

Engaging the Next Generation (ENG) – Summary Report

Background

Finding new ways to attract and engage young adults – the future generations of our church – was the strategic initiative pursued by the ENG innovation team. We paid particular attention to 18-to-40-year-olds and the personal and societal factors that might result in their under- or non-attendance at church. Within this demographic we focused on several subgroups: those who *don't care* about spirituality, or are spiritual but *don't see a need for organized religion*; those who were *raised in the church but have drifted away*; those who have been *repelled by or estranged from Christianity*; and those who belong to the church but are *not actively engaged or only weakly connected* to it.

Observations

Young adults are not unique in seeking purpose and meaning in their lives. They do however view institutions with caution, placing great weight on authenticity and being repelled by hypocrisy. They guard carefully their time, which is in short supply, and would rather explore than commit. They value flexibility, inclusiveness and tolerance. If raised outside of the faith, they may not be familiar with Christianity, especially as practiced by Presbyterians. And they are leery of church-sponsored events as being mere recruiting tools.

To win the hearts and minds of young adults, we need to be open and honest. We need to give them a voice, help them find a purpose, and offer ways for them to make a difference. We need to show we value them for who they are, and that the fellowship of Christian faith is one not of judgment or exclusion, but of nurture and mutual support. More than just inviting them in, we need to meet them out in the “real world”, where they can participate without feeling conscripted.

Recommendations

We propose four areas of action to address these needs:

Young Adult Advisory Board: A new, five-member board would be formed and charged with planning and implementing programs to engage young adults in the life of the church.

Support Group: Group meetings and workshops would be held for those who feel they have been harmed by, or have otherwise had a negative experiences with, a church or religious institution. The program would begin with an exploratory workshop, led by a trained facilitator.

Ecumenical Group: A young adult ecumenical steering committee, with representatives from other area churches, would be established for the purpose of designing and implementing young adult fellowship within the larger community (i.e., Libertyville and surrounding area). Initial partner churches would be St. Joseph's, Holy Cross Lutheran, St. Lawrence Episcopal, and United Methodist.

Contemplative Service: Four to six Sunday evening services would be held per year, featuring a contemplative (e.g., Taize or Iona) style of worship. Both members and those outside of congregation would have an opportunity to encounter Christ in a unique, reflective style of worship.

Specific steps for implementation are provided in the accompanying action plans and addendum.

Action Plan 1: Young Adult Advisory Board

A nominating committee will identify, by May 31, 2016, five individuals from the congregation who will serve on a young adult advisory board so that they can plan and implement programs to engage young adults in the life of the church.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Form nominating committee.	ENG committee.	3/20/2016	Meeting space in the church. Support from Kathy and Amy. Access to church database.	Five individuals commit to serving on the young adult advisory board for at least six months.
The young adult advisory board forms and begins designing programs.	Young adult advisory board.	12/31/2016	Guidance on how to partner with existing committees or groups to access needed resources. Staff liaison. Representative who reports to Congregational Care.	The young adult advisory board sponsors a minimum of two activities by the end of 2016.
The young adult advisory board discusses support staff functions and availability with Polly.	Young adult advisory board and Polly.	6/30/2016	Email/phone call/in-person meeting.	The young adult advisory board understands what they can expect from the support staff, what the support staff's limitations are, and how to access the resources made available by the support staff.
The young adult advisory board prepares cost estimates for its Fall 2016 activities.	Young adult advisory board.	8/31/2016	Guidance from Session on how to secure and use funding.	The young adult advisory board hosts its Fall 2016 activities within budget. Adequate funds are provided so that the events are free for participants.
The young adult advisory board creates a proposal for its 2017 budget.	Young adult advisory board.	By deadline for the whole church.	Guidance from Congregational Care. Approval from Business Affairs.	The young adult advisory board submits on time a budget sufficient to operate the activities that it has planned for 2017.

Action Plan 2: Support Group

We will conduct an exploratory workshop, led by a trained facilitator, specifically for those who have experienced harm from a church or religious institution, so that our church will be identified as a place where all are welcome. This group will have its first meeting no later than Feb. 2017.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Obtain formal session approval (and determine oversight).	Session/deacons.	10/1/2016	Representative from YAAB/ENG	Approval for establishment.
Identify facilitator for exploratory workshop	Deacons (Rich Alexander); Samaritan Counseling Group; former Covenant pastor potential facilitator (people who are done with religion but not done with God)	8/31/2016	Could include a stipend. Staff resources	Appointing a qualified support group leader(s)
Outreach/communication for exploratory workshop	Facilitator; deacons; Samaritan Counseling Group	11/1/2016	Moment for Mission; PL, FW, web; word of mouth; flyers; newspaper (Daily Herald?); cosponsored or advertised by ecumenical group? Advertising/promotional materials that request an RSVP or registration.	Workshop leaders receive RSVPs.
Workshop meets	Facilitator; deacons; Samaritan Counseling Group; mental health resources such as Youth & Family Services, Stephen Ministry	2/28/2017	Facilitator/leaders have agreed to lead workshop. Meeting space--possibly at a neutral (non-religious) meeting space. Budget for food? Materials (e.g., worksheets, books).	Group participation (more members than leaders)
Feedback to church	Facilitator; Session/staff	4/1/2017	Written communication; appearance at Session (staff meetings); feedback from workshop participants	Summary article in May 2017 First Word, Moment for Mission report
Church determines whether to turn the workshop into an ongoing group	Deacons; Session	5/1/2017	Recommendation from facilitator, deacons, and attendees.	Deacons/Session make a decision about whether there should be an ongoing group.

