

Young Adult Ministry Analysis: Report to the 39th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress

Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries was charged by the 38th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress in Nashville, TN, to research the trends and demographics of young adult ministry. This was done in conjunction with the Archdiocese Youth and Young Adult Ministry Team (Metropolis Youth Directors), which has spent the last two years in this endeavor. Focus groups with young adults were held throughout the Archdiocese in various Metropolises, as well as an online survey, which was taken by over 1,500 young adults.

In this Young Adult Ministry Analysis, you will find a brief synopsis of both the survey results and focus groups. This research cannot be viewed as an end all in understanding young adults today, but rather, as a stepping-stone to better understand their needs.

Young Adults Speak on the Church:

“I want to be heard and understood. To be treated with an open, modern mind and heart.”

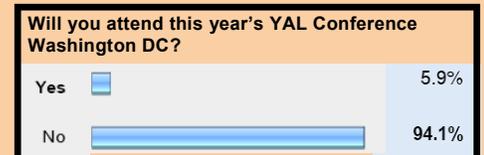
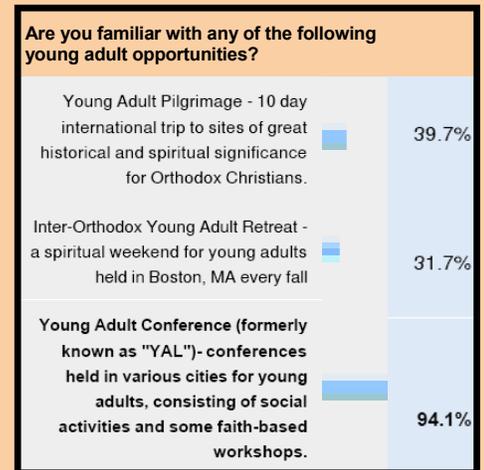
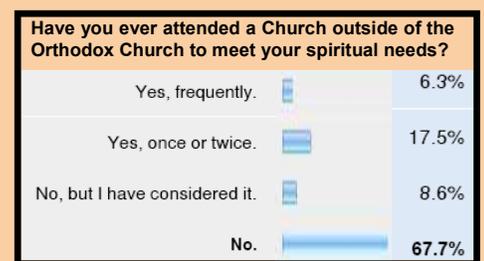
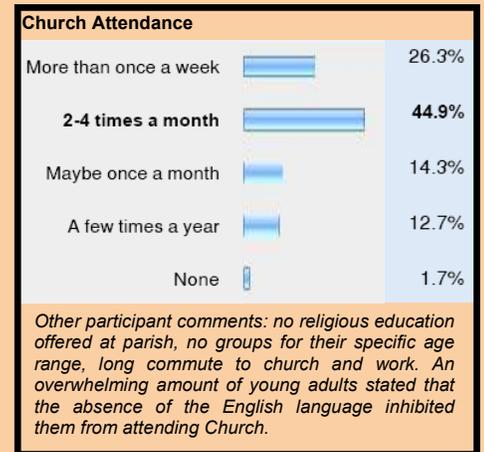
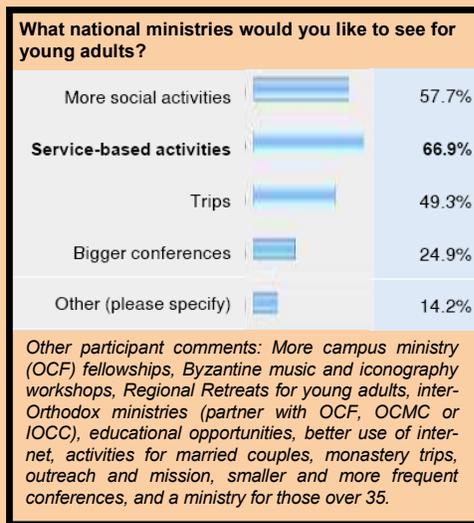
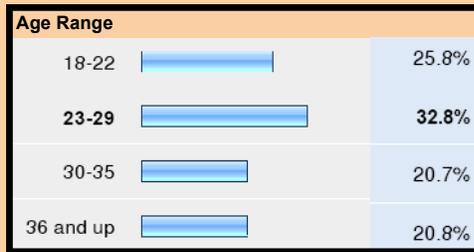
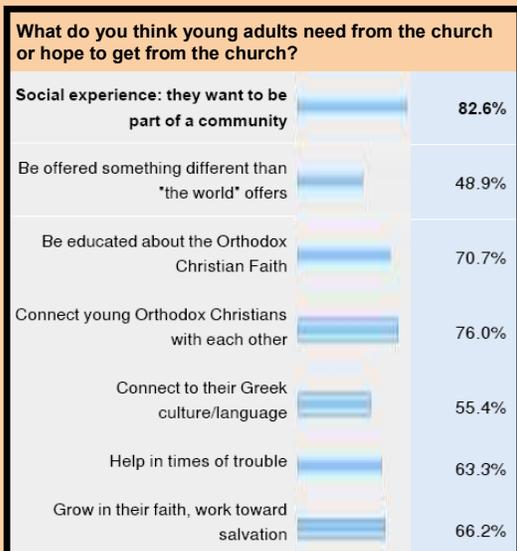
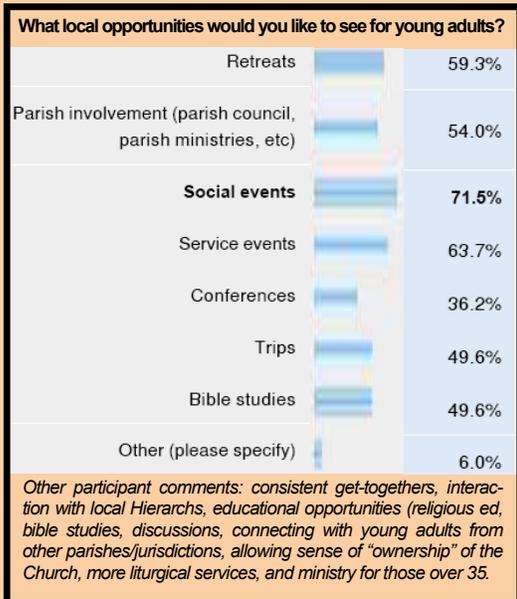
“A big reason why I am so involved in my parish is because there were people who invited me to help on various community events.”

