

New Agency *Empowers* *the Young as Disciples*

————— Lillian C. Smith —————

How can congregations reach young adults in their twenties and thirties? In the United Methodist Church, where the average age is fifty, most churches are wrestling with this question. It involves the challenges of being in ministry with young people outside the church. But it also involves asking the painful question, “Where have our sons and daughters gone?” So many are like the son of one of my colleagues in ministry. Although active in campus ministry, he has been unable to find a congregation that fits him since graduating—much to the lament of his mother.

Occasionally, I have the joy of being in conversation with such young adults. Many report feeling unwelcome in the church, even those previously involved in youth or campus ministries. They do not “see” themselves in churches with a scarcity of young adult participation. They feel there is nothing for them in Christian education or other programs. Even those who love the church are disappointed because it seems the church is unwilling to do anything new. And some perceive a disconnect between what church members say and do.

All is not lost! The exciting thing is that our denomination has acknowledged the need to intentionally engage in ministry with young people. And many young adults are providing active ministry throughout the denomination—in local congregations, jurisdictions, annual conferences, as general agency board members or staff, and as Global Justice volunteers. For a number of years, the Family and Life Span Team has focused on ministry with young adults. And The Upper Room provides an online Christian community for young people with its “Method X” website. (See www.methodx.org.)

In 2004, the General Conference acted to bring a more intentional focus to young adult ministry. It created the Division on Ministries with Young People within the General Board of Discipleship. This division is to focus attention on increasing, improving, and strengthening ministries with youth and young adults (defined as persons twelve to thirty years of age.) Also known as Young People’s Ministry, the division has the mission of “empowering young people as world-changing disciples of Jesus Christ.”

The Division of Ministry with Young People is working toward a number of goals: to be a clearing house for youth and young adult ministry resources and assemble a database of resources from the different general agencies; to develop networks connecting youth with other youth, young adults with other young adults, and adult workers with one another; to increase the pool of worker trained for ministry with young people; to provide focused support to annual conferences outside

the United States; and to offer leadership development resources to young people serving in local churches. Some of the division’s initiatives include:

- A Young Adult Network identifying resources, church communities, spiritual formation experiences, virtual communities and online experiences for young adults. This network includes an online component and connects young adults to one another, the local church, and the denomination.
- A Young Adult Summit held in November 2005 that brought together young leaders from across the United Methodist Church to share insights, support, and ideas.
- A Workshop on Worship Resources for campus ministers held in late 2005 to create liturgies for younger worshippers and discuss issues confronting young adults.
- Young People Grants available to support ministry by and with younger persons. These include Grants for Ministries with Young People (deadline July 1) and Youth Service Fund Grants (deadline June 1).
- Webcasts that facilitate peer learning among those involved in young adult ministries around the globe. Go to www.gbod.org/youngpeople/ for a schedule of upcoming web casts, or to view the recent web cast Project Transformation, about a Dallas, Texas ministry with urban youth.
- Leadership Development Training for adults who work with young people’s ministries. Such training was offered in Liberia in November 2005.
- A Global Young People’s Convocation and Legislative Assembly planned in late 2006.

Ministry with young people is possible! Scripture and experience have taught us, “With God, all things are possible.” The Division on Ministries with Young People is available to go with you on this journey. For more information about ministries with young adults or to join a network, visit the website at www.gbod.org/youngpeople/.



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