

Leading Ideas to Reach Young Adults

Introduction by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

Table of Contents

Introduction by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.	4
1. Young Adults and the Future of the Church by Ann A. Michel	5
2. A Generation of Tinkerers	7
by Erika Gara	
3. Why We are Losing Ground with Young Adults	8
by Marty J. Cauley	
4. A Single Voice	10
by Kevin Brown	
5. Are Young Singles Invisible in Church?	11
by James Lemler	
6. Learning to See and Listen to Younger Adults	12
by Susan Cox	
7. Serving Our Young Adults	13
by David E. Gray	
8. Hope for a New Generation	15
by Ann A. Michel	
9. Think Bigger: The Challenge of Reaching Millennials	16
by David McAllister-Wilson	
10. Millennials Seek Larger Framework to Understand God	18
by Chris Folmsbee	
11. Young Adults Seek Opportunities to Lead	20
by F. Douglas Powe, Jr., and Jasmine Smothers	
12. Reaching the Millennial Generation	21
by Asa J. Lee	
13. Lessons on Engaging Young Adults Effectively	23
by Asa J. Lee	
14. Best Practices for Reaching Young Adults	25
from <i>Faith Communities Today</i>	
15. Keeping Campus Ministry Graduates Connected to Church	27
by Jan Rivero	
16. 17 Ways to Welcome College Students	29
by Laurie Day and Janet Cromwell	
17. From Where Did All These Young Adults Come?	30
by Loren Bergstedt	

18. Tips for Welcoming Young People 32
from the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

19. Ministering to the Missing Generation 33
by Carol Howard Merritt

20. Why I Believe in the Next Generation 34
by Marty J. Cauley

Discussion Questions 36

About the Authors 37

Notes and Permissions 38

Other Books 40

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Introduction

The future of every denomination and virtually every congregation in the United States depends on their ability to reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people. This collection of articles seeks to address one of these challenges — reaching younger people. This one challenge, however, is deeply intertwined with the other two. Without reaching out to younger people, the church cannot grow in sustainable ways. And, because the young adult population of the country is far more diverse than the typical older makeup of churches, the church cannot become substantially more diverse without reaching younger generations.

The story of the church is that of one generation making possible the faith of another. Churches are built by one generation and lived out by another. Programs made possible by one generation benefit those of another generation. So it is that active church members today try to understand the changes needed in order to reach emerging generations for Christ. We know that the desire to reach young adults alone is not enough. There must be a willingness to listen to those you would reach and respond in ways that make faith vital for new generations.

The task is not easy. Many congregations are no longer multigenerational. At the same time, many young people have substantive questions and reservations about the church and what it represents to them. But the church does not give up on its young because of difficulties any more than parents give up on their children without making heroic efforts on their behalf.

While the goal of reaching young adults is essential, the ultimate goal is a church formed not around the preferences of those already there but around the Gospel presented in ways that diverse generations and other diverse constituencies can experience God's love through new life in Christ. No persons are more valuable in the eyes of God because of age or other categories, but God calls us to pay attention to those in our midst who are not in our churches. If we can stay attuned to "who's missing" when we gather, then we will have taken a giant step toward viewing our communities as God sees them.

These articles come from issues of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership's free online newsletter, *Leading Ideas*. Each week insightful and practical ideas are shared to help congregational leaders guide their churches toward greater service, vitality, and growth. Over the years, many readers have suggested that we pull together articles grouped by themes so others can have in one place, at a modest cost, ideas on a topic for which they seek help.

As you read these articles, think about who else should read them. Then begin conversations among those who care deeply about younger generations.

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1. Young Adults and the Future of the Church

by Ann A. Michel

How are twenty- and thirty-somethings shaping the future of American religion? Robert Wuthnow, a noted sociologist of religion, considers this question in *After the Baby Boomers*. Unfortunately, much of his data suggest the future of the church is being shaped more by the absence of younger adults than by their presence. Not only are young adults less likely to be involved in church today than a generation ago, but those that are active are an unrepresentative cross-section of their generation. With few exceptions, the church has failed to respond to the changing life patterns and social trends that characterize contemporary young adulthood. Unless religious leaders take younger adults more seriously, says Wuthnow, the future of American religion is in doubt.

While those in their forties used to be considered comfortably middle-aged, Wuthnow contends that young adulthood today extends to age 45. This is due, in part, to increases in life expectancy that make 49 the midpoint of adult life. But perhaps more significantly, the maturational tasks of leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child are taking longer than in the past. In 1960, 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men had completed these transitions by age 30. In 2000, only 46 percent of women and 31 percent of men had.

Church participation declining. Despite the common perception that America is graying, young adults age 20-44 still make up 50.7 percent of the population — roughly the same percentage as 30 years ago. But they are a smaller percentage of the constituency of most major faith traditions. Since the early 1970s, the percentage of young adults that say they attend religious services weekly has fallen from 19 percent to 14 percent; and the percentage that never attend has increased from 14 percent to 20 percent. Mainline Protestants have been hit hardest.

The proportion of young adults 21-45 among mainline church adherents has declined by five percentage points since the early 1970s, and the proportion in their twenties has fallen by seven points. But contrary to the popular impression, the proportion of young adults in evangelical and Black Protestant churches has fallen as well. It seems that the demographic trends that have caused problems for the mainline are now more prevalent across the board.

Delayed marriage. The most pronounced social trend defining the life patterns of this generation is delayed marriage. Over the past several decades, it has become the norm for people in their twenties to remain unmarried. In 1970, 62 percent of people in their twenties were married; whereas now only 28 percent are married. Among those in their thirties, the percentage married fell from 83 percent to 52 percent. And among those in their early forties, it fell from 84 percent to 55 percent.

“Being married or unmarried,” says Wuthnow “has a stronger effect on church attendance than anything else.” Almost all the decline in religious attendance among 21-45 year-olds had taken place among unmarried younger adults. Married couples attend religious services at the same rate as a generation ago — but there are significantly fewer of them. Increasingly,

churches are attracting an unrepresentative cross-section of young adults — those that are married with children.

What attracts young adults to church? “Many congregations have gotten spoiled,” says Wuthnow, “thinking they can serve young adults by sponsoring a lively high school group and then catering to young married couples with children.” Unfortunately, this approach leaves out three-quarters of today’s young adults. His research identified several characteristics of youthful congregations (those where more than 35 percent of participants are under age 35).

