

Does the church influence the missionary behaviour of youths?

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Around 2,800 European Christian youths came together in south Germany for the Mission-Net conference over the New Year.

These young people have a clear interest in mission and therefore are probably not representative of the Christian youth in general but we can learn a lot about this group.

An important question is whether their church had any influence on their decision to celebrate New Year at a mission conference.

Around 400 of the delegates took the time to complete 27 questions measuring their interest, commitment knowledge in relation to mission.

The 27 questions were supplemented by two related questions looking at how active their church is in mission. The first being whether their church teaches mission and the second whether the church they attend encourages people to become missionaries.

By comparing all these questions together, we can gauge interest in mission in relation to the two types of churches. The comparison involves using a statistical test (Chi-square, $p = 0.05$) to see if any differences are 'real' differences and not coincidental.

The table below lists all (27) questions and the significance calculated by type of churches. The first column refers to churches that teach missions, the second column concerns to churches that encourage their youths to become mission workers.

I have talked with someone about the possibility of serving in missions		X
My heart is drawn towards living a missional life		X
I work as volunteer in church / missions		X
I want to make a commitment to serve God in social projects / programmes		
I want to be introduced to mission/missional organizations		X
I experience the Lord is working in me for steps to be active in His kingdom		X
I am challenged to link up with a local or national mission		X
I have made a commitment to serve God in a full-time Christian ministry		X
I will react positively on making a personal commitment to take next steps in living a missional life style		X
I have decided to become a transformer of my world		X
I have committed myself to a country/part of the world		
I pray for missional work	X	X
I am an evangelistic message		
I have learned about Jesus principles	X	X
I have committed myself to a special type of missional work (students, Muslims, children, women, youth)		X
I read the Bible	X	
I live out missional lifestyle in my job, family, church, city or even nation	X	X
I have seen and heard what God is currently doing in Europe and see the challenges	X	X
My call from God is clear and I will follow this calling		X
I have made a commitment to serve God in Christian/Church work		X
I have learned many biblical/spiritual principles and apply them in serving God	X	X
I have made a commitment to serve God through a short-term mission experience		
I have received teaching on the biblical basis for missions and a missional lifestyle	X	X

I give money for missions / projects / someone who is doing Christian work in another country	X	X
I have learned how to know God's guidance for taking the next step in mission work		X
I have committed myself to a special spheres of influence (like sports, arts, politics, education)		X
I am effective in my church		X

The participants from the churches where they encourage people to be missionaries score on almost all (22 of 27) questions more positively (X). An important role for missionary work therefore lies with the churches.

Churches teaching missions also have a few positive scores (8 to 27) on the questions.

So churches that talk about missionary work, projects and mission agencies have a small impact, but churches that teach the missionary life, have a major impact on the participants.

The churches are the catalyst and have long-term impact, a mission conference is more of a boost or follow-up.

Conclusions we can draw are mission organisations or alliances should not think only about their projects, but the missionary message that they need to promote among churches. Church leaders must see the necessity of the missionary life, and try to stimulate interest in and show this life.

If we apply the answers of the 27 questions on a special analysis (rotated factor analysis), we see six different types of youth. These types are:

- I am willing to serve from my own environment/home
- I have made commitments and facilitate others
- I have knowledge of the missional life and want some (short-term) experience
- I will work on special activities in missional work
- I am willing to take steps towards missional work
- I am active in missional work

Essentially, the participants had different levels of involvement in mission.

The participants see that the missional lifestyle is more important than the execution of social projects.

In recent years, the balance between social projects and preaching projects has eroded. It seems that the younger generation not only want to execute projects, but also propagate the Christian lifestyle. The factors 'missional lifestyle' score well, indicating a trend towards the perception among young Christians that only meeting a need through a project is too 'business-like' or 'cold' and not something permanent. It looks like the difference giving fish or a fishing rod.

One question is whether this attitude only applies to conference participants and that this also applies to Christian youth in general?

If church leaders are not the examples in the missionary life then there will be less interest in missionary life in the whole church. The churches should see themselves at the forefront of stimulating the missionary lifestyle, not the missionary organisations which play a secondary role and more responsible for developing missionary interest and practice among young people.

To ensure the future implementation of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: make disciples all over the world) we need a new generation of young people to be involved and active in missions. This task does not have to lie primarily with missionary organisations but the churches.

Churches that proclaim the sometimes unpopular message of living a missionary life and which commit themselves to being living examples of this are the cradle for the new generation of missionaries. We can't only preach Matthew 28, we must live it too.

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