

# VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations

## Don't Confine the Spirit

by Lisa Kimball

Vestries, listen carefully. There is a great deal that you can do to strengthen young adult ministry in the Episcopal Church and it doesn't have to cost you a dime. In fact, spending money and building programs may get in the way.

In trying to address the reality that few "young adults" show up in most of our congregations on Sunday mornings, our church has inadvertently displaced incarnational theology with faulty developmental theories. As an institution we have allowed 20th century social scientists to convince us that age is a predictor of behavior. First we responded with structures to address the particular and predictable needs of children, then youth, and more recently young adults. We have so fully accepted the recent Western creation of "adolescence" as a universal, hormonally-driven stage of development, that we no

longer challenge the peculiar assumptions it makes about the maturity of body, mind or spirit.

### What does it mean to be young?

Adolescence (just like our high schools) graduates "young adults" who by default are those human beings stranded somewhere between puberty and full, independent adulthood. In reality, a quick glance across the globe can convince us that "youth" and "young adulthood" are socially constructed phenomena. The expectations and responsibilities of being fifteen or twenty in middle-class suburban North America are different from those that shape the lived experience of the same ages in sub-Saharan Africa. What does it mean to be "young," or to be an "adult," or to be a "young adult?"

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## A TIME OF NEW FOUND FREEDOM

### Love a Student

Susan Hanson remembers what it was like to be a young transfer student on the campus of Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, not knowing a soul and miles from home. "It was scary, and very lonely."

Those feelings soon dissipated, however, for Hanson's New Testament professor — and the local parish minister — at her junior college called former parishioners living in San Marcos. "Right away, they invited me and several friends to dinner, picked us up at our dorm, put out the good china and introduced us to their church, St. Mark's Episcopal Church — which was right across the street from the university." And her life was changed because of that thoughtful outreach.

Hanson joined the congregation and became active in the campus ministry program at St. Mark's. Some thirty years later the former Southern Baptist is not only still a member of that church, she is now the lay college chaplain at the university.

### Deliberate outreach essential

Such deliberate outreach to young adults is essential, believes the Rev. Michael Hunn, associate rector at St. Alban's Church, Davidson, North Carolina, and chaplain at Davidson College.

"Because college is such an intense time — a time of rapid and constant change — the

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CORNERSTONE  
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*Young adults face a plethora of choices regarding future mates, vocations and school choices. They are also exploring different spiritual paths and determining what makes sense and what doesn't. Here we explore how vestries can reach out to them — whether or not they are in the pew every Sunday.*

*This Issue:  
Young Adults*



# Love a Student

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worst thing the Episcopal Church can do is to ignore college students. If we are not there supporting and encouraging them, the message we are sending them is a loud “The Church doesn’t matter now that you’re in college” — and that’s not true! We need to pay more attention to our young adults in these intense years when very important life decisions are being made.”

## Interactions of value

Connie Sieracki, chair of the Campus Ministry Commission for the Diocese of Northern California, believes that the benefits of such interaction are of immense value. In a diocese that has over 300,000 students on more than twenty-seven state campuses, each parish is encouraged to become “student friendly” and welcome students who live, work or study nearby.

“Students are under greater pressure today, depression is common, and suicide rates have increased dramatically,” says Sieracki. “Knowing they are part of a caring community not only sustains students in rough times; it keeps them in touch with a community to which they can safely turn when needed.”

So churches are asked to treat college students as young adults seeking their own identity, rather than as “youth.” “Students frequently become involved in leadership roles: as Sunday school teachers, choir members, readers, musicians, vestry

members, mission trip organizers, camp counselors, youth leaders. They, in turn, benefit from participating in a supportive Christian community where they find mentors, home cooked meals, friends and a venue for service and growth.”

What about those congregations that are not located near campuses? Sieracki urges them to still be a partner in campus ministry through stipends, scholarships and prayer.

## Prayer and relationships

That prayer piece is essential, says Eugenie Drayton, chaplain to Montana State and director of Christian formation for St. James’, Bozeman — as is having a secure foundation with youth *before* they leave the nest.

“If we are truly a family, then it only makes sense that when one of our members goes out, we will continue to pray that he or she be kept out of harm’s way and return safely. This is especially true of our college students, as they are entering a time of great challenge and new found freedom. “When youth know that they belong *before* they leave for college, they will understand that there is always a place for them in the church, no matter where they may find themselves.”

