than 4 in 10 Boomers (42%), on average, had attended church in a given week. In 1991, half of all Boomers (50%) had attended church in the past seven days.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Statistics Canada, "Census families in private households by family structure, 1991 and 1996 Censuses" [statistics on-line]; available from <<http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Families/famil51a.htm>> (accessed 7 February, 2001) (Statistics show that the incidence of lone-parent families rose from 12.9% in 1991 to 14.5% in 1996, while the number of common-law families rose from 9.8% in 1991 to 11.7% in 1996)

<sup>15</sup>David K. Foot, *Boom Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift*, (Toronto: MacFarlane Walter & Ross, 1996), 187.

<sup>16</sup>Joe Couto, "Canadian Churches Attendance Declines: Stats Can confirms what church leaders have been coping with for years." *Christian Week*, 9 January 2001, Vol 14. No 18 p 1 (Stats Can Survey conducted in 1998). Who Goes to Church? 34% of Canadians over 15 attend at least one religious service a month. (down from 41% in 1988); 24% of Canadians aged 25 - 34 attend once a month; 52% of Canadians over 55 attend once a month. Church attendance nosedives when Canadians reach their mid-teens and continue until their 30's. While 34% of youth 15 to 24 years of age attended church at least once a month in 1998, the number dropped to 24% ten years later when this group was aged 25 to 34. Conversely, more than half of the older Canadians (55 and up) attend church regularly, largely unchanged since 1988.

<sup>17</sup>George Barna, "Church Attendance Drops Again: Boomers Cut Church From Schedule" *Barna Research On-line* [report on-line] available on-line at

Boomers in several respects have shed the characteristics of their youth and have become the “establishment” that they fought so hard to denounce during the Woodstock era.

They are now the gatekeepers, the executives and the professionals that are in positions of power and decision.

### **Relevancy and the Institutional Church**

The church however, still remains to be seen by a significant part of the younger generation in general as archaic and out of touch.<sup>18</sup> There appears to be a trend towards elevating the personal and the isolated existence over homogeneity and community which is seen as a ancient vestige of the church. If being alone was not attractive enough, it is possible now to be a part of a “cyber”<sup>19</sup> or on-line congregation<sup>20</sup> without leaving the

---

<<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=33&Reference=B>> (accessed 1 February 2001)

<sup>18</sup>James Bell, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1993), 31.

<sup>19</sup>The term “cyber” applies to a many concepts related to the Internet. The term “cyber space” was coined by science-fiction writer William Gibson in his ground breaking novel *Neuromancer* (1984) to refer to the “space” in which computer-mediated communication occurs; that is to the interface between digital bits and human consciousness– or between silicon and the soul. The prefix “cyber” comes from the word cybernetics, which is the study of self-regulating systems; it has been expanded, however, to cover all the areas where humans and computer technologies overlap in strange and stimulating ways. Found in Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul In Cyberspace*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 13-14.

<sup>20</sup>David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000), 66.

comfort of your own home computer to engage in cyber evangelism.<sup>21</sup> Andrew Careaga reports on his research about the growing number of cyber churches that are becoming available, “Despite the skepticism of this group of teens and twenty-somethings, plenty of evidence exists that the on-line church is alive and growing at a dramatic rate. And young people are leading the way in this new expression of the faith”.<sup>22</sup> While this is not likely to happen in a broad sweeping fashion immediately in Canada, there are influences upon institutions today that are being perpetuated by Internet technology as was evidenced in the example of the university described in the introduction.

Values of previous generations and traditional norms, are being replaced by liberal value systems of the younger generations, which will present serious challenges for relevancy for churches and Christian organizations into the new millennium. Janet Somerville, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches is quoted in *ChristianWeek* as saying: “Secularism and agnosticism is so normative to mainstream Canada today”. “Most [Canadians] need something big to experience Christianity.”<sup>23</sup> The key word in Somerville’s comment is “experience”, youth today are seeking one experience after the other.

Michael Adams, president of the Canadian-based Environics Research Group, had this rather bleak prediction with respect to traditional institutions:

---

<sup>21</sup>Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 149.

<sup>22</sup>Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregal Publications, 2001), 32.

<sup>23</sup>Joe Couto, 2.

I believe that by the year 2020, the institutions that the boomers fought so hard to reform will have much less significance for Generations X, Y and Z. Organized religion, institutions like universities, the professors and yes even the nation-state -- all will be much less relevant.”<sup>24</sup>

Reginald Bibby concurs with Adams, only with a shorter time-line, “by the year 2015, we will be looking at a drastically revised Canadian religious landscape”.<sup>25</sup>

### **Ambiguity and the Future of the Church**

While the power of revival and the influence of the Holy Spirit can never be discounted as a means of averting these dire predictions, the apparent alarming trend of conventional church decline seen in our nation is indeed sobering. We need to consider the ramifications upon our culture if circumstances are left unchanged. As much as it is seen as an unpleasant reality, the possibility exists that the relevance and influence of the “institutional” church will continue to wane in light of technological and media driven options, perhaps most notably among the young.

As the younger generation interacts with technology and the older generation gets left behind, there will not only be an age gap in the church, but a technological gap as well. There are some churches that are incorporating the use of technology and the surrounding culture with their ministries. However, a more intentional push needs to occur, if not to keep up with the times, to at least arrive as close to it as possible.

---

<sup>24</sup>Michael Adams, *Sex in The Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium*. (Toronto: Penguin Book Ltd., 1998), 29.

<sup>25</sup>Reginald Bibby, *Social trends Canadian Style*. (Toronto, Stoddard Publishing, 1995), 128.

Class rooms in schools and university campuses are upgrading the standards of technology to keep pace with the rest of society. In order to stay relevant, it is imperative that we keep pace in this competitive, technophilic age, at least by our awareness. It seems there is still a fear of popular culture by those in the church; that it may somehow contaminate them. Creative alternatives to the traditional understanding of doing 'church' should be considered in the near future to ensure relevance at least with the younger generation. Ken Bellous, executive minister of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec was quoted in Christian Week as saying:

Many churches are a fortification against anything that will harm them. They're fearful of the culture. We've got to get over this. [Bellous says] the trend among young people needs to be especially noted by churches. Clearly young people don't see their world reflected within the walls of churches. We must become international churches where all people feel welcome. We need Christian academics to do research. We need experimental churches and we need to educate Christians. <sup>26</sup>

The postmodern era has been ushered in with an unabashed love affair with internet technology and the freedom from established moral absolutes. Josh McDowell cautions against our infatuation with technology by reminding us that, "The electronic media have brought us together, within our own nation and with the people of other lands. But this 'global village' created by the electronic media has also sped the destruction of traditional moral values."<sup>27</sup>

The recent resurgence of the Internet and multi-media has fed this experiential and

---

<sup>26</sup>Joe Couto, 2.

<sup>27</sup>Josh McDowell, *Right From Wrong*. (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1994), 41.

isolationist existence. Pluralism, tolerance, political correctness, even multiculturalism all play a part in the dilution of a Christian's declaration of absolute truth in Canadian society. Recently, during our last national election, Stockwell Day, a candidate for prime minister was accused of using Christian principles during his campaign. He was condemned for being an evangelical Christian by political peers. As we wrestle with the multi-faceted domain of Canadian culture it needs to be stated that no single factor is contributing to the expanding pall of uncertainty which the church is attempting to minister within. The attempt of this dissertation is merely to look at one facet of that equation: the insurgence of the Internet in Canadian youth culture.

### **Implications for Canadian Youth**

The focus of this study is to investigate the ramifications and influences of computer mediated communication via the Internet upon Canadian Christian young people and their understanding of community. Its aim is to compare their experience of community to that of the church in general and their youth group. While several questions come to mind when exploring this massive new area, we are limited to asking only relatively few, with a focus on one. In short, this study will ask the question, what elements of authentic Christian community for the youth of Canada can be facilitated through the Internet?

### **The Problem of “virtual-community”**

As the church embarks on its journey at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is faced with a unique technological, multi-media driven culture that is reforming and reshaping the very structure of society. One of the revelations of the past decade has been the public acceptance and usage of computer mediated communication (CMC) via the Internet. Everyday tasks such as banking, renting a car, buying airline tickets or buying books on-line are seemingly commonplace. At the current time, however, there has been a cooling off period and certain markets on the Internet have fared better than others in the “dot com wars” of the last few years. Video and audio communication via the Internet were merely a dream less than five years ago, today reality, though not widely used for the time being due to affordability or convenience.

The Christian community is no stranger to the use and influence of technology. Churches are creating brilliant web sites and on-line ministry information “kiosks.” Missionaries are using e-mail to break down the communication barriers that cost and distance once hindered. On-line resources for every area imaginable from worship to fund raisers are available for the Christian community to use at will. Information resources related to youth ministry are one of the fastest growing Christian areas on the Internet. Christian music has made a definite mark on the Internet with Christian music MP3's<sup>28</sup> files available for anyone that wants to access them.

---

<sup>28</sup>An *MP3* file is a compressed computer file that is commonly used to transfer music files

The advent of cheap and easy access of personal computers at home and school has created a parallel existence for some youth as they begin to enter “virtual-communities” using chat-type programs and e-mail to make friends. In some cases youth are making their own statements about themselves by having their own web pages.

Accessing e-mail is as easy as having a home phone with visual display, a cell phone or a home television. No longer is it even necessary to have a home computer. Staying “connected” can be as easy as uploading messages to a Palm Pilot™<sup>29</sup> and carrying it around with you for the details of your daily communications.

Youth have been notorious for using the various means of technology to connect with one another throughout the years. Letter writing, as primitive as it is seen today, was one of the first means of keeping in touch with “pen-pals”. In the 1950's the telephone was the main source of communication with friends, when affordable. Then the television came into vogue and youth began to park in front of the “tube” with groups of friends. Movie theaters and television provided a new “gathering place” for youth. The 80's saw the advent of the indoor shopping “mall”, roller rinks and youth centers and youth hung out in droves seeking community and acceptance from one another. Then in the late 1990's the Internet became the next medium for youth, now being dubbed as Rushkoff calls them, “screenagers.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>*Palm Pilot* is a registered name for a hand held communications and electronic time management device.

<sup>30</sup>Douglas Rushkoff, *Playing the Future: What We Can Learn From Digital Kids* (New York: Riverview Books, 1999), 5.



The applications and ramifications of youth using the Internet are limitless. The Internet is an unregulated medium(for the most part), where morals and values are highly individualized. There are less explicit standards and loosely enforced absolutes beyond the watchful eyes of parents. Each person that enters this unregulated space has the capacity to assume any number of identities, and enter into a limitless world of disembodied options.<sup>31</sup> The Internet originally was created to facilitate military and government communications. Interestingly enough, as it evolved, virtual communities sprang up unexpectedly as people began to “converse” around topics of common interest. It was later opened up for public and commercial use and since then there has been no single entity that regulates it, as it is a ‘web’ of servers and computers linked across international borders.<sup>32</sup>

### **Youth Workers and Their Response**

Youth workers need to engage with this technology without fear and become savvy both with the positive and the negative aspects of the Internet as it relates to the youth that they are ministering to. Parents, educators and youth workers should also have concerns that the onset of ‘chat ’ and CMC is introducing the guise of a secure and accepting community. The question arises, “can this medium be experienced as a redemptive communication tool that can be used effectively in working with youth?” (i.e.

---

<sup>31</sup>Lyon, 39.

<sup>32</sup>Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*. (New York, New York: Harper Perennial. 1994), 7.

e-mail, chat, bulletin boards and ICQ). The Internet has far more advantages as a medium than the television which is solely a broadcast medium. For the first time, youth can engage in reciprocal relationships through an interactive interface through their computers. In some case in both audio and visual formats. The dream concept of the video-phone on the 1950's has come to reality through the Internet.

What are the inherent dangers or advantages of this pseudo or virtual-community youth are engaging in? Are Christian youth at a greater risk of “contamination” or will their values carry over into their use of the Internet? What are the unique opportunities that will engage youth in on-line evangelism via this tool? These questions will be engaged in the literature study in Chapter Four.

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are viable uses for the Internet to assist in building authentic community in youth ministry, this is answered in Chapter Seven. Is it possible to teach youth how to appropriately deal with this new avenue of communication? Can we equip them with the skills needed to be wary of the pitfalls that can come from an over-saturation of “virtual” on-line activity. Are youth pastors and workers aware of its lure and the positive and negative aspects of the Internet and youth culture today? Is it the devil’s playground or are there legitimate uses for developing community in youth ministries and invitations to “real” community and interaction with other Christians?

While this study will attempt to answer some of the aforementioned questions, the primary question as mentioned before that we will focus on is, “what elements of authentic community for Christian youth of Canada between the ages of thirteen and

twenty three can be facilitated through the Internet?”

One thing needs to be stressed regarding the scope of this study. To focus entirely upon the Internet as the sole influence on how people interact in community is presumptuous and certainly not the aim of this dissertation. Among the varied cultural influences that youth face, this study will attempt to compare and contrast how youth interact in different communities (i.e. youth group, church and on-line). Barry Wellman and Milena Guila raise a valid point when considering this kind of examination of the Internet and its impact on community and other studies they have encountered around this topic:

Much of the analysis that does exist is parochial. It almost always treats the Internet as an isolated social phenomenon without taking into account how interaction on the Net fit together with other aspects of people's lives. The Net is only one of many ways in which the same people may interact. It is not a separate reality. People bring to their on-line interactions such baggage as their gender, stage in the life cycle, cultural milieu. Socioeconomic status, and off-line connections with others. <sup>33</sup>

While attempting to look at the primary question of this dissertation, it will be equally important to be aware of other contributing effects such as stages of life, generational and social-cultural influences. These influences also play a big part in the formation of the lives of young people.

The structure of this dissertation is such that each chapter will build upon the premise of the previous until the conclusions are reached in Chapter Seven. In Chapter Two, there will be a reflection on youth culture and community from a theological

---

<sup>33</sup>Barry Wellman and Milena Guila “Virtual Communities as Communities: Net surfers don't ride alone” in *Communities in Cyberspace*. eds. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock (New York: Routledge, 1999), 170.

perspective. In Chapter Three, I will be investigating the impact of generational influences, development and postmodernism upon youth culture today. In Chapter Four I will address virtual community as it relates to youth and ministry. In Chapter Five the methodology of the project will be covered in detail. Chapter Six will be comprised of the analysis portion of the survey and focus groups while Chapter Seven will deal with the conclusions of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON YOUTH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

In the previous chapter we considered the essential question being raised in relation to youth and their interaction with community via the Internet. In this chapter, we will take into consideration the relationship between virtual community and youth culture from a Biblical and theological perspective.

First, there will be an examination of the theological understanding of community as found in the church, or *ekklesia* <sup>34</sup> and even more narrowly defined by *koinonea*. <sup>35</sup> Second, there will be a theological reflection on current youth culture.

---

<sup>34</sup> ἐκκλησία - The understanding of this word as the gathering of a secular assembly or the church or congregation. "The church as the body of Christians". Bauer in Kittel defines it further as "The congregation as the gathering of Christians living in a given place, and universally the church in which all those who are called together". (Gerhard Kittel (ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol III I-K (Grand Rapids Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 501-504.)

<sup>35</sup> κοινωνία - Means fellow, participant, it implies fellowship or sharing someone or in something. It is an abstract term from κοινωνος, and κοινωνέω which denotes participation in fellowship especially with a close bond. It expressed a two sided relationship. It also means impartation as well. Communal possessions shared in common. (Gerhard Kittel (ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol III I-K (Grand Rapids Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 798.)

## **A Theology of Technology**

It is not likely there would be any denial that the use of the computer and Internet are here to stay. Yet, there still seems to be a tension in the Christian community regarding technology. The tension in youth work centres on whether we should shun it and teach our youth to do so, or educate them to engage technology with a Christ-like attitude. One way to view these questions is through the lens of the five positions on culture found in H. Richard Niebuhr's classic work entitled *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr is an excellent choice to engage a discussion on faith and culture. Niebuhr's work is a foundational authority that demonstrates the place that culture plays in relationship to the Christian faith. A discussion regarding this interaction will be dealt with later in this chapter. For now, attention will be turned to the roots of youth ministry and thereby allowing conclusions to be drawn on developing a theology.

## **Historical Reflections of Youth Ministry**

In the 1940's and 1950's parachurch groups like Young Life and Youth For Christ emerged to meet the needs of young people in a highly evangelistic effort. Following that era was an awareness in the church that something needed to be done with the young people already existing within the church. Specialized youth workers comprised of volunteers and some paid staff began to develop programs to encourage and equip youth in the church to be involved in the life of their congregations.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Dean Borgman, *A History of American Youth Ministry*, ed. Warren Benson and Mark H. Senter (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 70.

For the first time, youth ministry became a subset of the overall church community. Some critics say that the segregation of youth from involvement with the rest of the church began here. Youth pastors and parachurch programs developed specialized programs to “reach out” to the youth that were “tuning out” of the regular church programs.

The various needs of youth today are indeed distinct from the needs of the rest of the congregation. These unique needs must be understood and accommodated in order to ensure the future survival of the church, if not, a present day preservation. Youth need caring mentors, adults of exemplary character that will try to listen and act as role models with love and compassion in a world that seems to care little or take time for the marginalised. Young people also need to have proper instruction in the basics of the Christian faith and enable them to create an apologetic foundation to defend themselves in the relativistic world that they encounter on a daily basis in their schools and work environments, including the Internet.

Generally speaking, absolutes are taken for granted by adults, however, for youth, moral absolutes seem groundless as they encounter challenges at school and work that run counter to the teachings of the church. Therefore, youth need to see other Christian peers and adults demonstrating a counter cultural attitude to the current postmodern atmosphere that denigrates the teachings of the gospel. These are merely a few of the special needs that youth have.

## **A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY**

When one speaks of the church, there seems to be a natural inclination to call it a community. The question needs to be raised is it truly a community, or what kind of community might it be? Perhaps the church is the representation of the body of Christ on earth, the heavenly manifestation of authentic community. As one speaks of ecclesiology one needs to establish the roots of community in the basics of Christian doctrine as it relates to the Trinity. These concepts will be examined in this chapter.

### **A History of Community**

Historically, the understanding of community in the church has varied. During the time of Constantine the official recognition of the church as a community of believers was uncertain from a doctrinal standpoint. There was a struggle to decide if it was solely a collection of sanctified believers, or a mixed community of the saved along with the lost. Eventually out of this uncertainty arose a hypothesis that the clergy were the real Church. In those early years the understanding of the definition of church remained in flux. The doctrine of the Godhead as the triune representation of community was not fully realized or accepted until years later.<sup>37</sup> The development of the doctrine of the Trinity did not arrive without considerable dialogue and scholarship. The efforts of three early theologians assisted in arriving at the accepted doctrine of the Trinity; Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus (“the Cappadocian fathers”). They declared

---

<sup>37</sup>Daniel W. Hardy “*Created and Redeemed Socially*” in *On Being the Church: Essays On The Christian Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1989), 52.



that God is one “essence” but three centres of consciousness or independent realities (*hypostaseis*).<sup>38</sup> While scholarship since that time has arrived at a satisfactory understanding of the Trinity, one may surmise from reading many authors from varied theological backgrounds that the mystery of the Godhead will forever be unfolding before us.

### **The Triune God**

While there is no single verse that exclusively supports or mentions the Trinity, the scriptures are laden with the interlocking references to the existence and unity of the Godhead. Several scriptures help to build the understanding of the Trinity. A reading of Genesis 1:1 - 3, John 1:1-3, the Acts of the Apostles, to name a few, help to shed a light upon the tri-personal personality of the Godhead. Upon the study of Scripture one can come to understand at least from the position of faith, that the One True God, the Lord Jesus and the indwelling Holy Spirit are separate and distinct, yet equal and an integrated whole – a community as it were. God is presented in these passages as the eternal community of oneness from whom all other communities take their life and meaning.<sup>39</sup>

A Catholic theologian, Mary Ann Fatula expands this point even further:

---

<sup>38</sup>Grentz, Stanley J. *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor books, 1996), 44.

<sup>39</sup>Bilezikian, Gilbert, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as the Community of Oneness*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 17.

...we need only read the accounts of the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles to see the reality of a God truly *experienced* by the early Christian communities – even if not yet able to be clearly articulated as such – as inseparably one and the same God and yet supremely distinct in a threefold way. In the experience of these early communities, Jesus is not his Abba, nor is this Abba the Spirit poured out among them with saving power through the death and resurrection of their Lord and Saviour.<sup>40</sup>

Since the Godhead is the demonstrable template for Christian community, then some assumptions about how we should act as believers in community can be made. The qualities and characteristics of the Godhead serve as the model for how all Christians must act toward each other in the confines of authentic Christian community.

It is these qualities or characteristics that will be used as benchmarks within this dissertation to measure what youth consider vital in their understanding of authentic Christian community in their church, their youth groups and their on-line experiences of community.

### **The Love of the Triune Community**

One established, foundational characteristic one may conclude with certainty, is that God is love (*agape*<sup>41</sup>)<sup>42</sup>. This kind of love is a self giving love that can be

---

<sup>40</sup> Mary Ann Fatula, *The Triune God of Christian Faith* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 23.

<sup>41</sup> ἀγάπη - The derivation of this love signifies for the most part the inclination or solicitous love of the gods for men, or friends for friends. It means the love which embraces everything that bears a human countenance. It is not an impulse or an intoxication which overcomes man, but an order or task which he may evade. The warmth of God the Father is evident in the usage of this term for his people. The acts of love that emerge from Christian charity for one another is also expressed in this derivation. (Gerhard Kittel (ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol 1 A-

demonstrated through the giving of oneself for the sake of others. God the Father demonstrated this by allowing his only son, Jesus to demonstrate this through his sacrifice on Calvary's cross. Assuming the Godhead is the epitome of love, then we can assume that our communities must also strive to be likewise.

It is interesting to note that the characteristics of community are hinged one upon the other. Rarely would they or should they act in isolation from each other. Love for example, as Stanley Grenz points out begets yet another characteristic of community; unity. Grenz states, "Active, self giving love builds the unity with the one God. The unity of God is nothing less than each of the Trinitarian persons giving himself to others. This unity is the dedication of each to the others."<sup>43</sup> Unity is an example of a characteristic from the community of the Trinity that was created from love. It is quite possible that love is the greatest of all the characteristics as so many of the others seem to be borne out of love.<sup>44</sup> If this is the case, then love can have a powerful dynamic in drawing us into community with one another and with God.

Fatula contributes to the discussion of the vital nature of love as exemplified by the trinity in community:

---

G (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 36 - 43.

<sup>42</sup>1 John 4:8, 16 (NIV)

<sup>43</sup>Grenz, 47.

<sup>44</sup>1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

Because we have come from the God of interpersonal love, it is literally not possible for us to gain our human fulfilment as selfish individualists. Eventually we learn that we *need* the context of a loving family or community of some kind if we are to find the peace and the joy the triune God has intended for us. Our own sometimes painful experience teaches us that we attain our full potential only when we also include in this goal that of consciously committing our energy and quality time to our families and communities. Here is the “place” where the triune God desires us to find the interpersonal communion and joy for which we are made, the intimate love which is meant to heal the world.<sup>45</sup>

Agape love is unselfish, loyal, and benevolent concern for the well-being of another. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul described “love” as a “more excellent way” than tongues or even preaching. The New Testament maintains this estimation of love throughout. The King James Version uses the word *charity* instead of “love” to translate the Greek word Paul used (*agape*). The word *charity* comes from the Latin *caritas* which means “dearness,” “affection,” or “high regard.”

Today, the word *charity* is normally used to describe acts of benevolence, and so the word *love* is to be preferred as a translation of *agape*. This concept of agape would most certainly fit with the notion of mutuality<sup>46</sup> within community. One might call it the glue, or perhaps more fitting, the mortar that holds community together. Fatula elaborates on her understanding of mutuality and love in a community:

---

<sup>45</sup> Fatula, 109.

<sup>46</sup> Mutuality is defined by Mary Ann Fatula as an assertion that mutuality is a quality that demonstrates love and reciprocity within caring relationships in a community setting. This would be the antithesis of domination and manipulation. Since love and mutuality are linked so tightly, it is interesting to note that the survey of Canadian youth in this study ranked love fairly high in their experience of community on the Internet. A further discussion of this phenomenon will be discussed more fully in Chapters Six and Seven. (Fatula, 19.)

Our belief in a triune God thus is no easy, esoteric, merely “spiritual” exercise but a radical way of life. To take seriously the implications of our Trinitarian faith means in this way a process of deliverance from patterns of self-centeredness, isolation, and exploitation, and a conversion to habits of relating in mutuality and interpersonal love.<sup>47</sup>

Grenz also contends that:

“... the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons-in-community, God intends that we reflect the divine nature in our lives. This is only possible as we move out of our isolation and into godly relationships with others. Consequently, true [*authentic*] Christian living is life-in-relationships or life-in-community”.<sup>48</sup>

Keeping these thoughts in mind, the original question of this study needs to be brought back into the discussion. That question being, if youth are able to enter into authentic community on the Internet can they experience authentic characteristics such as love on-line? It is hoped that this significant question will be addressed in the conclusions at the end of this dissertation in Chapter Seven.

One must come to the realisation no matter what *form* Christian community assumes, relationships must be established or grounded in the divine principle of mutuality. Therefore, hit-and-miss encounters which so often take place in virtual communication through the Internet would not qualify as authentic community by this definition or at the very least be found sorely lacking. We are talking here about entering into intentional community with others for edification and mutuality.

Gilbert Bilezikian in his book entitled, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local*

---

<sup>47</sup>Fatula, 102.

<sup>48</sup>Grenz, 51.

*Church as a Community of Oneness*, expressed this poignant conviction about the relationship of Christian community to oneness with God:

Its one of the laws of Spiritual life, as inexorable as a mathematical axiom, that the survival and welfare of authentic [Christian] community are dependant on the members of community being in communion with God, since he is the creator of community. In order to be attuned to each other in oneness and the designer of human oneness. Therefore, the quality and the viability of human communities vary in response to the members' willingness to accept their own dependency on God. <sup>49</sup>

### **Broken Community – The Fall**

When God created people to join His community, it was with the express purpose for them to enjoy communion with Him – a divine relationship.<sup>50</sup> God greatly desired intimacy with his creation. He made them in his own image so that they might relate one to another – the created to the creator. God felt Adam was incomplete until he created woman, demonstrating that God knew that it was important to provide a relationship for Adam's well being.<sup>51</sup> The creation of relationship between man and woman was the second manifestation of community. Not only was there community among the Godhead, there was a community of the creation with themselves and the Godhead.

Today, we may belong to many different communities, some are insular in nature

---

<sup>49</sup>Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan publishing House, 1997), 27.

<sup>50</sup>Genesis 1:26-28 (NIV)

<sup>51</sup>Genesis 1:18-23 (NIV)

(i.e. commune, convent or monastery), while others are wholly dependent upon relationships one with another (i.e. a church choir to the rest of the congregation).

McFadyen summarizes the tension that we struggle to exist with in communion with one another as broken people:

Human being is defined by the form of its response to God's offer of dialogue-partnership – that we be oriented on ourselves and free through our orientation on and binding to God. The Christian understanding that humanity is in a fallen state refers to the rejection of this offer. Instead of entering into a free and thankful relation with God we have become closed in upon and oriented on ourselves. We are still related to God and in God's image, but we are so in a distorted way. Consequently, we are also related to ourselves and to one another in a distorted way.<sup>52</sup>

This distortion is manifested in the two way relationship that McFadyen described earlier both in the vertical (with God) and the horizontal relationships (with one another) that we attempt to maintain.

We must operate within those parameters. Adam and Eve made a conscious decision to break the accepted parameters of community, and therefore, isolated themselves from the Godhead. Their disobedience destroyed the oneness God had intended for his created order and since that time the experience of pure and authentic community has been fractured. Yet, God in his mercy provided his Son, Jesus, as the sacrifice to restore the gift of communion with God once again through death and resurrection. Gilbert Bilezikian comments:

---

<sup>52</sup>McFadyen, 44.

Only after the sin of rebellion committed by the man and the woman had entered their world were their eyes opened to their former status of mutual servanthood. . . . Thankfully, according to the New Testament, the servant relationship that was lost in the garden is recovered in the new community. It becomes the hallmark in the way that Christians relate to each other. In both church and family, the two communities of oneness generated by redemptive ministry of Christ, the mode of interaction between its members is reciprocal servanthood and, therefore, mutual submission (Matt. 20:25-28; Gal 5:13; Phil. 2:3-8). Accordingly men and women in Christian community do not complement each other within an order of authority, but they minister together and to each other in a order of mutual submission and of servant reciprocity (Eph. 5:21). Thus was recovered the gift of community that had been offered by the Creator to humans at the dawn of history.<sup>53</sup>

We are left with the understanding that there is no such thing as perfect community on earth. It existed once before the Fall. However, there is redemption and grace within all Christian communities especially those who invite the Holy Spirit to be the mediator and guide for the interaction among their relationships. Churches fragmented by internal strife, youth groups despairing for unity, families struggling for closeness, must accept the healing offered by God.

No community should remain in distress or confusion for an extended period of time if they truly are seeking the guidance of God. All communities who call themselves Christian, in whatever capacity, must include the dimension of reliance upon the full Godhead to understand its purpose and enjoy healthy communion.

Communion is the term the Apostle Paul used to describe the nature of the Lord's Supper and thus the term used by many church groups to refer to their celebration of Jesus' final, memorial supper with His disciples. Paul used the Greek term *koinonia* to

---

<sup>53</sup>Bilezikian, 25.



express the essence of the Christian faith, a sharing in the life and death of Christ which radically creates a relationship of Christ and the believer and of the believers with one another in a partnership or unity.

The reality, however, is that we live in a fallen world and the communities that we partake in are fallen. Characteristics such as forgiveness, honesty, non-judgmentalism, peace, integrity, and unity might not have been needed in the list if we were not on this side of the Fall. There would not have been a reason to need them. We might have instead concentrated more attention to worship, love, praying, those characteristics that would exist in a sinless environment. The covenant that we have with God through Christ is what lifts us out of our despair and gives us hope for restoration from the sin we inherited through Adam and Eve. We have the example of Jesus to guide us in this process of living in healthy and purposeful community.

### **Mission and Purpose of a Community**

Jesus himself was a master at drawing people to himself, developing and maintaining community. His disciples were an example of how he could work with diversity and the ragged edges of a group of misfit fishermen. He was still able to foster within them a love and concern not only for one another but for those around them, crossing socio-cultural barriers. Jesus illustrated the practical dimensions of community by reaching beyond the immediate community to those around them who were in need. Hence, mission is a valued by-product of the focus or purpose of community. The inward instilling of values and an external manifestation of love all blend in harmony to create a

unified purpose for existence as a community. The Apostles carried on this principle with the establishment of the early church community as seen in the book of Acts. These guiding principles have served us well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, maintaining our distinctiveness as a mission minded community.

Howard Snyder defends the missionary purpose of the church as a body or community of Christ in the world:

The church is the agent of the Kingdom of God first of all through what it is. It best serves kingdom interests as the messianic community of God's people rather than as an ecclesiastical institution. The book of Acts gives a balanced picture of the early Christian experience: evangelism and the Church, proclamation and community, witness and fellowship. The two primary concerns of the early church were the proclamation of the gospel and the edification of the Christian community. Evangelism sprang from the community, and the community grew through its witness. Evangelism was not merely something that individual Christians did; rather it was the natural result of the presence and influence of the Christian community in the world. The community gave credibility to the verbal proclamation.<sup>54</sup>

Christian community therefore, provides a spiritual presence and an influence in a lost and dying world. It is much more than a benevolence society or social agency. Instead it is the living incarnation of the communal relationship of the Godhead among His creation.

Most theologians agree that without depth of human contact, intimacy and vulnerability, there is not much hope for the viability of authentic community. Consider this statement by James and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead:

---

<sup>54</sup> Howard A. Snyder. *The Community of the King*. (Downers Grove Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1978), 73.

For many of us, community is a especially attractive in its promise of honest communication and mutual support. We sense that relationships in community hold the possibility of “more”; here at least we will be able to move beyond the barriers that so often separate us from one another. Often it is a desire for the “more” that draws us to a community group. Here we hope to be able to experience a richer kind of relationship than we know in much of the rest of our lives.<sup>55</sup>

It is quite possible this “more” factor the Whiteheads have alluded to is what brings youth to the Internet in the first place. Perhaps there is a hope deep down inside each of us which draws us to consider what might be. Youth by developmental definition are in a vulnerable stage of life, in terms of fitting in and finding their space.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the Internet provides a promise of a utopian experience which will fill the “more” void. I will now look at reflecting theologically about youth culture.

### **A THEOLOGY OF YOUTH CULTURE**

One of the key questions facing Christians today is how does one Gospel of Jesus Christ relate to the manifold cultures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This question is pivotal when examining the diverse ethos and methodology of Christian ministry as it relates to both local and global expressions. It is no less significant as we look at the Gospel as it relates and interacts with the multi-faceted and often counter-cultural expressions of youth culture today.

---

<sup>55</sup>Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead. *Community of Faith: Models and Strategies for Developing Christian Communities*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1982.), 113.

<sup>56</sup>Susan Harter, “Self and Identity Development” in *At The Threshold: The Developing Adolescent* eds. Shirley Feldman and Glen Elliott (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 353.

One of the most significant books which addresses culture and faith is the classic by Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. It is because of its seminal importance in the ongoing dialogue regarding Christian community, this volume was chosen to compare and contrast the characteristics of youth culture with his five positions as outlined in the book.

Niebuhr illuminates five positions of how Christians may interact with culture. The contemporary Canadian youth ministry scene can be overlaid onto his five positions as a template that can help us examine youth culture and subsequently ministry to youth. Examination of these five facets will help to indicate both strengths and weaknesses as they relate to traditional youth ministry both inside and outside the church (i.e. parachurch).

Niebuhr's treatise on culture and Christ does not present "right" or "wrong" positions, he merely sets out to give a thorough explanation of the various positions that Christians have held with respect to encountering culture. When addressing the lives of contemporary young people there are perhaps more appropriate and more effective motifs found in Niebuhr's five categories than others. However, there are points within each which can shed light on the question, "How does each position engage the culture of youth in our ministry context?" While entertaining this examination we must continue to narrow the lens to focus on the singular facet of this study which is: to discover the uses of the internet by youth to engage in Christian community.

## Canadian Culture - A Backdrop

Canadian society has come a long way from being a nation founded predominantly upon Godly and Scriptural principles, to one which seems to take great effort to run antithetically from these founding principles. Moral guidelines and values in Canadian society, once backed by the church, are fast becoming a object of the past - something almost distasteful. Quoting a local newspaper editor regarding the thorny issue of Sunday shopping, typifies what we as Canadians may feel about the “marriage” of culture and Christian based precepts:

This is a democracy and people - merchants and citizens – ought to be free to make their own choices. The days when it was acceptable for governments and others to impose a strict daily morality on everybody vanished decades ago. And good riddance. Canada today is a diverse, pluralistic society in which this sort of law is not justified. It is after all, precisely the sort of thing for which many in our society sneer at fundamentalist Muslim nations. The difference between forcing all women to wear a veil and forcing shop owners to close their doors is one of degree, not substance.<sup>57</sup>

Canadian culture has a heritage driven by and wrapped up in cultural diversity, tolerance and acceptance. Recently though it seems the tolerance level and acceptance is biased toward anything other than that which represents absolute morality or Judeo-Christian based ethics.

A local high school in New Brunswick, recently had a debate as to whether to continue starting assemblies with the Lord’s Prayer. It seemed that it was deemed unfair to impose this act of religious piety upon a school population made up of so few Christians. Their point is well made. The rhetorical question looms before the church,

---

<sup>57</sup>Al Hogan, “Time to Allow Sunday Opening,” *Times & Transcript*, January 4, 2000, sec. D, p. 7.

can we expect to impose these traditions when we are so few in numbers by comparison to the rest of society?

Canadian Christians are no longer the “moral majority” in this ensuing post-Christian era. Rather it would seem that they are being seen as archaic relics of a bygone era representing religious institutional restrictions and old fashioned piety. Noted Canadian sociologist and cultural researcher, Reginald Bibby states:

According to such thinking, there is no “right” family form, or sexual expression, or religion, just as there is no “right” kind of food, or clothing, or music. What is right and wrong, good and bad, exists solely in the minds of individuals. Folkways, mores and laws are all socially created. No culture or lifestyle is superior to another. Terms such as “right” and “wrong” and “good” and “bad” aren’t found in the mosaic lexicon.<sup>58</sup>

Canadian sociologist and adjunct professor of Sociology at University of Lethbridge, James Penner concurs by citing these sobering statistics about Canadian youth:

The percentage of Canadian teens who consider themselves committed to Christianity dropped from 40% to 21% (from 1984 to 1992) with the majority entering the “interested in religion” category which ballooned from 28% to 44%. There was very minimal change in the % claiming to be either “not religious” or committed to a religion other than Christianity.<sup>59</sup>

This is merely a thumbnail sketch to allow the reader to understand some of the implications for carrying out youth ministry in Canada. We will now reflect on this

---

<sup>58</sup>Reginald Bibby and Don Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion*, (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1992 ), 176.

<sup>59</sup>James Allan Penner and Reginald W. Bibby, *Adolescent Religious Disposition in Canada: An Exploratory Analysis* (unpublished paper presented on behalf of the Dept. of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge at the annual meetings of the Religious Research Association and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion November 1994) p 11.

cultural backdrop in light of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*.

### **Christ Against Culture**

This view emphasizes human culture (the world) is essentially wicked and therefore, Christians should have nothing to do with the world. This separatist view was largely borne out of the early church, however, it did not to cease to exist at that point in time. Today there are denominations and churches which still ascribe to a faith-over-against-culture attitude. To be able to enter into the activities of the world is to compromise the teachings which Scriptures espouse: "Do not love the world or the things in the world, any one that loves the world, love for the Father is not in Him." <sup>60</sup>

The "world" in this context refers to society outside the church. The radical gnostic-like form of this position is that we are to love our brother and sister - that is, our fellow believer at the exclusion of all non-believing persons. This exclusive position was championed by early theologians like Tertullian, exemplified by Spiritual Franciscanism, practiced by later movements such as the Quakers, or exemplified by this form of understanding by Tolstoy's spiritualism.<sup>61</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptists were an example of those that chose to believe the government was sinful. A contemporary example is this would be the Jesus People USA, who advocate being separate from societal pressures and materialistic conformity. They

---

<sup>60</sup>1 John 2:15. (NIV)

<sup>61</sup>Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers Incorporated, 1956), 81.

attempt to provide positive alternatives that are counter cultural and interdependent within Christian community.

Each example had its own expression of Christian faith over against culture. The impression could be given this is viewed as a negative position, and yet, as we have seen with the example of the Jesus People USA, they are merely trying to respond to the culture they encounter. It seems there is rarely a total rejection of all which is seen as worldly by any group, with the exception of those that might be seen as extremists like that of the desert hermits of the late Roman era or sects that exist today in obscurity like the Heaven's Gate cult did. The separation of church and state exists throughout various contemporary situations today in one form or another.

The Western church and the older generations that make up the majority of our congregations today still hold to some degree to the position which chooses to turn a blind eye to popular culture or societal shifts. Some of this attitude is justified and in other cases perhaps they could be accused of being intolerant.

The prayer of Jesus in 1 John 17: 1-26 speaks to the idea that there is a holy tension between being of the world and not being a part of it. Jesus prayed to the Father before his betrayal:

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into



the world, I have sent them into the world.<sup>62</sup>

While Jesus knew his followers were of the world, they had inherited a new birthright which placed them in a new category that forever would change the way they viewed their earthly home. Unfortunately, the world as a whole could not understand this message and this is why this was a tension for Jesus and his followers.

As the church avoids addressing cultural transitions or distinctives, the “world” outside the church seems content to allow them to stay in their position of isolation. Secular society in Canada seems to be desiring to rid itself from any of the controls or perceived ties the church has on the way society is managed, especially when it is related to issues of morality.<sup>63</sup> It is as if there is a polar attitude developing, allowing the wedge to be driven deeper between the two worlds, and few people seem to care or be aware. Structures such as denominationalism and the institutional church are seen merely as a vestiges of a modern era which had its zenith in the 1950's.

