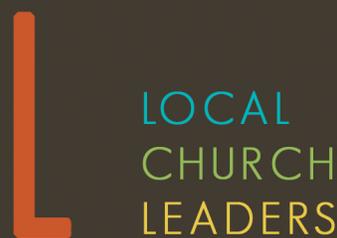


## LOCAL LEADERS SPOTLIGHT SERIES: A CONVERSATION WITH MIQUEL CONDON

Ashley Griffith



**Thanks for chatting with me today! For starters, provide us with a brief biography: your age, education, ministry experience, position at church, and current occupation.**

I am a twenty-eight-year-old Hyphen. I was homeschooled all the way through to my senior year and then attended Ohio State University, obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a specialization in Marketing in 2011. While at OSU, I and two fellow Buckeyes from my church started a campus ministry. We didn't know anything about Campus Ministry International at the time, nor did we know of anyone else that was involved in campus ministry. Being a part of campus ministry has been one of the best decisions I have made. A couple of years after graduation, my mom and dad planted a church—Infinite Church—in the Columbus, Ohio area. For the last several years, I have been leading our 20Somethings and our Marketing/Creative Team. Outside of “church stuff,” I started a small business a couple of years ago that allows me to design, create, and make things, which is what I really like to do!

**You mentioned starting a campus ministry while in college. Sounds like you've been involved with and drawn to the Hyphen age group for some time now. Why do you think that is?**

Many surveys have been conducted on why young adults leave the church. The reason I am drawn to young adult ministry is because I mentally walked through many of those reasons. I either had close friends that struggled or I personally struggled with these realities. In the United States, the current young adult generation is one of the largest segments of our population, and yet in many of our churches, that demographic is absent. I just simply can't deal with that. I also believe that it is one of the most talented and passionate generations, and if we can channel that with His anointing, it is an unstoppable force.

**Can you list some of the reasons why young adults leave the church?**

One reason is they don't feel they have or add any value where they are located. This is exacerbated by the fact that until very recently most churches didn't have young adult groups. It's definitely gotten better, but there was a time when, once you graduated from high school, there was nowhere to go. As a result, the influences outside the church became stronger than influences inside the church.

Another reason: a lot of my acquaintances struggled because they weren't given any responsibility or training in the church. There was no expectation of or opportunity for ministry involvement. This again made them feel undervalued. Meanwhile, they were valuable in the workforce and other places, so that's where they put their focus instead.

**I can see how all this would make the church largely irrelevant to young adults, which is another reason this age group is leaving the church in droves.**

**You said today's young adults are a talented and passionate generation. Coincidentally, there was recently a *Forbes* article that stated this generation will be the most innovative of all and will consequently make more money than generations before. God must have a specific reason for bestowing all this talent (and eventually money!) on the youth of today. What are your thoughts on this?**



I believe the young adults of the twenty-first century have the potential to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth through unique ways. It is certainly the most creative generation as of yet. This is a scary thing to previous generations because there are a lot of unknowns that come along with creativity; however, some of my church's greatest outreach efforts have come through creative ministries. I am not saying we need to get creative with the gospel message. We know the gospel never changes because He never changes. However, the possibilities are endless on how we bring Him to others or how we bring others to Him. The delivery mechanism of the gospel message can come from someone whose ministry is graphic design, poetic writing, photography, videography, music, and the list goes on.

**Great point. God can use any passion, interest, or talent for His glory. He isn't boxed in by only those who can play an instrument or preach. He can use anything. Once Hyphens realize this, and essentially stop discrediting what they uniquely have to offer, I think they'd be much more excited to find their passion and then discover how God wants to use it. This must be why there appears to be so much energy and enthusiasm among your Hyphen group. Certainly, Infinite Church doesn't seem intimidated by the creativity your Hyphens bring to the table. Would you say this is why there is so much momentum?**

Yes! They just love coming to church. They love being a part of the church. They love being *the* church! This generation, probably more than ever before, wants to be a part of something bigger than themselves. We try to provide several outlets for them to use their talents and skill sets to serve and build the church. They soon find out there is nothing bigger or better than being a part of His kingdom. Like every church, we are striving to do this better and better, but we're not perfect. Even with this strong focus, unfortunately some young adults don't stick. That's just the reality of things sometimes.

