

**ENGAGING YOUNG ADULTS: RE-IGNITING A PASSION AND
CURIOSITY ABOUT GOD**

**A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
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ABSTRACT

ENGAGING YOUNG ADULTS: RE-IGNITING A PASSION AND CURIOSITY ABOUT GOD

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The purpose of this project is to test new ways to interact with young adults ages 18-29 which are designed to meet them where they are and engage them in creative ways to reflect on and encounter God. These ministry attempts sought to strengthen the building of community between the church and young adults.

Additionally, my project tested a means by which experiences could be created that might give birth to a reconnection to the church and a re-igniting of their passion and curiosity about God.

The project confirmed recent research about Millennials and their attitudes toward and relationship with organized religion.

The project plan consisted of three modules designed to intentionally engage young adults. An initial lukewarm response to the project's original plan required adjustments, including increased use of technology such as text messaging.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my parents, Thomas and Pearl McDonald, who have been my inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all of the people God has placed in my life:

- **My Parents: now deceased, but are still with me in spirit. Thank you for your love, support and faith in me.**
- **Children: gifts from God who have given inspiration.**
- **Brothers : Thank you for your love and support**
- **Pastor J. Michael Sanders: Grateful for your leadership, support and inspiration**
- **Lay Advisory Team: Thanks for your honesty, support**
- **Fountain Baptist Church Fellowship: Grateful for your patience, love and support**
- **Sisters: Thank you for your encouragement, inspiration, love and support**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever, pastors and church leaders are facing the daunting and challenging task of ministering to young adults. The idea of young adults being consistently and actively present and involved in church is a slim possibility. In many congregations, young adults are not a growing demographic, and they have even been characterized as a population of dropouts.¹ What is going on?

Exactly who are these young adults? Young Adults, for the purposes of this project, are those persons ages 18 – 29, known as the Millennials, Generation Y or Generation iY. This generation is an active group of young people who are living during what some people call the best and worst of times. It is a time of change, one in which this generation has come of age and is now trying to make sense of life – to find work, meaning and love.²

The millennials are a generation that has been shaped by extreme catastrophes and trauma such as “the Columbine incident, the 9/11 World Trade Center tragedy, the massive earthquake in the Indian Ocean that triggered a devastating tsunamis in East

¹ John Roberto and Mike Hayes, “Best Practices in Young Adult Faith Formation,” Lifelong Faith Associates, Fall/Winter, 2007.

² Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Generation Next,” January 9, 2007, accessed October 4, 2014, <http://www.people-press.org/2007/01/09/a-portrait-of-generation-next>, accessed September 5, 2014.

Asia, Hurricane Karina, and the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti.”³ They are a generation affected by the postmodern worldview and the challenges of day to day life experiences. Research done by the Barna Group, with young adults ages 18-29, show two distinct findings about millennials

First, nearly six in ten (59%) of these young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away from either their faith or from the institutional church at some point in their first decade of adult life. Second, the unchurched segment among Millennials has increased in the last decade, from 44% to 52%, mirroring a larger cultural trend away from churchgoing among the nation’s population.⁴

As a result, attempts to evangelize and serve Millennials’ needs have been difficult. Pastors, church leaders, and congregations have been struggling to find ways to reach them as they adhere to the command which Jesus gave the disciples “therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”⁵

One such congregation is Fountain Baptist Church. Fountain Baptist Church is a large, vibrant, growing and stable church located in central New Jersey. It is a commuting church, with the majority of congregants from neighboring towns and states. Fountain is a church that holds to the tenants of discipleship, worship, mission and evangelism, being faithful to Matthew 28:19-20. It’s a congregation of people from all walks of life. It is an intergenerational church, and is comprised of about six generations.

³ Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 145.

⁴ Barna Group, “5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church,” September, 2013, <http://www.barna.org/.../millennials/635-5-reasons-millennials>, accessed September 5, 2014.

⁵ Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV).

Included in this is a large number that make up the young adult membership of the congregation. Some of these congregants were born into families in the fellowship, and others joined the church. I have had the honor and privilege of being the youth pastor to this group of young adults, also known as Millennials, Generation Y, or the Digital Generation. I have seen them grow up, mature, become converted and baptized. These young adults were very active members of the church.

Now however, there is a concern because the attendance and participation of these young adults in the life of the church is sporadic and, lately, almost non-existent. As some would say, they have “dropped out”, or there has been a falling away of these young adults. My concern, coming from a pastoral standpoint, is not just a numerical concern, manifested in a lack of their physical presence, but a spiritual one: one that speaks to the total well-being of these young adults. Since the rest of the church is growing numerically, questions arise, such as, how is their Spiritual Health? In a world where there are many challenges and struggles, how do they grow spiritually without being present on a regular basis in the faith community? How are they going to be able to stand when the storms of life begin to rage? Do they know how to hold on to their faith until, like Job, change comes for the better?

As I pondered these questions, I wondered about the spiritual foundation of these “sheep” and found that according to research, some young adults do have a foundation and a desire to grow spiritually. In a Barna Group Research report, when young adults ages 18-29 were questioned about their faith and spiritual growth, “they identified the most common drivers of their spiritual growth are prayer, family, friends, the Bible,

having children, and their relationship with Jesus.”⁶ But in spite of these findings, there is still disconnect. I believe that this disconnect must be addressed.

Therefore, for this particular congregation, as with many others, the challenge is in ministering to Young Adults. How can we reach the young adults? How can we make God real to them as they live their daily lives in a society that holds to a postmodern worldview? There is a need to understand the different world that these young adults live in and invite them to connect with God in ways that reflect the world they live in. To reconnect them, new methods and means must be used. This reconnection will foster a renewal, or re-igniting of their passion and curiosity in God, producing wholesome personal relationships with Christ that will transform young adults into instruments of healing for the mind, body, and spirit for themselves, their peers, the church and the community; thus attracting and retaining young adults not only in the local fellowship, but the body of Christ.

The purpose of this project then, is to test new ways to interact with young adults that meets them where they are and engages them in creative ways to find expressions for the essentials of faithful living that mean something to them. When young adults are exposed to innovative ways that impact their experiences with God, they can find new channels of connecting with God. The result of these ministry attempts will allow for the building of community among young adults. A community building component is important and a necessity for young adults. By building community, young adults will be able to connect through sharing their experiences, stories, ideas, apprehensions, fears and

⁶ Barna Group, “5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church.”

joys. These narratives can serve as tools of ministry and catalysts, inspiring and inviting God's presence and re-igniting a passion and curiosity about God in their lives.

The project, *Engaging Young Adults: Re-igniting a Passion and Curiosity about God*, is designed to engage young adults ages 18 – 29. The goal is to engage them in thinking about God, themselves, their lives, their relationship with God, their role and place in the church, the community and the world. It is an opportunity for the different generations within the young adult group to come to understand and interact with one another. Hopefully and prayerfully, through the intentional process of engaging the young adults, a word, prayer, scripture, song or experience will ignite more of a desire and passion and curiosity about God, producing an encounter with God that will transform young adults into the disciples and instruments of healing needed for ministry in this chaotic world today.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.¹

Countless efforts have been attempted to try to address the status of the young adult demographic in the Church today. It has been and continues to be a difficult task. But rather than throwing up our hands and throwing in the towel, the people of God need to consider the miraculous power of the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and sovereign God. What seems impossible to humanity is possible with God. And after all, isn't it all in God's hands and in God's plan? Therefore we can boldly and expectantly ask, how can the Church of Jesus the Christ begin to engage our young adult generation today, in this postmodern world? Why should the church even bother to reach those who are in a religious slump, have "dropped out" or are absent on a regular basis from the congregation today?

The title of the book, *Fashion Me a People*, by Maria Harris, resonates with what I believe the call of God is for the church ministering in this twenty-first century. God specializes in fashioning his people. In both the Old and New Testaments, we find the image of God as a potter making a people. In Isaiah, the scripture tells us that we did not

¹ 1Peter 2:9 (NIV).

make ourselves, but God as the potter, shapes, breaks, reshapes, molds and makes his people into what they should be.² Likewise I believe that God has called the church, at this point in reference to this project, to the awesome task of becoming God's partner in fashioning young adults. The ministry of the church is about fashioning or making a people who will be able to function as faithful, spirit-filled disciples of Christ, capable of being instruments of healing in a godless society. But exactly how is this done when the reality is that many of these young people want very little to do with church. There is an on-going battle consisting of a combination of cultural, age and faith issues. For many,

faith is often perceived as a lifestyle – enhancing appliance, a means of making a better life and meeting one's needs. God in this sense is primarily viewed as a Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist. Faith is viewed as merely a tool of personal happiness. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.³

These issues often cloud commitment and thus affect engagement. I believe that the answers to this critical concern can be addressed with the biblical understanding of discipleship and disciple making, community, nurturing, and a theology of inclusion and embrace.

First of all, ministry must be developed for the young adults who have dropped out or fallen away from the fellowship. This must be addressed because their plight speaks volumes to the nature and mission of the church. The spiritual condition of these young adults is scrutinized and doubted by the church and the witness of the church comes into question. Their continued unanswered absence goes against the very nature of Christ. For, after all, God in all of God's sovereignty has a plan for their lives, and

² Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989).

³ David Setran and Chris Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 23.

desires that they become the people God had chosen them to be. Therefore efforts to engage them are absolutely necessary.

God Calls the Church to Discipleship

Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see accounts of God's dealings with humanity, his speaking to and extending grace toward humankind, his calling humans unto himself for salvation and for the work that God has for them to do. One can say that from the very beginning it has been and is a call to discipleship. The call to discipleship goes out to all through God's mandate, the Great Commission. Thus, for the purposes of this project, the biblical/theological basis for engaging or ministering, in this postmodern society, to a demographic of people, ages 18-29 is found in Matthew 28:18-20, the key scriptural passage for this project. It gives a framework for working to engage young adults in a proactive as opposed to strictly a reactive manner. This scripture provides a response to the disengagement of young adults in our churches by presenting a challenge for the leaders of the church today. It is a direct mandate and commission which Jesus gives the church and its members. Here Christ's words to his disciples give direction to the issue of discipleship. Jesus tells his disciples, "therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."⁴

This commission was spoken directly to the disciples of the early church, but it is a mandate for the church and individuals today. This great commission entails much

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20. (NIV)

more than people realize. It is a command for much more than church membership; it is instead a call that will lead to the development and equipping of God's servants for the twenty-first century.