It is important to note that youth of the postmodern era see denominationalism as much less important than generations before them.<sup>64</sup> Youth today, including Christian youth are accepting a more “global” view of community and culture. “Whatever you do is fine as long as it does not hurt anyone else” is the operational theme of the new millennium. Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines culture as “a particular stage of advancement in civilization”.

---

<sup>62</sup>1 John 17: 13-18 (NIV)

<sup>63</sup>Adams, 25.

<sup>64</sup>Bibby and Posterski, 262.

In the vernacular of youth today, everything is “retro”. This is over against the modernists that would be looking toward the future. Young people today are turning to the past to find meaning and amusement. Science and advancement of the age is not the total solution even though the concept has not been abandoned for a simpler life style. Christian youth in particular are subject to incredible pressures to morph into a more relativistic existence and to abandon moral absolutes.<sup>65</sup>

Canadian market researcher, Michael Adams, betraying his own post-Christian bias, informs us of what he has found in his research:

Increasingly, Canadians are giving up on traditional religious dogma in favor of a less guilt-ridden spirituality. Growing numbers of hedonistic and experience seeking Canadians reject the existence of the Devil or Hell. This leads me to conclude that, if exorcizing guilt was the main motivation, maybe *Time* got it wrong - perhaps the Devil is dead, and we have become God. Sex in the snow, complete with snow angels. In many ways, it is this “death of the Devil” that heralded the erosion of Canadians’ Judeo-Christian view of the universe. Fear and guilt were often the greatest factors sustaining church-attendance numbers, and motivating Canadians to behave according to the dictates of religious strictures. These emotions are still major motivators among many older Canadians, and even among some baby boomers. But among younger Canadians, they are dying, along with the Judeo-Christian dogma that supported them.<sup>66</sup>

While Adam’s postulation is coming from a certain sociological (and perhaps personal) bias, he along with Bibby have illustrated in their extensive research that the youth of our country are becoming (if not already there) more secularized and numbed to the validity of the Christian faith. So the separation of culture and Christ (who is associated with his worldly manifestation - the church) is reaching a critical phase.

---

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Adams, 25.

As we consider the results of this research and think about Niebuhr's explanations, it leads us to ask how we as Canadian youth workers and pastors can encourage a more thorough examination of the causal factors in our churches leading to wariness of our culture? Bibby's research indicated the shift had gone from youth claiming to be Christian, yet there was a noticeable hunger still apparent for things spiritual. It is in this spiritual vacuum that we need to present authentic relationship as an option and not just the trappings of religiosity. Youth will not stand for it.

The doctrinal issues which come to the fore in this regard are the doctrines of the church and the doctrine of Christ. Is the church the incarnate body of Christ in this or any age, or is it merely an anthropomorphism or metaphor from a bygone era? Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Corinth in A.D. 55/56, "You are the body of Christ." should be echoed in the year A.D. 2001. In the case of the early church, such a affirmation was said to help them to identify who they were, today there needs to be a re-affirmation of this fact, to help us to remember and act upon it.

The struggle to deal with the issues of culture will always be with us. There must be a way to work with it, to reconcile the shifts and move on, rather than ignoring it. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the world of youth ministry. Youth workers and youth need to recognize the differences and act appropriately. First they need to be able to evaluate the culture, they need to interpret it and then to act upon it.

## **The Christ of Culture**

This view stresses that human culture is essentially good, that Christians should affirm and adopt the culture around them. The somewhat overused label of “Liberalism” is often associated with this particular view point. All too frequently, the distinctives of Christianity disappear into the dominant culture.

The postmodern or post-Christian era, as we are experiencing it, makes this particular standpoint rather difficult to reconcile for the younger evangelical Christian today. The universalistic thought, that culture contains the redeeming qualities of mankind, may be hard for Christian youth and adults alike to accept in this current age of post-modern angst. Culture, as represented by science, technology and progress, is not seen as the singular salvation of mankind anymore.

The church is left to operate somewhere between the world of the modernists and the postmodern climate. Many different cultural understandings are combined into a single congregation that is filled with many different generations. While the church struggles to meet the needs of the various groups within its walls, there is little time to consider how to engage with the world outside its doors.

The church, as a part of society, seemingly has little influence in Canadian society in value and moral formation.<sup>67</sup> The values and mores that the church once instructed through the form of catechetical lessons or Sunday school, have atrophied and lost their impact overall. Rather, many people steeped in confusion and disillusionment, look to

---

<sup>67</sup>Reginald Bibby, *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*, (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1995 ), 124.

self, introspection and deconstructionism as the means of coping with this doubt.

Pressure falls upon government agencies and schools to impart the seeds of moral formation from a relativistic position.

For many years, the young in particular, have learned to question the established order (church, family, school etc). While this has a great deal to do with their particular developmental stage of life, there is a definite decrease in respect for authority and boundaries overall. They have instead embraced the doctrine of relativism.<sup>68</sup>

In essence, there are few distinctives of the Christian faith for Western youth to embrace in this model to help them distinguish between being followers of Christ and just being good citizens of the planet. As the inclusive culture of the day provides little satisfaction for absolutes (moral benchmarks) it might be seen that the Christ *of* Culture viewpoint has little impact in helping youth find boundaries from which to operate from.

Since the 1950's with the inception of the Rock and Roll era, youth in particular have often been seen as a driving force that dictates culture. Millions of dollars are spent in advertizing and marketing to this generation. According to recent demographic studies there is a prediction that the current generation of youth will eclipse the boomers in size. <sup>69</sup> Because of their size, the generation that is upon us demands to be heard. Since youth often drive culture, if we can invest in the lives of this generation then there is a chance to shape the direction and formation of future cultural attitudes.

---

<sup>68</sup> Reginald Bibby and Don Posterski, 262.

<sup>69</sup> Kristi Turnquist, "Teen power steers popular culture: In a world of big spenders kids lead the way." *Newshouse News Service* MSBC report, (1999): 2.

Quentin J. Schultze and Roy M. Anker comment on this power that youth of today have to impact popular culture:

Together, interpersonal and mass communication establish the tone and shape of the youth culture in North America. As youth have interacted with each other, with the broader culture, and with the entertainment industry they have formed their own attitudes towards schooling, dating, parenting, and the like. From the 1950's to the present, the electronic media have shaped the youth culture by changing adolescents' patterns of communication and redefining their community life. North American youth increasingly live in their own generationally defined, media-maintained communities.<sup>70</sup>

Media and technologically driven culture will leave the church behind if the church does not begin to see how it can at least appear to be relevant or acknowledge the presence of advancements. Yet in a pendulum swing the opposite way, the church could buy into technology and lose its distinctiveness as the body of Christ and become merely another attraction to be experienced. A small example of this can be seen in a church in New Brunswick, that has an automated teller machine in the foyer of the building. The members are encouraged to debit their tithes using the machine as a matter of convenience.

A delicate balance must be reached as we reflect how we can embrace advancements in culture but not be drawn into the void of entertainment value. In an attempt to relate the culture of today, especially the young, some churches are meeting in theaters on a Sunday, offering alternative styles of worship and interactive dialogue around the message of the day. The positive aspect of being a part of the dominant culture

---

<sup>70</sup>Quentin J. Schultze and Roy M. Anker, ed., *Dancing in The Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) 50.

is it releases a creative spirit to see how it can engage the culture of the day. The church should be cautious as it could find itself trying to compete with other forms of entertainment which have vast financial resources at their disposal. The race to meet the ever spiraling need to be better and to be current would be impractical. As was mentioned earlier we run the risk of being involved in entertainment rather than ministry.

There is a new morality forming in our society, which is arising out of this menu-oriented society. The need for self expression and finding value in this uncertainty is creating a society of youth who are unsure where they place in this world.

Youth are seeing morals and values as something that is self derived, not by the dictates of traditional culture. As recent as April of 1999, the shooting deaths of twelve students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado by two teenage outcasts, and the shooting death of a high school student in Tabor, Alberta caught North Americans asking themselves “what morals are we instilling in our youth?” The two youths involved in the Colorado shootings, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had declared their manifesto on a home made web site for the world to see. These two young men are an extreme expression of the pervasive loneliness, frustration and hopelessness that is evident in some youth today. So one might have to question if our self regulated, morally inclusive culture has achieved all the answers.

The unhappy answer to the aforementioned question, is many youth in Canada (7 out of 10) believe *they* determine what is right and what is wrong. There are no absolutes or virtues which need to be obeyed.<sup>71</sup> Claims of truth are no longer valid and absolutes

---

<sup>71</sup>Reginald Bibby and Don Posterski, 262

have gone by the wayside. The advent of the Internet and its popularity among youth seems to enforce this moral vicissitude. The Internet is largely experienced as a self regulated, morally defunct, experiential activity for youth to assume multiple identities and involve themselves in whatever activities they please. This is assuming that parental influence is lacking.

The reality is we are facing an uphill battle to bring students back to the absolute truth claims which Jesus Christ made. The danger of being too inclusive in the Christ of culture position is we can sacrifice absolute truth to a degree. The grey areas become the place favored to work out of rather than defining established doctrinal boundaries. An example of this was made clear in one of the focus group conversations with a young girl stated that she only changed her name and identity to protect herself, “just in case”. She did not apparently mind lying about her identity because it served the purpose of protecting herself while she engaged in conversations with someone that she either did not trust or did not know.

Implications for pastoral ministry and parachurch ministry to youth need to address these aspects of our culture with the church. One implication is youth workers and pastors need to be grounded in their understanding of doctrines related to sin, salvation and Christ. Apologetics will take on a whole new modus in the coming era. We may be fighting a rising tide of a new Gnosticism. Erik Davis, author of *Techgnosis*, heralds the ushering in of an age of technology and information that he believes is ushering in an age of the new Gnosticism:



In contrast to orthodox Christianity, with its guilt-ridden doctrine of original sin, the Gnostics held that the sorry state of the world is not our fault. The error lies in the structure of the universe, not within our essential selves. We don't need to expiate any crimes, but simply to discover or recall the way back home – a way out that is also, mystically speaking the way inside. Unlike the Church, which encased the spiritual autonomy of the individual believer within an elaborate corporate hierarchy founded on the ruins of the Roman state and the magical transmission of apostolic authority, the Gnostics recognized instead the supreme authority of esoteric gnosis: a mystical breakthrough of total liberation, an influx of knowing oneself to be a part of the genuine godhead, of knowing oneself to be free.<sup>72</sup>

Theologian Kathryn Tanner asserts that students of theology must consider the problem of being seen as irrelevant in an age of new paradigms. Her comments below about preparedness would be an apt warning to youth workers in how to speak to and engage with a pluralistic, post-modern society:

The advent of postmodernism might, however, render moot the need to reflect critically on the use of modern assumptions in christology. With the advent of the postmodern, modern idioms lose their plausibility and currency outside a theological context; theologians are therefore less likely to try to transpose christological topics into modern idioms in the first place. Should that be the emerging situation, then the diagnoses to be found (in this chapter) and the general recommendations of critical reflection that propel it become a warning to a new generation of students of doctrine who will be responsible for developing the postmodern christologies to come.<sup>73</sup>

In closing, when one considers the position of Christ of culture, several factors both positive and negative come to the forefront. In a positive manner, the engagement of culture in a more inclusive fashion causes the church to be open to new ideas and more creative approaches to the expression of faith in our culture. To a degree there is likely to

---

<sup>72</sup>Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic + Mysticism in the age of Information* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 94.

<sup>73</sup>Kathryn Tanner, "Jesus Christ," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 269.

be more respect for broader society to see the positive influence of Christians in the world. In the negative position, there is a chance this position becomes so inclusive and driven by the need to be current, it either becomes impossible to keep up with change or impractical to implement. It also might mean we sacrifice some of the distinctives of the Christian faith to be seen as relevant and not out-dated. This, as in all the positions which Niebuhr presents needs to be engaged with culture, with an eye towards balance and caution.

### **Christ Above Culture**

This view affirms human culture is rooted in the goodness of God's creation, but that it is also distorted by the Fall, and therefore under evil dominion. However, because Christ has redeemed the whole world, it is possible to redeem fallen culture. Christians who accept this attitude towards culture believe they have succeeded in transforming the fallen (pagan) culture into a culture dominated by Christian values. Examples of this are Medieval Christendom and the Church of England. These can be seen as examples that were traditionally seen to uphold a strict separation of church and state. There was no mixing of the politics of the government and society and the affairs of the church.

The Christian who holds to the practice of Christ above culture is serious about holding his culture to Christian standards, but has difficulty imagining an alternative, non-Christian approach. As an example, one student wrote a paper on her distaste for work that she was asked to do in her high school English class:

Some of the erroneous ideas presented in the Wife of Bath's Canterbury Tales (Geoffrey Chaucer) were becoming just a little too much for me to bear one day in English class. The Lord used my irritation about the misuse of Scripture to help me share my faith and learn valuable truths. I asked God to help me write a paper to dispute the wife of Bath's inaccurate interpretations of the Bible and I handed it in as an extra project. Not only did I learn new Scripture but I had an impact on my teacher as well. He returned my essay with glowing comments and told me that he could see that I had a strong faith. I learned that standing up for your faith is not always easy but it is very rewarding and a chance to share Jesus is certainly worth it.<sup>74</sup>

Compromise would not be an acceptable term for those who ascribe to this position. It would seem in this example that the young lady, though not accepting of the other person's position [the wife of Bath], chose to engage the material in question in a healthy manner and stand for her beliefs. She was fortunate her teacher was open to her debate. In some extreme cases a Christ against culture attitude can be perceived as religious intolerance or bigotry.

The Christ against culture stance typifies a perception that the culture of the world must come into line with the Gospel in an uncompromising fashion, yet there must be a recognition that we do not live in that kind of world and therefore we must be agents of change.

Niebuhr asserts:

The great majority movement in Christianity, which we may call the church of the center, has refused to take either the position of the anticultural radicals or that of the accommodators of Christ to culture. Yet it has not regarded its efforts at solution of the Christ-culture problem as compromising, however sinful it knows all human efforts to be. For it the fundamental issue does not lie between Christ and the world, important as that issue is, but between God and

---

<sup>74</sup>Tom Balke, ed., "Atlantic IVCF Award for the Integration of Faith and Learning" *Vision, The Newsletter of the Atlantic Division of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada*, (Fall 1999): 2.

man.<sup>75</sup>

This statement underscores the position where every youth ministry struggles to exist and minister. The differences are very real between the world of the high school as it is seen through the eyes of a Christian and the eyes of a non-believer.

The responsibility to operate a ministry in the secular environment of the local high school encounters many opportunities for this uncertainty to exist. Mark Senter III in his book *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry and Its Radical Impact on the Church* says this about the challenge to church youth work:

From its inception in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church youth group has been protected by the cocooning effect of the host church. Youth sponsors did not have to maintain an effective ministry to have the youth fellowship function on a weekly basis. Church and denominational loyalties, along with family expectations, was the glue that kept groups functioning. But that day has passed. Denominational loyalties no longer motivate families to select a church to attend. Consideration is given instead to the services a church provides.<sup>76</sup>

The question remains stark as certain youth strive to live out their faith in a secular school environment. As Christian youth live among their peers are they being seen as relevant or irrelevant - do they interact with the world around them or do they isolate themselves as they see modeled by parents or adults in their churches? Christian schools and home schooling efforts, among other personal reasons given by parents, are a means to protect Christian youth from the damage of a secular environment. While in some cases it may be to battle the inadequacies of a decaying educational system

---

<sup>75</sup>Niebuhr, 117.

<sup>76</sup>Mark Senter III, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry and Its Radical Impact on the Church*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, 1992), 183.

A classic example of this was illustrated by an incident in September of 1999 in Texas. The incident in question was a reaction against the United States Supreme Court decision to ban prayer and Bible reading as unconstitutional and therefore banned from the public school in 1962. A high school in Galveston County Texas was challenging the supreme court decision by holding student-led public prayer at football games and other school activities. Yale law professor Steven Carter was quoted as saying, “It’s a battle between different ways of looking at the world. Is faith public or private, should our public spaces be empty of religious faith or full of all sorts of religious arguments and affirmations?”<sup>77</sup>

This case illustrates the point of Christ above culture. The students that were praying were hoping to “bless” a secular event in this case a football game. For the more radical positions which were explored in this paper there would be a few problems with this. First, some could say that a Christian should not be playing football, especially when it means that games are played on Sunday. The second point is there are non-believers in the crowd and on the team undoubtedly, so what right do they have to invoke the Holy name of God? Christian politicians that are rallying with this case are ultra conservatives who want to ensure Christians ethics and morals will be re-instituted back into the school environment. Having the Ten Commandments posted in each school with no other accompanying materials or qualifiers is an example of this kind of desire.

The nature of a Niebuhr’s point on Christ *above* culture is the Christian effectively

---

<sup>77</sup> Peggy Wehmeyer, Faith and Football, ABCNEWS : Legal Battle Over School Football prayers, Oct 11, 1999

is trying to redeem the lost culture which was meant to be in harmony with God. The main movement of the church is also characterized by a certain harmony of conviction about the universality and radical nature of sin.<sup>78</sup> When we try to reconcile with the fact we are sinners also saved by grace, we should have no cause to have a holier than thou position. Students in local schools are showing a responsible pro-active presence in their school by leading the school in the activity of sponsoring a child through aid agencies, helping with food banks, making care baskets for the local crisis pregnancy center. The groups are in effect a social conscience for the school at large.

### **Christ and Culture in Paradox**

This view affirms human culture is rooted in the goodness of God's creation, but it is also distorted by the Fall and, therefore, under evil's domination. Until Christ returns to redeem his creation, believers must live both as members of God's kingdom and in the human culture. Christians in this category believe they can affirm what is best and biblical in the human culture while avoiding its evil elements.

Christians that we would label as "Two Kingdoms" are those who are conscious that they simultaneously live both as citizens of the church and as citizens of the world. Life for them is dominated by the necessity to make appropriate choices. They recognize their loyalty first is to God, but they then must live responsibly among their fellow humans. The reformer Martin Luther articulated this view. He felt that sometimes the

---

<sup>78</sup> Niebuhr, 118.

choices between the values of the heavenly kingdom and the values of the earthly kingdom did not leave a Christian any flexibility.

An example of this struggle may be seen when a Christian student is elected to a student council position in school and then has to struggle with making decisions and policies that are counter to the Christian beliefs that they hold. Knowing God commands that we be holy in all areas of our lives, it would be a challenge for such a student to allow the student government to hold a casino to raise money for a local charity. On the other hand the student could justify the dilemma in their mind that God instructs us to take care of the poor. Paradoxical situations like this arise in the secular environment of the local school on a frequent basis. Christian students are challenged daily to make choices, balancing what they believe and know is right with the pressures of peers, grades, and social standing.

This is also a common problem that they may face with the Internet. With little to guide them, they are forced to make moral decisions about the kinds of activities they engage with on-line. If no one knows them then what is the harm in taking part in things which really are not “real” in this virtual environment? When they come across something that they know is questionable material on the Internet, they have the choice to leave or to justify it in their minds and participate in it.

This position that Niebuhr raises is probably the one which would afford the youth worker with the greatest challenge to be relevant and helpful. Youth are constantly being posed questions of an ambiguous nature and find themselves asking what should they do in those particular situations.

An example could be the concern a youth worker might have about a new believer that comes from a non-Christian home environment and the challenge this poses. The student may desire to go on a mission trip or take part in an activity they know their parents will forbid their participation because it is “religious”. The student may want to know if it is permissible to go on the trip or event without the knowledge of the parents. The youth leader knows that they want to go more than anything else and may also know that they would likely benefit from the event. However, the leader must gently remind that student of their obligation to honor their parents. Is the question to know which is the greater good?

Youth confronted with these kinds of choices do not find it an easy task. Certain denominational teaching has varying influences on students and how they will react to these kinds of decisions. There are some traditions that clearly separate the two worlds. What is church is church and what is of the world is of the world. There is often a great deal of debate and it often provides an interesting perspective on the denominational affiliations that come together in an interdenominational ministry such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

### **Christ The Transformer of Culture**

It is not hard to see this is the position Niebuhr was leaning toward when he wrote his discourse on culture and Christ. This position holds to the view the original goodness of human culture has been thoroughly distorted by the Fall. However, because Christ has come to redeem the whole world (culture as well as individuals), Christians have the task



of changing the fallen culture into a Christian culture. Most Christians who hold to this view believe this task will not be completed until Christ comes again to make all things new. John Calvin was a proponent of this position.

Both this and the previous positions are hard to distinguish apart from each other on a day to day working out of the faith. One is hopeful for the restoration of a redeemed culture and the other of living it out without the end in mind. Both of these positions are found between the polar views of rejecting culture and embracing culture. Augustine and John Calvin are examples of those who wished to see culture transformed. In both cases, they take specific, dominant cultural values which they feel are essentially true, and then modify them so that Christians can use these values without cautious reservations.

What distinguishes conversionists from dualists is their more positive and hopeful attitude toward culture.<sup>79</sup> According to Niebuhr, a few theological assumptions preface this position. One, that the creative activity of God and of Christ-in-God is a dominant theme, in harmony with the atonement. The second is the conversionist view of the nature of man's fall from his created goodness. The conversionist is over against the dualist in its almost Gnostic view that to be in the body is to be away from Christ, nothing good dwells in the flesh because it is subject to temptation. The conversionist view distinguishes quite clearly between the fall from creation and the place of the body in it. Man's defection from God is his choice, not that of God's. The conversionist lives in the divine now and is less inclined to be influenced by the thought of eternity.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup>Niebuhr, 191.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 195.

Christian youth of this emerging generation are more positive the world can be won for Christ. In recent studies there seems to be an optimism for the future demonstrated by this age group.<sup>81</sup>

The students attending first year classes in university in 2000 - 2001 were born in 1981. This current generation of youth has no meaningful recollection of the Reagan Era and probably did not know he had ever been shot. They were prepubescent when the Persian Gulf War was waged. Black Monday in 1987 is as significant to them as the Great Depression. There has been only one Pope. They were eleven when the Soviet Union broke apart and do not remember the Cold War. They have never feared a nuclear war. They are too young to remember the space shuttle *Challenger* exploding. Their lifetime has always included the threat of AIDS. The Vietnam War is as ancient history to them as WWI, WWII, and the Civil War.

This generation has a had little to threaten its security in a global sense and there are better prospects for jobs than for the generation (known as X) who preceded it. Their world view embraces an optimism for the human race and through unity and cooperation it can be transformed. Despite a postmodern idea that science and technology will not be the salvation of the planet, there is a resurgence which has led some to believe more in human potential and the drive for personal success.

---

<sup>81</sup>George Barna, "Teenagers Embrace Religion but Are Not Excited About Christianity", *Barna Research On-line*, 10 January, 2000 [Press Release on-line]; available from <<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=45&Reference=E>> (accessed 2 February, 2001).

## Concluding remarks

One can take any of Niebuhr's models and see how youth ministry of today would be able to be engaged within each. Some may be more comfortable to operate from one while others might find it to be more of a challenge to remain relevant or effective in another. We know we are a part of a fallen world which is especially evident in the world of the high school. However, there are great possibilities which exist to win the world for Christ - one person at a time. Innovation and interaction with youth culture today and looking for the areas which will produce opportunities to build relationships will undoubtedly be the wave of the new millennium in terms of youth ministry.

Susie Shellenberger editor of *Brio*, a focus on the family magazine for young teen girls has this to say about the future of youth ministry:

So many things will be vying for kids' attention in 2010 that youth ministers will have to fight harder than ever to get teens attracted and hooked into church. Computer technology is exploding. It'll be much easier for a teen to interface with others his or her own age through the telecommunications superhighway—a high tech system that will connect teenagers' computers to their TVs and enable them to order any show, music, or video they want. How can youth ministers compete with this? By making Christianity attractive. Leaders will know by 2010 that most kids aren't getting love (real love) from their homes, their boyfriends, their girlfriends. If they can teach the teens in their youth groups to love like Jesus loved, Christianity will be addictive. Real love is attractive—much more than the fanciest technology. Its impossible to turn down. It always wins. Youth ministers will know, though, that loving with this kind of love is a skill to be learned.<sup>82</sup>

It should give us confidence to know that even though the task is so much greater than us we know the One who can transform and renew our culture.

---

<sup>82</sup>Susie Shellenberger. Quoted in article entitled, "Where Are We Headed?" *Youthworker* 11, no. 1 (Summer, 1994): 36.

One can not look at human culture without realizing there are a myriad of facets which dictate what a culture is made of. Whether it is race, age, language or economy, to name very few, culture consists of its subsets which make up the whole. Adolescent culture is no less complex and is comprised of artifacts, rituals and myths that are evidenced by such things as music, clothes, friends, jobs, cars, academics, sports, cliques, extra-curricular activities, hobbies as well as many others.

Today's youth are more "world" savvy or globally minded than youth 20 years ago, especially with easy access to the internet where they can have friends in multiple cultures around the world and on demand access to information around the clock.<sup>83</sup> They are more in tune with current events and are technologically more advanced than students their age only a couple of decades ago. Tom Sine identifies this one drawback, "One of the major waves of the future is that a number of people are turning to the net and cyber-space to find community. Relationships can be complicated in cyber-space because the very technology that draws people together also keeps them apart".<sup>84</sup>

One of the characteristics of youth culture is the "spiritual hunger or vacuum" among Canadian youth. We are facing a challenging generation that longs for significance and impact. Youth are seeking opportunities to make a difference in culture and our responsibility as youth ministers is to provide those opportunities for change. As

---

<sup>83</sup>Dawson McAllister. *Saving The Millennial Generation: New Ways to Reach the Kids You Care About in these Uncertain Times*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1999), 11.

<sup>84</sup>Tom Sine. *Mustard Seed Versus McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 73.

we struggle to understand what youth are seeing as significant in their communities, we strive to provide the safe and caring environment that will enable them to grow and mature in their faith in Christ. The church has a responsibility to be open to all possible means of reaching youth even if it has to take them past their comfort zones.

There are times when we can see aspects of all five observances of the Christ and Culture issue that H. Richard Niebuhr outlines in his book in our own ministries. As in the point of *Christ against culture*, there are times when we want to push the outside world away and protect our safe haven. Our eyes are intentionally blinded to the cultural milieu our youth are a part of, and we expect them to understand why we are so close minded. With respect to *Christ against culture*, we want our youth to come in from out of the cold harsh realities of the world and to be safe from having to make choices which culture presents to them. Then there are times when we are willing to make sacrifices and embrace culture without fully comprehending that we have made some theological compromises as seen in *Christ of Culture*. There are the situations that we want to believe, sometimes as our youth do, that its *Christ above culture* and that is all that matters and the world is going to its destruction - we are the elect! We can also take the position of either the dualist or the conversionist and admit that while we are in culture we can take it or we can leave it. We can save it or we can endure it.

The focus that we need to remember regardless of what position we take, is that we have a responsibility to understand that Jesus entered our world and culture, depraved and sinful though we were (and are) and he chose(s) to redeem us unto the Father, for that we must be amazed and eternally grateful. We are drawn back to the community of love

that God intended in the Garden of Eden.

In summary, a basic theology of community has been discussed to determine if the church and the online community can effectively be compared against each other based on the parameters of Christian community. Love, as demonstrated by the Godhead, is seen as a significant characteristic of Christian community. Love is the basis for the existence of other characteristics--for which factors of mutuality, honesty, encouragement and so forth spring from. A examination of youth culture was conducted using the classic five positions of *Christ and Culture* by Richard H. Niebuhr to help illustrate the complex and multi-varied expressions of responses to culture by Christians. This was completed to help us examine the culture that youth find themselves a part of and how Christians tend to react to culture from the influences of their denomination, training, experiences, biases and family expectations. The exposure to these positions of culture and the interaction with Christ are fully warranted when one is investigating the newest facet of our culture – the Internet. This dialogue has attempted to show there is no one position that is correct or perfect. In the post-modern epoch that is upon us, we as youth workers must be aware of the various attitudes and approaches to examine and engage youth culture.

In the next chapter we will consider the effect the attitudes of a generation may have on the way people relate to technology. Coupled with that discussion will be a dialogue on issues both of the socio-psychological and faith development of youth. The chapter will conclude with a section relating the influence of postmodernism on this current generation.

### **CHAPTER 3**

## **GENERATIONAL INFLUENCE, DEVELOPMENT AND POSTMODERNISM**

Building on the last chapter, consideration will be given to the exploration of how specific generations interact with technology and how the current youth generation views the use of the Internet. It would seem appropriate, when presenting issues relating to generational attitudes, that discussion of faith and psychological development theories of adolescents be considered. In the final part of this chapter, the effects of postmodernism and the influence it has on today's young people will be discussed.

The world welcomed its 6 billionth citizen on October 11, 1999. The world's population has doubled since 1960. Of that total population, one billion youth are between the ages of 15 and 24. There are predictions estimating that the coming 1.8 billion children under the age of 15 will push the next "youth quake" thus eclipsing the boomers in size.<sup>85</sup> With the age of conversion to Christian faith still largely identified with those under the age of 20, it is important that a study and subsequent implementation of new strategies to reach out to these young people be endorsed.

It is imperative if we are to continue to conduct Christian youth ministry

---

<sup>85</sup> "World Population Hits 6 Billion", *The Associated Press, America Online, Inc.* 1999), [on-line article] available from <<http://mynews.netscape.com/mynews/specials/news/population/home.adp>> (accessed 11 October, 1999).

effectively within the Canadian context at the dawn of the 21st century, that we take the necessary steps to investigate the evolving contemporary milieu in which they exist. It is only then that we can begin to evaluate and establish contextualized strategies from which to apply practical and appropriate principles of ministry in our everyday work among them. Anyone who has ministered in youth work for any length of time knows that the work is far from static. Secular youth culture trends change every few years due to many influences--technology, economics, education and socio-political changes to name a few. Christian youth ministries likewise, need to reflect these societal changes as youth culture remains in a constant state of flux.<sup>86</sup> Just when well-meaning youth workers adjust and start to catch on, they find they are behind in their understanding of current trends. The change in communications technology is just one example of rapid change impacting our society.

James Fowler, professor of theology and human development at Emory University, comments on this societal angst and the rate of change that accompanies cultural change:

Times of transition in cultures and societies mean ferment, social tension and conflict. They bring widespread experiences of dislocation. Established institutions and practices undergo changes and loss of coherence. Assumptions that have guided public and private patterns of life without much examination become problematic and suffer questions of legitimation.<sup>87</sup>

The kind of rapid and often unsettling change that Fowler refers to may seem unwelcome

---

<sup>86</sup> Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion*. (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Ltd., 1992.), 2.

<sup>87</sup> James Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 160.



to the average person in society, yet the process of change, while daunting at the time, may usher in a new era of thinking and perhaps new ways of managing society. Fowler continues to elaborate on this postmodern shift, “It seems likely that at present we are undergoing an epoch of such deep going change in the structures of cultural consciousness and social practices that it may make the Enlightenment seem mild indeed by comparison.”<sup>88</sup>

Dean Borgman in his book, *When Kumbaya is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry*, makes this bold assertion; “Young people, as all of us, are products of the spirit of the times. Our word to them must appreciate their individual thought processes as well as the ideas that shape their world. That world has been described as post-Christian and postmodern.”<sup>89</sup> In addition to recognizing the pressure of postmodernism, it is important to have a sense of history and how past generations of youth have reacted to various trends. This is of particular importance because, in a few short years (if they are not already), millennial youth will be the dominant influencers of our culture. Boomers and Gen X’ers are now in the positions of parenthood, teachers and the adult establishment, instead of the rebellious or apathetic youth they were once known for. The situation seems to have been reversed; older generations are the primary influencers in the lives of millennial youth today. The following is an attempt to define what these distinguishing characteristics are for these generations.

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Dean Borgman, *When Kumbaya is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry*. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997), 24.

### A Working Definition of the Generations

Depending on what source is examined, there is not a great degree of consensus on the age delineations of the various generations. Statistics Canada has suggested that the following categories may serve to distinguish the generations: Golden Oldies born around 1930 or earlier, The Blessed Ones born between 1930 to 1945, Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1967 of which this is broken down into The Boomers born between 1946 and 1958 and Generation X born between 1959 and 1967, followed by the Baby Busters born between 1966 and 1979 and finally the Baby Boom Echo born between 1980 and 1995.<sup>90</sup>

Douglas Rushkoff in the October 1994 edition of *Group Magazine* suggests that Generation Xers are comprised of people born between 1963 to 1981 (19 to 37 for 2000 figures).<sup>91</sup> Andres Tapia in the September 1994 edition of *Christianity Today* places Generation X as those falling between the years 1962 and 1976 (24 to 38 for 2000 figures).<sup>92</sup> Mahedy and Bernardi in *A Generation Alone*, finds Generation X between 1960 and 1980 (20 to 40 for 2000 figures).<sup>93</sup> David K. Foot in his book, *Boom, Bust & Echo*, delineates the ages into the following categories: Pre-World War I (born 1914 and

---

<sup>90</sup> "Statistics Canada Population Survey", *Vancouver Sun* 11 February, 1995

<sup>91</sup>David Currie, "Understanding and Reaching Generation X" *The Pastor's Update* (Charles E. Fuller Institute) Tape 5034 Vol. 60.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi, *A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 10.

earlier), World War I (1915 to 1919), The Roaring Twenties (1920 to 1929), The Depression Babies (1930 to 1939), World War II (1940-1946), The Baby Boom (1947 to 1966), The Baby Bust (1967 to 1979), The Baby Boom Echo (1980 to 1995) and The Millennium Busters (1996 to 2010).<sup>94</sup>

For the purposes of this study, the general age brackets will be distilled into the following categories: The Millennial generation: born between 1982 and present. Generation X: born between 1965 and 1981. The Boomer generation--individuals born between 1945 and 1964 (post WWII). Since we do not deal with generations older than these first three, the generations beyond the Boomers will not be analysed for the purposes of this dissertation.

It should come as no surprise while there are similarities with previous generations, there are some unique differences from the youth of today and those twenty, fifteen or even ten years ago. The changes that have occurred from generation to generation are subtle, sequential and cumulative. These cultural shifts have been occurring since time began. It could be theorized that these changes have not been as exaggerated perhaps in any other time in human history as they have in the last 50 years. A simple example: the introduction of the television into society created a whole new era in entertainment and a broader awareness of the world, yet at the same time ushered in an era of social isolationism.<sup>95</sup> With the advent of the television, neighbours did not get

---

<sup>94</sup>David K. Foot, *Boom Bust and Echo 2000: Profiting from the Demographic Shift in the New Millennium*. (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1998), 19-31.

<sup>95</sup>Douglas Rushkoff, *Playing the Future: What We Can Learn from Digital Kids*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 39.

together as much, family games, story telling and listening to the radio was less of a popular activity. A similar comparison can be made of the Millennials who are growing up as familiar with computers technology as Boomers were with the television.<sup>96</sup>

William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi make an excellent point about the uniqueness of recent changes coupled with the similarities that remain with us:

[However] much things remain the same, though, they also change. This has always been true, but it is truer than ever in our rapidly accelerating technological culture. It could even be said that change is now the only constant. Yes, “things have always been this way” in terms of the very basics of life, but it is equally true to say that things have always changed. The difference is that in times past events moved much more slowly— but historical change is always irreversible.<sup>97</sup>

### **Moral Awareness**

The introduction of a new facet of culture is much like the effect of a rose petal falling into a pond. At first, the effect seems negligible; yet, after a while, the ever-widening concentric circles become more noticeable as they lap against the shores of cultural awareness. The subtle effects from the past, each introduction of moral decline, societal influence or cultural inflection has brought us to where we stand today. An example of how cultural acceptance is cumulative; is seen in the attitudes about homosexuality in Canada. Boomers as young adults were fairly open to this lifestyle as an acceptable alternative within society during the free love era of the 1960's. The parents of Boomers during that era where not nearly as receptive. Now that the Boomers

---

<sup>96</sup>Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 273.

<sup>97</sup>William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi, *A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 37.

are the parents, the children of Boomers (Millennials) are even more aware and accepting while the older generation remains unchanged in their attitude, however they are less in numbers by comparison to the two younger generations.<sup>98</sup>

We are at the dawn of a new millennium--Good or bad, right or wrong. People living today are the expressions and sum total of ancestry, their decisions and experiences. Unfortunately, the course of moral ambiguity within our society rests firmly on people living today. Is the course apathy, moral uncertainty, irrelevancy, or a change in direction?

Youth ministry specialist, Dawson McAllister, in his book *Saving the Millennial Generation*, writes about this cloud of moral ambiguity that surrounds youth:

Satan realizes that if he can destroy kids, he can destroy a whole culture, a whole generation. By eroding truth, he is creating a generation without a moral memory. It's not time for business as usual in our world. We need to recognize the slide of truth into the wastebasket of our culture and do what has to be done to change that trend."<sup>99</sup>

The focus of this dissertation as presented in the first chapter, is to look at the interaction of young people in community with the Internet. One facet in the use of Internet technology, that will be addressed, centres on the topic of moral uncertainty which exists within this medium. With the advent of virtual on-line community and the predominance of the Internet in everyday life, youth are entering domains that are relatively unchecked and uncensored. It is not a mere rose petal dropping into the pond,

---

<sup>98</sup> Bibby, *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*, 72.

<sup>99</sup> Dawson McAllister, *Saving the Millennial Generation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 1999), 79.

but rather a brick. While the Internet, in and of itself, is not an evil thing; it, as any medium or tool, can be misused. Involving ourselves in the understanding and the interpretation of the characteristics of community in on-line experiences may help leaders gain a better understanding of how youth can handle the questionable aspects of Internet community. Concerns will be addressed regarding community, the Internet and appropriate behaviour in Chapter Four. A contributing concern to keeping pace with the moral cautions related to the Internet, is being able to keep up the pace in understanding the changes and the technological maze confronted at every turn.

### **Rapid Technological Advances**

*Acceleration* and *influx* are two words that could well be used to characterize this technological age. Acceleration refers to the rapid rate at which technology is advancing and the speed at which information can be accessed and transmitted.

The second word, *influx*, relates to the sheer volume of information and technology that can be accessed by the average person with a computer and a modem.

Less than a half a decade ago the volume of Internet usage was merely a fraction of what it is now. The rate of growth of Internet use is rising exponentially (see Table 3:1). As of 1999, there were 92.2 million Internet users over the age of 16 in the United States and Canada. Since 1997, there has been a 59% increase in the number of Internet users. A Statistics Canada report found that 41.8 percent of households (about 4.9 million) had at least one member who used the Internet either at home, work or school in

1999. This figure was 35.9 percent in 1998 and 29.4 percent in 1997.<sup>100</sup>

**Table 3:1 US/Canada Statistics of Internet Use**<sup>101</sup>

Date	Population (In millions)
1995	22.0
1996	37.8
1997	57.8
1998	78.6
1999	92.2

We as ministers of youth sometimes enter into this technological era with the trepidation of a Luddite.<sup>102</sup> While youth pastors, parents and teachers struggle with installation manuals and instructions, youth are downloading, uploading, integrating and interfacing faster than the speed of light. Youth today are fast becoming the experts in some areas of technology and surpassing adults for the first time in history. As more Gen X young adults become youth pastors, teachers and parents this reality will likely fade as the Gen Xers are practitioners of computer technology.

<sup>100</sup>Owen Wood, "Canadians Snub the Boob Tube" *CBC News On-line* [news on-line] available from <[http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/tv\\_statscan.html](http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/tv_statscan.html)> (accessed 27 February, 2001).

<sup>101</sup>This information has been updated with latest data from the Spring 1999 CommerceNet /Nielsen Internet Demographic Survey. The projected growth has been adjusted to reflect this new data. "Internet Population" *CommerceNet/Nielsen Internet Demographic Survey* available from <http://www.commerce.net/research/stats/wwwpop.html> > (accessed 5 February 2001).

<sup>102</sup>Cultural change necessarily involves resistance to change. The term **Luddite** has been resurrected from a previous era to describe one who distrusts or fears the inevitable changes brought about by new technology. The original Luddite revolt occurred in 1811, an action against the English Textile factories that displaced craftsmen in favour of machines. Today's Luddites continue to raise moral and ethical arguments against the excesses of modern technology to the extent that it threatens our essential humanity.

