

GOD'S PEOPLE GROW TOGETHER: THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY TO
INVIGORATE SPIRITUALLY OVER LOOKED TWENTY-SOMETHINGS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis project was to investigate the reasons why Twenty-Somethings are not involved with congregational activities and what the congregation can do to improve in this area of ministry. By the use of a survey, Twenty-Somethings explained what their congregations have available for individuals in their age demographic. The survey questions allowed Twenty-Somethings to critique and vocalize their opinions concerning ministry to people in this age demographic. The survey shows three areas of rich opportunity and potential to spiritually invigorate Twenty-Somethings. This project shows that focus on these three areas help congregations to grow together in their relationships with each other, to motivate Twenty-Somethings, and most importantly grow in their relationship with God. This project will open your eyes to take in consideration your own congregation and how to integrate these individuals in the work of the church.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
What pushes Twenty-Somethings away	8
Reaction to the three researchers.....	13
What pushes them away: WELS Twenty-Somethings	14
Reaction to the WELS conference papers.....	18
The Survey	19
The Results: How Twenty-Somethings are perceived	20
The Results: Why Twenty-Somethings are not involved.....	22
The Results: What Twenty-Somethings are looking for.....	24
Comparison of the results.....	26
Conclusion	27
What We Can Do: Teach God’s Word.....	27
God’s People Gather Together	31
What We Can Do: The Congregation	33
What We Can Do: Willing to Work Together	35
The Church Grows Together.....	36
What Now?.....	37
Closing Remarks	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	44
Appendix.....	46
Survey questionnaire	46
Charts/Graphs of Survey Responses	47
Interview conducted with leaders of Rooted.....	49
Informed Consent Form	50

Introduction

“According to Rainer Research, approximately 70 percent of American youth drop out of church between the age of 18 and 22. The Barna Group estimates that 80 percent of those reared in the church will be “disengaged” by the time they are 29.”¹ These individuals grew up in the church. They may have attended Sunday school and continued their Christian education in confirmation classes. Perhaps they were even active members in the Teen Group during their high school years. But then, after high school graduation, they may have moved out of their parents’ house. It is possible they moved away to college and church attendance became a low priority in their busy lives. Drew Dyck describes it this way, “To tweak Kinnaman’s language [in *unChristian*] the problem today isn’t those who are *unchristian*, but that so many are *ex-Christian*. Strictly speaking, they are not an ‘unreached people group.’ They are our brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, and friends. They have dwelt among us.”² Previously written conference papers have shown this has been on the minds of Wisconsin Lutheran Synod pastors for some years. In his paper written for the North Atlantic Tri-Circuit retreat, Jerome Enderle writes, “You are probably aware of the fact that about 70% of our confirmands are no longer active members of church by the time they reach the of 21.”³ “You are probably aware,” can easily be rephrased as, “You already know this situation.”

This is not an issue found only in Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod churches; it is a problem found in many other church bodies in America and the world. It was noticed as a trend with Generation X or GenXers. It had become more and more acceptable to be disinterested in the regular attendance of worship and church functions. This trend has continued then with the present generation of Twenty-Somethings. It is assumed that this trend will continue to the next generations and only get worse. Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s research from *American Grace* shows: “young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six

¹ Drew Dyck, “The Leavers: More than in Previous Generations, 20- and 30-somethings are Abandoning the Faith: Why?”, *Christianity Today* 54, no. 11 (November 1, 2010): 40-44. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 28, 2014): 42.

² Ibid.

³ Jerome Enderle, *Slam the Back—Strategies for Regaining the Straying*, [WLS Essay File] (North Atlantic Tri-Circuit, January 2007, accessed 1 September 2014); available from <http://www.wlssays.net/files/EnderleBackDoor.pdf>; Internet: 1.

times the historic rate (30 to 40 percent have no religion today, versus 5 to 10 percent a generation ago)."⁴

Some willingly give excuses for a Twenty-Something to be absent from church life. “Young adults live busy lives and often burn the candle at both ends. Be patient and they will eventually show up in church when they are establishing families and setting down roots in the community.”⁵ These Twenty-Somethings are at the age when they move out of their parents’ homes and start life at college. It is the time when they are discovering a new life of independence. Mom and Dad are no longer looking over their shoulder telling them they need to be involved in church. It is the age of life when they are busy attempting to juggle different responsibilities—new and old. In order to make room in their schedules for other activities, regular worship attendance is neglected.

There is the hopeful assumption that once the Twenty-Something has settled into his or her new life he will begin regular worship again. But, when it comes to faith and an individual’s spiritual welfare, this is not a safe assumption to make. Jesus calls for a different attitude for God’s people to have in his parable of the lost sheep. “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4).⁶ Jesus calls Christians to go after the individuals who have lost their way and strayed from the flock. God’s people are concerned for the spiritual well-being of their straying brothers and sisters. “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you” (Matthew 18:15).

The purpose of this thesis is to address the questions: “Where are all the young people?” and “What can we do?” During my vicar year spent serving in Billings, Montana, it was my responsibility to start a Twenty-Somethings program. After working with the Twenty-Somethings in Billings for a year, I wanted to further investigate what could be done better with the ministry for this specific age demographic. There were over thirty members of Apostles Lutheran Church who were in this age group, and yet, on average, there were eight individuals

⁴ Dyck, 42.

⁵ George Gallup H. Jr. and Robert Bezilla, *The Religious Life of Young Americans: A Compendium of Surveys on the Spiritual Beliefs and Practices of Teenagers and Young Adults*, (Princeton: George H. Gallup International Institute, 1992), 17.

⁶ *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, (Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

who gathered together for our activities. Because of the work I did last year and the desire to encourage more participation from this age group, I wanted to learn what other WELS churches are currently doing to minister to the Twenty-Somethings.

Before conducting any research, I proposed that there is a lack of programs specifically intended for Twenty-Somethings in their respective churches. Because of the lack of focus on this age demographic, they feel that they are not vital members to the church. For this reason, Twenty-Somethings become disengaged and lose the desire to be involved with church life.

On account of my experience during my vicar year, I wanted to learn about the opportunities that were available. In order to answer the questions, “Why do they leave,” and “What can we do,” I needed to research what other individuals have learned concerning outreach and inreach to Twenty-Somethings. The reasons and solutions that these researchers propose are compared to the data that I received from a survey that I conducted. The survey was carried out to investigate what was on the minds of Twenty-Somethings in different WELS congregations concerning Twenty-Somethings programs. The survey was written in such a way to learn what programs were available, how the Twenty-Somethings feel they are viewed in the church, and what these individuals would like to have available to them in their church life. From the data of the surveys, and research from other literature, I propose that it is the responsibility of the church—the pastor, the congregation members, and the Twenty-Somethings working together—to spiritually invigorate this demographic.

Literature Review

Author Unknown. *Can We Stop the Bleeding: A Call to WELS Congregations to Address Teen Spiritual Losses.*

This article raises the simple question that too many are willing to ignore—Why are they leaving? While there are many excuses that can be used, this unknown author states that it is the church’s responsibility to address this issue. This article is directed to teens, and the author takes note that confirmation becomes too much like graduation. Once the confirmed students complete their classes, then they no longer attend church. This author points out that the responsibility to regain these straying individuals should not be left only to the pastor. It is the congregation members’ responsibility and God-given duty to take a personal interest in the spiritual lives of their fellow brothers and sisters in the faith. Although this article is directed towards teenagers, the same philosophy can be applied to regaining the straying Twenty-Something.

Dyck, Drew. "The Leavers: More than in Previous Generations, 20- and 30-somethings are Abandoning the Faith: Why?."

Drew Dyck's conclusion is simple. Twenty-Somethings have enough excuses to not attend worship services. The congregation members and the teachings of that church should not be one of them. Dyck points out how morally compromising behavior of a Twenty-Something is usually one of the quickest answers to why a Twenty-Something does not attend worship. However, Dyck proposes that there is more than that to the majority of situations. From his research, Dyck points to the teachings of certain church groups that are basically social gospel. What is taught by some churches is that if you believe in God and live a good enough life, then you will not have problems. Dyck explains how the Twenty-Somethings today do not buy into this notion. This article was helpful because it pushed aside the excuse of morally compromising behavior. It immediately opened my mind to think of the bigger picture and strive to dig deeper into why Twenty-Somethings may not want to attend worship.

Enderle, Jerome. *Slam the Back—Strategies for Regaining the Straying*.

The main focus of the paper was on strategies that can be employed to regain those who were members at one time but have left the church for one reason or another. In this paper, Pastor Enderle shows from Jesus' life how the Great Teacher worked with delinquents, wanderers, and the lost, while applying it to current ministry opportunities. The strategies that he proposes are obviously pointed to his own ministry, but the main principles that he discusses are useful to keep in mind with those who are wandering. Some of the strategies he suggests would be useful to keep in mind when reaching Twenty-Somethings who have "fallen through the cracks." He proposes a mentoring program, a preventative maintenance idea, and increased involvement of the congregation members for regaining delinquents. These different strategies are able to be honed and fitted to different congregation settings.

Gallup, George H. Jr, and Bezilla, Robert. *The Religious Life of Young Americans: A Compendium of Surveys on the Spiritual Beliefs and Practices of Teenagers and Young Adults*.

This book is exactly what the title says. It has hard numbers, percentages, graphs, and charts explaining the trends of young Americans concerning religion. Its focus is on all the major religions in the United States. The numbers and figures are interesting to look at and study; however, the book is 12 years old and the figures are simply out of date. The young Americans

who were interviewed in that survey are now the “older generation” of today. But, it is interesting to relate the numbers from this book and compare them with more current data.

Geiger, Michael G. *Evangelism Is Not Just for Adults.*

This is a helpful article for building up teenagers to be evangelizers to other teenagers. Because the focus was on teenagers, it was not very useful for my topic. However, there were points concerning teenagers that still apply to Twenty-Somethings. The main idea that correlates with each group is how to outreach to these age groups. Quite simply, build up the individuals who are teenagers and Twenty-Somethings, and they will be your best outreach to other teenagers and Twenty-Somethings.

Hahn, Todd and Verhaagen, David. *GenXers After God: Helping a Generation Pursue Jesus.*

Verhaagen and Hahn researched to see how to reach those who are part of “Generation X.”

These individuals wanted to help a generation that was facing the issue of a world that had become even less Christian than before. A major portion of the book applies the strategy of discipleship to build up GenXers in the faith in order to help the church minister to others. The main discipleship tool they use is called “narrative discipling.” The idea is to show how God’s Story (God’s Word) intersects with the individual’s life story. This helps to show the individual the big picture of salvation in their lives. Although the book is focused on the older generation of today, the strategy of narrative discipling could prove useful in some areas.

Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations.*

Dan Kimball is a pastor of the Emerging Church movement in the United States. The *emerging church* is one that recognizes that the culture of America is changing and cannot be ignored. Kimball’s work is focused on what the church can change to be relevant in the world today, and yet, still remain true to the Bible’s teachings (at least to his own doctrines). While WELS Lutherans will find more than one thing to question concerning Kimball’s theology, they also will find helpful points to keep in mind in this emerging world.

