

Significance of american youth programs

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



Keeping Youth in the Church by Building Strong Relationships and Community

Abstract

The author of this paper is applying to be a youth minister of the First Congregational Church of St. Louis, Missouri and has been asked how they would attempt to fix the decrease of youth in the congregation. To approach this issue, the trend of young adults leaving religious activity over the past few years is analyzed. Multiple articles that look at the causes of this trend and discuss how to end it are reviewed to better help the audience understand the issue. The problem is approached by focusing on building a relationship with the youth and creating a community with the rest of the congregation. The proposed solutions are to integrate the adult congregation and youth group into the same worship meeting, to keep the youth group for faith discussions and relationship building activities, to increase the number of service projects and to create youth leadership in order to build a lasting faith among the youth.

Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a significant decrease in church attendance among young adults across the nation. As many researchers and theologians have studied this topic, it seems that this problem arises when the youth are still in their home youth programs. This information makes the position of a youth minister extremely important in every congregation. As the First Congregational Church of St. Louis is located near Washington University, St. Louis University, and various smaller colleges, young adults are a major part of our congregation, and an actively engaged youth minister

is vital. The position for the youth minister in our congregation has recently opened, and the leaders of our church should take the current migration of youth out of the church into consideration when trying to fill this position. The new youth minister needs to be someone who understands the issue and is able to approach it with logical, effective solutions. This paper outlines my understanding of the issue along with my proposed solutions if I were to be hired as the new youth minister of our congregation. As youth minister, I would build a strong relationship with the youth and create a lasting community that will encourage them to continue in worship even after high school.

Issues

The Barna Group has a number of studies and articles on the subject of youth leaving church after high school. One of them entitled “ College Students Lose Interest in Religion” argues that in general, once youth reach college they begin to stop attending religious meetings and participating in religious activities. To prevent this, Barna suggests youth ministries must focus on building the faith of the youth to last beyond high school. Barna uses evidence to suggest that teenagers are spiritual, but lose that spirituality once they go to college. This article is focused on the general decrease of church attendance among young adults.

Other studies suggest that one of the most important thing for the youth’s spiritual nourishment is a good youth minister. In the article “ Youth Pastor, Youth Ministry, And Youth Attitude Toward The Church” Chang-Ho C. Ji and Tevita Tameifuna focus on the importance of the youth minister himself. They explain that a youth pastor should be hired in every congregation in <https://assignbuster.com/significance-of-american-youth-programs/>

order to help the youth have a connection with the church in some way which will help keep them active in religious activity. They discuss the importance of a good youth minister who is active at staying connected with the youth and building relationships with them. They argue that this relationship with a youth minister will help keep youth in the church.

Much like other articles, Brandon Vaidyanathan begins his article “ Religious Resources Or Differential Returns? Early Religious Socialization And Declining Attendance In Emerging Adulthood” by explaining the trend of youth leaving the church as they transition into young adult life. After some research and explaining he narrows down the factors of church attendance in the youth to four things: parental religiosity, church support, religious education, and youth group involvement. He then takes those reasons and focuses on what he finds the most important: parental religiosity. He notices the trend of religious parents producing religious youth along with the opposite trend. Therefore, he stresses the importance of parents who teach values taught in church at home as well. He also argues that people tend to go to church for image instead of for spirituality, which affects the whole atmosphere of the church and drives youth away.

Without any change to the program, the First Congregational Church of St. Louis is already more appealing to the youth than most other denominations. As put in the words of member Ward Klein, “[We] apply Christian values to contemporary culture.” With our progressive mindset of accepting all, youth already feel accepted in the congregation and are not afraid to be themselves. Although this helps our youth feel comfortable at first, the

congregation is currently facing the issue of whether the youth group should be for entertainment or for helping them grow in their discipleship of Christ (First Congregational). According to member Chris Spruill, “ The problem with programming spirituality, worship, prayer and discipleship is that many of them have not experienced enough of life to properly understand why those elements are necessary to their Christian faith journey...To truly reach young people you need to take them outside their comfort zone in order to challenge them.... Challenge them to think deeper and more substantially about their faith.” He then goes on to explain that we should start small with activities they will be drawn to, like game nights, and then build up to working at a soup kitchen in order for them to begin understanding basic Christian principles on their own. Member Katie Ramsey Solomon agrees with Spruill in that she thinks it is good for the youth to learn through experience, but she also sees it the responsibility of the youth program to teach the youth to go to worship services and pray.

