

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

Introducing teens to Christ

It's a rare event that combines hip-hop, improv comedy, worship music, an illusionist, and the gospel. But that varied line-up is what students find in Springfield during Youth Encounter, an annual student evangelism conference hosted by the Illinois Baptist State Association.

The slate of entertainers offers something for everyone, and a guest speaker—usually a nationally known evangelist—communicates the good news of Jesus several times throughout the two-day conference.

Amid the thumping music, slight of hand, and funny sketches, evangelism is the focus of Youth Encounter, said IBSA's Tim Sadler. Thirty-two people came to know Christ at the most recent Youth Encounter, which usually brings around 1,000 students and leaders to Springfield.

Sadler and the team that helps organize the conference is gearing up for big changes in 2015. Youth Encounter—traditionally held the weekend following Christmas—will expand and move to the Sunday and Monday of Columbus Day weekend.

"We're not doing one Youth Encounter," Sadler said. "We're doing three Youth Encounters." Leadership teams in the southern, central and Chicagoland regions will work with Sadler to organize three events tailored to the students in those areas. The simultaneous con-



Tim Sadler teaches a Youth Encounter breakout session on sharing your faith.

ferences will have their own entertainers, worship leaders and speakers. The goal is to create Youth Encounters that are "strategically focused on reaching teens in different parts of the state," Sadler said.

"Three locations, one date, one continued vision, and that is to see students come to know Christ."

The 2014 Youth Encounter will be held at the Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, Dec. 29-30. Go to www.IBSA.org/students to register.



ABOUT B-101

This is a 20-part study on the basic beliefs and missions of our denomination. It is designed for new believers, new Baptists, and those who want a refresher. Clip it out of the newspaper, fold into a four-page leaflet, and share with the people who would benefit from the information. You might even lead a study.

B-101 can be used for:

- New members classes
- Study on missions in Illinois and around the world
- Exploration of doctrines in *The Baptist Faith & Message*

Make as many photocopies as you need for study groups, church members, and worship attenders. Or download the PDFs at www.IBSA.org/B101.

Produced by the editors of the *Illinois Baptist*: Eric Reed, Meredith Flynn, Lisa Sergent. Designed by Kris Kell.

Look for B-101 in every issue!

What are you doing on Wednesday nights?

This is the 12th in our 20-part series. That means more than half the essays on *The Baptist Faith & Message* are ready for use in a new members class, small group, or doctrine study. Look online and download the set. We've bundled them for easy printing and distribution.

By the way: If you need copies of *The BF&M (2000)*, they can be downloaded too, or IBSA will provide them for your new study group. LisaSergent@IBSA.org



Reaching 10,000 students next door

When **Derrick Baker** started Church of the Cross in Mahomet in 2006, he figured his new congregation was close enough to the University of Illinois that they could have an impact on campus, and maybe involve students in church planting internships.

What he hadn't counted on was an opportunity for ministry at Parkland College, a campus of around 10,000 students less than five miles from U of I, and just 15 minutes from where Church of the Cross meets on Sundays.

Baker recently baptized the first Parkland student to come to Christ through the relationships his church is building on campus and in a nearby apartment complex. When the apartments were under construction two years ago, Baker passed them every day on his way to work.

"I always thought when these things are built, this is going to be a great opportunity to work with students," said Baker, a University of Illinois graduate who teaches math, humanities and philosophy at Parkland.

They started with a simple outreach effort: handing out Pop-Tarts to students as they left for class—beginning in a colder-than-usual January. "The first few times we did it, it was below zero," Baker said. "And I think they thought we were crazy, but we did it anyway."

At the beginning of this school year, he felt led to pour more energy and resources into the ministry effort. Partnering with another local church, Church of the Cross helped during student move-in days, and hosted events at the complex almost every night of the first week of classes.



We serve in ... college towns

Pastor **Derrick Baker** (right) baptizes Parkland College student **Shawn Campbell**, who his church met through campus outreach.

They connected with 70-100 students, Baker said, and were able to share the gospel with eight or nine people during those first few weeks. Shawn Campbell came to Christ, and was baptized in a swimming pool at the home of a Church of the Cross member.

