

The Diocese of Ohio Young Adult Outreach Task Force

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The Young Adult Outreach Task Force's research and discussions have generated initial recommendations on a variety of topics for parishes to consider as they focus on attracting and retaining multiple generations, especially focusing on young adults (18-30).

The context:

Emerging adulthood is a process of exploring identity and vocation while differentiating from the childhood self. As young adults experience massive brain and social development (especially between the ages of 18 and 21), they also tend to decide in these years whether to join or reject organized religion. Churches are thus grappling with how to support and accompany these young adult "Nones and Dones." ("Nones" is a colloquial phrase for those who are unaffiliated with any religion, and have *never* been so, in comparison to "Dones," who were raised in a particular tradition and have decided to unaffiliate.) Young adults also express craving a set of morals and values as they navigate cultural shifts and their own changing identities through young adulthood. While shifting later and later, most people marry between the ages 18 and 30. In finding a partner, young adults consider cultural compatibility more important than doctrinal

differences, and Episcopalians often share similar values to the religious “nones.” Studies show that when a religious person marries a non-religious person they are actually more likely to drop out of church. Therefore the impact that the church can make on 18-30 year olds is especially important.

The Church’s Role:

Young adults are often attracted to a broad sense of spirituality, which sometimes might seem like a “pick and choose” or anti-institutional religion. One of the Episcopal Church’s assets is making space for people in the midst of growth, struggle, and doubt. Embracing a both/and mentality and encouraging people to think and discern for themselves guides one to finding the identity, worldview, and relationship to Christ that is appropriate to each person as an individual. Demonstrating the many ways one can be a Christian aligns with the emerging adult’s need for a dynamic and organic religion. The Episcopal Church can offer *all* generations the gift of Christ, community, and cosmic love in a way that is inclusive to different identities.

Beyond anything else, what the church can do to attract any generation, especially young adults, is to be authentic and live into its assets. The Episcopal church can’t necessarily offer thousands of people, a praise band with a light show, and free soda. What we can do is fill the niche for spiritual, contemplative, prayerful worship; a relationship to a loving, liberation and life-giving God; and a safe place to interact with mystery, faith and doubt. These-- not the building, not the coffee-- are why young adults are embracing liturgy today. They express the desire for:

- Faith that embraces all aspects of a person (social, emotional, intellectual, physical , spiritual)
- Historical rootedness such as lessons from monasticism and ancient practices
- A sense of mystery, and aesthetic beauty
- Communal worship and Sacramental spirituality
- Countercultural faith

What we can do about it:

The task force has created some initial recommendations within a number of subtopics that your parish can start thinking about in your context. In the coming year, we will form implementation teams to provide resources and specific and concrete recommendations for parishes. These resources will be made available as they are completed. We will also be offering Young Adult Formation grants to help fund programs that your church may want to pilot. Information about that funding, as well as our existing College and Young Adult Work Grants, are both found below.

DATA/TRENDS

1. Sunday mornings are often not a great time for young adults. Social opportunities can occur late into the evening, and Sunday mornings are often the only time available for rest, sleeping in, and unscheduled time. There are some low effort-high impact solutions-- midweek Evening Prayer, quick Eucharist on weeknights, Sunday evenings. Make sure to think about childcare!
2. Provide the opportunity to share pronouns at every event, for example, on nametags. This sends the important message that the church recognizes (if not understands) the spectrum of genders and pronouns, and wants to honor individuals by using their preferred pronouns. Read more about pronouns here: <https://www.colorado.edu/cisc/resources/trans-queer/pronouns>
3. Consider ways to reduce barriers to entry. Walk into your parish with the lens of someone who has never been to a church. How do you get there-- do you drive? Is there public transportation? Can you find the bathrooms? Are you juggling multiple service books and booklets?

COMMUNICATIONS

1. Use social media as both information and invitation. How can you generate conversation and input, rather than just pushing out information?
2. Consider allowing young people to take the lead on your social media, in accordance with guidelines and practices (for example, making sure an account has at least two administrators in case of turnover.)
3. If you do use social media, there needs to be constant and quality content. Be in the habit of keeping your online presence updated and accurate.
4. Use your communications to tell your story. Who is your parish? How does your parish connect with God, the world, and each other?
5. Use multiple platforms-- newsletters, bulletins, instagram, texting, calendar invites, etc. to communicate in order to be accessible to multiple practices.
6. When engaging outside the church (for example, passing out water bottles, fundraising at community events), make sure the church tells its story-- branding, logos, flyers, pictures, etc. Can you purchase branded reusable water bottles so people remember the church later?

CAMPUS MINISTRY

1. Episcopal church moving away from generic campus ministry gatherings toward specific affinity groups or add-ons to other Episcopal gatherings for young adults.

2. Less Canterbury houses/clubs (chaplain for campus ministry in a house on campus-- Kenyon, Wooster) related to budget cuts from General Convention. Some still function as entities of the Diocese, others are independently funded. What is the function of campus ministry? To pastor the campus or to introduce people to Christ and the church?
3. Interest in parish-based campus ministry but a lot of unknowns and not a lot of support, fear from colleges. How to channel students from campus to the church? Need a PRESENCE on the campus-- events, visibility, etc. Ancient practices in public. Connect campus ministry with Episcopal and Christian identity.
4. Draw students to your parish through public events-- co-host with campus, etc. Visibility!

RELATIONSHIPS

1. The church can be a social center for people to meet each other. Consider informal gatherings like heading to a restaurant after a service or building a culture of meaningful coffee hour.
2. Getting married doesn't bring people to church, but having kids (school aged) does make them more likely to become involved. Many come to church when their kids are ages 5-7. What parents desire is help instilling a set of values for their children-- which means we need to offer quality content for children that clearly tells the story of God's inclusive love.