*Contributing to this article were Susan Hanson, Michael Hunn, Connie Sieracki, and Eugenie Drayton.*

*An easy and fun way to involve youth on Sundays: ask four or five of them to read a Bible lesson together, split into parts. Gather them around the lectern, use scripts, and call it “Radio Gospel Theater.”*

## Keep in touch

- ✚ Contact the campus minister or nearby parish where your student attends.
- ✚ Share that contact information with departing students.
- ✚ Send cards or email notes, especially on birthdays or holidays.
- ✚ Send a care package during exam time.
- ✚ Get to know students and their interests and then follow up when they return to church during the holidays — e.g., if you know the student is interested in medicine and you’re a doctor, go out to lunch.
- ✚ Invite students to speak to the congregation or youth about college life, its challenges and faith development.
- ✚ Offer scholarships.
- ✚ Send the church bulletin or newsletter regularly — or occasionally with cookies.
- ✚ Include students on prayer lists.
- ✚ Provide travel stipends.
- ✚ Publish news about the students in the parish newsletter.
- ✚ Invite students to serve in parish ministry and activities.
- ✚ Explore vocational options with students, including opportunities for ministry.
- ✚ For a more complete list of how to stay in touch, visit our website at [www.EpiscopalFoundation.org](http://www.EpiscopalFoundation.org)

# Welcoming the Young Stranger

by Douglas Fenton

God calls us as Christians to have a ministry of hospitality, especially to the stranger. But what does that mean for vestries as they reach out to young adults — who do not all share a strong connection to the institutional church?

I grew up in a very rural, isolated community. Every time a visitor arrived at someone's home unannounced, it seemed as though the entire contents of the refrigerator were set out on the kitchen table and a pot of tea or coffee was made.

No time was inconvenient. When people arrived it was always the right time to stop and share the news, tell stories and laugh. One such character in our community, Henry, was an old man who lived alone. As children we were fascinated by him. He had a distinct way of speaking, an unusual tone to his voice, and could be heard at a good distance talking loudly to himself, his horses, and his tractor as he chugged down the road. We would always go to meet him and invite him in. We climbed up on his knee and listened to him tell stories of something he had seen or heard.

As we got older we discovered that some or none of it was necessarily true. And we would become aware that Henry was someone for whom personal hygiene was not of ultimate importance. But as children it was never an issue. We were more interested in this person who gave us a great deal of attention and was always delighted to see us. It was as if we'd found our best friend, a unique treasure; we were filled with joy and delight in his company.

## Passionate delight

This kind of hospitality, this passionate delight in the stranger is instructive when it comes to reaching out to young adults in our midst. The Bible contains examples of the same. Abraham provided hospitality when he welcomed the three men into his household and offered water and food and a place to rest. (Genesis 18:1ff) In those three visitors he encountered the Divine. And likewise in the Letter to the Hebrews (13:2ff) we are reminded to offer hospitality freely, for those who appear as strangers among us may indeed be angels unaware.

## Equipping ourselves

How do we equip ourselves then for welcoming a young adult? When we are the greeter, the usher, the person "on the door" on Sunday, where do we get the tools to provide hospitality? We might smile, offer a greeting, and hand out the bulletin and perhaps a small library of books (prayer book, hymnal, etc., etc.). But have we made the person really welcome? She or he might want to ask what they should do with all of these books or this bundle of paper. Does our demeanor encourage them to do so?

And what do we do when the new person resembles a present day Henry? She's dressed unconventionally for this middle-class place, and her tattoos seem to be so obvious. Why does she have that ring through her lip? And he's got pink hair and it's a far brighter shade than the rinse our great-grandmother used. What's that chain hanging down from his pockets?

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*Pathways,  
sponsored by St.  
Michael and All  
Angels, Dallas, will  
hold a ministry  
discernment  
conference for high  
school juniors and  
seniors from April  
15-17, 2005;  
[www.SaintMichael.org](http://www.SaintMichael.org).*



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*Next Issue:  
Elephants in  
the Sanctuary*

# Welcoming the Young Stranger

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Do we react out of fear and stand back wondering what to do? Do we overreact in our effusiveness? Or are we able to greet these two young adults with the same care and thoughtfulness were it a person we had greeted every Sunday? Will they receive a different response from us than, say, the new young couple with the baby and the stroller?

**Young adults do not occupy a particular stereotype or characteristic dress code.**

**The young adult community is as diverse as the entire population.** They are all people: seekers, wanderers, maybe sojourners. They have arrived at this door, for now. They have names. Ask them who they are and remember their names when you invite them to coffee hour, or home for lunch, or when you say goodbye.

Providing hospitality is a delicate balance — a dance between a friendly smile and a greeting whilst offering a respectable space. What's most important for us all is the genuine care with which a welcome is extended. Integrity is essential.

How do we welcome both angel and mortal, complete with piercings and tattoos or Armani and Louis Vuitton? Graciously.

