RENEGOTIATING FAITH

The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada

Rick Hiemstra
Lorianne Dueck
Matthew Blackaby

A research partnership of

EFC The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
TM truth matters ministries
YOUTH FOR CHRIST
POWER to Change. | Students
INTERVARSITY

Faith Today Publications, 2018

Toronto, Ontario

(With corrections to tables 7.11 and 7.12 made October 17, 2018)

ISBN 978-1-989246-00-9 (Electronic/PDF)

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Rick Hiemstra, Lorianne Dueck and Matthew Blackaby

Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada

1. ISBN 978-1-989246-00-9 (Electronic/PDF)

2. Youth and Youth Adult Ministry – Christianity – Canada – Statistics.

Printed in Canada by

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship,
Power to Change – Students, Truth Matters Ministries and Youth for Christ

Toronto, Ontario

www.RenegotiatingFaith.ca

Table of Contents

Thank You **6**

Foreword **8**

Executive Summary **10**

Introduction **14**

1. Emerging Adulthood **16**

1.1. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development 16

1.2. Transition to Emerging Adulthood 19

2. How has Emerging Adulthood Grown? **21**

2.1. Leaving School 21

2.2. Leaving the Parental Home 23

2.3. Full-Time Work 25

2.4. Marriage and Common-Law Unions 27

2.5. Family Formation 29

2.6. Ministry Implications of Sociodemographic Shifts 30

3. Differentiation **31**

3.1. Differentiation Delayed 31

3.2. Religion as a Differentiating Marker 31

3.3. Morality and Differentiation 33

3.4. Church Exit Strategies 35

3.5. "My Father Does Not Understand My Real Religious Views" 37

3.6. Rites of Passage 39

4. Religious Transmission **43**

4.1. Parent-Child Religious Transmission 43

4.2. Parenting and the Quest for Safety 45

4.3. Church or Community Spiritual Transmission 48

4.4. Conversation and Articulacy 49

5. Mentoring **51**

5.1. What is Mentoring? 51

5.2. Mentors and Differentiation 54

5.3. Mentoring Communities 56

5.4. Barriers to Mentoring 57
6. Youth Group 63
6.1. Youth Group Leaders 65
6.2. The Importance of Friends 67
7. Christian Camp 70
8. Social Media and Mental Health 75
8.1. The Pervasiveness of Social Media 75
8.2. Framing Attention in a Global Community 76
8.3. Maintaining Connections Through Social Media 78
8.4. Comparison Anxiety 79
8.5. FNBA and Safe Spaces 81
8.6. FOMO, Facebook Depression and Loneliness 83
8.7. The Paradox of Emerging Adulthood 86
9. Identity Formation 88
9.1. Career 88
9.2. Pressure from Parents 93
9.3. Encouragement 95
9.4. Discernment through Trying Different Jobs 97
9.5. Approaching the End of the Moratorium 98
10. Religion 102
10.1. Change in Religious Affiliation 102
10.2. Change in Religious Service Attendance 103
10.3. Christian Doctrinal Specifics 105
11. The Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic 107
11.1. The UGRE and MTD 107
11.2. Gnosticism and Manicheanism 108
11.3. Processing Religious Difference 109
11.4. Moral Disagreements as Political Disagreements 110
11.5. Good Person or Good Human 112
11.6. A Higher Power 116
12. Life Choices after High School 118
12.1. Living Arrangements 118

12.2. Straight into University 119
12.3. Straight into the Workforce 125
12.4. Gap Year 127
13. Connections after High School 131
13.1. Connections with a New Church 131
13.2. Mentoring and Connections to Other Churches and Ministries 134
13.3. Connecting with Church Young Adult Groups 140
14. Christian Campus Groups 143
14.1. Home Church Connections 143
14.2. First-Month Connections 144
14.3. Explanations for Not Connecting with Campus Groups 145
14.4. Local Church or Parish Involvement 148
14.5. Church–Campus Group Relations 148
15. Facilitating Connections 151
15.1. Responsibility for Connecting Young Adults with New Christian Communities 151
15.2. Planning for Connections 155
15.3. Maintaining Relationships 158
15.4. Timely Follow-Up After Young Adults Start a New Job or New School 159
Conclusion 161
Bibliography 164
List of Tables 169
List of Charts 172
List of Abbreviations 174
Appendix. Methodology and Data 175
Literature Review 175
Ministry Expert Interviews 175
Young Adult Interviews 176
National Surveys 177

Thank You

Renegotiating Faith is a collaborative work of people from across Canada and across Christian traditions who care about the spiritual lives of youth and young adults and their place within Christian communities.

Thank you to Sid Koop of Truth Matters Ministries, Geri Rodman of InterVarsity, Anton Lim of Power to Change – Students, Tim Coles of Youth for Christ and Aileen Van Ginkel of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, who formed the backbone of the partnership without which this research would not have happened.

Thank you to Lorianne Dueck and Matthew Blackaby, the other researchers who worked on this project. Lorianne first identified the importance of shifts in young adult psychosocial development that underlay this report's analysis. Lorianne, gifted in languages, headed up our efforts to include French language speakers in our research. She conducted the French interviews and some of the English ones, transcribing about 800 pages from 66 interviews. Both Matthew and Lorianne worked through a mountain of books and articles to identify the best insights into young adult ministry and young adult spiritual development.

We are indebted to James Penner, Rachel Harder, Erika Anderson and Bruno Désorcy, my co-authors on the 2011 *Hemorrhaging Faith* project, which broke new ground in understanding youth and young adult ministry in Canada. Their work and its finding that many young adults leave faith and the church over major life transitions inspired the current study focusing on the transition from high school to the next stage in life.

Although the sponsors of the research come from evangelical backgrounds, we agreed from the outset that this research needed to include, as much as possible, the whole Church. So we worked to engage Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox and evangelical young adults and ministry experts. We are grateful that these leaders helped us to better understand and represent their communities. Where we succeeded, the credit goes to them. Many reviewers of earlier interim reports helped us correct and refocus our work.

Thank you to the denominational leaders and ministry organization leaders who helped us promote the Youth and Young Adult Ministry Workers (MW) survey. We could not have reached these MWs without your help.

Our young adult survey was really a survey with two different populations. The first was a national survey of our target population drawn from MARU Matchbox's Angus Reid Forum research panel. The second was a survey of students at evangelical Christian higher education institutions.

Thank you to Andrew Grenville, Stacey Kinley and Manjit Sehgal from MARU, who helped us implement our national young adult surveys. Young adults are reluctant survey respondents, and these three helped us to creatively find our sample and professionally implement our survey.

Thank you to Justin Cooper, executive director of Christian Higher Education Canada (CHEC), and Bruce Fawcett, chair of the CHEC board, and all the representatives of the 27 CHEC schools who helped us recruit 773 students from their schools. Thank you to the eight schools that expedited ethics reviews for us so that their students could participate. Though this report does not include the CHEC data, it will be covered in a paper to be presented at the October 2018 CHEC annual general meeting.

Thank you to the ministry experts and the young adults whose interviews revealed their experience and their life stories. Without your wisdom and insight, this research would not have been possible.

Thank you to the participants of our initial May 2016 consultation of ministry experts at the Crossroads Christian Communications facility in Burlington. Your input helped shape the parameters of the research and refine our questions.

Thank you to Rachel Siverns, who created the cover art for this report.

Thank you to Alan Yoshioka of AY's Edit, our editor, who has worked with me on several projects, making me look like a much better writer than I am.

Thank you to The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada for making primary research on the church in Canada a ministry priority.

Finally, thank you to my wife Beth, who patiently read my early drafts and pushes me to be clearer in my writing.

Rick Hiemstra, Lead Researcher
July 19, 2018

Foreword

On July 24, 2015, I picked up an email in the EFC general inbox from Anton Lim of the ministry Power to Change – Students. He was looking for information on how to respond to the 2011 *Hemorrhaging Faith* study "specifically as it relates to young adults who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary [education]."

The *Hemorrhaging Faith* study told us that transitions are often exit points for young adults, but it did not help us answer Anton's question. We very quickly began a conversation with Aileen Van Ginkel about how best to organize a research partnership that would look at a wider version of Anton's question: How can we help young adults who are transitioning from high school to the next phase in life, wherever they are headed, stay connected to church and faith?

Sid Koop from Truth Matters Ministries was brought on to chair the partnership that would go on to include Power to Change – Students, InterVarsity, Youth for Christ, Truth Matters Ministries and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Our first partnership conference call took place on November 26, 2015, and we decided right away that we needed to consult with youth and young adult ministry leaders about the research question.

On May 16, 2016, about 40 youth and young adult ministry experts from across Canada came together at the Crossroads Christian Communications Centre in Burlington, Ontario, to talk about the research question. This consultation helped define the parameters for the research, identify the literature we needed to consult, and network us with frontline ministry experts.

Shortly afterwards, a research plan was approved. In the summer of 2016, data collection for the Young Adult Transition Research (YATR) project began.

The partners decided from the beginning that this needed to be research for the whole Church in Canada. Along the way, we have consulted with experts from Catholic, Mainline Protestant and Orthodox communities, and our datasets include Canadians from all these communities. Orthodox data appears sparsely in this report simply because our networks into those communities are underdeveloped.

There is much more in the data than we can include in this report. A Christian higher education dataset that is not included in this report will be dealt with in a paper to be presented at the Christian Higher Education Canada annual general meeting in October 2018. The data also speaks to topics not covered in this report.

YATR is ministry research. It is cross-disciplinary, as all ministry is. It is part sociology, part theological reflection, part psychology, part media theory, part philosophy and part ministry application. It is research for the Church and for those who minister to youth and young adults.

Everyone connected to this project cares deeply about removing barriers to faith for youth and young adults and helping them to mature and grow their Christian faith.

We hope you'll find something in these pages that is helpful for your ministry.

Rick Hiemstra, Lead Researcher
July 19, 2018

Executive Summary

A new life stage called *emerging adulthood* has opened up as young adult identity formation and its accompanying shift into adulthood has been delayed by 5 to 7 years since the 1980s.

Emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between and a focus on possibilities.[1] This stage can be described as a psychosocial development moratorium in that the development of social roles and personal identity is temporarily suspended. Emerging adulthood is a time when prior commitments are up for renegotiation.

This study looks at young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 who had a Christian religious affiliation as a teen and who attended religious services at least monthly at some point during their teen years.[2] **We intentionally chose a young adult population whose teenage religious engagement was more than nominal. It is important to remember this as you read this report.**

Emerging adulthood works against young adults staying engaged in their faith and the life of the Church because it disrupts young adults' access to Christian communities and makes it difficult for them to negotiate meaningful roles in Christian communities.

Identity formation ushers in adulthood, bringing with it the capacity to make commitments, including faith commitments. The delay in identity formation that comes with emerging adulthood means it is after high school, when young adults are in their twenties, that most of them are forming their identities and making their faith commitments.

According to psychologist Erik Erikson, identity is formed when an individual negotiates a role in a community. Emerging adulthood often finds young adults living away from family, their home church and other Christian communities at the point in life where they are negotiating these roles. This means they are unlikely to negotiate a role in a Christian community.

A job market that demands ever greater levels of postsecondary education means that young adults are spending more time in postsecondary studies, delaying entry into the job market, and, in many cases, remaining dependent on their parents into their twenties. Continuing parental dependence makes forming an identity apart from one's family of origin (differentiation) more difficult. In some cases, young adults who do not have access to traditional differentiators of place, marriage and profession are differentiating themselves from their parents by rejecting their parents' faith.

---

[1] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 7–9; Erikson, *Identity*, 156.
[2] See methodology section in appendix.

To continue on in a faith community, young adults need to renegotiate their childhood roles as adult roles. Mentors can help with this renegotiation by reintroducing young adults to a church community currently familiar with them in their childhood roles framed by their family of origin. Through this reintroduction, mentors use their status in the community to help young adults forge new roles, and in so doing they provide a means of differentiation *within* the church community. Young adults who had home church mentors were more than three times as likely to connect with new churches or parishes after moving out of their parents' home and to connect with a Christian campus group after starting postsecondary studies.

Youth groups and Christian camps help young adults in maturation by encouraging them to negotiate new roles by which they differentiate themselves from their family of origin while still remaining within Christian community. These alongside-but-within-the-church communities also provide opportunities for faith-reinforcing friendships to form, friendships that are vital for faith persistence. Young adults who had been involved with Christian camps either as teen campers or camp staff were roughly three times as likely to connect with a Christian campus group and at least twice as likely to connect with a new church or parish after having moved out.

The roles that mentors, youth groups and Christian camps help young adults negotiate provide avenues for differentiation within the faith and reduce the likelihood that religion will be the territory on which young adults choose to stake out an identity that is different from their parents'. Moreover, they help young adults to grow up and find their place faster and, significantly, to find that place *within* the Church. Mentors seem to have their most positive impact on religious persistence when they continue to walk with young adults into and through emerging adulthood.

Young adults often find non-confrontational ways to exit the church: even when they reject their parents' faith, they often find ambiguous ways to express their disagreement, so that parents can plausibly figure their children still share their beliefs.

University is becoming a near-universal aspiration for young adults. More than four in five young adults who had attended university and almost half of those who had attended college said they always knew they wanted to go to university. Young adults want university to be seen as an autonomous choice, although many of those we interviewed acknowledged significant parental pressure to attend.

Those who took a gap year, which was sometimes understood to be a one-year discipleship program, between high school and postsecondary studies were more likely to attend religious services as an adult, to have had a home church mentor, to connect with a new church after moving out of their parents' home and to connect with a Christian campus group. Gap year activities vary, and the trajectory of young adults who took a gap year may vary by how the year was spent. Young adults who went straight into postsecondary studies fared worse on all our measures of religious persistence than those who had taken a gap year.

The most pressing postsecondary decision for young adults is not career but education. Career is often seen as a moving and unknowable target. Many young adults saw a career as a reflection of their identity and were not able to choose a career because the question of their identity was not settled. Most young adults knew, however, that they wanted to avoid dull, passionless, monotonous work.

Young adults whose giftings and talents were identified and who were encouraged to consider a career that made use of those talents were often able to see a trajectory for their lives. Parents, friends and teachers most often provided this encouragement, while pastors and ministry leaders least often provided it. Many young adults identified a career or calling while working in a leadership role or in an environment where others identified their gifts and talents and encouraged them.

Young adults are roughly three times more likely to connect with a new church after moving out of their parents' home if someone from their home congregation tries to make a connection for them. Similarly, young adults going on to postsecondary studies are four times more likely to connect with a Christian campus group or chaplaincy if someone from their home church tries to make a connection for them. Many groups, especially those with a strong sense of identity, are by their nature exclusive, and most young adults need someone to create a way in for them through either an invitation or an introduction.

Roughly three-quarters of young adults who go on to connect with either a campus group or a new church do so within the first month of starting at a new school or new location. This means that making timely connections with new Christian communities is critical.

Nearly four in five MWs say young adults are responsible for making connections to new Christian campus communities themselves. Three in five MWs say they share this responsibility with young adults, but fewer than three in ten say they have a ministry plan for making these connections. Significantly, only about a quarter of young adults reported that someone from their home church tried to make a connection for them to either a new church or a Christian campus group.

Some church-based ministry leaders are reluctant to connect young adults to campus ministries for fear of losing young adult leaders. Some campus ministries are finding innovative ways to partner with churches in order to create win-win young adult ministries.

Social media with its never-ending feed of beautiful and interesting images provides a new, dynamic and global point of comparison for young adults that leads them to doubt their achievements and question their goals. Constant comparison and the resulting self-doubt inhibits identity formation, goal setting and commitment.

Although emerging adulthood is an unprecedented time of opportunity for young adults it has also spawned a collection of new fears and anxieties. The Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), the Fear

of Not Being Amazing (FNBA), and the Fear Of Passionless Monotony (FOPM) press in on young adults ever more as they approach age 30, which, for many, marks the limit of emerging adulthood and a forced entry into adulthood.

We found Catholics keep 55% of their more-than-nominal teen affiliates into young adulthood, Mainline Protestants keep 53% and Evangelicals keep 64%. While a third of church teen affiliates are moving to the ranks of the combined group of Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual and None (AASN), there is a new development. About one in twenty Christian teens are converting by the time of young adulthood to other world religions, usually Buddhism and Islam.

About half of teens continued their level of religious service attendance into young adulthood, while 45% said their attendance level dropped and only 6% reported an increase.

Many young adults talked about discovering a shared religious ethic behind all religions. They describe this ethic as leading one to become a good human and promoting social harmony. This discovery has led them to conclude that religious differences are only apparent and that those who insist on religious differences are sowing division. We call this belief the Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic (UGRE). This ethic posits that religion fulfills a set of psychosocial functions and any religion that fills these functions is a good one. The UGRE is a strategy for dealing with religious difference.

A consequence of the UGRE is that to insist on a personality or identity for God is to promote religious difference. Many young adults preferred to talk about a higher power rather than God. The higher power they described was deistic in that it was uninterested and uninvolved in their lives, although many continued to hope the power might intervene in their lives to help them.

Some young adults seeing moral debates play out in the political arena have concluded that moral debates are really political ones. They then take the next step of concluding that politics does not belong in the Church, by which they mean moral discussion is disallowed.

Young adults who persist in the faith into young adulthood are well integrated into churches and other Christian communities. Warm relationships with parents who live out their faith are vital for faith formation; however, when it comes time to develop a Christian identity apart from one's parents, young adults need persisting communities of faithful adults, mentors and friends in their lives. When young adults move, it is vital that families, churches and ministries work to get them connected to new Christian communities in a timely manner. Young adults also need Christians and ministry leaders to identify their gifts and talents. Significantly, they also need mentors to pose the question "How might God be calling you to serve him with the gifts and talents he's given you?"

Introduction

Young adults now form their adult identities 5 to 7 years later than did their counterparts just a few decades ago. Their faith formation has significantly changed as a result: the faith formation we once assumed was happening during the teen years now most commonly happens in the early to mid-twenties.

This research began with a question about how we can help young adults transition from high school to the next phase in life while maintaining a connection to Church and faith. It quickly became clear that our question carried many unsustainable assumptions.

The first assumption was that there was a crisp transition and if we could just help young adults across this line they'd be able to take it from there – this is usually not the case. The second assumption was that young adults approached this post-high school transition with a faith they considered their own, that we simply needed to help them tend it – most, though, do not yet have a firmly established, fully owned faith. The third assumption was that the transition from high school to post-high school was the same as the transition from being a teenager to being an adult. For most young adults, there is an intervening period commonly called *emerging adulthood* between the teen years and adulthood.

Although emerging adulthood resists neat categorization, we can think of it situating itself inside the growing delay in identity formation that has opened up when young adults are in their twenties.

Identity formation happens when young adults renegotiate old roles in the communities in which they'd participated as teens or negotiate new adult roles elsewhere. Prior to the rapid extension of emerging adulthood over the last few decades, young adults would more quickly renegotiate their roles, commit to them and move into adulthood. Timing is critical. In the past, this typically happened during teenage years while they were still embedded in their *home church* communities.[3] This meant adult roles were renegotiated in and with these home church communities. One common feature of emerging adulthood is the pursuit of postsecondary education. Postsecondary education embeds young adults in new and demanding communities that often do not include Christian community. This means that young adults are often renegotiating identities without Christian communities to negotiate with. As they settle on a career and begin to make their commitments to new roles, even young adults who previously had been engaged in their church communities often do not consider roles in Christian communities because there are no Christian communities in their lives.

[3] Throughout this report we will use the term *home church* to refer to the local church or parish that young adults had attended as teenagers.

This report explores the consequences of this shift and how churches and Christian ministries might respond. It is based on the data from the Young Adult Transition Research (YATR) study. YATR is a multi-phase research project that began in 2015 and includes a literature review, 26 interviews with ministry experts, 40 interviews with young adults, a national survey of 1,998 young adults, and a national survey of 1,570 ministry experts. (See appendix for more on the research methodology.) The YATR study worked with two groups:

- Canadian young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 who identified as Christian in high school and who attended religious services at least monthly at some point during their teenage years; and
- Ministry experts drawn from the Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox and evangelical Christian traditions.

We intentionally chose a young adult population whose teenage religious engagement was more than nominal. It is important to remember this as you read this report.

All young adult names used in this report are pseudonyms.

The YATR study is a partnership between Power to Change – Students, InterVarsity, Youth for Christ, Truth Matters Ministries and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

First, we will look at Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as an analytical framework for the report. Second, using government data we will quantify the space that has opened up for emerging adulthood in the past few decades. Third, we will look at aspects of faith transmission during the teen years. Fourth, we will look at how social media shapes young adults' experience and how young adults form adult identities. Fifth, we will look at how young adults understand the role of religion in their lives. Sixth, we will look at how young adults make decisions about their futures. Seventh, we will look at how young adults make connections with new religious communities after major life transitions. Finally, we will look at what MWs are doing to help young adults make connections to new Christian communities.

1. Emerging Adulthood

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.
Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* Act II, Scene vii.

1.1. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

In this report, we will use Erik Erikson's eight-stage theory of psychosocial development theory (see table 1.1 below) as our principal interpretive framework. Erikson's theory has strong explanatory power and is used as the basis for Jeffrey Arnett's idea of *emerging adulthood*, which is the most common way contemporary youth ministry literature understands young adulthood.

According to Erikson, one stage must (usually) be completed before the next can begin. A stage is completed with a *crisis* when a *virtue* is attained. If a virtue is not attained, a person can become stuck at that stage of development.

Table 1.1. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development

Stage	Crisis	Virtue	Approximate Ages
1	Trust vs Mistrust	Hope	Birth to 1.5 years
2	Autonomy vs Shame	Will	1.5 to 3 years
3	Initiative vs Guilt	Purpose	3 to 5 years
4	Industry vs Inferiority	Competency	5 to 12 years
5	Identity vs Role Confusion	Fidelity	12 to 18 years
6	Intimacy vs Isolation	Love	18 to 40 years
7	Generativity vs Stagnation	Care	40 to 65 years
8	Ego Integrity vs Despair	Wisdom	65+

Sources: Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* and Saul McLeod, "Erikson's 8 Psychosocial Development Stages," Simply Psychology (2017) (https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html).

Erikson's *crises* and *virtues* have technical meanings that do not necessarily correspond to their plain or simple meanings. For Erikson, *crisis* is used in "a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential."[4] A *virtue* is "an inherent strength … or qualities which begin to animate man pervasively," and is the fruit of a successfully negotiated *crisis* that allows the individual to proceed to the next psychosocial development stage.[5] Our focus will be on stage 5, *Identity vs*

[4] Erikson, 96.
[5] Erikson, 232.

Role Confusion, and to a lesser extent stage 6, *Intimacy vs Isolation,* which correspond most closely to the 18 to 28 age range of the young adults in this study.

In the 1960s, Erikson proposed the idea of the *emerging individual* as part of his theory of psychosocial development.[6] The emerging individual, whom Erikson mostly thought of as an adolescent, was negotiating a role in society and emerging towards adulthood.

The virtue of *fidelity* in stage 5 is the ability to "trust in oneself and in others."[7] The ability to trust is also the ability to commit yourself to those you trust in. **Gaining the virtue of *fidelity* is about gaining the capacity to make commitments.** It is about identifying the groups where you have a role (belonging) and committing to those groups.

According to Erikson, **identity is attained by negotiating a role with or within a group**. In fact, young adults will negotiate many roles with many groups including churches and other religious groups. For Erikson, however, "it is the inability to settle on an occupational identity which most disturbs young people." **So, when Erikson talks about negotiating a role, he is, in the main, talking about "access to specialized work" or an "occupational identity."**[8] According to Erikson, the most desirable occupational identities correspond to the "ideal prototypes of the day."[9] These ideal prototypes correspond to "the wave of a technological, economic or ideological trend" of the day, and the least "stormy" adolescence is found "in that segment of youth which is gifted and well trained in the pursuit of expanding technological trends, and thus able to identify with new roles of competency and invention and to accept a more implicit ideological outlook."[10] Those who can assume a role or roles that society most values will have the least stormy emerging adulthood.

Despite the utility of Erikson's theory, it calls for some qualification from a Christian perspective, particularly with regard to Christian ministry. Erikson posited that identity is formed as a role is negotiated with a group. As Christians we are at once in a relationship with Christ and his Church. Erikson's theory certainly helps us to understand sociological group dynamics within church communities, but this is not how Christians understand their identities in Christ to be formed. Though we may negotiate a role in a church community (for example, as a minister, worship leader or youth leader), our identity in Christ is not negotiated but received as a gift. We ourselves as sinners hold no bargaining leverage over God. When we talk about identity formation in this report, it will usually be in the psychosocial sense, and not the theological sense. We will do this, recognizing a lingering tension in that Christ's Church is not separate from him, nor can it be reduced to a mere sociological community.

---

[6] Erikson, *Identity*.
[7] Erikson, 128.
[8] Erikson, 127 and 131.
[9] Erikson, 128.
[10] Erikson, 129.

The virtue of *love* in stage 6*,* achieved in the *crisis* of the *Intimacy vs Isolation* stage, is the ability to have a "new and shared identity" characterized by "true fusion or real self-abandon" to another that moves beyond identity as I-am-what-I-do (role) in stage 5 to I-am-what-I-love in stage 6.[11] As Erikson explains:

> The youth who is not sure of his identity [stage 5] shies away from interpersonal intimacy [stage 6] or throws himself into acts of intimacy which are "promiscuous" without true fusion or real self-abandon.[12]

Erikson observed that technological advances make mastering, targeting and attaining *ideal prototypes* or preferred societal roles more difficult and time consuming. He saw an emerging widening time between childhood and adulthood requiring "almost a way of life" between the two.[13] Erikson called this "way of life" a *psychosocial moratorium*, which is "a delay of adult commitments*."* Erikson explains:

> A moratorium is a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time. By **psychosocial moratorium, then, we mean a delay of adult commitments**, and yet it is not only a delay. It is a period that is characterized by a selective permissiveness on the part of society and of provocative playfulness on the part of youth, and yet it also often leads to deep, if often transitory, commitment on the part of youth, and ends in a more or less ceremonial confirmation of commitment on the part of society.[14] [Emphasis added]

To be clear, Erikson's *moratorium* is not one of his developmental stages; rather it is a hiatus from development. Although Erikson did not place strict age ranges on his stages, scholars agree that he had adolescence, roughly 12 to 18 years of age, in mind for his *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage.[15] At the time Erikson was writing *Identity and Youth Crisis* in 1968, 12 to 18 was a natural age range for this stage; however,

> research now suggests that the most extensive advances in identity development occur after high school/in college. **It is during this time that students/individuals make important decisions that pertain to various life domains including occupation, friendship, romantic relationships, and *religious* or political beliefs**.[16] [Emphases added]

---

[11] Erikson, 135, 137.
[12] Erikson, 135.
[13] Erikson, 127.
[14] Erikson, 156.
[15] Sokol, "Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory," 2; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 9; McLeod, "Erik Erikson."
[16] Sokol, "Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory," 5.

Erikson saw these moratoria coinciding, for the most part, with "apprenticeships and adventures that are in line with the society's values."[17] Today these "apprenticeships and adventures" most commonly coincide with postsecondary studies immediately following high school.

1.2. Transition to Emerging Adulthood

Jeffrey Arnett, research professor of psychology at Clark University, building on Erikson's idea of a *psychosocial moratorium* and the ideas of others, argued for the term *emerging adults* to describe individuals age 18 to 29.[18]

For Arnett, *emerging adulthood* has these characteristics:

1. **Identity exploration**: Answering the question "Who am I?" and trying out various life options, especially in love and work;
2. **Instability**: in love, work, and place of residence;
3. **Self-focus**: as obligations to others reach a life-span low point;
4. **Feeling in-between**: in transition, neither adolescent nor adult; and
5. **Possibilities/optimism**: when hopes flourish and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.[19]

When he first introduced the term *emerging adulthood*, he described it as "a time of frequent change as various possibilities in love, work, and worldviews are explored" and "a distinct period of the life course" that had expanded beyond the teen years.[20]

Arnett describes college, which is commonly the setting for emerging adulthood, as

> a social island set off from the rest of society, a temporary safe haven where emerging adults can explore identity possibilities in love, work, and worldviews with many of the responsibilities of adult life minimized, postponed, or kept at bay.[21]

It is also significant that these psychosocial moratoria are facilitated both by the young adult and by society; that is, they are joint creations and joint responsibilities.

Arnett pointed to delays in marriage, age of first birth for women, and the need to attain higher levels of education as factors that helped create emerging adulthood.[22] For Arnett, emerging adulthood is distinct from both adolescence and young adulthood, while largely overlapping and replacing both. It is a suspension of development that Arnett called a *roleless role,* a

---

[17] Erikson, *Identity*, 157.
[18] Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," 470.
[19] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 7–9.
[20] Arnett, 469.
[21] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 167.
[22] Arnett, 469.

description that is significant because, insofar as identity is a negotiated role with a group, a roleless role is the negation of identity, or the suspension of one.[23] This description fits well with the idea of Erikson's *moratorium*, which he saw as potentially requiring the reintegration or renegotiation of the *virtues* attained in previous stages of development.

Other scholars such as Christian Smith, Jean Twenge, Kara Powell and Reginald Bibby have all adopted terms to talk about contemporary young adults that either incorporate Arnett's idea of "emerging" adulthood or the characteristics of emerging adulthood he outlined.[24]

Arnett says that after high school most young people are transitioning into *emerging adulthood,* and to think of it as a transition to adulthood is problematic because the focus then moves to adulthood, causing us to miss what is happening in emerging adulthood.[25] Moreover, if our analysis overlooks emerging adulthood, we may carry on under a now unwarranted assumption that, for today's young people, psychosocial development continues at the same pace as in previous decades.

Arnett quotes an emerging adult who puts it clearly: "There's not a break and you become an adult. It's just a long, gradual process."[26]

So, what are emerging adults aiming at? What are their objectives? According to Smith and Snell,

> The central, fundamental, driving focus in life of nearly all emerging adults is getting themselves to the point where they can "stand on their own two feet."[27]

Similarly, Arnett found that emerging adults consistently listed the following three criteria for adulthood:

- Accepting responsibility for yourself,
- Making independent decisions, and
- Becoming financially independent.[28]

The goal of emerging adults is principally to take responsibility for themselves, whereas adulthood includes assuming more expansive responsibilities for others – which are seen to be adult responsibilities. As we will see later, it is not at all clear that many emerging adults want to move on to adulthood.

---

[23] Arnett, 471.
[24] Smith *et al*, *Lost in Transition*, 3–4; Twenge, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated*, 26; Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 29; Bibby, *Emerging Millennials*.
[25] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 22–24.
[26] Arnett, 321.
[27] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 34.
[28] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 15.

2. How has Emerging Adulthood Grown?

Arnett and others argue convincingly that emerging adulthood, rather than adulthood, awaits most young people after high school. Much space has opened up for emerging adulthood in Canada over the last few decades, as we will show.

Statistics Canada's Warren Clark identifies five "traditional bridges to adulthood":

1. Leaving school,
2. Leaving their parents' home,
3. Having full-year, full-time work,
4. Entering conjugal relationships, and
5. Having children.[29]

Crossing each of these bridges evidences a capacity for adult commitments. Quantifying the delay in these measures helps us understand the widening space being created for emerging adulthood.

2.1. Leaving School

Berger, Motte and Parkin identify three assessments of postsecondary education in Canada: *attainment, enrolment and participation*.[30] They also identify four important data sources used for postsecondary educational assessment: Statistics Canada's Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS), which is populated by data from postsecondary institution administrators; the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS); the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), and the Canadian Census.[31] Each of these surveys uses slightly different questions, making meaningful comparisons difficult.

Today's young adults *attain* higher levels of postsecondary education than did previous generations. In 1986, just 30 years ago, only 14.6% of young adults age 25 to 34 had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 34.9% in 2016 (see table 2.1 below).[32] Where we can make comparisons between 1986 and 2016 data for Canadians age 25 to 34, we can see that in 2016, 19.3% more Canadians from this age group went on to attain at least some postsecondary education, and an additional 20.3% attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

[29] Clark, "Delayed Transitions of Young Adults," 13.
[30] Berger, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada, Fourth Edition*, 29.
[31] Berger, 29.
[32] Changes to the census education question make direct comparisons difficult for college and trade data. Where comparisons are made in table 2.1 below, we have relied on published Statistics Canada documents.

Table 2.1. Highest educational attainment for Canadians 15 years and over, 1986 and 2016, percent

	Age 15 and over			Age 25 to 34		
Highest Educational Attainment	1986	2016	Change	1986	2016	Change
No degree, certificate or diploma	47.8	18.3	−29.5	28.0	8.7	−19.3
High school graduation certificate	20.3	26.5	+6.2	-	22.0	-
Trades certificate or diploma	10.0	9.8	−0.2	-	10.0	-
College certificate or diploma	10.4	19.4	+9.0	-	21.6	-
Univ. cert. or dipl. below BA level	1.9	2.8	+0.9	-	2.7	-
Bachelor's degree	6.4	15.5	+9.1		24.7	
Univ. cert. or dipl. above BA level	1.0	1.6	+0.6		2.1	
Medical degree	0.4	0.7	+0.3	14.6[a]	0.9	+20.3[a]
Master's degree	1.5	4.6	+3.1		6.6	
Earned doctorate	0.3	0.8	+0.5		0.6	

Source: National Household Survey, 2011 and "Population 15 years and over by highest degree, certificate or diploma (1986 to 2006)" (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/educ42-eng.htm), and "Education Highlight Tables, 2016 Census" (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/edusco/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=21&Geo=00&SP=1&view=2&age=1&sex=1)

[a] Aggregate for those who attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

On average, Canadian women attain dramatically higher levels of education than just a few decades ago. In 2016, 40.7% of women age 25 to 34 had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just 13.7% in 1986.[33] Men also made gains in university educational attainment, albeit less dramatically, rising from 15.5% in 1986 to 29.1% in 2016.[34]

Postsecondary *enrolment* numbers are a less reliable assessment because they fluctuate based on the size of the current potential student cohort. Although postsecondary enrolment grew 24% between 1999 and 2005, Berger *et al* expect declines by 2021, when there are projected to be 285,000 fewer Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 than in 2011.[35]

The 2006 SLID found that 57% of Canadians age 18 to 24 were enrolled in or had completed some form of postsecondary education. A 2009 YITS survey of 26- to 28-year-olds found that 81% had enrolled in some form of postsecondary education.[36] These two surveys provide different numbers, but both are significantly higher than the 21% of men and 16% of women age 20 to 24 who were attending school full-time in 1981.[37]

[33] 1986 and 2016 Canadian census.
[34] 1986 and 2016 Canadian census.
[35] Berger, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada, Fourth Edition*, 32, 35.
[36] Berger, 41.
[37] "Schooling in Canada," 13.

Berger *et al* sound a note of caution about a narrative of constantly rising assessments for postsecondary education in Canada. They write:

> Post-secondary participation peaked in 1997 when 71 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old population either was enrolled or had graduated. The rate has declined fairly steadily ever since, reaching a low of 57 percent in 2006. This drop in participation has been masked, however, by an increase in enrolment driven by demographics: as the size of the youth population has grown, enrolment numbers have increased even though the proportion of youth opting for post-secondary studies has declined.[38]

Berger *et al* attribute this declining *participation* rate to the relatively strong job market in the mid-2000s, and, writing in 2009, they expected the trend to reverse in a worsening economic climate.[39]

The expectation of educational *attainment* is rising among young adults. In a 2008 study, Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby found that 62% of male Millennials and 73% of female Millennials expected to eventually graduate from university, up from 48% and 55% respectively in 1987.[40] A 2004 government report had similar findings that "over two-thirds of 15-year-olds intend to go on to university after completing their secondary studies, with many (39%) aspiring to more than one degree."[41]

Although the majority (69.2%) of Canadians age 25 to 34 held a postsecondary degree or diploma in 2016, only about half as many (34.9%) held a university degree or higher.[42] The percent of young adults attaining bachelor's degrees or higher will need to almost double if all the Millennials in Bibby's study are to realize their educational goals.

Despite the different educational assessments drawn from different sources, it is clear that some postsecondary education is now the normative experience for Canadian young adults.

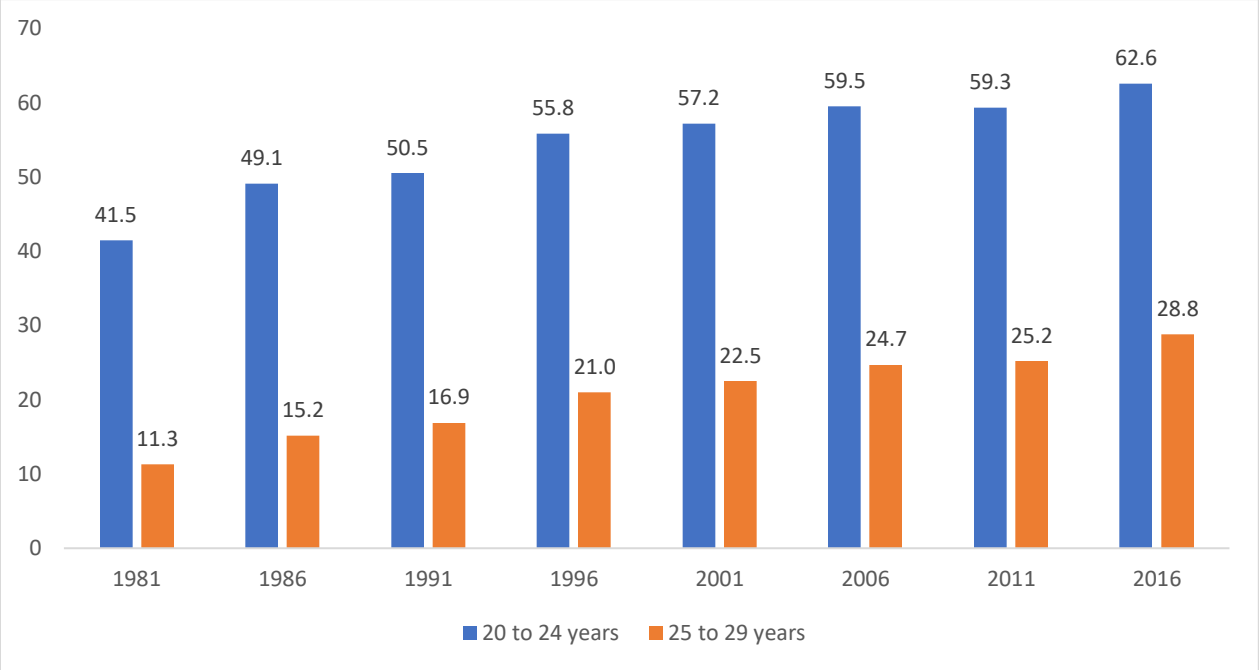
2.2. Leaving the Parental Home

More young adults are either staying in the parental home or returning for periods of time after initially moving out. In 1981, 41.5% of Canadians age 20 to 24 lived in the parental home, compared to 62.6% in 2016. For those age 25 to 29, the numbers were 11.3% and 28.8% respectively (see chart 2.1 below).[43]

---

[38] Berger, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada, Fourth Edition*, 27.
[39] Berger, 44.
[40] Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 197.
[41] Clark, "Delayed Transitions of Young Adults," 19.
[42] Galarneau, Morissette, and Usalcas, "What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?"
[43] "Figure 1 Percentage of Young Adults Aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 Living in the Parental Home, Canada, 1981 to 2011"; Government of Canada, "Families, Households and Marital Status Highlight Tables."

Chart 2.1. Percentage of young adults living in the parental home, Canada, age 20 to 29, 1981–2016



Sources: "Percentage of young adults aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 living in the parental home, Canada, 1981 to 2011," Statistics Canada (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/2011003/fig/fig3_3-1-eng.cfm) and "Families, Households and Marital Status Highlight Tables," Statistics Canada (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/fam/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=32&Geo=00&SP=1&view=1&sex=1&age=1).

Beaupré, Turcotte and Milan write:

> There are a growing number of factors that help explain this growing trend [of returning to the family home]. These include the increasing acceptance of common-law relationships (since such unions are more likely to break up than marriages); the pursuit of higher education, which tends to leave young graduates with heavy student debts; financial difficulties; the reduced stigma attached to living with parents; wanting a standard of living impossible to afford on their own; the new and different roles of parents and children in families; and needing a parent's emotional support during the stressful transition to adulthood and independence.[44]

They go on to talk about the how differentiation (the process of forming an identity distinct from one's family of origin – see section 3 below) becomes a "continuous process," which is different from the more discrete "quick cut" that we have tended to associate with moving out:

> Leaving home is often a continuing process in which close ties with the family home are unravelled slowly rather than being cut quickly. Even though the child is living elsewhere, some level of dependence remains, whether it is emotional, financial or

[44] Beaupré, Turcotte, and Milan, "Junior Comes Back Home," 28.

> functional, or all three. In this stage of what researchers have called "semi-autonomous living," the family home may provide a form of safety net for young adults and a refuge from financial or emotional difficulties.[45]

Because the family home is seen as "a form of safety net" and life is seen as full of emotional, financial and functional threats, it is difficult to say when young adults will feel safe enough to consider themselves fully autonomous.

Moving to a new residence is a major life transition for anyone, and Canadian young adults move more frequently than members of other age groups. Despite this higher level of mobility, young adults move less often today than in the 1970s. In 1971, 68% of 20- to 24-year-olds and 80% of 25- to 29-year-olds had moved in the last 5 years, compared to 50% and 71% in 2016 respectively.[46] This reduced mobility is explained partially by delays in moving from the parental home and more abundant local higher education opportunities available to an increasingly urbanized population.

Shelter costs have risen dramatically in the last few decades. Between 1971 and 2017 the real cost of rented accommodation has risen 264%, while the real cost of owned accommodation has risen 584%.[47] This means that a far greater share of this generation's income needs to be directed to shelter costs than for previous generations.

