

Young adults will leave church if they're overlooked, study says

January 19, 2007

Updated: 1/19/07

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LifeWay Christian Resources

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—More young adults are falling away from church and finding church irrelevant to their lives because their needs are not being met, new statistics released by [LifeWay Christian Resources](#) revealed.

In 1980, more than 100,000 people age 18 to 34 were baptized in Southern Baptist churches. But in 2005, that number fell to 60,000—a drastic drop considering the United States population has climbed above 300 million.

Research Project

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What's the problem? Why are young adults not finding church relevant for their lives? LifeWay Research sought to find answers by conducting an eight-month research project that included interviews with unchurched adults, regular church attenders and church leaders from geographical regions throughout the United States.

Churchgoers or not, the study results indicate young adults are longing for community and fellowship with peers, looking for ways to reach people in

need and circling the church but not always finding a home in it.

Seventy-three percent of church members and 47 percent of nonaffiliated young adults indicated community with other young adults is extremely important in their lives.

The lack of opportunity for connection within the church proves to be a frustration point for young adults. One study participant said, “After graduation, they give you a pat on the back and say, ‘When you start a family, we’ll be here for you.’”

Another respondent said: “Young adults are in the middle—not married, not old enough, not in high school. (We’re) in this ‘ugh’ stage.”

The second-most important thing for young adult churchgoers is participation in small-group meetings to discuss life application of Scripture, according to 71 percent of the respondents. Both churchgoers and those not affiliated said they want to participate in Bible study that minimizes finding pat answers in the exploration of Scripture.

One study respondent indicated it’s not always about one person with all the answers because there is value in the combined knowledge and experiences of others. Another study participant put the importance of small-group meetings this way: “What draws people is a climate of honesty. We don’t come and say we’re going to hide from each other ... and give Sunday school answers.”

The small-group atmosphere also is where this generation can find “advice from individuals with similar experiences,” the respondent said, which is one of the top five most important things to both churchgoers and unchurched young adults, with 68 percent and 45 percent, respectively, saying it’s very important.

Some young adults are finding such advice through connection with adults

in their 50s, 60s and 70s.

Another high-ranking priority of today's young adult population is the opportunity to meet the needs of others through social action on a regular basis. Sixty-six percent of churchgoers rated this as extremely important in their lives, and 47 percent of non-churchgoers said the same.

The study indicates social action is a big entryway to the church for young adults. In fact, social action is cited as the major reason unchurched young adults would consider being part of a church.

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