

It's Not Just for Kids Anymore  
by Earl J. Pierce

*This article is from the December 2004 New Harvest newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions. Permission is given to copy this article for distribution within your own congregation. Please credit the author and the Center for U.S. Missions in Irvine, California, [www.centerforusmissions.org](http://www.centerforusmissions.org). For more information, contact the Center at 949-854-8002 x1780.*

George Barna recently reported:

One further measure examined had to do with reliance on the Internet as a means of faith experience and expression. Overall, 5% said they would definitely use the Internet for personal faith activity, and another 18% said they would probably do so. The most surprising outcome related to this measure was the limited distinction between young and old adults: the differences between adults under 35 and those over 55 were not statistically significant.

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=133>

When I first heard these statistics not long ago, I immediately thought it referred to getting religious or spiritual information via the internet. But closer inspection shows that Barna's report is talking about something far different. Not only are people getting information from the web, which is what most who are not tuned in to the internet think it is for, but people are turning to the web for "faith experiences and expressions." One might say that these people are going to church online.

Another statistic worth pondering is that this is not just a "gen X" or "post-modern" generation phenomena. We have to realize that the emerging culture (which is a better way to describe what's coming) is not limited to younger people but spans the generations. Senior citizens are learning the internet in record numbers to keep up with their families who have moved away.

So, what experiences can one find on the web? The Associate Directors of the Center for U. S. Missions experienced their first online conference in August. From our homes or offices in Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, Texas, and California, we saw and heard one another. Despite a few technical glitches in the maiden effort, we were able to present reports, respond to one another and discuss issues without giving up two days to travel to the Center. It's a start.

Other experiences are available on the internet. If you want to meditate, go to [www.theranch.org](http://www.theranch.org). Here you can take a virtual walk, listen to soothing music, read a story or talk to someone. If you need to get something off your chest, go to [www.absolution-online.com](http://www.absolution-online.com), home of the online confessional. You simply go through a list of types of sins, choose one, then select the category and degree of seriousness. You can return to the lists and add more sins before proceeding to the check out--oops, I mean confessional. At the confessional, you will participate in a liturgy and be assigned penance and receive forgiveness. Sounds a little odd to us, but it is just one example of faith experience on line.

There are thousands of sites and endless possibilities; some of the sites are very, very good. Lutheran Hour Ministries has begun two new sites, one targeting those seeking an online faith experience and one for those attempting to work in this emerging culture. [www.re-yourlife.org](http://www.re-yourlife.org) offers an “online community re-focusing on the light,” with music and movie reviews, discussion pages, video clips to spur discussion and ways for viewers to participate and learn more about God. The other new LHM site, [www.re-connected.com](http://www.re-connected.com), is under development but promises to be online community “for those who help others re-focus on the light.” It is for pastors and others who are working with the new culture. A partner site with worship resources for multi-media is [www.mustardseedmedia.com](http://www.mustardseedmedia.com). A new resource there is “twenty-four days – what will tomorrow bring,” a package of sermons, videos, drama scripts, graphics and promotional material for Advent in what can be called the “emerging” style.

The internet is a goldmine for many. For others, it may just turn up lumps of coal. Some new sites worth the visit are: [www.sanctuary1010.org](http://www.sanctuary1010.org), a new LCMS mission in Illinois; [www.emergingchurch.org](http://www.emergingchurch.org), a non-LCMS site that includes a Lutheran section and a great links page to what is happening in the culture; and [www.churchcentral.com](http://www.churchcentral.com), Thom Rainer’s site. Thom spoke this Spring at the LCMS North America Mission Executives (NAME) and Outreach meeting in San Diego. His site has good information for both established and mission congregations. [www.vintagefaith.com](http://www.vintagefaith.com) is for “exploring the emerging church and vintage Christianity.” At this site and many others, you will find that many in the emerging church movement are returning to traditional practices, including the liturgy, to connect people to God both in the sanctuary and online.

People are looking for God. The internet is one way they seek Him. What else can we be doing to help them find Him there?

*Earl Pierce is the Internet Coordinator for the Center for U.S. Missions.*