*The Rev. G. Douglas Fenton is the staff officer for Young Adult and Higher Education Ministries in the Ministries with Young People Cluster at the Episcopal Church Center, New York. He has worked as a priest in the inner city of Vancouver, Canada, a university chaplain in Manitoba, and a parish priest in the Diocese of Keewatin, Canada.*



*Learn more about your congregation, including membership trends, attendance, and giving by going to the Episcopal Church's website [www.EpiscopalChurch.org](http://www.EpiscopalChurch.org).*

*Click "Leadership Resources," click "Congregational Development and Support Resources," then click "Study Your Congregation and Community." You may also view a demographic report for the zip code in which your church is located.*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

We've interviewed a lot of people for this issue: campus ministers, seminarians, parish priests, and church leaders. But what about young adults as churchgoers — what do they look for?

Uchenna Ukaegbu, a graduate student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, looks for a diverse and lively congregation that offers something more than just worship. "I like a lot of dialogue, a lot of people sharing ideas, not just a place where people come and sit and the priest talks."

Gayle Kenney, of Houston's Rice University, agrees. "I like an interesting liturgy, but even more important is an inclusive congregation with a warm feeling, including clergy who are interested in the congregation."

So far, so good. It would appear that young adults look for the things the rest of us do: vitality, inclusivity, warmth, familiarity. But about the ones who don't come?

For Houston resident Amanda Harris, a nutritionist and graduate student, the company wasn't right in church. She and her husband joined a local church and sung in the choir, but the other twenty-somethings turned out to be "geeks," people they just felt uncomfortable being around.

And then there are ever-changing work schedules and badly needed sleep. Cody Farley, of Long Lake, Minnesota, juggles two coaching jobs and school as he trains to be a firefighter. "I love going to church," he says. "I always enjoy it when I can get myself to go." But attendance is sparser than he would like, often competing with both work and school.

And maybe that's why we feel the angst among the twenty-somethings. It's an anxiety-producing time of life. We know. We've been there ourselves.

So take a minute. Break the comfortable conversation you are in and say hello to that young person. And with luck and God's grace, another Episcopalian may be doing the same thing for your child in another church, not so far away.

— Lindsay Hardin Freeman



# VESTRIES AND SEMINARY EDUCATION

## Providing for the Providers

by Lindsay Hardin Freeman

While not exactly a secret, it is something most Episcopalians don't know: the Episcopal Church is the only mainline denomination that provides no central, church wide support for seminary education.

And that education does not come cheap. While some seminaries offer better financial aid than others, a survey among the eleven accredited Episcopal seminaries shows that a three-year M.Div degree — the degree traditionally needed for ordination to the priesthood — costs, on average, about \$80,000.

"No doubt about it, seminary education is expensive," says John Mitman, executive director for the Society for the Increase of the Ministry (SIM), a national organization that has offered scholarships to ministerial candidates since 1857. "But the Episcopal Church has always been known for its intellectual rigor and discipline. The benefits of a seminary degree and living in community are immeasurable — both for the students and for the wider church."

### Potentially staggering debt

Given the current push in the Episcopal Church to recruit young adults for careers in the ordained ministry (in 2003, the average age at ordination was forty-seven and judged by many to be too high), one factor stands out: young adults often lack the money to pay for seminary and are even in debt *before* they start.

Contributing to that reality is that the average undergraduate loan debt today tops \$27,000. And given that many seminary students will graduate owing an additional tens of thousands more for their graduate degree, the debt load can be staggering — especially with modest clergy salaries. Young seminarians interviewed for this article had debts of between \$30,000 and \$80,000, even though they were receiving financial aid from several sources.

Perhaps that is why some choose to wait until later in life: in the last twenty months, those over fifty-five account for the biggest group ordained to the priesthood. But while

those clergy may owe less money, they have fewer years to serve the church.

### Two misconceptions

Two misconceptions continue in the wider church, says Mitman. "The first is that someone pays for all of this. And the second is that once God has called, God will provide. Well, God's providers are sitting in the pews; there's not some sort of celestial bank account on which someone easily draws."

So what can vestries do to encourage those who sit in the pews to provide for the providers? Traditionally, congregations have been asked to give 1% of their income to the seminary of their choice. But George Fowlkes, chair of the Board of Trustees at the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and former president of the Episcopal Church Foundation, sees a range of possibilities.

"Who's to say a vestry can't adopt a seminarian and upon graduation, take over the debt load so he or she can afford to work in the inner city or on a reservation? Or hire a person fresh out of seminary and pay off his or her debt in return for a five-year commitment? Or promise someone from your diocese that upon graduation, if you've done a good job, we'll pay off your debt?"

