

Leading Ideas

| Best Practices for Reaching Young Adults

By Perry Chang On May 7, 2014

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The emerging consensus of research regarding young adults shows a growing percentage of this age group is not connected with any religion, although many younger Americans express an interest in spirituality. This reality raises concerns about young adult participation in religious communities.

How are faith communities with a significant proportion of young adults distinctive? The *Faith Communities Today* research project has been studying congregations of all faiths across America that are doing an exceptional job of engaging young adults. A congregation is considered to have significant young adult participation if 21 percent or more of its participants are 18 to 34 years of age. Across all faiths, a total of only 16 percent of all congregations have such young adult involvement.

The findings identify some best practices for congregations that wish to attract and engage young adults. These can be summarized in a dozen "do's" and four "don'ts."

What congregations should do:

1. Offer a high-quality worship experience that is contemporary in style or refashion traditional worship in new ways.
2. Start a new congregation or young-adult-only worship group within an existing congregation, or move an existing congregation to a new location.
3. Prioritize metropolitan areas and communities near university campuses.
4. Allow people to bring coffee to worship.
5. Provide food.
6. Be intentional about reaching out to young adults.
7. Form friendships with young adults.
8. Involve young adults in leadership.
9. Sponsor activities that mix socializing with theological reflection.
10. Apply theological principles to everyday-life issues that young adults face.
11. Figure out how to connect with the different types of young adults — whether they are still in school or starting careers, single or married, with or without children. These groups cannot just be lumped together without some facilitating rationale.
12. Figure out how to connect with young adults who are aging out of the category in their mid- to late-30s.

Congregations should NOT do the following:

1. Be theologically doctrinaire.
2. Insist that people wear dresses or suits and ties to worship.
3. Expect growth in the number of members or total giving.
4. Expect young adults to sign up for long-term committee work.

This latest paper and the entire set of papers on this research project are available online at www.faithcommunitiestoday.org, the website for the *Faith Communities Today* (FACT) research enterprise. A PDF of this specific report can be found at [Summary-of-Best-Young-Adult-Practices-for-Churches.pdf](#).

Related Resources:

- [Lessons on Engaging Young Adults Effectively](#) by Asa J. Lee
- [Millennials, Social Media, and the Church](#) by Martin Davis

About Author

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