

Episode 3: Nurture Young Adults

Transcription

1) Demonstrate the Importance of Consistency

Lyndon: I think one thing that could be important is being consistent, which for me as a solo pastor, is how you work with lay leaders, which can include young adults to sustain young adult ministry. Cause very often it's really about finding people who will maybe help send out the notice on the social channels or email and kinda keep things going. Finding that person can be hard at first, but it's – I think that's really the key. So I feel that's where I'm at. And we tried like a young adult monthly meet up which was going well, but finding that point person just to say, "Hey we'll meet for a drink once a month" then. Just to get someone to commit to that is actually a pretty big deal. And I realise I can't rescue everything that starts and there's no support for it. Then, I'm like *well then that's just not going to continue until someone else picks up and does something else*. So I think part of it is us empowering students, young adults, and others to give them that freedom to do the things that they want to do. And not wait for someone else to create it. Which might not be sustainable if you wait.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

2) Actively Support Young Adults

Michelle: I think that congregations give opportunities for leadership development. To sort of practice and try on leadership skills that they might not get in other places.

Gretchen: I think of the work that I do of bringing new people into committees, how do I help people learn what this committee is all about, and how do I find the time to do that. But we're just not very good at it often across the church I think. Which, to our detriment. Especially I think for young people, if they feel like they're not supported, maybe they'll stop doing it, and we don't want that to happen right. So how do we better think about supporting young adults in the leadership positions that they're called into?

Michelle: I think about ways that some of us talked about our, you know, connections to the church as young adults and how we talked about outdoor ministry, and service projects, and

immersion trips, and opportunities to, you know, to go to trainings, and so I think about the invitations that come across some of our spaces around finding young adults to be part of LWF things or recruiting young adults for camp staff. Or, you know, all the ways that we invite young adults into a broader vision of what the church is and what their part of in the church could be – or in the world can be through the church. And so the more, yeah the more opportunities we talk about, right, the more chances there are that one of those opportunities is going to connect with somebody.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

3) Nurturing Space for Engagement

Anne: I think it's about valuing the contributions. And listening enough to hear what might be a passion, and figuring out how we as a faith community can hold space for that passion. That connects, right like Michelle was talking about, we have this faith that deals with these things and wants to come into conversation and think deeply, and you have these things, how do we put them together? And then express them within the community and share that and we all benefit, because of who you are. But it's helping young adults feel like it does matter, and they do belong and there is space for whatever that thing is, saying "yes". They tease me at third space "Stop saying yes Anne." Cause they'll "Oh I, what do you think about this and what can we do about this?" "Yes." They get grumpy when I say yes all the time cause that usually means that I'll say, "And, what are you going to do?" So, yeah, that space to do the thing.

Michelle: On our best days, church – congregations are spaces of like lots of grace and forgiveness, and experimentation. And so, on our best days when we can say, "Yes let's try it, or yes we'll give you a space to try it." Or, "Here's a thing for you to be part of, you might like it, you might not, but you're not going to know if you don't try it." I think that that can be really influential and impacting for young adults.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

4) Make Ourselves Available in New and Different Ways

Gretchen: We have to think about the way they find us is so different now, right, and so how are we cognizant of that? What are the avenues we need to do as church to encounter young people cause it's – we are so good at waiting for people to find us, and guess what?! Like people might be – I think people are often searching for ways to encounter meaningful and meaning-making experiences, but I don't think that often leads to a church on a Sunday morning, right? And so how do we make ourselves available in new and different ways? That, yeah, are just more accessible, I guess for young adults?

Pause for reflection and discussion.

5) Congregations as Communities of Diverse Perspectives

Michelle: That congregations surround young adults with these networks of support and cheerleaders. I think every young adult needs like, right, someone in their eighties who just thinks that their fabulous and congregations can be that. And I think that like young – congregations are networks of such diverse life experience, that can also be places where we invite young adults to see the world broader than their current experience of it. Because we come with all of our histories, so many of us come from different places around the world, we've had a variety of life experiences, and so we can share that. And we can, yeah, invite young adults to see the world more broadly than they can in that moment. I think that can be really good.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

6) Learn by Hearing First

Gretchen: I can imagine what might communicate welcome, inclusion, but I don't know if I'm right or not. And I wonder if we need to ask that of the young people we know. Not just young adults, but also youth and children. Right, how do we indicate that all are welcome here and are included? And I have some ideas, but could you also talk to me about how you encounter this space and what would be a sign to you that you are welcome.

