

# best [young adult] ministry practices

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In talking with young adults about their relationship to church, there are a few consistent themes they continue to voice.

What young adults want us to know:

- We are not the future of the Church. We are the Church right now.
- We are well-educated, trained, and passionate about issues that are important to Christ. Put us to work.
- Many of us do not know “Church Language,” so do not assume we know what you are talking about when you advertise VBS, say something can be found in the vestibule, or start a sentence with, “We all know that ....” We don’t know, but we want to.
- We would love to know people who have been through life experiences that could help us make better decisions about things like marriage, money, or simply how to use some power tools.

These are aspects of ministry that many of us do not even think about because we have been in church all of our lives and assume that we have all had the same life experiences. That is less and less true.

A graduate student told me that by the time his father was his age, he was married, had two children, and was elected a deacon. He looked at me and said, “Do you know what my church asked me to do? Say the offertory prayer on College Sunday. I want to do more.”

Here are some things we need to do to create Best Practices in reaching young adults:

First, we need to **Assess** what our church is gifted to do. Does our church welcome people to do missions with us? Are we a church that serves the community in a way that others can join in? Do we invite people to join us in Bible study or small groups? Ask friends and neighbors who go to other churches what they think of when they think of our church. We are often unaware of how others perceive our role in the community.

Second, reaching out to any group takes being **Intentional**. They have a multitude of other places to be on any given Sunday. Just opening the doors and assuming they will come or even know what is happening in our church is no longer a reality.

It is important that there be a person who **Advocates** for ministry that would include young adults in our planning — offering things like childcare, meetings at a time of the day and week that would work best, and making sure that someone continually asks, “How is this going to reach young adults?”

Then when they do come, **Engage** with them. Speak to them, ask them to sit at your table at a meal. Tell them you are glad they came. *Do not complain* about young people to the young people who *do* come. It will make them defensive and unwilling to invite their friends.

**Invest** in ways to reach young adults. I do not mean just monetarily. Look at ways that we allow people to contribute to the church. Ask them what is important to them and then help them think about those issues in Christ-like terms. Things like parenting, being a good spouse, how to budget their money, and many other daily issues are encumbering their lives and they need solid advice. Of course, you would need a relationship with them for them to trust you with their joy and pain. That is best accomplished when you serve side-by-side in the kitchen, the clothes closet, time in the nursery, or on a mission trip.

In addition to simply welcoming them, we need to **Equip** them to understand what is expected of them in any given task. If we want them to serve, lead, or even be a good member, they need to know the rules. Every church system is different and has specific expectations. *Do not be frustrated* at their failure to know our church’s idiosyncrasies if no one told them. That feels like sabotage and does not build a healthy community.

**Empower** them to lead or partner within the congregation. Branch out when thinking about people who have expertise in things like money management, fitness, social work, or ministry to special-needs children and their families. Many young people have up-to-date training in a variety of the areas where our people are struggling. Empower them to serve.

Ministry to young adults is at a crossroads. Invite them to join us in serving Christ. The church has many needs. Young people are a wealth of energy, knowledge, and desire to make a difference. **Invite** them to join us and experience what happens.