**You just made two excellent points that I think are vitally connected to each other: (1) your Hyphens love coming to church, and (2) they want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. When the two go hand in hand, how could they not be excited and passionate about going to church and involving themselves in ministry? With that genuine passion for what they do and for whom they're doing it, God's anointing has to be rich and irresistible to those who experience it. Do you have any examples of someone passionately using a unique talent for God?**

There have been so many powerful testimonies over the last couple years that I really don't know where to begin. Many complacent twentysomethings that have come to Infinite have since become a part of the church and found their purpose. (At our church, we call our Hyphen group "20Somethings." Our 20Somethings are comprised of those who are single and married between the ages of 18–29.) One of our 20somethings recently gave his testimony that he grew up in church with his family but upon entering college he felt quite alone. He prayed that God would lead him to a church where he could grow and connect with those his age. Shortly after that prayer one of our 20somethings invited him to Infinite. He has been a stable part of our group, he is one of our photographers, and has since joined the youth team. He helps us capture what happens on Sundays so we can share it on social media as a way of cyber evangelism.

**Purpose—a major question for young adults! They face so many life decisions in such a short period that it can be overwhelming. It's so important to provide an atmosphere that encourages this discovery, but also offers peace and support.**

**So what are your meetings like?**



On Sundays we are all in church together including the youth (the kids have Sunday school of course). We meet throughout the week at LifeGroups. For the most part, our 20Somethings meet in homes, although we have met in coffee shops, college campuses, our church, and other locations. It is very laid with one another and introducing any guests so that by the time we start our Bible study they are somewhat familiar with everyone. Our Bible studies last forty-five minutes to an hour, including discussion. We then spend about ten minutes discussing prayer requests and praying with one another. Most of the time everyone hangs out for a while afterwards. Sometimes we even end up at a restaurant or an ice cream shop.

One thing we do quite differently than most Hyphen groups is we keep our 20Somethings and Youth completely separate. We have found that those between the ages of 12–18 are in quite a different place than those between the ages of 18–29. When they turn eighteen we give them a year to make the transition and then there is no looking back!

**Now, that is interesting! I've noticed this at many churches, including my own. Young adults do not seem to want to leave the youth group. Why do you think this is?**

I'm not 100 percent sure, but I have a couple of thoughts. Sometimes the person moving on will be leaving friends in the youth group, and they don't want to be separated from each other at events and activities. Also, as with the transition from junior high to high school, a kid goes from being the "big dog" in the Youth group to being the newbie in the 20somethings. It's uncomfortable and intimidating sometimes.

But encouraging (or forcing!) the transition is so important. In normal circumstances, a twenty-four-year-old would never hang out with a twelve-year-old. Allowing these two age groups to stay together is unhealthy for everyone involved; the twelve-year-old is lost in the shadow of the older kids, and the older kids aren't really forced to mature.

I'd like to make one more important point. A natural tendency in our churches is to automatically allow the young adult to join the youth team, as if it's a natural, automatic progression, when really we should only have people on youth teams who are ministry minded, who have proven while in the youth group that they have a heart for youth ministry or ministry in general.

**Wow, these are excellent observations.**

**So, for someone hoping to start a Hyphen group at their church, how would you advise them?**

Do not look at your young adult ministry as a maintenance ministry. It is not just a ministry that gives them a place to belong and as a result prevents young adults from leaving the church. Instead, it should be a ministry that cultivates an environment for them to grow spiritually and as a result they'll share with their friends and invite them to be a part. Healthy things germinate. It's also extremely helpful to network with other churches and leaders that share in this journey with you. People are my greatest resources.

**It sounds like part of that spiritual growth you're encouraging is actual involvement and contribution, rather than just showing up, getting a blessing, and leaving. Would you agree?**

Yes. Recently several of our 20Somethings have spoken about ministries they have a burden for. It is certainly my vision to see each of them plugged in to the local church serving in ministries that complement their gifts. The vision for our 20Somethings group mirrors the vision of our church as a whole, the vision being that those far from God can experience the endless possibilities of following Christ.



**But first, your 20Somethings would need to experience those endless possibilities themselves. So their ministry involvement is key for their spiritual growth and discovering all those possibilities.**

**What about numerical growth? What steps did you take to make your Hyphen group grow numerically at Infinite?**

When we first launched Infinite Church, there were just a handful of us. Even before we had church on Sundays we started Bible study groups, which we call LifeGroups. We would contact old friends from school or wherever we could think of because it was lonely just staring at the same three people! We started having our friends bring their friends. I don't know the exact rate of growth for our 20somethings over the last two years, but I know that last month (August 2016) our church averaged 240 in attendance each Sunday, and I would say 30–35 percent of our church falls between the ages of 18–29.

