



NEXT IS NOW

**YOUNG ADULTS
BEYOND COLLEGE
MINISTRY**

SUMMARY

· Many young adults find this moment an exciting time in their lives as they start to live into life-long careers, deepen relationships, and more fully live into independent adulthood. Time and effort become more valuable to them, and they become more selective in where they invest themselves.

Vocation and Calling

· Young adults often have a strong personal faith sustained by individual practice. They crave an authentic community of other young adults to curiously construct a deep faith of their own, but often have trouble finding such groups.

Faith Formation & Practices

· Young adults appreciate mentor relationships with people five, ten, or fifteen years older. These mentors offer insights on employment, relationships, and life skills helping young adults navigate the first few years of young adulthood beyond college. Mentors provide a ministry alongside young adults to help and encourage them.

Ministry Relationships

· Young adults want help in articulating personal priorities and values they seek in a local church congregation. Young adults express difficulty finding a church because college ministry creates unrealistic expectations. Young adults could use help to know what they want from the church as a core need, where they are willing to compromise, and what in church life is no longer essential to them.

Ministry Purpose

· Young adults want to be invited, equipped, and challenged to use their gifts for good. The church often overlooks young people and centers church on Sunday morning worship, which doesn't work in young adults' lives. Invest in the young adults already in church - they can often lead and will bring their friends.

Evangelism

KEY THEMES OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD



YOUNG ADULTS ARE MORE MATURE THAN MANY EXPECT

There is a broad spectrum of experiences (starting careers, studying in grad school, starting to have families) in the lives of young adults.



THERE IS AN IMMENSE AMOUNT OF CHANGE HAPPENING IN YOUNG ADULT LIVES

These changes excite young adults as they often feel they are making real progress in life. Yet, the interconnected complexity of all these changes can leave young adults struggling with self-doubt, trouble balancing life, and a desire for help.



YOUNG ADULTS CARE ABOUT FAITH, BUT ARE DRIVEN BY BUSY SCHEDULE

Young adults value church, but church life centered solely on the Sunday morning schedule does not work well in their lives. They feed their faith in other places and spaces.

KEY THEMES OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD



INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES SUSTAIN A CONNECTION TO FAITH

Time in nature, journaling, and using online devotionals are key spiritual practices of young adults. Young adults often center on practices they can do individually and state they find a sense of larger spiritual connection to God in these moments.



LOOKING FOR CHURCHES WITH A CLEAR PURPOSE

Young adults seek a faith community that articulates its values in word and deed. Young adults are not willing to compromise core values to be accepted by a church and are willing to hold space for difference. When given “take it or leave it”, young adults will leave it.



SELF-DOUBT IS A REAL STRUGGLE WITH MANY YOUNG ADULTS

They feel like they should have it figured out by now but still wonder if they are falling short.

THE KEY FINDINGS

Common Challenges expressed by young adults as they move into young adulthood after college and campus ministry include:

- ✿ **DRAMATIC SHIFT FROM COLLEGE TO PROFESSIONAL WORLD**
- ✿ **DOMINO EFFECTS OF LIFE CREATED ANXIETY, STRESS, AND MENTAL HEALTH**
- ✿ **BUSY SCHEDULES WHERE TIME FEELS PRECIOUS**
- ✿ **UNSURE ABOUT BASIC SKILLS SUCH AS INSURANCE, FINANCES, ETC.**
- ✿ **YOUNG ADULTHOOD IS THE NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL**

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

- **EXCITEMENT ABOUT PERSONAL IMPACT IN LIFE AND THE WORLD**
- **DEEPLY PERSONAL FAITH EVEN IF IT IS NOT A FOCUS**
- **DESIRE AND WILLINGNESS TO FORM AN AUTHENTIC AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY**
- **YOUNG ADULTS HAVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND PASSION TO BE ENGAGED**
- **THERE ARE YOUNG ADULTS PRESENT IN CHURCHES, SO START WITH THEM**

KEY EMERGING THEMES

-  **NAVIGATING NEW BOUNDARIES**
-  **THE NEXT IS NOW**
-  **MENTORING KEY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS**
-  **SEEKING AUTHENTIC BELONGING**
-  **SEEKING SAFE SPACE FOR FAITH FORMATION**
-  **WANT TO BE INVITED, EQUIPPED, AND CHALLENGED TO USE THEIR GIFTS FOR GOOD**

KEY EMERGING THEMES

NAVIGATING NEW BOUNDARIES

Many young adults express the stark shift from a college environment, which, while diverse, is a community with many people the same age, all with the same experience as students, and concentrated in a similar area. Once young adults enter the next phase, it's harder to figure out the boundaries between professional relationships, acquaintances, friends, and more. In some ways, it's like the middle school of adulthood in its awkwardness. Yet young adults are often excited because they see their goals come into vision and are achievable.

