

## **Creating Open Space for Young Adults (Idea Mart One 06)** Blair Trygstad Stowe- [pastorblairts@gmail.com](mailto:pastorblairts@gmail.com)



Though 4 out of 5 teenagers report church attendance, **only 22% of those ages 25-29 are active church attenders**<sup>1</sup>. The church puts a lot of time, energy, and money into attracting teens to youth group, but once they graduate we expect these young people to join the general adult activities of the congregation and feel satisfied in their faith life. With the experience of extended adolescence<sup>2</sup>, overwhelming economic challenges<sup>3</sup>, and delayed marriage<sup>4</sup>, young adults need increasingly different ministry opportunities than their parents and grandparents. Additionally, the public view of Christianity in the United States continues to sour. In a 2007 study by the Barna Group, young adults reported that Christianity is viewed as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%).<sup>5</sup>

So what is the church to do? **Create spaces specifically for Young Adults**, just like we do for youth and children, which challenge the negative connotations of Christianity and invite young adults into a process of spiritual discovery and maturation as they enter adulthood.

**Open Space is an alternative faith experience meant for young adults and other spiritual seekers, modeled after the three levels of the original Methodist Societies.**

**Monthly Gathering (Society Meeting)**- The Monthly Gathering is the heart of the Open Space experience and takes place in a public setting (pizza parlor, coffee shop, brewery). The most invitational level of activity, the community gathers for non-judgmental conversations about faith and life. Topics have included Mental Health, Racism, Financial Health, and the Resurrection. The Gathering follows a liturgy with opening and closing covenants, a scriptural faith reflection, open conversation, communion, and acts of service as our benediction. This is the least threatening level of engagement, and invites the broadest audience.

**Small Group (Class Meeting)**- Those from the Monthly Gathering ready for a deeper dive into Christianity are invited to participate in a weekly Bible Study/Small Group. This group always opens with the historic question, “How is it with your soul?” and ends with sharing of prayers. The Bible is engaged with as much invitation as possible, usually

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/twenty-somethings-struggle-to-find-their-place-in-christian-churches/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/21/adulthood-extended-adolescence-when-will-we-grow-uo>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/poor-millennials/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-millennials-gen-x-and-baby-boomers-approach-marriage-2017-11#millennials-are-marrying-later-5>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity/>

approached with a group *Lectio Divina* process. Facilitation rotates to empower young adults to embrace their spiritual voice and encourage leadership development.

**Discipleship Groups (Band Meeting)**- Traditionally the most intense level of engagement, these groups utilize an experienced leader (ideally developed from the group) to facilitate deeper conversation on spiritual practices, personal growth, and accountability with a group of 4-6. These groups can be run in person if geography allows, or via online video chat apps. These groups also allow young adults to stay connected across college campuses or as they relocate for work.

**Open Space** chapters are always associated with an established local church to insure proper theological oversight, intergenerational opportunities, and financial stability (the current generation of young adults is unlikely to be financially able to support professional ministry staff, even without the overhead of a building). In four years of practice, we have seen new high school graduates stay involved with their faith through Open Space, though they stopped attending Sunday morning services. We have seen young adults come back to faith through Open Space, some becoming active members of Sunday morning congregations. Several members of existing chapters are now transitioning to Seminary and pursuing a call to ordained ministry. This pedagogy *works*.

There are currently three chapters of Open Space, with at least three more likely to roll out in calendar year 2018. With support from the *Young Clergy Initiative of GBHEM*, we are eager to continue working with local churches to establish new chapters, particularly on the West Coast. If you are interested in starting an Open Space chapter, email Blair at [pastorblairts@gmail.com](mailto:pastorblairts@gmail.com)




Keep up with Open Space!

Facebook: @OpenSpaceIE (Inland Empire) and @OpenSpaceLittleton (Colorado)

Instagram: @OpenSpaceIE (Inland Empire) and @OpenSpaceCO (Colorado)

Website coming soon! [www.OpenSpaceFaith.org](http://www.OpenSpaceFaith.org)

	<b>COVENANT</b>	<b>MAY WE EACH BRING OUR BEST SELF TO THIS GROUP OUR INTELLIGENCE, OUR HEARTS, AND OUR COMMITMENT, AS WELL AS OUR RESPECT AND TRUST. IN ALL THAT WE SAY AND IN ALL THAT WE SHARE, MAY WE WORK FOR PEACE WITHIN OURSELVES AND FOR PEACE IN ALL OF CREATION.</b>
	<b>CLOSING</b>	<b>AS WE LEAVE THIS PLACE, MAY WE GO LIVE BRAVE AND GENEROUS LIVES!</b>