2.3. Full-Time Work

Full-time employment rates have seen different trajectories for young men and young women: falling for young men and rising for young women at the older end of the young adult spectrum. In 1981, 50.0% of men age 15 to 24 and 87.0% of men age 25 to 34 were employed full-time, compared to 32.4% and 78.5% respectively in 2012. For women, full-time employment fell from 40.7% for those age 15 to 24 in 1981 to 24.9% in 2012. For women age 24 to 34, however, full-time employment rose from 47.7% to 61.7% over the same period.[48]

For males age 17 to 24, full-time wages, in constant dollars, were 11.2% lower in 2015 than in 1981; for their female counterparts, 3.0% lower in 2015.[49]

Even where young adults find full-time work, it is now more likely to be at a temporary job than in the past.[50] In 1989, 7.4% of full-time male workers age 15 to 24 and 4.8% of full-time male workers age 25 to 34 were in temporary jobs, compared to 24.1% and 10.3% respectively in 2014. The corresponding numbers for women age 15 to 24 were 7.8% in 1989 and 26.0% in

---

[45] Beaupré, Turcotte, and Milan, 28.
[46] 1971 and 2016 Canadian census.
[47] Government of Canada, "CANSIM - 326-0021 - Consumer Price Index (CPI)."
[48] Galarneau, Morissette, and Usalcas, "What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?" 4.
[49] "Canadian Youth and Full-Time Work: A Slower Transition."
[50] Statistics Canada defines temporary employment as "term or contract employment."

2014, while 3.0% of full-time female workers age 25 to 34 held temporary jobs in 1989, compared to 10.7% in 2014.[51]

In the 1990s, several member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) started measuring the percent of youth who were Neither in Education, Employment nor Training (NEET) as a way to measure the social exclusion of disadvantaged youth.[52] In 2009, NEET rates were 15.3% and 16.3% for Canadians age 20 to 24 and those age 25 to 29 respectively.[53] These rates are down substantially since 1976, when 23% and 28% of those age 20 to 24 and age 25 to 29 respectively were NEET.[54]

University education gives graduates a substantial and growing income advantage over high school graduates. Boudarbat, Lemieux and Riddle found that in 2005, on average, male university graduates earned 50% more than male high school graduates while female university graduates made 66% more than female high school graduates.[55]

Although university degrees tend to give holders advantages acquiring professional positions and obtaining larger salaries, Bibby notes, "only about 15% of jobs require university credentials."[56]

Although young adults are enrolling in, participating in and attaining more education than before, this does not mean that they have always settled on a career. The longitudinal YITS measured young adults' career expectations every two years starting when they were age 15 until age 25. Researchers looked at the age at which young adults begin to demonstrate consistency in their career decisions.[57] Young adults' career expectations were said to be consistent when they fell within the same occupational group from cycle to cycle.

The study found that "for the majority of young adults, the process of identifying and narrowing career expectations lasts beyond adolescence and well into adulthood."[58] Only 10% were consistent in their career expectations from age 15, and 7% from age 17, meaning that 83% either changed their career expectations or remained undecided between high school graduation and age 25.[59] Significantly, at age 25, 13% remained undecided and 38% had decided on a new career at age 25.

---

[51] Government of Canada, "Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada."
[52] Marshall, "Youth Neither Enrolled nor Employed," 4.
[53] Marshall, 6.
[54] Marshall, 8.
[55] "Trends in Higher Education," 41.
[56] Bibby, *Emerging Millennials*, 198.
[57] "Career Decision-Making," 3.
[58] "Career Decision-Making," 4.
[59] "Career Decision-Making," 4.

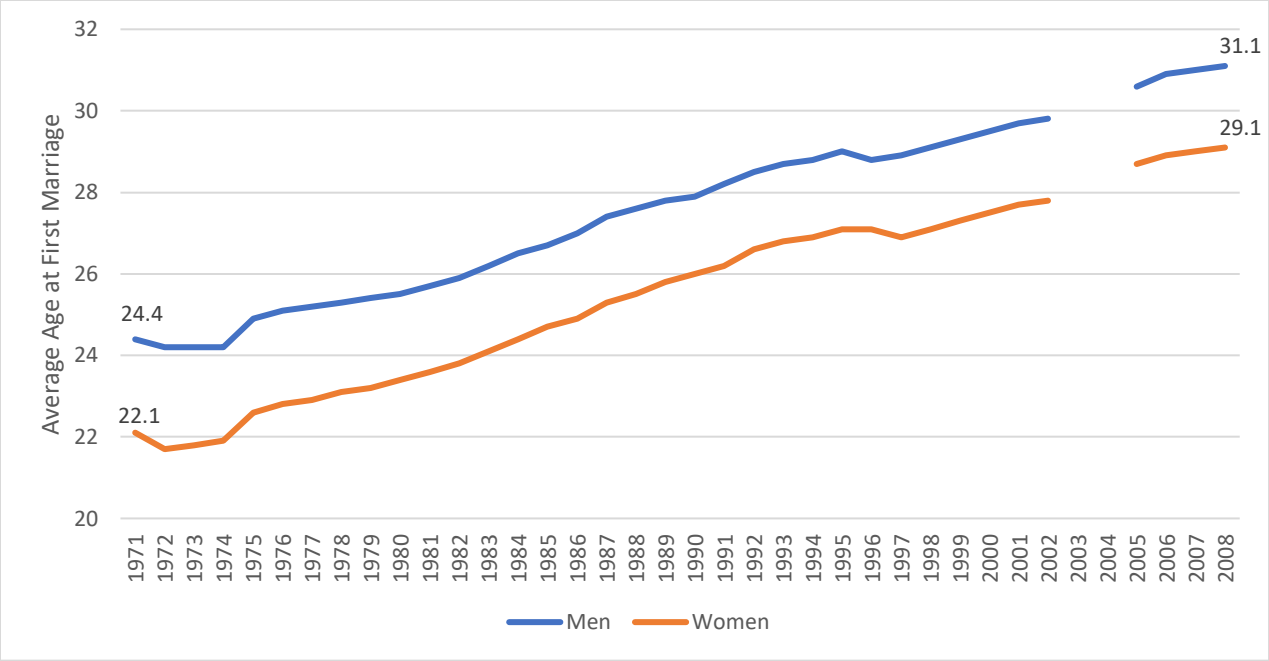
Erikson believed that an occupational identity was the main plank in identity formation. The YITS data suggests that identity formation is still in process for the majority of young adults age 17 to 25.

2.4. Marriage and Common-Law Unions

Emerging adults are delaying marriage and family formation, although most expect to eventually form stable marriages and have families.[60]

In 2008, the average age of first marriage was 29.6 years for women and 31.0 years for men, up from 22.5 and 24.8 respectively in 1974.[61] This represents a delay of 6.2 years for men and 7.1 years for women over a 34-year period. Chart 2.2 below shows the average age at first marriage from 1971 to 2008, when Statistics Canada stopped collecting this data.

Chart 2.2. Average age at first marriage for Canadian men and women, 1971–2008



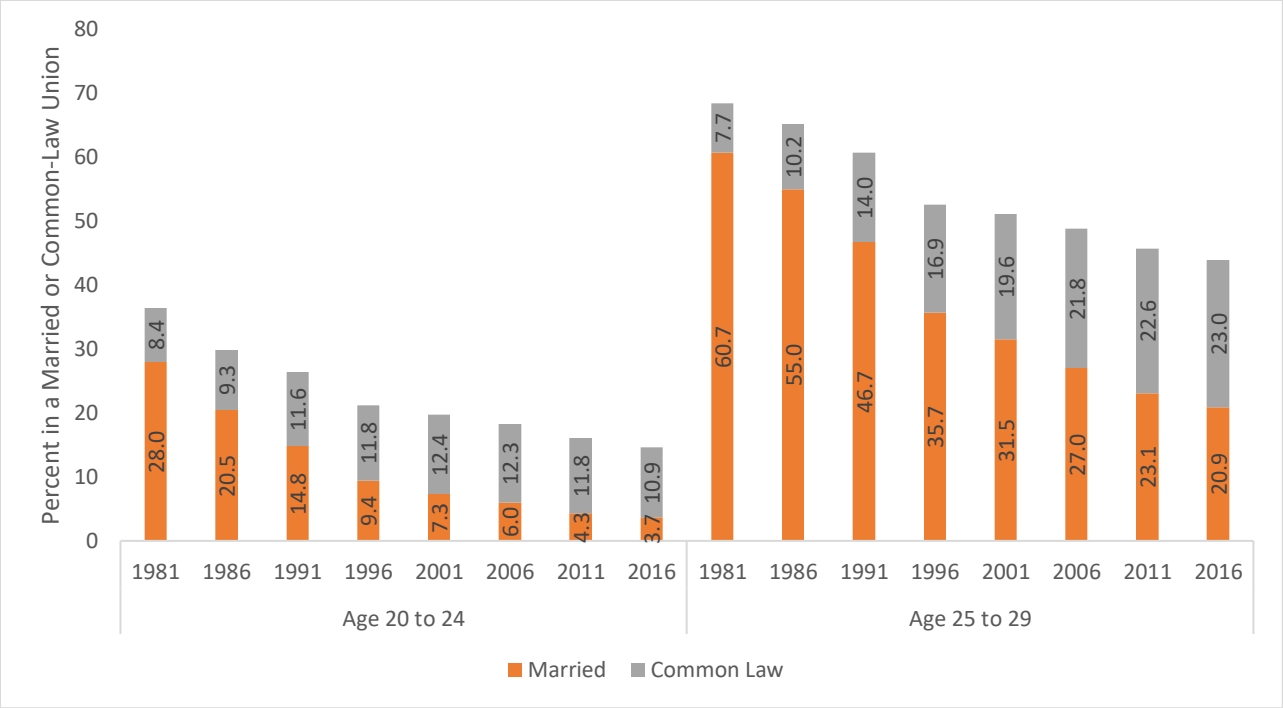
Sources: "Marriages and average age at first marriage, 1971 to 2002" (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2005001/tab/tab2-3-eng.htm), and Anne Milan, "Marital Status: Overview, 2011" (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-209-x/2013001/article/11788-eng.pdf). Note: 2008 was the last year Statistics Canada tracked average age at first marriage. Statistics Canada, "Mean age and median age of males and females, by marital status, Canada, provinces and territories, 2005 to 2008," CANSIM 101-1002 (Spreadsheet for years 2005 to 2008 provided by Statistics Canada). Notes: Missing data for 2003 and 2004. Statistics Canada stopped collecting data in 2008.

Marriage is no longer the predominant type of intimate union among young adults. Canadian common-law union data was first collected on the 1981 census.[62] Chart 2.3 below shows the percent of 20- to 24-year-olds and 25- to 29-year-olds living in either a marriage or common-law union in the census years from 1981 to 2016. In 1981, 8.4% of 20- to 24-year-olds and 7.7% of 25-

[60] Bibby, 199.
[61] Milan, "Marital Status: Overview, 2011," 10; Nault, "Twenty Years of Marriages," 44.
[62] "Fifty Years of Families in Canada," 1.

to 29-year-olds lived in common-law unions, and these percentages rose to 11.8% and 22.6% respectively by 2011. Over the same period, marriage rates fell from 28.0% for 20- to 24-year-olds and 60.7% for 25- to 29-year-olds to just 4.3% and 23.1% respectively.[63] Although the prevalence of common-law unions grew, and marriage rates fell, growth in common-law unions did not offset the decline in marriages. Overall, the share of young adults living as couples declined substantially, meaning young adults are increasingly delaying the formation of intimate unions of any kind.

Chart 2.3. Canadian young adults in married and common-law unions, 1981–2016



Sources: "Living arrangements of young adults aged 20 to 29," Statistics Canada, 2012. (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14314-eng.htm) and "Marital Status (13), Age (16) and Sex (3) for the Population 15 Years and Over of Canada, Provinces and Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas, 1996 to 2016 Censuses – 100% Data," Statistics Canada (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-. eng.cfm?TABID=2&LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=109650&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=117&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=) and "Persons in common-law couples increasing for all age groups," Statistics Canada (http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-553/figures/c8-eng.cfm). Prior to 1981 the Canadian census did not have a question solely on common-law status. 1981 Canadian Census.

Although young adult marriage rates have declined, Reginald Bibby found that 91% of female and 89% of male Canadian Millennials expect to eventually marry.[64] The reality may be quite different. Marriage rates for young adults are at historic lows, and they are dropping for Canadians in general. In 2006, for the first time, just over half of Canada's population age 15

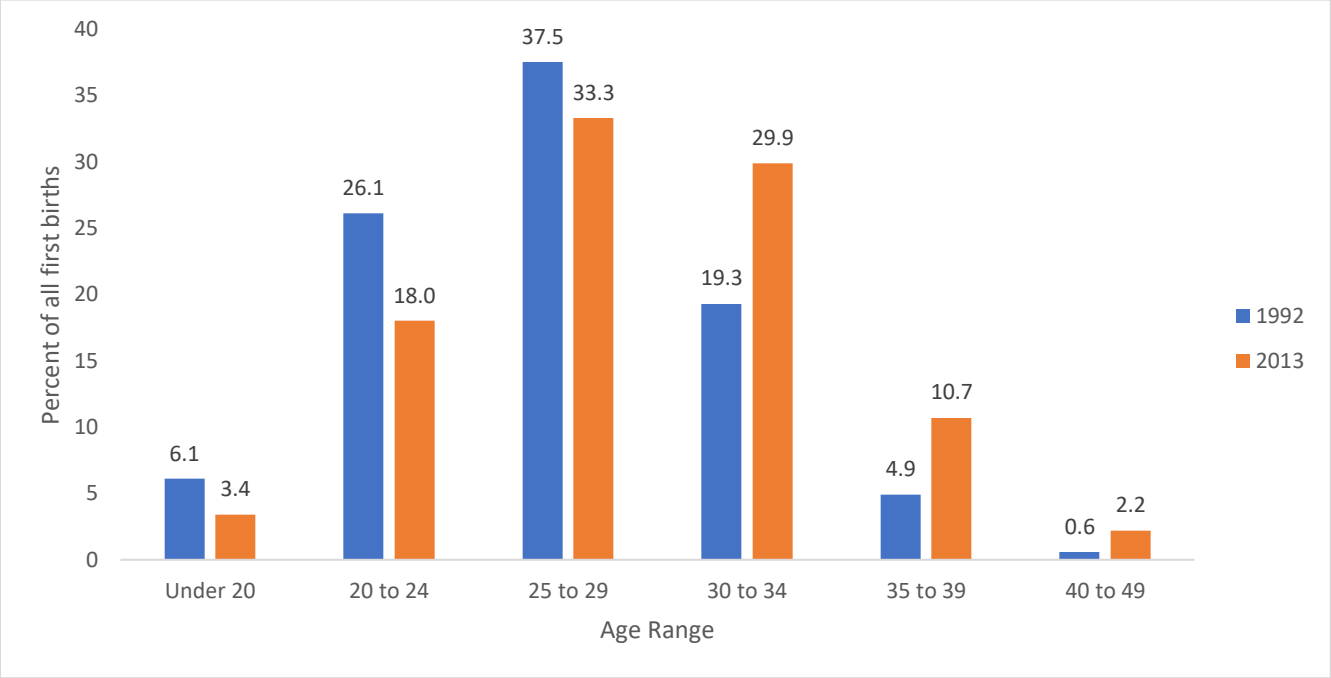
[63] "Living Arrangements of Young Adults Aged 20 to 29."
[64] Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 199.

and over was unmarried.[65] Ten years later, only 45.7% of the Canadian population age 15 and over was married.[66]

2.5. Family Formation

Young adults are also delaying family formation. In 2011, the average age at first birth for Canadian women was 28.5, up from 23.5 in the mid-1960s.[67] Chart 2.4 shows the shift in the distribution of mothers' ages at first live birth in 1992 and 2013. In 2013, just 51.3% of mothers having their first child were age 20 to 29, compared to 63.6% twenty-one years earlier.[68]

Chart 2.4. Canadian mothers' age at first live birth, 1992 and 2013



Sources: "Trends in Canadian births, 1992 to 2012," Statistics Canada, 2016. (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14314-eng.htm), and "Trends in Canadian births, 1993 to 2013," Statistics Canada, (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14673-eng.htm).

Even though family formation is being delayed, Bibby found that 94% of Millennials plan to have children, an increase from 85% in the early 1990s.[69]

[65] Milan, Vézina, and Wells, "Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006, 2006 Census," 6.
[66] 2016 Canadian census.
[67] Milan, "Fertility: Overview, 2009 to 2011," 6.
[68] "Trends in Canadian Births"; Government of Canada, "Trends in Canadian Births, 1993 to 2013."
[69] Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 199.

2.6. Ministry Implications of Sociodemographic Shifts

On average, young adults attain these five aforementioned adulthood markers 5 to 7 years later than just three decades ago. For most young adults this 5- to 7-year delay represents an expansion of *emerging adulthood.*

This matters for Christian ministry for a number of reasons but chiefly because identity formation has been delayed. In the past, much of youth and young adult ministry has been organized on the assumption that identity formation was taking place in high school while young adults were still part of the Christian community that they belonged to because they were part of their family of origin. Today, most young adults are forming their identities after they have left these Christian communities. This means they are forming their identities within the communities that are available to them, often in a new school or work setting.

These sociodemographic shifts are related to three problems with programmatic ministry. First, it tends to be mismatched with psychosocial development stages. Second, it provides only temporary roles, which do not form a stable basis for identification with religious communities. Third, young adults tend to resist joining the groups that characterize programmatic ministry.

Powell *et al* observe that many church programs are targeted to age ranges rather than psychosocial development stages. They point out that age targeting worked well when age ranges could function as aliases for developmental stages. Writing about the local church context, they identify a ministry "hole" created by "extended adolescence":

> Thinking in terms of only these three demographic categories [high school students, college students, and young married couples] leaves holes in our ministry offerings today. Extended adolescence means there's a new gap between college and marriage that most congregations ignore.[70]

Moreover, programs offer only temporary age-related roles within a Christian community. To the extent that identity is about negotiating a role in a group, age-targeted programs offer roles and identities only for the duration of the group. When young adults age out of a group, their roles and role-based identities are set aside, requiring them to go through the difficult work of renegotiating a role in the next age-based program group.

Jean Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University, adds that another difficulty with program-based ministry is that "young people would rather do their own thing than join a group. Across the board, youth are now less likely to approve of or be interested in large institutions such as government, mass media, and religious organization."[71]

---

[70] Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 121.
[71] Twenge, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated*, 47.

3. Differentiation

The terms *differentiation*, *individuation*, *identity* and *adult* are interrelated. Like many psychological terms, they have imprecise and debated meanings. In this report we will use the following definitions for these terms:

- **Individuation:** The life-long process of understanding who you are and your purpose and place in the world.
- **Differentiation:** The process of setting out identity markers between you and your family of origin and sometimes your close community of origin.
- **Identity** (or identity achievement): What is achieved in the *crisis* of Erikson's fifth psychosocial development stage when the *virtue* of *fidelity* is attained. We understand that with the virtue of fidelity the individual has achieved the capacity to make commitments and is transitioning from emerging adulthood into adulthood.
- **Adult:** An individual who has, among other things, the capacity or willingness to take responsibility for others beyond him- or herself, in comparison to an *emerging adult*, who strives chiefly to take responsibility for him- or herself.

3.1. Differentiation Delayed

Differentiation is the process by which young adults set out identity markers between themselves and their family of origin. In the past, adulthood markers such as marriage, moving out of the parental home and taking on full-time work were often significant differentiating markers. Adulthood is now delayed, but this delay has not removed young adults' need to differentiate themselves from their families of origin.

Today, young adults will often move out of the parental home for a time and then move back in. This means that the differentiating markers of place are set out, only to be taken up again as the young adults move back in. Today young adults start jobs, but the jobs are often temporary or part-time, making them impermanent differentiating markers, especially when job loss makes young adults dependent on their parents again. Marriage, which is usually a clear public differentiator, involves "leaving" one's family of origin and "cleaving" to one's bride or bridegroom; it is now usually put off until age 30.

3.2. Religion as a Differentiating Marker

In our interviews we saw evidence that young adults are now using religion as a differentiating marker in the absence of other available markers. Where parents have a strong religious identity, religion may provide a clear and compelling point of differentiation for young adults.

Young adults most often manifested religious differentiation by substantially reducing or stopping religious service attendance, or by rejecting their parents' faith altogether. Where

young adults have few non-family connections into their home church, differentiation by religion risks few relational costs beyond those with their families.

Although some young adults use religion as a differentiator, they usually try to do so in a way that minimizes conflict with their parents. Some young adults deliberately present their religious positions ambiguously so that parents and others can plausibly interpret them as they would like.

When Rosie and her sister were old enough to stay home alone from church, their parents gave them the choice to go to church or not, and they decided not to go because

> we didn't necessarily agree with some of the things that the minister was saying, and religion wasn't as important to me as it is to my parents. … [Our parents] decided to respect that we weren't as religious as they were. And, also, as we got older and our schedules changed, and we were always different places at different times, we weren't having dinner at the table, and it's kind of difficult to say grace during the news.

Religion was not as important to Rosie as it was to her parents. Reducing her religious service attendance was a way to signal this difference and to self-define as a non-religious person.

Rejecting one's parents' religion is less likely to provoke a conflict when both parents and children understand religion in functional terms. Religion is *functional* when its primary purpose is to fulfill a set of psychosocial functions.

Francine, speaking about her high school world religions course, focused on the function of religion (see section 11) that she found "deep down":

> I think listening to other people's perspectives and thinking about it myself, I realized that maybe some of the religious pomp and circumstance wasn't as important to me. But it was the general ideas of deep down charity, being kind to your neighbour, the core lessons that we have learned going to church, growing up and the community that surrounded it. Those were the most important aspects to me. It didn't really matter to me whether there was this god, or that god, it was the underlying things that we could apply in day-to-day life and that is what motivated me to do good moving forward.

The "underlying things" were what mattered to Francine, not "this god, or that god." Religion's purpose was to teach these principles. Significantly for Francine, these principles are easily distilled and extracted from their religious context, making "this god, or that god" unnecessary. Today, Francine does not attend or participate in church. She maintains that she has learned the "essential values" of religion, and listening to their repetition in a church context would not be the best use of her time:

> I am more comfortable right now in the lessons that I have learned in the church community. I have felt that even when I go to church the odd weekend now here, they are not really being built upon, it's kind of reiterating things I already know and core philosophies that I have established. So, for myself, it wasn't the best use of what I would consider my own time.

Where religion is functional, differentiating yourself from your parents' religion, either through a significant reduction in participation or rejecting it outright, does not carry a very great sense of loss because rejecting a particular religion does not necessarily entail a loss of religion's function.

3.3. Morality and Differentiation

The *Hemorrhaging Faith* study found that many young adults disengage with church because of conflicts with churches' moral teachings.[72] Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and his idea of a *moratorium* provide a framework for understanding emerging adults and their approach to morality.

The *virtue* arising from the *crisis* of the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage is *fidelity,* which is characterized by the ability to trust oneself and others. Moral commitments express this capacity to trust and to believe in something. Individuals in a psychosocial moratorium phase, however, have deliberately suspended such commitments. To accept moral limits at this stage would be a kind of *identity foreclosure*, and a truncating of the moratorium, or emerging adult, period. ***Identity foreclosure* happens when an identity is assumed, not because a role is negotiated with a group, but because it is imposed by others or by circumstances.**

According to Smith *et al*, most emerging adults are *moral individualists,* not *moral relativists*.[73] Moral individualism emphasizes personal choice and individual decision while not judging others in moral matters. Moral individualism is, then, an implicit social contract between individuals asserting personal, sovereign moral spheres, and granting those spheres to others. To have an individual morality does not necessarily mean the individual is a moral relativist. Moral individualists may hold strong moral positions, but they limit the sphere or application of their morality in order to receive the reciprocal benefit of not having their morality limited by others. Groups tend to share moral commitments. Where an emerging adult resists sharing the moral commitments of a group, like a church, it signifies that she has not formed an identity within this group.

[72] Penner *et al*, "Hemorrhaging Faith," 66.
[73] Smith *et al*, *Lost in Transition*, 21, 27.

Smith *et al*, writing about emerging adults and individualistic morality, argue that emerging adults' moral reasoning tends not to be rooted in "external guides." The external guides he describes are shared guides for communities who have chosen to commit to them.

> The major first point to understand in making sense of the moral reasoning of emerging adults, then, is that most do not appeal to a moral philosophy, tradition, or ethic as an external guide by which to think and live in moral terms. Few emerging adults even seem aware that such external, coherent approaches or resources for moral reasoning exist. Instead, for most emerging adults, the world consists of so many individuals, and each individual decides for themselves what is and isn't moral and immoral.[74]

Emerging adults do not appeal to philosophy, tradition or ethics as external guides because to do so would be seen to accept an *identity foreclosure* or to commit to that external guide. Moreover, to insist that others accept external guides is understood to be imposing a foreclosure and in the literature is sometimes called *coercive moral absolutism*.[75]

The resistance to external guides has its origins in the desire for a unique, and therefore purportedly authentic, set of moral commitments. Arnett explains,

> one reason the beliefs of many emerging adults are highly individualized is that they value thinking for themselves with regard to religious questions and believe it is important to form a unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma.[76]

Rhetorically, *ready-made dogma* is set against *thinking for oneself*, and it is accepted that thinking for oneself will result in something unique and original – qualities understood to be necessary to authenticity.

This quest for originality creates an extraordinary burden to either generate a demonstrably unique set of beliefs, or to deny all external guides. Steve Jobs, Apple co-founder, highlights the tension between dogma and the individual in his 2003 Stanford commencement address:

> Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice, heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.[77]

---

[74] Smith *et al*, 26.
[75] Smith *et al*, 21.
[76] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 217.
[77] Crouch, "Steve Jobs."

Steve Jobs has articulated a sentiment that many emerging adults hold to be true: religious beliefs need to be defined by and unique to an individual herself in order to be valid. Authenticity and originality have become linked ideas, causing young adults to question the validity and authenticity of religious institutions and systems rooted in longstanding traditions.

Arnett observes that young adults understand accepting their parents' religion as a kind of failure:

> **For most emerging adults, simply to accept what their parents have taught them about religion and carry on the same religious tradition would represent a kind of failure, and abdication of their responsibility to think for themselves,** become independent from their parents, and decide on their own beliefs.[78] [Emphasis added]

Arnett highlights that the religious difference sought by young adults is difference from their parents. In this sense, the quest for originality is largely a search for differentiation from their parents.

3.4. Church Exit Strategies

Although many young adults use religion as a differentiating marker, most find a way to do this without provoking a conflict with their families. They may use a new job, a move or some other new commitment as the occasion to withdraw from religious life. Usually the withdrawal would be explained as a time conflict rather than a religious conflict.

Ashley's family "moved around a bit," but she settled into a youth group in Grade 9, an experience she found "positive, I suppose." She had a few friends in the church, but she "wasn't the most popular kid."

Ashley stopped attending youth group in Grade 12 when it conflicted with her job. This coincided with her becoming more critical of church teaching. It was the chance to "take a step back from [church and youth group]" that gave her the perspective she needed to revaluate church life. She recalled,

> And when I started working my job and I was separated from [church and youth group], being able to look at it from the outside and [I saw] things that I didn't like.

Ashley began to gradually distance herself from church before stopping attending altogether. Today, Ashley has rejected Christianity but considers herself an agnostic.

Johanna grew up in devout Reformed family and congregation that she described as insular. She started to realize that her world was different when she got part-time work at Tim Hortons

[78] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 226.

in Grade 9 and started interacting with people outside her church community. Her broadening perspective led her to have theological disagreements with her father. At the time she was financially dependent on her father and continued to attend her home church, but she made plans to go to university and then go on an international exchange.

> And I, kind of, I had decided that I really wanted to move away but I didn't want to pay to have to go to school further away when I could stay at home and go to [a Canadian university], so I sort of made a deal with myself that I would stay at home, but then I would go away and do an exchange program, so that was kind of my relief to get out of home.

On this trip she attended a church in a different tradition, an experience that led to a decisive break with her home church. Years later, reflecting on her home church, Johanna expressed frustration that there was never any role for her there apart from her place in her family:

> And then I go back to this community where you are what your last name is, and you have your slot based on your family, and who you know. And I come back and it's, like, they don't know what I do because I have moved away. None of that matters. You are stuck back into the slot that you grew up in. And I hate it. I still have friends, I still come home, but I don't even remember the last time where I went back to one of the churches with all the same people that I grew up with, I just can't.

In her home church she was always her father's daughter, and never Johanna.

For Emily the most negative thing about religion is that "It is almost expected that you are there every single Sunday," which she found unreasonable because "there are things that come up in life." For Emily, Confirmation in her Lutheran Church coincided with getting a job as an indoor soccer referee. Work shifts weren't every Sunday morning, but attendance

> ended up kind of tapering off over time. Even as I stopped being a soccer referee, and getting into more work service retail jobs, it would still be that I would get shifts on Sundays.

Emily's religious practice, along with her family's, has dropped off significantly from when she was younger:

> There are still the odd times where there are family get-togethers and we pray before dinner and things like that. But for me personally, not anything really active.

Emily's part-time work became the occasion to reduce her religious service attendance.

When Andrew was confirmed in the Catholic Church, he saw Confirmation as "more of a ritual" that "didn't really make a lot of difference to me." Andrew received the sacrament because

> I couldn't stand up to my parents and say, "No it's not important," because that would have made them mad and a lot of other kids my age were getting it.

In Andrew's teenage years, he developed an anxiety disorder and stopped attending church:

> Well, I stopped going to mass because an anxiety disorder emerged where I got very anxious and claustrophobic around large numbers of people. So just for the sake of my sanity, my parents let me drift away from it, and that is the way it has been since.

Andrew's anxiety disorder became the occasion that allowed him to withdraw from church life without having to surface his theological disagreements with his parents. His anxiety disorder has since improved, but his parents do not pressure him to return to church because they still think his anxiety disorder persists.

In late high school, a lot of Emma's peers in the Latter-day Saints moved on in life, leaving her fewer social connections in the church. Around the same time, she said there was "drama and a lot of politics" combined with "sexism" connected to women's dress.

> There was a lot of older men saying, "You can't wear this," and "What you are wearing – you look too …" – they would use degrading words and things. And it was hard knowing – what I was wearing I didn't think anything inappropriate, but for them clothing was too tight or potentially too revealing and it was a distraction for men. And personally, I don't think that clothing should matter. Obviously, you should dress respectfully, especially at work, but I don't think that what I was wearing was inappropriate, and I don't think it was their place necessarily for them to have those conversations.

Not being able to question the "older men" and what she said was a personal "values shift" were the start of a distancing from the LDS church. Like many other young adults, however, she did not raise these issues with the church leaders directly. Rather, partway through university her parents moved within the same town, but far enough away that it was no longer convenient to attend this LDS congregation. The move became the occasion for an exit.

Ashley, Johanna, Emily, Andrew and Emma all had religious differences with the home churches they were raised in. None of them addressed these differences directly, but rather they waited for an occasion to leave the church without provoking a conflict.

3.5. "My Father Does Not Understand My Real Religious Views"

There are several reasons that parents may not understand their children's real religious views. First, they may not want to know. A parent may suspect their child no longer shares their faith, but until they know for sure, they can comfort themselves that this may not be the case. Second, a parent may simply be uninterested. Third, their child's religious views may be inaccessible because of a lack of religious conversation, or it may be that the child is not

forthcoming with her beliefs. Different religious beliefs are a potential source of conflict, so many families adopt a don't-ask-don't-tell strategy of managing that difference.

Looking for a way to measure how young adults might conceal their religious beliefs from their parents as a way to avoid religious conflict, we asked young adult survey respondents for their agreement with "My father does not understand my real views about religion." Respondents were asked a similar question with respect to their mother's understanding of their religious views, but since the data are similar and the relationship with one's father may be more important for religious transmission, we will focus only on the data on young adults' relationships with their fathers.[79]

As a baseline, 26% of young adults agreed that their fathers did not understand their real religious views.

Generally speaking, in situations where religious differences have potential to result in costly religious conflict, young adults were less likely to say their fathers understood their real religious views. In most cases, teenagers living at home will share their parents' religious affiliation. Young adults from our study who adopted a new religious affiliation were more likely (34%) to say their parents did not understand their religious views compared to those who did not (21%). When a young adult leaves the faith he was raised in, it creates the potential for religious conflict because it can be understood as an implicit judgement on the religious commitments of his parents and the choices they made on his behalf.

Young adults who changed religious affiliation and were religiously active as young adults were more likely to say their fathers did not understand their religious views than those who were not religiously active. Nearly half (47%) of religious switchers (those changed their teenage religious affiliation as young adults) who currently attend religious services at least weekly said their fathers did not understand their religious views, compared to just 28% of those who attend less than monthly. Changing one's teenage religious affiliation is a potential source of conflict in itself; however, changing and then manifesting devout religious behavior underlines the break with one's parents' religion. It may be these devout switchers are strategically excluding religious topics from conversations with their fathers as a way to avoid conflict.

Those who switched away from evangelical traditions were more likely to say their fathers did not understand their real religious views (45%) than those who left Catholic (30%) or Mainline (28%) traditions.

Where young adults who had a Christian teenage affiliation moved to another world religion, 47% said their fathers did not understand their religious views, compared to just 32% of those

[79] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 76.

who switched to another Christian tradition and 31% of those who became atheist, agnostic, spiritual or none (AASN).

Those who switched from an evangelical affiliation to become AASN (40%) were more likely to report their fathers did not understand their real religious views than AASN switchers coming from either Catholic (29%) or Mainline Protestant (26%) backgrounds.

Those who switched to another Christian tradition were similarly likely to say their fathers did not understand their real religious views (32%) as those who switched to become AASN (31%). Why might this be? It is likely that many parents see a move to another Christian tradition as a move within the faith. While a move to a different Christian tradition may be troubling because it represents a departure from their tradition's distinctives, it can nevertheless be understood as a move within the Church. A switch to AASN, however, is likely often seen more as a giving up of a Christian identity than as putting another identity on, as would be the case if their child switched to another world religion. In this sense, switching to AASN may not be as directly threatening to parents as switching to another world religion. In fact, many parents may plausibly reason that the absence of a positive religious identity means that their adult children are spiritually open and therefore open to returning to their parents' faith. This may be especially true where grown children continue to mark important dates on the Church calendar such as Easter and Christmas with their families.

Young adults who moved out of their parents' home and subsequently moved back in were also more likely to say their fathers did not understand their real religious views. More than half (53%) of those who moved back in and who attend religious services at least weekly said their fathers did not understand their real religious views. As with switchers, those who attend religious services more frequently were more likely to report that their fathers did not understand their real religious views. Unlike for other switchers, however, their fathers are more likely to be the drivers of their religious behavior now that they are back home because parents are usually the ones to set rhythms of life, religious and otherwise, for the parental home.

Although the data available to us is not conclusive, it seems likely that many young adults limit or frame their religious beliefs for their parents so that conflict over religious topics is limited. The potential cost of religious conflict is very high for those still dependent on their parents, financially or otherwise, because a break over religion could potentially jeopardize their parents' support.

3.6. Rites of Passage

Confirmation, Confession of Faith and Adult Believer Baptism are sacraments or ceremonies that in many cases have come to be treated as rites of passage. Functionally they are often assumed to be the point where teens assume an adult role within the community of faith.

In the cases of Confirmation and Confession of Faith, the teen (it is usually a teen) is assumed to be taking on the baptismal vows made on his or her behalf by his parents when he was an infant. In the case of adult believer baptism, the teen (it is usually a teen) is assumed to be taking on an "adult" faith within the context of the church. This is not always how young adults are interpreting these ceremonies, though.

Sacraments were "a really important part of [Francine's] life" growing up. For her they were not important for their spiritual meaning but because "they brought everyone together":

> [The sacraments] didn't have as much spiritual meaning, it meant something because it brought my family together, it brought me and any friends closer together because we all had something that we were doing that was similar and that we could connect over.

When asked to clarify what the meaning of the sacraments was, Francine said:

> I think the spiritual meaning of the sacraments in general would be to represent as you are growing up in the religious community, it is more of a symbolic gesture to show that you are moving on in different stages in your religious life, whether it be after Confirmation, you are becoming more of an adult in the community, or after first communion recognizing that you are no longer a baby and you have to make more of a stand yourself. For myself personally, what the sacraments more so represented also separation in time, I guess I recognized, but more so a celebration, something that you achieved, and then moving forward you have that kind of designation.

For Francine the sacraments are symbols marking her life's progression. They connect her life to her family's and her friends', in that they share in and participate in them. She explained further how her Catholic leaders shaped her understanding of the sacraments using the example of Confirmation:

> What our priest told us and what our teachers told us is that this was us changing and making a decision for ourselves to continue with the faith and to continue in the Catholic church as leaders. And I think that is also where, in my own classroom, where I saw some people whose parents had forced them to go to church all along. They kind of made their own decision at that point and said, "Okay, No. We no longer want to do this. We want to change." **So, for me, that sacrament was a change to adulthood because it was allowing you to make your own decisions more so and encouraging you to show your independence**. [Emphasis added]

The sacrament of Confirmation, then, was not being confirmed into the community of the Church, it was the starting gun for the differentiation process and the point of liberation for those who had felt they had no religious choice up until that point.

A ministry expert from a Reformed tradition described a Profession of Faith ceremony which was different from what Francine experienced in that it very clearly was interpreted as binding the individual to the community of faith rather than loosing them.

> One of the traditions in our church, obviously we practice infant baptism and at a certain point folks are encouraged to do a public Profession of Faith, which is our version of Confirmation or whatever. And every time that happens, the worship service ends by the entire congregation – and there are often 500 – going outside. And our pastor gives every person who has done their Profession of Faith a stake and each one is given a mallet and [they] hammer their stake into the church garden and the pastor says what you have done today by standing in front of us and declaring your life surrender to Jesus is you have driven a stake in the ground, you have made a mark, you have said this is who I belong to, this is who I am. And we will keep the stake in this garden here and it will be a reminder. And then he says a prayer and then we all sing a cappella the Doxology or something else appropriate like that.

Powell and Clark suggest using rituals, "social custom[s], or even a normal way of going about something, that provides the comfort of history, regularity, and even tradition," to reinforce identity.[80] This Reformed Profession of Faith ceremony used rituals and tradition to reinforce identity. The ceremony alone, however, is unlikely to be an effective part of identity formation unless it is accompanied by an ongoing new role within the community.

The 2011 *Hemorrhaging Faith* study found that 37% of those who were confirmed had felt pressured to do so. Of those who were confirmed, 71% said their Confirmation held no significant meaning for them as young adults. That such a high percentage of those who were confirmed said it carried no significant meaning for them just a few years later should give us pause about exactly what might be happening – or not happening.

In churches with a sacramental tradition, ideally Godparents and/or Confirmation sponsors should serve as non-parental spiritual mentors; however, in practice the roles are frequently ceremonial without a substantive component of practice of the faith in support of the baptized person or confirmand.

In the not-too-distant past, marriage and family formation provided young adults with significant responsible positions in the Church tending to the spiritual formation of children. With the delay of marriage and family formation, young adults are deprived of these significant and naturally arising adult roles, and it is not clear what other significant roles are available to them.

[80] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 60–61.

Powell advocates for other less-traditional rites of passage in which elders and mentors in the Church usher emerging adults into a valuable place in the Church. One such example involves taking graduating high school students on a hike with all of the pastors, elders and mentors in their lives and performing a ceremony signifying that the student officially becomes one of the adult congregation.[81] From a psychosocial development standpoint it is notable that this happens at the end of adolescence, rather than in early adolescence, when churches typically hold rite of passage ceremonies.

Confirmation, Profession of Faith and teenage Adult Believer Baptism usually occur prior to emerging adulthood. If Arnett is correct in hypothesizing that identity formation and worldview formation occur primarily during emerging adulthood, then these sacraments or ceremonies come too early, and their influence on identity formation is likely to be supplanted during emerging adulthood.

[81] Powell and Clark, 117.

4. Religious Transmission

The literature points to several ways families contribute to religious transmission or passing their faith on to their children. *Hemorrhaging Faith* and others show the importance of the example of parents living out consistent, authentic Christian lives before their children. Bengtson *et al* and others point to the need for the parent-child relationship to be characterized by warmth and conversation, especially conversation about spiritual topics.

The experts agree on the importance of the family for religious transmission. An expert from a Mainline tradition said the household of origin, "to be honest, [is] almost everything."

4.1. Parent-Child Religious Transmission

Bengtson, Putney and Harris measure religious transmission from one generation to the next. According to their theory, parents can pass on a strong, weak or non-existent religiosity. Religious transmission is said to be "successful" when the children's religiosity closely matches that of their parents.

Bengtson *et al* use a four-question scale:

1. Religious intensity: How religious would you say you are?
2. Religious participation: Frequency of attendance at religious services
3. Agreement with a literal or conservative interpretation of the Bible, and
4. Agreement with the importance of religion in civic or public life.[82]

Bengtson *et al* identified three factors in successful religious transmission:

1. Strong and intentional bonds between family and church or synagogue, in which religious activities are built around family activities with high family involvement in religious education,
2. Emphasis on parents' role modeling, evidenced in their investment in the tradition and their articulation of its beliefs,
3. The value given to family solidarity, characterized by warm emotional relationships, frequent family interaction, help and assistance.[83]

Bengtson *et al* identify *warmth* between parents and child as the pivotal factor in spiritual transmission, especially warmth between a father and his children.[84] *Warmth* is how close a child feels relationally to their parents. Bengtson *et al* measure warmth with the question "Taking everything together, how close do you feel is the relationship between you and your

[82] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 55.
[83] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 190.
[84] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 71–98.

father (or mother) these days?" They found a higher rate of parent-child similarity on their four-question religious transmission scale when children felt their relationship with their parents was close, or warm.[85] Although having a close relationship with both parents is important for successful religious transmission, Bengtson *et al* found that generally "having a close bond with one's father matters even more than a close relationship with the mother."[86] Moreover, Bengtson *et al* say that good parental devotional modeling is unlikely to transmit religion successfully in the absence of close parent-child relationships, or warmth.[87]

Kara Powell, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Chap Clark, professor of Youth, Family and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, also examine spiritual transmission. For them, the kind of "sticky" faith that supports successful religious transmission has three priorities:

1. **Sticky Faith is both internal and external.** Sticky Faith is a part of a student's inner thoughts and emotions and is also externalized in choices and actions that reflect that faith commitment. These behaviors include regular attendance in a church or campus group, prayer and Bible reading, service to others, and lower participation in risky behaviors, especially engaging in sex and drinking alcohol.
2. **Sticky Faith is both personal and communal.** Sticky Faith celebrates God's specific care for each person while always locating the faith in the global and local community of the church.
3. **Sticky Faith is both mature and maturing.** Sticky Faith shows marks of spiritual maturity but is also in the process of growth.[88]

Significantly, *sticky faith* requires participation in a community, that is, external behaviors within the global and local community of the church.

