

Nevertheless, Miller's conclusion is coherent. He argues that America's greatness does not lie in its economic, military, intellectual, or technological accomplishments, but "in its civil and religious freedoms, extending to all men and women the dignity that comes with being made in God's image, and being endowed by that Creator with inalienable rights to life and liberty" (190). Miller argues that the denial of this heritage will result in the decline and ruin of America's greatness.

Many nations, as well as churches, are confronted with populist ideas which can tempt them to become offenders of civil and religious liberties. That is why historical research in this area has never been more important than now. Once again, Miller makes this point clear by providing a compilation on the history of civil and religious liberties, while uncovering prevalent fallacies. For this reason, this book constitutes a valuable resource. Lawyers, historians, and theologians will especially be inspired by his brilliant illustrations.

Berne, Switzerland

BENJAMIN HOFFMANN

Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016. 330 pp. Hardcover. USD 19.99.

*Growing Young* is a collective work from three authors. The work is birthed out of the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI), a research institute in Pasadena, California, on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary. Lead author and executive director of FYI, Dr. Kara Powell, is a defining voice in the field of youth and emerging adult studies, earning her a place among *Christianity Today's* "50 Women You Should Know." Jake Mulder is a PhD student and the director of strategic initiatives at FYI, where he coordinates new research and develops resources. Brad Griffin is the director of FYI, where he develops research-based materials for youth workers and parents.

*Growing Young* points to several realities in the Christian church. First, young people are different psychosocially than other generations were. Second, churches are rapidly growing older in the average age of the attendee, while the absence of younger generations is becoming more apparent. Finally, Christianity's impact on society is waning. The reality of the Christian Church might seem bleak, but as the authors point out, not every church is undergoing these changes.

*Growing Young* is the most comprehensive and collaborative study on churches that are thriving with young people. It was conducted over a four-year period, in three phases, with some 259 churches. The churches studied are known as exemplars, because of their effectiveness in reaching young people ages fifteen to twenty-nine missionally, creatively, and numerically. Their research quality comes from the diversity of churches represented, and these churches represent most major Christian denominations and regional demographics throughout the United States of America, including major races and ethnic backgrounds, and various church sizes.

After analyzing the data, six essential strategies were deduced: First, unlock keychain leadership. Second, empathize with today's young people. Third, take Jesus's message seriously. Fourth, fuel a warm community. Fifth, prioritize young people (and families) everywhere, and sixth, be the best neighbors. The remainder of the book fleshes out these essential strategies in detail, offering practical approaches for implementing each strategy. In the effort to support churches desiring to "grow young," FYI has included church assessments and resources on their website: [www.churchesgrowingyoung.com](http://www.churchesgrowingyoung.com).

In the book, the authors point to the first strategy for church leaders: understanding the keys of power they possess, and being willing to get these keys into the hands of young people. Churches who grow young demonstrate a strong environment of empowering, training, and releasing young people to lead and serve. According to the data collected, both young people and adults rated effective and warm church leadership as a stronger reason to remain in church than even worship style or preaching.

The second strategy revealed that life for the average young person has drastically changed. The authors suggest that the church needs to step into the current generation's lives, feeling what they are experiencing, by utilizing empathy.

For the third strategy, churches that take Jesus's message seriously would be described as those who follow Jesus in earnest; taking in the broken and restoring them to wholeness; inviting people to follow a life of discipleship and sacrifice; and embodying God's unconditional love (128–129). Exemplar churches in the fourth strategy were described as authentic, hospitable, caring, welcoming, and accepting.

The fifth strategy is the tangible and institutional commitment to young people by resourcing and attention. Exemplar churches place prioritization on young people, via budgets, personnel, space, time, programming, and empowering their youth to lead in positions with real power. The final strategy recognizes that young people hunger to restore the world around them, here and now, as opposed to waiting for peace and restoration in heaven. "These churches train and infuse their young people with an integrated discipleship that enables them to thrive in our complex world" so that they may "neighbor well" (237) wherever they work, live, and do life.

*Growing Young* highlighted valuable data for leaders who want to position themselves to more effectively engage younger generations. Personally, I was encouraged when the authors found that young people are not looking for a church with superstar pastors, a great location, a modern building, a particular style of worship, or even hip innovation, instead they want warmth. Warmth does not cost much money, but can have huge dividends.

What I found most challenging was that young people want to be accepted for who they are before they believe the church's core beliefs. This indicated a yearning so deep that compromise looms, unless churches can start self-identifying as warm families, and not simply concrete and mortar, lined with pages of doctrine on the walls.

