

Editorial

Irma Fast Dueck and Peter J. H. Epp

When I (Peter) advertised the defense of my thesis, “It’s Like Dating Around: Mennonite Young Adults, Baptism, and the Church,” some of my thirty-something friends groaned. “Are we still talking about young adults and the church?” The best encouragement a pastor friend could muster was: “Maybe you’ll at least say something new about it.”

To be sure, in church circles the question, Where are all of our young adults? has almost become cliché. In many ways, I share my friends’ fatigue. It’s been more than a decade since I started talking and writing for older Mennonites about all my friends who weren’t in church. I talked for

so long about young adults that eventually I wasn’t one anymore.

Along the way, I’ve watched us keep circling back to the same kinds of solutions. Maybe they’ll come if we have a worship band. Maybe they’ll come if we use more liturgy. Maybe they’ll come if we have more young adult programming. Maybe they’ll come if we stop infantilizing them. Maybe they’ll come if we stop pressuring them. Maybe they’ll come if we give them more responsibility.

Maybe they’ll come if we make sure that each young person is spoken to by at least five older adults every Sunday morning.

Sometimes our approaches have been based on hunches. Sometimes they’ve been based on anecdotal evidence. And sometimes they’ve been based on sociological research. Usually, they’ve been clunky answers to the question, What’s the thing we need to do to keep our young adults?

As we’ve tired of mostly empty solutions, some have suggested that it’s time to just let go of the question. Maybe we shouldn’t be so worried about our numbers. Maybe they’ll come back when they have their own kids. Maybe there’s nothing we can do.

This issue has been driven by our belief that when it comes to young adults, there is much we can do. But it has also been driven by our belief



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that we're called to do far more than simply get them to come to church. Primarily, this issue has been driven by our belief that our young adults are our theological mirrors and the canaries in our ecclesial coal mines. Our young adults reflect back to us the theologies we embodied and articulated for them. Not the theologies we think we offered them but the theologies we actually offered them. They also warn us about the theological and ecclesial places that are toxic, and they sing to us about the places that sustain life. To be sure, our young adults do not have all our answers—in fact, my most reflective research subjects longed for a church that stopped



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trying to blindly accommodate their desires—but our young adults can ask and tell us much about what it means to be the church.

First, however, we need to look and listen, and we invite you to do both in these pages.

This issue includes some articles by young adults and other articles about young adults. Gil Dueck, Peter Epp, and Anika Reynar explore issues connected to understanding young adulthood in

our current cultural context and examining their relationships with the church. David Balzer, Jonathan Gingerich, Jessica Smucker, and Irma Fast Dueck open up issues of technology, anxiety, divorce, and cohabitation which are often connected to, but not limited to, young adulthood. Jessica Reesor Rempel, Isaiah Friesen, Andy Brubacher Kaethler, and Liz Weber write on themes connected to ministry and young adulthood. Meghan Larissa Good closes the issue with a sermon based on Acts 2, unleashing a rich incarnational understanding of the church. You will find this issue seasoned with single-page essays written by young adults in answer to the question, *Why am I part of the church?* or conversely, *Why I am not part of the church?* While we realize that these articles raise issues connected to young adulthood, we also recognize that many of the concerns raised by young adults are not limited to young adults.

We are grateful to all those who contributed to these pages, many of whom have never written for *Vision* before, or even heard of this journal. Thank you for letting your voices be heard here. Thank you for letting us look and listen.