Powell and Clark, considering the kind of parenting that makes for successful transmission, list two pivotal parental tasks:

1. We help our kids learn to trust God and create the kind of environment where they are able to explore faith and trust while practicing their freedom to respond in love.
2. We model an unconditional love in which our kids can do nothing that jeopardizes or even lessens that love.[89]

Both of these tasks are infused with the *warmth* that Bengtson *et al* describe as pivotal for successful religious transmission. In the discussion by Bengtson *et al*, however, the child's

[85] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 74.
[86] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 76.
[87] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 78.
[88] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 22.
[89] Powell and Clark, 37.

relationship with God is not specifically in view, whereas Clark and Powell put helping kids to learn to trust God as the pre-eminent task.

Powell and Clark, whose book is written for parents, advise them, "More than even your support, it's who you are that shapes your kid."[90] Smith and Denton also speak to the central role of parents:

> Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.[91]

Penner *et al*, in *Hemorrhaging Faith*, find that when parents, both mom and dad, regularly read the Bible, regularly engage in personal prayer outside of table grace and regularly attend religious services, roughly three-quarters of their children are at least somewhat likely to practice these spiritual disciplines as young adults.[92] Significantly, they find that consistent modeling of devotional practices on the part of both parents more than doubles the likelihood these practices are replicated in the lives of their young adult children compared to families in which both parents are inconsistent or only one parent is consistent.

Arnett finds a relationship between the religiosity of adolescents and parents, especially where parents "talk about religious issues and participate in religious activities."[93] By talking about and participating in religious activities, parents are modeling positive roles within the church community.

4.2. Parenting and the Quest for Safety

The dominant parenting theme that came out of the ministry expert interviews was that parents wanted their children to be safe. This quest for safety is seen in parents trying to protect their children from the consequences of their decisions and in their expectations that youth group be a safe and entertaining place for their teens. Although most experts thought young adults needed less protection and more opportunity to fail and learn from failure, some also talked about the need for safe relational spaces where young adults could "be themselves."

[90] Powell and Clark, 23.
[91] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.
[92] Penner *et al*, "Hemorrhaging Faith," 75–78.
[93] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 224.

4.2.1. Protection from Failure

Many ministry experts lamented that parenting that tries to protect young adults from the consequences of their decisions denies them the opportunity to experience failure and to learn from it. An expert working in a campus ministry talked about the effect of having parents who "just fix everything":

> I meet a lot of students whose parents, even at university, baby them so much that they never have to learn how to cope with things. **Their parents just fix everything, or "Oh you're busy? You don't have to do any cooking or cleaning at home." So, they haven't had to take responsibility for their own struggles**. [Emphasis added]

Significantly, the things this expert described parents fixing were all tasks one would expect an adult to cope with.

A denominational expert said the "Millennial mentality," which he used pejoratively, came from the "everyone's a winner" and "make sure everyone feels included" priorities of parents and teachers. **He was not critiquing their attempts to be affirming, but how the inherent "protective[ness]" in this approach kept young adults from experiencing the growth that comes with failure.**

Yet another expert suggested that parents acted overprotectively to compensate for their being absent.

Another expert attributed parental behaviors to a desire to protect their children from pain:

> **Parents have exhibited this deep desire that their children not have to have pain. … and that's just so counter to biblical truth, but I think the messages are confusing to our Christian kids.** [Emphasis added]

An expert serving with a campus ministry thought that, rather than looking at youth group as a "bubble where they can protect themselves from the big, bad world," we should be giving students

> a mission heading out of high school and into university or college or whatever their next step is. Like you have learned all this stuff in youth group. Now is your chance to be in that environment where you can be in a strategic place, where you are influencing the next generation, and who knows who you can share with that will be the next politician, doctor, lawyer, impacting our country. And I wonder if they went in with more of a missional [mindset]: you have a job here. [I wonder] if that would help them get their eyes off just themselves, and their own success and failure, to there being a bigger purpose of the Great Commission out there?

4.2.2. Permission to Doubt

Although ministry experts tended to want to see parents be more directive, this was not always the case. One expert, who wanted to see parents provide more room for questioning, saw attempts to discourage questioning as another way to protect young adults from pain.

> And so then, parents: Let's have a conversation about "What does it mean for your kid to doubt and question and feel safe doing that?" And "How do you support parents even in that process?" Because again, that speaks to that sense of belonging. Can a young adult even feel like they belong in their own family system when it comes to a conversation of "I don't think I believe that anymore"? And how will parents respond to that?

This expert advocated forcefully for what she saw as a positive role for doubt in spiritual development. Her descriptions of how that might play out, however, always assumed a high level of parental engagement.

One expert talked about the dinner table as a place that needed to be safe:

> Where when kids can go home, no matter what they've been told, no matter what people have called them, no matter what their experiences were, if they can go home to the dinner table with their family and be able to identify with themselves in their family knowing that there are people who love who that person is. It does not matter what they have achieved and haven't achieved, it goes a long way.

4.2.3. Outsourcing to Youth Ministries

Many ministry experts expressed frustration with what they felt were unspoken parental expectations that youth pastors keep their teens safe and out of trouble and take on most of their teens' spiritual formation (see also section 6).

This expert from a Mainline tradition expressed frustration that parents seem to assume that the youth pastor and youth group will look after all the spiritual formation needs of their teens.

> [Parents have] in some ways … outsource[d] [faith formation of] our youth [by] … sending their kid to youth group … **[They] thought that just by having youth group that they were filling their responsibilities … If we have kids coming from homes where parents are not engaged in their faith, the chances of the kid carrying on their faith into adulthood, in my experience, has been very slim.** [Emphasis added]

He was so concerned that parents might neglect their spiritual formation responsibilities for their children if their church had a youth group that he rarely advises churches to start a youth group:

> I rarely advise the church these days to start a youth group … I'm not opposed to youth groups … but unfortunately, we have often used [youth groups] as an excuse to not do anything else.

Another expert said there was an expectation that youth pastors "babysit kids until they are 18":

> I'll just speak cynically to be brief – but the expectation is that we'll be keeping everybody together and make sure we are babysitting kids until they are 18, keeping them Christians, providing something that is entertaining so that they keep showing up to keep parents happy so that they stay out of trouble, … and it's just not working **… I don't think young adults are buying the "come and have fun with us" thing**. [Emphasis added]

4.3. Church or Community Spiritual Transmission

Although warm personal relationships are important and parental role modelling is important, the literature agrees that it is these things *and* involvement in religious communities that together promote successful spiritual transmission. Bengtson *et al* say, "Strong and intentional bonds between family and church" are necessary.[94] Powell and Clark say that "Sticky Faith is both personal and **communal**."[95] Arnett finds a relationship between parents' discussions about religion and their participation in religious activities, and hence children's religious participation is strongly correlated with their parents'.[96]

4.3.1. Mentorship and Warmth

Bengtson *et al* argue that successful religious transmission depends on warm relationships between parents and children. The literature makes a similar case for warmth as a basis for spiritual transmission in other, non-parental, adult relationships such as a mentoring relationship or relationships with youth ministry leaders. In some cases, *warm* relationships may also be described as *safe* ones.

Powell *et al* say churches should, instead of focusing on programmatic ministry, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships that will fuel a warm community.[97] They explain that "as young people are choosing a church, warm community is often a stronger draw than belief."[98] Powell *et al* talk about "being welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable, and

[94] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 190.
[95] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 22.
[96] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 224.
[97] Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 25–26.
[98] Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, 170–71.

caring," as a *warmth cluster.*[99] They go on to suggest that programs may actually work against creating the warmth that is necessary for religious transmission:

> Ironically, it is possible that your church actually might be working against warmth by offering a myriad of programs. In churches growing young, many young people shared that their church culture is moving away from unnecessary busyness. A deprogramming strategy [i.e., removal of programs within the church] sometimes helps to elevate relationships by opening up time and space where they can flourish.[100]

Kenda Creasy Dean argues that "the best [faith] translators are people, not programs." She goes on to explain that programs often try to replicate adults' religious experience while inadvertently dis-incarnating that experience, resulting in a faith "translation" that is often wooden, distorted, stilted and bland – all characteristics that are the antithesis of warmth.[101]

Pamela Ebstyne King writes that "fellow [religious] travellers play an important role in enabling young people to internalize beliefs, values and morals." King writes that, to be "effective in the development of a prosocial identity," ideology, which is how Erikson understood religion, needs to be embodied.[102] An embodied "ideology" or religion is a warm one.

Powell and Clark report, "by far, the number one way that churches made the teens in our survey feel welcomed and valued was when adults in the congregation showed an interest in them."[103]

4.4. Conversation and Articulacy

If warmth is the precondition for relationships that foster religious transmission, conversation is the way the transmission happens. This is important because it means that didactic methods (i.e., teaching, or classes) or passive methods (i.e., listening to sermons) are less effective.

Dean says that "families and communities that encourage practices in which teenagers must put religious convictions and experiences into words are more likely to have highly devoted teenagers."[104] This echoes findings about conversation for faith formation from the Canadian Bible Engagement Study (CBES), which found that frequency of conversations about the meaning of the Bible was positively correlated not only with Bible reading but also with religious service attendance.[105] Dean also points to the need to help teenagers develop

---

[99] Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, 166.
[100] Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, 167.
[101] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 123.
[102] King, "Spirituality as Fertile Ground for Positive Youth Development," 58.
[103] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99.
[104] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 135.
[105] Hiemstra, "Confidence, Conversation and Community: Bible Engagement in Canada, 2013."

religious articulacy, the ability to talk about and explain one's faith.[106] Specifically, Dean says we need to have conversations that "both claim and confess our religious identities for ourselves and others, and critically examine the role of faith in our lives" and that have as their content "Jesus-talk, not just God-talk."[107] Articulacy gained in conversation requires individual processing of religious content, and this processing is done in the contexts of community.

Powell and Clark recommend having conversations about the difficult issues in the lives of emerging adults while encouraging individual thought.[108] Emerging adults need a "safe" space in which to engage difficult issues, ask tough questions and reveal legitimate doubts that hinder their faith. A space is "safe" if persons do not risk their place in the community by expressing their questions, doubts or ideas. Students who feel the freedom and have opportunities to express their doubts tend to have more continuity in their faith.[109]

Powell and Clark say that although parents who talk with their kids about faith tend to ask questions, it is "vital to Sticky Faith … that [they] also share about [their] own faith," with all its ups and downs.[110]

[106] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 136.
[107] Dean, 139.
[108] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 72–74.
[109] Powell and Clark, 73.
[110] Powell and Clark, 71–72.

5. Mentoring

The consensus in the literature and among ministry experts and among young adults is that mentoring is a good thing. There is agreement that mentoring involves a lot of conversation, that it should be focused on the mentee's life, and that it will succeed as a ministry form where programmatic ministry fails. There is also agreement that with mentors, mentees grow up more quickly and are more likely to embrace faith. Although mentoring is talked about as the solution to youth and young adult ministry problems, there is less agreement about what it is, or why it works.

Perhaps because of the hopes vested in mentoring, many adults, the would-be mentors, find the prospect of mentoring to be intimidating. In the literature, many authors therefore reframed mentoring in the more comfortable language of "intergenerational friendships," "sharing life," or "non-parental adult investment in children and youth."[111] Even with this seemingly less demanding language, it remains unclear why "sharing life" should work, and if it does, how mentors would know if they were doing it well.

In this section we will look at how mentoring is understood, how it functions from a psychosocial perspective, and what factors interfere with it. Its influence on religious persistence will be covered in section 13.2.

5.1. What is Mentoring?

One ministry expert crisply distinguished between *mentoring, coaching, leading* and *counselling*. He defined *mentoring* as a relationship for the benefit of the mentee where the mentor is an active listener who journeys with the mentee to a solution, rather than prescribing a solution. A *coach*, which he described as becoming a well-defined profession, helps the "client" to reflect, with an aim of consciousness-raising. A *leader* opens up professional opportunities for those she leads, and a *counsellor* offers solutions, with an expectation that his advice will be taken.

Leighton Ford, whose ministry promotes mentoring communities, is careful to distinguish mentoring from discipling, coaching, counselling or teaching:

> The focus of spiritual mentoring, however, is to help people pay attention to what God is doing in their lives and to respond. It is not "directing" others in the sense of imposing an agenda on them and telling them what to do. Rather it is

[111] Yuen and Lau, "Transitions: Ensuring Faith Formation in Children and Youth," 12–13; Reimer and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*, 165.

> meant to be friends, who listen deeply, and who may point out what God is doing and help them to discern God's agenda.[112]

Young adults' descriptions of mentors blurred these distinctions. Some saw mentors as a mirror that helped them understand themselves or what they could be, which sounds very much like the role of a coach. Others said a mentor was someone who supports them through personal difficulties, which sounds somewhat like the expert's descriptions of mentor and his counsellor. Others said a mentor was someone who holds them accountable for their Christian faith and their personal growth, which sounds like a counsellor. Others said a mentor was someone who helped them network and advance their career, which sounds like a leader.

The young adult respondents Francine, Hayley and Jessica provide different personal descriptions of mentors.

Francine talked about her conversations with her mentor and how they helped her understand who she was:

> [My mentor] ask[ed] questions about myself almost that I knew that I knew, but I couldn't communicate myself.

Hayley talked about the way her mentors walked alongside her, supporting her in her interpersonal struggles while offering guidance:

> They know where your struggles are. They know where your joys are. They know what you are good at. They know what you are terrible at, but they can still walk alongside you, encourage you in things you are good at, rebuke you for the things that you are not doing too great at, and just keep pushing you towards righteousness and following Christ more fully. And just generally being a friend in that process.

Jessica also valued mentors' support and said she looks to them for life wisdom. She said a mentor was

> someone older than you, not that it couldn't be someone the same age or younger, but I think it is important that they have a little bit more life experience to look back on and reflect on with you. Someone who is really willing to drop everything at the drop of a hat if you need something and being able to walk with you through any situation sensitively.

A ministry expert described mentor-mentee relationships as helping young adults

[112] Ford, 20.

> build self-esteem and therefore have a better outlook or have societal goals or motivation … [and] tend to make people progress to adulthood faster … [without these relationships, young adults] tend to be more explorative or more reluctant to pursue societal goals.

Both this description and Francine's point to difficulty in identity formation and the way that mentoring conversations help young adults to understand who they are.

In our interviews, most young adults eventually found a mentor. Often, however, these mentors were not in the church. This meant roles were opened up not in the church, but elsewhere.

Natalie grew up in a Sri Lankan immigrant Catholic family. Her family goes to mass more than once a week and is involved in home groups, prayer groups, youth group. She did not describe close relationships with other adults, or mentors, in her church, but she did have a teacher in high school that she considered a mentor. What she chiefly appreciated about the teacher was that she encouraged her to question what she believed. This teacher also recognized that she was "good at explaining things … and helping people." Today Natalie describes herself as agnostic, although she continues to attend mass with her family. She is at university and when asked about a career she said:

> Career-wise, maybe social work, teaching or counselling. I'm not completely sure. In my program, I am focused on intercultural relations, so maybe helping newcomers, somewhere in that field.

Natalie is negotiating a role right where her mentor encouraged her.

One expert talked about young adults having a "blurred path" as the reason they delay making adult commitments. He went on to say that a mentor can help address this blurred path by painting a picture of what might lie ahead. **The painting is not what lies down the path, it is a plausible course forward along the blurred path**. Significantly, the "mentor-painter" is an adult who cares for them. It is not enough to have a vision of a plausible future. That vision must be provided by someone who is trusted.

Yet another expert said that some parents have tried too hard to be friends with their children instead of parents. He suggested that this has, in part, created the need for mentors:

> A part of it is the shift in parenting that moved to parents wanting to be friends of their kids before actually wanting to be their parents. So, you are needing the role of mentors to speak in and do that parental role.

However, he did not think that substitute parenting was all that mentors were doing:

> But I think there is stuff that when you were a 15-year-old, you've never gone to your parents with; you don't go to your aunt and uncle with. They might be spiritual leaders in your life in that family circle, but having someone that you are going to share life with, someone who can call you out on things, you have a high trust.

One expert cited above (see section 4.2.1) suggested that young adults desire mentors because of a longing to make up the life-lesson deficit created by absent parents.

> **Mom and dad working all the time, not being home, kids trying to figure out their own things – they are crying out for adult relationships that are based on mentoring, not just tasks or authoritative or positional-based, but relational and mentoring-based.** [Emphasis added]

Because identity formation and the capacity for commitment that accompanies it do not typically take place until later in the emerging adulthood period, mentoring relationships – with their truth-creating, or truth-testing, spaces – need to persist through the entire period.

5.2. Mentors and Differentiation

Mentors can help young adults negotiate adult roles; if this life task can be accomplished within the church community, then the parents' religion is less apt to be used as a differentiating marker. Moreover, mentors help young adults to understand their giftings and talents and see a path forward toward adulthood.

Churches that successfully retain their young people tend to invest in religious programs focusing on teenagers separately from their parents, such as youth groups, short-term mission trips and Christian camping opportunities.

Each of these programs provides religious roles for young adults that are not merely add-ons to their parents' religious practice. Teens attend youth group as themselves, not as their parents' children. Teens usually go on a mission trip as mission team members, not as their parents' children.[113] Teens attend a Christian camp as campers or as staff, not as their parents' children. Although this distinction is not sufficient for faith formation on its own, it starts to show us how teens can find a differentiated place within their home church. A family may attend religious services faithfully and frequently, but if their teen's participation merely extends the parents' religious practice, then its benefit will be limited.

Despite the limitations of programmatic ministries (see section 2.6), they share this virtue: They create space in which more enduring mentoring relationships can be established and flourish.

[113] See Hiemstra, "Canadian Evangelicals and Short-Term Missions," pp. 21–22 for a discussion on how evangelical churches use mission trips for young adult discipleship.

Broad-based programs cannot take into account each individual's needs and circumstances. They are also temporary, and the temporary nature of elements of young adults' lives is one of the more debilitating conditions of that generation's experience. Mentoring relationships can provide tailored and enduring support.

An expert working in a denominational context thinks teens need to "figure out their own identity" apart from parents, though not necessarily apart from mentors, whose role she sees as "reinforcing what the parents have been teaching them all along." She goes on to say:

> And part of that is just teenage development in figuring out their own identity and who they are, and there often is a bit of a separation from family as they try to sort out who am I, separate from my family and as a part of this family unit. And I think mentors recognize that opportunity to be that voice that reinforces, journeys with, helps navigate, that can reinforce what the parents have been teaching them all along the way, at a time when the teenager may or may not be listening to their adult voice. As you know, so many times we have a parent say, "My kid came home and said the mentor told them this," and they will say "I've been telling them that for years!" But they didn't hear it from the parent, they really heard it from the mentor. And so, helping parents celebrate that and the different voices in a student's life [is part of my job].

Youth groups are situated alongside the church while being distinct from it. Their purpose is not to take youth out of the church, but to allow them to come into it on their own terms. In an analogous way, a mentor is an adult who is distinct from a young adult's family of origin, but not distinct from the church. **The mentor's role is to assist the young adult in negotiating a new relationship with the church that is different from the one they had as a child.** It is not, however, limited to questions of faith and religious participation, because religious identity is not neatly separated from other aspects of identity. Moreover, young adults are renegotiating all their childhood relationships with the different communities in which they interact. Once the major identity planks are set in place, the rest tend to follow close behind. This means that a Christian identity, an identity *within* the church, needs to be at an advanced stage of negotiation at the same time as, or before, the young adult is finalizing other large roles like career and family.

As an aid to the young adult negotiator, the mentor may take on several roles. First, she might open a place at the negotiating table. Communities with strong identities tend to be closed and resistant to new members because new members will change the group identity. Although a young adult may have had a childhood role in a church, they are outsiders to the adult community. Second, a mentor can help create space by making introductions to the church or other communities. An introduction frames an opening negotiating position for the young adult. How a mentor introduces a young adult shapes how the community will regard them. If the introduction highlights a young adult's gifts, abilities and virtues, then the way will be

opened up for the young adult to negotiate roles that take advantage of these. An introduction is at once simple and profound. The one who introduces the young adult throws the weight of their standing in the community behind the introduction and in so doing opens a strong negotiating position for the young adult that they could not make for themselves.

An introduction not only frames the possibilities for roles in the community, it also frames them for young adults themselves. Many young adults talked about how they did not know what they were good at until someone else identified it. When young adults sit down to negotiate a role in a community, they will gravitate towards negotiating for those roles where they think they have the best opportunities of securing a deal, even if these are not the best fits for their giftings. Young adults need to believe in themselves as much as the community does. A gifted guitar player who does not think there is a chance to negotiate a role as a guitar player will likely pursue something else.

Because the period of emerging adulthood is protracted, role negotiations too will be protracted. To be helpful during negotiation, a mentor needs to be involved for the long term. An introduction is only the opening round and the bulk of the negotiation needs to be taken by the young adult from that point. Negotiations go through rounds. Some rounds the young adult will win, and some he will lose. The mentor comes alongside the young adult negotiator, giving advice and helping them to understand what they have experienced at the bargaining table. Negotiations are sometimes bruising and hostile. People who have spent time in the church will know that this can be true within the church as well. The mentor is someone to stay in the young adult's corner through it all. Their continued presence is the ongoing force behind the introduction, and perpetual encouragement for the negotiator. Section 9.3 will look at the role of encouragement in a young adult's life. It is difficult to overstate the young adult's need for encouragement.

Programmatic ministry ends, meaning that in the next program-based community the young adult will have to negotiate another role. The mentor can walk alongside the young adult through these transitions, providing fresh introductions, fresh insight and fresh encouragement. The young adult's ultimate role in the adult community may be far off, so it is important that the mentor be present consistently.

5.3. Mentoring Communities

Several experts talked about setting up *mentoring communities* to perform the role of mentors, especially where there was a lack of available mentors.

This campus ministry expert explained the difference between Bible study groups and "mentoring communities" this way:

> the focus isn't simply on studying the Scriptures, but that we are also creating relationship, that we are creating a point of conversation, that we are trying to help the students wrestle with how to live out their faith on campus among their peers, how to live on mission.

Another expert working in a denominational ministry talked about "mentor-like communities":

> And to me, a mentor-like community then is the soil in which different kinds of mentoring relationships can take shape. … I would never in my church have had an explicit mentoring relationship where we met every other Thursday night – but, boy, I grew up in a mentor-like community, and I can point to all these people whose faith walks have shaped my faith walk.

These communities were intentionally created. They are in-person communities structured around conversation about the participants' lives and faith.

Leighton Ford Ministries and Outreach Canada promote mentoring communities. Ford describes mentoring communities as "circles of trust" and "safe places where servants/leaders in ministry can be received and welcomed, helped and listen to what God is saying to them, and encouraged and prayed for to become all they can be for Christ."[114]

It is significant that the purpose of the community is to help people pay attention to God, and that it takes a community to help promote and sustain this attention.

Mentoring communities are described as "safe spaces … where [leaders] can … find an older and hopefully wiser person willing to give them time, listen to their hearts, share their hurts, and help them discern God's agenda for them."[115] These are not places that are safe from criticism, but places where criticism is limited to the group, and its aim is the spiritual growth of the individual. This is an important point. In an age when everything is recorded and posted, criticism can be public, cold and potentially reputation-destroying.

Mentoring communities share with individual mentoring a concern for both the spiritual and social growth of their members. They are integrative in that they help their members find a place within the mentoring community and the wider church.

5.4. Barriers to Mentoring

In their book *Sticky Faith,* Powell and Clark recommend to churches that for every child they aim to have five adults "whom you recruit to invest in your kid in little, medium, and big ways."

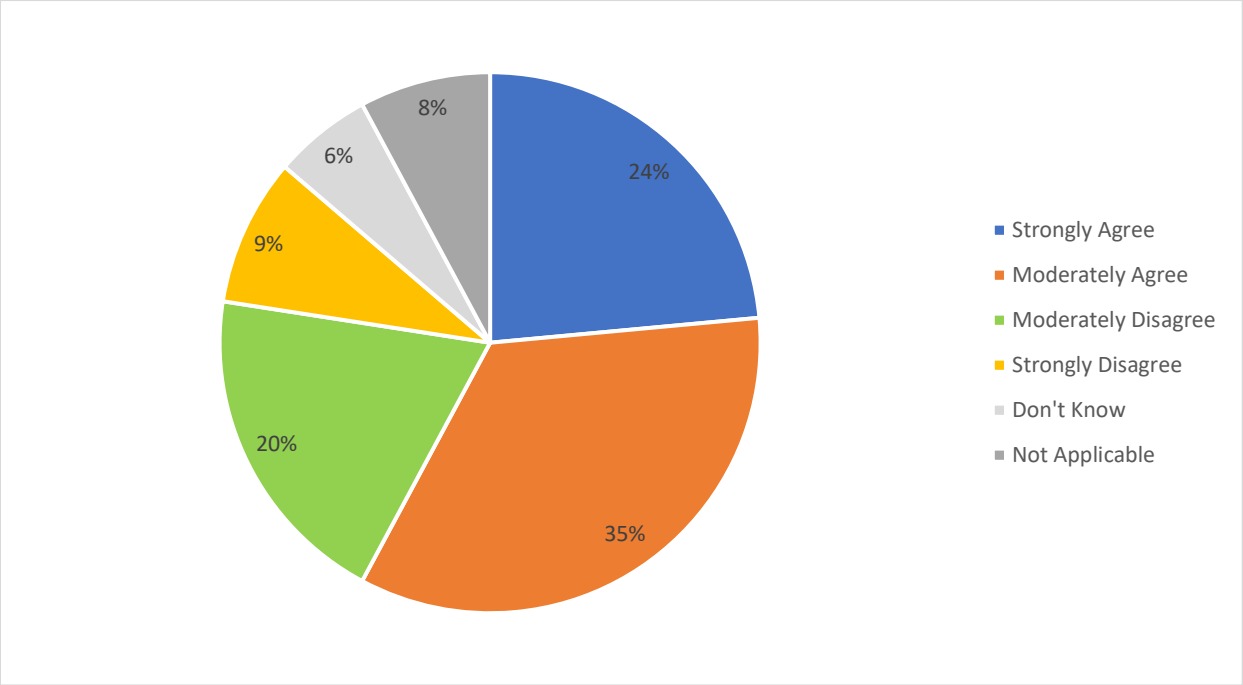
[114] Ford, "The Mentoring Community of Leighton Ford Ministries," 18.
[115] Ford, 22.

This 5-adults-to-1-youth ratio reverses a common one-adult-to-five-children rule of thumb in children's ministry.[116] How easy is it to find these five adults, or even one adult per youth?

5.4.1. Difficulty Finding Mentors

Potential mentors may feel inadequate, be too busy or lack the intentionality that mentoring takes. Three in five (59%) MWs agreed that "it is hard to find enough mentors for the youth or young adults in my ministry who want mentors" (see chart 5.1 below).

Chart 5.1. Agreement with "It is hard to find enough mentors for the youth or young adults in my ministry who want mentors," MW survey



Note: Values may not add to 100 because of rounding.

As experts talked about their difficulties finding mentors, it became clear that one of the biggest barriers for prospective mentors is feeling inadequate. One expert, trying to convince prospective mentors that they can do the job, said he tells them that young adults

> need to see the genuine faith, genuine life, genuine struggle. And it doesn't mean that you need to be the person who is necessarily the key mentor, but you can mentor in the way that you live and the way you interact and the way you engage with them. We can mentor by our love, we can mentor through our empathy, we can mentor through our genuineness, we can mentor through our understanding and willingness to be open and real.

[116] Powell and Clark, 101.

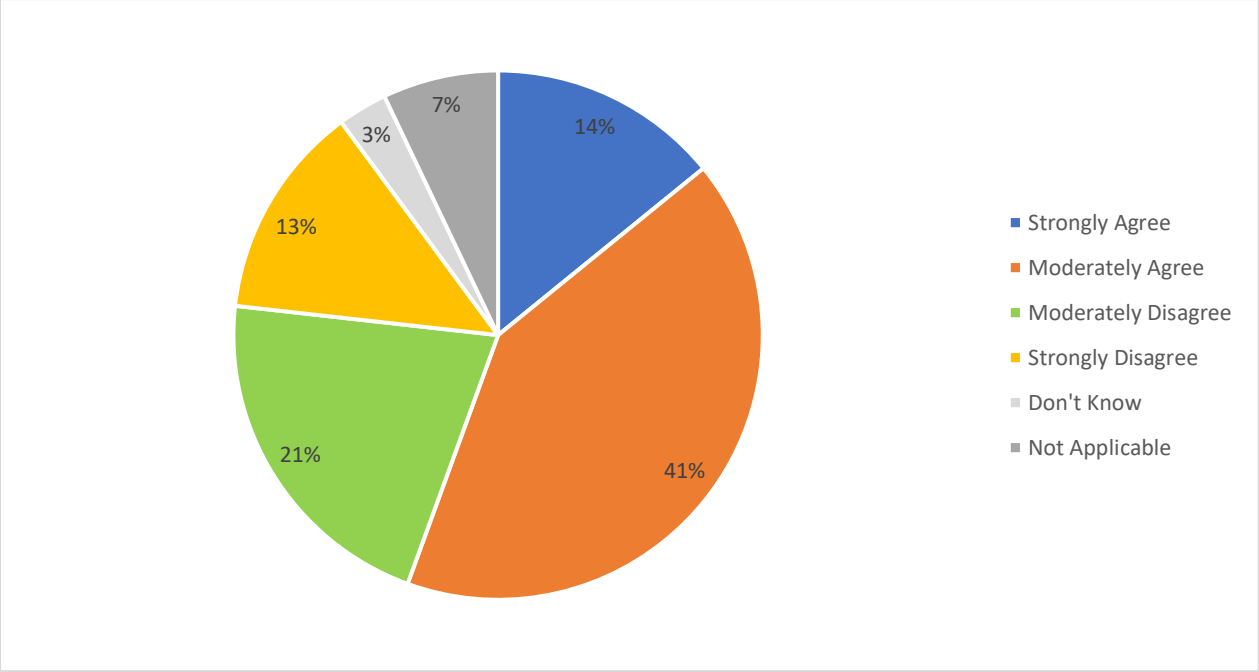
5.4.2. Lack of Time for Mentoring

Another expert, addressing potential mentors' concerns about the time commitment associated with mentoring, talked up the flexibility of mentoring:

> Our lives are too busy. There is too much to manage for work, for extracurricular activities, for family time, for time with friends, for homework. I can't make it every Wednesday night. What they can make is one mentor that is walking with them in life saying, "When our schedules can work, we can flex every week, we meet at different times, we can communicate different times, we can connect at different times, we can be on the phone, I can be in your social media world."

Ministry workers face significant time pressures. In section 13.2 we will see how important it is that home church mentors continue to follow young adults after high school. However, more than half of MWs (55%) agreed that they do not have enough time to mentor youth or young adults who are no longer an active part of their ministry (see chart 5.2 below).

Chart 5.2. Agreement with "I do not have time to mentor youth or young adults who are no longer an active part of my ministry," MW survey

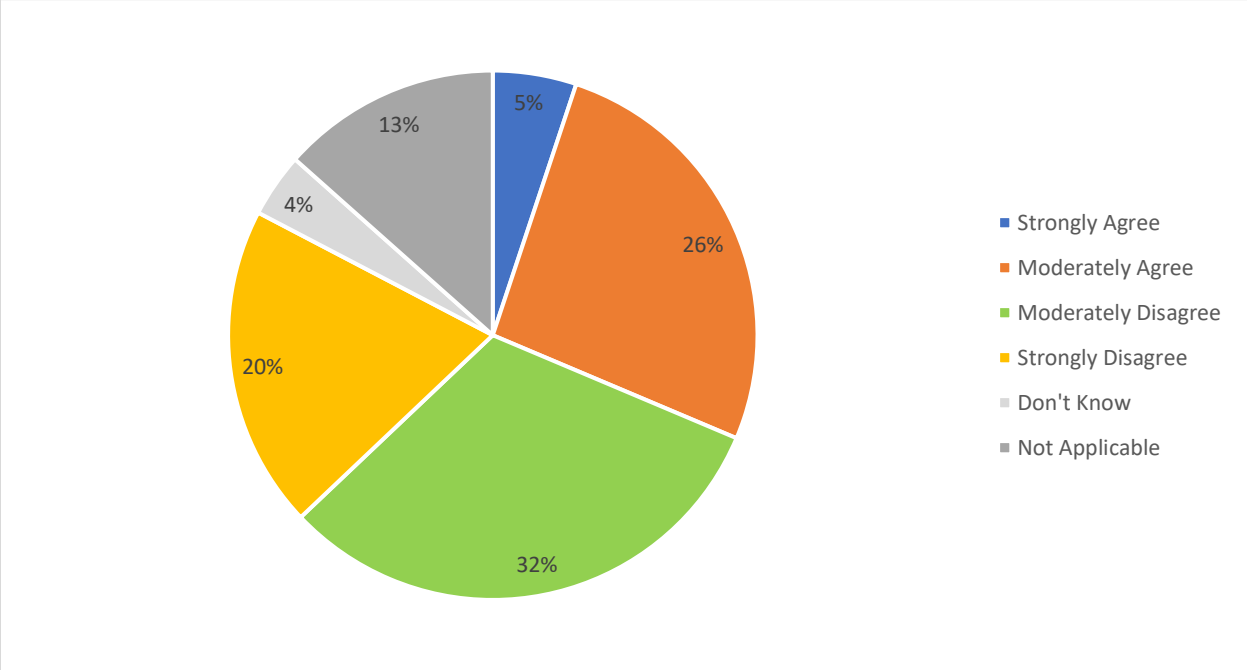


Note: Values may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Less than a third (31%) of MWs agreed that they had trouble finding time to follow up on a referral from a ministry colleague (see chart 5.3 below). Though the difference may be due partly to a perception that the latter request might, unlike ongoing mentoring, turn out to be a one-time commitment, it is not surprising that MWs are more likely to find time for those coming into their ministries than for those leaving.

There is a discrepancy, however, between the time MWs have available for those who leave their ministry and the sense of responsibility they feel for them. Three in five (60% of) MWs agreed that "When a young adult leaves my ministry because of a move my responsibility for them does not end until I have connected them with another Christian ministry." Of those who agreed they have a continued responsibility, only 54% said they did not have the time to mentor those who had left their ministry, compared to 69% of those who said they did not have a responsibility.

Chart 5.3. Agreement with "It is difficult to find the time to follow up when a ministry colleague refers a youth or young adult to me," MW survey



Note: Values may not add to 100 because of rounding.

5.4.3. Intergenerational Issues and Leadership

One ministry expert pointed to the "mutual distrust in the competencies of those on either side of the [generational] cultural divide" as a barrier to setting up mentoring relationships, and a reason why it is so difficult for older generations to mentor young adults into positions of leadership. He said young adults see themselves as inhabitants of a "digital age" and older people as inhabitants of an "industrial age" whose skills have been rendered irrelevant. By contrast, he said that Millennials, who inhabit the digital age, are

> not humble, and they are very honest, [and] it can actually ruin relationships. And the networking that they experience peer-to-peer is actually more convenient and easier to do than to understand their superiors, which would be Baby Boomers.

Another expert said that

> **This is the first generation of all time that won't need the preceding or the generation before them … to find doors or avenues for success, or to find the job or to climb the ladders, simply because they network and they network online**. [Emphasis added]

Responding to how he imagines Boomers feel about some Millennial requests for mentoring and access to their networks, an expert said:

> Millennials aren't wanting to get their job, they aren't out to "push the old guy out," but to network and learn and grow.

Young adults are used to a world where online networking is comparatively effortless. When young adults seem impatient to access the networks Boomers have built up over a lifetime, Boomers may feel Millennials are devaluing a lifetime of effort building relationships of trust.

One expert speculated that a young adult might say (which the expert also thought possible) how easy it is to build in the virtual world:

> **If I wanted to, I could plant a church tomorrow and call it Facebook Church, and bring my social networks into my sphere of influence.** [Emphasis added]

In this imagined conversation, the young adult thinks planting a church can be done "tomorrow"; church planters in the real world have generally found it to take more time and effort.

An expert talking about leadership transfer said:

> The ideas about leadership [in different generations] are different. The positions are positions of power, but I think the Boomers would say they're protecting the positions from Millennials who aren't equipped to take them, or who don't have the right character to move into them.

Another expert talked about how Millennials leaders were looking for:

> larger numbers of [Millennials] being on boards, more intentional development for them to take on significant leadership roles and help change the organizations towards organizational change.

He also said that Millennials wanted Boomers to come alongside and "walk with me, don't tell me what to do." There is a danger that this comes across to Boomers as "Give me the keys to the car, get in, but don't tell me how to drive."

5.4.4. The Impact of Scandals

Several ministry experts described the fallout from ministry sexual abuse scandals as a barrier to one-on-one mentoring. Vulnerable person protection policies mandated by insurance companies and denominations often restrict opportunities for one-on-one meetings between leaders and young adults.

An expert from an evangelical background pointed to the restrictions in the Plan To Protect program used by many evangelical churches:

> The challenges [ministry leaders] are running up against, that I am working with them on, are the Plan to Protect kind of idea, child protection policy. How do you do one-on-one care? … I believe it was in 2006 where the Ontario Government released a document that talked about the importance of mentoring and how critical it was for the life of a young person in their development of character, confidence, independence, all these value statements. And then they are also quick to then, … they are no longer [are] allowing coaches and parents, people to spend one-on-one time.

A Catholic described the fallout of sexual abuse scandals:

> So, everything now becomes events and activities where there are lots of people around, and that's different than being able to sit down for a snack or a coffee or a Pepsi with someone and talking into their lives.

On our MW survey, two in five (40%) agreed that "Child and youth protection policies designed to prevent abuse of minors make it difficult to structure ministry around mentoring relationships." Evangelical MWs were more likely to agree (43%) than either Catholics (31%) or Mainline Protestants (24%). Those in a local church or parish context (48%) and Christian camp contexts (48%) were more likely to agree than those who worked in campus contexts (18%); the difference is likely due to the average age of the respective groups they work with and the corresponding need to protect minors.

6. Youth Group

Church youth group participation is correlated with religious service attendance as a young adult. Half (51%) of those who attended a church youth group weekly as a teen said they attend religious services at least weekly as an adult, compared to just 18% of those who attended youth group one to three times a month or 9% of those who attended youth group less than monthly (see table 6.1 below).

Table 6.1. Young adult religious service attendance, by teen youth group attendance, percent

	Young Adult Religious Service Attendance		
Teen Youth Group Attendance	At least weekly	1–3 times a month	Less than monthly
At least weekly	51	26	23
1–3 times a month	18	48	34
Less than monthly	9	21	70
All	24	32	43

Relationships are a primary motivator for youth group participation. Several young adults talked about how they left youth group because they did not have friends there or because they could not break into their youth group's social circles. Others talked about how they switched churches in order to attend a youth group with friends. Some talked about the negative effect of family moves that pulled them out of youth groups where they had friends.

Overall, three-quarters of young adults agreed that "Learning about Jesus, the Christian faith and how to live out the Christian faith was the focus of the church youth group I attended as a teenager," while two in five (40%) strongly agreed (see table 6.2 below). Those from an evangelical tradition were more likely (52%) to strongly agree their youth group had this emphasis than those from either a Catholic (29%) or a Mainline (39%) tradition.

Table 6.2. Agreement with "Learning about Jesus, the Christian faith and how to live out the Christian faith was the focus of the church youth group I attended as a teenager,"[a] percent

		Tradition as a Teen		
	All (1,617)	Catholic (621)	Mainline (283)	Evangelical (617)
Strongly agree	40	29	39	52
Moderately agree	35	37	35	35
Moderately disagree	12	14	15	7
Strongly disagree	6	8	6	3
Don't know	5	7	5	2
Not applicable	3	5	1	1

[a] For those whose average youth group attendance as a teen was more often than "never." Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Young adults from an evangelical tradition were twice as likely (43%) to have attended a church youth group weekly as those from Catholic (20%) or Mainline (22%) traditions (see table 6.3 below).

Table 6.3. "During your teenage years (age 14 to 17), on average, how often did you attend a church youth group?", by tradition as a teen, percent

		Tradition as a Teen		
Frequency of church youth group attendance as a teen	All (1,998)	Catholic (840)	Mainline (347)	Evangelical (674)
At least weekly	28	20	22	43
1–3 times a month	37	37	43	36
Less than monthly	34	43	35	20

Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Many of the young adults from Mainline Protestant and Catholic backgrounds grew up in churches without youth groups. Usually the absence of a youth group was explained by there being too few teens in the congregation to support one. Unfortunately, our survey did not ask whether young adults' home churches had youth groups. From our data, we can only use the "never" values from the frequency of youth group attendance question as an upper bound on the percent of churches without youth groups. One-quarter (26%) of young adults whose teen affiliation was Catholic said they never attended a church youth group, compared to 18% from Mainline Protestant traditions or 9% from evangelical traditions.

In some cases, young adults reported that their parents thought Catholic high schools provided the spiritual formation that young adults might otherwise have expected to receive from a parish youth group, making a parish youth group unnecessary.

Young adults who dropped out of youth group or significantly scaled back their participation usually did so in response to new competing activities. Most often the competing activities were jobs or sports programs. Some young adults explained that they had had a growing uneasiness with their church or its Christian teachings, and the new activity allowed them to distance themselves from church without having to name the theological or moral conflict as the reason. One young woman distanced herself from her youth group because she did not feel she could ask theological questions that would show she was unconvinced about Christianity's claims.