In this book, Kimball focuses on the leadership of the churches. He first explains what is “wrong” with the church and why it needs to change in order to fit the world today. He then explains how pastors and other leaders are able to implement these changes. Because this book focused more on the leadership aspect, it was not as beneficial for my thesis as Kimball’s other book, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*. However, this book is helpful to open the mind to think outside of the box when it comes to ministry to the youth of today.

Kimball, Dan. *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations.*

Dan Kimball is a pastor of the Emerging Church movement in the United States. The *emerging church* is one that recognizes that the culture of America is changing and cannot be ignored.

Kimball's work is focused on what the church can change to be relevant in the world today and yet still remain true to the Bible's teachings. In this particular book he interviews non-Christians and asks them how they feel about the church and Jesus.

From his surveys, Kimball finds six different perceptions individuals have concerning the organization of church. Kimball addresses these perceptions, explains the reasoning, and then further explains what a church could do to fix any perceptions. From his writing, one is not able to get a clear picture of his stance on doctrine. This can be frustrating because he rides the fence on some issues. However, he does make very good points concerning the church and the necessity for flexibility in church leaders and congregation members. It was good to see, as far as I could notice, that he does not push for any change in doctrine in the church; but, rather, he urges churches to be aware of bad perceptions they may give to outsiders. These perceptions are helpful to learn about so that pastors and congregation members are able to both critique their situations and also think about how their church may be perceived. Those perceptions may not only affect those on the outside, but, it may also be affecting members of the church.

Kinnaman, David and Lyons, Gabe. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why it Matters.*

The focus of this book is on those who are outside of the church. However, Kinnaman draws the attention to the attitude of Christians and how, to an outsider, they look very "unchristian."

From interviews that he conducted and other research he had gathered, Kinnaman explains how many outsiders view Christians; it is not a very pretty picture. According to Kinnaman's research, Christians appear to be bullies who are judgmental, hypocritical, too political, women haters, and homophobes. Kinnaman explains that in order to help with this situation, Christians must practice what they preach. They also need to be aware of the perceptions in order to change for the better. What he writes was relevant because his findings would be useful to compare with my survey and how Twenty-Somethings feel their congregations are viewed. It also causes one to think about his or her life and how to be better imitators of Christ.

Leyrer, Daniel. *Reaching Out to Twenty-Somethings.*

In this paper Professor Leyrer explains the dynamic of Twenty-Somethings and how to reach them. He points out that we need to try to understand the character of the Twenty-Something in order to better serve him or her with Jesus. Professor Leyrer also gives great examples of outreach tools and plans for ministry to this age demographic.

Raether, Dale and Siggelkow, Alan H. *Twenty Somethings*.

Pastor Raether explains the trend that was seen in the attendance of Twenty-Somethings. He does not focus as much on the reasons why the Twenty-Somethings leave; but, rather, he focuses more on the Scripture to be used when ministering to them. Professor Siggelkow is the reactor to this paper. He gives a repentance model using the parable of the prodigal son to reach Twenty-Somethings. This paper was especially helpful to refocus on the Word of God when dealing with delinquency issues. It is a good reminder for Christians that what is most important is sharing God's Word with his people.

Setran, David P. and Keisling, Chris A. *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry*.

In this book, Setran and Keisling wrestle with the struggle of applying theology to the lives of emerging young adults. They recognize that between the ages 18 through 30 there is an abundance of decisions that individuals must make that will affect them for their entire lives. One such decision is whether or not God's Word is important enough to remain a priority. This book is written as a more of a practical guide for apologetics for college and young adult ministry. This book deals more directly with how a young adult is able to defend their faith when it is being questioned in their daily lives. This would be an interesting read to use for Twenty-Somethings to do a study on and see what they are able to apply in their own lives.

Veith, Gene Edward Jr. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*.

Gene Veith explains how in an individual's life there are many different positions that one fills. He explains from Scripture how each vocation—each job—that we have in life is a calling from God. By use of Scripture, Veith encourages the reader to make full use of whatever vocation they are filling at that moment because it is a gift from God. One section that was useful concerned an individual's calling to be part of a church. He had good insights to how being part of public worship is not only a benefit for an individual's faith but it calling from God.

What pushes Twenty-Somethings away

There are a number of different reasons why an individual decides to stop attending worship regularly. Writing for *Christianity Today*, Drew Dyck investigated this issue and writes:

20- and 30-somethings are leaving—but why? When I ask church people, I receive some variation of this answer: moral compromise...Tired of dealing with a guilty conscience and unwilling to abandon their sinful lifestyles, they drop their Christian commitment. They may cite intellectual skepticism or disappointments with the church, but these are smokescreens designed to hide reason. “They change their creed to match their deeds,” as my parents would say.⁷

Dyck recognizes the truth behind this perception of delinquent Twenty-Somethings. Often times, the Twenty-Something is viewed as someone who is off living irresponsibly. They are the prodigal child living a life of debauchery before he or she decides to grow up and settle down. There are probably many cases to support this reason why Twenty-Somethings leave the church. But Dyck felt that there was more involved in the situation than individuals falling into morally compromising behavior.

From interviews he conducted, Dyck learned that many Twenty-Somethings left their home church because of a certain negative event they experienced. “Many de-conversions were precipitated by what happened inside rather than outside the church. Even those who adopted materialist worldviews or vogueish spiritualities traced their departures back to what happened in church.”⁸ Dyck admits that there were many varying reasons why an individual left the church, but he realized that most of those who had left had been exposed to a superficial form of Christianity that eventually led to their departure. The superficial form of Christianity is described as, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” which casts God as a distant Creator who blesses people who are ‘good, nice, and fair.’ Its central goal is to help believers ‘be happy and feel good about oneself.’⁹

Dyck recognizes how this type of teaching does not hold up against anything in the world. It is a teaching that is solely based on feelings and emotions with nothing substantial to hold on to. “When this naive and coldly utilitarian view of God crashes on the hard rocks of reality, we shouldn't be surprised to see people of any age walk away.”¹⁰ What the individuals are taught to

⁷ Dyck, 42.

⁸ Ibid, 43.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

be true is proven false by the very nature of the world. As hard as the world tries to paint the world as a happy place, there are still so many troubles and problems that individuals face every day. The Twenty-Something knows that having a strong self-esteem is not going to find them a job. The Twenty-Something knows of individuals who are “good people” (as labeled by society) and deserve something good to happen for them, but those are the people who still suffer. It is not so much a pessimistic way of thinking, but more of a realistic thought process. Because these teachings are not real or true for them, the Twenty-Something no longer desires to equate himself or herself with it. For this reason, the Twenty-Something loses interest or even is frustrated with a church body and its teachings.

A different researcher, Dan Kimball, focused on individuals who were not members of a church and did not want to part of organized religion. He sees the main issue of churches in America—including megachurches—as being groups of people who are not willing to be flexible with the changing culture of this world.¹¹ The changing culture results from the view of Christianity in America.

The American culture no longer props up the church the way it did, no longer automatically accepts the church as a player at the table in public life, and can be downright hostile to the church’s presence. The collapse I am talking about also involves the realization that the values of classic Christianity no longer dominate the way Americans believe or behave.¹²

Church organizations are no longer set upon a pedestal that cannot be questioned or doubted. Their teachings are questioned just as much, if not more, than other teachings and belief systems. Church bodies need to be able to react to this changing perception of Christianity. But, if the church does not respond appropriately to these changes, then it is possible that it will push Twenty-Somethings out of their doors. Not only does it drive individuals out but it also will keep Twenty-Somethings from wanting to come into the church.¹³

To understand the issues and concerns of this emerging generation of Twenty-Somethings, Kimball conducted interviews to learn their perspectives. He lists these as the common misperceptions of the church by “those who like Jesus but not the church:”

¹¹ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: insights from emerging generations*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 18.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 17.

- The church is an organized religion with a political agenda
- The church is judgmental and negative
- The church is dominated by males and oppresses females
- The church is homophobic
- The church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong
- The church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally.¹⁴

Kimball insists that by understanding the reasons behind their opinions, individuals can better understand the people expressing them. Once this has been accomplished, then they can be more effective missionaries to today's emerging Twenty-Somethings.¹⁵ It is all too easy for an individual to look at these observations, to scoff at them, to insist that their church does not fit those perceptions or that these insights are incorrect. However, Kimball points out the problem with this type of mindset. "Just because they aren't correct doesn't mean there aren't good reasons we are seen the way we are."¹⁶

Kimball insists that a church and its leaders need to be willing to respond appropriately to these perceptions in order to be missional¹⁷ churches.¹⁸ If individuals try to ignore these perceptions and pretend they are not affecting the spread of God's Word, then they are acting foolishly. Kimball points out these perceptions so that the leaders of different churches are aware of how they are viewed—whether warranted or not. "By understanding the why behind their opinions, we can better understand the people expressing them, and then we can see how to be more effective as missionaries in today's emerging culture."¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid, 69.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ According to Dan Kimball, "Missional means:

- The church sees itself as being missionaries, rather than having a missions department, and that we see ourselves as missionaries right where we live.
- We see ourselves as representatives of Jesus "sent" into our communities, and that the church aligns everything it does with the *mission dei* (mission of God).
- We see the church not as a place we go only on Sunday, but as something we are through the week.
- We understand we don't "bring Jesus" to people but that we realize Jesus is active in culture and we join him in what he is doing.
- We are very much in the world and engaged in culture but are not conforming to the world.
- We serve our communities, and that we build relationships with the people in them, rather than seeing them as evangelistic targets.
- Being all the more dependent on Jesus and the Spirit through prayer, the Scriptures, and each other in community" (Kimball, 20).

¹⁸ Ibid, 70.

¹⁹ Ibid, 69.

Kimball further explains that these perceptions of Christianity create a second chasm that individuals face in their relationships with God. He uses the illustration of human kind and God facing each other on opposing cliffs. Between the two cliffs is the great chasm of sin that separates human beings from God. It is only Jesus and his work of salvation that bridges that gap. Through faith we united to God. But today, according to Kimball, people face a second chasm that is created by the Christian subculture and people's misperceptions of Christianity.²⁰ Before ever reaching the chasm of sin, individuals outside of the church must cross the chasm of Christian subculture, which Kimball explains this way:

We have created this chasm with our rhetoric and attitudes, which have led people today to harbor negative perceptions of Christians and Christianity that prevent them from trusting us and being interested in the gospel...Because we have become citizens of the bubble, having lost our understanding that we are missionaries in our culture and staying comfortably within our church walls and networks, the new chasm [Christian subculture] only continues to grow.²¹

In other words, in order for the church to grow and for God's Word to spread, the church must work to bridge that chasm of Christian subculture. Once the chasm is bridged, one reaches individuals on their level. Only then, according to Kimball, will those on the outside of the church be willing to hear what the Bible teaches.²²

Another researcher, David Kinnaman, sought to learn what was pushing individuals away from organized religion—specifically, Christianity. Kinnaman's desire in writing this book was for Christians to evaluate their lives and to reflect on their faith. Through his research Kinnaman prays that, "God will reveal your attitudes and stereotypes...I [Kinnaman] hope you will more carefully consider how firmly people reject—and feel rejected by—Christians, and that you come away feeling inspired with ways you can make a difference."²³ David Kinnaman wishes to show that these are perceptions that Christians must fight against in the world today; but, this book was not written solely for Christians. Kinnaman also wishes that with this book non-Christians will understand that these perceptions do not take away from the truth that is Jesus

²⁰ Ibid, 234.

