



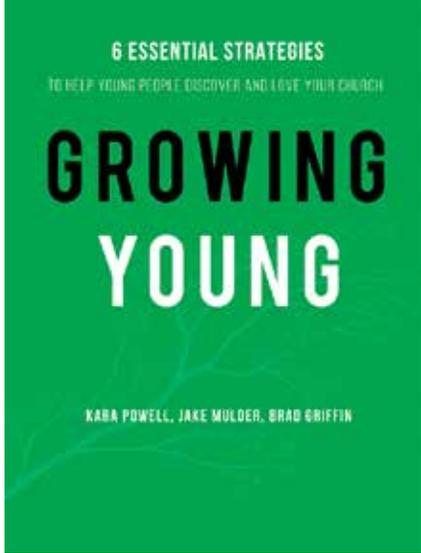
how churches can grow young

by Andy Jung, Pastor of First, Albemarle

Through interviews with church leaders (pastors, associate ministers, and lay leaders) conducted as part of CBFNC’s recent discernment process, a common concern expressed was the aging of our congregations. Like most congregations in the U.S., CBFNC partner churches, on the whole, struggle to reach and retain young people.

The good news is that there is hope for the future of our churches. In a recently released book, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, the leaders at Fuller Youth Institute share the results of a ground-breaking research. Based on a study of 250 churches across denominations, ethnicities, and congregational sizes that are effectively reaching the younger generation, the research found six essential qualities churches shared in reaching the young demographic that had little to do with music, church building, or budget. The study showed that churches that were willing to share key leadership, empathize with their struggles, help them take Jesus’ message seriously, create a culture of warmth within its fellowship, prioritize young people and their families, and go outside the walls of the church to be good neighbors excelled at reaching and retaining young people.

On **March 30, 2017**, Brad Griffin, one of the co-authors of the book, will be the featured speaker at **CBFNC’s Leadership Institute**. The Leadership Institute is a new feature of CBFNC’s Annual Gathering (General Assembly), which will be held at First, Hickory. The early-bird registration fee for the Leadership Institute is \$40 before March 1 (\$50 after March 1). The registration fee includes a copy of the book, *Growing Young*. Pastors, age-group ministers, and lay leaders are encouraged to register at www.cbfnc.org/AsYouGo2017.



reclaim your joy

by Jim Hylton, CBFNC Business Administration Coordinator

A trial lawyer turned standup comedian and Baptist minister, Rev. Susan Sparks is America’s only female comedian with a pulpit. A North Carolina native, Susan received a B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she was president of her class and a Juris Doctor from Wake Forest University School of Law. After ten years as a lawyer moonlighting as a standup, she left the practice and spent two years on a solo trip around the world. Upon returning home, she earned a Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, writing an honors thesis on humor and religion entitled “Laughing Your Way to Grace.”

Currently the Senior Pastor of the historic Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City (and the first woman pastor in its 165-year history), Susan is also a professional comedian. She’ll be with us in Hickory alongside a Rabbi and a Muslim comic in the **Laugh in Peace Tour** on **March 30, 2017**. Tickets are available at www.cbfnc.org/AsYouGo2017.

As a breast cancer survivor, Susan offers keynotes across the country on humor and healing for hospitals, non-profits, and survivor groups. Susan’s work has been featured in such media outlets as the *O* (the Oprah Magazine), *The New York Times*, CBS, CNN, and ABC. A blogger for Huffington Post, Psychology Today, and Baptist News Global, her book, *Laugh Your Way to Grace*, was named a best spiritual book and featured in *USA Today* and Good Morning America.

Susan and her husband Toby love riding their Harleys, eating good BBQ, and rooting for Tar Heel basketball. Read more about Susan at www.susansparks.com.

