

MINISTERING TO YOUNG ADULTS: HOW THE ATTITUDE OF THE PASTOR AND HIS
CONGREGATION PLAY A ROLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on developing the faith of young adults. When young adults have more freedoms after high school, they face many new problems and temptations. To help me know and understand these struggles, I interviewed pastors who have been specifically working with kids this age. The two major problems we talked about the most were peer-pressure and scheduling. Young adults are not being retained in churches right now. I believe a big factor of why this is happening is because pastors and their congregations do not have the proper attitude toward this generation. I discuss what that proper attitude looks like and how that attitude can be reached. Pastors and congregations are those who have to find ways to approach young adults on a day-to-day basis. Some ideas we focused on were loving care, good Bible classes, and teamwork. This paper will include, but is not limited to, the work in campus ministry. The ministry to young adults is important in the world right now because they are the future generation of Christians. We must remember that they are redeemed children of God who need spiritual nourishment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
INTRODUCTION	2
ATTITUDES OF YOUNG ADULTS TOWARD CHURCH AND RELIGION.	5
Defining the Term “Young Adults”	5
Understanding Young Adults	7
Peer-Pressure (Being Exposed to New Ideas)	8
Scheduling (Extra-Curricular Activities).....	13
Other Factors	15
What Are the Results?	16
ATTITUDE OF THE PASTOR AND CONGREGATION TOWARD YOUNG ADULTS	19
The Proper Attitude for a Pastor and His Congregation	21
Pastor and Congregation Function Together	23
What Young Adults Can Do for the Church	25
Music	26
Technology	26
Evangelism	27
Energy.....	28
HOW DO YOU REACH OUT TO YOUNG ADULTS?	29
What a Church Does for Young Adults	30
They Are Christians Too	33
It Is a Team Effort	35
Have a Good Bible Class.....	35
Some Things to Keep in Mind	36
CONCLUSION.....	39
A Note from the Author	41
APPENDIX 1	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	44

INTRODUCTION

My parents and grandparents brought me up in the Bible. Multiple members in my family were called workers. I went to WELS' (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) schools through high school. One could say that the roots of my faith were well-nourished for the first eighteen years of my life. I did not fear losing my faith, nor did I see any temptation that came close to threatening my faith. That all changed when I went to college away from home.

I went to a public college, the University of Wisconsin – Platteville (UWP), to become an engineer. My expectations were set extremely high going into my first semester. I did not doubt that this is where I wanted to be, so I was motivated to work hard. I was also excited to be on my own for the first time in my life. My high school buddy and I moved into the dorms together – planning on having each other's back. My parents and I contacted the local WELS pastor, Pastor Shane Krause, and I signed up to be in campus ministry. After unpacking, my parents left and I was finally on my own. What I did not know was how blind I was going into the world. I was finally outside of my "WELS bubble" I had been living in up until this point. My faith had never been tested in the ways it would be tested the next two and a half years.

Every corner that I turned felt like the devil was throwing a new temptation at me. There were so many things that I had not tried before. I said yes to things I wouldn't have said yes to if my parents had been present. Some nights I would lay in bed regretting and praying about the

struggles of that day. Those years were rough years spiritually. The only time that felt comfortable was Monday nights because we had our campus ministry meeting those nights. I had the opportunity to speak about my faith to my pastor. Most importantly, I was able to study God's Word and ask questions about the Bible and my faith with fellow Christians. I hung out with friends that were struggling with similar issues. I looked forward to Monday nights.

Then I started realizing that campus ministry was progressing forward: I became vice president, then president, and more and more kids were showing up. We were seeing success in the numbers coming to other events besides our Bible study. Before I knew it, my life was revolving around campus ministry and not school.

There was one day, we received a list of all the WELS students on campus, and Pastor Krause gave us the task to reach out to them. I was astonished to see a list of well over one hundred confirmed young adults. We were getting fifteen to twenty students a week at our Bible study; where was everyone else? Didn't they care? What had changed from the end of high school to the start of college that caused these hundred-some WELS members to not care about their faith?

Now that I have moved on from UW-Platteville, I look back and think of all the students that fell away from their faith after going to college. I would have called myself a strong believer coming out of high school, but even I struggled with the temptations of life away from home every day. Now that I am training to become a pastor, I want to know how does someone reach out to those who are struggling with their faith at my age? This was a major reason why I transferred to Martin Luther College (MLC): to become a pastor. I wanted to help young adults to continue to grow their faith after high school, instead of losing it.

Pastor Jonathan Hein (Director of Commission on Congregational Counseling) gave a presentation about the future of our synod. I have listened to him two or three times now, and he stresses the importance of retaining young adults. He says that the WELS is statistically declining, and there are four main factors for our synod's decline:

- WELS families aren't having as many children as they once were.
- The rate of deaths among WELS members is increasing.
- It has grown increasingly difficult to retain members, especially younger members.
- More recently, adult confirmations are trending down.¹

The one I want to focus on is number three. Why is it difficult to retain members who are my age?

I started asking pastors about the difficulties of ministering to young adults. But the more I talked to pastors, the more I realized that a big factor in successfully ministering to this age is to focus on the attitude of the pastor(s) and his (or their) congregation. That is where my thesis question started forming in my mind: **How does the attitude of a pastor and congregation members affect a young adult's faith?**

I know that a large factor in answering this question is understanding young adults and their culture. Many different studies have been done to help people and companies become aware of the younger generations. Another aspect of this question to investigate is what we are doing now as a synod, and if we can improve. Is there any success out there in our synod? In

1. Jonathan Hein, "A Demographic Study of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" (2017): 7-12, [<https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/key-convention-documents-2017-synod-convention/?wpdmdl=3376&ind=1501620690189>].

other synods? One way of learning about the current situation is by interviewing pastors who are working with young adults consistently.

Although I do not want to specifically look just at the campus ministry of every church, all these pastors are campus ministry pastors. I interviewed four pastors in the WELS who have the most experience with young adults and have found success in working with them. The following men showed interest in improving young adult ministry and hold it as a priority in ministry: Pastor Brian Wrobel (Zion Lutheran Church in Gainesville, FL and a member of the Campus Ministry Committee), Pastor Scott Wolfram (Divine Word Lutheran Church in Plover, WI and the Chairman of Campus Ministry Committee), Pastor Scott Oelhafen (Trinity Lutheran Church in Waukesha, WI and a member of the Campus Ministry Committee), and Pastor Luke Thompson (St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ottawa, ON Canada). The questions I asked them are found in Appendix 1. I will be sharing their thoughts to my questions when they are relevant throughout this paper.

ATTITUDES OF YOUNG ADULTS TOWARD CHURCH AND RELIGION

Defining the Term “Young Adults”

It is first important to define what is meant by the term “young adults.” Currently, the concept of how to divide each generation has been understood in many different ways over the years. The two generations that will be relevant in this discussion are Generation Y (Millennials or GenMe) and Generation Z (GenZ or iGen). It is important to define these terms because many different factors separate the two age groups. Knowing these differences may help one minister to a young adult because he or she has a basic understanding of whom they are dealing with.

