

6 ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES  
TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DISCOVER AND LOVE YOUR CHURCH

# GROWING YOUNG

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**Growing Young: 6 Essential  
Strategies to help young people  
discover and love your Church**

This resource document is based on the book **Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to help young people discover and love your Church** produced by the Fuller Youth Institute based on ground-breaking research with over 250 of America's leading congregations. Although the book is based on research undertaken in the USA, I believe there are a lot of lessons that the Methodist Church can learn and put into practice here in the UK.

**Growing Young** provides a strategy that any church can use to involve and retain teenagers and young adults. It profiles innovative churches that are engaging 15-29 year olds and as a result are growing spiritually, emotionally, missionally and numerically.

The hope of this resource document is to translate that learning and strategy into learning and strategies that the Methodist Church can use to engage with 15-29 year olds and as a result is grow spiritually, emotionally, missionally and numerically.

Full of practical ideas as well as research, **Growing Young** shows leaders of the church how to position their churches to engage younger generations in a way that breathes vitality, life and energy into the *whole* church.

[www.ChurchesGrowingYoung.org](http://www.ChurchesGrowingYoung.org)

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# This is Not the End...

... This is just the beginning of your journey on the path to Growing Young.



## Bare Spots:

If your church is like so many others, you have bare spots. Holes created by the teenagers and young adults (what the Methodist Church has aptly called the 'Missing Generation'). Maybe your congregation's bare spots represent more than just missing young people – for the purpose of this document young people = 15-29 year olds.

Perhaps across generations your church isn't growing as you wish. Your church's energy

and attendance aren't what they used to be or what you would hope, prompting you to ask... "Where is everyone?"



Every church needs young people. Their passion enriches the soil around them. The curiosity and questioning they bring to scripture and the authenticity they bring to relationships keep your church's teaching fresh and fellowship fruitful. Young people also need a

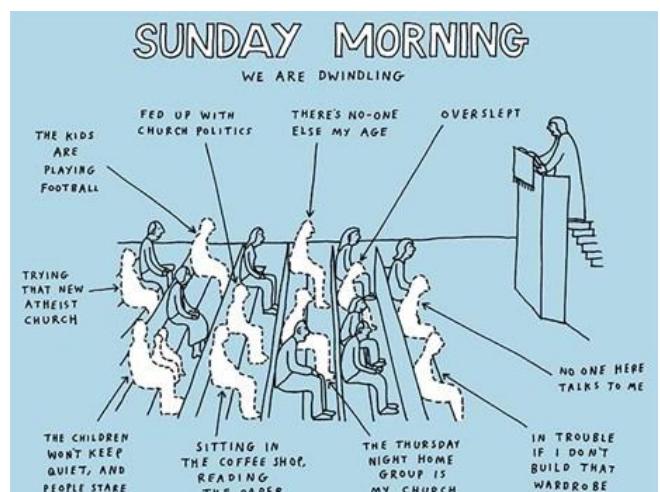
thriving church that grounds them in community and sends them out to serve. Your church needs young people, and they need your church.

## The Alarming Reality

If you're wondering why your congregation is aging, shrinking or plateauing, you're not alone.

"The first job of a leader is to define reality"  
– Max De Pree

The unfortunate reality is that most churches are not growing, and they aren't getting any younger.



Church attendance is declining with the ‘Rise of the Nones’ – those who identify themselves as having ‘No Religion’:

- A recent YouGov poll surveyed 8455 UK adults, of these 3199 identify themselves as ‘No Religion’. In total, 38% of the population now report having ‘no religion’.
- That proportion grows to nearly half (48%) of young adults (under 30) of whom only 26% identify with a Christian denomination.
- ‘No Religion’ has nearly overtaken ‘Christian’ see table below for age breakdown.

Age cohort	No religion	Christian	Other religion (including those who prefer not to state their religion)	No religion as % of the population (excluding Other)
18-19	55%	20%	25%	73%
20s	47%	26%	27%	65%
30s	44%	28%	28%	61%
40s	41%	40%	19%	51%
50s	36%	47%	17%	43%
60s	29%	56%	15%	34%
70s	21%	62%	17%	26%
80s	14%	64%	22%	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>48%</b>

- Most of the ‘Nones’ are not atheists, they just don’t identify with religion. Atheism has been growing far less than ‘No Religion’.
- Amongst the ‘Nones’ 43% are atheist, 40% are agnostic and 16% believe in God.
- Most ‘Nones’ don’t decisively reject God, what they reject is an identification with ‘religion’
- We have an ‘aging’ congregation

Taken from: <http://faithdebates.org.uk/research/>

These findings present an enormous challenge for the churches over how they make faith appealing to young people, and if these trends continue, Methodists will be extinct in a few decades.

“Although the decline appears relentless it is rather gradual, at a rate of about 1% per year. It would not be fair to project a linear decline. The decline might dwindle as the numbers dwindle” but he warned that the churches do need to find a way to keep their young people if they are going to survive.

- Professor Voas (Co-director of British Religion in Numbers)

Taken from:

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/exclusive.new.figures.reveal.massive.decline.in.religious.affiliation/41799.htm>

An overview of UK church life, published in Church Statistics, gives a detailed denomination by denomination overview of church membership, churches and congregations and the number of ministers. Covering each year from 2005 to 2010, with a forecast into 2015.

With Methodist membership readily available from headquarters we can see in the table below a decline of -19% in membership of the Methodist church between 2005 and 2010, with a predicted -24% drop in membership between 2010 and 2015, in reality the document **Methodism in Numbers – statistics at a glance 2016** we find membership numbers being 195,000 which is not as much of a drop as predicted but the gloomy news is that it is still a drop of -18%.

[http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2324645/Methodism\\_in\\_Numbers\\_2016.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2324645/Methodism_in_Numbers_2016.pdf)

*Table 1: UK Church Membership by Denomination, 2005 to 2015*

Denominational group	2005 Membership	% change 2005-2010	2010 Membership	% change 2010-2015	2015 Est Membership
Anglican	1,536,879	-5%	1,457,598	-8%	1,336,130
Baptist	207,777	-5%	197,871	-3%	192,479
Catholic	1,667,463	-12%	1,472,811	-10%	1,326,040
Independent	215,493	0%	215,199	0%	214,461
Methodist	294,819	-19%	237,744	-24%	180,921
New Churches	187,872	+12%	211,025	+7%	226,650
Orthodox	315,810	+ 5%	330,712	+7%	354,839
Pentecostal	342,485	+27%	434,905	+22%	529,594
Presbyterian	918,073	-19%	741,140	-22%	577,769
Smaller Denoms.	158,021	+36%	215,489	+14%	246,481
All Churches	5,844,692	-6%	5,514,704	-6%	5,185,514

Taken from: <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/download/csintro.pdf>

## Time to get Serious

Linda Woodward in Church Times has suggested that it is time to get serious and the church must face up to the reality, or die.

The Former Archbishop of Canterbury made headlines in the November of 2013 by telling the world that the Church of England was on the brink of extinction.

Taken from:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/31-january/features/features/time-to-get-serious>



This trend of decline is Not the end, the fat lady has yet to sing, trends Do Not always continue the way they are predicted. Other factors come into play, indeed decline itself is one such factor, it triggers movements to stem the decline and alter the course.

Thankfully the news is not all doom and gloom, despite the cloudy sky, light is breaking through here and there. This resource document is a call to those 'bright spots', a call that all churches must take seriously, a call to engage with young people in a new way.

Growing Young is the culmination of 4 years of research to investigate what these 'bright spots' are doing right. Discovering the 'core commitments' of churches that are not aging or shrinking but Growing Young.

The statistics and data highlighting the decline and 'greying' of our congregations is convincing, but it's not the full story.

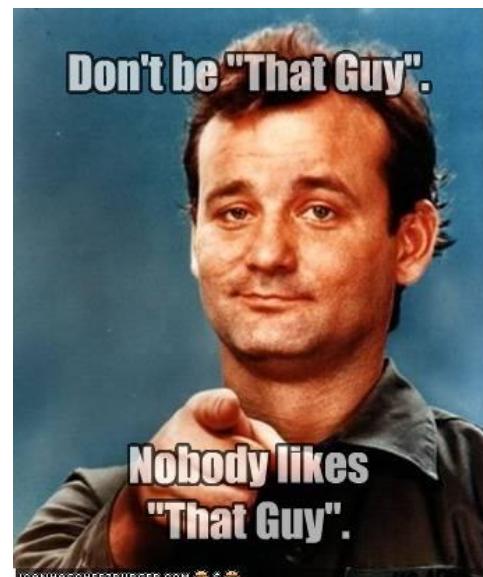
And it doesn't have to be the story of the Methodist Church.

Watch: <https://youtu.be/VnM0nnT4rxs> - You're Losing us

## 10 Qualities Your Church Doesn't Need in Order to Grow Young:

You may be hindered by a preconceived idea or image of what it takes to attract young people to church, we can cross off our list the following:

1. **A precise size** – Don't buy into the Goldilocks fantasy that some churches are too big, others are too small and some are 'just right'. There is no relationship between church size and its effectiveness.



2. **A trendy location** – The data unearthed churches flourishing in urban area, and university campuses but also uncovered equally robust ministry in rural areas and middle class suburbia. Your location does not have to be a limitation.
3. **An exact age** – you don't have to be a new church 'plant', or less than 5 years old, you could be a century old church and still grow young, there is no age discrimination when it goes to churches engaging with young people.
4. **A popular denomination... or lack of denomination** – we don't need to apologise for being part of a tradition or the fact that we are a denomination at all. God is working powerfully through churches of all stripes (and plaids).
5. **Being 'Cool'** – granted several of the congregations and leaders that bubbled to the top of the Growing Young research have a certain 'hip factor'. But these were in the minority. For young people, relational warmth is the new cool.
6. **A big, modern building** – some of the congregations that are most effective with young people have new, state of the art facilities. But not all. The majority of effective churches studied gather in decent, but not spectacular spaces. For teenagers and young adults, feeling at home transcends any building.
7. **A 'big' budget** – churches that grow intentionally invest in young people, and most often that translates into a financial investment. But not always. Less resourced congregations creatively support young people in other ways, proving a small does not have to mean small impact.
8. **A 'contemporary' worship service** – the data indicated that while many young people are drawn to "casual and contemporary" worship, others are drawn to "smells and bells" high church liturgy and everything in-between. While the churches being most effective at Growing Young were likely to prefer modern worship in some or all of their worship contexts, they didn't depend on that alone as a magnet to draw young people.
9. **A watered down teaching style** – it's often assumed that we have to water down the message and teachings of scripture and somehow make them seem less radical in order to appeal to teenagers and young adults. That's not what the research found. For today's young people growing young doesn't mean we talk about Jesus or the cost of following him any less.
10. **An 'entertaining' ministry program** – the entertainment options available to young people in our culture are endless. We don't have to compete. If we try, we will almost certainly lose. The research highlighted that faith communities offer 'something different'. Slick is no guarantee of success.

## Why Bother? What can young people add to your congregation?

*They don't tithe much. They can be a bit flaky.  
They prefer different - and louder – music.*

So why bother... at every stage the researchers asked themselves if it was worth the effort and explored the specific contributions that young people make to churches. One term heard more than any other was “**vitality**” young people infuse congregations with energy and intensity. And as the layers were peeled back further to understand how young people contribute, they realised they add a lot more to congregations.

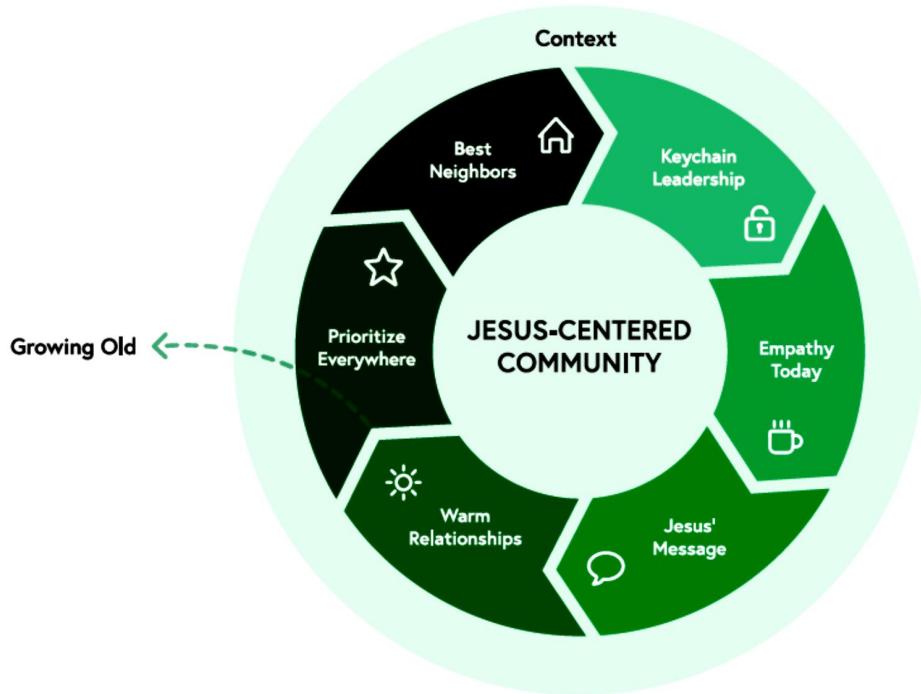


- More Service – the most dominant theme that came out of the research was that they help congregations accomplish their mission. Church leaders were quick to value how young people serve in worship services as well as out-reach and discipleship groups within the church, but also how much young people serve outside the church through community based and global organisations.
- More Passion – young people add *Passion* to a congregation. They pour themselves into what they do, which energises those around them and increases what's possible.
- More Innovation – the fresh spin young people bring to church life, the creativity released by churches willing to twist the cap off releasing innovative energy can transform their communities.
- More Money – young people may not contribute much actual money, but young peoples energy attracts older adults with money, who in turn support the ministries of the church. Plus eventually those young people get jobs and can contribute financially.
- More Overall Health – young people seem to be a barometer for the overall health of a church. “Healthy Churches reach young people, and young people make churches healthier. If your church is reaching 20 year olds your church will reach 60 year olds” – Erwin Raphael McManus according to John Ortberg “You can't build a great church with a bad student ministry with a languishing church”

For those wondering if churches that grow young inevitably reach other generations less effectively , the answer is an emphatic no. in a kingdom win/win, stronger ministry to young people bulks up the ministry muscles of the entire congregation, and vice versa.

# The Six Core Commitments Your Church Needs to Grow Young:

The deep and wide analysis undertaken by the Fuller Institute for Growing Young unearthed the Growing Young Wheel and Six core commitments.

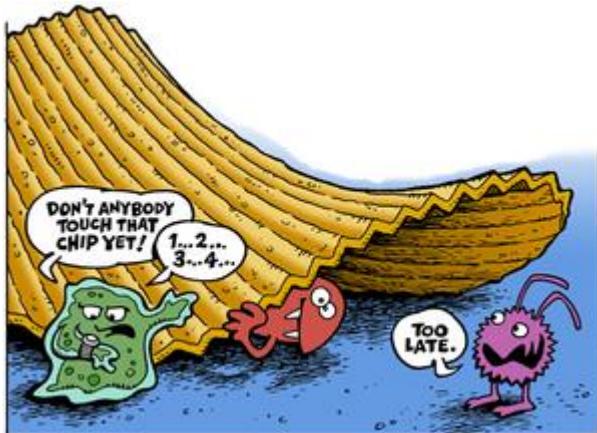


While there is no guarantee that enacting these six core commitments in your congregation will produce better engagement with young people, they are the most universal commitments in churches with the greatest proven effectiveness.

1. **Unlock Keychain Leadership** – Churches that grow young and engage with young people are marked by staff and volunteers who demonstrate *Keychain Leadership*. Whoever holds the ‘keys’ has the power to let people in or to keep people out. Keys provide access to the physical rooms, as well as strategic meetings, significant decisions and central roles and positions of authority. The more power you have the more keys you tend to possess. Keychain leaders are both aware of their ‘keys’ and are intentional about entrusting and empowering others (particularly young people) to lead.
2. **Empathise with Today’s Young People** – Churches that grow young step into the shoes of teenagers and young adults empathising with today’s young people. by empathy we mean “feeling with” young people. Like sitting on the kerb of a young person’s life, celebrating their dreams, and grieving over their despair, and that kerb looks a lot different than when we sat on it ourselves, even if we’re just a few years older. Instead of judging and criticising young people, step into the shoes of this generation.
3. **Take Jesus’ Message Seriously** – “Our churches message is less ‘you’re a sinner change now’ and more ‘this is awesome, come be part of this!’” Young people long

for churches to invite them into a journey of actively following Jesus. So instead of formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus centred way of life.

4. **Fuel a Warm Community** – Instead of focussing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships. Congregations that are warm and accepting are important to young people. Warmth often lives much deeper than your programs and structures – it's the life blood coursing through the veins of your church. “It just feels like family. I feel a sense of welcome – from everyone – like I belong here”
5. **Prioritise Young People (and families) everywhere** – When churches prioritise young people, and their families, everywhere, they take a step beyond both empathy and warmth. They allocate resources, energy and attention to teenagers and young adults both inside and outside their walls. So instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to ‘tangibly’ support, resource and involve them in all facets of your congregation.
6. **Be the Best Neighbours** – Churches that are engaging with young people strive to be the best neighbours, both locally and globally. They recognise the balance between what scripture commands for holiness and graciously loving their neighbours. This balance affects how they serve, pursue social justice, help teenagers and emerging adults find their calling, interact with popular culture and respond to ‘heated’ cultural issues. Much more than developing theological position documents or responses, these churches train and infuse their young people with an integrated discipleship that enables them to thrive in our complex world.



## The Ground Rules of Growing Young

The research identified a handful of ground rules that guide these six core commitments and therefore guide your church.

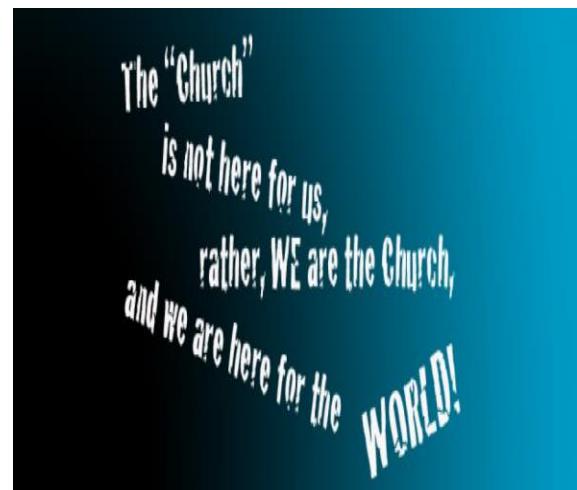
- The order is flexible – the growing young wheel follows the chronological order most commonly seen. In other words, more congregations started ‘Growing Young’ by beginning with Keychain Leadership. However some congregations started the process through, most notably warm community and prioritising young people.
- The boundaries bleed into each other – dotted lines separate the core commitments because they often (beautifully) bleed into each other, infecting each other with new priorities and practices.
- The Turning Point is *Priority* – a large proportion of Methodist churches can and do, foster many of these core commitments. They are filled with lovely people doing lovely ministry. They just aren’t reaching young people. For many

- congregations, making the '*intentional*' decision to disproportionately prioritise young people is the turning point between growing young and growing old.
- The Context is Pivotal – this research shows knowledge of young people, but they don't know YOUR young people or the particular dynamics of YOUR community. The six core commitments are surrounded by a layer of context because you need to listen and adapt constantly to the emerging teenagers and young adults in your family, congregation and location.
  - The Pursuit of Jesus is the Overriding Motivation – a church's passion to grow young is motivated by the members dedication to walk in the way of Jesus and invite young people to join them. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are what distinguish congregations from community centres or clubs. This is why the Growing Young wheel has the set of commitments circling the core of Jesus-centred communities.

## Growing Young Can Change More Than Just Your Church

Growing Young can change more than just your church. The church is the best way to change a society or even the world, through congregations dedicated to living out Jesus' commands to love God and to love others. Congregations stand the greatest chance of living out those commands when they are ignited by passionate young people.

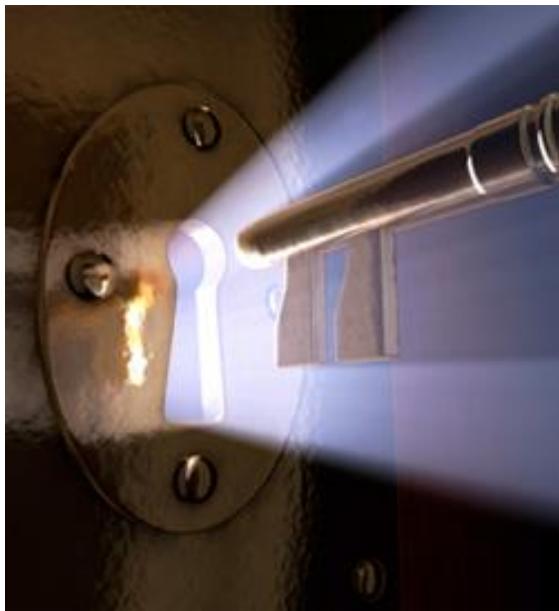
If A = B and B = C, then A = C. In other words, if we transform a country by transforming our churches, and if we transform our churches by transforming our work with young people, then transforming our work with young people can transform our society and even our world.





## Discussion Questions:

- What motivates you to read a document geared to helping churches grow young?
- How are the terms “young” and “old” used and viewed in the Methodist Church? Do these tend to be positive or negative?
- What are some of the ‘Bare Spots’ in terms of age groups in your church/circuit? What may have contributed to these ‘Bare Spots’?
- How, if at all, have you seen signs of an aging or shrinking in your congregation or other congregations?
- Which of the ‘10 Qualities Your Church Doesn’t Need in Order to Grow Young’ have you tended to believe?
- Based on your first look at the Six Core Commitments, which do you see happening the most already? Which seem to be missing?
- How have young people added vitality to the life of your congregation, church or circuit?



# Unlock Keychain Leadership: Sharing Power with the Right People at the Right Time

## ***Do you remember your first set of keys?***

When we refer to keys, we don't just mean 'physical keys', we mean the capabilities, power and access of leaders that carry the potential to empower young people.

Churches that grow young are filled ministers, lay workers, volunteers and parents who demonstrate *keychain leadership*. Whoever holds the 'keys' has the power to let people in or to keep people out. 'Keys' provide access to physical rooms, as well as to church strategy meetings, significant decisions and central leadership roles with authority.

Unlocking keychain leadership means empowering/giving young people the 'keys' to leadership roles within the Church, this means not just farming the young people back into leading the children's work, or running the PA, but thinking bigger by giving young people an equal say in the decision making in the church, empowering them to lead in ALL areas of the church, not just the unimportant jobs or the ones that no-one else wants to do.

By keychain leaders, we mean pastoral and congregational leaders who are

- Acutely aware of the 'keys' they hold and
- Intentional about entrusting and empowering teenagers and emerging adults with their own set of 'keys'.

I remember when I was first given leadership responsibilities over running the junior section of the Boy's Brigade at my Church, I may not have been given a physical set of keys for the church, but I was made an equal partner in decision making, planning and running the group, at 16. I do believe that if I wasn't given that responsibility to lead I wouldn't be in youth ministry today.

Brian Smith, Youth & Children's Coordinator for the London District of the Methodist Church

Keychain leadership goes beyond simply the launching of a young people's leadership program, it should permeate every area and corner of the church, ensuring the whole church is on board.



## How Keychain leadership helps your church grow

Even if you are not the one unlocking the physical church doors, but you invite all generations to take up the keys of leadership, week after week, but the only ones willing to work are the same group of volunteers.

*You're supposed to be the one with the 'keys', but at times it feels as if someone has changed the locks without telling you.*

If you are willing to entrust your 'keys' to young people, they will trust you with their hearts, their energy, their creativity and even their friends. Yes, it can sometimes seem like more work than it's worth – but if you give them access, you have the opportunity to reach a whole generation.

The "Priesthood of all believers" doesn't mean no-one is in charge – the research pointed out that those in leadership positions are vital to helping churches grow young. When pastoral leaders were asked to describe what accounts for their success with young people, the highest response (48%) was church leadership. Church leadership ranked higher than worship style, emphasis on social justice and using the latest technology. Congregational members were even more likely to attribute their churches effectiveness to leadership, with over 77% highlighting the churches leadership as vital to growing young.

There is a commitment to young people at our church, but our youth pastor is the secret sauce

– Jim, elder and youth volunteer

## What makes Keychain Leadership unique?

The Growing Young research coined the term Keychain Leadership, because, while every leader has keys on their key ring, not every leader uses those keys in the same way. Some leaders cling to their 'keys' tightly and refuse to share them even for a moment (we all know those kind of leaders), but keychain leaders model a posture of giving away access and authority. This posture not only empowers young people and others but also meaningfully links them to the life of the church, creating a sense of ownership and therefore young people are more likely to stick around.

## The research identified four types of 'key' leadership:

- Key-less leaders – often young and inexperienced, without much authority or access, these leaders spend their time trying to prove worthy to possess 'keys'. This could be a young person ready to volunteer – full of potential and passion as they begin their leadership journey. It can also represent an older member of the congregation who feels as though they have lost their 'keys' and therefore her 'voice' in the church.
- Key-hoarding leaders – always holding onto the 'keys' and refusing to give others access, they run the show. This might include the outgoing, extroverted leader who draws a crowd through sheer personality and ends up driving away others who offer to help. It can also represent the leader who has been around for a long time and church is done in a 'certain way'.
- Key-loaning leaders – Often taking the 'keys' off the chain and letting others borrow them temporarily, they make sure the 'keys' are returned pretty quickly after. One example might be a minister who knows that the contribution of others is important – but also believes that others won't do as good a job as he or she will.
- Keychain leaders – These leaders are very aware of the 'keys' they hold, they are constantly opening the doors for some while training and entrusting others who are ready for their own set of 'keys'. This could be a long-standing senior leader or trusted volunteer who young people, lay workers and the congregation turn to for advice. Everyone seems to get better when this leader is involved, and a long list of people can point to this leader as the reason they serve in the church today.



The leaders studied don't share the keys of leadership with others because they are less capable, talented or visionary themselves, but because they have a keen sense for where God is leading and leverage their strengths for the good of the overall church. They understand that young people don't want to sit passively on the side-lines (or pews) but are drawn to churches and leaders who help them get in the game (and off the pews).

However, sharing the 'keys' in leadership with others will be challenging (at least in the short term) than leading alone, because it involves constant adjusting, staying in touch and being willing to persevere even if someone feels stuck. While keychain leadership requires close collaboration and hard work, the long-term payoff of growing your church young is worth it.

## What follows are 6 essentials of keychain leadership:

- **Keychain leaders are mature... Not always young**

“Don’t all young people want a hip 25 year old pastor who rides a motorcycle and sports the latest fashion?”

While there is certainly some value in having young leaders who can connect with young people, it’s not the whole story, only 1 in 10 cited having younger leaders as the reason why their church is effective with young people.

- **Keychain leaders are real... Not “Relevant”**

Imagine a 50-60 year old minister going out and buying the latest hip and trendy clothes to mimic the clothing styles of the 20 somethings, in an attempt to remain “relevant”. Congregations were asked why they attend their church, many talked about the qualities of their leaders, only 13% focussed on how their leaders were relevant, while 87% talked about authenticity or other qualities unrelated to being relevant. Furthermore in surveys completed by leaders show that a transparency in decision making is positively related to both vibrant faith in young people and measures of church health. In other words the more transparent the leader is personally and the church is organisationally, the better placed they are to grow young. The implication is that young people aren’t looking for leaders who change their wardrobe or their ‘lingo’ in order to connect. Young people want leaders who are honest and comfortable being themselves. Young people have a sixth sense for authenticity and intuitively know whether or not leaders are genuine.

*“The main draw is how transparent our senior pastor is. It's the only church I've ever been a part of where the pastor shares how he feels and even shares his mistakes. This helps you feel like you can come in your brokenness and can walk with people when they're going through stuff without any judgement” - 22 year old college student*

Speaking of being “relevant” there is a difference in being relevant in dress and language than to being relevant in what we talk to young people about. At the end of 2016 One Hope and Youthscape Centre for Research published the results of a survey of 2054 churches about its children’s and youth work from across England, Scotland and Wales, called Losing Heart see link below:  
<https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/publications/losing-heart>

The survey indicated that churches are failing to talk about the topics young people want to discuss. Only 50.2% of the churches surveyed ‘often’ discuss the basic beliefs of the Christian faith with young people. The majority of churches ‘never’ discuss the subjects of pornography, same-sex attraction, other world faiths and drugs and addiction with their young people.

So being “relevant” with young people is about trying to be like them, but it is very much about talking about the issues that are “relevant” to them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kYjswEhVDE> – Swag Seminary

- **Keychain leaders are Warm... Not Distant**

It is possible to be real from a distance, but not connect in relationship. While teenagers and emerging adults might sometimes project that they have their act together or want complete independence. In reality young people desperately want keychain leaders who understand them, mentor them and personally hand them keys as they're ready. 43% of those young people asked pointed to the relational nature of their leaders when asked what made their church effective, specifically that they were caring, accepting or enjoyable to be with. Being relational doesn't mean leaders leave professionalism and boundaries behind and try to be their "best friend". But it does mean that leaders are approachable and genuinely care and connect.

While young people may be able to find great preaching online, many told the researchers that they're wanting more than that. They want to be in relationship with leaders who know their name and model a life of faith. These young people look to Christian leaders in their community and ask, "are you the real deal?" and then watch closely to see the answer.

- **Keychain leaders know what matters to people... Not just other ministers**

Keychain leaders (Particularly Ministers in this example) value and regularly practice, listening to their congregations in order to understand what matters most. Thus helping them to develop an understanding of which doors to unlock and when to give away particular 'keys'. It also informs how they lead, preach and structure their ministry. Instead of adding more and more activities to there already busy workload, these leaders strategically prioritise listening to congregation members of all generations.

- **Keychain leaders Entrust and Empower others... They Don't try to be a "super-leader"**

This is perhaps the most important step a leader can take in the journey from key-loaning to Keychain leadership, that of entrusting and empowering others. When the Growing Young research asked hundreds of leaders what accounts for their effectiveness with young people, over 30% mentioned that they entrust young people with opportunities to lead and contribute. (See Voice Activated for more on this). Young people don't just want to 'fill the pews' but they want to be given 'keys' to responsibilities that matter and make a difference. Resulting in a move away from "super-minister" where appropriate 'keys' are taken off one leaders keychain and given to the leaders best suited for particular roles and responsibilities. Further to this, when interview participants for the research were asked why they stay involved in their church, only 1 in 20 pointed to a particular leader. The implication being that while your leader might be critical for a few areas of church life, you/they



don't have to be the "super-leader" who is at every event or activity agrees to every invitation to meet in person or continually reaches out on social media. Entrusting and Empowering young people will involve taking some risks and 'letting go', not just for the leader handing over the 'key' but also for the whole church. In giving young people the opportunities to lead and contribute we also need to be prepared to support and encourage them when it doesn't completely go to plan, allowing the learning from mistakes to take place in a safe space.

- **Keychain leaders; take the long view... No short-sighted steps**

Across the board, the surveys, interviews and church visits conducted by the Growing Young research all pointed towards the importance of consistent long term leadership – both in youth ministry and the overall church. This makes sense given that moving from key-less. Key-hoarding or key-loaning to keychain leadership takes time. while long-term pastoral leadership is usually preferred churches that grow young manage to thrive even in the midst of the stationing process. This health seems to stem from the senior stewards, youth leaders etc sharing the 'keys' with the congregation and members, thus developing a leadership team that stays consistent even when ministers come and go.

### Ideas for Action:

What follows are some practical ideas for action to unlock keychain leadership in your church. Please keep in mind that not every idea will be suitable to your situation, and I'm not suggesting you try them all or even most of them; no-one needs more on there to do list, there are multiple ideas because every church is different, and it takes a team of leaders to grow young. As you read through this part of the document, maybe make notes in the margins about whether or not the particular idea would work in your church? Should it be implemented now or later?



- ✓ **Evaluate Your Own Keychain Leadership:**

In order to share the 'keys' of leadership, you need to know the 'keys' you actually hold and the 'keys' your church holds. List the major responsibilities in the first column and then in the second note who holds the 'keys' (remembering that we don't just mean the physical keys), if it's you, you can decide whether you can train someone (a young person) to hand the keys over to, if that isn't possible for the particular 'key' right now think about the steps needed to make this possible. This might also be an opportune time to examine your own theology of leadership, maybe spend some time reflecting on:

Exodus 18 v 1-27, Joshua 1 v 1-18, 1 Samuel 8 v 1-22, Jeremiah 1 v 4-19, John 13 v 1-17 & 15 v 1-17, 1 Corinthians 12 v 1-31, Ephesians 4 v 11-16 and Philippians 2 v 1-18.

### ✓ **Conduct a Young Leader Assessment**

Instead of starting with the ‘keys’ you hold, a second strategy is to start with the young people themselves. In the spirit of helping your church grow young, list teenagers or emerging adults who already hold, or could hold the ‘keys’ of leadership in your congregation. For each person write out the type of key (meaning area of responsibility) that might fit them based on their skills, gifting’s and passions. Then write out the potential next steps needed to get them ready to receive each particular key. After trying this activity on your own, invite volunteers, staff and leadership groups to join in dreaming about the future potential of your churches young people.

