

Getting Young People into Church and the Church into Young People

Often youth ministries create subcultures where young people feel very much at home, but still feel disconnected from the general life of a church. When they leave youth ministry or grow older they never truly engage in the local church, and for many disappear or fall away. How do you get young people into the church and the church into young people? How do you help the larger church body own and love unchurched and secular students?

Terry English founded and leads Fusion, a relational outreach tool which enables local churches throughout Central and Eastern Europe to reach unchurched youth through rock-gospel choir and performing arts groups. Prior to moving to the Czech Republic 14 years ago, he also worked with youth and student outreach ministries in the USA, UK, and Norway. While his focus is now on training local churches, he also continues to work with a local youth ministry in the Czech Republic so that he can keep his finger on the pulse of current trends in youth culture.

I. Your front door is open – is your back door open too?

- a. 50-75% of young people in US leave church when they graduate High School
 - i. focus on Christian behavior rather than true discipleship
OR Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
 - ii. not prepared for life outside youth ministry community/bubble
 - iii. they never attended church – the youth ministry was a para-church ministry within the church
- b. Integration into the wider church community is the no. 1 factor in young people growing in and maintaining their faith! (Fuller Youth Institute – Sticky Faith)
 - i. Ostrava – a sad story with a happy ending

II. Getting Young People into Your Church – in theory

- a. Keys to building a long term, sustainable youth outreach ministry
 - i. Personal development
 - ii. Fun
 - iii. Community and shared goal
- b. Keys to building a life-changing, discipleship ministry (Essential church)
 - i. Simplify – develop a clear structure and process for making disciples
 - ii. Deepen – provide strong biblical teaching and preaching
 - iii. Expect – let members know the need for commitment to the congregation
 - iv. Multiply – emphasize evangelism, outward focus, starting new ministries/churches

III. Getting the church “into” young people - in theory

a. Why isn't the church “into” young people?

i. SHOULD

1. Theology of evangelism – the safe “Holy Huddle”
2. Needs of the church – no need or urgency
3. Needs of young people – what is the world discipling them into?
 - a. Some of the churches “strengths” (love, community, respect) can be like crack cocaine to hurting teens

ii. CAN

1. Time/life stage
2. Judging/Fear
3. “Nothing to offer”
4. Never been asked

iii. COMPELLED

IV. Getting the church “into” young people – in practice

a. Sharing the vision and expectation – youth work is the CHURCH's ministry, not only the youth team's ministry:

i. Prayer

ii. Time

iii. Resource – financial, building and other

b. Look for/create natural ways for adults to interact with young people

i. Church members helping/serving at events – PRACTICAL role!

ii. Teaching a skill – instrument, cooking etc.

1. Linking felt needs teenagers have with practical skills church members have

a. Praying for known faces, not a nameless mass

iii. Hosting, then leading small groups

iv. Married couples serving at camp

v. Keep the youth ministry visible – prayer updates, service etc...

NOTE: initially, the “invitation” should not be open ended but time-limited – people are more likely to serve when they know it is for a limited time only!

V. Reaching out to parents

- a. Turning a mono-generational outreach into a multi-generational outreach
 - i. Events for parents
 - 1. Parent's meeting
 - 2. Christmas
 - 3. Mother's/Father's Day
 - 4. Summer BBQ
 - ii. Partnership with parents
 - 1. Ask them for help
 - a. Working alongside church members

VI. Getting the young people into the church

Remember: Integration into the wider church community is the no. 1 factor in young people growing in and maintaining their faith! (Fuller Youth Institute – Sticky Faith)

- a. Simplify – have a clear “pathway” into faith/the church
 - i. Example from Fusion
- b. Deepen – (even) your (outreach) ministry should teach Biblical truths, not just entertain!
- c. Expect – facilitate opportunities for young people to attend church services
 - i. Invite!
 - ii. Participate
 - iii. Serve
 - It is relatively easy to get a young person to attend a service/event once; getting them to come back is the challenge
 - welcome and relationships!
 - iv. Do your young people have a skill that someone in your church needs? (babysitting, repairing something, computer ability etc..)
- d. Multiply – allow young people to serve alongside you, not “just” under you
 - i. Non-Christian teens are often are happy to help multiply if they themselves have benefitted from your ministry
 - ii. Shared goal key to relationship building and commitment

VII. Review – there is little point in having a wide open front door if your back door is wide open too!

Recommended resources

Drew Dyke *Generation Ex-Christian – Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith, and How to Bring them Back* (Moody Publishers, 2011)

Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, Cheryl Crawford, *Sticky Faith, Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers* (Zondervan, 2011)

Thom S. Rainer, Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Drop Outs*

Skye Jethani, *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God*

Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church*

www.cpyu.org – good resource for tracking US trends in youth culture

<http://www.paulrobertson.ca/in-the-news.html> - a collection of current new stories involving youth

www.youthspecialties.com - good resource for games, programs and talks

<http://www.barna.org> - features research on social trends in and outside the church

<http://marc5solas.wordpress.com/2013/02/08/top-10-reasons-our-kids-leave-church/>