

Generations bridge gap through interviews at church

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GRAYSON, Ky. (BP)—An open forum discussion at First Baptist Church in Grayson, Ky., on a Wednesday night turned into an opportunity for young and older members to learn more about each other.

“I was teaching, and it was just a clunker,” Pastor Josh Schmidt said. “I said: ‘Let’s have an open forum discussion. What’s good and what’s not good at the church?’ One of the things the senior adults were concerned about was that they didn’t know anybody anymore.”

Schmidt said the church is growing, but it has been all from one demographic—under age 30. Many teachers and leaders from the high school attend church at Grayson and have invited students to come.

“The church has changed,” Schmidt said. “That (older) group is feeling left behind.”

Then came a suggestion from one of the senior adults: “What if we did like a speed-dating thing only with young people and old people?”

From that came the idea for one-on-one interviews between the under-25 and the over-25 age groups on a Wednesday night. It turned out to be so fruitful—with about 80 participating—they will continue doing it for the next six months, Schmidt said.

The groups gathered on a Wednesday night and “interviewed” each other. They had lists of questions to ask each other developed through the staff, the pastor said. Each person was to have three “interviews” with the other generation.

Getting to know you

Most of them were ice-breaker questions, but many of them went much deeper. One teenage girl accepted the Lord after meeting with an older woman in the church who held her hand during the entire interview.

“(Youth pastor) Cory (Jones) and I stayed until after 9 o’clock talking to the teenager,” Schmidt said. “We called that sweet older lady, and she was fired-up.”

Another teenager asked about baptism, and another revealed she was not a Christian but had questions. That was all unexpected fruit from the generational meeting, Schmidt said.

The pastor pumped up his senior adults to make sure they would be at the meeting, but the younger group was told what was going to happen after they arrived for a youth group meeting.

“People were kind of apprehensive at first—the teenagers more than the senior adults,” Schmidt said. “One of the things we were real intentional about was explaining why we were doing this. We both kind of started out our presentations the same way. Unless we do something tonight, the vast majority of these teens may never come back after graduating high school.”

Create intentional relationships

Schmidt said he read a report where 80 percent of teenagers never return to church after high school, but that number goes down drastically with intentional relationships, outside of parents.

He said the hope is to create some of those intentional relationships and before the start of school in the fall have a “spiritual adoption” where the senior adults “adopt” some of the teenagers and younger adults, within

some guidelines (attending games, birthday parties, church events, etc.).

The pastor said the response was good from both groups after the first meeting. They will do one a month through the summer. Both sides reported talking about more than the suggested questions in their brief meetings with each other.

“The end game is to have both parties, older adults and younger adults, to rank their top five favorite interviews they did,” he said. “We would assign the younger people to older people, and hopefully they can have that meaningful relationship.”

Schmidt said mixing the age groups it is not a unique idea nor is it anything he came up with.

“This game organically from the church,” he said.

After posting on social media about what First Baptist Church in Grayson was doing, the response from other pastors and young church leaders was strong, with many asking Schmidt how to put it together.