### ✓ **Make sure Young People are Trained before giving them keys**

Invest in developing young leaders, which means more than just a training course. Is there a training plan? a budget? Investing in developing young leaders will take time, there are no short cuts, but it’ll be worth the effort. Try some of these:

- Run a young leader development course (please e-mail me for a free copy of the 13 session young leader development course I have put together – [Brian@MethodistLondon.org.uk](mailto:Brian@MethodistLondon.org.uk))
- Invite a young person to preach or lead a small group and help them craft their sermon or lesson
- Send promising young leaders on training courses, and pay for them
- Ask young leaders about an area in which they’d like training. Then invite ‘experts’ to come in and lead a workshop.
- Partner with other churches to host staff and volunteer training together
- Create an internship program (see the One Programme for an example - <http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/children-and-youth/one-programme>)

### ✓ **Conduct a Time Inventory**

Begin by dividing your responsibilities into logical categories (for example, prayer and bible study, sermon prep, relationship building, meetings, event planning and admin) then spend at least a week tracking your time, allocating every hour into those categories and then look at the total amount of time you spend in each area and compare that to how you would like to allocate your time. what changes would happen if you invited young people to hold some of these ‘keys’?

### **✓ When it comes to vulnerability. Go First**

An observation about keychain leaders made by the research is that it's often not what they say that matters most but what they do. Vulnerability is a crucial aspect of keychain leadership. Given young people's desire for authentic leadership, a step towards vulnerability will likely make you an even more attractive leader.

### **✓ Don't surprise your Minister**

In exploring the relationship between minister and the youth or young adult leaders within the churches that are growing young, *trust* emerged as a key theme. Trust makes it easier to share the 'keys' – the youth workers trusted the minister's heart and intentions and the minister trust the judgement of the youth leaders. When youth leaders encounter problems or are facing major decisions it's vital to involve their supervisor as soon as possible.

### **✓ Your support network**

Ensure you have around you a network of relational support, friends who provide that supportive friendship, these deeper relationships are so essential for holistic health

### **✓ Close the gap on Social Distance**

A focus on close personal relationships doesn't mean you need to distance yourself from the rest of the congregation. Keychain leaders intentionally do whatever they can to eradicate the social distance by making themselves available to the congregation. For example by hosting regular dinners, spending time in people's homes etc. it's not about saying that you need to be available 24/7 or that you have all your close relationships formed within your church. Look at your schedule, how much time is spent on admin vs time spent with people, what could you change?

### **✓ Stay connected as a staff team**

People share 'keys' best when they know and trust one another. An example is in one church from the growing young research facilitates this by having a monthly standing meeting where the only agenda item is to have lunch together. No business just sharing life together.

### **✓ Recognise that keys aren't what they used to be**

There is no one size fits all formula for staffing a church – the traditional, get a minister, hire a youth worker model works and works well, but it is not the only model found by the research in the churches that are growing young. Several congregations utilised

retired adults as leaders, while others awakened the passion of those in their twenties. Another difference found in churches growing young is that the youth workers tend not to focus *exclusively* on youth or young adult ministry. They are given a voice (not just more work) into other areas of the church, such as children's ministry, men's or women's ministry, church council meetings. This multifaceted involvement naturally erodes the walls between the age-based silos that can exist.

✓ **Say Thank You**

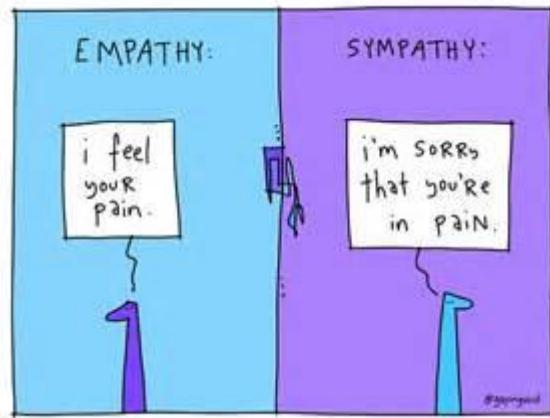
Gratitude recognises and affirms the contribution of others as well as shapes the character of the leader. Say thank you to those you have entrusted with 'keys' but also to whom do you need to say thank you to for entrusting you with the keys of leadership at some point on your journey? Spend some time writing, calling, e-mailing or texting those keychain leaders God used to position you for the leadership role you have today.



# **Discussion Questions:**

- Think back to a time when someone gave you ‘keys’ of access, authority, or responsibility in ministry or elsewhere. What was significant about that for you?
  - What ‘keys’ of your own have you shared with others in the church, in particular with young people?
  - Reflecting on the types of key leadership discovered in the research (p 15), which best describes you? Which describes the leadership culture of your church? what observations have you made about the ways keys are given or held in your congregation?
  - What might it look like to give young people more leadership in your church?
  - What is one area where you personally could share a ‘key’ with a young person?

# Empathise with Today's Young People



Young people today who swim in the deep end of challenging cultural and developmental questions often view the church as merely splashing around in the shallow end, or worse yet, they perceive the church (us) as standing on the poolside, wagging our finger and blowing a whistle at them in condemnation of who they are and what they do. Instead of standing on the poolside or wading in the shallows we, the church need to dive into the deep waters of young people's lives.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zng2piCy4RA>

Watch This!!!

Empathising with today's young people is the second core commitment to come out of the Growing Young research. By empathy, we don't mean patronising young people, nor do we mean a superficial or false sympathy. We certainly don't mean judgementalism, even if it's cloaked in helpful suggestions, for example "instead of playing video games all day, have you thought about looking online for a job?". When we talk about empathy, we mean *feeling with* young people. Empathising is "the work you do to understand people... it is your effort to understand the way they do things and why, their physical and emotional needs, how they think about the world, and what is meaningful to them" – Stanford University's 'D' (design) school.

## Research Findings:

- **Empathy seeks to Understand Today's young people**

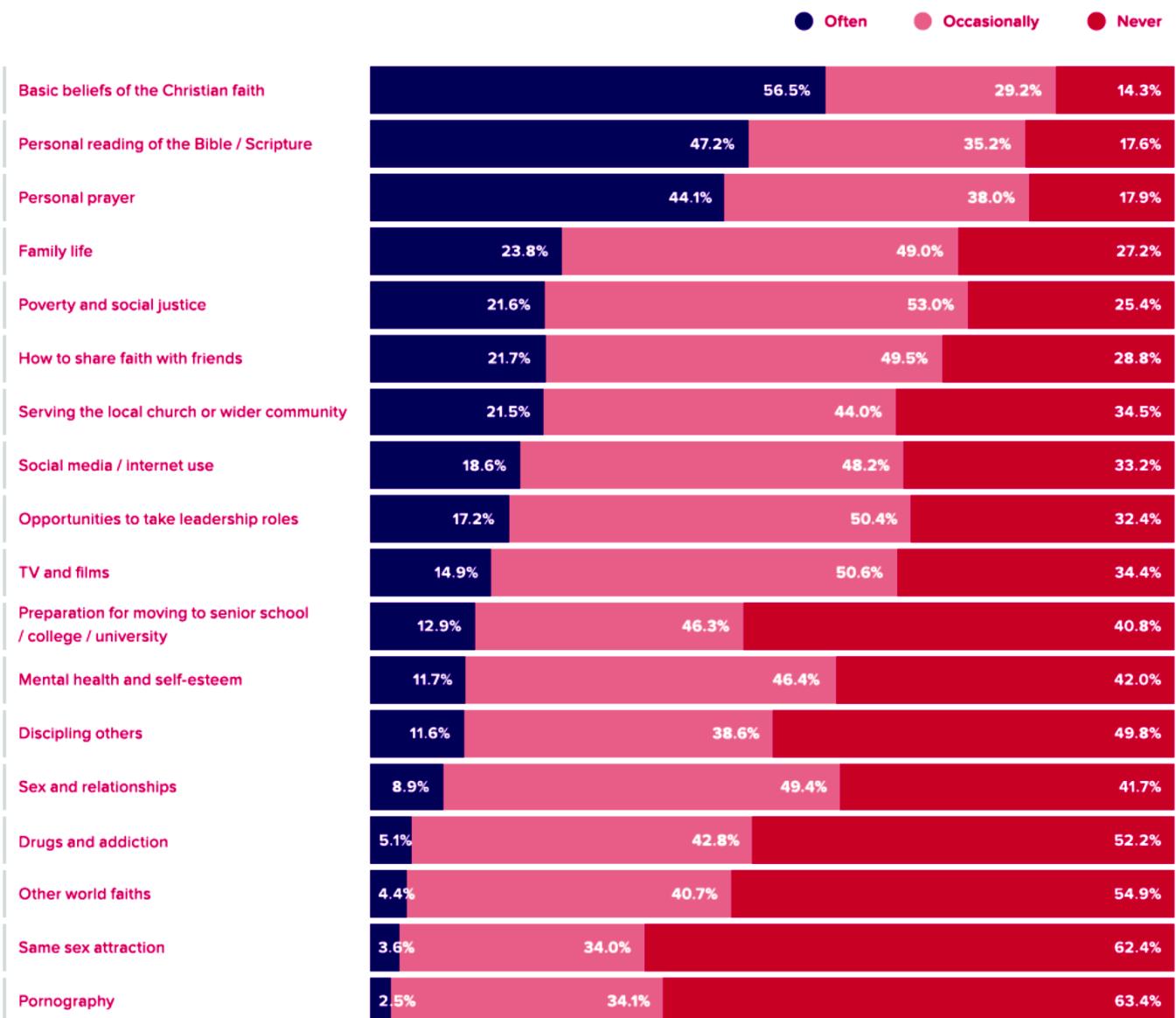
The crux of this core commitment isn't just empathising with young people in general terms; but understanding today's young people. While you may already know many young people from your church or community (or even still be one yourself) you need to understand more of what's going on internally, beneath the surface, as well as the external cultural forces that influence their lives.

In the Losing Heart research document (mentioned on page 17) they wanted to find out what churches were talking about with their young people, and the topics they prioritised in their youth work, so they surveyed 2054 churches across England, Scotland and Wales

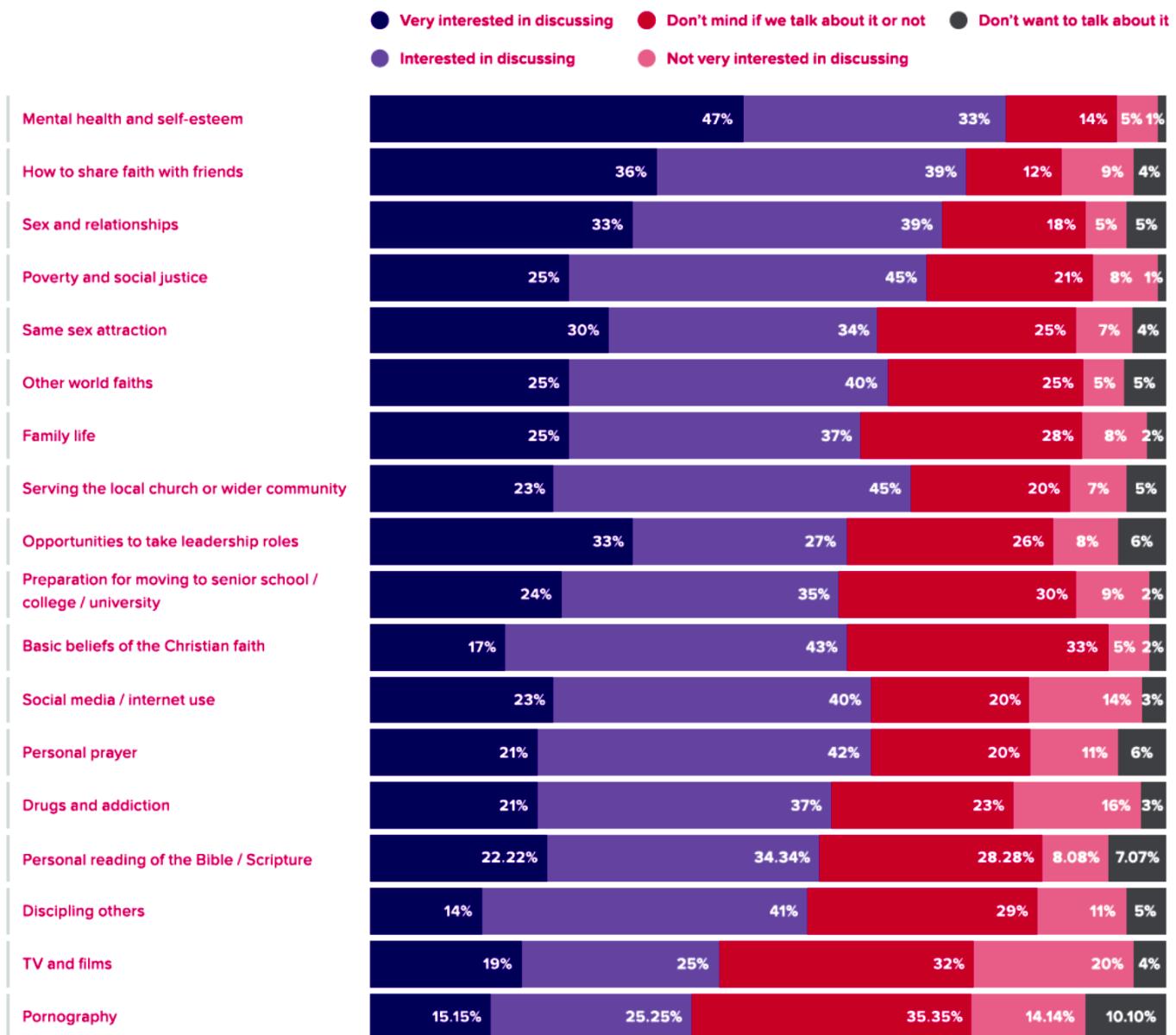
<https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/publications/losing-heart>

They provided what was thought to be a fairly standard list of youth work appropriate topics, which an average youth group may cover. The results (see the following table) were surprising, showing that only 56.5% of the churches surveyed

talk about the basic beliefs of the Christian faith with their young people and under 10% of the churches surveyed regularly talk about sex and relationships, drugs and addiction and pornography.



To compliment these findings they polled 100 11-19 year olds through an online survey to gauge which topics they would be most interested in discussing in their youth group. On average, young people were interested in talking about every topic on the following table. The most popular being mental health and self-esteem at 47%, this was one of the least regularly discussed topics from our survey of churches (only 11.7%). Another topic high on the list of topics young people wanted to discuss was sex and relationships, a subject which only 8.9% of churches surveyed regularly discuss. Perhaps unsurprisingly was pornography, with 10.10% of young people polled wanting to discuss this topic. This is unsurprising due to the sensitive nature of the topic, but nonetheless a topic which youth workers need to engage with young people about and one that 76% of the young people polled would at least open to discussing it.

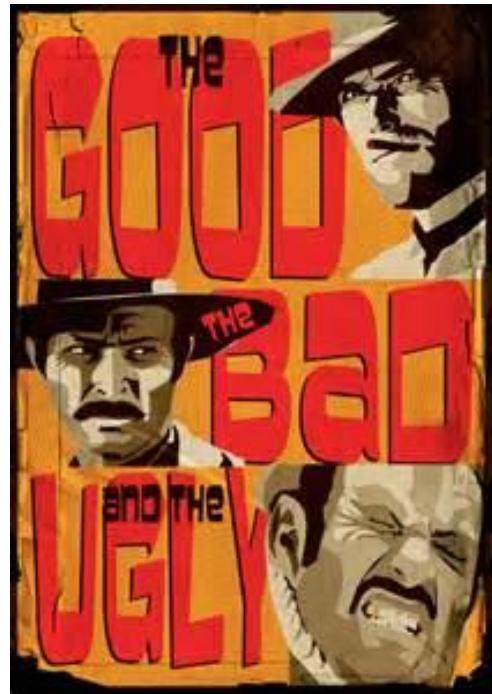


## The Good, the bad and the Ugly

- **Helping you Hit the Ground Running**

Included within the Growing Young research is a bringing together of the best and most recent social science, behavioural and practical theology research to help you hit the ground running in your journey of understanding young people better.

I must warn you that what it takes to understand today's young people is an intense journey. That's because the issues that young people are navigating are intense. Comprehending this generation means slogging through some pretty tough terrain and can be disconcerting at times. I love the fact that you care about young people enough to try and understand not just the good, but the bad and the ugly of their lives.



- **Empathy is contagious**

The young people the research studied were born around the time the film Pay It Forward (2000) came out, the essence of the film is that when you are the recipient of the good deed, you then 'pay it forward' by showing kindness to others. The research highlighted that the young people who were surrounded by empathetic adults often became more empathetic themselves.

- **The 3 ultimate questions of every young person**

At the core of what it means to be human lie three ultimate questions. If we are going to empathise with today's young people, we have to explore these questions. They are often what keep today's young people up at night.

- Who am I?
- Where do I fit?
- What difference do I make?

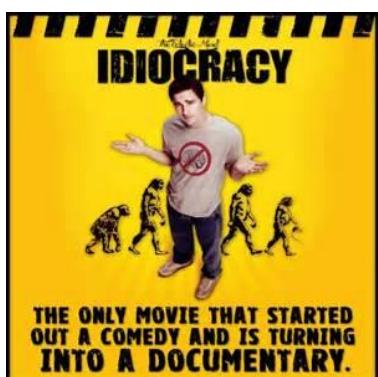
The first question is about *identity*, meaning a young person's conception (who they think they are) and expression (how they express who they are). The second is a question of *belonging*, or a young person's quantity and quality of life-giving relationships. The third is a question about *purpose*, or a young person's commitment to and ability to engage in meaningful activities that impact others.

- **The young people You know experience these 3 questions acutely**

Every one of us, regardless of age, contends with a common angst about our identity, belonging and purpose. Why is it then that those of us over 30 encounter these questions with less fervour? Those over 30 sense these questions as a back-burner presence, with intervals when the heat is turned up. However young people feel that heat acutely and constantly, their relational and self-image struggles (due to the nature of adolescence) keep their identity, belonging and purpose dilemmas at a constant boiling point.

- **A later finish line**

This generation are developing at a different pace. The time it takes for young people to mature has changed. On the one hand their journey towards adulthood is speeding up and on the other hand it had slowed down. In comparison with previous generations, today's journey toward maturity often seems to move in slow motion. Young people are older when they turn the corner of identity, belonging and purpose typically equated with becoming an adult. The average age for first marriage is now later, some news outlets reporting that it's now in the early 30's; compared with the mid 20's in the 1990's. The average age of women giving birth has now reached 30, compared with 28 in 1995 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-28329737>). Given the uncertainties of today's economy and the increased assumption that a university degree is a necessity, <https://fullfact.org/education/are-there-record-numbers-young-people-going-university/> - this link shows that a record number of young people are applying for university according to UCAS. While previous generations of young adults plunged into the workforce right after secondary school or in their early twenties, many of today's young people wait until their late 20's or early 30's to start a long-term career. Therefore it takes them longer to become financially independent, and so often are living with parents till a later age because of house prices, meaning the average age of new home buyers is 35 years of age. This date paints a clear and compelling picture of what has come to be labelled as "extended adolescence". The traditional signs that a young person has entered adulthood - a spouse, a family, completed education, a steady job and financial independence – now occur 5 or more years later. In no hurry to put down permanent roots and often rejecting one or more of these markers of adulthood altogether, today's emerging adults are 'explorers'.



If you want a bit of a giggle and can put up with a bit of swearing then watch this intro to the 2006 film Idiocracy:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzbWXgM0ygU>

This role of explorer is not necessarily a conscious or intentional choice by the young people themselves, they have been handed a more complex world, that's more competitive and diverse, with exponentially more paths available to them. As a result, there is so much more for them to navigate and explore - whether they want to or not.

That's why some 25 year olds sometimes seem like 15 year olds.

- **An earlier starting line**

Yet the inverse is also true. Sometimes 15 year olds can blow us away with their maturity and act like 25 year olds. Just as the finish line to adulthood is now later, their journey toward identity, belonging and purpose starts earlier.

Biologically, the onset of puberty is now starting at around 12 and 13 years for some girls.

Culturally, young people are bombarded with a wave of pressures that immerses them in what had previously been only for adults. Children had arguably seen more, heard more and done more than almost any previous generation. Young people carry more access to the world via smart phones in their pockets than their parents could ever fathom at the same age. And yet at 25, they still rely on those some parents to pay their mobile phone bill.

Click CEOP for more information about keeping your young people safe online

Talking to your young people about their online life. Having a calm and open conversation is one way for you and the young people to explore what is happening in an honest and supportive way.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

15 is the new 25 and 25 is the new 15, yes it is that complicated.

## Young Peoples Erratic Search for identity: Earlier Start + Later Finish = Longer Race

A longer race full of hazards, alternative paths and obstacles. As we seek to understand the world young people inhabit, we first need to examine how pervasive stress peripheral faith hijack their ability to define themselves.

### ➤ **Pervasive Stress**

What are some of the stresses that your young people are facing??

The following is taken from the Young Minds Website:

- Family breakdown is widespread.
- There is so much pressure to have access to money, the perfect body and lifestyle.
- Materialist culture heavily influences young people

- 24 hour social networking and what young people can access from a young age can have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.
- Body image is a source of much distress for many young people.
- Bullying on and offline is rife.
- Increasing sexual pressures and early sexualisation throw young people into an adult world they don't understand
- Violence is rife in many communities and fear of crime a constant source of distress for thousands of young people.
- Schools are getting more and more like exam factories; university entry has become more competitive and expensive.
- 13% of 16-24 year olds are not in employment, education or training.

Spend some time writing the ones your young people are facing in the box below:

Young Minds research indicates that 850,000 children aged 5-16 have mental health problems:

([http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training\\_services/policy/mental\\_health\\_statistics](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/policy/mental_health_statistics))

- Three children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental health disorder.
- Roughly 725,000 people in the UK suffer from Eating Disorders, 86% of these will have shown symptoms before the age of 19.
- One in 10 deliberately harm themselves regularly (and 15,000 of them are hospitalised each year because of this)
- Nearly 80,000 children and young people suffer from severe depression
- Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14.
- 45% of children in care have a mental health disorder - these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society.
- Nearly 300,000 young people in Britain have an anxiety disorder.
- 95% of imprisoned young offenders have a mental health disorder. Many of them are struggling with more than one disorder.

Many thousands of children and young people are isolated, unhappy, have eating disorders and self-harm; some tragically take their own lives. Many are likely to become

victims of crime, grow up in dysfunctional families, or left to cope with illness, drugs and/or alcohol issues – not necessarily their own.

There is still a huge stigma around mental health which means children and young people are not getting the support they need. Mental health problems can lead to young people being disruptive, difficult, withdrawn and disturbed and it's vital they are supported and not just ignored or told off.

[http://www.youngminds.org.uk/about/whats\\_the\\_problem](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/about/whats_the_problem) - check out this for more info



Although the typical young person is steeped in stress, there is some good news for churches. The hazards caused by stress seem less troublesome for churches that are 'Grow Young'. With over 80% of the young people surveyed saying that their involvement in church activities and leadership decreases their stresses, by reminding them of what's important and inviting them to step away from the chaos of their lives to refocus on loving God and others.

### ➤ Peripheral Faith

We can and should celebrate the fact that young people involved in the life of the church feel less stress. The identity of young people in general is not rooted in the Christian faith as we might hope. Jumping right back to page 4 of this document we can see that 'The Alarming Reality' is that:

Church attendance is declining with the 'Rise of the Nones' – those who identify themselves as having 'No Religion':

- A recent YouGov poll surveyed 8455 UK adults, of these 3199 identify themselves as 'No Religion'. In total, 38% of the population now report having 'no religion'.
- That proportion grows to nearly half (48%) of young adults (under 30) of whom only 26% identify with a Christian denomination.
- 'No Religion' has nearly overtaken 'Christian' see table below for age breakdown.
- Most of the 'Nones' are not atheists, they just don't identify with religion. Atheism has been growing far less than 'No Religion'.
- Amongst the 'Nones' 43% are atheist, 40% are agnostic and 16% believe in God.
- Most 'Nones' don't decisively reject God, what they reject is an identification with 'religion'

While most young people are not hostile to the Christian faith, there is an increasing (and worrying) trend to reject the idea of 'religion' and all that comes with that. While faith is ideally a central force in shaping a young person's identity, the 'bland' faith being offered by the 'typical' church is not providing a big enough gravitational pull for young people. Rather than define themselves by faith. Teenagers and emerging adults wander

aimlessly, searching down other paths for meaning, because we haven't given them an attractive enough alternative, hence the 'Rise of the Nones'.

### ➤ **Young Peoples Uncertain Quest for Belonging**

Young people's search for Identity is closely linked to their quest for Belonging. Unfortunately young people erratic identity development makes forming community more of a challenge. After all it's difficult to find where you belong when who you are keeps changing. As a result the teenagers and emerging adults in your church community often end up socially overstimulated and relationally under-supported. Therefore some young people turn to digital technology and sexual experimentation to help them find belonging.

### ➤ **Digital Technology**

Today's digital technology helps young people to connect with people on a global scale, from their closest friend down the road to their favourite musician across the pond. Teenagers and emerging adults can – and do – connect with everyone and learn about everything online. It's tempting for older generations to greet young people glued to their devices with four words "*Put That Thing Down*" But a better response is to try and understand *why* they hunger for that digital connection. Young people use social media for one major reason: *Connection*. Digital media offers young people desperate for community unprecedented access to friends, family and the rest of the world. But we need to appreciate and empathise that technology is a double-edged sword for young people eager to belong. On the one edge they have 'connections' with more people than ever before. But on the other, often sharper edge we have a generation being shaped by 'Selfie' culture of comparing themselves to others, in how they look but also in lifestyle and popularity. With the increase in the use of Instagram among teenagers. In which you can 'Photoshop' images of yourself before you post them. Sexting is a huge issue, with young people sending inappropriate images in the search of finding acceptance and belonging.

Here are some quick facts to help you understand how teenagers use digital technology to stay in touch with others:

- 92% of teenagers report going online at least once per day with 24% confessing to being online 'almost constantly'
- A majority, 71%, use more than one social media platform (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, snapchat to name a few) to keep in touch with friends.
- The Median number of texts a teenager sends and receives per day is 30, but that number increases to 50 for 15-17 year old girls.

## ➤ Sexual Experimentation

Hoping to connect with others through more than just a screen, many teenagers – including those who view their religion as very important to them – are turning to sex in the search for a feeling of belonging, the average age for young people losing their virginity in the UK being 17.

Beyond their quest in belong, there are a number of reasons as to what motivates young people to engage in sexual exploration (including sexting, pornography and oral sex) Over the past couple of decades there has been an increased Sexualisation of Culture in the UK, leading to a 'normalising' of sexual experimentation. Peer pressure is also a major factor, the idea that 'everybody's doing it'.

In research undertaken by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence: Eight out of 10 teenagers lose their virginity when they are drunk, feelings pressurised into having sex or are not using contraception, a survey has revealed.

The research is alarming combined with the fact that the UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe and that sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as chlamydia, are found mainly in those aged 16-19. The survey of 3,000 London secondary school pupils aged 15-18 found that:

- 39 per cent had sex for the first time when one or other partner was not equally willing
- Almost three in 10 lost their virginity for 'negative reasons', such as wanting to please a boyfriend
- 51 per cent of girls and 37 per cent of boys had had unprotected sex
- 58 per cent of girls and 39 per cent of boys had slept with someone at least once without using a condom
- A majority of both girls and boys who are sexually active wish they had waited. Seven in ten sexually experience teens (71%) say they wish they had waited until they were older to have sex. Only 20 per cent who have sex for the first time take precautions, are in a steady relationship or feel the timing is right

Taken from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/may/21/schools.education> and <http://www.safeteens.org/stds/waiting-abstinence/>

Whether young people look to sexual exploration as a fast track to gratification or a shortcut to belonging, their sexual choices often detour them away from the sense of belonging they seek. So what initially felt like a speedy path to connection often turns into a dead end of pain and regret.

## ➤ Adult Abandonment

We need to put our hands up and admit that part of the allure of technology and sexual exploration stems from a lack of support offered by adults. Have we become too busy or self-absorbed to invest time in young people without an agenda?

*"A man in our church became my mentor right around the time my parents ended up separating. He basically became another figure that I could talk to and ask for advice and hang out with. He has definitely been the most important person in my life from the church. I still talk to him on a regular basis for support and advice eight years later" – Marcus age 26*



Young people's hunger for caring adults doesn't end at the conclusion of adolescence. Emerging adults need the loving presence of others to help them navigate a host of new decisions. Robert Wuthnow in his book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty somethings are shaping the future of American Religion* he argues:

'we provide day care centres, schools, welfare programs, family counselling, colleges, job training programs, and even detention centres as a kind of institutional surround-sound until young adults reach 18, and then we provide nothing... yet nearly all the major decisions a person makes about marriage, child rearing and work happens after these support systems have ceased to function. This is not a good way to run a society'

There are a number of churches across the connexion that are meeting what the Methodist Church has entitled the Missing Generation, but this research is calling for more. Churches that are 'Growing Young' recognise that the absence of caring adults and help in building healthy families is the Achilles heel that blocks young people's quest for belonging and community.

## ➤ I'm all for empathy, but what do I do when young people I know make choices that are clearly unwise??? Does being supportive mean I have to stay quiet???

While sometimes our best move is to remain quiet and pray, at other times, the most compassionate and supportive step we can take is to speak up. If you feel called to share your concerns we recommend you follow this principle: *First Connect, and then Correct*. Embracing this approach might mean you.

- Pay attention to how you are feeling before you talk with them. Are you nervous or scared? Do this young person's choices stir up memories or old wounds in your own life?
- Start your conversation by affirming that you appreciate about them. This will be help by having built a relationship (Connect) with them first.
- Gently probe how they are feeling about the particular issue that concerns you. Instead of diving into a lecture.
- Ask if they can think of any other ways they could respond to that issue.
- Help them explore the pros and cons of those potential responses.
- Be impartial, giving options and choices.
- Share your concerns, and then ask what they think about the observations you have made. Both and positive and the negative.
- Ask how you can help them make any changes they desire to make.
- Show them the same response (unconditional love) you would give if they did want to change, even if they don't or try to and fail. Even especially if they disappoint you, please don't be the one adult who makes them feel abandoned.
- Pray for them and with them.

## ➤ **Young Peoples 'long way round' journey to Purpose**

For the teenagers you know who crave meaningful community the path towards it can be daunting. Young people's search for purpose is fuelled by their deep desire to make a difference; however there are forces pushing them back on the path, jaded realism and cultural pluralism.

## ➤ **Jaded Realism**

We often hear contradictory messages about young people on the one hand today's young people are heralded as justice crusaders devoted to helping those who are poor and marginalised.



Portrayed as selfless revolutionaries ready to change the world one social media post at a time. However on the other hand, the very same cohort of young people is often depicted as egotistical and entitled, motivated primarily by whatever best serves their pursuit of their own happiness.

Which is it? Are today's young people selfish or selfless? Yes.

They are both (just like the rest of us).

To quote Eugene Cho in his book Overrated:

*'Are we more in love with the idea of changing the world than actually changing it'.*

As indicated by the Losing Heart research of the 100 11-19 years old's who contributed to the online poll, 70% of young people were interested or very interested in discussing poverty and social justice, with 63% indicating an interest in serving the local church and community.

Yet all too often life trips them up, the reality of student loans and how much it costs to even go to university puts young people off, some find their dream job only to get burnt out or find out their dream job is really a dead end; with those emerging adults wanting to change the world being in the minority. And although young people at the churches used in the Growing Young research were less jaded, the majority of emerging adults are either consumed or disappointed with their own haphazard journey that they have become jaded realists who don't believe their efforts can move the needle to help others.

### ➤ **Cultural Pluralism**

With an increasing diverse population in terms of ethnic groups, today's young people are more likely to have cross-cultural friendships. And perhaps not coincidentally the value of cultural diversity has almost been the air they have breathed since birth. This appreciation for diversity – meaning an appreciation of others from a different background – which is fantastic but it can lead to pluralism – meaning the acceptance of different religious values systems as equally valid. Hence the Losing Heart online poll of 100 young aged 11-19 years indicates that 75% want to talk about how to share their faith with friends and 65% interested in knowing about other religions. (see page 25). This initial burst toward purpose that comes from cross-cultural relationships often degenerates into social and religious inclusivity that can halt young people's progress. Struggling in their exploration of a pluralistic culture that either implies or states explicitly that all belief systems are equally valid, meaning many young people and emerging adults lack the motivation and/or confidence to share their faith with others. Because their beliefs are no more valid than what anyone else believes. Pluralism can become a slow drain on a young person's energy, emptying them of their passion to impact the world.

On the flipside, in churches found to be 'Growing Young' the energy that teenagers and emerging adults pour into social justice activism often flows directly from their diverse relationships. It is typically a growing relationship with someone who is 'different' – through their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual preference that motivates the young people into action.

## Ideas for Action:

### ✓ Respond with Grace, Love and Mission

We believe the gospel, the Good News of Scripture, matters and offers the most profound answers to young people's questions about Identity, Belonging and Purpose.

- Young people's deepest questions about *Identity* can be answered by God's *Grace*
- Young people's search for community and somewhere to *Belong* is ultimately met by *Unconditional Love*.
- Young people's hunger for *Purpose* can be satisfied by being involved in God's *Mission* in the world



Grace, Love, Mission. In many ways, these represent the crux of what we – and more importantly Jesus – offer young people. Since the rest of this document and the book often touches on these 3 themes, the following Ideas for Action will specifically focus on helping you to empathise with this generation's journey toward – or sadly often away from – good answers. However in the midst of your journeying with young people and emerging adults, don't be afraid to point them to Grace, Love and Mission.

### ✓ Rewind to Your Own Journey

What was your own quest for identity, belonging and purpose like?

What helped you?

