

## Youth: The Heartbeat of the Church (by Teresa D. Goins)

They can be loud and obnoxious, cantankerous and lazy, and sometimes, just plain bad; but young people are undoubtedly the heart of the church. We all know the annoying nine-year-old that can't keep his feet still during morning worship, the child that has yet to learn how to whisper, and the little girl that walks back and forth between pews to sit with her mom and granny. They are a bother, a nuisance, and a distraction in the house of God. Or are they? This article is dedicated to the rare value of the young person in the Kingdom. Jesus encouraged the children to come to Him (Mark 10:14), so we must make room for them in the faith.

Why are young people important to the church? What can they give to the work of the Lord? Do their contributions outweigh their faults? Let's answer these questions with the following acrostic:

- ◆ **Y** – Kids can be messy, uncouth, and *Yokel-like*. They drop chunks of food under tables in the fellowship hall, leave gum wrappers in pews, and can't remember to put hymnbooks back where they belong. But they are also *Youthful*. Most adults today are worn out, stressed out, and out of energy, but young people keep us going! They bring new vigor and vitality into the church. They may giggle at inappropriate times and wear their hair and clothing differently, but they understand the secret (better than we do) to truly enjoying the life God has given.
- ◆ **O** – Young people can be *Overly Opinionated*. Kids are know-it-alls, and when something doesn't go their way, it is like the 'end of the world' to them. But that is not always a negative thing. Young people are *Outgoing* creatures, some, natural-born leaders. To channel their enthusiasm, give them a job to do. Make them responsible for passing out church programs or greeting each person that comes through the doors of the church on Sunday. Some of the most dedicated workers in the church are young people who feel they have something to offer because an adult asked them to serve.
- ◆ **U** – We must accept young people for who they are because God loved them first. They can appear *Unappreciative* and *Ungrateful*, but they have the *Utmost respect* for anyone that makes a way for them to have fun. Even the most extroverted teenager can seem aloof around his elders; but if you approach him first, he will willingly reciprocate. Church kids may not always say 'thank you' for the pizza party, but you can bet they will brag to their peers about all the cool things the church does on their behalf.
- ◆ **T** – And who hasn't encountered the *Trifling, Temperamental Teenager*? Most kids want attention, and they'll do just about anything to get it. Choose a teenager in your church body and vow to make a difference in his or her life. Teenagers are still *Teachable* and require only one thing: acceptance. When you show genuine interest, that child will become your best friend. The sweetest hug you'll ever receive is from a kid that feels you care about him, unconditionally.

- ◆ **H** – And, yes, young people are *Hardheaded* and *Harebrained*. Many times, they do not listen; they have their own agendas; and they couldn't keep up with their Sunday School books if their lives depended upon it! But if we look at them through our spiritual eyes, we will surely find a bit of *Holiness* there! Deep within, the young person is a precious child of God, and he is simply trying to find his way.

Young people can be all sorts of exasperating; even so, the church is called to love, guide, and protect them. When asked who is the greatest in the Kingdom, Jesus called a child to sit in the midst of them. He said that unless the mature believer becomes like a child, he will not see the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:1-3). It is certainly the responsibility of mature Christians like you and me to nurture and encourage the young people in our churches; but it is also our privilege to learn from them. Kids have not yet been tainted by unbelief and cynicism. They believe God's promises at face value, and 'the faith of a child' believes in miracles. Isn't it time we embrace the phenomenal worth of the youth in our midst? They are our future leaders and when genuinely appreciated, our dynamic and present beat of the heart.

(744 words)