

Cultivating Giving Among Younger Generations

Outline

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Objectives

- To examine the gap between current stewardship practices and the needs of younger adults
- To provide a working orientation to the young adult generation
- To offer some strategies for engagement
- To reflect on some lessons learned through case study in group engagement

Assumptions and Myths about Young Adults

- Difficult to discern clear patterns for many activities and behaviors
- Technology dependent
- Do not value relational engagement
- Often not monetary givers, therefore it is not vital to engage them around giving

Myth or Fact?

- Many attitudes about the current generation of young adults are not grounded in research data.
- Assertions based on general surveys and other generic material can be misleading.

The future of American Religion is in the hands of adults now in their twenties and thirties. — Robert Wuthnow

A Sociological Portrait of Younger Adults

- *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* by Robert Wuthnow (2007)
- A more concrete and data-driven approach to understanding young adult culture
- Can help debunk myths and empower the church to engage this generation

Key Trends from Research

- Delayed marriage (but not a rejection of marriage)
- Children: fewer and later
- Uncertainties of work and money
- Higher education
- Loosening relationships
- Globalization
- Culture — an information exchange

Observations

- The younger adult generation is unique and evolving.
- There are no easy identifying markers to which we can easily appeal and address.
- Many of the traditional hallmarks of generational security and generational identity do not apply.
- There are still ways our churches can engage the culture and address the needs of this group.
- Such engagement is essential to promote a culture of stewardship and giving in this age group.

Strategies for Engagement

- In light of some of the central trends and ideas about younger adults, we can make some assertions in engaging this population in giving to your church.

Choice and Accessibility for Giving

- The traditional ways of cultivating a relationship with a donor base still apply. Letters, emails, pledging, and general donor contact all still apply.
- Technology and innovation address **how to give**.
- Effective use of technological options allows donors to choose what to give and when to give.

Authenticity of Community

- Helping the young adult donors understand the rhythm of the community and expectations around giving helps them integrate in the community and feel comfortable in giving.
- Cycles of stewardship campaigns, teachings about giving

Relevance

- The church should not assume that its place in the hearts and minds of young adult parishioners is cemented.
- Church budgets and finances must be made relevant for the life of the church and the ministries that address young adult lifestyles.
- Does the church engage a broad base of ministries? How are lives changed as a result of giving?

The Importance of Listening

- Church leadership should be actively engaged in 'hearing' from all age groups in the church.
- Develop creative ways to assemble 'listening groups.'
- Cultural orientation to younger adult culture, don't make assumptions.

Lessons from Listening Groups

- Baptist Congregation
 - 138 years old
 - 'Large' Baptist Congregation
 - 16 persons in the age group 19-40: 4 male and 12 female
 - Historically African American
 - Some college educated
 - Held on a weeknight
- United Methodist Congregation
 - 158 years old
 - 'Large' UM Congregation
 - 6 persons in the age group 20-31; 5 female and 1 male
 - Historically White American
 - College educated

Continued

Questions Asked

- What programs (church or otherwise) do you give to and why?
- What are some positive elements of your stewardship program?
- What are some negative elements of your stewardship program?
- What are some helpful teaching aides that have been used in the past that helped you understand and promote giving?
- What are the ways that are most effective for you to be solicited/reminded/prompted to give from your church?
- What are some comments that you would want a stewardship committee or governing board to know about stewardship in relation to your age group?

Lessons from Listening Groups

- Results—TBD

Bibliography/Resources

- Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
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