It is a command to offer an invitation to humanity to come and surrender, learn and obey. It is an invitation to a person to accept and submit his/her life to Christ and be a recipient of the Grace of God. In his work entitled, *Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, expresses that discipleship begins with God's initial call to humanity to follow. Humanity's response should be one of obedience that is single-minded in taking the first step to follow. According to Bonhoeffer, "the situation is therefore not the consequence of our obedience, but the gift of him who commands obedience."⁵ A disciple of Christ is a person who is a follower of Christ, one who has been forgiven, given a new nature and yearns to obey and worship the Lord. The establishment of this new nature is an integral part of one's Christian journey or lifestyle in which there is an active and ongoing development of a relationship with Christ, not just an acquaintanceship but a faith which brings about a relationship of not knowing about Christ, but knowing Christ personally. It is about being made new. C.S. Lewis states,

The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self – all your wishes and precautions – to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call "ourselves," to keep personal happiness, as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be "good." We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way – centered on money, or pleasure or ambition – and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do.⁶

In John 3:3-8, in a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, we hear this dialogue;

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 68, Kindle.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 197-98.

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”
 “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’⁷

Additionally, I believe that young adults will be able to remain engaged in some form if what Eric Geiger calls transformational discipleship has taken place. In his book, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*, Geiger supports the fact that “discipleship should manifest a transformation in a believer’s life. Transformation only comes through discipleship that is centered on Jesus and the Church’s role is one of placing people in the pathway of God’s transformative power.”⁸ This transformation is more than information and more than behavior modification. There must be an encounter, as opposed to explanations. There must be an opportunity to experience God’s grace, to experience the living Christ each day through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But how does this discipleship work? It works in conjunction with the people of God. Discipleship is helped by disciple makers. Young adults are constantly bombarded by cultural issues and when it comes to their faith, for many there is confusion. Some feel that the church is judgmental and hypocritical and therefore they feel they don’t belong. But again, in order for young adults to grow and remain engaged, they need help. Young adults need to be helped to realize that for those who have accepted Christ, and

⁷ John 3:3-7. (NIV)

⁸ Eric Geiger, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 9.

are living a new life, “life is designed to develop from glory to glory. It is a new life that must be developed and nurtured.”⁹

God Calls the Church to Be the Community of Faith

Disciple makers are people who serve as compassionate guides or partners to help others and in this case, young adults, to develop honest, true relationships and help them on their spiritual journeys. When the love that Christ has given us penetrates our work and relationships with one another, a true sense of community is developed that will serve to strengthen and equip. Our concerns are not just for what we need, but for the welfare and edification of others. The church has been called to edify and equip others. The apostle Paul, on his second missionary journey, took Timothy in as his understudy and began to establish a disciple-making relationship. Through teaching, admonishing, coaching, loving and shepherding Timothy, Paul helped answer some of his questions and gave him insight to assess the cost of discipleship. It helped Timothy realize that his salvation was not about a grace that cost nothing, but it was the love of a faithful loving savior. Through this relationship and the mentorship of Paul, Timothy’s life was enriched. One would probably say that for Timothy, “Not only has the soul been saved but a new kind of life has been birthed from within the individual, a life hidden with Christ in God.”¹⁰ Through fellowship with Paul and the community with the other apostles and disciples such as Luke, and with the leadership in the church at Ephesus, his

⁹ Setran, 26.

¹⁰ Ibid.

life grew. Paul was the perfect mentor, missionary, partner, pastoral supervisor, coach, teacher, father and friend. He was the perfect disciple maker. Paul clearly communicates this message and love for Timothy in his correspondence with him in:

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purposes, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings-what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a Godly life in Christ will be persecuted, while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹¹

Paul's genuine interest in Timothy is a mirror of what is needed for the engagement of young adults today. There is a need for sincere unconditional love that invites community¹² leading to a desire to know God and reignite a passion and curiosity about God.

God Calls His People to Be a Chosen People

In correlation with the Great Commission to go make disciples, there is first the call of God to his people to connect with God personally. I believe God has called young adults to him as a part of the initial invitation to discipleship, because of the plan God has for their lives. The apostle Peter stipulates "But you are a chosen people, a royal

¹¹ II Timothy 3:10-15. (NIV)

¹² Jana L. Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* Illinois: IVP Intervarsity Press, 2012), location 755, kindle.

priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹³ Peter addresses this portion of scripture to believers and labels them as chosen by God to be a people set apart for his service. This was done because of God’s love for humankind. When one considers the nature of young adults, their inner drive and stamina, intelligence, willingness to work with and help others and their desire to make a difference in the lives of people in the world, one cannot help but see what incredible ministry can be done.

God Calls Humanity to Nurture

Not only is the church commended to make disciples, but we are told by Jesus through his teaching and example that we are to nurture and shepherd them. Jesus, the master teacher, taught his disciples how to care for his sheep. In this parable, Jesus said to them,

Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after he lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.¹⁴

This message specifies Christ’s heart and who Christ is. It also speaks to disciples in terms of our relationship with other disciples. This portion of scripture delineates the response the church should give to young adults who are no longer engaged in the

¹³ 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV).

¹⁴ Luke 15: 4-7 (NIV).

fellowship or faith. It endorses the fact that there must be a move to engage young adults who are not functioning in the body of Christ. However, it is not only done out of duty, but it is done out of the love that Christ has for us and we in turn ought to have for others. If Jesus could go and look for one lost sheep, what about the lost young adults, the ones whom David Kinnaman, author of *You Lost Me*, classified as either, “a nomad, prodigal or an exile.”¹⁵ These young adults are referred to as dropouts. Every dropout or person “goes on a unique journey related to his or her faith and spirituality.”¹⁶ Thus every dropout has a story, a journey. But in spite of their story, the Bible says that they need to be sought for and then, as in the Parables of the Prodigal Son and the Lost Sheep, met with rejoicing at their return home, even if they don’t return home physically but return home by re-energizing or renewing their relationship with Christ.

Nurturing is about helping others and treating them as we would want to be treated. Jesus’ response to a question posed by one of the Pharisees is crucial here:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”¹⁷

This is what the church is to be about, the business of loving one another. Encouraging people to become a part of the family and to remain involved requires much more than conversion, it requires the nurturing heart and mind of God.

¹⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 25.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV).

God Calls the Church to Embrace

Finally, in order to get young people to recommit and to become involved, the church must begin to practice what Miroslav Volf calls the idea of embrace as a “theological response to the problem of exclusion.”¹⁸ In other words, the church must intentionally practice the theology of Embrace, as opposed to inadvertent exclusion. Volf elaborates on the fact that the church is very exclusionary in its relationships with people. People are often characterized as being different and referred to as “them” and “us”. In creation, he says “that here is a “separating and a binding, but it is interdependent. The human self is formed by a complex process of taking in and keeping out. Exclusion then takes place when there is a transgressing of binding and separating.”¹⁹ Volf continues by saying that “expulsion can entail cutting of the bonds that connect, taking oneself out of the pattern of interdependence.”²⁰

Passing judgments are often considered acts of exclusion. Often times the church is very exclusionary in its nature by passing judgment on people, and has been accused of such by young adults. Because of their perceived lifestyles, misunderstandings, blatant or straightforward demand for answers to themes, topics, and doctrines they do not understand, they often are left out.

Additionally, because of the young adults’ capacity toward inclusivity of all peoples, exclusionary tendencies of the church negatively affect their desire to engage

¹⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 338.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,66

²⁰ *Ibid.*,67

with the fellowship.²¹ But the call is for embrace, which includes “repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for the other and the healing of memory.”²² In other words,

there is the need for overcoming “the idea of the polarity of “them” and “us” and live as community. God’s reception of humanity into divine communion with Him is a perfect example of how humanity should relate to one another. The church needs to move from an exclusionary attitude, whether apparent to them or unapparent, to one of embrace that is to make space for one another.²³

This is done at the cross, where God took on the sins of humanity regardless of who they were for communion with humankind. Jesus met humanity and this moving from exclusion to inclusion and embrace must be done with intentionality.²⁴

To aid in the understanding of how to embrace, I look at John 4, where Jesus intentionally goes through Samaria, and meets a woman of Samaria at a well. Jesus could have easily gone a different way, but to include her in the receiving of salvation, Jesus went out of his way. Jesus met this woman and made space for her to sit and talk with him, a Jew. He met her where she was, and he spoke to her as if there was no difference between them, inviting her to receive living water. His embrace of the Samaritan woman was done in love, the love that Christ had for all humanity. It did not matter her plight or her nationality.

Young adults need to become engaged in order to grow into the people God would have them be. But when they enter into our gates, no matter who they are,

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid.,100

²³ Ibid.,100

²⁴ Ibid.

embrace should be the norm so that they will be able to run, free, at peace and full of joy and in the power of the Holy Spirit witnessing and sharing the Good News saying in the words of their own life journey and narrative, “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?”²⁵

²⁵ John 4:29 (KJV)

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH SPECIFIC TO THE PROJECT

Young Adults-Millennials, Emerging Adults, Digital Natives, as they are called- the youth of our congregations are leaving the churches. Who are they? Why are young adults leaving the church? Where are they going? Many studies have been done in an effort to address the disengagement of young adults from the church.

David Kinnaman, president of one of the most prominent public research groups, The Barna Group, presents a discussion in his book, *You Lost Me*, in which he addresses the problem of the disengagement of young adults. According to Kinnaman, the ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the “black hole” of church attendance. This age is missing from most congregations. There is a forty-three percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement. These numbers represent about eight million young adults who were active church goers as teenagers but who will no longer be engaged in a church by their thirtieth birthday.¹

The Pew Research Center has issued several reports regarding trends among the young adults in religion. In their 2012 report, “Nones on the Rise,” it was reported that “there has been an increase in the United States in the number of young adults who were

¹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 22.

unaffiliated with any religion or church. Young adults who are 18 – 29 years old make up 32% of the ‘nones’.”² The 2012 Millennial Values Survey, conducted by Public Religion Research Institute reported that college-age young adults are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated and move away from the religious affiliation of their childhood.³ Also, a new survey by the Pew Research Centers forum on Religion & Public Life finds that many of the country’s unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way. “Two-thirds of them say they believe in God. More than half say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth, while more than a third classify themselves as ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious’ and one in five say they pray every day.”⁴ This report also says that 88% of the unaffiliated are not actively looking for a religion, church or group that would be right for them.⁵ Why? What are these facts saying about the young adult population? These young people need to be connected to God, and there must be an effort to try to understand them.

There are several reasons why these young people have decided to leave. But in order to effectively get a clear portrait of their disengagement and to minister to or engage young adults, it is necessary to become familiar with the millennial demographic by reviewing research that gives a description of who they are, their nature, desires,

² Pew Forum on Religion, “Nones on the Rise,” October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>, accessed October 8, 2014.

