

Crossing Great Divides

Communicating across the great divides of generations, cultures, and cohort groups can be exasperatingly difficult. *People can be tactless and self-absorbed, uninformed, oblivious, and intolerant. Other people that is.*

Brian McLaren (pg. 15) says that some young clergy arrive at traditional churches and are pressured to learn the language and accents of the established church culture, which in turn causes them to lose their ability to communicate with their own generation. Now there is a knotty conundrum!

We'd have to live deep underground not to have some experience with the difficulty of hearing and being heard across dissimilar racial, geographical, age, and socioeconomic groups. Think about the dropped balls and misunderstandings in talk among children and their parents (whatever their respective ages!), or between longtime and new churchgoers, or over neighborhood fences.

We are infatuated with the presumed power of good intentions and open processes, and so commend active listening in efforts to bridge our exclusive comfort zones. But achieving understanding of others is better than simply hearing what is said. And respect, empathy, and engagement are better yet—especially because they are attitudes difficult and elusive to sustain.

Reading the articles in this issue of *Circuit Rider*, I was confronted (again!) by how hard it is to go beyond tolerance in relations among the generational tribes (different music, different heroes, different aspirations and struggles, and different comfort levels with everything electronic) and move to a shared place of genuine curiosity and mutual appreciation.

I remember when folks who were then the age I am now helped make such connections. In graceful ways they not only taught me but exhibited humility, generosity, respect, and encouragement. Where did they find the wisdom, courage, patience, and stamina to do that? And why did they care so much?

Whichever decade is used to overly generalize and otherwise pigeonhole you, **how is God calling you to leave the safety of familiar ground and walk arm-in-arm with generational strangers?** How can the twenty and forty and eighty-somethings attend to two critical questions: 1) How will we serve and strengthen the Christian formation and witness of young folks? and 2) How will we not only recruit but also make room for young people to share leadership in that ministry?

We may doubt that we have the necessary wisdom, courage, patience, and stamina to do that. But by the grace of God, how can we not?



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