

Growing younger: The four big ideas that churches need to know about ministry to children, young people, and families

Below are some of the most important ideas that scripture, research, and decades of experience have taught us about good ministry to children, young people, and families. We ask that you discuss these points as a parish council and contact us for any support you would like to make these ideas more of a reality in your church.

Churches that grow younger focus on children and young people

1. They take seriously the biblical mandate to teach God's commands and testify to God's works to the next generation (Deuteronomy 4:9, Psalm 78)
2. Church works best when all generations are pursuing Christ together. Adults grow in their faith more when children and young people are present¹.
3. The strongest reason that unchurched Kiwis would consider being part of a church is for the faith formation of their children².
4. A significant factor for adults choosing or moving to a church is the quality of its children's and youth programmes^{3 4}.
5. Over 75% of Christians become so before they are 21 years old. Nearly half of Christians became so before the age of 13, 65% before the age of 18.

Churches that grow younger understand how younger generations are wired:

1. Generation Z and Alpha are the most unchurched, biblically illiterate generations we have seen in the western world for a millennium. One in 3 Kiwi Gen Z'ers know nothing about the Christian Church.⁵
2. They have a different approach to learning, have far shorter attention spans and prefer a more interactive approach.
3. Life is stressful for this generation. Despite all the toys Gen Z'ers are experiencing a greater incidences of mental health issues than previous generations of our time.

¹ Adults experience greater spiritual growth when they have regular interaction with younger disciples <https://www.barna.com/research/spiritually-vibrant-household/>

² PCANZ research conducted by Kids Friendly noted the primary reason unchurched adults would participate in church was for the spiritual nurture of their children.

³ 58% of Christian parents choose a church with their kids in mind. <https://www.barna.com/research/children-church-home/>

⁴ 69% of US adults surveyed in Pew Study cited "So children will have a moral foundation" for their reasons to attend church. <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/08/01/why-americans-go-to-religious-services/>

⁵Faith and Belief in New Zealand. Wilberforce Foundation.

4. These points have huge implications for how we do evangelism and discipleship with these generations, we can't just do what worked well 20+ years ago.

Churches that grow younger know how to grow lifelong followers of Christ

- 1) They prioritise discipleship over just gathering people and entertainment.
- 2) They empower parents. The strongest predictor of life long vibrant faith in young people is faithful parents who take the time to deliberately disciple their children. This makes empowering parents in faith formation in the home the greatest priority of the church.^{6 7}
- 3) They engage the whole congregation in discipling young people. The second strongest predictor of life long vibrant faith is that young people have meaningful connections with multiple generations in the church.^{8 9}
- 4) They focus on other key factors of life-long faith: serving in mission, understanding God's big story, encountering Jesus, responding with compassion, engaging in a positive peer community, sharing peak experiences, having mentors and coaches and engaging in rites of passage.
- 5) They take a long-term holistic approach to Christian education focusing on core beliefs, spiritual practices, our call into mission and ministry and into leadership.

Churches that grow younger develop and keep high impact leaders

1. They know that experience pays off. A key leader with at least five years experience in youth ministry will be infinitely more effective than someone who is new to youth ministry.
2. They do whatever it takes to keep their key children's and youth leaders for at least 5 years.¹⁰ They pay them well, support and encourage them.
3. They grow their own leaders. The majority of churches who struggle with a leadership deficit have no process in place for developing new leaders. We need to be prayerfully encouraging more people into voluntary and vocational ministry, it starts with a simple affirmation and encouragement.

⁶ <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-no-1-reason-teens-keep-leaving-the-church>

⁷ <https://here2stay.org.au/8pillars/family/>

⁸ <https://here2stay.org.au/8pillars/family/>

⁹ <https://www.barna.com/research/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church/>

¹⁰ Data collected by Canterbury Youth Services for over two decades shows a clear correlation between health, size and vitality of youth ministry and the longevity (five years or more) of its key leader.

Helpful Resources mentioned in the workshop

The Whānau Friendly Process

The Whānau Friendly Process has been created to help congregations reflect on their current ministry and discern in which ways God may be leading them in the upcoming years. It is an intentional journey with teaching and reflection for the whole church whānau to engage in together. It fosters an understanding of the collective power of the congregation discipling young people – together. It has also been created to help congregations reflect on their current ministry and discern in which ways God may be leading them in the upcoming years.

<https://whanaufriendly.org.nz/>

Stepping Stones Resource Catalogue

Creating or finding great teaching curriculum is an ongoing time-demanding task for youth leaders. We have hand picked several excellent resources to help teach young people and compiled them into several age and theme related categories. This resource will save you hours of work!

<http://steppingstones.pym.org.nz/>

Emerge Leadership Formation Video Course

Start developing tomorrows leaders today!

The ongoing development of new leaders is an essential part of any youth ministry within a church. Unfortunately, we find that many youth ministries struggle to find time to develop new leaders. We have put together a two-year video based leadership program that can be easily run in any local church.

<http://pym.org.nz/training/emerge/>

The Seven Sustainable Practices for Supporting a Youth Leader/Worker

Youth leaders who stick around for 5-7 years achieve so much more than someone who only has a 1–4-year tenure. This resource provides simple steps that a church can take to help retain a youth worker or leader. <http://pym.org.nz/management/>

The Employment Guide for staff working with young people

This is a comprehensive step-by-step guide for churches looking to employ a children's youth or families worker.

<http://pym.org.nz/employment/employment-guide/>

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