This study also brought out a more significant awareness that church should not simply be about the study of God, but also include the study of how people develop or grow. Church leaders must recognize the incredible intentionality required to engage young people in these changing times, the same old methods will not suffice. The question is, do leaders and members want to have this level of intentionality, and are they prepared for what it takes? Secondly, leaders need to begin the difficult work of creating a church culture that attracts, empowers, and spiritually builds up both young people and adults alike—which is no small feat, but necessary. This is seminal research in the field of church growth and ministry and should be given high priority.

Evaluating strategy three, “taking Jesus’s message seriously,” the author’s indicated that effective churches spent “less time talking about abstract beliefs and more time about Jesus” (136). What does this mean for a denomination with fundamental beliefs that are all vital? This shift communicates making Jesus the center of all doctrinal tenets, so it can be said, “Jesus found this belief really important.” A young person’s more urgent desire is for community, a “home,” which can outweigh their initial desire for doctrinal belief. Can the mass exodus of young people be indicative of the church’s misappropriation of doctrine over warmth? The opposite is also true. Simply because a community is warm, inviting, and authentic does not mean it is the safest space for a young person over the span of their spiritual life. These considerations are in line with what psychosocial dynamics say about young people today, that they are willing to initially overlook beliefs in order to meet their more urgent need for belonging. However, how can churches meet this need while maintaining doctrinal purity?

There are several methodological musings that one should consider in evaluating *Growing Young*. In phase two, the racial diversity in the interview of the 535 individuals was 73% Caucasian. The remaining racial breakdown was 6% Asian, 6% Black, 6% Hispanic. The data was highly reliant upon the Caucasian member’s church experience, which may not be accurate for other racial groups’ church experiences. Secondly, the “strategies” were, for the most part, not based on a blind study, involving observation of the exemplar churches. Eight conclusions were agreed upon from the researcher’s literature review prior to the study. While a hypothesis prior to a scientific experiment is in line with proper protocol, it has the potential to lead its research subjects to confirm the researcher’s hypotheses.

*Growing Young* falls into the larger chorus of church leaders and resources asserting “the youth will save the church, if only we can keep them.” While such sentiment carries truth, it under-emphasizes the greater divine mark and mystery that God will save his church. Andrew Root, in *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*, accentuates the prophetic call of Bonhoeffer’s lesser known work “Theses on Youth Work.” Bonhoeffer utters a prophetic cry to our time that “the spirit of youth is not the Holy Spirit and the future of the church is not youth itself but rather the Lord Jesus Christ.” The work of the Holy Spirit has been at work in believers

young and old for millennia. The question is, “Are we relying on the wrong savior (youthfulness) and have we gotten in the way of the Holy Spirit?”

Decline in church attendance overall, along with aging congregations, are very real concerns for churches in America, including the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The greater concern is that young people, if not absent, are not well represented in local churches, particularly apart from university and metropolitan settings. Though, worldwide, young people between the ages of sixteen to forty in the Seventh-day Adventist Church make up more than half the membership, in the North American Division (NAD) 18.54% are below the age of forty. The median age is fifty-one in the NAD, while worldwide it is thirty-two. The research speaks for itself; implementing any one of these strategies from *Growing Young* in the local church setting will bolster the future of the church in the NAD. While the data was not collected from Seventh-day Adventist congregations, one of the positive points of the study is the diversity of denominations, church affiliates, and regions of the United States of America that were utilized. Therefore, its benefit can be delineated and easily contextualized for an Adventist context, which has started with the *Growing Young Adventists* movement.

The format of the book itself is easy enough for a broad audience, and is geared to pastors and church leaders. I would highly encourage church leaders to, not only read this book, but gather a group to analyze each of these six strategies in light of their own church (utilizing the online assessment tool). *Growing Young* is meant to encourage struggling churches with strategies to go beyond their discouraging reality, learning from positive outcomes from thriving congregations.

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Pressler, Carolyn. *Numbers*. AOTC. Nashville: Abingdon, 2017. xviii + 323 pp. Softcover. USD 39.99.

While *Numbers* is a title that evokes the theological importance of the two censuses which indicate the failure of the first generation of Israel and the divine faithfulness towards the second, it is the Hebrew title that conveys the main thrust of the book: God’s people are on the way to Canaan *in the wilderness* (במדבר). The book of Numbers collects the most important glimpses of this wilderness journey. Carolyn Pressler thoughtfully examines such glimpses in the newest release of the Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries series (AOTC). The work reflects the teaching and research of the author, a professor of biblical interpretation at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-Saint Paul) and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Pressler’s personal interest in the Hebrew Bible, feminist and liberationist biblical interpretation, and gender and biblical law is evident throughout the pages of this commentary.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, the author provides a short introduction (1–8) to Numbers where she discusses authorship, composition and dating, as well as the issue of historicity and context