²¹ Ibid, 236.

²² Ibid.

²³ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity..and Why it Matters*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 19.

Christ.²⁴ He wants to show and explain that Christians are sinners too and need a Savior just as much as everyone else.²⁵

From the interviews that he conducted, Kinnaman proposes six different categories that push Twenty-Somethings away from the church. In the minds of those Kinnaman interviewed, Christians were perceived as the exact opposite or *unChristian*.

The most common points of skepticism and objections raised by outsiders:

1. *Hypocritical*...They say Christians pretend to be something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate. Christians think the church is only a place for virtuous and morally pure people.
2. *Too focused on getting converts*...Outsiders wonder if we [Christians] genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people.
3. *Antihomosexual*...They say Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and on leveraging political solutions against them.
4. *Sheltered*...Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality... We [Christians] are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people's lives
5. *Too political*...We [Christians] are overly motivated by a political agenda, that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues.
6. *Judgmental*...Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people.²⁶

These six categories really come down to the point that Christian people did not practice what they preached. As Kinnaman points out in his book, these perceptions are more difficult to deal with than just saying, "We are not like that." Kinnaman writes, "You can deny the hostility, you can refute its causes, you can harass those Christians who are trying their best to represent Jesus in a completely new context, or you can deal with the increasing hostility of outsiders in ways that honor God."²⁷ Kinnaman wants these perceptions to cause Christians to be aware of what others are thinking, to encourage them to be analytical of their lives, and to change their lives if they are *unChristian*. "The important thing to remember is these experiences have deeply affected outsiders, and the scars often prevent them from seeing Jesus for who he really is. This

²⁴ Ibid, 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 29.

²⁷ Ibid, 40.

should inspire our compassion for those outside our churches. We should be motivated not by a sense of a guilt but by a passion to see their hurts healed.”²⁸

Reaction to the three researchers

These three different researchers highlight key areas for consideration in both the individual Christian life and also the bigger picture of Christianity in America. It is interesting how they use the broad stroke of all Christianity and do not focus on individual church bodies. These researchers recognize that these perceptions affect all different types of churches—including mega-churches.

With a few discrepancies, the three researchers had similar discoveries in their interviews and research. While Dyck did not spell out a certain number of perceptions, his findings were very similar to the overarching theme of Kimball and Kinnaman. They each noted how it was something that had occurred at either an individual’s home church or a negative experience concerning a Christian that ultimately drove an individual from organized religion. Through their interviews and research, Dyck, Kimball, and Kinnaman found that the Twenty-Somethings did not point to the media or their friends, but to the churches and Christians themselves that pushed them away. It is quite possible that those individuals were looking for a single instance to blame for their predicament. But, the reasons must be taken into account! With any issue there are going to be layers and layers of information to weed through in order to discover the actual problem. But, it does not mean that one forgets about those layers that added to the problem.

It is also interesting to see that these three researchers focus on what other Christians are able to do to make church life more “appealing” for Twenty-Somethings. It is possible that this focus could lead some individuals to the idea that the spiritual welfare of an individual is dependent on other Christians. In other words, an individual is not “responsible” for their own faith. However, that would be false theology. Scripture clearly teaches that faith is a gift from God, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9). This faith comes to mankind by the Holy Spirit alone, “Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). But, the Christian is responsible to nurture their faith and not

²⁸ Ibid, 32.

become lackadaisical in their faith life. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18). Christians are further encouraged to grow in their faith, “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:13,14). As each researcher noted, these perceptions are not the only things that keep individuals away from God. Kimball correctly points out the chasm of sin which separates human beings from God. Dyck agrees that there are times when morally compromising behavior—a sinful lifestyle—keeps an individual from regular worship attendance. Kinnaman does not want to guilt an individual into making a lifestyle change. However, they do recognize the importance of having the knowledge about these perceptions for a church body that is doing the work of Christ. An individual does not go to a job interview looking like they just rolled out of bed and have not showered in a week. They recognize what first impressions mean and how showing up at an interview in that state could give a false perception of them. So, they do what they can to be perceived in a positive light. It is the same way with church bodies. This is why these researchers—and others—point out these perceptions. They recognize that these negative perceptions of Christianity are placing road blocks in the way of Twenty-Somethings. With the knowledge of these road blocks, Christians have the opportunity to remove them.

What pushes them away: WELS Twenty-Somethings

The previous three researchers focused on what pushes Twenty-Somethings away from Christianity in general. It is pertinent to compare that research with other research that has been conducted among other Wisconsin Lutheran pastors. There is not much written on the specific topic of outreach to Twenty-Somethings in the Wisconsin Synod. However, there are a few conference papers which gave important insights that relate to this topic.

Pastor Jerome Enderle wrote a conference paper discussing methods to regain straying members in Wisconsin Lutheran churches. In his paper, he does not specifically point out methods to regain Twenty-Somethings. But his insights and methods can be applied for ministry to Twenty-Somethings. A key insight that Pastor Enderle pointed out was the causes of delinquency:

1. Psychological reasons - The church is inadequate, irrelevant to his needs. Fear of not living up to the ideals of the church... feeling of guilt makes it impossible to feel close to God.
2. Theological reasons - He may lack adequate knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Little growth in Christian knowledge since confirmation... The careless morals of modern society may have made him callous to the laws of God... The Gospel has lost its meaning for him.
3. Sociological reasons - He may have a sense of not being needed or wanted. As new members they may not have been given a real sense of belonging... Some may feel they're second class members (don't send their children to school, etc.).
4. Economic reasons - Financial matters and Christian stewardship have not been understood and have become a source of personal indignation or a sense of guilt... The church program may be too much need centered and budget-conscious.
5. Personal reasons - Real or imagined grievances (misunderstandings, insults or indifferences) involving another member, a relative, a pastor or a group in the church.²⁹

Pastor Enderle recognizes that this is not an all-inclusive list. But, knowing the reason why an individual may become delinquent aides in regaining that individual for the Lord. This list directly applies to Twenty-Somethings. Many of the same reasons that Pastor Enderle points out are similar to the points raised by Kimball and Kinnaman for perceptions of the church that push Twenty-Somethings away from it.

Professor Dan Leyrer wrote a conference paper concerning outreach to Twenty-Somethings. In this paper, Professor Leyrer focused on what churches can do with not only reaching out to this age demographic, but also what churches can do to keep connecting this age group with the gospel. Professor Leyrer saw the work of the confessional church is to prove over and over again that life with Christ is the real, important life.³⁰ Leyrer sees young adults as being fed up with what the world has called a fulfilled life. They have seen how climbing the corporate ladder did not necessarily make their parents happy; but, rather, they may have been burnt out instead. They see that chasing after material possessions does not make one a happier person. The old way of doing things did not work for their parents, why would it work for them?

²⁹ Jerome Enderle, *Slam the Back—Strategies for Regaining the Straying*, [WLS Essay File] (North Atlantic Tri-Circuit, January 2007, accessed 1 September 2014); available from <http://www.wlssays.net/files/EnderleBackDoor.pdf>; Internet: 6.

³⁰ Daniel Leyrer, *Reaching Out to Twenty-Somethings*, [WLS Essay File] (A White Paper: Board for Parish Services, 2003, accessed 1 September 2014); available from www.wlssays.net/files/LeyrerTwenty.rtf; Internet: 2.

They want something to be done differently in order for them to have enjoyable, fulfilled lives.

Leyrer further explains,

Now is the time for the WELS to go on the offensive with the real, fulfilling life of living under Jesus. Now is the time to challenge young adults the way Paul challenged the Athenians: “Baby busters, I see that in every way you are searching for something real, something that won’t let you down, something that will fill your emptiness. The satisfaction you claim is unknown I am going to proclaim to you. Let me tell you the story of Jesus Christ” (adaptation of Acts 17:22-23).³¹

Professor Leyrer also recognized the importance of knowing this group target, as the earlier researchers understood, we need to try to understand the age group of Twenty-Somethings. Leyrer writes, “It would be good, in fact it is essential, to recognize our need for improvement. Reaching Twenty-Somethings consistently with the gospel means studying the target and considering how the weapon [the gospel] should be used.”³²

Professor Leyrer focused more on the general characteristics of Twenty-Somethings rather than specific perceptions. Leyrer describes this group of people as individuals who want to be recognized for their diversity; “They refuse to be labeled. It is important that we understand this not as immaturity or arrogance, but as a leaning toward individuality and a cry for diversity.”³³ They want their opinion to be valued, “They [Twenty-Somethings] do expect to be heard. And they don’t just accept diversity. They expect it. Churches that want to keep them in the gospel must be willing to ask for their help and listen to their ideas.”³⁴ They are seeking meaningful relationships with other people, “Mature Christian adults should not try to ‘be hip’ in order to attract and retain Twenty-Somethings at their church. The attraction and retention happens when the gospel is shared by Christians who are looking out for one another and are genuinely interested in one another’s lives. Like a family.”³⁵ Professor Leyrer insists that if a church understands this age group, even a little bit more than before, then they are able to share the gospel message to them more effectively. Generational differences are challenges in any

³¹ Leyrer, 2.

³² Ibid, 3.

³³ Ibid, 4.

³⁴ Ibid, 3.

³⁵ Ibid, 5.

facet of life—it is difficult to connect—but when achieved, the results are beneficial and inspirational.

In another conference paper, Pastor Dale Raether describes this investigation of what pushes Twenty-Somethings away as something like a hydra: once one takes care of a single issue, a different, more daunting issue takes its place.³⁶ Pastor Raether recognized, as have many pastors before him, that there was a serious spiritual predicament with Twenty-Somethings in Wisconsin Lutheran churches.