- Newer congregations seem to have an advantage in attracting young adults. Thirty percent of congregations successful at attracting young people had been founded since 1970, compared with only 16 percent of less youthful congregations.
- Youthful congregations are more likely than the average church to be large. Twenty-three percent have more than 1,000 regular adult participants, compared with 18 percent of less youthful congregations.
- Youthful congregations tend to be located in metropolitan areas where many young adults live.
- Youthful congregations are more racially and ethnically mixed.

Finding ways to connect with the vast numbers of unchurched young adults is more than a matter of institutional survival. It is an important way the church can care for this new generation as they face important life decisions, such as selecting a mate and choosing a career. For previous generations, these decisions were likely to come at an earlier age, when young persons were closer to their families of origin or still had the guidance of schools, youth programs, universities, or other types of social and institutional support. Now, important life decisions tend to be made after young adults have aged out of these structures. Congregations *could* be a valuable source of support, but not unless they look at ministry with young adults more creatively.

2. A Generation of Tinkerers

by Erika Gara

Robert Wuthnow's book *After the Baby Boomers* is about younger adults — a group he defines as persons from 18-45 years of age. Wuthnow examines how the characteristics of this generation affect their practice of religion and spirituality. He introduces a variety of topics that seem to make a difference to younger adults and how they live their lives and see the world. The one that caught my attention is something he calls “tinkering.”

Wuthnow describes this younger generation as a group of tinkerers. He says “a tinkerer puts together life from whatever skills, ideas, and resources are readily at hand. In a culture like ours, where higher education and professional training are valued, tinkering may have negative connotations. But it should not. Tinkerers are the most resourceful people in any era. If specialized skills are required, they have them. When they need help from experts, they seek it. But they do not rely on only one way of doing things. Their approach to life is practical. They get things done, and usually this happens by improvising, by piecing together an idea from here, a skill from there, and a contact from somewhere else.”

Tinkerers are able to live without having all the answers. They can deal with uncertainty and rely on resources outside themselves to solve problems. But tinkerers also are not going to make a sure and fast decision about things. They are going to talk about it, explore other options, see if they can pull a “MacGiver” kind of move, making something useful out of a piece of gum and a fast-food receipt.

Spiritually, then, these tinkerers are a generation of seekers — looking to have conversation with others, creating new kinds of social networks, and being okay with not having everything right. Tinkerers need spiritual places to be open and welcoming to a new and different way of approaching faith — one that takes time and care. They will not be attracted to church communities where connection and relationship are not central, where there is too much structure and not enough room for creativity and expression.

What's clear to me is that the kind of church to which a tinkerer would be attracted is a lot like the vision Jesus had for the kingdom of God!

3. Why We are Losing Ground with Young Adults

by Marty J. Cauley

After hundreds of conversations with young adults, I have identified some common strands running through their decisions to leave the church, or at least our version of the church.

One reason is the perception that worship is passionless. This is not because young adults do not care for traditional worship or liturgy. There is actually resurgence in older forms of liturgy among young adults, but the churches they flock to for this type of experience do it very well and are clear about why they do it. Young adults just will not tolerate watered down, unexplained ritual or poor quality, half-hearted worship. This generation desires to experience God in wholly different ways than did their parents — with their hearts as well as their heads.

Young adults desire clarity in a world filled with uncertainty. The lack of a clear, unified vision for our churches is a stumbling block. We must find a way to clarify our vision and renew our commitment to making disciples and changing our world. The abandonment of our heritage's commitment to balancing social justice with evangelism leaves us without the needed bifocal emphasis that would be most appealing to young adults.

Since their birth, this generation has been told they can change the world, and they intend to do it. But many are disgusted by what they see as the incongruity of spoken values and lived values in the church and the culture. To see a Greenpeace bumper sticker on a Suburban really bothers this generation of revolutionaries. They are also perturbed by constant political in-fighting within the denomination. The church's tendency to make mountains out of mole-hills seems ridiculous to this highly practical and pragmatic generation.

Another thing that drives young adults from our doors is criticism of things of little consequence. Churches that balk at having a young person with blue hair or a pierced nose as part of their congregation are essentially assuring their absence. This generation is striving desperately to identify who they are and where they fit into community. If that accepting, loving community is not found in the local church, they will find it elsewhere. Does it really matter how many piercings or tattoos they have?

Finally, the church's token attempts to reach young adults are actually alienating rather than attracting them. They see it as hypocritical when the church states how important their presence is but develops program *for* them but not *with* them such as "90's style" praise services. This is a generation of "doers" and not "watchers." They do not want to send money to missions as much as they want to be part of a missionary endeavor. They desire to put their hands where their hearts are. They also perceive the incongruity in rhetoric about wanting young adults in our churches at the same time that funding is cut for ministries with college students.

There is, however, hope. Young adult Christians can flourish in places where the focus on spiritual formation is sharp; where they can worship with complete abandon in services filled with symbolism and depth; where this generation of social media users can tell their own

stories of how God intersects their lives and be listened to; where they are welcomed into positions of influence and responsibility and empowered to live and lead boldly into the future; where the vision is clear; and where local mission and a global vision seek to change the world.

There are several important steps the church can take to reestablish connection with the next generation of leaders:

Validate youth and young adult ministry as a primary calling. Those on the front lines of young adult ministry — youth workers, campus ministers, and camping directors — have been made to feel that their ministry is not as important as that of other ministries. They often feel little connection and support from those who stand to benefit or suffer greatly from the fruitfulness of their endeavors in the years to come.

Bridge the gap between church youth groups and college ministry. Pastors need to make contact with campus ministers at colleges where they are sending their youth. And these interactions must be substantive — not just completing a form. Then, the campus minister needs to take pastoral responsibility for these new members of their “flock.” The lines of communication between the local church and their college students must reinforce the importance of spiritual connectivity.

Reinvest in ministries with college students. This may mean capital improvements to outdated facilities that have deferred maintenance due to fund shortfalls. Salaries for campus ministry must be comparable enough to be attractive to the best and brightest.

Plant emerging churches to reach young adults. New churches are more successful than established churches in reaching young adults. These churches may require greater investment than some church plants, but the returns can be tremendous in lives changed.

4. A Single Voice

by Kevin Brown

I had been attending a new church for a little over two months, when something changed. I was active in this church, attending Sunday school and participating in the hand bell choir, among other things. During that time a few people made me feel very welcome, especially those people who sat around me or who were in my Sunday school class. Then, one Sunday, I was welcomed with a fervor I had not seen before. I was offered a name tag, asked to sign the guest registry, and asked my name more often and with more enthusiasm than had previously been the case.

