

THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

Connecting Chicago disciples with each other, the Midwest and the world

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Families: In the World, Not of the World

We live in a very exciting time. The world around us is changing at an exponential pace. In the last few decades, we have seen remarkable advances in many areas of travel and communication—outer-space flights, household computers, the birth and development of the Internet, mobile phones and rapid global connection through air transportation. While most of these advances help in the ability to spread the gospel, they have also presented their share of challenges to the Christian family. Terrorism, online predators, gateways to Internet pornography in our homes and a world that markets to our adolescents are all new cultural challenges that our forefathers did not have to face. At times, it seems difficult and challenging to comprehend all that is happening around us. As Christian parents, we wrestle with what our kids are exposed to, and we often wonder how much we can or should control this exposure. Fortunately, God's word is consistent and timeless. We see cultural challenges recorded in the Scriptures from Adam to the apostles. We also see God teaching us principles in His word that cut across time. *"For the word of God is living and active."* (Heb. 4:12) In this article, let's look at some of our challenges in the 21st century and some ways to battle them spiritually.

Some experts tell us that our children deal with far more pressure than we ever did in adolescence. In his book, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, Chap Clark explains that the academic, social and athletic pressures which adolescents face today, paired with a general relationship disconnect with most adults, has produced "a world beneath." He believes that teenagers are becoming more isolated and lonely. In addition to that problem, many adults lack the interest to genuinely get involved in their world. As a result, many adolescents have learned to emotionally depend on each other instead of their parents or other adult role models. In many ways, today's youth are lacking moral value and restraint because of the

absence of proper mentors. More and more children are being raised in broken or blended homes by single parents, step-parents or grandparents. The typical 1950s family consisted of the father being the bread winner, the mother the homemaker and two or more children born to them in wedlock. According to Lamanna and Riedmann, in their book, *Marriages and Families: Making Choices in a*

Diverse Society, only about 7% of American families today fit that ideal. Today's youth are also dealing with many intense emotional and moral issues such as sexuality, drugs and abuse at much younger ages. Television, radio, movies, video games and the Internet broadcast

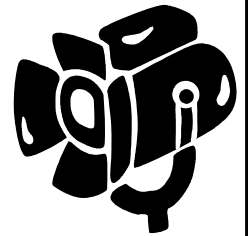
human frailty and sin, and sadly they each have helped to grease the slide of moral standards. But we shouldn't be surprised at this decline. One reason for this slide is found in **Proverbs 29:21**: *"If a man pampers his servant from youth, he will bring grief in the end."* Truly, children have always needed community and discipline to form godly character.

On the other hand, in most countries, children have more opportunities available to them than ever before in history. American childhood and the American family have significantly changed over the last 400 years. Our colonial forefathers viewed children as "adults-in-training" and expected them to make a considerable contribution to the household from the age of seven. Children were viewed as inherently evil and regularly heard about hell and judgment to keep them in line. After the American Revolution, and throughout the Industrial Age, children were working in factories, on farms or as apprentices for long hours, most every day of the week. It has only been during the last century that American children have had the freedom and opportunity to focus on their education and development without the burden of financially contributing to the family. The concept of adolescence coincides with this change. Adolescence is defined as the

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Brotherhood Spotlight



Madison Church of Christ

Madison, Wisconsin is considered one of the 10 best places in the country for outdoor activities according to *Sperling's Best Places*, the number-one ranked city for cycling, the number-three ranked city in America for walking and the most romantic city according to *USAWeekend.com*. Built on an isthmus between Lake Monona and Lake Mendota, Madison is renowned for its beautiful scenery and picturesque surroundings. The state capitol building, which has been recently refurbished, is widely recognized as one of the most beautiful in the United States. And the University of Wisconsin campus, with its 40,000 students, is a constant reminder that here lies a wellspring of future Christians who can change the world. These are just a few of the reasons why Jeff and Lori Mannel fell in love with this city. Along with 31 mission-team members, they planted the Madison Church of Christ in April of 1997.

Currently, the church has 111 members composed of teens, campus, singles and many young married couples. During the last few years, the church has focused on building a healthy, vibrant, active and balanced spiritual family. Here are some comments from some of the brothers and sisters in Madison:

I believe the Madison Church is a church that has reconnected with each other through small groups, fellowship and learning how to have a more balanced life. We have learned our lives have many purposes and that God wants us to stay in balance.

Through small groups, we have built a stronger family and have learned that, even as we grow, we need to keep our groups small so needs can be met. We have also learned that everyone is here to meet each others needs, not just the leaders. But if we work together as a family, the needs are met and no one is overburdened or feels not needed.

I think other churches can learn from Jeff and Lori about handing certain ministries off and not needing to put their hands in everything. Crown, His Needs-Her Needs and Young Marrieds are all examples of specific ministries in the church that others lead, with little or no involvement from the Mannels.