WORSHIP

1. Rather than trying to attract the praise band/ megachurch audience, we can offer a deeply authentic alternative, especially when it comes to worship. We can fill the need for what is ancient, grounded, and deeply spiritual. For example, consider including in your worshipping practices:
 - a. Chant
 - b. Incense
 - c. Silence
 - d. Ancient prayer practices (labyrinth)
 - e. Candlelight
 - f. Meditations
 - g. Poetry
 - h. Visual art
2. Younger generations are searching for God in the midst of unprecedented social and cultural change, and are attracted to a melding of ancient practices and modern contexts. For example,

- a. Silent retreats
- b. Pilgrimages
- c. Monastic practices (praying the hours, etc)
- d. Intentional Community

SHORT TERM MINISTRY

1. Acknowledge that young adults are transient as they follow education/career/family paths. Young adults may only be in a church for a year at a time, but can still participate in ministry together and make an impact.
2. Be intentional - Get to know people and where they are coming from/where they are going. Make them a name tag but perhaps do not expect them to tithe.
3. Understand and respect that they are only passing through - honor the journey.
4. Make connections - to ministries, other congregants - honor their abilities/gifts (Do they host healthy cooking classes? Have them do this!)
5. Send them off with grace and help make connections to the next place (a church in another city, etc.)

STEWARDSHIP

1. The reality is that young adults do not carry cash or checks (some even have limits on how many checks they can use/month! Consider accepting credit cards and other forms of digital payment. This may add a transaction fee, but it also opens up a whole new revenue stream.
 - a. The task force will look into a pilot program for multiple parishes/ the diocese to employ a digital giving platform to both defray transaction fees and find best practices.
 - b. The task force will also generate a list of recommended platforms for how people can engage in stewardship digitally. For example, paypal, venmo, tithe.ly, realm, applepay, etc. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/07/contactless-collection-plates-used-york-minster-first-time/>
2. Use communications to tell the stories of where the money is going! It's about knowing where our money is going and what it costs. Like kickstarter updates. (why does the electric bill matter? Because AA meets here, it's a place for people to connect, when a community member dies they have their funeral here, etc.) Advertise the good places your money is going. Make sure your name is on what you sponsor/ where you partner.
3. Don't be afraid to talk about money. Follow up! Recurring donations still need the follow up.

4. Integrate stewardship with all other aspects of being a church! Demonstrate how stewardship is essential to mission, evangelism, worship, etc.

NOMINATIONS AND CHURCH GOVERNANCE

1. Leadership Development:
 - a. Pay special attention to parishes without a staff youth/young adult person
 - b. Encourage and highlight the ministry of lay leaders, especially young adults in lay leadership
 - c. Pay attention to any call to ordained ministry-- Ministry Discernment Day
2. Communication:
 - a. Accurately describe what commitments the positions require, including frequency and times of meetings.
 - b. Encourage anyone over 16 who is confirmed to participate
 - c. Counter ageism at all levels
3. Consider who is restricted from participating based on the requirements of a certain commitment, for example, young professionals who cannot take off work for daytime meetings. Does your outreach team meet during the hours of a traditional workday? Is there childcare provided during vestry meetings? Can a meeting be done via Zoom?
4. Use communication strategies that reach young adults: instagram, texting, calendar invites, etc.

AGING OUT OF YOUTH GROUP

1. Continuation
 - a. Provide opportunities for reunion/ relationship building for 18-21 year olds on school breaks/summer (Mission Trip, EYE Pastoral Care Team, General Convention Young Adult Festival)
 - b. Provide opportunities for work for 18-21 year olds on school breaks/summer (Bellwether Staff, Diocesan Interns)
2. Connections
 - a. Use network and Ministry Referral Form to make personal connections between graduating youth and their new context (campus, city, etc)--
https://dfms.formstack.com/forms/young_adult_referral_form
 - b. Connect graduating youth with families and mentors in their new context (adopt-a-family laundry, dinners, etc)
 - c. Utilize database to keep track of graduating youth
 - d. Send care packages!
 - e. Consider other ways to make departing members feel a part of the community even when they leave (especially for something as short-term as

school). After investing in your church for so long, they shouldn't feel as though they no longer matter/belong there because they left.

INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY:

1. Mutual Mentorship: Our assets are intergenerational. What can we learn from one another in informal yet intentional relationships? Consider creating mentorships that are not confined to an older generation supporting a younger one.
 - a. Common professional interests
 - b. Confirmation preparation
 - c. Adopt a grandparent or adopt a family
 - d. Speed-dating find a mentor event
 - e. IT help from millennials (But please do not assume that because they're a millennial that they know everything about technology and are your free IT person!)
2. Dinner Groups:
 - a. Foyer groups with meaningful conversation starters
 - b. Book Club
 - c. WE curriculum for dinner groups
 - d. "Restoration Project" about discipleship
3. Near-Peer Opportunities
 - a. Encourage young adults called to children and youth ministry to volunteer/lead
 - b. Send care packages to recent grads who have moved away

MISC.:

1. Topic for clergy day--clergy tools to welcome & retain young adults in church. What do other generations need to know about young adults in ministry contexts? How are young adults' ministry patterns different and what can churches learn from that/how can they adapt?
2. Include young adult lay leaders in church life profiles. (Parishes can submit recommendations for profiles in diocesan communications through the Communications office.)
3. Education on various generations' preferences, tendencies, and gifts, and how multiple generations interact.