Several young adults talked about not being convinced about the Christian faith despite being involved in youth group leadership. Usually they ended their Christian religious participation after high school. Active youth group participation, even participation in leadership, is not necessarily an indication of Christian commitment.

6.1. Youth Group Leaders

Youth group leaders become significant mentors and friends for many young adults. The young adults we interviewed usually viewed their youth pastors or youth leaders positively, describing them as mentors or teachers. Some young adults continued these relationships past high school. A few young adults talked about how the departure of a youth pastor with whom they were close led to a spiritual crisis in their lives. These losses were experienced as abandonment because in choosing to leave the group, the youth pastor was understood to be choosing to leave the young adult. One young woman reported that each of the three times her youth pastor was replaced, her youth group's attendance dropped for a year or two.

Youth group leaders seemed to be especially valued by youth who came from broken households or who might otherwise be described as "at risk." Several young adults told us about how losing access to a youth leader they looked up to, usually because the youth leader moved, became a faith crisis for them.

Ben was raised in a small-town, farm family by parents who were "strong Christians." Each morning his family would have family devotions where his father would read the Bible. When Ben was very young, his mother was left disabled and in chronic pain by a serious car accident. As a child, he struggled to reconcile his mother's accident with God's love:

> If God loves Mom, why would he let that happen to Mom? Why is Mom not getting healed?

In Grades 10 and 11, Ben had an influential youth pastor that helped him come to grips with his mother's accident and injuries and helped him talk through other life questions. Ben said, "I think I was relatively good with my faith at that point."

Shortly after, this influential youth pastor left the church. About the same time, Ben came into his own as a high school athlete. The combined loss of a mentor and the social pressures attendant with being a local sports star made Grade 12 the worst year for his faith. Although he was a popular leader in his youth group, he recognized that he was "being a little bit fake with [his] faith." It was only through a major life crisis and the intervention of a new mentor that he came back to his faith.

Tom came from a home with an abusive father. He participated in church activities as an escape from the chaos in his home. Tom spoke about one youth leader that he looked up to:

> He was just constantly checking in with me, saying, "How's it going? How's home going?" When someone does that for you and you become more and more comfortable with them, you share what is going on with your life. So, I shared with him all the stuff with my dad, and he would just constantly listen to me and

> just give me advice and pray for me and love me. He would just talk to me and listen to me a lot, mostly what he did. And also, helped me understand what I needed to do as a Christ follower.

This youth leader moved, and Tom lost touch with him. Then in Grade 11 his best friend stopped attending youth group. The combination of losing both his mentor and the presence of his best friend at youth group made youth group isolating. Tom explained:

> It got to the point where it was so lonely that I just, my passion just sputtered out, just died out, about Grade 11, and I said I can't take this anymore. **This is so cliquey. This is so exclusive. I hate it and I began my hiatus with the church.** [Emphasis added]

Tom said he then "forsook [his] relationship with God."

Hayley was part of a youth group that experienced three youth pastor transitions, which she said were "pretty rough on the group." She explained:

> Attendance would drop [when the youth pastor left] and then it would take about a year or two for attendance to start to come back because youth have a really hard time with trusting a new face, especially when it is someone who is replacing someone that they loved so deeply like a youth pastor.

When asked how these transitions affected her personally, Hayley talked about her difficulty "making connection" with the new leaders.

Many young adults who had attended a church youth group spoke positively about their youth pastor's teaching. A few young adults from Mainline backgrounds spoke approvingly of youth workers with "modern" teachings and outlooks that challenged traditional church teaching and morals. Others from both Mainline and evangelical backgrounds talked positively about their youth pastor's teaching for its spiritual and theological depth and their youth pastor's concern to make disciples.

When young adults talked negatively about youth pastors it was usually to say that the youth pastor tried too hard to be cool, or they came across as fake somehow. One young adult describing what she called "fake[ness]" interpreted it as a lack of interest in her as a person:

> I didn't feel like [the youth pastor] was interested in getting to know and relate to me on a level I felt comfortable with.

We heard many stories about how youth leaders positively influenced young adults' lives.

When Hayley started attending youth group, she said she was looking for trouble:

> I kind of attended youth group to stir up trouble and drama, rather than be there to be a perceptive member of the youth group.

Things changed for her when a new youth pastor who "was extremely serious about us becoming disciples of Christ rather than just attenders of a program" came to her church. Hayley said it was then that she "made a personal commitment to Christ." Today she is a youth leader and disciples others. Commenting on the discipling she received in high school, she said:

> I was discipled through high school to be someone who can be approachable with questions of faith even when the questions are super scary, and people wouldn't normally want to answer.

Now she is the one providing answers to these "super scary" questions.

Melissa grew up in a Christian and Missionary Alliance church where there were "lots of people close in our age." She attended youth group weekly as a teen, and when she was older she volunteered as a senior youth leader for the younger youth group.

Melissa described her youth group leaders as mentors who "have been a part of my life from Grade 7 until Grade 12, and a couple in particular that were my small group leaders." These mentors would "daily or weekly would be a leader at my youth group and invest into my life and find out what I am good at and who I am as a person," and provide "advice and wisdom."

Melissa's youth leaders were also the leaders of her youth group Bible study. This teen group was so cohesive that it has persisted into young adulthood after the participants' formal participation in youth group ended.

Most youth groups were organized around fun social activities. Those who continued their religious participation into young adulthood tended to discount the importance of fun activities while emphasizing the importance of the good theological teaching they received and the close mentoring relationships they had with youth workers.

6.2. The Importance of Friends

Having Christian friends is important for Christian faith formation. One ministry expert said that the common thread linking young adults who are still "passionate follower[s] of Christ" is that they

> found themselves within a group of young adults who are literally on fire for Christ and living authentically that way. … I have seen it happen time and time again where a group of people are living out their faith authentically, a new young adult comes in and they are being challenged, obviously, by the Word, but

> [also] by their peers living out their faith, and they are having to ask questions, "Why is my life not looking, or why is my faith not like their faith?"

Another ministry expert explained that youth "will go where their friends go," and by that he also meant that if their friends were not going, then neither were they:

> They will go where their friends group, they will come on Sunday nights because there is good community, it's where their friends go. What I learned in youth ministry is they would come because their friends came. They just wanted to create more and more shared experiences with their friends because that is where they are able to be themselves most.

This ministry expert talked about "the need of that family vulnerability," by which he meant intimacy. He lamented what he saw as a lack of family intimacy and theorized that, as meaningful family roles weaken, friendship groups are becoming more important for identity formation:

> **I think where they look for [intimacy] now has shifted because there is just a lot of people are growing up with a lack of that [in families] now, and so they look to their friends for it,** which, I think you can find an affinity group where you can be, where you can find that connection. [Emphasis added]

Those young adults that felt unable to break into youth group social circles usually reported leaving youth group and the church.

Sarah grew up attending a Presbyterian church weekly. Her youth group met on Saturday night and Sunday morning during the morning worship service. As Sarah got to her teen years,

> church started losing its appeal to me because I found that the people at the church, the adults who were the leaders and then some of the more involved youth were very cliquey. And I often felt like I was on the outside looking in. And even though I showed up and I was involved, I was there, I didn't feel like I was really included in everything that went on.

Around the same time, age 13 or 14, Sarah's friends started to leave her home church for other churches, compounding her sense of isolation. Shortly afterwards, Sarah's family moved to another province, and she became angry with God for pulling her out of her friend group. Then Sarah stopped going to church.

Robyn attended her church youth group only a few times. She explained:

> I didn't feel like I fit in there with that group of people. … It was almost like they were trying really, really hard to be Christian … Even though I am a Christian and

> everything, … they didn't really relate to me or anything. And plus, I was shy, I didn't like going out and socializing.

When Wendy was 10, a good friend moved to a nearby town and Wendy regularly travelled to visit her there. While visiting, Wendy attended her friend's Baptist church. When they were old enough, they joined the church youth group together. Although Wendy had one friend there, the youth group drew heavily on the student body of a local private Christian school, and Wendy could not break into their social circles.

Wendy then began attending youth group at a different church with another friend. Wendy explained how she got involved in this second youth group:

> I would go early with them and help set up, and I would serve at a lot of the banquets. I went to a lot of the youth group, the retreats and the campouts and stuff like that, and it felt real to me. I felt like I was becoming a good Christian woman, and I was learning a lot of great values, and I felt like I was growing with God, and that was a good feeling.

Clearly, at this second church she found a way into the social circles and her faith grew.

Groups with a strong sense of identity, such as many religious groups, are by their nature exclusive. People usually manage to join a group when an existing member creates a way in for them through an invitation or an introduction. If you cannot negotiate a role in a group, you cannot participate in it. The quality of a youth group's teaching or program is secondary and possibly moot for the young adult who cannot break into the group's social circles.

7. Christian Camp

Camps are an important form of Christian ministry in Canada. Christian Camping International - Canada, an evangelical association, has around 182 member camps, and The United Church of Canada alone has 56 camps.[117] By these numbers and throughout the report, we are referring only to residential camps, that is, not including the myriad day camps run by churches and ministries across Canada.

We did not focus on Christian camping in our qualitative interviews, but we did include two camp questions on our national young adult survey as well as several questions on our MW survey. This section will look at the young adult responses and their relationship to measures of religious persistence.

Participation in Christian camping is positively correlated with young adult religious service attendance, connecting with new churches after moving out of the parental home, and connecting with Christian campus groups at college or university. Those who had participated in Christian camps were more likely to have a home church mentor and were more likely to take a gap year after high school. Our analysis does not isolate the independent contribution of Christian camping to these measures of religious persistence.

It is likely that Christian camping contributes to religious persistence in a number of ways. First, teen participants have a Christian camping community in which to negotiate a role apart from the direct influence of their parents. In this way, Christian camping provides an opportunity for differentiation within a Christian community. Second, those who attend a Christian camp are already more likely to be well integrated into their home church or parish because they had parents or a benefactor who cared to get them there. Third, Christian camps form natural environments for mentoring relationships to arise in. Fourth, Christian camps provide opportunities for youth to connect with peers who are serious about their faith.

We asked young adults two Christian camping questions. First, we asked if they had attended a Christian camp as a teen. Second, we asked if they had worked on staff at a Christian camp.

Although both campers and camp staff were more likely to stay integrated with Christian communities than those who had not participated in Christian camps, camp staff reported higher levels of religious persistence into young adulthood. The differences in these measures of religious participation and Christian community integration by camp participation were particularly strong for those whose teen affiliation was Catholic.

[117] Christian Camping International – Canada https://www.cci-canada.ca/ and United Church Camps http://www.united-church.ca/search/locator/all?keyw=&mission_units_ucc_ministry_type_advanced=6&locll=

A strong minority (44%) of young adults reported having attended a Christian camp as a teen (see table 7.1). A quarter (26%) of young adults reported having worked on staff at a Christian camp (see table 7.2 below).[118]

Table 7.1. Attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen, by teen tradition, percent

Teen Tradition	Teen Camper
Catholic (840)	41
Mainline (347)	46
Evangelical (674)	52
All (1,998)	44

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

Table 7.2. Worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp, by teen tradition, percent

Teen Tradition	Camp Staff
Catholic (840)	26
Mainline (347)	21
Evangelical (674)	31
All (1,998)	26

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

Having a home church mentor is correlated with many of our measures of religious persistence (see section 13.2), and those who participate in Christian camping were more likely to have had a home church mentor.

Fewer than half (43%) of young adults said they had a home church mentor as a teen. Those who had attended a Christian camp as a teen were more than twice as likely (64%) to have had a home church mentor as those who had not attended a Christian camp (26%) as a teen (see table 7.3 below). Those who had worked on staff were also more than twice as likely (75%) to have had a home church mentor as those who had not worked on staff (32%) (see table 7.4 below)

Table 7.3. Had a home church mentor, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp, percent

Teen Tradition	All	Teen Camper	Not a Teen Camper
Catholic (840)	42	71	22
Mainline (346)	38	49	28
Evangelical (674)	50	65	33
All (1,998)	43	64	26

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

[118] Many Christian camps start Leader in Training (LIT) programs for young adults as young as age 14.

Table 7.4. Had a home church mentor, by whether young adults worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp, percent

Teen Tradition	All	Camp Staff	Not Camp Staff
Catholic (840)	42	80	28
Mainline (346)	38	65	31
Evangelical (674)	50	73	40
All (1,998)	43	75	32

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

Likewise, having taken a gap year is correlated with many of our measures of religious persistence, and those who had participated in Christian camping were more likely to have taken a gap year.

One-quarter (25%) of the young adults in our sample and 35% of those who went on to attain at least some postsecondary education took a gap year after high school. Those who had attended a Christian camp as a teen were almost twice as likely (46%) to have taken a gap year as those who had not attended a Christian camp (26%) (see table 7.5). Those who had worked on staff at a Christian camp were one and a half times as likely (51%) to have taken a gap year as those who had not worked at a Christian camp (see table 7.6 below).

Table 7.5. Took a gap year, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen,[b] percent

Teen Tradition	All	Teen Camper	Not a Teen Camper
Catholic (561)	38	59	23
Mainline (271)	27	31	24
Evangelical (492)	38	43	32
All (1,422)	35	46	26

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] Only asked of those who had attained at least some postsecondary education.

Table 7.6. Took a gap year, by whether respondent had worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp,[b] percent

Teen Tradition	All	Camp Staff	Not Camp Staff
Catholic (561)	38	66	27
Mainline (271)	27	24	28
Evangelical (492)	38	47	34
All (1,422)	35	51	30

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] Only asked of those who had attained at least some postsecondary education.

Those who had participated in Christian camp as a teen were more likely to attend religious services frequently as a young adult. One-quarter of young adults we surveyed (24%) attended religious services at least weekly. Young adults who had attended Christian camp were more

than twice as likely (34%) to attend religious services at least weekly as a young adult as those who had not attended camp (16%) (see table 7.7). Young adults who had worked on staff at a Christian camp were also twice as likely (46%) to attend religious services weekly as a young adult as those who had not worked on staff (17%) (see table 7.8 below).

Table 7.7. Young adult religious service attendance, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen, percent

Young Adult Religious Service Attendance	All	Teen Camper	Not a Teen Camper
At least weekly	24	34	16
1–3 times a month	32	35	30
Less than monthly	43	31	53

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Table 7.8. Young adult religious service attendance, by whether respondent had worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp as a teen, percent

Young Adult Religious Service Attendance	All	Camp Staff	Not Camp Staff
At least weekly	24	46	17
1–3 times a month	32	37	31
Less than monthly	43	18	52

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Those who had participated in Christian camps and went on to postsecondary education were more likely to connect with a Christian campus group. Three in ten (28% of) young adults with postsecondary education connected with a Christian campus group. Young adults who had attended Christian camp and went on to postsecondary education were almost three times (44%) as likely to connect with a Christian campus group as those who had not attended camp (15%) (see table 7.9). Young adults who had worked on staff at a Christian camp and gone on to postsecondary education were more than three times as likely (55%) to connect with a Christian campus group as those who had not worked on staff (18%) (see table 7.10 below).

Table 7.9. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen,[b] percent

Teen Tradition	All	Teen Camper	Not a Teen Camper
Catholic (561)	28	54	10
Mainline (271)	21	32	13
Evangelical (492)	34	41	26
All (1,422)	28	44	15

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] Only asked of those who attained at least some postsecondary education.

Table 7.10. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group, by whether respondent had worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp,[b] percent

Teen Tradition	All	Camp Staff	Not Camp Staff
Catholic (561)	28	67	14
Mainline (271)	21	41	16
Evangelical (492)	34	49	27
All (1,422)	28	55	18

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] Only asked of those who attained at least some postsecondary education.

Those who had participated in Christian camps and moved out of their parents' home were more likely to connect with a new local church or parish. One third (35%) of young adults who had moved out of their parents' home connected with a new local church or parish. Young adults who had attended Christian camp and moved out of their parents' home were twice as likely (47%) to connect with a new church as those who had not attended camp (24%) (see table 7.11). Young adults who had worked on staff at a Christian camp and moved out of their parents' home were more than twice as likely (63%) to connect with a new church as those who had not worked on staff (23%) (see table 7.12 below).

Table 7.11. Connected with a different local (church/parish) after having first moved out of parents' home, by whether young adults attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen,[b] percent

Teen Tradition	All	Teen Camper	Not a Teen Camper
Catholic (484)	30	46	16
Mainline (219)	26	32	20
Evangelical (367)	50	56	43
All (1,141)	35	47	24

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] Only asked of those who had moved out of their parents' home. Does not include those who continued to attend the same church after having moved out of their parents' home. Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Table 7.12. Connected with a different local (church/parish) after having first moved out of parents' home, by whether young adults worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp,[b] percent

Teen Tradition	All	Camp Staff	Not Camp Staff
Catholic (484)	30	59	15
Mainline (219)	26	51	20
Evangelical (367)	50	72	38
All (1,141)	35	63	23

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] Only asked of those who had moved out of their parents' home. Does not include those who continued to attend the same church after having moved out of their parents' home. Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

8. Social Media and Mental Health

Social media is pervasive in the lives of emerging adults. It is a comprehensive community in which the currency is quantified public attention. Although social media networks are sought out for a sense of connection, they feed comparisons and feelings of anxiety, loneliness and depression.

8.1. The Pervasiveness of Social Media

Social media is a pervasive reality for young adults, and it is important to understand how it influences them. For most young adults, social media is the mediating and integrating reality of emerging adulthood.

Facebook was founded in 2004. Although it was not the first social media platform, it went on to have unprecedented reach, boasting 2 billion monthly users by June 2017.[119] Consider that in 2017 the populations of India and China were 1.3 and 1.4 billion respectively, and the global population was estimated by the United Nations to be 7.6 billion.

Here are the number of monthly users in 2017 for several other popular social media platforms:

- YouTube, 1.5 billion
- Facebook Messenger, 1.3 billion
- WhatsApp, 1.3 billion
- Instagram, 800 million
- Twitter, 330 million
- Snapchat, more than 300 million
- LinkedIn, 106 million.[120]

Many of these platforms have limited reach in China, Russia and other parts of the world, meaning they have a greater penetration in the West than these numbers would suggest.

In 2016, Internet users were reported to have, on average, 7.6 social media accounts.[121] Statista reported that, on average, Internet users spent 135 minutes per day in 2017, up from 90 minutes per day in 2012.[122]

[119] Balakrishnan, "How Many Users Does Facebook Have? 2 Billion a Month, CEO Mark Zuckerberg Says."
[120] Balakrishnan; Aslam, "• Twitter by the Numbers (2018)"; Aslam, "• Snapchat by the Numbers (2018)"; Kallas, "Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites and Apps [February 2018]."
[121] Mander, "Internet Users Have Average of 7 Social Accounts."
[122] "Global Time Spent on Social Media Daily 2017."

Almost all (95%) of the young adults we surveyed said they were social media users, and two-thirds (67%) said they used social media "frequently."

The sheer scale of social media changes how it influences our lives. Social media intersects with the real world in coordinating school projects, scheduling parties, mediating football games and so on. People from all parts of life are on social media: family, friends, classmates, co-workers, etc. As social media is experienced, it could be said that everyone is on social media, that it is a thoroughgoing community. And to the extent that all of our communities are integrated on social media, exclusion from social media will be felt in a thoroughgoing way.

In 1992, Robin Dunbar suggested that on average humans could cognitively sustain only 150 stable relationships.[123] Later on, at a time of widespread "buzz" about the globalizing potential of the Information Revolution, a new "Dunbar limit" of 291 was proposed by Bernard and Killworth, suggesting that humans can adapt to function in even larger social networks.[124] Whatever the real number, they were agreed that there was indeed an upper limit.

Our participation in social media and the World Wide Web is understood as participating in a global community. Even when the number of our social media contacts is small, our feeds bring us into contact with posts from people from across the globe. There is a tension between our cognitive limits for maintaining human connections and the scale at which social media asks us to live.

8.2. Framing Attention in a Global Community

In the 1980s, video jockeys (VJs) used to hold their thumbs and index fingers in front of themselves movie-director style to form a viewfinder frame. This was a conscious cultural nod to the prominent role of the lens (and the screen) as music moved from an exclusively aural culture (the world of the disc jockey or DJ) to a visual culture (the world of the VJ). There was something else VJs did with their framing: they always held their finger frames up so that you were the object that was framed. This was an implicit compliment to the viewer ("You're in my frame") while preparing people for a world where video frames would become the dominant way people interacted on social media. VJs and their short-lived monopoly on framing disappeared as cheap cameras, principally smartphones, allowed all of us to frame the world. Now we could return the framing compliment by framing others and, in turn, being framed by them.

Social media use focuses attention to the screen and, as it does so, removes attention from those things outside the frame of the smartphone. This kind of framing limits one's view, like blinders on horses. **This is the seminal idea for understanding how social media works. Social**

[123] Dunbar, "Neocortex Size as a Constraint on Group Size in Primates."
[124] Wu, "Where Is the New Dunbar Limit?"

media frames, limits and focuses attention. Attention is valuable – not just to social media platforms that figured out how to monetize attention by selling it to advertisers. It is valuable to families, churches and all other social groups.

It is fairly simple to initiate a social media role by setting up a digital profile. But how do you know that you've joined a group? This is not as straightforward as receiving a confirmation from a social media platform that your account has been set up. How do you know if anyone out in cyberspace noticed?

When we set up a cell phone, we find a service provider and connect our phone to their cell phone network. What does it mean for the phone to be connected to the network? There is, in fact, no continuous connection. Rather, your phone is constantly sending out a series of pings, or messages that say to the cell phone tower, "Are you there?" And your phone is waiting for a "Yes, I am" reply. As long as your phone gets a reply within a certain amount of time, it says that it "has a signal," or that it is "connected" to the cell phone network. Being connected, then, is a continuous series of "Are you there?" – "Yes, I am" volleys.

Social media works similarly. Connection to those in one's social media network is not experienced directly through the senses but mediated through the frame of the screen. The assurance that a person is connected to their social media network comes through posts and replies, which serve the "Are you there?" and the "Yes, I am" functions respectively.

You need only think about how it feels to make what you think is an important post and to experience silence to understand how important receiving replies is for knowing you are a part of the network. These replies could be "Likes," shares, follows or comments. On social media these responses are quantified, and they are seen, not only by yourself, but by others within your social media network. The replies and their public quantifications signal that you and your posts are important. As such, they reinforce your role in the social media network.

A social media *feed* scrolls content off the screen so that it is no longer framed. This means that content that generated a role-validating response will soon scroll out of sight and its effect will be lost. Once out of the frame, you have lost people's attention, because the next item in the feed will have grabbed it. With the loss of attention goes the certainty that you are noticed and that you still have a vital role in the network.

Adam Alter, in *Irresistible,* argues that the social media feed is designed to be addictive, mimicking the casino slot machine's rolling set of images.[125] Instead of pleasure being derived from a slot machine win, the social media user derives pleasure from the occasional interesting post and quantifications or social interactions that signal attention.

[125] Alter, *Irresistible*.

8.3. Maintaining Connections Through Social Media

Social media creates a sense of intimacy because participants are more immediately available to each other. Prior to social media, only your family and a few intimates had immediate access to you. Social media transcends the physical impediments of time and place to bring the rest of your network immediately into your presence, and this immediacy is, at least initially, experienced as intimacy. Our need for intimacy is a primary social driver, and never before has intimacy been available on this scale.

Many of the young adults we talked to spoke about how they used social media to stay connected with people they already know.

People with tighter, pre-existing relationships seem to prefer texting or direct messaging over Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Unlike with Facebook or Instagram, text messages are not visible to or quantified for wider network. Texting and direct messaging is a more private medium that is not looking for wider attention.

Martin and Sam, two of the young adults we interviewed, both use Facebook but prefer to text or direct message their close friends. This suggests that texting and direct messaging tend to target a more intimate social sphere with greater connection to the real world than social media such as Facebook or Instagram.

Francine uses Facebook to stay in touch with a few people who are her own age from her home parish, but "older people don't have Facebook." She interprets their unwillingness to use Facebook as an unwillingness to keep in touch. Francine described her Facebook relationships with those in her home parish this way:

> it's more of a relationship where I would follow them and read their Facebook posts and we would *like* each other's stuff. But we are not really close enough to be actively messaging each other or engaging with each other.

Direct messaging, then, is for close relationships where people actually engage with each other.

Rosie said she uses Facebook "a lot," and it helped her when she first started university to keep in touch with friends back home:

> When I first went to university [Facebook] helped me keep in touch with my friends who were still at home because most of them were still in high school, and friends who had moved all over the country and all over the world. And now that I am back home, it is helping me keep in touch with my friends who are back at university and again around the world, and it makes it a lot easier to keep in touch and know what is going on and be connected.

She coped with the stress of the move by maintaining her existing social circle in her home town through social media. In this sense, her friends moved with her. Now that she has finished university and moved back in with her parents, it is her university friends who are giving her support through social media. Social media allows Rosie to "talk to" her friends, something she said she "wouldn't get to do if social media didn't exist." Social media, then, facilitates a conversation (talking) in a way that the telephone does not. Specifically, it allows her to "feel like I am in the loop and part of the friend group even though I am 3,000 km away." **This feeling of belonging, then, is what she looks for in social media.**

8.4. Comparison Anxiety

Attention on social media is evidenced in the public and quantifiable nature of replies. It plays a validating role in assuring a person that they are noticed and that they have a vital role in the network. In fact, people may experience anxiety if they do not get a response within an acceptable period of time.

Young adults and ministry experts mentioned the tendency in social media to feel you cannot post what is mundane.

Kayla "got rid of" Facebook in second-year university because "I was just more looking at other people's profiles. I wasn't contributing anything, so I just got rid of it." She explained why she was not contributing:

> **I really didn't have that much exciting news to contribute to the status posts**, and in terms of pictures and stuff, I just wasn't taking that many pictures. [Emphasis added]

She didn't have "Facebook-worthy" posts. Several young adults said the purpose of social media posts is to present yourself as a unique individual who does not lead a routine life.

Ministry experts also expressed concern about young adults making unrealistic comparisons to social media representations of others' lives. This expert pointed to social media as one reason young adults feel they have "so many troubles":

> Social media plays a huge role in this. **Their peers, or people that they look up to, seem to have the life that they want, and so there is this unrealistic target of that's what I want.** … I want my dream job and I want to love it and I'm able to share that and I'm able to just be – that concept of the dream job without recognizing that that's not an actual reality, that's a social media reality. Even seeing their own peers travel and have money to do things, whereas they may have a butt load of debt, but they are thinking, **"Wow, I wish my life looked like that! Why does my life not look like that?"** [Emphasis added]

An expert serving in a campus ministry also talked about how social media comparisons create psychological pressure:

> **[Young adults] compare themselves one against another … it seems like they are constantly one-upping each other in terms of the trips that they are taking, and the fun that they are having on vacation, and things like that. … [There is] a certain amount of pressure to say, "I should be having fun. I should be doing more interesting things than just working."** [Emphasis added]

Another expert insightfully compared the dissatisfaction created by social media with the dissatisfaction created by lifestyle magazines.

> Where the thing [is], today, we have hyper-connectivity, but it's almost like paying attention to a knee that is sore. If you ignore it, you soon forget that you have a sore knee. But if you sit there on the couch and stare at your knee, man, it really starts to throb. And this sense of social media, it keeps the world hyper-aware of their lack of deeper, more meaningful relationships. And [one of the Millennials he works with] said, "It's almost like social media creates, it's like an airbrushed life that makes everybody dissatisfied." It's, like, all I ever read, all I do, is look at my *Homes and Gardens* magazines, and I always hate my house. Whereas if there never were any *Homes and Gardens Magazine*, "Oh, my house looks pretty good."

The kinds of images that get social media attention tend to be those characterized by beauty, wit, novelty (even disturbing novelty like an accident or storm) or misplaced intimacy. Therefore, these are part of the social media toolkit. Moreover, people try to optimize the beautiful, humorous, novel or pornographic qualities in their posts in order gain attention. Pornography is misplaced intimacy, and it can be emotional as well as visual. Revealing personal secrets online (sharing too much) is a kind of emotional pornography.

Smartphones and their powerful integrated cameras are a critical piece of the social media infrastructure. Smartphones have taken the previously difficult task of creating, printing and distributing images and made it virtually effortless and instantaneous. What is made easy is encouraged. Social media remains capable of printing text or prose, but images are preferred because they are easier and faster to distribute. They are both easier to produce and easier to consume, and because they are easier to consume they are more likely to command attention.

Particularly of concern for its removal of sexual excitement from the context of marital intimacy is that youth and young adults have rapidly taken up the practice of "sexting" (from the words "sex" and "text"). A sext is a text message that contains pornographic content, usually images. A 2018 meta-analysis found that 15% of teens had sent a sext and 27% had received one. The study authors concluded that the increase from more recent studies was attributable, in part,

to the growing access of teens to smart phones, which they described as "becoming near ubiquitous in recent years."[126]

8.5. FNBA and Safe Spaces

Several experts talked about how young adults would rather not try something than try and be seen to not be amazing at it. This Fear of Not Being Amazing (FNBA) is rooted in a fear of social rejection because one has not lived up to either one's own, or someone else's, standard. You cannot fail if you did not try, so it's better not to try.

One expert said:

> **We are encountering more and more, usually young men, young men that simply just withdraw from the expectations if the expectations are causing them stress.** [Emphasis added]

Another expert serving with a denomination talked about promising young leaders who just quit when they lose their self-confidence, what she calls "courage," to finish a task well:

> I had a group of young adults who were chosen as the cream-of-the-crop leaders within their church. And we were going to be putting on an event. And I was project managing, facilitating, championing this team to execute this event, giving as much as I possibly could away to them. And there was this one girl, they were so gung-ho about the food that was going to be served at this party for 100 people. And I said, "Do you want to talk about the grocery list?" And they said, "No, we've got it." And I said, "Great, because you are 24 [years old, and] you should probably be able to figure out what food we are going to serve!" But I was available. And then we got 5 days out, and I said, "How are we doing with the grocery list? How are we doing with the budget? What do we need to do?" **And there was paralysis that came out of nowhere. "I don't think I can do this. I don't think I really know what I am doing. I don't think I want to do this anymore. I don't think I can be on the food committee," or whatever. And there was no really good reason for it.** There was just this sense of "I have never done this before, so I don't think I can." [Emphasis added]

Another expert also talked about how young adults give up if they don't get "good results":

> **When [young adults] have attempted certain things, [and] they haven't gotten the results – they haven't gotten good results … [then they say,] "I'm just not**

[126] Madigan *et al*, "Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis."

> **going to do this." … So, you don't stick with it. So, they give up trying.** [Emphasis added]

The experts who identified this FNBA saw it as a relatively new phenomenon that they are "encountering more and more."

Leaders or young adults are less likely to be brave if their attempts at something new may face ridicule or social media–scale or "viral" criticism. For young adults, this means they are less likely to attempt to learn the skills that would allow them to take their place in the adult world.

Young adults and ministry experts thus talked about the need for "safe spaces," by which they usually meant spaces that are safe from such public ridicule. One of the paradoxes of social media is that while young adults understand their participation in social media as contributing to a positive space, they also fear being criticized or shamed in front of thousands (or more).

In 2002, the classmates of Quebec teenager Ghyslain Raza found some video he had taken of himself wielding a golf-ball retriever as though it were a Star Wars lightsabre and uploaded it to YouTube. The video circulated with the title "Star Wars Kid" and since then has been viewed more than a billion times. Raza became an object of ridicule and was depressed and suicidal. The scalability and immediacy of the implicit video criticism were almost unfathomable before the Internet, YouTube and social media. Prior to social media, someone who made a mistake might have been criticized in front of a few people. Social media means criticism that may be seen by a thousand. Moreover, not being face-to-face allows critics on social media to ignore the dignity and reputation of their target. Scoffers are often rewarded in the currency of attention for the wit and cruelty of their attacks. Today, because of smartphones, it has become extremely easy to capture moments of people's lives and circulate them widely. Wherever the moments of your life could be captured and ridiculed in a public post that "goes viral," no space can be considered safe.

Leighton Ford Ministries and Outreach Canada promote mentoring communities. Ford describes mentoring communities as "circles of trust" in "safe places where servants/leaders in ministry can be received and welcomed, helped and listen to what God is saying to them, and encouraged and prayed for to become all they can be for Christ."[127] These safe spaces are for any leaders, not necessarily young adult leaders. What Ford has recognized, however, is a growing need for these safe spaces where leaders can trust others, be welcomed, helped, encouraged, prayed for, and encouraged to listen to God.

Safe spaces limit the scale and intent of criticism by, among other things, putting in place explicit or implicit covenants that criticism will not get "posted" or shared online. Where critics are denied an audience, there is less incentive to make personal attacks and more chance of

[127] Ford, "The Mentoring Community of Leighton Ford Ministries," 18.

criticizing constructively. It has often been pointed out that when cameras were brought into the Canadian House of Commons, the decorum of the House fell. Initially it was thought that the cameras would provide accountability for lawmakers to their constituencies. What it did instead was provide lawmakers an audience, and having an audience changed the nature of what they were doing in the House. Criticism that is posted is, in the first instance, posted for an audience. Its main purpose is to secure attention for the critic, not to develop the person being criticized.

FNBA is rooted in a fear of criticism that is unbounded in scale and intent. The resulting reluctance of young adults to try to learn new skills and take on new challenges further contributes to delays in psychosocial development.

8.6. FOMO, Facebook Depression and Loneliness

Heavy social media use is the thread running through three mental health issues: the fear of missing out (FOMO), "Facebook depression," and loneliness.

Social media makes users aware of more social options, creating the fear of missing out (FOMO), the worry that social events, or otherwise enjoyable activities, may be taking place without you present to enjoy them.[128]

The Royal Society for Public Health noted:

> The sharing of photos and videos on social media means that young people are experiencing a practically endless stream of others' experiences that can potentially fuel feelings that they are missing out on life.[129]

Recognizing the effects of heavy social media use, the Society called for the introduction of pop-up warnings on social media that would alert users to the potentially harmful effects of heavy social media use, such as anxiety and depression, which they note are sometimes called "Facebook depression."[130]

Many young adults we interviewed talked about the depressive effects of comparing their own lives to those they saw posted on social media. In almost all cases these young adults recognized that the posts they were unfavorably comparing themselves with were likely fake, unreal or presented to place the poster in the best possible light. Recognizing this, however, did not seem to mitigate the posts' depressive effects unless the young adult was in regular contact with the poster in real life. A few young adults suggested that knowing the true-life situations of

[128] "#StatusOfMind," 12.
[129] "#StatusOfMind," 12.
[130] "#StatusOfMind," 8, 24.

these online friends made their online presentations less plausible and therefore less compelling points of comparison.

Close to half (45%) of the young adults we surveyed agreed that "I tend to get depressed if I spend too much time on social media." More than half (56%) of those who said they tended to get depressed also agreed that "My friends' lives are more exciting than mine."

Angel, talking about the differences between social media friends and face-to-face friends, said:

> I find that it's definitely hard because … I don't see [social media friends] often face-to-face … Because I definitely think I can separate it a little bit more when I can actually see these people in person and be able to interact with them and talk to them face-to-face. Because then I feel like you get a little bit more about the person, … what is going on in their lives. … I just feel like face-to-face people are a little bit more honest almost. They are more open to sharing the good and the bad, and sharing what is going on in general in their life. And maybe some of the boring things in their life as well. The things that maybe don't seem as important to share online. So, I definitely feel like online it is a bit more stilted, where people are only sharing things that they feel would be important for other people to see.

Many young adults we interviewed talked about reducing their social media use. Some reduced their use to manage their feelings of depression, and others made reductions because social media was seen to be "a waste of time," while others made reductions because their life circumstances changed. More than half (57%) of the social media users in our survey agreed that "I sometimes take a break from social media to get myself grounded again."

We asked the young adults we interviewed to describe their social media use. Most explained they now used it less often than when they were younger, or they talked about their efforts to reduce their social media use. Some seemed to be concerned that their level of social media use might be viewed as a character weakness.

Sam, age 19, said he recognized that social media made him depressed, so he reduced how much he used it.

> So, my family doesn't use social media. I started using social media probably in Grade 11. Up until then, I had never used it**. And when I became a heavy user of social media I noticed a decrease in my presence and awareness and general happiness levels, so I stopped using it as much. So yes, it is a conscious choice because of experience**. [Emphasis added]

Angel said that social media is a "love and hate" thing for her that uses up too much of her time and does not have a positive impact in her life:

> I feel like it is a very love and hate kind of thing for me, for sure! I think I try my best not to get too involved with it because I do find that if I find myself spending a bit too much time on social media then I don't feel like it has that much of a positive impact on me. I feel myself comparing myself to others and then really getting sucked into it, so I try my best to stay away from it and limit the amount [of time].

David, age 28, thinks his social media use is "a little bit less than it has been" now that his life circumstances have changed. He explained:

> When I was in high school and stuff like that, I was pretty keen on using it. But, I guess, as I get older the need for it and whatnot has just dwindled a little bit. Not that I don't want to stay in touch with people, but again, I guess as your friend group gets smaller and you get a little bit older, the need for social media goes down.

June, age 27, got her first cellphone at age 16 and her first smartphone, an iPhone, at age 17. When she first got her smartphone and social media she was "on Facebook a heck of a lot," but now she says,

> [I] only try to stick to a certain few [friends] and I don't really use it to talk to my friends as often as I used to, obviously, now. So, my use of it has definitely gone down.

Boston College professor Gerald Kane posits that in the *Intimacy vs Isolation* phase of psychosocial development, which comes after identity formation, people's social media use focuses on *prioritizing* and *targeting.*[131] This means social media tends to be targeted to a smaller group of people who are considered closer friends. Prioritizing and targeting of social media use may be an indication that young adults have moved past emerging adulthood into adulthood.

One of the ironies of being connected on social media is that users are more likely to experience social isolation.[132] Twenge, who has provocatively said, "There is not a single exception. All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all nonscreen activities are linked to more happiness," said just as categorically:

---

[131] Kane, "Psychosocial Stages of Symbolic Action in Social Media," 9.
[132] Roderique, "I Have 1,605 Facebook Friends. Why Do I Feel so Alone?"

> Just as for happiness, the results are clear: screen activities are linked to more loneliness, and nonscreen activities are linked to less loneliness.[133]

A ministry expert said that being "digitally immersed" creates a longing for "authentic friendship":

> **We've found that the more and more digitally immersed our generation becomes, the more and more they are actually craving personal contact.** So, I think it's only enhancing the need for a small group mentality and for authentic friendships. I think the numbers are in, in terms of digital immersion in correlation to loneliness, and everyone knows that these numbers are not what you would expect: **the more and more we are connected over social media, the seemingly more and more lonely we become, which is totally ironic.** [Emphasis added]

To the extent that people are different from how they portray themselves on social media, social media connections will not help them alleviate feelings of social isolation.[134] People are often not themselves online; therefore, they are not true social media participants. **To the extent that people's online identity does not match their real identity, they are spectators watching their avatars have social lives that are unavailable to their real selves.** Social media has been found to be less likely to induce feelings of loneliness if it is used to coordinate the user's real world rather than to replace it.[135]

Social science is increasingly finding that social media impoverishes our social interactions.

8.7. The Paradox of Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a time of paradox. Freedom and opportunity are available like never before, but rates of depression and anxiety are also higher than for previous generations.

The Royal Society for Public Health reported "rates of anxiety and depression in young people have risen 70% in the past 25 years."[136] Twenge and Arnett agree that anxiety and depression are more prevalent among emerging adults than among their parents.[137] Twenge, writing about America, observes, "While the suicide rate for middle-aged people has declined steeply since 1950, the suicide rate for young people is now twice as high."[138]

---

[133] Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?"; Twenge, *IGen*.
[134] Khazan, "How to Break the Dangerous Cycle of Loneliness."
[135] Khazan.
[136] "#StatusOfMind," 3.
[137] Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?"; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 276–80.
[138] Twenge, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated*, 147.

Arnett captures the contradiction of emerging adulthood that is at once highly social and isolating:

> Often the freedom of emerging adulthood is exhilarating – no one can tell you what to do and when to do it – but along with that freedom can come a sense of isolation, the chill of realizing you are on your own and have to swim constantly not to sink. The result of these contradictory forces is this paradox of mental health during the emerging adult years: overall, self-esteem and life satisfaction are high, but rates of depression and anxiety are high too.[139]

Twenge concurs that individualism leads to isolation, crippling anxiety and crushing depression:

> The growing tendency to put the self first leads to unparalleled freedom, but it also creates enormous pressure to stand alone. This is the downside of the focus on the self – when we are fiercely independent and self-sufficient, our disappointments loom large because we have nothing else to focus on. … All too often, the result is crippling anxiety and crushing depression.[140]

The ability to choose is no guarantee of making a good choice, or even a meaningful one. Arnett, citing Durkheim, says, "The more individualistic a society becomes, and the less people feel they have meaningful roles in a stable social system, the more they find themselves 'unable to escape the exasperating and agonizing question: to what purpose?' Consequently, incidence of depression and anxiety increases."[141]

---

[139] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 276.
[140] Twenge, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated*, 149.
[141] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 290.

9. Identity Formation

9.1. Career

9.1.1. Career as a Reflection of Identity

Many experts said that young adults seek a career that fits their identity. The uniqueness of the individual, then, means that a career that fits will be rare (or one of a kind) and therefore difficult to find. It also means that only someone who understands the young adult's identity can identify the career that fits her. Career choice and identity formation, then, are linked activities.

One expert talked about young adults whose "dream job mentality" they link to "the centre of who [they] are," which is a way of talking about identity.

> We have a lot of young adults who are leaving on things like YWAM [Youth With A Mission, an evangelical mission agency] and other missional endeavors, or just personal endeavors, to find themselves. We see it. They're not just going once. They are going three or four or five times because there is this perpetual model that you need to find this, gravitate to the centre of who you are. All they are doing is just delaying the reality that, at this time of life, it's just building, it's working at crap jobs to work yourself into a good place, but there seems to be a disconnect with that, with that thought.

