



Understanding the 'spirituality' FAQs of contemporary European young people

I know a church which one hundred years ago had 900 young people attending its Sunday school every week. Its current weekly attendance is probably closer to 90, of all ages. What went wrong? There isn't room here to offer anything but a partial answer, hinted at by our exploration of spirituality and young people.

The 900 Sunday scholars of one hundred years ago probably saw themselves as 'religious' whereas their modern peers generally shun that language in preference for one of 'spirituality'. The causes for this shift in self-identity continue to provide key challenges and opportunities for the churches of Europe. They also point to the need for a more satisfactory engagement by Europe's churches with the reality of contemporary young people trying to make sense of spirituality in the midst of practical and 'down-to-earth' lives.

Spirituality and European youth

Study after study tells us that Europe's young people have only a few opportunities to talk about spirituality with an older and more mature person. This reflects a deep disconnect with older generations as well as with the churches.

A 2001-2 study of 7,000 young people concluded that a third of young people in Europe are interested in spiritual issues but have relatively few opportunities to talk with others about the things that matter to them. The understanding that 'spirituality' included 'God' was indicated by a third of all young people who claimed to be interested in spirituality, with others commenting that for them it included a search to discover the meaning to life, or of learning to be true to one's inner self. This holds true for both Western and

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EDITORIAL

Does religion have any place in the lives of Europe's young people?

This edition of Vista raises questions and highlights issues that are not easily addressed. If they were, we ought to be seeing Europe's churches full of young people.

So, is there a space for religion in the lives of Europe's young people? We have tried to answer that question using the best studies and data available today.

Darrell Jackson's lead article surveys some of the key issues and emphasises the importance of a mature older generation who young people can look up to for answers to their spiritual FAQs.

We have done some further analysis on the European Values Survey to investigate the religious values of young people. As far as we are aware this is the first published analysis on the religiosity of young people using the 2008 EVS anywhere.

Vista concludes with some encouraging stories of successful youth ministries across Europe and a further review of resources,

There may be other themes that we will return to in future editions of Vista that relate to young people in Europe, but these twin themes of young peoples' spirituality and the response of European churches seemed to our editorial team to be the most topical. We hope you agree and that if you don't, then you will take the time to tell us why.

JM

Eastern Europe where research in 2005 showed that young people in post-Communist countries also value the availability of an older person to talk to about their spiritual questions.

Sadly, many contemporary young people feel isolated as they learn to cope with life and its spiritual aspects. A 2010 survey for the BBC revealed that a fifth of young people aged 18-24 felt isolated from older generations. Over half (54%) had never spoken to a person over the age of 40 in their community whilst just under a quarter (23%) felt ignored by such older people.

The need for a spiritually mature generation to be available to such young people is a strong argument for churches to support older people in working among young people with spiritual questions. A 2010 study by the European Baptist Federation suggested that a biblically faithful and missionary lifestyle is crucial for relating to young people in this way, as they share their questions about the meaning of life, belonging and identity, human relationships, and the reality of Christ.

Church attendance

Re-imagining church as a place where all this might happen may sound obvious, even trite, but it suggests the need for church communities to develop skills in dialogue and 'spiritual conversation' alongside those that have typically emphasised the one-way transmission of information from the religious professional to the passive recipient. In the face of an overwhelming

fifty-five minute monologue and an uncertain welcome, many young people simply seek the spiritual clarity they desire through experiences of nature, listening to or performing music, being alone, and/or through relationships with friends and family. Studies consistently show that the greater majority of European churches provide little opportunity for establishing real and in-depth relationships that nurture the kind of mutual spiritual exploration being suggested here.

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Research shows that church attendance certainly has an influence on a young person's attitudes and behaviour. Francis and Kay discovered that church attendance correlated positively with the likelihood of young people seeking help from others (particularly older people during a difficult time); with healthier attitudes to school-going; with a healthier sense of well-being; with a concern for world poverty; with a sense of being able to contribute to society; with respect for the law; with the comprehension of orthodox Christian beliefs; and with the greater likelihood of having positive attitudes towards immigrants and those of other ethnic backgrounds. In a

later study, MORI found that 46% of young people admitted that religion was a moral influence upon them, especially so for the 25% of young people who said that they attended church.