Technological acceleration and the influx of information is increasing at an exponential rate; the thirty-gigabyte hard drive of today is tomorrow's paperweight. The acceleration of new technology is not measured in years, months or weeks it does not seem to be limited by the calendar but rather the clock. The rate of information and its accessibility has been augmented by today's digital revolution. We can awake one morning and tune into the news and watch a hostage taking in progress or a school under siege by high school-age terrorists in real time – news at eleven. This is an example of influx of information.

Acceleration can also refer to the accelerated rate that young people are becoming familiar with computer technology. There is no end to the litany of success stories, such as a ten year old youth designing web sites and drawing a \$100,000 a year income. It is not uncommon to hear of helpless teachers enlisting the services of their students to load and service programs on their computers.<sup>103</sup>

A local newspaper reports, there is a Christian dating service in Toronto that for a fee will match you up with the appropriate love interest depending on your faith (i.e.: Christians, Hindi, Moslem, Jewish, etc) and a on-line prayer link service that connects believers across the country. They can log on to meet the demand for hundreds of prayer requests in mere minutes. The report quotes the web developer of this service as saying, "Jesus words where two or three gather in my name, there am I, ring with virtual meaning. This sense of community is something e-commerce entrepreneurs want to

---

<sup>103</sup>Don Tapscott, "Generation Lap, Children are Authorities", [article on-line] available from <<http://www.growingupdigital.com/Glap.html>> (accessed 12, April 1999).



tap.”<sup>104</sup>

It is in this environment we attempt to be relevant, effective and successful in our bid to minister to youth. The title of Borgman’s book aptly sums up the sentiment of those who are trying to ministry to youth at this point in our history; *When Kumbaya is Not Enough*. Let us deal with the issue now of how we minister in, through and with the generations.

### **The Battle of the Generations**

For the past ten years there has been a great deal of press and attention given to Generation “X”.<sup>105</sup> The term “Gen X” was synonymous with a generation steeped in powerlessness, apathy and hopelessness. Their fate was to be born after the baby boom. Their legacy was to follow the bloated Boomer generation and be squeezed out of opportunity and privilege in the job market.

Seemingly there has been a large amount of energy spent in the past few years to reach and minister to this lost and economically disadvantaged group. So much so has been the case that it seems, upon casual observance that we have neglected to prepare for the next generation that is presently on the doorstep of our youth groups (many in their late teens). The first of the Millennials, the class of 2000, have already graduated high

---

<sup>104</sup>Carol Lowes, “On-line Christian Soldiers,” *The Toronto Star*, 28 October 2000, H 18.

<sup>105</sup>The term Generation X has been most commonly associated with the generation that followed the Baby Boom. It was a term coined by Douglas Coupland in the early 1990's.

school and are in their first year on university and college campuses. Though sometimes it is done mistakenly, these millennial youth are sometimes lumped in with Gen. X young adults. They are a distinct group with distinct needs that will be discussed further in this chapter.

Generation X youth were the latchkey kids of the boomers that found both parents working to make a living often at the expense and neglect of their families. Parental neglect bred distrust and insecurity among Xer children. This was the legacy of millions of children of boomer parents.

Peter Halverson illuminates this generational paradox rather prophetically with the following statement made in the mid 1990's:

The future of the churches depends on the behaviour and choices of Generation X. If we want to be helpful to the churches we should be focussed on the next - not the previous generation no matter how unique and fascinating we might find Baby Boomers to be. We need to accept that our time is passing and that the important fertile ground for the future is the generation only now coming of age.<sup>106</sup>

Halverson's warning at the mid-point of the last decade that we ought not to miss the generation of the day can be directly referenced to today's Millennial generation. The time of the Xer is past in terms of their presence in our youth groups, unless they return as leaders and/or pastors. The torch has been passed on to the next group of youth that have stepped into the arena.

Accepting turnover with respect to new age groups of youth every few years is all

---

<sup>106</sup>Reginald W. Bibby, *There's Got To Be More: Connecting Churches and Canadians* (Winfield, BC: Woodlake, 1995), 73.

part of the job for youth workers. It is imperative that youth workers take the time to focus on the unique needs as each new generation emerges as the new youth group. The current youth generation is being understood, and labelled based on the characteristics and behaviours being exhibited.

### **Generation Who?**

This emerging generation will suffer the attempts of having a label attached to it just as its unfortunate cousin, the generation known as “X”. Some are calling this current generation “Next”, “Nexus”, the “Baby Boomlet”, “The Net Generation” (Don Tapscott) and “Y” (as in Why?) or the “Millennials” among others. In popular journals and most of the articles surveyed the term Millennials seemed to be used the most often.<sup>107</sup> As influential as Don Tapscott is in the international arena, his term “Net generation” or ‘N-Gen’ has not caught on to any degree in academic literature. For the purposes of this dissertation the term “Millennial Generation” or “Millennials” will be used.

### **Similar Yet, Different**

When one looks at each generation separately there are distinct differences that characterize each. Major corporations know this and exploit these differences. All one has to do is see the amount of demographic studies that are being done now to determine how to market to Millennials. One insightful article by Vicki Joyal who is the vice-

---

<sup>107</sup>Neil Howe and William Strauss, 6.

president of CUNA's Market Research and Information Department had this to say about the market that is represented by millennial youth:

Children age 18 and younger, which comprise 28% of the US population, are called the Millennial generation. To serve this market, it is imperative that credit unions learn as much about it as possible. Today's youth share many of the parents' values and interests, and are said to be more optimistic, caring, respectful, and civic-minded than their predecessors, the Generation X-ers. They are the first high-tech generation, born into a world of computers, cell phones, ATMS, and the Internet. As interactive consumers, they think and react differently than yesterday's youth. Many Millennials have money to spend - and save. According to a Rand Youth Poll, teens spent \$84 billion in 1997, up 12% from 1996. In 1996, 21% of US children lived in poverty. This means that for every 4 children who have money to spend and save, one child has nothing. Thus, while credit unions can provide special savings vehicles for those with money to spend, they can also provide internships for those less-fortunate youth. Young members should be viewed as future borrowers, not insignificant savers.<sup>108</sup>

The article above continues on for five pages with in-depth statistics and analysis in a bid to help the reader to understand the new customer – the Millennials.

With the secular market spending millions on research of the present generation, it would be wise for the church to sit up and take notice of the new kids on the block. Sociologists and demographers are having a field day attempting to predict the course of the next generation. Michael Adams, president of Environics Research Group, in his book, *Sex in the Snow* released in 1998, described the various groups he believed people fell into by value groups rather than standard understanding of demographics. His study did nothing to address the millennial generation at that point in time. His descriptors of Gen X sound suspiciously like those being used to describe the current generation.

---

<sup>108</sup>Vicki Joyal, "Meet The Millennials" *Credit Union Magazine* 60, no. 1 (January 1999) : 7A-8A.

Calling them the hot-wired, tuned-into-technology and the Much Music generation, (MTV) Adams describes the Gen. X people in much the same terms that Dawson McAllister has chosen to describe Millennials. Some of the confusion may lie in assuming that high school youth today are merely a technological extension of the Xers. This is not so.

Millennials are a distinct cohort. They are as distinct as a Boomer is from an Xer. Technology might be a common denominator with the previous generation, but so was the work ethic for the Silent Generation. Boomers would be the first to say they are nothing like their parents. Adams, had this rather bleak prediction with respect to traditional institutions: “I believe that by the year 2020, the institutions that the Boomers fought so hard to reform will have much less significance for Generations X, Y and Z. Organized religion, institutions like universities, the professors and yes even the nation-state – all will be much less relevant.”<sup>109</sup> While Adams takes aim at the institutions of the future he does not really define how they will be less relevant. His predictions may not take as long as his chosen date of 2020 when one considers the impact that is being felt by traditional institutions, such as the church, in this postmodern era.

One has to wonder about the stereotypical descriptors that are placed upon various generations. The Boomers were seen as hell-bent on destruction and rebellion, drugs and free love. The generation before them despaired that they were a “lost” generation. Yet, some of those very same Boomers are CEO’s and pillars in their communities today; most have married (and divorced), moved on to lead productive lives

---

<sup>109</sup>Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow* (Toronto: Penguin Book Ltd., 1998), 29.

and are contributing to and shaping society. One fact that is worth noting is that the upsurge that was predicted to happen with the Boomers coming back to church has simply not happened.<sup>110</sup>

The Generation X crowd five years ago were seen as aimless and without any contributing value to society. Presently, there is a glimmer of hope; they are making mark in technology and private enterprise, and raising the bar on entrepreneurial web businesses and start-up companies.

It is critical when studying generations and demographics that one must be careful about making broad generalizations which may impose a false sense of fate upon a group of people based exclusively on number crunching and statistics.

Leslie Milner age 18 had this to say about her objection to labels,

Instead of giving us our own name, someone – probably someone who doesn't know much about us – just said, "Hmm, well, this is Generation X, so why don't we call the next one Generation Y?" Or, "Well, they're the children of Boomers, so we can call them the Echo boom," Neither of these two names says anything unique about our generation. They say who we follow, but nothing about who we are. That's why those names are upsetting, and why nobody I know wants to use them.<sup>111</sup>

For the interest of this dissertation there will be an attempt to compare and contrast Generation X and the Millennial generation. These two generations are the two that are most closely associated with computer technology and the age of the Internet.

Casual observations have been made that there are differences between these two

---

<sup>110</sup>Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: 10 Life Rings For you and Your Church*, (Grand Rapids. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 46.

<sup>111</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, 6.

generations in the context of youth ministry. Perhaps there are differences as well as to how they approach virtual community. The bulk of the age groups that were surveyed for this project thesis are the early Millennials (13-19) and the late Xer's (20-23). We will now consider the influence that faith and psycho-social development has in determining how these two generations relate to technology and community.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES**

### **Millennial Kids**

As the generations stand now in the year 2001, Generation X is currently seen as those individuals that are approximately about 20-35 years of age. The Millennial kids are seen as those that are about 5-19 years old. There are some things that stay the same developmentally from generation to generation and are fairly static. These are often labelled developmental growth.

James Fowler in his *Stages of Faith* assures us that there are general times and areas of life that we are to expect more warmth to faith and to issues of truth. These themes run pretty much through each successive generation, as they are a developmental norms. This stage that adolescents traditionally go through, Fowler calls Stage 3 or Synthetic - Conventional.<sup>112</sup>

At this stage there is often a challenging of the literal interpretations of issues related to life and faith. This questioning causes a reflection to take place that shakes the neat and carefully constructed foundations of the previous literal stage (Stage 2 or

---

<sup>112</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 153.

Mythic-Literal Faith). Puberty is a time of great change and upheaval both physiologically and emotionally. Operational thinking begins to take place at this stage.

In school there is a more formalized approach to operationalizing at this age.

Operational thinking involves the young person's thoughts and reasoning taking wing.

At this age they are capable of using and appreciating abstract concepts, to think about thinking and to reflect upon stories, name and synthesize their meanings.<sup>113</sup>

Fowler suggests that it is at this stage in faith development of youth that we see the closing of options and verifying of hypotheses. They draw from the pool of information that is around them; teachers, parents, youth leaders and other significant leaders as well as outside sources such as friends, the Internet and media. These are the people and sources that have the greatest influence on formation and testing of their ideals. This is a time when youth will apply the questions to us, wanting direct answers.

It is at this stage that significant friendships begin to have more appeal and urgency as these relationships help to validate their existence. While youth predominantly think with their hearts during this period rather than with their heads, they still are driven to think things through. There is often a tension between what they feel and what they are thinking. It is for this reason that parents are often exasperated thinking that their child seems to have taken total leave of their senses. Youth approach life with passion facing trial and error at every turn. Loving, laughing and leaving behind the child that they once were. There is also a time when youth will eventually question and move away from the values that they had adopted from their family of origin. While

---

<sup>113</sup>James Fowler, *Faithful Change: The personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 61.



some of these parental values may “stick”, others are often incorporated into their new schema of moral development.

It is critical at this stage of life, to encourage youth who are seeking information and affirmation, especially on-line, to be cautious and to recognize that not all that is represented on the Internet is truth. Since this stage involves developing attachments to values, and beliefs and elements of personal style from others they encounter, the onus is on youth pastors and parents to guide, and to some degree, be wary of the content that youth may encounter on-line or who might be contributing to their value systems.

## **Generation X**

Generation X at this time, is currently leaving the stage of Synthetic-Conventional faith. Therefore we should look at the stage that they are entering according to James Fowler. The stage which follows pubescent adolescence is called Stage Four or Individuative-Reflective. It typically occurs during the first years of university age youth (approximately twenty years of age and up to thirty-something).

This stage is typically a time of questioning of authority and an entry into a cynical style of analysis of the environments and situations the person finds themselves in. It is this stage when the young adult is often uprooted from that which is familiar and formative into a milieu of values which may run counter to what they thought was sacred. This stage is often around the time when a college age student will leave home and enter into the quagmire of varied ideologies and values and then have to reconstruct their own

understanding of life and faith.<sup>114</sup>

Young adults at this stage will become aware of hypocrisy, justice, devotion and all things which may compromise their faith. It is at this point some students will take a hard look at the institutional church and leave it behind, sometimes forever. This fact was reflected in the data that was gathered from the survey for this project. Over 60 percent of the eighteen year olds who were surveyed do not attend formal worship services. Of those same students, 17 percent attend worship services once or twice a month.

The strength of Stage Four is the fact young adults (currently Gen. X) who are moving into this phase become more self-critical and strive to redefine their identity and their ideology. They are asking questions which help them shape what they believe not what they believed because of their parents or significant adult influencers had told them to believe.

If we were to study the Boomer generation as they entered this stage of development fifteen or twenty years ago, it would be interesting to note if there were any similarities between these two generations as to how they responded to their world and faith in Stage Three and Four of Fowler's development theory. This age group, also known as the Xers, view the Internet as a utilitarian tool so may not engage on-line community to the degree of the Millennials to find personal significance or ideologies.

---

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 174.

## Self and Identity Development

Coupled with faith development, is the psycho-social development that takes place in adolescent years. One really depends upon the other. Developing faith must be rendered within the framework of the developing an understanding of youth and their self concepts. Social and psychological developments are enhanced, in some cases by a clear understanding of the place of spirituality in the young persons life.

A clear understanding of the typical developmental stages of identity and self concept are critical when discussing the ways that youth interact within various communities around them including the Internet community. Susan Harter contends:

These processes do not occur, however, within a introspective vacuum. The self is a social construction. For example, the peer group looms large as a source of values, directives, feedback, and social comparison. Parental expectations, and exhortations also play a major role and may well conflict with the values of the peer culture. "In Search of Self," therefore, defines a major drama that unfolds on centre stage during adolescence, with a complicated cast of characters who do not always speak with a single voice.<sup>115</sup>

It would be the contention of this dissertation that the Internet is also one of the contributing voices which helps (or hinders) the formation and interaction within the internal development of youth.

Another point about the development of the young person is the way in which they interpret their roles in the various social settings which they find themselves in. Some studies of development suggest middle adolescents (age 14 and 15) struggle with

---

<sup>115</sup>Susan Harter, "Self and Identity Development" in *At The Threshold: The Developing Adolescent*, eds. S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 353.

the inconsistencies of multiple roles or selves which they try to integrate in their lives.

This apparently is in contrast to younger (11 to 12) or older (17 to 18) youth. They struggle with knowing who the “real me” really is in the turmoil of jumbled feelings and thoughts about how they react in various communities or settings.<sup>116</sup>

One could argue therefore that the Internet might pose a threat to youth which are in the critical developmental stage of trying to sort out their multiple selves as they try to develop a coherent and unified self. This understanding of selves and the impact on youth and their development with respect to on-line community will be more fully explored in Chapter Four.

As long as there has been adolescence there has been rebellion and questioning of authority. This is a constant, an expected part of growing up. Therefore, the dynamics of exploratory rebellion and searching which are found to be a part of this developmental stage can not be pinned exclusively on any one generation, each preceding generation struggles with rebellion and instability associated with the adolescent generation. Socrates once said this about youth: “children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food, and terrorize their teachers.” So one might ask what has changed in the past several hundred years?

Most developmental theorists will hold to the same stance that there are basic characteristics which hold for each generation. So the question remains. What are the characteristics which make Millennial youth different from Generation X who were at the same stage of life 10 years ago? Does this relate in any way to the way they act on

---

<sup>116</sup>Ibid, 358.

the Internet? We will now examine the differences between these two generations.

### **The Differences Between Xers and Millennials**

An attempt will be made in this portion of this chapter to examine various categories and try to establish the differences of the current youth generation (Millennials) from that of the generation previous to it (Gen X). Possible correlations may be able to be drawn as to how each generation views virtual community and the Internet.

Dawson McAllister has summarized some of the major differences these two generations have with each other. He saw that Xers' wanted to connect through relationships, while Millennials are fragmented into competing niche groups. Xer's are absorbed in the process of getting to a final product (unlike Boomers who value the product). Millennials are engrossed in the sources of information which comprise the process of getting to a final product. In terms of working styles, Xers work to live and Millennials live to know (this is over against the Boomers who live to work).

In terms of technology, Xers have become the developers and custodians of new innovations and have learned to adapt these changes to new applications. The Millennials are at least to this point, according to McAllister, highly analytical of the uses of technology. Xers, largely in a reaction to the Boomers have shunned the "Protestant work ethic" and workaholism that it represents and have placed more value on relationships. Their younger counterparts are still not into the main stream work force, but there are indications they will be committed to their friendship niches and still strive

for material wealth.

McAllister's final point in this comparison addresses each generation's willingness to trust. Boomers need to be included in this comparison as they have contributed to the formation of the succeeding generation's values with regard to trusting others. Boomers established themselves and demanded trust, Generation X lacked in confidence, a poor self image as it were, because they had a growing scepticism and they realized trust had to be earned. The most disturbing trend according to McAllister was that there was a fracture in the trust that Millennials had for anyone. There seemed to be a pervasive hopelessness at this point.<sup>117</sup> This factor will have serious ramifications for one of the main discoveries of this project in the survey analysis later in the paper in Chapter Six. We will now look at how the effect of the decline in church involvement may impact youth.

### **The Church in Decline**

The decline in the involvement of people in the Christian church in Canada has deep ramifications for the future of ministry--not only to the general population in the church-- but to youth within church and parachurch ministries. The highest attrition rate is among the young. Adolescent participation in church youth ministry is on the decline at an alarming rate with no quick solutions in sight.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup>Dawson McAllister, 10.

<sup>118</sup>Reginald W. Bibby, *There's Got To Be More: Connecting Churches and Canadians* (Winfield, BC: Woodlake, 1995), 17.

Mark Senter III a voice of experience and respect in youth ministry circles had this wake-up call to churches in an article which was written this past year with an eye to the future of youth ministry he says:

The problem with youth ministry isn't youth ministry – it's the church. Most local churches simply aren't prepared to identify and nurture the contributions that Christian adolescents – can make to the local bodies and to the worldwide impact of the Christian gospel. If youth ministry fails to become a full partner in shaping the church of the twenty-first century, the faith community will be the loser.<sup>119</sup>

The sobering tide of negative speculation toward the future of the Western church is far from positive. There are two ways of looking at this problem. First, while the demographers and sociologists try to speculate about the shifting of the generations and how this will affect the economic face of the country, we should not be surprised that this will have a direct affect on church growth and the future of how ministry will be done. Large church plants and expansions which are taking place now, are being built for the much anticipated mini-resurgence of the Boomers. They may find themselves lacking when the next generation of Xers and Millennials fail to fill the void. Is this an area where the efforts of church growth should be redirected? From a physical standpoint, numbers and demographic shifts will play a role in ministry shaping strategies. Similarly, the church has already witnessed an exodus of the Xer and even more so the Millennials. The church is still seen somewhat. by society, both in positive or negative terms, as the purveyor of values. We will focus on youth and values in the next section.

---

<sup>75</sup>Mark H. Senter III, "Where We've Come From (and Where We Need to Go)" *Youthworker* (January/February 2000): 48-52.

## Youth and Values

Mike Yaconelli, co-founder of Youth Specialties made this observation in 1994 about the effect that cultural values will have on the future of youth ministry:

The cultural value system in the next few years will increasingly remove God from any significant part of life, eroding whatever personal responsibility is left and demanding more conformity to the franchised person. There will be more violence, more anarchy, and more disintegration of the family. All this means that youth workers will find themselves continually fighting against the tide, the mainstream -- creating (if they are doing ministry effectively) counter cultural kids whose faith will challenge the values our culture holds.<sup>120</sup>

To some degree, Yaconelli's predictions have some truth and yet, in other ways, things have moderated from the increasing anarchy that he and others of the early 1990's predicted. In 1994 the Xer rebellion was in full swing and few actually anticipated a rebound in values that was to occur with the Millennials. Howe and Strauss elaborate:

Yes, there is a revolution under way among today's kids—a good news revolution. This generation is going to rebel by behaving not worse, but better. Their life mission will not be to tear down old institutions that don't work, but to build new ones that do. Look closely at youth indicators, and you'll see that Millennials attitudes and behaviours represent a sharp break from Generation X, and are running exactly counter to trends launched by the Boomers. Across the board, Millennial kids are challenging a long list of common assumptions about what "postmodern" young people are supposed to become.<sup>121</sup>

Don Posterski and Reginald Bibby in their seminal work *Teen Trends*, contend that values are much the same from generation to generation. They quote statistics from various surveys spanning almost three decades, that state that there has been about the same amount of pessimism that indicates a sense of the decline in values. While not

---

<sup>120</sup>Mike Yaconelli, "Where are We Headed?," *Youthworker* (Summer, 1994): 37.

<sup>121</sup>Howe and Strauss, 7.



unusual, the figures also indicate that there is suspicion for the older towards the younger generations.<sup>122</sup> Posterski and Bibby continue to show that youth still value highly, friendships, freedom and being loved. Which still holds for the Millennials as well today. A year 2000 survey of Millennial youth was conducted by Reginald Bibby (results to be released). It will prove interesting to see what further correlations can be made. Howe and Strauss comment:

Why is the image of Generation Y – alias GenX<sup>2</sup> – so off the mark? For the simple reason that the predictive assumption is wrong. Whatever the era they are living in, Americans habitually assume that the future will be a straight-line extension of the recent past. But that never occurs either with societies or with generations.<sup>123</sup>

Generation X is a by-product of the influence and anti-reaction to the values which have been foisted upon them by previous generations. No doubt this has caused a deep sense of hopelessness and frustration. The postmodern world view is predominant in this generation. No longer can they look towards science and technology to solve all the ills of society. Rather, more problems have been created; environmental disasters, compromised immune responses to new diseases (AIDS) and reduced effectiveness of drug therapy, economic uncertainty, moral failure of significant political and religious figures, political volatility and the “death of God” in the post-Christian era. Truth is relative and subject to individual interpretation. This generation has been classified as being basically pagan as they are not familiar with the church.

Finally there seems to be an equal understanding of the value of volunteerism.

---

<sup>122</sup>Reginald W. Bibby and Don C. Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion* (Toronto: Stoddard publishing, 1992), 13-14.

<sup>123</sup>Howe and Strauss, 10.

Generation X are supplying volunteers and current youth leaders in ministries today as the 20 something crowd involves themselves in volunteerism at a higher rate than the previous generation due to their free-form life style. The volunteer rate that Gen X has been giving has rivalled that of the time of the Peace Corps.<sup>124</sup>

### **Technology – The Internet and Community**

If the Xers established technology and pioneered the established applications, the Millennials have embraced it! Don Tapscott, the self proclaimed guru of the “Net-Generation” (his own term for the Millennial generation) has done extensive studies on the involvement of the millennial kids with the Internet and technology.

Tapscott defines the “Net-Generation”(Millennials) as those children between the ages of three and twenty-three (in 2000). He says that all children do not have access to the net, but the numbers are increasing exponentially. Numbers have shot up from a mere 50% in 1994 to 88% in 1997. Going “on-line” now is as popular as dating by research conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited.<sup>125</sup> A life style survey conducted by the YTV Kid & Tween report stated that children aged nine to fourteen years of age are averaging 3.8 hours a week on-line. Seventy two percent interviewed had a home computer and of those 68% had Internet access compared to 50% last year. Children

---

<sup>124</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, 198.

<sup>125</sup>Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 1998), 3.

ages six to nine are on-line less than an hour a week the same study revealed.<sup>126</sup>

Unpublished data from the Project Teen 2000 Survey that Reginald Bibby administered this year to over 3000 Canadian high school youth showed that on average the high school youth is on-line about one hour a day.<sup>127</sup>

Don Tapscott has been at the vanguard of interactivity with youth and the net. On his web site [www.growingupdigital.com](http://www.growingupdigital.com), Tapscott has addressed some major themes that are telling in their description of the millennial youth and are worthy of note:

### **The Ten Themes of N-Gen Culture:**

1. **Strong Independence** The typical N-Gener has a strong sense of independence & autonomy. N-Gen's unprecedented access to information also gives them the power to acquire the knowledge (knowledge here is understood to be the gathering of information – information is power) necessary to confront information they feel may not be correct.
2. **Emotional and Intellectual Openness** When N-Geners go on-line they expose themselves. They will maintain on-line journals and post their innermost thoughts on a Web page or in a chat room. Vulnerability or transparency
3. **Inclusion** N-Geners are moving toward greater social inclusion with technology, not exclusion. Their creative processes show a move toward global orientation in all of their activities. Check out a virtual community of about

---

<sup>126</sup>“Internet Use By Tweens On Rise: Lifestyle Survey”, *Times and Transcript*. Saturday 4 November 2000, G10.

<sup>127</sup>Reginald Bibby, Unpublished Results of the *Project Teen 2000 Survey*. December 2000. (used with permission)

30,000 N-Geners at Freezone.

**4. Free Expression and Strong Views** Being exposed to a lot of information on the Internet is to their benefit, insists N-Gen, and is a key element of the Internet's appeal and usefulness.

**5. Innovation** N-Geners live and breathe innovation, constantly looking for ways to do things better. These expectations of constant change and the ability to build or construct experiences have implications in our discussion of N-Gen Thinking and the education of N-Gen in N-Gen Learning.

**6. Preoccupation with Maturity** The changing nature of childhood makes itself most obvious when N-Geners are contrasted with the baby Boomers who, as a generation, have spent their lives obsessed with being youthful. N-Geners insist that they are more mature than adults expect.

**7. Investigations** When it comes to technology, N-Gen's initial focus is not how it works but how to work it. It is important for children to understand the assumptions inherent in software and to feel empowered to change those assumptions. When the Internet first became popular, one of the joys of surfing was never knowing what site you could end up at next. Search engines like Yahoooligans have contributed to ending that level of mystery and uncertainty.

**8. Immediacy** Interactivity and the speed of the Net have greatly increased the process of communicating. What used to take days or weeks, now takes seconds.

**9. Sensitivity to Corporate Interest** N-Geners feel that much of the

broadcasting material they see on television is there to satisfy corporate agendas.

However, on the Internet there has been such a flurry of creation involving so many people working in home-grown cottage industries, that there is even more intense sensitivity to corporate interest.

**10. Authentication and Trust** Because of the anonymity, accessibility, diversity, ambiguity of the Net, children must continually authenticate what they see or hear. Many sites provide inaccurate, invalid and even deceptive information. Pranksters spread false rumours. Who can the child trust? What sources of information are valid? Authentication of everything is required to establish trust. The proliferation of Internet hoaxes spread via e-mail has often been used to emphasize the inherent weakness of the Net.

One of the differences between an Xer and a Millennial youth is that the Gen Xer seeks community and are willing to seek that above most material seeking activity (i.e.: a 9 to 5 job). They are also less inclined to go on-line to seek out relationships as they do not see the purpose. The Millennial youth are isolationists and find community on-line or in cliques that are focussed and somewhat exclusive. Gen X interacts with technology, Millennials are enamoured with technology.

Dawson McAllister makes a critical statement with respect to the technophilic Millennials, “ They fail to understand that they are being hurt in two ways. Number one, they are being pulled away from meaningful one-on-one relationships that would help them develop emotionally. And number two, they are learning the lie that violence has

no consequences.”<sup>128</sup>

The angst that these youth are feeling against society and the despair that they can not talk to anyone about, is being posted for everyone to read on the Internet. Web sites become places to make a statement or a manifesto that allows the world to view them in a more intimate way. There is less risk, less chance of being rejected. Entire sites are devoted to on-line diaries that anyone can read. This point will relate to the issue of trust as mentioned earlier.

When Dillan and Kliebold made their desperate attack on Columbine high school they posted their hatred for the world to see on a web site. The youth of the silent voice are finding a place to make their voices heard on the world stage of the World Wide Web.

### **Moderation in All Things**

Tapscott and McAllister voice a concern that too much of a good thing is harmful. There is real concern that Millennials, in particular, are going to become subject to Internet addiction. There is also a grave concern for the unregulated nature of what can be found on the net, from sites devoted to hatred and racism to violence and graphic pornography.

Technological activism and hacking seems to be more prevalent.<sup>129</sup> Even as

---

<sup>128</sup>McAllister, 66.

<sup>129</sup>Tapscott, 182

recently as February, 2000, a thirteen year old hacker, alias Mafia boy, in Montreal, brought global giant Internet corporations such as Amazon.Com, E\*Trade.com and CCN to their knees for several hours costing millions in lost revenue.<sup>130</sup>

In an interview in *Youth Worker* journal, Quentin Schultze a media and pop culture expert was interviewed about the impact the Internet was going to have on the future generations, here is his response:

*Youth Worker:* I've read that "people 24 and older use the net as a tool... but people under 24 use it as a way of life." How do you see the Internet development affecting youths and youth culture?

*Schultze:* The Internet is fast becoming central to the way kids communicate, access information and entertain themselves. American teens, in particular, are using the Internet to strengthen their peer groups, build cross-geographical and consumer communities. They are weakening the power of traditional youth retailers who thought that brick and mortar were the answers to commercial success! The "Net" is also helping kids create cultural fads overnight – such as the grass-roots promotion that The Blair Witch Project received. The 'Net' is turning youth marketing and youth culture upside-down and making it much more dynamic and consumer driven.<sup>131</sup>

Schultze in the same article also made an observation that there should be a boom in relational youth ministry to the Millennials as a result of the search to fill the relational void on-line which will go unmet. He feels there will be real opportunity to fill needs in authentic relationships through youth groups and ministry.

---

<sup>130</sup>Pierre Thomas and D. Ian Hopper, "Canadian Juvenile Charged in Connection with February 'denial of service' Attacks"[news on-line] available from <<http://www.cnn.com/2000/TECH/computing/04/18/hacker.arrest.01/>> (accessed 6 February, 2001).

<sup>131</sup>"What the Internet Revolution Means for Youth Ministry: A Forward-Looking Chat with Quentin Schultze." *Youthworker* (January/February 2000): 40-47.

## **An Issue of Trust**

There is a vast difference between millennial youth and their parents, not in just age, but in philosophical understanding. Parents of Millennials are modernist thinkers, unless they are late Gen Xer's. The youth are coming from a post-Christian, post-Enlightenment era or post-modern thought perspective. It would seem that this, in itself, would cause strain between millennial youth and their parents; instead statistics are showing that the parents of Millennials are actually doing a better job than the parents of the Xers did. According to a new report, "Third Millennium Teens" by George Barna of Barna Research Group, Ltd., youth are closer to their parents, and have a higher approval rating in the areas of peace, trust, power and safety. There is some thought that it is because the values of parents have declined; therefore, its not as big a discrepancy between what parents and youth feel about values and morals.

George Barna records the cynicism of Generation X (the Invisible Generation) -- a group of neglected young adults, "70% of Xers claim that absolute truth does not exist and that all truth is relative and personal . . . Two thirds of the Xer generation concede that 'nothing can be known for certain except the things that you experience in your own life.'<sup>132</sup>

What seems to be most ironic is that the Xer accepts anomie as the norm but they accept it with pain and frustration as if they know that it could be better. The Millennials do not know that it can be any better and so they accept it. They are not upset, they just accept the fact-- this is the way things are. So the decay of absolutes, and a lack of

---

<sup>132</sup>McAllister, 53.



defining purposes, and fallen role models, have become a way of life for Millennials – an established norm.

## THE POSTMODERN DILEMMA

For most of the past decade, postmodernism has been touted as the next major shift in our social human evolution. Only history and probably another decade of debate will truly solve the rampant speculation as to the true nature and impact of postmodernism. Some scholars debunk the whole idea that we are still exiting a modernist mind set. Yet, others have claimed that we have ushered in a new era of deconstructionism and enlightenment full of distortion, confusion and declining meta-narratives. David Lyon presents an interpretation on this age that links to technology and its effects on society:

Postmodernity is a kind of interim situation where some characteristics of modernity have been inflated to such an extent that modernity becomes scarcely recognizable as such, but exactly what the new situation is – or even whether any new situation can become “settled” – is unclear. The inflated characteristics of modernity, which give rise to postmodern premonitions, relate above all to communication and information technologies (CITs) and to the tilt towards consumerism. . . . The growth of CITs and new media augments the power of the image, while encouraging such developments as positional pluralism. But the dynamic of the whole system may be traced increasingly to the demand that consumption levels be constantly raised.<sup>133</sup>

One of the basic premises of postmodernism is that this emergent social order is determined by the importance and power of mass media and that it can shape and govern

---

<sup>133</sup>Lyon, 7.

all other forms of social relationships.<sup>134</sup> The postmodern epoch that we find ourselves in is having a tremendous influence on the way youth of this age think and act. Dean Borgman comments:

Postmodernism is not a clear or agreed upon term. The word roughly describes a loss of confidence in Aristotelian logic and Enlightenment science. The movement questions authorities, resents patriarchy and hierarchies, and resists order and tradition. Postmodernism may be more of a style than a philosophical world view; it attempts to be free from classical, medieval, or modern epochs and frameworks. . . . A general understanding of postmodernism is important for youth ministers because young people either are strongly influenced by postmodern style and ideas or are reacting strongly against it.<sup>135</sup>

One must determine that whatever the social impact of popular culture is and the pressures that it exerts (i.e. on consumerism, art, theatre, television, music, and advertising etc.) there has to be an impact on the way that youth interpret their own social settings and communities as a result of this pressure. One of the possible influences of the postmodern era upon youth is the prevailing thought that truth is relative and individualistic. Boundaries are limitless and no absolutes exist. What I believe this does, especially in the area of virtual community is that it sets the stage for a false dichotomy. One statement that net-savvy youth may use to explain their compartmentalized existence on-line is; “What I do on-line is totally different from what I do in my every day life.” Again, they may say, “truth is defined by that which I can personally comprehend and define, I can not accept outside influences or absolutes to dictate what is right for me.”

---

<sup>134</sup>Strinati, Dominic, *An Introduction to the Theories of Popular Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 223-224.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid*, 25.

Postmodernism is touted to be responsible for the ever increasing erosion of collective and personal identities. Strinati comments:

The erosion of once secure collective identities has led to the increasing fragmentation of personal identities. It is argued that we have witnessed the gradual disappearance of traditional and highly valued frames of reference in terms of which people could define themselves and their place in society and so feel relatively secure in their personal and collective identities. These traditional sources of identity – social class, the extended and nuclear family, local communities, the ‘neighbourhood’, religion, trade unions, the nation state – are said to be in decline as a result of tendencies in modern capitalism like increasingly rapid and wide-scale rates of social change.<sup>136</sup>

Erosion of interpersonal relationships in this postmodern era would seem to be counter to the results of the studies that Bibby and Posterski conducted in the 1980's and 1990's of Canadian youth. Yet, the increasing popularity of the Internet to seek out relationships is going to be one of the spinoffs of a culture that is becoming more fragmented and isolationist. Friendships will remain a high priority in a postmodern age, there will likely be two categories however, those friendships that a youth has in the real world and those that they have in a looser affiliation in the virtual on-line world. These factors and the influence of the virtual world will be discussed in the next chapter.

In summary, this chapter attempted to define and characterize the Millennial generation. Also there was an examination of the unique world, and varied characteristics of the Millennial generation which are distinct from their predecessors the Gen X'ers. Millennials, who are the focus of this study, tend to be enamoured with technology and feel it is an integral part of their lives, unlike the generation before them who saw it merely as a tool. Millennials developmentally, both in faith and

---

<sup>136</sup>Strinati, 238.

physiologically are much like the generations before them with the few exceptional influences of a post-Christian society and the lack of adhering to moral absolutes. Sorting out multiple selves, identity issues and trust play heavily in this age group as well.

Finally, there was a reflection on postmodernity and the accompanying philosophies that are having an impact on the way youth may be processing their thinking about their interaction with community and the Internet. The next chapter will endeavour to elaborate on the issue of community and how youth interact on-line.

## CHAPTER 4

### VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND YOUTH MINISTRY - THE SOUL IN CYBERSPACE

Earlier in Chapter Two, there was a reflection upon the theology of community. At this point of the paper, it would wise to elaborate on the specific nature of virtual community and the diverse characteristics which set it apart from what is commonly accepted as off-line community. There will be an examination of how we communicate, especially with respect to the Internet. There is also a discussion of how this virtual environment affects Millennial youth and, subsequently, how youth workers might minister more effectively.

Four to five years ago, it would be have been difficult to find a significant amount of material relating to the topic of virtual community <sup>138</sup> and the Internet. Today, however, it seems that there is an increasing awareness coming to the forefront of secular media and scholarship. This increase in awareness causes one to consider how Christians should approach this increasing tide of enthusiasm for the Internet? After the discussion in this chapter it is hoped that the reader will have some sense of how to

---

<sup>138</sup>*Virtual Community* is the term that is largely associated with Howard Rheingold who is seen by many Internet enthusiasts as the grandfather of virtual community in the cyber frontier. He defines virtual communities as social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. (Rheingold, 5.)

respond to this question. Parents, teachers, youth workers, and even youths themselves, need to decide how they are going to ‘interface’ with the Internet and its various related technologies.

The temptation, previously mentioned in Chapter Two, is to ignore or condemn Internet technology as evil with the hope that our youth will abstain, but this is not likely. Yet, others may embrace it with abandon--giving little thought to the ramifications upon their relationships, personal wholeness and off-line communities. Michael and Rhonda Hauben typify this optimistic thinking of netizens<sup>139</sup> who have fully accepted CMC via the Internet as the standard in a postmodern age:

We are seeing a revitalization of society. The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new more democratic world is becoming possible. According to one user, the Net has "immeasurably increased the quality of my life." The Net seems to open a new lease on life for people. Social connections which were never before possible, or which were relatively hard to achieve, are now facilitated by the Net. Geography and time are no longer boundaries. Social limitations and conventions no longer prevent potential friendships or partnerships. In this manner netizens are meeting other netizens from far-away and close by that they might never have met without the Net.<sup>140</sup>

What needs to be achieved is a middle ground. The technology is here to stay--if not increase. To prevent youth from engaging with it would be intellectual suicide; to not show any care and guidance would be equally tragic. Heidi Campbell writes, “What is

---

<sup>139</sup>*Netizens* is a term that is a spin off of citizens on the net: “net citizens” or those that are a part of computer-mediated-communication (CMC). It was a term that was developed by Michael Huaben. Further explanation can be found in: Michael F. Hauben, “The Netizens and Community Network”, *Computer Mediated Magazine*, (February 1997) [online journal] available on-line at: <<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/feb/hauben.html>> (accessed 16 February, 2001).

<sup>140</sup>Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, "The Net and Netizens. The Impact the Net has on People's Lives." (1993) [paper online] available as Chapter Seven from <<http://wuarchive.wustl.edu:80/doc/misc/acn/netbook>> (Accessed 7 February 2001).

needed is a balance between on-line and real world community involvement” and a recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of both.”<sup>141</sup>

David Lyon, a noted Christian sociologist at Queens University, has devoted a great deal of effort in interpreting the social ramifications of ‘cyberspace’ upon human interactions. In a recent lecture at Atlantic Baptist University in Moncton, New Brunswick, he had wise council about how this new wave of on-line virtuality should be approached. He was quoted in a local newspaper:

Cyberspace turns the religious metaphor of Jesus Christ as “word made flesh” into “flesh made word.” Lyon contends that on-line relationships tend to be highly selective, lacking in quality and easily abandoned. Sociability is part of being human. We are not answerable only to ourselves. And yet, there is an emerging tendency to be either emotionally attached to our machines or to carry on abstract relationships in disembodied ways. Abstract relationships are superficial and lack vital qualities. Before you dive in, decide first what you want to use cyberspace for and guard against its shortcomings. Matter matters. Cyber utopianism must be tempered by Christian realism. Let us not be tempted to ‘being’ in other ways. And lastly, seek meaningful relationships through whatever media. Connect and care, globally and locally.<sup>142</sup>

The soul of all human beings longs for significance and relationship. This is the manner in which we are formed. It is a basic human requirement to be needed and to have significance with other human beings. Sherry Turkle elaborates on the tension of the virtual unknown:

Virtual environments are valuable as places where we can acknowledge our inner diversity. But we still want an authentic experience of self. One's fear is, of course, that in the culture of simulation, a word like authenticity can no longer apply. So even as we try to make the most of virtual environments, a haunting

---

<sup>141</sup>Heidi Campbell, “Plug In, Log On, & Drop Out? The Impact of the Internet on the Religious Community”(16 September, 1998) [paper presented at the British Association for the Study of Religion] available on-line at <<http://www.ed.ac.uk/~ewcv24/BASR.html>> (accessed 6 February, 2001).