To ever take a "crap job" would be to concede there was something crappy at the centre of who they were, so these young people hold out for unrealistic expectations, denying themselves experience that would help them reach their ultimate aspirations. An expert from a congregational context said the process of young adult career discernment is like a "treasure hunt in a weird, obscure island off the coast of Africa":

> Our young adults are always talking about career. We want to nail down what God has called us to. And **a lot of them think that it is some kind of specific thing to find, like some kind of treasure in a weird, obscure island off the coast of Africa – they are that specific and they are searching for it.** [Emphasis added]

There is a tension between the idea of God's calling and this treasure hunter's search. God's calling is presumably something God does, and presumably God would try to make that calling accessible to the one being called. This young adult's calling, however, is "nailed down" by his elaborate solitary search. It is the searcher's strenuous efforts that provide access to this calling, not God's revelation or voice. To the contrary, God is not seen as helping at all. The search ends with a special knowledge that unlocks the individual's career and identity.

Identity formation is understood to be the choice of the individual, rather than, as Erikson suggests, the outcome of a negotiation with a community. Therefore, the correspondence between identity formation and career choice means that career choice is also the task of the individual. This is why the young adult carries out his search on the "weird, obscure island" by himself. It also means that the responsibility for career choice and career success or failure falls solely to the young adult.

Career is something unique that comes to the individual in a moment of special insight. This is why the expert describes a "weird, obscure island" as the searching ground, instead of a "normal, familiar mainland where everyone else is." The search is inaccessible to others.

Another expert said that career is discerned through feeling.

> **If you don't love what you do, you aren't doing what you feel called to do, you aren't going to be happy**.

Moreover, he said that, in this view, you must do what you feel called to in order to be happy. Those who are unhappy, then, are not doing what they feel called to. *Feeling*, then, becomes a mode of career *finding.*

Robyn, who grew up in a non-denominational, middle-class family said she discovered her calling while auditioning for her school's Grade 12 play. In her description she interchangeably uses the ideas of feeling and calling:

> I basically could feel myself. I wasn't even in my own body. It almost felt like there was this sense. And I remember … I was doing dry reading, and it was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* and I was dry reading for the White Witch, and I just remember the feeling the room had basically gone (and I have a very vivid imagination as well). And I could just feel like giving a grand speech to a bunch of evil creatures and everything, and this calling saying, "This [i.e., acting] is what you are supposed to do."

Robyn said this calling was then "submerged" until another teacher "helped [her], and that calling came back up." Significantly the calling was from inside of her. The teacher did not call it out of her, rather the teacher "helped [her]" bring the calling up from where it was submerged. When young adults talk about calling, it may not have an external source.

Another expert who works in a campus ministry context observed that "pay[ing] the bills and provid[ing] stability" used to provide meaning, but now "there is a willingness to engage in a lot less stability … if the work is meaningful." He went on to say work was meaningful if "it uses my gifts, [and] I feel like I am doing something positive for people." **Fit with the individual's**

understanding of his gifts is a precondition for meaning. For work to be meaningful, then, it must match the individual's giftings and identity.

Young adults rarely identified the same arduous career/identity search that many of the experts did. This may be a perspectival difference in that young adults were asked to reflect on their own experience rather than to identify a trend among their peers as a group.

June had to take a job to pay the bills, but she hopes one day to have one that fits her and that is secured. She explains,

> You have to take a secure job over something that fits you. You have to make sure that money comes in, right? To take care of the bills and feed the kids. So, I mean you have to do what you have to do. But I would hope – I hope and I wish that anybody could really find that job that fits them and that is actually secure.

A consequence of not having a job that fits you and is secured is that your identity, insofar as it is linked to your work, is not secured.

9.1.2. Career and Choice

Today's young adults have choices of which previous generations could only have dreamed.

This expert ministering in a denominational and local church context said that in the past

> how big [young adults] would dream … was very much limited by their experiences in the local culture, the rural communities.

He went on to talk about how the Internet had expanded the range of careers they could dream about attaining.

It has been common to tell children and young adults: you can be anything you want to be. If this were true, then the only impediment to becoming something great would be the young adult's own poor choice. It would also mean that if your life turned out to be less than spectacular then you would be responsible. This premise puts an enormous amount of pressure on young adults.

This expert from a discipleship training context talked about the anxiety some young adults feel when choosing courses:

> For young people, I think it is a fear that they … will fail, that they will miss out. … **What if I have taken the wrong courses this year and closed doors for future career? I have screwed up everything. I will have screwed up my whole life.** [Emphasis added]

An expert ministering in a Christian higher education context talked about the paralysis of choice:

> It is probably a little less defined now than it was 20, 25 years ago – and particularly in terms of things like vocation. I find young people have so many options, it seems that they have so many options that it seems like for some of them, it does become a little bit paralyzing.

This same expert went on to say,

> So, I've seen students coming from really strong family backgrounds and yet they don't have any sense of direction. And even other students that seem to have a very hard – they've had a hard life already, and yet they have this incredible sense of call and this incredible sense of direction.

Having a strong family background is no guarantee of direction. Students from hard backgrounds with "a sense of calling" have made decisions about identity. They are no longer paralyzed by choice. There is an irony here that "strong families" may provide too many choices, inducing a paralysis that prevents young adults from making choices. By contrast, a young adult from a "hard" background with few options and a strong sense of calling can make a choice and move ahead with direction.

9.1.3. What I Am Supposed To be Doing?

There is a tension in the language that some ministry experts used to talk about choosing education. On the one hand it is universally acknowledged that an educational path is chosen, and that it should be chosen by the individual. On the other hand, they talked about what young adults are "supposed to do," suggesting that someone else or something else has already predetermined their course.

An expert working in a denominational setting said young adults were

> trying to figure out what they are **supposed to do** with their life. [Emphasis added]

A choice that you are supposed to make is a constrained choice, not one that is made freely.

Some ministry experts suggested that young adults' choices are being made by targeting desirable outcomes they see in other people's lives. Young adults are very conscious that their choices are being judged, and they are being judged on outcomes that are visible to others.

An expert working in a local church setting said young adults want to get into the program they are "supposed to be in" and find the "right" job.

> They want to be in the program that they are supposed to be in, they want to find that next job, they want to find that job out of university that will launch them into their career. And eventually, they are hoping to get married, find that one person and get married. So, actually, the interesting thing is that a lot of young adults, what they are experiencing is angst because the things that they thought that they were supposed to be hitting, like the getting to the right program, getting into the right job and then getting married, if they are not being hit or met at a right time, they get upset and they are questioning a lot of things and they are comparing to others that have gone that route.

Their angst arises out of "comparing [themselves] to others that have gone that route." What they are "supposed to do" is what has been done by those with whom they are comparing themselves. Their free choice is constrained by this comparison group, and they are likely experiencing some cognitive dissonance in understanding their education and career choices to be their own while at the same time feeling this choice constrained by others – a constraint (unlike a parental constraint) that they cannot easily acknowledge.

9.1.4. Fear of Passionless Monotony (FOPM)

Many young adults fear a life that is dull, passionless and monotonous.

Ministry experts often talked about how emerging adults wanted to make a difference and follow their passions. One expert who works as a denominational youth and young adult ministry advisor said that emerging adults delay adulthood

> to figure out what they really love and what they are passionate about, what is really going to make a difference.

Making a difference was described as "figur[ing] out how can they be a part of something larger than themselves."

A church-based expert talked about how emerging adults fear a life that is "not filled with passion, it doesn't give them life and vibrancy." He added, "I've had three meetings about that already in the last two weeks." He went on to locate this fear of a passionless, dull or colourless life in what he called the "comparison effect":

> If you look at the Christian world, what's kind of been harder too is you have people like Francis Chan and David Platt writing all these books about being radical and sold out, that kind of almost fuels it, but in the Christian way now. **Ah my life is so monotonous, me going to church and serving on Sunday and handing out bulletins is not saving the world like these other guys are doing it.**" [Emphasis added]

Another ministry expert talked about the disappointment emerging adults experience as a "quarter-life crisis," which she described as happening when

> what you thought should have happened hasn't, and you are wondering now what to do with life that feels a little disappointing. … I think it happens earlier … by the time you finish university you are 22, and you go to grad school, so you are 24, or you get your first job and then you quit after 2 or 3 years, so you are 24, 25. I think at that point you go, "Oh wow, this is different than what I thought it would be."

Another ministry expert with a discipleship training ministry talked about walking with 18- to 24-year-olds through disappointment that has reached a "crisis point":

> that is **a place where faith gets lost because when things aren't working out the way they should, whether that means job, or whether that means marriage, for Christian young adults it goes back to God-has-let-me-down and it goes directly to the core of their faith.** [Emphasis added]

She diagnosed this disappointment as being rooted in a mistaken theology:

> "If I walk well before God then it will go well for me, and life will turn out as I thought it should." **So, we find that as a core lie, a core myth to understanding God that is where the conversation begins with the young adults who are disappointed by life not turning out as they thought it would. And that is a hard journey.** [Emphasis added]

Emerging adults in the Christian world often have an expectation that life should be filled with passion and should be experienced as vibrant and not be monotonous or dull. Moreover, some expect that a passion-filled, vibrant life is the expected reward for leading a good Christian life.

9.2. Pressure from Parents

Many ministry experts and young adults spoke about parental pressure to attain postsecondary education.

A campus ministry expert from Quebec said,

> My sense from my interaction with students is that what their parents want is performance … to perform well academically.

A ministry expert who disciples young adults said that the pressure around educational choices represents a "shifting of values":

> I know that 16 years ago, 20 years, things needed to be decided about the future in Grade 12, but the stress around that, the pressure around that, the need to get it right didn't seem as high. Some people think it is because our whole world is more competitive now as far as the job market goes and all the rest of that, so parents want their kids to get a head start to be able to be equipped to manage the competitive world that they are going into, but I think it is something different than that. I think it is a shifting of values.

Although it is hardly a new phenomenon, another expert working with a campus ministry talked about how some young adults are in school to please their parents:

> One way you see it played out is students studying something they have absolutely no interest in. And I just talked with a student this week who really loves film and creative things, and she is studying actuarial science. And she says, "My parents provided for me, they want me to have something with a secure job future and so I'm studying this that I have no interest in."

What is striking about this anecdote is the candor it expresses about being in school to please one's parents when most young adults try very hard to frame their school choices as their own.

An expert working at a Bible college said that some students from evangelical backgrounds are actually "going against their parents' wishes" by coming to Bible College because Bible College is not seen as a path to "success."

An expert working in a Mainline context agreed that parents' primary concern is "academic development … [and] career planning," but that later on, when their children are 25 to 30 years old,

> they are sad because they realize that they have missed something along the way while they were worrying about all the other things in life for their child – which again is not a criticism, it's just being a parent – they realize they had missed out in the spiritual side of it.

Another expert ministering to Evangelicals lamented,

> **Among my peers, who all have kids graduating from high school around these years, that is the biggest thing parents talk about: "What your kid is going to do next year?", as opposed to, "Does your kid love the Lord and … and how are they serving the Lord?"** [Emphasis added]

She went on to talk about how this evangelical parental preoccupation with postsecondary education inhibits youth pastors' efforts at spiritual formation. She imagined that if a typical

evangelical parent were to make an unguarded comment to a youth pastor, the parent might say:

> It's good for you to keep our kids busy through high school, but now they have to move into real life.

More than two-thirds (67%) of the young adults who attained at least some postsecondary education agreed with the statement "My parents let me choose whatever program I wanted as long as I went to university." Half (50%) of all young adults agreed with the statement "The world is being divided into 'haves' and 'have-nots' and a university education is the best way to ensure that I land on the 'haves' side of that divide."

9.3. Encouragement

In our interviews with young adults, it was clear that the simple act of recognizing a young adult's giftings and talents and encouraging them to consider a career that made use of these gifts had often set the trajectory of their life. On our young adult survey, we asked young adults who had provided this kind of encouragement. Table 9.1 below shows their responses in descending order of frequency. Of the alternatives given, those in Christian ministry leadership positions were least likely to be recalled by young adults as having given them encouragement in this way.

Table 9.1. "Which of the following people identified your gifts and talents and encouraged you to consider a career that made use of them?", percent

Encourager	Percent
Mother	56
Friend(s)	52
Father	43
Teacher	40
A mentor	21
Pastor, Minister or Priest	12
Other Youth Leader	10
Youth Pastor/Minister	9
A camp leader	8

Respondents were asked to select all applicable answers.

We wanted to see if there was a pattern to the ways people reported being encouraged. We did a cluster analysis, which found two clusters, a low encouragement cluster and a high encouragement cluster (see table 9.2 below and appendix). The main difference, as their names suggest, is that the high encouragement cluster was more likely to receive encouragement from all sources.

Table 9.2. "Which of the following people identified your gifts and talents and encouraged you to consider a career that made use of them?", by encouragement cluster, percent

Encourager	Low Encouragement (1,505)	High Encouragement (493)
Mother	43	94
Friend(s)	39	91
Father	30	84
Teacher	25	85
A mentor	12	48
A camp leader	6	14
Other Youth Leader	6	21
Pastor, Minister or Priest	6	29
Youth (Pastor/Minister)	5	21

Table 9.2 is sorted from the most frequently cited encourager for the low encouragement cluster to the least frequently cited encourager. This ordering would have been similar had the table been sorted using the high encouragement column.

Only one-quarter (25%) of young adults fell in the high encouragement cluster. Those in the high encouragement cluster were more likely to report warm relationships with their mother, father, youth pastor or youth minister, and other youth ministry leaders (see table 9.3 below).

Table 9.3. Characterized teen relationship with the following as "warm," by encouragement cluster, percent

As a teen, I had a warm relationship with:	Low Encouragement (1,505)	High Encouragement (493)
Mother	75	89
Father	62	80
Youth (Pastor/Minister)	44	59
Youth Leader other than Youth (Pastor/Minister)	47	61

The coincidence of higher encouragement and higher incidence of warm relationships suggests that those who are more likely to receive encouragement are also more likely to be embedded in healthier families and communities. Two in five (39%) of those in the low encouragement cluster reported having a home church mentor, compared to more than half (54%) of those in the high encouragement cluster.

Young adults were far more likely to report warm relationships with youth ministry leaders than to report that youth ministry leaders had recognized their giftings and encouraged them to consider a career making use of those giftings (see tables 9.2 and 9.3 above). **This suggests that, while young ministry leaders are warmly regarded, they are often missing opportunities to provide young adults with spiritual direction or mentoring.**

9.4. Discernment through Trying Different Jobs

Identity may become accessible through trying different jobs or activities, through encouragement, through mentorships. Although young adults seem to have difficulty discovering an identity by themselves, they do seem to want to make the discovery themselves. This is how, according to a characteristic worldview of emerging adults, they would know the discovery was authentic and not a foreclosure.

One ministry expert working in a Christian higher education context talked about how his students found it easier to volunteer somewhere away from their local church:

> There is something about – and I think part of it is that it is unique, it forces them out of their comfort zone and they find themselves being pushed to do things that they normally wouldn't give themselves permission to do. And once they have experienced those things, then we find that they come back to the church and say, oh, where can I get involved in.

When young adults move out of their local church context, they are given an opportunity to negotiate a new role as part of a ministry team. This expert went on to talk about how young adults, having gained a new role and experience, face resistance from their local churches when they return and want to plug into new kinds of ministry.

> They are part of a team [on their ministry internships]. They are not doing it solo. Whereas with a church, they might plug into a team, but they are doing it kind of solo, and I wonder if that is part of it, if there is a bit of a resistance to doing it on their own. And it is also like going to your home church, it is a little bit more, "Well, this guy wasn't that much when he left, now he thinks he is something." And there is almost this sort of a judging thing, like, oh, what is he going to …

The local church resists these young adults' new leadership ambitions because they have not yet renegotiated their roles in their local churches: "Well, this guy wasn't that much when he left, now he thinks he is something."

Christopher was a pastor's kid who grew up resisting the idea that he would follow in his father's footsteps. He talked about working for his church for the summer and being "given a role of doing Bible stories for kids" and how that was the catalyst for rethinking his role in the church.

> So firstly, I worked at my church as a summer student – I actually did that for the last four summers. So, the summer after Grade 12 and then summers after my 1, 2, 3, years of university. And those first couple summers I was at VBS at my church. **I was given the role of doing the Bible stories with the kids**. So, it was

> funny, I wasn't excited about that at first at all. I was kind of upset that they gave me that role because it was probably one of the tougher jobs that you had to tell the story a few times every day to 30 kids – which, looking back now, doesn't seem like that many. **But in doing that, it was almost like it was little hints of preaching, of teaching Bible stories, to groups of people, even though they were mostly elementary school kids, some were leaders, and that was one of the times I started to realize how passionate I was about teaching the Word to other people.** [Emphasis added]

Christopher came to realize his giftings and passions in the role he was allowed to exercise. This was a new role within his congregation, and over several summers he renegotiated his place in the congregation. Christopher has gone on to become a pastor.

Hayley found clarity about her calling and her decision to go to Bible college while working at her church. She explained that she was

> interning in different ministry roles and then having a lot of people affirm me that what I was doing was something that I was good at and something that I should continue to do. … In those roles I was working in a church context, which was something that is a lot of fun, and I was under constant leadership and constant direction and supervision from people who had been at this for decades.

9.5. Approaching the End of the Moratorium

Most young adults we interviewed agreed that adulthood meant independence from their parents. This independence is manifested in an ability to make their own decisions apart from their parents, and in the financial and social capacities to act on those decisions. Many young adults talked as if a lack of finances were preventing them from moving into adulthood.

Some young adults talked about not feeling like an adult because they had become unable to support themselves financially, or they had returned to the family home due to either financial necessity or the ending of a romantic relationship. In these situations, they usually continued to say they were adults, but they qualified their status, saying they did not feel like an adult or that they had temporarily regressed from being an adult. Sometimes this was described as "regressing" or "falling back."

In almost all cases, the young adults we interviewed viewed marriage and family as optional, but not part of their immediate horizon. Young adults who already had children understood that providing for their children was inescapably part of being an adult, even though some expressed a desire to press pause and not be an adult for a while. Significantly, several young adults, who did describe themselves as adults, said they were adults "unfortunately" or

"reluctantly." Usually their dissatisfaction with their adult state stemmed from the burden of adult responsibilities. One young adult even defined adulthood as the capacity to make himself do what he did not want to do.

Many young adults contrasted college or university with the "real world." Lisa, now married and in the workforce, contrasted her "real-world" job with college:

> College is just amazing! **It is just the best time of my life, and now the real world is you have to go to work all the time! Every day!** [laughs] **And you have to make all your own meals and that is pretty much the real world. No one – if you want to – no one is just there to invest in you. If you wanted to, you could be all by yourself in the real world.** … And now, you just have to make it happen. You just have to do it. And if you want it, you have to be the one to take initiative, and I think we are all capable of it, but sometimes it would be kind of nice if you could just not go to work for the day, or someone could just be like, "Hey, I want to do this for you," or "Sit in my class and learn from me!"
>
> I just really miss, I just, **I could not emphasize enough the home and the family and a real community of believers that I found at [her Christian higher education institution]. … I guess I just really, really miss that**. And I really, really miss being a student and living the student life because it is awesome. I guess that is real life. Not that married life – married life is great! Just not working life. [Emphasis added]

There is evidence that young adults, aside from their experience of financial dependence, enjoy this stage in life and are reluctant to move on to adulthood and the "real world." This desire to remain in emerging adulthood may be extending this period of young adults' lives.

The young adults we talked to often distinguished between emerging adulthood and the "real world" (see table 9.4 below). Emerging adulthood often coincides with postsecondary education and frequent social media use.

Table 9.4. Differences between the spheres of emerging adulthood and the "real world"

Emerging Adulthood	Real World
People are young, beautiful and healthy	People are older, less beautiful and less healthy
Creating is easy	Creating is hard
I am in control	Others are in control
Socially rich environment	Socially isolating environment
Rich variety of activities	Dull or repetitive activities
Networking is easy	Networking is hard
Groups are customized to me	I have to fit in with groups as they present themselves

Source: YA interviews.

The different young adult fears examined earlier in this report (Fear of Not Being Amazing, Fear of Missing Out, Fear of Passionless Monotony) are in some sense a dread of the encroachment of the real world upon their lives.[142]

A Christian life trajectory begins in a world broken by sin and full of trouble, yet redemption in Christ leads to heaven. The experience of social media and university early on upends young adults' life trajectory. As young adults immersed in the social media/university world, they begin in the "heaven" or "paradise" of beautiful images, good health, a high degree of personal control and relative ease, and move to the dull, repetitive and socially isolating real world, where their boss is in control, their health deteriorates, and they become less beautiful. In the Christian worldview, you are born into a world conscious of the Fall, but also the Gospel; in the social media world you see the fall coming, and it is a fall into the real world. Without a hope of heaven to look forward to, you can either try to regain emerging adulthood or pursue any number of the forms of escape offered by our culture.

This is important for understanding emerging adulthood. When we talked to young adults about the adulthood they were aiming for, they talked about becoming self-sufficient. Very few saw the traditional markers of marriage and family formation as necessary or even in view. **The vision of adulthood most commonly articulated by our interviewees was distinguished from emerging adulthood mainly by greater financial security.**

One expert recalled conversations with young adults who have recently entered their thirties:

> For them, they feel like if they've entered their thirties, it's almost like a lot of things are too late, it's too late to be great at what they do, by that time it's

[142] See sections 8.5, 8.6 and 9.1.4.

> figuring out why does nobody love me, am I not loveable, am I not the type of person someone wants to be with, is there something wrong with me? If I find out I'm 29, I've been in my career for 5 years and I don't like it, is it too late for me to go back to school? Do I want to take on that debt again?

With the responsibility to choose comes anxiety about not making the right choice. Young adults also experience anxiety as they realize their window to choose is closing. For many young adults, age 30 was understood to be the time by which they needed to demonstrate the success of their choices. Erikson said that the *moratorium,* which Arnett reinterpreted as *emerging adulthood,* was possible because society indulged young adults. It would seem that age 30 is being interpreted as a limit on that indulgence.

One expert talked about choices as a kind of "pearl of great price," and that young adults experience social pressure not to make early choices. While choices are still in front of you, you have the possibility of making the best choice. Once you have chosen, if it can be demonstrated that there is a better choice, then you, as a chooser, look foolish. Of course, with a seemingly infinite number of choices, it feels certain that regardless of the best choice I might make today, there will almost certainly be a better choice tomorrow. This is FOMO as it manifests itself in career choices. It is also a reason that career choice is delayed and emerging adulthood is extended.

Eventually, however, the fear of missing out that helps extend emerging adulthood runs up against young adults' own understandings of when the time for choosing (often around age 30) is up. This is a pincer movement of anxieties that will eventually face those who have not formed an identity and gained the capacity to make commitments.

10. Religion

10.1. Change in Religious Affiliation

One of the significant findings from the 2011 *Hemorrhaging Faith* (*HF*) study was the "hemorrhaging" of religious affiliates. *HF* found that of those raised in the Christian faith, only half of Catholics (47%), one-third of Mainline Protestants (36%) and two-thirds (64%) of Evangelicals retained their religious affiliation into young adulthood (see table 10.1 below).[143] Our survey measured young adults' religious affiliation as a teen and as a young adult. There are two notable changes from 2011. First, though the observed differences may be due in part to the shorter interval being studied in the current survey, Catholic and Mainline Protestants may be keeping more of their affiliates into young adulthood: Catholics retain 55% of their affiliates, up from 47% in 2011; and Mainline Protestants retain 53%, up from 36%. Second, there is an increase in those with teen Christian religious affiliations switching to other world religions. In 2011 less than half a percent reported switching to another world religion, whereas in our 2018 study 6% of those with a teen Catholic religious affiliation, 5% of Mainline Protestants and 4% of Evangelicals reported switching to another world religion. Where Christians reported switching to another world religion, 31% became Buddhist, 29% Muslim, 16% Jewish, 13% Hindu and 10% Sikh.

Table 10.1. Young adult religious affiliation, by religious affiliation as a child or teen, percent

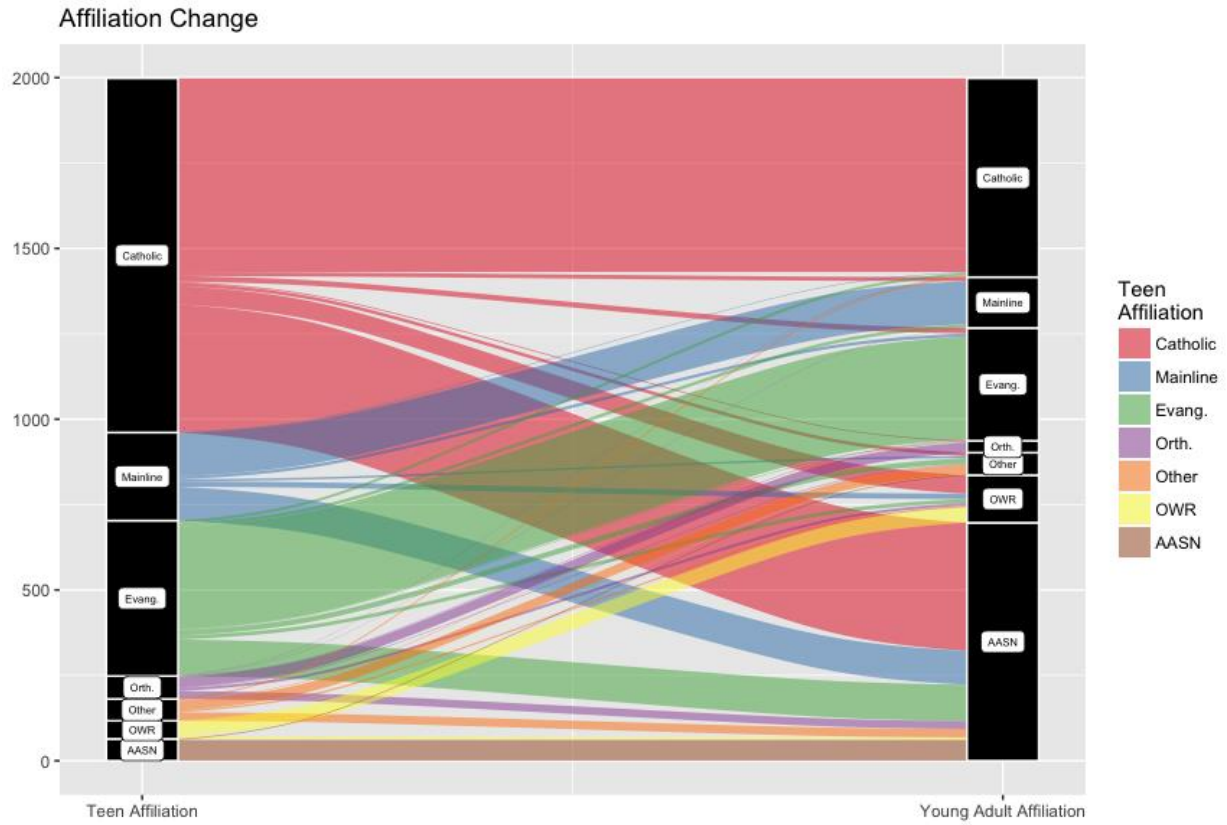
Young Adult Religious Affiliation	Religious Affiliation as a Child (2011) and Teen (2018)							
	Catholic		Mainline		Evangelical		All	
	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018
Catholic	**47**	**55**	2	1	2	1	24	24
Mainline	1	1	**36**	**53**	2	2	10	10
Evangelical	4	2	9	4	**64**	**64**	21	23
Other Christian	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
OWR	0	6	0	5	0	4	0	6
AASN	46	35	52	36	29	25	42	33
Other	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	3

Boldface indicates that the respondent's affiliation is within the same tradition as in childhood or teen years. Data for 2011 are from *Hemorrhaging Faith*; data for 2018 are from the YATR's main YA sample.
Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding. AASN is Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual or None. OWR is Other World Religions.

Chart 10.1 presents the 2018 data from table 10.1 as an alluvial diagram.

[143] The current study's population criteria were more restrictive than *Hemorrhaging Faith*'s. *HF*'s population was those who were raised Christian and were then between the ages of 18 and 34. YATR's study population was young adults who had a Christian affiliation as a teen and who had attended religious services at least monthly at some point during their teenage years. In effect, we tried to exclude those who had been essentially nominal.

Chart 10.1. Religious affiliation as a teen and as a young adult, counts



"AASN" is Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual or None. "OWR" is Other World Religions. "Orth" is Orthodox Christian.

10.2. Change in Religious Service Attendance

We asked the young adults we surveyed how often, on average, they had attended religious services as a teen and in the last 12 months. For each question they could choose one of the following five ordered categories: At least weekly, 2–3 times a month, Once a month or so, Once or a few times a year, Never.

Clearly, the changes from one frequency category to the next are not directly comparable in magnitude or in personal significance. Nevertheless, we can get a measure of religious service attendance change by measuring the category movement along this ordered scale from their teen to young adult responses. For example, if a young adult's attendance in the last 12 months was "Once a month or so" and their teen attendance was at "At least weekly," we would say that their attendance was down two categories.

About half (49%) of young adults continued to attend religious services at the same frequency as they did as a teen, while almost the same share (45%) reduced their religious service attendance and a small minority (6%) increased their religious service attendance (see table 10.2 below).

Those in the older half of our sample (age 24 to 29) were slightly more likely (48%) to have reduced their teenage rate of religious service attendance than those in the younger half (age

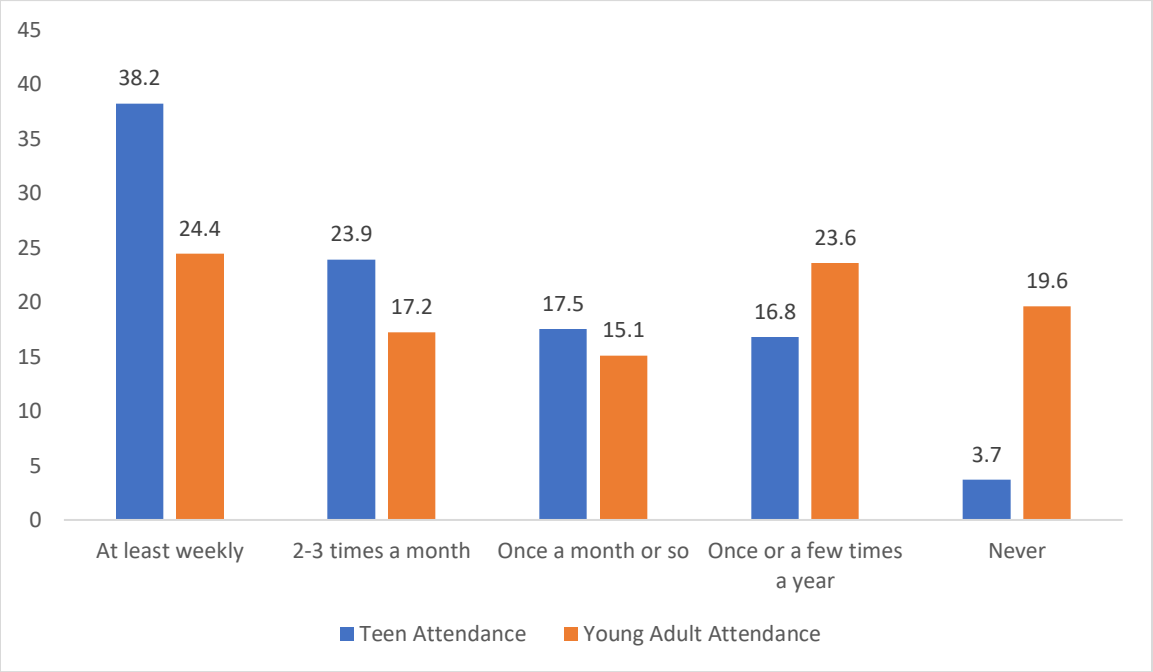
18 to 23) of our sample (43%) (see table 10.2). It does not appear that young adults are reverting back to their teenage religious service attendance patterns after earning an undergraduate degree or a college diploma.

Table 10.2. Attendance change from teen to young adult, by tradition and age, percent

Number of attendance category changes from teen to young adult	All (1,998)	Teen Tradition			Age	
		Catholic (840)	Mainline (347)	Evang. (674)	18–23 (1,070)	24–29 (928)
Up 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Up 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Up 2	1	2	1	1	2	1
Up 1	4	5	3	4	5	4
No Change	49	49	39	53	50	47
Down 1	23	23	33	16	24	21
Down 2	11	12	9	11	11	11
Down 3	8	6	11	10	6	11
Down 4	3	2	4	5	2	5
Up	6	8	5	5	7	5
No Change	49	49	39	53	50	47
Down	45	43	56	42	43	48

Chart 10.2 below shows the distribution of average attendance as a teen and as a young adult. Although the "Never" category has grown the most, it is largely drawing its growth from the teenage "Once a month" and the "Once or a few times a year" categories as shown in table 10.2 above.

Chart 10.2. Religious service attendance, teen and young adult, percent



10.3. Christian Doctrinal Specifics

We asked young adults to assess a very particular Christian formulation of who God is and what he has done, namely, "I believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of my sins." Two in three (61%) young adults in our study agreed, while 27% disagreed (see table 10.3 below).

Table 10.3. Agreement with "I believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of my sins", by tradition as a teen, percent

I believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of my sins	All (1,998)	Tradition as a Teen		
		Catholic (840)	Mainline (347)	Evangelical (674)
Strongly agree	41	30	34	63
Moderately agree	20	25	18	15
Moderately disagree	12	15	14	6
Strongly disagree	15	16	22	9
Don't know	9	10	11	6
Not applicable	3	4	1	2
Agree	61	55	52	78
Disagree	27	31	36	15

Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

In a similar question, this time inverting basic Christian doctrine around the person of Christ, we asked young adults their agreement with "In my view, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God." Less than two in three (57%) disagreed, while 22% agreed (see table 10.4 below)

Table 10.4. Agreement with "In my view, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God," by tradition as a teen, percent

In my view, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God	All (1,998)	Tradition as a Teen		
		Catholic (840)	Mainline (347)	Evangelical (674)
Strongly agree	12	12	13	11
Moderately agree	10	15	9	7
Moderately disagree	14	17	11	10
Strongly disagree	43	32	43	61
Don't know	15	18	20	8
Not applicable	6	6	4	5
Agree	22	27	22	18
Disagree	57	49	54	71

Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

The third question, although it does not deal with the person of God directly, looks at the Bible as a "reliable and trustworthy" expression of God. Fewer than two in three (58%) of young

adults agreed that the Bible is the "Word of God and is reliable and trustworthy" (see table 10.5 below).

Table 10.5. Agreement with "I believe the Bible to be the Word of God and is reliable and trustworthy," by tradition as a teen, percent

		Tradition as a Teen		
I believe the Bible to be the Word of God and is reliable and trustworthy	All (1,998)	Catholic (840)	Mainline (347)	Evangelical (674)
Strongly agree	33	25	23	52
Moderately agree	25	28	28	22
Moderately disagree	15	18	17	10
Strongly disagree	17	17	22	10
Don't know	8	9	9	4
Not applicable	3	4	2	2
Agree	58	53	51	74
Disagree	32	35	39	20

Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

For a sizable minority of young adults raised in the church, then, the identity, nature and mission of God is uncertain. Many of these young adults either do not believe in traditional Christian doctrine or are unsure. This is all the more significant when we consider that they were active in their churches at least monthly at some point during their teen years. As we will see below in section 11.3, many would be unwilling to press the identity, nature or mission of God too strongly lest it accentuate difference with their peers and threaten social harmony.

11. The Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic

In our interviews, many young adults talked about something behind all religions, as if there were a greater, deeper reality that they had discovered that others (usually their parents or grandparents) have not been able to discover.

We call what these young adults described the Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic (UGRE). It is an ethic rather than a religion because it encapsulates a set of principles about what it means to be a "good human" or a "good person." This ethic is a-theological in that it does not need God or gods. God or gods are epiphenomenal. Gods and religion are things that have become encrusted on the pure religious ethic and are something to be stripped away or bypassed, not dealt with directly. In this sense, the particulars of religions are mere barriers to understanding, or worse, they become a source of intolerance when people insist on them.

The UGRE has a primarily functional understanding of religion that is echoed in the way many world religion courses are taught. A *functional* perspective teaches that all religions serve a set of psychosocial functions. If a religion accomplishes this generic set of functions, then its particular teachings or traditions are of secondary importance. Indeed, as long as the functions are served, then one religion, or no religion, could be substituted for another. Moreover, teaching religion from a functional perspective presupposes that filling these functions is religion's purpose. Religious differences, or apparent differences, are then seen as matters of taste, not substance. These differences in taste are analogous to differences in cultural dress or cuisine. Indeed, religion is often seen as a manifestation of culture. When religion is taught from a *consequential* perspective, the aim is to see the consequences of different religious beliefs in society, politics, family life and other spheres. Teaching religion from a functional perspective fails to take the teachings of religions seriously and implicitly (and wrongly) suggests that they are inconsequential.

11.1. The UGRE and MTD

We counterpose the UGRE against the concept of moralistic therapeutic deism (MTD), coined in 2005 by Smith *et al*, who say that it has become the dominant religion in America. They summarize MTD in the following five statements:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when needed to resolve a problem.

5. Good people go to heaven when they die.[144]

MTD has the appearance of "substantive traditional faiths" in its vague references to God, a common morality manifested in niceness, and its gestures to ultimate things, such as the promise of heaven, without requiring a common, coherent moral outlook. By sharing the appearance of substantive traditional faiths, MTD allows emerging adults to avoid conflicts with parents concerned that their children share their faith while also allowing them to avoid conflicts with their peers that would be created by moral judgement. Parents and churches do not press moral issues too strongly because MTD looks enough like "substantive traditional faiths," and the live-and-let-live ethic of moral individualism is not threatened by the vague moral requirement of niceness. **Dean says that, with MTD, emerging adults experience religion as "homogenizing, not polarizing."**[145] MTD, then, fits emerging adulthood in that it does not press for firm commitments and allows the emerging adult to keep all religious options open without causing a decisive break with their family of origin.

The UGRE is different than MTD in that it does not require a notion of God, or religion at all. Many of the young adults we interviewed who talked about the existence of a higher power, when pressed, allowed that a higher power was not essential for their moral outlook. For many who articulated a UGRE outlook, heaven or an afterlife was not in view. Adherents of MTD are at least agnostic. Adherents of the UGRE have a special insight that allows them to know that God is a device, and that differences between religions are only apparent. The UGRE initiates adherents into a different kind of society by this new knowledge, whereas adherents of MTD keep one foot in an older society by clinging to a notion of God. The UGRE is like MTD in that the adherents of both experience religion as homogenizing, not polarizing.

11.2. Gnosticism and Manicheanism

Although the beliefs we label the UGRE often appeal to young adults as if they were a new spiritual discovery, in fact they echo ancient heresies long rejected by Christian tradition. The UGRE is gnostic in the sense that it is secret knowledge (*gnosis*) that comes in a moment of sudden enlightenment. Having gained this special knowledge provides initiates with a new role in the community of those who have discovered this deeper meaning.

Moreover, this knowledge can function as a differentiating marker between young adults and their parents (i.e., I understand this about religion, but my parents do not). Usually, young adults described this insight coming to them in a world religions course.

Sean discovered "modern perspectives" on the Catholic faith in his world religions and philosophy classes in high school. These perspectives embraced by his teachers, chaplain and

[144] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14; Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 154–55; Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163.
[145] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 30.

peers put Sean in the mainstream of local, newer Catholics, which he distinguished from remote, higher up, traditional Catholics. Initially his mom was "hesitant" about his new ideas, but he was able to bring his mother around to his perspective through conversation and because she was not a "hard core" Catholic.

With the UGRE there is an implicit Manichean duality: what is physical is bad, and what is non-physical is good.[146] The manifestations of religion that correspond most closely to the physical world are bad. These physical manifestations include "religious pomp and circumstance" and regular religious services that tie one to time and space. The part of religion that is good is the immaterial ethic that is seen to be behind all religion, and which does not require any specific religion.

The bad or physical side of religion can be apprehended by anyone with their five senses. The good or immaterial religious ethic can be apprehended only by special insight.

There is an intimacy created by sharing the UGRE's special knowledge. This intimacy is created by the experience of immediate access. With the UGRE's special knowledge, you are initiated into the community of those who share this special knowledge. Sharing this knowledge creates an intimacy between the initiates (i.e., we both have transcended the constraints of our religious upbringing and share this experience). This intimacy also has the quality of immediacy because, irrespective of your religious upbringing, you can be brought immediately to a shared understanding with other initiates. Religious specifics that may have been impediments to understanding are set aside.

Difference, especially religious difference, is a threat to this intimacy.

11.3. Processing Religious Difference

Religious difference has historically been a flashpoint for conflict. In contemporary Canadian society, interaction with different religious views is, for many young adults, a daily occurrence. The UGRE manages religious differences by saying they are only apparent, and this means that to insist that these differences are true or vital is to miss the deeper meaning of religion. Moreover, those who insist on the truth of their religion are at best unenlightened and at worst disruptive of social harmony.

Kayla's ideas about religion developed in a world religions course at university when she concluded "all our religions are intertwined" as she tried to reconcile different beliefs and perspectives:

[146] In the third century C.E., the Persian prophet Mani, a.k.a Manic[a]eus, taught a dualistic cosmology that said there is an ongoing struggle between the good, spiritual world of light and the evil, material world of darkness.

> How can I have one God and someone else has a different God? And then rather than taking light of there is one Catholic God, I do believe that there is another power and I just think that we all believe, we all – **All our religions are still intertwined, so rather than just believing in Catholicism, I just started believing that while we all believe in different things, that they are somehow all tied together.** [Emphasis added]

Nicole, considering the perspectives of others she encountered at university, revised her childhood understanding that the Catholic faith was the right religion, saying:

> But now, as an adult and being in university, and even being able to – I would say not being in a school that is Catholic, you can try to understand another person's point of view. **And I think there are parts of every religion that are probably really similar. So, I don't think that being Catholic or Catholicism is the only one or the right one, I think it just depends on the person and how they interpret their own religion.** [Emphasis added]

Nicole's insight was that each person's perspective leads them to judge their religion as being right. With this realization that religious truth is perspectival, she is able to transcend the limits of perspective. Others may think their religion is the only true religion, but Nicole knows that they think this because of the limits of their perspectives. The UGRE gives Nicole a supra-perspectival perspective.

