



Networking and Mentoring College Students

One of the truly underutilized gifts that we can give young adults in our churches is ***connecting them with people; not only peers, but people from other generations as well.*** Because of our culture's stratified approach to life, most young adults have few opportunities to interact with people outside of their age group. Building community is a challenge that we are struggling with in churches today, but one that must be addressed. The sense of isolation that people feel all around us is epidemic and it is a calling that compels us to be intentional about reaching out to people around us. All people need to feel valued and appreciated, but for this conversation, we are talking about young adults from 18-30.

One of the **misconceptions about young adults is that they do not want to know or be around anyone but people of their generation.** To be sure they share a worldview that is shaped by each other and media. A world-view that is often counter to their grandparents and even parents and one that challenges people from previous generations to question their thought process and their ensuing behavior.

However for all intent and purpose **we abdicate our influence,** because we fail to engage them in meaningful conversation when we have the chance. How do they know what we think and why we think it, if we never talk about anything that is important and life shaping in our lives? Too often we assume that young adults will absorb our values and live accordingly and we are shocked and devastated when they do not. For something to be absorbed, however, we would need to be in close enough proximity to each other to hear and be impacted by one another's values.

The young adults that I know are **hungry for someone to help them make sense of this complex, challenging and sometimes terrifying world.** They want someone to share with them how survived, what obstacles did they face and how did they handle the situation. They do not want someone to preach to them, or judge them from a far, but they do want someone to hear them and then process the situation with them.

All they have heard, all of their lives from adult family members is, **"I just want you to be happy."** Well, that is an unrealistic goal for anyone. Life by in large is made up of choices that are not going to make us happy. There are hard choices to make and things that we must do that do not make us happy and over and over they think that they must be doing this wrong. God must not love them, because if happiness is God's desire for them, then why are they not happy?

College students and young adults want and need to know how to live their lives when events and relationships are hurtful. **How do they make choices when the end results are going to be about painful for someone?** They are not equipped

to make those choices given the collective experience of their life and the lives of their peers. They need people with a long view, people who have failed and survived and people who are secure enough in their understanding of themselves as a Child of God to speak truth in love. **They need the church.**

So how do we do this? If a college student is thinking about a career in law, engineering, accounting or teaching, helping them meet people in your congregation who are passionate about those things, helps both groups. It offers value to the choices the adult made with their life and it gives the student insight and maybe career advantage by connecting them with people in the field.

They would love to **work along side church members** in the nursery, children and youth ministry and the choir. They would enjoy going on a senior adult outing and on mission experiences where they can learn from people with skills. **What they DO NOT want is to be put to work, so that others will not have to do the ministry of the church.** Too often we put them in the nursery alone and go to worship, or we ask them to do the youth group and then do not give them guidance or help chaperone events.

Many students were not offered leadership opportunities in their churches and they come from small families where they have not learned how to plan and implement activities with groups of children. **When we throw them into situations that they are not equipped to handle, we are setting them up to fail and no one wins in that scenario.**

What networking and mentoring provides is an opportunity to teach, to learn and to share in the lives of young people. It is an investment in the future of the church and the lives of those who will follow. It reminds us that others share our passion and we are all richer for it.

Look around for opportunities to meet and share in the life of a young adult.

Learn their names,

Discover their passion,

Develop a friendship,

Introduce them to others and

Take them to eat

Both of you will be glad that you did.