³ Public Religion Research Institute, “A Generation in Transition: Religion, Values and Politics among College-age Millennials, April, 19,2012, www.publicreligion.org/research/2012/04/millennial-values-survey-2012/, accessed October 24, 2014.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

concerns and the world and times in which they live. These findings will help provide a basis for a portrait of their disengagement from the church.

Portrait of the Millennials: Who are the Millennials?

The Millennial Generation is the largest generation in America's history and is comprised of those persons born between 1984 and 2002, and is known as Generation Y. Generation Y is often divided into two age groups. The older young adults were born between 1984 and 1990, while the younger millennials were born after 1990. The younger young adults are referred to as Generation iY. This younger population has been defined by technology, which is why they are labeled Generation iY. They have grown up online. Their world is the world of the iPod, iBook, iPhone, iChat, iMovie, iPad and iTunes. For many of them life is mostly about the internet. Nevertheless, Generation Y as a whole, is tech-savvy and has grown up with technology, which has become an integral part of their lives and defines who they are.⁶ "Armed with Blackberrys, laptops, cellphones, and other gadgets, Generation Y is plugged in 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They prefer to communicate through e-mail, and text messages rather than face to face contact."⁷

Millennials are considered the most diverse generation in American history. This generation is one that accepts and celebrates racial and ethnic diversity. "This is due to

⁶ Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19

the large number of Hispanic and Asian immigrants who have been coming to the U.S. for the past half century and whose U.S. born children are now becoming adults.”⁸ It is believed that young adults are more open to cultural diversity because they are growing up, with others who are racially, ethnically and culturally diverse. As a result they are more liberal.⁹ This “liberalism can be seen in their views on social issues such as same-sex marriage, interracial marriage and marijuana legalization.”¹⁰

The Pew Research Center reports that, in a world of struggles and stress, where people are usually depressed, millennials are classified as a generation of optimists. They are hopeful and positive. They know that there is a lot to do in the world and believe that they can help make it a better place.¹¹ However, millennials have been greatly affected by financial hardships. Their entry into careers and first jobs has been delayed, resulting in financial burdens. Their difficult economic circumstances is due to the impact of the Recession of 2007-2009.¹² As a result, they carry a lot of student loan debt, face high unemployment and low levels of wealth and personal income.¹³ Nevertheless, millennials are still hopeful and optimistic about their future. According to Bruce Drake

⁸ Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life, “Nones on the Rise,” www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/, accessed September 23, 2014.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, “Millennials in Adulthood,” March 7, 2014, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/, accessed September 21, 2014.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

in the article, *Six New Findings about Millennials*, “more than eight in ten say they currently have enough money to lead lives they want or expect to in the future.”¹⁴

Many millennials are not married. They feel that they still have time. The Pew Research reports in the article, *Social and Demographic Trends*, “just 26% of this generation is married. Most say they would like to marry, but many, especially those with lower levels of income and education, lack a solid economic foundation, which is a prerequisite for marriage.”¹⁵

Another characteristic of the millennial generation is their level of education and training. They are highly educated due to the changing economy and changing job and career prognoses, millennials have found it necessary to get the education and training needed to compete for career opportunities.¹⁶ “In an increasingly knowledge-based economy young adults who do not advance beyond high school have been greatly affected in terms of low wages and high unemployment.”¹⁷

Finally, millennials are much less religious than older Americans today. Very few of them belong to any one particular church or faith. Many young adults are unaffiliated because they have decided to leave the religion of their parents or the religion they were raised in without deciding to become a part of a new faith. One in five young

¹⁴ Bruce Drake, “Six New Findings about Millennials,” March 7, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/07/6-new-findings-about-millennials/, accessed September 23, 2014.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center, “Millennials in Adulthood,” www.socialtrends.org/2014/03/07/Millennilas-in-adulthood/, accessed October 12, 2014.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

adults say that they are unaffiliated.¹⁸ “Based on the 2007 Religious Landscape Survey, young adults who have remained affiliated with their faith say that they are a “strong” member of their faith. Eighteen percent report attending worship regularly, (27%) read scripture and meditate weekly, and (48%) pray daily.”¹⁹

Portrait of Millennial Disengagement

Millennial disengagement from the church is a crucial issue. Why are young adults leaving the church? According to research, several factors contribute to or foster their disengagement. These factors can be categorized under age-based, cultural, social, theological and church factors.

First, age-based factors contribute to young adult disengagement. The years between the ages of 18 and 29 have a long time been identified as being formative years. During this time young people are naturally on the “roller coaster” of young adulthood, juggling life tasks. I am quite sure the major part of their lives can be summed up in the activities they participate in and the questions that face them daily. The article, “What’s Going On with Young People Today,” highlights the fact that becoming an adult has always been understood “as encompassing five core transition-leaving home, completing

¹⁸ Religious Landscape Survey, “Religion Among Millennials,” February 17, 2010, www.perforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/, accessed October 24, 2014.

¹⁹ Ibid.

school, entering the workforce, getting married and having children.”²⁰ But the schedule that youth follow to arrive at adulthood has changed. Young people are taking longer to achieve economic autonomy. They are very busy and have decided to put their active involvement and their connection to the church on hold as they pursue independence and stability.²¹

Secondly, the young adulthood is a crucial stage for developing a worldview and a faith stance. There are many different ideologies. Young adults have been directly affected by the cultural shift from a modern worldview to a postmodern worldview. It has defined how they view the world, how they understand reality, truth, religion and how they approach the basic questions of life.²²

For the past three decades America has been part of an age called modernity. The age of modernity is a modern worldview or way of thinking that began in the Enlightenment Period of the eighteenth century. It is characterized by the belief in absolute truth and that truth is based on facts. It questions authority and tradition. It looks to science not religion to provide the answers to life’s mysteries. People who hold to this worldview have often developed an optimistic faith in the progress of humanity through knowledge, scientific inquiry, innovation, invention and rational thought.²³

The postmodern world view began at the middle of the twentieth century. It is characterized by the belief that both science and religion have failed to provide answers

²⁰ Ray Settersten, “What’s going on With Young People Today?” vol.20/no1/Spring 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kurt Struckmeyer, “The Postmodern World”, 2007, www.followingjesus.org/invitation/postmodern.world.htm/, accessed September 20, 2014.

²³ Ibid.

to life's mysteries or to solve life's perplexing problems. People who follow this view, reject the idea of absolute truth. When it comes to the church, instead of a purely intellectual response, one that focuses on explanations and propositions, they want to have an experience that they can relate to.²⁴ Leonard Sweet, in an interview posted in Group Magazine, *Second Century Youth Ministry*, said "Moderns define truth propositionally. Post moderns define truth relationally. The truth is both. Truth is part proposition . . . but, truth is relational. Jesus didn't say, "Come follow me and I'll give you propositions, Jesus said, come and I'll show you the way, for I am the way."²⁵

Social and cultural factors have also had an influence on the disengagement of young adults from the church. At this time in their lives, there are many entertainment options available and accessible to them. When they are not working, at school or taking care of other necessary duties, there are many opportunities for fun and play using video games, television, movies, parties, concerts, sporting events. Most of these events are done on weekends and weekend evenings which can detract from weekend and evening church activities. Additionally, some of these activities they participate in may be in direct opposition to what they would normally do, such as drinking and drugging. As a result, some young adults "may decide to decrease or eliminate their religious commitments in order to limit or avoid the feelings of guilt, insecurity or shame associated with the feelings of discontinuity between faith and lifestyle."²⁶

²⁴ Rick Lawrence, "Second Century Youth Ministry," Group Magazine, www.theeffect.org/...2nd%20century%youth%20ministypdf/, accessed October 28, 2014.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Setran, 18.

Also, young adults are very interested in internet browsing and social networking on laptops, tablets and cellphones. They spend their time, busily managing friendships and other relationships through social networking and rarely have time for those things related to their faith, God or witness.

Another factor that contributes to the disengagement of young adults, deal with their understanding of their faith. In this society, because of the diversity, they are bombarded by so many religious views. One such view that is prevalent among the younger millennials is the idea of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. This view has nothing to do with developing a personal relationship with God, or the fact that God is present and at work in daily life. This view is about living a well-behaved life practicing the Golden Rule. It is living a life with the central goal that highlights happiness. David Setran states,

Those influenced by Moralistic Therapeutic Deism view God as a distant creator who desires humans to be nice and fair to one another and who intervenes in human experience only when called on to bestow blessings or resolve problems. The purpose of life is happiness, self-fulfillment and a degree of goodness sufficient to earn entrance into heaven.²⁷

Young adults are also faced with the desire to take ownership of their faith. Many leave the church because they feel that their faith is not being challenged and their needs are not being met. They feel that religion and church are not capable of challenging and nurturing their faith. They feel religion and the church does not accept them and meet them where they are.²⁸ Some of the surveys and interviews done by the Barna Group

²⁷ Setran, 26.

²⁸ Ibid.

indicate that young adults do not attend because churches are “hypocritical, judgmental, too much about rules, unwelcoming to those who express doubts or have questions, too political, exclusive-not open to diversity, shallow, isolationist and out of touch with reality.”²⁹ In addition, many young adults feel that the church is not structured for them. There is a scarcity of leaders, programs and activities for this age group. Staff, facilities and programs are provided for children and adolescents. But there is really not much for the single young adult age group, who many times are left feeling abandoned, unappreciated and devoid of a clear identity within the people of God.³⁰

What do millennials want when it comes to their faith and the church? Research shows that millennials do desire to continue in their faith. They are searching. They want “more substance, openness to diversity, more compassion and tolerance, and a faith that is more passionately committed to Jesus.”³¹

Disengagement of young adults is also due to the overly cautious attitude of adults toward Christianity and ministry. In the text, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, the author states that the church,

in our attempt to remain relevant and to compete with broader cultural forms, we have neglected the hard work of teaching, shepherding, and mentoring students in the context of true Christian discipleship, serving instead as purveyors of cheap grace, the cult of niceness, and a God (butler?) who exists merely to meet felt needs.³²

²⁹ Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life, “Faith in Flux,” April 27, 2009, www.pewforum.org/2009/04/27/faith-in-flux/, accessed October 30, 2014.

³⁰ Setran, 52.

³¹ Pew Research Center, “Millennials: Confident. Connect. Open to Change,” February, 2010.

³² Setran, 25.

David Kinnaman suggests that wrestling with faith is an enduring feature of the transition to young adulthood. It is particularly urgent dilemma for the Christian community because of the profound changes to the millennial's social and spiritual context.³³

³³ Kinnaman, 60.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The words of I Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light,”¹ ring out in my very being as I think about the young adults at Fountain Baptist Church and the present world in which they live. These words serve as an inspiration and an impetus to this project, in conjunction with my love for young people.