Coming into contact with friends who have different religions changed Nicole's perspective on Catholicism. She explained:

> There is good and evil, that concept. And even Judaism and I think Hinduism and another one [Islam], a lot of those prophets are similar. We may believe as Catholics, we maybe believe that Jesus is the son of God, whereas others believe that he is just a prophet. And a lot of them still see similar views like treating others kindly is in a lot of religions too.

Common interreligious connection points such as the categories of prophets, good and evil, and shared emphases on things like kindness led Nicole to see religions as similar. They are similar in their functions. This is an important observation because if religion is a matter of function, then whatever fills that function is a good religion. If religion's purpose is something else, then function alone cannot be the only evaluative criterion.

11.4. Moral Disagreements as Political Disagreements

The UGRE is the dominant way of managing public spaces now, but it permits people to hold private contrary beliefs as long as they are not manifested in public spaces.

Social media is one such public space where religious discussions are usually quickly taken offline into a private sphere. Hayley, a young adult from our study, described how she decides which conversations should happen on social media and which should happen offline:

> So, I think that, honestly, any time that someone is commenting and goes, "But what about this," I don't think that is the place for the Internet. So, if someone has one of those connections, I will probably send them a direct message and say, "That's a great question. Let's meet up and talk about it." Because I have seen this go wrong so often, where someone will post something mildly controversial, someone will comment back to it, and then 50 comments later, and you've drawn in 30 people who had nothing to do with the post. Now everyone is fighting and then everyone misses the point of whatever the topic was, and then it's a giant nightmare, … So basically, any time someone is commenting something that is kind of asking something that is going further than the post, then that is a conversation for real life, not the Internet.

Controversy threatens the harmony of social media. If a potentially controversial conversation is not stopped, those who had "nothing to do with the post" will be drawn in, resulting in a "giant nightmare."

A consequence of the UGRE is that moral disagreement gets reframed as political disagreement.

Robyn, age 23, was the youngest of three siblings in an intact Christian family that went to a non-denominational church "every Sunday or so." She no longer attends church because there were "teachings and politics" in the church that she could not relate to as a teenager. Robyn identified the following moral issues as politics:

> So, like homosexual marriage, abortion, and things like that, the big topics especially for Christians and talking about sex and things.

For her, the church should not speak to moral-political matters because politics are "discovered in yourself."

> Some of those politics you actually have to discover in yourself, and also through talking to God."

She allows that internal political decisions include talking to God, but for her God only validly speaks to the individual, not the church.

Socially divisive moral teachings are "politics," and politics are negative. They are safely tucked away where they cannot cause social disharmony. By framing moral disagreement as politics in

a culture that often imports from the United States a notion of separation between Church and State (politics), she makes moral discussion offside in the church.

Emma, age 25, grew up in a non-practising Catholic family of four, which she described as "relatively agnostic." With the exception of "a few Bible summer camps," her childhood church participation was limited to Easter and Christmas, and her family's celebrations of these holidays did not have a "religious or spiritual tone." When she was in high school she started dating a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) who "encouraged us to attend some of the meetings and talk to some missionaries." She and her mother subsequently joined the LDS and were baptized.

Emma would eventually break with the LDS church, citing "a lot of issues in voting and legalizing gay marriage in the US at the time," which changed her thinking and put her at odds with her congregation. Like Robyn, moral issues for Emma are also political issues. Reflecting on when she left the LDS church, she said:

> But I think that was going through my mind, that there was a shift in values, and so I felt that I didn't necessarily [have] to attend church every week or be a part of that group, that I could still live by those spiritual values without attending.

Religion, then, was a way to acquire spiritual values. Her values shifted, but the ones she maintained, the "spiritual values" as opposed to political values, could be maintained apart from the LDS church. These spiritual values are not specific to any one religion. Asked to identify her spiritual values today, she said:

> Probably morality, and I do yoga now a little bit. So, doing good things, being a kind person, looking out for yourself – not necessarily being selfish – but making sure that you are healthy and that you are mentally well. And making sure that others, that you can give to those who are in need, so, being able to serve that way.

Having moral issues debated in a political arena reframed those moral issues as political ones for Emma. Politics is often experienced as a divisive exercise that has nothing to do with her "spiritual values."

11.5. Good Person or Good Human

In its substance, the UGRE is thought to lead one to become a "good person" or a "good human." Being a good human was often described in moral terms by the young adults we interviewed, and more than one young adult pointed to the Ten Commandments as the Judeo-Christian manifestation of this ethic. In their explanation of how the Ten Commandments exemplifies this ethic, they concentrated on the final six commandments that deal with

interpersonal relationships rather than the first four that deal with our relationship with God. Moreover, within the six, they remained silent on the commandments dealing with adultery, coveting, and obeying parents. So, the Ten Commandments exemplify the UGRE when one concentrates on three commandments, namely:

- You shall not murder
- You shall not steal
- You shall not bear false witness.

These commandments promote social harmony, which is the aim of this religious ethic, and aim to do so without intruding on one's personal autonomy as might the commandments dealing with adultery, coveting or obeying parents. So, by referencing this elided version of the Ten Commandments, one can appear to be within the Christian tradition. This helps young adults to avoid conflict with Christian parents concerned that their children might be leaving the faith, while committing themselves only to those parts that allow them to function comfortably within the implicit social contract of emerging adulthood that eschews judgement.

David said the "core philosophies" of the church were "pre-programmed" into him, making church participation unnecessary. David said, for example, that church attendance, not eating before Mass, and fish on Fridays are parts of the Catholic faith that are outdated. He thought the core of the Catholic faith were the "12 Commandments [sic]" and:

> just knowing right from wrong. How to treat people. How to operate day to day, stuff like that. Just being a good person, essentially – it boils down to the basics.

When asked what makes someone a good person, he said:

> How do I answer this question? … A good person. So, if I met someone who is vulgar, I don't know, steals, harasses people, beats them up, is physical, not a nice person, has low moral values, that is probably not a good person in my view.
>
> Someone who respects others, treats people with respect, is open-minded about things, wants to see good done for people, wants to see people succeed, wants to help people as best as they can, helping others, stuff like that, that makes a good person, I guess.
>
> And I think those are all things that are part of being Catholic, **it's not that it is part of the core Catholic religion, those are aspects of a good person.** Because there are people who are Catholic who aren't good people. [Emphasis added]

A Catholic, for David, then, may be a good person, but a good person is not necessarily a Catholic. What is necessary is to be a good person. A Catholic can be a manifestation of a good person, and being a good person is the manifestation of the religion behind religions.

Martin, age 21, talked approvingly about the comparatively less exacting standards of the modern Catholic church, describing them this way:

> I would go back to – the 10 Commandments really are the guiding principles of how people should behave in their daily lives. But a lot of them I find to be, in a way, **common sense. …. Don't hurt each other, treat each other with respect and the way that you want to be treated**, for example. Whereas other religions would be a little bit more intense about how people should act. For example, I have some friends who don't eat beef or some sort of meat because of XYZ, whereas I don't really see that in the Catholic faith.

The Catholic faith's standards, then, are "common sense" and in essence come down to "don't hurt each other and treat each other with respect."

In his teen years, Justin started having arguments with his parents about the Catholic faith and what he saw as "aggressive" and exclusionary doctrines. Interestingly, this conflict was resolved by his parents' making a distinction between "evil in the world" and "what religion is," or between "extremism" and "normal religion." An example of "evil in the world" or extremism was American Catholics "shunning homosexuals and sometimes people of other faiths and creeds." In a generous gesture to their American co-religionists, his parents said American Catholics with these "extreme" positions were "misinterpreting the message [of religion]." His parents exhorted him, he recalled:

> "You can't listen to the evil in the world and think that is what our religion is." … They had to sit down with me and explain to me the difference between extremism and normal, our religion. [Catholicism] is good lessons, but you have to take them all with a grain of salt.

"A grain of salt," then, is the interpretive key. Expanding on the Catholic faith and how to take it, his mother told him:

> Whatever lessons you learn are for you to take or not to. And if other people do not want to take them, that is their own choice. You cannot hold that against them. **And whatever faith you choose to have is really just your own way of living and you shouldn't – and I firmly believe that your own way of living should not hurt anyone else**. [Emphasis added]

Therefore, the key to avoiding extremism is to take the Catholic faith with "a grain of salt" and not hold other people's choices against them. The important outcome of Justin's interpretation is that he avoids causing harm to others and he promotes social harmony.

Through his studies of religion at university, Justin came to believe:

> All religions have some of those aspects that I talked about, there are a lot of similarities between – I mean, the stories are very different from one religion to another – but the lessons are still there, I believe.

Francine said that she does not need church at this point in her life because she knows the "core philosophies":

> I don't feel the need to have that kind of community support, maybe because I have found my own independence and I am more comfortable right now in the lessons that I have learned in the church community. **I have felt that even when I go to church the odd weekend now here, they are not really being built upon, it's kind of reiterating things I already know and core philosophies that I have established**. [Emphasis added]

Core philosophies, then, are the religion behind religion or the universal set of standards that all religions try to get at in their own imperfect way.

Wendy, whose significant teen church experience was in a Baptist church, also sees similarities between all religions:

> All the major [religions] that I know about, they have good values – **as long as you are not too extreme in any of those beliefs.** I think they make us – they give humans something to hold on to and to get through life as good humans. To do the best that we can do. [Emphasis added]

Religion, then, when it is "too extreme" becomes a departure from the "good values" of all the major religions. Given that what they share is seen as good, their extremeness is found in what they do not share. Justin's parents were making the same point when they contrasted the extremism of some American Catholics with "normal religion."

For Robert, who grew up in a Mainline tradition, ideal religion provides meaning and, with respect to unity, "a common goal." The common goal of religion is

> **Doing what is right. Doing what people deem as being morally justified and having a compassionate, loving society where people help each other out**. … We have to be respectful to one another. Be understanding of one another. Accept the differences that we all have.

Robert sees a common creed in what "people deem morally justified" and a common goal of "doing what is right" and being a "compassionate, loving society." When religion is taken "too literally," however, he thought it becomes a source of disunity:

> I find that it causes a lot of … disunity rather than unity, and people sort of get caught up in "My religion says this. Your religion says this," and it gets into a debate. … People almost do take it too literally in my opinion, and it causes a lot of conflict because people become so fixated on what my religion says is the only right answer and you should accept that as my right answer.

Unity, or social harmony, is the pre-eminent virtue. Religious literalism works against unity. Religion, then, in its particular manifestations is not the goal. Rather, unity or social harmony is the goal behind these religions, a goal that can be achieved if people do not become "fixated" on their religions as providing the right answers.

11.6. A Higher Power

Many of the young adults we talked to spoke of a "higher power" rather than identifying God as Jesus or using a Trinitarian formula. In many cases, this grew out of a reluctance to exclude others' understandings of God by insisting on a Christian understanding and from what seemed to be genuine uncertainty about who God is. The UGRE as an ethic does not need a particular god or any god, so long as the UGRE's underlying principles are understood and they lead one to be a "good human."

Kayla resolved the problem of religious difference by concluding (see 11.1) all religions at their core are the same. Speaking of her faith now, Kayla said:

> **I just look to a higher power for support. So, I don't know if I necessarily, I am trying to think about whether I refer to him as God, … I don't pray to God or mother Mary or anything. I just know that something is up there and still ask for support from time to time.** [Emphasis added]

When asked how she concluded there was a higher power that was an intertwining of all religions, Kayla said:

> And it is hard not to reflect on everyone else, whether it is Roman Catholics or all the other religions in the world, everyone else sees that there is this higher power, and I guess I just stopped questioning it. And **because I was getting comfort from it, and so many other people were too.** That is why I try not to single out and say God or Jesus or something. I just pray to someone above and hope that someone is looking down on me and supporting me when I need that strength. So, I guess in university and stuff, when I needed it, **I just came to the realization to stop questioning it.** I think I keep it more private too, I don't really talk about it to anyone anyways. So, it is just something for me. [Emphasis added]

Kayla's belief is instrumental. It gives comfort. It minimizes social conflict because it obscures difference. Beyond this, it is not rational or owned through reflection. She simply and consciously "stopped questioning." It is private or "just for me," so even this harmony of difference does not need to be broached in conversation.

Ashley, age 26, grew up in an evangelical family whose mom was "very religious," by which she meant "we went to church every Sunday, prayed before every meal, that whole thing." She participated in a church youth group and found it positive but dropped out when youth group conflicted with her job. Today she believes in a "higher power":

> I believe in a higher power, but that is about it. I don't go to church, I believe there is a higher power. I don't believe it generally has any control over our lives, it is just there.

Ashley's higher power either is powerless or chooses not to intervene in her life. Her description is consistent with an UGRE outlook in that her notion of god is unnecessary and inconsequential.

Wendy, age 25, grew up in a non-practising Catholic family. When she was 10 she was invited by a friend to a Baptist church, was eventually baptized and self-identified as an Evangelical. A mishandled case of sexual abuse in her congregation caused her to leave the evangelical church disillusioned. Today she "almost feel[s] like a little heathen" and describes herself as an agnostic. She explained:

> I definitely believe that there is something-bigger-than-me-magic-power out there because how else could this world be so perfect, and everything be so infinitely designed? I just haven't made up my mind on what that is yet!

Wendy believes, "All the major [religions] … give humans something to hold on to and to get through life as good humans." In harmonizing all religions, however, the distinct identity of God has been lost for Wendy, leaving her with a "something-bigger-than-me-magic-power" that is not intervening in her life right now.

12. Life Choices after High School

After high school, young adults face decisions about whether to enter the workforce or go on to postsecondary education. In many cases, these choices involve a move from the parental home. The immediate post-high school decision for most young adults, however, is about postsecondary education, not work or a career. Seven in ten (71%) young adults from our study had at least some postsecondary education, and 44% had at least some university education.

Career choice is often further into the future. The Canadian government's YITS found that only 10% of young adults were consistent in their career expectations from age 15 and 7% from age 17, meaning that 83% either changed their career expectations or remained undecided between high school graduation and age 25.[147] Although education will influence career choice, clearly most young adults are not making career commitments in their teens.

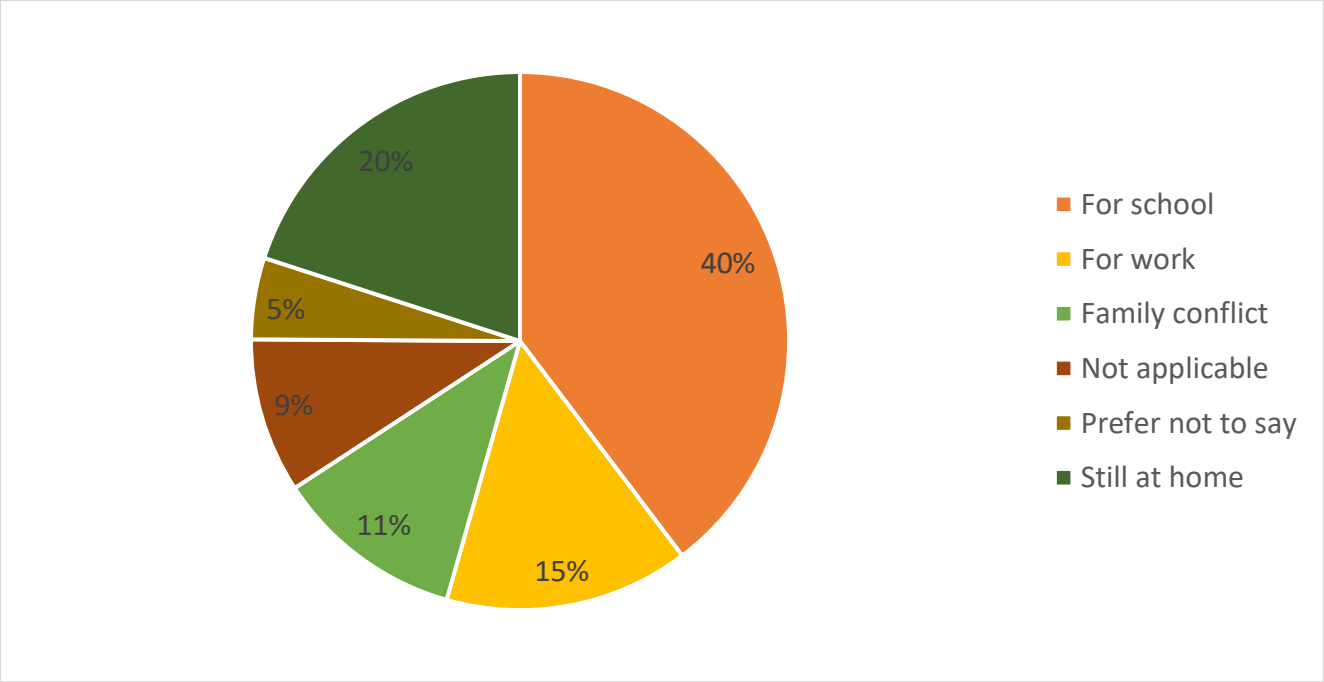
For a substantial minority, the larger choices about postsecondary education and career are put on hold while they take a gap year. One-quarter of young adults in our study had taken a gap year between high school and postsecondary studies, and this group seemed to be better integrated with Christian communities than those who had not taken that break or who had not gone on to postsecondary studies.

12.1. Living Arrangements

Two-thirds (66%) of young adults age 18 to 29 in our survey said they had moved out their parents' home either to attend school, to take a job or because of family conflict (see chart 12.1 below). Of those who had ever moved out, one-quarter (26%) said that they were currently living with their parents. Those who had never moved out of their parents' home along with those who had moved back in represented 45% of 18- to 23-year-olds and 28% of 24- to 29-year-olds in our study. For comparison, the 2016 Canadian census found that 62.6% of young adults age 20 to 24 lived in the parental home and 28.8% of those age 25 to 29 (see chart 2.1 above). Our study found a lower share of young adults living with their parents; however, we had two other possible responses, "Not applicable" and "Prefer not to say," to our question about why they had moved out of their parents' home (see chart 12.1). It is likely that some of these respondents were living in their parents' home, which would bring our numbers more in line with the 2016 census.

[147] "Career Decision-Making," 4.

Chart 12.1. "Which best describes the reason you first moved out of your parents' home?"



12.2. Straight into University

12.2.1. University Was Always the Goal

University seems to be becoming a near-universal aspiration. More than eight in ten (82%) of those who had gone on to attain at least some university education agreed with the statement "I always knew I wanted to go to university," and nearly half (46%) of those who had attained at least some college or technical school said the same. Going straight to the workforce following high school was usually seen as undesirable by those we interviewed, and community college was rarely talked about as an option.

Although most young adults present their post-high school education choices as free and autonomous, most also recognize at some level that their choices are constrained by circumstances, abilities or the expectations of their family and communities.

Some young adults said that their families insisted that they go to university but allowed them to choose the program. In this sense, they had a free but constrained choice. Where young adults saw a decision to attend university as fated, usually by family expectation, they usually said they were happy with this fate. At other points in the conversation, however, they were at pains to describe this same decision as free and autonomous.

For Sean, university was "always the goal."

> Well, university was always the goal. There wasn't really any pressure from my parents or anything. But it was a goal of mine to make it into a strong well-known university, because I am also very business-oriented and that is the field I am going into. So, I knew that in order to be relatively successful in life you need to have your education and that goes beyond just your high school diploma. So, I worked hard in high school to get the grades that I needed to for university.

Although Sean was not asked about parental influence on his post-high school decision making, it was important for him to say his parents were not influential.

Francine also said she always knew she wanted to go to university:

> I always knew that I wanted to go to university and that I wanted to move away from home and experience something different.

Unlike Sean, Francine acknowledged later on in the conversation that her family and friends had roles in her decision making:

> But looking back, I think it was my family a lot which influenced what I wanted to do and what I wanted to see, along with my friends.

Nevertheless, it was important for the initial presentation of her decision to appear to be autonomous.

Unlike Sean and Francine, Barbara comes from an immigrant family and openly recognized her family's influence on her education choices:

> Well, my family only really cared about me going to university. That was really what they wanted. They helped me with tuition and everything.

Within this framework, Barbara said, she could make her own decision, and she talked to friends about "what I wanted to do." Her will was free within the boundaries set out by her family.

Nicole also grew up in an immigrant family. She explained that her mom valued education

> because she [Nicole's mom] didn't really get to experience that [higher education] because growing up she had to work a lot of jobs and take care of her siblings.

Knowing about her mother's experience and sacrifice made Nicole choose university to "make her [mother] happy":

> So, in a way, I feel like we went to make her happy, but at the same time I wanted to go too. But all of my cousins, that is something that is in their mindset, that immigrant parents want the Canadian dream or the American dream.

Martin also came from an immigrant family, and for Martin's parents, "university was a must." He explained:

> I think simply because they saw it as a way for me to get a really good career. They said that quote-end-quote, "They are immigrants and we came to this country for a better life, and it would be a shame if I didn't go to university."

Martin would have shamed their immigrant sacrifice if he did not go to university. Despite this, Martin claimed he did not feel pressure to go to university:

> No, I felt more that it was my choice. I knew I wanted to go to school because I realized that the way I wanted to go in the future was based on having a university degree.

When Justin talked about how he decided what to do after high school, he talked about all the people in his family with education:

> In our family, my grandmother was a teacher, her brother was a priest, my grandfather was a farmer. And my grandmother, her whole family was in some way educated. Her family got all her kids educated, and she firmly believed that she was a whole lot better off because of that, her whole family was. So, she made sure – she had 10 children – and she made sure every single one of them got to go to university, and then she made sure that all of us went to university as well. But not necessarily, we weren't forced to go to university.

It is clear that within his family there was an expectation that he would get a university education, and indeed they were supportive of his plan to take a Bachelor of Science. However, he added:

> But they were very adamant that I should do whatever I want to be happy.

For many young adults, moving on to postsecondary education is the first step towards a career that will eventually allow them to be financially independent and make the commitments of adulthood. It is difficult to see educational choice as a differentiating marker, however, if your parents are making or constraining your choice. This is likely why young adults try to present their choice as autonomous because it is only authentically their choice if they, not their parents, made it.

Young adults from immigrant families recognized that their parents' expectations had constrained their choices and were generally more forthcoming about these limitations. However, even where parents' roles were acknowledged, young adults usually quickly minimized their parents' role by asserting they were happy with the choice anyway, thus reframing their parents' roles as confirmers of their own decision.

12.2.2. Spiritual Discernment

Only a few young adults talked about discerning their future through prayer, or with the participation of their church community.

Sam grew up a pastor's kid in an evangelical home and interpreted events in his life as God's leading. Unlike most others, he saw an active role for his family and church community in his decision-making process. And unlike others, he did not immediately jump to the conclusion that university had been foreordained for him. He knew that he loved math, science and computers, and not "a heck of a lot other than that." So, he prayed about it "because that is what you are supposed to do."

> And I did not feel like God was leading me towards anything in particular, I felt like he was very quiet on that issue. So, I just kind of operated under, "Okay, God, I am just going to start moving, and if you feel like there is something I am doing wrong, stop me."

When asked if he felt let down by God's silence, Sam said:

> No, I don't. I did at the time, and then I started listening to a lot of sermons on figuring out what God's will is, and what the Bible says about discerning what God's will is for your life. And when you read the words of Jesus, He is a lot more concerned about the type of person you are than about where you go. And I felt afterwards like God was silent because He didn't really care what I did as far as a vocation as long as I was living for Him and seeking to glorify Him through whatever I was doing.

Sam eventually went on to study engineering at a major Canadian university. Sam explained what preceded his choice: "[I] had several talks with my parents, and with my grandparents (because I was hoping to live with them in [a Canadian city]) and what they wanted to do, and with my classmates, like every student would."

When asked about their advice, Sam said:

> I just felt very supported in whatever I wanted to do. They would help me think through it and figure out what I wanted to do and pick something. My classmates would often point out things I was good at. I have a gifting with

> computers, and I work at a computer place. I'm good at that, so a lot of them were kind of pointing me in that direction. … And the vast majority of the people I would have been talking to were Christians themselves, and I am sure a lot of them were praying for me but that never entered into our conversations.

Several of the young adults who attended evangelical Christian higher education (CHE) institutions spoke about their initial reluctance to attend these schools. About half of the CHE students we interviewed had begun their stay with a trial one-year discipleship program, which they subsequently extended into a full degree.

Lisa was the top academic student in her class of 28 students, so she felt "a lot of pressure to attend university and attend the correct university." Her guidance counsellor applied to a regional university on her behalf, and she got in. Lisa applied to four schools including the CHE institution she would later attend. She had not heard of the CHE institution but applied at her mother's urging.

Lisa does not recall how she eventually made her decision to take a one-year discipleship program, but reflecting back, she said:

> I just believe God opened that door and dragged me through it a little bit – but for me, I was able to please everyone by going somewhere for a year, but I didn't have to commit to a program yet because I just had no clue what program I wanted to be in.

Lisa said she felt like the "pride of [her little] town" and did not want to let down people who were expecting so much of her. Lisa spoke of how the pressure of not letting people down drowned out the voice of God:

> And I also felt this incredible pressure, on the other side of it, the faith side of it. I was trying desperately to pray about it and sense some kind of direction. And I just wanted God to write it on the wall where I was supposed to go, and I just felt like I couldn't hear anything. And so, this not wanting to disappoint God neither was a huge factor.

Lisa has since graduated from the CHE institution and describes her experience there as life-transforming.

Christopher explained how he ended up at a CHE institution:

> And I suppose it was probably May or June of my Grade 12 year when I started feeling a nudging towards [a CHE institution]. It was weird because I never wanted to go to [this CHE institution] and I wasn't really including God in my decision making, but I also didn't really know what I wanted to do. So, lots of

> people in my church (because I had worked at the church) told me I was going to be going into ministry and whatnot – classic pastor's kid: You are going to be a pastor. So, I shut that down and said I wasn't going to. But at this point, end of Grade 12, I started feeling nudged towards [a CHE institution] and then I was like, "Hey, I'll give it a shot." I ended up here, probably about a semester in was when I was really starting to feel strongly something – which I realize now was God. Where am I at…? And I suppose it was around that time that I started feeling a call to ministry that I started really starting to begin taking my faith seriously.

Before Christopher made his decision to go to a CHE institution, he was leaning towards an engineering and business program at a regional secular university where he had been accepted. He applied to engineering because his teachers had identified that he was good at math and physics:

> So, I said, "Sure, I guess that makes sense. [Engineers] make good money and [this regional university] would be a cool school to go to.

Christopher's mother actually applied to the CHEC institution on his behalf. He recalled:

> It was probably within a few weeks when I really started to question going to [the regional university], if I was making the right decision. I don't remember having any huge deep conversations, it was more internal wrestling with it, I suppose.

Christopher enrolled in a business program at the CHE institution, rationalizing that business was widely applicable and if he did not like it there he could transfer somewhere else.

> So, coming in first year I didn't really have any direction with my life, didn't have any idea of what I thought of my faith, how that connected to the real world, how I lived my life day to day, but now that is all – I can't say by any means "figured out" – but it is definitely more clear to me now and far more important to me than it was. And that alone is more than I could have ever expected or anticipated.

Christopher "shut down" the "classic pastor's kid: You are going to be a pastor" role because that was his childhood role, and he needed to renegotiate an adult role for himself. As it turns out, he was about to take on a pastoral role when we spoke to him, but he came to that decision through a lengthy discernment process.

12.3. Straight into the Workforce

The young adults we interviewed who had gone straight into the workforce did so because life circumstances didn't permit them to go on to postsecondary education. These young adults talked about family dysfunction and addictions as their explanation. They were conscious that they should be going on to postsecondary education. Without exception, all of them had plans to one day get postsecondary education.

June regularly attended a United church in a northern Ontario community with her family until she was about age 12, when her life and faith unraveled in the face of her mother's cancer diagnosis. She ended up in foster care in high school, went through some "drug addictions, got out of foster care, had [her] son when [she] was 18." She and her boyfriend now live in a small town with precarious work that she believes to be threatened by technology.

June briefly enrolled in a social work program in order to help people in family situations like the one she experienced; however, she was not able to complete the course. Now at age 27, she hopes to either get a small business off the ground or go back to school for social work. As quoted above (see section 9.1.1), June hopes to one day have a secure job that fits her

> because it is pretty important to wake up in the morning and actually want to go to your job, rather than going to work and you're dreading it.

June is describing a foreclosed life, where her responsibilities keep her from the path she would follow if she had the choice.

Chloe dropped out of high school because of "anorexia problems" at age 16. She was having panic attacks and "lots of anxiety." She got a job after dropping out of high school because her parents told her she must either work or go to school. Chloe later moved out with her boyfriend and subsequently finished high school. Now, at age 25, Chloe has moved back in with her parents because she had split with her *conjoint* (boyfriend or common-law spouse) and so she can afford CEGEP (*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*, a postsecondary education system in Quebec), but added that she is chafing under their rules.

Despite her recent split with her conjoint, she talks about a future that includes him. She said that she expects her boyfriend to buy a house, she will move in, and they will have kids together – the kids are not to come before she has finished school, however. She added that she is waiting on her boyfriend to marry her, something she expects to happen in the next 5 years.

Wendy planned to take a year off after high school and then decide about higher education.

> I took a year off, I started hanging out with a different crowd of friends who were a bit more of the party side, some drinking and that sort of thing. And I just fell away from my mindset, and my religion, and I very much took into that life.

Wendy ended up moving to another province to get a job and boarded with a family. This was one of several moves to take temporary, unstable jobs.

Seven years after setting out to take a year off, Wendy is working and saving for college. She found a new boyfriend and told herself, "I should probably step up and do something good with my life at this point. I'm 25, it's time."

When asked to expand on what she meant by stepping up, Wendy replied:

> I guess I felt I had learned a lot in the years since high school, but it largely felt like I had come to a wall where I stopped growing. For a long time, I had been reading a lot of self-improvement books. I tried some new things. I learnt a lot about finances. I was doing stuff. But then I came to a point where I was like, "Okay, I am 25, what do I have to prove for that? I have a car. That's great. I have a nice apartment. That's great." But I need to do something at this point, and I felt like finding a career would be that sort of thing in my life.

Although postsecondary education is a near-universal aspiration for young adults, some have their plans derailed by life circumstances. Usually these young adults, who often had young families, described working towards getting some kind of postsecondary education.

One ministry expert talked about a young man who was "stigmatized" for choosing to work in his family's roofing business:

> The stigma isn't just from peers, but it is also from the institutional schools. … I would say the stigma is because of a lack of freedom that people feel like they are losing, but little do they know that they actually gain freedom. … being committed to something, you say no to a lot of things.

The young man was stigmatized for two reasons. First, he chose a career path, roofing, that was not judged by his peers and his teachers to correspond to *ideal prototypes.* Second, he was stigmatized because in the eyes of his peers and teachers he chose too early and was seen to be cutting off options.

This same expert went on to draw a parallel between the stigma of early career choice and stigma of early faith choice:

> I think someone, especially a young person, who commits to an ideology or a way of life strongly, that is shown [or regarded as] a lack of freedom … there is

> even a bit of persecution if you try to take that leap [of making a life commitment] … you commit to something and there is often stigma. … you are sometimes made fun of, usually by those who don't have as much focus in their life.

This expert's account suggests that early identity formation is sometimes discouraged by schools and peers, who see early choices as a squandering of opportunities.

12.4. Gap Year

Many young adults take a significant period of time away from education after high school that is commonly called a *gap year* or *gap period.* The literature sometimes calls those who take a gap year, or gap period, *Gappers*.

The 2003 cycle of the Canadian Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) looked at the transitions of young adults age 22 to 24 to postsecondary studies.[148] The study found that about 40% had gone on to postsecondary studies within 4 months after graduating from high school, 30% had delayed starting postsecondary studies for more than 4 months and 30% had high school education or less.[149]

Our study defined a Gapper as someone who took a year or more away from school between finishing high school and starting postsecondary education. A non-Gapper was someone who went on to postsecondary education sooner than one year after graduating from high school, and the remainder were those who did not report attaining any postsecondary education. A quarter of our sample (25%) were Gappers, 46% were non-Gappers and 29% had no postsecondary education.

Only a few young adults we interviewed had taken gap years. Two had enrolled in one-year discipleship training programs, which they described as gap years. Although a discipleship training program is an academic program, it seems that they are thought of as a gap year because they are not seen to be directly connected with the course of study young adults plan to take afterwards, which may be more tightly connected to their career aspirations. Another young adult took what she intended to be a gap year and now, seven years later, she is working towards saving enough money for school.

Ministry experts talked about young adults taking gap years to go on mission trips or to work. How ministry experts viewed gap years depended on how young adults used that year.

---

[148] Government of Canada, "Youth in Transition Survey (YITS)."
[149] Hango, "Taking Time off between High School and Postsecondary Education: Determinants and Early Labour Market Outcomes."

An expert working in a Catholic context talked about a diocesan program to encourage gap years as an opportunity to pursue spiritual formation. He said the bishop

> wants young adults more engaged in their faith. … I think a gap year would encourage some young people … to not rush into their school.

An expert working in a campus ministry context thought gap years made students "more socially mature, … more self-disciplined, more appreciative of school, seeing it as a privilege rather than a chore," before adding:

> I haven't always seen a high correlation between gap year and being more others-centred or being more missional.

Other experts said that the value of a gap year depended on what they were doing with the time. When asked about the value of a taking a gap year, one ministry expert said:

> The only way that [the value of a gap year] can be [assessed] is based on the way that the person does their gap year.

He went on to say he does not think Gappers are that different than those who went off to university:

> I don't think it is any different. The only difference that I see, the time that they have is spent differently, that is all. They might spend more time with the current friends that they have plus they may have more time to be a part of some local church activities. … So, what takes up their time is their full-time work, hanging out with friends and serving in our ministry. And other people in our ministry who are in university they can have studying, classes, friends, and then our ministry, so it's just a function of time.

Gappers were more likely (32%) to attend religious services weekly than either non-Gappers (22%) or those with no postsecondary education (see table 12.1 below).

Table 12.1. Frequency of religious service attendance as a young adult, by whether respondent had taken a gap year,[a] percent

Frequency of religious service attendance in the last 12 months	Gapper (503)	Non-Gapper (920)	No postsecondary education (576)
At least weekly	32	22	22
1–3 times a month	33	30	36
Less than monthly	35	49	42

[a] Gap year defined as taking a year or more away from school between finishing high school and starting postsecondary education. Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Gappers were far more likely (58%) to report having had a home church mentor than non-Gappers (35%) or those with no postsecondary education (43%). The Gappers who had a home church mentor were also more likely to still be in regular contact with their home church mentors (see table 12.2 below).

Table 12.2. Relationship with home church mentor, by whether respondent had taken a gap year,[a] percent

Mentor measure	Gapper (503)	Non-Gapper (920)	No postsecondary education (576)
Had a home church mentor	58	35	43
Still in regular contact with home church mentor[b]	69	54	63

[a] Gap year defined as taking a year or more away from school between finishing high school and starting postsecondary education.
[b] For those who had a home church mentor.

Gappers were more likely (41%) to connect with new Christian communities after having moved out of their parents' home as young adults than either non-Gappers (25%) or those with no postsecondary education (30%) (see table 12.3 below). Gappers were also twice as likely (40%) to connect with a Christian campus group as non-Gappers (21%).

Table 12.3. "Thinking of when you first moved out of your parents' home, did you connect with a different local church?" by whether respondent had taken a gap year,[a] percent[b]

Did you connect with a different local church	Gapper (371)	Non-Gapper (654)	No postsecondary education (289)
Yes	41	25	30
No (no church)	45	62	58
Attended same church	14	13	12

[a] Gap year defined as taking a year or more away from school between finishing high school and starting postsecondary education. Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.
[b] For those who had ever moved out of their parents' home.

Gappers are also more likely to have had help from their home churches in making connections into new Christian communities. Two in five (41%) Gappers who moved out of their parents' home had had someone from their home church try to make a connection for them with a new local church, compared to just 16% of non-Gappers and 34% of those with no postsecondary education. Gappers were twice as likely (35%) to have had someone from their home church help make a connection for them to a Christian campus group as non-Gappers (16%).

Gappers were almost twice as likely (38%) to report having worked at a Christian camp as were either non-Gappers (20%) or those with no postsecondary education (23%). Gappers were also more likely (60%) to have attended a Christian camp as a teen than non-Gappers (38%) or those with no postsecondary education (42%).

Teens continuing on to higher education who had teen Catholic or evangelical religious affiliations were more likely (38%) to have taken a gap year than those with a Mainline Protestant tradition (27%).

It seems that Gappers as a group are better integrated into Christian communities than either non-Gappers or those without postsecondary education. Further research or reflection by ministry practitioners is needed to show why.

13. Connections after High School

13.1. Connections with a New Church

Altogether, almost half of young adults who had moved out connected with a church: another local church or parish (31%) or the same church as they had attended while at home (13%) (see table 13.1 below). Evangelicals (42%) were almost twice as likely as either Catholics (26%) or Mainline Protestants (24%) to connect with another church after having moved out. There were no significant age-related differences in the likelihood of making these new church connections.

Table 13.1. "Thinking of when you first moved out of your parents' home, did you connect with a different (local church/parish)?"[a] percent

Tradition as a Teenager	Yes (402)	No (741)	Continued to attend the same church (173)
Catholic (555)	26	61	13
Mainline (245)	24	66	11
Evangelical (435)	42	42	16
All (1,314)	31	56	13

[a] For those who had ever moved out of their parents' home.
Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.

We asked those who had moved out of their parents' home if anyone from their local church or parish had tried to make a connection for them in a new church or parish. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of those who had moved out said that someone from their local church or parish had tried to make a new church connection for them. Where someone from a home church had tried to make the connection, more than two-thirds (68%) had gone on to connect with a new church, compared to less than one in four (23%) of those who had not had anyone making a connection for them (see table 13.2 below). **Young adults who had had a connection made for them by someone from their home church were roughly three times as likely to go on to connect with a new local church after moving out of their parents' home.**

Table 13.2. Connected with a different (local church/parish) after first moving from parents' home, by home church connection, percent

Tradition as a Teenager	Someone from home church had tried to make a connection (309)	No one from home church had tried to make a connection (834)
Catholic (146)	68	14
Mainline (58)	56	19
Evangelical (184)	72	41
All (401)	68	23

[a] For those who had ever moved out of their parents' home.

From the young adult interviews, it was clear that young adults saw churches as closed, walled-off communities. If you lack friends, family or an invitation, breaking into such a community seems daunting and overwhelming.

When Melissa went to university, she had "some family friends that helped [her] connect to a local church in [her] new city." Melissa also had family friends help with the move, and she "keep[s] up with friends from [her] hometown through Facebook or email and stuff like that," as well as keeping in touch with friends from high school. Melissa has a well-networked and well-integrated life.

Melissa explained her family friends' motives in helping her get settled in a new church:

> I think the genuine interest of extending the hospitality and friendship to someone who maybe doesn't know their way around the city and trying to get them connected. And a genuine intention of helping them feel settled in the new city.

Although the new church "has been a great transition, … the first few experiences were a bit rough." Melissa said she

> wasn't really sure that I felt at home. But there were people that I had met from university and from attending the college and career group at that church that I had recognized, and they had been very intentional about including me and making sure I had a ride to college and careers, or to different church events. So that was great as I didn't have a car that first year.

It was important for people to welcome Melissa into social circles and make her feel included. It was also important for them to facilitate her participation through giving rides. This is part of being hospitable. Had these friends not been there, Melissa said she

> probably would have gone to a different church where I would have known a pastor or knew a family member that attended.

Local churches or parishes, unlike many young adults, tend to be grounded in a place. For many people, place is a powerful part of their identity. For example, to belong to First Baptist Church of University-ville communicates identity markers of history (First), tradition (Baptist) and place (University-ville). While these may be important markers to those inside the community, they can appear as barriers to those outside the community. They can say, "If these markers are not you, then this is not your place."

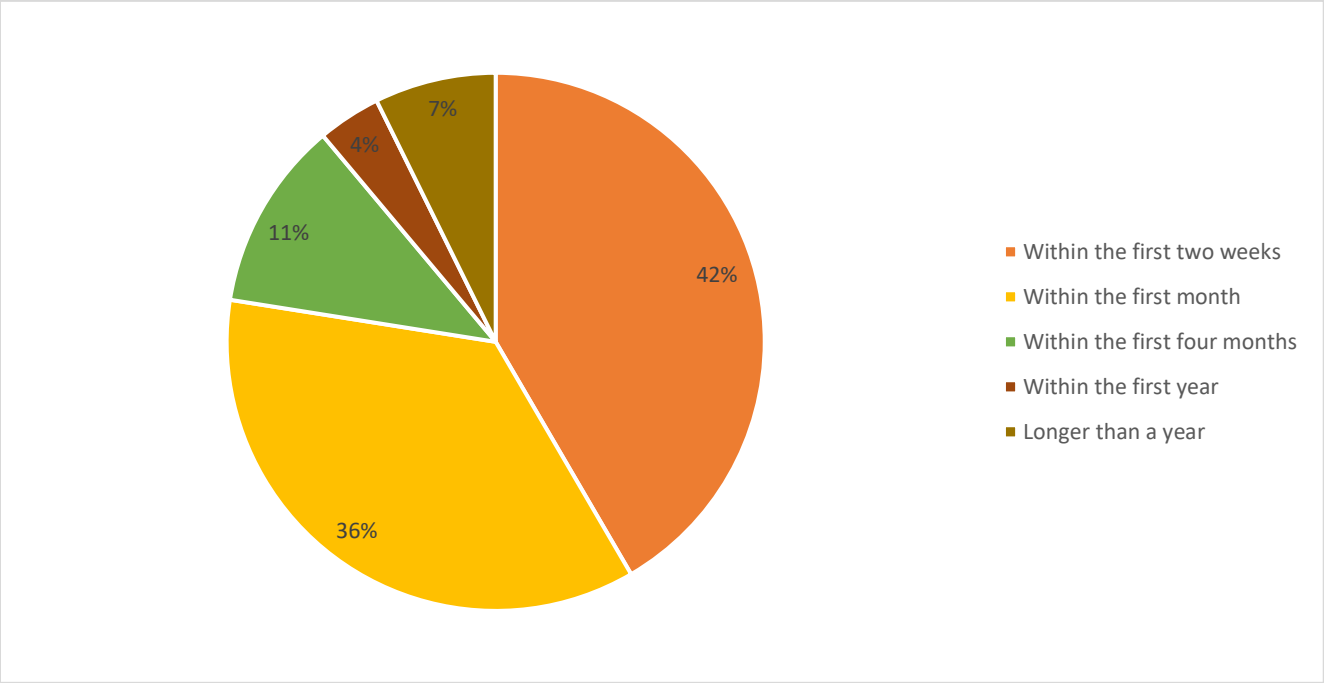
Church members tend to have more stable social contexts and networks. This strength may be perceived as threatening or cliquey to those on the outside. Young adults who described these networks felt the onus was on those in the group they perceived to be exclusive to create the

opening for them to join. Young adults have easier social options where participation takes less effort, and they will usually choose those before trying to break into church networks they perceive as closed to them. The important measure is how open young adults perceive a church to be, not how open a church thinks it is.

