

***FACT Case Studies of Congregations Engaging Young Adults***  
**Old St. Patrick's Church, Chicago**

By Courtney Ann Irby

This case study profiles Old St. Patrick's Church, a Catholic congregation located at 700 West Adams Street, Chicago, Illinois 60661. The extensive clergy team of Old St. Pat's, as the church is commonly known, is led by Father Thomas J. Hurley. Keara Ette is responsible for the young adult ministry but the historical commitment to reaching out to young adults has meant that much of the staff contributes to these efforts.

In reflecting on the needs and desires of laity, the church strives to be a place of hospitality, great music, and inspired teaching. As their website explains, "Nothing is more important to the mission of Old St. Patrick's Church than the hospitality extended to each person who crosses our threshold, whether as a first-time visitor or as a member of the Old St. Pat's community." They live out this commitment by having a time early in the services to greet and introduce themselves to other attendees. The rest of the service is full of liturgical Catholic hymns that are elevated by the beautiful voices of the choir and preaching that seeks to contextualize biblical teachings with contemporary concerns to provide thought-provoking homilies.

**Key Data**

Old St. Pat's is a large urban congregation with approximately 3,500 registered households that come from about 200 zip codes within the greater Chicago area. In order to serve this large membership they regularly offer six services on Sundays. Those who like to attend church early can choose from a 7:00 am or 8:00 am service, while those who prefer a more leisurely Sunday morning can choose from a 9:30 am, 11:15 am or 12:45 pm service. Finally, those who prefer an evening service can attend 5:00 pm services or, during the summer, a sunset service at 8:00 pm. The 5:00 pm service is popular for young adults, in part due to the time but also because throughout the year they offer programming for the young adults after this service. In addition to Sunday services, the congregation also offers services Monday through Friday at 7:00 am and 12:00 pm. All the services are offered in English.

The programming is fairly evenly split between staff and lay young adults. While initially the young adult ministers did the vast majority of the administrative, brainstorming, planning and execution of events/activities, that has changed over the years. With the success of their programming, their intentional efforts to include young adults in leadership (including hiring young adults as staff members and encouraging them to serve on committees outside of YA ministries) and their ability to build up lay leadership over the years, the events are now more coordinated and designed by lay, young adults. Ette estimates that the distribution is about 50 to 60 percent member driven and 40 percent staff driven. Specifically, the staff continues to be responsible for all the administrative and financial side of planning events. Budget and bills remain under the staff's responsibilities, but the design and coordination of young adult programs has

shifted to be more run by the young adults. For instance, the evening prayer rituals (peer-ministry) was initially developed by staff but is now run by young adults for other young adults.

While the Mass on Sundays represents a significant source of involvement in the community, it is far from the only way that people participate in the community of Old St. Pat's. In addition to their weekly services, they offer a wide array of programming. Whether it is for families, teens, young adults, or adults the parish offers a variety of ministries, lecture series, volunteer opportunities and events. Finally, a key way that people become acquainted with and potentially involved in the church is through the sacraments. For instance, Old St. Pat's hosts approximately 150 weddings a year and, as will be discussed later, each wedding involves a marriage preparation at the church.

Perhaps due to all of these activities or because of the quality of the services, the church continues to grow. Eleven months out of the year they hold a new members' dinner that includes 20 to 40 new additions to the church on average. In other words, between 220 and 440 new people join Old St. Pat's each year. Of course, as Fr. Hurley pointed out, this does not always indicate a net gain of this many new people to the church roster annually because their high percentage of young adults and urban professionals means their population is highly transitory. Specifically, they estimate that 40 percent of their registered members are young adults, however, these numbers do indicate the strength and overall growth of the church.

## **Demographics and Culture**

As is evident by the name, Old St. Patrick's Church is a historically Irish congregation. While the demographics of the church have shifted away from these Irish roots, the church building maintains a distinctly Irish feel. Stepping inside to face the altar, one sees a large statue of Old St. Patrick holding a handful of clovers, and walls covered with intricate paintings of Book of Kells-inspired Celtic knots. Despite the markers of Irish heritage in the church's appearance, the services and church community lack a strong sense of ethnic Irish culture. In fact, what is striking looking around the full pews is the relative diversity of the congregation. While the congregation remains predominately white, there is a notable presence of racial/ethnic minorities that gather to worship.

