

How NOT to Attract Young People

Over at StandFirm, they linked to this article from the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona about “How to Get More Young People in Church.” This is the liberal TEC diocese that I found so attractive that for the six months I lived in Arizona about five years ago, I worshiped in a Lutheran church. (But, of course, I’m not a young person.) Anyway, the article prompted me to think about how one might go about *not* attracting young people, and it occurred to me that where I teach has figured that one out just about right.

How NOT to attract young people:

1. Build a seminary in a rundown former steel town outside Pittsburgh. This will discourage the hip and trendy.
2. Design a curriculum that is centered around biblical theology and creedal orthodoxy. This will discourage the progressive and relevant.
3. Require every faculty member and incoming seminarian to sign a doctrinal statement affirming the essentials of creedal orthodoxy. Make sure the statement is detailed enough that it is impossible to fudge. This will discourage the open-minded.
4. Require every incoming seminarian to learn the basics of biblical Hebrew and Greek their very first semester. This will discourage those who hate hard work.
5. Besides requiring courses that teach the Bible in English, require every seminarian to take at least one advanced exegesis course on either an Old Testament or New Testament book in the original Hebrew or Greek. This will discourage those who have more important things to do with their time.

6. Require that all students take courses in the basics of systematic theology and church history where they actually read people like Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Barth rather than just reading about them. This will discourage those who would not rather read "dead white men."

7. Require that all students take a course in Anglican theology where they actually have to read people like Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, Richard Hooker, the Caroline Divines, Joseph Butler, John and Charles Wesley, Charles Simeon, the Oxford Movement, and modern Anglicans, rather than just reading about them. More "dead white men."

8. Require that students take mandatory courses in missions and evangelism, and that every student take a mandatory mission trip outside the United States. (One is right now spending her Thanksgiving holiday not eating turkey, but in Turkey.) This will discourage everyone.

9. Require that students attend chapel (Morning or Evening Prayer) on those days that they are on campus, and attend Eucharist at the weekly campus service. This will discourage the easily bored.

10. Require that students lead Morning and Evening Prayer and preach in chapel. This will discourage those who would rather sleep in.

11. Require that students attend weekly advisee groups where students meet with and pray with fellow students and faculty. This will discourage those who would prefer to avoid all that intimacy—like yours truly.

12. Require that students contribute mandatory work hours doing things like helping out in the kitchen. This will discourage those who already have enough work to do.

13. Require that students take a course in Mentored Ministry where they learn how to pastor by working under the

supervision of a local priest or pastor. This will discourage those who already know what the church needs.

14. Require that every few years the entire seminary (faculty and students) attend a major mission conference where people are encouraged to think about becoming overseas missionaries, and some end up doing so. This will discourage those who have no desire to go to dirty poor far away places where people don't speak American English.

15. Regularly admit students from overseas so that students daily interact with other students from places like Uganda, Nigeria, the Sudan, Egypt, Indonesia, and Brazil. This will discourage those who think that life begins and ends at the border.

16. Hire a Dean/President who has pictures of Luther, Calvin, and Barth on his office wall. This will discourage Anglo-Catholics.

17. Hire other faculty who have icons on their walls. This will discourage Evangelicals.

18. Hire at least one faculty member who decorates his office with African art that he has picked up on his regular teaching trips to Africa. This will discourage those who are afraid he might suggest they take a trip to Africa.

19. Make sure that the local bishop (who serves on the Board) is deposed from his ministry by the Presiding Bishop of TEC, and he then goes on to become the Archbishop of a new Anglican church. This is guaranteed to offend a lot of people.

20. Have other board members who are Communion Partner bishops, including one whose diocese is currently being threatened by TEC, and have other board members and regular guests who are bishops or Primate in those parts of the Anglican communion that "just don't get it." This is guaranteed to offend even more people.

21. Encourage students to take courses in Church Planting because it is quite unlikely that they will be hired as clergy in most dioceses in the Episcopal Church, and the Dioceses of new Anglican movements like the ACNA have not been established long enough to actually have existing churches in the places they will likely be pastors. This will drive away those who want a certain future.

22. Be amazed when the largest incoming class in recent history overwhelms the campus in fall 2010, and the majority are under 30 years old.

Perhaps I should add one last point about HOW TO attract young people to your church. Use contemporary worship with a praise band! Young people just love churches where aging boomers play electric guitars and sing music with insipid lyrics that sound something like Karen Carpenter might have written if she had a crush on Jesus instead of her imaginary boyfriend.

Young people hate hymns. They hate chant. They hate incense and solemn liturgy.