



## **Learning to See and Listen to Younger Adults** **By Susan Cox-Johnson**

As a United Methodist district superintendent, I have begun a three-year younger adult initiative. Meeting with each of the congregations in my district, I have tried to raise their consciousness about the young persons in their communities. I talk about God leading us out into the community and opening our eyes to the younger adults who are already there. Whether a church is in the country or the city, there *are* younger adults around who have not yet heard the Good News in an engaging way.

I have challenged individual church members to find a younger adult between eighteen and thirty who does not go to their church and ask them three things:

1. *What is your favorite TV show and why?* If the younger person names a program the church members have never seen, I ask them to make a commitment to watch it – even if it is *South Park!*
2. *What did you do last Friday night?*
3. *Are you currently attending a church?* This question needs to be asked in as non-judgmental a manner as possible. If the young adult's response is "yes," the church member should ask everything possible about that church, because lessons can be learned for their own church. If the answer is "no," the follow up questions are, "Have you ever?" and "Why are you not attending now?"

Some surprising answers have come back, especially to the third question. I expected answers like "I have to work," or "I'm too tired," or "I only see my kids on the weekends." But one of the first responses I heard about was from a twenty-year-old woman who had attended Sunday School and worship through her Junior High years. She stopped attending after she invited a high-school friend, who happened to be on public assistance, to attend her church. That was the Sunday the pastor chose to use an anti-welfare illustration in the sermon. The young woman never went back.

My goal in this process is simple -- to have church members begin to *see* the younger adults around them, to listen to them, and to begin to understand their world.