

Youth Full Churches



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Leading Biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman believes that there are three primary audiences for evangelism. The first is the most obvious: those who are outside the church and covenant of faith. The second group is those who are in church but whose faith has grown jaded or tired. The third group is least obvious: the children and youth of our congregations. It has been suggested that one of the reasons for Mainline Protestant decline in the twentieth century is our inability to keep our young people.

An effective way to retain youth in the church is to integrate them into the life of the community. Respect their gifts and abilities and include them on committees and mission activity in the church. Don't treat them as tokens. Youth have a great deal to contribute to congregations. They often have a zeal or passion about issues that can be refreshing and challenging.

While it is important for the youth to meet in peer groups and with youth from other churches, it is also vital for them to be integrated into the ministry and mission of the congregation. This happens when they teach in Sunday School, sing in choirs, serve on committees or on the session, usher, and lead worship.

When youth are integrated into the systems and structures of churches they have the opportunity to affect change from within. This evolutionary approach to change can be more effective because it lessens the risk of youth being taken as hostages by themselves, leaders or parents when they want to affect change in the church.

This is a dangerous activity in and outside the church. It often happens when people don't get their way and they use people who are under their sphere of influence—family members and friends—and make threats "do this or else . . ." Youth are particularly prone to this. Avoid this from happening in your congregation by listening to the youth and discerning their needs and how the church can respond.



Churches which are successful in retaining their youth by integrating them in their congregation's witness will see them invite other young people to church.

For more information on evangelism, including a section on turning around the cycle of congregational decline, please go to www.presbyterian.ca/evangelism.