

My friend and colleague, Pastor Tiff, has been writing the last couple of weeks about families and children and their place (or lack thereof) within the church. His observations and insight have been great, and I hope you had a chance to read about it.

If you will indulge me, I would like to carry the theme one more week, and explore a similar topic that I have been thinking on lately: young adults and church life.

Being a young adult myself (enjoying the last six months of my twenties), I cannot recall what young adult involvement in religious communities was like a generation ago. As an active member and leader in the Church today, however, I *can* tell you that the presence of young adults (those 20-40 years old) is notably lacking in many churches on Sunday mornings...and they are genuinely missed.

A lot of effort on the part of religious leaders today has gone into understanding why this generation seems to have walked away from the Church. I read about it all the time and often hear about new ideas and strategies for engaging these people and "bringing them back."

The efforts and the intentions are good enough, but I often find that certain assumptions are made in this quest that could very well (and often do) get in the way.

It is easy to look at young people and their priorities and assume that spirituality and faith are less important for them than for their predecessors.

It is easy to look at the way by which technology has conditioned young people in their communication, thinking, relationships and consumption (think mobile connectivity, digital life, and the resulting expectation of instant gratification), and assume that they disregard what we think of as genuine community,

meaningful personal relationships, and hands-on hard work.

It is easy to look at the world in recent decades (the last in particular) and assume that young people hold an outlook for the future that is as bleak as our present is often portrayed.

As a part of this generation, however, it is my experience and belief that young people are deeply spiritual. They may be more skeptical of institutions that have let them down (be they religious, political, economic, etc.), or more quick to shrug off institutional labels, but there remains a spiritual longing.

While much of a young person's interaction is by digital means, and the expectation for instant gratification is the norm, the saturation of one's life with the "virtual" often leaves a hunger for relationships and progress that are real and tangible.

Despite entering adulthood in an era of costly international "conflicts" and an economy that has done them little to no favors, this generation remains, perhaps surprisingly, quite optimistic.

Young adults want to belong and to serve in genuine community. They want to be generous. They may be more compulsive than their predecessors, but being such means they also compulsively give what they can for the sake of making a difference. They have already been dubbed the "generation of volunteers." They have shown that religious institutions do not own the corner market on generosity, hope and pursuit of the spiritual.

So why am I saying all of this? I am certainly not writing for the leaders of religious institutions, and I hope that I am not just writing for those who are fully and actively connected to a congregation. Rather, I am trusting that some of you are the people I have been describing – spiritual, generous people with a

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hope and longing to be a part of something bigger than yourselves – and to tell you that while the institution of the church may have let you down, or failed to see you for all that you are, there is indeed a place for you among God's people.

The Church does not always get it right. It is far from perfect. It may struggle to see your place and to guide you to it, but as God is eager to see your gifts and passion work for the sake of creating a new future, so to (I hope) is God's Church.

Take this as an invitation to come. Show up at whatever church is willing to welcome you and change for the sake of working with you. Teach them who God has called you to be. Teach them what genuine community, relationships and hope in a better future can look like in the generations to come. We, the Church, may struggle to understand such things, but we want to learn. Come, and let us learn together.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Peder Johanson