**How do these young adults change the dynamics of Infinite's church service and culture?**

Young adults are one of the many pillars in our church, and as a result they have certainly shaped some of our church's culture. We are actually a mobile church so we have to load in and out every week. Young adults make up a majority of that team. They have lots of energy, and it's contagious to those who arrive for church on Sunday morning. Many of our young adults are involved in the worship band, which leads us in worship each week. A creative team of young adults produces an announcement video each week that we integrate with our weekly worship experience. These are just a couple examples of how young adults have influenced the dynamics of our church.

**Back to your group meetings, what sort of topics do you cover?**

We have covered a whole range of topics and even different styles of Bible studies. We mostly stay within a series. We have done topical studies and character studies. We have done extensive studies on certain books of the Bible. We recently did a study on the life of Paul and then many of our 20Somethings focused on one of his epistles and taught about the historical significance of each church and their location, the relationship Paul had with each church, the topics that Paul discussed with them, and how those teachings relate to us today. We have had studies on relationships and money and all the other fun things!

We incorporate discussion questions in each of our LifeGroups. At times we have discussed things as we go; however, most of the time we save our discussion for the end. Everyone is typically very open to share their thoughts and oftentimes even their struggles.

**So your 20Somethings actually teach class? This goes back to involvement leading to spiritual growth. The pressure of needing to teach their peers a Bible lesson must push them to really study the Bible on their own.**

Exactly.

**Have you had to face any difficult situations or scenarios with your 20Somethings group?**

Our group consists of a range between those who are a little further along with their walk with God and some who are just starting their journey. One time while we were studying the book of Acts, a young man interrupted me, handed me his pocket Bible, and asked me to show him where it says he can't



have sex before marriage because he had a date scheduled the next night. Needless to say everyone was intrigued. I told him that once we finished our Bible study I would sit down with him and give him some scriptural passages to study.

**Whoa! As a leader, and particularly a single female leader, how did you end up handling things when you spoke one-on-one?**

In this situation, I did not meet with him privately one-on-one. Because he asked in a group setting, several others were intrigued by the question and the answer. They weren't actually involved in the conversation between him and me, but they were present.

**What sort of posture or approach is important for a leader of people this age, where you could regularly experience curve balls like this?**

It's important to take situations like this head on, to welcome them. I wasn't bothered by his question at all. I was actually happy he asked, but I wanted to finish my actual lesson rather than go down a rabbit trail.

I showed him where the Bible speaks against adultery and fornication, but being unchurched, he didn't really get it at first. He was sort of splitting hairs with my answer; he really wanted the Bible to explicitly say, "Do not have sex before marriage," so the challenge was making that connection for him.

Sometimes we don't want to confront sensitive topics like this, but our lack of confronting them is actually giving these individuals an answer as well. If the Bible or our own faith isn't robust enough to handle these real-life questions, then what are we offering in the first place? Young adults are looking for something real, so we need to be real as a result.

**What do you think are the needs, issues and/or challenges of Hyphens today, in your experience, both in the church and in the world?**

Young adults face many issues and challenges today, but a major one is that they need someone to believe in them. This current young adult generation has been criticized for how lazy they are, and they're constantly being reminded that they feel entitled to anything and everything. While in many ways this is true, it certainly doesn't have to remain that way. Labeling anyone is dangerous; therefore, I don't think we should be so quick to label them with such negative attributes. Instead, we should find a way to stir up the passion and talent that is in each of them. I promise you it's there. You just simply have to find it or allow God to reveal it.

**Certainly we've seen once young adults are energized by passion and purpose, they are anything but lazy! They have endless energy and enthusiasm and creativity for the things they love. Energy is a precious natural resource for any church. Like you said, it's all about tapping into that.**

**Any powerful testimonies to share?**

When we started our campus ministry at OSU, a guy started coming and remained part of the campus ministry until he graduated. We lost track of him shortly after that. A couple months after we launched the church, we were finishing our morning huddle and prayer before church started. I walked to the back and there was a guy sitting in the back row waiting for church to start. I introduced myself and he gave me a weird look and told me his name. It was the guy from our campus ministry! After college, he



stopped attending church and certainly was not on the right path. A family friend told him about Infinite Church, and he decided to go check it out. He had no clue that he would see some old friends! He is still a part of Infinite today. Not only is that a testimony that God can restore people but also that campus ministry works!