There was a recent study published in the SAGE Open (an unbiased peer-review journal) that discussed the “Method for Determining the Time Range of Generations.”² These Russian scientists needed to determine a suitable method to do proper research on the existing generations. Their research resulted in the use of three arguments to determine what a generation is or not:

- 1) Generations must have common indicators, by which they are differentiated, as the groups of generations that are distinguished according to different characteristics may differ significantly;
- 2) The 18-year-old range of belonging to a generational group is minimal, as the ability to have descendants is the right of adults;
- 3) The values of generations in the 20th and 21st centuries in different countries are in many respects identical due to globalization processes in the world, which makes the generations quite similar...³

Although these researchers came up with a definite year to divide each generation in Russia, they were four to eight years different than the research Strauss and Howe completed of the United States in 2018.⁴ This, and other studies, forced them to note that there are some discrepancies because Russia is a little behind the United States and other countries.

In other words, it is unclear which years to draw an exact line between generations. Many overlapping characteristics do not help the situation either. So, in this paper, the term “young adults” was chosen because it is a natural category. The ages I will look at range from eighteen to twenty-five years old. In that case, much of the research done in this paper tried to include both Generation Y and Generation Z. The importance of using “young adults” is to distinguish them from older adults, but yet they are starting to make adult-like decisions.

2. Oksana Karashchuk, Elena Mayorova, Alexander Nikishin, and Olena Kornilova, “The Method for Determining Time-Generation Range” (SAGE Open), 4.

3. Karashchuk et al., “Time-Generation,” 4.

4. Karashchuk et al., “Time-Generation,” 6.

Another thing to mention about young adults in these two generations is that those being studied are not just WELS members. There are two different sides to the young adults addressed in this paper. First, that the primary focus is the retaining of WELS young adult members. The second is that there is an emphasis on outreach. Both sides are important to every church in America and all over the world.

Understanding Young Adults

Before one goes out to do ministry work, one must understand whom they are reaching out to. Imagine living in a Hispanic community and you only know English. How successful are you going to be at communicating with them? Not very. The same goes for ministering to young adults. You must understand them to properly communicate with them. Practically speaking, the characteristics of young adults are always going to be changing, so it is good to continue to research whom you are ministering to. If you are using the same methods to minister to every age group in your congregation, it might be wise to reevaluate your methods. Another thing to take into consideration is where you are located. Wealth, language, and culture are all features that can change based on where you are ministering. It is highly unlikely that you would be ministering to young adults in inner-city Milwaukee the same as if you were in rural central Wisconsin. Living in the years 2020-2021 adds another thing to think about – the Coronavirus (COVID-19). COVID-19 has changed the ministry to young adults as well as many other ages. What makes ministering to them more difficult is not being able to see them on a regular basis. Knowing that those and other factors do exist, this chapter will be focused on understanding general facts about twenty-first-century young adults.

Jonathan Hein was not the first person in ministry to realize the change in ministry necessary to reach young adults. Over the past few years, there has been an increase in documents written on preaching to young adults, especially to GenZ. The *Journal of Youth Ministry* writes that, “Generation Z, the generation following the Millennials, is the first post-Christian generation in the United States and that in light of this fact, the church must develop new apologetic and evangelistic strategies.”⁵ This idea hints at the major difficulty for pastors to connect with young adults: no religious background. It is much harder for a pastor to reach out to someone if that person does not value the Bible in the first place. Where does this idea come from? It comes from the many different challenges young adults go through in life. The culture of young adults is prioritizing different things and leaving church, or religion in general, in the rear-view mirror.

In interviewing those pastors, one of the questions that needed to be addressed was “Why is it difficult to minister to young adults?” All four pastors had similar answers. It comes down to two main factors: peer-pressure and scheduling. These two factors have many different aspects that can affect many of the choices young adults make. They drive young adults to try new things, whether they are good or bad. Let’s look at how each plays a role.

Peer-Pressure (Being Exposed to New Ideas)

The first days after graduating high school can be a very exciting time for young adults. A sense of independence and freedom runs through each new young adult’s veins. Whether their next step is work or college, that may be a young adult’s first time away from their parents. Now,

5. Thomas E. Bergler and James Emery White. “Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World,” *Journal of Youth Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, 2017), 144.

there are more decisions they have to make on their own. Schooling through high school often isolates a child from the “real world.” Especially if that child was only in a private or parochial school their whole life, it is as if they are coming out of the “bubble” they had been living in the last eighteen years.

Now that they are a young adult, most parents allow their children to make more of their own choices. Whether it be working full-time or starting college, there are new people with their own beliefs entering into these new young adults’ lives. These next years are some of the most important for developing the rest of their life. The *Journal of Management* says this about the choices young adults are making:

During these early developmental stages, young individuals begin to define their adult identities through the choices they make, including decisions about college, majors, and first jobs. They start to ask questions such as, What am I looking for in a career? In what type of work environment would I be happy? These career stages can be described as “information gathering,” and they set the stage for future career directions.⁶

At work, they may be in the minority if they are Lutherans. Co-workers will expose them quickly to what their views and beliefs are. In a perfect world, these new strangers would have the young adult’s best interests in mind, but that is not the case. Those with a weak faith could be one new idea or one invitation away from heading down the road to unbelief. Because they have less experience in life, they are still learning how to figure out what is beneficial for their faith or not.

If they head off to college, where they go will be a big determining factor in their faith. The further they move away from their parents, the more others play a role in their life. Take their teachers for example. If you are WELS and you do not go to MLC (Martin Luther College) or WLC (Wisconsin Lutheran College), you can be quite certain that your professors will not

6. Jean M. Twenge, “Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing,” *Journal of Management* 36.5 (September 2010): 1121.

have to same beliefs as you. The young adult believer will most likely be the one that feels out of place. Being a Lutheran makes you a minority at a public university. Teachers may make fun of young adults because they do not agree with their faith. They can input their beliefs into their teaching and influence students who are trying to listen and gain knowledge. The more and more a young adult hears a lie, the more and more they start accepting that lie as truth. Questions of doubt begin to bombard this young adult whose faith is developing. Doubt can lead to a wide variety of sins that each young adult is now exposed to. Young adults can second-guess their faith and resort to other sources besides Scripture for truth.

Inevitably, young adults will start making new friends no matter where they are after school. Friends have just as much influence, if not more, than professors or co-workers. They are around friends and talking to friends more often than others. Friends like to do things together. If your friends do not go to church regularly, there is more of a chance that you will not go. If you make friends that do not have the same Christian morals that you do, then you have to make more choices that can affect your friendship. The closer you are to a friend, the more influence the two of you can have on each other. That is shown especially if a young adult has a boyfriend or girlfriend, then they are more likely to accept what the other believes or does.

