



God is going to be God and I am going to be loved

By Colin McDonald

Reflecting on my participation in Phase One of the Young Adult Initiative, two repeated and associated observations have endured and have a chance to guide our work toward reinvesting in young people going forward: testimony and surprise. On the surface, both aspects are currently and steadfastly a part of the integrity and principle, or guiding light, of Urban Village Church. But a deeper look suggests that we as leaders of the church have yet to celebrate, and so, to comprehend, the kind of space we make for alternative togetherness as a vital and intrinsic model for the “space for change” and innovation Gregory C. Ellison II has spoken of and which young people can no longer afford to live without. Think of a time when you shared testimony at Urban Village Church, whether in front of a congregation or, perhaps more intimately, across a table. How did that experience change your relationship to the church? Now think of a time when the church showed you what it, as a church, was about; a time you felt emboldened or surprised by what the church was bringing to the table. How did that experience change or make you think differently about your relationship to the church?

In my conversations with individuals already connected to Urban Village (UVC), and in the “Human Centered” Design thinking we employed as Congregational Fellows, it’s become clear that the invitation and sharing of testimony is essential in effort to foster community in which young adults feel like an active and necessary expression of the church, as opposed to subscribers of yet another institution. It may seem counter-intuitive to stress that what the Church needs more of in the 21st century is young people talking about themselves, unless you pause to consider where all of that seemingly self-absorbed talking that we *think* we see, and mostly term a threat to civic discourse and public engagement, is occurring. Namely, online,

in the “safety” and illusion of one’s being partially known. If the role of any faith community, and especially UVC, is to impress upon its members God’s devotion to their whole and wholly imperfect selves, that in being loved they might deliver that good news to others, then illusion, partiality, and comparison have no place and no chance of bearing relevance now or in the future. Again and again in my conversations with young people, aptly termed “social occasions” in our cohort’s preparations, it was the manifestation of God, unexpectedly, in would-be confrontations turned entanglements, that sprang from each interview with almost mandatory, or unwilling, enthusiasm: a young man brings his more religiously conservative friend to church on the day we just happen to be interrupting service to protest police violence and move worship outdoors; another, accustomed to marching alone at the Pride parade, comes to meet his congregation at the intersection of love and intolerance, stepping up to join his campaign for equality. Surprise! The church has left the building; the church is where these people were and they, in turn, were with the church. As Henri Nouwen writes in *Lifesigns*:

All Christian action is a manifestation of the human solidarity revealed to us in the house of God. It is not an anxious human effort to create a better world. It is a confident expression of the truth that in Christ, death, evil, and destruction have been overcome. It is not a fearful attempt to restore a broken order. It is a joyful assertion that in Christ all order has already been restored. It is not a nervous effort to bring divided people together, but a celebration of an already established unity.

Whereas activists try to change or restore the world, Nouwen goes on to write, Christians try (and fail) to recreate and rest, or act, assured in the presence of God; the voice of Jesus, who in the midst of chaos offers

“peace.” Whether out or indoors, a space in which to shout, to provide, to be essential, and to be surprised is what’s recognized and most wanted in the lives of young people today. The Church, then, can’t be just another setting for half-empty participation, for photo-ops and branded merchandise, but a community dependent on interaction, if our hope is to “ignite the city” and recreate God’s kingdom here on earth, bearing in mind a house of God is anywhere we celebrate solidarity “revealed to us” in acts of spontaneity by consequence of who we already are.

Think back on an experience of feeling seen at church and feeling like, in turn, you saw the church for what it was. What overlap presents itself? What do these experiences of revelation have in common? And how might we embolden and sustain their reoccurrence in the future as we work to offer peace in the lives of young disciples? And join me in a prayer of innovation, inspired by a prayer often recited during Phase One of the Young Adult Initiative, based on transcripts from my conversations:

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How do I respond to this love?

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How do I respond to this?

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How do I respond?

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How?

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God.

It’s become clear that God is going to be.

It’s become clear that God is.

It’s become clear.

It’s become.

It’s become.

It’s become clear.

It’s become clear that God is.

It’s become clear that God is going to be.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be.

It’s become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved.

It's become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How?

It's become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How do I respond?

It's become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How do I respond to this?

It's become clear that God is going to be God, no matter what I do, and I am going to be loved. How do I respond to this love?



Colin McDonald serves in Children's Ministry at Urban Village Church Edgewater. He hosts Chicago's historic Seminary Co-op Bookstores' [Open Stacks podcast](#) and programs children's and author events. He enjoys drinking coffee in museums and reading on the train.