

RESOURCING OUR YOUTH FOR EVANGELISM

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Why is it important to engage this generation with their local church evangelism goals? This generation seeks to be participants and not just spectators in their local church. A church spectator feels more like a visitor than a valued member. This is reflected in a recent research conducted by the Barna Group. This study shows that, when given the space, young adults become engaged and really active in their local church; however, they tend to have little participation in committees, church boards, and leadership in general. Here is what the report says:

The majority of engaged young adults are actually involved in a variety of activities—not just attending services. The majority also pay tithe (71%) and more than half contribute additional offerings (60%), attend Sabbath school regularly (61%), participate in church social functions (60%), or attend other types of meetings (52%). It is less common for them to participate in share-your-faith activities (40%), hold church office (35%), or serve on committees (34%).¹

Not all the youth and young adults are necessarily engaged in God's mission. However, to be invited, to be encouraged, and supported will create an opportunity for a decision that may not be possible without such support. This bears the question: Are youth and young adults not involved in church activities because they have an attitude of disengagement? Or, are they unengaged because they have not been invited and supported to participate? This is what Barna's study has to say:

As expected, the unengaged are unengaged across the board. About half (52%) do none of these activities. Fewer than one in three attend services more than monthly (29%), pay tithe (26%) or offerings (21%). Fewer than one in six attend Sabbath school regularly (15%), attend social functions (12%) or other meetings (13%). One in ten hold a church office (10%). Slightly fewer participate in share-your-faith activities (7%) or serve on a committee (3%). (Barna Group, Seventh-day Adventist | Young Adult Study, 26)²

The objective of this chapter is to find an answer to the following questions: Why is it important to engage this generation to be part of local church evangelism? What can the Seventh-day Adventist Church do to support youth/young adults to do evangelism at their local churches? Many answers to these

important questions will be explored; particularly, a tested model to assist and resource this generation to get engaged in evangelism will be featured.

Inspiration from the Bible and Ellen White

The church needs its youth's energy and creativity for new evangelism approaches. Ellen White describes this with these words: "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might **furnish** how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!"³

The previous quote describes both, the attitude Adventist pioneers had towards the involvement of youth in evangelism and the role of the church in supporting them, as well as what seems to be God's *modus operandi* with His prophets and chosen leaders (young leaders included): 1) He calls them, 2) He tells them what to do, and then 3) He provides them with the necessary resources ("furnish") to accomplish their mission.

This is the case of the Apostle Paul when he was called in his way to Damascus, most probably at a young age. He was sent/guided by God through the Early Church, and even though he was self-employed (Acts 18:1-3), he also managed local churches' donations for his missionary endeavors:

Although he did not request personal support, he spent close to ten years soliciting funds for what is commonly referred to as the Jerusalem collection. This was a collection he took up among the Gentile churches to help Judean believers who were facing harder than usual economic times as a result of a famine during the mid to late 40s. Paul and Barnabas made an initial famine-relief visit to Jerusalem in A.D. 46 and delivered a monetary gift from the church at Antioch (Acts 11:29-30). At that time the Jerusalem church expressed the hope that the believers associated with Paul would continue to remember the Judean believers, which Paul was more than eager to do (Gal 2:10)⁴.

Paul received the full support and trust of God through the resources of many churches, and his mission was accomplished as he wrote in Colossians 1:23: "the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister." Simply put, evangelism should be at the heart of the church, and a most fundamental way to make it happen is to support and empower those who God calls to fulfill His mission.

Hence, a crucial element of youth evangelism, is for the church to find ways to "furnish" its youth, which is to provide them with the necessary means so that they can fulfill the mission God is calling them to live out in their lives. Of course, church support does not guarantee that the results will be always positive; not all evangelistic efforts will bear the same fruits. However, the effort is always more than worth it.

Learning From Experience

One setting where we see many successful young leaders today is in the world of business. As one looks closer and explore the reasons for this phenomenon, it becomes obvious that many of those reasons are the same reasons our young pioneers became successful leaders. Among other things, young leaders in the business world are successful because:

1. They value and adapt to new and creative ways.
2. They obtain financing from investors that believe in them to develop new and creative ideas.
3. They are not afraid of failure. For them and their investors, controlled risk is a good thing.
4. They have access to good mentors.
5. They are placed in positions of governance.
6. They see change as normal and necessary.

As the introduction to this book clearly demonstrates it, way before many of today's successful companies even existed, our pioneers were already implementing these practices, empowering young people for mission. As we think of ways to "furnish" our youth for evangelism, as we empower and train them to share God's love with the world, these points ought to be considered.

A Proven Model for Youth Evangelism

The Lake Union Conference has developed an interesting initiative called "Youth Evangelism Congress". This event has taken place three times (2013, 2016, and 2018) and has developed effective practices for youth evangelism. Some distinctive activities at this event reflect the intention of this Union in providing youth/young adults resources for evangelism along with leadership opportunities.

