

Youth Ministry . . . Revolution?

by Natanael Estrada

Call it premonition, clairvoyance or just good old fashion gut feeling, but something is stirring in the waters of Houston's youth ministries. From the syncopated sounds of urban Hip-Hop in Houston's southwest to the quiet and quaint suburbs of Houston's west side, a movement is gaining significant impetus.

Shawn Scoggins, like many lay ministers, is a man who wears many hats: from secondary school teacher to Christian Hip-Hop producer. Scoggins leads Generation I.N.C. (In the Name of Christ), a ministry stemming from Streetlife Worldwide HOutreach in Houston's southwest. Generation I.N.C. like Streetlife, seeks to penetrate the notorious world of Hip-Hop through "evange-tainment," a term coined by Scoggins referring to the agglomeration of the Gospel message and the Hip-Hop culture.



"Being able to set up anywhere" has become pivotal to the creative stratagem of Generation I.N.C. Scoggins' vision of "total community transformation" is predicated upon the ability to be "creatively mobile." Being a "movement" but also a "mission" that does not forget its main objective, hence to inoculate the impenetrable world of Hip-Hop with the rhythms of God's love.

In the perspective of Scoggins, the mission of the Church is not to destroy 'culture' but rather to embrace culture; to not fear culture but rather to embrace its enigma. Instead of turning a blind eye to the grim reality of the urban street-life, the Church must accept the challenge that is presented before us.

In candid speech, Scoggins expressed that the greatest challenge that he faces in his ministry is the lack of financial resources. Being that the financial resources readily available to the Hip-Hop industry number in the billions of dollars, the lack of monetary availability for a ministry such as Generation I.N.C. can be overwhelming.

Also, another one of the great feats that face urban youth ministries like Generation I.N.C. can be the "lack of follow-up." Many will be attracted to the creative approach that Generation I.N.C. takes and see lives be changed as a result of their efforts but the stigma of inept or lacking follow-up presents a very real challenge.



Regardless of the pains and frustrations that Scoggins confronts in doing street-life ministry, Shawn continues "reaching kids where they are" and imbues them with the truth that God looks at their hearts and not their outward appearance.

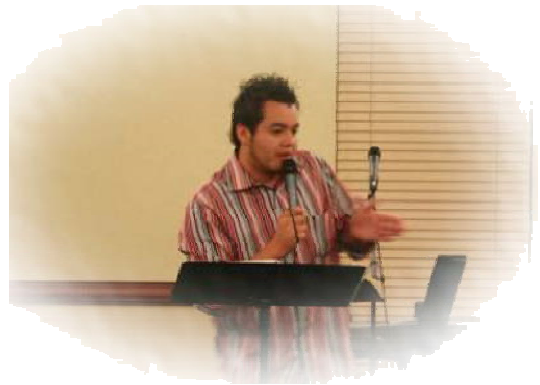
Founder of Homeboy Industries in East Los Angeles, California, Father Greg Boyle is transforming his community from the inside-out. Located in East Los Angeles, an area synonymous with nefarious gang activity, Homeboy Industries provides unique job opportunities as an avenue out of the 'thug-life.'

"Nothing stops a bullet like a job" is the adage that Father Greg Boyle lives by. Homeboy Industries provides everything from legal services to a café and bakery wherein struggling youths searching for a way out of gangs can utilize their vocational skills. Homeboy Industries even provides free tattoo removal for those serious about leaving the gang life for the work force. Although not based in Houston, Father Greg Boyle serves as an inspiration to what is possible when we stand in the gap for our youth.

If one were to drive down the quiet and quaint street of Country Place at Memorial, one would never expect the spiritual revolution gaining momentum there. In a small grey-blue building nestled between two apartment buildings in Houston's west side, No Limits Uth Church is redefining the meaning of youth ministry.

At just 22 years old, Pastor Eddie Escobar's vision for No Limits Uth Church goes beyond just your traditional Wednesday night youth service. No Limits Uth Church is a ministry that is 100 percent youth inspired and led.

Contrary to popular views about today's youth, Escobar believes that "young people are waking up" and are "coming to their senses about not living to their fullest potential." And to Escobar, the only way for young people to reach this potential is to have an ardent "hunger for God."



Working under the tutelage of Alejandro Carizo, Pastor of Centro Cristiano Las Buenas Nuevas, No Limits Uth Church stands in a unique position as being a church within a church. As Escobar puts it, "I am the youth pastor of CCLBN but the Senior Pastor of No Limits Uth Church." For Eddie, this unique "church within a church" model works very well and does not conflict with the vision and objectives of No Limits. On the contrary, Eddie believes that the presence of No Limits is crucial because it "forces the church to move" beyond the confines of religiosity and legalism.

In the three years since its inception, No Limits Uth Church has amassed a solid group of about 100 youth. And if you think Escobar is stopping here, think again. Eddie's faith is that by the year 2010 No Limits would reach 4,000 youth. Escobar believes "God is going to use this generation" to do great and wondrous things for His Glory. Youth will sharpen youth like iron sharpens iron.

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