

“Evangelism with Young Adults”

– report and workshop material

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Definitions

One of the priorities of the Evangelism Task Group is to recommending specific ways of ministry that are particularly effective in evangelism of young adults. *Evangelism* is here defined as sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, helping people come to faith in Jesus Christ, and incorporating them into the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. Also, a prerequisite for evangelism is shaping the life of the local church so that new people **can** be incorporated! *Young adults* are here defined primarily as persons between the age of 18 and 30, whether single or married. 30-somethings are sometimes included in the definition, and many of the observations we make may apply to them, depending on generational mindsets.

The insights in this report are drawn from both local church young adult ministry and college campus ministry. We offer some general guidelines and suggestions that will help you relate to young adults and share with them the love of Jesus Christ. Always remember however that every community is different. Campus ministry on a large residential campus, for example will be very different from young adult ministry in small-town local church. On the other hand, ministry on commuter or non-traditional campuses may be fairly similar to, and in fact part of, what your congregations hope to achieve with young adults.

Resources List

Curriculum ideas for a fledgling young adult group, whether Sunday school or mid-week, church, home, or coffee-house. This is just a starter list. Once your church establishes a young adult ministry then your own people will guide you in what to study and read.

1. NOOMA – a series of short films by Flannel Publishing, available through Zondervan, featuring Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, MI. NOOMA videos are the quintessential *conversation starter*. If they are all your group does, then you will run out quickly. But if you use them for a few weeks while you are first starting out, or for short breaks between longer studies, they can be tremendous resources to get young adults talking about spiritual things. The

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Discussion Partners at YAMC meeting at AC:
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perspective is very postmodern (more on that below) and the main focus is raising questions, rather than teaching doctrine. They are also an example of current standards of quality production.

2. BibleSense – a series of creative multimedia Scripture studies by Group Publishing, made to engage all the senses of group participants in learning and hearing God’s word. This is more suitable for home groups and longer sessions.

3. Saltshaker Resources – a series of Bible studies and short books by Becky Pippert published by Intervarsity Press, an established leader in young adult discipleship. Titles include “How to Lead a Seeker Bible Study” and “Looking at the Life of Jesus”. These work well for any age group but are especially helpful for young adults since they assume no prior faith commitments, but rather look as the Gospels as the source documents of Christianity.

4. LifeGuide Bible Studies – a series of more traditionally-formatted Scripture studies by “InterVarsity Press”. If your group has a particular Bible book in mind to study, these are great curriculum written by qualified Bible scholars with educational experience, full of excellent leading questions to get each student involved in Bible study for themselves. The perspective is moderate-evangelical.

Background Resources

Again this is just a starter list, to help your church leaders understand the rising generation of young adults, as well as wider issues in church and society.

1. “Generation Y” article on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_Y If you want a quick overview of the broad trends and characteristics of the generation which most of today’s young adults are part of, then use the media that most of them use to get basic information! It will refer you to several books with various perspectives and emphases. Read all the subject headings, and not just the “Religion” section!

2. "UnChristian," by Dave Kinnamon and Gabe Lyons; Baker Books. A widely popular book discussing the "image problem" of Christianity in the minds of 18-29 year olds, many will see that the problem goes deeper than image to the way most Christians really do behave: being known more for what we're against than what we're for, more for judgment than for love, etc. A good read for anyone attempting ministry with un-churched (or churched!) young adults.

3. "They Like Jesus But Not the Church," by Dan Kimball. A good followup/companion to the above.

4. "Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?" by James K.A. Smith; Baker Academic. An excellent brief introduction to postmodernism for Christians, demonstrating that this family of philosophies is not necessarily incompatible with orthodox Christian faith. Provides key background information on the philosophy behind the worldview of many of today's young adults. Even if most young adults have never heard of Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault, many of their core cultural assumptions are influenced by these thinkers and others discussed in this book.

Rev. Becky Pierson (Woodward New Horizon UMC) is available to teach a day-long (or shorter) workshop on "Understanding Generations and the Church." She can help your church leaders come to a basic understanding of cultural changes and learn to ask good questions about the relationship of young adults with the church.

Example Churches

Tulsa: Southern Hills, Trinity, and Christ UMC are currently in a new and ongoing experiment in a worship service designed especially for young adults (in an urban context). This service may eventually become a new church plant, or it may continue to be a cooperative effort between these three congregations, which will allow young adults to connect with one another in ways particularly suitable for them at the same time they are involved in traditional congregations. The style of this worship service is generally "emerging," with a blend of contemporary, traditional, and modern liturgical elements and music. For more information contact Rev. Jeff Jaynes.

Enid: First UMC has an established young adult ministry which meets in a local coffee house. The church is downtown, the college campuses are on the east side, and the coffee house is on the west side. Some who attend the group are college students, some are young adults from the local church, and others work in the community and attend a variety of different churches from the area. Some do not attend church regularly. The group centers on light Bible discussion and fellowship. A key insight from this group is that a great way to form a new fellowship is to form a relationship with a key person who has relationships with others and passion for what

you're doing. For more information contact Devon Krause.