An investigation of the present situation with the young adults of our congregation was done based on Ted Buckle’s model of church growth as presented in Loren B. Mead’s book, *More Than Numbers: The Ways Churches Grow*. Ted Buckle suggested that there are four different categories of church growth:

Numerical growth-This is growth in the ways we ordinarily describe it: Sunday attendance, size of budget, and numbers of activities, primarily growth in numbers of active members;

Maturation growth-This growth is in stature and maturity of each member, growth in faith and in the ability to nurture and be nurtured;

Organic growth-This is growth of the congregation as a functioning community, able to maintain itself as a living organism, an institution that can engage the other institutions of society;

Incarnational growth-This is growth in the ability to take the meanings and values of the faith-story and make them real in the world and society outside the

¹ I Peter 2:9 (NIV)

congregation. The congregation grows in its ability to enfold in the community what the faith is all about.²

While examining and synthesizing the information regarding the dwindling presence and activity of young adults in the fellowship, I became concerned with the spiritual growth of the young adults. What type of growth is being exemplified in these young adults? What is the church doing to promote growth in the young adults? After all is said and done, the immediate focus of the church is not to grow a young adult program, or to simply bring young adults into membership in God's family, but to foster and nurture vibrant faith-that is to equip them and build them up to maturity by the life changing power of the Gospel. In this way they will be able to stand, recognizing Christ in and with them on a daily basis, whatever the circumstances, as they confront all that life has to offer, as well as be instruments to bring change and healing in this dark world. To this end what can the church do to effect change and to encourage growth?

The Lay Advisory Team

In early November 2013, a plan for a project was developed that was designed to engage young adults with the purpose of re-igniting a passion and curiosity about God. To aid in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project, a committee was formed, known as the Lay Advisory Team. I believed that the success of the project depended on the composition of the members of the team, since they would assist me in conceptualizing, planning, and executing each step of the project. Each of the members

² Loren B. Mead, *More Than Numbers: The Way Churches Grow*, (The Alban Institute, 1993), 13.

of the Advisory Team would bring a different set of abilities to the table, but the underlying criterion for the team members was that they had to have a heart for the ministry of the church as well as a love for ministry to individuals. Additionally, I felt that spiritual maturity, their ability to have insight, and their expertise in their areas of ministry would be most helpful. The Lay Advisory Team consisted of twelve persons:

--Rev. Dr. Angelita Clifton, minister to women and the SAVE Ministry, acronym for Suffering and Violence Erased. Her expertise in ministry is in ministering to women of all ages, who are dealing with issues concerning abuse sexual abuse, and exploitation and trafficking.

--Rev. Gregory Davis, Minister to Youth. His expertise is in ministry to youth and young adults.

--Rev. Charlotte Mallory, Minister to Women and Prison Chaplain. Her expertise is in ministry to women.

--Rev. Dr. Evans Spagner, Minister to Christian Education Ministry. His expertise is in Christian Education, the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs for ministry opportunities in various areas of the church.

--Sister Lisa Glover, Communications. Her expertise is in ministry to youth.

--Sister Sandra Frierson, retired principal. Her expertise is in ministry to youth.

--Sister Sabrina McCoy, Diversity Consultant. Her expertise is in ministry to youth and working with social media.

--Trustee Michael Williams, Trustee and Technology Specialist. His expertise is in finance and technology.

--Lay Minister Jocquelyn Winstead, Minister to Young Adults. Her expertise is in ministry to youth and young adults.

--Nardina Howerton, Tiffany Howerton, and Steven Lovell, young adult consultants. These persons are students attending college or recent graduates from college.

I felt that, when looking at young adults in this postmodern world, this variety of team members would be an invaluable help in the planning and implementation of the project.

After contacting these persons and acquiring from them a commitment to become active, committed members of the Lay Advisory Team, a date in early January was set for the initial orientation meeting. This meeting was designed to give the members of the Lay Advisory Team an overview of the project proposals as well as distribute packets containing the project proposal or plan. The packets included the Lay Advisory Team meeting dates and times, an outline of the phases of the project, the role and assignments of each of the team members along with the due dates for the assignments. The project proposal was reviewed by everyone allowing for comments, questions and input. The door for additional comments and input was left open, because the team would be working together as the project proceeded and changes and adjustments and new strategies would undoubtedly be needed. Each team leader was then instructed to begin working on their assignment for the implementation of the first phase of the project. During the preparation phase and before the start of the implementation of the program, some minor changes were made, namely Lay Minister Jocquelyn Winstead, as well as the three young adult consultants on the Advisory Team were unable to continue to

participate due to other unexpected commitments. As a result eight remaining members worked faithfully with me to try to ensure the completion and success of the project.

There were five Lay Advisory Team meetings, two face to face meetings and three conference calls. Each month, in order to ensure proper execution, a team meeting was held just before each module was to take place. After each module, feedback between the Lay Advisory Committee and the candidate was done informally by telephone, at sub-committee meetings, and formally at the beginning of the next meeting. Each meeting began with prayer, petitioning God's presence and direction for the planning process. The first twenty minutes of the meeting served as a review of what had been done previously. Then an open discussion began by a review of the objectives and purpose for that particular module. Following the brief overview, each person on the Lay Advisory Team would share the results of their work done for their assignment due for that particular module.

Recruitment of Participants

In January at the first orientation meeting, plans were made to contact participants for the control group. It was decided that the participants for the project would be recruited from the church membership roster. This roster included young adults ages 18-29 who were active, as well as inactive members of the church. In order to recruit possible participants for a target group, announcements were placed in the church bulletin, and made from the pulpit. Personal invitations from the candidate, as well as

members of the Lay Advisory Team who worked with the youth and young adults were made via telephone calls and before and after the two worship services on Sundays.

Additionally, a survey requesting young adult viewpoints and interests were provided to gather additional information about the young adult population of the fellowship. Two members of the Lay Advisory Team would be responsible for creating the survey, as well as analyzing and synthesizing the data. Also, at this initial meeting, plans were made to begin to set up technology or the website for social media capability and arrange for a means to have continued open communication between the members of the team. Due dates for the initial survey were finalized. Discussion as to the importance of having a survey was held.

Plans for logistical issues and possible solutions were also discussed and placed as the number one priority for the next meeting. Assignments were given to make reminder telephone calls, and send text messages and emails to participants in terms of dates, times, and meetings of the participants. Due dates for the response of the participants were also given as well as deadlines for follow up telephone calls.

The Recruitment period was launched at the beginning of February from a roster of seventy young adults. It was hoped that a target group of fifteen persons could be recruited. By the middle of February, three young adults promised to participate.

The second Lay Advisory Team meeting, February 27, 2014, was a conference call due to inclement weather. The meeting opened with prayer with six members. The focus of this meeting was to concentrate on the first Module. The purpose of this module was to intentionally attempt to engage young adults by getting them personally involved. The outline of the module was discussed along with the timeline and the due dates.

Changes to the format of Module 1 were discussed and it was decided that the changes were for the better. A request was made for the social media website to be set up in time for Module 1 and the Lay Advisory Team members with the expertise in technology and social media was in charge. The committee discussed the recruitment process because the response of the young adults was extremely low and they were slow in responding. Suggestions and decisions about how to proceed followed.

This discussion was urgent because at this particular point, we needed to find a way to recruit. There was no substantive response. As a team we discussed the fact that the recruitment process looked good on paper, but in actuality, a more aggressive approach would be needed. The letters of invitation sent to the targeted young adults did not work because no young adults responded. They were requested to respond by telephone or text message. Interacting with young adults in the vestibule before and after worship service did not work because after service everyone was rushing to leave. Additionally, very few young adults were in attendance and they usually responded that they were very busy, and shared that they had very little time and needed to complete their tasks for work or school. The team and I decided to try to become more aggressive with the recruitment by making telephone calls, not just leaving a message but calling back to get a response. We also decided that the personal one on one contact before and after services would continue until we had reached any young adult who came to church.

To aid in the recruitment, a date was set to have a “special” twenty-five to thirty minute meeting with all young adults at the end of two worship services. These two special meetings would be used to break the ice and possibly generate some interest

among the young adults, as well as give the team and I an idea as to the level of interest and feelings of the young adults.

Additionally, the Advisory Team and I decided that recruitment would be an on-going process until I reach the goal of 15 participants in the target group. We hoped that perhaps there would be new persons who might be interested in participating.

The team also decided to reiterate the announcement about the project and give them an opportunity to have a voice by completing a survey. We hoped that by the end of our meeting, young adults would commit to participate and we could recruit at least ten young adults at this meeting. To put these changes in place, three team members and I had the assignment of telephone recruitment and three different team members and I were to converse with young adults on Sundays. By the end of the meeting, the excitement was in the air to continue to reach the young adults. The next meeting date was set.

The third Advisory Team Meeting, March 6, 2014, was also a conference call due to prior commitments of Lay Advisory Team members. Only five members participated. A review of last meetings discussion ensued along with an evaluation of Module I. As a team, we took a look at the target group as well as Module I itself. Module I called for members of the target group to participate each day using technology. Again, the problem arose wherein their response was less than I expected or wanted. Twelve young adults had committed to participate in the project. Nine of the twelve had been recruited after completing the survey. They seemed very much interested. But only six out of the twelve responded to Module I. I was really concerned and immediately began to think of another way to get the young adults to respond. I discussed the matter further with the

team in hopes of finding a way to get the members of the target group to participate. One person decided to call the young adults that she had a greater rapport with to see if there was a problem, or if there was something they did not understand. We desperately wanted to know why the young adults were not responding, and to eliminate any confusion or misunderstandings. But their responses as to why, still were the same. Each young adult participant would promise to respond. I decided to use another medium through which they could communicate or respond so that the project would move forward.

Preparations and assignments for module II was reiterated and new due dates were given. The main concern was for the identification of the movie and the formulation of the questions/quotes for the discussion. New assignments for the logistics, reminder communication to young adult participants, the purchase of food and the identification of discussion leaders were discussed. Again, new dates and meeting dates were set.

New dates and meeting dates were set, due to the slow response of the young adults to the appeals during the initial recruitment period. Thus the whole timetable had to be pushed back. Also, Module II would involve the use of a movie. Two members of the Advisory Team were assigned to find a movie suitable for young adults. We wanted to make sure that the movie was age appropriate, have the proper ratings and suitable to stimulate discussion and thought about the world, life and God. Both team members had a different method of movie selection. They were trying to take into consideration the likes and dislikes of young adults as a whole. But for some reason the deadline passed for the reporting of a movie selection. I then chose one person to complete the movie

selection and work with me on the questions. Without the movie, the module could not take place.

