

Continued

No. 9319**(Item for Reflection and Research)****HOW CAN DISCIPLES APPEAL TO YOUNGER ADULTS?****ACCEPTED by the General Assembly****BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

A recent study of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) reveals that one of the greatest challenges facing the church is "the necessity of increasing the rates of involvement in formal education programs...particularly at the senior high school and adult levels." This study discloses that participation in formal Christian education declines with age for most denominations (although Disciples have a higher percentage continuing to attend than any of the other mainline denominations). It is evident, as another recent study of Disciples indicates, that "Disciples have failed to appeal to the current generation of younger adults."²

This failure results in the dual tragedy of:

- (1) Placing thousands of younger adults at spiritual risk. Younger adults who should be recipients of the witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are deprived of or ill-informed about the spiritual, ethical, and intellectual heritage of the Christian faith. Consequently, their lives are barren of God's gift of love and strength which is revealed through Jesus Christ.
- (2) Placing the future of the Disciples church at risk. Younger adults, denied access to an effective encounter with the Gospel in the years of their "...formative development, when they are establishing the foundations of the faith, the values, and the attitudes that will shape their self-identity and influence how they will live their lives," cannot provide the church with informed and committed leadership in the years ahead. A church bereft of enlightened leadership is always at risk.

Concluded

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PROPOSAL FOR REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

It is proposed that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, July 15 - 20, 1993, place before the church the following for reflection and research:

(1) The proposition that an effective ministry by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to young adults [all persons post-high school to age 30, single or married, including college students] is an undebatable necessity for the church to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be relevant to the spiritual needs of this age group, and to prepare intelligently for the church's future.

(2) The challenge for every local congregation, region, and general unit to embark upon a two year research of its opportunities for ministering to young adults. Specifically, every local congregation, region, and general unit is asked to engage in continual reflection on how best to minister to those young adults for whom they bear a spiritual responsibility. Such reflection should include programs of the church in those formative years prior to young adulthood that involve youth in such events as: Sunday church schools, youth groups, summer camps and conferences, mission trips and work camps. Studies have revealed consistently that without spiritually appealing and intellectually satisfying experiences of Christian education and worship in their grade and high school years, young adults are at an extreme disadvantage in developing a mature faith. These manifestations of the church are called to reflect on the adequacy of their present and projected ministries to young adults, including their programs for keeping in touch with and ministering to youth on college campuses, single young adults entering the job market, and married young adults beginning families. These manifestations are called to reflect on how well they are planning for and financing their ministries to young adults, including campus ministries.

(3) The request that the General Board, as well as the Commission on Finance, Office of Research, General Units and Regions, research and reflect upon ways of encouraging and helping all manifestations of the church to position themselves financially, including where necessary raising new funds or redirecting present expenditures, so as to assure that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will become a church that does appeal to younger adults.

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1. *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations - Report for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. (Minneapolis: Search Institute). March, 1990.
 2. Williams, D. Newell. *A Case Study of Mainstream Protestantism*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and St. Louis: Chalice Press). 1991.
 3. *Disciples Strategy for Campus Ministry in the 1990s and Beyond*. Report of the Task Force on Disciples Campus Ministry to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). (St. Louis: The Division of Higher Education). 1991.
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