



*"... In love, He predestined us to be adopted..."*  
 – Ephesians 1:4-5 (NIV)

Sometimes a good idea takes a while to generate traction. But then a combination of timing, people, and Providence inspire enough hearts and minds to action that it transforms society, in what Malcolm Gladwell calls a "Tipping Point."

Consider, for example, the idea that churches should love youth in their communities by adopting public schools. The Campus Alliance has been saying this for years, even creating a website to help promote the idea and track its progress ([www.EverySchool.com](http://www.EverySchool.com)). But a review of the Every School database suggests that the cry has fallen on many ears that are unable, or unwilling, to hear. Many schools still wait to be adopted.

Recently, things began to change in New York City. In January, 293 pastors and ministry leaders who gathered at the 15th annual Concerts of Prayer Pastors Prayer Summit prayed intentionally for the first time in memory – with one voice and for more than a few minutes – for the city's millions of young people. Rather than generic, "Bless them, Lord" prayers, they focused instead on specific concerns:

- **At-risk youth within particular churches, including the incorrigible ones, the nondescript ones who blends into the background, and the weak ones whom bullies target.**
- **Personal and community struggles, such as sexuality, HIV/AIDS, family disintegration, and gangs.**
- **Systemic injustices such as a public education system where 60% of elementary school**

**students don't read at grade level, yet spends \$12 billion educating them, and generational poverty that traps nearly 30% of NYC children below the poverty line, with 72% of Latino and 61% of African American children.**

- **The commissioning of ministers, both church-based and marketplace workers such as teachers, paraprofessionals, business managers, health professionals, and students themselves, to love youth without judgment.**

This intentionality extended into a break-out session where 75-100 leaders conducted an "intergenerational conversation" concerning how to engage the region's youth and youth culture with the gospel more effectively.

Why the zealous response? Consider that Jesus described children, who represent 25% of New York's overall population, as the most ripe for a spiritual "harvest." Who's more "like a child" – Christ's prerequisite for entering the kingdom of heaven – than a child?

To make the conversation more manageable – engaging all of the city's two million kids 18 and under (by themselves, they would be the fifth largest city in America) is a daunting proposition – the discussion focused on the 1.1 million students in New York's public schools.

Why public schools? To borrow another of Jesus' metaphors, effective "fishing" requires going where fish gather, namely (cheesy pun alert) within schools. Factor into the mix the reality that public school students come disproportionately from our nation's most vulnerable communities, and compassion compels Christ-followers to be transformational agents.

How then should believers and churches engage within the context of nonreligious public school systems? By viewing those systems not as enemies, but as allies for equipping kids to live the lives to which God has called them.

Beyond that, churches should adopt particular schools within their communities. Imagine if every congregation committed to pray regularly for at least one local elementary, middle, or high school. Now imagine if individual congregants became answers to those prayers by volunteering within the schools as hallway monitors, classroom

[everyschool.com](http://everyschool.com)

Adopt a school by going to [www.everyschool.com](http://www.everyschool.com)



### Every Teenager

To help establish ministries that will expose every teenager in America to Christ.

assistants, tutors, event organizers, PTA delegates, or coaches. Even better, imagine if the students themselves were empowered to be salt and light on the campuses; and if God-fearing staff members – whether teachers, aids, principals, or agency administrators – recognized their profession as a calling.

**As a community outreach strategy, the best part about adopting schools is that it is doable.** New York City, which boasts the nation's largest public school system, spreads its students among 1,200 public schools. Who would adopt these schools? Sociologist Tony Carnes of the International Research Institute on Values Changes has identified 7,100 active churches within the five boroughs. That's more than a 6:1 ratio of churches to schools. Add in the 1,000 private and/or parochial schools, and there are still more than three churches for every school.

The math is similar on a nationwide scale. According to The Barna Group, there are more than 300,000 Protestant and 20,000 Catholic congregations throughout the U.S. The nation's 57.2 million nursery through high school students are enrolled in 94,000 public schools and 28,400 private schools.

What might happen if the body of Christ within those 300,000+ churches actually functioned as such, and lived out the incarnation of Christ within the walls of our 94,000 public schools? Kids might actually be loved unconditionally, families served selflessly, and schools transformed in ways we all long to see.

Some would advocate that we wage a quixotic battle to reinstate what I consider to be a meaningless nondenominational thirty-second prayer in schools. Why not, instead, resolve collectively to actually pray, repent of neglecting to labor where the fields are white unto harvest, and commit to loving our schools through adoption?

It's time we reached a "tipping point" to reach our schools! ↻



**Jeremy Del Rio** serves public school students as director of Generation Xcel, a holistic agency that partners with New York City churches to create youth development strategies. For more on adopt-a-school and other youth outreach ideas, visit [www.GenXcel.blogspot.com](http://www.GenXcel.blogspot.com).



## Affinity Networks REPORT

 SUMMER 2006

**A**ffinity Networks are nationwide relational networks that assist youth workers in connecting and co-laboring with their peers in an area of shared calling, giftedness or passion. It's one way the Network facilitates partnerships among youth workers. In this issue of Network Magazine, we take a quick tour of three of the groups. More will be reported in our next issue!

To affiliate with an Affinity Network and receive specific news about any of the groups, go to [www.Youthworkers.net](http://www.Youthworkers.net) and update your personal membership interest.



These are some of our dedicated heroes, not often visible or recognized for their work of reaching, encouraging and mentoring youth in difficult circumstances.

### Native American Affinity Network: Developing Leadership

The year 2006 has become a breakthrough year for the Native Network:

- Several networks of Native youth leaders have emerged in Arizona and New Mexico.
- The second Native Network Youth Leader "De-Frag Retreat" was held in April in Colorado.
- The Native Network is creating their own "ministry council" to steer the movement.
- Many discipleship camps, evangelistic tours of students, music outreaches, youth center openings and other events are planned.

Chuck Harper reports, "We have witnessed a tremendous growth in the number of churches and communities with Native youth ministry over the

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