LET'S
TALK
HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE SEE YOUR CHURCH?

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE SEE YOUR CHURCH?

A tool for local churches to access the voice of young people involved in the church community.

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HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE **SEE YOUR CHURCH?**

A TOOL FOR LOCAL CHURCHES TO ACCESS THE VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

The activities in this tool will help you learn the following things:

- How many young people are involved in your church activities
- How many young people are no longer involved with your church community
- How your church is perceived by young people

The activities are designed to be done as part of a church activity on Sabbath where most people are present, or part of a special forum organised just for this activity. Information will be gathered from adults (18+) and young people aged between 8-18. It is important that after the survey and focus groups are done that a short report or other form of feedback is shared with the church, especially those who participated in the process. This could either be done in Sabbath School to enable discussion about the findings and/or during the church service so that everyone gets to hear the results even if they didn't participate in the survey or focus group discussions.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

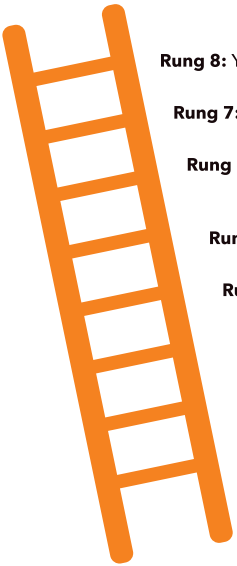
Congregations that fear churches are failing to reach young adults have reason to worry. The customs and rhythms of congregational life are designed for stability and continuity with the past; they are not well suited to dramatic, rapid transition. Young adults today spend long stretches of their life in an unsettled state marked by uncertainty and instability. Congregations that cannot adapt have little hope of convincing young people that religious institutions have any relevance for their lives, now or in the future.

Case studies report congregations that appeal to young people and children are remarkably inclusive in three respects. They meet young people where they are on their faith journey. They embody some form of diversity. And they invite young people to leadership and participation in congregational life.[1]

The tools in this survey will help you learn where your church community may be at regarding meeting the needs of young people. An important

1 http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/increasing-young-adult-participation-churches-and-other-faith-communities

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION



Rung 8: Young People and adults share decision-making

Rung 7: Young people lead and initiate action

Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people.

Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed

Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed

Rung 3: Young people tokenized*

Rung 2: Young people are decoration*

Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*

Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation

Adapted from Hart, R (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship.* Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

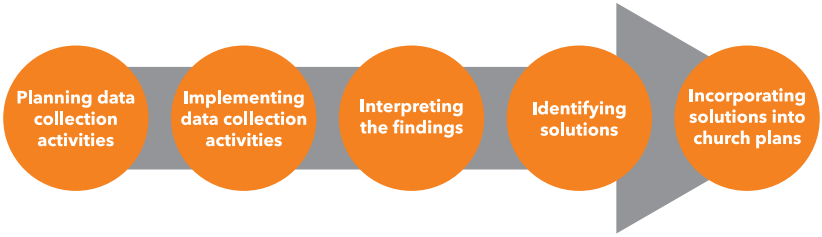
element to keep in mind is the concept of young people's participation. True participation is much more than just doing a job here and there in the church. Young people should play an active role in identifying how they want to participate in church community. Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation is a useful tool to gain a quick understanding of the different elements of youth participation. Keep in mind, however, that participation should not only be thought of as a hierarchy or ladder. This is simply a useful visual guide to illustrate different types of participation.

This tool contains the following activities:

- Guidelines for consulting children and young people
- Survey for children/young people 8-17
- Focus Group Guidelines for children/young people 8-17
- Survey for adults over 18
- Focus Group Guidelines for adults over 18
- Interpreting the findings
- Ideas for developing solutions

For each group the survey should be completed on the first Sabbath, followed by a focus group activity on the second Sabbath. Activities for children from age 8 are included, as it's helpful to capture their voices now while they are involved in the church community.

Although there are many sections to this tool, they form part of one process. Before starting it's important to set aside sufficient time to complete the whole process.