We all know there's a problem. But why does this problem seem to be bigger than a generation or two ago? What's different about society, about families, and about Twenty-Somethings themselves? Sin is nothing new. (Spiritually) dysfunctional families are nothing new. Youthful rebellion is nothing new. Is it perhaps there's just more of these things today than before? On the other hand some may argue things were as bad, if not worse in 1517. So then, how does one quantify the problem? With surveys? With scientific research? But who would do this work and who would interpret it? And after it's all done, would we really know any more than before?³⁷

From what seems to be cynicism from Pastor Raether, one gets the impression that the situation is a lost cause. This is a problem that congregations have to deal with and nothing will help it. But, that is not Pastor Raether's point. He recognizes the problem at hand and wants Christians to realize this will take work to improve the situation. Raether points out that Satan's attack against Twenty-Somethings come from a broader range of categories. He recognizes that, initially, in an individual's life there are certain "pressures" from outside sources to keep a young person involved in the church and its activities. The pressures can come from parents, peers, and even guilt.³⁸ These pressures are not all meant to be bad things; but, rather, quite the opposite—especially coming from parents and peers. It is the training of a young person's mind to learn that their spiritual life is important. It is following the wisdom of Solomon from Proverbs chapter 22 verse 6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." But, as Pastor Raether recognizes, the problems arise when these outside pressures are no longer present. When those pressures are not as prevalent, it is easier for the Twenty-

³⁶ Dale Raether and Alan H Siggelkow, *Twenty Somethings*, [WLS Essay File] (Paper presented to the Board for Parish Services, January 16, 1997, accessed 1 October 2014); available from <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/RaetherSomethings.pdf>; Internet: 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Something to neglect church attendance. Really, it comes down to the fact that Twenty-Somethings have new independence at that age in life. If they are not mature in their faith, then they may have difficulty with keeping Jesus and God's Word a number one priority in their lives.³⁹

There are many different reasons that a Twenty-Something may give for why he or she no longer attends worship services. Pastor Raether offers a broad assortment of reasons. Some categories are based on outside scientific research. Other categories are based on personal observances of Pastor Raether and others. Pastor Raether proposes that Twenty-Somethings are leaving Wisconsin Lutheran churches because youth are maturing later in life⁴⁰, there is a loss of rapport with mature Christians, the deification of self, idolatry, immorality, and false doctrine.⁴¹ It is important to note that Pastor Raether, in writing this specific conference paper, did not strive to point out specific issues that need to be addressed. "We know who this beast is and we know how to destroy his power. Instead of looking for 'new' things as causes of backdoor loses, we have to make sure we haven't unwittingly let go of the 'old' things. 'Fear God and give him glory.' In everything we do and in every aspect of our ministry, that's what it's all about."⁴² He does not wish to pinpoint a single issue must be resolved. However, the issues that he does point to are similar issues that were brought up by other researchers as well.

Reaction to the WELS conference papers

These conference papers discuss the issue of delinquent Twenty-Somethings in different Wisconsin Synod churches. But, each handles the issue in a different way. Pastor Enderle's focus is not solely on Twenty-Somethings but on those who leave the church in general. He recognizes the necessity of understanding an individual's situation in order to repair any perceived damage. Professor Leyrer points out the necessity of understanding the Twenty-Somethings in order to better serve them. He sees that after we are able to get to know the

³⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁰ "According to some researchers, children are maturing at a later age than they did a generation or two ago. What they're talking about is 'concrete operations' verses 'formal operations.' Children base how they relate to their world on the concrete, on what they can immediately see or feel. Adults on the other hand can perceive unseen cause-and-effect relationships, and how these relate to their beliefs about life and about themselves" (Raether and Siggelkow, 5).

⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

⁴² Ibid, 9.

individuals of that age demographic, then we are able to minister to their needs. Pastor Raether understands the necessity of knowing the individuals. But, he also points to the necessity to keep one's eyes focused on God's Word and not only on the different issues. He understands the importance of understanding the issues, but he warns against trying to fix a problem and actually creating a larger one. This is one of the pitfalls to be avoided:

When we see lambs and sheep being torn apart, we're tempted to launch a massive campaign to cut off that hydra head. Examples: TV, materialism, pornography, humanism, etc. Results: we may cut off a head, but it will grow back. And even while we're cutting that one off, lambs and sheep are being destroyed by six other heads. Worse yet, by getting wrapped up with issues, Satan draws us away from the one thing that can destroy his power. Every attack we launch must be used as an opportunity to preach repentance and forgiveness, calling forth daily contrition and repentance in all aspects of their life, not just for that one thing.⁴³

Although their focus is different, these Wisconsin Synod pastors recognize the work that needs to be done. As Raether stated, the problem of delinquent Twenty-Somethings seems to be getting worse in the current generation of Twenty-Somethings. Whether it is the Twenty-Somethings' perceptions of Christianity, their different characteristics from the older generations, or the lack of maturity with their newly discovered independence these researchers all agree that there are different areas that need to be addressed amongst this age demographic. They recognize that there is not one single formula to keep Twenty-Somethings involved. They also know there are many different ways that a church and its members are able to work with this age demographic to keep them rooted in God's Word. They each state what is most important. It is not that Twenty-Somethings come and sit in church on Sunday morning. What is important is that they are connected to God's Word and gladly hear and learn it.

The Survey

Who better to ask about Twenty-Somethings programs available in churches than Twenty-Somethings themselves? I decided that for the focus of this paper, a survey would work best for my research. I put together a survey in order to receive a wide variety of opinions. The survey was a sixteen point questionnaire using the online forum of Google Docs. The focus group for the survey was individuals who fit in the age demographic of 20 through 29 years old. The form was set up so that when an individual responded, there was complete anonymity (unless the individual stated their name or the name of their church). This was done to

⁴³ Ibid, 8.

encourage open honesty and protect the privacy of their thoughts and opinions. The survey was sent to individuals with different backgrounds who lived in different areas of the United States. This was done to receive varied responses from different WELS churches in America.

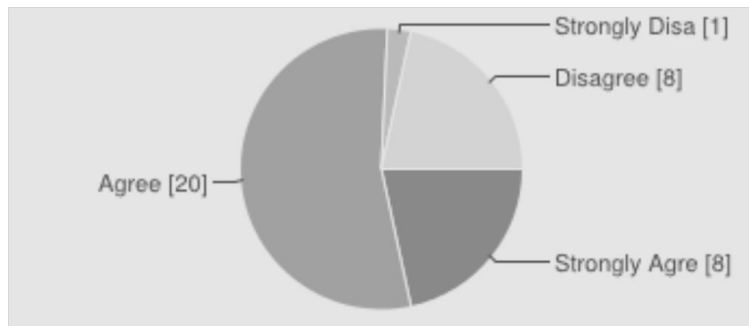
The survey was written to allow the individual to critique their personal experience as a Twenty-Something in their home church. It also prompted the individual to provide input on any Twenty-Something program available at their home church. I then presented the individual with the opportunity to disclose what their interests were for a Twenty-Something group. The survey asked different styles of questions in order to receive varied responses. Along with open and closed questions, there were statements that asked the individual to rate different possibilities and scenarios. The individual was asked to rate their feelings concerning a statement between “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” Following such questions, the individual was given the opportunity to give the reason for their response. This proved very beneficial. An individual may agree or disagree to a certain statement and just click on an answer without putting forth much thought. But, when asked to give a reason, they would need to think more deeply about the question.

When looking through the responses, it was necessary to be aware of any potential bias. This was necessary because many of the individuals who completed the survey know me on a personal level. Also, with the informed consent letter sent to them, they knew that their answers would be used for a theological paper at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. For this reason, an individual may have written their answer to have a more “Christian” tone to it. These were also good Christian people who naturally want to speak well of their churches. However, it is also possible that there were individuals who experienced a negative situation in their home church. This also would have swayed their answer a completely different way. With these thoughts in mind, all the responses were taken in the kindest possible way.

The Results: How Twenty-Somethings are perceived

I first wanted to discover how Twenty-Somethings are perceived in different WELS churches. In order to learn this, I asked the individual to describe how they are greeted when they arrive at church for worship. Thirty-five out of the thirty-seven survey partakers responded positively! They were either greeted by specific greeters in the congregation, felt welcomed by other congregation members, or at the very least the Twenty-Something was told “Good Morning” or “hello” with a smile. To dig deeper into how the Twenty-Something is perceived,

the survey asked the individual to react to the statement, “I feel that I fit in at church functions.” The following chart shows the results.



Over seventy-five percent of the respondents felt that they fit in at various church functions. Take note that this question did not specify a certain type of church function. This was meant to be a broad statement to see how the individual would respond. Following this question the survey asked the individual to give a reason for their answer. When this question was answered the results were similar. However, eleven individuals added clarifying remarks for their reasons. They felt they fit in but there was something that did not make them feel completely comfortable.

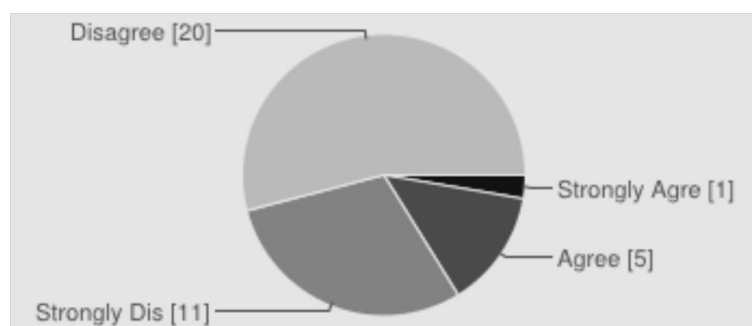
The survey also asked the individuals to describe how they felt Twenty-Somethings were perceived by other congregation members. Again, in the majority, the results were positive. Twenty-two individuals felt that other congregation members were happy to see the young people in the church. But, there were also more negative responses to this question. Five individuals felt that Twenty-Somethings were noticed by other congregation members but then they were forgotten. One individual described the perception they felt was, “Not poorly—but not necessarily sought out.” Three responded that Twenty-Somethings seem to be viewed as individuals who have a long way to go in life and have much to learn. Six individuals felt that Twenty-Somethings were looked down on. They are individuals who are seen as bigger kids but not quite yet adults. From the results, it seems that the individuals feel they are welcomed at church. But, at the same time, they seem to have this feeling that they are not quite connected with the other members of the congregation.

The Results: Opportunities for Twenty-Somethings

The very first question of the survey simply asked to describe what programs were available to Twenty-Somethings in their home church. I wanted the individual to think of their personal situations without any outside aides. Twenty-four individuals responded that there was some type of opportunity for them to be involved in the church. Examples were given such as

ushering, ladies aid, choir, teaching Sunday school, and attending Bible Class, to name a few. Six divulged that there was something available specifically for their age group. But seven made a point to say there was nothing specific for Twenty-Somethings. But, from those seven, five recognized that there were other opportunities available to them as well.

Later, the survey asked the individuals to react to the statement that there was specifically a Twenty-Somethings program available in their church. The results can be seen in this chart.



Over eighty percent of the individuals did not believe that there was a Twenty-Something program in their church. Again, the survey asked the individuals to expound on their reasoning for their answer. Instead of just stating the obvious and saying, “There is not a program available,” many elaborated on their answers. Twenty-four individuals stated that there was nothing specific for this age demographic. One stated, “There isn’t a single ministry that focuses on Twenty-Somethings. There are a lot of offerings for adults and children, but nothing for the demographic in between.” Seven individuals explained that there had been a program at the church for a time but it was no longer running. Only six out of the group of respondents agreed that there was a specific program available to them.