According to Jeff, he can't agree more with those thoughts, especially with the last comment. Letting go

and letting other people lead has been one of the greatest lessons he has learned in the ministry. He has learned how to give someone a ministry, provide the training they need to lead it, give them authority to lead it and, finally, let them lead it. Jeff considered this one of the hardest lessons he had to learn, yet it has brought about great rewards. He is now able to be more focused on preaching and teaching, allowing others to use their gifts and talents to serve the church. One of Jeff's goals is to earn a Master's Degree in Divinity. He believes that learning is one of the keys to effective church leadership.

One of the highlights of the Madison Church is its **Crown Ministry**. Crown is a 10-week, small-group study providing a biblical perspective for handling money. This ministry has revolutionized people's finances and given real tools to help families get out of debt, plan for the future, save money and give first to God. Of course, there are many more shining stars in the Madison Church like the marriage dynamics class and the youth and campus ministry (called **Flipside**), with its mission to help Christians *communicate* God's love to others, *connect* to others in Christ's body, *cultivate* their love for God, *contribute* their passions and abilities to the body and *center* their lives in worship of God.

The church is also one of the major contributors to the Ukrainian mission work. They not only help support the church financially, but they are also a great source of encouragement to the Ukrainian churches. Just a few months ago, nine adults and four children traveled to Kiev, Odessa and Lviv to encourage the disciples there.

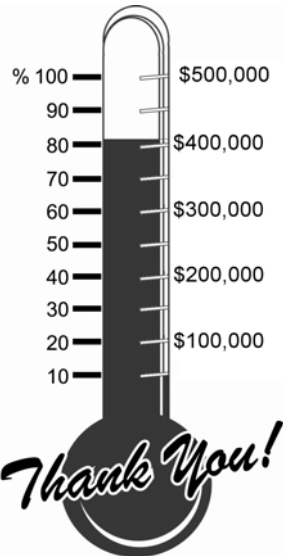
There are three full-time staff members and one part-time staff member in the church. Jeff and Lori Mannel lead the Madison Church and Kirk and Amy Stevens work with the campus and youth ministries (Amy works part-time for the church). Kirk and Amy began dating in high school, were converted in the campus ministry and were active members of the Champaign Church of Christ before leaving for Madison. Members of the Madison Church of Christ warmly extend an invitation to all Chicago disciples to come and see their beautiful city and learn more about all the great things God is doing through them in the great state of Wisconsin.

Winston Batino

Reviews and Previews

Eurasian Mission's Offering

The elders and evangelists would like to say a big "thank-you" to everyone who was able to donate toward this year's mission's offering that will be used to build up the great work of God going on in Eurasia. So far, we've collected \$407,106 to support 37 churches in 12 countries. For the next few weeks, let's continue to turn in as much as possible in every region to bring us closer to our original goal of \$500,00 and to hopefully move beyond it. Please be sure to mark your checks for Mission's Offering!



Women's Retreat Registration Begins

Registration has begun for the sixth annual **Women's Retreat** to be held September 8-10 at the Lake Lawn Resort in Delavan, Wisconsin. The theme for this year's retreat is *The King and I* and will feature classes and events filled with "royal celebration and inspiration." There are a variety of room types and registration options. To register, visit the registration table at church. This event always reaches capacity, so register early!

Spanish Translation Needed for Disciples Today Website

The DisciplesToday.com website would like to begin presenting content in Spanish. If anyone would like to volunteer to assist with the translation, please e-mail Steve Haberkom at smh68@yahoo.com.

Northwest Region Allison Arensmeier

Reaching back more than 100 years, you can trace the faith of our most recent teen conversion, Allison Arensmeier. Allison, a sophomore at Geneva High School, is the 14-year-old daughter of Mark and Cindy Arensmeier. She is also the granddaughter of one of our elders, Randy Harris, and his wife Patsy, and Wallace and Dorothy Arensmeier of Portland. However, the seeds of faith started much earlier than with her two sets of grandparents. In fact, Allison's roots go back to her great-great-grandparents on both sides of the family. This makes Allison a fifth generation conversion! *"These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all His decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life."* (Deuteronomy 6:1-2) Truly, the Harris and Arensmeier families are great examples of honoring this important admonition of Scripture.

