

I have long believed that young adults are the greatest untapped group who can move the church forward, both within the church body and beyond our walls. If allowed, they can help the church equip itself to be the presence of Christ in a hurting world. However, they are not interested in simply contributing their money without exploration or just because the church has always done it that way. They are drawn to and shaped by the “Why” questions of life before they will contribute to the “How” responses we often give.

The topic of “giving and the church” was discussed one evening in a class I taught on young adults and the church. Ironically, the ten young adult students sat facing the older students around the classroom tables. The discussion was rather heated, particularly from the older students to the younger. After about twenty minutes, a non-Millennial who was on staff at a large church looked across the table and with great passion and a pointing finger said, “I need you to come to my church and help me pay for that million dollar building we built for the youth 10 years ago.” The room fell silent and there it was: the divide and the disconnect of the church’s need for people to help them keep the doors open and young adult’s desire for their giving to serve Christ and others. Those two things do not have to be mutually exclusive, but there must be a greater effort to talk about giving—what it means to our faith journey and how we can invite people into the process of generosity.

My husband and I recently moved, and we are attending a new church. One of the things we noticed when attending Mars Hill, Mars Hill, was that the church does not have the financial angst that many other churches express. Over lunch one day we asked the pastor, Tommy Justus, what he thought contributed to that reality. He told us that about twenty-five years ago he heard the Christian author and teacher, Leonard Sweet, talk about “giving” as a discipline of “giving your first fruits” rather than a prescribed amount. Tommy said that concept shaped how he

talked about money with his congregations. The conversation on “giving” focused more on generosity and sharing from the top, rather than giving the leftovers of our assets.

It helps that Justus has been at the same church for 20+ years and throughout that time has stayed engaged with the children and youth as well as the adults, so this theology has permeated the whole congregation. Those first youth group members are now deacons, Sunday school teachers, and community leaders. Those youth who went on mission

trips are now chaperoning and leading mission events.

The focus on giving at Mars Hill has been on sharing resources as a means of doing

ministry, and part of their ability to do ministry is to open their church building for community and college needs. Ongoing ministries such as a meal site for the elderly, meeting space for 4-H and scouts, university team meals, sorority and fraternity meetings, and being the launching area for the county’s Christmas Project are ways in which the church uses its building to accomplish this. When people see their building as a place of ministry, then paying for lights and other mundane supplies makes sense.

Mars Hill is not a rich church. There are no large donors that dictate the ministry. Most of the contributions are modest amounts given by people who share a vision of being the presence of Christ in their small community. They do that through national and international missions endeavors, local service, and providing a place for young adults to grow into their faith and learn generosity. In so doing, they find that sharing their money is one part of their faith journey.

People give because it was modeled for them, and others have shown them why it is part of a believer’s spiritual giftedness

While this article is primarily focused on young adults, giving is a broader issue. It is not just a financial crisis for the church, it is a spiritual crisis. It is necessary to dismantle old stewardship ideas of duty and supplant it with a calling to invite, invest and respond.

# invite, invest, respond

by Wanda Kidd, CBFNC Collegiate Engagement Coordinator

## Some things that have been observed about church giving and young adults:

A large number of young adults, even those who grew up in church, are not attending any church on a regular basis, much less contributing to it.

Churches assume that young adults who do attend understand the value and purpose of giving to the ongoing ministry of the church.

While churches vote on annual budgets, seldom is there an explanation of the theology involved in how the budget was created.

Many churches do not have younger voices involved in shaping and impacting financial decisions of their church.

## For us to show young adults why they would grow spiritually by sharing their talents and financial resources, we must:

cast a vision that can be shared by the whole church body;

help them understand as followers of Christ why they should give; where the money is spent; what are the results of their giving and what would happen if they did not give;

provide a variety of techniques for them to give, such as electronically and online;

make space and time for people who value and understand the theology of giving to share their stories.