Central to the identity and culture of Old St. Pat's is its location in Chicago's West Loop. This location is adjacent to downtown but also immediately off the main highways that connect the city to the suburbs (I-90/I-94 and I-290). Additionally, it is conveniently located on local transit lines and close to the train station in downtown Chicago. Due to the location, attendees can easily commute from not only the nearby west side of Chicago but from all over the city, suburbs, and even northern Indiana. The free parking and many empty lots on Sundays makes driving downtown to attend church potentially more convenient than some of the parishes in other Chicago neighborhoods. As a result, compared to many Catholic parishes that continue to operate as neighborhood churches, Old St. Pat's has cultivated itself into a commuter parish.

While this commuter culture is predominantly an artifact of their spatial location in the city, they have also embraced this identity. In fact, they draw on their Irish heritage to theologically understand themselves as a church “meeting at the crossroads” symbolized by the Celtic cross that adorns the walls of the church. In his religious artwork for the church, Thomas O’Shaughnessy included the Celtic cross, which is an encircled cross, as a central motif in both the painting and stained glass. Elfriede Wedam, a sociologist who studied the parish in the 1990s, explains that historically this symbol was used on ancient city maps to represent the walls protecting city residents but that Old St. Pat’s “has reinterpreted and used this symbolism to connect the church with the city as a whole, reaching beyond traditional parish boundaries” (221). The combination of viewing all of greater Chicago as their “parish” and their emphasis on hospitality has meant that they are intentional about creating events for new members to the community and offering a wide variety of programming to target various populations.

## **Background and History**

As one of the few buildings to survive the Chicago Fire of 1871, Old St. Pat’s represents a Chicago institution. As former Mayor Richard M. Daley explained in a book commissioned to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church, “People throughout Chicago recognize Old Saint Pat’s as the historical center of the Irish community, but its story is not simply the story of one church in one community serving one ethnic group. It is the story of communities throughout our city.” (ix). As the oldest church building and second oldest parish in the city, the history of Old St. Pat’s congregation reflects the historical trends of Chicago.

Established in 1846, the church initially served the Irish immigrant population until the mid-twentieth century, when changes to the city threatened the parish. The church was first threatened with demolition in 1950 because of the construction of the expressways. While it survived this threat, the neighborhood around it did not. Between displacement due to the expressway cutting the neighborhood in half and the general process of people increasingly leaving the city for the suburbs, the surrounding neighborhood became predominantly an industrial area which would a few decades later experience its own decline. By the 1980s the congregation had shrunk to only four registered members. It was at this time that Father John J. Wall stepped in and began a process of revitalization.

Fr. Wall approached the parish with a new vision. In looking out at the neighborhood he saw potential in what had previously been barriers to growth. Specifically, he believed that the expressway that had once helped to decimate their population and isolate the church now could serve as a way to rejuvenate the community. The revitalization of downtown, which included the new construction of buildings on the West Side like the Sears Tower, meant that thousands of cars were regularly brought to the church’s front door. A key part of Fr. Wall’s redevelopment plan involved creating a metropolitan church that would serve young adults and minister to urban professionals. Refusing to

believe in the life-cycle theory that said young adults drift away from the church, he sought ways to target and serve young adult populations by tapping into preexisting groups, such as encouraging the Young Irish Fellowship Club to use their facilities. In what he called an “Inside-Out Church,” Fr. Wall redesigned the congregation around the idea that the church must seek to understand and respond to the world. Rather than assume people would come to the church on their own and find ways to fit the needs of the church into their own lives, he sought to find ways that the church could serve laity and be meaningful in their lives.