You might be wondering what changed that week, but I don't have to wonder. It's not that people began to see that I might have some gifts to offer the church. No one seemed interested in the fact that I had taught Sunday school at my previous churches, or that I had served as deacon at those churches, or that I preached at those churches, filling in for the ministers when needed. No one seemed interested that I am a well-educated, 30-something male, despite the fact that churches say they clamor for this demographic group. Most churches, you see, don't really seek out people in that demographic group — unless they're married, that is.

And that should explain what happened that Sunday. The woman I was dating, who happened to live in a different state, was visiting me. Thus, I was no longer all of those things I mentioned above; I was a part of a couple, and now the church actively sought me out and almost begged me to return.

5. Are Young Singles Invisible in Church?

by James Lemler

St. Bartholomew's is a friendly congregation. It has always perceived and represented itself as a warm and caring community and is the home to some 300 worshipers each Sunday. There is pride in a full range of programs and occasions offered for the congregation and its members.

One Sunday, four people in their twenties were noticed by some long-time members at the end of the service. A conversation began. A church member welcomed them to their first St. Bart's worship. "Actually, this isn't our first visit here," offered one of the visitors in response. "Each of us has been here as individuals, but no one seemed to notice. It's kind of a scary place to visit, so we thought that we would come together."

The last term the people of St. Bartholomew's ever thought applied to their congregation was "scary," but the parish members listened to what these young people had to say. They had not felt welcomed by the music or the worship, and not a single person had talked to them at the coffee hour. Each of these young people wondered if they should return, but they decided to come back together for a last attempt.

The two St. Bart's members talked with others in the congregation and related the story of these young visitors. They realized that very little in their congregation was welcoming to young, single people — and they decided to do something about it. The four young people were contacted and invited to return. People listened to their stories, and the parish decided to learn more so that they might be truly hospitable to the stranger. They began to try different forms of music and worship that reflected the interests of younger generations; they did some advertising in the community's young adult newspaper, and investigated opportunities for specific young adult ministry.

Hospitality in a congregation is the practice of openness, invitation, and welcome that reflects the hospitality of God. This practice is rooted in God's hospitality and welcome to us. A hospitable climate is essential to mission and the invitation of people into the community of faith.

6. Learning to See and Listen to Younger Adults

by Susan Cox

When I was a United Methodist district superintendent, I began a younger adult initiative. Meeting with each of the congregations in my district, I tried to raise their consciousness about the young persons in their communities. I talked about God leading us out into the community and opening our eyes to the younger adults who are already there. Whether a church is in the country or the city, there are younger adults around who have not yet heard the Good News in an engaging way.

I challenged individual church members to find a younger adult between eighteen and thirty who does not go to their church and ask them three things:

- What is your favorite TV show and why? If the younger person names a program the church members have never seen, I asked them to make a commitment to watch it!
- What did you do last Friday night?
- Are you currently attending a church? This question needs to be asked in as non-judgmental a manner as possible. If the young adult's response is "yes," the church member should ask everything possible about that church, because lessons can be learned for their own church. If the answer is "no," the follow up questions are, "Have you ever?" and "Why are you not attending now?"

Some surprising answers came back, especially to the third question. I expected answers like "I have to work," or "I'm too tired," or "I only see my kids on the weekends." But one of the first responses I heard about was from a twenty-year-old woman who had attended Sunday School and worship through her Junior High years. She stopped attending after she invited a high-school friend, who happened to be on public assistance, to attend her church. That was the Sunday the pastor chose to use an anti-welfare illustration in the sermon. The young woman never went back.

My goal in this process was simple — to have church members begin to see the younger adults around them, to listen to them, and to begin to understand their world.

7. Serving Our Young Adults

by David E. Gray

Many churches are interested in developing programs for young adults to help their congregations grow. However, there is another equally compelling reason for churches to focus on young adults — the critical needs of the early young adult population. In recent years, our society has appropriately focused on the needs of teenagers. But current trends suggest that some of the same problems we used to worry about for teenagers are now in crisis mode for young adults.

Social researchers have recently pointed out that teens are getting into less “trouble” than they used to. According to the Foundation for Child Development’s national Child Well-Being Index (CWI), violent crime involvement, teen pregnancy, and cigarette, alcohol and drug use among teenagers have fallen over the past generation. As a result, the CWI’s “safety and behavioral” indicator was 36 percent higher for teenagers in 2005 than in 1975.

Dr. Ken Land of Duke University says that part of this improvement can be explained by increased protectiveness by parents who shield their children from risks. Many have kept their children away from the dangers of unsupervised activity through schedules and indoor programming. According to Dr. Land, this tendency has contributed to the epidemic of overweight children, but has kept them out of some trouble. However, we must question how we protect and prepare young adults to deal with dangers they will face when parents and home churches are no longer there to help on a daily basis.

While teen pregnancy rates have fallen by 31 percent since 1991, there is a silent epidemic of unwanted pregnancies among Americans aged 20-24. According to Kelleen Kaye of the New America Foundation, “Childbearing by singles has grown by over one-quarter since 1990, and young adults account for roughly 60 percent of this increase. Births to young, single adults surpass even the ‘epidemic’ levels of teen childbearing, with 550,000 births annually.” And while drug and alcohol use among teens overall has declined, binge drinking among college students puts vulnerable young adults at risk, and many young adults go through college unprepared for the behavioral challenges and pressures placed on them.

Churches must continue to invest in the well being of our children, including teenagers. Yet young adults must not be forgotten. There are concrete steps that churches can take to make a difference for this age group.

Seeing young adult ministry as a mission area. Too often young adult ministry is seen only as a field of evangelism. Every mainline Protestant church I know is asking, “How can we attract more young people?” to help address declining membership. This focus misses what research is revealing — that young adult ministry is a mission field. Churches that look to support and meet the needs of young adults will be providing an important social function — and are more likely to bolster attendance.

Staying connected with young adults. Many early young adults do not easily find a church home in college, graduate school, or during their early transient years. Churches should

follow up with their college-age students when they leave for school. One Presbyterian church in Ohio sends food and letters to its college students to let them know they are praying for them, and another holds a weekend get-away each year for its young adults who are back for the summer.

Investing in campus ministry. Campus ministers are often on the front line of identifying needs and connecting young adults. At a time when support for campus ministry at a national church level is being cut, those who minister to young adults on campuses depend on their local churches even more to keep their ministries going. Chances are that your church is not far from some college or vocational school or graduate community that needs your support.