It is critical for young adults that someone facilitate their entrance to a new church community, whether it be someone inside the church or someone from outside the church with social standing in it.

Young adults who had connected at all with a new church after having first moved out of their parents' home usually made that connection quickly. More than three-quarters (78%) of those who connected with a new church did so within the first month after moving out, and more than half of these made the connection in the first two weeks (see chart 13.1 below).

Chart 13.1. "How long was it after you first moved out of your parents' home before you connected with a different (local church/parish)?"



For those who had moved out of their parents' home and connected with a different (local church/parish).

When Becky moved to go to university, a friend from her Presbyterian church helped her connect with another Presbyterian church in her new city. Church became part of her support network:

> I had to move to a different city, so moving away from my hometown to a new place, that was the biggest stress because I knew no one from the place I was moving to. And I coped with it by going to church and meeting new people there,

> and they were supportive, and they became my new friends, and I guess that helped me settle in to the new place.

She experienced this new church as supportive when they gave her

> undivided attention and asking about my upcoming circumstances and being there for me and listening for what I have to say, and what I am going through. … We would go out to eat together and spend time outside and go over to their places at home and stuff like that.

13.2. Mentoring and Connections to Other Churches and Ministries

Home church mentors are one of the most significant factors correlated to young adults connecting with and continuing on in Christian communities after high school. A mentoring relationship helps young adults walk through their identity formation, and the presence of a mentoring relationship is a sign that a young adult is well integrated into their home church community.

John Bowen, professor emeritus of evangelism at Wycliffe College, in a 2002–2003 study of those who were Leaders in Training (LITs) at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Pioneer Camp in Ontario from 1981 to 1997, asked, "What would you say are the main factors that have enabled you to stay within the Christian faith?" The presence of mentors in their lives was the second most important factor (82%), just after "my relationship with God" (89%) and before friends (81%).[150]

Reimer, Wilkinson and Penner, in *A Culture of Faith,* concluded that "non-parental adult investment in children and youth, by youth pastors or adult lay members, for example, is one factor that promotes institutional involvement into adulthood."[151]

Powell and Clark observed that "contact from at least one adult from the congregation *outside* the youth ministry during the first semester of college is linked with Sticky Faith."[152]

In our sample, less than a third (31%) of young adults who had moved out of their parents' home went on to connect with a new local church, and just 28% of young adults who had attained at least some postsecondary education went on to connect with a Christian campus group. When a young adult had had a home church mentor as a teen, though, these numbers rose to 53% and 48% for local church and campus group connections respectively. When that

[150] Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 35.
[151] Reimer and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*, 165.
[152] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 100.

mentor had continued to be in regular contact with the young adult after high school, these numbers were even higher, at 65% and 57% respectively (see chart 13.2 below).

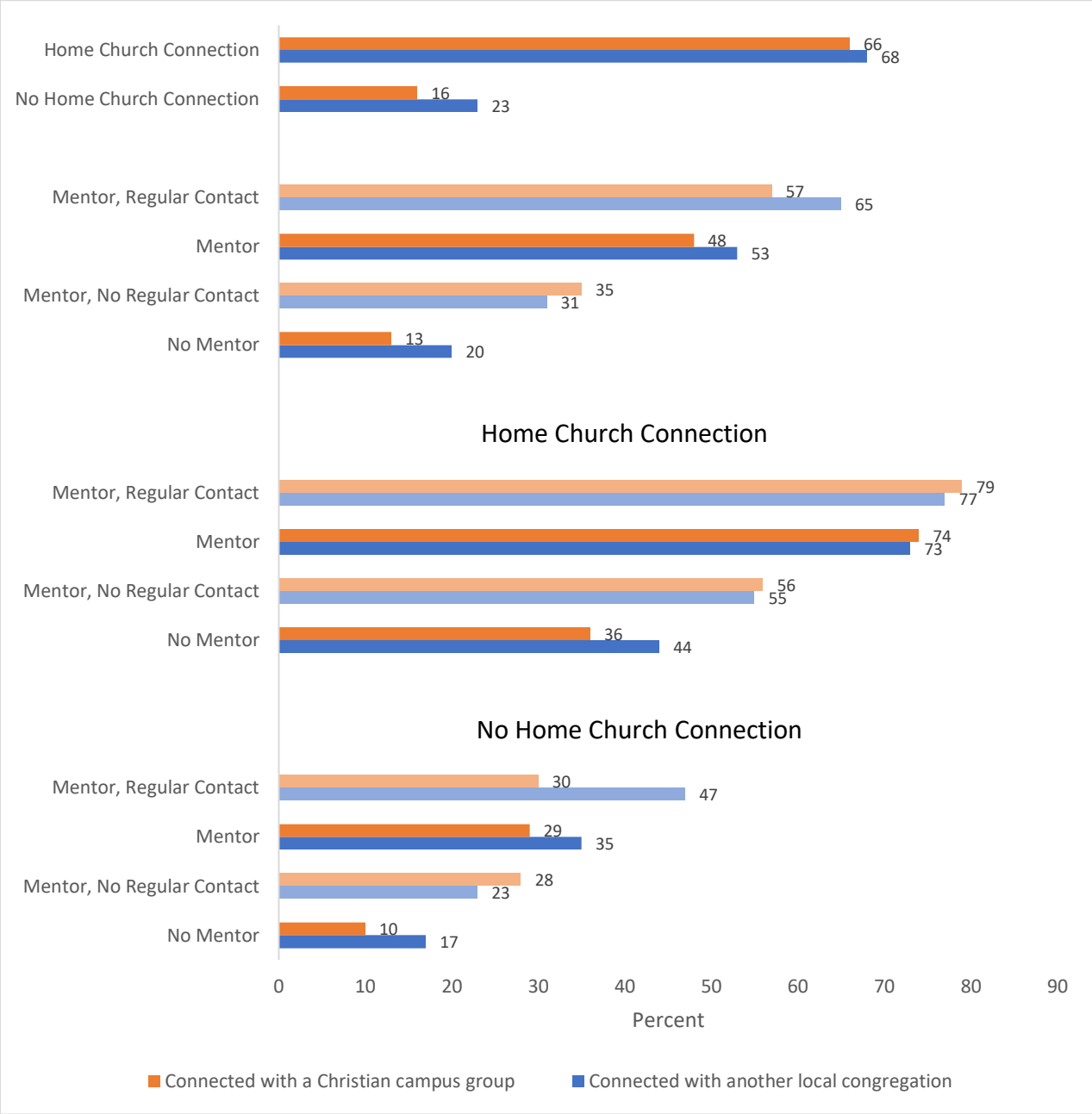
We also asked young adult survey respondents if they had had someone from their home church help make connections for them: with a new church if they had moved out of their parents' home, and with a Christian campus group if they had gone on to postsecondary education. Those who had moved out of their parents' home and had had someone from their home church try to make a connection for them with a different church or parish were three times as likely (68%) to connect with another local church or parish as those who had not had this help (23%) (see chart 13.2 below). Similarly, of those who had gone on to postsecondary education, two-thirds (66%) had made a connection with a Christian campus group when they had had someone from their home church try to make the connection for them compared to just 16% of those who had not.

We also looked at the cumulative effect of having a home church mentor and help from a home church in making connections to new Christian communities. It should be pointed out that where home churches make connections for young adults with new Christian communities, the person from the home church making those connections will often be the young adult's home church mentor. When a home church mentor continued to be in regular contact with a young adult *and* the young adult had had someone from their home church try to make a connection for them with a different congregation, almost four in five young adults (77%) went on to connect with a local church. Similarly, four in five young adults (79%) who had gone on to postsecondary education with the benefit of having someone from their home church try to make a campus connection for them connected with a Christian campus group. Where both the home church connections and the home church mentors were absent, though, new church and Christian campus group connections were just 17% and 10% respectively (see chart 13.2 below).

Mentoring is most effective in helping young adults connect with new community when the mentor continues to be in regular contact with the young adult after they graduate from high school. When a home church mentor was in regular contact with a young adult, they were twice as likely (65%) to have connected with a new congregation after having moved out as those who, although they had a home church mentor, were no longer in regular contact (31%). Similarly, young adults who had gone on to postsecondary education with a home church mentor who stayed in touch were more likely (57%) to have connected with a Christian campus group than those whose mentor no longer stayed in regular contact (35%).

Churches or campus ministries that connect with young adults after they move out or start postsecondary education are most effective when they do so in partnership with the home churches these young adults come from. Where people are mobile, individual congregations cannot effectively minister unless they are both connected to and work cooperatively with other churches and ministries.

Chart 13.2. Young adults who made connections with a Christian campus group[a] or a new local church[b]



[a] For those who had gone on to postsecondary education.
[b] For those who had moved out of their parents' home.
"Home Church Connection" means someone from the young adult's home church tried to make a connection for them either to a new local church/parish or a Christian campus group. "Mentor" means they had a local church/parish mentor as a teen. "Regular contact" means they are still in regular contact with their home church mentor. "No Regular Contact" means they are not in regular contact with their home church mentor.

Young adults who had moved out and connected with a different local church were more than twice as likely (71%) to connect with a local church young adult group as those who had not

moved out (30%), and more than three times as likely (21%) as those who had moved out and did not connect with a new local church (21%) (see chart 13.3 below). Similarly, young adults who had gone on to postsecondary education, moved out and connected with a different local church were more than three times as likely to connect with a Christian campus group (60%) as those who had not moved out (19%) and those who had moved out but did not connect to a different local church (16%) (see chart 13.4 below).

Although those who had moved out were slightly more likely to make connections with local church young adult groups and Christian campus groups, having made a connection to a different local church was a better predictor of whether they would go on to connect with these other Christian communities as well.

Chart 13.3. Connected with a local church young adult group since high school

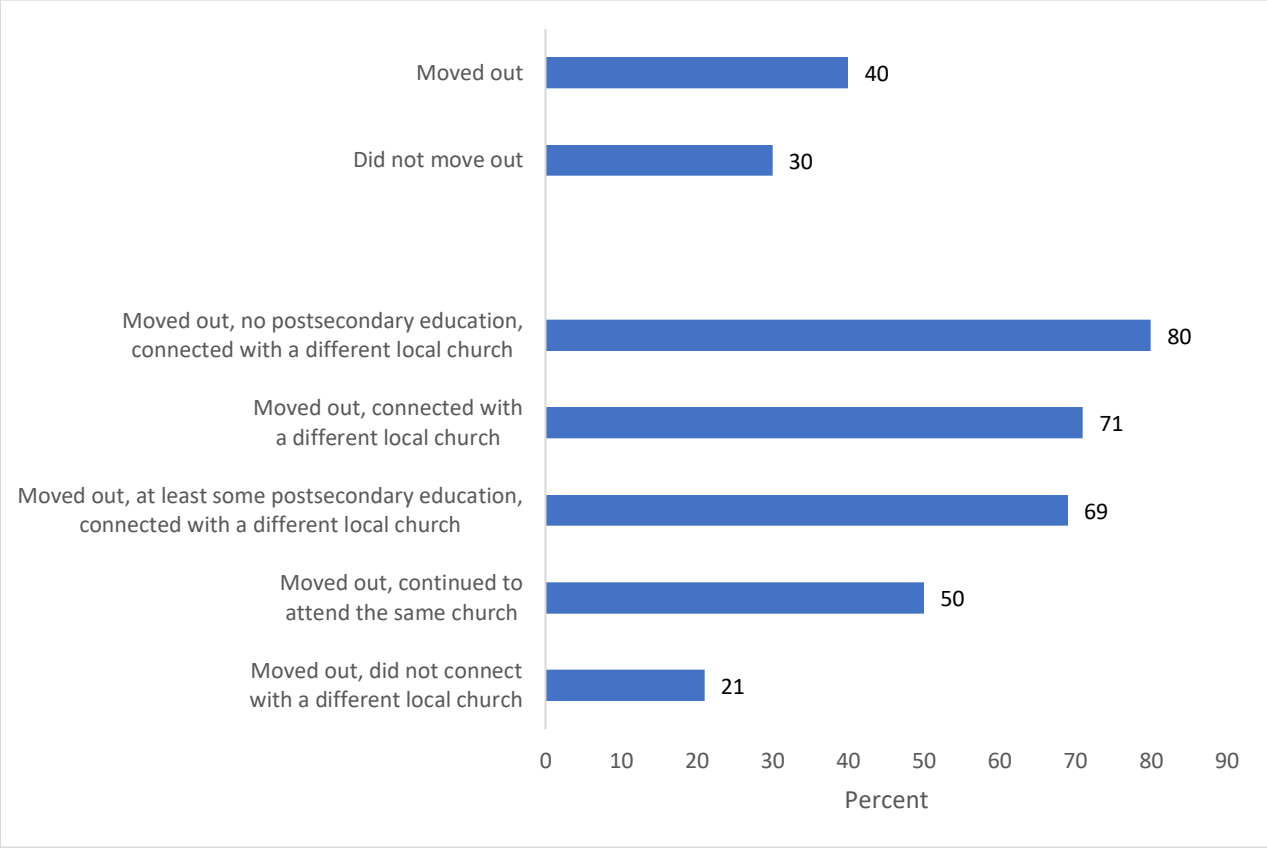
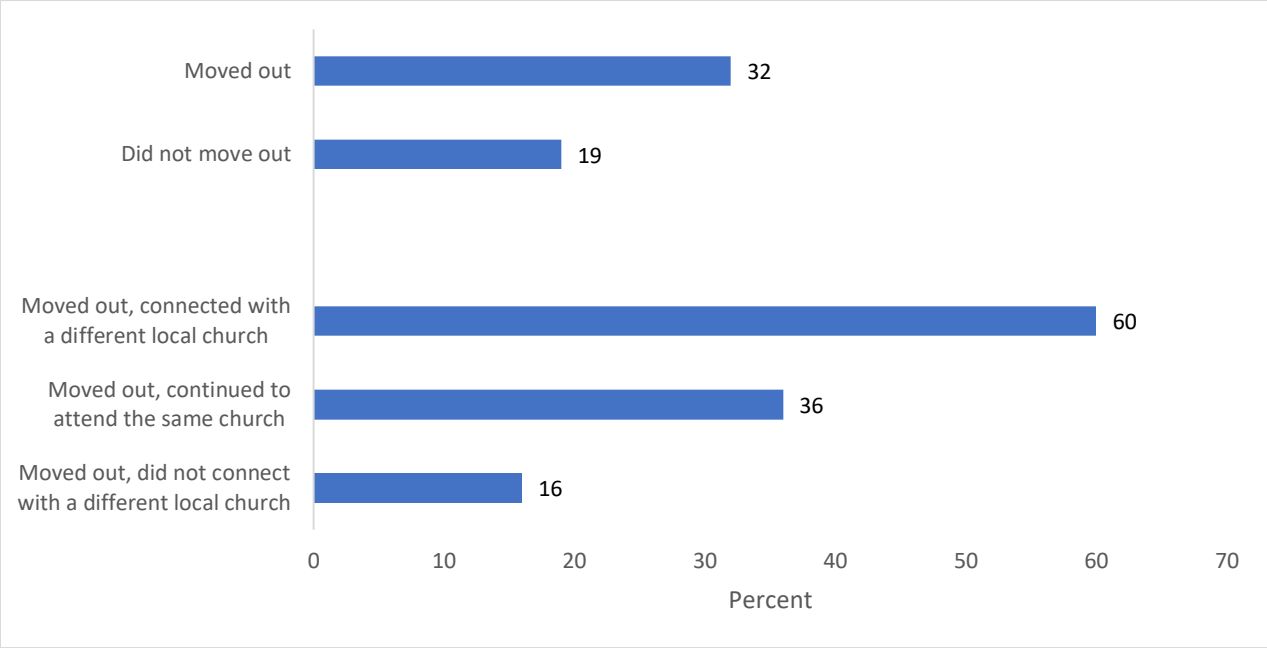


Chart 13.4. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group since high school[b]

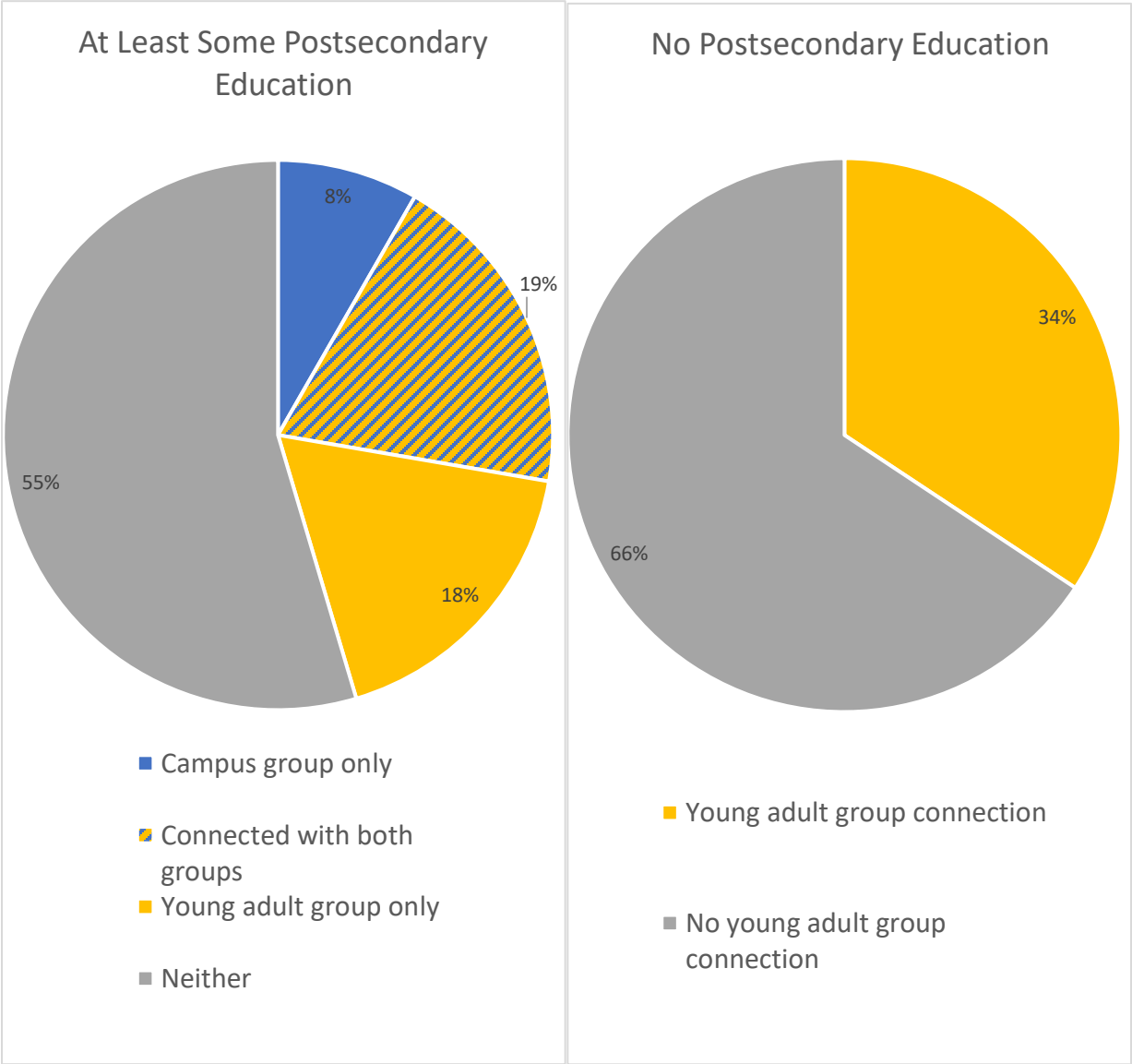


[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] For those who had gone on to postsecondary education.

Those who went on to attain at least some postsecondary education (45%) were more likely to connect with a Christian community outside worship service attendance than those with no postsecondary education (34%) (see chart 13.5 below).

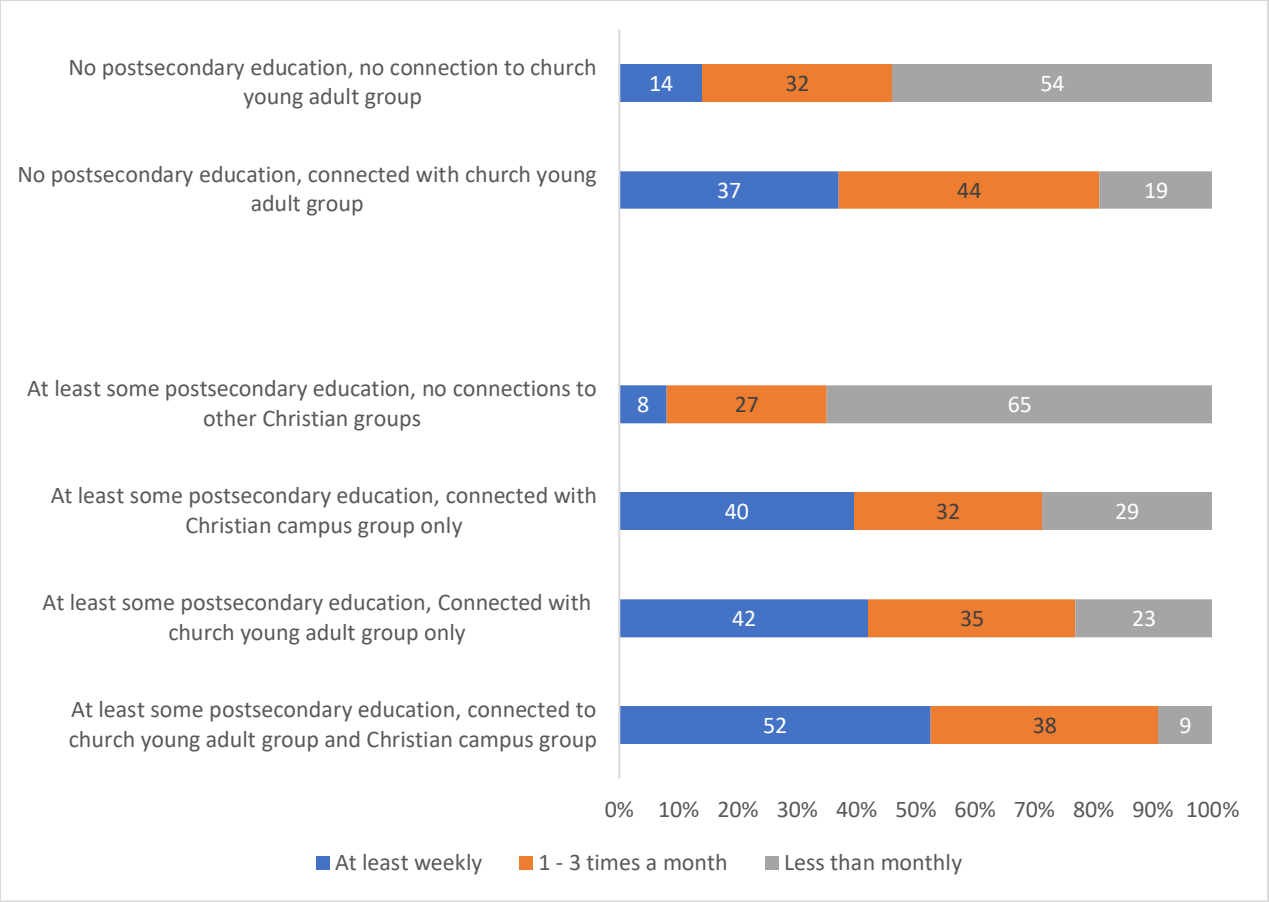
Nearly three in ten (28%) of the young adults who had gone on to postsecondary education connected with a Christian campus group, and only about one-third these (i.e., 8% of those with postsecondary education) did not connect with a local church young adult group as well. More than a third (37%) of young adults who had gone on to postsecondary education connected with a local church young adult group, compared to 34% of those with no postsecondary education.

Chart 13.5. Connected with local church young adult group since high school and/or connected with a Christian campus group (a) for those with at least some postsecondary education, and (b) for those with no postsecondary education



Nearly six in ten (58%) of the young adults we surveyed did not make a connection with either a local church young adult group or a Christian campus group (see sections 13.3 and 14.3). Young adults who had gone on to postsecondary education and made a connection with at least one of these groups were more than four times as likely to attend religious services weekly compared to those with postsecondary education who did not make a connection (see chart 13.6 below). Those with no postsecondary education who connected with a local church young adult group were more than twice as likely to attend religious services weekly as those who did not.

Chart 13.6. Young adult religious service attendance, by education and connections to church young adult groups and Christian[a] campus groups



[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

When young adults move out of their parents' home and connect with a different local church or parish they are immediately confronted with negotiating a role in this congregation that is independent of their parents. Making this connection demonstrates a level of intentionality about taking on an adult role in the church that they may not have had to face if they had stayed in their parents' church and continued on in their established roles. This intentionality in connecting with a new local church seems to carry over into connecting with other Christian communities such as church young adult groups and Christian campus groups.

13.3. Connecting with Church Young Adult Groups

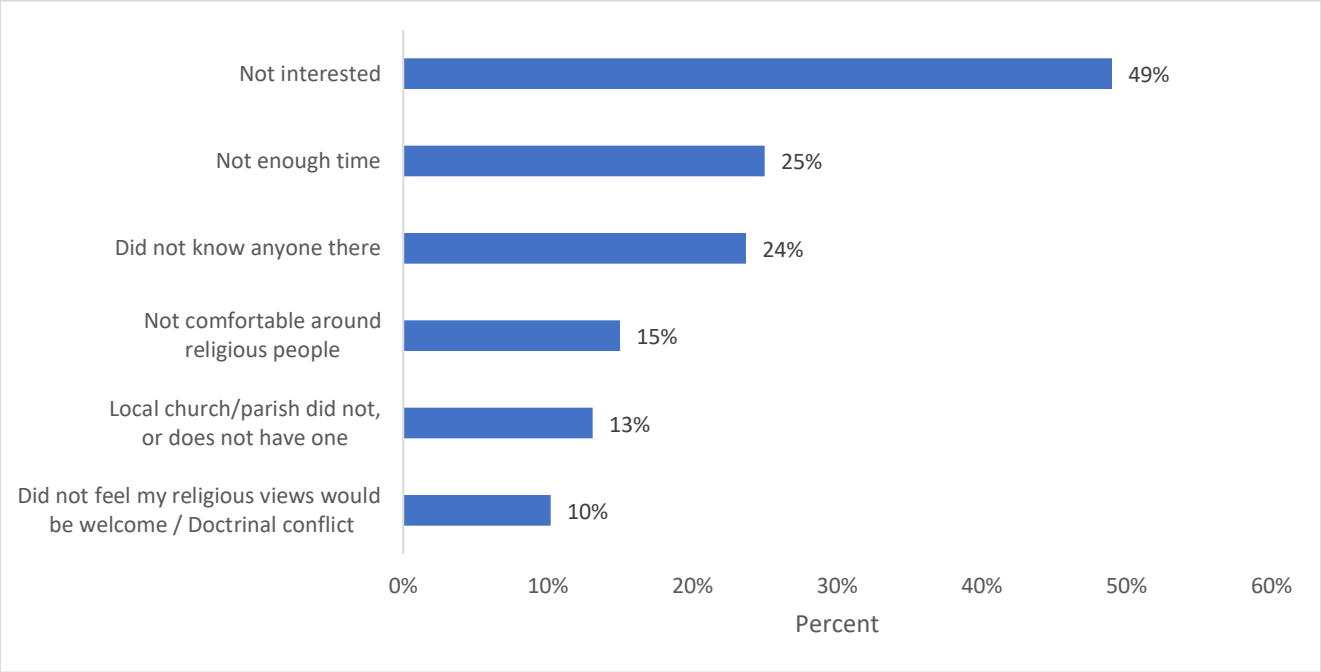
Many local churches and parishes have young adult groups. These groups provide opportunities for religious participation beyond religious service participation. A little more than one-third (36%) of young adults we surveyed had connected with a local church or parish young adult group since high school (see table 13.3 below)

Table 13.3. Connected with a (local church/parish) young adult group since high school

Age	Percent
18 to 20 (444)	34
21 to 23 (625)	31
24 to 26 (384)	37
27 to 29 (544)	43
All (1,998)	36

We asked those who had not connected with a local church young adult group to tell us why. Respondents were presented with a list of options that were drawn from our earlier interviews with young adults. Their responses, by descending frequency, starting with "Not interested," are shown in chart 13.7 below.

Chart 13.7. Explanations for not connecting with a local church/parish young adult group since high school



Respondents could choose as many as were applicable.
For those who did not make the connection.

We wanted to see if there were patterns in the explanations given for not connecting with a young adult group, so we conducted a cluster analysis (see appendix). We found two clusters, which we have called Open and Closed. Those who are Open were more likely to say they did not connect with a local church young adult group because they did not have enough time, they did not know anyone there or their local church or parish did not have a young adult group (see table 13.4 below). Members of this cluster are open because, in theory, these are objections to

participation that could be addressed. Members of the Closed cluster were more likely to say they were not interested, they had a doctrinal conflict or they were not comfortable around religious people. These young adults are considered Closed because of their lack of interest and their disagreement with church doctrine.

Only 37% of young adults had connected with a local church young adult group since high school. Of those who did not connect with a local church young adult group roughly half were Open (52%) and half Closed (47%).

Those in the Closed cluster are less likely to attend religious services weekly (8%) than those in the Open cluster (18%), and far less likely to attend weekly than those who connected with a local church young adult group (44%).

Table 13.4. Explanations for not connecting with a local church/parish young adult group since high school, by openness cluster, percent

Explanations for not connecting	Open (647)	Closed (608)
Not enough time (320)	49	0
Did not know anyone there (302)	46	1
(Local church/parish) did not, does not have a YA group (165)	25	1
My religious views would not be welcome / Doctrinal conflict (130)	4	17
Not comfortable around religious people (176)	8	20
Not interested (581)	22	72

Note: "Not interested" was not used in the formation of these clusters.

The relationship between local church young adult group participation and campus groups, including the effect on time pressure for group participation, is discussed in section 14.4 below.

14. Christian Campus Groups

Young adults are far more likely to participate in a Christian campus group if someone from their home church tries to make a connection for them. It is not clear who is responsible for making these introductions, though, and just over one in four (28%) MWs have plans in place to facilitate connections. Almost three-quarters of young adults (74%) who connected with a Christian campus group did so in the first month after they started college or university.

Among young adults who did not connect to a campus group, 78% could be open to attending, and 22% seemed closed to the possibility. Just over half (55%) of young adults with some college or university education did not connect with either a Christian campus group or a church young adult group, and almost two-thirds (66%) of young adults without postsecondary education did not connect with a church young adult group. Young adults who attend a Christian campus group or a local church young adult group are far more likely to attend religious services.

14.1. Home Church Connections

Three in ten (28%) of the young adults in our study with some postsecondary education connected with a Christian campus group. Young adults who identified themselves as evangelical in their teens (34%) were slightly more likely to connect than those with either a Catholic (28%) or Mainline (21%) affiliation.

Young adults were four times more likely to connect with a Christian campus group if someone from their home church tried to make a connection for them. Two-thirds (66%) of young adults with home church involvement connected to a campus group, compared to one in six (16%) of those where no one from their home church tried to make a connection (see table 14.1 below). Evangelicals were twice as likely to make a campus group connection without help from their home church (26%) as either Catholics (11%) or Mainline Protestants (12%).

Connections are significant, whether they are made by family, friends, pastors, or even acquaintances. For students, integrating into communities on campus is easier and occurs naturally, with fewer implicit social barriers than seeking out churches.

Table 14.1. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group or club,[b] percent

Tradition	Someone from my home church tried to make a connection with a Christian campus group for me (216)	No one from my home church tried to make a connection with a Christian campus group for me (111)
Catholic (158)	71	11
Mainline (58)	63	12
Evangelical (167)	62	26
All (394)	66	16

[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.
[b] For those who had gone on to postsecondary education.

14.2. First-Month Connections

Young adults were also more likely to connect with a Christian campus group if they did so soon after starting college or university. Almost three-quarters (74%) of those who connected with a Christian campus group did so within the first month after starting college or university, and nine-tenths did so within the first semester (see chart 14.1 below and compare with section 14.3). There were no significant differences in the timing of campus group connections by sex or by teenage religious affiliation.

Francine, age 20, did not seek out either a Catholic campus group or a new parish when she got to campus. She explained her decision this way:

> I decided not to because at home I went to church mostly because my parents went there and that's where I grew up so I kind of created a community around it. I knew so many people who were there. Where now going to [the Canadian city where her university is], I didn't know anyone who was going to church and, although I realized that there was a big Catholic church on campus …, I kind of found my other community living in the residence and other friends, whether it be through French club or other commerce committees, so I really didn't feel that there was a void in my life in that sense of community that I was missing that I needed to reach out for.

Justin said he found support where all students naturally find it:

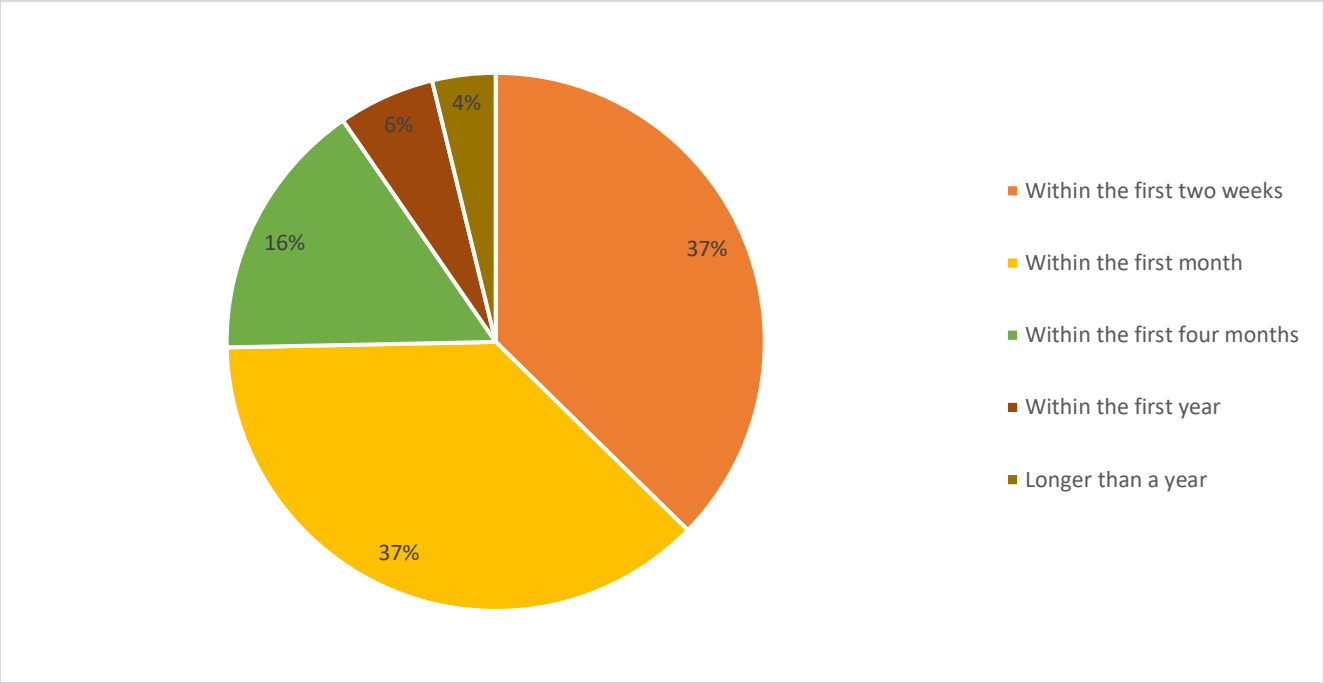
> I turned to other first year students like myself. I think we banded together and figured it out mostly for ourselves, just to try and get settled.

Young adults who had moved to attend university or college most often looked to classmates, roommates or others they met at university for their support group. A few initially looked to friends in their home towns for support. They connected with these friends either through

social media or by frequent visits home if they lived close enough and had the means to make the trips. Eventually, however, most migrated their support base to their new university or college communities.

The first people young adults meet when they start university or college usually become their support network. These first contacts are vitally important.

Chart 14.1. "How long was it after you first started university or college before you connected with a Christian[a] campus group or club?"



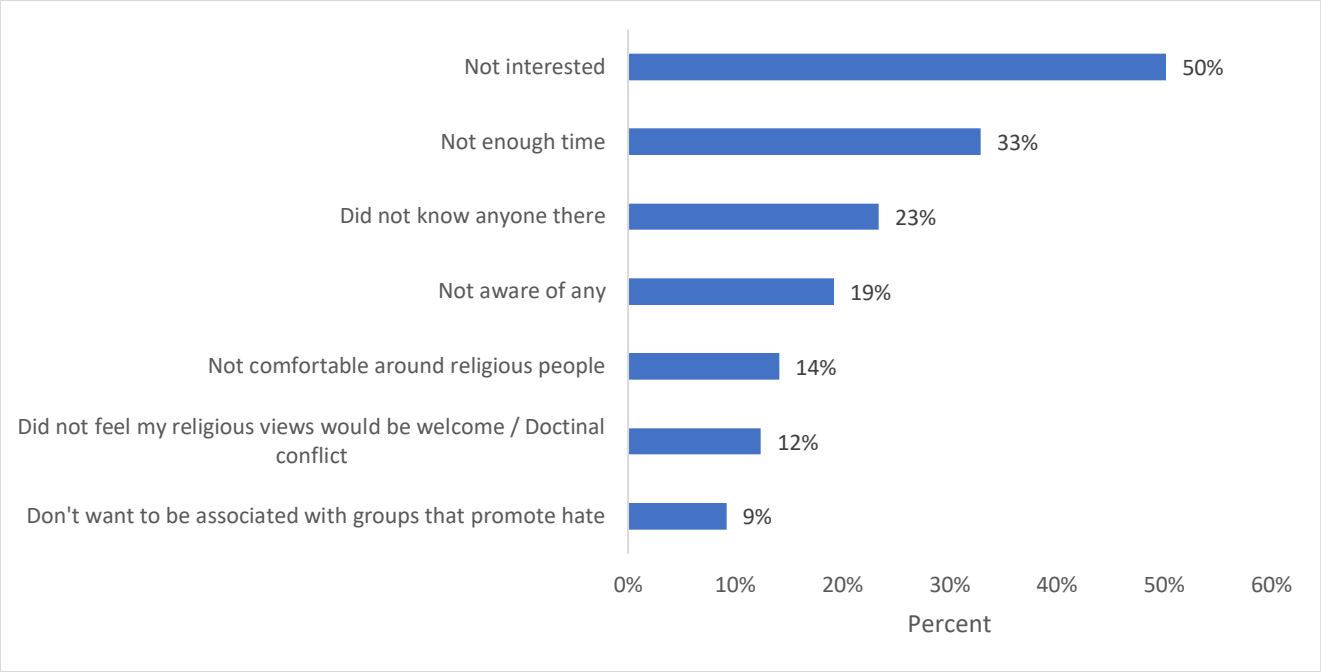
For those who had attended university or college and made a connection.
[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

14.3. Explanations for Not Connecting with Campus Groups

Young adults who had attended university or college but not connected with a Christian campus group were asked why. The possible responses were drawn from the explanations given in our qualitative interviews, and respondents could choose as many as were applicable.

Half (50%) of the young adults who had not connected with Christian campus group said they did not connect because they were not interested, and one-third (33%) said they did not have enough time. Almost one in four (23%) said they did not get involved because they didn't know anyone there, and 19% said they were unaware of any Christian campus groups (see chart 14.2 below).

Chart 14.2. Explanations for not connecting with a Christian[a] campus group or club



Respondents were asked to select all applicable answers.
For those who had attended university or college and did not make a connection.
[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

We found that young adults who did not connect to campus groups fell into distinct groupings according to the kind of explanation they gave for not connecting. A cluster analysis of the responses identified two clusters, which we have called Open and Closed.

The Open cluster of young adults tended to say they did not connect with Christian campus groups because they were not interested, they did not have enough time, they did not know anyone there or they were not aware of any Christian campus groups. Members of this cluster are “open” because, in theory, these are objections to participation that could be addressed.

The Closed cluster of young adults tended to say they did not connect with Christian campus groups because they were uncomfortable around religious people, they had doctrinal differences with the Christian campus groups, that they saw Christian campus groups as promoters of hate or that they were not interested. Members of the Closed cluster are “closed” because they could not participate in Christian campus groups unless those groups changed their (perceived) nature and purpose.

Four-fifths (78%) of those who did not connect with a Christian campus group were open and one-fifth (22%) closed. Table 14.2 below shows the explanations each cluster’s members gave for not connecting with a Christian campus group.

