

“Be the Best Neighbors”

Back during the pandemic year of 2020, I, along with several adults from the Northern Great Lakes Synod, participated in a webinar from the ELCA on “Growing Young”. It featured presenters from the Fuller Youth Institute and their research which led to a book, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, 2016, Baker Books.

Some people in our synod have already read this book and discussed its implications. I encourage everyone to read this book. The research of this book showed that some of our assumptions about youth ministry are probably wrong. You don’t have to be a big church with a young and cool youth leader to have an effective youth ministry. You don’t even have to have a lot of money to be on the right path to growing younger.

This book is the result of research from a broad range of denominations and churches of many sizes. Six key strategies emerged from the research by Fuller. One of those strategies was:

“Be the Best Neighbors: Loving and Shaping Your World Well.”

Young people need to be guided by the example of adults from our churches to be good neighbors. The world is watching how our churches interact with our “neighbors.” Here are some quotes from that chapter of the book about being the best neighbors:

“Christianity is about the restoration of how it is all supposed to be.”
Isaiah, age 20, p. 234

“We’ve always had a heart to get out of the church building and serve the world—but sometimes we also want to bring positive parts of the world into the church.”
A Pastor, p. 243

“Anyone can show up to this church on their worst day and it will turn your life around.”
Alejandro, Young Adult, p. 244

“No matter where churches growing young fall on the theological spectrum, they place emphasis on essential beliefs that can be shared rather than exaggerating various differences.”
A High School Junior, p. 245

“Churches that want to be the best neighbors seem especially aware of their ministry to, and inclusion, of the poor.”
Authors’ observation, p. 251

“My friends and I need more than the cynicism we’re offered by the world and wider culture. Our church offers more.”
A Young Adult from the Northeast, p. 253

“At our church, everybody has something they care about, and the church doesn’t need to rubber-stamp your passion before you can do it.”
Justin, age 23, p. 255P

Pray for your own church to be the best neighbor, not simply to attract more youth, but because that’s what Jesus wants us to be.

Pastor Jim Duehring
Assistant to the Bishop and Director for
Evangelical Mission