Continuing with this argument about the purpose of a youth ministry, Jim Dekker discusses the flaws of only entertaining the youth in his article “ Resilience , Theology, and the Edification of Youth: Are we Missing a Perspective?” He explains that adolescents are encouraged to avoid adversity in life, and that this encouragement is actually what is forcing them out. He argues that embracing adversity will make the youth stronger spiritually and stay active in college. Instead of having all these groups and activities to forget worries, these meetings with the youth should be focused on solving problems and making life better.

One of the main reasons youth leave the church after graduation is the absence of a community feeling within the church. According to former Washington University student Jim Goodwin, “ many students don’t want to be around other 20 somethings all the time..... many are seeking to be with community of all ages and traditions.” Apparently Goodwin is not the only one who feels like this: in Relevant Magazine Rachel Held Evans argues in her article “ Is Your Church Too Cool?” that modern day congregations try too hard to be cool instead of spiritually uplifting. She comments “ I want to be part of an uncool church because I want to be part of a community that shares the reputation of Jesus.” Sharon Galgay Ketcham also argues that too much time and energy is put into the separate activities of the ministries, and not enough effort is put forth making the youth part of the faith community in her article “ Solving The Retention Problem Through Integration: A Communal Vision For Youth Ministry”. She explains that this lack of community makes the transition to college from high school even harder on the religious youth, as everything they knew about worship has suddenly changed.

According to Len Kageler in “ A Cross National Analysis Of Church Based Youth Ministries” and Thomas Perks and Michael Haan in “ Youth Religious Involvement And Adult Community Participation: Do Levels Of Youth Religious Involvement Matter?”, youth who grow up in church communities like the one Evans hopes to be a part of are much more skilled socially and more ready to handle life away from home. Perks and Haan argue that religious youth grow to become helpful and successful adults in the community. However, they have noticed that, particularly in Canada, youth

membership has declined. Perks and Haan blame this on the lack of community set up around the Canadian youth, but at the same time they stress that if this problem were fixed, the youth would have a much better future ahead of them as seen in past trends.

Solutions

After extensive research on the issue, I have been able to formulate specific solutions for the youth of the First Congregational Church of St. Louis. In order to create faith that lasts past high school, I suggest to give the youth more opportunities to teach their peers and the children. One way to develop this teaching skill is to have a different youth member give a spiritual thought each Sunday in youth group. Along with this opportunity, I also suggest to allow youth members to volunteer with the congregation's nursery and younger youth groups in order to further develop their leadership skills. The thought put into teaching will teach the truth of our religion to them as well as build a devotion that will last them through college.

In the past we have had our seniors leave by hosting a Senior Sendoff in August before they go off to their various colleges (Baker 7). At this ceremony each Senior explains where they are going and what they are planning to do there. As youth minister, I would suggest having each senior prepare a short sermon to give to the congregation about how their faith in Christ has been strengthened during their time at First Congregational. Preparing this sermon would help the youth leaving realize how much they have learned and make them unafraid to join a local congregation at their college. It could also help verify the youth program and help the younger

students see the goal of where they want to be at the end of their time in high school.

Currently, our church has the youth meeting Sunday evenings as opposed to in the morning with the adults (Youth Groups). This meeting is full of more activities rather than spiritual enrichment. My suggestion for this is to include the youth in the main church meeting Sunday mornings to help them feel completely part of the congregation, and keep the activities Sunday night. This will help them grow together as a youth group but also increase the sense of community with the rest of the congregation. These youth activities can also consist of discussions of personal thoughts from the Sunday morning meetings in order to help them form opinions and understand all aspects of our religion. As we have had the university students teach the children in the nursery in the past, it would also be helpful to have the students help lead the activities for the youth in order for the youth to feel like they can relate to their leaders, and the students would be able to transition into young adult life easier by being around the youth program they just left. Adults would be allowed to volunteer in the youth program as another way to build a bridge between the two age groups and make the eventual transition much easier for growing youth.

