

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

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INLAND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S NEWSPAPER

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THURSDAY, April 14, 2005

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'SPIRITUAL QUEST' Students seeking answers on faith

BY MARISA AGHA
AND BETTYE WELLS MILLER
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

College students today are unlike any previous generation in their quest to lead spiritual lives and achieve economic success, authors of the nation's largest study ever of spirituality and religion on American campuses said Wednesday.

Those findings pose special challenges for universities, employers and politicians, Claire Gaudiani, former president of Connecticut College, said in a telephone news conference. She is on the national advisory board of UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute study of spirituality and religion among college students.

"I think the bottom line here is that we have a generation that is on a spiritual quest," Gaudiani said Wednesday.

This generation of college students is the first where a majority has been raised by working mothers, witnessed parents balancing marriage with careers or experienced a 50-percent divorce rate, she said.

It is a generation for whom religion and spirituality rank very high in importance, along with getting a job and doing well economically, she said.

"These working families may have vaulted into America the first balanced generation," Gaudiani said.

"Colleges and universities are going to have to do a great

FAITH: 'They're so dang lost and they know it'

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deal more to prepare an academic environment to welcome this dual quest of our young people," she said. "Legal firms, corporations and medical practices need to understand the souls of their hires. They tend to look at achievements but not where their spirits are, so they don't give enough time to do pro bono work or do matching gift programs. They need to give them space for this spiritual quest."

DRAMATIC CHANGES

Echoing a finding of the UCLA study that more than half of college students perceive God as love or the creator, the Rev. David Geib, director of St. Andrew Newman Center near UC Riverside, said college students he sees today are not afraid of God as were many of their parents.

"Today's kids presume a good God that loves them no matter what they do," he said by phone. "They don't have to work hard at the relationship. I think that's more healthy than the opposite, and much more accurate."

The study suggested that professors, used to a culture that considers religion a taboo subject, will face more of a challenge in educating this generation.

And politicians cannot take for granted that the most religious or spiritual students will support politically conservative positions, researchers found.

While the most religious and spiritual students are more conservative on matters of abortion, same-sex marriage and legalizing marijuana, researchers found they are very similar to students with the lowest level of religious engagement when it comes to believing that wealthy people should pay more taxes, abolishing the death penalty and gun control.

GENERATIONS: A quarter of 18- to 25-year-olds said they have no religious denominational preference or call themselves secular, according to a fall 2004 survey of 1,385 people nationwide.

Religious preference by generation (percent responding)

	Total	Gen. Y	Gen. X	Baby Boom	Silent	GI
Protestant	41%	26%	32%	41%	56%	64%
Roman Catholic	23	20	20	23	21	21
Jewish	1	2	1	1	3	4
Muslim	1	2	2	0	0	-
Mormon	1	2	-	1	1	2
Orthodox Church	1	0	1	1	0	-
Other Christian	10	14	10	12	4	4
Other/not Christian	7	7	8	7	4	-
No preference/ atheist/agnostic	14	23	23	11	7	5
Don't know/ refused to answer	2	1	3	2	4	-

Generation Y: Born 1982-2000; **Generation X:** Born 1961-1981;

Baby Boom: Born 1943-1960; **Silent:** Born 1925-1942; **GI:** Born 1901-1924

SOURCE: "OMG! HOW GENERATION Y IS REDEFINING FAITH IN THE IPOD ERA," RELEASED APRIL 2005

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REDEFINING FAITH IN THE IPOD ERA

Key findings of Reboot study of 18-to-25-year-olds:

36 PERCENT attend worship services weekly

55 PERCENT pray before meals

51 PERCENT say it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values

38 PERCENT talk about religion

with friends

33 PERCENT read religious books, newspapers or magazines

18 PERCENT attend an informal religious or prayer group

8 PERCENT volunteer to help the disadvantaged

SPIRITUAL LIFE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Key findings of UCLA study:

80 PERCENT are interested in spirituality

76 PERCENT are searching for meaning and purpose in life

74 PERCENT discuss the meaning of life with friends

81 PERCENT attend religious services

79 PERCENT believe in God

69 PERCENT pray

83 PERCENT say non-religious people can be just as moral as religious believers

64 PERCENT say that most people can grow spiritually without being religious

"We have a generation we haven't known and that political parties are treating in a highly simplistic way," Gaudiani said. "We recommend that political parties ... take a look at this generation because it is different from any we have seen before."

UCLA researchers surveyed more than 112,000 freshmen last fall at 236 colleges and universities nationwide about their religious and spiritual values and practices. Officials said they have asked freshmen some questions about values for 38 years, but this was the first time they've asked in-depth questions about religion and spirituality.

"We did see a dramatic falling-off of values concerning the meaning of life," said Alexander Astin, co-principal investigator of the study. "That's one thing that motivated the John Templeton Foundation and us to undertake this study. There's been a dramatic change in students' religious preferences."