Jesus said that if we make the tree good then the fruit will be good. By investing in programs that serve the needs of young adults, churches can extend branches of care that connect young adults to their faith roots in ways that can bear good fruit at a critical time.

8. Hope for a New Generation

by Ann A. Michel

Many church leaders bemoan the absence of younger people from their pews without bothering to consider the contextual factors that must define ministry with new generations. In *Reframing Hope: Vital Ministry in a New Generation* Carol Howard Merritt explores the cultural trends and interpersonal dynamics that shape the needs and expectations of the millennial generation.

From her vantage point as a young, mainline pastor in a complex urban setting, she describes a generation with an intense desire for intimacy and genuine relationships, but within the context of an evolving notion of what constitutes community and how it is sustained. Commenting on expectations with regard to pastoral visits, she notes that few parishioners today stay home polishing silver and dusting the parlor in hopes that the pastor will drop by. Instead, emails, text messages, social networking, and blogs have become essential tools of ministry that can forge authentic relational bonds. Online communication has created virtual communities in which people can tell their own stories.

Leadership looks different as well. People are more open to learning from a colleague who comes alongside them than a credentialed expert who talks at them. The model of leadership is no longer a pyramid with a single individual poised at the apex, but a network in which leaders are relationally connected to many others. Leaders are, in the author's words, "accessible, authentic, and human."

But no sophisticated use of technological media or contemporary leadership matrices can carry the day unless they convey a compelling message. The hope of which Carol Howard Merritt writes is grounded in faith that the church's story can indeed resonate in a post-modern world. She explores how spiritual meaning is expressed today in vital practices that embody faith — not only prayer and silence, but social activism, global engagement, environmental awareness, and responsible living.

In the midst of these dynamics, she also claims a message of hope for mainline denominations. She writes that "a new generation of Christians is longing for the very practices of inclusion, diversity, and questioning that many mainline churches have been cultivating." To those fixated on a story of membership declines and eroding institutional standing, this author offers a new narrative that does indeed "reframe hope."

9. Think Bigger: The Challenge of Reaching Millennials

by David McAllister-Wilson

We spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to get the millennial generation to come to our churches. We think if we can just implement the right programs, worship formats, or welcome strategies, younger adults will flock back to our churches. I wish it were that easy. But we know it's not.

Finding ways to engage the Millennials and the younger generations that follow in their wake is the single, biggest challenge confronting the church (and the seminary) today. It is a problem that cannot be solved by tinkering around the edges of our current ways of doing church or educating people for ministry.

Thomas Kuhn, in his groundbreaking book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, caused us to think about scientific progress differently. Kuhn said, normally we think of change happening as “development-by-accumulation” of accepted facts and theories. But this process of continuous change is interrupted by periods of revolutionary science, which happen when “anomalies” lead to new paradigms. These change the rules of the game and ask new questions of old data. They are leaps of faith. I think we are in a similar moment in the history of the church.

How can we discover our own paradigm-shifting anomalies and take our own leaps of faith? The challenge of our day is to “think bigger” and engage in the kind of creative, collaborative dialogue that might spark new ideas.

New Ways of Being Church

We must devote some part of our time thinking about “being the church” we are called to be instead of “going to the church” we trying to hold together. Our preoccupation with people in the pews and money in the plate has led us to think about ministry too narrowly. It has blinded us to alternative expressions of what it means to be the Body of Christ.

What would it mean really to ask what God is doing through people who are not part of the church? To be a resource in their spiritual quest without insisting that our current formulation of church is sufficient? New forms of spiritual expressions and Christian community are taking shape at the edge of what we think of as church — or even beyond it entirely. We must be attentive to where God's Spirit is already active in the lives of Millennials and acknowledge that necessary change may come from the outside in.

Leading from Brokenness

I think we will discover that “authenticity” is the particular yearning of this generation. It isn't about styles — new worship vs. old worship, or generations, young vs. old. Like Jesus, they have a finely-tuned radar for hypocrisy. They don't want to pray for one thing and prepare for another. They think we expect them to be perfect, yet they know we are not perfect. What if,

instead of continuing to act as if we have answers to all the questions, we invited young people into our struggles and our uncertainties?

Young adults face major life challenges in matters related to employment, finances, and relationships. They come back from war or out of chronic underemployment yearning for healing and wholeness. We have offered them programs when what they long for is the experience of community and care. What if, instead of focusing on “church questions,” we made the church a truly safe place to talk together about how to do life?

Incubators of Change

What if, instead of training people to run churches and serve on committees, we prepared people to innovate? What if our seminaries became incubators for change in the church, and churches became incubators for change in the world — learning laboratories where rising leaders could experiment with new approaches to ministry free from institutional pressures and fear of failure? Of course that means, instead of ministering to young adults, we would place them in leadership.

I think we would find, as all successful revolutions discover, that movement precedes institution, which means mission and service precede membership.

Glimpsing Grace

Dr. Kenda Creasy Dean has observed that “Young people today are grasping for an offering of grace. They smell it. Even though they have no language to express it, when they experience it through a relationship or a community, it clears the way for them to live in a new way.”

When we strip away the institutional trappings of church, the Christian faith still offers answers to the fundamental questions of purpose and identity that every person, in every age, must grapple with. With this as our cornerstone, seeking new ways of being church may not be as novel and difficult as we think, as we now peer through the glass dimly.

As science must do this in its pursuit of the truth about how creation works; the church must do this in pursuit of the truth of the Gospel, about why creation exists and our purpose in it. We will have to take our own leap of faith, which begins by ignoring, for a little while, our concern about the survival of our particular institutions.

10. Millennials Seek Larger Framework to Understand God

by Chris Folmsbee

A group from my church often visits a restaurant right across the parking lot to share a meal after Bible study. One night the server asked one of my friends if we lived nearby. “Not far,” he replied. “But we work together every Tuesday night over at Resurrection. Have you ever been there?” “Nah,” said the server, “I don’t usually get along with church people.” “Why is that?” someone from our table asked. His response: “Because I have too many big questions, and their answers are always too small and packaged.”

No Easy Answers

This person was looking for the church to admit that sometimes things are too hard for easy answers. This person would rather have the church admit that some things are just too complicated to really have a nice and neatly packaged answer. This is one of the major challenges facing disciples living in a post-Christian culture. Many Christians have wrestled with the Bible and the somewhat-unanswerable questions of life and have either learned to live without knowing an answer, live in the tension of multiple answers, or come to an answer that may seem clear to them but far-fetched to a young person who didn’t grow up getting ready for church as a kid.