In supporting the search for personal values by young people, the churches in Europe are less and less able to rely on the equivalent of the classroom, as did the pioneers of the Sunday school movement. Instead, they must acquire the skills of mentoring and dialogue and use them in the ordinary and practical life -settings of today's young person. That's probably how Jesus would have done it, I think.

A church for lakeside spiritual searchers

Visiting the city of Jönköping, Sweden, in 2005 I had the chance to talk with the local Lutheran priest, Per-Arne Waldenvik, about the many young people who were using the shores of the nearby lake to meditate in search of spiritual clarity. We discussed the fervour of the spiritual search as something to be commended.

Pointing to the evangelistic role of the church in responding to these many young people, he indicated that young people sitting on the shores of the lake eventually found that it became cold as the sun dipped below the horizon and night fell. Drawing on the metaphor of his own word picture, he highlighted the role of his parish staff and team in providing a 'space' for cold and benighted young people; a space where it was possible to find spiritual companionship that made reference to the manifold wisdom and spirituality of the Christian gospel.

DJ



Lakeside at Jönköping, Sweden

What does the data of the latest wave of the European Values Study reveal about the spirituality of Europe's young people today?

In the last issue of Vista we presented our first analysis of the fourth wave of the European Values Survey (EVS) carried out during 2008 in 47 countries and regions across Europe. By looking at five specific questions from the EVS we were able to observe some significant changes in values since the first wave of research in 1980. This analysis also enabled us to combine the results into a single league table of secularity which we have called "The NOVA Index of European Secularity". For more details see Vista Issue 3.

For this issue we have gone a stage further in the analysis, extracting the data for each of the five questions not only by country but also broken down by the year of birth of the respondents. This has enabled us to generate results for ten-year age cohorts for each country. The responses of the 20-29 year-old group gives us invaluable insights into the spirituality of European young people.

Do you believe in God?

Across the complete 17 country dataset, 68% of people said that they believed in God but in

the case of young people (20-29) the percentage was only 63%. There is a clear trend to increased belief in God with age, which whilst not quite linear, suggests that the probability that someone believes in God increases by approximately 3% per decade (Figure 1).

Poland, Romania and Greece have the highest number of respondents who believe in God (95%, 95% and 91% respectively), and this continues to be the case when the subjects are young people (Poland 93%, Romania 89% and Greece 86%). However some countries show huge generational differences. The difference between the percentage of young people who believe in God and the average person from that country is most significant in Spain (-18%), Finland (-16%) and Belgium (-13%) (Figure 2).

How important is religion in your life?

Once again we see a clear difference between the generations in regard to the importance of religion. Religion is "very or quite important" to 49% of the sample across all respondents to the survey, but in the case of the 20-29 year olds this drops to 41%.