These efforts were resoundingly successful because by the late-1990s the church had 2,800 registered members, most of whom were drawn from the greater Chicago area. Also, through their own fundraising efforts they were able to complete a multimillion-dollar restoration of the architectural and artistic features of the historic church building. Under the present leadership of Fr. Thomas Hurley, the church continues to understand young adults as central to their ministry but recognizes that many of those young adults that first helped to expand the church under Fr. Wall’s tenure have now become adults with their own children. The church now prides itself on being a multigenerational church that tries to serve the needs of each generation individually, while also considering the multiple generations of the community as the collective body of the church.

### **Underlying Philosophy**

For decades, the mission statement of Old St. Pat’s has been “Serving the life and the work of the laity in the world.” The vision behind this mission statement was that Old St. Pat’s was a faith community that would help to serve and build up the laity in order for the laity to go and serve the world. While currently they are in the midst of a period of self-reflection on this mission statement, it still represents an underlying philosophy of their approach to laity broadly, and to the life situation of young adults particularly. As sociologist Elfriede Wedam notes, “the kind of participation Old Saint Pat’s asks of its members respects the broad pluralism of everyday life; at the same time, it refuses to build a church simply around their needs” (217). Her observation can be seen in some of the ways that they conceptualize the concept of “church.”

According to the church website, “The people who gather at Old St. Patrick’s are building an experience called church: (1) that stands squarely at the intersection of faith and life; (2) that rests on a foundation of welcome and hospitality; (3) whose walls define a sanctuary for the growth of intimacy with God and a deepening of relationships with others; (4) that is richly textured by the diversity of peoples and generations; (5) whose cornerstone is hewn from a commitment to compassionate service and justice; (6) that is illumined by the Light of Christ; (7) whose roof is frequently raised by the joyous celebrations of life; and (8) whose doors and windows are always open to the movement of Spirit in the world.”

In every iteration of their philosophy, there is an underlying theme of recognizing that churches should not assume the laity exist to serve the church. Rather, they understand

church as a collective project and for it to succeed churches must be aware of the needs and life positions of laity. In the case of young adults, this has meant they avoid approaching their ministry from the perspective of “Why don’t young adults attend church?” Instead, they ask “How can we reach out to young adults to where they are in life and can we show them that church is meaningful when they reach out to us?”

## **Outreach with Young Adults**

One of the key ways that Old St. Pat’s has reached out to young adults is by seeking to integrate church into relevant areas of their lives and intentionally seeking to build relationships when young adults reach out to the church. Consistent with their concept of being a church that serves the laity, Old St. Pat’s has constructed four main types of ministry centered around learning, spirituality, service and community, all of which are part of larger effort to missionize to young adults. While these ministries are open to other age groups, they represent intentional programming designed for young adults and have emerged out of decades of building relationships with them, asking what they are interested in, and finding out what they need.

*Learning* – One of the prominent ways that Old St. Pat’s ministers to young adults is by hosting a variety of lectures and discussion series. These events are hosted for several weeks during most seasons, which means that there are regular opportunities to attend a learning session at the church. Rather than use these as a way to teach young adults the Catholic catechism, they view learning series as opportunities for young adults to come together to discuss particular aspects of faith and consider how it relates to their lives. One such series is the “Theology on Tap” program which originated at Old St. Pat’s but has since spread across Chicago, as well as to over a hundred parishes across the United States and world more broadly. Running for over thirty years now, this series tends to be held during the summer for about four weeks. The series features a group of young adults gathering to drink and discuss relevant matters on theology and religion. In a casual meet-and-greet style the events involve a speaker presenting for approximately a half-hour and then about twenty minutes of discussion and sharing about faith. In the summer of 2013, for instance, the topics focused on cultivating and living out one’s spirituality as a young adult.

*Spirituality* – By providing young adults with opportunities to attend retreats, participate in afternoons of reflection or to lead an evening prayer, Old St. Pat’s has oriented another arm of their ministry towards cultivating the spiritual lives of young adults. These spirituality-oriented programs often draw on the young adults’ own input and leadership. For instance, the evening prayer program is a type of peer ministry that is a service entirely run and organized by young adults to serve other young adults, as well as other populations. Building off a long tradition within the Catholic community, the church has used the tradition of evening prayers as an opportunity for young adults to be involved in church leadership. Another way that young adults help to plan and structure the events is by suggesting new twists on existing programs or practices. For instance, because some participants enjoyed camping, they instituted camping trips to draw young adults into the practice of spiritual retreats.

