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The Changing Youth Building

By Jerry A. Fountain, Architect

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A few years ago Oldsmobile ran a commercial that said, "This isn't your father's Oldsmobile." A similar statement can be said for some new youth buildings being built today across America. And to that I say, "Thank God!"

For far too long churches have given the youth programs the 'left overs.' George Barna indicates that the typical church appropriates less than 3% for the youth in the budget while the youth make up approximately 11% of the membership. Churches have been saying to the youth, "You really don't matter." Is it any wonder that the youth are leaving the church in droves? Satan has certainly done his job of enticing them away. M.T.V., Hollywood and popular music captures their attention and grabs them. It is high dollar, loads of fun entertainment targeted directly towards them and in their face everywhere they turn. It's a war for their hearts and minds and ultimately their soul.

Very few churches realize this and have done little to combat it. A few churches have attempted to do something.... Like build a gym. Ride by many of those churches today and those gyms sit empty 99% of the time. A good well intentioned idea, just not thought completely through.

But a few churches have gone on the offensive by providing youth programs designed to reach youth with more than just basketball. They are providing facilities that reach to the very heart of who youth are. Youth are extremely social beings. They like to congregate in small and large groups. This is how they feel accepted.

One such facility is Eastside Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia. This facility is open, bright, entertaining and

used during the week for after school tutorial instruction. The building also includes study areas with internet access to allow students to do homework. Two lecture hall/assembly rooms are equipped with a theatrical lighting and sound package that would make many churches envious. These features allow those spaces to be more than just a gathering for the group, but a place where the kids can perform dramas or even bring in a Christian band for a concert.



While all of these features appeal to the youth's human and secular senses, the lay leadership mandated that everything be bathed in prayer and to be the central focus. That is why the prayer chapel is front and center in this building. It literally and figuratively is the cog for the entire building. Each kid passes this room to and from the rest of the campus. Except for the view window in the door it is a windowless room, save the skylight that draws your attention heavenward.

Al Arrington, the chairman of the Building committee quotes the building as saying, "I am natural, open.... Stay here a while and learn about me, feel warm and comfortable and loved, and , by the way, while you are here, learn about the naturalness of loving God and His Son Jesus."



While the facilities themselves don't guarantee results, they do provide a springboard for new and innovative programs; programs that give youth a sense of belonging and value, and isn't that what the gospel is all about.

Now not all churches have the budget or financial strength to provide a facility such as Eastside. But look around your church campus. Where do you have the youth? Is it in that old building out back that no one else wanted that is literally about to fall down? What could your church do to "fix it up" so it is a place the youth, and church, could be proud? Or is there a better place in your building that could be renovated, even if it is a couple of classrooms?

If you would like to tour Eastside's facility, please give us a call and we'd be happy to arrange it.