

**Understanding the Unchurched in Your Community:
A Module of Study Taught at Southwestern Assemblies of God University**

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, pastoral ministry graduates will face serious challenges as they seek to minister in America's postmodern, post-Christian culture. Will these pastors be able to recognize postmodernism? What understanding will they have of generational theory (e.g., Builders, Boomers, and Busters)? What resources will they be prepared to access that could help them analyze and understand their community's context? Will such pastors know how to evaluate and even re-design local churches for ministry to the unchurched of the twenty-first century? Training is needed that will equip them for these challenges.

This project presents research regarding what is becoming the prevailing mind set in the twenty-first century Western world—postmodernism with its tenets of deconstruction, centerlessness, and the absence of absolute truth. It positions the matrix of postmodernism as an overlay to a study of current Western thought regarding generational theory. Particular emphasis is placed on the impact of postmodernism upon Busters (Generation X) who are presented as the first truly postmodern generation.

An understanding of the significant paradigm shift that is in progress in the Western world raises the following question: How is the twenty-first century church to respond to these challenges? The biblical-theological dimensions of this project suggest similarities between the paganism and religious pluralism which Paul the Apostle and his associates experienced as they proclaimed Christ in their Hellenistic culture, and what the church of today will likely encounter as it presents that same message in the postmodern world. Twenty-first century ministers must not give up in despair as they view the complex culture in which God has called them to

minister. There is not a post-Christian world. It is a pre-Christian one and it is reachable for Him.

This research was presented as an eight-lecture teaching block in a course that is required of pastoral ministries majors at Southwestern Assemblies of God University. Students were introduced to postmodernism and generational theory. They received instruction concerning community assessment methodologies (including a community survey field project) that could be used by pastors to develop a composite profile of the unchurched in the area their church will seek to target. In addition, students were exposed to seeker-type churches that are successfully reaching the unchurched for Christ and to other workable church models.

This study includes extensive back matter. The fourteen appendices include a syllabus, lesson plans, eight lectures on the topics of postmodernism and generational theory, handouts, several web sites relevant to understanding the unchurched, pre-test and post-test instruments, a survey instrument, and a variety of questionnaires.

This project proposes that successful pastoral ministry in this new millennium will require an understanding of the unchurched and a willingness to consider how the church can be re-designed in order to offer effective ministry in the twenty-first century.