The fourth Lay Advisory Meeting, April 6, 2014, was face to face. This meeting served as an evaluation session and brainstorming session. As with the other meetings, this meeting focused on the evaluation of Module II. Module II did not go as well as planned. Again, the participation of the members of the target group presented a problem. Young adults did not respond as I wanted in spite of telephone calls, letters, conversations and publicity. As a result, I tried another strategy. In order to try to alleviate the problem of non-participation, I tried to bring the young adult target group together with the entire church for the showing of the movie, which was “Twelve Years a Slave”. This was a new movie and the entire church fellowship was invited to come out and see the movie in the fellowship hall. The plan was to give it a theater ambiance. Flyers were posted, verbal announcements as well as written announcements were placed in the weekly bulletin, and personal letters/flyers were sent to the young adults. Email/text messages were sent as well as telephone calls. Everyone knew about the movie. My task was one on one communication with the target group. Each time I spoke with them via telephone, text or email, the young adults were always polite and always assured me that they would participate. But they did not respond to me in the manner I thought. I began to look at the participants who normally respond and noticed that it was the older young adults who responded as opposed to the iY. Young adults 26-29 years of age were the ones following thru. The younger young adults were very courteous when approached, but they rarely respond. The older young adults usually responded often times between 10:30-12:00 a.m.

But for this module, not one of the participants in the target group attended the showing of the movie at the church. Perhaps, it was because the movie was held on a week night. We decided to have the movie night on a Thursday night because, young adults are busy Friday through Sunday night. So once again, I changed the format, and sent a movie trailer and a text message with instructions. I explained that they had an opportunity during a week to respond to questions via text or email or conference call. Once again, I began my telephone calls, for the one on one personal contact. The overall response was better with seven responding.

The final module, Module III, was discussed while looking for ways to minimize the major problem that has been presenting itself, which was the lack of adequate participation from the target group. It had already been suggested to make additional phone calls, more texts and even to try to get another young adult to make calls. Team members made several suggestions including visiting other facilities and workshops to see what has been going on in other fellowships with young adults. Assignments were given for the reminder phone calls, emails and text messages to the participants. The meeting closed with new assignments and everyone charged and ready for the next module. The next module required members of the Advisory Team to identify content and resources to inform the activities. Additionally, evaluation forms would be made by the team and ready for the final module.

The fifth meeting, April 19, 2014, was a conference call, due to the scheduling conflicts many of the team members had. An open and candid discussion was done on the evaluation of Module III. Module III was designed to allow for the participants of the target group to come together in community and discuss topics and issues they deal with.

The module was scheduled for a Saturday morning, with continental breakfast. However, this was the smallest turnout thus far. Only three persons attended. But in spite of the small number of participants, there was a rich and fruitful roundtable conversation lead by the candidate.

The Lay Advisory Team and I continued at this meeting to brainstorm ways that might bring young adults out. I decided that, at this particular time, the best method was to continue encouraging the young adults to participation by utilizing one on one contact.

A sixth and final meeting, was scheduled to finalize the findings of the project. At this face to face meeting, the Lay Advisory Committee and I interpreted the data collected from the survey, the evaluation forms and narrative summaries from informal face to face conversations with the young adults as well as telephone conversations. Attention was also given to observation of their behavior in worship. Informal interviews were conducted a week or so after the final module to determine if any of the participants had any additional thoughts or feelings either positive or negative about the project, or wanted to make additional recommendations or suggestions. The Lay Advisory Team also helped me in the end prepare for the site visit.

Modules Which Composed the Project

The project took place over a span of three and half months. The underlying premise of the project was that when young adults are exposed to innovative ways that impact their experiences with God, they can find new channels of connecting with God. This connection will foster a renewal or a re-igniting of their passion about God,

producing wholesome personal relationships with Christ. Each of the project modules were intentional in that they were designed to inspire the young adults and get them intentionally engaged. The project consisted of three modules. The modules were as follows:

- a. Module I – Prayer/Praise/Reflection
- b. Module II – Movie/Discussion
- c. Module III – Roundtable/Discussion

Each module utilized a new way of interacting with young adults that was intended to meet them where they are and engage them to find expression for the essentials of faithful living.

Module I was initiated the week of March 11 – 18, 2014 and was designed to intentionally engage young adults in Prayer, Praise, and Reflection. Module I was developed based on research on the characteristics of the spiritual lives of Millennials. Information also came from the young adult survey that was administered during the initial recruiting period. This module consisted of engaging young adults through the medium of e-mail. The purpose of Module 1 was to provide “One on One Time”. It was a time to engage the young adults in personal devotion. Through the prompts of prayer, scripture, proverb, saying, and a thought, young adults would actively engage or participate in a devotional period. This would be a time when they felt led, or a time that was most conducive to them, perhaps during lunch break, breakfast, dinner, before going to bed, just sitting and relaxing or just daydreaming. The devotion time was comprised of a moment of reading a portion of scripture, a proverb, or a quote. Questions were provided to serve as a prompt or food for thought. Young adults were to respond via e-

mail. They could respond in any way they felt and at any time before 12:00 midnight. The prompt would be sent by 7:00 a.m. The young people could express their response in any way they felt – by writing a prayer, reflection, a song, a statement of praise, journaling, writing a poem, sending a reference to a poem, rapping, recording an observation that came to mind because of the prompt/devotion time or just observing or thinking about God. But the responses to these prompts via email was minimal. It is at this point, after a brief consultation with the Advisory Team, I decided to change the medium through which the prompts for the module would be sent. I began to use text messages. I decided, instead of sending print, I would use music. I sent two songs that were popular at that particular time. The first song was entitled, *Happy*, by Pharrell Williams. I also included the video version of the song. The other song, “All of Me” was performed by John Legend. The young adults again were asked to respond at their convenience via text messages. The response was better, with some young adults responding to one another’s texts with comments of support and agreement on the reflections given. Finally, this is what I wanted to happen – communication and sharing of narratives between young adults.

The following excerpts comes from responses the young adults gave during Module I.

Reflections on Psalm 23:

- I am thankful that God is with me no matter what I am going through.
- The Lord is good no matter what.
- When I first saw the scripture I immediately felt a bit lost. As this is one of the better known scriptures I have encountered it at different times in my life and it seems to speak to me in a different way each time. Sometimes it comforts me when I may feel particularly alone, or it reminds me that no matter what the

circumstances may be, whether joyous or turbulent, I will make it through and be better for it. I was unsure what the passage spoke to me about on this particular occasion until very close to the end of the day. It may be because my schedule and priorities have changed after starting a new job, but it reminded me to take some time and just be. I remembered to slow down and be in the present moment and find something to appreciate about my surroundings. I became thankful for the obstacles I was facing at work for the valuable lessons that they would teach me. I appreciated the people that I am with every day for teaching me something new about myself, whether we happen to get along or we butt heads. Every circumstance happens for a reason and there is nothing that I am not grateful for.

Reflections on song "Happy"

I think the words of the song and the video relate to the joy of the Holy Spirit and that no matter what's going on in your life and what you're doing today, you can still have joy or happiness in your spirit. You can't let others bring you down or situations steal your happiness.

Evaluation of Module 1 was in the form of a questionnaire conducted via telephone by one of the Lay Advisory Team members and me. The questionnaire covered the areas of recruitment, usefulness to participant, to what degree engaging and overall grade.

Module II was to be held March 19 – 27, 2014. It was developed based on young adult natural interest and concern with social issues, social justice, diversity, empathy and service to others. This module consisted of a movie and a discussion. It was designed to utilize media as another way of engaging young adults, one that would bring them face to face with one another to develop relationship through community. This module would provide a strategy whereby self-reflection and examination in relation to society and God

could take place. This module gives opportunity to get people actively involved in thinking, observing, and being present for God's revelation to see where God fit in the issues, and struggles of daily life. An open and candid conversation is hoped for, one that will bring differing ideas as it relates to society, self and God to the forefront. The aim was to utilize the fellowship hall set up as a theater to show a movie and then through the use of the fishbowl technique discuss the movie. The movie shown was a newly released movie entitled, "Twelve Years a Slave." Personal invitations were extended to the young adults from the candidate, as well as members of the Lay Advisory Team before and after the two worship services on Sundays. Invitations were also sent in advance of the event by letter, email and text. However, for this module the response was minimal almost non-existent. Only three persons responded by email. The movie night was then opened up to the entire church to try to evoke a response, and once again the young adults were invited, but no young adult response. The parishioners turned out in good numbers, but none of the participants of the target group. I reached out to one of the young adults formerly on the Lay Advisory Team to solicit help in recruiting participation, but their schedule did not permit their availability. Once again, I decided to change the format. Thus the manner in which Module II would be conducted changed. It consisted of a Trailer of the movie, "Twelve Years A Slave," being sent via email and text message with accompanying questions. The young adults had a week in which they would be engaged through discussion using the questions as a prompt and then reflecting and responding via text, email, or telephone. The response was much better. Evaluation of Module 2 was done by a questionnaire requiring a short answer sent via text message to each participant, requesting their overall evaluation of Module 2.

As stated earlier, the movie was a means by which I attempted to engage the young adults in thinking about the world, society and where God is and how God works in society and in lives. The participants were asked the following questions pertaining to the main character in the movie. Solomon's story speaks to the world and society by showing the horrible life he had to live. Today, how do people face difficult circumstances? One young man responded by writing,

Some of us endure, and maintain hope as Solomon did by falling back on our faith, reading self- help books, seeking out expert advice or going to friends and advisors for suggestions. But many of us lack the strength to hold that resolve for a prolonged period. We self- medicate with drugs or distract ourselves with other vices. Those who entirely lose hope in everything may end their own lives through suicide or give into temptation and commit illegal acts resulting in their incarceration.

One young lady responded,

People face difficult circumstances in the same way today that they were faced during the time period that the film takes place. Perhaps they seek approval of those that they feel oppressed by because of the sheer hope of some acknowledgement or reward. Perhaps they prefer a sheer state of denial created by a continuous dream-like and withdrawn state induced by alcohol or drugs. Others draw on a deep inner strength that comes from faith and strong sense of will and determination. Prayer, faith in oneself and faith in the Spirit of God that is found in others can have profound effects.

Another question was presented to the young adults. This question enabled them to apply their knowledge of Christ in enabling humanity to survive. Solomon said, "I don't want to survive, I want to live". What did he mean? Do we live or survive today?

Young man's response:

I think Solomon was pointing out that it is possible to exist without having any joy, peace or love within that existence. And those were things he was not willing to exist without. I think it is dependent on our resolve and God's strength and not our economic and social conditions alone that determines if we survive or live.