*Service* – Partnering with various organizations around the city, such as shelters or urban Catholic schools, Old St. Pat’s organizes a variety of service events throughout the year. For the past twenty years, they have brought groups to volunteer at a local shelter. Seeing that the need for service extends beyond the Chicago area, they have also organized a variety of service trips. For instance, after Hurricane Katrina they took a group of young adults down to help with the cleanup at a parish that they had a connection with in Mississippi. On another trip, they focused on border immersion by taking a group of young adults to the Mexico border on a pilgrimage that sought to reflect on where God is in the difficult situations involving immigration and border disputes. The various service events strive to make the question of “how are we people of faith?” tangible in the lives of their participants. As the young adult minister, Ette, explained, the service aspect has been important for attracting young adults because so many people of this generation want to help and she believes that Old St. Pat’s can make this possible by organizing service events.

*Community* – Especially amongst a transitory demographic, Keara Ette also notes that the church can provide a way to connect and meet people outside of work and the bar scene. As such, the goal of building community among young adults undergirds many of the other types of ministry, as well as serving as a goal in its own right. Much of the young adult programming is scheduled after the 5:00 pm Mass. This allows young adults to participate in the community of the church during the service, and makes the church more inviting as it lives up to its stated goal of hospitality. By periodically creating these times after services to meet and socialize with other young adults, Old St. Pat’s can invite them into the church community and allow them to meet other Catholics their own age.

The church also consistently uses various forms of social media to increase community. Every week the church sends out a general email to their members/"friends" (people interested in the church activities but not official members). This email is not directly aimed at young adults but may include updates about upcoming events. They also send out an email every other week directly to the young adult members/"friends" that details the events, activities, etc. They have a facebook page that they seek to update daily that includes general happenings at the church which can include YA events. They also have a twitter account with similar postings. Lastly, they have a well-done webpage that provides general information about the church and up-to-date information about different events. The church uses a combination of digital and print media (bulletin, handouts, etc.) to notify people in the greater Chicago area about their events.

These four pillars of their outreach ministry goals do not represent entirely distinct categories of ministry because many of the church’s events cross boundaries between the four goals. All four, however, are part of the larger mission of the young adult ministry that emerges from the overall philosophy of Old St. Pat’s. The four pillars of their programming represent ways that the church seeks to help young adults engage more deeply in their faith. Recognizing that relationships with God are accomplished through multiple avenues, they seek to construct a varied programming schedule.

The fact that Old St. Pat's is a Chicago institution also helps the outreach of the church. As one young adult who moved to Chicago and began attending Old St. Pat's explained to me, all these programs help to establish a certain level of buzz about the church. Young Catholics in the greater Chicago area all appear to know the name Old St. Pat's even if they have never personally attended. Part of this is due to the notoriety of some its members, such as the former Mayor Daley and his family, but another key factor is their fundraising event, the "World's Largest Block Party," that they have hosted for the past thirty years.

Drawing on the neighborhood practice of blocking off roads and throwing a party, Fr. Wall reclaimed this urban ritual by throwing a street music festival beginning in the 1980s. Especially in the early years, this event would draw large crowds because there were few music festivals in the city. Each year the church closes down the streets in their neighborhood and uses the adjacent parking lots to host various bands, vendors and drinks. In fact the notoriety of this event extends beyond Chicago as evidenced by the description on the Lonely Planet Travel Guide's webpage, "Old St Pat's is best known for its year-round calendar of social events for singles, including the enormously popular World's Largest Block Party; this is a weekend-long party with big-name rock bands where Catholic singles can flirt."

While the above style of programs operates as a type of outreach to young adults by attempting to pull them into church life, Old St. Pat's also offers what Young Adult Minister Ette calls "inreach" programs. These programs involve recognizing and capitalizing on times when young adults approach the church on their own over their life course, and finding ways to make these times meaningful and enjoyable experiences that provide them with a reason to become involved in the church. These inreach programs involve capitalizing on moments such as weddings when young adults often at least briefly establish contact with churches.

