

pass it on!

The virtually untapped yet incredibly valuable assets in all of our churches are the life experiences of the people in our pews. Our churches are rich with people who have navigated family stages, careers, joys, and heartbreaks as people of faith. Many of these wisdom guides would be willing to share their journey with young adults, but we struggle in congregational life to create the space and the time to authentically connect with each other.

Our superficial connections mean that we squander a rich trove of wisdom that should be bequeathed to other generations. We are told that a vast amount of money is going to be transferred between generations in the next thirty years, but we often overlook the wealth of information and encouragement that is going to be left on the table if we do not pass it on to those who follow.

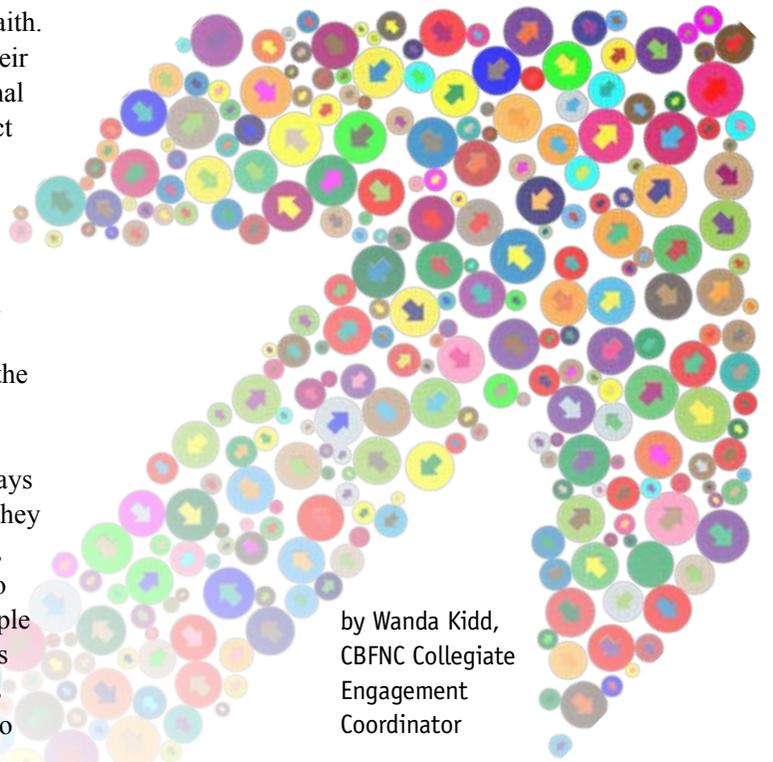
I frequently hear that young adults only want to go to church with people who look like them, but that is not always true. Young pastors have spoken to me about the pressure they feel to advise young parishioners about how to be an adult, when they themselves are struggling to find the best way to parent, be married, and handle finances. They long for people to share that responsibility. Our culture provides few places beyond nuclear families and social media to untangle life's complexities. Our insular lives have cut us off from ways to share wisdom and insights, and we are poorer for it.

It seems to me that church is a perfect place to begin to build those bridges. Church has a culture of mentoring and teaching in our DNA, and we have ample space and people to facilitate community. So how do we cultivate the process?

First, the senior pastor must think nurturing relationships is important or mentoring will struggle to find traction as a church movement. (The pastor does *not* have to *do* the mentoring, *but* they must *ble*ss it.)

Once we have that firm base, lay aside some of our preconceptions of young adults. Consider this:

- If they are spoiled, they did not become that way without our help;
- If they are ill informed, do not assume they did not want our help but that they may not know how to ask;
- If they seem stingy, it could be because they are carrying a huge college debt and they are underpaid;
- If they seem standoffish, do not underestimate the impact we had on warning them about strangers and the unknown when they were young;
- Understand the goals of mentoring but do not limit the outcome. When we begin to share our stories, amazing things happen. We may think we are only teaching someone how to quilt or use a hammer, but they may discover much deeper truths from a shared experience;



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- Relationship building needs to be on someone's radar because it no longer happens naturally. Whether it is a staff or layperson, make sure it is someone who sees the value and is good at connecting people;
- Offer and expect mutual respect when reaching across generational lines. Hold each other accountable. If you agree to do something, treat it as important and valuable;
- Start with something easy like a discussion starter on each table the first Wednesday night of the month. For example, "I started coming to this church because ..." or "I grew up ..." or "My favorite holiday is ...";
- If you or your church have ideas that have helped you mentor young adults and build relationships, let us know and we will share those ideas.

We can continue to be frustrated about the lack of young adults in our churches or we can offer them something that they cannot find elsewhere. We can offer them compassion, empowerment, belonging, and wisdom, and through those shared experiences we can point them to Jesus.

The same Jesus who gave our life purpose and value sustained us through the tragedies and triumphs of life. That relationship is vital to them because their world is often defined by suspicion, manipulation, and broken promises. They need more than an invitation to church, they need to know Jesus.

We must not judge them for not believing, but love them through their unbelief.