A young lady's response: Solomon knew that his life had a purpose and that that purpose was to be determined by no one but himself. Merely existing was not enough. He knew that out his life in the manner that served him and God was his right.

The final module, Module III was held on Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Module III was developed based on the research dealing with the formative years of young adulthood, where the concern was with issues and decisions young adults must deal with that affects their emotional, social, psychological and vocational development. It would be in the form of a roundtable/discussion and brunch. This module was two-fold. It was a discussion of issues young adults face daily identified in a given scenario on a movie clip, an excerpt from current events or a short case study. Additionally as part of the module a final evaluation, in the form of a discussion will be held. What impact did the project have on them and on others? What suggestions do they have for future engagement?

First of all, as part of this Module, young adults met in the fellowship hall and participated in a round table discussion followed by Brunch. The session was led by one of the members of the Advisory Team. They engaged the young adults in an ice breaker exercise that required them to identify issues young adults face today. Following the icebreaker, I introduced the discussion segment by utilizing a picture and the reading of a vignette to delve into a discussion about loneliness and overcoming loneliness. The final forty minutes was the evaluation portion. Again using the discussion format and newsprint the young adults were asked to give their critique of Module 3 as well as the project. How has it impacted them? What would they like to have seen and done? What suggestions do they have for the future implementation?

Three young adults participated and a healthy discussion ensued around the topic of young adult involvement and spiritual growth. This discussion came about in relation to the evaluation of the project. The issue for the two young men and one female centered around, “the pulse and climate” of the church. These young adults were basically reiterating what the research is showing about young adults wanting to experience and grow in Christ. But they feel that it is difficult if they do not have a “stake” in it. For these young people the word of God is important and they realize that they need the Word to grow. But when they can’t see or feel that they are needed or accepted, that they don’t have a voice and are not validated for who they are, then they pull away and look for God in other places. They said that young adults need to have a voice and be recognized as part of the fellowship. New methods and new understanding as to the church’s vision about their place in the church will help them grow immensely. These young adults said that they learned that the spiritual disciplines as practiced in Module I helped them grow. They appreciated being conscious of actually setting aside time and plan to read or reflect. The more they are involved the more they grow.

The Advisory Team and I decided to have one final meeting to discuss the project. It was decided that final telephone calls to touch base with the group would be made. Thank you letters were mailed, thanking the young adults for their participation and inviting them to continue to allow God to work in and through them where ever they decide to go. Also, the team and I discussed the project one last time by consolidating data, making suggestions, evaluating the project and preparing for the site visit. I believe everyone benefited from taking part in working in some aspect with the project. I feel that we came away with new insight about ministry, a new zeal and determination to

move forward with ministry to and with young adults as it relates to the ministry of the entire church.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF PROJECT

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.¹

In order to evaluate the project, it is necessary to pose a few questions and answers as the project allows: Who were the participants? How well did the project work? Did the project make a difference? What transformations have occurred? What were the lessons learned? What are the implications for the project going forward? What were some of the negative and positive occurrences during the implementation of the project? What could have made the project better? What impact, if any, did the project have on the participants?

To begin, it is necessary to consider the participants involved in the project. First of all, I discovered that my findings confirm much of the existing data in the literature about Millennials, or young adults. The young adults involved in the project were true to the description of young adults today. They were very, very busy, and even though many promised to participate, they did not, due to jobs, school, career related activities, fatigue, social activities or they were just not interested.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:7(NIV)

The literature states that young adulthood is a formative period in which young adults are involved in critical life tasks such as choosing a college, finding new friends and relationships, engagement, marriage, establishing families and vocation and parenting. Thus for many young adults, church or faith related activities are put on the back burner. The recruitment process for participants in this project yielded fourteen young adults out of a total of sixty-five who were listed on the church roster and it was truly very difficult to get the young adults to participate. It was equally difficult to get the fourteen young adults who committed to participate to stay true to their commitments for the duration of the project.

Another factor that made their participation difficult, is the correlation between the ages of the participants and their participation. This coincides with the research. When one considers Generation Y, we find that it consists of two groups: the older Generation Y ages 26-29 and the younger known as Generation iY, ages 18-25. The older participants were more mature and lived more stable lives, and they were more willing to honor their commitment to participate in the project. However, their participation was still minimal. The younger group was more concerned about using their telephones, school, jobs, social activities, career options and relationships. Again participation was minimal.

Secondly, I must consider the Lay Advisory Team. I am very appreciative and humbled by the involvement and participation of the members of the Lay Advisory Team. Without these experienced people, the project would not have been possible. I could not have had a better group of mission-minded committed people who love God, the work of God and the church and, above all, love to work to ensure that God's people

are moving toward being the instruments God is calling for in these dark days. The team worked as a unit, brainstorming, investigating and creating, prayerfully supporting and being available whenever possible for the completion of the project. The lay advisory team not only helped to formalize and implement the project, but also has agreed to be available and assist in any way needed, after the conclusion of the project, as we move forward in continuing to engage these and other young adults in order to re-ignite a passion about God.

In looking back at the project and the evaluation reports from the Lay Advisory Committee, there were some challenges from the very start that we had to work through. One challenge was with the recruitment and participation of the target group. The response of the young adults as a whole to the appeal and advertisements was minimal. Perhaps it was because they were not accustomed to participating. One of the Lay Advisory Team member noted “getting sufficient participation from the target population was a major challenge and caused some delay initially.” Also, I believe that the time factor had a lot to do with the slow response. The initial appeal was made right after the New Year, and many were back in school or starting new phases at work. Secondly, the church had entered the annual forty day period of renewal and rededication with the ministry focus that of hearing from God.

Thirdly, there was a period of inclement weather that interfered with attendance at the church. An Advisory Team member stated, “Due to inclement weather and conflicts with the church calendar, the project timetable and scheduled meetings were truncated.” Another said “winter weather and church calendar management were major issues during the first forty days of the year.”

In order to reach out to young adults for participation, we used one-on-one communication by telephone, which usually took place at night, and face-to-face communication after the two worship services, inviting young adults to participate. Looking back at this period we decided that perhaps more time set aside for advertisement would be needed to ensure a better response.

Another challenge that needed to be dealt with was maintaining young adult participation in the project. To initiate and elicit participation, I had to change the format of Module I and Module II. Instead of physically meeting with the young people, technology was used. In place of using e-mail, I used text messages, to which there was a better response. One Advisory Team member pointed out, “identifying and engaging the young adults in this project presented a real challenge. We had to follow up with them on several occasions.” It seemed to me that again, research was supported. Technology was the way to go, for they responded at their leisure and when it was convenient for them. The new structure of the project spoke to the nature of young adults; that is, for the most part in research they are characterized as Generation iY. Also, it fit in easily with their busy schedules. It allowed for their engagement in the morning before getting out and getting involved in their daily routines or evenings at the end of their daily routines. The use of texting made room for community and conversation among the group.

Another challenge that cannot be overlooked dealt with scheduling. Due to the weather and personal schedules, planning and follow up meetings were done via conference calls. A Lay Advisory Team member said, “One of the challenges has been schedule conflicts-both for the project participants and for members of the advisory team. People’s commitments changed from when they initially agreed to participate in the

project. It was unavoidable.” Another person offered “conflicts occurred with scheduling meetings. This was due to inclement weather conditions.” Still another elaborated “equally as challenging was working with the Advisory Committee. Most of them have full time jobs, family obligations and additional church responsibilities, which made finding a mutually convenient time to meet very difficult.”

Finally, one additional challenge that should always stay in the forefront when dealing with young adult participation is in the area of the participants’ present spiritual states. The reality is that usually some may be babes in Christ, and some further along in their spirituality and spiritual development. One must be able to discern where they are spiritually, for their present spiritual state greatly affects their desire and willingness to participate.

I believe that in addition to being busy, perhaps the lack of participation and reluctance to participate was because of fear, and or of not knowing what to expect, not knowing how to participate and not knowing what was good for them. This was seen in the first module which was intentionally designed to engage young adults by using some aspect of the spiritual disciplines. I believe that all Christians need these in order to grow, but they hardly use them.. Again participation was minimal. The response from two of the participants coincided with research in the form of a request to “participate on their own terms” and an unwillingness to participate with young adults – a thanks but no thanks response.

The project was designed to engage young adults, hopefully re-igniting a passion and curiosity about God. I can’t be sure if a passion and curiosity about God was reignited within this period of time, but I believe the young adults who participated were

blessed. When the young adults did participate, their participation as a whole was true and genuine. As a result of talking with some of the young adults and reading some of their responses, they truly wanted to know more about God. One young lady said as much when she stated that she wanted to “experience what she had read in the Bible and heard said in worship, in a new way.” She wanted to know “how can I experience Christ and still be validated in who I am?” Through the observation of the young adult participants in worship, their responses to the prompts, hearing their spiritual struggles as they tried to explain, reflect, comment on the prompts and the lyrics to the music, they showed their search and desire to continue to learn and grow. Even in two instances during a one on one conversation, a request was made for more communication. I felt a positive energy just in knowing that in keeping them intentionally reading, the message of Jesus the Christ was being planted. I do believe that Millennials do want an encounter and an experience. For many growing up in FBC, they have the information and head knowledge about Christ. This project has hopefully been an experiential piece that will help them continue to seek to experience God for themselves.

Ministry with young adults can be a rewarding experience. I believe that one factor in engaging young adults is the ability to be flexible and open. Flexibility in ministry is a must and a given. Whatever is done must not be written in stone because people and situations change from minute to minute, day to day and year to year. Flexibility occurred many times throughout the project. I believe that flexibility is required because that is how one follows the leading of the Holy Spirit to meet people where they are. This can be seen in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles as they were often directed to go in a different direction. Flexibility in ministry with young adults

shows that one is in tune with God, and while recognizing the characteristics and needs of young adults.

This project also has served as an instrument of intervention that allowed the Lay Advisory Team and I to see who the young adults are, where they are spiritually and where they are going. It gave first hand evidence of implications for ministry; that is, it offered a glimpse of the magnitude and scope of ministry with young adults. The project allowed us to experience first-hand the difficulty with ministry to this group. First of all, the project showed the need for transformation, the need for a new mindset and desire to learn to become better equipped to minister to these young people. The specific eye opener was in the area of technology. It is necessary to find and recruit people who are savvy technologically in order to establish ministry that will meet young people where they are. There is also the need to stay abreast of the new and rapidly-changing trends in society today.

