

Religious Attitudes and Commitment Among 1.5 and 2nd Generation Asian-Canadian Protestant Young Adults

Yearning For “Connectedness”: Voices of Young Adults

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Since 1990s we often hear the word “Silent Exodus”, which describes the incessant departure of Asian-American youths from their ethnic home churches across North America. Leaders of congregations in Asian Canadian Churches have expressed concern over the number of young adults who, although highly committed to the church throughout their secondary school years, nonetheless have tended to leave the church once they graduated from high school. This research was born out of anecdotal concern for religious attrition among 1.5- and second-generation Asian-Canadian Christian young adults.

This study examined religious loyalty among 1.5 and second generation Asian-Canadian Protestant young adults with the aim of determining how and why religious commitment and attitudes might change when such young people leave high school. The research surveyed 300 University students in Ontario, Canada – 150 of Korean, 115 of Chinese, and 35 of Taiwanese descent – ages 18 to 25, who identify as Protestant to better understand their religious attitudes and commitment to their churches. The survey asked 74 questions – both multiple choice and descriptive – to gather demographic information and also find out more about these students’ church experiences while they were in high school, their current church and spiritual life, their parents’ church life, as well as gauge their ideas and expectations about the church and youth ministry.

In examining Asian-Canadian youth with varying degrees of church involvement, this research seeks to address the question, “Can ‘Silent Exodus’ be verified?” This research also attempts to demystify relevant religious attitudes, beliefs and commitment in relation to their current involvement in the church: Have they left the church? If so, what is the primary reason behind their departure? Are they active in the church now? Which factor(s) motivate their reasons for staying or leaving the church? The presentation will address these questions and discuss how parents’ church activities are correlated to children’s church participation, how youth’s own activities in high school are correlated to their current church involvement, and how they hope to further nurture their spiritual life with the help from the church. In short, we will hear their voices.

In summary, of the 300 students, 216 participants currently attend church. In their written responses, the students used the words: “being connected;” “diversity;” “openness;” and “inclusiveness,” to describe what they wanted in their church lives. Repeatedly, respondents said they wanted to be part of a church that made them feel connected to real life events, to family, to church leaders, to congregations, and to spirituality in a changing world. Not wanting to be treated like children, the students expressed a desire for churches to address the difficult issues in the world in their teachings.

The findings show the positive effects of youth ministry in the church. The respondents’ views concerning the future of the church are hopeful and worth listening to. Indeed, there is hope that those students who do not currently attend church might return.

- I. Demographic Data of Participants
- II. Previous Church Experiences (During High School)
- III. Current Church Life
- IV. Discontinuing Church Life
- V. Parents Church Involvement
- VI. Correlations To Discontinuing Church Life
 - Previous Church Experiences
 - Parents Church Activities
- VII. Hopes of Young Adults