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Religion

Where Have All the Young People Gone: Explore Generational Change and How Young People Can Be Reached

R. Channing Johnson
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Statistics support what many churches have been increasingly aware of in recent years: Young people in Generations X and Y have been shying away from established religious teachings and traditions. Naturally, this situation concerns church leaders, as they struggle with declining memberships and aging congregations. Fortunately, R. Channing Johnson's *Where Have All the Young People Gone* offers guidance on how to effectively address the problem.

Johnson, an Episcopal clergyman who has also studied cognitive psychology, worked as a scientist, and taught at a church-related college, sets the youth problem in its historical context. He begins with a thorough explanation of the transformation of the United States from an agrarian society to an industrialized nation. He shows how this transition affected the basic family structure, which evolved from multigenerational households to the baby boomer generation, whose members questioned their parents' worldviews and pursued their goals and dreams in urban centers. Johnson's analysis provides a solid foundation for his suggestions for meeting the challenges churches face in attracting and retaining young people. His use of easily understandable tables and research data reinforces the validity of his analyses.

After firmly establishing the differences between the four generations (including the pre-Boomer "Builders" generation), Johnson provides steps to bridge the two older generations with the two younger ones. Since young people prefer informality over rigid guidelines and like to establish relationships based on experiential sharing, he coaches older readers on how to relay their personal stories of spiritual discovery. Johnson wisely covers some basic Biblical teachings, like repentance and baptism, to remind readers of some of the pivotal points that underscore their stories as they reach out to young people.

The final two chapters offer Johnson's suggestions for uniting all four of the generations

and to develop a strong and growing church. These chapters should be required reading for church leaders of all denominations because they provide a checklist of twenty-six factors attributable to the growth and decline of churches. The author also presents a plan for cross-generational ministry.

Where Have All the Young People Gone is not a dissertation or post-mortem on a major problem area in today's churches. Rather, it is a much-needed rallying cry for churches to implement solutions to the youth problem that are based on love and understanding—two concepts that transcend generational differences.

Jeff Friend