CONSULTING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

As your church embarks on the process of understanding the needs of young people it's important that the consultation process and follow-up activities create an environment where young people feel supported and safe to share their opinions. If a supportive environment is not in place, young people may feel their participation is just a token. Tokenistic participation negatively impacts young people's sense of belonging and connection to the church community, which is the opposite of what we are trying to achieve. This section of the tool aims to provide guidance on how to create a safe and positive environment for the participation of young people.

Advantages Of Including Young People

The idea of consulting with young people may be new to your church community. Some members may even question why the church would want to involve young people in "adult" decision-making process. However, we know when young people participate in ways that fit with their evolving capacities, the results are incredible for young people and adults alike. Here are some examples:

Better understanding of children's capacities: By interacting with children and young people, adults gain a better understanding of their concerns and capacities.

Improved decision-making processes: Through joint decision making with the church leadership, children and young people can positively influence church practice, and can actively contribute to

the spiritual and physical growth of the community. Involving young people in church life (i.e. planning and decision-making) can help to ensure that relevant decisions are grounded in their realities. Also, understanding the realities of children and young people attending church will help adults to better target children and youth programs and services At some point there is even potential to hand over control to young people.

Improved children's knowledge and skills: Children and young people can acquire information, knowledge and understanding by participating in leadership meetings and/or actively contributing to church decision-making. Active participation of young people can contribute to improving their leadership and communication skills. It can also help to improve their self-esteem and assist in creating a greater sense of belonging.

Consultation Standards

If consulting with children is something new for your church the following principles and standards can help with planning, implementation and the review stages of the overall activity.

1. Transparency, honesty and accountability

What do we mean? Adults involved in consultations with children follow participatory practice and put children's best interests first.

Why is it important? There are inevitable imbalances in power and status between adults and children. Transparency, honesty and accountability are needed for children's participation to be genuine and meaningful.

Example: All opportunities for under 18-year-olds to voice their opinions (i.e. through participating in data collection activities, survey and FGDs, and presentations or taking on tasks at a church meetings, services or outreach activities) are well planned by church staff and are clearly communicated to the under 18-year-olds, with ample opportunity for them to prepare.

2. A children-friendly environment

What do we mean? Children experience a safe, welcoming, inclusive and encouraging environment that enables participation.
Why is it important? The quality of children's participation and their

ability to benefit from it are strongly influenced by the efforts made to create a positive environment for their participation.

Example: Asking young people to attend a church board meeting may not create an inclusive or encouraging environment. To gain the opinions of young people a parallel processes may need to be developed. For example, the church may need to facilitate a small subcommittee where young people's views can be expressed. This information can then be shared in the adult decision-making forum.

3. Equality of opportunity

What do we mean? Participatory work should include different groups of children within the church community. Such as girls and boys with disabilities, out-of-school children and children from different ethnic backgrounds.

Why is it important? Children, like adults, are not a homogeneous group. Participation should provide for equality of opportunity for all regardless of age, location, ethnicity, gender, abilities or other factors.

Example: It is important to ensure that children with learning difficulties can participate in the process. Systems may need to be put into place to help children with written tasks.

4. Safety and protection of children

What do we mean? Involvement in church activities must not expose any children to threats or harm. A child's safety and health must be considered in every possible way, with safeguards put in place. This includes both physical and emotional wellbeing.

Why is it important? The church has a duty to protect children and to minimize the risk of abuse and exploitation or other negative consequences as a result of their participation.

Example: All churches should have child protection practices in place. These practices should be followed when conducting the survey and follow-up activities.

5. Commitment and competency of adults

What do we mean? Adults working with children are committed to the aim of consulting with children and are trained and supported to

carry out participatory practices.

Why is it important? Adults can only encourage genuine participation effectively and confidently if they have the necessary understanding and skills.

Example: All church members have different gifts. When conducting this activity ask church members with skills in facilitation to assist. Furthermore, make sure all the adults understand the process being undertaken and can explain it clearly to the children involved.