In this Congress, the "training" section is intended to be more inspirational than instructional. In fact, the speakers are (in their majority) lay church members, youth and young adults that have created or adapted a successful ministry. In other words, presenters and attendees are peers with the same opportunities to start a new ministry.

After 10 minutes for each presentation in a general session, the attendees have some time for "table talk". This is when they process the information with young people from different churches, analyzing if the ministry presented is feasible or adaptable to their local church reality. When all the presenters have finished, there is 40 minutes "breakout sessions" where each attendee can choose to learn more about a specific ministry.

Finally, as soon as the Congress is over, each attendee has the right to apply for an Evangelism Fund that will cover 50% of the budget for an evangelism project that the applicant will develop under the support of their local church board. The applicant has to present a project description, including a budget detail and the commitment of its local church board to cover the other 50% of the budget with a vote stated in church board minutes.

This is an collaborative work between:

- A young person or a group of youth engaged with the Church's mission.
 - A local Church Board that decides to trust that young person with a leadership position to lead its project, and 50% of the budget necessary for that project to take place.
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- Lake Union administration, local Conference administration, and their Youth Ministries and Evangelism departments that supports this initiative by covering the other 50% of the evangelism project budget.

The outcomes of this initiative are reflected in the next reports:

2013 LUC Youth Evangelism Congress—JESUS, ALL OR NOTHING (1 Timothy 4:12)

1. When and where: **February 8-10, 2013 in Chicago, IL.**
2. Total attendance: **452**
3. Overall evaluation (survey): **71% Excellent / 28% Good**
4. Presenters evaluation (survey): **77% Excellent / 18% Good**
5. Evangelism Fund amount offered by LUC: **\$16,000.**
6. Amount requested by attendees in Evangelism projects: **\$8,383.**
7. Number of evangelism projects that requested sponsorship: **8**
8. Percentage of the evangelism fund claimed: **52%**
9. Average budget for each project (LUC \$ + local Church \$): **\$2,095.75**

2016 LUC Youth Evangelism Congress—CALLED TO SERVE (John 3:16)

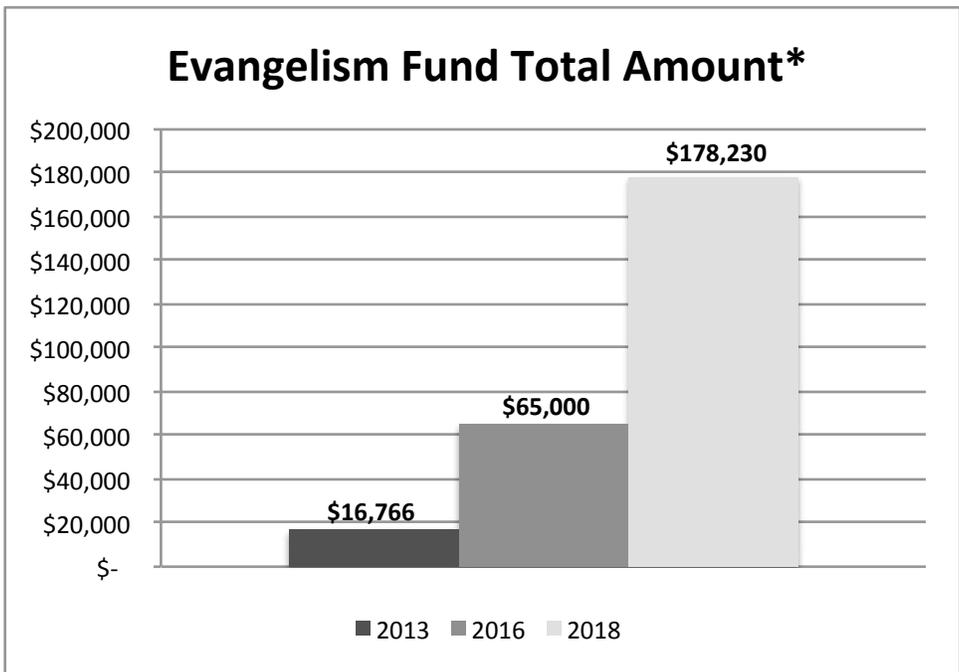
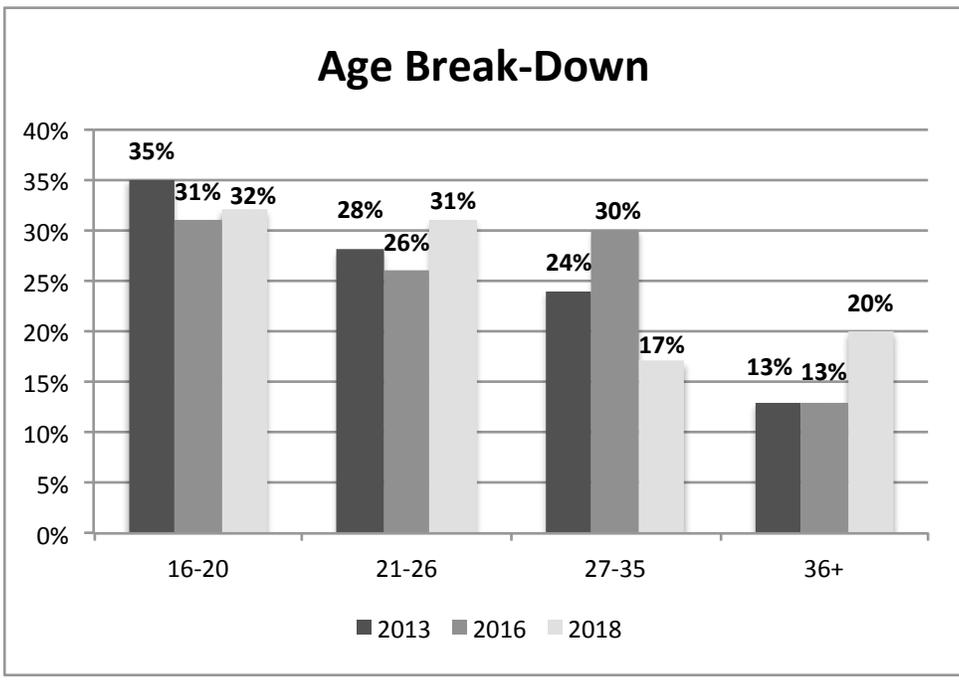
1. When and where: **February 12-14, 2016 in Chicago, IL.**
2. Total attendance: **301**
3. Overall evaluation (survey): **81% Excellent / 18% Good**
4. Presenters evaluation (survey): **90% Excellent / 10% Good**
5. Evangelism Fund amount offered by LUC: **\$32,500.**
6. Amount requested by attendees in Evangelism projects: **\$32,500.**
7. Number of evangelism projects that requested sponsorship: **14**
8. Percentage of the evangelism fund claimed: **100%**
9. Average budget for each project (LUC \$ + local Church \$): **\$4,642.85**