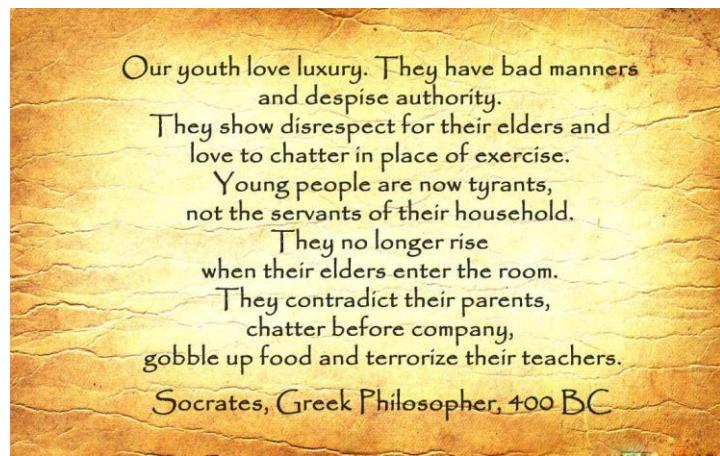
What roadblocks slowed your progress?

How can these memories increase your empathy for today's teenagers and emerging adults?

## ✓ **Stereotype No More**

You or your congregations likely have stereotypes about young people.  
Perhaps...

- An unemployed 24 year old = Lazy
- A 19 year old taking a “Gap Year” before starting university = Non-Committal
- An unmarried 32 year old = Loser
- A 28 year male still living at home with his parents = Mummies Boy
- Any Teenager = Rebel



## ✓ **When you see something New, Confusing and Maybe even offensive in Young Culture. Ask Why?**

#Hashtags, Selfies, Instagram, Whatsapp Messaging, modern music or the latest fashion trend for men wearing skinny jeans (which I personally don't understand). At best these pieces of youth culture are confusing; at worst they are downright annoying. But when you place any one of these pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of a young person's search for identity, belonging and purpose, a different picture takes shape. Clothing choices are part of a young person's quest to explore and define themselves. Constant texting helps them stay connected to their community. Music captures the joys and laments of being young. Closely linked to almost every confusing cultural trend is the young person's quest for meaningful relationship with themselves, their community and the world. If you can't see the link between their choices and the 3 ultimate questions, ask a young person to help you make those connections. Ask why that trend is popular (or 'trending') and how it is connected with the quest for identity, belonging or purpose. that conversation alone could help your relationship with that young person, as well as your empathy for young people in general.

This is the reason a sat through the first Twilight movie (that's 2 hours I won't get back ☺) because I wanted to understand firstly what all the fuss (at the time) was about and secondly to better understand the young people I was working with at the time

✓ **Walk through Your Church and Worship Service with the Eyes of a Young Person**

“Time in erodes awareness of” – Pastor Andy Stanley

We may have been part of our congregations and church culture for so long that we may have become blind to how it feels to guests.

**Question: ‘If a stranger walked into your church, what would they see?’**

Think about: the language used, the traditions, the worship, ceremony and environment. Try to empathise with how the church culture you’ve come to love feels to a first time visitor, Especially a young person.

What steps could you take to make your church more welcoming to young people?

Now ask your young people the same questions?

*See Appendix for a resource of helping your young people ‘Reimagine Church’*

✓ **Learn their Names**

You'll be amazed at the power of remembering someone's name. This is especially true with teenagers and emerging adults who want to be known. As we seek to be more empathetic, knowing their name is an easy first step.

✓ **Dive Deeper**

Understanding identity, belonging and purpose helps you empathise with the ups and downs being navigated by young people as a whole. But you'll likely stay in the shallow end until you build a quality relationship with at least one young person. Mentoring someone, based on some shared interest, is a great way of doing this.



## Discussion Questions:

- Empathy can be understood in a number of ways, this chapter defines empathy as “feeling with” or “sitting on the curb of a young person’s life, celebrating their dreams and grieving over their despair”. What difference does it make for you when someone offers you empathy like this? Describe what it feels like?
  
- Which of the 3 ultimate questions; who am I? Where do I fit? And what difference do I make? Rise to the top for you most when you were a teenager or emerging adult? What about today?
  
- Who or what has been most helpful to you in navigating those questions?
  
- What factors do you think create the biggest generational gap in your church?
  
- How does your church empathise with young people well?
  
- What gets in the way of your church empathising with young people?
  
- What steps need to be taken in order to be a more hospitable place for young people’s journey toward identity, belonging and purpose?



# Taking Jesus' Message Seriously

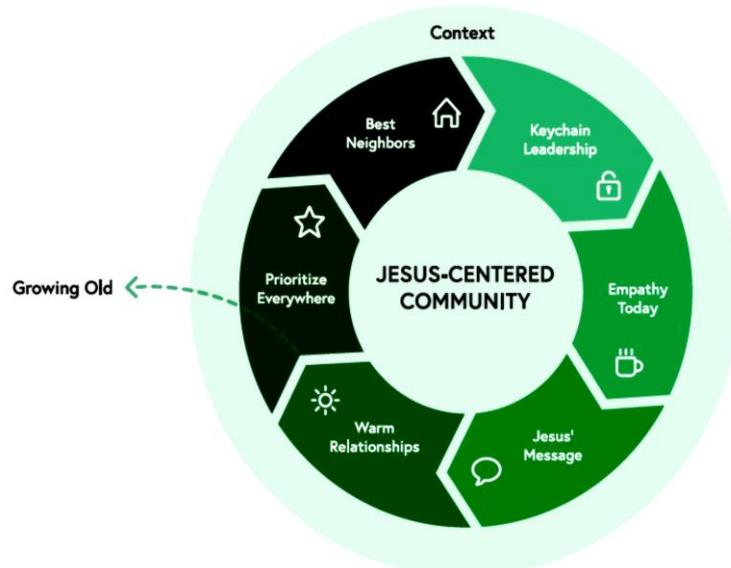
## ➤ MTD? (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism)

What would it look like for your church to embody the message of Jesus? – Not a story of shame but of redemption. Not a narrative of being written off based on sin but one of being embraced and restored. It's not about being perfect, young people are going to screw up (we all do) how are they going to be treated when they do?

This is the Jesus that congregations who are Growing Young follow...

- The Jesus who did not condemn but set free
- The Jesus who took what seemed broken and restored wholeness (google Kintsugi)
- The Jesus who invited followers into a life of discipleship that required sacrifice
- The Jesus who embodied the fullness of God's unconditional love and unending faithfulness

The teenagers and emerging adults face a long list of obstacles that threaten to hinder their pursuit of Jesus (see last chapter) adding to this list could be churches drained by a 'thin' gospel. The Growing Young research team were struck by how the commitment to take Jesus' message seriously is both demonstrated through action and the overall spirit/ethos in the churches growing young.



Of course the Jesus message can't be contained in just one core commitment; rather the Good News radiates into all the core commitments.

Pursuing Jesus – not just pursuing young people – is at the heart of churches growing young.

## Research Findings:

One of the central themes that came out of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) is that the dominant belief system of teenagers today is MTD or Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

- It is *moralistic*, meaning that religious young people equate faith with being a good, moral person (generally being nice).
- It is *therapeutic*, so faith becomes a means of feeling better about themselves.
- And it is *deistic*, meaning God exists, but this God is not involved in human affairs with any regularity

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moralistic\\_therapeutic\\_deism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moralistic_therapeutic_deism)

Is MTD a result of poor understanding? Or do we just do a good job teaching a poor version of the gospel?

Research suggests both. Developmentally, adolescents are perfect candidates for MTD. Their concrete (although becoming more abstract) thinking leads them to focus on behaviours and their self-focus causes them to think that others exist to make their lives more pleasant and that God doesn't need to be actively involved in their world. But on the other hand, parents and significant adults are the greatest influence on young people's faith, including the language we use to talk about faith. Teenagers are much more likely to reflect back this flawed teaching than to create their own theology. So we have to ask ourselves what version of the gospel are we teaching young people?

God has essentially become a heavenly butler for teenagers, inspiring them at best to be polite to others. While a more passionate faith would provide young people with the anchor they need to ground their identity in Christ, this half-hearted religious worldview leaves teenagers and emerging adults adrift in a 'lukewarm' sea of bland religious niceness.

When the research asked 535 young people from churches that are growing young to describe their faith, they found a much more 'robust' gospel. Among 19-23 year olds in particular the message of Jesus beats the MTD gospel. However, it is true that young people 14-17 years of age were more inclined towards a gospel akin to MTD, referring more to the general idea of 'doing good', describing God in deistic terms. Only 1 out of 5 of the teenagers we surveyed used relational language when describing the message of Jesus. The following cringe-worthy interview excerpt illustrates this well:

"The central message of the gospel is that someone is always there for you and that there are many different paths you can take but ultimately they lead to the same thing, which is heaven. I feel like there are many good things you can do and many

bad things you can do, but no matter what, you are always going to be forgiven. Even if you think something is unforgivable, God is like this magic person that can always cure it and can make it okay. And there is always going to be a happy place even when you

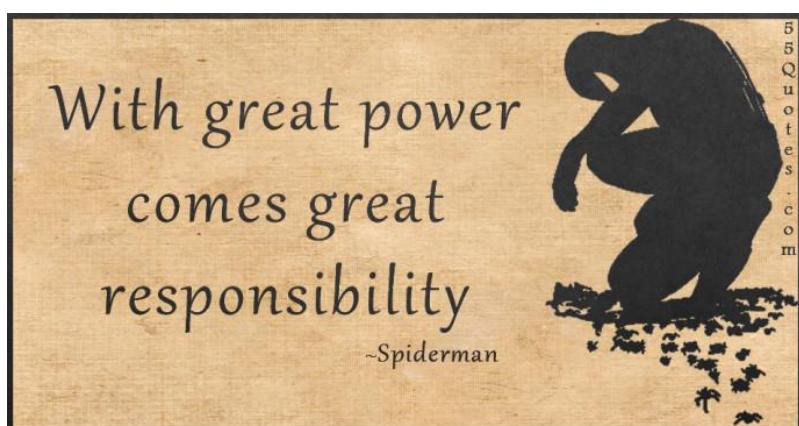
are in your darkest of darks. There is always going to be light that is there for you”  
(Alyssa, age 18)

*If you are feeling brave ask your young people to describe the central message of the gospel? Go on I dare you ☺*

You'll notice a few of the features of Alyssa's description of the gospel is fairly universalist, focussed on an abstract notion of 'heaven' (or happy place or light) off in the distance; describing grace like some kind of magic trick performed by your fairy godmother (another young person described God as someone 'like the ice cream man'). These descriptions fail to mention Jesus and his life, suffering, death and resurrection.

But before we blame teenagers for their lack of understanding of the gospel, lets first take a look in the mirror. The research suggests that Alyssa didn't make this gospel up on her own, out of thin air, she would have witnessed it all her life.

We're responsible... Teenagers and emerging adults are not devising this tepid 'lukewarm' faith on their own. They are not substituting MTD for the messages they hear and the modelling they see in churches today. Instead, they are mimicking a tame version of faith that permeates both their churches and homes. So rather than shake our heads in disapproval at faith like Alyssa's, we need to let these repeated descriptions invite us into a place where we examine our own faith and understanding of the Good News.



### ➤ The Golden Rule Gospel

Running in parallel with MTD we find the Golden Rule gospel, which is generally relayed as some version of "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6 v 31). The passion generated by this version of the gospel is lukewarm at best. The Golden Rule Christianity is described by Nancy Ammerman as emphasising on 'right living' rather than 'right believing'. At the surface level, this faith doesn't seem too alarming. These believers want to help others, and in many cases practice hospitality and care for those around them in ways that put some more spiritually vibrant congregations to shame. But at the root of this version of Golden Rule faith isn't really faith at all; it's behaviourism. God is found through good behaviour, and along the way we learn to tolerate and embrace those who are different, at least in theory. It takes 'nice' a step closer to kindness, but stops short of the transformative love for our neighbour which is underpinned by grace. Most disturbingly Jesus is largely absent from the picture.

## ➤ A More Robust Gospel

Churches that are 'growing young' are changing behaviour based gospels like MTD and Golden Rule by making 3 key shifts in how they describe the message of Jesus:

### Shift 1: Less talk about abstract beliefs and more talk about Jesus

Instead of simply agreeing with abstract theological truths, young people are drawn to the person and work of Jesus Christ. They want to know the meaning behind the tradition-laden religious terms and to dig deeper into the roots of what Jesus said and did. Of those young people who participated in the research 7 out of 10 mention Jesus when they talk about the gospel, mentioning his role as saviour and God's Son, they also spoke about Jesus' work as restoring, liberating, freeing and making new. Also quite telling was that the 3 out of 10 who didn't mention Jesus, spoke in terms of MTD. This shows a clear contrast in the versions of the gospel being used. Simply *mentioning* Jesus does not equate with understanding who Jesus was/is and what he did/does. So whether you are encouraged or discouraged by the findings, it does give us hope that 70% of the respondents descriptions of the gospel focussed on the centrality of Jesus. Jesus is compelling, and the vast majority of young people in churches that are 'growing young' want to talk about him. While the way we sometimes do church (including the language used and the traditions) seems to be no longer working for young people today, Jesus is no less an beckoning figure for teenagers and emerging adults.

If MTD and Golden Rule versions of the gospel are seen within church communities, how much more true is it for young people on the fringes or non-church backgrounds? What version of the gospel are they seeing portrayed by the church? As mentioned earlier on pages 3-5, there is a lot on apathy around following a religion, with the rise on the 'nones'. So if the gospel these young people are witnessing in just about being moral, feeling good about ourselves and that God is not active or that it's just about being nice to each other. Then why would they follow that, we need to get them a better version of the gospel, than the one currently prevalent in a lot of churches..

### Shift 2: Less tied to formulas and more focussed on a redemptive narrative

Jesus' message best makes sense when it's understood as part of a larger story, the role of narrative theology and teaching has been re-emerging of late, and this trend is a hopeful one for the church. *Narrative theology and teaching*, means interpreting each part of the bible within the whole unfolding story of God and God's people. A couple of good examples and resources of this are: The Jesus Storybook by Sally Lloyd-Jones, Where, as the tagline for the book goes 'Every story whispers his name'. Another example comes from Soul Survivor church and is called Storylines: Tracing the threads of the bible.

Everywhere from the pulpit to the children's work the leaders that were studied in the growing young research are tapping into the power of narrative to shape congregational imaginations. When people can see their story located within God's story the work of the church gains greater meaning. According to the research, churches that communicate the gospel of Jesus as the centrepiece of God's story are more likely to have young people with greater faith vibrancy and maturity. What's more they are also focus more on worship with others, small groups and bible studies.

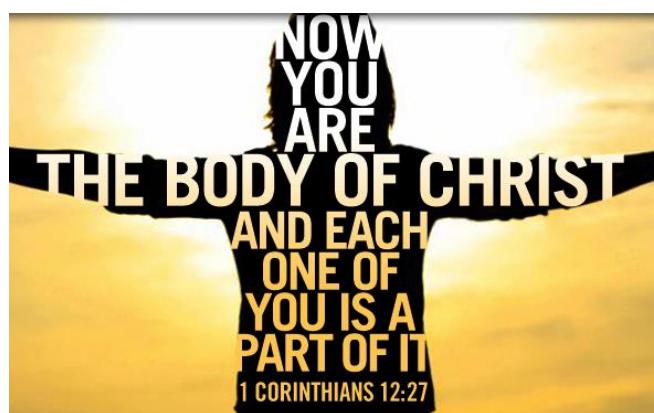
### Shift 3: Less about Heaven later and more about life here and now

A majority of people in churches that are growing young talked about a here and now faith, not focussing on going to heaven and hardly any talk about hell. Salvation was a major theme, but a kind of salvation that is more focussed on life in the present than something in the future. In other words a gospel that promises not only rewards at the end but also transformation now. It is a new way of living, a new reality that is intended to pervade everything in this life, and that has both present and eternal implications.

#### ➤ **It's not Just about being saved from. It's about being saved for**

Some young people wonder whether Christianity is offering anything to *do* or simply offering a list of things *not to do*. No's are good at providing boundaries (which are needed), but they don't provide any kind of vision for living as a Christian. Young people's resistance to the gospel presented as a list of No's is both fair and logical. Young people don't just want to be saved from something later; they want to be saved for something. They want to get to work. They want to be significant. They want lives filled with action, not just restriction. "it's less about, you're a sinner, change now... and more... This is awesome, come be part of this" – 15 year old volunteer.

The good news is that this is not only the kind of life young people want, *it's what Jesus wants too*. Following Jesus is costly and requires sacrifice, and invites us to actively participate in God's kingdom. In fact the church by its very nature is participatory, everyone shares the work. It's a body (Romans 12v5-8, 1 Cor 12v1-31, Eph 4v1-16), and every part needs to play its role in order to build up the whole.



## ➤ Challenge is Not something to avoid

During the research interviews, 40% of young people specifically mentioned “challenge” when they talked about why their church is so effective with their age group. They appreciate challenging teaching, even when it makes them feel uncomfortable and

invites them to make changes to their lives based on the teaching. Contrary to popular belief that young people want it easy, many told the researchers they love their churches *because* they inspire them to act. Leaders (as explored in the section about Keychain Leadership) who model authenticity and humility extend the challenge of following Jesus not from a place of superiority or power but out of an invitation to pursue the way of Jesus together. In short, teenagers and emerging adults in churches that are

growing young aren’t running from a gospel that requires hard things for them. They are running towards it.

## ➤ Evangelism Isn’t Dead among young people – It’s just Different than We might think

The word *Evangelism* was hardly mentioned by young people in the study. Talking about faith with non-Christians was the least common practice among a list of variables related to faith maturity. But this doesn’t mean evangelism is dead. While fewer young people in the study are talking about faith with non-believers than we might hope, however, one characteristic most significantly related to the sharing of the gospel is increased honesty about questions and struggles. Perhaps it’s not certainty that makes young people better evangelists but honesty?

Young people in the research were less concerned about convincing a friend (much less a stranger) to recite a formulaic prayer and more concerned about generating authentic dialogue about faith.

It’s not that teenagers and emerging adults simply want to avoid certainty but that questions – when articulated – open up deep exploration of both doubt and faith. What’s critical is that the young people not walk alone through those canyons of doubt and uncertainty about faith.

Not only is honesty correlated with sharing faith, but those who are honest about their struggles also tend to read the bible more. Perhaps they are looking for answers to their questions or maybe the more they read the more questions they have.

Evangelism among today’s young people is more about seeking understanding of the other person’s beliefs /faith (or lack thereof) than trying to ‘convert’ someone. It’s more like the young people are saying ‘I understand’ and then journeying with them. The



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young people in the research have discovered how powerful it is to listen well before we speak, to understand, to form authentic relationships, to be honest about their own struggles and questions.

## Ideas for Action:

### ➤ **Elevate faith education beyond just following a moral code**

Often teenagers and emerging adults have inherited a theology from well-meaning children's ministry leaders and volunteers who want to make the gospel "practical" for children and so every Bible story ends with a moral punch line, often resulting in a behaviour based gospel that feels a lot like a list of do's and don'ts that we must follow to please God, more than the invitation to join and participate in the beautiful story that is God's transformative grace. But this moral behavioOur gospel continues into the youth and adult teaching as well. To help your church take Jesus' message seriously, evaluate the teaching, from the children's work right up to the adults, including the sermon. Ask questions like:

- Do we let Bible stories speak for themselves, or do we impose moral rules for people to follow?
- In what ways do we create space for wonder, questioning and reflection of scripture to aid in allowing them to discover meaning, rather than teaching a predetermined set of points?
- How do we teach specific moral questions within the light of God's grace and our identity in Christ?
- How does our teaching emphasise grace over works? (see Gal 5 v 22-25)
- How are our invitations to a life changed centred on a call to follow Jesus instead of a call to follow our own moral or political agendas?



### ➤ **Tie each part of scripture into the grand narrative of God**

Many teenagers and emerging may struggle with identifying how particular stories, teachings or relationships fit within the whole. After the entire bible may look like one book, but is really a collection of many books. The more we connect the dots for young people when we teach, the more a holistic story emerges.

Here's a couple of ideas:

- Teach straight through the Bible, through the books of the Bible, or through the life of Jesus.

- Utilize the seasons of the Church year (the liturgical calendar) to ground congregations in an annual cycle of the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Encourage the development of Holy Habits, mainly challenging the whole church to read the Bible in a year and follow that through with teaching.
- Develop a sequence of teaching, over a number of years and across the various ministries within your church, so as to ensure they don't bounce around the Bible and inadvertently miss out important parts of God's story
- This knowing God's story brings us back to evangelism and a theory of evangelism produced by Youth for Christ (YFC) a number of years back. YFC suggest that a way of evangelism is to listen to understand their story, share your story through honest and authentic relationships and then through journeying with them share (without crowbarring it in) God's story.



### ➤ **Ground moral obedience in the invitation of Grace**

This model for guiding young people towards obedience without reducing that message to mere moral obligations called the 'Guilt – Grace – Gratitude' model of the Heidelberg Catechism from Reformed theology. These movements can help articulate how grace and our action work together.

- Good (Gen 1 v 26-27): God created us good, in God's image.
- Guilt (Rom 3 v 10-12): We then chose to disobey God, leaving us with the guilt of sin. All of us carry this mark and it impacts us every day.
- Grace (Rom 3 v 23-24, Eph 2 v 6-10): Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has extended grace to us to make things right and restore us to relationship with God and one another.
- God's People (Eph 2 v 19-22): As we experience grace, we are adopted into the body of Christ, enacting God's reign in the world. We join the mission of God, participating in the work of God happening in and through God's people today.
- Gratitude (Col 2 v 6-7): Out of this gift of grace, we respond in gratitude towards God. This is the well out of which our obedience - which includes moral behaviours – flows. In other words, the gospel doesn't begin with behaviours nor is it dependant on behaviours. The behaviours are an act of thanksgiving to God in response to grace. As we grow in trust, we naturally grow in obedience.

- God's Vision (Rev 21 v 1-5): We are living in between Christ's first coming and his return, when he will make everything new. Serving people and the ways we seek justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed are part of the in-between story of God's kingdom emerging right in front of us. We get to participate in something Jesus started and that ultimately Jesus will finish.

Locating obedience as a response to grace – not a prerequisite or alternative to grace – helps young people stand on more solid theological ground for their actions and decisions.

### ➤ **Ask Young People What they Believe**

Invite the young people you work with to describe the gospel to you as they understand it. This is the question used within the research:

- What do you believe to be the central message of the gospel (or Good News) of Christianity? Or
- How would you describe your faith to others?

Their responses can help you identify gaps in understanding and may inform how you teach, preach or select curriculum material for your ministry.

### ➤ **A model for Sharing the Gospel without Judgement**

*"If you want a friend to know Jesus, the youth worker won't take that friend out for pizza to talk to them about Jesus. They'll take you out for pizza to talk through how to talk to your friend about Jesus. They want us to share naturally in our relationships, but they'll not leave us to figure it out on our own."*

This approach to evangelism has moved away from the attractional “bring your friends to church and we’ll take it from there” model and toward an organic relationship-based approach that trusts young people to share their own experiences and testimonies with their friends. Yet most young people aren’t sure how to bear witness to their faith without seeming judgemental.

As the apostle Paul urges: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give reason for the hope that you have, But do this with gentleness and respect”

– 1 Peter 3 v 15

How can you help young people to better share their faith? Any thoughts?

## ➤ Allow Salvation to look more like a journey

A great deal of evangelism has emphasised ‘Damascus Road’ style conversions: dramatic, instantaneous and featuring repentance from some major sin or sinful lifestyle. We have all heard these testimonies, and as a consequence if our own testimony isn’t dramatic and instantaneous then we either don’t think we have one or that it isn’t worth sharing. Yet in a one study of teenagers, over two-thirds described a conversion experience that sounded a lot more like Peter’s a slow, incremental, more getting it wrong than getting it right and in need of ongoing grace.

The young people you encounter may respond less positively to the direct evangelist approach of ‘will you receive Jesus as your Lord and savior?’ or ‘have you asked Jesus into your heart?’. Yet be very open to talking about questions like ‘where are you on your spiritual journey?’ and ‘with what issues are you wrestling with when it comes to God?’

Ask a handful of young people in your church whether they relate more to Peter’s conversion or Paul’s. consider the fact that for many emerging adults, salvation is more like a long, winding road than instant belief or ‘conversion’.

Just as a sidebar question for you:  
Do we ever stop going through the conversion process? If the idea is to become more like Jesus are we ever ‘fully’ converted?



A useful tool for asking these questions is through Blob's The Way (see handout section)

## ➤ Share Testimonies Frequently

Across traditions and denominations churches that are growing young frequently integrate testimony as part of their regular worship and spiritual formation. Stories of conversion experiences, breakthroughs, healings, God’s provision etc.

Share part of your testimony here:

## ➤ **The Potential of Rituals**

Rituals help us embody something more powerful than words. When it comes to counteracting moralistic therapeutic deism (MTD) and Golden Rules Christianity, we not only need better teaching. We also need concrete actions that draw young people into a better story. Rituals serve to answer deep questions of identity, belonging and purpose.

Examples of meaningful Rituals:

- Communion or Eucharist: Impacts on how young people viewed relationships, brokenness, their own stories and pain, and Jesus' work of healing and restoration.
- Baptism
- Confirmation classes
- Confession of sin – privately, in small groups (accountability)
- Milestone ones (baby dedication, birthdays, graduation, engagement, marriage and pregnancy)
- Obviously Easter and Christmas Etc.

What are the Rituals that have been especially important in your church and in Methodism as a whole? How can you tap into the significance of ritual even more? What new rituals (or old ones that are new to your community) might add deeper layers to the formation of young people?

## ➤ **Embrace Young Peoples Doubts about Faith**

According to the Sticky Faith research, 7 of 10 students harbour significant doubts about God and Faith. Yet less than half of those students talk with ministry leaders or peers about their doubts and questions.

One of the factors that determine whether a young person's doubts positively or negatively impact on their faith development is if they have opportunities to express and explore doubts. When they do have those opportunities, doubt is actually correlated with greater faith maturity.

In your teaching, small groups or one 2 one's with young people, equip leaders to be sensitive to questions and doubts and see them as faith forming opportunities rather than 'back-sliding' or failures. Sometimes simply knowing that questions/doubts are part of the faith development journey can be enough to quell young people's fears (and our fears) that their faith is falling apart.

There are 4 key words to use when you are caught off guard by a tough question from a teenager or emerging adult "I don't know, but..." and we can complete that sentence with any number of helpful phrases that communicate that questions/doubts are not only allowed but welcomed. i don't know, but...

- That's an important question
- Let's find out together
- I wonder that too
- I bet you're not the first person to ask that
- Who do you think we could ask about that?
- God is big enough to take that question
- Here's what I have experienced about God...
- Thanks for sharing this with me.

You might, of course, have an answer to their question. Even so it might be worth taking a step back and probe a bit about why that question has come up, before unleashing your "right" answer. Being heard can at times be as (or even more) important than the answer itself.

#### ➤ **See 'Faithing' and 'churching' as work we all do**

Despite all the language about "passing faith down" faith isn't really an object we can possess or hand off to someone. Nor is it a commodity that one generation "owns" more than any other. a Fuller Institute colleague Steve Argue asserts that we can't simply hand faith to adolescents or emerging adults – they have to '*birth*' it through the work of the Holy Spirit. Those leading young people, then, are more like midwives in this process. Faithing is an appropriate word to describe this process of formation and meaning-making. It is how we ask, reach and doubt our way toward a mature faith identity.

If we commit to journeying with young people in the process of 'faithing', perhaps 'churching' is how we can talk about doing this together, following Jesus as a community, discovering faith in our particular context day by day. So rather than assuming a young person is 'losing' their faith when they doubt, struggle or push back

against *our* understanding of God and faith, we welcome their angst as an opportunity come together towards and even deeper shared experience of the living spirit of God. In doing so we teach young people not only *what* to believe but also *how* to believe – and live out – the Good News.

Which sounds a lot like taking Jesus' message seriously.



## Discussion Questions:

- When you read about ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’ and ‘Golden Rule Gospel’, how do you think those versions show up in your own context? And within Methodism? Where do you see evidence of the gospel of grace?
- Which of the 3 shifts (Shift 1: Less talk about abstract beliefs and more talk about Jesus, Shift 2: Less tied to formulas and more focussed on a redemptive narrative, Shift 3: Less about Heaven later and more about life here and now) in the way churches that are growing young talk about the message of Jesus resonates most with you and why? What would your church resonate with and what might cause dissonance?
- How are young people in our churches invited to put their faith into action? Rather than simply focussing on behaviours to avoid?
- How are questions, struggles and doubts about faith handled in your church? and in wider Methodism?

- In what ways are testimonies and/or faith journeys shared in our congregations? What could be some natural ways to share our faith with one another more, think particularly in ways young people might access?
- What are the rituals that have been especially important in your church and in Methodism? How could we tap into the significance of ritual even more? What new (or old, but new to you) rituals might add deeper layers to the formation of young people beyond word based discipleship alone?

### More Ideas for Action:

- What are you already doing to help your congregation take Jesus' message seriously? What else could you do? What else could the Methodist Church do?
- What words and phrases does your congregation use to talk about Jesus, the gospel and evangelism? How do young people respond to that language?





# Fuel a Warm Community: Warm is the new Cool

"I love my church. I think it is amazing. Everybody knows each other and we all care about each other. It's not, like, compartmentalised between generations or between different types of people. It is just like a big family" – Katy, age 20.

The next core commitment identified by the growing young research is '*Warmth*'. So instead of focussing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships. Congregations that are warm and accepting are important to young people. Warmth often lives much deeper than your programs and structures – it's the life blood coursing through the veins of your church. "It just feels like family. I feel a sense of welcome – from everyone – like I belong here".

## Research Findings:

### ▪ Why Structure Alone isn't Enough to Grow Young

Structures are important, they are simply not enough. The growing young research indicated that we need to stop assuming that programs (such as setting up fellowship groups) alone are going to foster close relationships. The terms young people and emerging adults used to describe the communities that are growing young included the repeated use of words such as: *welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable* and *caring*. This *warmth* cluster, as the research began to call them, emerged as stronger than any one program. While 6 out of 10 interviewees did mention group practices like small groups, youth groups and retreats when they talked about why their church was thriving, what seemed more important about those practices is that they

"*Warmth resonates, especially doing ministry in an urban context (such as London). For kids growing up without biological fathers or being raised in foster care, the church has to stand in the gap and be family. That means much more than a programmatic approach. Young people have to experience, 'This is where I belong, where I'm affirmed, where I'm pushed and held accountable'.* This is a hopeful finding for a small church in the inner city or a rural area. You too can make a significant difference with young people. You can get in the game" – Efrem Smith, World Impact

created space for people to be together and nurture relationships.

So yes do develop a small group structure, but be careful not to depend on the small groups or whole church events themselves to solve the social isolation often felt by teenagers and emerging adults. Warmth often lives much deeper than your programs and structures – it's the lifeblood coursing through the veins of the whole church body.

Ironically, it is possible that your church actually might be working against warmth by offering a myriad of programs. The research pointed towards a move away from unnecessary busyness. A deprogramming strategy sometimes helps to elevate relationships by opening up time and space where they can flourish. Young people can then do life together through shared meals, shared service in the community etc. in churches growing young, warmth beats programs. 19-23 year olds who are connected to the church were asked why they stay involved, 45% percent pointed to personal relationships, not programs.

#### **▪ Warm is the New Cool: Authenticity Beats Worship Style**

When someone says the name of your church, what image comes to mind? A building? A worship service?. Your teenagers and emerging adults might have a different response, why not ask them and note the responses below:

How would you describe your church to a friend?

For young people today, church means much more than a worship service or a place to gather. Regardless of how much time, energy and money we put into making worship services great (and I'm not for one moment saying we shouldn't), the worship service may be less important to young people than we think. When the researchers asked young people how they would describe their church to a friend, only 12% percent talked about worship and only 9% mentioned worship style. Similarly, when asked what makes your church effective with young people? Only quarter mentioned worship at all and only 12% mentioned anything about music.

So what do young people talk about when they describe their church? Overwhelmingly, nearly 1 in 3 shared about its *warmth*. You can hire or buy cool, but you can't hire – or fake – warmth.

Cultivation of warmth requires much more than staffing or planning in order to attract young people to your services. In site visits made by the growing young researchers it was noted that some churches are moving away from the models of attractional worship and highly polished experiences of worship. It was also noted that what a particular church lacks in physical resources and flashiness, it makes up for in warmth, authenticity and hospitality. As it turns out, warm is instead the new cool.

However, these findings don't mean that worship planning no longer matters. It may be that the worship can put young people off churches or be a barrier to engagement, but simply making our music better does not ensure their involvement.

#### ▪ **Warmth is in the DNA of the Church Family**

By suggesting that churches need to grow warmer, we don't mean adults should be nicer to young people. Nice doesn't cut it. It isn't how Jesus responded to people, and it falls short of the depth the researchers saw in congregations that are growing young. Warmth is more than superficial community. It's like family. In fact the phrase "like family" surfaced as the most common term young people used to describe their 'growing young' church.

This metaphor of family is rich with images of hospitality, welcome and unconditional acceptance, all of which emerged in the research. It's no surprise given the developmental need to discover where they belong, that we explored in the core strategy: Empathise with Today's Young People in a previous section. It turns out that young people are looking for warmth not as an add-on but in their churches very DNA. The warmth that young people seek isn't usually clean and tidy and that's fine, because family isn't clean and tidy. It's messy, and messy is a good word to describe what young people want from a congregation. They desire not only a be open about their own messiness but also walk alongside the authentic and honest messiness of others.

What would/could this look like for your congregation?