At this age, young adults have a greater chance of changing their values they have had their whole life. Whether it be professors, co-workers, or new friends, new opinions and beliefs are being thrown at young adults daily. Another place, besides the church, that has been affected by young adults' change in values has been the workforce. Businesses trying to hire millennials (GenMe) started having troubles back in 2009. A study done by four college professors noticed differences between Millennials and the previous generations. They noticed a rise in two values

for Millennials who were looking for in the workforce: leisure and extrinsic values.⁷ In other words, they wanted to work less and get more for what they did. The study went so far as to say “the combination of not wanting to work hard but still wanting more money and status verifies the sense of entitlement many have identified among GenMe.”⁸ That makes it very difficult for businesses to sound appealing to the Millennial workforce because it goes against the morals people have grown up knowing in the generations before them. Some people (especially in older generations) could easily look down on generations with these new values and call them lazy or spoiled.

Another source that influences young adults is growing by the day: social media (specifically on phones). Through apps like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok the influences on young adults cover a wide variety of opinions. At the tip of their finger, young adults have the largest source of information ever to be created. Jean Twenge, a professor at San Diego State University, fears for those growing up in the smartphone age – Generation Z (which she calls iGen).⁹ Her studies include looking at the increase of depression and suicide among adults. She blames their lack of social skills because they are always on their smartphones instead of hanging out with friends.¹⁰ With more time scrolling through these apps, young adults and teens are being slammed with a multitude of moral, societal, religious beliefs. Their mind grabs anything that interests them and they start developing their own beliefs. That is why one

7. Twenge, “Generational,” 1133-34.

8. Twenge, “Generational,” 1134.

9. Jean Twenge, “How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids,” [<https://theconversation.com/how-the-smartphone-affected-an-entire-generation-of-kids-82477>].

10. Twenge, “Smartphone.”

stereotype of young adults from these generations is that they are always looking down at their phones no matter what they are doing.

That leads to the final source that young adults shift to: their sinful nature. Every human being has this Old Adam inside them. Their sinful nature wants to explore other ideas, and through friends and the computer young adults are carrying around they have the capabilities to do just that. All of the other influential sources mentioned earlier feed the sinful nature with new beliefs. T.V. shows bombard their minds with thought-provoking situations. And with no parent over their shoulder to correct them, they tend to grab onto anything they agree with, even partially agree with. For example, love for your neighbor can easily turn to accepting homosexuality because that is showing that minority love. Another common example is that finding happiness can turn into a pursuit of materialism. That all stems from their sinful nature, who whispers in their ear “it does not hurt just to try it out.” And when they see everyone else doing it as well, it is even more likely they fall into those temptations.

The truth is, even if a young adult goes to church after high school, there are many different ways they can be peer-pressured into falling away from their faith. They get exposed to new temptations or a new way of living. New opportunities mean more opportunities for the devil to sneak in doubt into a weakening faith. That all comes with the independence a young adult gains after high school. If they do not continue to strengthen their faith through devotions, worship, and Bible studies, their faith can dry up. These new sources can otherwise pick apart their faith until it is no more. It is incorrect to say that all of these influential sources affect each young adult the same way, but each young adult will have a weak spot in their heart for one or more of the things or people mentioned above.

Scheduling (Extra-Curricular Activities)

The second factor comes in the form of time. There never seem to be enough hours in the day to do everything you want to do. Once a child becomes a young adult, there are so many other things he or she can do at that age. Think of all the opportunities a young adult gets to choose from while on a college campus: school, work, music, drama, sports, socializing, video games, etc. If you enjoy doing multiple things, your schedule can fill up extremely quickly. The difficulty for young adults comes in how they prioritize all of the things they want or have to do.

Pastors have heard every excuse in the book for why someone did not come to worship the previous Sunday. It is easy for young adults to fill their weekly schedule. School and/or work along with sleeping take up most of a young adult's time. Then add hanging out with friends, being in a relationship, and all of their extra-curricular activities, and soon their 168 hours are full. Then decisions have to be made on what is more important. Which activities are going to get more or less time in their schedule? School and work usually come out on top, but what comes after that? Young adults in the twenty-first century tend to think inwardly.¹¹ Because of all the sources talked about above and more, their viewpoint on the church can be easily misled or confused. The world is trending away from believing church is important. And because God is a mere outsider in the new age, "churches are unnecessary in such a world view."¹² That means that church becomes on the bottom of the totem pole when young adults make their schedule for the week. There is a lack of interest, a lack of need, in most young adults' minds.

11. Russell Lackey, "High Hopes in a Grim World: Why Emerging Adults Need the Church," *Word & World* 40.1 (Winter 2020), 72.

12. Lackey, "High Hopes," 73.

Another thing taking time out of a young adult's schedule is sports. Sports in general have been at an all-time high in America. It seems as though every young kid's dream is to become the best at some sport. If you want to be good at a sport, you need to practice. And if you want to be great at a sport, that takes a lot of time out of the week to practice. And when they have meets and tournaments, it is usually on the weekends, fighting for the spot commonly used for church and Bible studies. And their weekdays are filled with practices, matches, and games. Church and church events can easily be pushed aside because of dedication to a sport or sports. Some people go as far as to say youth sports are horrible for church ministry. In the interview with Pastor Scott Oelhafen, he even went as far as to say, "Youth sports are the death of the church."¹³ He continued to say that the church is not to be threatened by youth sports but to find ways to work with families in youth sports. Pastor Oelhafen stressed the importance for a pastor to properly teach that both sports and church are gifts from God, but to teach which is more beneficial in the long run.¹⁴

Pastor Oelhafen was not the only pastor who mentioned youth sports in their struggles to minister to young adults. Pastor Luke Thompson, located in Ottawa, Canada says that he has similar problems. Not only does Canada not have a strong culture for going to church, but Lutherans are the only church body to have campus ministries.¹⁵ He also said that sports were a big part of every age level's schedule. Extra-curriculars, like hockey, take up most of their free time. Pastor Thompson said it is difficult to keep young adults and students engaged because of

13. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

14. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

15. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

“extra-curricular overrun.”¹⁶ With time committed to school, work, and extra-curricular events it is difficult for young adults to find time for church, Bible study, or their personal devotional life.

Another consequence of this scheduling problem for young adults can be seen when one poor time-management decision leads to other poor decisions. Young Adult Pastor, Paul Jarzembowski, describes the age that young adults are in as a search for three things in their life: identity, belonging, and purpose.¹⁷ When a young adult has so many things going on in their life it can feel hopeless at times. Questions are going through their minds and at moments they make wrong decisions which makes things even worse. “Sometimes, due to finances, circumstances or expectations, these decisions can often be made in haste, leading to an ongoing frustration with their initial career and life decisions.”¹⁸ Their busy lifestyles are often affecting their mental health. Busy schedules are not only affecting their spiritual health but young adults’ mental and bodily health as well. That is why it is so important for young adults to learn time management as soon as possible in life. Otherwise, their schedules can become a life-long problem and affect many aspects of their lives.