“I want a place of community, where we can be comfortable in our own skin as we help one another find salvation.”



Young Adult Survey

The young adult survey was conducted over a period of 2 months and recorded over 1,500 young adults from across the country. The survey set out to learn more about the needs of young adults of today's world, as well as better understand their interest in the national and local church. The full survey will be available online this fall. Below are abridged results of the findings.



Young Adult Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted in four Metropolises of the Archdiocese (Chicago, Denver, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco) in order to allow young adults to express their voice in regard to the church. All demographics of young adults were gathered: varying age groups (18-35 *year olds*), life circumstances (*student, married, single, divorced, etc.*) and involvement in the Church (*very active, active and lapsed in attendance*). Each focus group consisted of 10 to 25 participants and took place either at a metropolis, church hall, or other venue. Young adults were asked to be candid and open, in the spirit of love for the Church and its teachings. Below is a synopsis of the findings:

Community

The most resounding point seems to be that young adults are looking for community, the ability to connect with other young adults with the same Faith and background. They are isolated in school and work from their Orthodox peers, and the church is the only place to join with other Orthodox Christians. They are seeking to “own their own faith,” not their “parents faith.” There is a reassurance when being around others of like mind, and they yearn for community. However, many times they feel “unwanted” and “not welcome” in Church.

Education

Many young adults feel that now they are ready to take their Faith to the next level – through bible study, catechism, mentoring, etc. They feel that on a local level there is a lack of religious education, discussion on current social issues, and inter-Orthodox cooperation (*other young adult ministries*).

Relevance in the Church

Young adults voiced their concern over their role in the Church today. They have the desire to be active in their parish, but feel that the “older generation” is not willing to give them an opportunity for leadership. Therefore, they question their importance within the community. Some feel that no one is reaching out to them – and in their own words, “someone reaching out makes a big difference.”

Liturgical Services

Young adults want to actively participate in the divine services, and when they are given this opportunity, they usually do. When they come to services and the majority is in Greek, they find it difficult to participate because there is no context for understanding the services.

National Conference

Young adults in general would like to see more retreats, conferences, etc. However, they want to see these take place on a local or regional level. They do not want to spend the money to travel across the country for a conference or retreat, but would rather attend a small, local, intimate gathering. Some young adults like the “big” conference because they have the opportunity to meet other people from throughout the country. The local parish level is where the “connection” should begin – most young adults agree that conferences and events are not enough, they are seeking more.

Web Presence

Most young adults feel the need for a strong presence from the Archdiocese on the Internet. They want a place not to substitute the relationship with their parish priest/spiritual father, but to find specific answers about their faith. They would like to see a web site with a practical application of faith to young adult life, book clubs, culture and social issues. This web-site should be updated and evolving, with current news feeds about current issues and topics, links to other web-sites (*music, resources, etc.*), as well as blogs and the Orthodox Christian response to major current events and issues. Young adults feel that there is a lack of publicity and promotion for young adult ministry and that more should be emphasized on the Internet. “No one knows what is available after GOYA.”

Outside Statistics

In both American Orthodoxy as well as other Christian denominations, studies have shown a steady decline in young adult attendance in church, fellowships, and other parish activities. According to a 2006 study of young adults by the Barna Research Group, “*six out of 10 teens involved in a church will probably not continue their spiritual commitment into early adulthood.*” Likewise, in a 2006 and a more recent 2008 study of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute (PAOI) in Berkeley, CA, the number one concern for parish priests and lay people was “*youth and young adults leaving the Church.*”

Parish Young Adult Ministries

An informal poll of Metropolis Youth Directors indicated that there were only 48 parishes in the Archdiocese with an active young adult ministry. This means that less than 10% (9.2%) of our parishes have an active ministry. These numbers suggest a series obstacle in ministering to our young adults.

Moving Forward

Following the Clergy-Laity Congress in Washington, DC, our Department will convene a Young Adult Ministry Task Force to analyze this research and discuss the vital role of young adults in the life of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Clergy and lay leadership active in young adult ministry will discuss opportunities and methods for reaching out to this age group, as well as look at various models of ministry toward integrating young adults into the overall life of the Church. Following this, a recommendation for future ministry will be given to His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America and the Holy Eparchial Synod.

Concluding Remarks

It is our task to use this pertinent information, to listen to our young adults with open hearts and minds, and to extend a hand to welcome this rapidly declining demographic in our church. While young adults are not fully participating in the life of the church, our survey indicates that many of them would like to be involved. Fortunately, most of them have not yet gone elsewhere to meet their spiritual needs. We are at a crucial time in regard to young adult ministry — we must be ready and willing to offer them what is necessary to become active sacramental members of Christ’s living Church. Now is the time!



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