Romanians, Greeks and Poles give the greatest importance to religion whereas

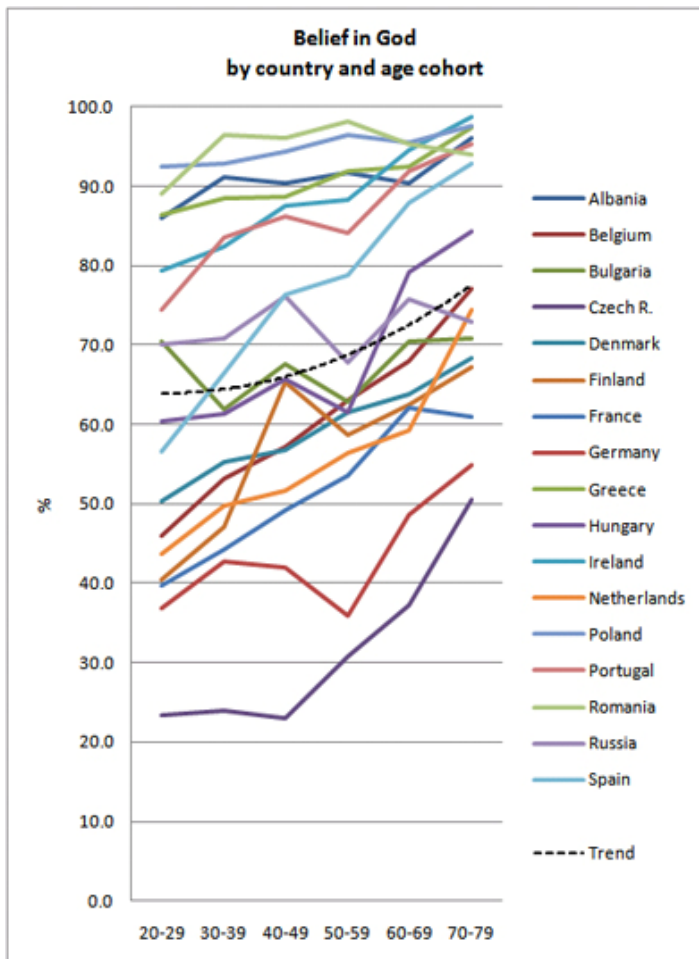


Figure 1

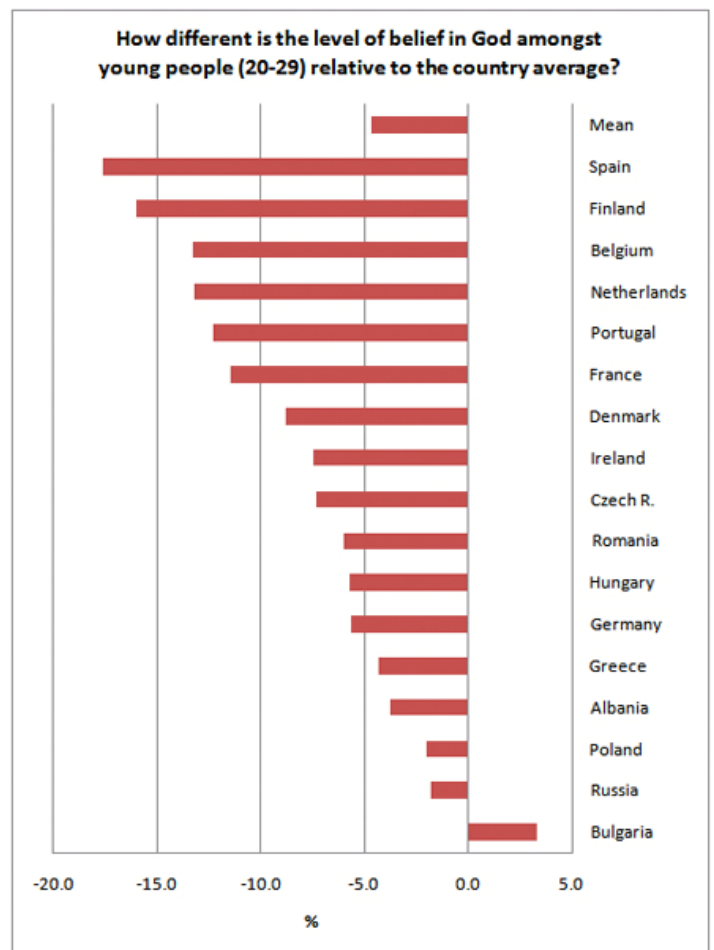


Figure 2

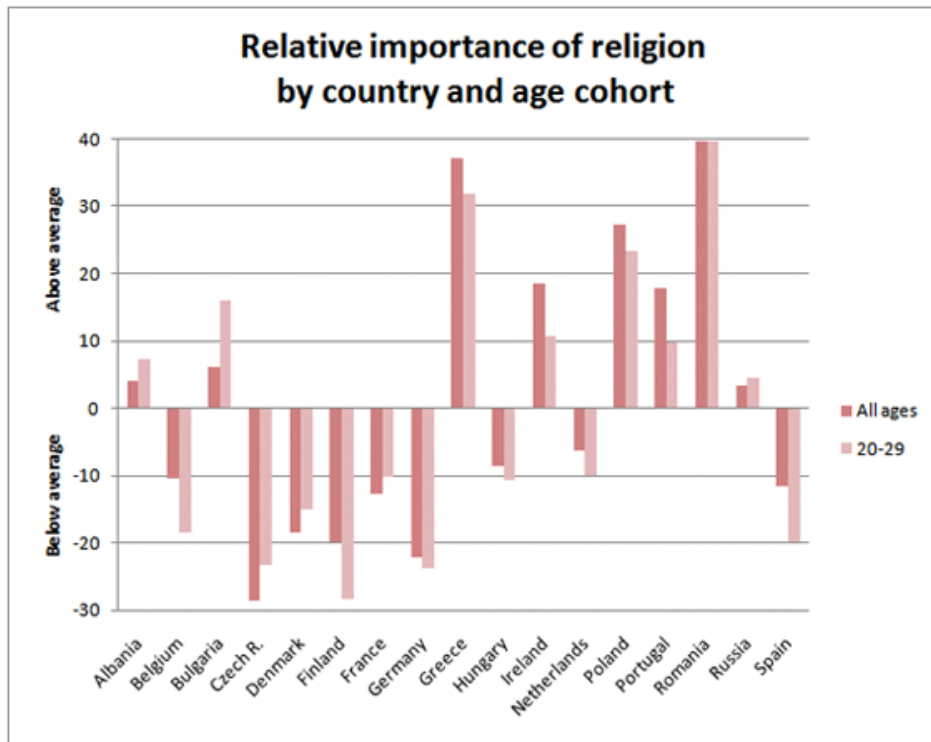


Figure 3

Finns, Germans and Czechs give it the least importance (Figure 3). This also holds true for the young people from those countries. What is more interesting once again is how generational differences vary from country to country. Finland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Ireland all show a 15% decline in the importance of religion for the 20-29 cohort in comparison with the country average. Conversely young people in Bulgaria give a slightly higher import to religion than average (+2.3%).

Are you religious, non-religious or atheist?

Overall 61% of respondents described themselves as religious people. Even amongst the 20-29 age group 52% said likewise. Once again however, when considered country by country a more nuanced picture emerges. Greeks, Poles and remarkably, Albanians are the happiest to declare themselves as religious people, with more than 80% of all adults and more than 75% of 20-29 year-olds saying they are religious.