- **Warmth Helps Young People Find – and Stick with – a Church**

When young people are choosing a church, warm community is often a stronger draw than belief. When the research asked what keeps people involved in their church, the highest response was personal relationships (named by 1 out of 3), and warmth was almost equally mentioned. In fact, beliefs comprised only 6% of responses, and more telling, 12% of leaders, but only 3% of young people mentioned beliefs. In other words young people are staying in church because they have experienced in church what feels like family. So for teenagers and emerging adults, depth of relationship opens the door to deeper exploration of belief and faith. The first message young people should hear is “you belong here”, “you’re accepted”.

- **Honest Relationships Build Belonging**

“I can just be myself” was a phrase (or ones similar) heard repeatedly in the research from teenagers and emerging adults in ‘warm’ churches. As one person put it “It feels so safe to be part of a community that isn’t afraid or of offended by the ugly parts of my life”. It matters so much to young people to be part of a church family where they can be authentic, where they can be real. The young people also expect their leaders to be real about their struggles. This reciprocal authenticity warms up the whole church.

How are you doing this as an individual and as a church?

- **Warm Intergenerational Relationships Grow Everyone Young**

A lot of youth work is geared around building relationships with their peer-age group. While these peer friendships are crucial, intergenerational relationships are also incredibly important. Specifically, churches with close intergenerational relationships show higher faith maturity and vibrancy, as well as more examples of the 6 core commitments in action.

There are two primary avenues through which can strategically integrate generations: Mentoring and Worship. Mentoring often develops through one-2-one discipleship, vocational guidance, or shared ministry work/role/task (usually involving a skill). Intergenerational worship was discovered in the previous ‘Sticky Faith’ research to lead

to a mature faith in teenagers and emerging adults, more than any other form of participation. Many churches, even the ones growing young, still struggle with intergenerational worship. However, when we bridge the generation gaps, everyone grows young. Meaning that it is not only beneficial for young people but also for older generations who need the vitality of the young to inspire their faith just as much as the young people need wise elders to ground their faith.

#### ▪ **Fostering Peer Friendships Fosters Spiritual Formation**

Peer friendships also strengthen faith. When asked about church friendships, those who reported more close friends at church also showed higher faith maturity. As the number of close friends at church gets closer to five, so does the likelihood that a young person attends church and regularly participates in worship with others, takes time to read and study the Bible, talks openly with other Christians about their faith questions or struggles, serves others in need (locally and globally) and sees their faith as an influence in their friendships.

#### ▪ **Becoming a Body Drives Warmth**

At the end of the day, increasing warmth in your church is not only about growing young, it's also good theology. Paul in Romans 12 v 5 said "each member belongs to all the others". This theology of church (ecclesiology) pushes against the social trend of individualism, in which churches see themselves as loosely linked groups of spiritual persons having simultaneous, individual spiritual experiences. In contrast we are adopted into *one body*. That means teenagers and adults are connected together as they work out community together. Jesus' own life illustrates how young people can be welcomed within the faith community. In Luke 2 v 41-52 we find a 12 year old Jesus travel with his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, his parents begin the journey back to Nazareth, with extended family and friends, thinking Jesus is with them. When they discover he isn't with them they race back to Jerusalem and after 3 days (of what I can only imagine as frantic searching) find him sitting among the teachers in the temple, listening and inquiring. There are a few questions we can be asked of this story that have the potential to be game changers for churches that want to grow young.

- Where did Jesus sleep?
- Who made sure he was safe?
- Who fed this boy?

We can give the spiritualised answer of God simply provided and watched over him for those 3 days. But there is also a community answer; that the faith community at the temple saw this young person, embraced him and welcomed him to their table. Both 2000 years ago and today, churches that grow young find teenagers and emerging adults who need our welcome and embrace.

## Ideas for Action:

- **Take your Congregation's Relational Temperature**

Warmth isn't generated through simply being polite or nice, the qualities of a warm church discovered by the research include: authenticity, hospitality, caring, welcoming, accepting and belonging. Consider asking a handful of young people to gauge the relational temperature of your congregation based on this definition of warmth.



On a scale of: Icy, Cool, Room temperature and Fireside Warm. What rating would you give your community?

Why do you think the temperature is what it is?

What ideas do they have for fostering more warmth?

Take these insights to your leadership team and then wonder together what it might look like to get beyond nice to true warmth. Considering the following questions:

- What if young people really felt like they belonged in our church community?
- What would be gain if we took the steps it would take to be warmer?
- What would we lose?

## ▪ Help Newcomers Land Smoothly – and Soon

Assess your church's approach to visitors, thinking about different age groups and life circumstances (e.g. young people, single adults, families with kids, college students etc.):

- What is it like to walk into your building for worship and other activities/ministries?
- How warmly are newcomers greeted? How are they oriented to the building and to the service or program? If you ask guests or visitors to stand or raise their hands during worship services, how does that feel for them? How can you make that kind of recognition warmer and less awkward?



<https://youtu.be/fE-EJscutM> - Check this YouTube video for how NOT to greet people.

- How does the language, tradition and direction - or lack of direction - given during worship services feel to a visitor? Are there particular phrases that need to be explained from time to time? We cannot assume a base level of knowledge about Christianity in the visitors that come through our doors, so the language/phrases we use, either need explaining or rephrasing so as to be inclusive of new people, this not a dumbing down process but rather it is a disciplining one.  
<https://youtu.be/T8gmtrOBcgQ> - check out this YouTube video for an idea of what I'm talking about. Also think about the language/terminology/words that young people use that we don't understand, we either ask them to speak English and/or ask them to explain what they mean, should the young people expect any less from us and our use of 'Christianese'. Tradition is another area that can leave visitors and new people left a little in the dark, so a first step is asking why are we doing that particular 'thing' is it because we have always done it that way, or does it have special meaning (if so we can explain that special meaning) if it is because we have always done it that way, maybe think about if you should continue to do it?. Transitions (for example children and young people going to their own groups) should be handled in a manner that helps new people know what is happening.

One church said: "we see our job as creating the environment where relationships can happen. We have programs, yes, but more importantly, we build the platforms where people connect. Our strategy has been to create an environment that screams 'stay here!' after worship. Every week we have food, things for kids to do (all within eyesight of parents) and a sporting event on the big screen nearby. We see the time after the service as just as important as the service itself"

Another church has breakfast together once a month instead of the service, to build relationships.

- How easy is it for a newer person to access the smaller gatherings, small groups or clubs in which they might find relational connection? What is the balance of 'open' versus 'closed' groups in your church community right now?.
- Do you host any kind of new visitor or new member connection event, like a monthly meal just for recent attenders? If not could you create one?

#### ▪ **Create a 5:1 Ratio of Adults; and Young People**

One of the most practical ways churches and families can boost intergenerational relationships is to rethink our ratios. Often in ministry (and safeguarding) we have the ratio of one adult for every 5 children or young people. But what if we flipped that ratio and sought out 5 adults for every young person? We're not suggesting that you now need to recruit 5 adults for every young person in your small group. One may be the small group leader, another the Sunday school teacher, still another a mentor, another who simply knows the young person's name and commits to praying for them; this commitment to walk with the young people will release a flood of support around each young person. Blessing the young people in this way doesn't just inspire the young people it changes everyone.

#### ▪ **Explore more Intergenerational Worship**

Worshipping together across generations is important but can be tricky (just choosing the worship songs is tricky enough). Functionally there are 3 main categories of intergenerational worship:

- 1) All-Inclusive Worship: Everyone worships together all the time. In some cases, an adjacent room is provided for parents with babies or restless children.
- 2) Partially Inclusive Worship: Everyone worships together some of the time during each worship service. Perhaps children and young begin and/or end the service with the whole congregation but exit for age-based worship and teaching (by far the most popular in English churches)
- 3) Special-Occasion Worship: Most of the time everyone worships in age-based programming, but occasionally the whole church worships together. In some cases this happens once a month or quarter. In other cases, they worship together for Christmas, Easter etc.

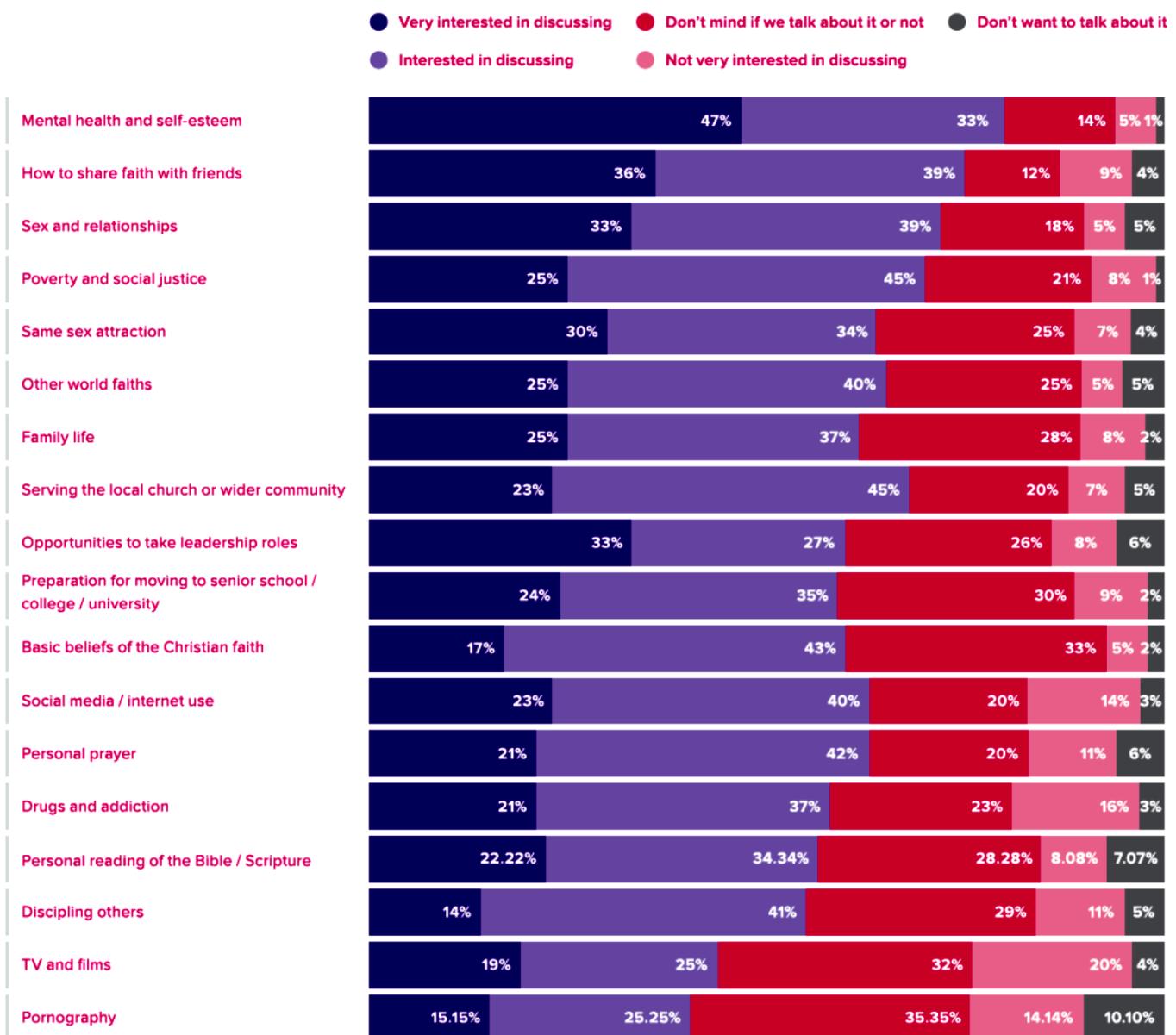
Brainstorm how your church might take a step towards more intergenerational worship? And how can you make existing intergenerational worship more vibrant for young people particularly.

#### ▪ **Change Your Worship space to have a more family gathering feel**

The temptation to turn our worship services into a 'professional' worship experience is huge. However rather than just on this particular bandwagon, imagine viewing your service as a family gathering. Restructuring the physical space in order to see each other

more clearly and reducing the distance between worshippers and leaders might help. But you may not actually need (or can) rearrange the furniture. Instead encourage ways of worship that include both vertical (people to God) and horizontal (people to people) encounters. Here's a few ideas:

- Weave more personal stories of struggle into sermons that help humanise the minister as 'one of us'.
- Add sermon illustrations and/or topics that include young people or speak to issues they care about, the following table is taken from the Losing Heart research undertaken by YouthScape in 2016 in which they polled 100 11-19 year olds through an online survey to gauge which topics they would be most interested in discussing in their youth group.



<https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research/publications/losing-heart>

- If your liturgy is relatively formal, focus on the sacredness of this formality without assuming formal equals cold. Buffer the highly structured parts of the service with elements that promote warmth, such as ‘passing the peace’ or other greeting. Give people a few minutes to talk to one another, and perhaps provide a question for folks to ask each other to break the ice.
- Include opportunities during or after the service for small group discussion with others sitting nearby. And/or discussion with the minister.
- Invite congregants to voice their own brief prayers of petition and thanksgiving from where they are sitting.
- Reframe mistakes and awkward moments in the flow of the service as reminders that we gather not to consume a slick show but to worship a great God.
- Invite young people to help write and deliver sections of the service, better yet engage young people in your worship planning or even sermon preparation. Teenagers are quick to point out words and ideas that might lose them.
- If language differences exist in your congregation maybe include prayers, Scripture readings or songs that reflect the different languages present.
- Experiment with a teaching series that spans age groups, linking the teaching that is taking place in the youth and children’s groups match what is happening in the ‘adult’ service (Roots). It could also mean doing a teaching series in which teenagers stay in with the adults and learn together. (a good example of a resource for this is Not a Fan by Kyle Idleman)

#### ▪ **Pray Warmly**

A logical starting point for churches wanting to build greater intergenerational warmth is one of our most basic, but profound community practices – praying for one another. Here’s some prayer practices that could foster warmth across generations:

- Prayer Post-it’s: At the beginning of worship invite people from all generations to write down their prayer requests on post-its and stick them to the wall. Later in the service, everyone is invited again to pick a prayer request (that isn’t theirs) and commit to pray for that request. Ideally you would want young people to be praying for the adults and vice versa.
  - Invite/encourage adult fellowship groups to pray for specific youth or young adult events and activities and vice versa.
  - Create prayer bookmarks for adults in the church that feature a picture and name of a young person, and ask them to commit to praying for that young person. This can also be extended to include those young people going off to university and so can include contact details.
  - Peer Match an older young person to a younger young person and encourage them to pray for each other during the school year.
  - Designate a prayer wall where children and teenagers can trace their handprints and write their names under them. Then encourage the adults

to write prayers and passages they have for that child or teenager in the handprints.

### ▪ **Generate ‘Tiny’ Churches**

While we can't structure warmth, our structures can work to support it. Small groups represent one of the most common strategies incorporated by churches that are growing young. One church's young people described their small groups this way “We're not a church *with* small groups but a church *of* small groups”. The small group community becomes like a tiny church, so much so that people may be willing to miss Sunday worship but not their small group.

While we can't tell you which small group format will work best for your community, we encourage you to consider how what you are doing now fuels warmth through peer friendships and intergenerational connections. Evaluate how your current small group leaders are trained and supported. Get together with them and brainstorm ideas for improvements to make you more effective in nurturing warmth.

### ▪ **Create Both On-Ramps and Road Trips**

In one church used for the research they use on-ramps and road trips as metaphors for increasing levels of commitment to community. Not everyone is ready to jump into a 12 month road trip level of commitment to a small group. For many young adults in particular, shorter experiences in community give them freedom to explore new frontiers until they are ready for a more permanent relational territory.

On-Ramp experiences can include:

- Community dinners open to everyone.
- 6-10 week ‘life’ groups based on particular interests, service opportunities or bible studies. Options include: craft nights, football teams, book clubs, movie nights.
- Alpha style courses
- Annual whole-church retreat, which is intentionally under-programmed, freeing up time for games, hikes or sitting by the fire chatting. Forging new relationships over board games, shared meals and worship.

The idea being that the people leading the group is consistent, but there is no commitment level required from participants, they can drop in and out. What starts as a small investment yields high relational returns.

Road-Trip experiences can include:

- A six-month group exploring vocation
- A yearlong commitment to a prayer group or intergenerational small group
- Volunteering

- **Support Those Young People Moving onto College and University Well**

It can be easy to just wish them well and pray for them as they head off, thinking our work here is done, [www.stickyfaith.org](http://www.stickyfaith.org) has done a lot to counter this. The Growing Young research indicated that many of the churches that are growing young are intentionally reaching out to college and university students. Food is often the pathway to the heart of students, maybe try inviting a student to lunch after church, introduce take a student to lunch days or adopt a student schemes. For students who are away at University encourage adults to send care packages (including snacks and coffee gift cards) and connect with them through social media.

- **Budget to Facilitate Warmth**

At one church used in the research the volunteer leaders had meal budgets. Every small group leader in the youth ministry is encouraged to take young people out for meals or treats regularly as part of the discipleship process. The young people loved this to but it wasn't just because they were getting free food, they described their conversations as fuelling their warm community.

- **Remember That Warmth Can Be Slow**

Warmth may not seem like a big secret. But it does come with a hard truth: warmth is often slow. Really Slow.

Stability, patience, faithfulness to a local community, these are the traits that give roots to churches that grow young. It takes time and commitment to move pass the superficially of 'welcome team' hellos into the intimate spaces where real authentically can happen. It can be tempting to try and stay up to date and relevant; some churches have forced both *cool* and *community* too quickly. This kind of accelerated progress often backfires. Instead let's take the time needed to foster community practices that fuel warmth.



## Discussion Questions

- The research for growing young discovered that ‘like family’ was the most common phrase used to describe these thriving churches. To what extent does your church feel ‘like family’? How would your young people describe your church in terms of welcoming, authentic, hospitable and like a family?
- What are some of the obstacles to warmth (as described in the question above) for your congregation?
- What is it like for newcomers to visit your church? How easy is it for newer people to access smaller gathering in which they might find relational connection?
- Where do you see intergenerational relationships thriving in our church? What could foster more – and deeper – relationships across generations?
- How could our worship services feel more like ‘family room’ gatherings? (see pages 63-65 for ideas) Are there other contexts in the life of the church you’d like to warm up?

## More Ideas for Action:

- What are you already doing to help fuel warmth in your congregation?



- In what ways does your church struggle with relational connection?
  - What shifts do you want to make in your church?

# Prioritise Young People (and Families) Everywhere

WHEN YOU  
**PRIORITIZE,**  
ALL THE  
**IMPORTANT STUFF**  
GETS DONE.

*"Young people know they are important because they are involved in ministry. They are treated as fully-fledged members of the church, not just kids to be entertained"*

The 2017 inaugural address of the new President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Loraine N Mellor, was entitled, "How are we disturbing the present in the Church today?" in the address which can be found here <https://vimeo.com/222980067> The Revd Loraine Mellor asked: "How are we disturbing the present in the Church today?" as she shared her concerns with the current state of the Church and her vision for taking radical risks to change its culture.

Reflecting on her worries over the "declining Church", Loraine took a sobering look at the current state of the Methodist Church and its dwindling membership. "We don't have too many churches; we just don't have enough people in them..."

As a potential solution, Loraine implored Methodists to take radical steps to change the shape of the Church, through a renewed focus on God-centred worship, generous hospitality and being unafraid of failure in evangelism.

"I know I am part, at present, of a declining Church, but I am not part of a declining gospel.

"The gospel of Jesus Christ is here to stay, but has the time not come of us to be radical? To take some risks in order that we can grow...

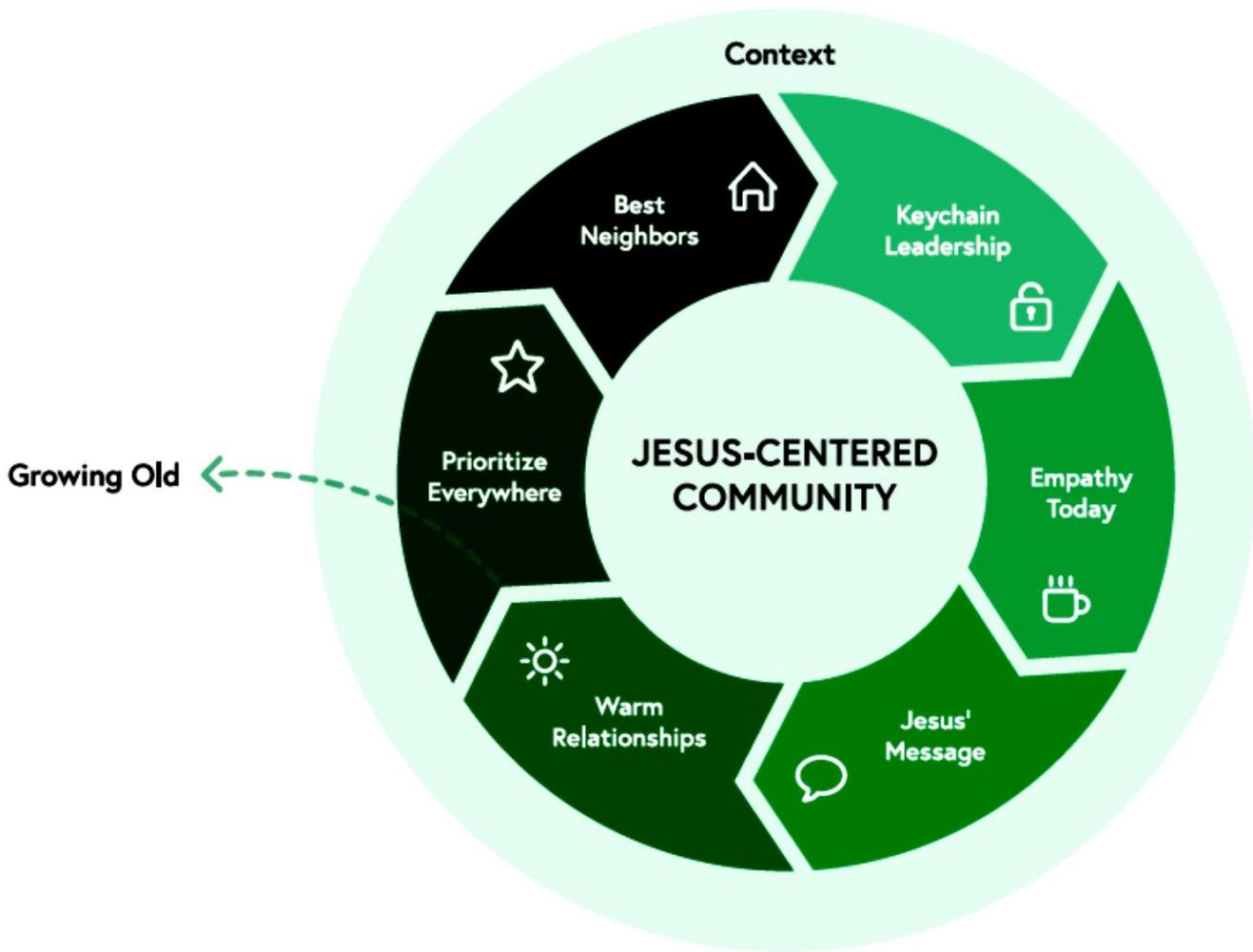
"Because, you see... I don't believe that God is done with us just yet."

- ❖ **How much would you and your church sacrifice, give up, change traditions, be radical with or risk in order to reach young people?**

Write down your initial thoughts on this...

The research discovered that the hinge point separating churches that *grow old* from those that are *growing young* is priority. When churches prioritise young people – and their families – in every area of the church, they take a step beyond empathy and warmth. They allocate resources, energy and attention to teenagers and young adults both inside and outside their walls.

It is called the hinge point because while churches who have keychain leaders, empathise with young people, focus on Jesus and nurture warmth can be lovely churches, they can eventually get comfortable, face inward and ultimately grow old. If they fail to prioritise young people everywhere (within the outside of the walls) and help them live as the best neighbours (see next chapter), over time the congregation will age out. This is why there is an arrow pointing away from the growing young wheel at the junction between warmth and priority.



Whatever your role within the church, you will not be able to make your church more effective on your own. You need everyone in your church to prioritise young people if you hope to make worthwhile and lasting progress. To put it simply, priority is the game changer for churches that want to grow young.

## Research Findings:

### ❖ Why Making Young People a Priority Matters More than you Might Think

In the first stage of the research pastoral leaders were asked to name up to 3 characteristics of their church that account for its success at engaging young people. The top response (tied with leadership) was making young people and their interests a priority in the church. Priority represented half of all responses. But what does this prioritisation mean? Resource allocation (aka your budget) is a helpful indicator of prioritisation. Not only budget resources but also personnel, room allocation, time and programming offer glimpses into the level of priority a church places on young people.

*'I was once at a youth work training when the conversation about budgets came up and one attendee confessed to her church's flower budget being higher than their young work budget'.*

However, this resource allocation often looks different than churches expect. A church may think that employing a youth worker and setting aside a youth room (usually out the way) where teenagers can exercise dominion, as long as no-one can hear them. But this is a great start but doesn't go far enough. Prioritising young people everywhere means just that in all areas of the church.

So how do churches that grow young make young people and emerging adults a greater priority? When they think about budget, strategy, worship planning, preaching, programming, community life, theology and in all other aspects of church life they think about young people. They intentionally pay attention. Young people themselves provided the best barometer of prioritisation in the research. When asked how their church makes them a priority there was no hesitation. They were eager to share how churches keep them at the heart of the community. Churches growing young prioritise young people not just for the sake of keeping young people happy, but because the whole church benefits.

*"Young people are like salt. When they're included, they make everything taste better"*

How is prioritisation different from empathy and warmth?

These 3 core commitments emerged separately in the research and can be distinguished as follows:

Empathising with today's young people means we listen for and seek to understand their development journey towards identity, belonging and purpose.

Warmth is the way we surround them with supportive, accepting and authentic community.

Prioritisation of young people everywhere represents our tangible, institutional commitment to allocate resources and attention – not only for specific youth or young adult programming but also across the life of the church/congregation.

The research found that these three commitments, while distinct, influence and reinforce one another.

## ❖ Prioritising Young People Means; Prioritising Families; Too

It's impossible to prioritise young people well without also prioritising their families. We can't engage with children and adolescents apart from the systems in which they are embedded – in particular, their families.

- Parental Influence Matters Most:

Parents still carry the most important weight in their children's faith development. This is not only true in childhood but also through adolescence. Research continues to affirm that the best predictor of a young person's faith is the faith of their parents. That means that the role of ministry leaders who care about young people also must include the care, equipping and formation of parents and families. In studying churches that are growing young they found that parents participation in church worship and programming correlates with a more mature faith in young people. Also when parents are intentional about faith building outside of church, overall faith maturity and vibrancy within the congregation rises even more.

- Parents Need Support:

Another reason youth ministry is swinging back toward an emphasis on families is that parents today need all the support they can get. Since parents hold so much influence on a young person's faith development and need so much support. Prioritising young people must also involve prioritising their families.

Here are some ideas for greater parental engagement:

- Pray for parents
- Communicate with parents
- Offer Training for Parents
- Parent – Youth Leader Evenings (like parents evening at school)
- Parent Youth Groups – invite the parents to one of the session you are providing

## ❖ The Effects of Divorce Require Our Attention

Prioritising families means we must also respond to a myriad of struggles that burden the families in our congregations. There were 101,055 divorces in the UK in the year 2015 and although this is a decrease of 9.1% the wounds of divorce are no less critical. Divorce leaves children and young people permanently conflicted, ping-ponging back and forth between parents in a game they never wanted to play. They end up feeling like they partially belong in both parents worlds, meaning they never fully belong in either. For young people from 'intact' families, special events such as birthdays, holidays and graduations enhance a sense of belonging. For teenagers and emerging adults from divorced families, these same events heighten the tensions of standing with one foot in each parent's world.

Lacking a secure sense of belonging at home, children of divorce are three times more likely to feel alone, twice as likely to feel unsafe and almost four times as likely to disrespect their parents (Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 2005). As they age young adults from divorced families tend to have higher rates of alcohol and drug use, do more poorly in school, and are more likely to be depressed and withdrawn (Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*). Even more heart-breaking is how poorly the faith community supports young people affected by a family breakup. In her book *Between Two Worlds* Elizabeth Marquardt pointed to one study which found that 2/3 of young adults who regularly attended church or synagogue at the time of their parents' divorce reported that no one from their faith community reached out to them during that painful season.

**We are Family: The Changing Face of Family Ministry** is a research project undertaken by the Methodist Church

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/families/resources/family-ministries-research-project>

which defines what is family and explores the way churches can and do work with families.

#### Children affected by divorces

Almost half of all couples (48 percent) divorcing in England and Wales in 2012 had at least one child aged under 16 living in the family.

There were 99,822 children aged under 16 in families where the parents were divorcing in 2012. That's 1.75 children aged per divorcing couple.

Over a fifth (21 per cent) of the children in 2012 were under five and 64 per cent were under 11.

Source: Divorces in England Wales 2012  
Office for National Statistics Statistical Bulletin February 2014

#### Family breakdown

Children affected by family breakdown are:

- 75 per cent more likely to fail at school
- 70 per cent more likely to become addicted to drug
- 50 per cent more likely to have alcohol abuse problems
- 40 per cent more likely to have serious debt problems

Source: Breakthrough Report Social Justice Policy Group July 2007

### ❖ Young People Must Play-Bearing Role

When asked why young people keep coming back to church they frequently named their responsibilities in the church – playing in the worship band, serving within the children's ministry, working the PA system – these needs keep them accountable and connected.

When young people in your church and community know they are needed and invited into participation, just like everyone else, they sense that they play a *load-bearing role* in the congregation. By *load-bearing* we mean that young people are given roles and responsibilities within the whole of church life, and not just tokenistic roles, or roles the

church doesn't really care about or don't want to do themselves, but REAL responsibilities. They then become purposeful co-participants in the life of the church rather than junior participants or future members. Their voices, hands and hearts matter now for the ongoing life and work of the Methodist Church and they know it, they feel it.



Check out Voice Activated: Developing Participation in the Methodist Church - <http://methodist.org.uk/mission/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/downloadable-resources/voice-activated> Sharing that vision and the learning from rolling out the Youth Participation Strategy.

#### ❖ Ask for Participants, Not Just Volunteers

This emphasis on playing a load-bearing role brings both higher expectations and higher reward. So rather than ask for a *volunteer* to fill a role, ask for *participation* in the community of the church. Volunteers feel like they are giving time and energy in order to fulfil a duty. In contrast, participants contribute work essential to the life of the church, work that binds to other members of the body. This model increases young people's connection to the church but also increases the level of risk. A task might not get done, or done as well, as it would if a paid member of staff simply did the work. But it's essential for moving from a consumer mind-set (in which the church provides goods and services to young people) to one of participation in covenant relationships in which all members bear the load.

#### ❖ Be Careful to See Them for More than What They Do

In the midst of this emphasis of inviting young people into significant work, we need to beware of focussing only on what the young people do. Prioritising young people because of what they can do for us can inadvertently degenerate into using them as cheap labour. Therefore invite young people to serve where they are gifted and to discover their gifting's as they serve. Remember; offering young people a load-bearing role doesn't mean we assume that their best (or only) role in Sunday worship is to cover the children's work. It means actively incorporating their gifts across the whole of the life of the church.

Where are young people given load-bearing roles within your church?

## ❖ **Myth: Good Leaders and Programs Automatically Prioritise Young People**

Churches that are growing young have made prioritising young people a lifestyle commitment for their church (not an occasional, when we remember or if there is time act) and the young people know it. However there is this myth about how churches reach this level of prioritising young people. If an average member of your congregation was asked to guess what it takes to prioritise teenagers and emerging adults, they would be excused for saying strong programs and good leaders. While they would not be completely on the wrong track, they would be missing something critical.

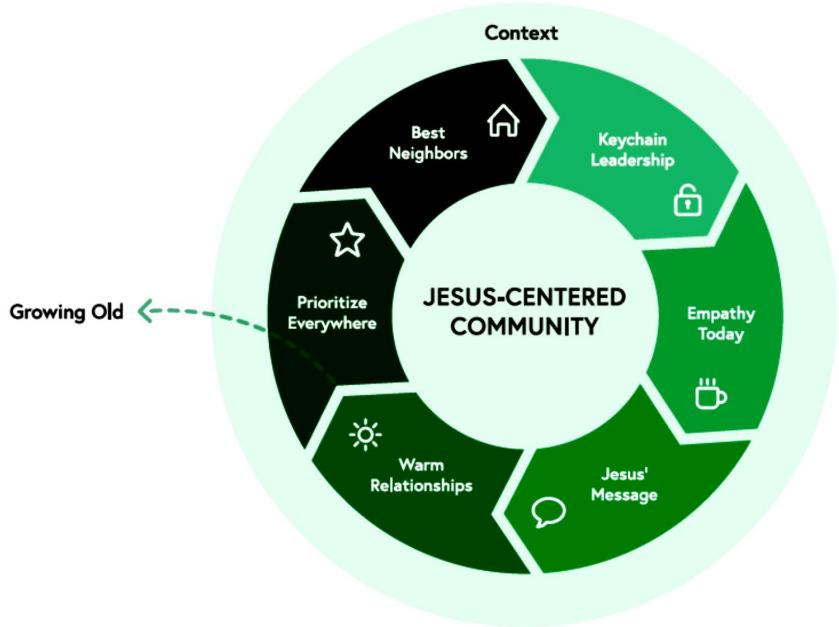


That “something” is congregational or church culture, and it’s more important than most church members think. Culture cannot be defined by a list of programs; it’s deeper than that. The researchers heard this from both the leaders and the young people. When talking about their churches effectiveness with young people, 2 out of 3 ministers named their churches attitudes and attributes, not specific programs. This is because there is a correlation between the churches culture and whether priority takes root and grows. In short, even a great leader cannot force priority if the church/congregational culture doesn’t support it. Similarly, young people in the study whose congregations make them a priority talked less about programs and more about their churches culture – specifically its relationships, traditions and rituals.

