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BOOK REVIEW:

YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY NOW

A Growing Young Guide

Steven Argue

An eBook of 148 pages published in 2022 by Fuller Youth Institute.

YOUNG ADULT ministry should be viewed as a complex art and science. This book provides current research concerning young adult ministry and makes it accessible to its practitioners. The author, Steven Argue, serves as the Associate Professor of Youth, Family, and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, in addition to his research role at the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI). The intended audience targets youth and young adult ministry leaders; however, others, including volunteers, passionate church-goers, and young adults themselves, can find practical advice addressed to them.

The structure of the book emphasizes its main claim: research indicates that compassionate attentiveness and radical creativity are necessary to do young adult ministry well. The first three chapters focus on articulating young adult research, while chapters four through six emphasize a variety of application strategies. The research draws primarily from the Ministry Innovations with Young Adults (MIYA)—a five-year project involving more than 2,000 young adults.

The author pointed out that to engage young adults in an active, “faithing” process, one must develop an accurate understanding of their experience, both religious and otherwise. Because the traditional order of progression from high school to having kids is no longer linear for today’s 18-29-year-olds, the assumptions many have concerning this age group no longer seem applicable. Intentional ministry for young adults begins with seeing them and understanding their perspectives, including the variety of transitions they navigate and the order in which they experience them.

Based on this perspective, attendance at impersonal programs or even church services yields a poor metric for

success. In addition, with young adulthood now characterized by busyness and ever-changing lifestyles, questions and doubts become inevitable. Instead of seeing these as obstacles, young adult ministry leaders should harness them as invitations for spiritual growth.

Dr. Argue used illustrations from his classroom experiences to explain how compassion remains the most helpful attitude to adopt when engaging in young adult ministry. Practically, this looks like cultivating the skill of empathy. Considering the desire of young adults for identity, belonging, and purpose, listening becomes the foremost practice that enables an accurate understanding of young adult perspectives.

Also, making Jesus central to any framework of young adult ministry allows leaders to creatively assist young adults through the process of “asking good questions about life and Jesus” rather than emphasizing never-ending programming, which leads to burnout. Surprisingly, most religious young adults already find Jesus compelling. The Gospels present Jesus as reassessing established norms concerning social justice, equality, and peace. Because of this, discussing issues most important to young adults today within an accepting community provides the opportunity they deeply desire. Discipleship for young adults, therefore, is reinforced by continuing to develop and stand behind “reliable, Jesus-centered narratives.” Paradoxically, wrestling with controversial claims about the Christian faith will not drive young adults away, but emphasizing recruitment at the expense of authenticity will.

Young adult ministry requires courage because the unique perspectives of young adults might challenge existing leaders and structures, as well as change the DNA of a congregation. Current church leaders with a “scarcity mentality” and

a fear of possible deconstruction will need a courageous mentality to give power away rather than cling to it. Dr. Argue described this process as “unlocking keychain leadership.” Empowering, supporting, and equipping young adults to lead, giving them real responsibility, is inherently accompanied by the risks surrounding inexperience. When “keychain leadership” is not paired with a compassionate community, it can lead to dehumanization and disaster. Hence, Argue advocates for “doing ministry *with* young adults, not merely *for* them.” The book ends with a call for young adult ministry leaders to embrace a mission-connecting role that leads to a discernment team style. This entails a check-and-balance dynamic that will guard against the idea that you need to do it all by yourself.

Even though statistical research forms the foundation of this book, it leaves the reader with the impression that young adults must not be viewed as statistics, but as whole persons. A sense of urgency and passion is attached to the practical suggestions presented, which can inspire the reader to desire change for young adults. While the book contains plenty of practical tips, another important element for leaders is a call to prioritize a posture of humility and gentleness as they engage young adults in discussions on spirituality. One powerful moment in the book came at the end of chapter three, where Dr. Argue encapsulated his philosophy of young adult ministry in the prayerful poem *Young Adult Vignette*.

That being said, the author’s prose in the book often comes across as formulaic, predictable, and largely unoriginal. He frequently resorts to cliché one-liners and heavily relies on repetition. If you are looking for an in-depth, academic resource discussing the complexities of young adult ministry from a theoretical point of view, this is not that book. However, if you are looking for an accessible, practical guide attempting to enhance the nuance surrounding young adult ministry for the lay reader, this book will provide you with research-based, Jesus-focused principles to apply in a communal setting.

Reviewed by Eden Samaniego, Pastoral Intern at the Arlington Adventist Church in Arlington, Texas.