<sup>142</sup>Sandra Devlin, “Beware of the Trap of Cyberspace: Sociologist says Internet and e-mail can alter our perception of the “here and there”. *Times and Transcript*, 2 November, 2000, D2.

question remains.<sup>143</sup>

### **Communication and Community in Cyberspace**

As people, we have basic—even primal—needs for mutuality and fellowship with other people. Communication is one of the primary means of connecting with and maintaining these significant relationships. Today the Internet, which is often accessed through a computer or digital device, is--by its very nature--seen as an essential tool of communication. It is a conduit through which people can be brought into contact with other people. One of the perceived limiting factors about this medium is that, in most cases, it eliminates most of the tools of personal face to face communication that make up the essential qualities of relationships. Functions that are equated with “face to face” contact such as touch, voice and facial expressions, are often left out of the equation. Dr. Joyce Bellous comments on orality and literacy:

. . . talking permits an oral self to develop in social relationship and enhances the cohort aspect of social intimacy, i.e. *nearness*, while reading and writing encourage the individuated aspect of social intimacy that grounds critical reflection, i.e. *difference*. The willingness and the ability to be near and different encourages the competencies necessary for civic commitments and personal authenticity. Our need for committed, authentic citizens is very great.<sup>144</sup>

While the multi-media capability of the Internet is ever increasing and devices such as video and audio and two way telephony are now possible, oral communication via the web is passed over for a text-based medium.

---

<sup>143</sup>Sherry Turkle, "Virtuality and its Discontents," *The American Prospect* 7, no. 24 (December 1, 1996).

<sup>144</sup>Joyce E. Bellous, "Spiritual and Ethical Orality in Children: educating and oral self". *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 5, no. 1 (2000): 16.



## How Do We Communicate?

There seems to be two camps that respond to the Internet; those that embrace it, or those that are wary of it. It is no longer simply a matter of “haves” and “have nots” for reasons of economic disparity or technological ignorance (though that still exists to a degree). The Internet receives criticism that it depersonalizes communication between people. Other forms of communication, which have been around for a greater period of time, are being compared with the computer and the Internet as legitimate means of communication. The radio was a predominant medium before the television. Its communication style, like the television followed, was to broadcast information in a one-way manner. News, weather, sports and other information is blasted out to an audience who may not pay serious attention to what is being transmitted.

Forms of two-way communication began with the advent of Marconi’s wireless, ham radios, two way radios and various types of intercoms. The telephone became a form of affordable two-way communication which was found in most homes in the early 1900’s. The telephone is widely used to connect people even though it eliminates all but the voice element from distant communication.<sup>145</sup>

Telephones allow emotion to be conveyed through audible vocal expressions and intonations, therefore, making it easier to hear and understand not just what the person is saying but also allow for interpretation of some non-verbal communication. The time element is very important in that it allows for instant clarification so as to avoid some possible misunderstanding about what the person is meaning. Text-based communication allows for a great deal of interpretation and sometimes, when something is written, there can be more than one interpretation.

---

<sup>145</sup>Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyber-Space* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 39.

Letter writing was used long before the medium of electronic communication and was more than adequate for the purpose of maintaining relationships and conveying significant meaning. However, in the world of instant gratification, written messages via the Internet are frequently perfunctory and utilitarian. The hand written letters of old were frequently quite creative, lengthy, detailed. The letter writing communicator would make the effort to explain in great detail in ways which would help the reader to understand the meaning more fully.

It has been speculated that with the advent of the Internet, there has been a renaissance of written communication. There are those that complain that it has reinforced habits of poor spelling and grammar, as well as allowing for minimalist structure. Don Tapscott, a strong proponent of the Internet and its many virtues, explains how the shift from text based communication prior to the television era is once again making a comeback :

. . .humanity is turning back to written language. We are undergoing yet another vast and trembling shift from the magic of television to the magic of interactive digital media. As with typography, and unlike the broadcast medium, communications are recorded—based on the written word. Only this time such communications are many-to-many (unlike the press and TV which are one-to-many). Digital communications are both real time (chat), and non-simultaneous (e-mail, voice mail, computer conferences, bulletin board, Web sites); and they extend beyond the eyes and ears to embrace (eventually) all the senses. . . . Never before has it been more necessary that children learn how to read, write and think critically.<sup>146</sup>

It could be argued that we are better equipped to communicate through the written medium because there is more time to form ideas and express them more clearly than in a normal oral conversation. Written communication also allows for people to take the time to formulate their ideas and reasoning when handling sensitive or controversial topics. Sometimes, more rational thought can flow through writing than when one is in the heat

---

<sup>146</sup>Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 63.

of the moment involved in face to face conflict. Of course, there is also the danger of a poison pen which can hurt as deeply as an oral harsh or thoughtless word; thus the written medium is not above reproach.

Don Langham shares his thoughts on the progression of human communication:

The first revolution, the advent of speech, allowed communication at a speed approximating that of human thought. Writing, the second revolution, is slower than speech, but is powerful nonetheless for its ability to make speech dependent upon the speaker or the memory of the hearers. The third revolution came with the widespread use of moveable type, which brought about a revolution not in the way people communicate, but rather in the way they conceive the world. Now, at the end of the millennium, we have what Harnad calls "electronic skywriting"--the "fourth cognitive revolution". In this revolution, writing will allow us to communicate with speeds approaching that of speech, which is much closer to the speed of thought than other communication media.<sup>147</sup>

### **Sharing a Little Deeper**

Youth may find it difficult to talk in person about various subjects that concern them. They may, however, be more open to sharing thoughts via computer-mediated-communication.<sup>148</sup> In a sense, the Internet becomes a form of electronic confessional. It allows us to come in contact with an individual. There is privacy, a listening ear, and possible absolution or resolution without fear of reprisal. To some degree, there needs to be a level of trust or intimacy on the part of the youth for them to share things that are important. It may be easier with a pre-existing relationship or with someone who can be

---

<sup>147</sup>Don Langham, "The Common Place MOO: Orality and Literacy in Virtual Reality" *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine* 1, no. 3 (1 July, 1994): 7.

<sup>148</sup>Quentin Schultze, "What the Internet Revolution Means for Youth Ministry" *Youthworker* 16, no. 3 (January/February 2000): 44.

trusted to be honest such as a Christian friend or a youth pastor.<sup>149</sup>

The randomness and anonymity of the Internet does allow a certain amount of freedom to share deeper issues, however the questions of authenticity and authority are important. Some arguments are made that it is not possible to maintain significant relationships via the Internet.<sup>150</sup> The question with the Internet is exclusivity; can the net be enough to maintain significant relationships, especially with those whom there has been no prior contact, in instances where anonymity is a factor? Howard Rheingold describes his first personal encounter at a face-to-face dinner party with people with whom he spent a great deal of time getting acquainted on-line:

I remember the first time I walked into a room full of people IRL who knew many intimate details of my history and whose own stories I knew very well. Three months after I joined, I went to my first WELL party at the home of one of the WELL's on-line moderators. I looked around at the room full of strangers when I walked in. It was one of the oddest sensations of my life. I had contended with these people, shot the invisible breeze around the electronic water cooler, shared alliances and formed bonds, fallen off my chair laughing with them, become livid with anger at some of them. But there wasn't a recognizable face in the house. I had never seen them before.<sup>151</sup>

While Rheingold had supposedly established relationships with numerous people on the

---

<sup>149</sup>One unique aspect of the Christian on-line community is that, while many individuals recognise that high levels of deception are present on the Net, they "believe those that represent themselves as Christian on the net." This is often due to the guidelines & boundaries existing within specific Christian discussion groups. Also the label of "Christian" carries with it a certain expectations of behaviours and trust. Within the Community of Prophecy, honesty is built not only into the beliefs, but also into how individuals practice the prophetic gifting. As one person put it, "why would anyone "bother" to be dishonest in this particular type of Christian forum?" (Campbell, 1998)

<sup>150</sup>Groothuis, 46.

<sup>151</sup>Rheingold, 2.

WELL<sup>152</sup> and had shared deep and sometimes intimate thoughts with them, there still was an awkwardness that ensued when he had to complete the transaction and meet these people face to face. In this chapter, there will be several points made which support both the pros and cons of communication and relationship via the Internet.

### **Similar Patterns - CB radio and the Internet**

Quentin Schultze who is known for his expertise in media and faith matters, wrote an article about the advent of a new technology that emerged in 1973 through the Citizens Band (CB) radio.<sup>153</sup> While reading this article, it was striking to note the incredible similarities between the use of the CB radio and the use of the Internet to communicate with others.

Several factors were similar between the two mediums. Both are based, for the most part, on random contact. In IRC (Internet Relay Chat) or chat-type programs especially, there is usually a high degree of randomness in responses and those whom you choose to talk. The same thing happens with the CB radio in that most people (truckers especially) will seldom encounter the same person again unless by chance. This, of course, would lead to numerous (albeit shallow) encounters and superficial conversation.

---

<sup>152</sup>The WELL or Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link was a virtual community in the San Francisco Bay area that Rheingold participated in over a period of years.

<sup>153</sup>Carolyn Marvin and Quentin J. Schultze, "The First Thirty Years" *The Journal of Communication* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 124.

Both means of communication allow for the use of anonymous experimentation with assumed identities or altered roles. Internet users often have a nickname or an alias that they use on-line. In the CB subculture, the use of a “handle” was synonymous with one’s identity. There is not a lot of privacy on either domain when using the public access forums, therefore personal information is not likely to be exchanged. In both situations, they can switch to more private venues for semi-private conversations. For the CB, it is a matter of switching to a empty channel, although, as far as they know someone could still be listening in. For the Internet, private rooms can be accessed to carry on private conversations (though there are means to tap into internet communications and nothing is really 100% private).

### **Anonymity - Who am I?**

One of the factors that causes great unease with the use of the Internet for developing significant relationships on-line is the factor of anonymity. It is so easy for anyone, not just youth, to assume any identity, be it a certain profession, false name, or even different gender. The amorphous nature of the Internet would be an attraction to those that want to explore different fantasies and roles that they may want to live out on-line. The concern is that with this fact may lead people to believe that everyone who is on the Internet has a false facade. It would be difficult, therefore, to develop a level of trust with those contacted in a random fashion.

Douglas Groothuis shared this humorous note: “A now famous cartoon in the

*New Yorker* shows a dog saying to another, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog”.<sup>154</sup> Anonymity has its place on the Internet as Smith and Kollock point out:

Anonymity (including pseudonymity) is very controversial in the on-line world. On one side, anonymity is touted as the savior of personal freedom, necessary to ensure liberty in an era of increasingly sophisticated surveillance. It allows people to develop reputations based on the quality of their ideas, rather than their job, wealth, age or status. On the other side, it is condemned as an invitation to anarchy, providing cover for criminals from tax-evaders to terrorists.<sup>155</sup>

Being anonymous allows Internet users to either participate on-line within the confines of caution, or it also can give them the opportunity to be deceitful. It is left up to the user regarding how they interact with this facet of Internet communication. It seems the need for anonymity is critical. This need allows people to share their inner most thoughts without fear of repercussion or criticism from those with whom they will have to face in the off-line world.

There is, however, a danger that, while assuming a false identity is a permissible or expected practice on the Internet for the purposes of security, there is also a danger that it can lead to purposeful deception. Young people may not see the harm in stretching the truth and even inventing aliases which allow them to be someone or something else entirely and, therefore, it gives them a greater sense of satisfaction than their true identity.

Here is one young lady’s interpretation of handling anonymity:

---

<sup>154</sup>Groothuis, 126.

<sup>155</sup>Smith and Kollock, 53.

If you meet someone in a chat room, I think its almost impossible to decide if what you're reading about someone is true," says 14-year-old Neasa Coll. "After all, how many of us haven't lied to someone on the Internet? I don't think there's ever a way to tell for sure whether someone you know only over the Internet is lying or not. However, after years of a relationship, there should be a certain trust built up between each person, and lies should not be needed.<sup>156</sup>

After hearing Neasa, its hard to believe that it should take years to build trust, but in the world of the Internet, it is questionable whether complete trust can ever be achieved.

A concern with the question of anonymity and the often fragile nature of the development of adolescents is that they are trying to sort out their own identities. The adoption of many selves is a part of their everyday development as was mentioned in the previous chapter. They are one persona to their parents, another to their friends, their teachers and yet another to those people whom they meet on-line. The self that leads to the greatest opportunity for manipulation and fantasy is in the on-line environment.

Harter states that sorting among the multiple selves that teens often manifest is a critical part of their development process:

We glean that the display of different selves in different social contexts is cause for concern, as the adolescent struggles to reconcile these different selves as well as determine which is the "real me". Experimenting with one's persona and determining whether this brings affirmation or denigration from others, is typically an emotional experience for the adolescent preoccupied with the challenge of self-definition. Such self reflection is not restricted to the present but extends to one's future self, what one would like to become.<sup>157</sup>

While having multiple selves to sort through during adolescence is normal, it

---

<sup>156</sup>Tapscott, 75.

<sup>157</sup>Harter, 353.



would be helpful to note that the potential exists for a fixation upon the surreal identities that can be manifested in on-line experiences. Assuming aliases or false identities belie a necessary trust as Neasa alluded to above, one must wonder about the quality of on-line communication. Trust is a hallmark of authentic relationships, if it missing from the equation in the on-line context, this raises serious questions of validity.

### **Trust and Obey?**

Youth today seem to be less trustful than they have been in previous generations. Many factors contribute to the distrust that youth have for institutions and adults. Among the many factors that contribute to their distrust, are the fallen heros that youth look up to. Youth look to heros as role models they can admire. When they follow them, they often forget these people are not super human or above reproach. Youth have been exposed to scandal again and again from well known sports heros<sup>158</sup>, politicians<sup>159</sup> and religious leaders.<sup>160</sup> The disintegration of the family unit and the higher incidence of single parent

---

<sup>158</sup>Ben Johnson, the Canadian sprinter who was stripped of his Olympic gold medal in 1988 after testing positive for drugs. Johnson, was also banned for life after a second positive test in 1993, he was quoted as saying that athletes in all sports use performance-enhancing drugs and that there has never been a level playing field. *CNN Sports Illustrated* (4 August, 1998) [Press Release on-line] available from <[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/athletics/news/1998/08/04/johnson\\_badguy/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/athletics/news/1998/08/04/johnson_badguy/)>(accessed 8 February 2001).

<sup>159</sup>Former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney's reputation was damaged by being named in an investigation of kickbacks in a 1988 Airbus sale to Air Canada.

<sup>160</sup>A recent American example, in an official statement issued on January 17, 2001, Rev. Jesse Jackson, renowned civil rights activist admitted to having fathered a child outside of his marriage.

and alternative family<sup>161</sup> arrangements could also be a contributing factor to the problem of distrust. Self image and other adolescent development factors also add to this air of uncertainty and lack of trust.

Youth by their nature tend to be somewhat distrustful of adults as they begin to emerge as young adults themselves. McAllister makes this observation from his exposure to both Canadian and American youth, “The inability to trust is just one characteristic of the new generation of youth people, but it is perhaps the most significant, especially in terms of how they evaluate truth shared by others and how they assimilate values into their lives.”<sup>162</sup> It seems then that distrust among youth is a common phenomenon. Yet, each era that forms our young people must contribute to the lack of trust for adults and institutions.

The church does not engender trust as it did in the years prior to the 1950's. The era of the televangelist scandals with Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggart falling from grace contributed to the already weakening influence of the church in society. With the scandal of the Clinton/Lewinski affair, many youth, Canadian as well as American, saw the leader of one of the most powerful nations in the world lie under oath, and be impeached for his behavior.

Trust is a factor that is also hard to achieve in the on-line experience. There is no

---

<sup>161</sup>Statistics Canada, “Census families in private households by family structure, 1991 and 1996 Censuses” [Statistics on-line] available from <<http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Families/famil51a.htm>> (accessed 7 February, 2001).

<sup>162</sup>McAllister, 2.

way to really verify that a person who is met randomly has your best interest at heart.

Yet, youth are vulnerable to being accepted, and they dare to believe that someone who shows concern for them on-line may genuinely cares for them. While this may be the case, caution must be exercised and care taken so one does not offer blind trust too willingly in the anonymous environment of the Internet.

### **To Tell the Truth**

Truth is no longer the stalwart absolute that it once was in secular society. In a post-modern environment, truth has become diluted to be a relativistic and individualized possession of individuals to do with as they see fit. Truth and trust are related in different ways. Millennial youth do care about truth, it is just the source of truth that is often suspect.<sup>163</sup> Since youth are not trustful of authority figures such as parents, government, or church to answer their questions, they are forced to seek elsewhere. Dawson McAllister elaborates:

The postmodern, post-Christian slide away from reason and propositional truth has undercut any foundations. The mass of available information and the speed of decision making make careful reflection passé. What are they left with? Personal experience. That's what really matters, that's what they value most above all else, and that's what they seek.<sup>164</sup>

There is a danger that must be heeded when working with Millennial youth. Truth as a relative expression of individuality can be twisted to support reality. A young person

---

<sup>163</sup>McAllister, 70.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

may say that “. . .what is truth for you, is true for you and what is truth for me is true but the two do not have to be the same”. Youth can slip into the mind set that they can create their own reality of truth. The interaction that takes place in the virtual environment will be equally as damaging if youth think that in their own cyber-created self and environment that they can fabricate their own designer label truth.

Youth must also be made aware of the danger of assuming that everything that they access on the Internet is truth. For many years, what students were taught in school, college or home was basically deemed authentic. The old adage “you can’t judge a book by its cover” could be re-translated, “You can’t believe everything that a flashy web site says”. With the sheer volume of material that is available for students to download there is almost no way that they can verify the validity of everything that they are reading. It is important that adults enter into dialogue with what youth are reading to get them to think critically about the content.

Douglas Groothuis makes this sobering comment about truth on the Internet, “Cyberspace may be the greatest temptation yet offered to humanity to lose its soul in diversion. Having the senses inundated with information or overwhelmed with stimulation is not conducive to a soul finding serenity in the knowledge of the truth.”<sup>165</sup> The pace that information can come to the person surfing the web can be overwhelming. Since it takes the average person time to digest through reading what is being downloaded, it really is not possible to be able to absorb and critique vast amounts of

---

<sup>165</sup>Groothuis, 82.

material in a short time frame. It is possible to be able to access hundreds of different sites on almost any topic at the click of a mouse. It takes time, however, to be able to sort through the abundance of material and absorb the essence of truth contained or not contained in material derived from the Internet.

Groothuis again has these words to ponder:

The mightiest hard drive, the fastest modem, the most sophisticated word processor, and the most powerful Internet search engine on the planet will not download wisdom into the human soul. Cyberspace is a matrix for highly mobile information--some true, some false; some helpful, some harmful; some profound, some trivial. The possession of wisdom is a uniquely personal quality not reducible to any technique.<sup>166</sup>

### **Constructing or Concealed Identities**

As was mentioned before in this chapter, youth are at a stage of life where they are contending with the various selves they portray in their everyday world. Constructing identities is a component that thrives on the Internet. As in the example of the CB radio, a “handle” or identity is pretty much an essential part of being a netizen. Constructing an identity, however, is much more than deciding on a catchy name. With that name, also goes a persona. The standard progression of a conversation between two people that meet on-line may be; “Hi, where are you from?” and “How old are you?” or “Where do you live or where are you from?.” In a normal off-line conversation this may not be highly problematic. Most people will divulge where they are generally from and essential bits of information about who and what they do. In the Internet world, the element of trust and anonymity gain significance. If there are any doubts as to the person’s intent, or

---

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 87.

if the person really is not that important to the person being asked, they likely will alter information for protection.

One of the most fascinating results to arise from the survey portion of this study was that youth valued the characteristic of honesty on-line as the highest desired value. While youth felt that this venue was where they experienced honesty more than any other choice for community, they still voiced concern in the focus groups, over the anonymity and lack of intimacy experienced on-line. So there seems to be a tension with what they experience and what they actually seem to get. The anonymity as evidenced by other questions in the survey seems to allow youth to be more open for less fear of reprisal. Yet, despite the factors of intimacy and anonymity, for the most part, the results showed that they receive a high degree of satisfaction with honesty on-line. Somehow the use of aliases and virtual identities does not influence their feelings about the on-line honesty factor.

Doctor Sherry Turkle, renowned Internet community researcher, offers her observation about the assumption of virtual identities:

But there is another way of thinking, one that stresses making the virtual and the real more permeable to each other. We don't have to reject life on the screen, but we don't have to treat it as an alternative life either. Virtual personae can be a resource for self-reflection and self-transformation. Having literally written our on-line worlds into existence, we can use the communities we build inside our machines to improve the ones outside of them. Like the anthropologist returning home from a foreign culture, the voyager in virtuality can return to the real world better able to understand what about it is arbitrary and can be changed.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup>Sherry Turkle, "Virtuality and its Discontents," *The American Prospect* 7, no. 24 (1 December, 1996).

Most times the deceptions that occur on-line are more in the sense of omission of information to hide one's identity rather than commission.<sup>168</sup> Some youth (as do many adults) will feel the need to protect themselves by assuming pseudo identities. A problem may exist when mere fantasy may cross over into perceived fact. It may be better to instruct youth to simply give sparse or little information rather than create an elaborate persona built on a deception. There is a fine line between creating a false persona and what was commonly known as role playing in the popular Dungeons and Dragons of the 1980's and 1990's. Neither are overtly helpful to the Christian.

Susan Harter describes the natural propensity for young people to stretch the truth regarding their personas:

. . .adolescents clearly distinguish between their true and false selves. They are most likely to display false-self in romantic or dating situations and with classmates, and least likely to display it with close friends, while the level with parents falls between. The motivations for engaging in false-self behavior are varied. There are four primary reasons: To impress others; to try out new behaviors and roles; because other force one to; and because others do not understand or like one's true self. In certain cases teenagers report disliking their false-self behavior whereas in other cases they find it acceptable.<sup>169</sup>

False-self or identity can lead to false intimacy. False intimacy is one of the dangerous manifestations of concealed identity. If a young person is merely hearing what they want to hear about the other person and the other person is "morphing"<sup>170</sup> to fit what

---

<sup>168</sup>Judith S. Donath, "Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community" in *Communities in Cyberspace*, eds Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 52.

<sup>169</sup>Harter, 361.

<sup>170</sup>*Morphing* was term that was commonly used in the mid 1990's to describe the process of changing images from one image into another through computer enhancement

they like, it can lead to a damaging situation. In the extreme, there are stories of young girls going to meet a young teenage boy that they met on-line only to be confronted by a middle aged man with ill intentions.

Quentin Schultze has this counsel on the potential risk of false intimacy:

On-line communication is like a conversation on an airplane. People will bare their souls because there's little to no consequence to what they say—there's anonymity, and they assume the relationship ends when the conversation does. The danger of on-line communication is that people are a lot more likely to form inauthentic relationships—almost like acting or taking on a persona, playing a role. At the same time, some people will be extremely open and honest. So it's hard to truly know which camp a person is in— and its very shortsighted to judge young peoples' emotional or spiritual states only on the basis of what they say on-line. The bottom line is that if youth workers who communicate on-line with their students have good communication with them in person, that tends to help eclipse artificiality and leverage the openness for real ministry.<sup>171</sup>

If there is an unhealthy pattern of identity shifting and on-line deception, it could be assumed there may be more deep-seated problems that often can be related to addictive behavior.

## **Internet Addiction**

When one hears the naysayer talk about the evils of the Internet, they will often cite the overabundance of pornography, racist and hate sites, and the presence of perverted individuals that are on-line trying to seduce children. While this is certainly a

---

programs. For example a picture of a woman's face could be seen to morph into the face of a cat in a few seconds. The term is synonymous with changing as a chameleon will change to suit its environment.

<sup>171</sup>“What the Internet Revolution Means for Youth Ministry: A Forward-Looking Chat with Quentin Schultz.” *Youthworker* (January/February 2000): 46.



very real danger on the Internet, it has to be put into perspective with the rest of the material and benefits of this technology. While there could be assumptions made that there are thousands of young people now spending hours a day logged onto the Internet downloading questionable materials. Recent research has found that the average young person in Canada is spending about an hour a day on-line.<sup>172</sup>

Addictive behavior takes many different forms. The Internet is no more insidious than any other form of addictive practice in which youth can be involved in. It is however, one more activity that has the potential for abuse. Use of the Internet by itself is not an additive activity unless the individual that uses it is abusing certain aspects of it (downloading adult material, secret relationships, to name a few).

Dawson McAllister sheds some light on the “big picture” when it comes to youth and the values they hold:

The point is this: developmental factors remain constant in youth culture from one generation to the next, but the forces of our culture are driving families apart, promoting sex and drugs, and undermining the foundation of truth. The images and sounds of the past thirty to forty years give us a loud and clear message. Sure the steep increase in drug use and sex during the X’ers youth have been arrested. That’s great. But we aren’t gaining any ground we’ve lost. And in the field of morals and truth, we’re losing even more ground. The culture is speaking to us. We’d better listen!<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup>Project Teen 2000 Survey preliminary results. (Used with permission.)

<sup>173</sup>McAllister, 51.

## Cyber Evangelism

Quite the opposite side of the spectrum is the issue of how to live out one's life of faith on the Internet. Cyber evangelism is fast becoming a niche in Christian ministry that is attempting to enter the digital world with the message of Christ. A rather optimistic article by Arne H. Fjeldstad issues a recruitment call for Internet missionaries:

The Internet provides an open, non-judgmental marketplace where people can leave some of their prejudices behind. It is an exciting new opportunity for evangelism. Just as the church sent Barnabas and Paul, and millions more missionaries throughout the centuries, churches need to commission dedicated men and women to penetrate the Internet, to present the gospel and model a holistic, Christian life. With more than 20,000 active user groups and e-mail conferences on almost any imaginable subject all over the world. Christians have tremendous opportunities for relationship building and for sharing faith in Jesus Christ. . . . In a real sense, communication is more than "transmitting" a message via an external tool (like radio, TV. Etc.) But also it is about being willing to go in person like a missionary.<sup>174</sup>

There is an irony about this optimistic statement that Fjeldstad makes about cyber evangelism. His comments that it is a non-judgmental forum are a bit over stated as anyone knows who has tried to talk about spiritual things related to Christianity can share. It is more common that they will get "flamed"<sup>175</sup> than listened too. He also makes the comment that it is possible to demonstrate a holistic Christian life exclusively on-line. This would be a difficult endeavor as it is hard to imagine getting a true sense of the missionaries committed lifestyle through a text-based conversation. If the messaging led to a personal encounter it might be more realistic, or if the missionary could convince the

---

<sup>174</sup>Arne H. Fjeldstad, "Communicating Christ in Cyberspace" in *Worship Leader* (July/August, 1998): 28-29.

<sup>175</sup>*Flamed* is a term that describes the often violent outburst or negative response to someone on-line. It is the equivalent of getting tongue-lashed only in a text format.

person to connect with a body of faith nearby such as a local church or Bible study group. His closing statement belies a certain bias as he states that we need to go in person. The question begs to be asked, how do you do that solely on the Internet?

The purpose of introducing this article is to show that even though there is a often euphoric view that the Internet is the next untapped Macedonia of missionary zeal, it requires more than a modem and a keyboard to help a person come to faith and live a life of Christian witness.

Douglas Groothuis brings a more balanced thought to the whole Internet cyber evangelism issue:

Because of its vast worldwide connections, some Christians see cyber space as a wonderful opportunity to present and defend the gospel. This opportunity however, is another two edged sword. Electronic bulletin boards, chat rooms, and e-mail can be used to articulate the Christian world view only if the established “netiquette” of such forums are respected and the intrinsic limitations of the medium are recognized. . . . When entering cyberspace in the above ways we are involved. Because of its disembodied, impermanent, and largely impersonal nature, cyberspace is not the best setting in which to explain or argue for the Christian message, although interaction that has begun on-line may lead to more engaging encounters person-to-person.<sup>176</sup>

There are basic realities that Groothuis brings to light that must be considered before embarking on an aggressive evangelistic blitz via the Internet. It would almost be akin to taking a telephone phone book and starting to call through the directory trying to engage people in a conversation about Christ. It is not beyond the realm of possibility to introduce people to Christ, however, the rules of relationship and tact as well as a prayer laden approach would most likely win more converts than an aggressive cyber-crusade.

---

<sup>176</sup>Groothuis, 149-150.

In summary, the aforementioned topics are merely some of the issues that are related to on-line community and youth ministry. The issues that arise require careful thought and interaction with mentors and adult leaders who are working with youth. Morality, issues related to authenticity, false identity, the role of truth and trust and even being wary of addictive behaviors are all part of the wise counsel. Millennial youth are the practitioners of this technology and may at times leave older adults perplexed. The wisdom of the elders can, however, transcend the megabytes. There is a Biblical precedent, knowledge can be imparted regarding most moral questions or dilemmas which youth may find themselves encountering in cyberspace.

The next chapter will deal with the methodology of the project portion of this dissertation. A explanation of the procedures and rationale for this project will be included in it as well.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **A WINDOW INTO THE VIEWS OF CANADIAN CHRISTIAN YOUTH WITH RESPECT TO THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY**

To help determine the views of Canadian youth, with respect to community, survey invitation cards were sent to 43 youth pastors and workers across all Canadian provinces (excluding the Yukon, North West Territories and Nunavut). The purpose of the sending the 6,500 invitation cards was to invite youth to take part in an on-line survey. Of that amount, 245<sup>177</sup> youth (approximately 4 percent), logged onto the site and submitted responses. While the return was relatively low, there was representation from each province from across the country. The reasons for the low response rate will be discussed later.

Two on-line focus group sessions were conducted with youth that had taken part in the original on-line survey at a prearranged time on a secure chat room at [www.christianyouthworks.com](http://www.christianyouthworks.com). A total of seven youth joined the first session and two returned for the second session. The focus groups were conducted to follow up on the results of the on-line survey to obtain clearer explanations for some of the material that

---

<sup>177</sup>Of that number, 231 were used for the statistical data in this report; fourteen were outside the age range that was specified for the study (13 to 23 years of age).

was evidenced in the survey results.

A third focus group was scheduled to interact in a face to face interview with youth that were not actively involved on the Internet. However, due to time constraints and the inability to find any youth that were not actively involved in the Internet in my area I had to let this one aspect go. It would have been interesting to compare the experiences of youth that are not involved on-line with those that are in terms of their views on community. A further explanation of the procedure that led to the execution of the focus groups will be covered later in this chapter.

The goal of this exercise, using the grounded theory method of analysis, was to challenge my assumptions on the role that the Internet plays in the experience of Canadian Christian youth in community on-line. A comparison was done of youth ages 13 to 23 and their experiences and understanding of the qualities of authentic Christian community in their youth groups, in their churches and on-line.

An on-line survey was deemed the best way to access a greater representation of responses from across the country for several reasons:

- a) the cost of printing and mailing 6,500 surveys would have been prohibitive and would have hindered the scope;
- b) the thinking at the time was that it would be a great deal easier to send invitations to numerous youth workers and have them endorse and hand out the cards at youth functions therefore obtaining a greater cross section of response from Christian youth;
- c) the use of an on-line survey would facilitate receiving a survey submitted

immediately--as soon as a young person hit the submit button. There was also a greater chance the youth would respond. This would also eliminate the need to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope which would be expensive.

An on-line focus group experience was chosen to augment the survey for several reasons:

a) the on-line focus groups allowed students from across representative regions of Canada to participate in a focus group that would otherwise been possible only through a conference call which would have eliminated the possibility of anonymity and would have been cost prohibitive;

b) the focus groups could be accessed only through a secure chat room-- thereby instilling confidence of the participants that it was not open to anyone except those who participated in the actual survey and at my invitation;

c) the on-line focus group mimicked the actual working elements of a on-line community so the experience of the interview served as a mini-example of what a community could be like in terms of communicating with one another. After the last session, two girls--one from the West Coast and one from the East--exchanged e-mails and decided to keep in touch following the focus group.

I was able to enlist the assistance of some of the high school staff team of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship to assist in the distribution of the survey cards. I called numerous youth pastors and volunteers across the country whom I knew from various denominations and requested their assistance in the distribution process. The printing and mailing costs for the survey cards were generously covered by James Berney, the

president of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. The registration costs for the name of the dedicated web site through Network Solutions [www.christianyouthworks.com](http://www.christianyouthworks.com) were also covered by Mr. Berney.

It was not possible to do a random sample on a national scale due to the constraints of time and resources. I chose to get as broad a denominational and provincial representation as possible. I am from Atlantic Canada and know more people in the East than the West; this fact would have influenced a higher response rate from the Atlantic Provinces. There was also a higher response from youth who were high school age as opposed to the college and university youth, ages 19-23. The limitations of this distribution will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

### **Survey Invitation Cards**

The survey invitation cards, survey questions, promotional materials and the focus group questions were all approved by the Committee on Ethics in Research of McMaster University before they were distributed and the website activated. The site was open for a six-week period to enable students to return their responses during a wide window of time. It also gave me a period of time in which to call people and remind them to encourage the youth to complete the survey or to remind the leaders to distribute the survey invitation cards.

The survey cards were each encoded with a username (*students*) and a password (*waldo*). Each card was numbered with a unique four-digit number ranging from 0001 to 6500. The name of the web site where the survey could be accessed was printed on each



invitation card along with the dates to gain access; October 15<sup>th</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000 (see Appendix A).

### **On-line Survey Website**

The web site was secured with a username and password system. Security was a high priority for this endeavour since it would be inappropriate for others to access the site. At the beginning of the survey, there was a response field to put the unique ID Code number from the invitation card so each survey could be tracked for its location by province and distributor. Each card was to be used once; this was indicated on the invitation card. Having the unique ID code number allowed follow up in the event of tampering or to catch a student who might submit more than one survey with the same card. It would also prevent the chance of “spamming” by a student who might want to skew the results.

Coupled with the need for security on the web site, was the issue of student confidentiality. The process of site identification did not allow the surveyor to see the identity of the participants beyond the standard demographic information provided in the actual survey.<sup>178</sup>

Each survey that came in also was date and time-coded along with the ISP (Internet Service Provider) number from the computer which the student was using so

---

<sup>178</sup>Arlene Fink and Jacqueline Kosecoff, *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-By-Step Guide*. (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 7; points out that it is imperative to preserve confidentiality especially those surveys that are web based, through an encryption or secure method of data gathering.

tracking could be done to ensure clean and un-tampered results.

I experienced an example of how this security system proved to be valuable. I noticed one afternoon six surveys had been submitted within a five-minute window indicated by the time code on each survey. Since they were all from the same ISP, one option meant they could have been submitted by one student at a one computer terminal at home or at school. Upon checking the time code for each survey, it appeared there was a 15-second delay between two of the surveys. This would be impossible to do since it took at least 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey in a legitimate fashion, let alone going through it and submitting bogus answers (which I tested myself and found took about two minutes to complete). The answers were different in each survey, but they did appear to be logical and not random since there were comments which required thought and typing time to arrive at the answers.

Since I had the unique ID codes of each the six surveys, I was able to contact the distributor of the cards and asked if it were possible for six students to have completed the survey simultaneously. He concurred that six students from an Inter School Christian Fellowship<sup>179</sup> group at the high school had gone to the computer lab as a group, completed the survey, and submitted them within a relatively similar time frame. The mystery was solved and authenticity was assured.

The other factor that the on-line survey web site allowed for was the ability to close the site after the deadline date of November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000. This eliminated the

---

<sup>179</sup>Inter School Christian Fellowship is the high school ministry arm of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada. They are a Christian based club that meets in the context of the local middle or high school.

possibility of accepting late surveys.

## Survey Design

The survey web site was designed and maintained using Microsoft FrontPage 2000. The survey questions were chosen carefully to try to determine what students thought about the three communities for which I was testing; youth groups, churches and on-line communities. Through preliminary conversations with groups of high school students and literature research of current academic thinking, 20 characteristics of basic Christian community were chosen to use in the on-line survey. An option was also provided for students to chose characteristics they perceived to be the ideal Christian community; this was used as a baseline to compare the other community characteristics which were chosen.

The structure of the survey was carefully created to prevent students from figuring out any specific patterns. There were cases where double questions were asked to determine that all answers were consistent. The survey was conducted on-line in a field pre-test one month before the release of the actual completed survey, with a on-line Christian community on ICQ of over 345 people. Over 100 people completed the survey and responded with criticism as to clarity, time, and ease of operation of the site. It helped locate potential problems that had remained undetected and allowed fine tuning of the on-line version of the survey.<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Floyd J. Fowler, Jr. *Survey Research Methods (Second Edition)*, (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 102-103; point out that self-administered questionnaires deserve more pretesting than interviewer-administered survey instruments. They also

In order to avoid the possibility of bias toward a positive response only to the various aspects of community (church or on-line) there were opportunities provided for students to list any negative qualities on each possibility. The negative responses, which were often sentence answers, were codified and tabulated. It provided a more balanced view of each community. Caution was exercised to ensure that inclusive language was utilized in all material.

### **Data Management**

The data from the surveys were received by e-mail with the responses in a tabulated format with all the identification regarding codes and date and time. Since the time factor and financial resources did not allow for the responses to be automatically tabulated, each response was printed in a hard copy and saved to a disk file. The data was then manually entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to be used later for statistical analysis using the SPSS 10.0 statistics software package. The data was stored in three file formats for security purposes in the event of a hard drive crash or faulty diskette.

In order to test for possible data error due to manual entry, each column was checked for anomalous or missing data. If data was missing the hard copy was checked and the data corrected in the master file.<sup>181</sup> This was relatively easy to test for in Excel;

---

pointed out that length and respondent ability and willingness to complete the survey was critical. Since time was a factor when considering youth and attention span, the time factor was carefully considered in ease of use and length of time to complete the actual survey.

<sup>181</sup> Floyd J. Fowler, Jr. *Survey Research Methods (Second Edition)*, 130-131, emphasized the importance of keeping error as low as possible. Data cleaning was also

a column by column search revealed some missing data that was later inserted. There were instances of duplicate surveys being sent, however, this may have been due to a student hitting the submit button more than once because of a slow server. In all cases, the duplicates were identical and only one was chosen from each set of duplicates to be entered into the data. Only one survey had to be discarded when two surveys were submitted with the same ID Code number. The assumption was that a sibling decided to use the same ID code number (both came from the same ISP server). Following the data entry, the hard copies and electronic copies of the surveys were destroyed.

### **Survey Criticisms**

Initially, when surveys started to arrive, some obvious concerns arose. The rate of return was much lower than would have been desired for a true national sample of students. It became apparent that the rate of return was going to be low with the average response being around one student per 100 invitation cards distributed. It would mean that in a youth group of 100 students, only one response might be possible. In one case, 1,600 cards were distributed at a provincial denominational youth rally and only 30 surveys were completed. This pattern of return was consistent across the board and no area outshone the others as far as return rates. I have concluded that youth either forgot or were not interested since there was no incentive, reward or motivating factor to complete the survey.

---

something that needed to have attention applied. Since the electronic format was error free it was critical to make sure the interim manual data entry was as accurate as possible. Having the hard copies also helped to verify missing or anomalous data.

There was disparity in the number youth ages 19 to 23 and those who were 13 to 18. Since the number of distribution contacts who volunteered were largely high school staff and youth pastors, this was not a surprise. In retrospect, I should have enlisted university IVCF campus staff assistance in targeting the 19-23 age group; it might have balanced out the numbers.