What are some of the things within Methodist church culture that could hinder making young people a priority?

What are some of the cultural issues within your own church that hinder prioritisation?

As the arrow departing from the Growing Young Wheel suggests, a failure to prioritise young people typically sends churches on a trajectory towards growing old. Often this is because surface-level changes are made without deeper shifts in church culture. To quote the Methodist Church President 2017-18 The Revd Loraine Mellor "How are we disturbing the present in the Church today?"

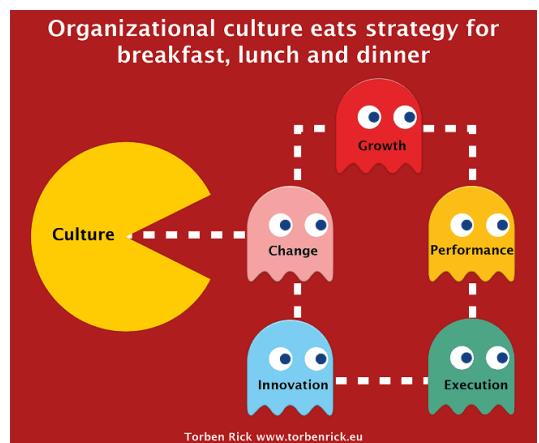


When it comes to young people, culture change means building an overall ethos of investment in teenager and emerging adults. It'll take dedication, but over time a commitment to intentionally prioritise young people becomes a natural part of the life of the church.

What would this 'Disturbing the Present' look like for you and for the Methodist Church?

### ❖ Myth: Good Intentions Are Enough?

There's a saying in the business world that culture eats strategy for breakfast. In other words, you might come up with a strategic plan for your church, but the actual culture of your organisation, your church trumps the planned strategy every time. Or more simply, who you *really* are overrules who you *say* you are. When it comes to prioritising young people "you can't fool young people into thinking your church has made them a priority".



This is why, if leaders try hiding the congregations real priorities and give lip service to teenagers and young adults about how much they matter, they'll know and walk right out the door. Young people in every generation – but perhaps especially today – can spot a fake in no time. Most church leaders' motives are not so insidious. It's not so much that we are trying to hide the truth from young people. It's just that while we think we are doing what we can to prioritise them through strategy and resource allocation, our church culture is working against us.

It's one thing to say that you want to prioritise young people it's another thing to do something about it. If something is 'important' you and your church will 'intentionally' do something about it which will lead to 'participation' from the whole church (including young people).

### ❖ **We Follow Jesus' Lead When We Prioritise Young People**

Jesus' disciples were used to the crowds, endless days of teaching and healing, and demands from the most unlikely of people seeking hearing with Jesus. They were used to Jesus going out of his way to heal children specifically (Mark 5v21-43, 7v24-30, 9v14-29). They had already been admonished by Jesus about the value of children, both in this world and in God's kingdom, as he took a child in his arms and declared, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9 v 37).

Yet the disciples were still struggling with how Jesus talked about and interacted with children. Could Jesus really have meant that welcoming children is a way to welcome Jesus? Surely he had to be exaggerating and not to be taken literally. While children were treasured in Old Testament Judaism, by the first century AD, children were not viewed as equal in value to adults. At best, childhood was seen as a training ground for adulthood, not a significant stage of life in itself. Jesus however, eagerly welcomed young people to come close to him; at the expense of adults who thought they had they had more of a right to access Jesus, his ideas and his power.

Whether the disciples didn't understand Jesus or did not yet believe him, but on one particular day they made a choice that apparently crossed a line. "People were bringing little children to Jesus" (Mark 10 v 13) *Not More Children!*

How does a church make young people such a big priority without excluding other groups?

Prioritising young people and their families does not mean that a congregation ignores senior adults or sidelines other commissions/groups. But sometimes it does mean tough choices about resource allocation. Based on the stories that came from churches that are growing young, when big decisions are made about dedicating more funding, staff or space to young people, these changes were made by multiple generations who share a common commitment to teenagers and emerging adults.

Adults aren't forced to focus on young people they chose to do so.

*"The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very centre of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them." – Mark 10 v 13-16*

Jesus' actions must have astounded not only his disciples but all of the people gathered, children included. It was not the first time Jesus had held a child in order to make a point (Mark 9 v 16). But this time Jesus moved from a command to welcome children to a command to become like children, receiving God's kingdom as children do. By saying we must become like children, Jesus was not suggesting a reversion to immaturity. He was making it clear that not only are children eligible to receive the kingdom, but they are actually examples of what it means to receive the kingdom. Some have suggested that children's sincerity, willingness to trust and dependence make them exemplary. According to theologian Karl Rahner, children model to the entire community (church) an 'infinite openness' to the infinite. Maybe it's that very nature that inspires us all the grow young. In other words, we need them as much as they need us.

Theologically, we stand on solid ground when we prioritise young people everywhere in our churches and congregations. Jesus led the way for us in his shocking attention to children and his reorientation of the community (church) around them.

What would it look like if your church took the same approach to children, teenagers and young adults today?

## Ideas for Action:

### ❖ Rethink the Numbers:

Congregations often use attendance numbers to evaluate success (As Methodists we use the October Count), which makes sense. But additional numbers can help us assess what God is doing in the though our ministries with young people. Consider evaluating the following numbers and see what picture emerges:



- The percentage of young people in your congregation (you might want to break that down into ages, e.g. 7-11 year olds, 11-18 years and 18-23 years etc.).  
*Remembering to also include those young people attending your youth clubs, schools work, outreach, that don't come on a Sunday morning.*
- The percentage of young people in your broader community and how that's reflected in your church
- The percentage of budget currently allocated toward the work with young people
- The percentage of staff (including volunteers) and/or building resources allocated toward work with young people

Evaluate these numbers with your leadership team, and determine if the numbers feel right or if adjustments need to be made.

## ❖ **Assess Everywhere**

Using a “red-light, yellow-light, green-light” system, gather others together and list the current ministries within your church (include as much as possible). Assign a colour to each ministry listed based on how much young people are prioritised in the area.



A green-light means a high priority, a yellow-light means medium priority and a red-light means a low priority.

Follow this up with a discussion identifying why young people have, or haven’t been prioritised in particular areas (there may be a very good reason why they haven’t). List clearly what needs to happen to move from red to yellow to green lights wherever feasible.

For example: leading worship; what colour would you assign to that?

- **Ask a Simple Question**

When any new ministry begins – ideally while it is still in the dreaming phase – intentionally ask the question;

*“How could young people be part of this?”*

This could also lead us to wonder whether young people have been unintentionally excluded from other ministry opportunities simply because we haven’t asked.

- **Hire Purposefully in Youth and Young Adult Ministry**

Sometimes congregations rush to put a youth pastor in post to fill a vacancy or to create a role they assume must be part of their staffing structure. Churches growing young often took a more thoughtful approach toward hiring.

One Methodist Church shared that their turning point in effective youth and young adult ministry was hiring a stable youth leader. After a chain of one or two year youth directors who were ‘cool’ but not consistent, they realised they needed a youth ministry veteran who was willing to commit to the long haul. That meant a salary that could support someone with more experience. This investment in stability translated into a team of both paid and volunteer leaders who are skilfully mentored and supported by this experienced leader. This leader is currently in his 10<sup>th</sup> year within this congregation. The senior pastor reflected, “yes, it was more expensive to hire someone with experience, but to be honest, I would wager that we’ve made up for it financially because of the families who have stuck around and the new families who have joined because of this leader.”

As you think about staffing decisions and resource allocation, what changes could you make to help support greater longevity in youth and young adult ministry?

Think about:

- More than a 3 year contract
- Investing in training for them
- Proper support structures in place (line management and mentoring)
- The church having 'realistic' expectations
- The whole church understanding and supporting the work

#### ❖ **Address Family Pain and Brokenness through Support**

Prioritising young people and their family's means being ready to empathise with and address the deep pain and brokenness within family systems. This aspect of pastoral care often relies heavily on ministers, mentors, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers and small group leaders, but the research found that congregations growing young were offering more opportunities for support.

One church in the study offered both professional and lay counselling opportunities and support groups for the array of struggles in its community: anxiety, addiction, divorce, grief, miscarriage, abuse and chronic pain. In order to foster more member led care groups, the church created a 9 month lay counselling training program. While lay groups are not meant to take the place of professional therapy, the church hopes to foster a community in which more members are equipped to support those through life's darkest places.

Evaluate your churches/congregation's care for others through structures (programs, staff and groups) and the relational culture (an environment of warmth, acceptance, honesty and support). What could it look like to prioritise young people and families by offering more support for family pain and brokenness?

## ❖ Prioritise Partnering with Parents

In your ministry try taking a few ‘intentional’ steps to move churches and families closer to one another:

- *Review your ministry calendar:* Be on the lookout for youth and children’s programs or events that compete with families for time and energy or that cause tension within families because of the ways calendars collide with – rather than complement – one another. Consider realigning your schedule of programs.
- *Create rhythms of engaging parents:* Look at your churches daily, weekly, monthly and yearly engagement with parents and create ‘touch’ points that feel sustainable in your context. Better yet, ask parents how much and though what channels they would like to hear from your ministry.
- *Partner with adult education:* Since parents are the greatest influence on their kid’s faith, the discipleship of adults has a direct impact on the discipleship of young people. Partner with whoever leads the adult spiritual formation in your church to better equip parents to talk about and live out faith every day.
- *Offer parent training when it works for parents and feature topics they care about:* To ensure parents attend and the right parents attend (often they are attended by parents who need it least). Run them at times when parents are already on site (during your youth group gatherings, or just afterwards, during Sunday school, or immediately after church (providing lunch and childcare). Also give them valuable help with topics they care about and/or might be anxious about, such as digital technology and social media, the transition into secondary school and learning to talk to their kids about sex.
- *Invite parents to volunteer:* Tap into the gifts and skills of parents so they can serve in youth ministry directly rather than watch from the side lines. Think beyond tasks like organising meals or driving to events, and look for opportunities for parents to be involved in formation through mentoring, leading small groups, or discipling younger ministry volunteers.

## ❖ Ditch ‘Youth-Led’ Sunday – Involve Young People Every Sunday Instead

Having young people lead a service every so often is a long standing tradition in many churches and congregations, it’s a Sunday when young people take over the worship service and leads everything for the music to the preaching. Some members of the congregation love it, often smiling approvingly while teenagers display their abilities. Others avoid this Sunday, preferring to skip a week rather than endure loud music and awkward moments. For the young people involved it can also be a mixed bag. Some enjoy the opportunity to share with the congregation, while others feel pressured by leaders and parents to participate in something that feels unnatural to them, like being put on display.

For many of the churches used in the growing young research; these type of youth-led services are a thing of the past. Not because they do not want to give teenagers the opportunity to participate and lead; quite the opposite. They are involving teenagers every Sunday. From leading parts of the worship service, to running the sound desk, to helping with the children's ministry, young people play a load-bearing roles in the churches Sunday service.

Dream together with your leadership team about your weekend gatherings becoming what young people look forward to most throughout their week. Where young people could be more integrated? What would it take to integrate them? How much would you be willing to change in order to make this happen?

#### ❖ **Leverage Technology. But Don't Obsess Over It**

Young people are what could be called Digital Natives – born into a world where the internet has always been an active presence in their daily lives and smartphones are more common than microwaves. Rather than lamenting the role technology plays in the lives of young people, churches that are growing young leverage technology for connection and yes, even discipleship. It's possible that young people can lead our churches and congregations forward in surprising ways through digital technology if we let them.

However, leveraging technology does not mean we need to embrace every new gadget or social media platform in order to reach young people. Remember, they want a warm community more than a flashy one. Also be careful not to use social media solely for event promotion. One example of this that came up in the research was that they stopped promoting events on social media and instead started celebrating them on social media afterwards; believing that what's celebrated gets repeated. They share photos, quotes and highlights as avenues toward community and trust rather than as marketing tactics.

Further, young people do not necessarily want to connect with adults in the same 'virtual' space where they connect with their friends. Ask your young people how they

think your church could improve its use of technology and social media. Also ask where they do *not* think more effort is needed. Specifically ask what social media platforms they do and do not want to use to interact with church members or discuss faith questions.

### ❖ **Diversify to Meet 20-Somethings Where They Are**

Adapt to the needs and realities of 20-somethings in your community, thinking about how you can accommodate those in different life stages (single, married or with young families). Ideas found during the growing young research included:

- A bible study, around a shared meal
- Pub Theology – meeting in a local pub, offering conversational bible study in an environment where they feel comfortable inviting their friends who may not be willing to explore faith in a church building.
- Sunday School for 20-somethings



It's not about making young adult ministry, youth group 2.0, but a way of engaging emerging adults where they are and helping them to discover their place and purpose – both in the church and in the world.

Ask the 20-somethings in your church to share both what they appreciate about what your church does now to connect with them and for ideas for better ways of addressing the needs of their age group. Do not assume they will want a programmatic response. In some contexts, the researchers for growing young found that, there was no need for a specific program they were seamlessly integrated into the life of the congregation. Once you introduce the idea of prioritising young people (including 20 somethings) you might find that young adults are willing to create structure and launch initiatives themselves. Just be sure to support them in this process.

### ❖ **Thank Adults Who Sacrifice Personal Preferences to Prioritise Young People**

In many cases, prioritising young people everywhere means adults need to put aside some of their own preferences for the sake of younger generations. These sacrifices should be named and celebrated. One pastor shared “We constantly express gratitude to adults from the platform by acknowledging they are very likely giving up some of their preferences around dress, music and formality in order to reach younger people. We thank them for that gift”



## Discussion Questions

- ❖ What evidence do you see that your congregation makes prioritising young people everywhere reality? What are you already doing?
- ❖ In what ways are young people given ‘load-bearing roles’ in your church? What could you do to inspire more of a sense that your church needs the gifts young people uniquely bring?
- ❖ How supported do parents and caregivers feel in your congregation? How can your church support and partner with parents? What might it look like to increase that support?
- ❖ What are some of the ways your church is putting prioritising young people into action? What are the areas where you may talk about the importance of young people but fail to act?
- ❖ What one or two shifts might you or your church want to make?

# Be the Best Neighbours: Loving and Shaping Your World Well



"I didn't need to be looking for Jesus or a church to find them. They were out there doing their thing as opposed to a lot of churches that try and get you to come to their events in the church building... everyone in our city wants to change the world, but this church makes that tangible in a manner I have never seen before in a church. It teaches you how to apply your faith to the culture so you can interact with the world as God intends" – Alexis, Washington DC

Check out this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6AOwEcgLo>

These highlight how churches growing young strive to be the best neighbours, both locally and globally. They carefully maintain a balance as they interact with our culture and world. On the one hand, they do not simply mimic the surrounding culture. On the other hand, they are not so different or separate from the world that they lose their ability to relate. Instead, churches that grow young value both fidelity to Scriptures commands for holiness and knowing and graciously loving their neighbours. Affecting how they serve, pursue social justice, help teenagers and emerging adults find their calling, interact with popular culture and respond to heated cultural issues. Much more than developing policies or releasing theological position papers, these churches train and infuse their young people with an integrated discipleship that enables them to navigate and thrive in our complex world.

**What do we mean by 'the world' and 'culture'?**

Since Christian traditions use the terms the world, culture, and other synonyms broadly, we want to briefly explain our working understanding of these two important terms.

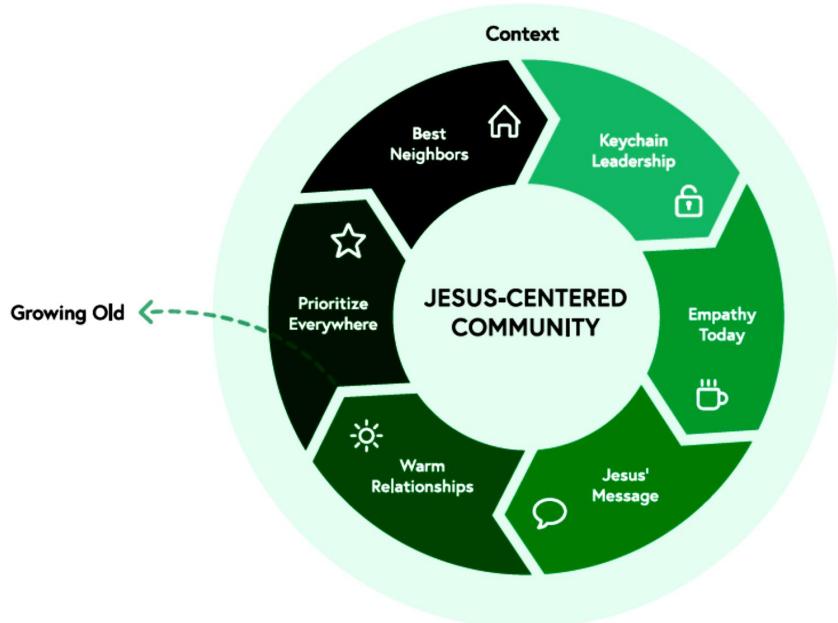
**The world:** We are not using this phrase with a negative connotation or as something bad that Christians should avoid. Instead when we say 'the world' we mean almost anything that is located or takes place outside of the church walls.

**Culture:** Our use of this term includes values and ideas, ethnic and gender identity, pop culture, politics and heated issues (such as gay marriage and immigration)

This sounds simply enough, right?

In reality, the research found that offering young people a thoughtful path to be the best neighbour is anything but easy. When the leaders of the churches that are growing young were surveyed about the biggest challenge their church faces in ministering to teenagers and emerging adults, 1 out of 3 named challenges in navigating culture. The most frequently named cultural obstacles included the difficulty of keeping their church relevant and the pressure on young people to conform to popular cultural norms.

As you read about the churches in this research that aim to be the best neighbours, please remember that the order of the core commitment in the growing young wheel is flexible. In some churches, this commitment serves as an entry point to growing young; in others it comes later. Just because this is the last in the growing young wheel does not mean it will be the least important for your church. Regardless of the timing of this commitment, the research discovered several common areas in churches the neighbour well.



## Research Findings:

### ➤ The Best Neighbours Ask. ‘Who is My Neighbour?’

Churches that intend to be the best neighbours, and that train young people to do likewise, try to adhere to the example set by Jesus. In Matthew 22, when an expert in the law asks Jesus to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus replies by citing Deuteronomy 6 v 5: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” However Jesus moves beyond familiar Jewish command by adding a second “greatest” command that references Leviticus 19 v 18 “Love your neighbour as yourself.” For Jesus, love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable.

*“All churches must understand, love and identify with their local community and social setting, and yet at the same time be able and willing to critique and challenge it” – Tim Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City.*

An obvious question that follows is, “Who is my Neighbour?” Thankfully, Jesus responds to this question with the famous parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 v 25-37. When a Jewish man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho is violently attacked, robbed,

and left for dead. Two religious authorities (a priest and a Levite) see the man but pass by. The man's life is saved when a Samaritan stops to help. Despite being an enemy of the Jews, the Samaritan bandages the stranger's wounds, takes him to an inn, and pays for his expenses. Unlike the religious but aloof travellers, the Samaritan enacts true neighbouring.

**Churches striving to be the best neighbours reflect this selfless mercy toward people outside their congregations – whether those neighbours are friends, strangers or enemies. They demonstrate compassion and forgiveness, even when it is within their power to turn away or inflict harm. Churches that grow young practice this mercy in a variety of ways: in their service and social justice efforts, in their political engagement, in discussions about race and ethnic identity and in response to pop culture. Doing so earns these churches a hearing in a culture that often would otherwise dismiss them as judgemental or close-minded.**

Asking "Who is my neighbour?" helps ground young people's response to the needs and culture around them in more than a 'give yourselves a pat on the back' kind of way. When we position our work in the redemptive narrative of Jesus, good deeds are repositioned within Good News.

*"Our church has more than just a desire to do good. We understand that this good, this need for justice, comes from our understanding of the gospel. It's grounded in who Jesus is, who God is, and what life is all about, not just an add-on"* – Tina, age 27

### ➤ **Hospitable Neighbours Honour What's Good**

Day after day, news headlines tell us the world is not as it should be. This reality is not lost on young people. If anything social media relays global strife with an immediacy unknown to prior generations. While churches that grow young don't deny the problems of the world, they consistently look to emphasise the good and embody that good in faithful living. They understand young people are tired of congregations that define themselves by what they are against rather than what they are for.

The young people in my church don't seem to reflect or even respect our views on cultural issues today, especially human sexuality. Does our congregation have to choose between either keeping our teenagers and emerging adults or throwing our convictions?

Our culture is changing at what feels like an exponential rate, and it's difficult for most of us to keep up. A quick skim of young people's social media accounts is all it takes to reveal that their approaches to cultural issues may be a little different from, or even completely opposed to, those of older congregants.

While there are no quick or easy answers, we recommend that congregations view these differences through the lenses already shared about empathising with today's young people and fuelling a warm community. Loose associations will likely melt apart in the face of heated debate. Instead, churches can grow young by viewing these cultural issues as opportunities to draw closer to one another in relationship and do the hard work of sharing life together across different generations and perspectives.

When leaders used in the research were asked “What do you believe accounts for your church’s success at engaging young people?” nearly 1 in 3 pointed to its inclusive and open attitude toward other people and the overall culture. In addition, when teenagers, emerging adults, parents and church volunteers were asked to name why their church is effective with young people, equally as many named this positive posture.

Congregations that aim to be the best neighbours keep their radar tuned to the good they find in culture and those outside their church (Philippians 4 v 8). This doesn’t imply wholehearted acceptance or that your church should pretend real differences do not exist. However, hospitable neighbours maintain both dialogue and relationship, especially when they disagree. The churches in the study did not have much trouble finding common ground to at least begin to have a conversation, even about controversial cultural issues. After all, as Psalm 24 v 1 declares “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

### ➤ **Compassionate Neighbours; Make Their World Better**

Churches that become the best neighbours don’t stop with naming what’s good around them; they also focus on ‘doing good’, both in their neighbourhood and around the world. While most leaders might guess that this is important, what came out of the research was that it is vital for churches to engage in service, acts of compassion, missions and social justice.

Nearly 605 of those interviewed named service, mission and generally being outward orientated as what makes their church effective with young people. Furthermore when leaders were asked what indicates commitment and growth in young people, nearly 70% cited young people serving in some way.

### ➤ **Patient Neighbours; Respect the Journey as Much as the Destination**

When participants in phone interviews were asked how they would describe their church to a Christian friend, 43% focused on the church’s accepting nature. This was confirmed during site visits and nearly 200 young people from the 12 congregations observed unpacked how their church’s process or journey to arriving at a particular belief or position. Especially when it comes to heated cultural issues, like politics, same sex marriage, and homosexuality. When churches predetermined stance on an issue can be hard for young people to swallow or stomach, churches can seem closed to dialogue and young people will often vote with their feet a look elsewhere for more palatable

In *Losing Heart: A survey of youth and children’s work on 2054 across England, Scotland and Wales* produced by The Youthscape Centre for Research in Dec 2016. 80% were interested in discussing Mental Health and Self Esteem, 72% Sex and Relationships, 64% Same Sex Attraction, 68% Serving the local church or wider community, 58% Drugs and addiction and 40% were interested in discussion pornography.

This highlights the need for churches to be ‘open’ to dialogue on these (and more heated issues) if they are to grow young.

conversations about issues that matter most to them. While the churches used in the research were anything but theological lightweights, they often demonstrate a generous spirit when it comes to differing opinions. When the interview participants described their church, they were 8 times more likely to mention the diversity of beliefs than similarities. The young people at Flood Church were quick to share that they feel comfortable bringing their friends because they know the teaching will proclaim biblical truth without judging people who are not yet ready to embrace that truth. No matter where churches fell on the theological spectrum, they focussed on essential beliefs that are and can be shared rather than exaggerating the various differences. In this way, those whose beliefs do not match the church's at least feel welcome to join in the conversation. The researchers heard from several young people who do not completely align with their church's stance on one or more of these controversial issues but nevertheless remain part of the church because they respect the process by which decisions are made.

*"We talk about the big social issues... we definitely engage in those. But we don't tell people what to think about them. And that is what I really love. I have never felt awkward asking one of the leaders, 'what do you think about this?' because I know they're not going to tell me exactly what to think. Instead, they engage me in conversation. And then through that, we can derive together that ways that we should live out our beliefs." – 18 year old*

#### ➤ **More Conversations, Less Conclusions**

Respecting the journey seems particularly vital when navigating these hotly contested and complex issues, and the one thing united all the congregations used in the research, was their commitment to informed, respectful and thoughtful dialogue. Remember God is bigger than any issue or debate.

Furthermore churches that are growing young are sensitive to making a decision or taking a particular theological stance that is perceived as shutting down the conversation. Rather than make decisions in a leadership vacuum, they recognise the tensions that swirl around these issues, especially for young people who may encounter these issues every day. These church leaders avoid making blanket statements and instead try and honour all people as created in God's image. They make space for safe and honest dialogue so that everyone – both young and old – can share their questions, beliefs and experiences.

#### ➤ **Courageous Neighbours Embrace Ethnic Diversity**

Racial and ethnic diversity are an everyday reality for teenagers and emerging adults, possibly even more so than for other age groups. Yet most denominations and churches represent an overwhelmingly mono-cultural tribe. Given young people's awareness of racial and ethnic diversity, as well as the lack of this diversity in many churches, the

research team was encouraged that almost 1/3 of the churches in our study were multiracial. Young people across the country are often confused and frustrated when they look around their school and see others who look different but then show up to a church service where everyone looks the same.

Informed by social media, young people and emerging adults are often immediately aware of highly charged issues (particularly when it comes to injustice) when it bursts onto the public sphere. Teenagers and emerging adults long for space to dialogue, speak honestly about hard issues and lament and pray on behalf of those directly affected.

### ➤ **Fair-Minded Neighbours Seek Socioeconomic Diversity**

Churches that are growing young don't stop at ethnic diversity; they also pursue socioeconomic diversity. While the 12 congregations visited during the study were pursuing socioeconomic diversity in different ways. It was a demonstrated value in nearly every church. Churches that want to be the best neighbours seem especially aware of their ministry to and inclusion of the poor.

In what ways is your church or congregation addressing these needs for more ethnic and socioeconomic diversity? What can you do more of?

### ➤ **Wise Neighbours Help Young People Discover Their Calling**

As highlighted in a previous chapter, today's 25 year olds can often seem like 15 year olds and vice versa. So when it comes to discovering their purpose, young people often struggle to find the right paths for both their vocational calling and their calling to serve their



community. Like a Sat-Nav offering 6 potential routes to the same location, life gives teenagers and emerging adults an overwhelming array of options that prove difficult to

sort through. The church is often better positioned than the careers advisor to help young people discover all God has for their future.

Churches that grow young provide this vocational guidance by helping teenagers and emerging adults locate themselves and their work in the light of a grand narrative. This narrative gives their lives greater meaning and purpose than simply ‘finding a job that pays the bills.’ Many of the 200 Christian young people interviewed as part of the research highlighted how the Christian story is giving shape and context to their biggest questions and dreams. It helps them to step away from individualism and consumerism and toward participating in what God is doing in our world. The Christian story also provides teenagers and emerging adults with guidance about why their plans might not always work out. Churches that are growing young recognise the gifts of young people and serve as mentoring communities where young people can discover their identity, nurture a sense of belonging and find purpose. They help young people identify their particular vocational fit during a time of seemingly limitless options.

How can you and your church do this?

### ➤ **The Best Neighbours Avoid Common Pitfalls**

When it comes to engaging with our world, churches that grow young successfully avoid four common pitfalls that often trip up congregations:

#### **1) Aiming for Perfection**

When asked to rate how true particular statements are of their church, those interviewed, one of the lowest average



ratings (3.72 out of 5) was ‘teaching people how to interact with cultural and societal issues.’ So even in churches that are strong and healthy, participants feel there is room to grow in their cultural engagement.

Young people seem to appreciate their churches good intentions and initial action in neighbouring well, even when not done perfectly.

## **2) Copying and Competing**

Given young people’s high value on authenticity and their uncanny ability to sniff out someone or something that’s fake, churches that grow young do not attempt to copy the culture around them or compete with the entertainment industry. Which is wise given that young people in the survey expressed scepticism about churches that try too hard to be relevant.

*“We resist the temptation to entertain them simply because we are in an entertainment culture. If we were trying to entertain our young people, they would sense some inauthenticity and likely leave the church. There are much better forms of entertainment out there.” – Grace, Youth Pastor*

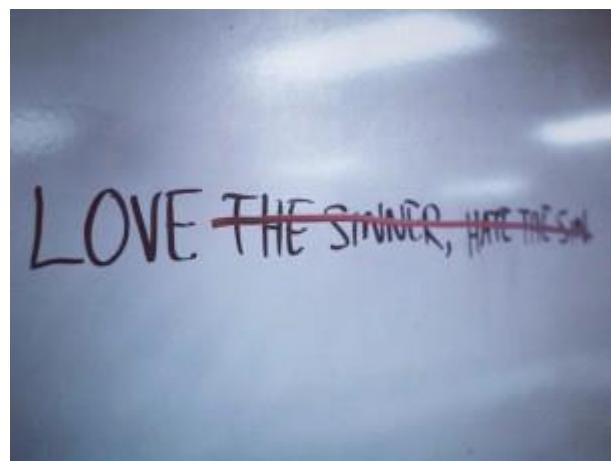
## **3) Condemning and Critiquing**

Teenagers and emerging adults today know what their church is against. The so called Christian mantra to “love the sinner but hate the sin” has more than done its job... at least when it comes to the second part of the statement. While condemning and critiquing might occasionally be useful, churches that grow young seem to take that posture sparingly.

*Try Love the Sinner, Not the Sin.*

Check Out this Blog:

<http://jarridwilson.com/why-hate-the-sin-not-the-sinner-isnt-working/>



Rather than enter the debates as one more negative voice, churches that grow young seek to listen to what is happening in the wider world and ask what unique contribution can a Christian community make, and then try to make that response a reality, which will be a draw to teenagers and emerging adults.

## **4) Finding the One “Right” Program, Cause or Social Justice Issue**

*When it comes to making a difference in the world, is it better to serve locally or globally? And does it matter what cause or justice issue churches choose?*

The short answer is NO.

The longer answer is that while the churches in the study were nearly universal in talking about the importance of service, exactly how they serve is all over the map. Literally, churches practice being good neighbours through participating in global and local mission trips, volunteering inside and outside of the church, raking leaves for the elderly, volunteering in a homeless shelter, building houses, leading advocacy work and immigration support, running debt management programmes and picking up litter.

More important than finding the “right” cause is that the issue is meaningful to those involved. Congregations that are growing young are able to discover what is meaningful because they listen to those in the congregation and community. They pay attention to statements like, “I really care about this issue” or “I felt alive when I was serving there.”

By listening to what’s meaningful to their own people, churches that grow young strategically avoid adding endless new causes to an already full church calendar and budget. They also allow their people’s interests to sprout new ministries without feeling like they have to support vast infrastructure. These catalytic churches empower their members to launch additional causes at a grassroots level or to get involved with organisations in the community that are already doing great work.

*“At our church, everybody has something they care about, and the church doesn’t need to rubber-stamp your passion before you can do it. We want the kind of environment where people are empowered and released to pursue what they care about and bring people around them to get involved”* – Justin, 23 years

How are you empowering your congregation to launch or to get involved in great work that is already happening?

## Ideas for Action:

### ➤ Know Your neighbourhood:

Being the best neighbour begins by understanding who your neighbours are. Go to the Office for National Statistics

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/> and nomis (the official labour market statistics)

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> for a big picture understanding of the demographics

of your area. Pay attention to your areas household income, ethnic and age diversity and poverty and education levels.



Does anything surprise you? How do the results match the demographics of your church? Based on the data about your community, what do you wish was different about your church?

Gather a group to study your community more intently based on what you learn through the data. Informally survey members of your own community (using the 'A strategy for 'new' work in church communities' document in the appendixes as a guide) about their needs, meet with local government and catalogue existing services and groups. All this data can build a more complete picture of your communities existing assets and biggest needs.

Pursuing diversity at a level that matches your surrounding community is not just a good thing to do – it's likely critical for the future of your church.

## ➤ **Diversify Your Contacts:**

Would you like your church to have greater diversity but aren't quite sure how to reach that goal? Instead of focussing on your church, first focus on your own circle of contacts. Take a scroll through the contacts in your mobile phone. How many of those come from a different ethnic group to you? If the number is lower than you hoped, create a plan to help you build relationships with people from other ethnic groups. Consider aiming for at least five friendships as a starting point (or adjust higher based on your context). Perhaps there are other church leaders or volunteers in your area or circuit or from a different denomination that you could connect with who are of a different ethnicity to you. If you're a parent maybe you could have coffee with the parents of one of your children's friends.

*Remember just don't be weird about it.*

## ➤ **Brush Up on Culture through Systematic Listening**

Q: Do you still own a VCR?

Q: Have you ever used a phone that wasn't 'Smart'?

Q: When somebody says 'cookies' is the first image that comes to mind edible?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, your perspective on today's culture might need a bit of freshening up. Churches that grow young are marked by their regular and systematic practice of listening to the world around them as individuals as well as a leadership team. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Listen to a few of the most popular songs in the charts right now (alone and with others). What do they tell you about our culture and what's important to the millions who listened to these songs in the last week?
- Try asking young people what songs or artists they are listening to? Do the same with movies, TV shows and even YouTube videos? And have a listen or watch of those.
- Take a 45 minute walking tour of the neighbourhood around your church with a note pad at the ready. Who are your neighbours? What seems to be important to them? How might your church better connect with them?
- Spend some time at the shopping centre/mall. Not just as a customer, but as a cultural detective. Sit on a bench near the food court around lunch time or dinner time and simply observe. Go into a few stores you typically pass by, especially those that cater to youth culture. What do the signs, fashions and topics of conversation around you communicate?

