

EXCERPT



**Not Done Yet**  
*Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults*

July 28, 2020 | \$18, 250 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4157-8

*"If your ministry is interested in reaching young adults, Not Done Yet is a strong primer. The five practices—initiate, invite, include, involve, and invest—are not only helpful but something that's congruent with the ways that our most thriving communities tend to operate. These rhythms, if practiced, would be transformative, not only for your faith community but also for the spiritual lives of young adults around you."*

**James Chung**, vice president for strategy and innovation with InterVarsity Christian

## Engaging the "Nones" and "Dones"

Ben transferred from Loyola University to a local college near the Midwest metropolis where he grew up. Through his younger sister's influence, Ben, an unchurched young adult, began to hang around an active evangelical church near his home. Paul, the church youth pastor, invited him to help with the youth group and then to join the high school mission trip to Guatemala. There Ben made a first commitment to follow Jesus.

In time, Ben and his college-age brother and sister began to cook for their friends on Friday nights. Sometimes they pulled out a guitar and sang songs, including Christian music. The gathering grew to twenty and then thirty college students and young people pursuing careers. They went skiing over winter break, and Ben came alongside and gently cared for each young adult. The lead pastor reached out to Ben and connected with him regularly for mentoring and prayer, and the church offered Ben the "chapel" on Friday nights.

This community became Access, a young-adult ministry of the church with thirty to sixty young adults showing up on Sunday nights and eventually Sunday mornings for worship led by Ben and friends. Many were new to church and not yet following Jesus.

Ariana, a young adult on the church support staff, tended the fledgling group, which drew young people, including "nones," those who don't identify with any type of religion, and "dones," those who have given up on church attendance. The Access community invited people to speak each Sunday on topics significant to emerging adults' faith and purpose. For this community of young adults, "church" was anything but irrelevant. It was an essential part of their social routine.

### The Other Side of the Coin

However, groups like this are far from common. Much research from the past decade or so shows that North American congregations are losing many more young adults than they're gaining—at least among the youngest emerging adults: eighteen- to twenty-three-year-olds. When we look at individuals' religious trajectories during their young-adult years, we see that many more of them experience a decline in religious faith and practice (63 percent) than growth (8 percent).

The term *dones* is fitting for those who have "been there, done that" and dropped out of church for twelve months or longer. How are bright-spot churches reaching one of the least-reached, least-churched (especially the younger eighteen- to twenty-three-year-olds), and the least-supported cohort in terms of social services and church support? This question drove me to research that small minority of young adults growing in religious service attendance, prayer, and salience, which led me to study the pathways that bright-spot churches create to serve the pre-conversion journeys of emerging adults. To better understand how to engage unchurched young adults effectively, it's critical that we know what's happening in churches that effectively evangelize emerging adults.

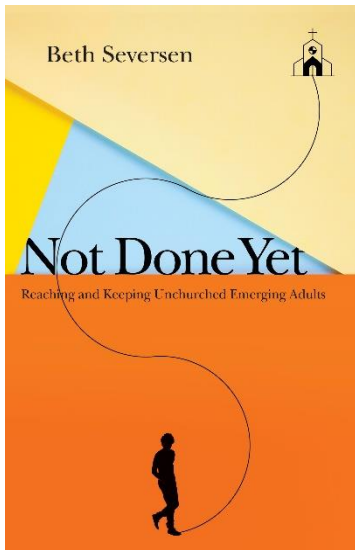


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*“Grounded in careful research on emerging adults and the churches that are reaching them, Beth Seversen’s Not Done Yet provides a hope-filled portrait of vibrant faith in the next generation. More importantly, she offers clear and practical guidelines for how churches can welcome, include, and equip the twentysomethings around them. A must-read for church leaders!”*

David Setran, Price-LeBar Professor of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College

We also need to listen to the stories of emerging adults who are experiencing spiritual transformation. And we need to hear the stories of bright-spot churches, which have proven effective at reaching and retaining former nones (the religiously unaffiliated) and dones (church dropouts). What is going right in the churches that are effectively evangelizing them? How can North American churches have an impact on emerging generations? What would success even look like these days? What would it take to get young adults to come to church—and to stay there? Is anyone doing it? My research on the spiritual journeys of emerging adults—a group I roughly define as nineteen to twenty-nine years old—suggests that the answer is yes.

#### The Good News

The small percent of young adults growing in their faith stand out in a culture of indifference and disillusionment. And this has led me to uncover a new script being written in certain churches scattered across North America. When researching my own denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church, I discovered a breathtaking phenomenon: there are churches that young adults really like. In these churches it’s normal to see emerging adults making new faith commitments to Christ, attending church regularly, growing in prayer and service, and prioritizing their relationship with Jesus. These churches aren’t common, but they exist. I call them *bright-spot* churches, because they stand out in a landscape where most young adults find religious faith anything but compelling.

Churches I researched for this project are writing a new narrative: emerging adults like Jesus and they also like church. That may surprise you, because lots of young adults do not like church. Many of them look at the church and feel disillusionment, hurt, or indifference.

Here’s some good news: we can learn a lot from these churches. Through interviews with young new Christians and their pastors across North America, I found that churches reaching and keeping unchurched emerging adults have attitudes and practices in common. Churches seeing faith develop among unchurched young adults share similar social and cultural patterns—patterns other churches can adopt and learn. Some churches are effectively making connections. Some are even connecting with emerging adults who have never set foot in a church building or have given up on the church.

This book aims to identify why these churches stand out when it comes to understanding emerging adults, how they make Christian faith, community, and service attractive to them, and how they guide them along the path to spiritual transformation.

—Taken from the Introduction



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Beth Seversen (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate professor of Christian ministries and director of the Center for Christian Ministries and Practical Theology at North Park University in Chicago. Previously the director of evangelism for the Evangelical Covenant Church, she also has served as associate pastor at churches near Kansas City and Milwaukee.

## Emerging Adults and the Life of the Church

**What important questions must we answer in order to successfully engage young adults?**

**Beth Seversen:** I am a friend and mentor to many emerging adults. I watch them struggle with church attendance and faith commitment—both those who've been there, done that. The church is not working for them and those who've never tried church. In a cultural context where young adults are dropping out of church, I think it's important for us to learn from those select churches that are drawing them in. This is where we are seeing life change and commitment to faith in Christ and to God's mission to the world which the church stewards.

What are those churches doing that is different in their approach to young adults? How are they connecting to emerging adults and reaching them and then incorporating them into the life of the church? I believe there is an urgent need to answer these questions, and I've spent a large part of my last decade investing the answers in order to help churches influence young adults in their journeys toward faith in Christ and lifelong commitment.

**What is the primary focus of your book, and who do you hope to ultimately impact with the messages found within it?**

**Beth:** My book focuses on the characteristics and evangelistic approaches of churches making a difference in the spiritual lives of emerging adults through effective connection, reaching and integrating young adults between the ages of 18 and 33.

**What are some key points you want readers to take away from your book?**

**Beth:** By making a few small changes, churches can have a greater influence in the lives of unchurched people, especially unchurched young adults. Young adults need the opportunity to try out Christian faith. The five practices I identify in the book, those of initiating, inviting, including, involving, and investing, give them that opportunity and time to explore and experiment with faith and identity in a welcoming and accepting Christian context.



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