Concerning the current debate in our congregation between an entertaining youth program and a spiritual one, as youth minister, I would use the advice from both Spruill and Solomon to create the best youth program for our congregation. To create this environment at our youth programs we will begin the night with 45 minutes of activities that will bring the youth

together. The rest of the time on Sunday nights will be devoted to group gospel discussions, spiritual thoughts, and a lesson from me. These lessons will consist of studying a bible story and applying the lesson of the story to the youth's personal lives. My main focus in these lessons will be to comfort the youth through their adversity, while also helping them understand the importance of adversity and how to solve their problems individually with God. I also hope to bring the youth on a mission trip for a few weeks each summer in order to give them the opportunity to go on a fun trip with their friends while also growing in character and spirituality. The inviting nature of the First Congregational Church of St. Louis brings the youth to church, but a youth program that is fun and also helpful in bringing them to Christ will keep the youth coming.

Our congregation needs to be careful to not fall in this trap of pleasing the youth by being cool. Instead, we need to focus on creating this community that Goodwin and Evans talk about. We can do this by having weekly service projects for the whole congregation. At our soup kitchens that we have set up we can make sure that everyone has a meaningful assignment and that the members have to work together to be productive. Other service projects may include volunteering in a nursing home, cleaning up our neighborhoods by planting gardens and picking up trash, working in a cannery, or helping a specific member move in or out of their home. Hopefully these service projects will also help the youth realize that the church is more than a social opportunity, but it also provides a great, personal building of character and spirit. This will help the youth feel like they are part of a family at church and eager to find a church when they go off to college.

As youth minister of the First Congregational Church of St. Louis working 40 hours a week I will spend the majority of my time building relationships with the youth. This includes planning activities, going to service projects with the youth, and supporting the youth in their hobbies by attending their sporting events, performances, and helping them whenever they are in need. The table on page 9 of this paper explains exactly how I expect to spend my time as youth minister. David R. Smith, a youth minister in Florida, suggests a successful youth minister studies the bible everyday and attends youth minister trainings. Therefore, I expect to spend the first hour of everyday studying the scriptures and to attend a youth minister training every saturday afternoon. On weekdays, I will spend the next two hours after personal study planning lessons and activities for that week's youth group. Monday through Saturday I will go on youth visits which includes holding personal meetings with the youth and supporting youth's hobbies. These two hours on these days will work somewhat like office hours in that I will be completely free for the youth when they need me at these times. These youth visits may also include visits with the youth's parents in order to understand where each family is spiritually, and how I can personalize my treatment for each youth member. On Wednesday nights I will hold a miniature youth group for an hour that will include an uplifting message and fun activity for those youth who choose to come. Sundays, I will go to the regular congregation, help in the nursery and younger youth groups, meet with the leaders of our congregation to relay information and get advice, meet with the youth member giving the spiritual thought and give advice, and lead youth group. Saturdays will consist of a service project in the

morning, and a youth minister training meeting in the afternoon. By creating this bond with our youth, I hope they will see the importance of coming to church and continue to do so after high school.

Sun Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat

9: 00 Scripture

Study Scripture

Study Scripture

Study Scripture

Study Scripture

Study Scripture

Study Scripture

Study

10: 00 Church Lesson Planning Lesson Planning Lesson Planning Lesson Planning Lesson Planning Lesson Planning Service Project

11: 00 Volunteer in Younger Youth Programs Activity Planning Activity Planning Activity Planning Activity Planning Activity Planning Service Project

12: 00 Meeting with Church Leaders Service Project

1: 00 Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits

2: 00 Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits Youth Visits
Visits

3: 00 Meeting with Youth giving Spiritual Thought Youth Minister Training

4: 00 Youth Group

5: 00 Youth Group Mini Youth Group

Conclusion

As youth minister of the First Congregational Church of St. Louis, Missouri I will focus on building a strong relationship with the youth and welcoming them into the church community to help them stay devoted to their faith after high school. I will do this by giving the youth more leadership responsibilities, spending time with the youth, balance the entertainment and education of the youth group, invite youth to the main worship service, have activities every Sunday night, discuss their personal faith with them, find various service projects with the rest of the congregation, and have them prepare a sermon before leaving the program. Hopefully with this effort and show of love for the youth, they will learn to love church and what it stands for, making them not even think about leaving after high school.