*Marriage Preparation (Pre-Cana)* – Similar to other sacraments in the Catholic Church, members are required to go through a series of classes to learn about the significance of the sacraments and their associated liturgy. In the case of marriage, Catholic dioceses across the country offer a variety of different types of marriage preparation courses to teach couples about the sacraments, and help them look beyond the wedding day and towards the marriage. While the Archdiocese of Chicago offers their own marriage preparation courses, Old St. Pat's decided that rather than have couples getting married at their church attend this diocesan program that could occur at any parish that had opened its doors for that day, they would offer their own Pre-Cana programs.

The decision to commit resources and volunteers to conducting their own marriage preparation emerged from the realization that this represented an opportunity to build relationships with participating couples. By having their own staff organize the event and inviting their own couples who have been married to talk to the participants, they are able to better control the quality of programming and to introduce couples to members

of the church. In comparison to the diocesan programming, which includes events with more limited commitment, such as a one-day events, Old St. Pat's always has Pre-Cana occur over a period of three consecutive Sunday afternoons. By conveniently ending the courses at 4:45 pm, they use these classes as a way to also encourage (mostly) young adults to attend the 5:00 pm service with the ministry team. Following their overall philosophy of hospitality, they believe that by offering their own program they can create a more welcoming environment and positive experiences for young couples. They present these efforts as their own investment in couples' marriages by helping to connect them to a faith community that can provide support over their future years as a married couple.

*The Rite of Christian Initiative for Adults (RICA)* – About forty people a year are brought into the church through the sacraments of initiation, namely baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. Approximately 80 to 90 percent of these people are young adults who are either converts to Catholicism or were raised Catholic but had not done the sacrament as a child and it was now part of their bucket list. As with the marriage preparation classes, Old St. Pat's has redesigned these courses to fit young adult needs and to help build relationships with them.

Undergirding these efforts remains the philosophy of the church which has sought to serve laity, so that laity can serve and bring God's love into the world. Young adult minister Keara Ette believes that this mission, especially in how it has been actualized in the above programming, creates a church that is empowering and resonates with young adults. They strive to make church, and by extension religion, not a one-hour experience on Sundays but something that is connected with a community, inviting people to participate in the life of the church in a deeper, more holistic way.

While young adults may find this philosophy empowering, the ones I spoke with felt more inspired by the politics of the church. Situated in a progressive urban city, the few young adults I spoke with resonated with the church's efforts to seriously engage with contemporary issues on which they felt the Church hierarchy has tended to be more conservative. For instance, the church has a gay and lesbian outreach ministry and in 2012 after the Vatican chastised American nuns, they held a prayer service for women religious to honor their good works, kindness and holiness. While Old St. Pat's does not contradict the official teachings of the Church, they have been willing to engage in a discussion on controversial topics which has resonated with young adults. For one young adult, witnessing the congregation's progressive but still distinctly Catholic orientation on contentious issues sends a message to a new generation of Catholics that the church is still relevant.

### **Young Adults as Both a Subpopulation and the Community**

In an attempt to serve but not isolate young adults in the congregation, Old St. Pat's has designed programming to fit the specific spiritual needs of young adults but also seeks to integrate them into the church community as a whole. As Ette explained, the goal behind their young adult programming is to connect young people to each other with the

ultimate goal of pulling them into the larger mission of the church. She explained that Old St. Pat's views the young adult ministry as successful when young adults become part of the other programs in the church, such as involvement in the liturgy, leading ministries or even serving on the finance committee. In fact, their staff includes a number of young adult members in their twenties and thirties.

Krista Kutz, one of the liturgy ministers, who is in her late-twenties, comments that they often hear when people walk into a baptism preparation course that they expect an elderly volunteer who will pass out handouts but at Old St. Pat's they encounter a young woman in her late twenties who is energetic and excited about liturgy. Krista believes that having young ministers interested in liturgy allows other young adults to relate, especially when the ministers look like them and sometimes have friends that work in similar jobs to theirs. She thinks that this helps to break down stereotypes and provides a new, inviting face to the Catholic Church.