Other Factors

Peer-pressure and a full schedule are not the only things that can affect ministering to young adults. Something that has only recently been added to this list of factors is the effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). It was inevitable this virus was going to be mentioned because it has changed everyone’s way of living in the past year. The church could not escape the grasps of

16. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

17. Paul Jarzembowski, “Join Hands with Young Adult Ministers,” *Horizon* 35.4, 22.

18. Jarzembowski, “Join Hands,” 22.

COVID either. Although President Trump and state governors were more lenient to churches reopening or staying open through the pandemic, many different things inside the church changed dramatically. Church bodies, if they did not have cameras or recording devices, rushed to order and set up their new style of worship. The numbers of members at church services dropped. All physical contact came to a halt. These changes affected everything pastors had worked so hard to gain in relationships with their members. It also affected their ministry with young adults. Many of the pastors interviewed have not been able to see their campus ministry students for along time. All events or gatherings had to change or be canceled.

While performing the interviews, each pastor gave two responses to the questions: pre-COVID and how it changed after COVID hit. They talked about the struggles in keeping in contact with their members, especially those students who were attending because they were at school nearby. Because of COVID, many schools went to virtual learning, so students left the dorms and went home. Their weekly Bible studies or get-togethers were moved to online Zoom calls and there was a drop in attendance. On top of that, all relationships that they were working on came to a halt because there were fewer chances to see them. Now, they did all mention positives during COVID too, but those will be looked at in the following chapter.

What Are the Results?

After looking at how peer-pressure and their schedules affect the “young adult” group we know today, many different spiritual results became evident. Over the last decade, scholars in the U.S. have been doing a study called the *National Study of Youth and Religion*. They looked at

teenagers and their development into being a young adult, or what they call “emerging adults.”¹⁹ They concluded that “in general, emerging adults, regardless of how religiously committed they were, had difficulty expressing what they know about their religion – including their own religious beliefs, God, heaven or hell, and any number of other issues.”²⁰ In other words, young adults are going out into the world knowing little to nothing about the basics of their religion on average. They determined it was because of these three reasons that young adults did not possess that knowledge:

1. Religion in general was not taught to them.
2. Other things in their life took priority over religion.
3. They think their minds can make moral decisions at the moment.²¹

The *National Study of Youth and Religion* came to a similar conclusion in comparison to the four pastors I interviewed. The only difference was if the young adult was confirmed, the pastors I spoke to could assume they went through some training of the Bible during catechism class.

This study concluded that these factors created “new beliefs” in the minds of young adults. They described the newly created outlook as a “do it yourself” spiritual outlook.²² Each young adult adapts their beliefs according to their own needs and desires. Hence, they could not explain a predefined religion because they only believe some of what is taught. The study then defined seven views that most “emerging adults” have when they enter into adulthood, “1) karma is real, 2) everybody goes to heaven, 3) just do good, 4) it’s all good, 5) religion is easy, 6)

19. Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory. “A DIY Religious Outlook: Seven Spiritual Beliefs of Young Adults” *The Christian Century* 2020, 30.

20. Denton and Flory, 30.

21. Denton and Flory, 30.

22. Denton and Flory, 31.

morals are self-evident, and 7) no regrets.”²³ Most young adults’ religious beliefs can be understood in their agreement with most or all of these viewpoints. Any one of them values some views more than others, but that was based on what they experienced in life. Not being nailed down to one form of belief means that they can change their beliefs however they please as they grow older. This makes it very important for a pastor to get to know an individual by asking questions because no two young adults are the same. That means there is no standard that each generation will have because they have mixed viewpoints about religion and going to church. As noted in an earlier chapter, they go to a variety of sources for answers, but they do not like nor have beliefs that are set in stone. They are maturing spiritually, but when they look within themselves and are honest with themselves, they see an empty space for a set truth. A void that the church has a solution for — Christ is the truth. The difficult part is identifying what each young adult needs to minister to them effectively.

Peer-pressure and scheduling problems can make ministering to young adults seem impossible. With no set truth in their ever-changing mind, it is obvious why Generation Y and Generation Z young adults don’t want to be part of a religion with set truths. Even if they graduate high school with faith in Christ, they are extremely vulnerable to outside sources. They go and search for whatever beliefs their mind agrees with since they are being barraged from many different sources. Because their faith-life is all over the place, these two generations can be grouped into an “Ever-Changing Generation” of their own. This shows how much more of an effort needs to be made by parents and pastors to grow in their understanding of young adults. And once you think you start to figure them out, expect their mindsets to change again and again. Young adults need a lot of attention if they want to be understood thoroughly.

23. Denton and Flory, 31.

ATTITUDE OF THE PASTOR AND CONGREGATION TOWARD YOUNG ADULTS

So, how do pastors and congregations react to these “spiritually vulnerable”²⁴ young men and women? Or, maybe a better way to put it, “How are we going to be a church that reaches out to that demographic?”²⁵ There are some mixed feelings about young adults. Since little is known about Generation Y and Generation Z, viewpoints towards these generations vary. People like to make conclusions based on what they see and hear on social media, and they make a general conclusion about young adults.

Viewpoints on young adults can be negative at times. Imagine a grandmother sitting with her grandkids in church and her grandkids take out their phones before church starts, or even during church. If their grandmother is not able to spend much time with them, she may be upset and think that it is disrespectful in the church. Even if she had told them that they cannot have their phones out at church, it is more difficult for young adults to part ways with things that are important to them – like technology. Maybe there are church members that think young adults are “fragile people who need to be fixed.”²⁶ They may think there is no hope for them or that they are lost. In general, there is a negative connotation to this generation because of their work ethic. These negative views can easily enter the church because the church consists of sinful human beings. We as human beings are so quick to judge. So, how does the attitude of the congregation towards young adults play a role in the success of ministering to young adults?

24. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

25. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020.

26. Russell Lackey, “High Hopes in a Grim World: Why Emerging Adults Need the Church,” *Word & World*, 74.

As I asked this question to the pastors I interviewed, they each gave examples of how they were extremely blessed to be a part of congregations that were welcoming to young adults. The pastors I interviewed were all part of churches that had a campus ministry associated with them. These churches each had something in common that gave them this mindset: they cared about their youth. These churches either started in that location because of a nearby college campus, or the church started the ministry with the student at that nearby college. These churches were purposeful to put ministering to young adults as a focus in their mission. This is great to see because not all congregations feel the same way about young adults.

Ministering to young adults can be similar to ministering to new guests at a church. When a visitor comes to church, a pastor usually tells members, especially the greeters, to be welcoming or to “make them feel at home” when they come through their doors. The same goes for young adults. The best way I heard it said was from Pastor Wolfram, who said he made every effort to make young adults feel that “We want you here!”²⁷ That statement can take all negative viewpoints away from people toward young adults. This concept also helps address Generation Y and Generation Z whose beliefs and values are always changing. All people seek places or groups that want them to be there. It is difficult to enjoy a place where you do not feel welcomed, so congregations need to have that welcoming feeling.

