
WHAT TO DO WHEN: YOU'RE AN "AGING" CONGREGATION

Episode Description

The average age of church members in the US is around 55 – and it's higher in mainline churches. However, the longer a church has been established, the older the average age of its membership. Today, it's not uncommon for the average age of a small to mid-sized church to be mid-60s or even young-70s. And even though larger churches ... even mega churches ... are experiencing the aging-effect, by and large these churches have significantly lower age-averages than smaller churches. In this episode, Drs. Bill and Kris address this phenomenon and offer strategies to deal with the issue.

Episode Outline

There's nothing wrong with being an older church ... unless the church isn't taking in at least as many members as it's losing. Indeed, in many communities, there is a place for churches that have chosen to target older adults. However, the reality is, most aging churches want to attract the younger generations but are ill equipped to do so. We'll look at two solutions.

Choosing to be Better Than Status Quo

- Choose your target: Boomers or Silents – there's a significant difference
- Make your church as "senior friendly" as possible
- Widen aisles between rows of pews (or chairs) to be walker/cane friendly
- Design the service with your target in mind
 - Boomer music and style
 - Full on traditional style (remember, this will need to change over time as "traditional" worship changes as the younger generations get older and bring their own version of "traditional")
- Consider adding screen technology (that doesn't mean get rid of the hymnals)
- Focus your support services, fellowship, etc. on age-targeted activities
- Focus missions activities on those your target can and will support
- Advertise/market as a Senior-Friendly Church

Choosing to Lower the Congregation's Average Age

–This is NOT an overnight process – it takes time to attract and connect with younger generations

- Decide whether you're going to add a new service or change the current one
 - Not changing your worship style isn't a viable option
 - There are no viable compromises – blended services nearly never attract younger gens to visit, let alone return
 - If you'll be changing your current service, don't overreach beyond one full generation

- Before you change worship, get ready for guests
 - Upgrade your nursery
 - Upgrade your children's ministry (elementary)
 - Upgrade your technology
 - Upgrade your hospitality
 - Upgrade your connect-ability
- If launching a new service, do so with significant generation-savvy marketing
- Equip and empower your pastor to be the primary CNO – Chief Networking Officer
- Develop target-appropriate connection activities
- Members must adopt guests – make connections with them

Discussion Questions

1. If you've had younger visitors who haven't returned – and you have contact information for them – consider doing an exit-interview with them to discover why they didn't return.
2. What have been the biggest obstacles in maintaining relevance with the younger generations?
3. Which of the two options above seem most viable for your congregation?
4. What changes will present the most challenge to implement? How could you usher in the changes with a minimum of conflict?