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Abstract Only – Work in Progress

“Congregations that Get It”

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In major urban centers across the United States, there is a generalized perception among religious leaders that individuals in their 20s and early 30s constitute a “black hole” in congregational life. Members of this population are missing from most churches, synagogues and mosques. For this project, an interfaith team of researchers (Muslim, Christian and Jewish) explored congregational life in Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, DC, and New York to illuminate the way young people view religious, spiritual and congregation affiliations. The research team focused on congregations that are exceptions to the rule - namely, those with significant programs ministering to young adults in their 20s and early 30s and that are successfully attracting young adults in all three faith groups into congregational life. This paper presents the findings from the Muslim congregations, focusing on American-born Muslim young adults across the United States and their relationship with religious congregations; their quest to redefine their religious practice and the space in which they explore their religious identity and questions; their methods attracting Muslim young adults in which their religion is made more “relevant” to their everyday life in America, as well as their ongoing process of negotiating their religious, cultural, and civic identities. The paper also highlights examples from the Jewish and Christian congregations that were studied in this year-long research project to provide examples of how other religious communities in America are successfully attracting young adults into their respective congregations. This study was undertaken through a partnership between the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies, USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture and Office of Religious Life, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and the Omar Ibn Al Khattab Foundation, and was funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. Researchers in this year-long research project included Nadia Roumani, Tobin Belzer, Richard Flory, and Brie Loskota.