

## **How to have a Conversation and Communication with College Students**

If we truly want to be a mentoring and welcoming congregation for young adults, we must address how we converse and communicate with them. This will be a challenge, because for the most part we struggle with communication on every front in the church. The “busy-ness” in our lives means we barely have time to show up at church on a regular basis, much less actively participate in the ongoing lives of those sitting around us. I think that sometimes we fear making a connection with anyone, because we intuitively know that we do not have the time or energy to absorb one more person’s problems. Often we are just barely holding our own lives together and the thought of adding one more issue to our precarious existence to overwhelming.

If this is the case and your church is already emotionally cut off from each other, then mentoring a transient group of young adults is going to be difficult. That does not, however, give us permission to give up on engaging young adults in your midst, but it does mean that we need to step back and look at the overall health of our congregations first. Investing in the lives of others in our community of faith and beyond IS church. It is the bedrock of what Christ called us to be and do with His life and ministry. It is not an add-on; it is the essence of the Christian faith.

The churches that are thriving are the churches where people believe that their presence makes a difference to someone, someone that is in that community of faith, someone who notices if they are there or not and cares that they made the effort to come. People want to believe that they matter. In almost every area of our lives we are valued what we can “do” rather than who we are. Church needs to be an oasis from that world of performance and be a place that we are somebody, because we are a beloved child of God who has worth in light of the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Many of us grew up knowing that. We believed that it made a difference to Jesus whether we showed up or not and that was enough reason to go to church. We understood that our faith was about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that we could endure many things in this world through that sustained faith in Jesus. But if we are going to understand young adults, we must understand that they do not have that assurance and in most cases we have not even introduced them to that type of faith in Jesus. Just thinking that they ought to understand that motivation to come to church is not going to impact their understanding of church. We will have to reach them with our love for them and our love for Jesus.

So here are some concrete and pretty simple things that a mentoring church can do to invite a young adult not only into our churches, but also into a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ.

## 1. Pray:

- Pray that God will show you how to love yourself and others
- Pray that your eyes and heart will be attuned to those around you who need someone to speak to them and
- Pray that you will act on that insight even it is seems uncomfortable
- Pray for wisdom, that you will see into the hearts of those around you and if their need is greater than you feel capable of handling, that you will let someone who is equipped to deal with the issue, know about your concern.
- Pray that your church will find or will continue to have a welcoming heart for people
- Pray that God will show you ways to reach out to the people around you beyond the time of worship.

## 2. Speak:

- Start small; speak to the person beside you.
- Speak with sincerity and honesty. They know the difference when we are just checking off a box or when we really want to talk to them
- Then begin to look around you for someone who is new to you or is sitting alone.

I like to think of this like the instructions of the flight attendant when explaining about the emergency exists closest to you. She always says, "Look around you to find the closes exit, realizing that the closest exit might be behind you." The person you might need to speak to could be behind you, so look around. They might be behind you, but you are the person they are looking at throughout the whole service

## 3. Engage: These are the 3 universal questions that carry the first conversation on a campus thousands of times a year. They are:

1. Hi, I am \_\_\_\_\_, and you are?
2. Are you a student here?
3. Where are you from?  
And if you get that far...
4. What is your major?

**4. Include:** Invite them to whatever one time event that is going on beyond the service that they could participate in. Covered dish lunch, free Wednesday night dinner, a mission thing, ie Habitat group, soup kitchen, Christmas events, chaperone a youth event.

Do not assume that they want to take over the nursery, the choir or the youth program. Those types of invitations need to wait awhile until they know where they fit it.

**5. Continue:** Continue to Pray. If they turn you down the first time, but they come back another Sunday, then continue to speak, engage and include. Eventually you may have a small group and it is sometimes easier to invite them to be part of the group of their peers. Either way," do not grow tired of doing good."