All generations can benefit from transformation. Members of the Lay Advisory Team visited other churches while the project was in progress in order to find ideas that would help engage the young adults. They saw the necessity of staying up to date with the various new trends in technology and other trends that can be used for engaging people, especially young adults.

The Lay Advisory Team and I embraced the idea of partnering with technology as a means of ministering to young adults and others even more. The idea of using technology was already in the forefront, but just reinforced and reiterated by the project.

Additionally, the questionnaire or survey gave feedback indicating some of the young adult ideas and concerns. This project showed the need for the church to listen to

young adults' statements and comments, for in them we can hear and discern their journeys at present as well as where they want to go in the future. Their narratives and stories help in ministering to them. A few of the young adults voiced some of their concerns, desires and needs. One person shared, "her desire for spiritual healing and nourishment along with a sense of direction." Another stated a desire "to be able to get teachings on our level that deal with everyday situations." A young lady singled out the goal of "Guidance because it is easy to get lost and distracted at our age." Someone else said, "a better understanding and relationship with Christ." Still another sought "faith, peace, acceptance, love, encouragement, and understanding" and finally, a young man wrote, "I have recently graduated and I am just starting out on my own. I have been raised by a wonderful mom, but I struggle. I am really trying - I've come for guidance- it is easy to get lost and distracted at our age. I feel as though I struggle with my faith due to my lack of voice. It's important for the children to be recognized and heard."

As the candidate working with this project and a minister of the Gospel, I indeed can say that the planning and implementation of this project has been a challenging experience for me and is essential to the ministry at Fountain Baptist Church. The project brought to light three areas of concern: relevancy, reality and intentionality.

First of all, I saw the need to stay relevant in a day like today. If a church is not relevant and aware of the new trends, ministry at the church will become almost nonexistent or ineffective because the church will be trying to operate in a vacuum. If the church does not remain relevant, it will become a dying church void of any new life.

Also, the reality in doing ministry is being cognizant of who you are ministering to. The project with the young adults at FBC allowed me to see that, in facing the

problem of knowing and not knowing what to do to minister or meet the needs of those who need it, it is sometimes necessary to give more time to listen to the journeys and narratives of the individuals. This is what I did in reading their responses and having the one on one conversations. In listening, their spirituality comes out, it weaves itself out and each individual is validated.

Validation was one of the issues the young adults pointed out as lacking for them in the church. By allowing individuals to tell their stories in any form or way they want to respond validates them and they are embraced for who they are. I found that validation and embracing informs ministry which leads to engagement and the re-ignition of passion for God and spiritual growth. One of the young men wrote:

most young adults want the older people in the church to meet them where they are and accept them for who they are. We may talk different, dress different and, according to them, act different. We need to look within our souls and thoroughly think about the way we interact with each other and accept one another so that we can grow.

The young adults who responded to the devotional part of the program were validated even though some felt that they should have been spiritually further along. But each time, they still participated in the module, which indicated to me a desire to continue. It indicated a desire and a search for God and a desire grow. Whatever the spiritual need, I believe that their participation was a first step forward toward an active or conscious thinking about God.

Additionally, intentionality has come to the forefront and I believe is necessary and beneficial in ministry settings. This project was done with intentionality in mind and I believe that by being intentional in trying to engage young adults, they were blessed. Often times, especially, in difficult areas of ministry, people are left on their own. But I

believe love, guidance, instruction, nurturing, nudging, and seeking out all has a place in ministry. Going the extra mile to reach out is very important. Every time I think of intentionality, I think of Jesus, who intentionally went through Samaria where he met a woman at the well, who would not have otherwise ever met Jesus, the source of living water. There are many young adults who need to meet the source of living water so that they can receive the living water. This living water will keep them alive and refreshed spiritually no matter where they go. Then they can become the instruments of healing God is calling for in this sick and dark world.

Finally I saw the need of allowing the participants in the project as well as congregants opportunity to see the importance of having some accountability in their own spiritual development. In drawing a parallel from the education profession, motivation is important, but allowing and assisting young adults to take ownership in their own spirituality helps too. Young adults need to be able to take ownership and make the effort to allow God to work in their lives. In spite of busy schedules and personal agendas, a conscious effort is helpful in taking a step to allow God to be Lord in their lives.

The project was designed to engage young adults, hopefully re-igniting a passion and curiosity about God. However, an overall analysis and assessment of the project showed that efforts to engage the young adults at FBC was not successful. It was very difficult to get them to respond. I was quite disappointed by the number of young adults who responded. I was saddened by their lack of response, in spite of the various allowances, adjustments and changes made to the project. Perhaps, as research showed, their lack of participation and response was due to their age, maturity, jobs, career

pursuits, schedules and/or lack of interest. Perhaps a completely different approach, at another time would work better.

The Apostle Paul gives words of wisdom in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that are significant and essential to consider in light of an evaluation of this project. Paul states “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”² These words again speak to ministry with young adults. But with God all things are possible, for it is the power of the Gospel God places in us. This Gospel is not of us but of God. The project, even though the participation was less than I had expected and hoped, was an encouragement to me to be faithful to the call to go and make disciples. We have been called to plant and to water, but God is the one who will give the increase. I realize the reality and relevance of the parable of the soils, the falling of the word and ministry on the different types of soils. I also embrace the reality of the Word in saying as it is written in Zechariah 4:6, ‘This is the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.’³

Self-Evaluation

Working with the planning, implementation and execution of this project has been a challenging, at times disappointing, and yet enriching experience. It has required the enhancing, the putting on and the letting go of some things in order to effect change.

Throughout the planning and implementation process of the project, I believe my strengths were exemplified in my ability to be calm, flexible, and diplomatic when

² 2 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV)

³ Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)

necessary. Flexibility is often times needed in ministry when working with people. In addition to being flexible, I believe that being able to encourage and exhort is necessary when talking with people.

Most important is my ability to listen. Working with the lay advisory team as well as the target group required listening in order to begin to address issues that needed to be addressed. I believe that, at that time, and whenever needed I was able was to collaborate with all parties involved.

Finally, my strength is in my ability to be open and receptive to new methodologies. As a minister, my aim and goal is to minister to others and find any means to minister which includes seeking out new methodologies.

One of the areas that needs work is the area of highlighting details. There must be a balance of highlighting the small details as well as the larger. Often times there is the need for constant monitoring to insure that all parties are following through.

I disagree with one of the Lay Advisory Team's assessment that one of my weakness was my "very relaxed demeanor, which is both a pro and a con." As a minister of the gospel, I take my calling and work seriously. At times, I feel that it is necessary to show compassion. It is by no means a sign of weakness. The weakness comes into play when one buy's into the negativity and hinders ministry.

This project reminded me of how difficult ministry is at this present time, especially this area of ministry with young adults and youth. It has forced me to think about how to measure the effectiveness of ministry without using old paradigms reliant on participation and numbers. . This project required the letting go of such. It brought to

light the necessity of staying open, for ministry is not just to the church, but to the church “without walls.”

I believe that this experience been a fruitful experience for me. I really enjoyed working with the advisory team. I was blessed in looking for the gleams of sunlight as the young adults responded in their own ways to the project, as we tried to engage them, praying that the engagement would reconnect them and foster a renewal, or a re-igniting of their passion and curiosity about God.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Often times, as ministers we ask ourselves where we go from here, especially after having completed a task that God has allowed for the building up and the equipping of his people. This project was designed to test new and creative ways to interact with young adults that would engage them and meet them where they are. The thesis I was testing stated that this engagement would in turn re-ignite a passion and curiosity about God. I cannot say for sure if a curiosity and passion for God was re-ignited in the young adults, but I can say, based on responses and comments received as well as the observation of overt behavior, everyone was blessed. The Lay Advisory Team and I developed a stronger zeal and intention to minister and engage young adults, so that they can be sure and strong witnesses for God.

As a result of the implementation of this project, ministry to and with young adults will move forward in the direction of working to meet their needs. This will be done by further development, expanding and implementation of this project. The project has been a catalyst in the rethinking of how ministry is done with young adults, keeping in mind relevancy, reality and intentionality. To continue with the idea of relevancy, the project will be used as a guide or framework to further incorporate the use of social media as a medium through which the ministry will be structured and implemented.

Social media will enable the flexibility many young adults seek because of their busy schedules and physical unavailability.

Also, I believe that there should be an expansion of components of the project to include a component to directly deal with the reality of addressing the spiritual lives of young adults. This component should include instruction to enable their spiritual growth, and formation, integrity and personal accountability. Young adults need to be sure about their spirituality as it relates to who God is and their relationship with God. Instruction should be geared toward helping young adults recognize the presence of God in life, in and around them, the signals the Spirit sends to them to notice God being active in daily life, which could help them from moment to moment decide which choices to make and which roads to travel. Young adulthood is a time of spiritual formation and decisions. It is not a time of gimmicks and watered down Gospel, but a time for new and creative engaged instruction that will produce an encounter or a reigniting of a passion for God. After all, this is their expressed desire to experience God for themselves.

Intentionality will add another dimension by bringing direct hands-on ministry with young adults. This would be a catalyst for promoting action and availability among young adults, so that when the course of their lives takes them away from the church, they will be able to remain witnesses and instruments to be used by God. Intentionality would be in the form of developing aspects of the project that will get them directly engaged, not only in the project, but that will also lend itself to becoming engaged in parts of the life of the church, if that is possible. When people, especially young adults, are directly involved in ministry and Christian education that focus on engagement in the giving of or receiving of “didache - teaching, leiturgia - prayer, koinonia - community

and diakonia - service,”¹ a reigniting of their curiosity and passion about God will produce growth, desire and genuine spirit-filled witnesses of Jesus the Christ.

Most importantly, the project has served as a tool for evaluation and intervention for the ministries at FBC. The Lay Advisory Team and I, upon the evaluation of the project, saw implications for criteria to be considered in the planning, formation, implementation and evaluation of ministries of the church. The following questions were birthed as a result of the project. What role does relevancy, reality and intentionality play in the development and implementation of the ministries at the church? How much nurturing/mentorship is provided members, new member's, the youth and especially young adults in leadership development and possibly ecclesiastical vocational opportunities as a whole? What role does personal accountability for one's own spirituality play in each members search for God? How much intentional community building is done among young adults and the older generations of the church?

Finally, this project will be a useful tool/resource that can be presented at youth development workshops, denominational and mission conventions. These presentations will incorporate mentoring, nurturing young adults for leadership roles in the implementation of the project as well as young adult ministries, especially since the young adults are tech savvy. Their ability to monitor and manage technology will open up venues for them to learn about worship, and read about and experience God in new ways, thus reigniting their passion and curiosity about God. The presentations will also serve as a venue to provide information and direction for possible young adult investment in various vocations of the church.