Old St. Pat's approaches young adults as their own subpopulation of the community, while also recognizing that they are part of the collective community and should not be isolated. Towards this end, they use a broad definition of "young adults" that does not limit it to single and unmarried people in their twenties and thirties. As Fr. Hurley notes, too often "young adults ministry" is a singles ministry program but in reflecting on the young adults in his parish he notes they are also married couples and young parents. Therefore, while they do develop programming aimed at a more narrow population that includes going to bars to discuss theology, they also recognize that much of their programming involves opportunities to minister to young adults more broadly.

Integrating young adult programming and ministry into the overall philosophy of the church and not isolating them within the community has tied the success of the young adult ministry to the success of the congregation. One young adult who regularly attends commented that he believes the vibrancy of the young adult population is a result of the vibrancy of the overall congregation. In describing his involvement, he included examples of attending both events aimed at young adults, such as walking to a local bar after the 5:00 pm service to discuss spiritual matters, and events that crossed generations, such as serving on a social justice committee. As a result, Old St. Pat's was able to holistically serve his spiritual needs.

### **What We Can Learn from Old St. Patrick's Church**

In many ways Old St. Pat's is a unique congregation that could appear difficult to replicate. The convenient location that allows people to easily commute to it, the historically beautiful building that draws couples seeking to get married there, or its history as a revered institution of the city, are all facets that cannot be easily reproduced. It is important to remember, however, that Old St. Pat's was once a struggling congregation with only four members and that their careful attention to young adults helped them to grow. The history and current ministry of Old St. Pat's offers insight into various principles of successful programming with young adults in their twenties and thirties.

First, Old St. Pat's actively embraces their faith tradition. Both young adults and staff commented on the fact that the staff really enjoy liturgy. Their passion for the music, liturgy and rituals of the church results in religious education programs that do not involve blandly recounting the rules of the church, but instead offer peers that enthusiastically and intelligently discuss the traditions in ways that highlight the continued relevance. Rather than approach the Catholic Church's traditions as something to avoid or downplay with young adults, they find a way to make them a strength and something to take pride in. The staff explained that they adopt an attitude of being open to questions and believe that the ensuing discussions can make Catholicism more understandable.

A second related point is that Old St. Pat's takes pride in offering compelling and high-quality services. Across the city, the church is known for having services that involve relevant preaching and beautiful music. One young adult, after attending a service at Old St. Pat's for the first time, commented that he recognized all the hymns from the Catholic Church he grew up in but that he had never heard them performed so beautifully. Rather than change the music and make it sound more like music he would listen to on the radio, he appreciated how the Old St. Pat's choir had infused traditional hymns with new life. He commented that for young Catholics, the music performed at Old St. Pat's is simultaneously familiar and fresh. As a result, attending Old St. Pat's connects young Catholics to their own faith histories but also makes attending Mass feel new and compelling, creating a more moving experience.

A third insight from Old St. Pat's is the fact that to attract young adults, a church does not have to try to "sell themselves" and compete with other marketing aimed at young adults. As Keara Ette explained, young adults are in high demand and constantly encounter people trying to sell things to them. Rather than try to make church "hip" by changing the music and creating a separate young adult-style service, Old St. Pat's has chosen to provide everyone a high-quality service and a welcoming community. This approach sends the message that the church wants to integrate young adults as people rather than as a demographic. In practice this has meant that they do not have a curriculum-based approach to young adult ministry but instead a relationship-based approach. Rather than design their programming around either the church's narrow boxes or a narrow image of young adults, they emphasize creating programs that emerge from discussions with real young adults. By focusing on producing a quality service and not a cheesy facsimile of church, young adults are approached as the next generation that church must seriously invest in.

A fourth related point that the Old St. Pat's approach indicates is that sometimes churches must reframe their attitudes towards young adults. Rather than view the transitory lives of young adults as a sign of lack of commitment or faith, Ette notes that this is a product of their life position. Young adults' lives are often externally structured by jobs and school in ways that mean their schedules and living situations can be unpredictable and ever-changing. Instead of feeling resentful that young adults may not be able to be clear in how long they can commit their time and energy, she encourages

churches to redesign some of their commitments to accommodate the unique life situations of young adults.