Michelle: And in that is a way, right, is by listening. How can we do it, by listening, by asking the question, by not assuming that we know. By inviting the feedback, by changing

when we're called on the carpet for not doing it right, you know, for messing up. Those kinds of things. Taking responsibility for, you know, our own sort of rigidity. And be open to learn from, I think all of those things are important.

Sarah: And I think that allowing ourselves as church, to also be real people and let that show, just in and of itself can create a more nurturing environment.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

7) Be Honest about What We Don't Know

Sarah: Those of us who are not young adults anymore, also don't have everything figured out. And I think if church can be a place where we can all be safe and honest about that, that's going to be a lot safer and more welcoming for people who are questioning. You know, like if someone says, "I don't know about God." "Yeah, me neither kid." Like, I don't know. Sometimes the answer is I don't know. And it's okay.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

8) Demonstrate Authenticity

Michelle: If the only time we talk about it is when we're preaching it, and we don't sort of let it infuse other aspects of our life, then those who are watching us are only going to witness it in the context of our job. You know, and so I think that telling the story and coming along side folks and really letting others see that this is not about our job, it's also about our faith, or our convictions.

Anne: How we tell the story to is important. One of my – my husband's a P.K., a pastor's kid and he always says, "Anne, you can't do pastor's voice if you're preaching. Be the same at the dinner table as you are in the pulpit. And I think that – it's across the board, right? So like, maybe that's getting at some of what you're saying around how, Cyan, how do we do this work. I think it's if we're authentically telling this story across the board whether it's in worship or in a conversation or as we're caring for our neighbor. It's going to come across a little easier and maybe more – maybe people will catch it in a different way.

Sarah: If there's a distinction between what you say or how you say it, you know from the pulpit or on Sunday morning and on Sunday afternoons. Or - you know, if your not – if anybody's not consistent why would you believe them or trust them or anything? Right and I think that's part of what we do as leaders and also what we encourage in our people of all ages. On Sunday morning, you know, Jesus loves everybody. Then we will leave the church and put on our Black Lives Matter, or Every Child Matters shirt when we walk into the world. Because we actually mean it.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

9) Begin with Love not Shame

Sarah: Church is going to be the place that if you do it wrong your going to go to hell. Like that, I know that that has been the experience of so many people I know and it breaks my heart for every single one of them, and I, you know, and I think given my confidence and my experience in the church and knowing like if church treated me like that, I'd be like "to hell with you. Like I don't need you any more." But I have encountered so many people in their young adulthood and getting, you know, getting into their thirties who are – who have had that experience and are just hungering and thirsting to know that that's not true. To know that God does love them just as they are. That that door is open, that if some door somewhere slammed, this one doesn't have to. But, not because we've got it all figured out, but because we are loved just as messed up and confused and questioning and making mistakes as we are and we somehow been given a glimpse into this, you know, amazing love that loves us anyway. And so we're doing our best to draw a reasonable hand-drawn facsimile of that love for whoever you are of whatever age.

Pause for reflection and discussion.

10) Keep the Door Open

Gretchen: But then saying, we're still here, or we're still – you know the doors always open and we're still here to be in relationship with you as a sign of God's commitment to you as well, right so...

Anne: The door's always open. So I think about Sarah saying, "I needed to go away. I needed to leave church and figure out my stuff and" but the door was open when you came back and went "Ta Da!" They were like, "Yay!" That idea that, go do the thing, be the, and we're here and there's not a judgement whether it's I'm going to be away for six weeks cause I want to do this thing, or I'm really questioning if this makes sense for me, I don't know about God. Door's still open. Doors – the door is open and you, no matter what, even if you come back and say, "I don't know about God." Come, be! And be with us. And you are here, and we're glad that you're here.

Pause for reflection and discussion.