This is a post-Christian world. It is not churched, and it is not primarily viewed as Christian. For some, this is devastating and a reason to panic and live in fear. For others, it is a blessing in disguise because it allows for what searching Millennials want — conversation, relationship, leadership, missional causes in which to collaborate, and inclusivity that loves without reason.

For many, especially Millennials, the best response is not to quickly answer their question with certainty and dogma. Rather, for many, the best response to a difficult question of life, such as why good people have bad things happen to them, is not a well-thought-out and immediate thesis but an acknowledgement that life is difficult and sometimes there is no painless answer or response.

The old, modern apologetics that “rationally” argued to prove prophetic fulfillment, the existence of God before time, and the preeminence of Christianity over other religions are not what the church needs to be relevant and impactful now. No, instead, we need an apologetic that is rooted in the purest aspect of the gospel, love. That isn’t to say that the modern apologetic framework doesn’t have a place in the conversation. But it doesn’t have a place being first in the conversations with nonreligious people, especially Millennials.

A Larger Framework for God

The answer is not to hire younger, cooler-looking staff and build edgier programs. The answer is to give Millennials a larger framework for God and to push their boundaries of God, thus changing their concept of God. Far too often I hear from churches that they are starting

a program to reach nonreligious young people. I'm thrilled to find the passion and sometimes blown away by the carefully planned-out methods. However, in the end, the programs and methods typically fall short because Millennials are not looking for programs and methods to connect with God and others. They can do this anytime they want, wherever they want, whenever they want. Millennials are not looking for us to provide a room for them to meet in and have some snacks.

Millennials are looking for meaning in their vocation, opportunities to work in partnership for the greater good, amusement and adventure, and the openness to choose what they want to talk about and what questions they want to ask. Sometimes the worst thing we can do is program for what we think others want. Instead, remembering it is a post-Christian culture, we should be looking for ways to spark younger people's imaginations, fuel their passions and dreams, and offer them a chance to contribute to God's mission to restore the world regardless of their beliefs and convictions, and individualized to their multiple ways of self-expression. This will broaden their concept of God and their perception of the church.

What Millennials, and the generations to follow, need from the church are meaningful conversations, dependable relationships, faithful leadership and mentoring, a commitment to missional discipleship, and a lasting promise of enduring inclusivity. More than all of this, for Millennials, however, is a big concept of God. The smaller we make God seem, the less likely Millennials are going to engage with the church. Each of these significant desires within the hearts and minds of Millennials must be enveloped by ruthless truth-telling, hope, compassion, nontraditional thinking, diversity, complexity, beauty, deep-rooted values, and practical solutions to common problems.

11. Young Adults Seek Opportunities to Lead

by F. Douglas Powe, Jr., and Jasmine Smothers

Wait! Wait!

Young people are often sidelined in church. Yet, everywhere else, they are challenged to lead. Consciously or unconsciously, older generations in the church send a message to young adults that their turn for leadership is coming in the future. However, this message of waiting is not being well received by young adults who want to share their gifts with the church now.

Are these young adults being presumptuous about their gifts for leadership? Should we make them wait in line? Given the demands for ministry in the 21st century, we do not believe so. You be the judge, but do not wait too long as you risk losing gifted leaders who will seek a place elsewhere to use their gifts.

Young adults want the same opportunity to succeed and fail in leadership as those in the older generations did. Young adults are not naïve in believing they will get it right every time, but neither did those in older generations. Congregations must be honest about the fact that many individuals in older generations are where they are today in leadership because they were given an opportunity. Young adults want this same opportunity. Many of them are in leadership positions outside of congregations where they have an opportunity to fail and succeed. Congregations that extend the same opportunities as others receive the gift of creative and generative leadership.

Young adults seek genuine collaboration in moving congregations forward. For most young adults it is not about doing it their way. They want to collaborate with others so that it truly is a decision in which we all, not just a few, have a stake. The fear that allowing young adults to assume leadership means older generations will be out of the loop is often unfounded. For many young adults, leadership is not about who is the boss, it is about discerning where God wants to lead the congregations.

The truth is that young adults are seeking an opportunity to lead so they can live into their commitment to follow God's lead and help others to do the same.

12. Reaching the Millennial Generation

by Asa J. Lee

Churches must become more innovative and diverse on a variety of fronts, but less doctrinaire and institutionally rigid, if they want to reach Millennials. This is one conclusion of recently released research from the Pew Research Center that surveyed the millennial generation in adulthood. Pew's new report, "Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends" reveals some significant changes in generational assumptions about culture, politics, and religion among adults born after 1980. The study is one of the first to identify how this generational cohort will impact our society and our economy as they enter adulthood.

Millennials are, according to the research, "unattached to organized politics and religion, linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry, and optimistic about the future." They are the most diverse and optimistic generation of any currently alive in the United States, but also the most distrustful of institutional structures in our society.

Politically and Religiously Disaffiliated

Millennials have the highest levels of political and religious disaffiliation of any generation Pew has studied. Half describe themselves as political independents, although they tend to have liberal views, and about three-in-ten say they are not affiliated with any religion. Not only are they less likely to be religiously affiliated; they are also less likely to say they believe in God. A solid majority still do — 86 percent. But only 58 percent say they are "absolutely certain" that God exists, a lower share than among older adults.

Diverse

Millennials are the most racially diverse generation in American history. Unlike previous generations, they are not congregating in racially or politically segregated groups. They have moved away from the traditional ways of categorizing people, ideas, and beliefs — categories such as race, ethnicity, political parties, and religious affiliation.

Skeptical about Institutions

This research suggests that traditional systems of power that are often part of the institutional life of many churches are major turnoffs for this age group. Millennials are overwhelmingly resistant to institutional maintenance and seek active, relevant ministry in the world for Jesus Christ. They are looking for churches that offer dynamic ministries that are transparent in their sense of purpose.

Digitally Connected

Millennials are “digital natives” at the leading edge of the digital revolution. The internet, mobile technology, and social media define their social affinity groups and shape their self-identities. Arguably these digital connects have supplanted the institutional connections that defined earlier generations. This generation expects the church not only to have a robust digital presence, but also to embrace the relational potential of electronic communication.

Millennials are now at the forefront of the changes driving our society. To be relevant to this age group, churches must envision a new way of operating and engaging — drastically reordering some priorities and focusing intentionally on issues of diversity, institutionalism, and innovation.

Congregational leaders and practitioners should be ready to adapt to “serve this present age.”