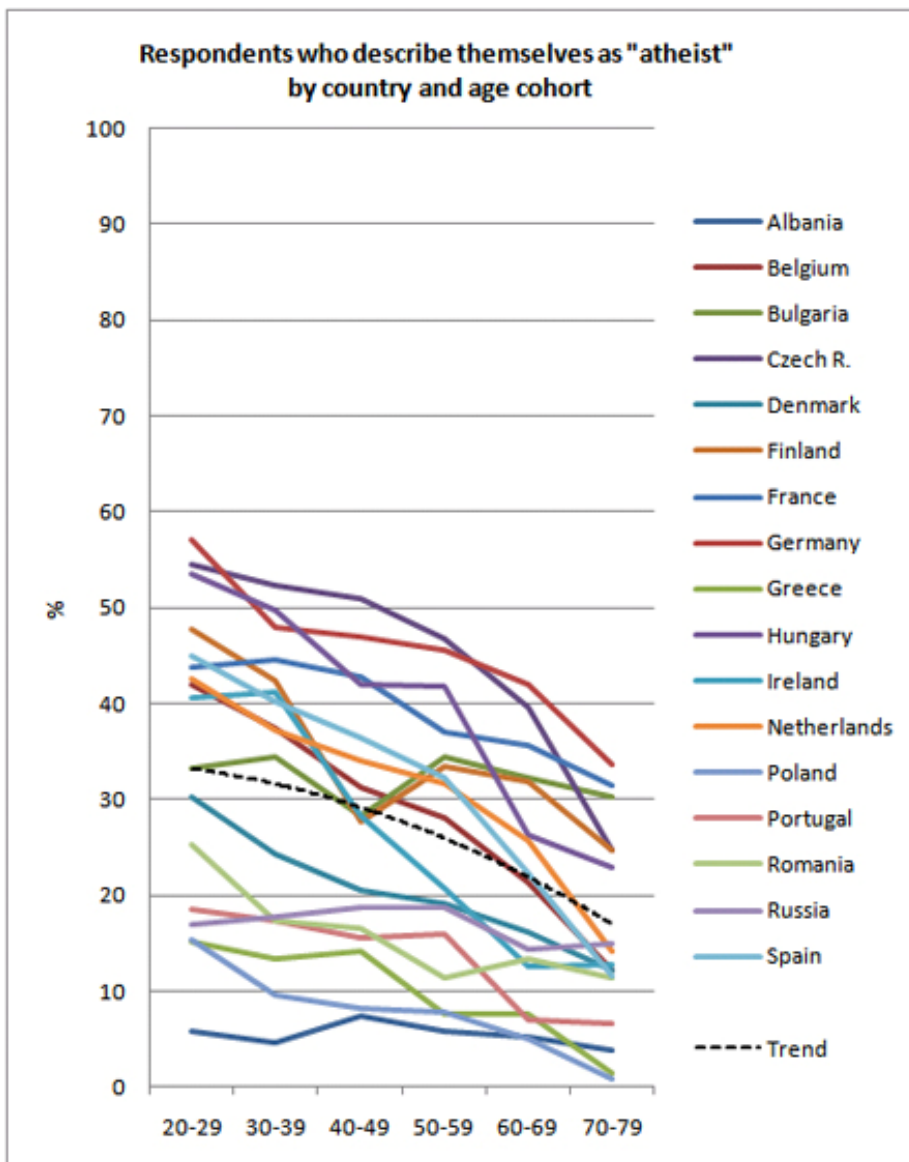


Figure 4

Conversely, 27% of people declared themselves atheist rising to 33% in the case of the 20-29s. Germany and the Czech Republic have the most self-declared atheists with 46% in both cases, whilst once again the most startling statistic is that the country where you are least likely to find someone calling themselves an atheist is the formerly atheist state of Albania (Figure 4).

How often do you attend religious services?

An average of 15% of respondents across the 17 countries said they attended religious services at least once a week. In the case of the 20-29 year-olds this was only 10%.

A ranking of attendance would have Poland, Ireland and Portugal at the top with 53%, 43% and 31% of adults attending a service at least weekly. At the bottom would be Finland and Denmark with 4% and 2% respectively. But this does not reflect the huge generational differences. The EVS data shows that Irish and Polish young people attend religious services much less frequently than previous generations. Nevertheless, Poland is the only country where more than 20% of young people attend religious services at least weekly (Figure 5).

How much confidence do you have in the church?

The final question relates to confidence levels in the church. Overall the data suggests that older respondents have more

confidence in the church than younger ones: 31% of 70-79 year-olds surveyed have a 'great deal of confidence' in the church whereas in the case of 20-29 year-olds this was only 14%. Romania stands out from all other countries in its high levels of confidence in the church across all age cohorts, nearly 40% above the average and 20% higher than any other country.

Once again, focussing in on the relative confidence of young people in the church we observe a significant difference between them and their older compatriots. These lower levels of confidence are most evident in Poland (-13%), Greece (-12%) and Spain (-8%) (Figure 6).

On a more positive note by way of conclusion, an observation of the trend across the whole dataset shows a slight upturn in confidence in the church amongst 20-29 year-olds.

Conclusions

There is no question that European young people have a more secular worldview than previous generations. Even in some traditionally Catholic countries the young

people have a markedly different attitude to the church to their compatriots.

However the EVS data does contain more hopeful signs. Belief in God, even amongst young people continues to hold up. In only three countries, France, Germany and the Czech Republic does belief in God amongst young people fall below 40%. Half of all Europeans and 41% of young people continue to believe that religion is 'very or quite important' in their lives.

Whilst attendance at religious services is very low, that is not only true for young people but for most age groups. In fact the EVS data suggests that the 20-29s may have more confidence in the church than we think.

If the results from Albania are anything to go by, perhaps we should not consider the self-conscious atheism of many Europeans as a threat but rather an opportunity for presenting afresh the gospel of Jesus Christ without the baggage of Christendom.

Note: This article is based on the data from 17 countries whose 2008 data was available. Unfortunately data from other important countries such as the UK, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Croatia were not



available at the time of writing so could not be included. The averages quoted in Vista Issue 3 relate to the 8 countries who participated in all four waves of the EVS and whose data was available. This explains the difference in averages between the two analyses. The full 2008 EVS can be consulted freely at www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu

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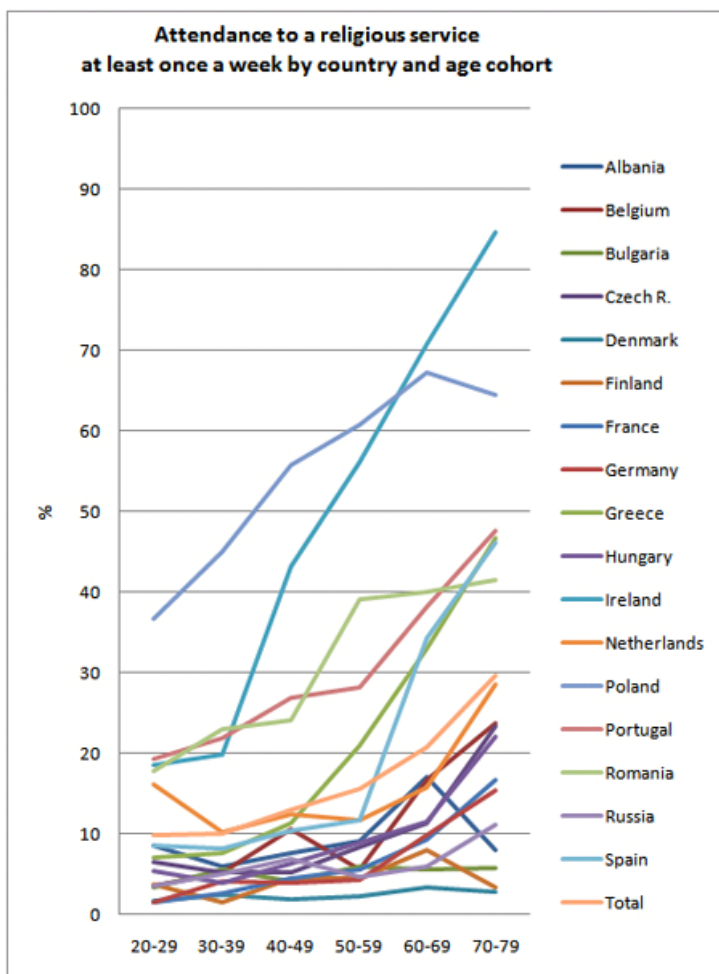


Figure 5

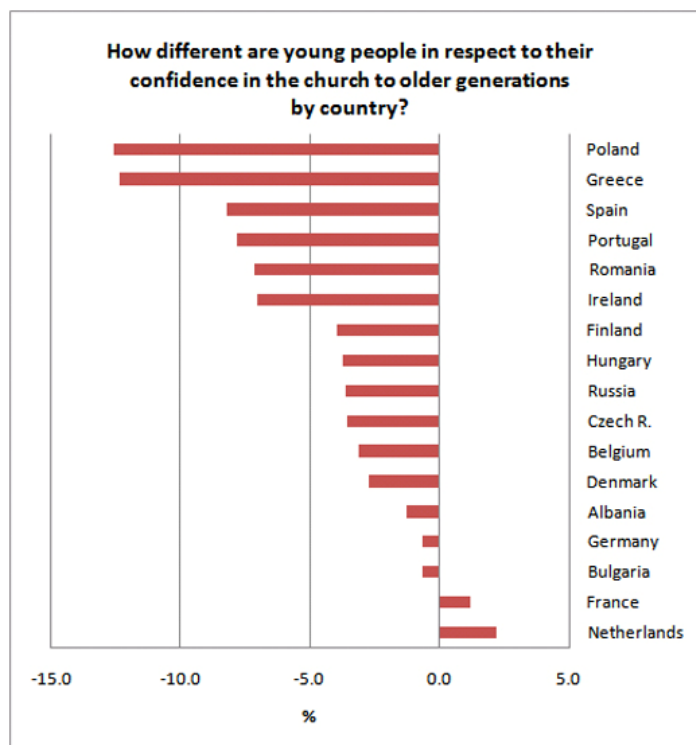


Figure 6

In this edition of Vista we wanted to feature some examples of spiritual vitality amongst young people from across Europe. These are only four of many we could have chosen but reflect the diversity and dynamism of Christian youth ministries today.

Reaching the *groms*

The extreme sports ministry Christian Surfers has been active in Europe for over eight years and has sections in Holland, France, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Ireland and the UK. There is also the potential of new missions being planted in Italy and Germany.

Their core activity is to be a 'Christian presence and witness in the surfing communities', and they work alongside surfing associations, as well as organizing a number of events of their own, both local and high profile.

For example, in Holland a core group of approximately 60 Christian Surfers run their own events in Katwijk and Scheveningen, and also work alongside the Dutch Surf Association in a serving capacity at a number of contests. The surfers range from the *groms* (young, keen surfers), right the way through to those who have been surfing for 20-30 years.

"I think one of the major challenges, particularly in some of the European countries, is to get through the 'I am a Catholic, therefore I am a Christian' attitude where your religion is what you inherit, as



opposed to something that describes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ," says Phil Williams, Christian Surfers Europe regional coordinator.

