

# **Voices: Reaching the social justice generation**

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As an English education major, I am student teaching at a local high school for my last semester of college. When I was in my students' shoes only four years ago, I remember my youth minister telling us that 70 percent of youth group kids stop attending church after graduation. While I continued going to church in college, I noticed—even in my Christian university—many students never got involved with any church family.

I have heard many theories of why this happens: “Kids these days just want to be entertained.” “Their lives have gotten too busy for God.” “These universities teach them to question their faith.”

At some level, each of these reasons may play a part in a student's decision to stop attending church. But since I began student teaching, my thoughts on this issue have changed.

## **The surprising foundation of younger generations**

After our students completed a research paper, my cooperating teacher and I decided to give our students a more fun and artistic assignment to reward their hard work. We gave them an outline of the human body and asked them to tell us about themselves through the form.

Their heart should be the shape of whatever they loved. Their hands should hold the things important to them. Their backbone should show what motivated them, and their feet should show what they believed in.

The students did a wonderful job selecting their images and writing about why they chose each image or word. Again and again, I saw two words at my students' feet: faith and equality. These are the values they stand upon.

## **What young generations look for at church**

For many of my students, faith and equality went hand in hand—or in this case, foot in foot. This gave me pause to consider what young people look for in a church. Of course, they look for community. Many look for upbeat music, free coffee or an engaging pastor. But for me and many other young people, we often look for a place to serve.

I don't mean just service opportunities within the church. It is wonderful to serve the church family by volunteering to teach Sunday school or serving cookies in Vacation Bible School. Yet, this generation is more concerned with people outside the church who don't feel they have a place at the table.

Generation Z has been named by some "the social justice generation." They care deeply about equality for all people, regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, background, country, socio-economic status or religion.

Many young people—including those of Generation Z—believe faith and equality for all should meet in the same place: the church. They believe the perfect group to address issues of inequality is a body of believers who love God and love their neighbors.

## **Connect with younger generations**

# through social justice

Sadly, the church too easily can become inwardly focused. While church members may serve people within the four walls of the church, they may do little to serve those outside the walls who need it most.

To the many churches who wish for young people in their congregations, I encourage you to consider how your church could become involved with social justice issues in your community, state, nation and world.

One way for churches to advocate for justice is to partner with Texas Baptists' [Christian Life Commission](#). Their resources range from topics of hunger and poverty to human trafficking and immigration. A church can begin by adopting one issue that affects its community or touches its heart, learning more about that issue and creating a plan to advocate for justice in that situation.

## Younger generations want to put feet to faith

Young people do not need another social event. However, the church does have a unique opportunity to bring like-minded people together as a catalyst for change. Opportunities for service—not flashing lights or loud music—will keep young people in church.

When asked what is the “greatest commandment in the law,” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-38).

If loving God is one shoe and loving neighbor is another, let us wear them both as we walk this faith journey together.

*Grace Mitchell is a senior at Hardin-Simmons University. She is currently student teaching at Cooper High School and works as a social media manager for Logsdon Seminary. You can find her on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).*