

Hungry?
John 21:15-17
June 6, 2010

You have already heard about our Hungry program and met those that participate in the program. I want to thank again our friends from Birmingham First for being here this

hungry?

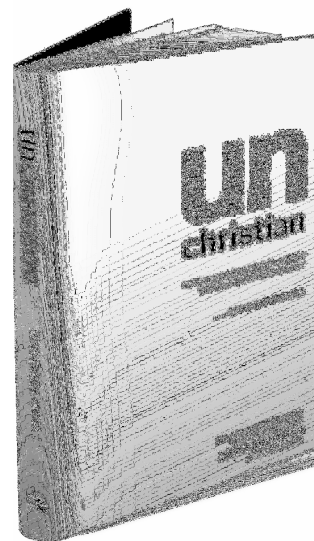
morning. I especially want to thank Chad Oyer and Julie Work for all that they have put into this program. Literally, if it was not for them, Hungry would not exist. And for Chef Mike, without him who knows what we would have been serving these students.

Over these past 9 months I have talked about this program. From time to time I have given updates regarding the number of students we have been serving. Though I have talked much about the program I don't believe I have ever shared how it came to be and what the goal of Hungry is.

It all started last summer. Sometime in the middle July I get a call from Chad. I knew who he was because my daughter Connie had participated in a number of Junior High youth activities at Birmingham First. Chad calls me and asks if we could get together to talk. On July 28th we meet. In the course of our conversation Chad shares a vision about a lunch ministry to high school students. Since we were right next door to Groves and just a little over a mile down the road from Seaholm, would I like to consider a joint ministry with Birmingham First.

Have you ever had a moment of coincidence where you felt it was maybe more than that, maybe a God-incidence? I had one of those feelings while talking to Chad. You see just that Spring I had been reading through a book with a clergy group. This ministry Chad was talking about would possibly address some of the issues raised in the book.

The book is titled *UnChristian: What a New Generation thinks about Christianity...and why it matter*. This book was written by David Kinnaman and



Gabe Lyons from the Barna Group. If you are not familiar with Barna, it is an organization that conducts research studies. David Kinnaman worked his way up from being in the field asking questions to being the president.

Let me read the first page of the book.

Christianity has an image problem.

If you've lived in America for very long, I doubt this surprises you. But it brings up important questions. Just what exactly do people think about Christians and Christianity? Why do these perceptions exist? Obviously, people believe their views are accurate (otherwise they would disavow them), but do their perceptions reflect reality? And why do people's perceptions matter-should they matter- to Christ followers?

I have spent the last three years studying these questions through extensive interviews and research. You may be astonished to learn just how significant the dilemma is- and how the negative perceptions that your friends, neighbors, and colleagues have of Christianity will shape your life and our culture in the years to come. Our research shows that many of those outside of Christianity, especially younger adults, have little trust in the Christian faith, and esteem for the lifestyle of Christ followers is quickly fading among outsiders. They admit their emotional and intellectual barriers go up when they are around Christians, and they reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians.

The information presented in this book should be a wake up call for the church. According to their research 40% of those 16-29 are outside the church. On the one hand, young adults have always been scarce around the church. Students go through confirmation and then they disappear. You see them at Christmas Eve and maybe Easter, but that is it. Once they get established jobs and begin having a family they make their way back to church.

That was the normal pattern, but things have changed. The young people that are outside the church are not coming back. Their absence from the church is not driven by indifference, instead there is hostility, even resentment towards Christianity.

When questioned about their view of Christianity, 1/3 of those 16-29 year olds outside the church said Christianity represents a negative image with which they would not want to be associated.

Why are there such negative impressions of Christianity? Mr. Kinnaman explored the nature of those perceptions. As they did their research one crucial insight kept popping up, Christians are primarily perceived for what they stand against. As he writes in the book: “We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for.”

What did they find? What are the perceptions of those 16-29 year olds that are outside the church? The 3 most common perceptions are that Christians are anti-homosexual, judgmental and hypocritical. On the screen you will find the top ten perceptions and the percentage that choose that description:

Anti-homosexual	91%
Judgmental	87%
Hypocritical	85%
Old fashioned	78%
Too involved in politics	75%
Out of touch with reality	72%
Insensitive to others	70%
Boring	68%
Not accepting of other faiths	64%
Confusing	61%

We may say that is not the way most Christians are, that those are mistaken perceptions, but that’s how those young adults feel. How do we change those attitudes? How do we have a chance to be heard by these children of God? Maybe by being more Christ-like.