## ➤ **Survey Says...**

Conduct a survey of your congregation. The results will offer guidance on preaching and small group topics, staffing and programs on offer. The survey should gather personal demographic information such as age, gender, education level, ethnicity, marital status, income level and birthplace. Other potential questions include:

- How long have you attended our church?
- How often do you attend our church?
- In what programs/activities/groups do you participate in? what do you value about them?
- What attracted you to our church (friend/family member, internet search, preaching, worship style, service opportunity, the churches reputation in the community, the denomination or something else?)
- What are your favourite aspects of our church?
- What would you like to change or improve about our church?
- Is there a story you could share about how our church has made a positive impact in your own life?

This survey could be linked and done at the same time as the October count.

## ➤ **Craft a Theology of Culture**

Are you aware of the theology of culture and how it contribute to your churches interactions with the world outside your doors? The teenagers and emerging adults in your church can sense your churches theology, even if they may never use that term. Gather together your leadership team, volunteers and some teenagers and emerging adults to discuss three critical questions:

- What do our current actions and public communications (website, newsletters, and media statements) reveal (either explicitly or implicitly) about our posture toward culture and the world around us? Do this for your own churches actions and communications but also for the Methodist church as a whole?

- What do we actually believe about how our church (and the Methodist Church as a whole) should interact with culture and the world around us?

- As we compare what we (our church and Methodism) actually believe to what we communicate, what are two or three shifts our church needs to make in order to be the best neighbours?

## ➤ Tackle a Difficult Topic with Grace

What's a difficult contemporary topic that you don't want to talk about with your small groups, volunteers, leadership team or overall church ... but you know you need to? In some churches it could be money, for others immigration, transgender issues, same sex marriage, homosexuality, mental health, disability. While the topics may vary, churches that grow young don't sidestep 'the elephant in the room' but confront them. But confront them in with conversations flavoured with unity, unity in Christ. One way to empathise this unity is to take time to share the in communion together before jumping into the discussion. There is no greater unifying activity than sharing the body and blood of Christ together, recognising our common sin and the source of our salvation. Designate one person of the group to remind everyone of the unity we have in Christ. As difficult topics are tackled, if it starts to become a little too heated, this person reminds everyone of this unity so even when conversations get heated, our common solidarity, as demonstrated through the communion, outweighs the differences among us. Taking a few seconds of silence so everyone can reflect on the unity found in Christ; before continuing the discussion; repeating as necessary.



## ➤ Start Locally: Not Just with a Popular Slogan

While young people may value mission trips to faraway places and tend to be globally aware, they also value making a difference in their own community. So much so that even when the researchers thought that churches were doing amazing work in their local area, the teenagers and emerging adults in those churches often wished their congregations were doing more. Focussing on local issues; such as a homelessness project; can change the psyche and relationships of the church as a whole.

*"The secret to reaching the world is first reaching YOUR world. When you reach your world, it's amazing how your world starts expanding to reach the world."*

– Erwin Raphael McManus

Your church might have neighbours who are homeless, employed, in debt, in need of food, excluded from school whom you get to know and serve. Or you could take young people on a mission "trip" where you stay and work in your own town. No matter what you choose, make your decision based on carefully listening to your local neighbourhood, not just on the latest fad.

## ➤ **Expand Globally: Mission and Justice as a Two-Way Street**

While starting locally is important, being the best neighbours also includes our worldwide neighbours. Your church likely has plenty of requests coming to you from global churches or international mission and aid organisations. The Research offers one piece of advice as you pursue this avenue.

### *Make your mission and justice work a two way street*

There is a ‘saviour complex’ prevalent in many churches. Churches that talk and act as though *we* (who have things all together) are going to save *them* (who desperately need our help). Churches that want to grow young should adopt an opposite posture. Being honest about the fact that Jesus is the one who saves and that we often end up benefiting more than those we serve. As you prepare a team to travel globally, reflect on the following questions:

- How do we move service beyond “spiritual tourism”?
- How can our service work be part of God’s kingdom justice?
- What are the most important theological thread that should weave their way through our service?
- How does service contribute to teenagers and emerging adults identity development?
- What does it look like to develop true reciprocal partnership with those we’re serving?

A good book for further reading on this issue is *Overrated* by Eugene Cho

## ➤ **Partner Up**

You don’t need to go it alone, if your church is running all its own community service efforts, you’re likely putting undue pressure on yourself and potentially offering a lower quality of service than if you identified people and or organisations to partner up with.

If your vision is to provide meals for those children, young people and their families who struggle over the summer holidays when the schools are closed, then partner up with Make Lunch - <https://www.makelunch.org.uk/>

If your congregation wants to support the children and young people in your local schools through mentoring, then partner up with TLG – Transforming Lives for Good - <https://www.tlg.org.uk/>

If you see a need to reach out to Dads, father figures and their children, then partner up with Who Let the Dads Out - <https://www.wholetteddadout.org.uk/>

If a local need is to provide a Food bank, then partner with The Trussell Trust - <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>

As you dream about how to be the best neighbours, instead of launching a brand-new ministry on your own, spend time brainstorming local social organisations and/or churches with whom you could partner. Better yet, consider having members of your team (including volunteers) join existing churches together networks, local boards, groups, school PTA's, friends of... groups in order to enter on the ground level of the needs of your local community.

### ➤ **Launch a Vocation Group**

Like many churches, you might struggle with getting people in their 20's to show up for your ministries. Especially that Sunday 7.30am Bible study on the book of Numbers, that hasn't grown young in over a decade.

Given emerging adults desire to find their vocation, as well as their tendency to float from job to job, churches that grow young talk explicitly about vocation and calling. Hosting vocational group's help emerging adults navigate the confusing messages they receive about calling, gifts, career and vocation. Rather than telling teenagers and emerging adults "you can be anything you want to be" journey alongside them and help them discover what God has called them to be and do. Ideas to get you started include:

- Be intentional about the time commitment. Some churches growing young purposely seek a long-term commitment from young people, believing it leads to deeper impact. Instead of asking young people to make such an extended commitment, others initially aim for six to eight weeks. They believe it's long enough to establish a rhythm and provide value but short enough that it's easy for busy or hesitant emerging adults to say yes to. Groups always have the option of continuing after the time elapses.
- When it comes to curriculum, spend time studying passages in Scripture that address calling or different vocations. Share hopes and fears and pray about them together. You could to a Spiritual Gifts questionnaire and study. Whatever you do make sure you give time and space for group members to share honestly and pray together that you would experience God in the midst of your vocational adventures.
- Encourage teenagers and emerging adults to share their testimonies, and help draw out aspects of their stories that hint at how God has wired them for different careers and ministry interests. Invite adults from a variety of professions to share their own stories as well. Perhaps create short-term or long-term mentoring relationships by matching these adults with young people who share the same vocational interests and dreams.
- Offer paid or unpaid internships within your church (see the Methodist churches One Programme - <http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/children-and-youth/one-programme>) internships give emerging adults valuable tastes

of vocational ministry during times of natural transition (gap year between college and University or while at University).

### ➤ **Give Them a Why**

Many of the young people in your church and community want to make a difference. Your congregation has the power to help them understand ‘why’ they feel this passion by locating it in God’s redemptive gospel narrative. Think about how to help teenagers and emerging adults connect their passion for being the best neighbours with what God intended in the beginning of creation, as well as God’s future new creation.



## Discussion Questions

- How do we answer the question “Who is my neighbour?” here at our church? How does that shape our engagement with the community and world?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- If our church moved out of this neighbourhood, for what would we be missed? Who would miss your church most? What does this tell us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What kind of posture do we tend to take in our church toward heated cultural issues? What influences that posture? How do young people respond to our conversations (or lack of conversations) about these issues?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What do ethnic and socioeconomic diversity look like in your church? How do you feel about that reality? What are you as an individual and a church to build bridges toward greater diversity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In what ways does your congregation support young people in their pursuit of calling and vocational discovery? What could strengthen that support?

## More Ideas for Action:

1) What are you already doing personally to stay in touch with the culture around you? What extra things will you do now after reading this chapter?



2) What are some of the positive and life-giving steps your congregation is taking to be the best neighbour to the world outside its doors?

3) Given the ideas you've read in this chapter, what one or two shifts might you or your church want to make?

4) Who else needs to be part of this conversation?

5) What can you do in the next few weeks or months to move toward these changes?

# Growing Young in Your Context: How to Create a Plan for Change



*"Our church knows we need to reach out and change, or we'll die"* – Kristen, Pastor

*"This is a changing church, and we're part of a changing world. I've learned that I need to be big enough to change with it"* – Hank age 76

*"I know I am part, at present, of a declining Church, but I am not part of a declining gospel... The gospel of Jesus Christ is here to stay, but has the time not come of us to be radical? To take some risks in order that we can grow... Because, you see... I don't believe that God is done with us just yet."*

– Revd Lorraine N Mellor, Methodist Church President 2017/18



St John the Evangelist Catholic Church knows that growing young is not just *optional* but *essential*. Founded in 1871 as the first Roman Catholic parish in Indianapolis, St John has a rich history (much like the Methodist church has a rich history). Located in the heart of the downtown business district, its towering steeples have been a landmark of the skyline for over 140 years. But in the 1980's and 90's, the future looked bleak. St John's had been heavily affected over the preceding three decades by the nationwide trend of residents moving from downtown out into the suburbs. By the 1980's, membership had declined. Most attendees were commuters who worked in the city and came for midday mass. St John's like many churches was growing old. The average age of membership was getting higher and higher. One bleak year the church almost closed its doors for good.

Then in 2009, the parish turned a corner. Unwilling to concede that the people were too old, the road to difficult or the timing too late, the church resolved to grow young. They decided to prioritise the young adult ministry. The downtown area had recently been redeveloped, making it the ideal time for a parallel revitalisation of the congregation.

Father Rick, a wise and gifted leader, was recruited to serve as chaplain at the University campus, located just a few blocks from the church. New activities were initiated for young adults, including a Sunday evening service and midweek gatherings designed to integrate them into the community. Slowly, younger people started to reengage with the church, overall attendance began to increase, average age began to decrease, and the ministry grew both deeper and wider. St John's was growing young.

Understandably, this movement toward growing young did not come without its hurdles to overcome. Several long time members felt undervalued, others found it challenging to connect with this younger population. Thankfully they felt comfortable voicing these concerns with Father Rick, who helped them empathise with the young peoples and their search for identity, belonging and purpose. Growing young was not easy; it took significant time investment from both the young people and the older congregation. The leadership team remained steadfast and mixed the age groups in membership committees, small groups and service teams. They also started an "adopt a student" program that matched adults with students who shared similar vocational interests or hobbies. The older congregates continued to look for ways to reach out and eventually cross-generational relationships grew deeper.

However there was still this sense of a split into 2 congregations/communities, so in response Father Rick, who was still serving as the university chaplain, was appointed as the head pastor of the church and was charged with the work of merging these 2 communities. The church also hired a few part-time college staff members so that Father Rick could maintain his role as university chaplain while focussing the majority of his time on the congregation as a whole. It wasn't easy, but Father Rick and his team were determined to unite the congregation as *one body*.

Their team strategically targeted social events, such as weekly minor league baseball games, that older congregates attended regularly. They encouraged young people to attend both the game and the traditional pregame barbecue at the church. As a result, church attendance tripled. Even more importantly, the younger and older members of the congregation were able to connect in nonthreatening and fun environments.

Emerging adults were especially drawn to the social justice efforts of the church, including a ministry to the homeless. The young people joined an already consistent group of volunteers who fed dozens of hungry people daily.

The churches dynamic young adult community soon evolved into a mixture of singles and married couples, many of whom met at St John's. As the couples began having children, the congregation responded over time by developing training and small groups to help young families adapt to this new stage in life.

A couple of years into these incremental changes, an arsonist broke into the church and set the church ablaze. While the fire was extinguished quickly, it caused over \$400,000 in damage. It was a defining moment for St John's; rather than express hatred and

anger toward the arsonist, as a twenty something remembered “the leaders called us not to be mad but to pray for that person and to demonstrate the gospel.” The church came together to host a ‘Tested by Fire’ fundraiser to refocus on its mission and rebuild its damaged building. As the members weathered this tragedy, their shared passion to restore the church transcended generational differences and further united the church as a family.

Today St John’s is a thriving congregation that exemplifies what it looks like to grow young. Like every church, it has its share of ongoing obstacles and bumpy patches. “St John’s is one of the most vibrant parishes I’ve ever seen” said one national Roman Catholic representative. Indeed, there are over 1,500 members, nearly 1000 of who are teenagers or young adults.

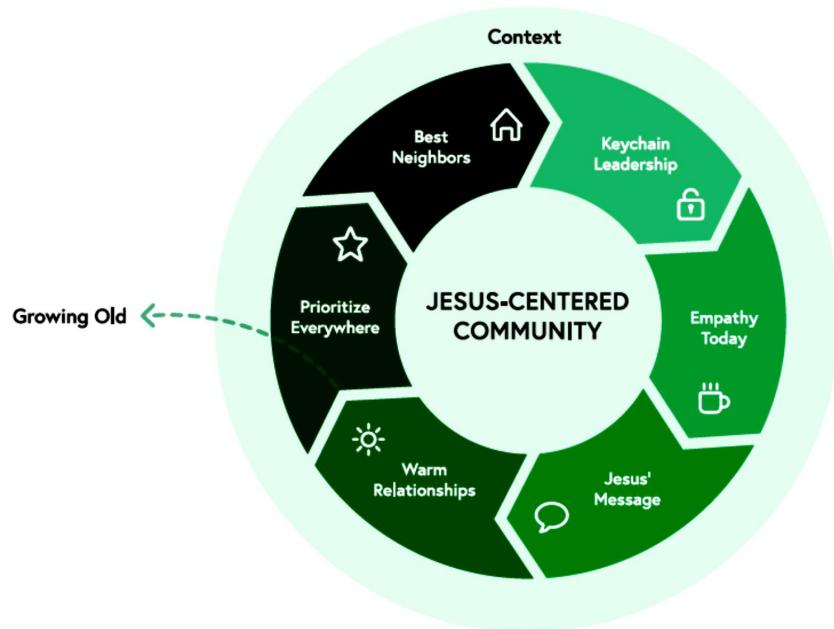
Not bad for a church that was close to shutting its doors.

## The Six Core-Commitments Fleshed Out in St John’s

All through the previous chapters we have looked at the six core commitments common to churches that are growing young. Notice how each was embodied in St John’s:

### *Unlock Keychain Leadership:*

Father Rick was a capable leader but not controlling. He empowered people in his church to use their gifts to fulfil the vision of the congregation.



### *Empathise with Today's Young People:*

At first the older members of the congregation did not connect with the young people. However, they eventually developed relationships by listening carefully and appreciating the challenges navigated by today's teenagers and emerging adults.

### *Take Jesus' Message Seriously:*

St John’s talked about Jesus message consistently and applied faith to the here and now. Rather than respond to the arsonist with anger and condemnation, the leadership preached and modelled grace and restoration.

### *Fuel a Warm Community:*

Instead of relying on the power of church services alone to draw the church together, the leaders strategically planned social events to connect the whole church in relationship.

### *Prioritise Young People (and Families) Everywhere:*

The decision was made to prioritise young adult ministry at St John's and hiring Father Rick as the university chaplain showed this. In addition, the congregation developed training and small groups geared up to help young families entering into parenthood.

### *Be the Best Neighbours:*

As just one example of its commitment to serve the marginalised, the church fed, and continues to feed, dozens of homeless neighbours every day.

### **✓ Great News for Your Church: Change is Possible**

The story of St John's, while remarkable, doesn't have to be uncommon. The thousands of churches in the UK growing older have good reason to be concerned.

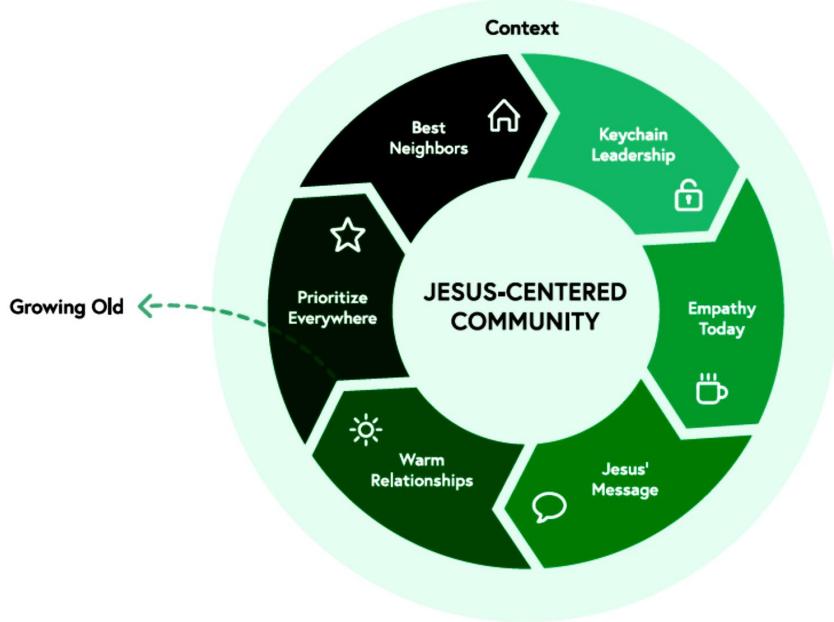
*"I know I am part, at present, of a declining Church, but I am not part of a declining gospel... The gospel of Jesus Christ is here to stay, but has the time not come of us to be radical? To take some risks in order that we can grow... Because, you see... I don't believe that God is done with us just yet." – Revd Lorraine N Mellor, Methodist Church President 2017/18*

But they don't have the admit defeat.

Perhaps your church's future looks bleak, and that's what led you to read this. Or maybe your church isn't in danger of closing, but you know if it has so much more potential. It may not be growing old, but it's not growing young either. If you can relate to any of this then this final chapter helps you move beyond *what* needs to change by helping you plan *how* your church can change.



In the Growing Young wheel, the outside rim is labelled “Context” because every church needs to understand how to embody these six core commitments in your own particular setting. While you can certainly learn from the experiences of other congregations, what works for them might not work in your community or with your young people. Nor will it work to cherry pick a few ideas from each chapter and expect to bring about sustainable change. The six core commitments will not help that much if you apply them haphazardly; instead, let’s explore how you can apply them strategically.



As the powerful story of St John’s illustrates, the six core commitments require more than a quick fix or list of easy steps. But the good news is that you and your church are not aren’t left guessing about how to develop your own unique plan.

The churches involved in the growing young research had not always been effective with young people; many admitted that their church had not been effective from its inception. Of those young people and adults who knew the history of their church, more than one-third reported that their church had undergone significant change to become more effective with young people.

Making this bold move to more fully embody the six core commitments benefits churches on many levels, the biggest benefit being vitality. Young people’s energy, excitement and passion can electrify churches and propel them into a more hopeful future. However, there are also real dangers for churches that make shifts to grow young. A church may risk upsetting a large portion of its membership (perhaps even those who provide your church’s financial backbone). Perceived failures may cause church members to become more disgruntled and frustrated with those in leadership. Leaders may even lose their jobs. It is certainly wise to count these potential costs, and pre-empt them as much as possible before jumping in and making adjustments.

But in the end of the day the decision to grow young is not rooted in statistics or strategies. It’s rooted in prayerfully seeking God’s call for your congregation and the wider Methodist Church. So gather together your leadership team, volunteers and staff in fact anyone in your church who cares about teenagers and emerging adults as you prayerfully ask for God’s guidance. Take courage in the fact the millions of churches in

the last 2000 years have successfully navigated significant obstacles to adapt to new realities. Your church can too.

### ✓ **Three Myths about Churches that Change to Grow Young**

Before we explore how churches initiate change, we need to dispel three common myths that will *not* help you church grow young. In fact they can sabotage the process.

#### *Myth #1: There is a single Silver Bullet:*

There is neither one easy step to take nor one common problem to fix that will you're your entire church to grow young. When participants in the study were asked what they might want to change about their church, their responses varied greatly. No single area was mentioned by more than 10% of the congregants. While this can free up churches to experiment and learn, it also puts more pressure on leaders to listen to their context as a compass to help chart their own particular course.

#### *Myth #2: Bigger or Well-Resourced Churches Can Change Faster and Easier:*

Having a big building, the latest technology, a significant number of staff, or a surplus of cash, positions a church to make shifts quickly, right?

Not according to the research. In fact, when hundreds of pastors were asked about their biggest challenge to becoming more effective with young people, only 1 in 10 mentioned the churches lack of material resources. This wasn't because all the churches were well resourced. Some of the most innovative and exciting churches in the study were fairly small and lack a big budget, a large staff or a fancy building.

#### *Myth #3: Hiring \_\_\_\_\_ Will Solve the Problem:*

Many roles could be inserted to fill the blank. A new minister, youth worker, children's and families' worker, someone outgoing, someone young, someone experienced, an expensive consultant....

Hiring can certainly help, at least in the short term. But most of the real change that needs to happen in a church cannot be imposed from the outside or from the top down. It needs to be owned and implemented by the 'entire' church – usually from the inside and sometimes from the bottom up.

### ✓ **Aim for Adaptive Change in Order to Grow Young**

The reason these myths don't work is because the types of changes required to grow young are *Adaptive* challenges. Adaptive challenges involve shifts in attitudes, values and behaviours that require leaders to learn new ways to solve problems, contrast this with technical problems in which leaders can resolve their dilemmas through current knowhow.

Think of a technical problem as someone with a broken arm. A doctor can set the bone and apply a cast, typically solving the problem in a few weeks. While activities like driving may become a bit more difficult, significant changes in behaviour and values are not required. Adaptive work is more like trying to convince someone to quit smoking. A doctor can provide information about the risks and suggest ideas that might help the person stop smoking, but they cannot stop smoking for the person. The ultimate decision depends on a major modification of the values and behaviours of the smoker.

Applying this principle to organisations – “The single most common source of leadership failure we’ve been able to identify – in politics, community life, business or in the non-profit sector – is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.” – Ronald Heifetz (Harvard Professor)

After studying 100's of churches and witnessing the complexity of their systems, structures and cultures. They were strong advocates for adaptive change. Most of the important obstacles faced by churches that want to grow young involve a shift in the attitudes, values and behaviours of the people in the congregation. This entire document (and the book of which it is based) is littered with the principles of adaptive change that will best position your church to grow young.

## Creating YOUR Churches Plan for Change:

You likely have a sense for where your church is currently – it might be stalled, growing old or doing well but not reaching its full potential. By now, you probably also have a picture of what your church would look like if it were growing young. Your goal now is to create your plan for change to get from ‘here’ to ‘there’.

A good place to start would be to do the FREE online assessment:

<http://churchesgrowingyoung.com/assessment/>



The following sections on listening, storytelling and tools for change will hopefully empower you to embody the six core commitments and create your own contextual plan.

## Listening

### ✓ Leadership Begins with Listening:

Since the six core commitments in the growing young wheel have already illustrated *what* we should do, it can be tempting to jump straight in with an action plan. We can

be inclined to immediately make a formal announcement from the front, develop an elaborate strategic plan, or hire a new staff member. But if leaders move forward before carefully listening to their congregations; they're implying that they already know and understand what their congregation needs. Moving forward, while critically important to leading change, must first be tempered with appreciating the particular obstacles and opportunities of our own unique church context.

If we don't listen to others, we are prone to the common mistake of equating the health and needs of our church with the '3 B's' that have often been used to measure congregations – building, bodies (or bums on seats) and budget. While they can provide a helpful picture, it's not the whole picture, there is so much of a church's past, present and future that falls outside of these simple categories and must be incorporated in our growing young plan.

Let's move past these redundant categories and take time to understand and respond to the needs of our young people.

What are some of the needs of YOUR young people?

- **How Do We Start Listening Well?**

If your church truly desires to grow young, you won't get far without understanding your current context and reality. Begin by gathering a team that commits to listening well. Spend at least 2 months listening before any action is taken.

- **Who Should we Listen To?**

Here's a list to start you off:

- God
- Young people themselves – to gain their perspective
- Your own heart
- Research about young people – some of which has been highlighted in this document

- Parents, Sunday school teachers, and youth/young adult leaders and volunteers
- The Older generations – capture the passion and support of older members
- Your churches neighbours (including organisations that work with young people and emerging adults)

## ○ **What's the Best Method for Listening?**

There is no one best method, and it may include a combination of some of the following:

- Detailed Surveys
- One 2 one conversations
- Focus groups

Whatever path you choose, you might want to develop some common questions that can be used to hear their stories. Here's some to start you off:

- How did you hear about our church?
- What drew you to our church?
- What do you like best about our congregation?
- What do you like least about our congregation?
- What is one idea you have to improve our church?
- What's something exciting that has happened in your life recently?
- What's something difficult that has happened in your life recently?
- If there was one story from your life that would help me understand who you are, what would it be and why?
- What is something they you hope for or dream about?

## ○ **What Should We Listen for in Response to Our Questions?**

In your listening, aim for more than surface level conversations. Ask about people's hope and dreams. Listen for the pain in their lives and the questions that keep them awake at night. By doing this work in your own context, your church will be in a better position to respond to the longings and losses that really matter to your teenagers, emerging adults and families.

Thinking teenagers won't want to talk to you? Think again, especially because you are talking about something they actually care about, such as stress, dating, mental health etc. Enlist an adult that the young people know well, to partner with you.

In addition, listen for ideas about what your church could be or do. Discern their expectations for your church, especially when you hear the word 'should'. Pay attention to what sparks their interest or passions. Listen out for the presence of the six core commitments (or lack thereof), pay attention to their hopes and frustrations

related to any of the core commitments. And perhaps most importantly, listen for stories. Reflecting on what the stories convey about your congregations attitudes and values, along with the implications for your journey to grow young.

- **When Do We Stop Listening**

*Never.*

Even when you feel like you have completed this first phase and can start creating an action plan, listening should weave it's way throughout your entire transformation process and beyond.

## Stories

- ✓ **Vision is a Shared Story of Future Hope**

When asked about the history of their church, 31 percent of those who said their church changed to become more effective with young people attributed that shift to a change in the churches vision or strategy.

Scott Cormode defines vision as “shared stories of future hope.” This definition encompasses three crucial elements needed to create vision: *shared, stories and future hope*. The third crucial element, *future hope*, signals that Jesus brings Good News for the whole world and as a result, any church can grow young. Because to quote the 2017 inaugural address of the new President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Loraine N Mellor "Because, you see... I don't believe that God is done with us just yet."



### ***The Significance of Stories:***

What makes this definition so potent is the second key element, *stories*. God's story, your story and your churches story are connected and lead to something powerful: *our story*. Connecting vision to stories enables the vision to immediately connect with an individual and sweeps up that individual into a story much larger than any one person alone. Stories challenge, encourage and lead people deeper into the redemptive gospel narrative of what God is doing in the world. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman suggests:

*"Stories then, provide us both with the common elements that allow us to make with each other and the unique identities that keep us anchored in the midst of our diversity. They can be told over and over, linking us to the past, while evolving with each new telling ... Active, intentional storytelling is the basis on which all communities have always been built, and that is no less true today when communities are so fluid and fragile."*

Take a moment to think about a person you know that has a vibrant faith, whose identity is rooted in the grace of God, who knows they belong in the love of Christian community and who passionately lives out their God given purpose through a mission orientated life. Now think through the story of that person's life and experiences that shaped them into who they are today.

What would your church look like if we wanted today's young people to have the same (or similar) experiences?

### ***Putting Stories to Work in Your Church***

Based on what you and your team heard in your listening phase, consider drafting a short (one or two pages) story of what you hope your church will be like in the future. You might find it helpful to begin by first writing stories that focus on individuals. Think about how you answered the question above "What would your church look like if we wanted today's young people to have the same (or similar) experiences?" and imagine a future for either a real or fictional young person.

What do you hope and dream will happen in the life of that person as a result of your church? How do you hope that your church's embodiment of the six core commitments will shape their faith and life?

Try writing a short (one or two page) story about one young person, or maybe a few. Once you've developed the right story, tell them over and over in every part of your congregation.

- ✓ When another leader catches you in the hall after worship and asks what you're excited about, share the story.
- ✓ When you are invited to give a report at the circuit meeting, share the story.
- ✓ When you meet with someone new to your congregation and want them to understand your greatest dreams for the future, share a story.

These stories might be actual accounts of what God has already done in the lives of your young people or your visions for how God intends to work in your community in the future. Either way watch as these stories become contagious and transform the culture of your church.



## Tools to Help Your Church Change

Your team has listened well to understand where your church is now. You've crafted shared stories for future hope to paint a picture of what your church will look like as it grows young. If you have done these first two aspects well, this will make the final step of developing a plan for change easier. Not easy. But easier.

Follow the following four guiding principles to help your congregation navigate the peaks and valleys of your growing young journey.



### **1) Begin Where You Have The Most Influence**

The research asked leaders of churches growing young to identify the major challenges that prevent them from reaching young people more effectively. At the top of that list were:

- Their Own Congregation at 37%
- The Surrounding Culture at 29%
- The Young People Themselves at 24%
- Young people's Parents at 9%
- Other 1%

The top church related challenges under 'Their Own Congregation', ranked in order:

1. A generation gap
2. Inconsistent or non-existent volunteers
3. Lack of effective church strategy
4. Lack of material resources
5. Lack of willingness to change
6. Worship style
7. Other generations assume the worst about young people

While these hurdles may seem daunting, so rather than focus on the obstacle churches that grow young focus on what they can influence, such as keychain leadership or uniting around a common vision.

## **2) Construct a Holding Environment**

Earlier we distinguished between adaptive challenges from technical problems. Heifetz believes leaders can best solve adaptive challenges by creating and managing a "holding environment." Church leaders cannot force their congregation to change their deeply held attitudes, values and behaviours about the church.

But they can create holding environments to nurture and encourage major shifts. A holding environment is a space that keeps attention focussed on a problem in a way that is uncomfortable enough to promote change but safe enough that the church's anxiety about change isn't acute. The role of the leader is to carefully raise the heat so that the problem is taken seriously but then lower the heat when tensions rise too high and threaten to boil over. Driving the change at a pace the context could tolerate. For example, most of the congregations in the research did not prioritise young people at all levels of the church right away. Instead, these churches slowly raised the heat but highlighting in their preaching, meetings and one-on-one conversations that the church was in danger of growing old and irrelevant if it didn't change.



## **3) Experiment in the Margins**

As you introduce the core commitments in your context, it is tempting to immediately and publicly roll out a new campaign in front of the whole church. Consider starting with a less overt, and more covert approach. Rather than launching change from the pulpit, look for opportunities to implement shifts that start on the periphery rather than at the centre of your church. Trying out a new idea first with the Sunday School class,

small groups, young adults or youth group or anywhere not on display to your entire congregation qualifies as an experiment on the margins. For most churches, changes in the main worship service do not. One church in the study knew that tackling music style head on could spark a long and messy battle (many of you are nodding your heads along with them). So as an experiment on the margins, they encouraged the young people and emerging adults to set up a worship band that practised immediately after the regular Sunday worship service, so while the congregation shared tea and coffee, they could see and hear this group rehearsing. Before long, some of the members, who would have been opposed to a drastic change in music style, were asking if these young people might be allowed to play one or two songs for the main worship service. Slowly but surely, the church embraced a newer style, which has been a major step on its journey to grow young.

#### **4) Maintain Disciplined Attention**

For many churches, the main barrier to initiating change is not lack of desire but a lack of the long term dedication and discipline needed to make the transition a reality. Churches that grow young successfully fight against distractions or other pitfalls that threaten to derail them by “*maintaining disciplined attention*.” Intentionally keeping themselves and their team focussed on the tough questions and difficult shifts ahead through 5 key strategies:

- 1) *Develop a Growing Young Team and Start Meeting* – As your church prepares to take steps to grow young, create a guiding coalition that is separate from your church board or leadership team, include ministers, staff members, elders or deacons, members of the congregation, parents, young people, emerging adults and anyone else who should be represented. Meeting once a month, making sure that each time you identify the next steps your team plans to take, who’s in charge of making sure those steps happen and when those steps need to be completed.
- 2) *Create a Plan to Conquer Conflict* – In one of your first meetings, discuss how you will handle (or currently handling) conflict. It is an unavoidable aspect of change. When you find yourself stuck in conflict, rely on the vision filled stories you’ve crafted to remind yourselves why you’re pursuing these adjustments in the first place. Practice your best listening and lean into the unity in Christ that holds your church together. At the end of the day, keep hold of the shared stories of future hope to which God had called your community.
- 3) *Treat Failure as a Door to Learning* – Great organisations fail frequently. So do great churches. The key point is not to avoid making mistakes but to learn from those mistakes as quickly as possible so you can head in a better direction. Leaning on the gospel of grace not just as individuals but as a whole congregation/organisation. The more you marinate in a sense of God’s grace, love and mission, you might find your churches tolerance to failure increases.

- 4) *Leverage the Power of Small Wins* – Rather than focussing on a single marker or gauge that will tell you your church has “arrived” and has grown young, identify several smaller victories your team can measure and celebrate along the way. If your team continues listening well, there will be ongoing stories of positive life transformation you can celebrate.
- 5) *Think Long Term* – While many of the churches studied witnessed exciting movement within their church in a few months of a year, board culture change typically takes several years. While you’ll understandably need to focus your initial plans on the next few months, keep your church’s long term trajectory in the back of your mind. Perhaps schedule a daylong meeting for one or two years from now in order to celebrate progress and address obstacles impeding your progress.

