

Ministry With Young Adults*

Goal — To reflect upon ministry with young adults and consider what initial steps might be taken to begin or enhance such a ministry in a local church..

Objectives — Activities in this workshop are designed to enable participants to:

1. List and discuss characteristics of young adults in relation to the church.
2. Consider factors which may be keeping young adults from participating in the life of the church.
3. List several specific steps which could be taken by the congregation to address these factors.
4. Consider how ideas for actions fit the perceptions young adults.
5. Decide who will follow up with the ideas created.

Materials Needed — Newsprint, markers, enough chairs arranged in a circle to accommodate attendees.

Time — As long as it takes! This workshop could begin a process that may take several sessions. The time suggestions below are for a 60 to 90 minute meeting. You may need to allow more time for discussion depending on the size and level of enthusiasm of your group.

Introductory Comments

One of the major difficulties of ministering with young adults is that relatively few of them regularly attend most UCC churches! This is a significant challenge to churches accustomed to doing most everything with those who are already attending. If a congregation desires to take seriously a call to minister with young adults, it will have to confront this awkwardness and move into relatively uncharted territory. In short, the congregation will have to commit itself to change! While change never comes easily nor without pain, the results of change can be inspiring, indeed, as more people can have the opportunity to join in the ministry.

Discussion in this workshop may not get past the issue of the need to change. And that's okay because this first step of perceiving the need to change is the most difficult to take. Most congregations won't change until maintaining the present situation is understood to be more painful than the pain involved in change. If the decision to change significantly the way in which the congregation lives and works together is not made clearly, then all of the workshops in the world about ministering with young adults will have little to offer.

*The 1987 General Synod defined "young adult" as those people who have graduated from high school or are 19 years of age through age thirty. Nowadays, the upper limit could be raised to "thirty-something."

Getting Started (10-15 minutes)

After introductions and an opening prayer, ask the person to the leader's right to recite the first statement on Handout A, have the next person do the same for the second, and so on until all of the statements have been read. Ask that each statement be read slowly with a few moments between statements to encourage reflection by the group.

After all the statements have been read, ask for comments or questions from the group. Allow a few minutes for discussion. Included here may be personal experiences with young adults. If young adults are participating, they may be asked to comment on the accuracy of the statements as they apply to their lives.

What's Been Keeping Young Adults Away? (20-30 minutes)

The discussion above may already lead the group to consider which specific characteristics, assumptions, and practices of the congregation may be keeping young adults away. Here, a superficial conversation of "demographics" or "We just have too many older folks in our church," won't do. Challenge the group to be as specific as possible in answering this question:

"How are we preventing young adults from identifying with our congregation as an important part of their lives?"

As in "brainstorming," encourage a free flow of identifying specific points without evaluating whether the observations are true or not. (In this type of discussion, *perceptions* are the important reality to lift up.) List responses on newsprint.

After several points have been listed, have the group consider this question (or a similar one):

"What specific steps could be taken to remedy each situation?"

Some situations can't be "remedied" by direct human action. But with those that can be, push the group to consider what specific steps might be taken for one or two of the more central observations listed on the newsprint. The degree of difficulty of this discussion will depend upon the readiness of the group to consider change.

Record ideas for change on another sheet of newsprint.

Connecting with Perceptions of Young Adults (15-20 minutes)

After two or three of the points for change have been discussed and recorded (the time for this will vary widely depending upon the nature of the points and of the group), suggest to the group that we consider to what degree the suggestions will address **the perceptions and needs of young adults**. Since young adults may be absent from the discussion, on Handout B are some general characteristics (overly simplified to be sure) which may apply to ministry with young adults. As you did with the list of General Statements above, have members of the group recite each characteristic.

Encourage the group to evaluate its suggestions for change using the list above. Key concepts in each point are underlined for your convenience. If a suggestion for change does not address any of the underlined concepts, then the group needs to reconsider that suggestion and reflect upon this situation. If the list confirms the group's suggestion, then it is to be congratulated and affirmed for its insight! Continue with all the suggestions, or as time and energy allow.

Who Is Going to Follow Up? (15-25 minutes)

Now for the million-dollar question: "Who's going to follow up with all this?" Ask the group how we want to proceed. If possible, try to get the group or individuals from the group to commit to taking a next step. Be sure not to plan too big at this point. Encourage the refinement of a specific, practical step, including the accountability for its completion. At the very least, the group's proceedings should be reported to the congregation's board or consistory.

Before departing, affirm the group for all its hard work. A closing prayer or song may be appropriate.

Handout A

General Statements That Don't Apply to Every Young Adult

- ! We are skeptical of religion but open to spirituality.
- ! Our image of Christianity has been formed by televangelists and popular culture.
- ! Divorce, the internet, and a downsizing economy are among the most significant experiences in forming our outlook on life.
- ! Those of us who care about the church have been alienated from it because it usually doesn't take us seriously.
- ! We want to make a difference in the world but often aren't sure how to go about doing it.
- ! We don't like to be isolated into a peer group as "youth" customarily are.
- ! We have little knowledge of the Bible.
- ! Among our favorite TV shows are Seinfeld, Friends, ER, and South Park.
- ! Our lifestyles and interests vary dramatically.
- ! Theological concepts such as "sin" and "guilt" don't communicate very well to us because they represent a negative, repressive spirituality.

Handout B

Needs and Perceptions of Young Adults Relating to the Church

If the church is to become a meaningful part of our lives, we need opportunities to:

- ! Be treated as **adults** whose skills, opinions, and enthusiasm are valued.
- ! Participate in **a community** that seeks to understand us and our situation.
- ! Exercise **leadership** with affairs important to the church.
- ! **Serve** others.
- ! Have experiences with **persons from diverse backgrounds**. (e.g., ethnic, generational).
- ! **“Own” ministry** with young adults. We don’t want ministry “to us” or “for us.”

Selected Resources for Young Adult Ministry

1. ***Developing Faith in Young Adults***
by Robert Gribbon (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1990)
2. ***A Generation Alone, Xers Making a Place in The World***
by William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994)
3. ***Living Unplugged***
by Pam Peters-Pries, (Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1996)
4. ***Resources for the Young Adult Journey, Volumes I-III***
Order from: Homeland Ministries, Center for Congregational Growth and Vitality, PO Box 1986,
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986 (317) 635-3100 (Cost \$12.00 each or all three volumes \$30.00)
5. ***Young Adult Ministry Resource Packet***
Order from: same as above
6. ***God Works***
by Thomas K. Chu, Sheryl A. Kujawa and Anne Rowthorn, (Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse Publishing,
1997)
7. ***Bible Quest*** Young Adult resources will be available in January, 2000 for use beginning in
September, 2000.