2018 LUC Youth Evangelism Congress—IMAGINE (Ephesians 3:20)

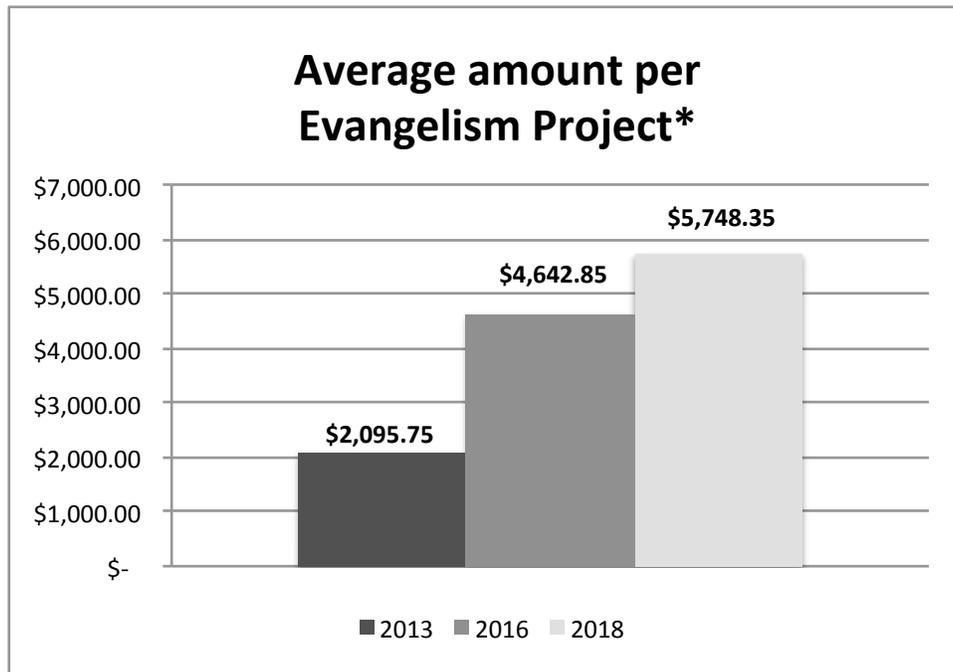
1. When and where: **February 16-18, 2018 in Shipshewana, IN.**
 2. Total attendance: **351**
 3. Overall evaluation (survey): **71% Excellent / 27% Good**
 4. Presenters evaluation (survey): **79% Excellent / 20% Good**
 5. Evangelism Fund amount offered by LUC: **\$50,000.**
 6. Amount requested by attendees in Evangelism projects: **\$89,115.**
 7. Number of evangelism projects that requested sponsorship: **31**
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- 8. Percentage of the evangelism fund claimed: **178%**
- 9. Average budget for each project (LUC \$ + local Church \$): **\$5,749.35**