The final criticism was related to the lower numbers that were obtained from the Western provinces. This was due to the limitations of time and the inability to connect with enough youth pastors from various denominations in that part of the country. If there had been more time, personal contact would have enabled me to enlist the support of youth pastors with whom I was not acquainted.

### **On-line Focus Groups**

At the completion of each survey that was submitted on-line, the student was taken to an acknowledgement page which showed appreciation for their participation. They were then invited to send an e-mail indicating their willingness to be a part of an on-line focus group. Twelve students responded indicating that they would be willing to be a part of the focus group. Following approval from the Ethics committee in January 2001, e-mail instructions were sent to the twelve students inviting them to a specific date and time (based on time zones). The web site had the same security features with a password and username that allowed entry to a chat room especially designed for the focus group.

Of the twelve students that were sent instructions, there were only six were able to participate in the one hour on-line session (one joined too late to contribute). The second session was attended by two of the original six student participants. The second

session was to follow up on any of the original questions asked in the first session.

To summarize, any final conclusions must be sensitive to the reality that positive results and projections may be the result of an imbalanced survey result. The positive aspect of this study is that the quality of responses of the younger high school students are enough to give a fairly clear picture of the trends and patterns for their understanding of community. There also was representation from each Canadian province and a broad denominational sample. The females represented in the survey outnumbered the males, but in most cases the significance did not point to huge differences based on gender. The results are fascinating and show some clear preferences for the various characteristics of the various communities to which students were asked to respond. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

One assumption that has to be considered: there is always a possibility that deception may have taken place with someone filling in the survey who was not authentic. Most self-administered anonymous surveys run the risk of some kind of deception. In this case, looking at the spread of the data helped to see if any data was manipulated by anyone to a large degree. The appearance of the on-line survey was made to appeal to a youthful audience and yet still maintain the integrity of a scholarly survey testing instrument. (Appendix B).

Several comments were made in various places throughout the survey that helped to clarify the data. I shall interact with the comments that were made and their implications as well as other aspects of the survey in the chapter that follows. At this point I wish to provide a presentation of the answers to the on-line survey with a basic

analysis of the data which flows from these responses.

**Table 5:1 Question # 1 - What Canadian province do you currently live in?**

<b>Province Represented</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Percentage of total</b>
<b>British Columbia</b>	20	8.7
<b>Alberta</b>	16	6.9
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	8	3.5
<b>Manitoba</b>	14	6.1
<b>Ontario</b>	24	10.4
<b>Quebec</b>	30	13.0
<b>New Brunswick</b>	42	18.2
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	36	15.6
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	11	4.8
<b>Newfoundland</b>	30	13.0

The numbers are fairly distributed with the exception of Saskatchewan. The greatest number were related to my proximity to youth leaders that I knew. Distribution of numbers of cards was fairly even in most provinces.



**Table 5:2      Question # 2 - How old were you on your last birthday?**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
<b>13</b>	16	6.9
<b>14</b>	25	10.8
<b>15</b>	38	16.5
<b>16</b>	34	14.7
<b>17</b>	30	13.0
<b>18</b>	23	10.0
<b>19</b>	15	6.5
<b>20</b>	18	7.8
<b>21</b>	16	6.9
<b>22</b>	12	5.2
<b>23</b>	4	1.7

The numbers of students are higher in the high school age range and then taper off after the university age of 18 to 23. The highest age represented was age 15. As was mentioned before this disparity in numbers was largely due to the lack of connection with youth pastors with college age youth. A remedy would have been to have contacted campus staff workers of IVCF to distribute on college campuses and that could have bolstered the number of 18 years and up. The costs would have been doubled as the number of cards would have to have been close to the 10,000 to 12,000 mark to get those numbers up. The average mean age of males as 17.5 years old and the average mean age for females was 16.6 years of age.

**Table 5:3      Question # 3 - What grade/year of your program are you in?**

<b>Grade or Year of Program</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>grade 7</b>	0	0
<b>grade 8</b>	15	6.5
<b>grade 9</b>	22	9.5
<b>grade 10</b>	39	16.9
<b>grade 11</b>	35	15.2
<b>grade 12</b>	30	13.0
<b>grade 13 (ON)</b>	5	2.2
<b>CGEP (PQ)</b>	2	0.9
<b>First year college or university</b>	22	9.5
<b>Second year</b>	21	9.1
<b>Third year</b>	13	5.6
<b>Fourth year</b>	13	5.6
<b>Community College</b>	1	0.4
<b>Graduate student</b>	3	1.3
<b>Post Graduate</b>	1	0.4
<b>Not in School</b>	9	3.9

These figures are consistent with the age groups that are represented in question # 1.

**Table 5:4      Question # 4 - Are you male or female?**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Male</b>	97	42.0
<b>Female</b>	134	58.0

The higher number of girls could reflect the tendency for a higher number of girls that attend youth groups as opposed to boys.

**Table 5: 5      Question # 5 - How many times a month do you attend your church worship service?**

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>I do not attend</b>	2	0.9
<b>1 to 2 times a month</b>	14	6.1
<b>3 to 4 times a month</b>	94	40.7
<b>5 or more times a month</b>	121	52.4

It is fairly obvious that the sample of students that were recruited were already active in their youth groups and churches as that is the domain that we sought to administer the invitation cards to. There is a relatively highly committed element of Christian students. Over half of the students are involved five times or more a month in their church worship service which does not include attendance of youth groups or other church functions as well. This will be compared to the figures in Question # 6 dealing with youth group attendance.

**Table 5:6      Question #6 - How many times a month do you attend your church youth group or young adults group?**

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>I do not attend</b>	11	4.8
<b>1 to 2 times a month</b>	28	12.1
<b>3 to 4 times a month</b>	82	35.5
<b>5 or more times a month</b>	103	44.6
<b>Does not apply</b>	7	3.0

As reflected in the church worship service attendance a high percentage of youth attend their youth programs as well. More than 80 percent of the youth in this sample attend their youth programs three or more times a month. Using data from this question and question # 5 and question # 8, relating to their stand on personal faith, a pretty accurate picture can be gleaned about the type of dedication to their faith and church programs.

**Table 5:7 Question # 7 What denomination or faith are you currently associated with?**

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Baptist (Convention)</b>	40	17.3
<b>Baptist (Fellowship)</b>	30	13.0
<b>Pentecostal (PAOC)</b>	30	13.0
<b>Non-denominational</b>	27	11.7
<b>Mennonite</b>	16	6.9
<b>Interdenominational</b>	15	6.5
<b>Presbyterian</b>	14	6.1
<b>Other</b>	13	5.6
<b>Anglican</b>	12	5.2
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	9	3.9
<b>Pentecostal (other)</b>	9	3.9
<b>Wesleyan</b>	8	3.5
<b>United Church</b>	3	1.3
<b>No Church</b>	3	1.3
<b>Baptist (Southern)</b>	1	0.4
<b>Nazarene</b>	1	0.4

The higher percentage of Convention Baptists would likely be related to the personal contacts that I have are centred in the denomination that I am a part of. Also in the Atlantic provinces, ISCF is largely attended by youth from convention Baptist churches. Because of the small sample it would not take many of any one denomination to become predominant. The other issue is that some of the more liturgical churches do not have as many youth programs.

**Table 5: 8 List of “other” denominations that were not listed in the survey:**

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Brethren Bible Chapel</b>	3	1.3
<b>Christian Reformed</b>	1	1.3
<b>Evangelical Free</b>	2	0.9
<b>Lutheran</b>	1	0.4
<b>Missionary Alliance</b>	3	1.3
<b>Salvation Army</b>	1	0.4
<b>Union d’Eglises baptistes</b>	1	0.4
<b>Methodist</b>	2	0.9

**Table 5: 9 Question # 8 - Would you term your relationship with God as:**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Personal</b>	165	71.4
<b>On the way</b>	50	21.6
<b>Random</b>	2	0.9
<b>Not really interested</b>	2	0.9

There seems to be a high proportion of young people dedicated to their faith. This is evidenced by the high percentage of youth that consider their faith to be personal (almost 72 percent). Linking this to the church and youth group attendance there is a strong indication that this sample of youth are dedicated to their faith.

**Question # 9 - Some Questions about your church and friends:**

**Table 5:10 a) Do you go to church with your friends instead if with your family?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Yes</b>	101	43.7
<b>No</b>	128	55.4
<b>Non response</b>	2	0.9

This was asked to get a sense of the connectedness of these youth to their family. Is the trend still that youth attend church as a family unit? Here we see that over half attend with their family.

**Table 5:11 b) Do you have non-Christian friends?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Yes</b>	220	95.2
<b>No</b>	11	4.8

An overwhelming amount of these youth are well connected to friends that are non-believers. This is significant when considering their potential role in peer evangelism.

**Table 5:12 c) Do you go to church services with your family?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Yes</b>	178	77.1
<b>No</b>	53	22.9

The question is asked a different way with the results showing a strong link to family.

This question was linked to question 9 a).

**Table 5:13 d) Do you go to a different church from that of your family?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Yes</b>	69	29.9
<b>No</b>	156	67.5
<b>Non response</b>	6	2.6

There appears to be a correlation between this and the last question. There is a high proportion that are not going to another church and they appear in the last question to be linked quite strongly to their families attendance. Also for those that are not attending the same church as their parents (almost 30 percent) it could be interpreted that this could be because their parents do not attend church at all.

**Table 5: 14 Question # 10 - How many times have you changed churches in the past 5 years?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Once</b>	66	28.6
<b>Twice</b>	24	10.4
<b>Three to Four</b>	22	9.5
<b>More than Four</b>	6	2.6
<b>Have not changed churches</b>	113	48.9

The reason this question was asked was to determine how rooted these youth may be. There has been speculation that this generation of youth tend to be menu oriented and wander from church to church. These figures indicate that this is not so much the case as almost half (49 percent) have not changed churches they have attended (at least within the past five years) and others (29 percent) have changed only once in that same period.



**Table 5:15 Reasons why changed churches:**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Moved to new town</b>	36	15.6
<b>Change because of university</b>	19	8.2
<b>Changed because of different doctrine in the church</b>	12	5.2
<b>Dissatisfaction with the church</b>	11	4.8
<b>Youth group was not good</b>	10	4.3
<b>Conversion experience so joined a church</b>	5	2.2
<b>Parents job situation changed</b>	5	2.2
<b>Conflict with the pastor</b>	4	1.7
<b>Conflict in the church</b>	3	1.3
<b>Liked new church better than previous</b>	3	1.3
<b>Convenience</b>	2	0.9
<b>Changed to be with friends</b>	1	0.4
<b>Like variety move around a lot</b>	1	0.4
<b>Church closed</b>	1	0.4

The reasons for leaving the church for those that have in the past five years are many and varied. The highest number was for typical reasons of relocation for a new home, town or to go away to school.

**Question # 11 - How would you rank your experience of the following?****Table 5:16 a) Genuine community at my church or youth group**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Satisfactory</b>	111	48.1
<b>Somewhat satisfactory</b>	74	32.0
<b>Satisfactory</b>	34	14.7
<b>Dissatisfactory</b>	11	4.8
<b>No response</b>	1	0.4

A high percentage (80 percent) of the sample ranked their feelings as somewhat to very satisfied with the communities that they experience in their churches. Only a low amount were dissatisfied (almost five percent). This is the first indication of positive feelings about community in the local church.

**Table 5: 17 b) My relationship with my non-Christian friends**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Satisfactory</b>	69	29.9
<b>Somewhat satisfactory</b>	96	41.6
<b>Satisfactory</b>	54	23.4
<b>Dissatisfactory</b>	10	4.3
<b>No Response</b>	2	0.9

This response shows that while question # 9 b) indicated that most of these students have a lot of non-Christian friends that the majority (65 percent) only find these relationships somewhat to satisfactory compared to 30 percent at very satisfactory.

**Table 5: 18 c) Genuine Christian community while I am on the Internet**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Satisfactory</b>	31	13.4
<b>Somewhat satisfactory</b>	77	33.3
<b>Satisfactory</b>	63	27.2
<b>Dissatisfactory</b>	42	18.2
<b>No response</b>	18	7.8

This question gives an indication while there is not a very strong satisfaction with the Internet for community that it does have a fairly strong showing with almost 61 percent experiencing it from a satisfactory to somewhat satisfactory experience. There was a higher number (just over 18 percent) dissatisfied with the Internet as a expression of community.

**Table 5: 19 d) Sharing my Christian faith on-line**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Satisfactory</b>	52	22.5
<b>Somewhat satisfactory</b>	44	19.0
<b>Satisfactory</b>	54	23.4
<b>Dissatisfactory</b>	56	24.2
<b>No Response</b>	25	10.8

There was an even spread among the feelings towards sharing faith on-line. This of course is not related only to the limitation of the use of the technology but also the ability, stage of development, personality and desire to share one's faith.

**Table 5: 20 e) My church has helped me grow in my faith as a Christian**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Satisfactory</b>	141	61.0
<b>Somewhat satisfactory</b>	51	22.1
<b>Satisfactory</b>	27	11.7
<b>Dissatisfactory</b>	9	3.9
<b>No Response</b>	3	1.3

This question showed high marks for the church as a community that students felt provided a nurturing environment so they might grow in their faith. This question becomes one of the foundational building blocks to building a strong case for the church as seen by youth as the primary community to develop and assist them with their faith development.

**Question # 12** What do you believe to be the 5 most important characteristics of Christian community in your church or youth group as you are experiencing them now? (See Appendix B for further instructions that came with this question The results are sorted in descending order with characteristics chosen as number one.)

**Table 5:21**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Response as #1 choice</b>	<b>Percentage for # 1</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage of responses rated 1 to 5</b>
<b>Christian Love</b>	47	20.3	49.4
<b>Worship</b>	35	15.2	56.7
<b>Praying</b>	19	8.2	47.6
<b>Honesty</b>	19	8.2	28.1
<b>Fellowship</b>	17	7.4	41.1
<b>Unity</b>	16	6.9	31.6
<b>Forgiveness</b>	11	4.8	32.0
<b>Encouragement</b>	10	4.3	29.9
<b>Openness</b>	8	3.5	15.2
<b>Non-Judgmental</b>	8	3.5	22.1
<b>Acceptance</b>	8	3.5	23.8
<b>Loyalty</b>	3	1.3	5.6
<b>Integrity</b>	3	1.3	10.8
<b>Kindness</b>	3	1.3	11.3
<b>Accountability</b>	2	0.9	13.0
<b>Mission</b>	2	0.9	9.5
<b>Spiritual Gifts</b>	2	0.9	11.7
<b>Giving of Time</b>	2	0.9	7.8
<b>Listening</b>	1	0.4	11.3
<b>Peace</b>	0	0	3.9

This results of question # 12 show that the top characteristic(expressed as the number one choice) that is expressed in the community of the church is Christian love (20 percent). Next came Worship (15 percent), Praying (eight percent), Honesty (eight percent) and then Fellowship (seven percent) as the top five characteristics. It is interesting to note that with the exception of Honesty, the other characteristics are fairly practical and experiential. Prayer, Worship and Fellowship and to some degree Christian Love are all characteristics that can be seen or acted out on a Sunday morning. Integrity or Accountability are perhaps a bit more nebulous and would not rank as high for youth.

When the cumulated values or responses that were from one to five were added up; Worship moves up to the highest (57 percent), (most experiential) followed by Love (49.4 percent), Praying (48 percent), Fellowship (41 percent) and moving up from below and replacing Honesty comes Forgiveness (32 percent). It is worthy of note that Worship in the church community as a characteristics in the cumulated total was the highest rated characteristic of all three categories being compared in question # 12, # 26 and # 28.

There were a few other qualities that were shared as alternatives to the ones that were in the list:

**Table 5:22 Other qualities that were listed as alternative to those presented in the table**

<b>Other Qualities Listed</b>	<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
<b>Learning and growing in our relationship with God</b>	1	1
<b>Doing God's will</b>	1	1
<b>Faith</b>	1	1
<b>Love (no teen encouragement through prayer as well, accountability for actions i.e. bible readings)</b>	1	1
<b>Focus on Christ</b>	1	1
<b>Education/edification</b>	1	1
<b>Truth</b>	1	2
<b>Welcoming</b>	2	1
<b>Prayer</b>	2	1
<b>Ministry</b>	2	1
<b>Desire to know God</b>	3	1
<b>Friendship with each other</b>	3	1
<b>Enjoyment</b>	4	1
<b>Wisdom</b>	4	1
<b>Able to answer questions</b>	5	1
<b>Genuine</b>	5	1

While these were presented as alternative characteristics there was not enough of any one of them to really consider as significant in the analysis of the data. The idea was to provide an opportunity to allow students to express misgivings or negative characteristics for this community as they experience it:

**Question # 13** No situation is perfect. Please list any negative qualities (if any) that you may have experienced with your church. Youth or club experiences.

**Table 5:23 Negative #1**

<b>Negative Qualities</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Cliques/exclusive</b>	29	12.6
<b>Judgmental</b>	16	6.9
<b>Lack of true community</b>	15	6.5
<b>Apathetic youth/congregation</b>	12	5.2
<b>Disunity/disharmony</b>	11	4.8
<b>Problems with various functions of the church</b>	10	4.3
<b>Hypocritical</b>	9	3.9
<b>Segregation /prejudice/intolerance</b>	9	3.9
<b>Pastoral inadequacy/poor leadership/no vision</b>	6	2.6
<b>Not enough Bible/ Spiritual ignorance</b>	5	2.2
<b>Superficial/traditional/unfulfilling</b>	4	1.7
<b>Gossip/Slander</b>	4	1.7
<b>Passiveness/lack of passion</b>	3	1.3
<b>Appearances/prideful</b>	3	1.3
<b>Too introspective/inflexible</b>	3	1.3
<b>Boring</b>	3	1.3
<b>Age gap</b>	2	0.9
<b>Selfish/greed</b>	2	0.9
<b>Isolation</b>	2	0.9
<b>Broken promises/lack of integrity</b>	2	0.9
<b>Poor attendance</b>	1	0.4
<b>Lack of prayer</b>	1	0.4
<b>Political/money/power/time</b>	1	0.4



Table 5:23 (continued)

<b>Inexperience</b>	1	0.4
<b>Conflict</b>	1	0.4
<b>Lack of discipline/disrespect</b>	1	0.4
<b>No response</b>	125	54.1

Table 5:24 Negative # 2

<b>Negative Qualities</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Problems with various functions of the church</b>	17	7.4
<b>Pastoral inadequacy/poor leadership/no vision</b>	14	6.1
<b>Lack of true community</b>	11	4.8
<b>Cliques/exclusive</b>	10	4.3
<b>Judgmental</b>	9	3.9
<b>Hypocritical</b>	8	3.5
<b>Disunity/disharmony</b>	4	1.7
<b>Gossip/Slander</b>	4	1.7
<b>Apathetic youth/congregation</b>	3	1.3
<b>Superficial/traditional/unfulfilling</b>	3	1.3
<b>Age gap</b>	3	1.3
<b>Political/money/power/time</b>	3	1.3
<b>Passiveness/lack of passion</b>	3	1.3
<b>Too introspective/inflexible</b>	3	1.3
<b>Not enough Bible/ Spiritual ignorance</b>	2	0.9
<b>Appearances/prideful</b>	2	0.9
<b>Isolation</b>	2	0.9
<b>Segregation /prejudice/intolerance</b>	1	0.4

Table 5:24 (continued)

<b>Inexperience</b>	1	0.4
<b>Broken promises/lack of integrity</b>	1	0.4
<b>Poor attendance</b>	1	0.4
<b>Conflict</b>	1	0.4
<b>Lack of discipline/disrespect</b>	1	0.4
<b>No response</b>	125	54.1

Table 5: 25 Negative # 3

<b>Negative Qualities</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Judgmental</b>	12	5.2
<b>Pastoral inadequacy/poor leadership/no vision</b>	8	3.5
<b>Problems with various functions of the church</b>	8	3.5
<b>Superficial/traditional/unfulfilling</b>	6	2.6
<b>Not enough Bible/ Spiritual ignorance</b>	4	1.7
<b>Segregation /prejudice/intolerance</b>	4	1.7
<b>Age gap</b>	3	1.3
<b>Apathetic youth/congregation</b>	3	1.3
<b>Political/money/power/time</b>	3	1.3
<b>Cliques/exclusive</b>	3	1.3
<b>Lack of true community</b>	2	0.9
<b>Hypocritical</b>	2	0.9
<b>Lack of discipline/disrespect</b>	2	0.9
<b>Morality/sin</b>	2	0.9
<b>Boring</b>	1	0.4
<b>Gossip/Slander</b>	1	0.4

Table 5:25 (continued)

<b>Selfish/greed</b>	1	0.4
<b>Disunity/disharmony</b>	1	0.4
<b>Broken promises/lack of integrity</b>	1	0.4
<b>Appearances/prideful</b>	1	0.4
<b>Too introspective/inflexible</b>	1	0.4
<b>Jealousy</b>	1	0.4
<b>No response</b>	169	69.3

While the list is vast there was a fair amount of repetition with the highest incidence of frustration or negative experience was that around relational issues; cliques, judgmental, hypocrisy, pastoral and church conflict, lack of community.

**Question # 14. How would you rank the following for importance for you?**

Table 5: 26 a) My attendance of worship services:

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	149	64.5
<b>Fairly Important</b>	66	28.6
<b>Not Very Important</b>	12	5.2
<b>Not Important</b>	2	0.9
<b>No Response</b>	2	0.9

While there may be frustration with the imperfect body of the church, students see it as worth attending in this sample. A very significant 93 percent rank attending worship service as fairly to very important. So not only is there a high degree of attendance as viewed in question # 5 but there is a degree of high value placed on it as well.

**Table 5:27    b) My friendships at school**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	112	48.5
<b>Fairly Important</b>	101	43.7
<b>Not Very Important</b>	14	6.1
<b>Not Important</b>	2	0.9
<b>No Response</b>	2	0.9

As Bibby and Posterski's studies in youth showed <sup>182</sup>, youth still highly value their friendships at a high rate. These figures show that the friends that they have in the school community are significant to them at fairly to very important at 92 percent.

**Table 5:28    c) Ability to access the Internet**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	42	18.2
<b>Fairly Important</b>	89	38.5
<b>Not Very Important</b>	77	33.3
<b>Not Important</b>	22	9.5
<b>No Response</b>	1	0.4

While the Internet is not as high a priority for youth they still find that its fairly to very important (57 percent) to be able to have access to the Internet and those that are not as concerned, that felt that it was not very or not important at all came in not much lower than the positive students (43 percent).

---

<sup>182</sup> Reginald W. Bibby and Donald C. Posterski, *Teen Trends*, 11.

**Table 5:29 d) To be able to keep touch with close Christian friends via the net.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	77	33.3
<b>Fairly Important</b>	75	32.5
<b>Not Very Important</b>	67	29.0
<b>Not Important</b>	11	4.8
<b>No Response</b>	1	0.4

The need to communicate and stay in touch is fairly high for this group of youth especially with their other Christian friends. They felt that it was fairly to very important (65.8 percent) to be able to have that ability to stay in touch on-line. So the Internet is seen by a fairly significant number to be essential to maintaining their friendship networks.

**Table 5:30 e) My friendships at church**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	157	68.0
<b>Fairly Important</b>	62	26.8
<b>Not Very Important</b>	9	3.9
<b>Not Important</b>	2	0.4
<b>No Response</b>	2	0.9

The friendships at church beat out any other friendship cohort that is fairly to very important (95 percent) to these youth. In fact there were almost no students that did not care about their friendships at their church.

**Table 5:31 f) My involvement in my youth group or Bible study group**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	162	70.1
<b>Fairly Important</b>	50	21.6
<b>Not Very Important</b>	10	4.3
<b>Not Important</b>	7	3.0
<b>No Response</b>	2	0.9

This question was paired with the question # 6. This shows that not only was attendance, as reflected in # 6 important but the actual degree of importance is very high as well from fairly to very important (92 percent) to them.

#### **Question # 15**

**Table 5:32 a) About how many Christian friends do you have in your non-on-line world?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Less than 10</b>	43	18.6
<b>Between 10 and 20</b>	71	30.7
<b>Between 20 and 30</b>	44	19.0
<b>More than 30</b>	72	31.2
<b>No Response</b>	1	0.4

This question indicated that there is a pretty even spread (probably due to personality and ability to interact with various groups) of the number of Christian friends that students have in their non-on-line world. This question is to serve as a base line for subsequent questions on numbers and types of friendships this cohort has.

**Table 5:33    b) About how many non-Christian friends do you have in your non-on-line world?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Less than 10</b>	66	28.6
<b>Between 10 and 20</b>	70	30.3
<b>Between 20 and 30</b>	43	18.6
<b>More than 30</b>	49	21.2
<b>No Response</b>	3	1.3

This question shows that Christian students have a few less non-Christian friends than they do non-Christians. This discredits to a small degree the misnomer that Christian students congregate in “holy huddles”. The reality is with such a high degree of church and youth group involvement and satisfaction, that the exposure is just higher in the church for these kinds of friendships.

#### **Question # 16**

**Table 5:34    a) Do you consider relationships that you have with on-line friends as:**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very significant</b>	36	15.6
<b>Fairly significant</b>	86	37.2
<b>Not very significant</b>	66	28.6
<b>Not significant</b>	36	15.6
<b>No Response</b>	7	3.0

Linked to #14 c) and d) this question reveals that a little better than half (53 percent) of this group feel that its fairly to very important to have on-line relationships with friends.

**Table 5:35    b) Do you consider the relationships that you have with non-on-line friends as:**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Very significant</b>	186	80.6
<b>Fairly significant</b>	27	11.7
<b>Not very significant</b>	8	3.5
<b>Not significant</b>	7	3.0
<b>No Response</b>	3	1.3

This question was asked as a comparison to the questions that will reflect the importance of their on-line friendship experiences. Here we see that once again this group places a high value on their friends that they see face to face (92 percent).

**Table 5:36    Question # 17 Do you have internet at home?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Yes	208	90.0
No	23	10.0
Non response	0	0

The results of this question could have been predicted based on the fact that the survey was done on-line and these students would have to have access in order to complete the survey. There were students that completed the survey from their school computer labs. The number of youth that may not have been able to access this survey is not known and it may have been a factor for some not being able to take the invitation cards.



**Table 5: 37 Question # 18 About how many hours a day on average would you spend on-line?**

<b>Hours a Day On-line</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>0</b>	17	7.4
<b>1</b>	111	48.1
<b>2</b>	25	25.1
<b>3</b>	16	6.9
<b>4</b>	14	6.1
<b>5</b>	7	3.0
<b>6</b>	3	1.3
<b>10</b>	1	0.4
<b>No Response</b>	4	1.7

This result was a bit surprising as there has been so much hype about the Internet and youth becoming mindless cyber-drones linked to the web for hours at a time. As was mentioned earlier in this dissertation the average usage for high schools students is about 1 to 2 hours a day. These results compare similarly with a national study that was conducted with over 3000 Canadian students.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> Reg Bibby, Project Teen 2000 survey - preliminary data (used with permission).

**Table 5:38 Question # 19 - How many E-mail addresses do you have?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>1</b>	84	36.4
<b>2 to 5</b>	110	47.6
<b>6 to 10</b>	11	4.8
<b>More than 10</b>	26	11.3
<b>No Response</b>	0	0

If I could have asked this question a different way I would have broke down the two to five category. It is not uncommon for people to have multiple e-mail accounts for various different related activities; one for home, work, school, recreation etc.

**Table 5:39 Question # 20 - How many nicknames or aliases for you have?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>1</b>	98	42.4
<b>2 to 5</b>	110	47.6
<b>6 to 10</b>	10	4.3
<b>More than 10</b>	13	5.6
<b>No Response</b>	0	0

Some people need to have aliases to enter chat rooms and other domains on the Internet to protect their identity or just to be identified with a neutral name that does not give away an identity. This group of students seem to have a normal range of aliases from one to five (90 percent).

**Table 5:40 Question # 21 - How often do you access web sites?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Many times daily</b>	40	17.3
<b>Daily</b>	75	32.5
<b>Several times a week</b>	55	23.8
<b>About once a week</b>	26	11.3
<b>2 to 3 times a month</b>	14	6.1
<b>About once a month</b>	6	2.6
<b>Hardly ever</b>	14	6.1
<b>Never</b>	1	0.4

This number was actually higher than I anticipated with several times a week to many times daily at almost 3/4 (74 percent) of this group accessed web sites at a fairly high rate with almost half (50 percent) daily to many times daily.

**Table 5:41 Question # 22 - About how often do you access chat rooms?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Many times daily</b>	6	2.6
<b>Daily</b>	12	5.2
<b>Several times a week</b>	8	3.5
<b>About once a week</b>	10	4.3
<b>2 to 3 times a month</b>	11	4.8
<b>About once a month</b>	6	2.6
<b>Hardly ever</b>	73	31.6
<b>Never</b>	105	45.5

Question # 22 indicates the majority of this group do not participate actively in chat rooms, however, almost a quarter (23 percent) are active to one degree or another in using them. There is an even spread in the rate at which they are trying them out as well.

**Table 5:42 Question # 23 - About how often do you check your E-mail?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Many times daily</b>	68	29.4
<b>Daily</b>	103	44.6
<b>Several times a week</b>	38	16.5
<b>About once a week</b>	9	3.9
<b>2 to 3 times a month</b>	3	1.3
<b>About once a month</b>	2	0.9
<b>Hardly ever</b>	5	2.2
<b>Never</b>	3	1.3

#### **Question # 24**

**Table 5:43 a) How many Christian friends have you made on the net that you have never met in person?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Less than 10</b>	189	81.8
<b>Between 10 and 20</b>	21	9.1
<b>Between 20 and 30</b>	6	2.6
<b>More than 30</b>	5	2.2
<b>No Response</b>	10	4.3

**Table 5:44    b) How many non-Christian friends have you made on the net that you have never met in person?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Less than 10</b>	179	77.5
<b>Between 10 and 20</b>	19	8.2
<b>Between 20 and 30</b>	12	5.2
<b>More than 30</b>	9	3.9
<b>No Response</b>	12	5.2

If I could be ask this question again it would have been to provide options that would be less than 10 (i.e. five or less etc) or none as an option. The less than 10 option here could take into account there are some who have never made any such friends. The question was also worded in a negative manner and unclear.

**Table 5:45    Question # 25 - What are some of the sites or items that you access while on-line?**

<b>Items Accessed On-line</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Christian music sites</b>	133	57.6
<b>Secular music sites</b>	57	24.7
<b>MP 3 sites</b>	58	25.1
<b>Christian Chat</b>	41	17.7
<b>ICQ (I Seek You)</b>	98	42.4
<b>Homework related sites</b>	171	74.0
<b>Devotional sites</b>	56	24.2

**Note:** Other sites were so numerous mostly comprised of the following sites; poetry, Christian resources, concerts, courses, E-bay, electronic cards, family background, forums, friends webs pages, games, hobby sites, jobs, jokes, Napster, news, on-line shopping, outdoor recreation, political parties, pornography, schools, search engines, sports. TV, kids sites, movies, Urbana, humour and comics, veggie tales, wrestling and many more.

**Question # 26 Which do you believe are the 5 most important characteristics of Christian community with your On-line community or internet contacts on the web? (See Appendix B. for further instructions that came with this question The results are sorted in descending order with characteristics chosen as number one.)**

**Table 5:46**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Response as #1 choice</b>	<b>Percentage for # 1</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage of responses rated 1 to 5</b>
<b>Honesty</b>	54	23.4	42.0
<b>Christian Love</b>	18	7.8	31.6
<b>Encouragement</b>	17	7.4	41.6
<b>Praying</b>	14	6.1	29.0
<b>Listening</b>	10	4.3	34.6
<b>Non-Judgmental</b>	9	3.9	26.0
<b>Openness</b>	6	2.6	19.5
<b>Giving of Time</b>	6	2.6	12.1
<b>Fellowship</b>	6	2.6	16.5
<b>Integrity</b>	4	1.7	8.2
<b>Accountability</b>	4	1.7	12.1
<b>Acceptance</b>	4	1.7	16.0
<b>Loyalty</b>	3	1.3	10.0
<b>Forgiveness</b>	3	1.3	10.0
<b>Kindness</b>	3	1.3	17.3
<b>Peace</b>	3	1.3	3.9
<b>Unity</b>	2	0.9	4.8
<b>Worship</b>	2	0.9	6.9
<b>Spiritual Gifts</b>	2	0.9	2.6
<b>Mission</b>	1	0.4	3.9

The response to these characteristics in Question # 26 was very interesting because it gives a snapshot of what these youth are thinking are the most significant characteristics of their on-line community experiences. It is amazing that Honesty (23.4 percent) comes out as the number one choice for on-line community. It also was the highest rated number one characteristic of the three questions (#12, # 26, and #28). This is remarkable because the Internet is often criticised for its anonymous and often unverifiable nature. This characteristic was followed by Christian Love (7.8 percent). A significant characteristic chosen was Encouragement (7.4 percent), something that might be more associated (perhaps erroneously) with a face to face encounter especially with someone that you know well. Praying (6.1 percent) and Listening (4.3) are also very interesting first picks that this group had made. Prayer and Listening are both experiences that are often expressed and experienced in an audible format.

When the cumulative percentage of ranking of one through five is compiled, the results still show that Honesty was the highest rated characteristic for the Internet at 42 percent. Next again came Encouragement (41.6 percent) and Listening (34.6 percent), Christian Love (31.6 percent) and finally Praying (29 percent). These characteristics are interesting in that we may have to take our old definitions of how people see and experience these and adapt them for the environment of the Internet.

As in Question # 12 there was an opportunity to express the negative aspects of this particular community. Respondents were asked to list what three things they thought were negative about Internet community:

b) No situation is perfect. Please list below any negative qualities (if any) that you may have experienced with your Internet on-line experiences.

**Table 5:47 Negative # 1**

<b>Negative Qualities</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Lack of authenticity/no proof of identity/lying</b>	27	11.7
<b>Inappropriate language/materials and values</b>	14	6.0
<b>Lack of intimacy/impersonal- no audio-visual references</b>	9	3.9
<b>Chat rooms addictive/questionable activity-language</b>	6	2.6
<b>Arguments and flaming/ violent behaviour or talk</b>	5	2.2
<b>Difficult to express oneself fully/clarity</b>	4	1.7
<b>Judgmental</b>	4	1.7
<b>Sporadic and random contact with people</b>	4	1.7
<b>Difficult to navigate/not clear/misleading</b>	3	1.3
<b>Sexual promiscuity</b>	3	1.3
<b>Church or Christian bashing/False or nominal Christians</b>	3	1.3
<b>Strange (weird) people</b>	3	1.3
<b>Spamming and unwanted e-mail</b>	2	0.8
<b>Not private</b>	2	0.8
<b>Junk ads and bombarded with advertizing</b>	1	0.4
<b>Pride</b>	1	0.4
<b>Boring</b>	1	0.4
<b>No Response</b>	139	60.2



**Table 5:48 Negative # 2**

<b>Negative Qualities</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Inappropriate language/materials and values</b>	10	4.3
<b>Lack of intimacy/impersonal- no audio-visual references</b>	6	2.6
<b>Church or Christian bashing/False or nominal Christians</b>	4	1.7
<b>Sporadic and random contact with people</b>	4	1.7
<b>Lack of authenticity/no proof of identity/lying</b>	4	1.7
<b>Arguments and flaming/ violent behaviour or talk</b>	2	0.8
<b>Difficult to navigate/not clear/misleading</b>	2	0.8
<b>Chat rooms addictive/questionable activity-language</b>	2	0.8
<b>Difficult to express oneself fully/clarity</b>	1	0.4
<b>Boring</b>	1	0.4
<b>Immaturity</b>	1	0.4
<b>Sexual promiscuity</b>	1	0.4

**Table 5:49 Negative # 3**

<b>Negative Qualities</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Lack of intimacy/impersonal- no audio-visual references</b>	5	2.2
<b>Church or Christian bashing/False or nominal Christians</b>	3	1.3
<b>Inappropriate language/materials and values</b>	3	1.3
<b>Difficult to navigate/not clear/misleading</b>	2	0.8
<b>Lack of authenticity/no proof of identity/lying</b>	1	0.4
<b>Arguments and flaming/ violent behaviour or talk</b>	1	0.4

The responses that kept coming back, centred around the lack of intimacy and face to face nature of the Internet and that hindered community. The lack of authenticity bothered a great deal of the students as there was no proof of identity and they often felt led to lying about identities. A common complaint is the inappropriate language and materials that often centred around sexual content.

**Question # 27. Where everyone knows your name:**

**Table 5:50 a) Does being anonymous take away from the intimacy or closeness that you experience with your on-line friends?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>A Great deal</b>	29	12.6
<b>Quite a bit</b>	37	16.0
<b>Some</b>	80	34.6
<b>Not at all</b>	54	23.4
<b>No Response</b>	31	13.4

Some to a great deal (63 percent) of these students felt that the anonymity factor for the Internet hindered their experience of closeness with the people that they were dealing with on-line from. Only 23 percent felt it did not really bother them at all.

One would think because of the lack of intimacy, that trust would be a big question in the minds of these students. If one can not trust the party they are addressing then it would be impossible to share to any depth of a personal nature. The next question deals with this fact:

**Table 5:51    b) Does being anonymous make it easier to share personal or sensitive issues on-line?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>A Great deal</b>	51	22.1
<b>Quite a bit</b>	63	27.3
<b>Some</b>	48	20.8
<b>Not at all</b>	37	16.0
<b>No Response</b>	32	13.9

An interesting phenomenon occurs on-line. Even if being anonymous is a detraction to some degree for some youth, there were over 70 percent who felt that being anonymous allowed them to share about personal things on-line (some to a great deal). My theory regarding this is what I like to call the electronic or “cyber-confessional”. In the environment of the Internet youth can share deep and personal issues and not fear rejection. They can not see the person and in some cases a listening ear is more important. Listening came in on question # 26 regarding the Internet as the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest experiences characteristic regarding community. Encouragement came in at number two. Both these qualities are something that youth may desire above the intimacy factor that they must sacrifice on-line. Yet, this characteristic of Listening as we will see in the next question is not the desired ideal. In fact it is far down on the list of desired characteristics. Listening maybe a characteristic that is intrinsic to the Internet where a captive audience or a willing ear is ready to listen 24/7 day or night.

**Question # 28** If you could create or join the IDEAL or PERFECT Christian community what would be the five most important characteristics of that community from the list below? (See Appendix B. for further instructions that came with this question The results are sorted in descending order with characteristics chosen as number one.)

**Table 5:52**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Response as #1 choice</b>	<b>Percentage for # 1</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage of responses rated 1 to 5</b>
<b>Christian Love</b>	48	20.8	46.8
<b>Honesty</b>	37	16.0	39.0
<b>Worship</b>	23	10.0	41.1
<b>Praying</b>	22	9.5	47.6
<b>Unity</b>	12	5.2	26.0
<b>Fellowship</b>	9	3.9	27.7
<b>Acceptance</b>	9	3.9	21.6
<b>Forgiveness</b>	9	3.9	31.2
<b>Non-Judgmental</b>	8	3.5	22.1
<b>Encouragement</b>	5	2.2	36.8
<b>Accountability</b>	5	2.2	17.7
<b>Openness</b>	4	1.7	20.8
<b>Integrity</b>	3	1.3	9.1
<b>Spiritual Gifts</b>	3	1.3	7.8
<b>Mission</b>	2	0.9	7.4
<b>Giving of Time</b>	2	0.9	6.9
<b>Kindness</b>	2	0.9	10.4
<b>Peace</b>	1	0.4	4.8
<b>Loyalty</b>	1	0.4	8.7
<b>Listening</b>	1	0.4	15.2

It was important to create a baseline from which to work from in this study so an ideal was created. Youth were asked if they could create or join the perfect or ideal community what would be the top five characteristics of Christian community? The answers were interesting and served as a benchmark to compare the other two communities of church (question # 12) and the Internet (question # 26).

The perfect community showed Christian love was the number one choice (21 percent) followed by Honesty (16 percent) which we note was the number one choice in the on-line community in question # 26. The third highest rated characteristic for the ideal was Worship at ten percent as the number one choice. Worship scored highest in question #12 for the cumulated percentage of 56 percent in the church. As for the ideal, praying was the next highest choice as number one at 9.5 percent followed by unity (5.2 percent) which is the only place that unity appears in any of the top five.

