



God's Love Made Real

Commitment #3: Listening to and Amplifying Young Voices

Intergenerational Connections

For these ELCA churches, youth ministry isn't about segregating young people; it's about fostering connections across generations and giving them the opportunity to grow alongside older adults in their lives.

Wanting children to remain part of the worship service, congregations such as Christ the King or Advent Lutheran Church in Manhattan establish "playgrounds" where children can participate in worship and play together at the same time. Even when the noise gets to be a little too distracting, the congregation is willing to find solutions to prioritize kids being in worship.

As a smaller congregation, Langdon has seen intergenerational relationships bring vitality to Christ Lutheran and its nearby community.

"We have about 15 senior adult volunteers who help pass out snacks and drinks [to high school students we serve]," he says. "It's been cool to watch them interact, and for the high schoolers who have no church background to love coming over here."

At ELC, one initiative to address this is through Faith Webs. ELC has also sponsored intergenerational mission trips.

Meeting Young People Where They Are

In his work with the Naming Project, a youth ministry camp for LGBTQ+ youth and allies, Deacon Ross Murray has learned that engaging younger generations should begin with an outward curiosity, not just a desire to bring them into ministry programming. "The more we can build the relationship with people, in their own setting, in their own space where they feel like themselves and the most comfortable, makes it easier to bring them into our space," Murray says.

Some congregations are intentional about reaching beyond traditional church walls as well. Advent engages young adults through pub theology sessions and food pantry service opportunities.

"One young adult first started coming with his girlfriend to serve in our food pantry," shares Hayley Moe, a former vicar of Advent. "Then he started coming to some of the young adult events, and he realized that there was a place for him in the church."

Making space for young people, she adds, can create an enduring desire for community and faith practice.

"Last summer, we anticipated the number in worship to go down," Moe says. "However, it didn't because of the consistency of the young adults. ... Each Sunday, a group of young adults would stay after worship to continue talking. They were showing community was

building. They invited each other to events and created their own [gatherings]. Now, they take the initiative to seek out other young adults and get them plugged in.”

An initiative that is being employed at English with the confirmation students is “student driven sessions.” What this means is that the students decide the topic and the pastors and Jared work on the curriculum for those topics. It is a fun way for them to learn about the things they are interested in regarding faith issues.

The Path Forward

Across the ELCA, innovative congregations are demonstrating the transformative power of authentic youth engagement. Their success stories prove that meaningful change happens when churches move beyond token representation and give young people real authority and voice in congregational life.

As Langdon reflects, “I want them to say, ‘At my church, I was the assistant minister on some Sundays; I also helped count money; I served communion and did numerous other things.’ I hope the church would allow them to get plugged in at whatever age or level.”

The message is clear: Young people aren't just part of the future of the ELCA — they are an essential part of its present vitality. For congregations ready to truly empower youth, the path forward requires courage: the courage to share leadership, to create brave spaces for authentic engagement, and to allow young people' gifts and perspectives to contribute to the future of their faith communities.

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