

Should Churches Offer Teens Career Counseling?

What do today's teens aspire to become after graduation, and how does the input from pastors and church leaders influence these aspirations? A study released from the Barna Group reveals that, while teens may look to the church for career advice, there is a disconnect between where teens' future professional interests lie and the encouragement and instruction they receive in their church or faith community.

Only 38 percent of youth pastors and 36 percent of senior pastors say they frequently discuss college plans with their students, and this counsel is more likely to happen when "there is a clear strategy for student ministry in the church, and in those churches that work effectively with teen leaders," the study noted.

While helping students deal with future life decisions may not seem like an urgent priority in the face of the pressing social, emotional and spiritual pressures that teens face, research suggests that the church is not preparing students for the moral and intellectual challenges that come with higher education.

This need comes into focus as the Barna study revealed that "more than half of the students express interest in some type of scientific or applied science career" and another 20 percent planned to enter creative vocations, such as art and music. In stark contrast to these numbers, only 1 percent of youth workers say they addressed issues related to science in the last year, and a similarly small percentage had taught about creativity or the arts.

"Many young people do not seem to understand how a rich, historic understanding of the Christian faith and the gospel

ought to inform their career aspirations,” Barna Group President David Kinnaman noted. “And faith leaders are not as intentional as they could be with instruction and coaching on these types of decisions.

Understanding how teenagers hope to spend their professional lives can help faith communities and institutions better support these students as they discern God’s calling in their lives.”