The cumulative average for the ideal community is very telling with Praying being the highest rated at almost 48 percent. This was followed by Christian love (46.8 percent), Worship (41.1 percent), Honesty (39 percent) and Encouragement at 36.8 percent. These ideal characteristics appear in either of the previous questions (#12 - church community, and #26 - on-line community) in differing degrees so there is perhaps a correlation as to what youth experienced in the church and on-line community as what they expect to be the ideal.

The last set of questions does a side by side comparison of each of the communities of church, youth group and on-line experience. The questions were deliberately structured in the survey so that they would be able to compare their

experiences of community in a side by side comparison (see Appendix B):

**Question # 29** Please rate the following in terms of that which has given you the greatest help in the following areas. Please rate each community by choosing an answer for each box. (Note: Shaded box indicates the community that rated as top in the Very Well category)

**Table 5:53 a) Increased or benefited my prayer life**

Response	Church		Youth Group		On-line	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Very Well	63	27.3	141	61.0	13	5.6
Fairly well	126	54.5	62	26.8	36	15.6
Not very well	30	13.0	16	6.9	59	25.5
Not well at all	10	4.3	11	4.8	122	52.8
No Response	2	0.9	1	0.4	1	0.4

The youth group scored high in this comparison with almost 88 percent saying that it benefited their prayer life fairly well to very well followed by the church at almost 82 percent. The on-line community fared poorly at only 21 percent for fairly well to very well.

**Table 5:54 b) Has allowed me to share my deepest needs and hurts without fear of rejection**

Response	Church		Youth Group		On-line	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Very Well	30	13.0	105	45.5	36	15.6
Fairly well	97	42.0	32.9	32.9	61	26.4
Not very well	72	31.2	37	16.0	38	16.5
Not well at all	31	13.4	12	5.2	95	41.1
No Response	1	0.4	1	0.4	1	0.4

Youth groups came in at 78.4 percent for the fairly well to very well categories for not fearing rejection. The church comes in significantly lower at 55 percent and while on-line makes a surprising showing of 42 percent for fairly well to very well.

**Table 5:55 c) Has taught me about the Christian faith and equipped me for service**

Response	Church		Youth Group		On-line	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Very Well</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6.9</b>
<b>Fairly well</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16.0</b>
<b>Not very well</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>27.7</b>
<b>Not well at all</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>48.9</b>
<b>No Response</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>

Youth pastors and Christian youth club sponsors should feel good knowing that youth ranked the youth group highest by 92.6 percent fairly well to very well barely squeaking out the church which came in high at 91.8 percent. The on-line falls short at almost 23 percent for fairly to very well for equipping youth for service.

**Table 5:56 d) I feel comfortable sharing about sensitive or personal issues**

Response	Church		Youth Group		On-line	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Very Well</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>19.5</b>
<b>Fairly well</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>33.8</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24.2</b>
<b>Not very well</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>16.5</b>
<b>Not well at all</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>39.4</b>
<b>No Response</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>

This question could relate to the cyber confessional theory mentioned previously. Youth

groups come in the highest with 74.5 percent fairly to very well in being comfortable in sharing sensitive or personal issues. The church ranking drops considerably to 46.4 percent followed closely with the on-line at 46.4 percent for fairly to very well.

**Table 5:57 e) Makes me feel a part of a body, a sense of belonging to something**

Response	Church		Youth Group		On-line	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Very Well	115	49.8	168	72.4	25	10.8
Fairly well	80	34.6	45	19.5	52	22.5
Not very well	22	9.5	11	4.8	46	19.9
Not well at all	13	5.6	6	0.4	107	46.3
No Response	1	0.4	1	0.4	1	0.4

The youth group again comes out on top (almost 90 percent) in helping these youth to sense they are a part of the body, from fairly well to very well. The church comes in at a lower 84.4 percent. Only a third (33.3 percent) of students felt their on-line experience gave them a sense of belonging to something ranking from fairly well to very well.

**Table 5:58 f) Gives me a sense of what a “real” or authentic community is all about**

Response	Church		Youth Group		On-line	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Very Well	92	39.8	121	52.4	20	8.7
Fairly well	99	42.9	85	36.8	40	17.3
Not very well	27	11.7	16	6.9	60	26.0
Not well at all	12	5.2	8	3.5	110	47.6
No Response	1	0.4	1	0.4	1	0.4



Once again the youth group comes in at the highest to show students felt it demonstrated a sense of authentic community at 89.2 percent. It was followed closely by the church at 82.7 percent and the on-line community failed to convince them from fairly well to very well at 26 percent.

**Table 5:59 g) I am known in this community - the “real me”. . .**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Church</b>		<b>Youth Group</b>		<b>On-line</b>	
	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Very Well</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>17.7</b>
<b>Fairly well</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24.2</b>
<b>Not very well</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16.0</b>
<b>Not well at all</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>41.6</b>
<b>No Response</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4</b>

This question is directly linked to the thoughts mentioned about adolescent development and the personas that they create or reflect. The youth group was the highest ranked community for fairly well to very well at 89.2 percent feeling that it was the best place for them to be known. The church come in with just over three-quarters by the students believing they are known in the church (75.8 percent). The internet is not as great, but surprisingly at almost 43 percent.

As can be seen in the shaded areas of the boxes in question # 29, the youth group was the number one choice in all categories. The church was second in all cases and the on-line was the lowest. There were points, however, where the on-line and the church were closer by comparison. The next chapter will deal with the analysis of this data.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN YOUTH IN CANADA (An Analysis of Survey and Focus Group Results)**

In this chapter, an analysis of the survey data submitted by 231 Canadian youth will be conducted. Additionally, a comparison will be made of the data with the focus group conversations. Though the response rate of this survey was somewhat lower than desired for a national survey, there was enough data to give some representation from across the country. The survey participants expressed some rather interesting factors for consideration.

The province with the highest response rate was Newfoundland. This was due largely in part to 1,600 survey invitations being distributed at a denominational youth rally in mid-October of 2000. Saskatchewan had the lowest response rate; this was most likely due to the fact that fewer than 700 cards were distributed in that province.

The age range chosen for the purposes of this study was 13 to 23-year-olds. The greatest response was from the younger segment of the cohort --13 to 18 (middle to high school range). The lower response was from the 19 to 23 spectrum. Age did not seem to have an effect in some of the comparisons that were made of the data. There was a higher representation of female students respondents at 58 percent of the total. It could be speculated that there are higher female populations in youth groups. This may have had

an effect on the number submitted.<sup>184</sup> From all statistical comparisons there were no real significant correlations with any of the data related to gender; this may have also been due to a low sample size.

### **Activity and the Internet**

The youth surveyed gave a picture of having a balance in their attitude toward Internet use and to its related technologies. Of these youth, 90 percent have access to the Internet at home, but only 56.7 percent said they felt that it was fairly to very important for them to have access. About 73.2 percent spend an average of one to two hours a day online. Most of these youth (84.0 percent) have between one and five e-mail addresses. Also, 90 percent of these youth have one to five aliases which they use online to identify themselves.

Their activity online is quite regular. Over 50 percent access web sites daily or many times daily. If one is to include those who access web sites several times a week, the number is actually 74 percent. E-mail is also a high priority for youth keeping in touch. Of those surveyed, 73 percent access their e-mail at least from one time daily to many times daily. When those who check it several times a week are added, the number rises to 89.5 percent. The number of youth who participate in chat rooms is lower than

---

<sup>184</sup>Recent Canadian Project Teen 2000 survey results show that 14 percent of females and 10 percent of males surveyed report being a part of a religious youth group. 22.7 percent of females and 20.5 percent of males reported attending religious services weekly or more while 32 percent of females and 32.5 percent of males report attending religious services monthly or more. (Source: James Penner, preliminary Project Teen 2000 survey results, unpublished data, used with permission. Data accessed 16 February, 2001)

other activity reported, yet there is still a fair number who have participated in chat (23.0 percent) which is still an emerging technology. Most youth are actively seeking web sites which involve Christian music (57.6 percent) and secular music (24.7 percent). Over 42 percent access friends through ICQ, a chat-like community program that is fast becoming popular among youth. Parents and teachers of these particular youth may be pleased to note that 74 percent access web sites to research homework projects.

### **Friends Forever**

To this sample of Canadian youth, friendships are important. They are well connected to non-Christian friends as 95.2 percent said they had such friends. The relationship these youth have with non-Christian friends is 29.9 percent. They found them very satisfactory while others found their friendships were satisfactory to somewhat satisfactory at about 65 percent. The friends they have in school are ranked from fairly to very important at 92.2 percent. The friendships the youth have at church are even more significant with almost 95 percent stating church friends are on a range from fairly to very important, while 68 rank these friends as very important. The youth also felt that keeping touch with Christian friends via the net was fairly to very important at 68.8 percent. The online relationships with these friends were fairly to very significant at 52.8 percent.

The number of Christian friends that they have off-line ranged from less than 10 friends (18.6 percent) to between 10 and 20 (30.7 percent). Conversely, the amount of non-Christian friends that they have off-line ranged with 10 or less friends (28.6 percent) to those that had between 10 and 20 such friends (30.3 percent). They thought the

relationships they have with these friends, overall, is to very significant at 92.3 percent and 80.6 percent with the rank of very significant.

Most of these youth (81.8 percent) have not made many Christian friends online (less than 10) whom they have never met in person. There were a few more who have made some non-Christian friends online but only 77.5 percent have made less than 10 friends whom they have never met.

Finally, anonymity reduces the degree of intimacy that is developed with online friends. Only 12.6 percent stated that it was a major problem, while 16 percent indicated it was a problem and 34.6 indicated it was somewhat a problem. Only 25 percent said anonymity was not a factor. While anonymity was largely a factor for inhibiting intimacy, several thought that being anonymous allowed the sharing of personal things online; (22.1 percent felt that to share personally online meant a great deal to them, 27.3 percent felt it made quite a bit easier, and 20.8 said that it made it easier to share only some).

### **Faith and Church Attendance - A profile**

From the data, there is every indication that the majority of youth that participated in this survey are actively involved with their faith, active in their churches, youth groups, and Christian clubs. Of the 231 students who responded, 93.1 percent attend church worship services an average of three to five or more times a month, or more. Of the same students, a very solid 93.1 percent ranked attending worship services as fairly to very important.

Of the 231 youth surveyed, 80.1 percent attend their youth groups or Christian clubs three to five times a month, or more. When asked about their relationship with God, 71.4 percent responded that they had a personal relationship with God; 21.6 percent said their faith was developing.

These indicators are helping to create a profile of these particular individuals in the hope that it gives an indication of their commitment to faith. This is expressed through their active involvement in church. There may be a slight correlation between the facts these youth, who are actively attending the church, go with their parents. In fact, 77.1 percent attend church with their families. It could be interpreted that their “devotion” may be a family obligation, however, this seems unlikely. Whatever the case may be, they have reported they are attending church and involved in Christian activities.

### **Attitudes and Participation - View of the Church**

There seems to be a certain level of dedication in this group; it is reflected in their overall church involvement. Of the total students surveyed, almost half (48.9 percent) have not changed churches in the past five years. Also, 28.6 percent moved only once in the past five years. Of the total number of students who left to go to another church, at one to more than four times in the past five years, only 25 percent left their church either because they moved to a new town or left to go to university. Of that total over the same period of time, only 22.9 percent of students left for “negative” reasons involving various conflicts and dissatisfaction.

Overall, most youth thought their churches provided an adequate example of

genuine community; this was evidenced in a ranking of 80.1 percent being somewhat satisfactory to very satisfactory. Students gave high marks to their churches for helping them grow in the faith; 82.1 percent indicated they were somewhat to very satisfied. Of the total surveyed, 81.8 percent felt their church increased or contributed to their prayer life either fairly well or very well. The same youth reported their youth groups had been even more effective in the area of increasing their desire for a deeper prayer life (87.8 percent). As Christians, part of the church experience is to equip people for service. Of the students surveyed, a solid 91.8 percent felt that their churches accomplished that goal.

Becoming a part of the body of believers and developing community was an important area to consider when trying to evaluate the strength of community. Of those who were surveyed 84.4 percent reported they felt encouraged, either fairly to very well, by being included as a part of the “body” or having a sense of belonging. They also reported (82.7 percent) that they had gained a sense of authentic community; they rated the experience from fairly well to very well. Respondents felt they were known in the church community fairly well to very well (75.8 percent) by their true identity--as the “real me”. It is significant that these youth have a close connection to their churches. It will influence the comparison of experiences with the online community versus the ideal (authentic) community to be compared later in this chapter.

On a slightly more subdued note, there were some areas where the youth did not feel the church was able to significantly meet their needs. A smaller number of youth (55 percent), felt the church to be a safe place where their deepest emotional hurts and needs could be met without fear of rejection. In the survey, a question was asked of the

same students whether they felt comfortable sharing personal or sensitive needs. The students reported only 46.4 percent felt fairly comfortable to very comfortable. While many of the youth are strongly connected to the churches, almost half did not feel secure to share the deeper issues with which they struggle.

### **Characteristics of Church Community - Analysis of Question # 12**

The 231 youth who responded to the survey were asked to choose what they perceived to be the five most important characteristics in their church community, ranking them from one to five with one being the most important. The youth were offered 20 characteristics from which to choose, with the option of adding any they thought were not included in the list. In the case of church community in question 12, it was an aggregate of what they considered “church” to be; either the church and/or the youth group. The youth group was not separated from the church in this question.

Question 12 of the survey was compared to question 26 and question 28 in how youth ranked each characteristic of community. For the purposes of this section, there will be a report on Question 12 as it relates to the church community.

Youth who completed the survey ranked Christian Love as the top choice at 20.3 percent (see Table 6:2). It is interesting to note the choice of Christian Love matched the ideal community with only a difference of .5 percent. It could be surmised that these youth were experiencing the degree of Christian Love in their churches as they would expect to be the ideal situation. In other words, the church is meeting the expectations of the youth in the area of Christian Love.



The next in the top five characteristics for the church was Worship, which ranked 15.2 percent (almost five percent higher than the expectations for the ideal community). Therefore, Worship is perceived to hold a high priority with these youth. The third highest rated characteristic was Prayer at 8.2 percent--a fraction lower than the ideal (9.5 percent) and higher than online community at 6.1 percent. These three communities compare relatively close together. A discussion regarding the characteristic of Prayer will be presented later in the paper.

**Table 6:2. Five top characteristics of church community ranked as number one compared with the other communities**

Characteristic	Church Community		Online Community		Ideal or Perfect Community	
	<i>N</i>	chose # 1(%)	<i>N</i>	chose # 1(%)	<i>N</i>	chose # 1(%)
1 -Christian Love	47	20.3	18	7.8	48	20.8
2 -Worship	35	15.2	2	0.9	23	10.0
3 -Praying	19	8.2	14	6.1	22	9.5
4 -Honesty	19	8.2	54	23.4	37	16.0
5 -Fellowship	17	7.4	6	2.6	9	3.9
Total	137	60.3	94	40.8	139	60.2

*Note: The shaded areas denote the highest ranked characteristic of the three communities of church, online and the ideal.*

One of the most fascinating characteristics which stood out was Honesty, which was rated fourth in the church community at 8.2 percent. It should be noted when compared to the ideal, which was higher at 23.4 percent and online community at 16.0 percent; Honesty seems to be experienced less in the church by these youth. Even though they felt the church community expressed honesty at this level they felt it was not

as significant as the ideal and interestingly enough almost three times less than online community.

The final and fifth ranked characteristic of community for the church was Fellowship at 7.4 percent. It was significantly higher than the ideal community (3.9 percent) and online community (2.6 percent).

A further investigation of the choices youth made with respect to the various characteristics of community in the church will require scrutiny of the cumulative percentages for each of the top five choices (see Table 6:3).

**Table 6:3. Church Community Top choices one through five cumulative percentages - comparisons with other communities**

	<b>Church Community</b>	<b>Online Community</b>	<b>Ideal or Perfect Community</b>
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( %)</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( %)</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( %)</b>
<b>Worship</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>41.1</b>
<b>Christian Love</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>46.8</b>
<b>Praying</b>	<b>47.6*</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>47.6*</b>
<b>Fellowship</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>27.7</b>
<b>Forgiveness</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>31.2</b>

*Note: shaded areas denote the highest characteristic by comparison. \* these figures are the same*

Christian Love which was ranked number one by the 231 youth in the last comparison, fell to second place (49.4 percent) when the cumulative percentages were examined. Worship rose as the highest ranked characteristic (56.7 percent). Their desire for worship is higher than the ideal expectation they have at 41.1 percent and understandably much higher than the online experience of worship at 6.9 percent. When

considering the comparison with online community, it is not unusual for youth see it as less important. The limitations of the Internet, in terms of face-to-face interaction, would make it virtually impossible to have as significant an experience of worship.

Youth are highly experiential, especially when one considers the issues of adolescent development and the generational characteristics ascribed to the Millennials who were discussed in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation. Worship could be considered to be one of the most experientially charged characteristics.

Christian Love was the second highest ranked characteristic at 49.4 percent. This compares closely with the ideal (46.8 percent) but not so closely with the online experience of community at 31.6 percent. The limitations of face-to-face communication and tangible expressions of love may be a reason for this lower expectation for Christian Love online. This will be considered with the conclusions in the final chapter. Next in line to Christian Love, prayer was 47.6 percent. This figure also matched the ideal community at 47.6 percent. Prayer could also be considered a experientially based characteristic. It is possible to pray online through text. This dimension, though reduced perhaps quality by the lack of vocal expression, can still be facilitated somewhat through CMC online.

Youth felt Fellowship, which was ranked fourth in the cumulative response, was fairly high at 41.1 percent. It was considerably higher than the 27.7 percent represented by their idea of the perfect or ideal community. It was even higher than the 16.5 percent they felt the online experience provided. Youth are experiencing a high degree of involvement in the fellowship dimension of their church, this may be due partially to the

high degree of involvement and satisfaction with their youth groups where they feel accepted--as indicated by earlier figures in this chapter.

The final characteristic of the cumulative total is Forgiveness at 32.0 percent. It was closely related to the ideal community at 31.2 percent, but came out strong over the online experience of forgiveness at 10.0 percent. One should consider that online community does not provide a high a degree of accountability, thus conflict can be often solved by a mere click of a mouse thus shutting off a person with whom one is experiencing problems.

The cumulative characteristics seem to match fairly closely those that were ranked as the number one characteristics. Forgiveness appeared in the list and honesty fell out of the top five for church community within the cumulative figures.

### **Characteristics of Online Community - Analysis of Question # 26**

The characteristics of online community and youth attitudes toward virtual community provide valuable insights into the thoughts of the youth who were surveyed. The results of this comparison can be seen in Table 6:4.

As presented in Chapter Four, online community can take many forms. The understanding of virtual or online community is based on the technology experience of each youth. There are no uniform expectations or experiences online, just as there are no uniform experiences of youth in groups or church community.

The characteristic which ranked the highest was honesty. It is significant to note not only was honesty the highest ranked by 23.4 percent of the respondents, it was also

the highest ranked number one choice for any of the characteristics in any of the three communities which were compared. The experience of honesty was much higher than the ideal community at 16.0 percent, and compared to the church at only 8.2 percent. The question arises: “Is this what they desire or what they are experiencing?” From looking at the other characteristics that they chose and how they chose to respond, it would appear that this was not just a whimsical desire to see this as a possibility, but they are truly experiencing it in this manner.

**Table 6:4. Five top characteristics of online community ranked as number one compared with the other communities**

Characteristic	Online Community		Church Community		Ideal or Perfect Community	
	N	chose # 1(%)	N	chose # 1(%)	N	chose # 1(%)
Honesty	54	23.4	19	8.2	37	16.0
Christian Love	18	7.8	47	20.3	48	20.8
Encouragement	17	7.4	10	4.3	5	2.2
Praying	14	6.1	19	8.2	22	9.5
Listening	10	4.3	1	0.4	1	0.4
Total	113	50	96	42.4	113	49.9

*Note: The shaded areas denote the highest ranked characteristic of the three communities of church, online and the ideal.*

As presented earlier, in the process of the development of youth, they are quite naive and tend to believe much of what that they encounter on the Internet as valid. As was mentioned in Chapter Four, there is little time to discriminate what is valid from what is not valid due to the volume of material encountered. For whatever reason, youth thought that honesty online was the most important characteristic, this will be borne out

again later when compared with the cumulative results for online community. A reflection will also be conducted on comments made in the focus groups.

Christian Love is ranked second highest at 7.8 percent. Christian Love remained as one of the top two ranked characteristics in all the communities in the comparison. The percentage is much lower for this characteristic than what youth saw as an ideal community at 20.8 percent and for the church community at 20.3 percent. It could be speculated that Christian Love is often experienced through tangible, physical acts of love and kindness. The limitations of the Internet may prevent these acts of love from being felt or experienced in a virtual community.

The third ranked characteristic, of Encouragement (7.4 percent), for the online community was interesting to note as well. This characteristic was higher than the ideal of 2.2 percent and the church community at 4.3 percent. Encouragement online seems to be a characteristic that stands out stronger in this community. While the numbers--given percentages--are not high, they are significantly higher than the other two communities. It is as if the youth do not have high expectations for being encouraged (as reflected in the ideal figure).

The fourth characteristic, ranked as number one choice for the online community, was Prayer at 6.1 percent. It ranked lower than both the ideal at 9.5 percent and the church community at 8.2 percent.

Finally, the last characteristic was Listening. It was the third characteristic that was highest in the online community. While the percentage numbers were not high, they were well above the ideal of .4 percent and the church of .4 percent by comparison.

Listening also in an interesting characteristic to be ranked in the top five for online community because listening because it is often associated with an audible and vocal interaction and interchange. Yet for some, this is an important facet of online community.

The cumulative figures for characteristics ranked one through five for online community provide some intriguing comparisons with the other communities (church and the ideal). It is significant that three unique characteristics which were not ranked high in either the church or ideal community are presented here in the top three of the online community experience (see Table 6:5).

**Table 6:5. Online Community Top choices 1 through 5 cumulative percentages - comparisons with other communities**

	<b>Online Community</b>	<b>Church Community</b>	<b>Ideal or Perfect Community</b>
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( % )</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( % )</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( % )</b>
<b>Honesty</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>39.0</b>
<b>Encouragement</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>36.8</b>
<b>Listening</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>
<b>Christian Love</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>46.8</b>
<b>Praying</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>47.6*</b>	<b>47.6*</b>

*Note: shaded areas denote the highest characteristic by comparison. \* these figures are the same*

Honesty, once again, is the top ranked characteristic at 42.0 percent. By comparison, the ideal is only slightly behind at 39 percent and the church was perceived to be at only 28.1 percent. The honesty factor mentioned before could arise from many possibilities. There is a possibility that youth are finding it easier to be more open and

honest in their communication with others because of the anonymous nature of the net –hence the cyber-confessional idea. This could also be related to the concept that youth are more open to share more honestly because there is little risk in being rejected or held accountable. This was discussed in the focus groups by one of the students who will be commented on later in this chapter. Perhaps the formal nature of the church, the fact that youth have a more difficult time talking to adults (which the church is largely comprised of), may all be contributing factors to the lack of trust that may be present and prevents youth from sharing their needs and struggles.

Worthy of note is the fact that encouragement came in high at 41.6 percent for the cumulative totals. The same factors seem to be reflected in the numbers again comparing them with the church (29.9 percent) and the ideal communities (36.8 percent). The youth seem to be finding either that the online community experience provides them with a greater encouragement or they are able to encourage others better through this medium.

The next highest ranked characteristic for online community was that of listening (31.6 percent). This cumulative characteristic was significantly higher than the ideal (15.2 percent) and the church (11.3 percent). Listening in an online format must involve more than audible hearing; it should also involve listening to understand and to empathize.

The forth-highest cumulative characteristic was Christian Love (31.6 percent). It falls short in light of the numbers that are represented by the church (49.4 percent) and the ideal community (46.8). It is apparent that youth are not finding Christian Love as fulfilling online as they are in the church or as they would expect in the ideal setting.



The last characteristic of online community was that of prayer at 29.0 percent. The experience of prayer online is not as significant to the youth surveyed as what they believed to be important in their churches (47.6 percent) and what they perceived the ideal to be at 47.6 percent. While prayer does exist in the online setting, it is possible some youth have never considered the possibility of praying online or the somewhat impersonal nature of the Internet prevents them from considering it as a viable option.

### Characteristics of the Ideal or Perfect Community - Analysis of Question # 28

The purpose of offering an ideal or perfect community option was to create a benchmark from which to compare the responses of youth to the other two communities. The ideal community that youth would have envisioned proved to have a few interesting aspects worthy of note (see Table 6:6).

**Table 6:6. Five top characteristics of an IDEAL community ranked as number one compared with the other communities**

Characteristic	Ideal or Perfect Community		Church Community		Online Community	
	N	chose # 1(%)	N	chose # 1(%)	N	chose # 1(%)
Christian Love	48	20.8	47	20.3	18	7.8
Honesty	37	16.0	19	8.2	54	23.4
Worship	23	10.0	35	15.2	2	0.9
Praying	22	9.5	19	8.2	14	6.1
Unity	12	5.2	16	6.9	2	0.9
Total	142	62.5	136	59.8	90	40.1

*Note: The shaded areas denote the highest ranked characteristic of the three communities of church, online and the ideal.*

The youth who were surveyed chose Christian Love as the top characteristic for their ideal community (20.8 percent). It was followed quite closely with the church community (20.3 percent) and to a lesser degree online community (7.8 percent). It is interesting that youth have chosen Christian Love as the number one characteristic if one considers 1 Corinthians 13:13 “. . .the greatest of these is love” (NIV).

The second choice for the ideal community was honesty. While honesty in the ideal community setting rated 16 percent of students choosing it as the number one characteristic, the online community was higher with a rating of 23.4 percent of students choosing honesty. The church, by comparison, was at a low of 8.2 percent when choosing honesty as a characteristic. The honesty factor, which was discussed earlier, is shown once again as higher than the ideal. These youth that were surveyed must have had a higher expectation of honesty on the Internet than they would have expected in an ideal situation. The alternative is that youth may have a low expectation of honesty overall and the Internet is just higher by default or by experience.

The third highest characteristic of Christian community in the ideal setting was worship. While this was the third ranked ideal at 10 percent, the church surpassed this with 15.2 percent of students finding their experience of worship better than what they would expect in an ideal situation. The online community falls well below the ideal at only .9 percent.

Fourth in the list of characteristics, which was ranked as a number one choice, was praying with the ideal set at 9.5 percent. It was the highest of the three communities compared in the study. The church was not far behind with 8.2 percent and the online

experience at 6.1 percent.

Lastly, unity appears in the ideal setting at 5.2 percent. Unity is the only characteristic that appears solely in this community. Unity is not a high priority with youth as reflected in the numbers that are shown; however, the unity which is experienced in the church is somewhat higher (6.9 percent) than the ideal, and well above the online experience set at .9 percent.

There were some interesting comparisons made when looking at the ideal versus the online community in the cumulative result (see Table 6:7). None of the five characteristics, which were listed for the top five cumulative percentages in the ideal community, were higher than the other two communities. The number one ranked characteristic for ideal community was praying which was matched with the experience of prayer in the church at 47.6 percent. The second ranked ideal cumulative characteristic was Christian Love (46.8 percent). The church was the higher expression of that characteristic at 49.4 percent.

The third highest characteristic for the ideal setting of community was worship at 41.1 percent; however, this was eclipsed by the experience of youth in their churches at 56.7 percent. The fourth and fifth characteristics for the ideal community were honesty (39.0 percent) and encouragement (36.8 percent); however, both were found to be greater in the online experience at 42.0 percent and 41.6 percent respectively.

**Table 6:7. Ideal Community Top choices 1 through 5 cumulative percentages - comparisons with other communities**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Ideal or Perfect Community</b>	<b>Church Community</b>	<b>Online Community</b>
	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( %)</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( %)</b>	<b>combined # 1 to 5 ( %)</b>
<b>Praying</b>	<b>47.6*</b>	<b>47.6*</b>	<b>29.0</b>
<b>Christian Love</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>31.6</b>
<b>Worship</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>6.9</b>
<b>Honesty</b>	<b>39.0</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>42.0</b>
<b>Encouragement</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>41.6</b>

*Note: shaded areas denote the highest characteristic by comparison. \* these figures are the same*

#### **Side by Side comparison of the Church, Online and Ideal Communities**

The youth who were surveyed were given seven questions in item # 29, which asked them to rank their responses--very well, fairly well, not very well and not well at all. The questions were to be responded to within each community: church, youth group, and online. Where the first 28 questions of the survey were asked in a manner that would not betray a pattern, question number 29 lined up each community (youth group, church, and online) so that each could be compared against the other. In all cases youth chose the youth group as the highest expression of satisfaction for all the seven parts to question 29.

The first question 29 a) asked how each of the communities increased or benefited their prayer life. The youth group came ahead with almost 88 percent saying that it benefited them fairly to very well. Next came the church at 82 percent, followed by the online community providing only 21 percent. The experience of prayer is most likely

greatest in a peer setting, such as a youth group or Christian club setting.

Question 29 b) asked if each of these communities had allowed them to share their deepest hurts and fears without rejection. Youth groups provided fairly to very well (78.4 percent) while the church was much lower at 55 percent and online not much further behind at 42 percent. It is not surprising that youth will find it easier to share in the environment of the peer relationships in their youth groups rather than the adult-dominated church. The online community fared better in this question and related to Question # 27. It found that 70 percent of youth felt that anonymity assisted them in being able to talk about sensitive issues. While its not in the majority, it is significant to note.

Question 29 c) asked how each of the three communities prepared them for their Christian faith and, eventually, for service. Of those who responded, 92.6 percent thought that the youth group was the strongest community and provided them with the vital assistance for growth with respect to faith. The church ranked 91.8 percent for those who felt that it was provided fairly well to very well. The online community failed to make much of an inroad in the preparation for faith and service at 23 percent. Once again, it is very revealing that the limitations of the Internet preclude it from providing much practical or tangible assistance when compared with that of face-to-face community.

Question 29 d) asked if the youth felt comfortable sharing sensitive or personal issues. The question relates to question 29 b) without the caveat of rejection added. Only 74.5 percent of youth felt they could share these needs in the youth group setting.

The church, as mentioned before in question b) came in quite low at 46.4 percent. An interesting fact that comes out of the data was 46.4 percent thought the online experience of community provided fairly to very well in allowing them to share in depth. The online community also was higher than the church in the very well category at 19.5 percent where the church came in at only 12.6 percent. There is some benefit to the online community in reaching out to youth who need to be heard.

Question 29 e) asked if youth thought that each of these communities made them feel a part of a body, and provided a sense of belonging. The youth group, of course, scores high with almost 90 percent feeling that it did so fairly to very well. The church was slightly lower at 84.4 percent and the online failed to gain more than 33.3 percent who felt that it provided a sense of belonging. The amorphous and random nature of the Internet struggled to provide a sense of permanency or belonging to anything concrete for these students.

The next question 29 f), asked is any of these communities provided a sense of what “real” or authentic community was all about. These young people felt the youth group provided an adequate sense of authentic community and reporting that 89.2 percent felt that it did so fairly well to very well. The church came in not much lower at 82.7 percent. Youth felt that the church provided fairly to very well in this question. The online community was far behind at only 26 percent. The Internet seems to fall short in providing the closeness and authenticity that Christian youth need to feel good about it as a real community.

The final question of the survey 29 g) asked youth if they felt that any of these

communities knew them as their “real” selves. This question was asked to link to the multiple selves’ theory that was discussed in the section on adolescent development in Chapter Three. The youth who responded indicated that youth groups provided the greatest environment where they could be known for who they really are (89.2 percent). The church was ranked 75.8 percent for those who felt it provided the proper environment to be known fairly to very well. The Internet, while not a high number, still registered 43 percent; which seems to indicate that almost half felt they are known in the Internet environment.

### **Online Focus Groups (session 1 and 2)**

This section will present some of the comments the youth shared who participated in the two online focus group sessions (see Appendix C and D).

It became apparent that the two males and four females who joined the chat were from varied backgrounds and experiences, and in a sense, represented the diversity of the students who submitted responses through the surveys. One of the participants was a 29-year-old-male (possibly a curious youth leader) who offered a perspective from an X’ers point of view that proved helpful.

After some basic demographic questions to get a sense of whom I was speaking, we moved into the questions. There was some discussion regarding the youth groups that they were participants and this was a mixture of responses. Tim appeared disillusioned with his experiences in his church. Leslie was frustrated that her group had changed and apparently the leadership had not changed with them, and the group died. Kelsey was a

sporadic attendee and Jonathan, the older participant was no longer involved.

Some of the interesting comments that came out of the interview centred around the issue of online experiences. The interviewer asked what they thought the Internet was in their lives--a tool, or something that they felt was an integral part of their lives. Jonathan, the Generation Xer, thought it was quite utilitarian. Representing the younger group, the Millennial youth said that it was, both utilitarian and an integral part of life. I took the comment to mean that it was as a tool, but it was also something that was an integral part of their lives in terms of communication with friends.

One probing question was asked regarding the issue of the artificial or anonymous nature of the Internet. It was asked to see if this took away from their experience of online community. Here were their responses: (it should be noted that the author has chosen not to correct the grammar and spelling of the students' responses in order to preserve the authentic manner in which they have presented themselves):

**Kelsey:** I think so, you can't get to know people the same way online as you can in person.

**Jonathan:** The physicality of gathering is gone. The interaction is more sterile...

**Randi:** I have to agree with Kelsey

**Leslie:** yes and no, it is harder to get to know people, but there's less judging, so it's easier to be yourself

**Tim:** No. It's like the phone...

Leslie's comment about the less judging triggered later questions relating to the ability to share online without fear of repercussion (relating to question 27). After that, the interviewer asked the youth to use descriptors to describe the three communities of church, youth group and online. Their responses were very illuminating in light of the numerical data.



**Responses for the church:** big, traditional, hypocritical, caring, unusual, 900 people, singing, all smile-nothing worthwhile, uplifting, social, intimidating, essential, rewarding, comfort, familiar, family, helpful, happy, forgiving.

**Responses for the youth group:** non-judgmental, same as the church, fun and comfortable.

**Responses for online community:** sterile, artificial, fake, no limits, open, but still fun, impersonal, be anyone you pretend, worse than summer camp imposters, honest, like being the new kid and starting over, faceless, voiceless, scentless.

The responses of the church and youth group sound fairly typical knowing how youth are wary of the impersonal or traditional nature of the church and the unleashed openness of the youth group setting. Online is still fun though it exhibits negative characteristics of sterility and anonymity.

Leslie mentioned that she saw the online community as honest, which comes out of the survey data as being the highest number one characteristic for online by comparison with all the communities. As the interviewer, I pursued this characteristic with her further; she replied to my query:

**Leslie:** i fell like i can be more open with people if i'm not having the actual physical meeting, i dont know why, it's just easier to be myself if i'm not worried about how I'm looking or the tone i'm saying things in, or the other persons reactions and things... i dont know if i said that right

Kelsey and Jonathan added their thoughts as well:

**Kelsey:** It's anonymous, so I know that some people feel more comfortable opening up... for me, it also allows me to meet people that I never would have met otherwise

**Jonathan:** the perfect poker face and anonymity

**Interviewer:** is that important to you personally Jonathan?

**Jonathan:** sometimes hiding things is good

**Leslie:** i like the anonymous aspect, i can get to know people easier, and let my friends get to know me easier, i can be more frank about my beliefs and stuff

**Jonathan:** but you can go either way, you can subdue yourself or you can create a bold persona that just isn't you

**Jonathan:** it's easy to hide and/or lie (that's ironic because I am being very honest right now)

Angela expressed an interesting point half way through the interview that also correlates with the survey data--she felt she could be more open without fearing judgement from others. This was referred to in the data about being accepted online without the fear of judgement. Next to cliques, judgement was the highest negative quality of the church community (see Table 5:23). Angela went on to explain that in her particular situation she could see the judgment in her church community and by comparison she was able to find comfort online.

Kelsey felt that the youth group was the best for her of the ones presented. She comments:

**Kelsey:** Well... my experience of community is the best in the youth group, I think, because that's mostly my group of friends, and we all know a lot about each other and are comfortable to open to each other. The church... well my church is really small and so there is not as many people I can relate to there... and on the net, it's mostly just for fun.

Jonathan provided his insight as well into the three communities from his perspective:

**Jonathan:** When I felt the most connected was at Youth Group (c.1987, 88, 89) the best was Summer Camp (c.1988, 89) and the next was IVCF at University, my strongest, lasting ties are all in there. Church is much less so, unless it gets down to a smaller Bible Study (my closest thing to a Youth Group now). Online, I only keep in touch with those who have moved on to other places, but nothing lasting as a purely online based community has even come close to lasting...

The next area that the interview chose to question the youth was in the area of the characteristics of face-to-face community and what it could provide that the online could not provide. The responses were very interesting:

**Interviewer:** In just the opposite way what does face to face community provide that the internet community can not?

**Jonathan:** closeness

**Kelsey:** You actually have a sense of really knowing the person, knowing who they are

**Leslie:** it's more real, there's a lot more trust (like Jonathan said about the internet making it easy to be someone else)

**Jonathan:** being in the room, seeing honest faces

**Interviewer:** that is important to you Kelsey?

**Angela:** I agree with the rest of them

**Kelsey:** Yes, it is

**Jonathan:** warmth

**Leslie:** the aspect of physically seeing the person adds a lot to how well you know them, being able to hear their tone and see how they respond and act

**Interviewer:** So in a way then the perfect community should allow us elements of both the security and honesty of the net and the closeness and the intimacy of the real world? Comments?

**Jonathan:** Right, the anonymity protects us but the contact nurtures us.

**Interviewer:** hmmmmmmmm

**Angela:** exactly,

**Leslie:** yes, that would be great, but is it possible?

**Interviewer:** that is something to think about

**Kelsey:** I am more comfortable being with real people--on the net, you don't know who is telling the truth and who isn't.... I don't know if that's what you're asking though

**Interviewer:** I don't know.... I guess it goes back to what Jesus taught us that we should be to one another really

**Tim:** I say that's what the church SHOULD be

The consensus was that the net did little to provide intimacy, however it gave an opportunity for sharing and honesty in a low-risk environment. The face-to-face community provided the warmth and human contact to needed to build intimacy. As Jonathan so succinctly pointed out, "the anonymity protects us but the contact nurtures us."

The dialogue of the first interview followed the theme of discussing the virtues of each of the communities. The second focus group only had two girls return from the first session, Angela and Leslie. The conversation centred around sharing online and how important the online environment was to them to share the issues that are sensitive. They both felt they would be more comfortable sharing online, once again due to the rejection factor being reduced. Angela seemed to want to talk to people with whom she did not have any pre-existing relationship while Leslie would use the net for pre-existing

relationships. Both indicated that they would talk to a cyber youth pastor before talking to a “live” youth pastor. This was interesting since one of them did not have a youth pastor and the youth group was fairly dysfunctional. They both discussed the fact its far easier to talk to someone online than face-to-face for many reasons-- comfort, overcoming shyness, or avoiding rejection.

Anonymity was brought up in discussing the alteration of identities for protection. Discussions about uses of aliases and multiple e-mail addresses ensued. They were asked if the online community had helped them in their faith:

Leslie: yes, i've got a lot closer with a couple of my friends, that i've been able to keep in touch with, and be more open with online, and also being able to contact pastors and things about faith questions easily

Angela: oh yeah... online I have friends from all over the place (New York, California) places like that whom I've met online... they encourage me to keep the love that I have for Christ...and no matter what happens in my family, friends, school, etc...it shouldn't affect how much I love the Lord...

Angela: same as me Leslie...

These two young ladies epitomize the longing and the desire to be significant. They appear to want to find someone, whether online or offline to give them value. If one thing was learned from this second focus group discussion; it's that whether through the typewritten word or an audible one--everyone needs to be encouraged to keep going in their faith.

In summary, this chapter assumed the task of analysing the survey data that was revealed in Chapter Five along with the two focus groups. The youth in this survey were largely dedicated to their faith, churches and youth groups and demonstrated a high

degree of personal commitment to their faith in Christ. There was a high degree of satisfaction with their experience of the community, especially with the youth group in particular, followed in most cases by the church community. The on-line community in almost all cases did not provide significant assistance in many aspects of Christian faith development.

