

Study: Teens leave churches seen as judgmental, unfriendly

Why do young Christians leave the church?

Research by the Barna Group finds that they view churches as judgmental, overprotective, exclusive and unfriendly toward doubters. They also consider congregations antagonistic to science and say their Christian experience has been shallow.

The findings, the result of a five-year study, are featured in *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, a book by Barna president David Kinnaman. The project included a study of 1,296 young adults who were current or former churchgoers.

Researchers found that almost three out of five young Christians (59 percent) leave church life either permanently or for an extended period of time after age 15.

One in four 18- to 29-year-olds said "Christians demonize everything outside of the church." One in three said "church is boring."

Clashes between church expect-

tations and youths' experience of sexuality have driven some away.

One in six young Christians said they "have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them."

And 40 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Roman Catholics said their church's doctrine on sexuality and birth control is "out of date."

Kinnaman called the problem of young dropouts from church "particularly urgent" since many congregations are used to "traditional" young adults who leave home, get educated, find a job and start a family before age 30.

"Churches are not prepared to handle the new normal," said Kinnaman. "However, the world for young adults is changing in significant ways, such as their remarkable access to the world and worldviews via technology, their alienation from various institutions, and their skepticism toward external sources of authority, including Christianity and the Bible."

© 2011 Religion News Service

The Lutheran