



# international family magazine

Planet Earth's Every-Family. We are the Stories We Share.

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## Family Man



### The Modern Family's Search for God. By Michael Wayland

I have been noticing an interesting trend lately. I am encountering more and more young professionals, say, late twenties to late thirties, who are struggling with the concept of God and religion. Their struggle seems to come from being raised in a home with a mainstream Christian religion, and then finding him or her accidentally drifting away or purposefully stepping away because of a conflict. The tension could be religious rules and their own life experiences and, or worldview.

Research seems to back this up. A new study by The Barna Group (Ventura, California) shows that despite strong levels of spiritual activity during the teen years, most "twenty-somethings" disengage from active participation in their faith during their young adult years – and often beyond that. In total, six out of ten "twenty-somethings" were involved in a church during their teen years, but have failed to translate that into active spirituality during their early adulthood.

Sally White in Boston grew up Catholic. "My grandmother would sit next to me saying the rosary over and over and not even listening to the priest. The ritual of the service was so standard that I could repeat it in my sleep. It came to have no meaning to me. I certainly didn't feel any closer to God when I left church than before I went there". Sally drifted away as an adult.

There are lots of Sallies out there coming from all sorts of church backgrounds. For them, the struggle seems to emerge when they become parents. In the back of their mind, they believe in God's existence but don't see him working in their lives, and haven't been to church in years. This develops into angst over what to tell the children about God and whether they should start taking them to church. They don't want to take the kids back to the same religion they walked away from, but don't know where to go. A sort of passive searching begins to take place. Some find what they are looking for, others, don't.

This void is increasingly being filled by non-denominational Christian Churches. Typically they have a modern service with contemporary music and a comprehensive child's program and activities. The kids can go to the children's programs while the parents go to a relaxing down-to-earth service. Typically everyone is dressed comfortably, most often quite casually. In 2000 "Christ's Church of the Valley" in the Philadelphia suburb of Collegeville opened. It began with a few people in a movie theater complex. The congregation experienced rapid growth, and it had over 900 members and it's own church by 2004.

[Links to previous IF articles by Michael Wayland.](#)

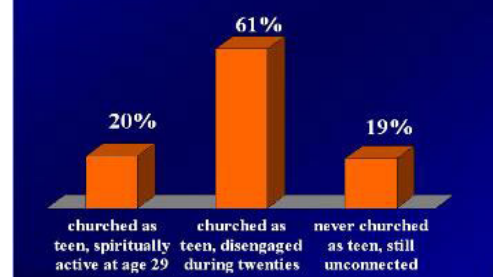
October 2006  
Parental Alienation Syndrome.

September 2006  
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The Gentle Divorce.

### Twentysomethings Struggle to Stay Active in Christian Faith



Source: The Barna Group LTD 2006

Russell Johnson grew up in a Christian home. When his parents divorced, he saw them “treated like lepers” by his church, which did not believe in divorce. He thought, “if that is how ‘good’ Christians behave, I don’t want to be a part of that” and Russell began to drift as a young man. Russell found his way back to church and religion while studying science and has been a pastor most of his adult life. Russell runs Fairfield Christian Church in Lancaster, Ohio. As a non-denominational Christian church, its members come from a wide array of religious backgrounds, from agnostic to Catholic and Lutheran. Fairfield, like many non-denominational churches, embraces the arts as a legitimate form of worship and incorporates music, interpretative dance and art into Sunday services. Johnson believes that many people find this broader definition of worship to be more palatable. “Just because you had a case of food poisoning, does not mean you swear off food for life,” Johnson says. Likewise with church and God.

A lot of the non-denominational churches have had what the main line denominations may view as out-of-the-norm beginnings or locations. The Myrtle Beach Sun News recently reported, “There are about 100 churches worshipping in AMC, Cinemark and Regal theaters around the country, according to National Cinemedia. Churches, particularly young ones, are making flea markets, dance studios, schools, homes and even coffee shops places to reach and teach folks who might never attend a church with a steeple. People who may not be comfortable in a traditional church setting will come to a place where they are used to going.” This approach tends to bring “church” back to the original meaning of church; a community of people worshiping God, as opposed to the current interpretation which tends to see the meaning of “church” as the brick and mortar building.

A lot of the new churches that are large enough to have their own buildings construct them around a “family life center”. They have fun children’s programs, sports and try hard to provide for the whole family. Many even have coffee shops and snack bars with Wi-Fi so people can connect to the internet wirelessly. Most have classes in addition to just a Sunday service. Classes run the gamut from “parenting skills” to “divorce care” to bible study. This builds community and people will tend to hang around and socialize over a coffee rather than run each other over in the parking lot trying to get away from one another.

While parents who have stepped away from their religion are struggling with what to explain to their children about God, a new nationwide survey among children ages 8 to 12, conducted by The Barna Group, reveals that children struggle with the faith arena. Overall, less than four out of every ten young people (38%) said that churches have made a positive difference in their life. An even smaller number (34%) said that prayer is very important to them. And a minority of pre-teens (43%) rejected the notion that they would rather be popular than do what is morally right.

There are noteworthy lifestyle challenges facing kids, too. A bare majority (56%) believes that they will have a great life. A similarly slim majority (57%) contends that they look forward to spending free time with their family. Just one out of every three pre-teens (35%) said they find it easy to talk to their parents about everything that is happening in their life these days. The survey also revealed that one out of every three 8-to-12-year olds (31%) is bothered by bullies who threaten or scare them.

It is no wonder parents are trying to regain a foothold on their faith. The good news is there is new breeds of churches that can help them do just that. Don’t wait for the perfect one. Get out there and try a church. As pastor Johnson says, “You need to balance your expectations. You would not wait to find the perfect restaurant before you would ever go out to eat, or wait to find the perfect road before you would ever drive”. Don’t sit on the sidelines waiting for the perfect church to find you. Get out there, find one, and try it.

For questions or recommendations of churches in your area, feel free to email Michael at [CDSOhio@yahoo.com](mailto:CDSOhio@yahoo.com)

Source: The Barna Group, LTD 2006



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