THE NEXT IS NOW

For many young adults, the most exciting part of their lives is moving from a season of study and preparation to the next level of professional life. These next steps can be graduate school or starting a job. The next step can be about taking the next serious step in a relationship. The key is they feel this is the moment to start making decisions that will shape the next part of their lives. Things shift from a clear milestone and goal (graduating college) to a life-long project reflecting the authentic way God works in their lives.

MENTORS ARE KEY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults expressed the key role that other Christians (beyond their pastors) have played in their lives. Young adults are looking for people in their 20s and 30s to help guide them through this time of life. Many times guidance comes from seasoned co-workers who adopt new young adults as they start their careers.

KEY EMERGING THEMES CONT'D.

SEEKING AUTHENTIC BELONGING

Young people are more selective in their friendships as they decide which people they want to invest in and which friendships they are willing to let go of. They don't need more friends; they seek better quality friendships. Young adults are looking for meaningful relationships in a community where they are seen, valued, and can be their authentic selves. They are more interested in small group belonging rather than having membership in a large institution. Being a young adult can be lonely, so they want to be seen. Young adults often feel overlooked and undervalued. Finding a place of authentic community is really hard, yet deeply important, among young adults.

SAFE SPACE FOR FAITH FORMATION AS YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults often have a strong personal faith. They often discuss individual practices of podcasts, prayers, music, journals and conversations with God. Faith in God is an anchor, yet they need a brave space to bring questions to grow their faith. Many young adults have expressed church hurt and struggles with mental health. Young adults are wounded by church and society. A community that offers mental health in a healthy community is really important. People are ready for intimate, tender conversations.

INVITED, EQUIPPED, AND CHALLENGED TO USE GIFTS FOR GOOD

Young adults want to be included in positively impacting their local community and the larger world. Older generations value stability and length of service as belonging, while young adults see impact and engagement as belonging. They need a little help with space, resources, and encouragement, but young adults will surprise others with their ability to lead. Don't put them on committees to keep the old processes going; give young adults permission and support to try something new outside the church walls. Given the fragile finances of young adults, the church should proactively offer a small investment to support young adult ministry.

HOW COLLEGE MINISTRY CAN BUILD BRIDGE TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD



BE CLEAR ABOUT THE HARD SHIFT AWAY FROM COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Young adults need an ongoing reminder that once they graduate, it will not be as easy to find a community. Friends no longer live 10 minutes away. People don't just hang out in the middle of the day. College ministry can help young adults build habits to sustain ongoing friendships themselves, while offering regular reunion events to help young adults reconnect and renew.



PREPARE STUDENT FOR HOW TO FIND A NEW CHURCH

Young adults need help identifying what is essential to them in a new church and where they can be flexible with diverse approaches. A clear sense of what they want in church helps young adults find more meaningful and quicker connections to a church community.



DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS

Several life skill topics emerged throughout the interviews for inclusion in a "Bridge" program into young adulthood:

- Faith and your First Job
- Getting Real with Relationships
- How to Meet New People
- Finances: Bills, Mortgage, Roth IRA
- Ways to maintain life/work balance
- Finding Mentors

METHODOLOGY

Methodology:

Ethnographic Research of Young Adults who participated in college ministry began in Fall 2023.

Ethnographic research provides space to deeply study and learn about young adults across the region to create an actionable report providing data and outcomes that provide ministry guidance with young adults as they graduate from college ministry and transition into independent young adulthood.

Two practitioners conducted research weekly for over three months, deeply studying and listening to young adults' experiences and responses to open-ended questions. The themes that emerged across multiple conversations were categorized and validated through research notes and interview transcripts. This initial report is the result of twenty conversations and captures emerging themes of young adulthood in post-college ministry.

Interview Questions for Young Adults

- What is the most exciting part of your life right now?
- What is your biggest challenge in life right now?
- Describe the role of your Christian faith in your life today.
- What do you wish college ministry had included to help prepare you for this phase of life?
- Who or what would you say is making the biggest impact on your life right now?
- What do we need to know that we didn't ask about?

(To date, 20 young adults have participated in our research.)

HARVEST TEAM



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