Friendships with both Christian and non-Christians were very significant for these youth which is supported by current research literature regarding attitudes of Canadian youth. They have not engaged to any degree with making friends they do not already know on-line.

The characteristics that were shared in the off-line community of church or youth groups were generally experiential in nature; Christian Love, worship, praying and fellowship were among the top five characteristics chosen. The highest ranked characteristic was honesty and this was found in the on-line context.

When comparing the three choices of church, on-line and ideal communities, the church provided the greatest degree of satisfaction in the qualities of Christian faith and attitude. The church came in a close second while in most cases the on-line was seen as inferior to the other two choices. There was the exception of questions regarding sharing deep issues being close to what the church provided. A significant point that arose from this study was that the Internet experience allowed a majority of these youth to share personal issues without fear of rejection. This anonymous or non face-to-face interaction seemed to give them the space needed to deal with things that required more sensitivity.

The next and final chapter will examine theoretical material from the early part of

this dissertation and compare it to the results of the survey data and focus group materials. The final conclusions derived from this study will be summarized.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE FUTURE OF COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNITY: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITY, YOUTH AND THE INTERNET BASED ON A SAMPLING OF CHARACTERISTICS**

My interest in examining the role of community, youth and the Internet was precipitated by my attendance at a symposium on the Internet and youth ministry sponsored by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. While extremely informative, the symposium raised more questions than it answered. Originally, I had been preparing to do my dissertation on youth culture and values. Following the symposium, however, I chose to narrow the focus of this topic to satisfy my own curiosity.

Once I began my research journey, it quickly became apparent there were more than a few opinions regarding the Internet and youth culture. The reactions ranged from those who viewed the Internet as the next bastion of interpersonal relationships and cyber hang-out for Millennial teens, to being seen as an electronic portal to sin and degradation. Fortunately, there was significant scholarship which could be found between these two extremes. I must admit I was amazed and shocked at what I read articles and academic journals dating back only five years ago. It felt like I was uncovering time capsules from a bygone era. Books and articles written in 1994, even as late as 1996, were woefully outdated. Pundits of the time speculated about Internet technology and the advance of



this new forum of communication and community. Some of the speculations have not been yet realized; many others have long since been surpassed; while others have missed the mark entirely.

A full spectrum of opinions was encountered in the literature research portion of this project. The most equitable positions, in the estimation of this researcher, were those that promoted a healthy and balanced approach to use of the Internet rather than advocating abstinence. Results from the study were certainly compelling and, hopefully, will provide a springboard for continuing research.

Below are listed some of the realities encountered through analysis of the survey and focus groups:

- The highest ranked choice (as choice number one) for a characteristic being experienced by these youth in all three communities (church, online and the ideal), was honesty in the online community at 23.4 percent (see Table 5:46).
- The top three characteristics (cumulative percentages of the top five rankings) of online community which ranked higher than their counterparts (the church community and the ideal community) were Honesty (42 percent), Encouragement (41.6 percent) and Listening (34.6 percent) in that order (see Table 6:5).
- The last two characteristics in the list of the top five were Christian Love (31.6 percent) and Praying (29.0 percent) (see Table 6:2).
- The online community, while ranked by most at a fairly high degree, has

not provided the youth with a great degree of satisfaction other than for utilitarian purposes (e-mail, surfing for certain topics, staying in touch with friends). Seeking out community with relative strangers, especially for chat, was not a driving concern.

- The youth group fared the best in the three-way comparison for qualities of community which provided them with the overall essentials of Christian faith and personal fulfilment.
- Certain experiences of the church community were almost matched by the online experience in low ratings; this was particularly noticeable with respect to lack of trust and youth not feeling comfortable sharing personal needs in either community (see Table 5:54 and Table 5:56).
- Of the 20 characteristics provided, Worship, as a characteristic, was the highest ranked (cumulative) response in the church community (56.7 percent) and the third lowest at 6.9 percent for on-line community.

### **Honesty - Relating to Trust and Sharing**

Of all possible characteristics, youth who participated in the survey, chose honesty as their first choice ranking of the online community experience (see Table 5:46). This ranking was also the highest ranked number one choice among all the three possible communities (church, online and the ideal community). When considering honesty, one assumes there is a certain level of trust which must exist between two or more people to allow transparency online. As was formerly discussed in the third chapter on the theology

of community, the fallen nature of the human condition belies the possibility of total honesty. There is, in essence, a loose “honour system” which seems to exist and allows for honesty to be experienced on-line.

The literature relative to this issue indicated there is a desire by students at this age to be needed--to have significance--often at the expense of making good personal choices. (i.e., peer pressures, addiction, following the crowd) Nevertheless, there is an indication from survey results that there exists a high degree of trust within the online community. As one of the online focus groups participants stated, “I feel more open to them because they don't really know me and if they want to judge me they can . . . it doesn't matter because they don't know me . . .” Honesty and anonymity seem to be unlikely allies in this alliance, yet it seems to work.

Since youth approach life in a highly experiential manner, they often lead with their hearts. While truth is important to them, the sources of truth are often of a secondary concern.<sup>185</sup>

### **Encouragement - Be All You Can Be**

Another of the top three cumulative characteristics which outranked both the church and the ideal setting was encouragement. Youth seek affirmation! Mentoring is a task which needs to be taken seriously in this era of youth ministry. In the section on development in Chapter Three, Susan Harter emphasized the need for youth to receive

---

<sup>185</sup>McAllister, 21.

feedback and exhortation as a means of helping develop a more integrated sense of self<sup>186</sup>

Youth by their own admission, are not receiving the encouragement which they are seeking in the church. To a degree, this may be offset by their very positive experiences within the youth groups. However, the youth in this study have indicated they seek or receive a better share of encouragement on-line. Being able to encourage takes a considerable amount of vulnerability and trust, which by its nature, is linked to the previously mentioned characteristic of honesty.<sup>187</sup>

Since the on-line environment carries with it the stigma which seems to suggest difficulty in achieving personal intimacy, the quandary arises: Is there value in being vulnerable on-line? The issue of anonymity and the “cyber-confessional” theory seems to indicate this is possible. We would like to think youth are discriminating enough to choose with whom they will interact; in reality, if they are in a needy state, youth will turn to anyone who shows care and compassion, written or audible.<sup>188</sup> Therefore, perhaps youth workers could be aware of this aspect of on-line interaction and provide council either on or off-line.

---

<sup>186</sup>Harter, 353.

<sup>187</sup>McAllister draws this conclusion that honesty and mentoring, or encouraging walk hand in hand, as there needs to be a vulnerability when one shares in the life of another (McAllister, 130).

<sup>188</sup>Harter, 364.

### **Listening - Did I Hear You Correctly?**

This characteristic of listening would seem least likely to make the top five selections in the cumulative response; yet, 34.6 percent chose this as an important quality for their on-line community experience. When discussing the example of listening, one must consider other aspects of listening beyond mere auditory interaction. When a person is writing on-line, they can be “heard” and understood. It is very much related to the other two popular characteristics in the on-line experience. Without two-way listening, there could not be encouragement. Without honesty, listening could be an empty and fruitless venture. Youth desire and need to be heard. Their voices need to be heard and given undivided attention in order that the meaning is not lost and they are truly understood. For some reason, youth in this study felt they were experiencing the characteristic of listening on-line to a higher degree than in the church or even compared to their ideal.

The fact youth chose these three characteristics of honesty, encouragement and listening, does not mean they do not occur in the church. What it seems to indicate is that they are experiencing these characteristics to a higher degree in the on-line setting. All three of these characteristics were higher than what was stated for the ideal community. There is a possibility these youth have lower expectations of the particular characteristics; therefore, what they are experiencing on-line is surpassing their ideal expectations. It could also mean the on-line experience of these three characteristics is a poor imitation of what they could be experiencing in healthy, intentional off-line community situations. They may be accepting an inferior quality of honesty, encouragement or listening, for lack

of better alternatives. This was evidenced somewhat by the comments from the few students in the focus groups who were mostly comprised of marginalised or disenfranchised youth who were not connected to a significant church or youth group community.

The top five cumulative characteristics for church community were Worship, Christian Love, Praying, Fellowship and Forgiveness (see Table 6:3). All these characteristics were higher than the on-line and the ideal setting--with the exception of praying which tied with the ideal. Most, if not all, of these characteristics experienced in the church are highly experiential in the nature, so they might not be as highly regarded as possible in the on-line experience. Worship at the current time is not a viable experience in the on-line environment, thus the reason for being ranked only 6.9 percent.

### **A Simple Matter of Love**

The question was raised in Chapter Two in the section on theology of community: Is it possible for youth to experience love on-line? From the survey, it was apparent love was one of the five highest cumulative characteristics which youth chose as significant to them (see Table 6:2). They did experience love to a greater degree in the church at 49.4 percent, but not as high as their ideal estimation of 46.8 percent; however, by comparison, the on-line experience of love at 31.6 percent was not far behind the others (see Table 6:3). It was apparent from the survey that these youth, according to their understanding, experience Christian love on-line. Earlier in Chapter Two, Mary Ann Fatula helped to establish the characteristic of love as an all encompassing and the

demonstrable quality of authentic Christian community. Her comments also helped establish that if love was present, then effective and healthy community can be expected among the participants. It is worthy of note that almost a third of these youth who were surveyed felt Christian love was significant in the on-line community.

### **Youth Culture and the Internet**

The use of the Internet for building community has been judged from basically two attitudes: from those that seem to resent its influence and the perceived threat to face-to-face community, to those that think that it is a necessary part of our evolving culture. The balance that needs to be achieved can be seen in varying degrees. Niebuhr's five positions that were outlined in Chapter Two helped to provide a framework to understand the essential elements of culture and how computer-mediated-communication (CMC) can be perceived to fit into Christian community. The positions, in light of the study results, not only show how Christians may view the radical shifts in our postmodern day culture, but also how they may react to the need for transformation within the culture of the church. To recap, here are the positions that Niebuhr identified.

Those who view the Internet as a tool of evil are those who may espouse the Christ against culture model. There is not much likelihood that people of this persuasion will care to entertain the possibility of using the Internet in ministry. There are those who may take the view CMC and Christian on-line community are the next frontier for Christian ministry. This attitude would be best typified by Niebuhr's "Christ of culture" position. An example of this attitude could be reflected in those who are organizing and

running on-line churches and congregations to the exclusion of the local congregation involvement. This attitude is exemplified by those like Fjeldstad who are actively recruiting missionaries for cyber-evangelism.<sup>189</sup>

Niebuhr also depicted the “Christ above culture” position. People who ascribe to this view of culture will have a difficult time seeing the Internet as a tool which is capable of being redeemed for the use of the Kingdom, largely due to its loose, unregulated nature and moral ambiguity. However, there may be a few of this persuasion who would attempt to be the trendsetters and provide safe alternatives for youth to participate through screening software. Michael W. Smith, a popular Christian musician is one of the proponents of providing safe alternatives for youth that will block offensive or questionable material on the Internet. “Christ and culture in paradox”, the fourth position of Niebuhr, is one of the more probable positions which would find Christians engaging in on-line Christian community. This position recognizes the weaknesses of on-line community and the inherent limitations which exist within it, and looks for the viable options which allow for authentic or safe participation on-line. Many of the younger Christian generations would fall into this category as they are the practitioners of computer-mediated-communication and therefore recognize the potential for positive ministry. The older generations, those unfamiliar with CMC or those who only see the Internet for utilitarian means, will not likely fall into the “Christ and Culture in paradox” model.

The final position, which is not too unlike the last one which was discussed, is

---

<sup>189</sup>Fjeldstad, 28.



“Christ the transformer of culture.” The difference this position would reflect in CMC would be that Christians who take this view would be actively involved in making an impact on-line by engaging people in Christian community, developing web sites which engage non-believers, and generally embarking on a mission of transformation with those they encounter.

This position, and the last one discussed, are the two which describe those who are engaging in on-line activity in Christian community in a responsible manner, unlike perhaps those of the “Christ of culture” mind-set. The purpose for elaborating Niebuhr’s positions on culture here, and in Chapter Two, is to help us to recognize the influence of different faith backgrounds and understanding of who the people are that likely will engage in CMC and Christian community on-line. Niebuhr’s positions, especially the last one, coupled with the results of this study of 231 Canadian youth, help Christians to realize there are radical transformations taking place within our postmodern culture. The repercussions are being felt in the church, which by the accounts of these youth is lacking in its ability to be transformed. The study has shown that these youth are not receiving what they are desiring within the church, which they are seemingly finding on-line. While a great deal of these needs are being met adequately within their segregated peer group settings (i.e., youth groups, clubs), a few, to a higher degree, are being provided through the on-line community.

### **Millennial Christian Youth and the On-line Community**

While understanding the impact that physiological development can have on the actions of the youth with whom we are working, as illustrated by Susan Harter, it is equally important that we gain a clearer understanding of how faith development can have an impact on the decisions that youth make with respect to on-line activity. James Fowler's groundbreaking work *Stages of Faith*, provided some of the principles that helped us to determine what youth are thinking at this vulnerable stage of life and faith.

Synthetic-Conventional Faith (adolescence and beyond) is the stage that is closely associated with this age group, as outlined in Chapter Three of this dissertation. At this particular stage, youth are beginning to chart their own courses and synthesizing from external sources to formulate their own faith agenda. It is a critical stage considering that youth are questioning the established norms and values that parents, church leaders and teachers have given to them in the past. The youth in this study have made their observations known about their preferences for various characteristics related to the communities of youth group, church and on-line. This study revealed that youth accepted the support and sustaining community of the youth group. They were impressed with the church to a lesser degree, and in most cases they found the Internet lacked in providing the basics for Christian faith development; with the exception of allowing for a deeper vulnerability, which was not found in either the church or the youth group.

Since the Internet, as shown in the survey results, is a significant part of this information gathering process, it is critical that we help youth to begin to discern what is appropriate, to affirm them in their questioning so they might be careful not to accept all

that is on-line as truth. Being aware of these characteristics and stages of faith development are critical when assisting youth in the types of activities and the communities in which they engage in order to help them assimilate information and understand the feedback. It was mentioned earlier that youth are sensing a great deal of encouragement, listening, and honesty on-line, thus it could make them more vulnerable to deception and mis-information which could set back their spiritual and self development.

### **Suggested Uses for Ministry within On-line Community**

In light of the review which has been undertaken through this study, I would like to offer some suggestions to consider for ministry to millennial youth in a computer mediated community.

1. In order to connect at a deeper level in the lives of youth who are currently involved in our ministries, there ought to be a concerted effort to facilitate the opportunity for them to meet on-line either with each other or with a youth pastor. Since youth seek a deeper level of honesty online (see Table 6:4), and are more willing to listen and be heard, as revealed in the study (see Table 6:4), youth workers can take advantage of the openness to engage their youth at a deeper level.

Contacting youth is easily facilitated through various community-type programs (for example ICQ) which are often free of charge and user friendly. Often, youth can be found on-line surfing the net after school or in the evenings. This would be a prime time to interact with these youth and “catch up” on their day and perhaps entertain some

deeper questions as they present themselves. While a youth group or ISCF club obviously needs to maintain its real world presence, mission and purpose, an extension can be made into the dimension of the Internet. This could be done by youth themselves who are gifted with computers (a great group project to help build community on-line and augment the “real world” community which already exists within a youth group, through creation and promotion of their web site, etc.).

Youth pastors could list the hours when they are “in” or on-line, so youth who desire to approach them can talk about the issues of concern. Youth need to be able to talk to leaders who are role models or people in authority whom they respect. This is why there is such an attraction for youth to log on-line and “talk” to movie, pop music and television celebrities today on the Internet in special chat forums. Youth leaders should be prepared to be accessible through this medium.

This survey review has revealed a need: An effort needs to be made to help youth side-step fear of rejection or judgement in their face-to-face encounters in the church. It is apparent there needs to be a more focussed effort on helping youth to build confidence in their leaders and mentors so they are able to share with confidence and confidentiality. The opportunity to share on-line may help break down some of the walls of tension and allow a more free flowing of discussion about the deeper issues of concern. It could also be a first step which can lead the youth worker to invite the youth to meet and talk about these specific issues face-to-face. While possibly slow to accept the idea, churches will need to free youth workers and pastors to allow time to become involved with on-line ministry to their youth in addition to their regular activities. There is a high need for

integrity on the part of the youth pastor to link up with the youth and not waste time while being on-line.

**2.** A second possibility for applying these findings is found in training programs.

Teaching youth, for example, how to interact with non-Christian and Christian friends on-line in a more encouraging, honest manner while utilizing better listening skills, as revealed in the study. Youth workers could also discuss on-line case studies and incorporate discussions around issues which impact both on-line and off-line worlds. For example, youth love music: for the case of honesty, what should a Christian's response be to Napster and other related services which are computer-mediated communities, that allow illegal transferring of MP3 music files without compensating the artists who wrote the music? Part of the responsibility, as the results of this study show, is to help youth interact in all the community settings with their non-Christian and Christian friends so they cannot only act appropriately (i.e. being more encouraging, honest and more attentive) and make good choices, but also can enter into purposeful dialogue about their faith.

Earlier in this dissertation, it was suggested teaching apologetics in a rudimentary form could help youth interact evangelistically with their non-Christian friends. In the postmodern milieu, there is a greater need to teach youth how to tell their story and ask others to share their stories. The postmodern narrative philosophy lends itself beautifully to the sharing of stories within the Internet community. Students enjoy listening to other people's stories and telling their own story.

One of the goals is to help students develop their own conscience when

interacting with people on the Internet. Allowing youth to separate their values and Christian principles from their interactions on-line is not a healthy outcome. Integration of life and faith must be a carry-over into their involvement on the Internet. Youth workers must help them to realise every aspect of life needs to be under the Lordship of Christ.<sup>190</sup>

The survey results have shown that Christian youth have a significant number of non-Christian friends in their educational environment. Could there not be an opportunity to invite these youth to take part in on-line activities which are organized by church youth groups or ISCF clubs and therefore create a bridge to their offline youth group or club community? The Internet is the perfect intermediate step to encourage post-Christian youth to see what our groups are all about before they have to take the more difficult risk of entering the church or Christian club environment.

3. Spiritual support through prayer can be powerful. Prayer was the fifth highest ranked cumulative characteristic youth experienced on-line (see Table 6:5). On-line prayer can have as great an impact as it does in the off-line world. Prayers can be typed in advance (giving a chance to think more deliberately) and sent to youth, with an attached note telling them someone is prayed for them at a particular time of day. Or, in the chat-type programs such as ICQ, a person can type in real time and interact with the

---

<sup>190</sup>McAllister cautions youth may take the attitude their on-line existence as a Christian is virtual spirituality--or an extension of virtual reality. Youth can fall into the trap when they have had enough of Christ, they can simply "switch off" much as they would with someone on the Internet they do not agree with (McAllister, 110.).

other in real time prayer. It could be possible for a youth pastor to send prayer requests gathered from the youth group and distribute them out on a daily basis. The possibility of soliciting anonymous prayer requests is also very possible as a part of a prayer ministry.

The survey results illustrated 90 percent of the youth check their e-mail either many times daily or weekly. Statistics are showing, as was mentioned earlier, in this dissertation, more and more youth are acquiring e-mail accounts, and they have the ability to check e-mail while at school or from another computer. Prayer requests can now be received or shared by these youth at any time of day or night when they are logged on. There are many exciting possibilities to consider when thinking about prayer and the Internet. As youth leaders, we need to consider taking advantage of this technology to encourage youth by praying and making it meaningful for them.

## **Summary**

The future of computer mediated communication (CMC) continues to unfold as new advances in technology are released almost daily. Upon reflecting over the last few years, and considering where trends seem to be moving with regard to CMC, it is hard not to become enthused about the potential for furthering the impact of local youth ministry.

It can not be assumed using the Internet will be the solitary factor which will make inroads into the lives of youth. As in the past, youth workers will still need to invest in the face-to-face communities they have labored to establish. The results of this study have shown, without a doubt, that a youth group has had the greatest impact in the lives of these youth who responded to the survey. The results should be a resounding

affirmation to youth pastors and club sponsors who have taken the time to invest in the lives of the young people.

Beyond the Internet, many other factors beyond the scope of this study, will have a direct impact on the way in which youth ministry will be conducted in the new millennium. Youth workers will minister to youth in a post-Christian era. Globalization and rapid changes occurring on the political and economic scene will have an impact on how youth will view their world. All these factors and more will interact to create a more complex and needy world in which youth pastors and youth workers will continue to endeavour to reach youth with the timeless gospel of Christ.

This study has indicated the Internet is playing a significant role at the present time in the lives of Christian millennial youth. Perhaps their children will take the use of this new technology to the next level and beyond. If personal observations over the past five years, the review of literature, and this survey project are any indication, we cannot ignore the potential that exists for the use of the Internet in youth ministry. The task before those who work directly with youth, is to launch into this new forum and experiment with technology and develop new models of ministry. The next ten years will indeed be exciting as creativity is released and new developments are created to cause people to interact with this medium for the purpose of fostering on-line and offline community among Christian youth.

Community is important to youth. They are communal beings who desire to be connected with one another. The Internet is creating a conduit through which they are able to extend their friendship networks to friends in their everyday world, or to people



whom they have never met in real life. What youth workers should develop is a clear understanding of the theology of community and youth ministry as it relates to technology. When we are confirmed in what we believe, we can extend the boundaries to include these new avenues for reaching youth.

### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Michael. *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the end of the Millennium*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1998.

Agel, Jerome. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects. Marshall McLuhan and Quenton Fiore*. San Francisco: Hardwired, 1996

Anthony, Michael J. (ed). *Foundations of Ministry: An Introduction to Christian Education for a New Generation*. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1992.

Atkinson, Harley. *Ministry with Youth in Crisis*. Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1997.

Balke, Tom. "The Changing Face of the Canadian University What Will It Look Like in 2007?". Unpublished paper submitted to Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada National Staff Council., 1998.

Barna, George. *Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation*. (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Christians Embrace Technology" *Barna Research On-line* (12 June, 2000) [statistics on-line] available from <<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=64&Reference=B>> (accessed 6 January, 2001).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Generation Next: What You Need To Know About Today's Youth*. California: Regal Books, 1995

\_\_\_\_\_. "Teenagers Are Focussed On the Future" " *Barna Research On-line* (8 February, 1999) [statistics on-line] available from <<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/Home.asp>> (accessed 6 January, 2001).

\_\_\_\_\_. "Teenagers Embrace Religion but Are Not Excited About Chrisitanity" *Barna Research On-line* (10 January, 2000) [statistics on-line] available from <<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=45&Reference=E>> (accessed 30 January, 2001).

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Cyber Church is Coming" *Barna Research On-line* (20 April, 1998) [statistics on-line] available from <<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=9&Reference=B>> (accessed 6 January, 2001).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Third Millennium Teens" *Youthworker* 16, no. 3 (January/February 2000) :22-24.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "We Don't Train Pastors How to Exegete the Culture", *Youthworker*, 11, no.1 (Summer 1994) : 53-56.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Worship Tops The List of Important Church-Based Experiences" *Barna Research On-line* (19 February 2001) [statistics on-line] available at <<http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=22&Reference=E>> (accessed 20 February, 2001).
- Bell, James. *Bridge Over Troubled Water: Ministry to Baby Boomers--A Generation Adrift*. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books- SP Publications, Inc., 1993.
- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *The Good Society*. New York: Alfred A. Knoph Inc., 1992.
- Bellous, Joyce E. "Spiritual and Ethical Orality in Children: educating an oral self." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 5, no 1, (2000) : 9- 26.
- Benson, Warren S. and Mark H. Senter III. (ed). *The Complete Book of Youth Ministry*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1987.
- Bernard, Jessie Bernard. *The Sociology of Community*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973.
- Bibby, Reginald W. *There's Got To Be More! Connecting Churches and Canadians*. Winfield, British Columbia: Woodlake Books Inc., 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*. Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Ltd., 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada*. Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Company, 1997 (reprint).

Bibby, Reginald W and Donald C. Posterski. *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion*. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Emerging Generation: An Inside look at Canada's Teenagers*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1985.

Bilezikian, Gilbert. *Community 101: Reclaiming the Church as Community of Oneness*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.

Bohlin, Sue. "The Internet," *Leadership University* (updated 2 September 2000) [paper on-line] available from <<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/internet.html>> (accessed February 6, 1999)

Borgman Dean, *When Kumbaya is Not Enough: A Practical Theology of Youth Ministry*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997.

Bowler, Gerry. "Teens confront the fear of not belonging" *Christian Week* (October 1999)

Brock, Peter. "The "No-Future" Generation?" *The Ecumenical Review* (1992) : 179-196.

"Canada world champs in Internet Use" (16 November, 2000) [news on-line] available from <<http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?news/2000/11/16/echamps001116>> (accessed 20 February, 2001).

"Canadians desert 500 channel universe" *CBC British Columbia News Online* (25 January, 2001) [news on-line] available from <<http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?category=Regional&story=/news/2001/01/25/bctvstats010125>> (accessed 20 February, 2001).

Carter, Jeff. Inter School Christian Fellowship, Results of the 2000 Internet Survey Questionnaire of 100 high school delegates to the annual LIFT Higher (2000) Conference administered January 31, 2000.

Careaga, Andrew. *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2001.

Cherny, Lynn. *Conversation and Community: Chat in a Virtual World*. California: CSLI Publications, 1999.

Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People. The Church as a Culture in a Post-Christian Society*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1996.

- Clark, Chapman R. "Reaching Out to the New Adolescent" *Theology, News and Notes* (June 2000): 2-3.
- Codrington, Graeme, "Generation X Papers: Towards a Theology of Incarnational Youth Ministry." [paper on-line] available from < <http://home.pix.za/gc/gc12/papers/> > (accessed 11 December, 2000).
- Cohen, Phil and Pay Ainley, "In The Country of the Blind?: Youth Studies and Cultural Studies in Britain." *Journal of Youth Studies*. 3, no.1, (2000): 79-95.
- "Community" *Youth Leaders Networks - Next Special Edition* (no date) [paper on-line] available from <[http://www.youngleader.org/specialedition/pg3\\_8.html](http://www.youngleader.org/specialedition/pg3_8.html)> (accessed 5 March 2000).
- Campolo, Anthony. *Growing up in America -- a Sociology of Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Preaching to Youth at the End of History*, audio tapes of lectures by Dr. Anthony Campolo, presented at the McMaster Divinity College Festival of Preaching, Hamilton Ontario, April 11-12, 1995. Tape #1.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *What we need to Know About the Sociology of Youth Ministry*, audio tapes of lectures by Dr. Anthony Campolo, presented at the McMaster Divinity College Festival of Preaching, Hamilton Ontario, April 11-12, 1995. Tape # 2.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Preaching to the Culture of Narcissism*, audio tapes of lectures by Dr. Anthony Campolo, presented at the McMaster Divinity College Festival of Preaching, Hamilton Ontario, April 11-12, 1995. Tape # 3.
- Cortese, Amy. "Special Report: Internet Communities" *Business Week* (5 May, 1997): 64-84.
- Cote, James E. and Anton L Allahar. *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century*. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Company, 1994.
- Coupland, Douglas. *Generation X*. British Edition. London: Abacus, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Life After God*. New York: Pocket Books, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Generation X: Tales for and Accelerated Culture*. New York: Saint Martins Press, 1991.

- Couto, Joe. "Canadian church attendance declines" *ChristianWeek* 14, no.18 (9 January 2001): 1-2.
- Creasy, Kenda Dean and Ron Foster. *The God bearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998.
- Crouch, Andy. "For People Like Me: The Myth of Generations" *Young Leader Networks* [article on-line] available from <<http://www.youngleader.org/peoplelikeme.html>> (accessed 2 March 2000).
- Dannefer, Dale W. and Nicholas Poushinsky. "Language and Community" *Journal of Communications* 27. no. 3 (Summer 1977): 122-125.
- Davis, Eric. *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic + Mysticism in the Age of Information*, New York, Three Rivers Press, 1998.
- Dean, Katie. "And God Said: Let There Be Net" *Wired News* [on-line magazine] (18 January, 2001) available from <<http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,41229,00.html>> (accessed 2 February, 2001).
- Devlin, Sandra. "Beware the Trap of Cyberspace", *Times and Transcript*, 1 November 2000, Section D, 2.
- "Does Prayer Belong at High School Football Games?" (15 November, 1999) [news on-line] available from <[http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/schoolprayer\\_sctus\\_991115.html](http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/schoolprayer_sctus_991115.html)> (accessed 15 April, 2000).
- Driscoll, Mark and Chris Seay. "A Second Reformation is at Hand," *Youthworker Journal* (January/February 2000) [journal on-line] available from <<http://www.youthspecialties.com/ywj/articles/vital/reformation.html>> (accessed 11 December, 2000).
- Dunn, R. Richard and James W. Mohler. "The "Fourth Wave": A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry." *Christian Education Journal*, 3, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 47-61.
- Dunn, R. Richard and Mark H. Senter III. *Reaching a Generation For Christ: A Comprehensive Guide to Youth Ministry*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997.
- Fatula, Mary Ann. *The Triune God of Christian Faith*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. 1990.

- Fjeldstad, Arne H. "Communicating Christ in Cyberspace", *Worship Leader* (July-August 1998): 26-30.
- Fields, Doug. *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Foot, David K. and Daniel Stoffman. *Boom Bust and Echo: How to Profit From the Coming Demographic Shift*. Toronto: Macfarlane Walter and Ross, 1996.
- Ford, Kevin Graham. *Jesus For a New Generation: Putting The Gospel in the Language of Xers*. Downers Grove: Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Ford, Leighton. "Up & Comers: A Letter to Future Leaders" *Christianity Today International/Christianity Today Magazine* 40, no.13 (November 11, 1996): 16.
- Fortosis, Steven G. and Tapia, Andres, "Reaching the First Post Christian Generation" *Christianity Today* (12 September 1994): 18-23.
- Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest For Meaning*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Fryer, Greg. "The Internet: Research on Teen, Parent and Youth Worker Use of the Internet." Youth Unlimited Report. 17, January 2001.
- Gangel, Kenneth O. and Warren S. Benson. *Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1983.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Created For Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*. Wheaton, Illinois: BridgePoint Books, 1996.
- Gribbon, Robert T. *Developing Faith in Young Adults: Effective Ministry with 18-35 Year Olds*. New York: The Alban Institute, 1993.
- Groothuis, Douglas. "Christian Scholarship and the Philosophical Analysis of Cyberspace Technologies" *JETS* 41, no. 4, (December 1998): 631-640.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Fate of Truth in Cyberspace" [paper on-line] available from <<http://www.gospelcom.net/ivpress/groothuis/truthincyber.htm>> (accessed 8 January, 2001).

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Soul in Cyberspace*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999.
- “Growing number of Canadians log on” (4 December, 2000) [news on-line] available from <[http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?category=Canada&story=/news/2000/12/04/internet\\_stats001204](http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?category=Canada&story=/news/2000/12/04/internet_stats001204)> (accessed 20 February, 2001).
- Gunton, E. Colin, and Daniel W. Hardy. *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1989.
- Horrocks, John E. *The Psychology of Adolescence. Fourth Edition*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.
- Harrison, Dan, and Gordon Aeschliman. *Romancing the Globe: The Call of the Wild on Generation X*. Downers Grove, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1993.
- Harter, Susan. “Self and Identity Development” in *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent*, eds. S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Henderson, Charles. “The Emerging Faith Communities of Cyberspace” *CMC Magazine* [journal on Line] (March 1997) available from <<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/mar/hend.html>> (accessed 16 January, 2001).
- Hoge, Dean R., Benton Johnson and Donald A. Luidens. *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- Holtzman, Fred. “Trends of the Revolution: Education and the World-Wide Web,” *Leadership U*, (updated 6 February 1999) [paper on-line] available from <<http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9603/holtzman.html>> (accessed 15 March, 2000).
- Hoge, Dean R. and David A. Roozen., eds. *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*. New York : Pilgrim Press, 1979.
- Horn, Stacy, *Cyberville: Clicks, Culture, and the Creation of an On-line Town*. New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1998.
- Howe, Neil and William Strauss. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.



- Iyer, Hemalata (ed.), *Electronic Resources: Use and User Behaviour*. New York: Hawthorn Press, Inc. 1998.
- Jamison, Barbara. "Hooked On-line" *WebMD Medical News*. [on-line article] ( 12 June, 2000) available from <<http://health.msn.ca/content/article/1674.50516>> (accessed 12 December, 2000).
- Jones, Stephen D. *Faith Shaping Youth and the Experience of Faith*. rev. ed. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987.
- Keagan, Robert. *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press. 1994.
- Koppe, William A. *How Persons Grow in Christian Community*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1973.
- Lamb, Richard B. *Following Jesus in the Real World: Discipleship for the Post-College Years*. Downers Grove: Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1995.
- Langham, Don. "The Common Place MOO: Orality and Literacy in Virtual Reality" *Computer-Mediated-Communications Magazine* 1, no. 3 (1 July 1994): 7.
- Lawrence, Rick. *Trend Watch: Insights That Fuel Authentic Youth Ministry*. Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing Inc., 2000.
- Leddy, Mary Jo and Romero House. "The Church As Parallel Culture" *The Gospel an Our Culture Network* 11, no.2 (June 1999) [newsletter on-line] available from <[www.gocn.org/news112.htm](http://www.gocn.org/news112.htm)> (accessed 2 April, 2000).
- Lytle, Tom. "The Anatomy of Community, And Three Disorders That Cripple Its Life" *Youthworker Journal* (Spring 1997) [journal on-line] available from <<http://www.youthspecialties.com/ywj/articles/vital/community.html>> (accessed 11 December, 2000).
- Lyon, David. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Future Society: Life After 1984 – Threat or Promise?* Bellville, Michigan: Lion Publishing Corporation, 1984.
- Mabee, Carlton. *American Leonardo: The Life of Samuel B. Morse*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1957.

- Maffin, Todd. "Faith in a Digital World" *CBC Radio Interactive* (25 July, 2000) available from <<http://todradio.com/show05.html>> (accessed 5 September, 2000)
- Mahedy, William and Janet Bernardi. *A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World*. Wheaton, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1994.
- Marvin, Carolyn and Quentin Schultze. "The First Thirty Years," *Journal of Communication* 27. no. 3 (Summer 1977): 104-125.
- McAllister, Dawson. *Saving the Millennial Generation: New Ways to Reach the Kids You Care About in These Uncertain Times*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.
- McFadyen, Alistair. *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- McRobbie, Angela. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth is Stranger Than it Used To Be: Biblical faith in a Post Modern Age*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1995.
- Neuborne, Ellen "We Are Going to Own This Generation" *Business Week On-line* (15 February, 1999) [magazine on-line] available from <[http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99\\_07/b3616005.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99_07/b3616005.htm)> (accessed 3 November 2000).
- Neuborne, Ellen and Kathleen Kerwin. "Generation Y: Today's teens - the biggest bulge since the boomers - may force marketers to toss their old tricks." *Business Week On-line*, (15 February 1999) [periodical on-line]; available from <[http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99\\_07/b3616001.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/1999/99_07/b3616001.htm)> (accessed 3 November, 2000).
- Niebuhr, Richard H. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1951.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Youth in God's World: A response After Twenty-Four Years*. *The Ecumenical Review*, 1992, 234-254.
- Parrott III. Les, "Adolescent Spirituality: What Can We Expect?" *Youthworker*, Spring 1985.

- Penner, James and Reginald Bibby. "Adolescent Disposition in Canada: An Exploratory Sociological Analysis." Presented at The Annual Meetings of the Religious Research Association and The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Albuquerque, New Mexico, November 1994), University of Lethbridge, 1995.
- Posterski, Don. *Friendship: A Window On Ministry To Youth-Project Teen Canada*. Toronto: Passmore Printing Inc., 1986.
- Powell, Jon T. and Donald Ary. "Communication without Commitment" *Journal of Communication* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 118-121.
- Prior, Randall. "Gospel and Culture: A Dangerous Conjunction" *Auburn Report* 9, no. 2, (April, 1997)
- Ratcliff, Donald and James A. Davies, eds. *Handbook of Youth Ministry*. Birmingham, Alabama: R. E. P. Books, 1991.
- Reilly, John J. Review of TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information, by Eric Davis, *First Things First: A Monthly Journal of Religious and Public Life* (May 1999): 64-67.
- Rice, Wayne. ed. "Where are We Headed?: Christian Leaders Speak out About the Future of Youth Ministry" *Youthworker* 11, No.1., (Summer), 1994.
- Richards, Lawrence O. *Youth Ministry*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.
- Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. New York: New York, Harper Perennial, 1994.
- Roxburgh, Alan J. *Reaching A New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*. Downer's Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Rushkoff, Douglas. *Playing the Future: What we Can Learn from Digital Kids*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.
- Senter, Mark, III. *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry and its Radical Impact on the Church*. USA: Victor Books, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Where We've Come From (and Where We Need To Go)," *Youthworker* (January/February 2000): 48-52.

- Schultze, Quentin J. *Internet for Christians: Everything You Need to Start Cruising the Net Today!* Muskegon, Michigan: Gospel Films, Inc., 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What the Internet Revolution Means for Youth Ministry," *Youthworker* (January/February 2000): 40- 47.
- Schultze, Quentin J., Roy M. Anker, James D. Bratt, William D. Romanowski, John W. Worst, Lambert Zuidervaat. *Dancing in the Dark.: Youth, Popular Culture and the Electronic Media.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing Co., 1991.
- Seabourn, Keith. "Leading the Way on the Web Frontier: A Call for Christian Educators to Pioneer into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Leadership U*, (February 6, 1999) available from <<http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9603/keith.html>> (accessed 12, March 2000).
- Senter III, Mark H. *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry and its Radical Impact on the Church.* Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Where We've Come From(And Where We Need To Go)" *Youthworker* 13, no.3, (January/February 2000): 48-52.
- Shelton, Charles M. *Adolescent Spirituality.* Loyola University Press, 1983.
- Shelton, Karla and Todd McNeeley, *Virtual Community: Your Passport to the Bold New Frontier of Cyberspace.* Toronto: Coriolis Group Books, 1997
- Shields, Rob. *Cultures of Internet: Virtual Spaces, Real Histories, Living Bodies.* Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications, 1996.
- Sine, Tom. *Cease Fire: Searching for Sanity in America's Culture Wars.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mustard Seed versus McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future.* Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Books, 1999.
- Snyder, Howard A. *The Community of the King.* Downers Grove, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1978.
- Smith, Marc A. and Peter Kollock. *Communities in Cyberspace.* New York: Routledge, 2000.

- Spotts, Dwight and David Veerman. *Reaching Out to Troubled Youth*. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1987.
- Springhall, John. *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs To Gangsta Rap 1830-1996*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998.
- Stefik, Mark. *Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996.
- Stewart, Charles William. *Adolescent Religion: A developmental Study of the Religion of Youth*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1967.
- Strauss, William and Neil Howe. "The New Generation Gap" [article on-line] available from <<http://home.pix.za/gc/gc12/papers/p1009.htm>> (accessed 3 June, 2000).
- Strinati, Dominic. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. New York, Routledge, 1996.
- Sweet, Leonard. *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim In The New Millennium Culture*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999
- Swingewood, Alan. *Cultural Theory and the Problem of Modernity*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998.
- Tapia, Andres. "Reaching the First Post Christian Generation" *Christianity Today* (12 September 1994): 18-23.
- Tapscott, Don. "The Culture of Interaction" [article on-line] available from <<http://www.growingupdigital.com/lcult.html>> (accessed 2 January 2000).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Three Impressions of N-Gen Personality" [article on-line] available from <<http://www.growingupdigital.com/ngthink.html>> (accessed 2 January 2000).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*. Montreal: McGraw-Hill, 1998.
- Thieme, Richard. "The Future Shape of Religious Structures" *CMC Magazine* (March 1997) [magazine on-line] available from <<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/mar/last.html>> (accessed 16 February, 2001).

Thompson, Clive. "Don Tapscott: Life as a Techno-Missionary Super Cyber-expert" *Enroute* (April 2000): 36-48.

Tipton, Steven M. *Getting Saved From the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural change*. California: University of California Press, 1982.

Tittley, Mark. "Millennials and Commitment Level Ministry" [article on-line] available from <<http://www.youth.co.za/model/millen.htm>> (accessed 10 January, 2001).

Turkle, Sherry, *The Second Self: Computer and the Human Spirit*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984.