Once inside the church, young adults or students from local colleges still might be looked down upon. This is not something that is said to their faces. But statements like this can be heard: “Why are we putting money into ministering to the youth? They don’t even give anything in the offering plate,” or “Giving money into the Campus Ministry Fund is like throwing money down the drain.” With thoughts like these, involving the youth in a church will be a hard task. Without

27. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

saying words, these thoughts can come across in actions or even facial expressions. That is why it is vital to get the importance of young adult ministry across to members of a congregation. That being said, it is not a small task to change the mentality of a congregation. Not all congregations were started to focus on ministering to colleges or young adults. What helps is a proper understanding of what the correct attitude is to be towards young adults.

The Proper Attitude for a Pastor and His Congregation

One way to define the proper attitude of the pastor and the congregation is to keep it simple: love young adults. When someone loves another person, they will do anything for them. But we must remember that the goal of the church is not just to love everyone. The goal of the church is to proclaim the gospel message, the truth, that is its mission. “The task of the church is a matter of proclamation. The church must become a place where young people hear a message that truly matters.”²⁸ It is difficult to remember that Jesus included everyone when he said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15 NIV). The love that Jesus showed to all people, he wants Christians to show to others as well. The attitude of the congregation starts with love, then the truth found in the Bible can be expressed through that love. We want to show them the gospel message because we love them. Even though this love may be for a generation that is looked down on—a generation that thinks leisure and extrinsic rewards are the most important things in life.²⁹

As mentioned earlier, the pastors that were interviewed for this study were blessed to be a part of congregations that were welcoming to young adults. That mindset does not sprout up out

28. Russell Lackey, 73.

29. Jean M. Twenge, 1121.

of nothing, it comes from love. Pastor Thompson said that youth ministry is part of his church's "DNA."³⁰ Now, that does not make as much sense for a congregation that has no campus ministry or nearby college, but Generation Y and Generation Z are filling up a greater and greater percentage of the population of the world. Young adult ministry needs to be part of the church's mission; it needs to be a passion to reach those generations as well. This could take years and years for a congregation's attitude to change into one that cares for young adults no matter what.

Another aspect of this proper attitude towards young adults is willingness to teach. Because young adults are maturing spiritually, their faith may not be strong enough to defend the devil on their own. Pastor Wolfram said it this way, "They are vulnerable right now."³¹ Their faith needs to be cared for as if they are birds not ready to be pushed out of the nest yet. Pastor Wrobel calls the church an "incubator of church leaders."³² The church is preparing future pastors, teachers, and lay members for the church of the future. This care has to be "constant, but not too pushy," as Pastor Oelhafen put it.³³ But a church needs to realize its role as a teacher in a young adult's spiritual growth. The role of a pastor and his congregation is to show a loving attitude with a passion to want to help and care for young adults spiritually. This task does not always have to rely on the pastor either. Lay leaders and other members can easily be included in this mission by doing things like leading Bible studies or social events too for young adults.

30. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

31. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

32. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020.

33. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

Like other aspects of ministry, a loving, welcoming attitude helps create an environment young adults are looking for. As they jump from different friend groups or follow new people online, they are searching for that location that they feel comfortable in. They want to be loved. They are more willing to try something if they feel welcomed by other people. An unpleasant atmosphere or an arrogant attitude turns people away. But once a young adult feels loved and welcomed in the church, they have a better chance to participate and learn the gospel proclamation. Then a congregation is fulfilling another need in a young adult's life: a mature faith. But it all starts with a loving and welcoming attitude from the pastor and the congregation.

Pastor and Congregation Function Together

Getting this proper attitude across to the many people in the church is tough when all its members are not perfect. Neither the church nor its pastor are perfect. Mistakes are made, relationships are weakened, but yet the Lord through his mercy continues the Church. Although the church or the congregation may have the proper attitude towards young adult ministry, both church and pastor must be dedicated to this ministry. If they are not on the same page, like any ministry in the church, it will not be as bountiful of a harvest. Then they are working together to minister to young adults.

As the leader of the church, it is the pastor's responsibility to direct the church's undertaking of youth ministry. Pastor Thompson suggested a pastor can do that is by having sermon or devotional themes on the topic.³⁴ This can be focused on helping those members in your congregation (in-reach) or those in your community or local college (outreach). Another way to address this if it is a problem in a church is by speaking with the leaders in the church

34. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

(church president, council, etc.).³⁵ Explaining to them in private or in meetings the importance of this ministry can open their eyes to something they had not seen or maybe overlooked. When a pastor encourages his congregation in ways like this, it can stop the complaining about why church membership is low.³⁶ He can suggest then lead them to find a solution to problems like that. More importantly, it can give the Holy Spirit more opportunities to create and strengthen the faith of young adults.

The same goes for the responsibility of the church members. A pastor cannot do this ministry by himself. There are many different duties and responsibilities a pastor has that take up their time. Pastors can get busy or maybe the gifts that the Lord gave him are not in ministering to the youth. The congregation must hold the pastor accountable, making sure a pastor is fulfilling his duty as a shepherd to all of the flock. Members can bring up the subject and remind the pastor, or volunteer to help. Maybe the pastor has been looking for someone to help out or maybe create a committee dedicated to young adults. One way a congregation can show the pastor young adult ministry is important is by including that ministry in his call when they look for a pastor.³⁷ Doing this indicates to the pastor that it is something important to the congregation. Then, when the pastor and congregation are on the same page, an appropriate course of action can be created and implemented.

What is important is that the pastor and the congregation are working together. Of course, not all churches are located near colleges or have a wide variety of resources. But there are always young adults in the area; they might even be members already. When both are

35. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

36. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

37. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

collaborating then that age group is not forgotten about. There are ministries for all ages: Mornings with Mommy, Sunday School, youth ministries, nursing home ministries, etc. With all of the other efforts being made, this is a reminder that the congregation's young adults are important too. Brainstorm different ways your church can reach out to young adults in the area. The main thing is that the pastor and the congregation have to work together for this ministry to work.

What Young Adults Can Do for the Church

Young adults can benefit the church and its worship in many different ways. Realizing what young adults can do for the church can help motivate the pastor and the congregation to reach out to young adults and get them involved in the church. When there is a negative attitude towards young adults, the following things can show hope for the older generations that may look down on the younger generations.³⁸

Celebrating Campus Ministry's 100th year in the WELS, Pastor Wrobel and four of his students in Gainesville, Florida, took time and discussed campus ministry and the church. In their discussion, they mentioned some amazing ways young adults can be involved and even further the church. First, are how young adults can fill in or even share responsibilities in the church.³⁹ They can do many of the roles the pastor is looking to fill, whether it be being on different boards, help with childcare, teach Sunday School, and many other positions in the church.⁴⁰ Some of the most needed responsibilities could be filled just by asking young adults if

38. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020.

39. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

40. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

they are willing. This can help young adults push away distractions that the devil is throwing at them. The following sections are different ways the pastors I interviewed said their young adults are involved.

Music

One of the most beautiful ways young adults can exemplify their help is by playing music for worship. Singing songs or playing instruments beautifies any service in the church year.⁴¹ It does not have to be every service or even in every other service that they participate in. But it can simply be for special services like Easter, where everyone looks forward to hearing trumpets Easter morning. Young adults who are gifted with playing instruments can use their gifts to praise the Lord. Think about how many heads whipped around the last time you heard a violinist play his or her first notes for pre-service. In the form of instruments or vocal cords, these methods can help young adults feel part of the service, part of the church. This may be a little different each year if your congregation is leaning on college students for this service because as the years go by, they leave the school. Many young adults are talented in these ways and are looking for experience.

Technology

Another way young adults are talented is through technology. Generation Y and Z are leading the way in the use of technology in a technology-advancing world. GenY and GenZ are technology natives.⁴² Their whole childhood was filled with advances in technology that they

41. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

42. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

kept up with. Their basic knowledge of digital devices is higher than any other generation before them. It is like a second language for most young adults. Recently they have shown how helpful they can be in the church amidst COVID-19. When churches had to go to a recording or live streaming, young adults were the ones to who pastors usually turned for help. Young adults were the ones who were volunteering and getting the church's live stream or recording set-up. Apart from that, they can also have ideas for social media because they have either done it in the past or they have seen others do it.⁴³ Young adults are a simple request away from helping in this department. They might need an incentive like payment, but this duty is helping them get involved with the church. Since technology seems to be advancing daily, the church can look to young adults for aid.

Evangelism

Another area young adults can be a benefit to the church directs itself to another gift young adults have: socializing. The friendships they have created can be the church's best outreach tool. Through their friends, they bring people into the church.⁴⁴ Just by an invitation, they can be evangelists to their friends that might never have been to a church before. Their friends will be around the same age so they may be looking for spiritual guidance as well. That can lead their friends to meet the pastor or other members and become a prospect. This can be more common for churches with a campus ministry just because of the volume of local college students. However, their invitation is nothing out of the ordinary for young adults to bring up to their friends to come because it is something they care about. By first getting one or two young adults

43. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

44. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

on board, the possibilities could be endless for how many they can bring through the doors. Since many churches are looking for evangelism opportunities, get your young adults involved so they start becoming young evangelists.

Energy

If you look at the age of the members in your church, statistics show that church bodies are getting older. Older generations are making decisions that their generations would enjoy. As I mentioned earlier, not many of the older generations know the characteristics of young adults today. They may not be the best ones to choose things that affect young adults in the congregation. Asking young adults to be part of the service and putting them on church boards can bring energy to the church. This can bring a higher level of youthful energy along with new ideas.⁴⁵ Ideas that could be something that the church may not have thought of, like having a contemporary service each month or advertising on Facebook. If a congregation is focused on young adults in ministry, young adults would be the best to make choices because they know what their generation likes and dislikes. Congregations do not need to be afraid to reach out there and try something new. That is not saying their new ideas will always work or that they are the best options for the church. But at least new ideas are being brought to the attention of others in the congregation.

These methods are just some of the many ways young adults can benefit the church. The important thing to take from this is to give young adults a chance. “Allow opportunities for young adult’s light to shine.”⁴⁶ If you want them to feel important, give them important jobs or

45. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

46. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020.

tasks. Along with encouragement, do not forget to show them thanks for what they are doing for you. Remember, they have many different things they could have done instead of helping the church. Show them the same love and respect as any of the other generations.

HOW DO YOU REACH OUT TO YOUNG ADULTS?

When there is a positive, loving attitude toward young adults, then their great potential for service can be realized. The only thing left to do is to bring young adults into the church. Well, that is easier said than done as most churches in America are struggling to bring young adults through their doors. So, how do you reach out to young adults?

First, let's look at what we (the WELS) as a church currently do for young adults in our ministry. There are two periods in life that our church body is passionate about. There is a strong passion to be brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord: baptism, Sunday school, grade school, catechism (or confirmation) class, and high school. The second is when members are facing death. Pastors preach, teach, and give comfort through the eternal joys of heaven to believers. But something is missing, there is a gap. What happens to those who do not go to an area Lutheran high school or Martin Luther College? What does the church do to help them continue to grow in their faith? Not saying that there is nothing congregations are doing, but it could be improved. You may see your young adults when they come back from college at breaks. Maybe they come and sing or play an instrument here and there. But the next time you see them could be when they are getting married or even later. During that time their faith life could have dropped to nothing.

The Lord has truly blessed the WELS in our ministry all over the world, but there are still some places our synod can improve, one of them is young adult ministry. I think Pastor Oelhafen

said it best in our discussion when he said, “We [as a church], well-intentioned, put all our money for our workers, school, day-care, but once they get to eighth grade, we give them a token effort and move to other things and wonder why all the young people are gone.”⁴⁷ To be clear, the synod’s intentions are not being questioned, but there are some areas, like young adult ministry, that are lacking.

We are not the only church body that is recognizing this problem and trying to come up with a solution. Even the Catholic Church noticed this need in young adult ministry. One of the people who thinks he can find a solution for this problem is Paul Jarzembowski, executive director of the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association. He named five things that he thought could help solve this problem:

- 1) Build connections with young adults
- 2) Be present and work alongside them
- 3) Continue outreach beyond high school
- 4) Use media and technology
- 5) Advocate and pray⁴⁸

Whether these solutions will work or not is yet to be discovered through statistics. Before possible solutions are discussed, let us first understand what role the church can be for young adults.

What a Church Does for Young Adults

In the United States, there was a study done seven years ago to see if religion promotes healthy behaviors in emerging adults. Although this paper was primarily about physical health to prevent obesity, many of the participants applied the truths they discovered about religion to their

47. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

48. Paul Jarzembowski, “Join Hands with Young Adult Ministers,” *Horizon*, 24-26.

lifestyles. One young lady said, “It [religion] influences what I decide to invest my time in, what I think is purposeful, and it influences what I like in the big decisions in my life. It influences the way I treat people...it’s not really a part of my life, it’s like the foundation of my life.”⁴⁹ The focus groups concluded by saying religion is important and came up with many ways to incorporate religion in their lives.⁵⁰ This paper was an amazing example to show young adults the importance of their faith from a neutral source apart from the church. They might not realize their need until they become an adult.

