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and spiritual vitality.

If your congregation is thinking about starting or improving its youth ministry programs here are some helpful hints.

First, it's important to acknowledge and change the congregation's false perceptions about teens.

Christian Smith is author of "*Soul Searching: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers.*" The book is based on the findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), the largest and most comprehensive study of teenage religion and spirituality, Smith offers the following false perceptions(from: [An expanded conversation with Christian Smith](#))

- 1) **Teens are rebellious.** This stereotype remains from the "generation gap" of the 1960s. Teens do value adults' opinions and in fact, a church setting can be a safe place to share ideas and engage in conversations.
- 2) **Teens are different from adults.** Teens are human beings just like adults, with the same wants and needs.
- 3) **Teens are anti-religion.** Most teens are benignly positive about religion - they're not antagonistic. Many, do however, have difficulty articulating what they believe. Nonetheless, a majority of today's young people see religion as a positive influence on their lives and the lives of their community. Moreover, they have no desire to cast off the faith of their upbringing.
- 4) **Teens don't listen to adults.** Parents have been sold a destructive myth about their teens; they need to realize how important they still are in their teenagers' lives and how much their teens do look to them and value their opinions.

Second, consider incorporating the following practices into your youth ministry:

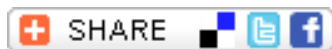
The recommendations, below, are from Kenda Creasy Dean ("*Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*")

1. Seek life transformation
2. Help teens build a bridge between their faith and the culture
3. Use interactive, participative learning methods
4. Create space for human encounters (hospitality, outreach)
5. Structure spiritual mentoring relationships to teach both catechesis and cultural literacy
6. Create space for spiritual encounters (camps, retreats, mission trips, etc.)

Lastly, do research to understand the role of youth ministries within your congregation.

On the sidebar you'll find resources of interest. Enjoy some summer reading as you learn more about the many facets of youth ministry.

For further information about FACT, or to learn how to join the Cooperative Congregations Studies Partnership (CCSP), contact David Roozen at roozen@hartsem.edu



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