REMEMBER

- Being able to chose to invest in something out of their own free will rather than because their parents' signed them up can be a healthy way of exploring who they are as an individual apart from their family.

- Geek culture offers a path to belongingness that is more accessible for some teens because it is based on using one's devotion to a hobby or interest rather than popularity as social capital.

- Young people who are seeking admiration and success that they may not be finding in their everyday lives can gain both through their exhaustive knowledge of a one subject in geek culture. In this world credentials such as education or life skills are not required. This can provide some teens with a "short cut" to the recognition they desire but doesn't allow for the development of social skills they need.

- What a teen is interested in is really important to them. Dismissing its value just because you don't understand it is diminishing its value. These teens have found a place where they belong just because they showed up. Does what you are inviting them toward freely offer that to them as well?

RECOGNIZE

- Geeks and gamers love and know every detail about their favourite form of entertainment such as table top games, video games, comics, anime or fantasy movies. Marvel, Star Wars, D&D or Minecraft are a few examples of the worlds where geeks and gamers love to reside.

- Most geeks and gamers share their devotion through fandom (ie.fanatic + kingdom), where bonds are formed with others around a shared niche interest. Much of this happens online. Membership provides a huge sense of belonging and significance for youth that may not be finding it elsewhere.

- Niche interests provide an identity to embrace when you're not sure who you really are. More than half of gamers feel their online identity better expresses who they are than their real life does.

- 77% of teens use online games to relieve stress and take a break from the real world. Many young people spend more time online with friends than they do in real life.

- Most gamers and geeks have a sense of feeling irrelevant, unwelcome, or ostracized by the church. Their world and the church's world feel like two separate planets.

- Research has found that deep-rooted geeks and gamers carry a mixed bag of characteristics all at once such as assertive overconfidence, depression, and feelings of well being. These teens are intelligent, opinionated, creative and focused yet may not fully know how to bring these gifts to the real world.

RESPOND

- **Be genuinely curious.** Ask questions to discover what's good about this world they've immersed themselves in - not what's wrong with it. Ask what they enjoy most about their particular interest and about the community it opens up for them.

- **Cross the bridge.** Niche interests provide a natural place to meet and know teens. Ask if you can play, watch or be part of it with them. Recognizing them as the expert who is teaching you creates a place for their self-esteem to grow and relational power to be shared.

- **Expand their possibilities.** These young people aren't satisfied with being passive receivers - they want to be active participants in making something happen. They are practicing creativity, problem solving and decision making in their gaming world; they are practicing loyalty, imagination, and collaboration in their geek world. Introduce them to people and places that need these skills and provide support as they learn to transfer their skills and gifts to real world issues.

- **Initiate face to face talk times.** Create opportunities for face to face conversations. Tell them you have a ton of questions you'd love to ask to get to know them better. Let them see the questions either on paper or your phone to give them a sense of where the conversation is going. This can help them "switch gears" away from their primary topic. These conversations are an invitation to stretch their social interaction skills, but also a window into who they are beyond their fan interest.

- **Build a bigger identity.** Watch for hints of the image of God stamped on them - even as you observe them in their geek and gamer world - and tell them what you see. Talk about the identity they are forming or choosing in their fan community or game. How does that translates into the rest of their lives? Are they the person they portray or is there more?

RESOURCES

www.lovethynerd.com - This website exists to be the love of Jesus to nerds and nerd culture. A great place to gain understanding of this culture.

www.godsquadchurch.com - A church that meets gamers where they are - online.