Action Plan 3: Ecumenical Group

Establish a young adult ecumenical steering committee (of joint leadership) for the purpose of designing and implementing young adult fellowship within the larger community.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
2 individuals (male and female if possible for gender balance) recommended by church leadership from 5 local churches (First Pres, St. Joe's, Holy Cross, St. Lawrence, United Methodist). One adult recommendation from First Pres should be on the young adult advisory board.	Mark--initial outreach with talking points	4/30/2016	Mark needs email addresses of the clergy. Mark needs talking points.	Each church provides names of 2 individuals.
Follow-up meeting after Mark's initial research to explore (w/ 3 possible meetings)	Mark, a YAAB representative, and leaders from other churches (possibly a pastor as well)	last week of May-first week of June	Room at First Pres and coffee/dessert. For this committee to be successful, we will need each church to contribute institutional support.	Follow-up meeting has attendees.
The young adult advisory board discusses support staff functions and availability with Polly.	Young adult advisory board and Polly.	6/30/2016	Email/phone call/in-person meeting.	The young adult advisory board understands what they can expect from the support staff, what the support staff's limitations are, and how to access the resources made available by the support staff.
The young adult advisory board prepares cost estimates for its Fall 2016 activities.	Young adult advisory board.	8/31/2016	Guidance from Session on how to secure and use funding. Participating churches are asked to commit to sharing costs and to contribute other resources (e.g., staff time).	The young adult advisory board hosts its Fall 2016 activities within budget. Adequate funds are provided so that the events are free for participants.
The young adult advisory board creates a proposal for its 2017 budget.	Young adult advisory board.	By deadline for the whole church.	Guidance from Congregational Care. Approval from Business Affairs.	The young adult advisory board submits on time a budget sufficient to operate the activities that it has planned for 2017.

Action Plan 4: New Contemplative Service

Offer four to six Sunday evening services per year featuring a contemplative (e.g., Taize or Iona) style of worship, so that members and those outside of congregation regularly have an opportunity to encounter Christ in a unique, reflective style of worship, with the first such service being held no later than the second Sunday of December 2016.

What must you accomplish?	By whom?	By when?	With what?	How will you measure success?
Establish a leadership team to plan and lead the service.	Worship Committee	5/31/2016	Proposal for contemplative worship service.	People agree to serve on the team and plan specific elements of the worship--confirmed by Session? Session/the church at large commits to support this team.
Create a rough outline/template of what the service should include, with specific leadership needs identified.	Leadership team	8/31/2016	Nominees for each leadership role.	Enough nominees commit to leadership roles to fill all needs for service.
Leadership team schedules services for December 2016 through December 2017 and reserves space in chapel or sanctuary. Likely will be a Sunday evening service.	Leadership team	8/31/2016	Office support staff, at least one pastor, reserved worship space. Reserved fellowship space?	At least five services are scheduled through December 2017.
Incorporate a demonstration of contemplative service into regular Sunday services, 6 weeks and 1 week before the first contemplative service will be held.	Leadership team and worship leadership teams.	First Sunday in November 2016	Music or liturgy, announcement in bulletin.	A demonstration of specific elements of Taize worship, referred to as such, is included in both the sanctuary and chapel services twice before the first contemplative service.
YAAB specifically invites people in the 18-40 age group to the service.	Leadership team and YAAB.	3 weeks before first service	List of 18-40-year-olds from Kathy Chapman.	At least 20 people attend first service.
Specific invitations to people who regularly attended Sunday at 6 services.	Brian Paulson	3-6 weeks before first service	Attendance records.	At least 20 people attend first service.
Leadership team plans the first service.	Leadership team; new chapel music leader	6 weeks before first service	Liturgy, music, worship space, service leaders--at least one pastor; some lay leaders	First contemplative service is held by Dec. 15
Adapt plans for future services based on how the first one went.	Leadership team	1/31/2017	"Exit conversations" with attendees. Feedback from those who planned and led the service.	Stable or growing attendance over first three services.

Addendum to ENG Action Plans: Recommended Specific Ideas and Actions

Interventions for ecumenical collaboration board to consider:

- organize “pilgrimages”
- sponsor community events, e.g. Independence Grove, frisbee golf
- offer yoga, Pilates, Zumba etc. here at FPC
- form young people’s entrepreneur/tech group
- set up networking group for young adults working to implement change
- provide shuttle or other transportation to events

Interventions for young adult advisory board to consider:

- offer “life skills” classes; target area colleges
- form small groups for young adults (e.g. Bible study, book discussions, spiritual growth); identify point of contact for same
- provide shuttle or other transportation to events

Additional interventions that could be pursued without a formal action plan:

- seek publicity via NPR (e.g. Cuba)
- hold new/special inquirer’s class; acknowledging harm
- send targeted invitation of young adults to FMSC etc., e.g., with specific/personalized invitations
- create “runway” for youth to transition from SHF to full participation (possibly through Kara and/or youth team)

Put on hold – for future consideration

- make changes to schedule of worship services
- hold marketing campaigns, e.g. at fitness centers, art galleries, wine and painting classes
- enable remote/virtual participation in church activities, e.g. stream services/events online
- hold Wednesday night all-church activities with broad appeal for all ages/interests