RS-672: TACKLING THE ISSUE: RETAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN MAINLINE DENOMINATIONAL CONGREGATIONS

Adair Lumnis, instructor, and Thomas Chu, consultant

Course Description and Objectives

"Why are there so few youth and young adults now in this congregation? What can we do?" This is a familiar plaint in many mainline Protestant congregations and echoed in their denominations' national offices. Course reading centers on factors considered connected with retaining young people in mainline Christian congregations. However, the course also deals with trends in young people's beliefs and involvement in religious centers, congregations and other organizations across a wider spectrum of denominations and faiths.

Recently many research studies, position papers, articles and books have addressed the questions of how the culture affects young people's religious perspectives, what they seek, where they look, and what might keep them within the congregational fold. On this research front, there are study results, insights, and advice, but no definitive answers.

The course's main objectives are to give students recent research findings, ideas, concepts and possible approaches toward their better understanding, ministering to and with young people. Students will be asked to consider in their responses to weekly lecture questions and in final essay whether various findings about young people's religious attitudes and participation might or might not hold for those in their present congregations or faith community, or in the kind that they hope to develop. Thomas Chu, who has engaged in program development and research for ministries with young people on the regional and national levels of the United Church Christ and the Episcopal Church, will comment on students' responses.

All reading assigned will be available on-line.

Course Requirements

Weekly: Complete the assigned reading; answer one of the questions posed by the instructor or consultant with each lecture, and comment on at least one of the answers written by another student. 40% of final grade*

Mid-term proposal for final essay: 500-1000 words on your proposed subject and approach on a final paper for this course. 25% of final grade

Final essay: About 1500 or more words (15 pages double-spaced) on what you see or propose for the future of young people's involvement in your congregation, teenage or young adult group, denomination, or other faith community - AND WHY (using your scholarly reflections, assigned readings, interviews, insights, and hopes.) 35% of final grade

* Weekly participation on the discussion course site is expected. Missing more than two weekly discussion sessions is likely to lower your final grade by 10%.
Course Starts Monday, January 24, 2011

Weekly reading will usually include a lecture of several pages and assigned reading. The reading assigned in forthcoming weeks is primarily to gain understanding of themes and trends (not historical or statistical details)

WEEK 1: Introduction to Religious Views and Participation of Young People

1. Reading: Only the on-line lecture introduction
2. Students: Introduce themselves to the class, and give some information about their backgrounds, and their particular interests are in this course or for their future careers.

SECTION A. THEORIES & STUDIES ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND RELIGION

WEEK 2: The Effects of Cultural Changes on Young People’s Beliefs


WEEK 3: Religious Involvement of the Boomer, X, Y and Tinkerer “Generations”


WEEK 4: Seeking a Spiritual Identity and Shopping for a Faith Community


WEEK 5: Importance of the Teenage Years in Faith Formation

WEEK 6: Importance of the College Years in Faith Formation


WEEK 7: Young Adults and Congregational Participation


SECTION B. THE PRAXIS OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

WEEK 8: (Review and Future Plan) YOUR Work with Young People and Religion

The lecture this week will give more information about the final essay. No other reading or web posting is required. Instead, students should ensure that their 500+ word proposal for their final essay is emailed to the instructor by the end of the week or very soon thereafter..

WEEK 9: Denominational Guides and Evaluation of Programs for Young People

1. Thomas K. Chu. "Young Adults: Spiritual Typology"
2. Program evaluation studies to skim:
   7. "United Church of Christ: Youth and Young Adult Ministries Program Assessment" (2009)
   8. "Episcopal Youth and Young Adults in Congregations and on Campuses (2008)"
3. Other material will likely be added

WEEK 10: Being a Youth Minister is Risky Business

   a. Chapter 8, "Aligning the Heart: The Emotionally Healthy Youth Worker", pp.107-123.
WEEK 11: Finding a Youth Minister

   b. Chapter 7 "Searching Right: A Primer for Youth Ministry Search Teams", pp. 90-106,
   c. Chapter 10 "Architecting the Constellation: From Camp Counselor to Sustainable Leader", pp. 140-158

WEEK 12: Pulling Together as a Age-Diverse Congregation


Spring Reading Week: April 18-24. (No Seminary classes)

WEEK 13; Summary Lecture and Final Essay

No reading or web posting required of students. Final Essay is due on or before May 2, or at least by May 7, 2011.