*Growing Young (Fuller Institute) want to continue to be part of your journey toward growing young, especially as you hit roadblocks or if you’re not making progress as fast as you’d like. For tips on how to deal with setbacks in your journey, please visit [www.ChurchesGrowingYoung.Org](http://www.ChurchesGrowingYoung.Org). There you can access a free assessment survey and a host of practical resources and consulting and training options, as well as finding other leaders who are on the same road towards growing young. You might also consider joining a growing young cohort, a community of innovative churches committed to growing young together. Also get the book Growing Young.*

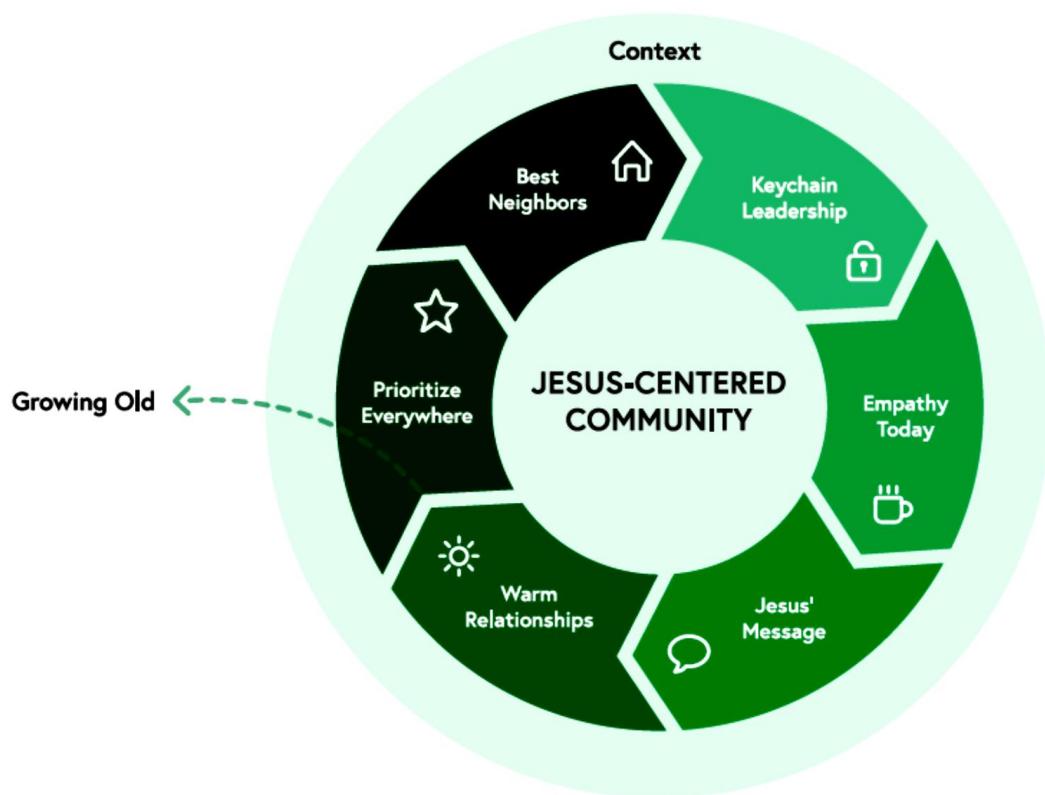
# Strategic Questions to Help Your Church Develop its Own Plan to Grow Young



# Your Church Now

- Who are the key people from your church who should be part of the leadership team or guiding coalition to help your church grow young?
  
  - To whom does your leadership team need to listen? Make a list of individuals or groups, noting the names of those from your leadership team who will do that listening.
  
  - What are the major themes (4-6 of them) that stand out?

- Go back through this document (and get the book and do the same) and review your answers to the questions during and at the end of each chapter. Based on these and what you've heard from your congregation, which two of the six core commitments need to be focused on first? Perhaps make notes on the Growing Young Wheel below.



# Your Church Growing Young

# Your Plan for Change

This resource document brings together the following research publications the first of which 'Growing Young' forms the basis for this document. In order for you to explore helping your church Grow Young, I highly recommend getting your hands on the following publications:

Growing Young, Powell, Mulder and Griffin, A Fuller Youth Institute Resource, Baker Books, 2016

[www.ChurchesGrowingYoung.org](http://www.ChurchesGrowingYoung.org)

Losing Heart, The Youthscape Centre for Research, December 2016

[www.Youthscape.co.uk/research](http://www.Youthscape.co.uk/research)

Rooted in the Church, The Church of England Education Office, November 2016

We are Family: The Changing Face of Family Ministry, The Methodist Church, 2015

[www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)

Voice Activated: Developing Participation in the Methodist Church

<http://methodist.org.uk/mission/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/downloadable-resources/voice-activated>

### **Additional Resources:**

Talking Jesus: Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelism in England, Research conducted by the Barna Group on behalf of the Church of England, Evangelical Alliance and HOPE, 2015

[www.TalkingJesus.org](http://www.TalkingJesus.org)

Gen Z: Rethinking Culture, Youth for Christ, April 2017

Liquid Church, Pete Ward, 2013

Faith Generation: Retaining Young People and Growing the Church, Nick Shepherd, 2016

Sticky Faith, Powell, Griffin and Crawford, 2011



# **Appendices, Handouts, Articles and Further Resources**



# **Reimagining Church with Young People**

**“If young people find church boring,  
irrelevant or alien, then there is of course the  
possibility that it’s because the church is  
boring, irrelevant and alien”**

## Ice Breaker:

### SKITTLE



Invite each member of the group to take a handful of Skittles from a bag or bowl, but then explain that for each Skittle they eat, they will need to share something about themselves with the group.

You could make the activity more varied by having different colours signifying different topics:

- **Red:** favourite song or band
- **Orange:** ideal holiday destination
- **Yellow:** favourite film or TV show
- **Green:** hobby or interest
- **Purple:** favourite subject at school

Explain that today's session is all about who we are as people and how we can begin to work together as a team to reimagine church together. If we're going to try something new, we need to put all our skills, passions and knowledge together. Together, we make up God's Church.

## What is Church?

**YouTube Video:** Mr Bean goes to Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rCnLFamb0c>

Have you ever wondered how strange a church can seem for people with no experience of it?

This is what we are going to explore today "Reimagining Church"

### More than a building...

'The church is not just a building in which we meet, the church is the people'

The bible speaks of us being 'Living Stones' (see 2 Peter 2 v 2-10), the idea being that we are 'chosen' by God to make up the church, not bricks and mortar but blood and bones. And Jesus is the foundation on which we build 'church'

## **YouTube Video: What is the Church Really About? – Jon Jorgenson**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kNESgIYPh8>

### **1 Peter 2:2-10 - New Living Translation (NLT)**

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment,<sup>3</sup> now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

#### **Living Stones for God's House**

<sup>4</sup> You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honour.

<sup>5</sup> And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests.<sup>[a]</sup> Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. <sup>6</sup> As the Scriptures say,

"I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem,<sup>[b]</sup>  
chosen for great honour,  
and anyone who trusts in him  
will never be disgraced."<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him.<sup>[d]</sup> But for those who reject him,

"The stone that the builders rejected  
has now become the cornerstone."<sup>[e]</sup>

<sup>8</sup> And,

"He is the stone that makes people stumble,  
the rock that makes them fall."<sup>[f]</sup>

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

<sup>9</sup> But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests,<sup>[g]</sup> a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

<sup>10</sup> "Once you had no identity as a people;  
now you are God's people.  
Once you received no mercy;  
now you have received God's mercy."<sup>[h]</sup>

## **Living Stones:**

**Grab a stone from the box, look at the stone carefully ask yourself:**

- **What does your stone look and feel like?**
- **Where might the stone have come from originally: the sea, a beach, a mountain, a riverbed?**
- **How old might it be?**
- **Who has walked on it?**
- **Who might have held it?**

**The stones may at first look dull and boring (sometimes how church can seem) but they can have a great story to tell.**

**Decorate your stone using the sharpie pens, writing your name, think about using words like 'chosen' 'royal priest' 'a holy nation' etc**

**Play some music in the background**

**When everyone has finished place your stone on the table**

**Say:**

**'God knows each of us by name and we are important to him. each one of us has unique gifts and talents and God has chosen you to build his church'**

**Take your stone and pile them up together (carefully)**

**'God has chosen you to build his church and each of you make up part of the church community'**

# What could Church look like?

## INCLUSION CIRCLE

10

Get everyone to stand in a circle with arms linked. Ask a volunteer to stand outside the circle. Their mission is to break in while everyone else tries to keep them out (agree rules to play the game safely). After they have succeeded, or after three minutes playing, stop and ask them how they felt when everyone tried to exclude them. Repeat the game again but this time the group should be as welcoming as possible. How did they feel to be welcomed? Talk to the whole group about examples of how they feel when they are excluded or included.

### KEY POINT 1

The early Church points us towards many of the key elements that make up church, including worship, community, sharing, inclusion and mission. This helps us to think about what church could look like today if we have these elements as our foundations.

In Acts 2 we see a great example of the key elements that make up church:

**Acts 2 v 42-47 - New Living Translation (NLT)**

**The Believers Form a Community**

**42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper[a]), and to prayer.**

**43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity[b]— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.**

## **Discussion:**

- What were the key things that the early church did?
  - Worship
  - Community
  - Sharing
  - Inclusion
  - Mission
  - Connectedness
  - Meals together
  
- What did they share and how?
- Why do you think they were glad about giving?
- Does this sound like church today?
- Would you like to belong to a church like this?

## **What does your church look like?**

### **CHURCH CHARADES**

**5** Use your box of items associated with church. Ask the young people to reach in and pick an item (making sure only they can see it) one at a time. Using only their body, with no words or sounds, ask them to act out the item as the rest of the group guesses what it is. Alternatively you could get them to describe the item without using any 'churchy' words.

**Church items include:** bible, a book of liturgy, the Methodist workshop book, a hymn book, communion plate and cup, coffee and biscuits, a cross, Christian CD etc.

## **Your Church:**

**What does your church look like?**

**'If a stranger walked into your church, what would they see?'**

**Think about: the language used, the traditions, the worship, ceremony and environment.**

**Write the positive and negatives on the pieces of flipchart paper**

**Feedback and discuss**



## KEY POINT 1

No church is perfect. They all have challenges and flaws, which is just as well because we all have challenges and flaws too. Thankfully, Jesus loves us just as we are, including our imperfections.

### What could we do?

#### The Wall:

Watch YouTube – ‘Church from Scratch’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6AOOwEcqL0>

Discuss:

- How did this video make you feel?
- Did you identify with any of the people?
- Did you see any similarities with the way they struggle to explain church to their friends?
- Where do you think the walls are between your church and the wider community?
  - What about young people, particularly your friends?

Say:

‘If we are being honest, most of us like the safety of the walls. This is why lots of people like the church building – it’s a safe place where we can worship, pray, sing. It is easy to be a Christian when we are surrounded by Christians, but sometimes we can exclude people without realising it and sometimes we need to reimagine Church so we can meet people where they’re at.’

## **Jesus > Religion**

**Play YouTube Video – Jesus>Religion**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IAhDGYIpqY>

**What particular lines from this poem struck you? – highlight on handout**

**How does this video impact on ‘reimagining church’?**

### **Brainstorm:**

**In small groups think about some of the things you could do as a group to ‘reimagine’ church for your friends and the other people on the other side of the wall. Write your ideas up on a piece of flipchart paper**

**Remember to think ‘outside the box’**

### **How can we make it happen?**

**Let me make one thing very clear, what I am NOT saying is that we should leave our churches, this is an exercise in ‘reimagining’ not ‘leaving’.**

**I believe that we need to work ‘within’ our churches to establish this reimagined vision.**

### **Participation is the key:**

**If we truly want to see our churches reimagined we need to actively participate in them, we need to serve them, become decision-makers within them. Active Participation is about joining in with the life of the church. This involves:**

- **Finding your identity in Christ**
- **Being valued and valuing others**
- **Hearing God’s call on your heart**
- **Understanding community**
- **Serving God and others**
- **Becoming decision-makers**

**In small groups Discuss:**

- **How can you ‘participate’ with your church?**
- **How can you implement the ‘outside of the box’ ideas within your church?**

**Write ways down on flipchart paper**

## **Devotional:**

**Pep Talk by Kid President**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-gQLqv9f4o>

**and/Or**

**A Godless Generation by Jon Jorgenson**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zng2piCy4RA>

**Pray to Close**

# **Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus**

## **by Jefferson Bethke**

**What if I told you Jesus came to abolish religion?  
What if I told you voting Republican really wasn't His mission?  
What if I told you Republican doesn't automatically mean Christian  
And just because you call some people blind doesn't automatically give you vision?**

**I mean, if religion is so great, why has it started so many wars?  
Why does it build huge churches but fails to feed the poor?  
Tells single moms God doesn't love them if they've ever had a divorce  
But in the Old Testament, God actually calls religious people whores**

**Religion might preach grace, but another thing they practice  
Tend to ridicule God's people; they did it to John the Baptist  
They can't fix their problems, and so they just mask it  
Not realizing religion's like spraying perfume on a casket  
See, the problem with religion is it never gets to the core  
It's just behavior modification, like a long list of chores  
Like, "Let's dress up the outside, make it look nice and neat"  
But it's funny that's what they used to do to mummies while the corpse rots underneath**

**Now I ain't judging; I'm just saying, quit putting on a fake look  
Cause there's a problem if people only know you're a Christian by your Facebook  
I mean, in every other aspect of life, you know that logic's unworthy  
It's like saying you play for the Lakers just because you bought a jersey  
See, this was me too, but no one seemed to be on to me  
Acting like a church kid while addicted to pornography  
See, on Sunday I'd go to church, but Saturday getting faded  
Acting if I was simply created to just have sex and get wasted  
See, I spent my whole life building this facade of neatness  
But now that I know Jesus, I boast in my weakness**

Because if grace is water, then the Church should be an ocean  
It's not a museum for good people—it's a hospital for the broken  
Which means I don't have to hide my failure; I don't have to hide my sin  
Because it doesn't depend on me; it depends on Him  
See, because when I was God's enemy and certainly not a fan  
He looked down and said, "I want that man."  
Which is why Jesus hated religion, and for it He called them fools  
Don't you see so much better than just following some rules  
Now let me clarify—I love the Church, I love the Bible, and yes, I believe in sin  
But if Jesus came to your church, would they actually let Him in?  
See, remember He was called a glutton and a drunkard by religious men  
But the Son of God never supports self-righteousness—not now, not then

Now back to the point—one thing is vital to mention  
How Jesus and religion are on opposite spectrums  
See, one's the work of God, but one's a man-made invention  
See, one is the cure, but the other's the infection  
See, because religion says "do"; Jesus says "done"  
Religion says "slave"; Jesus says "son"  
Religion puts you in bondage, while Jesus sets you free  
Religion makes you blind, but Jesus makes you see  
And that's why religion and Jesus are two different clans

Religion is man searching for God; Christianity is God searching for man  
Which is why salvation is freely mine, and forgiveness is my own  
Not based on my merits, but Jesus' obedience alone  
Because He took the crown of thorns, and the blood dripped down His face  
He took what we all deserved—I guess that's why you call it grace  
And while being murdered, He yelled,  
"Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."  
Because when He was dangling on that cross, He was thinking of you  
And He absorbed all your sin, and He buried it in the tomb  
Which is why I'm kneeling at the cross, saying, "Come on, there's room"  
So for religion—no, I hate it; in fact I literally resent it  
Because when Jesus said, "It is finished," I believe He meant it



## REIMAGINING CHURCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Lots of churches are great. Lots of congregations which meet to worship in buildings up and down the land are genuinely forming communities of equipped disciples who are working, together with the Holy Spirit, for the transformation of the world. Many have a good spread of ages, are growing, and seeing the kingdom come in their communities.

Unfortunately, lots of churches are less great. Hopefully you are involved with and know of exceptions to the norm, but the general trend of Church decline and aging in the UK is both undeniable and devastating. There are a plethora of sad looking graphs confirming this.

The reality is that we live in a time of incomparable change. This side of the industrial revolution, the world wars and the digital revolution, the only thing for certain is that change is here to stay. In the midst of this turbulence we can take great comfort from the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever but this does not mean, as some presumably assume, that church should remain unchanged. A changing world needs a changing Church. The vast majority of the churches in the UK basically operate in a format that is hundreds of years old, with the best of them only achieving relatively minor cosmetic changes to service style, language and music. This might be a bold statement, but unless we re-find our story and discard the baggage unquestioningly inherited, which was designed by prior generations and is no longer fit for purpose, we are destined for extinction. Like David refusing to fight in Saul's heavy bronze armour, a fresh look at a stalemate might just be exactly what the Spirit is requiring.

There is all the difference in the world between a fresh expression of a church service, and a completely reimagined understanding of what it means for a community of people to exist as the people of God

Fully aware of this reality, the much misunderstood Fresh Expressions movement has been encouraging people to reimagine what church might be and look like throughout the diversity of our society. This officially approved campaign is a more palatable progression

from the emerging Church scene which almost every denomination in the country now encourages. These are exciting times. When else in the Church's history was revolution so welcomed by the establishment?

The problem is that even ten years on, most congregations have never heard of Fresh Expressions, and the vast majority of those involved are over 50. Many of those who have heard of it basically think it means Messy Church, which although at its roots and at its best is a valid fresh expression of church, is often treated with suspicion as the patronising status quo ask: 'When will they come to proper church?'

Evidence suggests that we are not losing young people because of the idea of Jesus and the challenge of the gospel in this materialistic world, but because the culture of our churches is so unattractive

Here we see the problem. All this stuff is seen as a bridge. A halfway house. A trick with which we can engage people before recruiting them for our unchanged 'proper' churches. It could be argued that lots of youth groups actually function as fresh expressions of church: communities of people, pursuing the way of Jesus, engaged in his mission and committed to discipleship. Again the problem is the expectation that they will one day graduate to 'real' church, instead of being encouraged to consider what church is and how they might continue to *be church* in culturally relevant ways.

Encouraging young people to think outside the box when it comes to church can be quite tricky. Sadly even at a young age they are so acclimatised to the culture of church that they can't reimagine the wood for the trees. A while back it was quite popular to start youth congregations. Many of them were useful and successful, many presumably less so. Many of them have since stopped, many have grown up, had babies, and are youth congregations no longer. They would often receive criticism that church should be multi-generational, and would be seen as rebellious young people who wanted everything in their own style and on their own terms. (The pot calling the kettle to tell her about the speck in her eye springs to mind.) My criticism of them would be that on the whole they didn't go far enough. They were often born of a holy discontentment and a desire to exist in a more culturally relevant way that might increase the likeliness of getting their friends to come along. They often changed the music, and swapped the pews for bean bags, but still did recognisable services complete with sung worship and a talk from the front. It was like a new paint job for an old car instead of taking the opportunity to invent a hover-car. Or perhaps the more biblical image of getting some new wineskins but putting the same old wine in them. There is all the difference in the world between a fresh expression of a church service, and a completely reimagined understanding of what it means for a community of people to exist as the people of God, living out the mission of Jesus in a given context. Read that last sentence again slowly. In fact, read it again here: there is all the difference in the world between a fresh expression of a church service, and a completely reimagined understanding of what it means for a community of people to exist as the people of God, living out the mission of Jesus in a given context. This is what we're after.

If young people find church boring, irrelevant or alien, then there is of course the possibility that it's because church is boring, irrelevant and alien

At the risk of showing my age, it was when watching *Chicken Run* that God really spoke to me about being church differently. The fat chickens cooped up inside their caged run were

visited by a free cockerel who invited them out. Their initial question made me shudder to my core, 'What's... out?' They had no comprehension of anything beyond their fences. The next question they asked – 'Who will feed us?' – is so similar to the barrage of questions my friends and I were asked when we began to do things differently: 'Where will you get your teaching?' In truth, the answer is that we get our teaching from the Bible, the sharing of books, TED talks, radio programmes, occasional sermons online, and conversations with wise old friends, but I used to prefer responding with a reciprocal question: 'What are you doing with all the teaching you get?' It's so telling that this was often the primary concern in our post-enlightenment culture with its elevated status of knowledge; as though without hearing sermons every week we would not learn anything new about how to follow Jesus. People would warn us with concerned looking crinkly foreheads, 'Make sure you don't throw the baby out with the bathwater,' which is wise, but the voice in my head would scream back, 'Yes but change the bathwater for goodness sake – it's cold and dirty and the baby is getting wrinkly.' The next verse levied against us would usually be the warning not to neglect our meeting together from Hebrews chapter ten. My cheeky answer would be to point out that it says, 'Do not neglect meeting' not, 'Do not neglect your meetings', but in truth we found that we met more regularly and more meaningfully than any of us had experienced by attending services and sitting quietly in rows once a week. Let me be clear: I am not advocating departure from a church community for a disgruntled individual, but if a few together embark on the pursuit of a more meaningful and engaging expression of Church, we know that Jesus will be among them.

### **Even young people are so acclimatised to the culture of church that they can't reimagine the wood for the trees**

This is such an exciting opportunity, to sit with young people and ask: 'What does it mean to be Church?' I remember having the opportunity to explain this to a group of 120 sixth formers in a school near to where I used to live. I played them the *Chicken Run* clip and I told them my story. Over about 45 minutes I described how I'd grown up in church, how I often found it boring and yet how I found Jesus fascinating. I said that church was something people are as a community, not somewhere people go to attend. I told them about how I wanted to change the world, and I thought that God, although often a mystery to me, wanted this too. I told them about the anti-trafficking charity my friends and I were involved with, and read them Amos chapter five, explaining that working to make sure girls aren't abducted and sold for rape is more worshipful to God than gathering to sing songs. Then I asked them: 'If this is what we mean by church, who'd be up for it? Who wants to get together next week to work out what this could look like?' I sensed it had gone pretty well, but couldn't believe my eyes when getting on for half of them raised their hands! One lad who was very concerned came and insisted that his church wasn't boring, and that I'd enjoy the songs there. I doubt it. The school didn't let me start a church with them and shortly after I moved town, but I did go home that afternoon leaping and jumping for joy (inside). Had I given them the Four Points and told them to come to church, I suspect it might not have been such a positive response. Inviting them into the adventure I believe God has for us was a much more helpful way to frame the gospel for this group of young people.

The point is this: more is up for negotiation than we might at first think, and unless we cultivate innovation we risk getting stuck and ultimately extinct. In every group there are always those who see the world differently and dream of new possibilities. They need to be celebrated and encouraged to dream their dreams. They do not need taming and sapping by

a tired culture of risk-averse pastors, desperately claiming against all the evidence that fluency in their archaic practice is essential for ministry in the 21st Century. If in their pursuit of Jesus' vision for his bride and kingdom your dreamers are perpetually scrutinised by defensive guardians of the status quo who perceive them as a threat, the chances are they won't be around for long. If they do hang in there, they will waste a lot of energy justifying themselves. That energy would surely be better expended in dreaming, daring and doing all that God has for them.

**Why not put this into practice with your young people, and explore what church could look like in your context? Check out the first instalment of our meeting guides for reimagining church with young people (continued next month)**

There is much evidence that we are not losing young people because of the idea of Jesus and the challenge of the gospel in this materialistic world but because the culture of our churches is so unattractive. If young people find church boring, irrelevant or alien, then there is of course the possibility that it's because church is boring, irrelevant and alien. One answer is to beat them into submission. A better is to be open to change. This isn't about entertaining them more with ever increasingly impressive multimedia production. This is about engaging the adventurer in them with glimpses of the potential for life in all its beautiful fullness. Your rehearsed answers, slick animated logo and clichéd slogans won't impress them. Your life, captivated by Jesus and vulnerably shared in play, in work, in party and in pain should do the trick over about three to five years. Incidentally, I think this is the model Jesus used.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Steve Leach is a Pioneer Minister in Winchester, training for ordination in the Anglican church on the CMS Pioneer Mission Leadership course. Before this he spent ten years in Bournemouth growing church with the Nightclub Chaplaincy, day jobbing with FYT's Aim Community and helping to establish anti-trafficking charity Love146 in the UK.

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 1: WHAT IS CHURCH?



## THIS WEEK'S PASSAGE MARK 3:14



### MEETING AIM

We all have different understandings of what it means to be Church depending on our culture, context, background, upbringing and tradition, but what is the essence of Church? What are the key components of Church?



### PREPARATION

Find a clip of *Mr Bean goes to church*, either on DVD or it's available on YouTube and prepare a way to show it. Find pictures of five or six different types of church building and either print them out or show them on a slide show. You also need Toblerone bars (sufficient segments to give one to each young person) and pre-cut triangles of paper and pens.

### MR BEAN



**10** Watch a short clip from *Mr Bean goes to church*. This could be either the section where he falls asleep or doesn't know where to stand up or sit down. Talk with the group about how we laugh at him not knowing what to do in church. We know this is not real church and just a comedy clip but point out that church can seem a strange place to people with no experience of it. Explain that over the next four sessions we will be trying to work out what Church actually is. Then we can be really well-equipped to reimagine church.



### SETTING THE SCENE



**5** Show the pictures of different kinds of church and ask if these pictures show us what Church really is. Talk to the group about how the pictures just show the building but not what the Church is really like. Talk to the group about the fact that the building is not the Church, the Church is the people.



### KEY POINT 1

Our expressions of Church would seem strange in other contexts. Traditional, Western-style church is not the only way to do church. The Greek word 'ekklesia' from which our word 'church' comes from means 'called out'. It is nothing to do with buildings, but is used to describe the disciples being 'called out' by Jesus, as we will hear about in the Bible story.

### THE SMALL PRINT



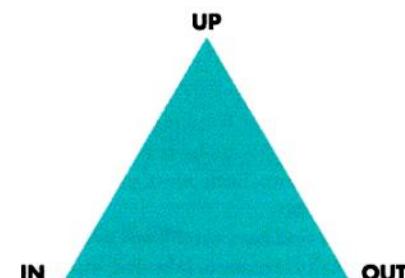
Ask someone in the group to read the Bible verse aloud. Start by saying that the apostles were sent out on a mission. We read about and watch characters in stories and films being trained by their leader and then sent on a mission but here we read about the apostles being with Jesus, learning from him and then being sent out. The word 'apostle' literally means 'sent out' in Greek.

Read the Bible verse a second time. Ask what we can learn from this. Explain that the Church was started by Jesus as a key part of his ministry on Earth. Belonging to Church is all about a relationship with Jesus (being with him), serving Jesus (being sent out) and doing things in community (the 12 disciples with Jesus). Draw attention to the fact that the apostles were not on their own.

### WHAT IS CHURCH?



**10** What makes a church? Explain that there are three elements of Church: these can be called 'up', 'in' and 'out'. 'Up' is worship, 'in' is being in community with each other and God, and 'out' is reaching out in mission. We should have all three of these elements in church. A fourth element that joins churches together, is connectedness, as Christians are connected in 'the body of Christ'.



Explain that a popular chocolate bar can be used to demonstrate this. Give out chunks of Toblerone and point out that each corner represents a different part of Church: the worship part (up), the community part (in),

the mission part (out). Ask the young people what they think the piece of chocolate joining all the chunks together may represent? As you break up the chocolate point out that all the chunks are connected together. This represents the connectedness of all churches and Christians joined together by their beliefs. Eat the chunks of chocolate.

Depending on time you may also like to think about connectedness through time as well as space, as each generation of churches is connected together through history.



### KEY POINT 2



Church is a community called to live in a rhythm of worship and mission, to be with Jesus, and to be sent out.

### APPLY IT



**15** Give out triangles of paper and ask the young people to label the corners of the triangle with the words 'up', 'in' and 'out'. Ask them to think about what happens in their own church context with mission, community and worship, and write words or draw pictures to describe these on the paper triangles.

- What sort of worship takes place at your church?
- Does your church have any mission outreach projects?
- What sort of church community activities happen?
- How is your church connected to other churches?

When the triangles are finished share them with the group, talk about what people have written and link them all together with string or glue on a larger piece of paper to show the connectedness of church.

### PRAYER



Place the joined triangles carefully onto the floor as the young people gather around them. First pray for worship, asking God to inspire us in our worship so that we can express our faith through the worship we bring to God. Secondly pray for our church community, that we may be faithful followers of Christ and make our community a safe, hospitable, welcoming place. Thirdly, pray for mission as we reach out to share our faith with others. Finally pray for the worldwide Church, our connectedness and our Christian brothers and sisters wherever they are.

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 2: WHAT IS CHURCH?



## THIS WEEK'S PASSAGE 1 PETER 2:2-10



### MEETING AIM

To focus on community as a key part of church. To move away from the idea of church as a building or institution and instead to think about it as a living community built on the principles taught to us by Jesus.



### PREPARATION

You will need some stones of various shapes and sizes, pens and paint to decorate them, a way to play 'I could sing of your love forever' by Delirious? and ideas for the people sculpture shapes.

## PEOPLE SCULPTURE



The aim of this game is to make shapes or sculptures using bodies as props. This will link to the idea of living stones in the Bible passage later. Make sure there is plenty of space. Think of some ideas for shapes, for example a boat, tree, table, house, wheel or cart. Ask the young people to work in small groups to create the shapes. Explain that they can lie on the floor or stand to create the 3D effect. You can vary the game by giving different ideas to the different groups and then asking the young people to guess the shapes that the other teams are doing.

## THE SMALL PRINT



Ask someone to read 1 Peter 2:2-10 aloud. Introduce the theme by saying that we may wonder what God wants our churches and communities to be like, but in this passage Peter give us some clues. Where there are difficult words, such as 'slander' and 'malice', you may need to define them.

Explain that we are not talking literally about stones; we are not called to physically build a building (draw their attention back to session one when we talked about the Church not just being a building). Say that this description of us as 'living stones' who can build the Church is an image used to help us understand. Lots of people Jesus

and his disciples spoke to were familiar with how buildings were built. Peter describes the Church as a living, spiritual house which is made up of living, breathing people – the stones. Explain that the key idea here is community because all the living stones, the people, make up the Church with Jesus as their cornerstone, the key stone who all the others are based on. Jesus is the foundation who holds the building, the community, together.



## KEY POINT 1

We are not a pile of stones in a building but living stones, building a community together on Jesus' firm foundations.

## A COMMUNITY OF LIVING STONES



Gather the young people in a group with tables or a surface where they can paint or draw. Bring out a box of stones of different shapes and sizes and invite each person to choose a stone that they like from the box. Look at the stone carefully, hold it in your hand and think about the following questions:

- What does your stone look and feel like?
- Where might the stone have come from originally: the sea, a beach, a mountain, a riverbed?
- How old might it be?
- Who has walked on it?
- Who might have held it?

Say that the stones may at first look dull and boring but they can have a great story to tell. We don't know where they may have come from or where they are going.

Decorate each stone with paint or pens. They can write their name on to the stone and also words like 'chosen', 'precious', 'trust' or 'loved'. While the group are painting or drawing, play, 'I could sing of your love forever' by Delirious?. When everyone has finished, place the stones on the table in front of them and look at them carefully. Say that God knows each of us by name and we are important to him. Each one of us has unique gifts and talents.

Say that God has chosen them to build his Church. Ask everyone to take their stone and pile them up together carefully. Say again that God has chosen them to build his Church and that each one of them makes up the church community. Leave the stones in the pile but at the end of the meeting invite the young people to take the stones home with them.



## KEY POINT 2

Like stones we can be brought together to make something much more than what we are on our own. Through faith we can be linked together in community with each other and with Jesus, our cornerstone.

## DISCUSSION



Ask the young people to discuss these questions:

- Have you ever been chosen for anything at school, sport, or other activities?
- How did you feel? (Be sensitive: you may also ask how it feels not to be chosen, or missed out.)

In the Bible reading, God says we are precious and important to him. We also know from this reading that we can't do everything on our own. To build a church we work better in community with all our gifts and talents combined. **Ask:**

- How might God use you to build the Church?
- What gifts and talents do you have that can be used to build community?

## PRAYER



Gather around the stones as a central point for focus.

Encourage the group to choose one other person to pray for: they are going to focus on this person as a 'living stone' and part of the community; it doesn't matter if they know them well or not.

Pray for that person to be like a living stone in the church. Pray for them to be a faithful servant of God. Ask for them to know the firm foundations of God's love and care. Ask that they will work together in community with others using their gifts and talents to God's glory. Close by praying that each of us become the firm foundations, building community and God's Church where we are and for those near us.

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 3: WHAT IS CHURCH?



THIS WEEK'S PASSAGES  
**JOHN 1:29-42**  
**AND MATTHEW 28:19-20**



## MEETING AIM

To move away from the idea of church as a building or institution and to focus on some of the key elements taught to us by Jesus, particularly mission and passing on our faith to others.



## PREPARATION

You will need: several printed copies of the dramatic Gospel reading to give out to each of the characters in the drama, batons, oranges, balls, polo mints and straws for relay races, paper and scissors to make paper chain people, a candle that is easy to light and be safely passed from person to person, a cross, Bibles and quiet worship music.

## ■ DRAMATIC GOSPEL READING



Get some young people to act out this passage from John 1:29-42:

**Narrator:** The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him.

**John:** Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

**Narrator:** Then John gave this testimony.

**John:** I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's chosen one.

**Narrator:** The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. They testified that

Jesus was the son of God. When John saw Jesus passing by, he spoke.

**John:** Look, the Lamb of God!

To read the rest of the story go to [premieryouthwork.com](http://premieryouthwork.com)

## ■ DISCUSSION



Ask the young people if they have ever run a relay race. Talk to the young people about how the baton is handed on from person to person without dropping it. Then talk about how this relates to our faith and how it is important to pass on our faith to others; in fact it is something that Jesus calls on us to do.