13. Lessons on Engaging Young Adults Effectively

by Asa J. Lee

How can a congregation effectively engage younger adults? The Faith Communities Today (FACT) study provides some clues. As part of the largest ongoing religious research project in the U.S., the study focused on the active involvement of young adults in participating faith communities and involved a multi-year examination of ten congregations with a sizable presence of young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. These ten congregations were diverse in every aspect, including size, ethnicity, and faith tradition. These case studies and other qualitative data revealed some key lessons in how to attract and engage younger adult populations.

Be intentional in engaging young adults. Congregations in the FACT study initiated programming with the intent to engage young adult populations in their surrounding contexts, whether urban, rural, or suburban. It was not haphazard or accidental. In the areas of worship, budgeting, service, or governance, these congregations were strategic in cultivating young adult participation and creating space for young adults to exercise their gifts. They displayed a willingness to “make room” for young adults and “envisioned” them into the life of the community. The churches sought input from young adults to plan, build, and implement programming for their age group.

Be true to yourself. Key to the intentional actions of these congregations was a strong sense of identity. The FACT study congregations discerned a role for young adults as part of their communal identity and found ways to enact that vision. In one of the churches studied, young adults attributed their involvement in the church to the congregation’s strong Roman Catholic identity. The young adults became deeply involved because they appreciated how the congregation lived out its values. Ultimately, the essential work of attracting and engaging younger adults requires congregations to recommit to their identity and the values that shape their communities.

Integrate, don’t assimilate. Vibrant congregations have a culture of “integration” as opposed to “assimilation.” The etymological root of assimilation means “to make alike,” while integration simply means be “part of.” A culture of integration rather than assimilation frees young adults from rigid conformity and allows them to be who they are. The congregations studied exhibited a form of inclusivity, a culture of integration that invites young adults to exercise their gifts and abilities in ways that best suit them. They accept young adults “as they are” and work deliberately to connect them to the broader community. Young adults feel welcome and report a sense that they have a place integral to congregational life. The resulting affirmation encourages participation from young adults in areas of visibility, including worship, faith formation classes, service activities, and governing committees. FACT contributor and religious researcher LiErin Probasco explained that these vibrant congregations “meet young adults where they are on their faith journey.” They embody a “come as you are” and “be what you will” attitude.

Offer challenging programs addressing real-life needs. Too often, church leaders provide younger adults what they think young adults want and need rather than what young adults

really want and need. The FACT study revealed that vibrant congregations strategically invest in young adults in ways that build on their real needs, both spiritual and physical, and provide opportunities for growth. All of the congregations studied offered programs and worship that challenged young adults to grow in various aspects of their lives, but each congregation did this in a way consistent with its own values. These programs and activities were oriented toward creating community and faith formation. They offered fellowship and challenge. They accepted young adults and provided space for them to exercise their gifts in the community. They also equipped them to address the challenges of their lives.

Be innovative, not contemporary. Many congregations seek to be relevant to young adults with “contemporary” worship, language, or décor, while retaining traditional values. However, the FACT study reveals that being “innovative” may be more important than being “contemporary.” The difficulty with the contemporary mindset is that it can quickly become static, such as the many “contemporary” worship services that are stuck in the practices of the 1980s. Innovation refers to the readiness and adaptability of a congregation to address its present context for ministry. Innovation is characterized by a willingness to entertain the new and effective ideas for the sake of relevance. With innovation as a mindset, ministry is contemporary. An example from the study is the role of innovation and technology. Technology is not what makes ministry relevant, but innovation views technology as a vehicle to be relevant.

14. Best Practices for Reaching Young Adults

from *Faith Communities Today*

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.

15. Keeping Campus Ministry Graduates Connected to Church

by Jan Rivero

For many students, campus ministry becomes a community of friends, a home away from home, a kind of extended family. It is a body of believers with whom students grow and play, worship and serve. It is a community of faith that becomes church for students because it is more than a place, more than an activity, more than an hour a week. It is for them the embodiment of the people of God where they are in their lives in that moment.

For young adults, it is no small thing to find a sense of belonging in the church. It is no small thing to have a supportive community to walk with through these challenging and, at times, overwhelming years. It is no small thing to know that your friends are praying for you as a family member is passing away. It is no small thing to have a group of peers to work beside in healing the hurts of the world.

The challenge for the church, however, is what happens to these young people when they leave college. Because of these vibrant campus ministry experiences, many students graduate and realize that the church is not that kind of community. In the transition group that I do with seniors, we spend time talking about the reality of church beyond campus ministry. Fully warned and braced for what they are going to find when they enter the “real world,” they still return to campus to report that they cannot find a church home that has a ministry for young graduates.

Let’s face it: the church is geared toward families. We have Sunday school and scouts, youth groups and choirs. We have service projects and worship. But when it comes to ministries that serve a post-graduate, largely single population, the church often does not know what to do. The fact of the matter is the church is losing young people because once they have experienced the power of true Christian community on campus, they cannot find it in our local churches.

A college graduate who was active in her denominational campus ministry now attends a non-denominational congregation because she could not find a church within her own denomination that had any ministry whatsoever to young professionals. What she found in the church she now attends, however, was a variety of small group offerings for her age group and a culture that both welcomes and assimilates young people into the full ministry of the church. Other graduates have found church homes within their denominations. I asked them what it was that drew and kept them there. Here is what I learned:

- Because many are single, they are looking for a safe place to meet people their age with shared values.
- Single, or newly married without children, they have time to give to the church and their community.

- As part of Generation Y, they are all about relationships, and those are best formed outside of worship: in small study groups, supper clubs or service opportunities — sub-communities that make the larger church feel manageable.
- As graduates of campus ministries, they seek active, creative, energetic worshipping communities that provide opportunities that connect the spiritual with the social.
- They have matured in their faith such that they look to the church more for community than comfort and more for service than having their own needs met. They have come to experience church not as a place to go or something to do but as who they are as the people of God.
- As the first generation to grow up with the world wide web, they look for communities of interest and connection on the internet, so having a web presence is critical.
- Still at a transient stage of life, not ready to put down roots and able to take off for the weekend at a moment's notice, they gravitate toward communities that place few expectations on their attendance but welcome them when they are present.

For too long, too many congregations have assumed that young people will come back to the church when they have children. But in the 21st century, with so many ways beyond the church to meet the needs of the world, with so many other things to do with weekends, with so many demands placed on their own time, young people have to have a compelling reason to go to church.