Baker's congregation isn't a church of college students—it's a mix of people in their 20's, young families, and several people who are retired or approaching retirement. "For us, it was a matter of seeing, number one, that Mahomet has a close connection with Parkland," the pastor said. "So, if we're going to reach our community, we had to take Parkland seriously."

His church also saw open doors for ministry. "As those doors were opened, we felt like we couldn't let those things pass us by."

— Meredith Flynn



Pray for a new church

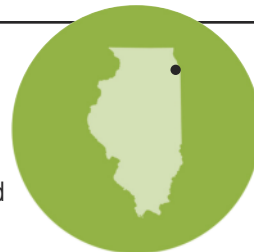
Location: Chicago's South Loop

Focus: New residents in the area

Characteristics: The up-and-coming feel of this neighborhood is evidenced by the expansion of hotels and condos.

Pray: For planters to start new churches in the South Loop.

— From the IBSA Church Planting Team



A SENSE OF URGENCY

Today's headlines combined with a spate of apocalyptic books and movies have stirred a sense of urgency among believers and renewed curiosity about the end of the world in many others. Our Christian eschatology (the study of last things) has always urged us to share our faith, because time is limited and Jesus will be returning soon. But how soon?

In the early 1970s, there was much discussion about the rapture and the end times. And when the "Left Behind" series was first published in the 1990s, the anticipation was renewed.

Now with such unrest in the Middle East, there appears new urgency to share the gospel, before it's too late.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT... THE LAST THINGS

Read Article 10 of *The Baptist Faith & Message (2000)*, “Last Things,” at IBSA.org/B101.

In December 2012, when the Mayan calendar ended, many people held their breath in anticipation of doomsday. To everyone’s relief, the earth continued to spin in its orbit! Still, news headlines persist on announcing disasters, famines, wars, persecution, cataclysmic earthquakes, apocalyptic devastations, economic catastrophes, and unrestrained immorality.

Has the world come to a relentless whirl of chaos, confusion, and hopelessness? Should Christians live in fear of the future?

The Bible confirms that dreadful days of wars and rumors of wars will precede Christ’s return (Matt. 24:6). Although religiosity will increase, that period will culminate in a state of apostasy (2 Thess. 2:1-3). Yet, before the end comes, the gospel will be preached to all nations (Matt. 24:14). In a desperate attempt to overcome God’s people, evil will unleash its rage by using political and religious powers (2 Thess. 2:3-11). This period is known as the Great Tribulation. But God will pour His full wrath on this evil and vindicate His people (Rev. 6:10, 16).

Christ’s return is the pivotal event that will usher in the end of history (Luke 21:27-28). The turn

of events will be swift in God’s economy (1 Thess. 5:1-11). The dead will rise first and Jesus’ true followers will meet Him in the air, a “rapture” visible by all (1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:17). They will reign with Christ in an age of peace, justice, and perfection known as the Millennium at the end of which Satan will be bound forever (Rev. 20). God will bring every deed into a final judgment. Subsequently, His reign will remain undisturbed for eternity.

When will this take place? Only God knows (Matt. 24:36), although it will not take the believers by surprise if they understand the signs. Who will be able to stand up at God’s grand finale? Not all people who claim to be followers of Christ will enjoy eternity with God, only those who maintained and lived the faith to the end (1 John 2:28). Those who refused the King’s invitation, accepted it half-heartedly, or did not bear fruits will spend eternity separated from God in a conscious place of torment (Rev. 20:11-15).

How will all of this take place and how long will each event last? Scholars do not agree.

For example, they view the Millennium either as a symbolic or a literal 1,000 years of Christ’s reign on earth. It could represent:

a. Christ’s ministry on earth through His Church from the time of the crucifixion to His return

(amillennial view),

b. A time before Christ’s return after the Church christianizes the whole world and establishes God’s Kingdom on earth (postmillennial view), or

c. A time when Christ will reign on earth with His Church prior to God’s final judgment (premillennial view).

Instead of speculating and arguing about what exact events will take place, Christians should prepare for the coming of the Lord in service, brotherly love, and righteousness. When God will end history, He will either regenerate or renovate His creation to a state of perfection (Rev. 21:1-5). The Last Things do not refer to the annihilation of all existence but the end of a creation marred by sin (Rom. 8:18-15). Christians understand the necessity of such matters: although they are a new creation in Christ, partakers of the new covenant by the power of the Holy Spirit, they still struggle with their sinful nature. They long for the glorification (Rom. 8:30; Phil. 3:20) that is promised at the consummation of all things when God will eradicate sin and evil (Rev. 22:1-5). Therefore they can look forward to this day with serene expectation.