You might be curious about the books title – *UnChristian*. David Kinnaman believes that how outsiders view the church. Christians are not acting like Christ. They repeat a statement Ghandi once made, “I would follow Christ if it were not for the Christians.”

Can you see how Chad’s idea struck a cord in me! After reading the book some clergy friends and I were praying. What can we do, what can our churches do to change the church’s image? How about a ministry of serving lunches to senior high school students?

As you heard, we began in September with 8 students. The ministry grew slowly as the months went by. When we made the decision to go from once a month to every week, the program took off. To be honest one of initial obstacles we faced was the skepticism of the students. “A free lunch – where is the catch?” “A free lunch in a **CHURCH** now there really has to be a catch!”

In *UnChristian* 6 broad themes are lifted up. One of those themes is the perception that Christians are too focused on getting converts. I quote: “Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people. They question our motives when we try to help them “get saved”, despite the fact that many of them have already tried Jesus and experienced church before.”

So why are we serving a free lunch? Many students asked that question. Many church members asked that question.



After coming a number of times and seeing there were no hidden agendas, the students began trusting the program and started telling their friends. This past Wednesday we told the Hungry story to the Birmingham Optimist. It was then I heard Chad tell of a conversation he had with a female student. She asked him when it was going to happen. (Chad- explains how she was expecting us to lock the doors and begin preaching at them)

Why do we have Hungry? It’s about changing perceptions. It’s about those students that come to Hungry having a positive experience with Christians and the church. Maybe just maybe, because of Hungry they will begin seeing Christianity in a different light. Will that make a difference? Who knows, I got to believe it will.



One image I use when I speak of Hungry is seed planting. Our ministry of food and hospitality is planting a seed in these students. Somewhere down the line they may be in a place where they are seeking direction, or struggling with issues, or looking for a supportive community, and they

will remember the positive experience they had in a church. That may get them to go to a church to hear more about Christ and what Christ and the church can mean to them.

Both Chad and I have had members ask what the next step is. There has to be a next step right? Serving student lunch can't be what this ministry is all about! Jesus says to Peter "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep", "Feed my Sheep". Hungry is about feeding the sheep.



But Pastor David, Jesus wasn't just talking about physically feeding people. I know as well as you that there is a physical hunger as well as a spiritual hunger. The students we serve live in Southfield, Beverly Hills, and Birmingham; they don't have to worry where their next meal will come from. Though there may not be a physical hunger there probably is a spiritual hunger. Sometimes one must go through the stomach to get to ones heart.

When Chad choose the name for the program he was very clever. First there was the take off on the "got milk" campaign. Next is the double meaning of *hungry?*. The ministry is about satisfying one hunger, but it is planting seeds for taking care of a deeper hunger.

hungry?

Those that have heard the story of Hungry have been blown away at how God is using our two churches to touch Junior and Senior high students in our area. Are they coming to our worship services, are they joining our youth groups? NO! But God is at work in this ministry. We have a whole lot of sheep, children of God, that are outside the body of Christ called the church. Christ is calling us to feed them.



In this day and age we must think outside the box to find ways to reach these sheep. A joint ministry between two churches is out of the box. A cooperative between 7 to 8 United Methodist

Churches in Southeast Oakland County is another new way of doing things. We are doing that with our participation in the “Compassionate Neighbors in Cooperative Ministry” cooperative.

Last year our denomination came up with the slogan “Re-think church”. Churches are challenged to find new ways to be in ministry. Our own Ken Dowell has been trained to lead churches in a rethinking process. There is nothing set, but I think we will have Ken lead us in the fall.



Speaking of the fall, once school starts again in September, we plan on Hungry offering lunches on Tuesdays.

Chad and I will continue to pray to see how God might want us to go. Will the lunch be it? If yes then we will continue to plant seeds and change perceptions. If God has other opportunities to offer our students, then we will explore those options. Thanks be to God for this chance to feed some of God’s sheep in our community.

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