

Are Churches Ignoring Teen Needs?

In the church of the future, the only members will be elder women and children.

That is the startling claim made by bestselling author Jawanza Kunjufu in his new book, *The Role of Teens in Your Church*.

According to Kunjufu's research, 40 percent of eighth grade students leave the church just as they are becoming teenagers. What's more, 70 percent of female teens and 90 percent of male teens leave the church upon their high school graduation.

With teens leaving in such high numbers, Kunjufu says the church is not on a sustainable path of growth. He asks, "If children and teens really are our future, then how will the church survive such a massive exodus of youth?"

Why are teens leaving? "Age segregation in the church is the last bastion of elder power," says Kunjufu.

Senior church leaders say that youth are the future, but youth ministry is usually the least funded in the church, he says, so teens do not feel respected, valued, or welcomed by the church at large.

What can the church do? Youth ministry is used as an agent of age segregation, but teens and the church would be better served if youth ministry was transformed into an agent of transition, helping to prepare and train youth from 12 years of age—the age Jesus began teaching in the temple—to worship and serve in the adult congregation, Kunjufu says.

As Kunjufu sees it, churches must create a nurturing, godly climate in which teens can mature to their full potential. To stem the tide of teens leaving the church, *The Role of Teens*

in Your Church argues that teens and adults should worship and serve together.