"TV viewing down, Internet up: StatsCan" *CBC News* (January 25, 2001) available from <[http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?category=Canada&story=/news/2001/01/25/stats\\_010125](http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?category=Canada&story=/news/2001/01/25/stats_010125)> (accessed 20, February, 2001).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Virtuality and its Discontents," *The American Prospect* 7, no. 24, (December 1, 1996).

Warren, Michael. *Youth and the Future of the Church: Ministry with Youth and Young Adults*. New York: Seabury Press, 1982.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Reading and Resources in Youth Ministry*. Wynona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 1987.

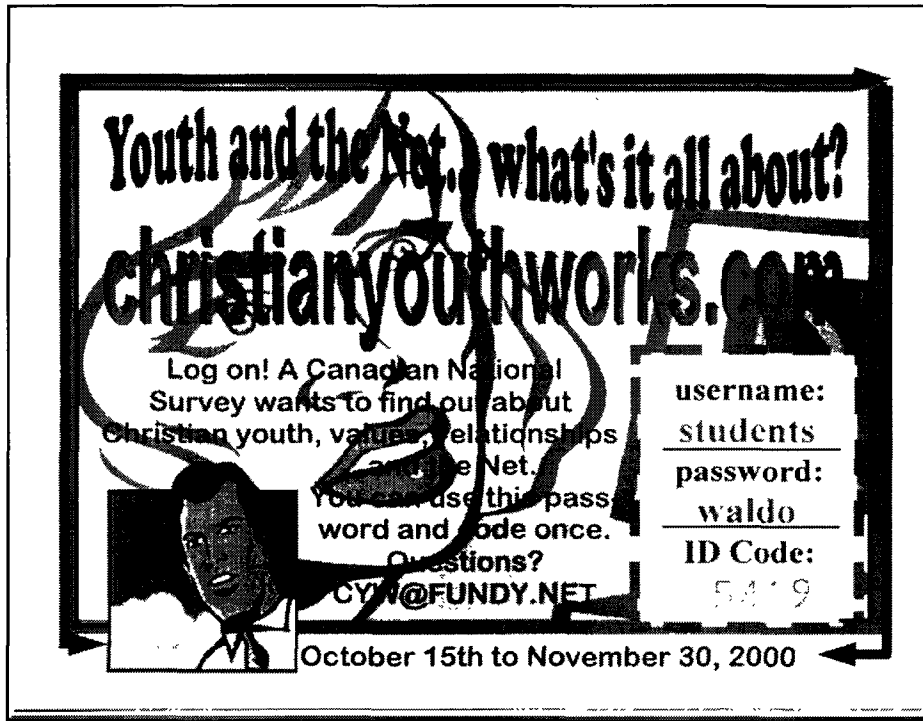
Wehmeyer, Peggy. "Faith and Football" (11 October, 1999) [news on-line] available from <[http://more.abcnews.go.com/onair/dailynews/wnt\\_991011\\_prayer\\_feature.html](http://more.abcnews.go.com/onair/dailynews/wnt_991011_prayer_feature.html)> (accessed 6 April 2000).

Weinreich, Frank. "Establishing a point of view toward virtual communities" *CMC Magazine* (February 1997) [magazine on-line] available from <<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/feb/wein.html>> (accessed 16 February, 2001)

\_\_\_\_\_. "There's No Living in the Nodes" *CMC Magazine* (February 1997) [magazine on-line] available from <<http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1997/feb/weinon.html>> (accessed 16 February, 2001)

- Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton and James D. Whitehead. *Community of Faith: Models and Strategies for developing Christian Communities*. New York: Seabury Press, 1982
- Williams, Ederyn. "Experimental Comparisons of Face-to-Face and Mediated Communication: A Review." *Psychological Bulletin* 84, no. 5. (1977): 965-976.
- Wood, Owen. "Canadians Snub the Boob Tube" *CBC News On-line* [news on-line] available from <[http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/tv\\_statscan.html](http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/background/tv_statscan.html)> (accessed 5 January, 2001).
- Zuck, Roy B. and Robert ER. Clark, eds. *Childhood Education in the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1975.

## APPENDIX A.



**Survey Invitation Card.**

The username and password were the same for all cards. The ID Code: number was unique for each card numbered from 0001 to 6500. The duration of the access window for the site was from October 15<sup>th</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000.



## APPENDIX B.



Thank you for taking the time to answer this ONLINE survey\*. Please answer all the questions that you can, this is not a test, we just want YOUR views. This survey is completely confidential and no one will know that you filled out this survey form.

We will not ask your name. If you come across a question that you do not understand, please skip it and then move on. This survey should take you about 10-15 minutes of your time. Please take the questions seriously -- but have fun doing them as well! If there are words that you do not understand click on the highlighted word for a better explanation (i.e.: community) then hit your back button to return to the survey. Questions? [cym@fundy.net](mailto:cym@fundy.net)

After you are finished filling in the survey, please press the Submit button at the bottom of the survey (only once) and you are all done!


A confirmation page will appear when you are done.

## Some Basic Information

ID Code:  (required from postcard)




1. What Canadian province do you currently live in?

Select a Province 

2. How old were you on your last birthday?

<input type="radio"/> younger than 13	<input type="radio"/> 13	<input type="radio"/> 14	<input type="radio"/> 15	<input type="radio"/> 16	<input type="radio"/> 17	<input type="radio"/> 18
<input type="radio"/> 19	<input type="radio"/> 20	<input type="radio"/> 21	<input type="radio"/> 22	<input type="radio"/> 23	<input type="radio"/> older than 23	

3. What grade/year of your program are you in?

Select a grade or level 

4. Are you male or female? ☐ Male ☐ Female

## You and Your Faith Experience

5. How many times a month do you attend your church worship service?

How many?

6. How many times a month do you attend your church youth group or young adults group?

How many?

7. What denomination or faith are you currently associated with?

Chose your denomination

If not listed above, tell us which one you are with:

->

8. Would you term your relationship with God as:

Personal	On the way	Random	Not really interested
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Some questions about your church and friends

	YES	NO
Do you go to church with your friends instead of with your family?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you have non-Christian friends?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you go to church services with your family?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you go to a different church from that of your	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

family?			
---------	--	--	--

**10. How many times have you changed churches in the past 5 years?**

Select times

If you did change churches can you explain in the box below, in a few words why you changed?

**11. How would you rank your experience of the following?**

	Very Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Satisfactory	Dissatisfactory
Genuine community at my church or youth group	○	○	○	○
My relationship with my non-Christian friends	○	○	○	○
Genuine Christian community while I am on the Internet	○	○	○	○
Sharing my Christian faith online	○	○	○	○
My church has helped me grow in my faith as a Christian	○	○	○	○

**12. What do you believe to be the 5 most important characteristics of Christian community In Your Church**

OR Youth Group Or Christian Club as you are experiencing them now?

**NOTE:** Please select only 5 from the list below and number them from 1 being the most important, 2 next important, 3 next important, 4 next important and finally 5 as the last selection. (For example: 3 Tolerance would be the third highest rating) If only a few apply only indicate the ones that apply to your situation, if none apply then leave them blank.

<input type="checkbox"/> Honesty	<input type="checkbox"/> Accountability	<input type="checkbox"/> Christian Love
<input type="checkbox"/> Forgiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Kindness
<input type="checkbox"/> Unity	<input type="checkbox"/> Peace	<input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance
<input type="checkbox"/> Openness	<input type="checkbox"/> Fellowship	<input type="checkbox"/> Giving of time
<input type="checkbox"/> Integrity	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty	<input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-judgmental	<input type="checkbox"/> Mission	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship
<input type="checkbox"/> Praying for another	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of Spiritual gifts	<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>

13. No situation is perfect. Please list below any negative qualities (if any) that you may have

experienced with your church, youth group or club experiences.

a.  b.  c.

What are some of your thoughts on these next questions:

14. How would you rank the following for importance for you?

	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
My attendance of worship services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My friendships at my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to access the Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To be able to keep in touch with close Christian friends via the net	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My friendships at church	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My involvement in my youth group or Bible study group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. a. About how many Christian friends do you have in your non-online world?

☐ Less than 10    ☐ between 10 and 20    ☐ between 20 and 30    ☐ more than 30

b. About how many non-Christian friends do you have in your non-online world?

☐ Less than 10    ☐ between 10 and 20    ☐ between 20 and 30    ☐ more than 30

### Some Net Questions

16. Relationships. . .

	Very Significant	Fairly Significant	Not Very Significant	Not Significant
Do you consider the relationships that you have with online friends as:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you consider the relationships that you have with non-online friends as:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. Do you have access to the internet at home? ☐ YES ☐ NO

18. About how many hours a day on average would you spend online?  hours a day

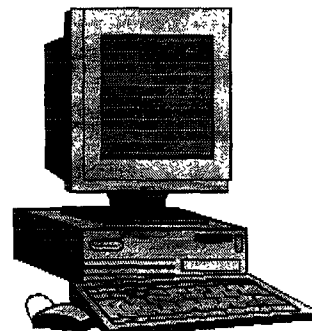
19. How many email addresses do you have?  How many?

20. How many nicknames or aliases do you have?

How many?

21. About how often do you access web sites?

How often?



22. About how often do you access chat rooms?

23. About how often do you use or check your e-mail?

24. a. How many Christian friends have you made on the net that you have never met in person?

☐ Less than 10    ☐ between 10 and 20    ☐ between 20 and 30    ☐ more than 30

b. How many non-Christian friends have you made on the net that you have never met in person?

☐ Less than 10    ☐ between 10 and 20    ☐ between 20 and 30    ☐ more than 30

25. What are some of the sites or items that you access while online (check any that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Christian Music sites	<input type="checkbox"/> Secular music sites	<input type="checkbox"/> Christian MP3 (download)
<input type="checkbox"/> Christian Chat Rooms	<input type="checkbox"/> ICQ (I Seek You) Chat	<input type="checkbox"/> Research for homework
<input type="checkbox"/> Devotional sites	<input type="checkbox"/> other? <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> other? <input type="text"/>

26. A) Which do you believe are the 5 most important characteristics of Christian community with your ONLINE COMMUNITY OR INTERNET CONTACTS ON THE WEB?

NOTE: Please select only 5 from the list below and number them from 1 being the most important, 2 next important, 3 next important, 4 next important and finally 5 as the last selection. (For example:  Tolerance would be the third highest rating) If only a few apply only indicate the ones that apply to your situation, if none apply then leave them blank.

<input type="text"/> Honesty	<input type="text"/> Accountability	<input type="text"/> Christian Love
<input type="text"/> Forgiveness	<input type="text"/> Listening	<input type="text"/> Kindness
<input type="text"/> Unity	<input type="text"/> Peace	<input type="text"/> Acceptance

<input type="checkbox"/> Openness	<input type="checkbox"/> Fellowship	<input type="checkbox"/> Giving of time
<input type="checkbox"/> Integrity	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty	<input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-judgmental	<input type="checkbox"/> Mission	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship
<input type="checkbox"/> Praying for another	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of Spiritual gifts	<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>

B) No situation is perfect. Please list below any negative qualities (if any) that you may have experienced with your Internet online experiences.

a.  b.  c.

27. Where everyone knows your name...

	A Great Deal	Quite a bit	Some	Not at All
Does being <u>anonymous</u> take away from the intimacy or closeness that you experience with your online friends?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does being <u>anonymous</u> make it easier to share personal or sensitive issues online?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Final Questions

28. If you could create or join the IDEAL or PERFECT Christian Community what would be the 5 most important characteristics of that community from the list below?

NOTE: Please select only 5 from the list below and number them from 1 being the most important, 2 next important, 3 next important, 4 next important and finally 5 as the last selection. (For example:  Tolerance would be the third highest rating) If only a few apply indicate the ones that apply to your situation, if none apply then leave them blank.

<input type="checkbox"/> Honesty	<input type="checkbox"/> Accountability	<input type="checkbox"/> Christian Love
----------------------------------	---	---

<input type="text"/> Forgiveness	<input type="text"/> Listening	<input type="text"/> Kindness
<input type="text"/> Unity	<input type="text"/> Peace	<input type="text"/> Acceptance
<input type="text"/> Openness	<input type="text"/> Fellowship	<input type="text"/> Giving of time
<input type="text"/> Integrity	<input type="text"/> Loyalty	<input type="text"/> Encouragement
<input type="text"/> Non-judgmental	<input type="text"/> Mission	<input type="text"/> Worship
<input type="text"/> Praying for another	<input type="text"/> Use of Spiritual gifts	<input type="text"/> other <input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/> other <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> other <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> other <input type="text"/>

29. Please rate the following in terms of that which has given you the greatest help in the following areas. Please rate each community by choosing an answer for each box.

	CHURCH COMMUNITY	YOUTH GROUP COMMUNITY	ONLINE COMMUNITY
Increased or benefited my prayer life	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one
Has allowed me to share my deepest needs and hurts without fear of rejection	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one
Has taught me about the Christian faith and equipped me for service	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one
I feel comfortable sharing about sensitive or personal issues	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one
Makes me feel a part of a body, a sense of belonging to something	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one
Gives me a sense of what a "real" or authentic community is all about	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one
I am known best in this community - the "real" me...	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one	<input type="text"/> Select one

When You have completed the questions above click on the SUBMIT button once and wait





00415

\* (The FINE Print) This survey is part of a research project being conducted by Jeff Carter to fulfill the requirements to complete a Doctor of Ministry degree at McMaster Divinity College. The survey has been approved by the Committee on Ethics in Research of McMaster University.

Copyright © 2000 Jeff Carter. All rights reserved.

Revised: February 13, 2001 00:28

**APPENDIX C.**

**ONLINE FOCUS GROUP - 9:00 PM (Atl) 1/4/01**

(Interviewer's Note: Preamble conversation took place for about 5 minutes until the majority of students entered the chat room)

Interviewer: Just a note that this has been approved by the Committee for Ethics in Research at McMaster University Ethics Board and your participation is totally voluntary...

Interviewer: is that ok with everyone?

Jonathan: yes

Kelsey: yep

Leslie: yes

Tim agrees to all...

Interviewer: Ok cool, well lets begin...

Interviewer: one way that we can keep it clear is to each respond once to a question unless I ask you to clarify or expand on the comment ok? other than that feel free to have fun with it

Interviewer: First Question (I have to ask) how old are you?

Tim: 16

Leslie: 16

Jonathan: 29

Kelsey: 15

Interviewer: gender?

Jonathan: m

Leslie: F

Kelsey: f

Tim: m

Interviewer: Do you attend a church regularly?

Jonathan: yes

Leslie: Yes

Kelsey: most of the time

Tim: Not anymore.

Interviewer: Do you attend youth group regularly ? If yes, How often?

Jonathan: no, N/A

Kelsey: not regularly but sometimes...once every couple months or so

Leslie: Not anymore

Tim: Yes... Weekly Basis

Interviewer: Any reasons why those of you that are not attending can elaborate?

Jonathan: Feel too old to be with first and second year Univ.or younger students.

Tim: I felt unwanted there..

Interviewer: How often do you use email?

Leslie: I used to go, like EVERY time, but the youth leader just doesnt seem to put effort into it anymore, our entire Sr. High group has stopped going... The church is trying to Revamp it, but there isnt much youth support at our Church

Interviewer: Thanks Leslie....

Jonathan: every work day, MTWTF

Leslie: Everyday

Interviewer: Can I ask you some more about that?

Kelsey: I use email a lot, usually every day

Interviewer: (about the youth group>?)

Leslie: me?

Interviewer: u huh.... Leslie would you say that there was a close knit community in your youth group>?

Interviewer: at one time?

Tim: I use E-mail many times daily

Leslie: Yes, like, in Elementary and JrHigh, we'd all grown up in the Church

Interviewer: what were the best qualities of that community? When it was rolling well?

Leslie: In jr.High, we were all going to the same school, and we all were dealing with the same issues, it was easy to go to Youth Group and feel like we could be ourselves, because we'd all known each other for so long

Interviewer: Leslie , then what changed? Do not worry about the pauses in typing....

Interviewer: While Leslie is preparing her answer the rest of you can prepare your answers to the next Question: Do you use Chat rooms if so how often?

Kelsey: I don't use chat rooms often... maybe once a month, to chat with friends of mine from the States

Leslie: In sr.High we were all going to different school, which wasnt that bad, just that we didnt know each others friends anymore, we didnt really have as much to talk about, and the youth leaders sort of seemed to put less effort into the group, like... I dont really know, just like they hadnt seen us change and grow too much, and they seemed to give up more, eventually everyone stopped going, the activities were never well planned... (on a totally diff note I want to say that our Sunday school class has become better than ever)

Tim: I've been using them more lately

Leslie: sorry, that was long..... I rarely use chat rooms...

Jonathan: I did a lot in College.

Interviewer: Great Thanks Leslie if we have time at the end I may come back to this ok?

Leslie: sure

Interviewer: that was excellent Leslie thanks

Leslie: np

Jonathan: I can offer some on that subject too

Interviewer: Ok sure Jonathan

Jonathan: later?

Interviewer: no now would be ok....

Interviewer: if people want they can

Interviewer: type answers in shorter sentences

Interviewer: and that way it comes a little quicker

Jonathan: I found that in Jr. High things went the same in Grand Bay, but not only was the group tight in Church, they did a lot

Jonathan: of things outside together, all you needed was one or two catalyst people to do a bit of acalling

Jonathan: and people would get together "if you plan it they will come..."

Interviewer: What would you say the best qualites of that community were Jonathan?

Jonathan: Common belief

Jonathan: common interests in subgroups

Jonathan: age similarity

Jonathan: laughter

Jonathan: everyone could talk about God and be comfortable

Interviewer: Great thanks Jonathan.... I hope to jump back to this again if we get time at

the end... I appreciate these answers they are really helpful...

Interviewer: I don't want to leave Kelsey or Tim out either!

Tim: Thats OK

Kelsey: Yeah...

Interviewer: Question: would you consider the internet a integral part of your life? Why?

Tim: Yes.

Jonathan: no not really

Kelsey: Hmmm.... it's important I guess, I do do stuff on it a lot

Tim: It allows me to commicate with others...

Jonathan: the email is the only integral part

Leslie: um, yes, it's my main form of communication with my friends, like, on MSM messenger and stuff

[Randi joined channel \_surveys]

Interviewer: HI Randi we are just getting going.....

Interviewer: Randi I am asking questions and asking people to respond and I ask people to elaborate on ceratin answers ok?

Randi: okay

Interviewer: Randi for my records can you let me know your gender and age?

Randi: f/14

Interviewer: Jonathan as the "token X-er" here (sorry for the label) would you say that you see it more as a functional tool rather than a integral part of your life?

Jonathan: exactly

Interviewer: For the rest of you "millenial youth!(13-18) Do you see it as merely a tool or a functional part of your everyday life?

Kelsey: Some of both, I think...

Tim: Both for me.

Randi: both for me too

Leslie: both, i agree

Interviewer: thanks

Interviewer: interesting thanks....

Interviewer: Question : Do you experience community with other people online?

Interviewer: if so How?

Kelsey: To some degree

Leslie: not really, i pretty much just talk to the people i know from school and things

Interviewer: ok..... thats cool

Interviewer: any others?

Tim: Yes. I feel that I have communication with others that isn't bound by flesh..

Randi: I'm like Leslie!

Jonathan: No. I did have a group I would talk to on a chat, but it was so unreal because they could have been anyone...with email, I already know the person.

Interviewer: Question (further to this one) Do you feel that the artificial nature of the Web takes away from your experience of community?

Kelsey: I think so, you can't get to know people the same way online as you can in person.

Jonathan: The physicality of gathering is gone. The interaction is more sterile...

Randi: I have to agree with Kelsey

Leslie: yes and no, it is harder to get to know people, but there's less judging, so it's easier to be yourself

Tim: No. It's like the phone..

Interviewer: thanks folks.... this is helpful

Tim: You are still the person that you are..

Interviewer: Ok we are halfway!

Interviewer: ready for the second round?

Jonathan: yes

Kelsey: sure

Leslie: sure

Randi: sure

Tim: No prob

Interviewer: Ok lets treat this next question like a rapid fire answer round

Interviewer: just send single words that describe Christian community to you as you experience it in the following categories ok

Interviewer: The church?

Jonathan: big

Leslie: traditional

Tim: Hypocritical

Kelsey: caring

Interviewer: you can send as many as you like

Randi: unusual

Jonathan: 900 people

Jonathan: singing

Tim: All smile, nothing worthwhile



Kelsey: uplifting

Jonathan: social

Leslie: intimidating

Jonathan: essential

Jonathan: cyclical

Leslie: rewarding

Interviewer: I am looking for qualities or characteristics of Christian community....(ie: tolerance etc etc) most of what you have sent is good I just should have been more specific... my fault

Interviewer: keep 'em coming

Interviewer: they can be positive or negative

Jonathan: comfort

Jonathan: familiar

Jonathan: family

Kelsey: helpful

Jonathan: happy

Jonathan: forgiving

Tim: I don't understand..

Interviewer: Ok Lets Shift to the next category with the same question and rapid fire answers as above...

Interviewer: Oops let me explain again Tim

Interviewer: What I am looking for are qualities or characteristics

Tim: OK.. I think I get it now..

Interviewer: of community.... ie: loving, caring, hypocritical etc.

Tim: Sorry.

Interviewer: no problem!

Interviewer: ok next category

Jonathan: what we see them as or what they should be?

Interviewer: As you experience them or see them now

Jonathan: OK

Interviewer: THE youth group (If it applies)

Kelsey: non-judgmental

Tim: Same as the church.

Kelsey: fun

Jonathan: N/A

Kelsey: comfortable

Interviewer: Ok and the last category

Tim: LOL

Interviewer: qualities of Community ONLINE

Jonathan: sterile

Kelsey: artificial

Jonathan: fake

Tim: No limits

Tim: Open

Kelsey: but still fun

Leslie: impersonal

Jonathan: be anyone you pretend

Jonathan: worse than summer camp imposters

Leslie: honest

Jonathan: like being the new kid and starting over

Jonathan: faceless

Jonathan: voiceless

Jonathan: scentless

[Angela joined channel \_surveys]

Interviewer: Hi Anglea... welcome to the focus group

Angela: hi

Interviewer: I am just asking questions and getting people to respond to them and then asking for them to elaborate if I want more info ok?

Angela: understand

Interviewer: Also Angela can you let me know your age?

Angela: I am fourteen

Interviewer: QUESTION: Do you find that your online experience of community is satisfying? How or Why?

Kelsey: I have made some friends online... it is fun and you can get to know them.... but it's just not the same as in real life

Jonathan: Only when I can get or keep in contact over long distnces, with people I've already met in person

Jonathan: Communication tool

Leslie: um, it's not really 'satisfying', i dunno, i use it, like, instead of the phone

Angela: cool...well personally I've met a lot of friends on the net...

Interviewer: So Leslie its back to partly being a tool for you then?

Angela: but I could do without it...

Leslie: yes

Angela: there's always the phone and the advantage is hearing the others voice

Angela: but when I'm on the net I feel more open to what I want to say and people don't judge you so much

Interviewer: that is helpful Angela.... thanks....!

Angela: no prob

Interviewer: Ok here is a BIG question that may need time to answer

Interviewer: Question: How would you compare your experience of community in 1) your church 2) your youth group and your 3) Online community if you are a part of one

Interviewer: (maybe its too big?)

Angela: well...oh my...where I live it's very small...so in my church it's different... people are always judging you but I feel comfortable there...

Leslie: the church seems really traditional, everyone sort of knows where they stand, while the youth group changes a lot, the purpose of it shifts and suff... i dont know... something like that

Interviewer: ok.....

Tim: I feel respected online, whereas I'm just "Tim" at church / youth Group

Interviewer: great..... any more?

Kelsey: Well... my experience of community is the best in the youth group, I think, because that's mostly my group of friends, and we all know a lot about each other and are comfortable to open to each other. The church... well my church is really small and so there is not as many people I can relate to there... and on the net, it's mostly just for fun.

Interviewer: that's really helpful Kelsey thanks

Angela: In my youth group...wow...you've really touched a spot there...I'm the only christian in my youth group so I don't really seem part of the others even though I know I am, so I don't feel I have either relationship with my youth group

Interviewer: that's very interesting Angela....something to think about there....

Interviewer: any others in the works or ready for the next question?

Leslie: next

Kelsey: go ahead

Jonathan: When I felt the most connected was at Youth Group (c.1987, 88, 89) the best was Summer Camp (c.1988, 89) and the next was IVCF at University, my strongest, lasting ties are all in there. Church is much less so, unless it gets down to a smaller Bible Study (my closest thing to a Youth Group now). Online, I only keep in touch with those who have moved on to other places, but nothing lasting as a purely online based community has even come close to lasting...

Interviewer: Ok before I go on can I ask Leslie to clarify a point she made earlier?

Leslie: um...sure

Leslie: (i agree with the best sense of community being camp, btw)

Interviewer: Leslie you had mentioned as one of your qualities of online experience that being honest was one of them why would that be?

Interviewer: say versus church or youth group... am I clear in my question?

Leslie: i fell like i can be more open with people if i'm not having the actual physical meeting, i dont know why, it's just easier to be myself if i'm not worried about how i'm looking or the tone i'm saying things in, or the other persons reactions and things... i dont know if i said that right

Interviewer: While Leslie is preparing an answer the rest can be thinking about the next question

Interviewer: QUESTION: What qualities does the internet provide that face to face community does not?

Interviewer: I understand perfectly Leslie thanks!

Kelsey: It's anonymous, so I know that some people feel more comfortable opening up... for me, it also allows me to meet people that I never would have met otherwise

Jonathan: the perfect poker face and anonymity

Interviewer: is that important to you personally  
Jonathan?

Jonathan: sometimes hiding things is good

Leslie: i like the anonymous aspect, i can get to know people easier, and let my friends get to know me easier, i can be more frank about my beliefs and stuff

Interviewer: I am asking two more questions to the group feel free to give your thoughts...

Interviewer: these are really important answers thanks for these responses....

Jonathan: but you can go either way, you can subdue yourself or you can create a bold persona that just isn't you

Interviewer: that's really helpful Jonathan.....ok next question (one more after that)

Jonathan: it's easy to hide and/or lie (that's ironic because I am being very honest right now)

Interviewer: Yes, I agree... (I wish I could get into a discussion on this one!)

Interviewer: OK next question

Interviewer: In just the opposite why what does face to face community provide that the internet community can not?

Jonathan: closeness

Kelsey: You actually have a sense of really knowing the person, knowing who they are

Leslie: it's more real, there's a lot more trust (like Jonathan said about the internet making it easy to be someone else)

Jonathan: being in the room, seeing honest faces

Interviewer: that is important to you Kelsey?

Angela: I agree with the rest of them

Kelsey: Yes, it is

Jonathan: warmth

Leslie: the aspect of physically seeing the person adds a lot to how well you know them, being able to hear their tone and see how they respond and act

Interviewer: So in a way then the perfect community should allow us elements of both the security and honesty of the net and the closeness and the intimacy of the real world?  
Comments?

Jonathan: Right, the anonymity protects us but the contact nurtures us.

Interviewer: hmmmmmmmm

Angela: exactly,

Leslie: yes, that would be great, but is it possible?

Interviewer: that is something to think about

Kelsey: I am more comfortable being with real people--on the net, you don't know who is telling the truth and who isn't.... I don't know if that's what you're asking though

Interviewer: I don't know.... I guess it goes back to what Jesus taught us that we should be to one another really

Tim: I say that's what the church **SHOULD** be

Interviewer: One last question:

Jonathan: I've always said that telling someone something personal is like handing someone a little dagger. Can you trust them not to use it on you?

Interviewer: good point (no pun intended!)

Angela: that's a good way to think about it Jonathan!

Jonathan: tee hee Jeff, tee hee

Kelsey: Very interesting... but when you get to know people, really, you can trust them

Interviewer: Before I ask the last question I forgot to ask a question of each of you

Jonathan: Can you?.....

Interviewer: can you describe your faith (assuming in Christ) as 1) personal 2) one the way) random 4) not really interested

Interviewer: # 2 should be on the way

Interviewer: 3) is random

Leslie: personal...

Kelsey: somewhere in between 1 and 2... closer to 1

Jonathan: on the way ...and a little bit personal now

Tim: 1> personal, but should be made public

Angela: I agree with Kelsey...

Leslie: personal, but still on the way... getting more personal, i suppose

Interviewer: ok thanks

Interviewer: last question

Interviewer: assuming that you would be comfortable sharing your faith with another friend

Interviewer: how would it be easiest? face to face or via the internet?

[Jenn joined channel \_surveys]

Interviewer: what would be the most meaningful do you think?

Interviewer: Hi Jenn

XLJenn: hello

Kelsey: Actually... face to face. You can really talk to people and find out what they are thinking. It's much more meaningful in person, I think

Interviewer: Jenn we are just wrapping up our online focus group with the last question



for the evening

Jonathan: easier is the net, but it might be only as deep or personal as a bumper sticker

Angela: I believe it SHOULD be easier face to face and the most meaningful this way... but for me where I'm the only christian in youth where I live I get put down a lot and would feel a lot better if I could do it via the internet... though I've done it many times face to face...

Tim: I agree wiht Jonathan

Leslie: face to face would be much more meaningful, it would really help the person to see your passion for Christ, but over the comp. would probably be easier for the one sharing

XLJenn: me too

Jonathan: the better has to be in person, because you have something at stake, they actually know you

Interviewer: those are really excellent points I wish I could have another hour with all of you but I don't want to keep you over time.....

XLJenn: Talking face to face means that you can explian yourself better then on the net.

Leslie: i agree with jenn

Kelsey: In person, they can actually see that you mean what you are saying... on the net, they have no idea if you are serious or not.

Leslie: it would be harder to share face-to-face, but it would be a lot better for the one you're sharing with

Jenn: I am going through something like this right now...

[Jenn left channel \_surveys]

Kelsey: I actually find it easier to say things in person... most of the time

Interviewer: For now I do want to say a HUGE thanks to each and everyone of you... this has been a great experience for me I have TONS of material here to work with.

(Note: following this point in the interview there were several lines just dealing with

signing off and ending the personal conversations)

**APPENDIX D.**

**ONLINE FOCUS GROUP - 8:00 PM (Atl) 1/8/01**

[Angela joined channel \_surveys]

Interviewer: really? Ok.... let me see

Interviewer: Hey Angela better late than never!

Angela: hi everyone...

Leslie: hello

Angela: yeah...mom wanted me to wait to get on till my brother came home...

Angela: cause we only got one phone line..

Interviewer: That's ok!

Angela: so when did u guys come here??

Interviewer: I was just going to ask Leslie a question but you can pitch in too if you want

Interviewer: Here is what I noticed in our last conversation..

Interviewer: about 10 minutes ago

Angela: cool

Interviewer: we had talked about it being sometimes easier to talk to people about issues and things online because we could be less vulnerable

Leslie: yes

Leslie: i agree with that

Interviewer: I was wondering why that is or what things make that true?

Angela: I agree too...

Leslie: hmm...

Angela: um... I don't really know...

Leslie: i'm not sure why... maybe just because the other person cant see us, or something, i dont really know

Angela: I feel more open to them, because they don't really know me and if they want to judge me they can...it doesn't matter because they don't know me...

Interviewer: One of the students I interviewed mentioned is was because you did not have to face the possibility of rejection (the eyes tell a lot)

Angela: yeah...that's the truth

Leslie: it's sort of, they cant see one's reactions, and the tone of voice... yes, what you said!

Interviewer: Do you think that because they do not know you its no more important... than say a face to face friend?

Leslie: ??

Angela: it's just as important....

Interviewer: what I was saying before was are the people that you can't see online any less significant to you than face to face people... is it easier to dismiss them because they are not "real"?

Leslie: no, they're just as 'real', i don't know, i pretty much just talk to people i know from life, too

Angela: same as me...

Interviewer: here is a good question.... that hinges on this topic

Interviewer: if you had a very personal issue to talk about who would you find it easier to talk to

Angela: people online...

Interviewer: a person on the net or a face to face person?

Angela: I've dealt with that a lot...

Interviewer: assuming that you knew both really well

Leslie: online friends, as well

Angela: I find it hard to talk to my friends and I don't really want them to know.

Leslie: i would most want to talk to a 'life' friend online, like, with msn or something

Angela: I don't talk to people online that I know real well...I mean I talk to some that I know but most of them I don't...

Interviewer: Angela were you the one that was the only Christian in your youth group?

Angela: yeah...

Leslie: it's really great, though, some of the organizations (like Zjam) where you can talk to youth pastors online, and stuff

Interviewer: ok now I understand your answer a bit better

Interviewer: have you done that (talked to online youth pastors?)

Angela: I haven't...

Leslie: yes

Interviewer: do you have a youth pastor?

Angela: nope...

Leslie: um... not really, we have a few 'youth group leaders', but they dont seem to focused, and we have a sunday school teacher, who is a wonderful teacher, but sort of intimidating

Interviewer: which would you find it easier to talk to then (the youth pastor online or the youth leaders in your church) about tough personal questions?

Leslie: the youth pastor online, same as talkign to friends online

Leslie: talking\*

Angela: I don't really know... probably the online youth pastor...

Interviewer: I am trying to find out why so many youth find it easier to talk to people on the net vs. face to face people

Interviewer: its a thread that keeps coming back more and more

Leslie: i dont really know why, it's harder to be vulnerable face to face with someone

Interviewer: Tim mentioned to me a while ago it was easier to talk to me online about some deep issues because the threat of a negative reaction or disapproval was distanced from him than if we were face to face

Angela: I find it easier because online I don't have to talk...just write... and when I try to talk about some issues I get all shy and stuff in person and can't talk...so it's easier to me online just to type

Angela: true

Interviewer: That's interesting Angela

Leslie: I agree with both of those, totally

Interviewer: acceptance in a youth group is pretty critical or at school, maybe the net provides instant acceptance?

Leslie: online conversations, even with people that one knows from 'life' reduce a lot of the tension, and emotions and stuff

Interviewer: hmmmmmmm so maybe there is a place for youth pastors, teachers etc... to use the net to "talk" about issues that students would not be able to talk about in person... or to at least get the ball rolling

Interviewer: this is good stuff this is very helpful

Angela: exactly...

Leslie: like, there's the Zjam bulliten boards, they have sections for just students, and for just pastors, and for students to ask pastors...and stuff

Interviewer: what is the URL for that site Leslie?

Interviewer: is it Zjam.com?

Leslie: i dont know the address for the zjam boards... but there's a link for the zjam site,

which is [www.zjam.com](http://www.zjam.com)

Interviewer: cool... I'll check it out later....

Interviewer: I was mentioning that trust seems to be a big factor either on or offline

Leslie: yes, tis

Interviewer: online you never know if the person is being real

Interviewer: offline you never know if you might get rejected

Angela: yep

Angela: ture

Angela: \*true

Leslie: yes

Interviewer: is belonging important to you?

Interviewer: either to youth groups, online groups etc etc

Angela: well to a certain extent...

Interviewer: belonging sorry

Leslie: well, yea, i guess

Interviewer: I guess hat depends on personality too huh?

Leslie: yea

Angela: yeah...

Angela: definately

Interviewer: This is a personal question and feel free to pass

Angela: at my youth group I am who I am... no one can change that.. Online I am who I am... but while I'm out with my friends I change...

Interviewer: have you ever stretched the truth a bit about yourself online? To protect yourself or for whatever reason?

Angela: I mean...not in a bad way I don't think... I just don't talk as much... or anything...

Interviewer: ok

Angela: sometimes if I haven't felt comfortable talking to someone online I'll tell them a different age or where I live or something but other than that no...

Leslie: well, i dont really talk to anyone other than people i already know, so i couldnt really... but if i was talking to someone i didnt know, hmm, i might, i'm not sure

Interviewer: some students that I interviewed had as many as 10 email address names or aliases

Angela: i have many different e-mail addresses...

Leslie: i have more than one email, but not for a different 'identity' or anything, just for different uses

Interviewer: cool thanks for being honest

Angela: like 7 or sumthing...

Leslie: 3

Angela: but I don't use them anymore...only two I use...now...

Interviewer: they had assumed different identities for different reasons

Angela: but like Leslie said it's not for different identity

Interviewer: ok cool

Leslie: yea, it's just, one's for more 'professional ' things (the one you have) and then, i have more fun ones, for forwards and stuff

Interviewer: ok that makes sense

Angela: I just like to try out what the different sites (yahoo, hotmail, excite, etc.) offer... what kinda cool clubs and stuff...



Interviewer: so last question

Angela: yeah...

Interviewer: would you say that your faith has been helped by being online in anyway?

Interviewer: if so how?

Interviewer: or has it been harmed? if so how?

Leslie: yes, i've got a lot closer with a couple of my friends, that i've been able to keep in touch with, and be more open with online, and also being able to contact pastors and things about faith questions easily

Angela: oh yeah... online I have friends from all over the place (New York, California) places like that whom I've met online... they encourage me to keep the love that I have for Christ...and no matter what happens in my family, friends, school, etc...it shouldn't affect how much I love the Lord...

Angela: same as me Leslie...

Interviewer: If there was something that you wanted adults to "get" about how important the internet is in your life (or not important about it) what would that one thing be.>? (I snuck in another one sorry)

Leslie: um...

Angela: here... no one really talks to me about that kinda stuff, u know... and all my friends neglect me to some point...because I'm a christian... they don't tell me this but I can tell

Angela: I don't know...

Interviewer: for example some think that it's a big waste of time.... that youth are going to be absorbed into this mindless void and become social introverts

Leslie: i can really be me online, i don't feel judged by how i look or anything, i can talk to my friends a lot easier...

Angela: that is not true...[interviewers note: Angela was referring to my comment not Leslie]

Angela: I mean...I spend a lot of time on the net...

Angela: Jeff

Angela: but....

Interviewer: about how much a day would you spend online?

Angela: I mean... the net is just somewhere to get away from the world that is out there...

Angela: who me??

Angela: It depends really...

Angela: I mean some days I may spend no time on or just long enough to check my mail...

Interviewer: both of you if you want

Angela: but other times I get on and spend hours on..

Angela: it also depends on my parents

Interviewer: do you both check email daily or more than once daily?

Leslie: i used to use it a lot, too much, like, 4 hours a day, but recently, for about the past month, i limited myself to only an hour a day

Interviewer: (suddenly thinking about more questions! sorry!)

Leslie: yes, at least daily

Interviewer: so then you both do not think that statement about the mindless void is true that there can be both online and offline in balance?

Angela: if I get on at my school I usually check my mail... and if I get on home I'll check it... also if I get on after school then after supper I'll check it then... but I don't sign out then sign back in two seconds later just to see if someone wrote me...

Angela: truth to that one...

Leslie: um... i'm not sure

Interviewer: ok LOL (you are not addicts!)

Angela: I hope not...

Angela: no...I'm not

Leslie: i mean, people can totally live from the computer, but, i dont know... i don't think it would ever get that bad that everyone would just surround their lives from the internet

Interviewer: certainly not... I was just joking (there hard to see my smile see!) :)

Leslie: he he

Angela: LoL

Leslie: brb, one sec

Interviewer: well I should let you ladies go.... I appreciate your honesty tonight and helping me understand more of what we talked about last week, this actually really helped clue me in some more

Angela: I mean... when we first got the net I used to spend most of my time on there like an time my partents would let me... but now...there's just not the interest

Angela: no prob...

Interviewer: it wears out after a while? Kinda gets boring?

Angela: yeah..exactly

Leslie: i'm back, sorry about that

Leslie: i agree w that

Interviewer: here is one crazy thought..... are girls you think more into the relationships and the guys are more into the games and stuff

Interviewer: no guys here to defend themselves!

Angela: probably... my brothers get on and play games..and stuff... but me... I get on and talk... or leave messages on message boards...

Interviewer: hmmmmmmmmmm neat observation

Angela: hey Leslie if u like you can add me to msn messenger...

Leslie: um, i mean, i am talkign to my friends all the time on here, but a lot of games, and stuff, too... my brother is mostly chatting

Interviewer: East meets west!

Leslie: i dont think gender has too much to do with it, maybe just a bit

Angela: I don't really like games

Angela: ture Leslie

Interviewer: well ladies I will say good bye and

thanks so much for your help....

(Interviewers note: the conversation ended here after a few more exchanges of a personal nature between the two girls and they exchanged email addresses to stay in touch)