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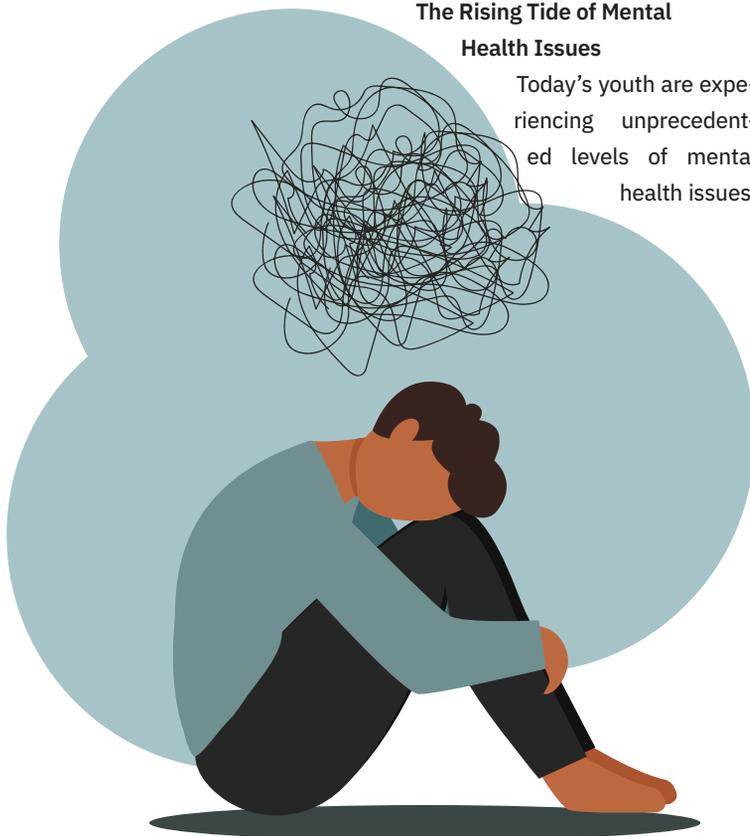
Youth ministry has always been a pivotal component of church life, serving as a bridge between generations and fostering spiritual growth among young people. However, the challenges and needs of today’s youth are markedly different from those of previous generations.

This article will focus on three critical aspects that modern youth ministry must address: the rising mental health issues among young people, the necessity of trauma-informed care, and the importance of including youth in church leadership and decision-making.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Globally, it is estimated that 1 in 7 (14%) 10-19-year-olds experience mental health conditions, yet these remain largely unrecognized and untreated.”¹ Multiple studies register an increase in rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders among adolescents and young adults over the past decade. Factors such as social media pressures, academic stress, and global uncertainties contribute to this mental health crisis. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, isolating many young people and disrupting their routines and support systems even four years later.

The Rising Tide of Mental Health Issues

Today’s youth are experiencing unprecedented levels of mental health issues.



Youth ministries must prioritize mental health in young people by creating a supportive and understanding environment. Creating such an environment involves providing education on mental health issues, destigmatizing mental illness, and offering resources for professional help. Church leaders and pastors should receive training in mental health first aid and tools to help them recognize signs of distress. Additionally, fostering open conversations about mental health within the church can help young people feel less isolated and more supported through their mental struggles.

Healing from Trauma: A Holistic Approach

Trauma is another critical issue that youth ministries must address. Research shows that “62% of

U.S. adolescents ages 13 to 17 years old had been exposed to at least one lifetime traumatic event, and 19% had suffered exposure to three or more traumatic events.”² Many young people today have experienced various forms of trauma, including abuse, neglect, loss, and exposure to violence. Trauma can have profound and long-lasting effects on an individual’s emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being.

A trauma-informed approach to youth ministry involves understanding the impact of trauma and how to integrate awareness of it into all aspects of ministry. This approach requires creating safe and nurturing environments where young people feel secure and valued. Activities and programs should promote healing and resilience by incorporating self-awareness, therapy, or peer support groups.

Empowering Youth

An effective youth ministry must involve young people in leadership and decision-making processes within the church. Historically, church leadership has often been the domain of older generations, with young people’s voices frequently marginalized. However, involving youth in leadership roles can bring fresh perspectives and energy to the church, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among young members.

Ellen White earnestly counsels, “Never was there a time when youth of every age and country were needed to do earnestly the work to be done, as now.”³ Empowering youth involves more than just token representation; it requires meaningful inclusion in the planning and implementation of church activities and policies. Young people should be encouraged to take on leadership roles in various church committees and ministries. They should be able to express their ideas and contribute to the entire congregation’s decision-making processes.

Involving youth in church leadership can benefit the ministry through their insights and creativity. Their inclusion also helps young people develop critical leadership skills and a deeper commitment to their faith community. When youth feel their voices are heard and valued, they are more

likely to have a sense of belonging and it increases their chances of staying engaged and actively participating in the church’s life. Fuller Youth Ministry Institute recommends, “When young people are adopted into God’s kingdom as God’s sons and daughters and adopted into the body of Christ and the local church family, youth ministry shifts from ministry for teenagers to ministry with teenagers.”⁴

Conclusion

The landscape of youth ministry is evolving, shaped by our time’s unique challenges and opportunities. Addressing the mental health crisis, adopting trauma-informed practices, and empowering youth through leadership are crucial steps in creating a vibrant and supportive faith community. Churches focusing on these aspects can better support their young members’ spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being, helping them thrive in their faith and life. Then, youth ministry can become a beacon of hope and healing for the next generation. ■

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