The Results: Why Twenty-Somethings are not involved

In the earlier sections I stated different reasons that other researchers have pointed out why Twenty-Somethings are not involved with the church. Dyck, Kimball, and Kinnaman focused on individuals who were not members of a church body. The WELS pastors I researched did not conduct interviews; but, rather, it seems that their focus was primarily on their own perceptions. The main goal of my survey was to learn what was on the mind of Twenty-Somethings in the WELS congregations. In order to fulfill this purpose, I wanted to learn from WELS Twenty-Somethings what they believed were the issues that hindered congregations. Therefore, I needed to discover the obstacles and struggles that WELS Twenty-Somethings faced concerning church attendance and events.

In order to find out this information, I took the attention away from the individual who took the survey. I did this by asking, through the survey, if there were any obstacles a friend would face to participate in a church activity or event. There was a dual purpose for this question. Firstly, the individual might feel entirely comfortable with their situation in their church and not know how to answer for themselves. Asking the question in this way, the individual would need to be objective. Secondly, it leads the individual to think outside of the box and think of outreach to other individuals in their age demographic. The written responses varied, and many answers given by the individuals listed two or more obstacles. Six individuals pointed to the issue of the lack of events specifically focused to Twenty-Somethings. With these events there was a perceived problem that the events were not exciting or engaging for Twenty-Somethings. One respondent even called a Twenty-Something group a “glorified teen group” that would not interest individuals. A different obstacle was the issue of time. Eight respondents pointed out that this would be the hardest obstacle for their friends to overcome. As one respondent simply stated: “Not enough time to do extra church events.”

Another major obstacle was the problem of feeling judged and disconnected with the older generations. I tie these two into one category because when an individual is feeling judged they will not feel connected to the people around them. Eleven individuals commented that this would be the main obstacle their friends would have with church events. There is a feeling that Twenty-Somethings are not viewed as being able to give meaningful service. Along with that, Twenty-Somethings felt that their opinion is not valued at their current age in life. For this reason, they feel disconnected to the older generations because they believe they are looked down upon.

In order to expound on these responses, the survey asked the individual to explain why they thought churches struggled to keep Twenty-Somethings involved. Again, the responses often came in lists of two or more issues. Quite surprisingly, only two individuals mentioned that the style of worship was a problem. The same obstacles that were stated for the friends came up again with the struggles of the church. Five separate times it was pointed out that Twenty-Somethings are viewed as children and not given respect or challenged enough. Seven times it was felt that the focus is placed on everyone else in the church but there was nothing specific for the Twenty-Somethings. Nine times it was stated that Twenty-Somethings felt disconnected with the older generations. Nine other times outside pressures and temptations

were given for reasons for the struggle. But the biggest struggle was not placed on the church. The biggest struggle was actually pointed back at the Twenty-Somethings. Thirteen times it was recognized that Twenty-Somethings struggle with time and responsibility management. They recognize that worship and church activities sometimes take a lower priority in their busy lives. From the data of the survey, I see that many individuals of this age demographic realize that the issue and struggle ultimately lies with them. They know they need to take responsibility for their actions. Many of the individuals—even if they do not state it—would probably admit that these issues are easy excuses for their lack of participation. They know how to ease their conscience with a number of different defenses. But, these excuses are issues that are a real struggle for many who belong to this age group. Because Twenty-Somethings struggle with management of time and responsibilities, it could be a possible field that congregations focus on in order to help this age demographic to be more efficient. This is an area where all Christians could learn to grow. This would be an opportunity for all congregation members to grow together.

The Results: What Twenty-Somethings are looking for

Having learned the struggles, the obstacles, and the issues that may explain the delinquency of Twenty-Somethings, it seemed fitting to also learn what these individuals want to see their churches do better. With this set of questions I wanted to learn how Twenty-Somethings believed their congregations could improve in their ministry to Twenty-Somethings. I also wanted to learn what would interest this age demographic and be most impactful for them.

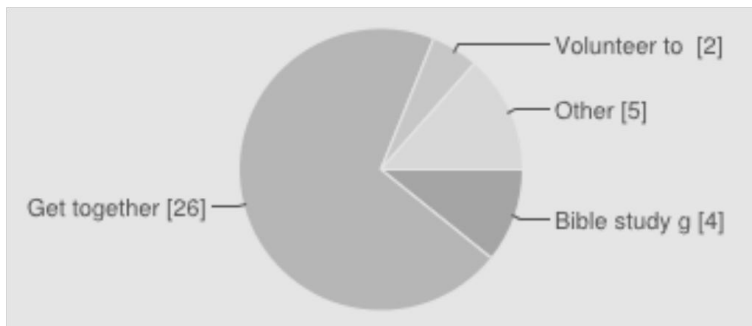
The areas in which the churches could do better in their ministry to this age group directly corresponded to the areas of struggle. Nine respondents specifically desired a group that focused on Twenty-Somethings. Not a special group for newly-weds or young families; but, a group that was focused on young adults. Nine individuals made comments that pointed to the desire of meaningful relationships within the congregation. They did not want just acquaintances at church, but friends that were close like family. They wanted to feel like they were really wanted and not just another face in the pew. Twelve individuals specifically pointed to the desire to become involved in the ministry of the church. They wanted their churches to make them feel like they were needed assets to the church, its function, and ministry. One individual responded in this way:

I think that having the 20-somethings take some ownership in the church is important. The elders do all the “important” jobs, but maybe having the elders use some of the 20-somethings to help them out would be good. Or maybe creating an “outreach team” that

could consist of the 20-somethings, which they had the power to come up with and execute ideas to recruit other 20-somethings to come to church. Basically, having more meaningful positions for these people would help a lot. I believe that many feel they are just a glorified member of youth group who is too old to still attend youth group, with no real responsibility in the church besides Sunday services and Bible study.

This individual raises interesting points. Not all the work of an elder in the church should be delegated out to other individuals; however, there are areas where Twenty-Somethings could help. Depending on the situation, a Twenty-Something might be able to assist with delinquent calls. This may be very effective when it is another Twenty-Something who needs reassurance. The idea this individual raises for an outreach of just Twenty-Somethings could be very effective not only with outreach to that age demographic. There is something to be said about having youth in the church fulfilling different roles. There is a feeling that the church is alive, active and vibrant. The general idea is to have the Twenty-Somethings involved in meaningful positions of the church.

The respondents also gave great information to what would interest them and their friends. The following chart shows how seventy percent of the respondents simply want to be able to get together and really grow in their relationships with each other.



In the follow up question, the respondents explained what those gatherings “ideally” would look like for them. Twenty-seven respondents explained that they were looking to meet other individuals of the same age and to grow together with them. This would come from growing in their relationships along with the study of God’s Word. For twenty-two of the respondents, they made sure to add into their commentary that they wanted Bible Study to be a key component to their gatherings. These individuals are looking to grow together with others who share the same faith and are facing similar situations in their lives.

Comparison of the results

Because the survey was conducted with Twenty-Somethings from the Wisconsin Synod, there would be discrepancies between those results and the results found by the other researchers already mentioned. Both Kimball and Kinnaman pointed to the church as being too political as a deterrent of individuals to Christianity. But, in the survey there was no mention of politics being an issue. Some of the issues that were brought forth by other researchers—issues of doctrine, homosexuality, roles of men and women, inerrancy of Scripture—were found to be obstacles as well in the survey. The difference was the level of importance the topics and perceptions were held by the researchers and those who partook in the survey. The main instances when these arose were when the individual was asked to give possible obstacles for friends. It also was brought up by two individuals when asked about struggles in their home church. But it does not seem to be a major difficulty on the minds of the majority of the individuals who partook in the survey. There could be a number of different reasons for these discrepancies. Firstly, the differing demographics with whom the interviews were conducted. Kimball and Kinnaman focused on individuals who were not members of a specific church organization. The survey I conducted was given specifically to WELS members who quite simply may not perceive the same issues being present in their respective congregations. Secondly, those who partook in my survey may have restrained their opinions in order to put the best possible light on their home congregations. And so, they would not raise these issues even if they were present. Thirdly, it is possible that these issues do not affect them in the same way; therefore, it does not apply to them.

There were a few different areas of similarity. An issue that arose in the papers of Pastor Enderle, Pastor Raether, and Professor Leyrer was the difficulty of proper balance of time and responsibilities. This was a major point that was brought forth by the Twenty-Somethings. They recognized this to be an issue for themselves and also an issue for their friends to be involved in church activities. Because this is a struggle, church leaders may consider working with Twenty-Somethings to encourage them in their time and responsibility management skills. An area of struggle that was felt by the outside sources and the partakers of the survey was the church seen as hypocritical and judgmental. From this also came the encouragement to not only practice what you preach but also to take Twenty-Somethings seriously. This was a point that was stressed by each of the researchers and those who responded to the survey. Twenty-Somethings

want to have their voices heard, want their opinions to matter, and want to take a hold on the ministry of the church.

Conclusion

What We Can Do: Teach God's Word

In no way does this paper look to push the fault off of the Twenty-Somethings and their responsibilities. Many of those who responded to the survey recognized that the problem was found in time and responsibility management. One does not wish to burden consciences but there comes a point when the excuses are just smokescreens for what is the real issue. All too easily does the comment, "I am just so busy," come to the lips of the Twenty-Something who is delinquent in their church attendance. But, especially because they are discovering their new independent life away from their parents, the church and church leaders cannot hope to drag them to church and force them to enjoy themselves. That is where God has given us the tremendous tool of his Word to invigorate Twenty-Somethings spiritually.

The wandering Twenty-Something needs to be taken back to God's Word and shown that their actions are not God-pleasing. Time and again one can read through Scripture and see the curses pronounced on those who reject his message. God, through his prophet Jeremiah, spoke concerning his chosen people Israel, "I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law" (Jeremiah 6:19). The word "Law" here is not speaking only of the ceremonial laws that God gave to his nation; it is speaking to all his Word. In the New Testament Jesus speaks of what will befall those who reject him. "Whoever believes in him [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). Jesus also said, "But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:33).⁴⁴ What a terrible judgment to be placed under because of one's own rejection. Especially to those who have heard God's Word but have rejected it, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment" (Matthew 10:15). Writing to the Romans, Paul warns, "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger" (Romans 2:9).

⁴⁴ Parallel passage is found in Luke 12:9: "But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God."

To those who say they are too busy, they are waiting to get settled, and then they will get back to God's Word and to worship, one is able to point them to Jesus' parables. One parable that would fit this situation is Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew chapter 22 verses 1 through 14. The feast is ready to be served and it is time for those who had already sent in their RSVPs to come and join him. When they received the message, they rejected it. But, the king wants them to join him at his feast and sends more messengers. But, "They paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business" (v. 4). They were too busy to listen to the King's message. To relate it to the Twenty-Somethings: they went to their school work, they went off to their careers, and they wanted to wait until they were better situated in life. But, this age demographic must be aware of this same warning. Because those in the parable rejected the message, the king's invitation, they were no longer welcomed at the king's feast. Be warned, disinterest in God's Word may lead to apathy and a hardening of the heart.