Old St. Pat's realized that in order to create the space for young adults to be able to serve on committees they had to reevaluate the type of commitments they expected. Specifically, they recognized that typical three-year commitments were prohibitive to the involvement of many young adults. Ette explains that sometimes a young adult can be an amazing contributing member for only eight months and they leave because they have to move for school. Rather than view this as a limitation to working with young adults, she encourages other churches to value these contributions and accept this as part of the process of ministering to young adults. In particular, Ette encourages churches to view young adult ministries as a long-term process and commitment on the part of the church. Learning about young adults and involving them with the life of the church involves building real relationships with young adults, and that that requires time, as well as recognizing that they have complicated lives with many demands. Creating a successful young adult ministry does not mean finding one group of committed young adults, but rather creating a church that is always inviting new people to participate.

By viewing young adults as a group of people to build long-term relationships with, instead of a demographic to be marketed to, a fifth insight Old St. Pat's offers is a way to approach integrating young adults into the church community. Rather than focus on creating a vibrant but parallel ministry for young adults that includes their own isolated programs and services, the Old St. Pat's philosophy is to use young adult programming as a way to serve the needs of this population with the goal of bringing them into the overall church community. While the church frequently reflects on their level of service to the young adult population, Fr. Hurley strongly believes that this should be contextualized within thinking about the needs of the whole community.

One way they do this is by using a broad definition of young adults that does not serve only unmarried individuals but rather recognizes that the "young adult" demographic is broad with varying needs and desires that can include everything from drinking at bars to childcare for young parents. They also recognize the points where young adult needs overlap with the general community, such as creating compelling services that are responsive to current issues. Another way they integrate young adults is by providing spaces both within and outside of young adult ministries for leadership. One young man I spoke with commented that he went to a lecture at the church about social justice which he found particularly moving and that afterwards he contacted the church about how he could be part of their effort on this topic. Now, he is on a multi-generational committee devoted to social justice. Old St. Pat's intentionally considers the young adult perspective and seeks to build relationships with people in this demographic, but they also realize that their needs are tied to the community at large.

Finally, the Old St. Pat's practice of inreach programming serves as a reminder that young adults are reaching out to the church and these represent ripe opportunities for the church to build relationships. As part of the larger ethos of hospitality at the church, Old St. Pat's strives to make these times positive and welcoming. By using their own

married couples during marriage preparation classes, they provide young adults with a friendly face and set of stories about what belonging to the church can be like. Additionally, they adopt a position that is open to questions and does not view them as a sign of disrespect or as a challenge but as an opportunity to make the beliefs, rules, and rituals of the Catholic Church meaningful to a new generation.

In talking to young adults (staff, locals and members), two things struck me. First, the church found ways to structure programming around activities that young adults were already interested in. Numerous times staff commented that events like the Block Party or Theology on Tap were the type of activities that young adults already do and Old St. Pat's was trying to find a way to make church relevant in their lives by hosting similar events. Second, the church sought to capitalize on the times when young adults might come in contact with the church, specifically weddings. Again, as the staff noted frequently, young adults are getting married and having kids. They viewed these as life events that the church could make itself more relevant to, and not just an item to check-off the list.

These six insights – embracing one's faith tradition; quality services; avoiding marketing to young adults; building authentic relationships; integrating young adults into the community, and capitalizing on moments when young adults reach out to the church – have been important for the success of not only the young adult ministry at Old St. Pat's but the church overall. Even while other elements of the congregation may be difficult to replicate, these six elements provide useful directions for other churches to pursue in their attempt to reach out to younger generations.

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Old St. Patrick's web site: <http://oldstpats.org/>

Facebook page for Old St. Patrick's:  
<https://www.facebook.com/OldStPatricksChurch?fref=ts>

Lonely Planet web site: [www.lonelyplanet.com/usa/chicago/sights/other/old-st-patrick#ixzz2Y2DoTBvY](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/usa/chicago/sights/other/old-st-patrick#ixzz2Y2DoTBvY)