

Summer VBS to Blame for Millennials Fleeing the Church, Pastor Says

Countless studies report Millennials are not in the pews, and one campus pastor thinks he knows why: Vacation Bible School.

“Rarely does a biblical image so singularly justify a church practice as the seed imagery does for VBS, because as an outreach strategy, VBS is usually a flop, but still the chorus echoes across the country, ‘At least we planted the seed,’” Peter M. Burfeind writes for *The Federalist*. Burfeind also serves as a campus pastor at the University of Toledo.

“That may be true, but as long as we’re using biblical images, let’s remember the devil’s seeds also—the weeds. In the case of VBS, we have to ask: Is VBS part of the ecclesiastical cocktail leading to the decline of Christianity in America? More specifically, did it help drive Millennials, the demographic leading that decline, from the church?”

Each summer, churches across the United States gear up for weeklong programs that teach the gospel in a fun, memorable way. Attendees learn new songs, Bible verses, crafts and how to tell their friends about Jesus.

Herein lies the problem, Burfeind writes. VBS teaches children that church should be entertainment, and if they get bored, they move on to the next thing—VBS, church, programs and eventually—or eventually just leave it all together.

With articles online that place music, snacks, recreation time and crafts above time spent in the Bible, Burfeind’s analysis sounds solid.

He writes:

Is it any wonder after 30 years of a Christian populace bopping around from church to church seeking the highest entertainment value, the kids grew up and decided to seek their sense of the holy and eternal in religious alternatives like progressivism, a more serious world religion, or even radical Islamism? Or does it surprise us that after growing up in a faith life backdropped with cartoon caricatures, the apparent substantiality of science was enough to dismantle such childish thoughts?

Folks, we've raised our children to leave the church. The loss of Millennials has no one to blame but the parents and church leaders of the past 40 years. Forty years of a strategy of marketing the faith through the medium of pop culture has backfired, as every study of Christianity in America has revealed the past ten years.

But Burfiend isn't suggesting doing away with the church summer classic. Rather, he advises congregations write their own curriculum under pastoral guidance rather than literally buying into the theme of the year.

VBS remains one of the few church events devoted entirely to encouraging children to tell everyone they know about the love of God. We definitely need more of that. {eoa}