A second parable to use for the delinquent Twenty-Something is Jesus' parable of the ten virgins recorded in Matthew chapter 25 verses 1 through 13. This parable is especially useful because Jesus is not addressing outright atheists. The ten virgins are all waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. They all have lamps eagerly anticipating his arrival (v.1). But five of them were foolish, "The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them" (v. 3). Explain to the delinquent that the oil is faith and all ten initially have faith. But the foolish ones do not see the oil—faith—as something they need to be concerned with at that time. When they neglect opportunities to grow in God's Word and put their busy lives and work schedules as their number one priorities, they are showing—by their actions—that faith is not important to them. Without faith, the door to heaven is locked. Those who are in their early twenties are at the height of their physical lives. It is the time when they feel invincible and able to take on the world. But like the foolish virgins, they may be woefully unprepared. Twenty-Somethings need to hear this parable and to be constantly reminded, "Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." They do not know when Jesus will come back.

One does not wish to pass unnecessary judgment on an individual. For many Twenty-Somethings they feel judged by other congregation members and for this reason they do not wish to attend worship services. Remember that Scripture clearly states that human beings are not able to see in the hearts of man and see their faith. "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

For all one might know, the person who does not attend worship regularly may be studying God's Word every night. When a Twenty-Something hears they must attend worship services, it quite possibly sounds to them like Law motivation. When motivated by the Law, the sinful man fights against it and wants nothing to do with it. But, God does not want to motivate with the Law. God motivates with his Gospel promises. It is the power of the Gospel that reaches into their souls and cracks the walls of the hardened heart. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Professor Siggelkow comments,

It is my experience that there is a remembrance of grace on the part of many of the Twenty-Somethings. It is sometimes a remembrance of cheap grace. But in the despair of the *valley of the shadow of death* many remember: "My Father loves me!" For many who have gone through our system there is still the hope of objective justification in them. It is a hope that we need to strengthen. It is the remembrance of the precious grace that we need to strengthen! It is the remembrance of the grace won by the holy, precious blood of the Son of God shed for us.⁴⁵

Twenty-Somethings want meaningful relationships. Show them from the Parable of the King's Invitation that God the Father wants a special relationship with them. He sends his messengers to them with the Word in order to give them the invitation. Twenty-Somethings want to feel and know that they are sought out. Point them to their Savior Jesus whose purpose was to seek the lost, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Show them Jesus who is their High Priest who intercedes for them with the Father, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus felt the same temptations of the same struggles that Twenty-Somethings feel today. And yet, he did not sin. He was their perfect substitute who died for their sins so that they are given confidence in their relationship with God. "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). For many Twenty-Somethings they have heard time and again, from numerous individuals, the need to return to church and the necessity to participate in church functions. Instead of using that approach, encourage them with the truth that God wants to meet them there at worship with fellow believers. He calls them to approach his throne with confidence and he promises to give

⁴⁵ Raether and Siggelkow, 11.

them grace, mercy, and help in their times of need. Again, it is motivation with God's promises, not the Law.

For those who struggle with the thought that church is not for them, they need to hear the simple yet powerful message that, "God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Some of the individuals may feel judged for being "slow" in their return to worship. Show them God's patience, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Remind them again and again that, "[God our Savior], wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Remember, this is an age demographic who is fed up with the disillusionments of this world and commercialism. Show them that in Jesus God shows the one truth that will set them free (John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.>"). Professor Siggelkow exhorts with this comment:

We need to say a few words about the "fear of returning syndrome." "What will people say when I first come back to church?" "My parents will be the winners then." "They will never forgive me." "I could never go back to that church!" One wonders about contrition when one hears those words. Yet, we need to train our church council members and our people to be joyful about the return of the lost. We need to show the joy of the father, sometimes more quietly, but still communicated carefully to the returnee. In our welcome we need to live objective justification.⁴⁶

Twenty-Somethings want to be seen as individuals who are unique in their own ways, but Twenty-Somethings need to be shown that they are not unique in the fact that they are sinners. After that has been established, it is important to remind them that in God's eyes they are unique because Jesus died on the cross for each of their individual sins. He cares for each of them individually. He wants them to come to repentance, to turn away from the sinful desires of this world, and turn back to him. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with them and calls them to gather together not only with others of the same age demographic but everyone who share the same faith. Congregation members and pastors are able to encourage them when instead of giving excuses to the delinquent Twenty-Something and hoping that they will return to the Word, they go and share that Word with them! Learn what is on their mind. Try to understand what problems they are facing in their lives. Making the comment, "I have not seen

⁴⁶ Ibid, 12.

you in awhile,” to a Twenty-Something comes off judgmentally—even with the best intentions. Instead say, “It is great to see you again, how is everything going in your life?” This sounds inviting and not condemning. Actually show care for the individual. Sometimes, for the returnee, it feels like there is a waiting period they must face in order to see if they can be trusted again. That is not how the Father welcomed back his prodigal son. That is not how Paul tells the Corinthians to react to the repentant sinner. Instead Paul writes:

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake. (2 Corinthians 7-10).

When a delinquent Twenty-Something returns, reaffirm your love for him or her. Jesus works through other congregation members, his people, to show those individuals love and to share with them his forgiveness.

God’s People Gather Together

Once the Law and Gospel have been properly applied to a situation, it is imperative that Twenty-Somethings are reminded the reason why God’s people gather together in regular worship. Their lives are a testimony to God’s work that has been done in them, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 15:1-2). God gives them a specific opportunity to share God’s work he completed in them with others in public worship.

I feel there are times when the benefits of public worship are forgotten. It is more than just a social event or a time to make one feel better about themselves. It is a time when one is edified by God’s Word and in-turn is able to build others up as well. “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Romans 15:1-2). Paul’s writes in his first letter to the Thessalonians in chapter 5, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (v.11). What more meaningful service could Christians be given than the opportunity to build each other up in the faith. Once Law and Gospel have been correctly applied to the situation, one is able to show that in our lives of sanctification we have been given a great opportunity to each other. “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose”

(Philippians 2:12,13). Pastor Enderle explains the application of Hebrews chapter 10 verse 25 in this way:

When Hebrews 10:25 ["Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching."] is usually applied, dire warnings are offered about the fact that absenting oneself from the assembling of God's people places one in spiritual jeopardy. But this passage also has another emphasis that is less perceived when this passage is explained. In a number of places in the New Testament, particularly in 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul argues that spiritual gifts are offered to the total church through gifts that God gives to its individual members. Not only do persons short change themselves and make themselves vulnerable to apostasy when they forsake the assembly of God's people, they also short change the members of the congregation... When they withdraw from the fellowship, their gifts are no longer available to their fellow members.

Every person has gifts that are to be profitably shared with the whole congregation. Of course, the inactive person will understand this only when we have first motivated him/her with the assurance of complete forgiveness through Jesus.⁴⁷

With this work, sharing the Law and the Gospel, and pointing Twenty-Somethings to the importance and benefits of public worship, one is reminding them of the special calling they received from God. Because of the sinful nature that is innate in mankind, we were not part of God's family. In Ephesians, Paul describes mankind as darkness at one time. They were called out of that darkness and have been made light, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). As children of the light we have been called out to live a new and holy life.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Gene Veith elaborates on this calling from 1 Peter 2:9-10,

Because Christians are called by God's Word, they are called *out of* the sinful world and *into* the Church...With the call of God, the person who was once an isolated and alienated sinner becomes part of a holy nation, the people of God, an actual community whose purpose is to declare the praise of the Caller. That is, the Christian becomes a member of Christ's Church.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Enderle, 15.

⁴⁸ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 121. Italics in original.

Twenty-Something want to know that they are part of something worthwhile and meaningful. The 1 Peter passage helps to show them that God called them to be part of his people. God's people are connected to each other in faith. With Christ, believers are joined together in the "invisible church." This church cannot be seen on this earth because one can only tell if someone belongs by looking at the faith that is in his or her heart. But, that does not stop God's people from gathering together. God teaches in his Word the benefits and blessings that come from gathering together in a visible church. God comes to us in his Word and Sacraments in public worship. It is in public worship that believers are encouraged and built up together (Hebrews 10:25). It is also in public gathering that Jesus gives an additional promise to be there with us. No matter how small the gathering, Jesus comforts us with his presence and blessing. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

In all of the ordinariness of a local church and an average Sunday morning worship service, Christ—as with other vocations, though this time in a spiritually save way—is hidden. He is actually *there* wherever two or three are gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20. He is present in His Word and in His Sacraments and in the hearts of all believers who, though drab and lowly and nothing special on the outside, make up nevertheless a royal priesthood whom Christ has called and in whom He dwells.⁴⁹

The survey shows that Twenty-Somethings want to feel they are important, valid members of the congregation. Show them from God's Word how they fulfill an integral role in the congregation with their presence. They are called a royal priesthood. Twenty-Somethings are God's holy nation. Explain to them that at public worship God comes to be with them and encourage them with his Word and Sacraments. This can be done when speaking with a delinquent. The previous information can also be used to encourage regular worship attendees as well.

What We Can Do: The Congregation

It is important to recognize that first, the Twenty-Something must check his or her own heart before passing the blame onto other people. But, that does not give an excuse to the congregation to not be proactive about a situation. It is all too easy with any case of delinquency to throw them to the wolves and leave them to defend themselves. These cases take a lot of time and effort.

What can the Synod do about Twenty-Somethings losses? We are tempted to say, "Very little!" The issue is too personal. It takes the personal mentor. It takes the time of a person

⁴⁹ Ibid, 122. Italics in original.

of God working with another child of God face-to-face, one-on-one, with the Word and with issues surrounding the Word. It takes personal faith-driven Law toughness and personal Gospel-soaked patience. It takes personal Christian maturity, love, and caring to seize the opportune time to proclaim, to remind, to rebuke, to listen, to repent, to encourage repentance, to absolve, and to encourage the fruits of repentance.⁵⁰

Instead of looking at the situation as a hassle, view it as it is an opportunity from God to share his love with others. “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

One should not look the other way when they see a case of delinquency. God has called us to be watchful for our brothers and sisters and their spiritual welfare. God commands his people, “Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt” (Leviticus 19:17). Concerning Israel’s wickedness, God spoke to his prophet Ezekiel, “When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood’” (Ezekiel 33:8). And Paul exhorts us, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:4-5).

God calls his people to take an interest in other individuals. He created man to be social creatures and calls believers to work to understand other believers. Take an interest with them while having the same attitude as Jesus. It is not judgmental, not looking to make oneself feel better about his or her life, not manipulative, and not prying. Take interest in others out of love for them keeping in mind Jesus’ great command to his people, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). When an older congregation member sees a Twenty-Something walking into church: go to them, talk to them, and take an interest in their life. Congregation members, instead of asking where are all the young people and not doing anything about it, ask the pastor whether or not he has spoken to them recently. If he has not, try and see if there is some contact information for the individual. Then take the time to speak to the individual. Granted, there are times when people want to be left alone and do not want to talk to other people. But, there are other times when the individual wants—sometimes without knowing it himself or herself—another individual to inquire about his or her well-being.