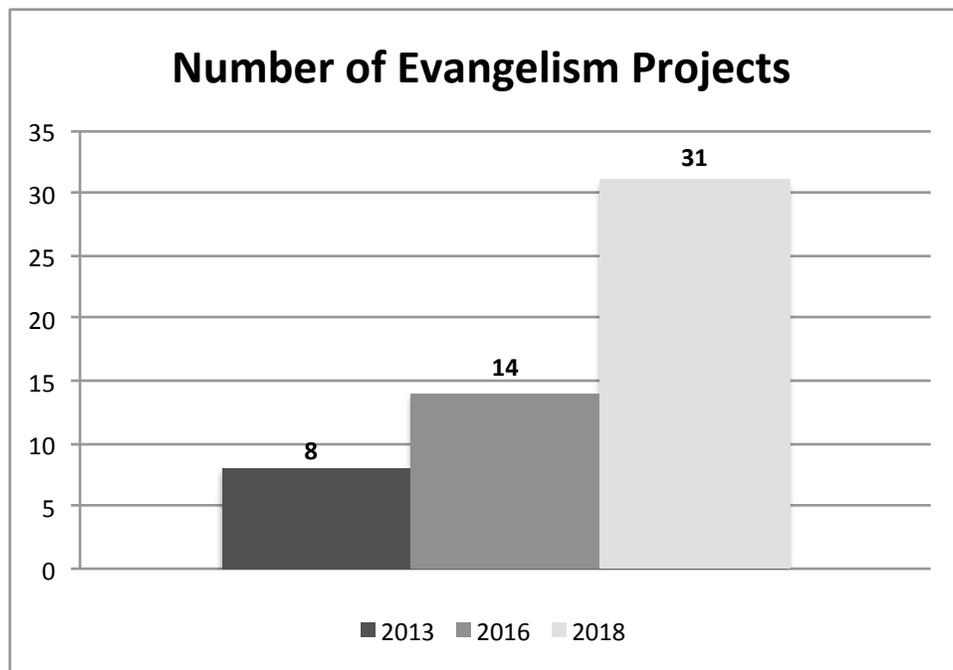
LUC Youth Evangelism Congress 2013, 2016, and 2018 Comparison



* Including dollars from Lake Union, local Conference, and local Churches.



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Conclusion

Beyond the strategy and the evangelism funds, the intentionality of this event is clear: to support youth and young adults not only with words but with votes and resources. The rationale is simple: church members can't wait for a pastor to do all the evangelism, but need to see youth and young adults as potential missionaries here and now, as Ellen White clearly saw it more than hundred years ago:

“In order that the work may go forward in all its branches, God calls for youthful vigor, zeal, and courage. He has chosen the youth to aid in the

advancement of His cause. To plan with clear mind and execute with courageous hand demands fresh, uncrippled energies. Young men and women are invited to give God the strength of their youth that through the exercise of their powers, through keen thought and vigorous action, they may bring glory to Him and salvation to their fellow-men” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 67).

In the words of Patty Dmytriev, one of our presenters in Lake Union Youth Evangelism Congress 2018, “It is not about your capability but about your availability for doing God’s will”. It is truly not a matter of age or capability but availability.

While we should always strive for success, we can’t expect infallibility, particularly from young people. In fact, mistakes should be welcomed as a way to learn lessons on how to improve in our missional endeavors. On this Ellen White writes: “If you fail ninety-nine times in a hundred, but succeed in saving the one soul from ruin, you have done a noble deed for the Master’s cause.”⁵ In other words, avoiding failure is not as important as trying as many times as possible.

The Lake Union is planning for the Youth Evangelism Congress in 2020 under the theme “Courageous”, based on Joshua 1:9. There will probably be different presenters, different speakers, and a different amount for evangelism funds. However, the vision to resource youth and young adults for evangelism will remain the same. This vision is well reflected in these words: “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!”⁶

It is our prayer that God will inspire His church in these last days of earth history, to train its youth and young adults, to inspire them, to “furnish” them with resources and leadership opportunities and then to let them decide which direction for mission to take.

Endnotes

1 Barna Group, Seventh-day Adventist | Young Adult Study, 26 <https://www.scribd.com/document/353932065/Barna-SDA-Millennials-Report-final-pdf>

2 Ibid.

3 Ellen White, *Education*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002): 271

4 Belleville, Linda L. *2 Corinthians*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 34

5 Ellen White, *Christian Service*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999): 101

6 Ellen White, *Education*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002): 271