"In some of these countries, we have found that if you try to talk about your faith, they can respond very adversely and we have organized movie showings where people have walked out and thrown tomatoes at the screen as the gospel content of the movie is shown. That said, we have seen some good growth and heard

some amazing stories of how Christ is reaching surfers."

Phil says he is excited as they look to the future and aim to continue building a European team, to network together, and to be a Christian presence and witness among those communities, firstly as individuals, and secondly as the body of Christian Surfers.

Contact Phil Williams by e-mail phil@christiansurfers.co.uk or www.christiansurfers.co.uk

The word became flesh – and moved into the neighbourhood

Eden began in 1997 as an initiative of the Message Trust in Manchester, UK. Young people from tough urban communities were becoming Christians through their schools ministry, but found it difficult to settle in a church to be discipled. So rather than take young people out of their context, the Message began to work with young people where they were, in partnership with local churches.

Eden teams aim to bring God's love and transformation to some of the most deprived areas of the UK, including Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford, the North East and soon to be launching in London. Modelling John 1.14 (the Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood) their incarnational approach includes living in the community, and building relationships and trust with the young people in these areas.

"Lots of Eden's work is under the radar," says Anna Thompson, Eden Network's

National Development Coordinator. "Team members spend time hanging out with their neighbours and the kids on their street. Activities flow out of friendship rather than the other way around, sharing life together as Paul did with the Thessalonians 'We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well,' 1 Thess 2:8."

"Our Christian identity is revealed very quickly - people will ask 'why are you here, nobody ever

deliberately comes here'. In these areas you are either born there or you by circumstances you find yourself here because you are the bottom of the pile. That opens up those initial questions where we can say that we are here because we believe God cares for this place even if other people have forgotten it."

To find out more about Eden Network, and watch the documentary *A story of hope* visit their website, www.eden-network.org



A New Wave in Bulgaria

The New Wave movement in Bulgaria began in 2001 for as an initiative for Christian youth, and most of those who attend are aged between 15 and 25.

“Our main goal is to gather young people together and help them have passion for God,” explains Peicho Muhtarov, one of the organizers. “In Bulgaria we have very good praise and worship teams, with live concerts where the young people’s heroes are on stage. If you can give the young people their music they will stay together with you for hours and hours to praise God non-stop.”

The annual *Summer Wave*, attracting 6-700 young people, is held in the Black Sea area. The week-long event focuses on teaching, music and groups where ‘young people meditate about the Word of God and pray’ as well as music.

The *Spring* and *Autumn Wave* events are held in different cities each year. Several praise and worship teams are involved in each event, and the music is interspersed with

three teaching slots. Between 800 and 1300 young people attend the 10 hour-long events.

“We choose to hold New Wave three times during the year, because if it is only held one time, the young people’s new passion and fire disappears if there is not a real commitment to follow Christ,” says Peicho. “As well as helping them have passion for God, the next important goal is to watch them and to invite some of the youth in a conference to be trained how to be leaders in their generation. In the last 10 years more than 50% of the young people we trained are now involved in some form of Christian ministry.”



Youth culture in the established church

Evangelisches Jugendwerk (EJW) is the youthwork arm of the Lutheran church in Württemberg (South Germany) and is affiliated to the German YMCA. Historically, EJW has organised brass bands, children work, boys and girls groups and camps – but for more than a decade it has also planted youth churches, based on the UK ‘Fresh Expressions’ model.

“If you want to reach youth culture, you have to live the Christian faith within that culture,” says Reinhold Krebs, regional youth worker with EJW. “We feel that it isn’t enough to run a club, or to send young people out to reach their peers – we have to build up spiritual centres. Because the historical church is not reaching them in relevant ways they need to experience a Christian community within their culture to be thrilled by the gospel.”

However Reinhold is adamant that the churches still need to be part of the Württemberg Lutheran Church, which is one of more than 20 churches within the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).

“We now have about 210 youth services in our region, Some meet monthly, some four

times a year, and some weekly or fortnightly. A lot of the young people are integrated in worship bands and take part in leading the service, creating an atmosphere where they encounter Christ. These youth churches are the first models of “fresh expressions” within our church, which is more and more discovering a “mixed economy” kind of vision for the postmodern context.”

Find out more at www.ejwue.de/



Junge Gemeinden - Experiment oder Zukunftsmodell by Kristina Büchle, Reinhold Krebs and Marg Nagel is about EJW’s experiences of youth churches.

