

A Church's Guide to Recruiting Young Adults

Christian organizations and church leaders have recognized that for more than a decade, many young adults have left established churches. During the time of this pandemic, many churches have found the decline of membership and ministerial engagement among young adults to be more prevalent.

What can be done to put the gospel in front of more young people seeking for answers?

Is the Church Real or Relevant?

Young adults are looking for authenticity not relevancy. *Leadership Journal* Editor Drew Dyck says,

“Millennials have a dim view of church. They are highly skeptical of religion. Yet they are still thirsty for transcendence. But when we portray God as a cosmic buddy, we lose them (they have enough friends). When we tell them that God will give them a better marriage and family, it’s white noise (they’re delaying marriage and kids or forgoing them altogether). When we tell them they’re special, we’re merely echoing what educators, coaches and parents have told them their whole lives. But when we present a ravishing vision of a loving and holy God, it just might get their attention and capture their hearts as well” (Dyck, 2014).

Taylor Snodgrass, an active member of “Church of the 20-somethings,” provides one of the best ways to reach Millennials and other young adults. He advises leaders to tell them the whole story; do not sugarcoat the truth. My experience as a Sunday school teacher to teens helped me to realize that young adults can easily spot a church’s attempt to sell them a certain version of God. Young adults receive this as the speaker lying to them.

Church leaders leave out large portions of the Bible when speaking to young adults from a sense of protecting them and to avoid certain uncomfortable topics. Other church leaders leave out large portions of the Holy Scriptures from their messages with a sense of condescension and defeat. They believe that young adults would not understand some of the more “advanced” concepts of Christianity. I see those motives as a disservice to young adult ministry.

I recommend that church leaders communicate with young adults as if they were adults. It never helps to put a metaphorical pacifier in their mouths by saying things such as, “They are too young and immature for this topic. They don’t have such problems. Things may get out of hand if we talk about something like that,” and more. However, I have found that by tiptoeing around topics such as self-harm, suicide, the transgender movement, the “Me Too” movement, LGBTQ+ associations and more, a church leader’s message will come off as thin and too safe to be spiritually satiating.

Jeff Frazier, the co-pastor of First Baptist Church East in Geneva, Illinois, introduces the frequency of youth-specific church services.

He explains, “We’ll meet twice a month, and it’ll have tables for people to share Communion. It’ll feature one person on a piano or guitar. It won’t be driven by the pipe organ or by one worship leader or praise team, but by the content” (Frazier, 2014). Would a quieter one-on-one service appeal to teens and young adults?

I have found that one-on-one or small group church services that are held away from older congregants foster a sense of focus for young adults. This separation encourages them to be themselves. Church leaders are less effective when teaching a young adult who is maintaining a facade or acting as they sit with their older and more conservative counterparts. Age separation creates intimacy and honesty in a church setting.

Furthermore, gender separation enhances the intimacy and honesty for spirit led conversation.

This intimate setting is where the power of the testimony can be used to draw in those who lacked a relationship with Christ Jesus and the Christian community. Many young adults are in a quiet crisis. Hearing the testimonies of others will encourage them. It will help them see that there is a way out of hardships and strongholds as they accept the way that leads to God. Seeing themselves in another person's deliverance story is a powerful experience. It provides instant relevance to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Conversations about the testimony will help them think about what they just heard and what they have personally experienced for greater spiritual understanding.

In summary, this article was delivered in three layers.

Layer one: Church leaders must be contributors to conversations regarding the topics that are top of mind to young adults today.

Layer two: Church leaders must do this using personal experience and unadulterated scripture to empathize with them and justify what they are saying respectively.

Layer three: Church leaders are advised to hold services separate from older and more conservative congregants. In these separated services, church leaders must be open to holding evolving conversations with a panel of young adults who are tasked with asking questions about difficult topics to create real and relevant spiritual understanding. The church can grow as its earthly leaders pursue the lost among the hard knocks and roar of the social marketplace. {eo}

This article was excerpted from A Millennial in Church: A Church's Guide to Recruiting Young Adults Part 1–Part 4 by Deliza Elizee.

Deliza Elizee, a graduate of Oral Roberts University, is a

woman who enjoys living her calling to teach young people about the Bible. You are welcome to visit and follow her Instagram account (@SisterElizee) to expand your exposure to original Christian content.