

Good morning, everyone!

I'd like to preface this by saying that while I can't speak on behalf of all my peers, I'm here to offer one young adult perspective among a diverse demographic.

I often hear people discussing ways to make church more exciting or appealing to youth. How do we keep teenagers engaged, and how do we keep recent Sunday School grads interested in our services? I don't think it's a big mystery. In many ways, I think we can look at the roots of our Movement to see what attracted people in the first place. We can "dress up" our services all we want – maybe in the form of new music, more fellowship gatherings, more discussion groups. And these might be creative and engaging initiatives. But wouldn't you agree that the same reason we all stay with church could apply to our youth? No matter how fun it is, or how social it is, most of us would probably lose interest if we weren't experiencing *healing*. What sets us apart, what makes our denomination unique and precious, is the moral, physical, and emotional healing we have come to rely on in our daily practice.

I think it's important to remember there's not some magic answer for providing **youth** with an exciting, dynamic church --- don't we **all** want a church that's alive? I think we all want to see a tangible expression of an inviting atmosphere, and this makes the task a lot less intimidating. Rather than rack our brains for something that will speak to those youth, we're simply yielding to an already complete expression of church, one that can't be anything other than exciting, fresh, and incredible. We're healing in this church! There's nothing boring about that! It's already radical and awesome! Are **we** bored and disinterested by healing? No! Then there's no reason why young people would find our church's mission unappealing. A key part of unifying our Movement is unifying our own branch churches – building connections between our Sunday School and church members. When people of all ages see each other enjoying church, being inspired by church, and growing in church, the fellowship and camaraderie takes care of itself. I've noticed that when a young person gets excited about healing, it tends to make the older church members excited. When I think about the adults who have inspired me, they were the ones who were really "on fire", who had so much conviction, really excited about healing. If we want youth to be excited, we need to demonstrate excitement, too! It's a reciprocal camaraderie where the whole church body feeds off the collective energy. It's a group effort. The church members bless the Sunday School, and the Sunday School blesses the church. The entire group is strengthened, uplifted, and cherished.

I currently teach a 4 and 5 year old Sunday School class. We *know* the youngest children in our Sunday School are receptive to the most simple healing truths we teach them. I would say the same is true for our teenagers and young adults. We **know** the same is true for our adult members – it's why we're all here. We never grow out of our hunger and thirst for Truth.

Let's shed any notions that church isn't dynamic enough, or exciting enough for teens and young adults. But let's also be willing to do our part to ensure **we** see church as alive, thriving, progressing, and a place where healing happens.

If we expect our youth membership to grow, we need to think about the message we're sending in the way **we live our lives**. We're one movement, not a group of disengaged youth over here and dedicated long-timers over there. There's one real attraction to church – we're all attracted to Love, capital L. Our job is to lead by example, really **live out** church in the way that we want to see it expressed. Church Alive requires *activity*.

In reflecting on my church experience, I found myself considering a series of humbling questions. As we prepare for this afternoon's breakout sessions, I thought I'd pose them here, but this time I've changed the "I" to a collective "we".

What message do we send?

Do **we** invite our friends to church services? Do we invite friends to lectures? Do we feel comfortable talking to others about Christian Science?

In our families, do we make church a priority – or is Sunday morning a time for homework, soccer games, and sleeping in?

Are we members of the Mother Church and do we express our appreciation for its activities? Are we active branch church members? Do we volunteer for committees, and embrace the idea of teaching in our Sunday Schools? What better way to show our youth we really care than engaging in dialogue with them? Are we excited or afraid at the thought of serving in the children's room? Do we make sure our business meetings are approachable, and relevant to young adults? Do we give *just as much thought* to our youth outreach and Sunday School activities as to our building renovations, or floral displays? Is youth activity a prominent part of our budget? Do we regularly ask for input from our Sunday School students? How do *they* want the Sunday School to look, or feel? There are simple, practical steps we can take to make Sunday School and church more welcoming to youth.

Are we open to allowing our youth to participate in church? When I was in university, I attended a branch church that really embraced its youth. When my college-age friends and I graduated Sunday School, we were automatically welcomed into membership. Our Sunday School teacher could vouch for our commitment to Christian Science and was sure we had much to contribute, so we didn't need to go through the formal application process. Within my first couple years as a branch church member, I was able to teach Sunday School, serve on the lecture committee, and serve as a member of the Board. We also held two summits – a TMC Youth Summit and then a Church Alive Summit. The membership just rallied around their youth, and we felt that. It was so natural to join and serve church.

Technology provides us with incredible opportunities to feel more connected to the world around us – we have real time access to news and current events. Most youth I talk to feel a responsibility to engage in their local and global communities, and they express a desire to be a force for change. I look forward to exploring ways we can turn our awareness into outreach to pray for and bless the world. It's a shift in thought from "what can church do for me?" to "what can we as a church be offering to the world?"

I'm a young adult who has stuck with Christian Science, and not merely as the result of any fun, flashy activities of church and its related programs, but because I've seen its practicality. There are definitely days where I empathize with friends who have grown tired of long business meetings or hearing overly formal desk announcements. It can be frustrating, disheartening to see unnecessary tradition, close mindedness, or judgment toward others try to creep into a Movement that is really all about freshness, new inspiration, and growth. Participation in DiscoveryBound programs, CS summer camps, and deep, inspiring conversations with my CS friends have certainly contributed to my journey. But ultimately it's the healings I have that prove to me **this** is something special, something worth working for, and something worth sticking with. When you come home from camp and you're no longer surrounded by CS friends, you'd better know how to fend for yourself and put into practice what you've been learning. At the end of the day, each of us needs to **live church** if we want to see a church that's alive for all our members – children, young adults, and adults. I think we agree it should be normal to see newcomers at our services every week – not an exception to the rule. It's natural to have daily newcomers in our Reading Rooms. Natural to share Science and Health with "sincere seekers of Truth". And I think whatever becomes natural and real to us in our church will naturally become a reality for our youth.

- Alison Osborne, May 4, 2013