

SAVING THE YOUNG

(A condensed article, originally written by William S. Banowsky that appeared in the *Gospel Advocate*.)

The greatest loss in the church today is occurring through the indifference and departure of our young people. Recent studies have indicated that the church is losing 40% of its young people before they reach the age of 21. Why talk of saving the world when we are not even saving our own?

Unless we are able to reach, challenge, and really convert our young people we will never make a dent in the exploding population of the world. This is true because most of those obeying the gospel are doing so when they are young. Nineteen of every 20 who obey the gospel are baptized before they reach the age of 25. Seven times more people are converted at the age of 16 than at 26. If the church expects to grow, it must excel in reaching the age group most responsive to the invitation of Christ.

The church should be deeply alarmed when its vitality is so low that it is unable to retain the devotion of those reared under its wings. What, in a positive way, can be done?

First, we can make Christ relevant to the lives of our young people. Christ must be seen as the real solution to life's problems. There must be a marriage of truth and life.

Second, we can involve the young people in the work of the church. This means more than just waiting on the Lord's Table, but involving young people in the evangelistic and benevolent works of the congregation.

Third, we can plan the Bible class curriculum to win, hold, and develop the young people. Too much time is wasted in unplanned and careless instruction. Make sure the Bible class teachers are ready and excited about teaching this age group.

Fourth, we can convince them that the church is the greatest institution on earth. And we do that by acting and living like we believe it ourselves! Young people will see right through the hypocrisy of preaching without practice.