Standard	Criteria	Principle
Before Consultation		
Plan for appropriate child participation	• Discuss with the leadership team how best to involve children and young people in the planned activity.	
Develop child-friendly information and share it with children in advance	• Produce child-friendly and age appropriate information in advance that outlines the aim of the activity and the roles and responsibilities of participants (adult and children).	
Review child protection practices	• Prior to the activity ensure that all adults assisting are aware of the child protection practices of the church.	
Develop a transparent and fair process to select participants	• If all children can't participate in the activity develop a fair and transparent process that doesn't discriminate against age, gender, abilities, language. Self-selection is always a good option as it puts the decision to participate into the hands of the children.	
Ensure parents and caregivers consent to their child's participation	• Inform parents of the planned activity and request that they make contact with the church leadership if they DON'T want their child to participate.	
Select adults that have the knowledge and skills to consult with children	• Select adults that have established positive relationships with children.	

Standard	Criteria	Principle
During the Consultation		
Ensure children have equal opportunity to voice their opinion	• Encourage all children to share ideas and opinions. There are no wrong or right answers and every-one's opinion is valued.	
Develop appropriate systems to allow children of all ages and evolving capacities to participate	• Develop age appropriate activities (this guide provides examples, how-ever the facilitators are encouraged to adapt/change them as required). • Ensure that all children understand how they will be involved and whom the information will be shared.	
Ensure that follow-up activities are finalised and agreed upon during the activity	• Allow children to voice how they would like to be involved in any planned follow-up activities • Set clear expectations of what will happen and ensure you don't set expectations that can't be met.	
Standard	**Criteria**	**Principle**
After the Consultation		
Follow-up with facilitators	• Check-in with the adult facilitators about any potential issues that need to be followed-up. For example, if a child was made fun of during a session it's important to speak with the child after the session and let them know their opinion is important.	

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SURVEY GUIDELINES

- This survey is designed for young people aged between 8-17 who attend church regularly.
- It is a paper survey form that should take around 20 minutes to complete.
- It can be completed during a church service, or in any children's activity e.g. Sabbath school, youth church or a Pathfinder meeting. Previous experience shows that the most effective way to run the survey is to set aside 20 minutes in the middle of the service/activity for people to complete it. Anyone who needs more time can complete it at the end of service/activity.
- It is an optional and confidential activity.
- If possible, try to have an equal number of girls and boys complete the survey. Otherwise try to have all young people present complete the survey.

Before the Survey

SELECT the best time to hold the survey in your church
NOTIFY the children and parents in advance
PLAN allow sufficient time to complete the survey (approx 20 minutes)
BRING sufficient copies of the survey, and lots of pens

During the Survey

1. EXPLAIN

- That the survey gives them a chance to say what they think
- That there is no right or wrong answer
- That the survey covers different topics
- That if anything is unclear they can ask a friend or a leader
- Some questions only need to be answered by 11-17 years old, however younger children can have a go at answering them if they wish

2. ASSIST

- Remember that some children may have lower levels of literacy and/or translation needs. Ensure there are enough helpers around to help clarify questions. You can read them out loud and also provide explanations, however make sure the answers come from the children themselves.

3. FUN

- Make the activity fun! Maybe play a warm-up game before starting the survey. It's not a test. ☺

4. FOLLOW-UP

- Let the young people know what the planned next steps are, and when they should expect to receive feedback from the survey
- Let the young people know that follow-up activities (a focus group discussion) will be conducted and some young people will asked to participate in them. (They can tell you after taking the survey if they are interested in participating in the follow-up activities.) If you know the details (when/where) let the young people know. The facilitators should either have a set date so they can announce it, or have them back-to-back.

5 THANKS

- Remind the young people that they are valued members of the church community, and information provided in the survey will help the whole church body grow.

6 COLLECT

- Completed forms should be collected and handed over to the coordinator of the survey activity.

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