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Youth and young adults represent the diversity of the church—in all categories except for age. A campus ministry fellowship, for example, does not represent the average age of United Methodist membership. Not even close! And that is a problem. It is a problem because young people don't know that Christianity is a faith shared among a community of believers. It is not just a set of personal beliefs about God and Jesus. It is a problem because young people so often find that church participation does not help them grow in spirit. And out of disappointment, ignorance or frustration, many of us leave the church. However, a few of us stay in order to push the church to change. You have seen the declining numbers of young people in The United Methodist Church; let that spur you now to listen to someone pushing from within.

The Old Testament says that David, son of Jesse, was anointed King of Israel when he was a youth. Samuel did not anoint him because he thought Israel needed more youth representation in leadership positions. He did not anoint David to attract other young people to Israel. He anointed David because of what God saw in David's heart. With help from his faith community, David maintained a relationship with God and became a symbol of hope for his nation.

The theme for General Conference 2008 references God's plan to give us "A Future with Hope." So who is Hope? David was "hope" for Israel. What youth and young adults do you see as our "hope"? I see Ana, who takes on leadership at the national and global levels of the church; I see Katie, who found her calling in ordination; and I see Charlie, who maintains an active relationship with his faith community even while facing doubts about his vocation. These three young people look like "hope" to me.

Some people see me as hope. As an active church member since age 4, I have years of experience of being looked upon with a kind of "benign fondness." Members of my church family are sure the future will be bright because Emily is part of it. However, instead of looking in my heart, all many of them see is a generic young person. That is the basis for their optimism. I am young and I am there: the future is settled.

That kind of passive expectation of a future with hope will not draw in and retain more young people to The United Methodist Church. Instead, reach out and connect young people you know to the larger church. Get to know their hearts.

This generation is more connectional than any before us, spontaneously forming local and global networks and communities so that we can interact with each other. Whether we're hanging out, talking on the phone, texting or instant messaging, we keep up a sense of connection.

The United Methodist Church has a lot to offer young people because it is a connectional church. Sounds like a perfect match! But many local churches do not participate in connectional opportunities, so they cannot help their young people sustain ties to the church when they move away from the local congregation they grew up in.

A local congregation can be insular and settled: difficult to replace when you move to a new location and difficult to join when you are new and possibly moving again in a few years. Young people want

to connect—and not just to other young people. We enjoy making connections with older adults as well. You have something to offer in a relationship with a youth or young adult. I don't just mean your wider experience or theological knowledge, although those can be of value to us, but your shared likes and dislikes, stories, compassion, and trust are valid bonds in a relationship with a young person. And once you form that relationship, once you share your heart, maybe you will see your new brother or sister's heart, as God sees. Maybe you will be the reason one more young person stays in The United Methodist Church. Maybe you will be the link connecting that person to this connectional church.

The United Methodist Church needs young people to get involved and stay involved, but it won't achieve this by passively waiting for young people to realize how great the church is. Welcome young people to God's house. Help young people see the possibility for involvement at different levels of the connection and then connect them to the ones that match their interests. Then perhaps we will see The United Methodist Church grow. Then, perhaps, young people will more truly represent the entire body of this "people called Methodist."