

Attracting and Engaging the Next Generation

By Cheryl Sacks

No church can be truly “prayer saturated” without the participation of the younger generations. However, attracting and engaging children, teens, and young adults is one of the biggest challenges facing churches today. Many congregations are facing the dilemma of a shrinking and aging population. What can we as church leaders do to become more effective with young people? How can we do a better job of creating an environment they find inviting and relevant?

My experience in working with churches of every size and denomination leads me to believe this: engaging the emerging generations in dynamic “vertical” worship and Spirit-empowered prayer ignites their passion for the Lord and stirs their spiritual hunger in ways that nothing else can. In fact, history records that most revivals and spiritual awakenings were preceded by a new sound of worship that attracted a new generation of followers.

Many churches around the country are attracting and engaging young people in various ways. Bethel Church in Redding, CA, is at the forefront of a growing—and decidedly youthful—evangelical Christian revival.

Bethel draws young adults in droves, sending students into the city and across the globe, armed with biblical training in Spirit-empowered ministry, hearing God’s voice, and healing prayer (John 14:12). These experiences give them purpose, community, and connection with their friends and with God—all things that surveys commonly reveal are the things young people are looking for in a church.

Hillsong Church similarly attracts large numbers of young people. At Hillsong Phoenix, where my husband and I attend, young adults greet us at the door, lead in worship and prayer, and sometimes bring the sermon. The majority of these young leaders are under the age of 35. In addition to powerful worship and prayer, young people are also attracted to Hillsong because there is a place for them to serve and learn to lead.

Life-transforming Encounters

If you want to engage young people in your church, here are a few other suggestions straight from the mouths of the young people themselves. Millennials and “Gen Z” say they are looking for an encounter with God when they come to church. They don’t want canned sermons, timed worship sets, or prayer formulas. They want to have a life-transforming experience with God! And they want their friends to experience the same.

They want their prayers to change the world. They are a justice generation and want to pray for causes like sex trafficking, homelessness, and poverty.

They want to connect with older leaders who are authentic and genuine; those who will not just preach to them but worship and pray alongside them and show them how to walk out their faith.

How do we create an atmosphere that invites and engages young people? Ultimately it is a work of the Holy Spirit. Take a look at Bethel Church. Each week their intercessors and leaders pray for every child and young person who will be in their service. They ask for hungry hearts and a desire for more of God. They plead with God that each young person will encounter the Lord—and that their hearts will be open and all “walls” separating them from God will break down.

God wants to draw this next generation to Himself. Jesus says that if He is lifted up, He will draw people to Himself (John

12:32). When we relentlessly invite the Holy Spirit to come and change the spiritual atmosphere, when we focus on exalting Christ Jesus, then hearts of hungry young people will be drawn unto Him.

CHERYL SACKS is a bestselling author and inspirational speaker. Her "Saturate" series—*The Prayer Saturated Church*, *Prayer Saturated Kids*, and *The Prayer Saturated Family*—have mentored thousands of individuals and impacted thousands of churches.