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FROM "OUT THE WINDOW" TO "ONTO THE SIDEWALK"

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



"Many of us stare out "the window," wondering what it will take to reach kids with the Gospel, oblivious to the fact that the answer has been there all the time."

Over the years, I've been known to rewind through the last three+ decades to recall some of the most significant conversations I've ever had. . . you know. . . those profound moments when out of what seems like nowhere you get hit between the eyes with truth. I love those moments. . . usually. This particular story recently came to mind. . .

Three hundred youth workers, parents and pastors from all over the city (this one in Canada) had gathered to learn about the emerging generations and how to reach them with the gospel. As the evening's moderator, I sat on the stage along with four teenagers from the community who each took fifteen minutes to tell their story to the crowd.

When the teens had finished, I invited members of the audience to ask questions of the young people on the stage.

As the evening was about to end, the last questioner, the youth pastor of the host church, said, "I have a question for the young man on the right." The young man, Brian, was a member of the local community who had openly stated his disinterest in Christianity. The youth pastor continued: "Every day for the last two years I have arrived here early in the morning. I park my car and walk around the building to the front entrance. Because the high school (which is across the street) is a smoke-free zone, you and many of your friends congregate on our church

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sidewalk to socialize and smoke before the school day begins. I walk through and around you on the sidewalk and onto the steps to the front door. And every morning when I sit down at my desk, I look out my window at you and your peers and ask God what I can do to reach you. It's so frustrating." At this point the youth pastor paused to think about his next words. . . a sure sign of his frustration. Then, he looked at Brian and asked his question on behalf of everyone in that room: "What can we do to connect with you?"

What happened next was incredibly powerful. Brian didn't have to think about his answer at all. First, he chuckled loudly, as if to say, "You've got to be kidding! How can you not know the answer to that one?" Then he looked at the youth pastor and said incredulously, "That's easy! Get out of your office and come out onto the sidewalk with us!" It was a powerful and eye-opening moment for everyone in that room. In the silence, I could almost hear everyone asking themselves, How could I have missed it?

Many of us stare out "the window," wondering what it will take to reach kids with the Gospel, oblivious to the fact that the answer has been there all the time.

After his resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus gathered his disciples in Galilee to give them – and his disciples in all times and all places – their charge: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20).

In effect, Jesus is telling us that when it comes to the emerging generations, we are to "get out of our offices and onto the sidewalks."

Youth workers, what are you doing to go into and understand the world of today's children and teens? Their world is markedly different from the world you and I grew up in. For that reason, you must become a cross-cultural missionary. That's a key to reaching today's children and teens with the Good News of the Gospel.

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