If the church is going to thrive, we have to provide ministry that nurtures post-college young adults where they are. The key to a successful ministry to this generation is identifying the population in your midst and working with them to provide the programming and space they want. Chances are good that if you can nurture a few, they will invite their friends; and before you know it, your church will have a vibrant ministry with young adults, who in turn will pump new life and energy into your congregation.

16. 17 Ways to Welcome College Students

by Laurie Day and Janet Cromwell

Your church can make a big difference in the life of a college student. Here are some fun and easy ways to welcome college students who visit your congregation. They'll appreciate your efforts and your church will be enriched by their participation.

- Make a point to meet and speak to college students when they come to church. Feeling welcomed is the number one concern of students who attend a new church.
- Invite students to sit with you during worship so they don't sit alone.
- Treat a student to lunch after worship. Whether it be at home or a local restaurant, students will appreciate an invitation to talk and eat a meal that was not prepared at the dining hall.
- Bring extra food for after-church potlucks and invite the students to stay for lunch. Most students do not have kitchen facilities to prepare a potluck dish, but they want to participate in church activities.
- Make a personal phone call to a student who attends your church on Sunday morning, and answer any questions they may have about your congregation.
- Take a student for coffee during the week following their visit at church.
- Offer to drive students to worship.
- Send birthday cards, a bookmark, or words of encouragement throughout the year. Students love mail.
- Include college students on your church newsletter mailing list.
- Offer Sunday School classes on topics of interest to young adults.
- Organize a fellowship activity for college students.
- Present a plant to every new student who attends worship.
- Include students in worship, inviting them to read scripture, usher, or serve as a communion steward.
- Create "care packages" for students before finals week. Cookies, small toys, pens, sticky notes, stuffed animals, and even a Slinky would be great gifts for stressed out students. Enclose a note wishing them well on their exams.
- Adopt a student for a year, inviting them to meals and calling to be sure they are all right.
- Include students in your family's holiday activities. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter are hard times to be far away from home.
- Design a flier describing your local church and post it in the Student Union on campus. Be sure to include worship times and a map to your church.

17. From Where Did All These Young Adults Come?

by Loren Bergstedt

I visited a new church a couple of weeks ago. I periodically do this partially because of my own natural curiosity about how different churches cultivate spiritual vitality differently.

On this particular week, I visited a congregation only two miles from my home in a suburb of Minneapolis. I found several unique aspects about this congregation. 1) The church began only about six years ago. 2) It now has five services per week at multiple campuses throughout the city; thousands of people attend. 3) About 70 percent of those attending are under 29 years old. This last tid-bit I found to be most intriguing, partially because I am very close to that age group.

I have had friends say that the younger generation is not interested in church and that they are almost “unreachable.” Yet, this congregation clearly demonstrated that this doesn’t have to be the case. When I visited this congregation I experienced a solid biblical message from the pastor and contemporary music. However, this is not unique. What could it be about this congregation that attracts so many young people? It felt to me that something really dynamic in a cultural way was happening, yet I couldn’t quite put my finger on what it was.

I wasn’t there for the history of this church; so I cannot fully understand what God is doing there to inspire so many. Yet, after reflecting for most of the afternoon, I was able to put my finger on two things that changed my thinking.

People Were Welcoming . . . Really Welcoming

When I started to walk out of the building, a man in his 20s held a homemade, tagboard sign with these words written on it: “Come hang out with us!” He proceeded to invite every person who walked by to go have lunch with him and his group. I’ll be honest. I choked up when I walked by. To me the message of the sign was: “We don’t care who you are, and we don’t care that we don’t even know you. We welcome you into our life.” Living in the city can be lonely and isolating. This young man understood that. This inclusion went further than the normal one minute in the service to greet your neighbors. (And let’s face it. How many truly engage strangers and how many of us primarily speak with those we already know?) In this church was a sense that visitors were really wanted.

They Got People Involved

The pastor invited anyone who wanted to make a difference to come forward to be connected to a ministry of their church. At a recent conference I attended, the Gen Y Guy, Jason Ryan Dorsey, (jasondorsey.com) said that today’s young adults want to be valued for what they bring to the table, they want to have their voices heard, and they want to make a meaningful difference. This church didn’t ask them to sit on a committee, or to wait in the wings for a chance to be part of the community. When people came down for prayer after the service, the

prayer team was made up of young adults. The greeters, ushers, audio/visual team, announcement givers, and mission trip leaders appeared to be largely people in their 20s.

It's not about numbers. It's not about turning my church into a mega-church. It's about reaching new people. Although I believe that culture changes, the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is timeless and powerful. What do you believe young adults are looking for in a church community? What are some ways that your church is bringing this life-transforming message to the next generation?

18. Tips for Welcoming Young People

from the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

- Thanks be to God; you are family with young people in your church!
- Young people bring unique gifts to the family, both as a generation, and as individuals. Take the time to talk about what those gifts are and how to incorporate them into your church life! Ask young people about their experiences with worship, study, and mission!
- Young people, inherently, bring changes. Change can be scary, but often brings vitality and new life!
- All people of faith seek to live out God's will for their lives. Young people are deciding what paths to follow with their lives and are often asking what God wants them to do. All young people, not just future clergy, are called to discern God's will for their vocation.
- God often calls those who do not expect to hear a call. Often, having other people name a call is the first way that a person knows what the call is. Do not be afraid to share the gifts you see in others, and ways they might be used! God calls people to ministry in many creative ways. Have a conversation in your church about ways other church members have experienced calls.
- Young people are as diverse as other generations. Their styles of worship are diverse. Some like contemporary worship, some like traditional hymns, and some prefer other styles altogether, but all are seeking God. Styles of dress differ within generations, so do not assume that the way a young person is dressed is disrespectful or unprofessional. Today's society is much more casual than in past years. Jeans and other casual styles are accepted in most places.
- You can help people listen for God's direction in their lives. Share how God might direct the use of our money, time, relationships, and gifts. Be ready to identify gifts, and then to nurture and encourage calls. Have a way for people to name and commit to the ways that they hear God asking them to live. Talk about all vocations as possible callings of God. Name the joys of ordained ministry. Track those calls, and hold people accountable to them!
- Listen for the Holy Spirit, and trust that the Spirit will lead.

19. Ministering to the Missing Generation

by Carol Howard Merritt

When I began as a twenty-seven-year-old pastor of a small rural church, ministering to young adults seemed like an impossible task. Newspapers and magazines often dressed young adults up as greedy slackers, ever-sponging off our parents and never assuming responsible roles in society. I often did not recognize the people our popular culture described. No matter what cause united moms, how much volunteering dads engaged in, or what trends twenty-year-olds began, they were inevitably compared disparagingly to Baby Boomers, the civil rights movements of the sixties, and were eternally dwarfed in that Boomer-looming shadow. How can the church understand young adults if it continually looks at them through the tinted spectacles of older adults? I loved studying books like *Soul Tsunami*, but I realized the great gulf between where we were as a church and where we needed to be to implement the suggested ideas.