Dr. Sylvie T. Raquel is Associate Professor of New Testament at Trinity International University.



CONSIDER THIS For personal study or group discussion

- 1 Do you see signs of apostasy with an increase of religiosity in the world? If yes, where and in what form?
- 2 Since the rapture described in Thessalonians is not mentioned in the book of Revelation, scholars place it either at the beginning, the middle, or the end of the Great Tribulation. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each view?
- 3 Go to www.persecution.org and study specific cases of Christian persecutions. Go to the prayer map (under “About VOM”) and investigate restricted nations. How does that information affect you as a missional Christian? Are you discouraged or encouraged?

The 4-14 window

Church leaders have identified a critical age range when people are most open to spiritual things.

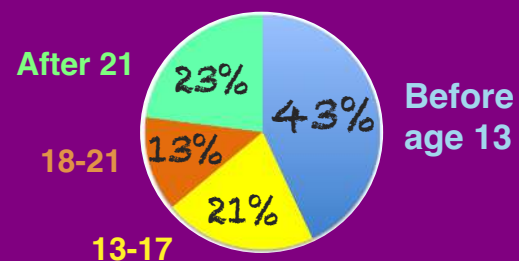


1 in 4 people in the world

is under the age of **15**.



Barna found most Christians came to faith before adulthood:



The researcher also has studied the relationship between young people and the church:

20% of Millennials (born in the early 1980s) say going to church is important, but



30%

say it isn’t important at all. The top three reasons for not attending:

- ▶ It’s not personally relevant.
- ▶ They find God elsewhere.
- ▶ They can teach themselves what they need to know.

Through the **Cooperative Program**, when you give on Sunday, you support **outreach to kids** in Illinois and their families.

CP WORKS

Sources: Barna Research, 2004 and 2013

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

GIVING KIDS A WIDER WORLDVIEW

I remember the school assembly where elementary school girls, dressed in crisp brown and green dresses, extolled the virtues of the civic organization they said we should all join.

I went home and told my mom this was for me—they had *uniforms*.

“We don’t have time for scouts,” she said. “We’re GA’s.”

It was probably a Wednesday, and we were probably already on our way to church. First for dinner in the fellowship hall, followed by children’s choir, and then, the capstone: 45 minutes of missions education known as GA’s, or Girls in Action.

I was a GA through sixth grade, when I graduated to the Acteens group that met down the hall. On another floor of our church, elementary school boys went to their RA’s class (short for Royal Ambassadors) until they were ready to be Challengers.

The group names have changed over the years, and some churches have integrated missions education into their overall children’s curriculum. The prevalence of GA’s, Acteens and the rest has waned in some churches. Still, missions education remains a hallmark of many Southern Baptist congregations.

Those Wednesday evening sessions were, for me, a window to worlds I had no way of seeing or understanding from our suburban neighborhood. In GA’s, we learned about real missionaries: what they really ate, wore, drove, and did all day. We learned about how the heart of missions is proclaiming the gospel, and we even took small steps in learning

how to share our mostly new testimonies of coming to faith in Christ.

And we had uniforms too—sort of. At the end of each year of GA’s, we received a badge signifying we’d completed the “steps” associated with our grade level. Those steps were where the real learning happened:

We studied Paul’s missionary journeys, wrote letters to “MK’s,” and explored hands-on missions projects in our own city.

My best friend from third grade was right there next to me most Wednesday nights. She and her husband now serve as international missionaries. Another friend in our class is in full-time ministry. A girl two years ahead of us serves in the local church where we all grew up.

God used those Wednesday nights to call children into ministry—full-time, part-time, short-term and to the ends of the earth. He could have done it if we’d been in Awana, or in a small group during the week, or at a day of hands-on mission projects. It just so happened we were in a classroom on the third floor, missing the local scouts meeting, but gaining a whole lot more.

—Meredith Flynn

Think about it:

1. Think back to your childhood: How did you learn best? Classroom experiences, hands-on projects, or something else?
2. How can your church use those different methods to communicate the importance of living on mission to kids in the congregation?