That means, above all, the church is to show them the need for religion in their lives. But since there are so many other sources trying to do the same thing, they might pick any kind of religion. They might not know what religion they need to edify their faith. Young adults are known for being more accepting than other generations. They grew in a world with many religions, and with parents that are less likely to be associated with a church. Since they do like to try new things that suit what they believe, a church must identify what young adults are looking for. In Pastor Wrobel’s discussion with his campus ministry students, a major part of their discussion was what opportunities the church has to minister to adults.⁵¹

The one that was not only brought up in their conversation but also in my conversations with pastors was the role the church could play: their “Home away from home.”⁵² They are away from their parents after high school, so take them in as a family.⁵³ Thinking of them as children

49. Shalonda E B Horton, “Religion and health-promoting behaviors among emerging adults,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, 26.

50. Horton, “Religion,” 24.

51. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

52. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

53. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

who need caring for, paints a picture that spurs on the importance of being part of their life. Most college students who live in the dorms are far away from their hometowns and do not get as many family visits.

The second opportunity was that this part of their lives is a time for mental and spiritual growth.⁵⁴ They are searching for what is right, what is truth. They are seeing and experiencing new things every day. They need a source to grow that faith that was started in grade school and high school. Or if they have never studied the Bible, this could be their first chance to hear the truth. Since they are looking and open to new experiences, a church needs to show them how beneficial the gospel can be to their mental and spiritual growth. Otherwise, they may be influenced by falsehoods claiming to be truths.

The next opportunity includes those who are searching for that same truth but have not grown up in the faith. They may know and have friends that do not have faith, so reaching kids who have not been exposed to Christianity is extremely valuable.⁵⁵ It is one thing to have faith grow, but it is completely different if the Bible and God's grace have not been taught to them. This is where classes like Bible information classes can draw in someone who has never learned about the Bible before.

The final thing they mentioned was a need all of our youth have: Christian role models. Young adults are looking for role models.⁵⁶ They are out in the world on their own, searching for what is right, and friends, teachers, and co-workers take up much of their time. We know that these role models are usually not helpful to a Christian's faith, especially being a minority in a

54. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

55. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

56. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

non-Christian world. Filling that void with Christian role models from the church is a great way to reach them. Then, they are realizing what Christian living looks like.

Seeing those needs and figuring out how to incorporate them into your church are two completely different tasks. The campus ministry students also gave prime examples for the church when they answered the question: “In what ways can a local congregation be a blessing to college students?”⁵⁷ Their list for ways a congregation is a blessing included: can provide a place for worship, be welcoming, be other Christians to talk to, can be their intellectual resource, can allow students to take an active role in the church and have responsibilities, and to empower students and teach them to be leaders for the future.⁵⁸ To help explain what they meant by these answers, I made my list incorporating their views, the pastors I interviewed, and other various resources. They are defined in the following sections.

They Are Christians Too

Just like all Christians in our churches, young adults have temptations and spiritual needs too. Young adults coming from Lutheran high schools have been part of a church their whole life. They know that being part of a church is important. In turn, their friends will see how they represent the church and they could gain interest as well. Being part of a church means that they become members and consistently do things that members do. These can include Bible studies, communion, conversing or hanging out with other believers, and volunteering. They are looking for a welcoming church that involves them. That could be including them in worship or decision making, something that makes them feel needed in the church.

57. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

58. *WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years* Video (2020).

When you are a member of a church you also get to know the pastor. They are looking for a pastor they can communicate with when they want to. They want a pastor that knows them, one they can go to for help. And when things get tough, they want them to be their pastor and mentor to counsel them. Although it may feel like these younger generations are not interested in church, they still have basic instincts that all humans have. For example, when a major tragedy hits, most people turn to the church for comfort and hope. There was a study in four hospitals in Minnesota, Arizona, and Florida done on eighteen to thirty-five-year-olds. This study was done about ten years ago.⁵⁹ They asked young adults who were hospitalized for an average of three days to see if they wanted to be visited by a pastor or chaplain. Seventy-one percent wanted to be visited during their stay. About half of them were visited by hospital chaplains.⁶⁰ “The reason most highly endorsed by young adults for wanting to see a chaplain was to be reminded of God’s care and presence.”⁶¹ This shows what joy and comfort those in need find in the Bible when it is preached to them.

These examples are to show that young adults have the same needs as older adults. They are looking to have opportunities to let their faith shine.⁶² They are searching for a pastor that has the same caring attitude for their souls. They want to feel wanted and loved, that a pastor and the members of a congregation care for them individually.

59. Katherine M Piderman, Sarah M Jenkins, Jennifer S Hsu, Alexander S Kindred, “Hospitalized young adults' expectations of pastoral interventions,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 2.

60. Piderman et al., 3.

61. Piderman et al., 4.

62. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020.

It Is a Team Effort

It is important to have proper motivation in everyone involved ministering to young adults. As I mentioned earlier, it is extremely important to encourage church bodies to bring about this caring, loving attitude. For those that have campus ministries, take to the heart being their “home away from home.”⁶³ They are humans who are in a world filled with sin and their faith is still maturing. We, as a church, want to reach those “who are vulnerable right now.”⁶⁴ This is not an easy task to accomplish; it takes a full effort. Pastor Oelhafen has a dream to have a cooperative effort between the pastor(s), called workers, parents, and council leaders.⁶⁵ When each of these role players has the attitude that cares about young adults’ spiritual well-being, then young adults have a fighting chance in this sin-filled world. Whether you are in a big city or small, a properly motivated congregation can be tremendously helpful to the life of young adults.

Have a Good Bible Class

Most campus ministries start by having a get-together to study the Bible. Student’s days are filled with classes, social events, sleep, and anything else they incline to do. Despite their busy schedule, that does not mean they cannot continue to grow their Bible knowledge. Pastors have to be flexible on this subject. Maybe their church’s regular Sunday morning Bible class does not fit in the student’s full schedule. Work with them to find a regular meeting time and place. Maybe your church has enough money to build or rent a separate location closer to campus. Some of our churches have been very blessed in this regard. Other times, it can be as simple as

63. Brian Wrobel, Interview, November 16, 2020. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

64. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

65. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

getting a carpool going to church together. Let their drive for knowledge motivate you to make time for them.

The important thing is to have a Bible study. This allows time for them to feed their souls. It gives them opportunities each week to ask questions that have been on their mind. The time spent together with other young adults and the pastor allows them to create and strengthen friendships with people that have the same faith. To have a “good” Bible class, it is important to write a lesson each week that is valuable to young adults. In other words, have them on topics that are applicable or on the minds of young adults. Ask them questions to see what they want to study. Pastor Thompson says he writes his campus ministry Bible studies heavily on apologetics.⁶⁶ He has found that to be a great way to teach young adults. But that does not mean apologetics is the ultimate solution in every case. Remember that Bible lessons take time to write. It takes a committed attitude of a pastor to set aside time to put together a well-written Bible lesson. This could also be an opportunity for a knowledgeable and willing member of the church can help out.