‘10 from 2010’: challenges facing Europe’s churches and their work among young people

From Colin Piper’s blog at <http://www.colinpiper.info/>.

Colin Piper, is Youth Adviser to the European Evangelical Alliance, and a coordinator of EEA21, a community of people passionate about reaching young Europeans for Christ. www.eea21.eu. With his wife Melissa, he is International Director of International Christian Youthworks, www.icy.org.uk

This selection of ‘10 from 2010’ is based on what he has written over the previous year.

1. Recognise that a true measure of success is seen in what your young people have gone on to achieve, not what you have achieved (30th December).
2. A major obstacle remains those churches that say that they see the need for change but equally say that they do not want to change (26th November)
3. Effective youth and schools ministry will value student and youth participation as a key component of success (19th November)
4. Churches need to continually encourage its volunteer and paid youth workers in the regular reading of the Bible (20th September).
5. Jesus’ model of counter-cultural denial and identification requires churches to be visibly connected to the world of young people and requires them to be contemporary and therefore intelligible (5th August).
6. Success in working among young people requires an over-riding commitment to being relational so that Christian organisations can make best use of all the resources, vision and gifts they have available to them (7th July).
7. Professional youth ministry is not necessarily the same as missional youth ministry (28th June).
8. There is a need for flexibility in responding to European young people raised with traditional values as well as to other Europeans shaped by post-modern values. One does not fit all! (4th March).
9. At the end of the day, it’s all about the Kingdom of God, not just expanding our own ministries to young people (28th February).
10. Youth ministry must remain ‘people-centred’ rather than ‘programme-centred’ if it’s to avoid losing contact with the people it’s intended to serve (24th January).

JA

DJ

Once again this edition of Vista concludes with a survey of some helpful resources for mission in Europe amongst young people.

Publications

Written from a UK perspective, *Teenagers: Why do they do that?* by Nick Pollard explores how culture affects young people's behaviour today. The second edition of the book was published in 2006, and is available to buy from the Damaris website:



<http://www.damaris.org/cm/shop/product/41/>

The 2010 book, *The faith of Generation Y*, written by Syliva Mayo-Collins, Bob Mayo and Sally Nash provides sociological and theologically based insights into attitudes of British teenagers towards faith and the Church. An earlier companion book *Making Sense of Generation Y, the World View of 15-25 year olds (published in 2006)* explores how the media and arts affect how young people make sense of the world, and the implications for the Church. Both books are published by Church House Publishing.



Websites



EEA21 was launched at the pan-European youth conference, MissionNet, in April 2009. The network aims to connect youth workers across Europe for "prayer, encouragement, spiritual growth and training", and its key strategies are "to do with networking and partnership, stimulating biblical thinking, leadership development and training, and mobilizing young people for evangelism and mission."

Web links: www.europeanea.org/youth.html and <http://www.eea21.eu>



The Alpha course is also available for young people as Youth Alpha. The Alpha course content has been adapted for teenagers, and runs over ten sessions plus a weekend or day away. According to their website, Youth Alpha is being used around the world by a wide variety of churches, as well as teenagers in schools. More information at youthalpha.org

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) is a network of young Christians, with member organisations in 26 European countries. These include national ecumenical youth councils and denominational youth councils which organise conferences, seminars and camps. The EYCE also hosts

seminars, study sessions, consultations and training events on themes such as 'modern technology and Christianity, perspectives on overcoming violence and human rights education. You can find out more at www.eyce.org



Both the European Union and Council of Europe have departments focusing on youth and young people. You can find out about all of the Council of Europe's activities at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/default_en.asp. In particular, their European Youth Foundation offers grants and financial support to non-governmental youth organisations. There are several categories, each with funding priorities – visit <http://www.eyf.coe.int/fej/> to find out more.

The European Union's Youth for Europe is a "platform based on the expected evolution of the European Youth policy with regards on young people's own European experience and the "Youth in action" programme (2007-2013)." Its main aim is to help you network – you can register an email address and profile your organisation on their website, and find out about other organisations and projects happening in your area. There are also funding opportunities – see <http://www.youthforeurope.eu> for more information.

What youth resources are you aware of? Leave a comment on our blog to let us – and other Vista readers – know: <http://europeanmission.redcliffe.org>

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