



I nearly laughed out loud when I first learned that members of the early church were thought to practice cannibalism – they were overheard in secret spaces talking about eating bodies and drinking blood after all. And I chuckled to myself a bit more recently when I was told that church leadership has been accused of vampirism – due to our all too common practice of waylaying young adults when they visit our churches, and then depending on their presence to sustain our congregational life. Think about it. When pastors see someone who appears to be in their twenties or thirties, our eyes get big, our hearts start racing, and we've got them revitalizing the youth ministry before they've even had a chance to sit down. But perhaps before we lose all control we need to ask ourselves what *they* need and what *they* might have had to overcome to even enter our churches.

That's what a group of pastors in Greensboro have tried to do over the past six months. Meeting regularly with an actual young adult, we talked and listened, ate some humble pie, apologized, brainstormed and brain farted...until we came up with the beginnings of a plan. And we called it The Space Between. The Space Between is a place where young adults stop to engage the space between youth and adulthood, society and faith, world and church. The idea is that we'd start reaching out to young adults between the ages of 22 and 32 in our individual circles of influence, and we'd invite them to gather (off campus) for some non-threatening, easy-entry fun, food and fellowship. It occurred to us that despite the church's failure to find the magic formula, we did know one thing that everyone needs – community. So that's what we're doing; we're slowly, deliberately and intentionally, working to create *space* where young adults can build community through conversation, recreation, and just navigating life.

We're not trying to make it a Bible study or a worship service. We're not trying to undo everything the church has done to turn them off to organized religion or church participation. And we're not trying to get them to revitalize our youth ministries. We're telling them they're loved, by us and by God. We're telling them they're seen, by us and by God. We're telling them we're with them and for them, and we're going to do better.

So far we've had a Christmas gathering, exchanged White Elephant gifts, and gone bowling. Next up is a Charcuterie Party! We're still building trust and figuring things out, but it is well worth the time and effort. I don't think young adults are going to suddenly start pouring back into our sanctuaries in droves, but I am hoping the word is spreading, among young adults *and* our congregations, that we're more interested in authentically being the Body than in drinking anyone's blood. See what I did there? What might this look like in your communities?

Rev. Sam Perkins
Pastor for Formation, Mission, and Connections
Westminster Presbyterian Church