

# Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church

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whelmed with their daily tasks. The author does an excellent job of sprinkling in relevant stories along with practical counsel to get the reader to bring balance to a life that can easily become chaotic when attempting to embrace everyone else's priority lists as our own.

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## **GROWING YOUNG: SIX ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DISCOVER AND LOVE YOUR CHURCH**

*By Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, & Brad Griffin  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books (2016)  
Paperback, 330 pages*

*Reviewed by David Chimwaso*

The authors of Fuller Youth Institute have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing quest for church growth by providing not only a theoretical model for relational church growth that can “Energize [the] entire church congregation,” but also a description of a practical application of the concept. The model has been explored in the context of “six core commitments,” or strategies, “of churches that are growing young.” The profiled churches are thriving because they are attracting and engaging young people ages 15 to 29, who are growing spiritually and emotionally, which gives credence to this concept (pp. 19, 20, 23). Engaging young people is key (p. 29). It is in this context that the authors believe churches that engage young people, metaphorically, grow young.

As churches across North America

experience “Aging, shrinking, or plateauing congregations,” an effective model for church growth becomes essential. “The decline in overall church attendance is linked with young people’s religious practices or lack thereof” (pp. 15, 16). What this means is that many young people are leaving the church.

*Growing Young* offers strategies that attract young people. These strategies involve leadership, empathy, a Christ-centered message, warm relationships, being good neighbors, and giving priority to young people. These strategies have become the yardstick of churches that are growing young (p. 43).

Powell, et al, discount models with preconceived ideas for attracting young people such as, “popular denomination, big modern buildings,” or “watered-down messages.” Instead, “for young people, community and relational warmth is the new cool” (pp. 26, 27).

The model appeals to the life of the church. There is need for inter-generational relationships or mutual dependence. The church needs young people, and they need the church. Young people bring curiosity and authenticity to Scriptures and relationships, which can be refreshing. On the other hand, “young people need a thriving church,” that will “ground them in community” and missional activities (p. 14).

It is necessary that older adults empathize with young people. According to the authors, young people know that they are not perfect. They need a church where they can ask questions or make mistakes and learn from them without being judged. The last thing they want to hear is criticism at every turn. They need a warm, caring, and empathetic community, “a community of grace” (pp. 91, 128). The aim is to under-

stand and uplift young people.

“Keychain leadership”—many congregations start growing young involves first implementing this strategy—by entrusting young people with not only leadership roles but with church keys, which is a smart move. The book has testimonies on how young people felt when they began to receive church keys. They also felt free to hang out at church, which gave them a sense of belonging (pp. 44, 51).

What the authors fail to mention is the positive impact of involving young people, in not only leadership roles, but in programing and worship services. But one may argue that it is implied. The authors make a strong case that when we entrust young people with leadership roles, they in turn trust the church, and they become an avenue to the rest of the youth, which I think is a valid observation (p. 55).

There are many books on church growth written in recent years. However, many of them have focused on exponential growth—using various strategies such as discipleship, as is the case with *Discipleship that Fits* by Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, or mentoring—as is the case with *Mentor for Life* by Natasha Sistrunk Robinson, both of which are very good on fostering relationships as a vehicle for church growth.

*Growing Young*, however, is different. It is concerned with bridging the generational gap, which, if not checked will have a negative impact. Therefore, while growing numerically, churches that grow young are those which are attracting young people ages 15 to 29. This is because this group has no interest in church and can easily get distracted or disillusioned and leave (pp. 16, 19). Yet every church needs young people.

Presenting Christ-centered messages means a lot to young people—

which I think translates into expressions of love, sympathy, and empathy—not only focusing on doctrine. Many times, young people are faced with do’s and don’ts that do not recognize that spiritual growth is progressive. No one can become spiritually mature overnight (p. 151).

These strategies are not new. One learns that when congregations begin to recognize and implement these strategies, change begins to happen.

However, these strategies go beyond ideas, *Growing Young* inspires action. It identifies strategies, generates dialogue, and encourages taking action. There is something to learn from the research findings. The strategies are not exhaustive. While only six strategies are presented, the reader is led to think of many more.

The last chapter offers ideas on how to create a plan for action, which I think helps eliminate procrastination. The success of these strategies will depend on church leaders engaging a common vision for young people. It would be beneficial for leaders to study the book together. There is need to brainstorm, put the strategies into context, and take action. For this to work, leaders and the entire church family must get involved.

I strongly recommend this book to all church leaders, parents, and other adults who have a passion for young people. It will help them create a warm, relational church, with special focus on young people as a vehicle for church growth—a church where young people “feel known, accepted, and valued” (p. 51), and in turn fuel the life of the church.

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