### **What do you guys do for fun?**

We schedule one official event for each quarter. These things have ranged from trips to NYC and Chicago, a day trip to Cuyahoga Valley National Park, ski trips, and more. Also, coffee is kind of a big deal where we're from, so last winter we did a coffee crawl in downtown Columbus. We visited four coffee shops within a three-hour period. It was awesome! With all that being said, most of the stuff we do for fun is very informal. We are all connected on a GroupMe so someone will just casually invite people over to their apartment (we aren't fancy enough to own houses yet!) to play games or whatever. We have a lot of outdoorsy people so this summer there has been at least one impromptu hiking trip each week. Most everyone in our group lives alone or with a roommate so they are constantly looking for opportunities to do life with one another.

**Using GroupMe or something similar is an excellent idea! Feeling a part of a community is key for any age group, but I think for young adults with jobs and school and responsibilities, it is easy to get sucked into life's demands and all of a sudden look around and wonder where their friends are. They feel they are bearing the heavy pressures of this life all by themselves. An invitation from friends on GroupMe can make all the difference in bearing those burdens, to “do life with one another” as you said.**

Definitely. While this in itself was not a surprise to me, I am constantly reminded of how many broken people there are in our world and in our communities. Many in our group are currently overcoming significant battles, whether it's pornography, drugs, gaming, thoughts of suicide, job loss, poor stewardship of time and/or money, or relational issues. I know now more than ever that we must have God in our lives and others to help encourage us along the way.

**Absolutely.**

**To close out this interview, I want to ask a few questions about your approach to leadership. How do you prepare yourself personally and spiritually to lead this group?**

I think it is a natural tendency for leaders to empty themselves while helping others without much of a focus on their personal and spiritual growth. I've heard it said multiple times that you cannot take someone where you yourself have not gone. Just last month our church had a “Healing & Restoration” weekend. I planned to attend, hoping to learn something I could use to help others through their healing and restoration. But five minutes after the start of the first session, I knew God was going to make me go through each step personally and not just take notes for some future purpose. It's incredibly important to have our personal time with God outside of the time we spend preparing for lessons and things.

**So the teacher becomes the student again. God so often puts the leader through the trial or challenge before the group she is leading, to sort of pave the way for everyone else. What are the current challenges you are facing as a leader and a Hyphen group as a whole?**

My biggest personal challenges are probably achieving balance, being honest with myself about my limitations, and being able to say no when it is absolutely necessary. Our challenge as a group is that we've hit the size where it's a possibility that someone who is not actively pursuing relationships with one another could slip by without anyone realizing it. This is why we are trying to put together a team



that can help keep track of those situations and help get them involved within the church and with our group.

**What do you look for in team members?**

I look for individuals who have been extremely involved within our group, have caught on, and have been actively involved in carrying out the vision of our church and what that vision means for our 20somethings. Each member of the team has a specific role/focus.

**Can you elaborate on the different roles and focuses you're thinking about? This might be helpful to other Hyphen leaders.**

One team focuses on the admin side of things—simple follow-up, recognizing when someone hasn't made it to church, noticing those who aren't yet involved in a LifeGroup, and informing them what the 20Somethings group is all about.

Because I'm a single person, I've asked a married couple to be involved in leadership to bring that aspect to things. This couple is in their twenties, and they've been involved with the 20Somethings so respect and relationships are already there.

There's a spot for teaching, planning events, social media, and a techy role that creates surveys, for example, so we know what topics the group wants us to cover. Things like that.

**How do you balance life's responsibilities (work, family) with your church responsibilities?**

This is currently my weakness. I own a small business so I work for myself, which makes this all quite complicated sometimes. I do my best at trying to prioritize all these areas, although there is still room for improvement. I am not sure this is the correct approach, but I try to not allow each of these areas to merge together. When I am working I am focused on work, and when I am with family I am focused on family. Yet I realize there are situations where there is an exception.

**I think this is a challenge for just about anybody! Compartmentalizing is a good idea.**

**We'll close with a fun question: name two goals on your bucket list.**

I actually have a notebook full of goals and dreams. The hardest part is simply choosing two! I'll go with (1) someday I want to have a personal library with a sliding ladder, something that looks like it came out of *Beauty and the Beast*; (2) I hope to visit each of the seven continents, although I'd survive if I never made it to Antarctica.

**Well, thank you for chatting with me today and sharing your insights. I think other Hyphen leaders will be encouraged and inspired by your example.**