

**Essay Title:** Attracting Young Adults

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DO YOU LOOK AROUND ON SUNDAY MORNING and see mostly older faces? Do you ever wonder where the young adults are? Or how to attract them to services?

To attract young adults, listen to what they want. Young adults want worship that is relevant to their lives—to their experiences as well as to the turmoil and transitions that they are living with. They want a place where they can explore relationships, connect their values with their work, and ground themselves in community. They want a place where the best ideals of humanity are put forth as a challenge for all of society—justice, accountability, democracy, and equality.

Many young adults tell us that they also want something that fits their lifestyle and schedule. Often this means that Sunday morning is not when they want to worship. In addition to young adult-oriented Sunday morning worship, contemporary services have been successful on weekday evenings, Saturday nights, and Sunday afternoons and evenings. Planning a contemporary worship forces us to think outside of the paradigm that the “real” worship in our congregations takes place on Sunday mornings. Real worship can take place any time of the day or night, and on any day of the week.

Within one congregation, there may be people who want to worship in different ways and at different time. A religious community is all about overlapping circles of programming and people—and not just about one time and place, in one space designated the sanctuary or worship hall.

Most of all, young adults want to be invited—into worship, into relationship, into community, into membership in your congregation. Without that explicit invitation, they will largely assume that they are not who you are reaching out to, even if this assumption is wrong. Never underestimate the power of invitation

Young adults are attracted to worship with a palpable energy, in which their connection to that which is greater than them can be renewed. This is primarily what we mean when we challenge congregations to consider “contemporary” worship services to attract and retain young adults.

Here are some tips for creating contemporary worship services that may appeal to young adults. Spice them up with different perspectives and fresh music. Have several people address the same topic, perhaps in dialogue. Invite a band to play. Give people manageable bites rather than a 20-minute sermon.

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Create a spiritual atmosphere and tone so that after the service people feel renewed and alive rather than to a college lecture. Find time slots other than Sunday morning, Add multimedia. Put hymn lyrics on an overhead projector so that people have their heads up when they sing.

Young adults, just like older adults, want worship that speaks to their experiences in life, that challenges them to develop deeper relationships, and that connects them to things that are beyond themselves. Many congregations have been successful at attracting young adults. It's just a matter of thinking differently. And being welcoming to everyone.

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