Get the group to look up Matthew 28:19-20 and ask someone to read it aloud. Talk about the inspiring instructions Jesus gives us, but that at the same time remind the group that when we read these commands there is great responsibility. However, remember Jesus promises always to be with us to help us, forever.

Explain that John the Baptist is a key character in this story as someone who has to pass his baton on. He has prepared the way for Jesus really well, telling people about who Jesus is and spreading God's word. Now it is time for him to hand over the baton to Jesus who in turn hands it to the disciples. Jesus calls the disciples - who are a very unlikely group – are they going to be up to the job? Well they do hand on the baton of faith and mission, and ultimately it is handed onto us. What are we going to do with it?

Spend some time praying for the courage to hand on our faith to others even if we feel ordinary or not up to the job. Pray that we have the confidence to take on the baton and pass it on.



## KEY POINT 1

Reaching out to others and sharing our faith is an important part of what we are called to do as Christians (see Matthew 28:19-20). This links us to other Christians and gives us a sense of connectedness today, back into the past and into the future.

## ■ PASS IT ON



Choose one or two of the fun relays listed below to illustrate passing things on, connecting to the passing on of faith:

- A traditional relay race passing on batons.

This could be run if you can go outside.

- Each team must pass an orange, or orange-sized ball from person to person using only their necks and chins.
- Each team must pass a polo mint from person to person. It must be passed on using straws held in people's mouths.



## KEY POINT 2

It is not always easy but it is important to remember that Jesus has promised to always be with us and to help us until the end of time.

## ■ APPLYING IT



In groups, discuss these questions:

- Why is it important to pass on our faith?
- What difficulties do we fear when we reach out to others and try to share our faith?
- How can we pass on our faith to others?

Remind the group that actions are as important as words: how can our actions help to spread our faith?

## ■ PRAYER AND REFLECTION



This prayer activity helps us to focus on passing on our faith and the connectedness of faith we have with other Christians: today, in the past and into the future. Make paper chains of people and if possible, form all of the chains into a circle or a line on the floor.

Gather into a circle and once everyone is sat down quietly, tell the group that they are an important part of a linked group of people going back to John the Baptist and Peter. Hold a Bible and say, 'This is the story of our faith, let's keep it alive and pass it on.' Pass the Bible around the circle. Hold a lit candle and say, 'This is our worship, let's keep it alive and pass it on.' Carefully pass the candle around the group. Take the cross and say, 'This is our hope and our salvation, let's keep it alive and pass it on.' Take some of the paper people and say, 'This is our community, we are God's family, let's keep it alive and pass it on.'

Then link the paper people representing our community to other paper people on the floor. Say, 'These are the people we are reaching out to in mission, let us take our faith to them and pass it on.' Close by praying for the group and giving thanks for all those people who passed on their faith to us.

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 4: WHAT COULD CHURCH LOOK LIKE?



## THIS WEEK'S PASSAGE **ACTS 2:42-47**



### MEETING AIM

The early followers of Jesus took the guidelines from this passage as their foundation for building church communities. Can we use these foundations to help us reimagine what church could look like today?



### PREPARATION

Use Bibles or print off sufficient copies of Acts 2:42-47. Find four pictures to represent the four elements of church: worship (eg a candle or the Angel of the North with outstretched hands), community (eg breaking and sharing bread), connectedness (eg hands joined together or paper people joined by hands and feet) and mission (a ship setting sail or direction arrows), and prepare a way to show the four pictures. You will also need a candle for the prayer time, wrapping paper and chocolates (pre-wrapped and individual for ease of use), scissors and sticky tape.

### THE SMALL PRINT



Ask someone in the group to read out this week's passage. Ask the group what elements of church they can recognise in this Bible reading; can they find worship, community, connectedness and mission?

Look for the word 'together' in the passage. Ask how many times it occurs and ask someone to read out the sentences where the word 'together' occurs. Discuss what this shows us about the early Church community and how they showed how much they belonged to God by how they belonged together. Explain that when the first Christians met together to make the first church they didn't meet in a building like ours. They met together in people's homes and outside. Ask what the advantages of meeting in this way could be, both then and now?

Talk about how they looked after each other and were generous in sharing all that they had, both food and possessions, even though in the First Century many of the Christians were poor and had very little to share. Explain how they were welcoming to others and included people of different backgrounds, cultures and financial situations.

### ■ INCLUSION CIRCLE

**10** Get everyone to stand in a circle with arms linked. Ask a volunteer to stand outside the circle. Their mission is to break in while everyone else tries to keep them out (agree rules to play the game safely). After they have succeeded, or after three minutes playing, stop and ask them how they felt when everyone tried to exclude them. Repeat the game again but this time the group should be as welcoming as possible. How did they feel to be welcomed? Talk to the whole group about examples of how they feel when they are excluded or included.



### KEY POINT 1

The early Church points us towards many of the key elements that make up church, including worship, community, sharing, inclusion and mission. This helps us to think about what church could look like today if we have these elements as our foundations.

### ■ DISCUSSION

**10** Ask the group to discuss these questions:

- What were the key things the early Church did?
- What did they share and how?
- Why do you think they were glad about giving?
- Does this sound like church today?
- Would you like to belong to a church like this?

### ■ GAME

**15** Remind them that the Bible passage talks of sharing what we have and sharing with a generous heart. Give each person a chocolate and ask them to wrap it up carefully to give as a present while you discuss the following questions:

- What is the best thing you have been given?
- When you hear 'giving' talked about in church what does this refer to? What do you give?

- What things could you give?
- Is it easier to give to those who give to you?
- Are there people you find it hard to give to?
- What good things have been given to you by the church? (Not focusing so much on material things but on less tangible things such as love, encouragement or care.)

Explain that they are going to give away their last chocolate not expecting anything in return. Give out the chocolates and reflect on how they felt.



### KEY POINT 2

Paul makes it clear that it is not an easy option to build Church. There will be sacrifices and costs that come with the territory. But do we think it is worth the cost to follow Jesus?

### ■ QUIET REFLECTION



**10** Using the pictures of the key elements of church reflect on each one in turn (worship, community, mission, connectedness) and encourage the group to think about what the early Church was like and how vital these aspects of church were there for them in their day-to-day lives. How are these parts of church a part of your life today? Which are important to you? Why? Are there any of these elements that you feel should become more important to you? Do you want to change anything as a result? What could church look like if all these foundations were there?

### ■ PRAYER



**10** Gather to pray and set a candle in the centre of the group, either on a table or carefully on the floor. Think about your friends who you would like to know about God's love. Pray about how the church can meet our friends where they are (both physically where they live and where they are in their lives emotionally and spiritually). Pray for those people you don't know who live in your neighbourhood, ask that the church can reach out to them too.

Pray that the group would have the confidence to reach out and tell of their faith no matter how difficult it is. Pray for the light of the world to shine from them and show Jesus' love.

### KATHARINE CROWSLY

writes for Fresh Expressions, and founded Cook@Chapel, a fresh expression of church among young people

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 1: WHAT DOES OUR CHURCH LOOK LIKE?



## THIS WEEK'S PASSAGE LUKE 2:41-52



### MEETING AIM

To look critically at our churches as they are, encouraging the young people to ask questions and explore how the elements of church are embodied in our church community.



### PREPARATION

Have a large piece of paper with an outline of a church building on it and draw a thick line down the centre. You will need: pens and writing equipment, blank pieces of paper (enough for each young person), post-it notes and a box full of items associated with church (eg a Bible, a book of liturgy, a hymn book, communion plate and cup, coffee and biscuits, the collection plate).

## CHURCH CHARADES



**5** Use your box of items associated with church. Ask the young people to reach in and pick an item (making sure only they can see it) one at a time. Using only their body, with no words or sounds, ask them to act out the item as the rest of the group guesses what it is. Alternatively you could get them to describe the item without using any 'churchy' words.

## OUR CHURCH



**10** Open the session with the question, 'What does our church look like?'

Ask the young people to imagine looking at your church through the eyes of a visitor or stranger: 'If a stranger walked into our church right now, what would they see?'

Discuss some of the positives and negatives of your church. Write these down on the outline of the church building, with positives on one side, and negatives on the other. If they are struggling, remind the young people of the four key elements mentioned in the theory sessions (worship,

community, connectedness and mission). How does our church embody each of these elements well and where do we fall short?



### KEY POINT 1

No church is perfect. They all have challenges and flaws, which is just as well because we all have challenges and flaws too. Thankfully, Jesus loves us just as we are, including our imperfections.

## ASKING QUESTIONS



**20** Read Luke 2:41-52 together, emphasising verses 46-47: 'They discovered him in the temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.'

At this point in his life, Jesus was a teenager. He actively sought out the temple leaders and had conversations with them. He asked them questions. Ask the young people: if you could ask your church leader questions about our church, what would they be?

Perhaps try and arrange a meeting with someone in your church leadership. If this isn't possible you could pass on the young people's questions, and bring written answers back next week. What do they think are the positives and negatives of your church? Are there any aspects of worship, community, connectedness and mission that they would like to see expressed more fully?



### KEY POINT 2

It can be unnerving to put yourself out there and ask a question, to admit that you don't know an answer. But we only learn more about God, our church, our community and our lives by asking questions.

## CHURCH AND ME: PART ONE



**10** During your discussions you may have found that some of you have different likes and dislikes about aspects of church. Encourage the young people to talk about their differences, for instance some might love sung worship, while others may find it awkward. Some might enjoy listening to talks or messages, while some might find them boring.

Hand out a piece of paper to each young person and invite them to draw a line across it. With this line representing their life so far, encourage them to annotate their

experiences of church on it. Use examples such as, 'I started going to Sunday school when I was five,' or, 'When I started playing guitar I became more interested in worship music.'



### KEY POINT 3

Your faith journey is unique and important. Think about the Bible, and how messages are told through stories such as Jesus and his parables. God did not send down a book of outlines, lectures or theology. His book starts with a story. The Bible is filled with the most powerful stories we will ever read or hear, but it isn't just a storybook. It is God's testimony to each of us. Your testimony is important, and we are all called to share our testimony and our story of what God has done in our lives.

## CHURCH AND ME: PART TWO



**5** Share these timelines together as a group, encouraging the young people to reflect on what has been important to them and to be thankful for the positive effect that being part of a church community has had on their life and discipleship.

Explain that even though later in his life Jesus was very critical of the temple, he still took time to be part of it and see the community. Even though there may be parts of our church that you don't enjoy, look around at the people who do connect to God through these things. Be thankful for their faith and their relationship with God. God created us all differently; just because we have different opinions doesn't mean that we are right and others are wrong.

## PRAYER



**10** Take the box full of items associated with church: a Bible, a book of liturgy, a hymn book, communion plate and cup, coffee and biscuits, the collection plate etc. Use these as prayer stations, by either setting them around the room, or sit together in a circle and pass each item along.

Think about the elements of your church these items represent. Invite the young people to write prayers on the post-it notes, thanking God for each of these parts of the life of your church. Challenge them to think of those who connect with God through the different elements, even if they personally struggle to. Thank God that he has made us all different and created different ways to connect with us.

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 2: WHAT COULD WE DO?



THIS WEEK'S PASSAGES  
**LUKE 8:16-17, MATTHEW 18:18-20**



## MEETING AIM

This session is about exploring what we could do together to reimagine church. How could we change what we do, or do something new to connect with our friends and other young people? Are we willing to get over our fears and step out as Christians into the world?



## PREPARATION

You will need: the 'Church from scratch – don't start with church' video (easily found on YouTube); some photos of local places your young people will recognise eg a local park, coffee shop, beach, school playground, skate park; blank stickers; Lego or Duplo bricks; a candle and a way to play 'Build your Kingdom here' by Rend Collective.

## THE WALL



Watch the 'Church from scratch' video. Ask the young people how the video made them feel. Did they identify with any of the people? Did they see any similarities with the way they struggle to explain church to their friends?

Gently move the conversation on to thinking about your own church again, drawing on some of the challenges we explored in the previous session. Where does the group think the walls are between your church and the wider community? What about younger people, and their friends in particular?

Explain that over the next few weeks you'll be exploring together how you might travel beyond the wall together, and reimagine Church for the people you know who might not connect with things now.

## LOOKING AROUND US



Pass around the pictures of local and familiar places. Ask the young people if they have any particular

memories from here, any stories that spring to mind.

- Are these places where we can experience community?
- Could we feel connectedness to people, or things, or God?
- Are there mission opportunities here?
- How could we worship in these places?

You might need to challenge the young people to think outside the box. Remind them that if we do exactly the same things that our church does, but in a different place, we aren't really doing church differently. What new imaginative ways can they think of to do church differently?

## DON'T LOOK AWAY



If we're being honest, most of us like the safety that the walls bring. This is why lots of people like the church building - it's a safe place where we can worship and sing and take part in communion.

It is easy to be a Christian when we are surrounded by Christians, but sometimes we can exclude people without realising it and sometimes we need to reimagine Church so we can meet people where they're at.

Give out the toy bricks. Have the young people label each brick with a reason for building a wall. For example: 'praying in public is hard', 'people won't understand what church means to us', 'how do I worship in public without feeling self-conscious?' 'What if people laugh at us?'

Read Luke 8:16-17 together. As this is happening, light a candle and put it behind the wall of bricks. The light that Jesus is telling us about is his light, the good news. Why do we hide it behind the wall?

Sometimes we feel self-conscious about our traditional ways of doing church. People from unchurched backgrounds might think a lot of these things are weird, but Jesus calls us to share our faith. Everyone is different, and we can develop new forms of church that fit in the places we see in the pictures. It doesn't have to be singing hymns or reciting liturgy: what could we do that is different?



### KEY POINT 1

It can be scary to share and show our faith in public, but we can have courage because Jesus is with us.

## BUILDING SOMETHING NEW



Have each of the young people take back their bricks, and remove their self-conscious labels. Have them write new labels about how and why we should reimagine Church for those who aren't already part of it: 'not everyone likes singing,' 'it is easy to meet people outside,' 'we don't have to meet on a Sunday morning.'

Ask the young people to use their bricks to build a stand for the candle to shine brightly from. As they do this, play 'Build your Kingdom Here' by Rend Collective during this reflective time.

## WHAT COULD WE DO?



Invite the young people to think about some of the things you could do as a group to reimagine church for their friends and the people they know. Begin to dream together and imagine some of the different possibilities.

You might need to guide the young people, encouraging them to think 'out of the box' – meeting at a different time or place, or doing Bible study, worship and prayer in different ways. On the other hand, they may be incredibly ambitious, in which case you might need to sensitively guide them towards simpler ideas that are more achievable. Be careful not to dampen their enthusiasm by being too negative and shutting down the discussion. Make sure you make a note of these ideas for the next session.

## ARE YOU STILL FEELING SELF-CONSCIOUS?



Read Matthew 18:18-20. Together we can rest in the assurance that God will be with us wherever we meet. It doesn't have to be in a traditional church building: 'For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.' How powerful is that? Close by praying: Father God, we thank you that you are the light that shines in the darkness. Help us to step out beyond the walls of traditional church and beyond our own self-consciousness, and take your light into the world. We thank you that you will be with us whenever we meet in your name. Amen.



### KEY POINT 2

If only a few of us meet in prayer with the intention of 'being' or 'doing' church together, God is with us!

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 3: HOW CAN WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?



THIS WEEK'S PASSAGES  
**10:38-42, JOHN 11:1-44**



## MEETING AIM

To explore any doubts or questions the teenagers may have about doing church differently.



## PREPARATION

You will need: a large bag of Skittles (or other different coloured sweets), three paper circles for each member of the group in three different colours, writing materials and a ball of string or wool.

## SKITTLE



Invite each member of the group to take a handful of Skittles from a bag or bowl, but then explain that for each Skittle they eat, they will need to share something about themselves with the group.

You could make the activity more varied by having different colours signifying different topics:

- **Red:** favourite song or band
- **Orange:** ideal holiday destination
- **Yellow:** favourite film or TV show
- **Green:** hobby or interest
- **Purple:** favourite subject at school

Explain that today's session is all about who we are as people and how we can begin to work together as a team to reimagine church together. If we're going to try something new, we need to put all our skills, passions and knowledge together. Together, we make up God's Church.

## LOOKING AROUND



We previously discussed how the traditional Western style of church is not the only way to do church.

Ask the young people to discuss where else we can experience community (school, football clubs, youth club), connectedness

(friends, family), mission (helping out at a food bank, anti-bullying committee at school) and worship (God's creation, poetry, music). Can you think of how these key elements might be present in your life outside of church?



## KEY POINT 1

Together, these four key elements make up church, in whichever form it takes. But we can also find these elements of discipleship in other parts of our lives.

## LOOKING AT ME



Read the stories of the famous New Testament siblings Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Luke 10:38-42 and John 11:1-44. Here we have three siblings with completely different stories, personalities and passions. Martha works hard, she serves Jesus and runs to him first. Her thoughts are practical and grounded in reality. How does she worship? What is her mission? What is her community and how does she connect to them? Think about people like Martha in your life.

Mary is a free spirit. She abandons all to sit at the feet of Jesus, to listen to him and spend time with him. She wears her heart on her sleeve and her emotions on full show. How does she do mission? What community does she belong to? How does she worship and connect? Can you think of someone like Mary? Do you have 'Mary-Moments'?

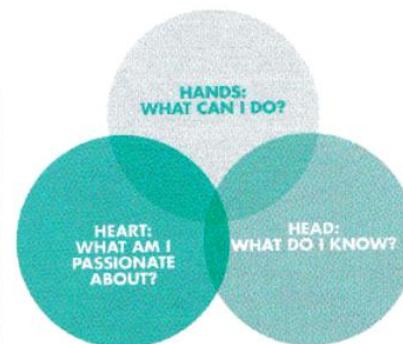
Finally, we have Lazarus. He died. He came back. Is there anyone who wouldn't want to hear his story? He's got a testimony and it is powerful! He spends his time telling people, and bragging about what Jesus did for him! Is this his mission? How does he worship? How does he connect with people and be part of a community? Do you have a life-changing story to connect you to Lazarus?

Martha, Mary and Lazarus all have strengths and weaknesses, and they are all very different, but they are also an important part of Jesus' life and story.

## HANDS, HEART, HEAD



Explain that we're now going to think a little bit about our own strengths - the things that make us who we are. Give out the circles to the group. Ask them to label one 'hands: what can I do?', another 'heart: what am I passionate about?', and the last one 'head: what do I know?'



Invite the young people to write something in each circle, before placing them on the floor in the middle of the group, then work together to group the circles into similar themes and topics, moving them into clusters on the floor.

## HOW CAN WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?



Remind the young people of some of the ideas they had in the previous session about how to do 'church' differently. Ask the group how they could make one of the dreams or ideas a reality, drawing on their own strengths as a group to make it happen.

## STRING PRAYER



Have everyone sit in a circle, with one person holding the end of a ball of string. Throw the ball of string to someone and compliment them on a strength that they have or encourage them in some way. That person then wraps the string around their finger and passes the ball on, complimenting and encouraging someone else. Carry on until everyone in the circle has been encouraged, and the string has gone to and from everyone to create a web. Close by praying: Lord, we thank you for this web of encouragement that you have created. Thank you for binding us together in love and care for each other, and connecting us through your love. You created each of us individually in your image Lord, help us to appreciate our differences and strengthen each other in your name. Amen.



## KEY POINT 2

Each of us is different. It is natural for us all to have different passions and interests, just as it is natural for us all to worship and connect with God in different ways, but God has a part for each of us to play.

# REIMAGINING CHURCH 4: INTO ACTION!



## THIS WEEK'S PASSAGES EZRA 3, JOHN 20:21-22



### MEETING AIM

To plan a new way of being church in a new place, with new people. How can we work together, using our strengths and skills to prepare something new?



### PREPARATION

You will need: newspaper and sticky tape for the tallest tower game, pieces of paper and writing equipment, a large piece of paper or flip chart, enough small candles or tea lights for each young person to take home and something to light the candles with.

## THE TALLEST TOWER



Split the group into two or more teams. Give each team a pile of newspapers and some tape. The aim of the game is to see who can build the tallest tower in the shortest amount of time: the first one to the ceiling wins! You could add an extra twist, by making it a condition that your tower needs to be able to support or hold an object (such as a book or an apple).

## REBUILDING THE TEMPLE



Read through Ezra chapter 3 together – don't worry it's a short chapter. In the passage, we can see the step-by-step process of the Israelites rebuilding the altar and temple in Jerusalem. Ask the young people to discuss:

- What is happening here?
- Why are they rebuilding the altar and the temple?
- How did they make sure that all the jobs that needed doing were done? Was it just thrown together or planned out carefully?
- How did they celebrate when the job was done?



## KEY POINT 1

The Israelites worked hard to re-create their temple. It wasn't a quick process, and it wasn't without objection, but God was with them, and they sacrificed, giving thanks and praise through each step.

## LOOKING TO THE NEW



Explain to the group that we are going to look at the who, what, where and how of reimagining church in this session. We have covered a lot over the past eight weeks, from looking back to the way the original followers of Jesus did things to building walls and taking them down again, from looking in to our church and the way it does things to discovering the key elements of what being a church means. It has all led to today... how can we take our ideas and put it into action?

## PLANNING



Over the last few weeks, we have looked at our own individual passions, skills and knowledge, and the different ways in which we connect to God, how we take part in community, and how we worship.

Remind the young people of the idea (or ideas!) that they have been developing so far to reimagine their own group from scratch or start something new together. By sketching out your idea on a large piece of paper or flipchart, begin to put together a step-by-step plan for putting it into practice. What practical steps will need to be put in place to make it happen? Who will take responsibility for which elements of the preparation? How will you include the four key elements of community, mission, worship, and connectedness?

You can use these four headings on the flip chart as a way of organising and guiding the conversation:

- **Who?** Who do you want to invite to join in? Who do you know that doesn't fit in? Who do you think will benefit from a new group like this? What about your friends who don't know Jesus?
- **What?** What kind of group is this going to be? What will your aims be? What will you do when you meet?
- **Where?** Where will you meet? How often? What day and time? Are you reimagining your current group or planning something new and different?
- **How?** How will this be an expression of church? How will we practically prepare

everything we need to make it happen? Are there some jobs we each need to take responsibility for?



## KEY POINT 2

It won't always be easy: a new adventure like this will take courage. Courage does not mean lack of fear, but rather the guts to stand and trust God.

## JESUS' COMMISSION



Read John 20:21-22 together. Explain that Jesus breathed on the disciples so that they would be blessed with the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the receiving of power was to be witnesses across the earth for Jesus. The same calling and purpose exists for us today. We have an incredible strength that isn't like what the world sees as strength: this is a God-strength.

What is God-strength? Just look at Peter. We see him before the crucifixion, denying Jesus three times in fear. Yet in the opening chapters of Acts we see he has a new God-strength. He is working miracles, standing up and preaching in the streets, declaring Jesus' story for everyone to hear and even standing up to those who had condemned Jesus just a few days before. The number of believers in Jesus grew enormously as Peter led them with authority and wisdom.

You might want to ask the young people: how will we need God to help us as a group in order to make our plan happen?

## PRAYER



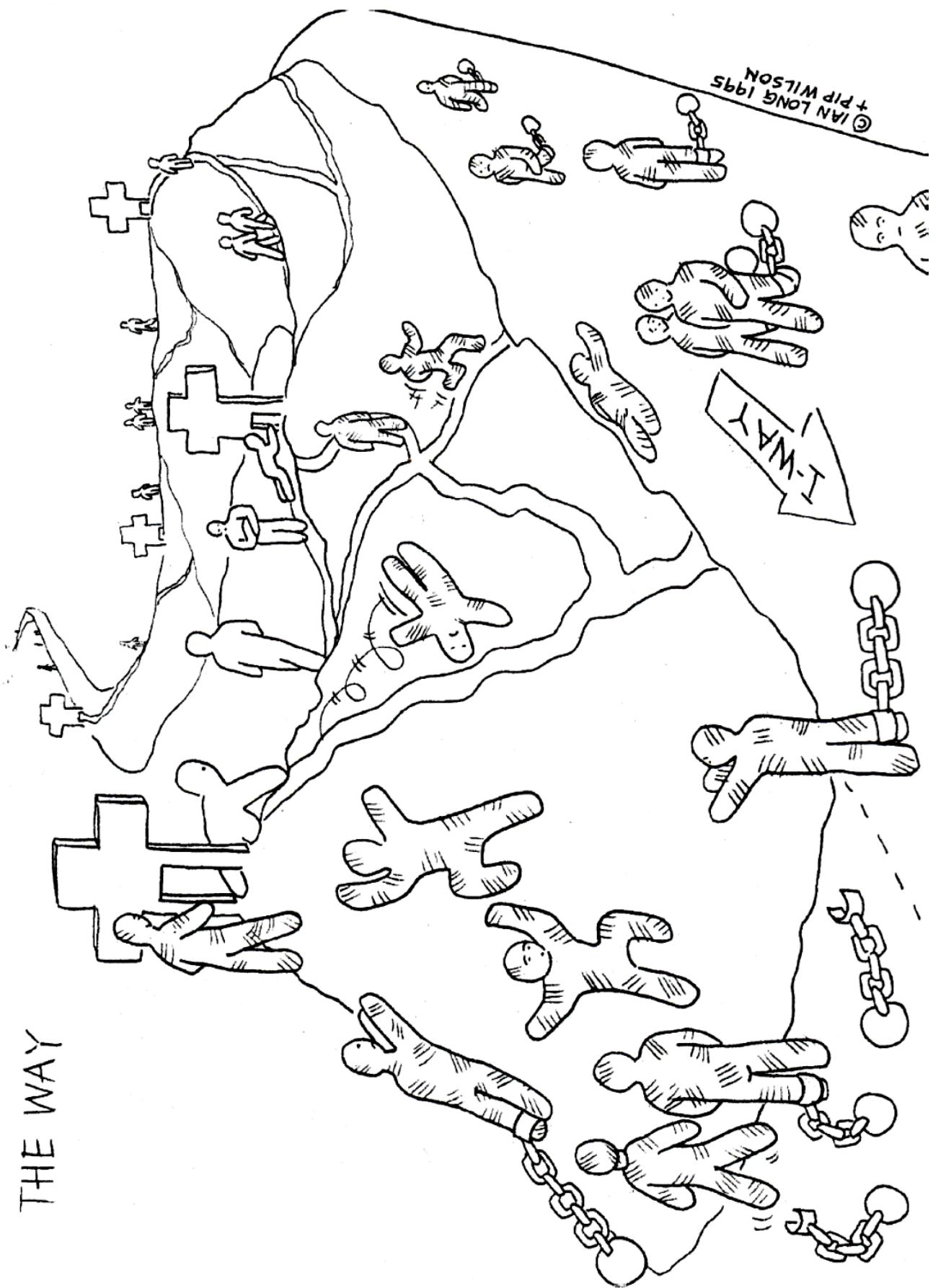
Hand out the small candles or tea lights. While sitting or standing in a circle, have the young people carefully light the tea light of the person next to them. As they do, invite them to say the words of John 20:21, 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.'

When all of the candles are lit, pray: Lord, as we come together to reimagine church, help us to think about your will and your way. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who provides us with God-strength in every move we make. Thank you Lord that you are with us every time we meet in your name, and give us the strength to step out and be your light in the world. Amen.

## ABIGAIL COOK AND JAMES HENLEY

work for The Lab, an experimental church made up of young people and young adults in Newport, South Wales.

THE WAY



## A strategy for 'new' work in church communities:

This activity is for you to do with your church's leadership team and the people you work with. You are going to begin to create a strategy for undertaking 'new' work with young people and emerging adults in your community. The activity consists of 5 steps, talk to young people and emerging adults, church, school and community groups to find out the needs and interests and what you can offer as a church (being careful not to raise expectations that cannot be met):

✓ **Step 1: identify the needs of the area:**

In the centre of a large piece of paper, draw a symbol to represent young people and emerging adults. Around the symbol write down the needs of the them in your community (be that physical, spiritual, social, emotional)

In the centre of the second sheet of large paper write the name of your community. Around it write down all the different things (people, organisations and activities) in your area that relate to young people and emerging adults. (Include: schools, colleges, universities, community groups, health centres, and leisure activities) – If you don't know all that is available, how can you find out?

Underneath the people, organisations and activities on the second sheet, write down the needs that these things meet, then think about and list the needs that remain unmet.

✓ **Step 2: Acknowledge the skills and talents of the church community:**

Draw a picture of a church building in the centre of a large piece of paper, and around the picture brainstorm the assets of your church community (Include: both physical assets e.g. the building facilities and equipment) and people and their skills (Include: life skills, talents and personality asking what can they offer the children?)

✓ **Step 3: Identify strengths and weaknesses of the church community:**

Q: What is your church able to offer the local community?

Q: Are there ways in which your church can meet the needs of the local community?

Use SWOT analysis:

- ❖ **Strengths:** what is being done well and the resources, people and facilities available.
- ❖ **Weaknesses:** what aren't you doing or what are you doing ineffectively
- ❖ **Opportunities:** what opportunities are there in your local community?. The needs and opportunities that are there to reach out to young people and emerging adults, and the opportunities to share with the congregation of your church or circuit
- ❖ **Threats:** what are the potential stumbling blocks? For example the limits for the church building, limited numbers of helpers or volunteers to do the work, people with insufficient skills or knowledge (this last one can be resolved by sending them on training) etc.

The church needs to be aware of current initiatives and local and national government legalisation. Current laws and regulations affect the way we can do things.

✓ **Step 4: Plans, Aims and Strategy :**

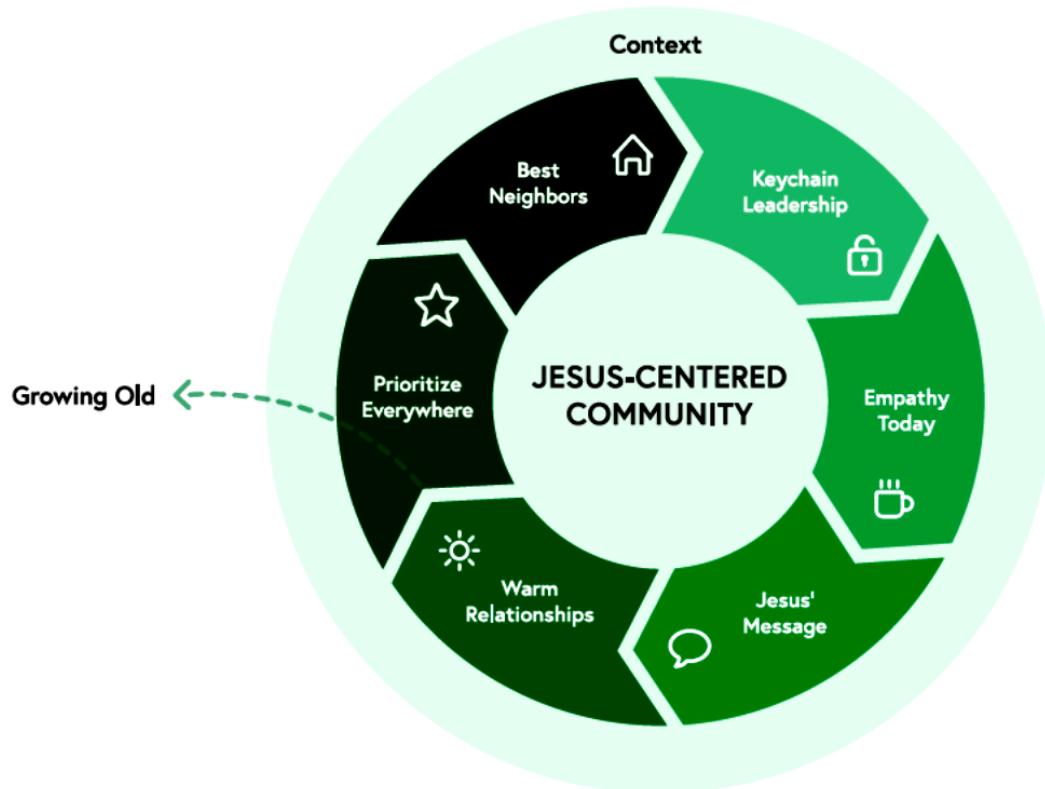
Once you have selected the needs of the local area which you think need consideration. Use SMART goals as a possible planning method:

- **Specific:** Be specific, an aim that says 'be there for the local young people and emerging adults' is good but too vague. You'll never know if you are meeting it and then people may become discouraged. An aim 'to provide regular opportunities for local young people and emerging adults to talk about what is troubling them' is a lot clearer, but how can it be clearer?
- **Measurable:** for example 'by the end of September we will have run a welcome evening for young people and emerging adults.
- **Attributable:** tasks should be assigned to specific people so that everyone is aware of their responsibilities
- **Realistic:** the task should be a small step, not a giant leap. The aims should be achievable. For example 'we should have reached out to 5 new young people and emerging adults by Christmas' rather than 'we should triple the amount of young people and emerging adults members by Christmas' – people may become disheartened if goals aren't achieved.
- **Time bound:** the goal should be attained within a specific timescale, giving you a clear indicator of achievement. Having a timescale allows you to look back on achievements and celebrate successes of goals met.

✓ **Step 5: Achieve the goal:**

Once your goal is set a plan needs to be drawn up and broken down into tasks that need to be achieved to meet the goal. You will need to set a timeframe and who's responsible for each task. In addition there should be someone checking that the whole goal is on target.

# The 6 Core Commitments of Churches Growing Young



## Unlock keychain leadership:

Instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people.

## Fuel a warm community:

Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

## Empathize with today's young people:

Instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation.

## Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere:

Instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation.

## Take Jesus' message seriously:

Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life.

## Be the best neighbors:

Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally.

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