It turned out that my small, ancient rural church was the perfect place to effectively care for young adults — a place where years of tradition formed something beautiful. And they came, and they began to join. Over time, we began to weave a rich tapestry of diverse, intergenerational people. We did not discover the formula for a booming Gen X megachurch in just three years; instead, we reversed the trend of lost membership, kept the original members, and had a consistent ten percent growth made up of individuals of various ages. Our congregation became an intergenerational meeting ground, a place for supportive tribes to form, and I began to realize that our mainline denominational church has great assets for reaching out to young adults.

Though young adults came, we realized how easy it was for them not to. It's no longer important for someone in their twenties or thirties to go to church. Denominational affiliation has very little power in our politics or workplaces. The societal expectation to attend worship is gone. When a young person walks into a church, it's a significant moment, because nothing pressures her to attend; instead, she enters the church looking for connection — connection with God through spiritual practices, connection with her neighbors through an intergenerational community, and connection with the world through social justice outreach.

The church has been making these vital connections for thousands of years, and we can easily respond to the young, weary travelers in our midst, letting them know that they can find a spiritual home within our worshiping communities and that we will provide a supportive space for them. Even the smallest churches — *especially* the smallest churches — have the resources to respond to young adults in meaningful ways when they understand their contexts and make a place for them. These relationships take shape when our intergenerational groups of displaced families and single people begin to weave a rich tapestry of familiar space.

20. Why I Believe in the Next Generation

by Marty J. Cauley

Ingenuity empowers the young adults I encounter. They are not bound by any pre-conceived ideas or limitations. Those of us who are older think linearly, but Mosaics (my preferred name for this generation) think in webs. Every line interacts with, informs, and influences every other line. This allows for a level of creativity and ingenuity previously unheard of. Young adults are ingenious. If you don't believe me, just get to know one.

Secondly, injustice enrages them. This generation seems to have an inherent moral compass that makes them completely intolerant of social injustice. Whether it is the crisis in Darfur, the AIDS pandemic in Africa, or local poverty, they attack injustice. Whereas some might be content to send \$10 to the cause of the day, Mosaics pack their bags and head to Bolivia to dig wells and to India to distribute mosquito nets.

Additionally, challenges enthrall them. Mosaics love to be told what they cannot do and what is "impossible." Challenges give them the opportunity to utilize all of their resources to attack and discover new ways of beating the system. Mosaics think fast and act fast. They love a fast-paced, challenge-laden environment.

Part of their ability to adapt to any challenge so quickly is that culture has equipped them to be flexible, fast and focused. The pace of change in our culture is faster than at any time in history. And Mosaics swim in the waters of change almost effortlessly. Culture has taught them to be flexible and keep their options open, to think and act fast because the opportunity will pass you by, and to be completely focused on the emergent problem at hand so that, once it is solved, you can move along to the next one.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, hope inspires them. Amidst the rapid pace of change, the challenges of our world, and the injustice that surrounds them, Mosaics continue to manifest hope. They are not blind optimists, but deliberate realists, who still believe they can change the world. They are unwilling to accept the status quo and are ready to make their mark upon the world. It is now our job to help them mold that energy into a synergistic force for good and then get out of their way.

If I were to offer faith-based leaders three words of advice, they would be: 1) expose Mosaics to big ideas; 2) equip Mosaics to lead; and 3) encourage Mosaics to follow their dreams. Never underestimate the power of a Mosaic to be willing to study, research and grapple with big ideas. This is a generation built upon the idea that intellectual capital is the greatest force on earth.

Allowing Mosaics to lead is risky but rewarding. They will not follow the path of those who have gone before them, but that does not mean they will go astray. Mosaics will try new

things, come up with vastly different ideas, and be willing to take risks. So what if they fail as long as they learn and are able to take their experiences and fail forward. Let them lead!

Finally, be a dream enhancer rather than a dream eliminator. Help them grasp the scope of their dream and map out a way to accomplish it. Help them understand the cost of following the dream and the benefit if it is accomplished. One ridiculous dream may be what it takes to save the planet! I believe in the next generation, in their abilities, their ideas and their values. The future rests in their hands. Let's help them by investing in them with all that we have.

Discussion Questions

1. Where do you see shifts in lifestyle patterns between 20-to-40-year-olds today compared to young adults in previous generations? What do these shifts mean for how the church engages young adults?
2. What challenges do single people experience in your church? How might you be more welcoming to single young adults?
3. What are some of the stumbling blocks that are keeping younger adults away from church these days?
4. Make a list of the younger adults you know in your daily life — friends, neighbors, family members, individuals who work in stores or restaurants you visit, etc. What are they like? How could you learn more about them?
5. How might you learn more about the spiritual questions and concerns of young adults who are not part of your church?
6. How could the church better respond to the personal and pastoral needs of young adults?
7. What are your thoughts about social media as a way of connecting with younger adults? What are the opportunities and challenges? How might your church make better use of social media as a ministry tool?
8. What would make a younger adult enthusiastic about being a leader in your church? What might make it difficult?
9. What are some the attributes of older, traditional churches that might be appealing to younger adults?
10. Imagine your church 30 years from now. What do you think will be the same and what do you think will be different?

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Notes and Permissions

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Introduction by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

For more information, see Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Focus: The Real Challenges Facing The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012).

Young Adults and the Future of the Church by Ann A. Michel

Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2007).

A Generation of Tinkerers by Erika Gara

a tinkerer puts together Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2007), 13.

A Single Voice by Kevin Brown

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Are Young Singles Invisible in Church? by James Lemler

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Reaching the Millennial Generation by Asa J. Lee

Pew's new report . . . pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood

Lessons on Engaging Young Adults Effectively by Asa J. Lee

Information on the FACT reports, specific case studies, and the aggregate data are available at faithcommunitiestoday.org/increasing-young-adult-participation-churches-and-other-faith-communities.

Best Practices for Reaching Young Adults from Faith Communities Today

This latest paper and the entire set of papers on this research project are available online at faithcommunitiestoday.org, the web site for the *Faith Communities Today* (FACT) research enterprise. This specific report can be found at faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/Summary-of-Best-Young-Adult-Practices-for-Churches.pdf.

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