⁵⁰ Raether and Siggelkow, 10.

When these inquiries are completed out of love and care for brothers and sisters in the faith, then it is an action encouraged, blessed, and condoned by God.

What We Can Do: Willing to Work Together

From the responses of the survey, there were quite a few Twenty-Somethings that noted the lack of desire for change in a congregation. The old adage, “We’ve always done it that way,” is too easily used as an excuse. This can be seen when attempting to start a new group or committee in the congregation. The pastor or another called worker is given the sole responsibility to start a group or committee to minister to group of individuals. It is important that the called worker and pastor know what occurs in their congregation. But, it is neither beneficial, nor realistic, that he or she is given sole responsibility. Twenty-Somethings want to be given meaningful service in the church and want to be given responsibility. Does it not make sense to then make them the leaders of their own group?

An example from Colorado

Twenty-Somethings as leaders of their own group is exactly what occurred with the group named “Rooted” based out of Colorado.⁵¹ A few lay members recognized the need and desire of Twenty-Somethings in the area congregations to meet other WELS members their age. In Colorado there are not many WELS churches near to each other. Many of the Twenty-Somethings had moved there from other parts of the country for work, school, or other reasons; therefore, there were not many WELS connections present. But they wanted to get to know other individuals who shared the same beliefs and faith. What started as an after-party to an area Reformation service, God has blessed to grow into a successful group that includes all the area WELS churches in the Front Range of Colorado.

There are a few things that this group did differently than the old “tried and true” methods of other Twenty-Somethings groups in the past. As mentioned earlier, the leadership is not called workers. They are lay members who will ask pastors to come and do a Bible Study but otherwise they are self-started and self-supported. One pointed out, “With called workers in the driver seat, it’s easier for everyone else to take a step back and get lost in dark.” They did not

⁵¹ A telephone interview was conducted with the leaders of the group James Free and Dan Kleist. They do not call themselves the leaders of the group but more as the “pushers” of events. They realized that in order for the group to be successful there needed to be someone who is the head to promote get-togethers and Bible studies. The interview questions are located in Appendix 3: Interview.

have to rely on a called worker to drive the group and so it also pushed them to take ownership. The group members also recognized the need for the input from the group they serve. As they stated in the interview, they are still working out issues with communication and publicizing of events, but anyone from the group can give an idea for what they want to do as a group activity.

“Rooted” saw what started as a purely social get-together of fellow WELS members, turn into a time with a desire for Bible Study. They conducted their own survey of what the people wanted to do more in their gatherings. The top answer: study God’s Word together. It was quickly recognized by them that this was also a unique outreach tool for them. A Twenty-Something group can be a great outreach tool for other churches as well because, as James Free said, “For many people, it’s awkward and scary to be invited to church and meet a bunch of people who they don’t know. But if you say, ‘Here’s a group of people who are getting together, we will have a Bible study as well, would you like to join?’ It’s a lot easier to come into.” Dan Kleist added, “Others do not feel it as a push to convert, but God’s Word is being taught and it is a way to get the people in the door.”

The Church Grows Together

As was noted in the interview with the leaders of “Rooted,” and with my personal experience with Twenty-Somethings, there needs to be something more than just a get together. After time, these get together times become monotonous and it is hard to continue. Again, Twenty-Somethings want to know what they are doing is important and worth-while. A church is able to promote the events and advertise different activities but there needs to be more to keep interest. Yet, a church also needs to be willing to listen to these Twenty-Somethings and be willing to support these individuals. As Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians,

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

This is a call to all members to be willing to take interest in lives of others and to be willing to see the world from their point of view. Those of the older generation are reminded, “You might not go to clubs and concerts together, but you certainly can have a friendship. And from

friendship comes trust, and from trust comes dialog about spirituality and even church. Your age and wisdom do make a huge difference with younger people.”⁵² Especially for Twenty-Somethings, they are at a time in their life when they come to the realization that they do not have everything figured out in their lives. Living away from home at college is different than living away from home and starting a new career. With starting a new career they feel they need to be more serious and mature with some of the decisions they make in their lives. The older generations can be there to help them, to guide them, and to be an encourager for their physical and spiritual lives. They are able to be the ones who Twenty-Somethings go to speak with after church because they have a good relationship with them.

What Now?

With this in mind the church is not looking to only make programs to fill the Twenty-Somethings time or even take every idea that they have and run with it to see if it works. The church’s goal and purpose is not looking to only make sure that the Twenty-Somethings fill a space in the church pew. It is to build their faith and work to mature that faith.

Our goal should not be to get people to “go to church.” We should be inviting people to participate in the life of the church community and to participate in the activity of God, not merely inviting them to attend our worship services. Though in most cases getting people to participate in worship gatherings is a step in the process of their coming to trust Christians and the church, the goal is to see the Spirit of God transform them into disciples of Jesus whether or not they are going to your weekly worship gathering.⁵³

In order to continue to assist with nurturing the faith of Twenty-Somethings, there are some tools that some churches promote. One idea, that was proposed by an elder at Apostles in Billings, Montana, was that every new member has someone who is a type of “mentor.” This idea was brought forth mainly for new members who had completed a Bible Information Course. But, this same idea can be used for Twenty-Somethings. These mentors would be other members in the church who go out of their way to talk to that Twenty-Something, get to know them, and make them feel comfortable in the church. They are sure to let the Twenty-Something know that they are individuals who the Twenty-Something can feel comfortable speaking with. This grows relationships and gives the Twenty-Something someone they can trust in the church who is not

⁵² Kimball, 214.

⁵³ Ibid, 215.

the pastor. This would grow a relationship of trust and knowledge that they are part of something.

Another church uses the idea of “preventative maintenance.” This is described by Pastor Enderle like this:

Preventative maintenance could well include making someone in the congregation responsible for contacting the closest WELS pastor when a member moves, enters the military, or goes to college through the use of referral cards available through our synod's Special Ministries Commission. Referral should be made as soon as possible. It would be a great help to the pastor if someone would volunteer to assume this responsibility and carry it out on a regular basis. Conversely, when a congregation receives notification that a WELS member is moving into the area it is imperative that the pastor or members immediately visits that person.⁵⁴

Basically the idea is to not allow that individual to fall through the cracks. This can be tied into the mentoring program so that there are specific points of contact for the individual. And this does not just have to do with the church worship and its functions. This can be the individual who “adopts” the Twenty-Something who has just moved and is getting settled. They, maybe, can show them around town and connect them with the other Twenty-Somethings that are in the congregation. This age demographic wants real connections with other people. The mentoring and preventative maintenance shows the individuals that they are cared for. They are more than just another face or another name on the church membership. Other individuals from church have an interest in their daily lives and most importantly a desire to encourage them in their spiritual lives.

Before Jesus left this earth, he commanded his disciples, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This mentoring and adopting of Twenty-Somethings are ways that Twenty-Somethings can be taught and made disciples of Christ who are equipped to spread that gospel ministry to other individuals. The best evangelists to Twenty-Somethings are other Twenty-Somethings. Build them up so they can reach out to others. This work can be done where a pastor or other leaders in the church take notice of Twenty-Something or someone who is close to that age who is an out-going individual. It is someone they would be able to train and set the idea in their mind. If there are group of friends around this age, then speak to all of them. Plant the idea in their minds to see how they react to the possibility of a group of young

⁵⁴ Enderle, 8.

professionals getting together to get to know other young professionals better. Make it known that this a group that the Twenty-Somethings are able to develop as their own with some guidance, if they seek it. I am optimistic in thinking that they will agree to the idea and their curiosity will be peaked. They may have never thought about it before, or they maybe did not know the best way to go about it. Suggest that the group meet outside of church in order to encourage a relaxed atmosphere. It is quite possible that the group begins solely as a social event. It is a time where individuals around the same age get together to have a grill out, attend a sports game, go to the movies, hike, or quite simply they compare interests and join together in them. An important note would be to try and develop a strong core of individuals who will do whatever is possible to expand and build up the group. This solid core can then work on outreaching to not only Twenty-Somethings in their church, but also to their co-workers, friends, relatives, and neighbors. While this is being done, explain the work to the other members of the church. Encourage them to speak to the Twenty-Somethings to inquire about the group. This promote encouragement all around, support from all individuals in the church, and it promotes outreach to Twenty-Somethings who are not members of the church. This is church ministry working together. It does not mean that everyone has to be directly involved with the group. A man is not going to try and join the Ladies Aide group, but he still supports it with encouragement and prayers. It is the same thought with the Twenty-Somethings group.

For the Twenty-Somethings that are already members of the congregation—get them involved! Use their talents—whatever they may be—in the congregation for gospel ministry. Pastor Enderle makes an interesting insight,

Jesus was familiar with the spiritual gifts of his followers and matched those gifts to specific tasks. I can remember reading a conference paper that made the point that Jesus didn't ask for volunteers, he assigned people to specific tasks that he knew they could handle. The effort Jesus made at involving his following in ministry served to bond them more tightly to him. This, in turn, helped to prevent them from straying.⁵⁵

Look for the talents that these Twenty-Somethings have and use them in the church. When an individual completes a Bible Information Course, the pastor often will hand him or her a “spiritual gifts” sheet to fill out. This gives the pastor and the individual an idea of where his or her gifts and interests are in the church. I suggest that when a student graduates high school, and

⁵⁵ Ibid, 6.

before he or she graduates college, give a similar sheet to them. See where their interests and where their talents are at in the church, and then encourage them to use them. Keep in touch with the individual while he or she is at college and when they return home for vacation, implement them into worship. Do not wait until graduation from college to get the Twenty-Something involved; start the encouragement as soon as possible. Help show the Twenty-Something his or her unique gift, and then help him or her be able to share it with the congregation.

There is a lot of luck in potluck, but there is none in the body of Christ. In the body we do have a leader who not only tells us what we are to bring to the table, but actually gives it to us. Spiritual gifts are not abilities that we choose ourselves and work hard to bring up to standard. They are given by God for specific purposes. Paul says that spiritual gifts are “manifestation of the Spirit” that are “given for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). These empowerments of God are vital to the Christian community. They allow us to serve in the specific ways that God intended.⁵⁶

As Christ’s body, we grow together united with him. Understand that in Christ’s body then everyone has different gifts that are beneficial for his people. Not everyone has been given the talents to preach, to teach, and to lead groups. We do not expect every Twenty-Something to have the same gifts; but, be willing to use whatever gifts God has given to them. Christ has given each member of his body special gifts to build the church.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11-16).

And just as the body cannot function if it were all hands or all eyes, so too is the body of Christ: the church.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving

⁵⁶ Hahn and Verhaagen, 70.

greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12:21-26).

Rejoice that God has made his people in this way. Be thankful that God uses his people with the different talents to share God's Word with each other and to grow together.