Enid: Willow View has a more traditional group in the form of a young adult Sunday school class. They knew there were several young adults in their 20s attending church, but the youngest class we had was full of 40-somethings with kids, and some of our younger adults still felt a little out of place, or like they weren't as mature or knowledgeable (even though some of them were). They prayed for several months and then stated in our newsletter an intention to form a class for 18-30 year olds, with the exception that if you wanted to *teach* the class you could be a few years older. Amazingly, a couple volunteered right away. The associate pastor has been mentoring them as they learn to teach the class, and a small core group formed right away, of two other couples and two singles/college students. Curriculum alternates between video discussions and Bible study courses. For more information contact James Lambert.

General Principles for Young Adult Ministry

1. Change first and foremost

There are reasons this generation is not currently here, therefore we can expect things to change when they do come in. As with any evangelism, the local church body needs to be open to change if they expect people who are not here now to join them. The message of Jesus Christ remains constant, but the method needs to change to communicate with new generations.

2. Ownership

New ministries, groups, and worship services formed to reach young adults need to be conducted (with/of/by) this generation, not merely for them. Don't forget that young adults still differ widely in their preferences based on urban, rural, and regional considerations, so there is no one-size-fits all. You need to get a feel for the young adults of your community, and what they want and need from the church, to know how to help them connect with Jesus Christ.

3. Unchurched culture

(Not just de-churched, but never-been-churched is very common.) Many in this generation are not going to come to church just because it's the thing to do when you settle down, get a job, or have a family. They need to be re-introduced to Christianity; many of them need to meet Jesus for the first time.

4. Millennial Generation

The generation who are currently "young adults" is generally known as the "Millennial Generation," or "Generation Y," usually describing those born roughly between 1982 and 2001. Much information is available to describe their generational characteristics and differences with previous generations. In the spirit of this generation, readers are encouraged to "Google it,"

and/or read the Wikipedia article mentioned in the Resource section!

Just for today, a few starters to think about:

- a) Millennials are “digital natives;” technology that is “new” to the rest of us has always been there for them.
- b) Millennials tend to delay certain rites of passage: they may put off getting married and having children, and they are in closer touch with and possibly dependent on their parents. This is only a trend and certainly not true of everyone in the generation!
- c) Millennials can be more idealistic than their parents. For example, they are more likely to desire and expect to find meaning and purpose in their work than Gen-Xers or Boomers before them.

That is just a sample. **What other trends have you noticed about today’s young adults??**

5. Relational or Polished

This can be a controversial topic, but if you really want to attract young adults to your church or ministry, you have to do at least one of two things.

Polished “Build it and they will come” does not work unless everything is done very well, with very high quality music, graphic arts, presentation, etc. And “high quality” means in comparison to the broader culture and secular media influences, not just “pretty good for a church.” If you’re going to do it, do it well. However...

Relational Thankfully, the majority of congregations who can’t pull off a polished new worship service can still do ministry the old fashioned way. That is, building real relationships with real people, and gradually introducing them to our real God through his Son Jesus Christ. Young adults may be different from you, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t interested in genuine friendships with you. As you get to know them and their concerns, you can develop a ministry in which they have “ownership” (number 3 above).

6. Jesus vs. Church/Denomination

One AC delegate said “Young adults aren’t interested in becoming ‘better Methodists;’ they’re interested in becoming followers of Jesus.” Of course the exceptions are young adults who have been steadfastly nurtured in our UM camps, leadership training, etc. But this is only a minority and we must remember our focus is on those who are not here yet! Of course we need to use the resources of our Methodist/Wesleyan faith tradition,

which has a long tradition of reaching young and old; but we need to be careful not to make “Methodist-ness” either the draw or the goal of our evangelism and discipleship efforts, because it won’t work as either one. It’s about Jesus. Millennials (not to mention Gen-Xers and Boomers before them) are not often loyal to institutions for traditional reasons, but they can certainly develop loyalty once they see the good that an institution is doing in the world.

7. Community

Young adults are often extremely hungry for community, and that is one of the first things we need to provide them if we hope to reach new people for Jesus Christ and make our churches younger and more diverse. Just showing up and listening to a preacher talk is not enough, and this generation will not do it out of cultural expectation. How can we help young adults connect with one another and with us?

8. Persistence and Consistency

Since young adults are often a tough group to pin down, and come in many shapes and sizes, if your first efforts aren’t a success, don’t give up! With prayer, diligence, and some critical thinking about what you’re offering and attempting, you will find something that works. Remember, Jesus said the harvest is plentiful!

9. Depth

Remember young adults are indeed adults. Your young adult ministry should look different from your youth ministry. One delegate said “don’t dumb it down.” Our youth are also intelligent and in search of a deep relationship with God, but this applies even more so to young adults. As with youth ministry, middle aged and older adults will often find ourselves needing to dig deeper into our own faith and making new progress along our own journey with Jesus in order to have something to offer to the current generation of young adults. They will challenge us to explain not only what we believe but why we believe it. Also, “Evangelism” and “Discipleship” cannot really be separated, since your best evangelists of any particular age or demographic group will be the disciples whose faith has been formed over time sharing their faith with peers.

10. Relationships, relationships, relationships

We mentioned this above, but it is a great place to end. In any evangelistic ministry in which you would like to form a lasting body, class, or congregation, you can best begin by forming relationships with people who already have relationships with others in the community. Also, time spent building relationships with your leaders and early group members is always a good investment.