

# GROWING TOGETHER

BY ALINA VAN RENSBURG

'Growing Together' is about helping local churches pass on spiritual legacy from one generation to the next. It's a cultural shift that moves youth and young adult ministry from the periphery to the heart of the local church where everyone can thrive. It is a year-long learning journey for church leadership teams that will help all generations grow stronger together.

## ***What does our Church look like right now?***

Before we talk about what we want to see happen and how to get there, we need to face the confronting reality of what is happening in our surrounding culture and Church right now.

As we look around society today, the 'religious nones' are on the rise. By this, I mean those people who identify themselves as either atheist, agnostic, or simply nothing - they do not identify with religion.

***In the 2019 Australian Generation Z Report, it revealed that 52% of Australian Teens aged 13 to 18 are religious nones. The 2017 Faith and Belief in Australia Study revealed that 36% of our current Generation Y--that's my generation--18-38 year olds identify themselves as 'nones'.***

This means that our co-workers, the people we study or work out with, our neighbours, that girl who serves us at Coles - they do not know who Jesus is. We are surrounded by people who have no idea about God. People who are desperate for hope, identity and purpose.

And yet there seems to be a disconnect between what happens inside our Church walls and our current culture. The Fuller Youth Institute puts it like this:

## ***The Church is calibrated for a world that no longer exists.***

Kayle de Waal, the Head of Theology at Avondale College puts it like this:

*We are living in one of the fastest periods of change in human history and the local Adventist Church is in danger of becoming irrelevant, even out-dated. The local church is at the cross roads and needs to Biblically reinvent itself to stay relevant in a rapidly changing world.*

According to 'The Barna Group', a Christian Research Organisation, over 60% of young adults who attended church in their teens will ultimately become spiritually disengaged at some point during their twenties. In other words, 1 in 2 young people who grow up in the Church will drift by the time they graduate from high school.

***Roughly 70% of Australian young people who attend Church drop out before they are 30 years old.***

Pres. John Freedman from the North American Division observes:

We have a generational crisis that is not adequately being addressed. We are failing to adequately incorporate young adults into church ministry and mission. John Freedman, NPU President, July 27, 2017

Our current reality is confronting. It brings many of us to tears. But in the midst of this crisis, I believe that God is in the midst of bringing about a renewal.

I believe that the Spirit WILL and already is, working through some very simple, practical, Biblical principles, that will transform our Church and enable this Bride to thrive. The Fuller Youth Institute explains them in their latest research project, 'Growing Young.'

In the book, "Good to Great", Jim Collins studied great companies, to discern principles of best practice. In a similar way, the Fuller Youth Institute decided to study great churches, that were thriving and growing their church through younger generations, and they recorded their findings in the book 'Growing Young.'

Fuller uses the term 'Growing Young' to describe Churches that aren't shrinking and ageing, but are growing in involving and retaining young people (ages 15-29), which brings overall vitality to the whole Church.

1. **Keychain Leadership** - Empower others - especially young people instead of centralising authority
2. **Empathise with young people** - Step into the shoes of others instead of judging or criticising
3. **Taking Jesus' Message Seriously** - Welcome young people into a Jesus-centred way of life
4. **Fuelling a Warm Community** - Cultivate warm relationships and intergenerational friendships
5. **Prioritise Young Adults (& Families) Everywhere** - Look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource and involve young people in all facets of the Church
6. **Be the Best Neighbours** - Engage in the community as a Church and enable young people to neighbour well locally and globally.

These 6 principles are so simple, and yet they lead us to ask ourselves some thought-provoking questions. I believe that our responses to these questions, will provide a framework for moving our Church forward, and embarking on a journey of 'Growing Together.' ■