The seeds that had been planted in Allison since the time of her birth took root last year at camp. However, it didn't happen in the way you might ordinarily think. She actually realized after the week of camp had been completed that she had not given her heart to the lessons, to the other people there and, most importantly, to God. After returning home, Allison didn't have the same "fire" that she typically had after returning from camp in years past. She realized that she had come back home virtually

the same as when she left for camp. This humbling realization was a major turning point for Allison. She quickly came to understand that she was not where she wanted to be spiritually, and she decided to begin doing character studies on a weekly basis. Sometimes, as in Allison's case, it's realizations such as these that are needed in our lives in order for us to begin changing. And that is exactly what happened. Over time, the change in her heart and lifestyle became more and more obvious to her friends and family. She studied the Bible diligently, passionately pursued God for the next number of months and was baptized on May 7, 2006. No doubt this year's camp (in just a few weeks) will be quite a different experience for Allison. Now, as a baptized disciple, she will be able to help other teenagers who may be exactly where she was last year.

We are so encouraged by the faith and conviction Allison displays as a teen disciple. She certainly carries with her a deep desire to be devoted to God and His teachings, the same desire that has been found in her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents.

Conversion
Corner

Welcome New Baptisms!

Chicago

- Brandon Williams

Metro

- Heidi Wilton

Families: In the World, Not of the World (Cont.)

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time during which one physically becomes an adult through puberty to the time society recognizes them as an adult. In the last 100 years, the length of adolescence has stretched from about four years to 14 years. At the turn of the 20th century, 18-year-olds were getting married, working full-time jobs and providing for their families. Today, it's uncommon for that to take place until they reach their mid- to late-twenties. This radical shift in culture enables today's youth to prepare and develop for adulthood. The challenge with this change is that it can also lead to ingratitude and lack of perspective, as many teenagers don't realize how good they have it.

So how can this knowledge help us? Thankfully, we find countless examples of men and women in the Scriptures responding to changes they experienced. Adam had to leave the Garden of Eden. (**Gen. 3**) Noah was surrounded

From the Scriptures...

- ✦ *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Rom. 12:2)*
- ✦ *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. (2 Cor. 10:3)*
- ✦ *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (Col. 2:8)*
- ✦ *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)*

by wickedness and had to start from scratch after the flood. (**Gen 6-9**) Abram was called to leave everything he knew and go to a foreign land. (**Gen. 12:1**) Joseph was thrust into Egypt and a very different culture from that of a shepherd boy. (**Gen. 37-41**) Moses was raised as an orphan in Pharaoh's palace. He certainly experienced a number of culture changes and challenges in his first 40 years of life in that environment. (**Ex. 1**) Daniel, a devout Hebrew man, was taken as a servant to the king of Babylon. He was forced to learn the language, literature and customs of the Babylonians. Yet he was determined to stay faithful to his convictions and live a life of devotion to God. (**Dan. 1**) Even in New Testament times, we see culture and Christianity meshing. Jesus faced multi-faceted challenges with the worldly Romans, legalistic religious people and the various social norms of his day. Paul addressed polytheism, eating customs,

women's roles and head coverings in his first letter to the Corinthians. As evidenced by these and other examples in Scripture, the world has always introduced challenges to God's people. But His truths have continued to provide direction for the proper way to respond to each of them.

So what can we learn from these examples? The most apparent characteristic evident in every one of these men was their spiritual conviction. The world around them in many ways was flailing out of control, yet they stood their ground. Abram left his home and his country for his God. Moses chose the spiritual path over the strong temptation to live a worldly life. Daniel refused to eat food that could have polluted him. And Paul's direction on facing this challenging issue was emphatic, as stated in the Scriptures found in the box on the left.

The greatest challenge to our faith, our children and our community is in our own hands. If we grow distant from Christ and His convictions, we will falter. If we allow the world to shape our thinking instead of the Word, we will fall. God's Word needs to permeate our very beings. It needs to be what we read and meditate on every day. It needs to be what we talk about consistently. It needs to be what we regularly instill in our children. (**Deut. 6**) Spirituality does not come about through osmosis or wishful thinking. We must allow the Word to reach us when we struggle with sin and when we lack in faith. And we have to talk with each other and get help when we fall short and need perspective. (**Col. 1:28-29, Heb. 3:12-13**)

It requires humility to listen to and understand our kids and what they're dealing with on a daily basis. And it requires open dialogue with each other to chart a godly course for each of them. While we have always needed each other for perspective and guidance in regard to our children, with the shifting sands of a rapidly changing culture, we desperately need to be open with each other about our fears and challenges so that Satan can't get a foothold in our families. (**Eph. 4:27**) We need to educate ourselves about the world around us. We should understand the Internet—both the good it provides and the bad it enables. We should be involved enough with our children's education that we can guide them in moral decisions and dilemmas. We should know our children's friends. We need to find ways to practically engage our children about God and His relevance in their world. Most importantly, we should pray and be faithful. God and His Word have always held the power to cut across cultural issues and transform people. He is always relevant. Let us help our children to clearly see His love and power in the 21st century, and how that love and power can be used to guide them through these challenging times.