John Mitman suggests that parishes be open and candid about finances, both when sponsoring someone for ordination and when hiring someone with a seminary degree. One option he suggests is for parishes to write a monthly check directly to the loan agency as part of a non-taxable benefits package to help pay down the *principal* of the loan, thus making a real impact.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Mark Anschutz, rector of St. Michael and All Angels in Dallas, and founder of the Pathways program, puts it best.

"When engaged in theological education, we are only one generation from extinction. We really do depend on clergy who are well formed and biblically astute; and if we don't raise up excellent people, we are just contributing to our general demise. We need to do far more to ensure that people are not hampered by constant worries about monetary issues."



*Recognizing the emerging crisis in seminarian indebtedness, the Episcopal Church Foundation and the Society for the Increase of the Ministry have been testing, over the past three years, the idea of mounting a major capital fund drive to raise an endowment sufficient to insure that seminarians will not have to add to their debt load while at seminary. Titled "The Fund for Future Leaders," it is hoped that such a campaign will begin in 2005.*

<sup>1</sup>A Three Phase, Comprehensive Plan to Help Limit, Manage and Help Ordinands Successfully Repay Accumulated Debt, available from the Society for the Increase of the Ministry, 860-233-1732 or simministry@earthlink.net

Editor's note: Figures for this issue were compiled from statistics provided by the Church Pension Group and the Office for Ministry Development.



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# Don't Confine the Spirit

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Right here in the United States, there are eighteen year old married parents serving in the military, nineteen year old high school seniors, twenty year old city council members, twenty-one year old college juniors, twenty-two year old bakers, twenty-three year old drop-outs, twenty-four year old inventors, twenty-five year old singles, twenty-six year old uncles, twenty-seven year old doctors, twenty-eight year old musicians, even twenty-nine year old grandmothers, and...thirty-two year old children living in their parents' basements. They are all "young adults." They are all human beings on a life journey.

As Christians, we believe they are made in God's image, and we can see that they are gloriously diverse. The conditions of their lives, and the choices they make create ever-changing composites that resist simplistic categories. Although they may not interact with the institutional church as much as we would like, our incarnational theology insists that God-with-us is with them too, whether or not they recognize and name it.

#### Creative, competent human beings

When the Church is able to see beyond the demographic boxes and attendance patterns that have defined young adults, to see them as creative, competent human beings and to notice how God is actually moving in their lives, extraordinary ministry begins. It is ministry rooted in the baptismal covenant. It is mutual. Young adults are encouraged to share their gifts with the Church as they experience the personal support and spiritual nurture of our congregations.

#### What can a vestry do to achieve this?

✚ **Start close to home.** Track down the "young adults" who are active in your congregation, and those who grew up in your congregation but may no longer be active. Do not assume that a young adult who no longer attends church has found a new Christian community, or has lost all interest in things spiritual. It is more likely that young adults are struggling to balance the demands of their lives, and recognize a deep yearning for authentic Christian community. Many stay away from church for practical reasons — work

schedule conflicts, transportation, fatigue. Some find our practices dull, irrelevant or hypocritical, but few have rejected God. Listen to their stories. What is holy? What is broken? What would they welcome from the Church? Consider young adults living in the world as missionaries or deacons of your congregation. Love them. Pray for them. Send them care packages. Honor their role as translators and bridge-builders between the institution and the wider community.

✚ **Build on your strengths.** Consider young adult ministry not as a program, but as a pastoral mandate. Rather than isolate young adults, look for opportunities to build relationships across the generations and around common interests. Who in your congregation is best suited to reach out to particular young adults? How might you match individuals who share a common career or vocational interest? How might a young adult's technological skills help an elder in the congregation? What successful event or program could be moved to a time or location that would better suit young adults?

✚ **Trust the unconditional love of God.** There is more than enough love to go around. The goal is not to make young adults conform to the image of older adults, but rather to celebrate the gifts of all ages as full members of the Body of Christ. Let's not make "membership" so exclusive that we confine the Spirit to two antiseptic hours on Sunday morning. Make room for doubt, honor diversity, and invite commitment. Be sure there are snacks!

Young adults are just as human as the rest of us. Young adult ministry will thrive when "they" discover that "we" truly live as if we believe what Jesus taught: that we are worthy, and forgiven by God, regardless of our age.

*Lisa Kimball is a Ph.D. candidate and instructor at the University of Minnesota. She is the national 2005 Episcopal Youth Event (EYE) Coordinator, and regularly works with congregations and dioceses to invigorate ministries focused on youth and young adults.*