

How to attract and retain new and younger members

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Forty years ago I sat in a large attendance hall and listened to a speaker address “what to do with groups who had only older members”. The speaker proceeded to say “Let those groups grow old gracefully and die” at which time the crowd almost became riotous and literally half the attendees walked out.

Fast forward ten years and in a similar large group we addressed the issue again and we were told as Dominicans to bring in a new member half our age.

And we have continued to address this issue over and over unsuccessfully. It may not be adequate that we can “Let’s leave it in God’s hands”.

After many years I have observed this:

- Younger people will not willingly associate with people who are more than say, 30 years older than them.

This is just a fact of life. School children at their grandfather’s birthday party will play with other school children. Think about weddings you have attended. Who sits with whom? We need to get realistic.

If we are serious in promoting our laity I suggest these concrete efforts be undertaken:

1. New members will be attracted in a one on one situation.
 - a. If you go to daily mass, especially, connect with someone you always see there. Invite them in a clear forthright manner, no beating around the bush, for example “ I have seen you at Mass regularly and would like to invite you to join a group of us that meet here regularly”. This has worked.
 - b. Hand out a copy of the Magnificat Mass Book to regular daily mass people. Mention that it is prepared by Dominicans and that you have a group they might be interested in attending.
 - c. Pamphlets will have a very low response result and may not attract the type of person who would have a vocation.
2. Think 10-20 years difference at the most. Admit it if you are old. Look for someone your age or 10 years younger.
3. If a group suddenly has interest from one or more young people (40 years younger than themselves) encourage them to start a new group or sub-group on their own.
4. Participate in parish organizations in order to meet new people. Ushers, choir, then invite someone, just like the example above. Isolation is the new norm. Civic associations like clubs, VFWs etc. has all but disappeared. Now people must find human friendships with only family members. When that fails or does not exist they move politically toward socialism because the

government will provide for their needs even if it is not personal. This sentiment of personal isolation is exactly what our groups' work against. There are people who care for you and share your hopes and aspirations. Don't neglect to show those feelings toward one another in church and at meetings.

5. If you get a younger person to agree to attend your meeting and there is a noticeable age difference you should confront the situation immediately. Take it from me, if you don't they will not be back. Focus on the younger members joining other chapters and suggest that they might be a catalyst to expand the vocations at your location.