

## The Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

### It's Up to You (Week 5) - How Can We Better Reach Young Adults and Families?:



- 1) This is a most timely question for churches, certainly for PCUSA congregations: 56% of the PCUSA is 56 or older, 31% is 70 or older, while only 12% is 25 or younger.
- 2) This question has been the focus on more than half a dozen major research projects over the last 10 years (the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Fuller Youth Institute, and so on), and what we tried to report in the sermon is where these studies overlap, which the promise that there will be more specifics to come in the Kronicle.
- 3) Having a written, definitive plan to reach those under 40 matters: only 3 in 10 churches have one, but of the churches that are actually reaching this group, over 9 in 10 have one.
- 4) Churches must ask themselves who they're trying to serve: are they overfocused on the needs/wants of the older generations presently in the congregation, or on the younger generations they hope to reach (see Phil. 2.3-4).
- 5) To do this, a church must be committed to overcoming or transcending the very real generation gap that exists in the America right now: whereas those 25-40 think the world is getting better and their generation is responsible for that, those over 60 think the world is getting worse and the fault lies with the younger generations.
- 6) Churches must earn back lost trust: like all other institutions in American society, Gallup reports that trust in church has greatly deteriorated over the last 50 years, so in a very real way churches are starting in negative numbers with younger generations, not a zero or neutral.
- 7) For these reasons, authenticity, integrity, and transparency really matter for the younger generations.
- 8) What a church is and does outside of the worship service matters more to them than the worship service itself: for example, does the church engage in causes that are for the common good, and does the church allow those 40 and under to grow spiritually and be challenged by the person and message of Jesus?
- 9) Churches that reach younger adults are also intentionally intergenerational, something we'll explore with more depth in a forthcoming Kronicle article: they find avenues for multi-generational relationship building, service/ministry, mentoring, etc.

10) The young adults you are most likely to reach are those who are already within your social/relational circle (family, friends, friends of friends), and the young adults you already have in your congregation should be the driving force for any ministry plan to reach more of those in the same generations.

### **Quotes To Chew On**

#### 1) Lovett Weems (The Lewis Center for Church Leadership):

The question for any congregation is, "Do we really care deeply about reaching young adults – so much so that we will do what it takes for that to happen?" This is a question of heart, not of programs, budget, or tactics...While many church members bemoan that the young lack interest in the church, they themselves show little interest in reaching young adults.

#### 2) Canadian pastor, podcaster, and researcher Carey Neiuwhof:

Character will determine effectiveness in reaching young adults far more than competence does...An authentic experience with a church with an average worship service beats a hollow experience in a church with A+ programming and performances...The effective churches by no means have the best lights, stage, or production. What they all had in common was passion, and when it comes to reaching the next generation, passion beats polish... It's far more about who you are than what you do.

#### 3) The Fuller Youth Institute:

Contrary to popular thinking that young adults want it easy, many told us that they love their churches because their churches inspire them to act. This isn't done with an attitude of superiority or power, but out of an invitation to pursue the way of Jesus together...In short, young adults aren't running from a gospel that requires hard things of them. They are running toward it.

#### 4) Aileen Jimenez, writing about The United Methodist Church research project:

To reach young adults, focus on themes and causes such as love, belonging, social justice, identity, global conflict, and other topics...These universal values bring meaning to them as individuals but also place them in the story of the bigger picture. They want to support organizations that are making a positive impact in the world...They want to stand for something bigger than themselves.

## For This Week

1) Talk to a 25-40 year old this week about the content of the sermon, church in general, their spirituality, generational tension, you name it. Go into that conversation with the goal of just listening and learning.

2) Pray this a few times this week for KirkWood and our aspiration to reach those 40 and younger:

Adapted from Rev Marjory McPherson (The Church of Scotland):

God, You called a young Joseph to dream and lead, a young Samuel and Jeremiah to prophecy and speak Your truth, a young David to slay giants and be king, and a young Mary to bear Your Son. In their inexperience and doubt, uncertain and unsure of the future before them, they heard and followed Your call courageously. May we help those younger than us hear and follow Your call too, oh God.

Jesus called little children to show the way of His kingdom, a teenager to feed the hungry, and a 30-something John the Baptist to prepare God's people for His coming. In their youth, they heard and followed His call courageously. May we help those younger than us hear and follow the high call of Jesus, and not impede them from either seeking or finding Him.

You will use the optimism and imagination, bravery and adaptability, hope and idealism, faith and passion of justice of the young for the greater good of the world and to build Your Kingdom. Even now, Your Spirit calls the young to stand up in the face of persecution, to take their talents and skills where they are most needed, to raise their voices in songs of protest, to fan the fire of fairness for all, to build new and renewed communities of love and compassion, to teach the old to dream new dreams, and to minister and serve for the sake of the good news. So may we celebrate all that You are doing and will do through those younger than us, and may we be changed by You through them.

In those younger than us are planted seeds of new possibilities, gifts for the years to come, new insights that will shape the future, and the continuation of Your promise that all things will be made new, and for this we are forever grateful, amen.

3) Two short online resources:

- Top 10 church faux pas that run off Millennials (25-40 year olds), reporting the findings of The United Methodist Church's research project: [Top 10 church faux pas that turn off millennials](#)

- 5 things you need to know about Millennials (25-40 year olds), also from the United Methodist Church's research project: [5 key millennial research findings churches should know](#)