Some Things to Keep in Mind

Throughout my interviews, many extraordinary ways of serving young adults were laid out. I heard stories of success and failure. But you cannot just “copy” what works for one church and “paste” it at another church that is struggling with reaching young adults. I think the best way is to talk with the young adults where you are located. Have a group meeting with food and figure out their specific needs and desires. Show them that you as a pastor (or lay member) are here for

66. Luke Thompson, Interview, November 3, 2020.

them. There is no one best way with step-by-step instructions for every church with young adults. The best way is to try something and see if it works in your situation.

Many of the pastors I spoke to have created a group of leaders that have the sole purpose of caring for young adults. These groups are formed by finding men and women in the congregation that have a caring and willing heart. Pastor Oelhafen says each pastor should have a congregational “hound dog” that finds young adults and talks with them as much as possible.⁶⁷ Whatever it takes, find members who have the proper attitude toward young adults and are loving at heart. This will help spread the duties off of the pastor’s schedule while still ministering to young adults.

Another important thing to remember is that young adults love food. If you ask them, they will never say no to food. This is not the most important thing to success, but it helps. Many congregations include a home-cooked meal for their young adult ministry because they only are eating cafeteria food and fast food. This can be included in your efforts to be their “home away from home.” You will hear them say that meal is the best meal they had that week, and they will remember that. COVID-19 has changed this effort, but there are ways around it. Pastor Wolfram’s church has switched to ordering pizza or subs to still remind the young adults that the church is thinking of them.⁶⁸ Just remember, food is a big deal to a young adult.

Vocation and busy schedules often take over a young adult’s life. But once you get to know your young adult members or prospects “start something and do something.”⁶⁹ Stick to

67. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

68. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

69. Scott Oelhafen, Interview, October 19, 2020.

whatever you decide for a long enough time to see some results. Sometimes, you have to be patient with the Holy Spirit's work – faith takes time to grow. May God be with your ministry.

CONCLUSION

To be blunt, it is foolish for anyone to think that young adult ministry is not important. All statistics show that Generation Y and Z are characterizing as pluralists: “This generation has been formed in an age of dazzling diversity of all kinds, including worldviews, religion, sexual identity, and racial-ethnic concerns.”⁷⁰ If there has ever been a generation in more need of being taught the truth, it is the young adults right now. They are being brought up in a world that does not define itself as Christian. New “truths” are being preached and accepted every day. It is going to take determination from all sides to help these generations to grow in the truth found in the gospel message.

The attitude of pastors and congregations plays a big role in the success of ministering to young adults. Peer-pressure and scheduling are two leading factors young adults struggle with in life. However, this does not mean these are the only things that can cause a young adult to fall from faith. There are many more temptations that the devil is using to distract them. Each young adult will face different challenges that they will have to overcome. The goal is to have pastors and congregation members there to help young adults deal with the problems they are individually struggling with.

Pastors and congregation members are not the only people who play a role in a young adult’s life. There are always people in their lives that have a negative impact on their faith, like: co-workers, professors, and new friends. The Lord also uses people in each of those categories to have a positive impact on their faith. The other one that I cannot forget to mention are parents. Young adults may not want to admit their parents are as important as when they were growing

70. Gregory S Cootsona, “Some Ways Emerging Adults Are Shaping the Future of Religion and Science,” *Zygon*, 561.

up, but their parents still can play a role in their faith life. This paper focused more on the role of the church, but family is just as vital and effective in growing a young adult's faith.

Jonathan Hein's numbers are scary for the WELS and they are not out of the question from coming true. When pastors say that "[Ministering to young adults] is the future of the WELS,"⁷¹ they are trying to say that this is important today, not five or ten years from now. It takes a team effort with an attitude that knows the importance to address this problem. It takes time, money, commitment to show young adults that "WE WANT YOU HERE!"⁷² It takes patience with the work of the Holy Spirit. Your time and efforts may not see numbers right away, but it will pay off.

So, when you know someone at the local college, or is going to college, let the local church know. You can do that online at our synod's website.⁷³ Encourage young adults in whatever way you can. Learn about the younger generations. Invite them out to eat and talk with them. I would suggest watching the "WELS Campus Ministry at 100 Years"⁷⁴ video Pastor Wrobel made this last year. Another way a pastor could start bringing this topic up to his congregation is by going through a Bible study put out by the synod called "Ministering to Millennials."⁷⁵ And do not forget to thank young adults when they help out, however they may provide service. This is going to be a long process, but through prayer and having the proper attitude it is not an impossible task.

71. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

72. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

73. data.wels.net/CampusMinistry/CampusMinistry

74. <https://welstasteandsee.com/wels-campus-ministry-at-100-years/>

75. <https://welscongregationalservices.net/ministering-to-millennials/>

A Note from the Author

This topic hits home to me more than ever. I have two younger brothers in this age group and I see their faith struggling every day. I can see the spiritual war that is going on in their hearts as their faith matures and is attacked even harder. I do not want to see them or any other Christian coming out of our Lutheran high schools and fall away from their faith. Our synod has put so much time and effort into our children's lives, and when I see those children fall away as soon as they get out of high school it is gut-wrenching. That is why I give these words of encouragement to all those working with young adults.

When I hear pastors like Scott Wolfram say things like "this is the future of the WELS" and "they are vulnerable right now,"⁷⁶ I can't help but think other pastors are thinking this as too. I know the fight that young adults are going through. I used to be one of them. If it weren't for the strong campus ministry at UW-Platteville, I would not be graduating from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary seven years later. I thank every lay member and pastor that took the time to encourage me and help me when problems came up in my life. They were my family away from home and now they are my family of believers.

So, if you know of any young adult in your congregation or anywhere in your life, I urge you to do the following three things. First, talk with them. Be their friend. Do not ignore them. Secondly, it is important to encourage them. You may not know the struggles they are specifically going through, but they always need more support. Lastly, pray for them. Include them in your daily prayers and ask our dear Lord to watch over their faith. Nothing can match the power and love that God shows to his people.

76. Scott Wolfram, Interview, November 5, 2020.

APPENDIX 1

Below are the interview questions I asked the four pastors:

Thesis Interview: Young Adult Ministry

Background and the Decision-Making Process

- a. Ask to take notes/record interview
- b. Explain what the focus is in doing the interview: young adults.
- c. Where are you located?
- d. How long have you been there?
- e. What experiences have you had with campus ministry?

Design Objectives

- a. How many members are 18-25 years old in your congregation?
- b. What variables affect the number of members at that age?
- c. Would you say that your members at that age are active? (i.e. do they come to worship, volunteer, or help the church in some way)
- d. What got them involved?
- e. How do you keep them involved?
- f. What struggles do you see in getting young adults active?
- g. Rate your church from 1-10, would you say your congregation is welcoming to young adults?
- h. How do think it got that way? In other words, what created that attitude?

- i. How does the attitude of the congregation towards young adults play a role in the success of young adult's membership?
- j. What can a pastor do to change the attitude of the church if it is negative toward young adults?
- k. What would you say to a fellow pastor about the importance of active young adults?
- l. If you had the time and resources, what would be your ideal way to reach out to young adults?

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