Closing Remarks

When undertaking this project, I felt there was need for a new approach to how the WELS ministers to Twenty-Somethings in their congregations. I look at a typical WELS church and they have their Ladies group, their Men's Bible Study, their Teen Group, but I felt that there was something lacking for Twenty-Somethings. Sure, where there are many college students at a church there may be a campus ministry available to them. However, for the young professional who has just graduated and moved to a new congregation, I felt it was easy for them to fall through cracks and be forgotten. I had heard it said on more than one occasion from different churches and congregation members that they want to do something to work with this age demographic but they do not know what to do. One can read demographic surveys and read other books that describe the typical Twenty-Something. But, what about the Twenty-Somethings who are members in our churches today?

When researching for this topic, I noticed there is not very much written on outreach to specifically this age demographic. Much of what had been written is already ten years old or older. For this reason I wanted to investigate what makes this age demographic different today. I needed to learn what was on their minds and their felt reasons why our church struggles to keep them involved in the Word. In a perfect world, Twenty-Somethings would be mature enough in the faith to desire to come to church whenever possible and be involved in whatever they were able to. The fact is it does not work out that way. There is a buffet line of excuses for why they are not involved in the church. But, from those same excuses I felt that there were solid reasons and obstacles in the way for Twenty-Somethings to be involved. They long for something specifically for their age demographic. They desire to grow in relationships with people of the same faith. They yearn for their voices to be heard and their ideas and opinions to be taken seriously. These are obstacles that can be avoided when addressed properly in congregations. It is not about the church becoming people pleasers and doing everything they ask. That is not practical for the ministry of the church, nor is it effective for gospel ministry. However, it is

beneficial to be critical of the ministry of their church to see that they are doing all they can to God's glory.

There are few different ways to branch off from this topic. As one survey respondent pointed out, many of the survey questions focused on what is wrong with Twenty-Somethings programs in the WELS. There were those who did share positive points to this specific ministry in their home congregations; but, overall the focus was on the negative. A different avenue to take would be to investigate well done ministries to Twenty-Somethings, what can be gleaned from them, and how to grow with that knowledge.

Another route would be to see what other church organizations are doing in this specific ministry field. This survey was conducted primarily with WELS members. This is an extremely small niche of Twenty-Somethings, not only in the country, but also considering other church bodies. I would find it interesting to see how other church bodies are ministering to Twenty-Somethings. I think it would be intriguing to compare other ministry strategies of larger church bodies with smaller church bodies. From this comparison I think it would be beneficial to see what parts could be implemented in WELS congregations.

An issue that was raised in the survey was the lack of Twenty-Somethings in the respective churches. A different thesis may possibly go down the route of investigating regional groups. The group Rooted is a group of this type. It would be interesting to investigate how this could be done in more congregations so that more individuals are connected. Could it be something like WELS Youth Rallies except it is WELS Twenty-Somethings who gather together to grow together? Is that plausible? Would it be worthwhile? These would be things to keep in mind.

A possible branch off topic could be a mentoring program specifically developed for Twenty-Somethings. It was mentioned earlier in this thesis that a type of mentoring program would be beneficial for this age demographic. A project focused on this could expound on the mentoring program, how it could be used for Twenty-Somethings, and the benefits that would be reaped from it.

A fault in the research would be in the lack of personal formal interviews with Twenty-Somethings. The reason behind keeping the survey anonymous was for privacy and to bolster honesty which I did not feel would come from personal interviews. However, there would be a place to have more personal conversations with individuals.

Another fault would be in the number of respondents to the survey. Ideally, there would have been more responses. While I cannot force someone to partake in an essay, I would have liked to have received more responses. However, I feel that the information that was gathered from the respondents was sufficient and conclusive.

In conclusion, I believe that my thesis was well supported. Twenty-Somethings are looking for a group that is specifically tailored to them and their needs. They desire to be heard in the church and have their service taken seriously. They want to grow in meaningful relationships with other people of their own age and the older generations. These are the areas that give congregations opportunities to grow together. When pastors and congregation members recognize these needs, they will strive to fill them. Make use of these individuals whom God has given to the church to be the next leaders. These Twenty-Somethings need encouragement, not just from other Twenty-Somethings, and not just from the pastor or other called workers. We are a family in Christ, brothers and sisters in the faith. As a family, it is our responsibility to encourage one another. When we are encouraged together, we invigorate one another and grow stronger. When God's Word is taught in its truth and purity, and it is used to strengthen and encourage one another, the Holy Spirit causes God's people to grow together.

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Appendix 1

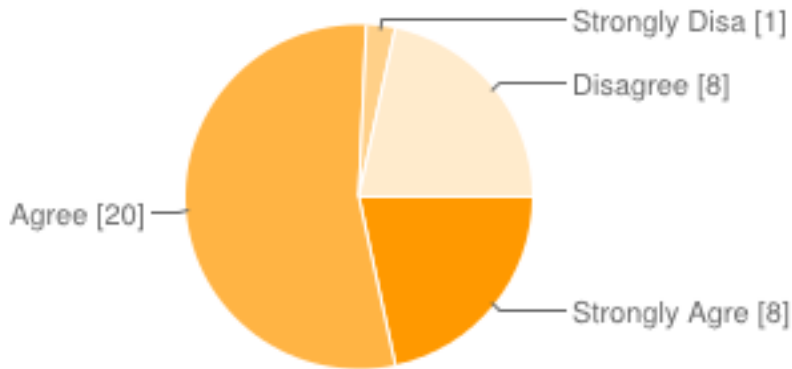
Survey questionnaire

1. For an individual in your age demographic, what programs/church functions are available for you to participate in at your church?
2. When you walk into church on Sunday morning, describe how you are greeted.
3. Select which applies: Following the church service...
 - I shake hands with pastor and go home.
 - I stand in the fellowship area for a few minutes and then head home.
 - I converse with fellow members and meet and greet others.
 - I am the last one to leave besides the pastor.
 - Other
4. React to the statement: I feel that I fit in at church functions and in bible studies.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
5. Explain your reasoning for your answer to the previous question.
6. React to the statement: There is a 20 something program in your church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
7. Explain your answer to the previous question.
8. How do you sense that a person in your age demographic is viewed by other congregation members?
9. If there were any obstacles for a friend to participate in church events, what do you think they would be?
10. Out of these activities what draws your attention most:
 - Bible Study Growth Group
 - Get together with individuals of the same age and decide on different activities to do together—bowling, grill out, games, etc.
 - Volunteer to serve meals at shelters or church functions
 - Other
11. Explain your answer to the previous question.
12. Why might churches struggle to keep "20 Somethings" interested in church and its functions?
13. What does the church do well with individuals of your age group?
14. What do you believe the church could do better?
15. What activities would your friends of your age demographic be most interested in?
16. What should I have asked that I did not that you believe is important for my research?

Appendix 2

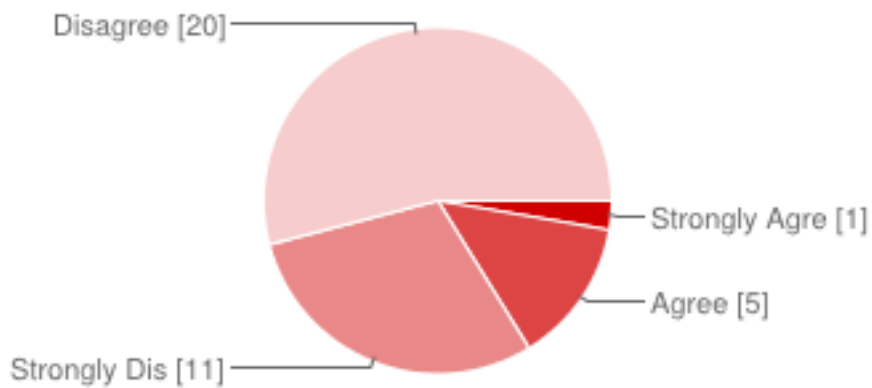
Charts/Graphs of Survey Responses

4. React to the statement: I feel that I fit in at church functions and...



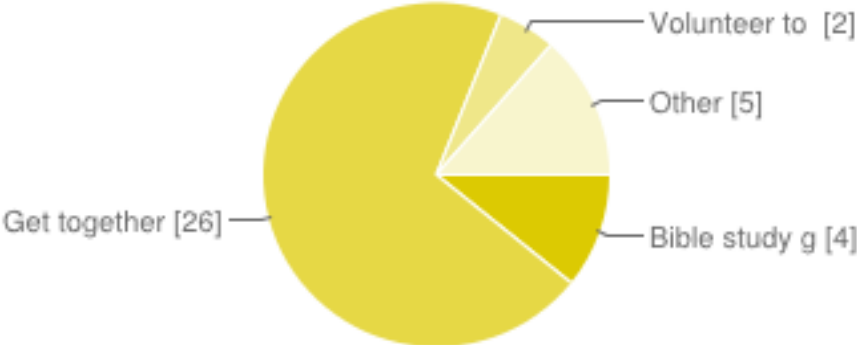
Strongly Agree 8 22%
Agree 20 54%
Strongly Disagree 1 3%
Disagree 8 22%

6. React to the statement: There is a 20 something program in your church



Strongly Agree 1 3%
Agree 5 14%
Strongly Disagree 11 30%
Disagree 20 54%

10. Out of these activities what draws your attention most:



Bible study growth group 4 11%
Get together with individuals of the same age and decide on different activities to do together—
bowling, grill out, games, etc. 26 70%
Volunteer to serve meals at shelters or church functions 2 5%
Other 5 14%

Appendix 3

Telephone interview conducted with leaders of Rooted

Interview with James Free about Rooted

- 1. Who are you? What do you do? Where do you work? (Biography information)**
- 2. Give a description of this group...who is the focus group, what is its purpose, what are the goals, where is the group based**
- 3. What is your part in this group?**
- 4. What are the activities that are done by this group? What does a typical get together look like?**
- 5. How do you reach/publicize events?**
- 6. What are your “selling” points to join?**
- 7. Is this group based out of a church? How is the group funded?**
- 8. How long did it take to get the group going and moving to something that will stay around and not die out after a few months?**
- 9. You don’t want to determine success by numbers; but, how successful is the group in your thoughts?**
- 10. What are the struggles that this group faces?**
- 11. What are your thoughts on called workers as the leaders?**

Appendix 4

Informed Consent Form

Greetings,

I am in my final year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and part of the curriculum for the senior year is the writing of a senior thesis. This is an opportunity for each student to investigate and research a topic that interests them. I am researching what churches are doing to reach out to individuals from the ages of 20-30 years old. Please fill out this short survey to assist me with my research.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate a church's role in working with "20 Somethings" (individuals of 20-30 years old). The research is being conducted by seminary senior, Thadeus Flitter, as a part of the senior thesis required for graduation at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

In this research you will be participating in an online survey in which you will share your views on the strengths, weaknesses, issues and challenges that 20 Somethings face with programs in their individual church homes.

Please be assured that any information that you provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study.

By your completion of the survey, you will be giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research project.

Thank you,

Thad Flitter