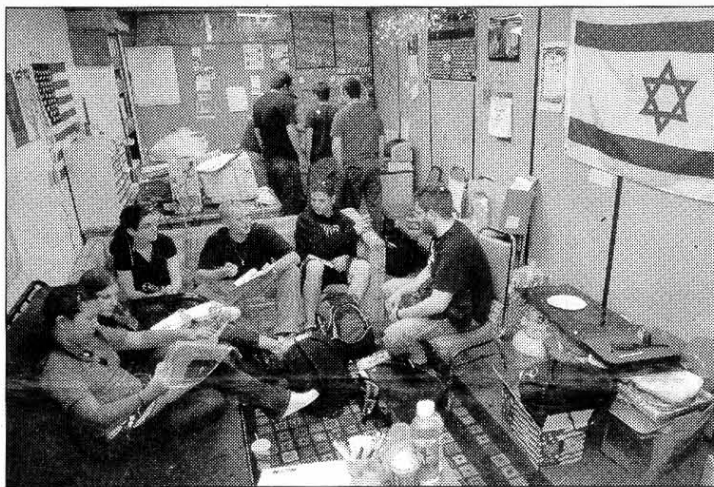
It is the second major study of spirituality among young adults announced this week.

"OMG! How Generation Y Is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era," released Monday, is the result of a fall 2004 survey of 1,385 Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim 18- to 25-year-olds nationally. The study was commissioned by Reboot, a national Jewish youth network.

Those researchers found that young adults today are the most ethnically diverse generation in the nation's history and are more disconnected from traditional religious affiliations than previously, posing a challenge for faith groups seeking to reconnect with their youth.

"This generation is characterized by open-mindedness and tolerance, believing that people should do their own thing, even if it seems strange to others," according to the report.

Generation Y — those born between about 1982 and 2000 — is no less religious or spiritual than earlier generations but expresses that in more informal and nontraditional ways, such as attending Christian rock concerts or participating in groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ, the report's authors said.



CAITLIN M. KELLY/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

UC Riverside students relax inside the Hillel office on campus.

STUDENT VIEWS

Cal State San Bernardino freshman Xee Moua, 18, said her father is a Hmong shaman from Laos whom others consulted if there was an illness or family dispute. The Beaumont student said she still feels connected to her family but is deciding whether to continue with its religious rituals.

"I don't go in the past. I want to live in the future," she said. "I don't want to control my kids. Let them do what they want."

UC Riverside sophomore Ian Oxnevad said he is "more spiritual than formally religious," although he is converting to Judaism and is vice president of Hillel, the Jewish student union on campus.

Oxnevad, 19, said his life has improved since he decided to become a Reform Jew. He has lost 40 pounds and his grade-point average has risen from 2.0 to 3.8.

Once he began the conversion process, Oxnevad said, "life felt much more positive than before."

Sidney Stoll, 19, also a UCR sophomore, was raised an Orthodox Jew. At UCR, Stoll said his faith and involvement with Hillel gave him an immediate sense of community in a new place.

"It gives me a Jewish identity. I'm with other Jews here," Stoll said.

Temple Beth El in Riverside has worked for several years to strengthen its relationship with Jewish students at UCR, Rabbi Harold Caminker said by phone. Students are given free temple memberships and are invited to Sabbath meals and other events.

LINKS TO REPORTS

UCLA Higher Education Research Institute — www.spirituality.ucla.edu
REBOOT —
www.Rebooters.net/poll.html

"I have two daughters who are college students," Caminker said. "I know full well the pressures college students are under. ... All we can do as a synagogue is open our arms and be as welcoming as possible."

Jamie Smith, 18, said growing up a Roman Catholic meant attending Mass every Sunday.

The UCR student said she feels empowered after attending Mass, which she still does, either at home or closer to UCR.

"It makes me feel like I belong somewhere," she said.

OTHER FINDINGS

The findings of student interest in spirituality and religion are no surprise to other researchers and Inland-area faith-based institutions.

Enrollment at California Baptist University in Riverside has more than tripled in the past decade to about 2,900 students last fall.

Author Naomi Schaefer Riley reported in her book, "God on the Quad," that enrollment at evangelical schools rose by 60 percent nationally between 1990 and 2002.

Chapman R. Clark, associate professor of youth and family ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, said 19- to 25-year-olds today are late adolescents trying to figure out if they can trust older people and the system.

"I see them seeking for anything to define themselves as they become adults," he said by

phone. "It's not organized faith because those are institutions. Those 28 and younger have rejected institutions wholesale. But there is great openness to something."

Only a quarter of that age group trusts institutions enough to align with them, said Clark, who has studied teenagers and young adults and last year published "Hurt, Inside the World of Today's Teenagers."

"They don't trust government, education, adults in authority," he said. "It's the whole theory of abandonment. Institutions have become more about the people in charge than the original intent of the people who started them. ... This is the greatest day in 50 years for dealing with 18- to 25-year-olds because they're so dang lost and they know it. They're willing to make decisions when they can find people to tell them the truth."

Reach Marisa Agha at (951) 368-9646 or magha@pe.com.
 Reach Bettye Wells Miller at (951) 368-9547 or bmiller@pe.com