¹ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 16.

One cannot forget the fact that ministry to young adults is a daunting task, and yet God has called the church to the mission and ministry of reaching out to all. We can be encouraged, invigorated and energized by the witness of Paul and the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ, “Do you not say, ‘four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”² This project has been an initial intentional step at FBC in ministry to young adults, a field that is truly plenteous and ripe for harvest.

² John 4:35 (NIV)

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO YOUNG ADULT GROUP

Dear Young Adult Group:

Greetings!

Thank you for your interest. We would like to welcome you to a project that has been designed to hopefully energize your passion about God. The underlying premise of the project is that through the Word of God, our Worship to God and Witness for God we can be the instruments of healing for the mind, body and spirit of a needy world. Therefore, We ask for your *support and commitment to actively participate and follow through with each of the following three dimensions of the project.*

I. Prayer/Praise/Reflection

Each morning, during the week of March 11 – 18, a daily e-mail will be sent. Respond with a prayer, a statement of praise or a reflection. Please respond by email or text to the prompt by 9:00pm each day.

II. Movie/Discussion:

A movie trailer and questions will be sent on Wednesday, March 19. Please have all questions answered and submitted by Thursday, March 27, 9:00pm.

III. Final Session: Roundtable/discussion will be held Saturday, morning, March 29, 10:00 – 12:00 noon. Lunch will be served. There will be an in depth discussion about the previous dimensions.

I will be available for two conference calls on Wednesday, 3/12 from 12:00 -12:30 pm and 9:30-10:00 pm, to answer any questions/concerns about this letter and any of the activities.

Finally, thank you for committing to these three dimensions of the project. It is hoped that you have experienced new hope and a desire to continue to grow.

Please respond indicating your availability and willingness to support this initiative, via email, or text.

Sincerely,
Rev. Joyce McDonald

APPENDIX B

YOUNG ADULT SURVEY

The purpose of the survey is to identify the needs and tap into the ideas and feelings of the young adult population at Fountain Baptist Church. It is to assess who we are, as young adults, what we are doing and where we see ourselves going.

The results from the survey will help in the identification and implementation of strategies that will reignite a passion for God, thus enabling each person to grow to become the witnesses and instruments of healing, God would have them to be.

Please complete the following survey. Check the appropriate box where applicable and add comments when requested. Your responses are anonymous.

Background Information.

1. Are you a member of Fountain Baptist Church?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Are you
 - Male
 - Female
3. How old are you?
 - 19 - 21
 - 22 - 24
 - 25 - 27
 - 28 - 30
4. Are you currently enrolled in college?
 - Yes
 - No
5. How often do you attend church, on an average?
 - none
 - about once or twice a year
 - once or twice every three months
 - once a month
 - two to three times a month
 - once or twice a week

Relationship with Christ

Jesus, in John 3:7 said, “Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again”. Jesus lets Nicodemus, know that he must receive Christ. This invitation comes through a personal invitation to have a relationship with Christ. It involves coming to God from self and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us what He wants us to be.

6. Do you have a personal relationship with Christ? (Explain on your response)
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure
 - At times, I feel that God is right beside me. We are very close and intimate.
 - At times, I go days without praying. I don't feel close to God.
 - I don't think at all about God.
 - Sometimes, I feel confused and don't know.
 - I'm searching and would like to know_____.

Comments

Engagement with the Church

In the Bible Paul states that God has given each person a gift to be used for the building up and edification of the body of Christ. God has appointed some apostles, teachers, prophets, workers of miracles and some with gifts of healing.

7. Do you actively use your gifts in the church or body of Christ?
- never
 - occasionally
 - regularly – about once a month
 - Not Sure
 - Not at all
 - Whenever there is an opportunity

Comments

Personal Devotion

It is important to take time to fellowship with God. Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Matt. 22:37

8. To what extent do you spend time each day, alone with God in prayer, worship and the study of the word? (on an average)
- 0 – 15 min.
 - Half an hour
 - An hour
 - An hour and a half
 - No time limit
 - None

Comments

Witness for God

The Lord has commissioned each of us to share the Good News and “seek the Lost”, He said, Go and make disciples of all nations, and Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation”. It is our greatest calling, to share the love and forgiveness He has given us with those who have never received Him as their savior and Lord.

9. How engaged are you in being obedient to the command of Jesus to share the Gospel and tell of his love?
- Often
 - Every day
 - Never
 - Once a week
 - Rarely
 - Other – please below

Comments

10. What do you think most young adults hope to get from the church? (Write a response below)

APPENDIX C

PROJECT COMPONENTS

Module 1: Prayer/Praise/Reflection

The purpose of Module I: to provide “One on One Time”. It is a time to engage the young adults in personal devotion. Through the prompts of prayer, scripture and song, the young adults will actively engage or participate in a devotional period. (time when they felt led or one that is most conducive to them) This devotion time is comprised of a moment of reading scripture or listening to a song, or lifting up prayer. Questions will be provided for thought. The young adults will respond to the prompt. They can express their response in any way they felt – by writing a prayer, reflection, song, making a statement of praise, journaling, poem writing, rapping, drawing, sketching, meditating, recording an observation that comes to mind because of the prompt /devotion time or just thinking of the goodness of God.

Module II: Movie/Discussion

The purpose of Module II. To provide a strategy whereby self-reflection and examination in relation to society and God. This can take place through the use of movies and discussion. It gives an opportunity to get people actively involved in thinking, observing, and being present for God’s revelation to see where God fit in the issues, and struggles of daily life. It is difficult times and often it seems hard to keep the faith and continue to move in the direction God would have us go. People are struggling to survive. As we watch this movie, what issues or problems you or people your age face. How are your circumstances and the character in the movie circumstances similar or different? Is it possible to survive? How? Where is God in all of this?

Module III: Roundtable/Discussion

The purpose of Module III: To provide a venue whereby self-reflection is done in relation to the issues young adults personally deal with and face with each day. It’s an attempt to enable young adults an opportunity to delve into issues that produce conflict for most young adults, and in their eyes is hard to overcome. The roundtable will begin with a movie clip, vignette or case study highlighting issues young people face. Topics such as loneliness, sexuality, relationships, finances, depression, suicide etc., can be discussed depending on the group.

Module I

One on one time is time you make, at your convenience, when you feel led, to have personal time alone with God. Sometimes, because of our busy schedules and lifestyles, we must intentionally make time to commune with God. Personal time with God can be through prayer, reflection and meditation:

- **Just thinking about how good God has been**
- **Thanking God for what God has done**
- **Seeing God's goodness in the things around you**
- **Quiet reflection just enjoying nature, the air, the peace around you**
- **Humming, singing a song that is in your heart and thinking on the words**
- **Reading a book or article**
- **Mediating**

Whatever way you spend one on one time with God that is your devotion time. This week be intentional about your time with God.

Directions: Prayer/Praise/Reflection: Each morning, during the week of March 11-15, a daily e-mail/text will be sent with a prayer, a scripture, statement of praise, or a song. Please respond by email, text or telephone to the prompt by 11:00p.m.

Day 1: prayer is a means of communicating with God, both talking and listening. Each day take time to meet with God. Read the following statements and be inspired. Take a moment to say, write a prayer, statement of praise, a reflection, a poem or your thoughts.

*Thank you, Oh God, for this moment when I can bring to you my thoughts. You are worthy to receive all the honor, power, glory and praise. Thank you.....

Response: _____

Day 2: We communicate with God by talking, listening, meditating and reflecting. Read the following statements and be inspired to respond.

Psalm 23: **A psalm of David.**

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with
 oil; my cup overflows.
6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell
 in the house of the Lord forever.

Response: _____

Day 3: Find time to sit quietly. Close your eyes. Speak to God, Think on God. Meditate.

Response: _____

Day 4: Click on the song. Listen to the Lyrics. What speaks to you in the song the most?

Can you find God in the song? What do you think the song is saying about God and
 about you?

Response: a statement of praise, prayer poem, thoughts:

Day 5: Read the lyrics to the song. Hum or sing a little of the song. What does the song
 speak to you?

Response: _____

Module II

Directions for the movie: 12 Years a Slave

1. *Look at the movie.*

2. *Reflect on what you saw and how you felt.*

3. *Then use the following questions to write a reflection or response.*

a. What were your first impressions of the movie? What did you like about Solomon? What didn't you like?

b. Think about Solomon's story: Solomon's story speaks to the world and society by showing the horrible life he had to live. Today, how do people face difficult circumstances?

c. How do you face your hard times or difficult experiences today? Does knowing scripture for yourself, songs and prayer help you find your way? How does it help? Why does it help? Does knowing where you come from and who you are enable you to hold on to your faith?

d. Solomon said, "I don't want to survive, I want to live". What did he mean? Do we live or survive today? Or do we do as Solomon did when he said, "I want to survive. I won't fall into despair. I'll keep myself hearty until freedom is opportune." What do you think? Explain.

e. What does Solomon's story say about our experiences with others, especially those experiencing pain. Can feeling someone else's pain help, hinder or change us?

f. How does 12 Years a Slave speak to you? What message, thought, idea.

Module III:

A roundtable discussion will be held. A vignette, movie clip or case study will introduce the session.

Discussion Questions: (loneliness)

- a. Can being present in a crowd still result in loneliness? Explain.
- b. How can one make a change when all seems hopeless?
- c. How does one remain true to God when all seems hopeless?
- d. What does the medical field say about loneliness?
- e. Is God present when one is struggling? How do you know? In what ways?

APPENDIX D

PROJECT EVALUATION

Over the past month, you have engaged in a few activities which focused on your participation.

Please take a few moments and respond to the following statements/questions.

- | | | |
|--|-------|----------|
| 1. The prayer experience make me more cognizant of my actual time I talk with God. | | |
| Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 2. My personal devotion was enhanced by the past month's experience. | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 3. From this experience, I feel I want to learn more about God and ways to serve Him. | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 4. The movie was difficult to watch and made me angry. | | |
| Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 5. The movie allowed me to see the world in a different way and gave me a desire to work for change. | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 6. After viewing the movie, I feel that I can see that God can work in any situation. | | |
| Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 7. The opportunity to share in a group setting was beneficial and I gained some insights. | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |
| | | |
| 8. The various activities inspired me and gave me the desire to dig deeper to find answers to questions about God. | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | Not |
| Applicable | | |

9. The activities were engaging and fostered a desire for more reflection and introspection.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not
Applicable

10. What did you learn about yourself and your relationship with God during the last month?

11. As a result of these activities, personally, I feel that God is

12. How would you rate this project in its capacity to get you to reflect about God, Who God is
to you and your relationship with God?
Poor Fair Good Excellent

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