Table 14.2. Explanations for not connecting with a Christian[a] campus group or club, by openness cluster, percent

Explanations for not connecting	Open (799)	Closed (230)
Not interested (516)	52	43
Not enough time (338)	38	14
Did not know anyone there (241)	25	17
Not aware of any (197)	23	7
Not comfortable around religious people (145)	3	54
My religious views would not be welcome / Doctrinal conflict (128)	1	52
Don't want to be associated with groups that promote hate (96)	1	39

For those who had gone to university or college.
[a] Catholic or Orthodox or other Christian.

Of those in the Closed cluster, 27% agreed that "through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of my sins," compared to 62% of those in the Open cluster. Similarly, just 21% of those in the Closed cluster agreed that "the Bible is the World of God and is reliable and trustworthy," compared to 57% of those in the Open cluster.

There were no significant cluster membership differences based on sex, highest level of education, or immigrant status. Unsurprisingly, those that attended religious services more frequently were more likely to be in the Open group.

Barbara and Natalie are examples of young adults who would be in the Closed group. Explaining why she did not join any Christian campus groups, Barbara said:

> I think I just don't like talking about religion in general. Because in my experience, people either get too into it, or they just reject it.

When asked what she meant by "getting too into it," she simply said, "I don't know, how can I explain this … It's kind of hard to explain." Religion, then, is seen as a binary choice of extreme embrace or extreme rejection. Barbara is reluctant to spend time with religious people.

Natalie grew up in a devout immigrant Catholic family. She attends a local university and commutes from home. Natalie did not get involved with any Catholic campus groups because she feels uncomfortable around people who "know what they are about":

> I don't really know where I am, belief-wise, so I feel like if I go to a place where everyone knows what they are about, and [that] makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable.

Natalie felt a campus group would exert an implicit pressure to conform to others' beliefs.

In our young adult interviews, we asked current and former postsecondary students about their awareness of or participation in Christian campus groups or campus chaplaincy programs. Although several of young adults initially said they were unaware of any Christian campus ministry presence, as the interviews progressed, several of these allowed that they did know of at least one. Only one-fifth (19%) of young adults who had gone on to postsecondary education and did not connect with a Christian campus group said they were unaware of any.

14.4. Local Church or Parish Involvement

In our interviews, several young adults said that they attended their local church's young adult group and as a result they did not have enough time to take on the additional commitment of participating in a Christian campus club.

Sam was one such student:

> I would rather plug into the young adult group at my church than one of the Christian communities on campus. And being in engineering I only had time, I felt, for one commitment outside of church, per week. So, I chose the young adults group at my church … because I knew people there already and I didn't know anybody who was attending one of the campus groups.

Our survey asked young adults whether they had connected with a local church young adult group and whether they had connected with a Christian campus club. We did not ask how often respondents participated in these groups, just whether they had made a "connection."

Of the young adults who made a connection with a church young adult group but not a campus club (see chart 13.5(a) above), 46% said they did not connect with a campus club because they did not have enough time (see table 14.3 below). Conversely, for those who connected to a campus group but not a local church young adult group, only 24% said they did not connect with a young adult group because of a lack of time (see chart 13.5(b) above and table 14.4 below). This suggests that young adults are more likely to see participation in a church young adult group as a more important commitment than participation in a Christian campus group.

14.5. Church–Campus Group Relations

Young adults who have someone from their home church try to make a connection for them to a Christian campus group are far more likely to go on to make that connection. Some Christian campus groups are intentionally looking for ways to establish a collaborative relationship with churches. There can be tension between churches and campus groups, though, if either perceives that they are competing for student involvement and volunteer leaders.

Table 14.3. Explanations for not connecting with a Christian campus group, by connection with a local church young adult group, percent

Explanations for not connecting with a Christian campus group	Connected with a local church young adult group (252)	Did not connect with a local church young adult group (778)
Not enough time	46	29
Don't know anyone	34	20
Not aware of any Christian campus groups	32	15
Not interested	25	58
Doctrinal conflict	9	14
Not comfortable around religious people	7	17
Don't want to be associated with groups that promote hate	6	10

[a] For those who had gone on to postsecondary education.

Table 14.4. Explanations for not connecting with a church young adult group, by education and connection with a Christian campus group, percent

Explanations for not connecting with a church young adult group	Connected with Christian campus group[a] (119)	Did not connect with Christian campus group[a] (778)	No postsecondary education (361)
Don't know anyone	29	24	22
No young adult group	27	12	10
Not interested	25	52	45
Not enough time	24	26	23
Doctrinal conflict	13	11	7
Not comfortable around religious people	8	15	13

[a] For those who had gone on to postsecondary education.

Several ministry experts (usually those who worked for Christian campus ministries) talked about how they found churches reluctant to make these connections. These experts said churches sometimes fear that by making these connections they will lose young leaders who might otherwise work in their local churches.

One expert ministering in a campus setting said that sometimes churches are reluctant to invest in bridging events:

> **I have talked to churches about getting their students plugged in, there's a mix of "Oh that would be great," because there's a general concern for students to stay close to God, and I think churches recognize that a campus group can help with that. But mixed with that is "Well, we don't necessarily want to challenge**

> **our students to join you because then their leadership capacity might be spent on campus instead of in a church setting."** And I understand that too and we hope students are serving in church [too]. [Emphasis added]

Other experts talked about a "poverty mindset" in churches, where encouraging students to be involved in Christian campus communities is seen as a loss of leaders for the church or church programs.

Other experts talked about how campus ministries are trying to partner with churches. *Bridging events* are designed for students who will be moving on to postsecondary education so that they can connect with Christian campus communities at the postsecondary institutions they will be attending.

To create the conditions for successful bridging events, some campus ministries have started focusing on building relationships of trust with pastors and local churches. One campus ministry expert explained:

> So, from our standpoint, that has meant trying to figure out other things and other ways that we can serve the church. Are there things that we have that we can offer them that can allow us to get in relationship? … Anecdotally, the reason we have gained any headway in relationship with the [denomination] over the last couple of years I think has been because we have prioritized partnering with them on some events and working together and getting in the same room so that we can celebrate common wins.

Another campus ministry expert said he intentionally works with local churches on bridging events:

> Sometimes it's just a single event where we team up on an event like doing a coffee house with the church, there will be a tag team. Sometimes there's more ongoing – we have had a couple ministries where we work on a weekly meeting together or we have a pastor that comes and helps with a certain aspect of the ministry, maybe disciples a couple students or helps co-lead a group.

When churches and campus ministries work together, misunderstandings are less likely and the relationship is moved onto a cooperative footing rather than a competitive one.

In order to address churches' fears of losing leaders, one campus ministry expert said their ministry has begun to insist that students be involved in local church leadership as a prerequisite to involvement in their campus group's leadership:

> We won't let a student get involved in leadership with us unless they are actually actively involved in a church as a student.

15. Facilitating Connections

When home churches try to make connections for young adults with new Christian communities such as new parishes, churches or Christian campus groups, they are more likely to go on to actually connect with these communities. Knowing this, our MWs survey asked questions about who has responsibility for making these connections, how they plan to make these connections, and what follow up they do with young adults going through major life transitions.

15.1. Responsibility for Connecting Young Adults with New Christian Communities

The research clearly indicates that young adults are more likely to make a campus connection if someone from their local church makes a timely introduction for them.

In many cases connections are not being made for students by local churches because it is not clear who is responsible for the task and, consequently, no one is intentional about carrying it out. Here are some of the responses from experts when asked about how they are connecting young adults to Christian campus ministries:

- "In general, there is no formal intentional connection that way."
- "To be honest, it is one of those areas where we are not the greatest at. … A lot of people only come for a season and they are off."
- "I don't think we do much. I wish we could say we do something, but I don't think so."
- "Catholic chaplains have talked about connecting new students to campus ministries, but there is currently nothing intentional to make those connections happen."
- "Everybody should help, but they [the people in her denomination] have done very little. Yeah, actually the majority, 85–90% are not doing well."

A Catholic expert said that youth ministry tends to be parish-oriented, with parishes investing most heavily in parish-based ministries that are seen as most likely to contribute to the growth of the parish ministry. Young adults' lives, however, often extend far beyond the boundaries of a parish, meaning parish-based ministry can fail to address many parts of young adults' lives.

The same dynamic is experienced in most Protestant denominations, which tend to have geographically based, hierarchical administrative structures. Most young adults, by comparison, live virtual lives, move frequently, and communicate through relatively flat social media structures.

On our Youth and Young Adult Ministry Workers (MW) survey we asked whose responsibility it should be to make these campus connections, with the ability to choose multiple answers. Seventy-nine percent said that young adults themselves should be responsible (see table 15.1 below). Young adults were not seen to have the sole responsibility, however. Seventy percent

said that a youth pastor or youth ministry was responsible, and two-thirds (66%) thought campus groups or campus chaplaincy ministries should be making the connections. The order of most frequently selected responses was different for Catholic respondents, who chose "Campus Group or chaplaincy" most often, followed by young adults themselves and then a youth minister.

Clearly, left on their own, only a small minority (16%) of young adults will make a Christian campus connection. Although a majority of MWs (66%) think Christian campus groups are responsible for making the connection with young adults, it is clearly helpful and more effective for campus groups to identify and reach out to Christian students if someone lets them know they are coming.

Table 15.1. "Who should be responsible for connecting young adults who attend university or college with Christian campus communities such as a campus group or a chaplaincy?" by ministry worker tradition, MW survey, percent

Individual or ministry with responsibility for connecting young adults to Christian campus ministries	Catholic (150)	Mainline (100)	Evang. (1,285)	All (1,570)
Young adults themselves (1,237)	75	67	80	79
Youth Pastor or Youth Minister (1,097)	72	52	71	70
Campus group or chaplaincy (1,040)	81	52	66	66
Parents (665)	31	41	43	42
Priest, Pastor or Minister (619)	52	54	37	39
A denominational office or agency (168)	22	12	9	11
Other (145)	10	8	9	9

Respondents were asked to select all applicable answers.
Note: Orthodox values not presented because there were only 6 observations.

When we asked MWs for their agreement with "My ministry has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities," only 28% agreed (6% strongly and 22% moderately) that they had a plan. Half (50%) said they did not have a plan, 15% said they did not know if they had a plan and 8% said the question was not applicable to them and their ministry (see chart 15.1 below).

Three in five (60%) MWs agreed that "When a young adult leaves my ministry because of a move, my responsibility for them does not end until I have connected them with another Christian ministry." Only one in five (21%) both agreed they had a responsibility to make a connection and had a ministry plan for making that connection (see chart 15.2 below). Close to half (47%) of MWs who agreed they had a responsibility to make the connection said they had no plan for making the connection happen, while one in five (18%) said they either did not know if they had a plan or that having a plan was not applicable in their ministry situation.

Chart 15.1. Agreement with "My ministry has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities," MW survey

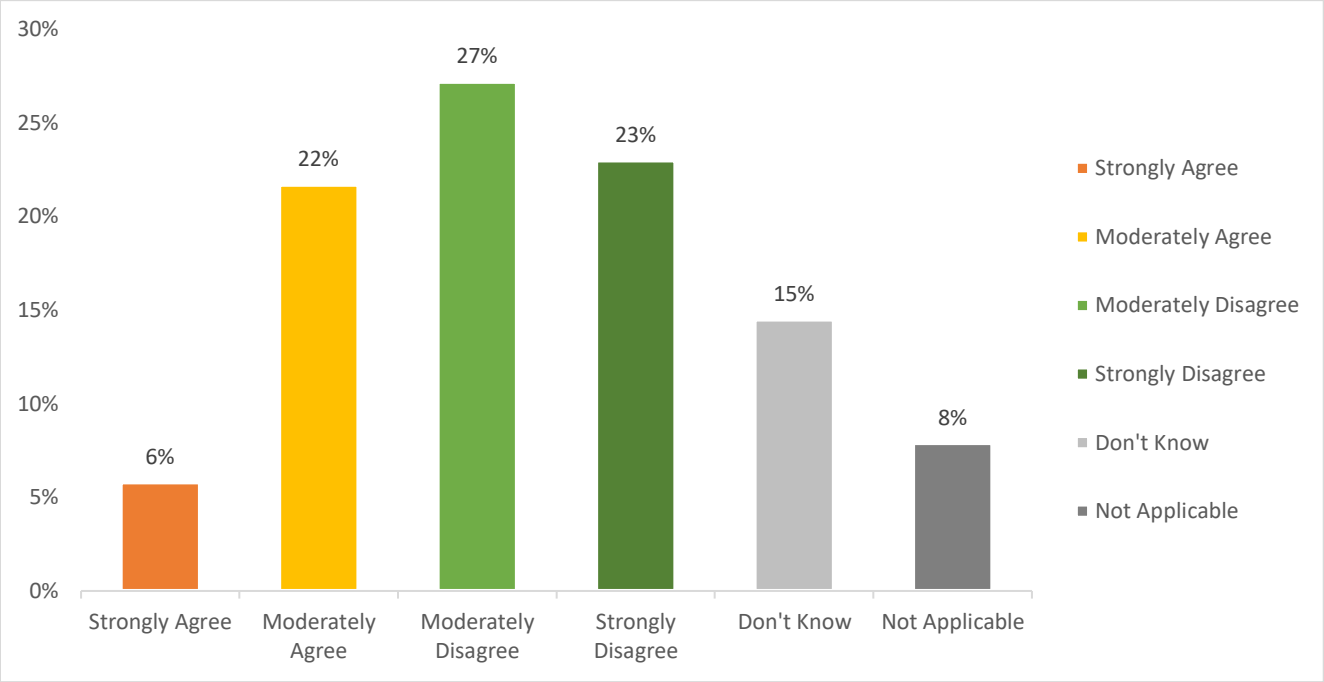
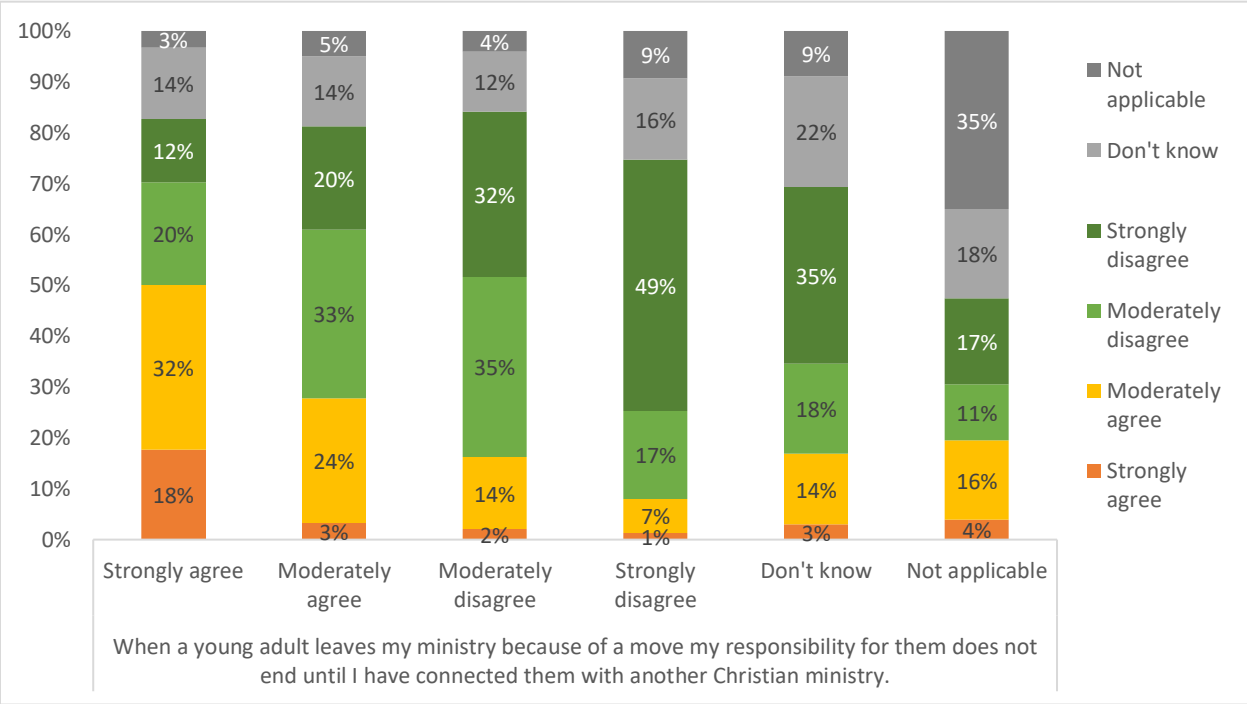


Chart 15.2. Agreement with "My ministry has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities," by respondent's perceived responsibility for connection, MW survey



Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Ministry workers see a variety of individuals and ministries sharing responsibility for helping young adults who go on to postsecondary education connect to campus groups and those who move connect to a new church or parish.

Similarly, MWs were asked, "Who should be responsible for connecting youth or young adults who move either for school or work with a new church or parish?" and were given the list of responses that appear in the first column of table 15.2 below. They could choose as many responses as they thought applicable. Unlike with making campus connections, the most commonly selected response was "Youth Pastor or Youth Minister" (77%), followed by young adults themselves (70%).

Table 15.2. "Who should be responsible for connecting youth or young adults who move either for school or work with a new church or parish?", MW survey, percent

Individual or responsible for making connection	Catholic (150)	Mainline (100)	Evang. (1,285)	All (1,570)
Youth Pastor or Youth Minister (1,210)	72	62	79	77
Young adults themselves (1,099)	73	59	71	70
Parents (906)	41	49	60	58
Priest, Pastor or Minister (714)	55	50	44	46
Other (215)	11	7	15	14
A denominational office or agency (144)	17	12	8	9

Note: Orthodox values not presented because there were only 6 observations.

We know from the data presented in sections 13 and 14 of this report that young adults are three to four times more likely to connect with new Christian communities if someone from their home church tries to make a connection for them. If MWs believe a significant share of the responsibility for making new Christian community connections lies with young adults themselves and they leave young adults to make those connections on their own, then, in many cases, no connections will be made.

Clearly, left on their own, only a small minority (16%) of young adults will make a Christian campus connection. Although a majority of MWs (66%) think Christian campus groups are responsible for making the connection with young adults, it is clearly helpful and more effective for campus groups to identify and reach out to Christian students if someone lets them know they are coming.

Two-thirds (66%) of MWs thought the responsibility for connecting young adults to Christian campus groups or chaplaincies rested with those ministries. If someone does not make a connection between the young adults and the campus ministries, however, it is difficult to imagine how the campus ministries would know who to connect with.

We followed up these questions by asking MWs their agreement with "When a young adult leaves my ministry because of a move my responsibility for them does not end until I have

connected them with another Christian ministry." Three in five (61%) MWs agreed and one in five (20%) strongly agreed that they had a responsibility to connect young adults to a new ministry (see table 15.3 below).

Fewer than three in ten (27%) of young adults who had moved out of their parents' home said someone from their home church tried to make a connection for them with a new church or parish. Similarly, less than one-quarter (23%) of young adults who had gone on to postsecondary studies said someone from their home church tried to make a connection for them with a Christian campus group. This suggests that many MWs who see themselves having the responsibility for making new Christian community connections are not following through, or that young adults are often unaware of their efforts.

Table 15.3. Agreement with "When a young adult leaves my ministry because of a move my responsibility for them does not end until I have connected them with another Christian ministry," MW survey, percent

Ministry Context	Strongly Agree	Mod. Agree	Mod. Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK	NA
Camp Context (66)	17	32	24	2	5	21
Campus Context (212)	18	44	23	5	6	4
Church/Parish Context (952)	21	41	20	5	6	8
Community Context (80)	20	43	10	8	5	15
National/Leadership Context (160)	18	43	12	4	6	18
All (1,570)	20	41	19	5	6	10

Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding. Mod. means moderately. DK means Don't Know. NA means Not Applicable.

15.2. Planning for Connections

Many churches understand the post-high school transition as a transition away from or out of the church. Yuen and Lau's "The Adolescence to Adulthood Transition" report lists eight specific ways congregations can help young adults with this transition. Five of these eight are framed with an implicit or explicit assumption that an ongoing relationship between the emerging adult and the church is not in view.[153] At one point they pointedly explain to their readers, "This is not a 'send them away from your church' moment."[154]

The *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report* lists ways "veteran youth workers are working through the problem of transitions." Of the report's 12 suggestions,

[153] Yuen and Lau, "Transitions: Ensuring Faith Formation in Children and Youth," 34–35.
[154] Yuen and Lau, 35.

only one (brainstorming about how your church can focus on university students during "frosh week") directly addresses the post-high school transition.[155]

Yuen and Lau's report and the *Transfusing Life* report suggest that church-based youth and young adult ministries tend to focus on adolescents and to expect emerging adults to move out of church-based ministry. Smith *et al* in their conclusion to *Lost in Transition* write:

> Many religious congregations … devote significant resources to children and teenagers, yet unfortunately seem to passively accept that their ties to youth will be lost after the high school years. … Success in this would require thoughtful planning, intentionality, investment and sustained effort.[156]

As Arnett observes, though, this is a critical time to engage because

> for most people the process of forming a worldview is not completed by the time they leave adolescence. **It is during emerging adulthood that people address worldview questions most directly, and it is during emerging adulthood that most people reach at least an initial resolution to their worldview questions**. [Emphasis added][157]

People are more likely to follow through on a task if they have a plan. In this section we will look at whether MWs have a plan for connecting young adults to new Christian communities, if they cultivate their own networks so they can network young adults, and if they have the contact information for young adults that they need to stay in touch.

The ministry experts we spoke to conceded, however, that responsibility for following and helping young adults with their transition from high school to college, university or work is seldom assigned.

An expert working in a campus ministry setting said that students connect with their ministry through informal connections. He noted that those who aren't "spiritual keeners" are bypassed, and if the upstream network breaks down "there is no plan."

An expert working with a teen ministry said that when connections are made, it is usually through "informal chatter" or "informal connections" and happens with "no planning."

We asked respondents to our ministry expert survey to tell us their agreement with "My ministry organization has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries

---

[155] Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report*, 5–6.
[156] Smith *et al*, *Lost in Transition*, 241.
[157] Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 212.

in their new communities." Less than three in ten (28%) agreed that their ministry organization had a plan (see table 15.4 below).

Table 15.4. Agreement with "My ministry organization has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities," MW survey, percent

Ministry Context	Strongly Agree	Mod. Agree	Mod. Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK	NA
Camp Context (66)	6	20	29	21	11	14
Campus Context (212)	10	32	26	16	13	3
Church/Parish Context (952)	5	19	30	26	13	7
Community Context (80)	8	23	26	13	18	14
National/Leadership Context (160)	5	26	23	18	19	9
All (1,570)	6	22	27	23	15	8

Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding. Mod. means moderately. DK means Don't Know. NA means Not Applicable.

Being able to network young adults into new Christian communities is, in part, a function of the networks MWs themselves have. To try to measure this, we asked MWs their agreement with "I intentionally cultivate relationships with youth and young adult ministry leaders in other cities so that I can make connections for young adults who leave my ministry because of a move." Just over half (56%) agreed, and less than one in five (19%) strongly agreed that they intentionally cultivate these relationships, so they can make connections for young adults (see table 15.5 below).

Table 15.5. Agreement with "I intentionally cultivate relationships with youth and young adult ministry leaders in other cities so that I can make connections for young adults who leave my ministry because of a move," MW survey, percent

Ministry Context	Strongly Agree	Mod. Agree	Mod. Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK	NA
Camp Context (66)	18	35	9	15	0	23
Campus Context (212)	21	49	17	7	3	3
Church/Parish Context (952)	19	36	17	9	5	14
Community Context (80)	23	33	11	6	5	23
National/Leadership Context (160)	20	33	12	9	8	18
All (1,570)	19	37	15	9	5	15

Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding. Mod. means moderately. DK means Don't Know. NA means Not Applicable.

As a measure of how MWs might be cultivating their networks we asked, "Did you attend a youth or young adult ministry professional development or networking conference in the last 12 months?" Just over half (54%) said they had attended one of these conferences in the last year, and nearly two-thirds of these (64%) agreed they networked in order to help young adults make connections to new Christian communities.

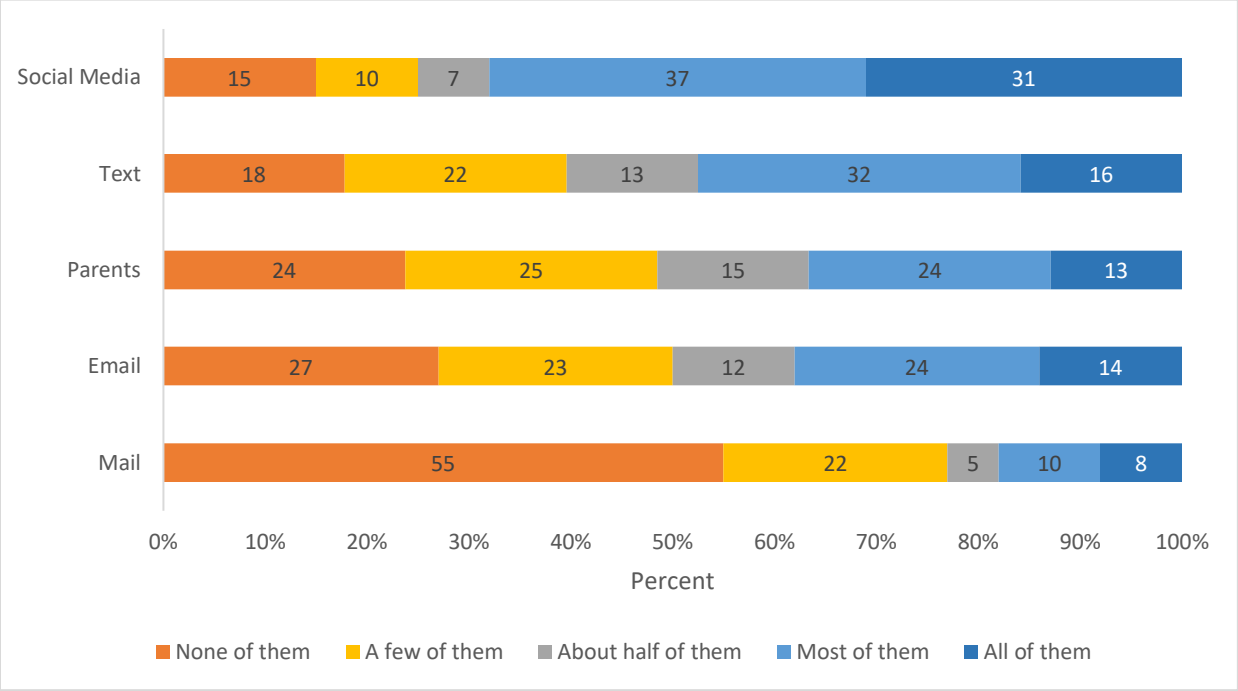
15.3. Maintaining Relationships

Some of the ministry experts we spoke to said that not having contact information for young adults is one of the reasons they do not make connections for them or follow up with them when they move. To see how prevalent this might be, we asked MWs how they could connect both with the young adults who ceased to be a part of their ministry in the last year and with the young adults who are currently part of their ministry. Respondents were asked to tell us what proportion of young adults they could "readily contact" by various means.

Social media followed by texting were the most common ways MWs reported being able to connect with young adults who had left their ministries in the last year, an ordering that was reversed for those currently in their ministries (see charts 15.3 and 15.4 below).

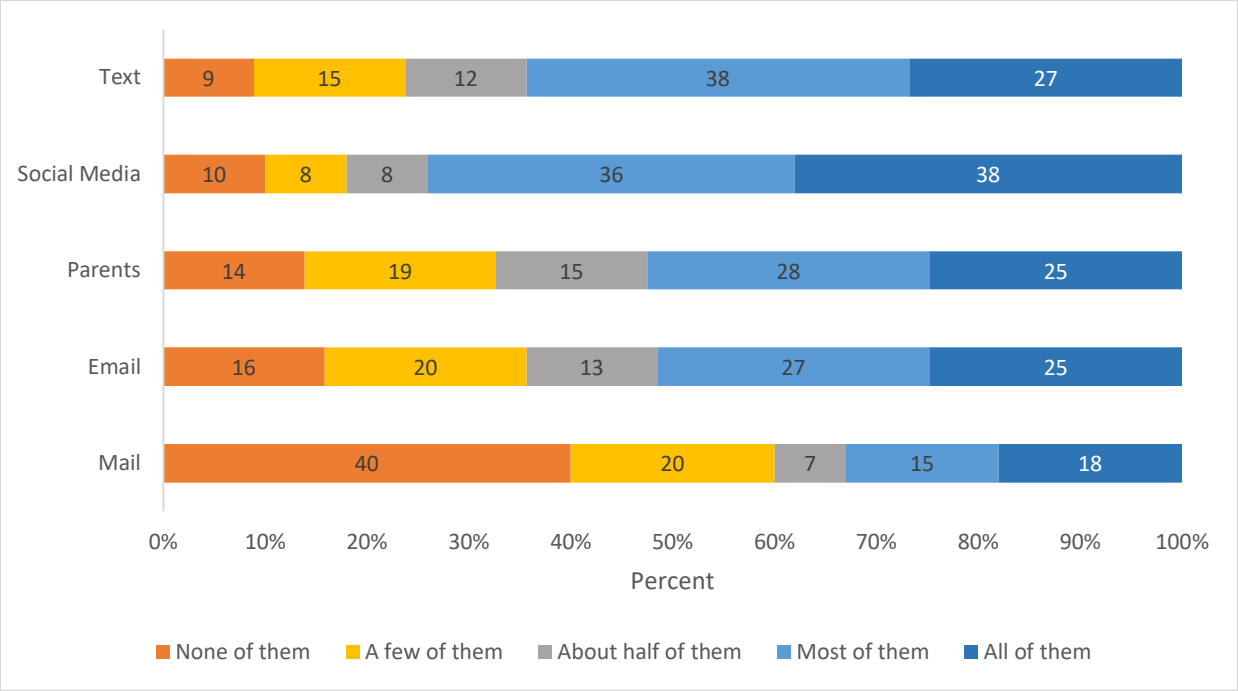
Only a small minority (15%) said they were unable to get in contact with the young adults by any of these means, and fewer than one in ten (9%) said the same about the young adults who were currently part of their ministries.

Chart 15.3. Means of contacting young adults no longer active in respondent's ministry, MW survey



Respondents were asked, "Of the young adults who ceased to be an active part of your ministry in the last year, what portion could you readily contact by:" the listed means. Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Chart 15.4. Means of contacting young adults currently active in respondent's ministry, MW survey



Respondents were asked, "Of the youth or young adults who are currently and active part of your ministry, what portion could you readily contact by:" the listed means. Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.

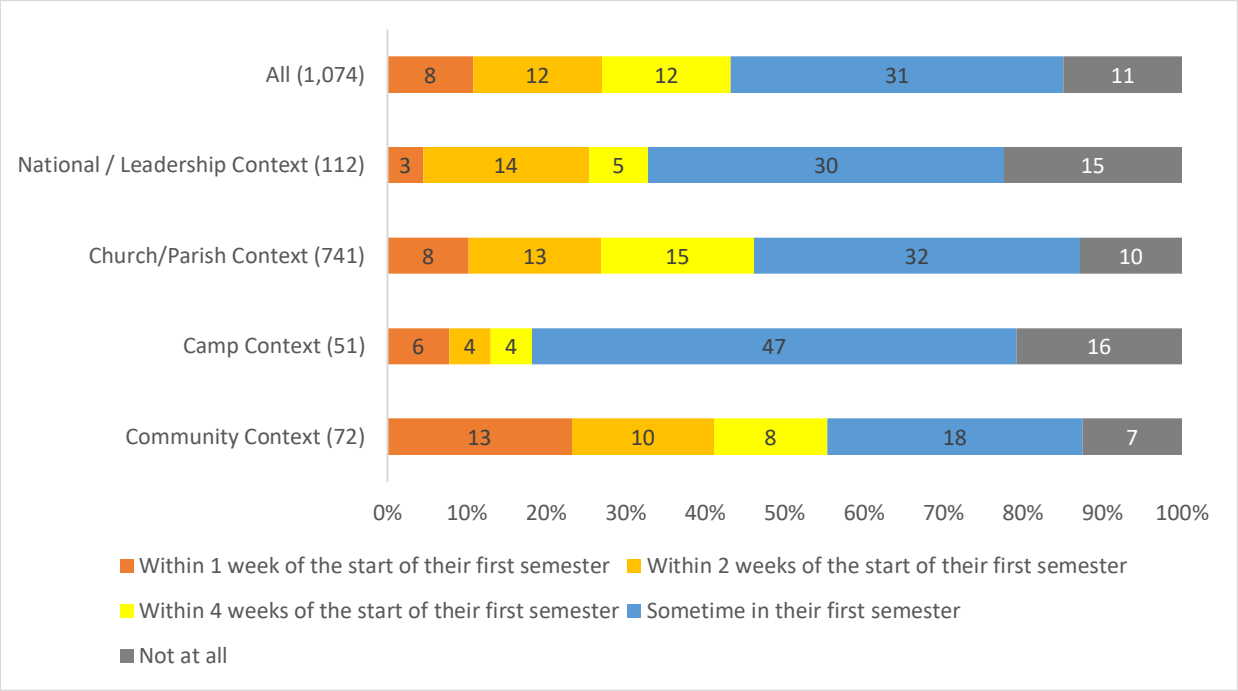
15.4. Timely Follow-Up After Young Adults Start a New Job or New School

Timely pastoral follow-up after young adults move or start at college or university is critical for making connections to new Christian communities. About three-quarters of young adults who connect with either a new church after moving out or a Christian campus group after starting postsecondary education will do it within the first month (see charts 13.1 and 14.1 above).

We asked MWs how long it was after young adults in their ministries started a new university or college program before they followed up with them to see how they were doing spiritually. Almost one third (32%) said that they did so within the first month, while most (89%) said they did so within the first semester (see chart 15.5 below).

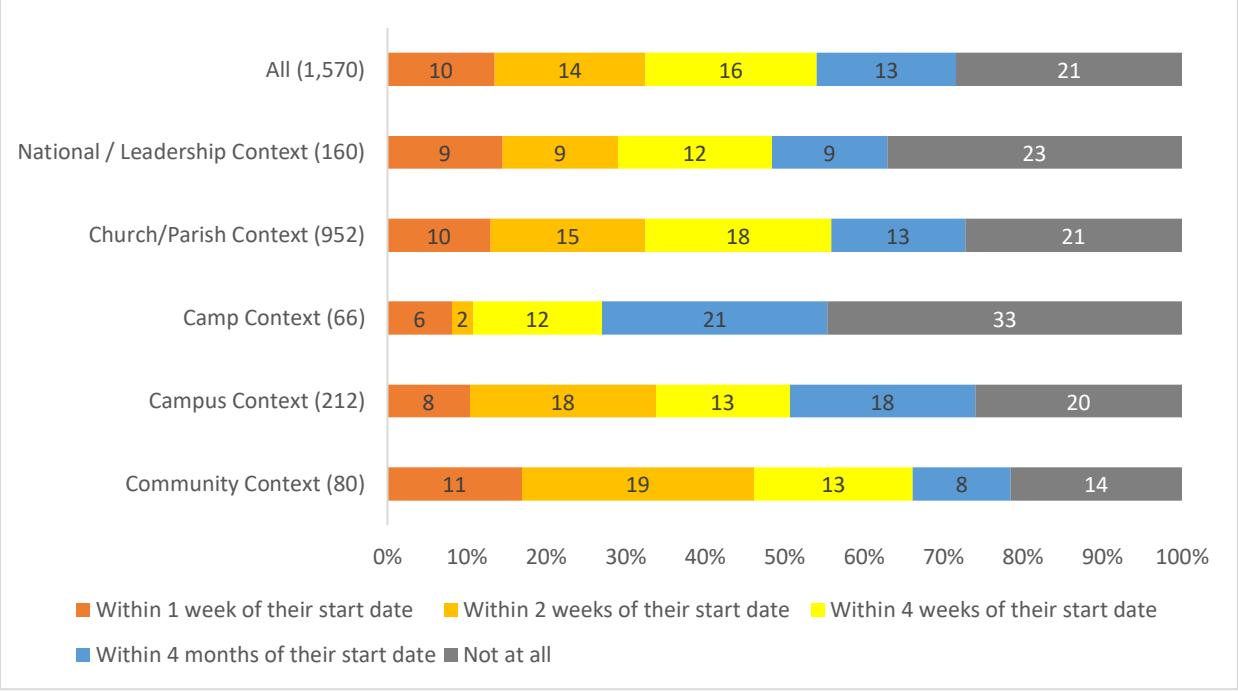
Similarly, we asked MWs how long it was after young adults in their ministries started a new job before they followed up with them to see how they were doing spiritually. Two in five (40%) MWs said they followed up within a month of a young adult's start date (see chart 15.6 below). One in five (21%) said they did not do any spiritual follow-up at all.

Chart 15.5. Agreement with "When youth or young adults connected to my ministry are entering university or college for the first time, I intentionally connect with them to see how they are doing spiritually,"[a] MW survey



[a] For those who minister to teenagers or those in CEGEP. Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Chart 15.6. Agreement with "When youth or young adults connected to my ministry start a new job, I intentionally connect with them to see how they are doing spiritually", MW survey



Note: Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Conclusion

Emerging adulthood has, on average, delayed young adult identity formation and its accompanying shift into adulthood by 5 to 7 years since the 1980s.

Emerging adulthood moves differentiating markers like marriage, family formation and full-time work into the future without removing the need for young adults to form an identity apart from their families of origin. In many cases young adults are choosing to quietly and non-confrontationally reject their parents' faith as a way to set out differentiating markers.

Emerging adulthood has expanded as young adults increasingly spend time in postsecondary education and in response to the difficulty of targeting constantly changing and multiplying career choices. Moreover, emerging adulthood has become a congenial precursor to adulthood, which is seen as dull, monotonous and difficult, making emerging adults reluctant to move on.

Emerging adulthood works against young adults' staying engaged in their faith and the life of the church because it disrupts their access to Christian communities and makes it difficult for them to negotiate meaningful roles in those communities. Emerging adulthood's moratorium on commitments, including moral commitments, means that an insistence on traditional Christian morality is seen as an imposition on young adults' identities. In some cases, moral commitments are reframed as political ones.

Social media with its never-ending feed of beautiful and interesting images provides a new, dynamic and global point of comparison for young adults, leading them to doubt their achievements and question their goals. Constant comparison and the resulting self-doubt inhibit identity formation, goal setting and commitments.

Although emerging adulthood is an unprecedented time of opportunity for young adults, it has also spawned a collection of new fears and anxieties. The Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), the Fear of Not Being Amazing (FNBA), and the Fear Of Passionless Monotony (FOPM) press in on young adults ever more as they approach age 30, which, for many, marks the limit of emerging adulthood and a forced entry into adulthood.

Home church mentors can help reintroduce young adults to their Christian communities as adults, helping them to negotiate new roles within those communities. Mentors also help young adults to understand their giftings and see a path forward into the future. Where young adults have home church mentors, and especially where those mentors continue to be a part of their lives into emerging adulthood, young adults are more likely to connect with new churches and Christian campus groups. Young adults need mentors and ministry leaders to identify their gifts and talents and in conversation to pose the question "How might God be calling you to serve him with the gifts and talents he's given you?"

Youth groups and Christian camps help young adults in maturation by encouraging them to negotiate new roles by which they differentiate themselves from their family of origin while still remaining within Christian community. These alongside-but-within-the-church communities also provide opportunities to form faith-reinforcing friendships, which are vital for faith persistence.

Gap years, especially if they are used for discipleship training programs or some kind of directed ministry, are positively correlated with many measures of religious persistence.

Young adults are roughly three times more likely to connect with a new church after moving out of their parents' home if someone from their home congregation tries to make a connection for them. Similarly, young adults going on to postsecondary studies are four times more likely to connect with a Christian campus group or chaplaincy if someone from their home church tries to make a connection for them. Groups with a strong sense of identity are by their nature exclusive, and most young adults need someone to create a way in for them through either an invitation or an introduction.

Roughly three-quarters of young adults who go on to connect with either a campus group or a new church do so within the first month of starting at a new school or new location respectively. This means that making timely connections into new Christian communities is critical.

Nearly four in five MWs say young adults themselves are responsible for making connections to new Christian campus communities. Three in five MWs say they share this responsibility with young adults, but fewer than three in ten say they have a ministry plan for making these connections. Significantly, only about a quarter of young adults reported that someone from their home church had tried to make a connection for them either to a new church or to a Christian campus group.

Many young adults are dealing with the religious difference they discover in their social circles by adopting a religious framework we call the Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic (UGRE). The UGRE is usually described as shared religious ethic behind all religions that comes to young adults in a moment of enlightenment. They describe this ethic as leading one to become a good human and promoting social harmony. This discovery led them to realize that religious differences are only apparent and that those who insist on religious differences are sowing division. This ethic posits that religion fulfills a set of psychosocial functions, and any religion that fills these functions is a good one.

A consequence of the UGRE is that insisting on a personality or identity for God is to promote religious difference. Many young adults preferred to talk about a higher power rather than God. The higher power they described was deistic in that it was uninterested and uninvolved in their lives, although many continued to hope the power might intervene in their lives to help them.

Young adults who persist in the faith into young adulthood are well integrated into churches and other Christian communities. Warm relationships with parents who live out their faith are vital for faith formation; however, when it comes time to develop a Christian identity apart from one's parents, young adults need persisting communities of faithful adults, mentors and friends in their lives. When young adults move, it is vital that families, churches and ministries work to get them connected to new Christian communities in a timely manner.

Bibliography

Alter, Adam. *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties." *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000): 469–80.

———. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. Second edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Aslam, Salman. "Snapchat by the Numbers (2018): Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts," February 13, 2018. https://www.omnicoreagency.com/snapchat-statistics/.

———. "Twitter by the Numbers (2018): Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts," January 1, 2018. https://www.omnicoreagency.com/twitter-statistics/.

Balakrishnan, Anita. "How Many Users Does Facebook Have? 2 Billion a Month, CEO Mark Zuckerberg Says." News. CNBC, June 27, 2017. https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/27/how-many-users-does-facebook-have-2-billion-a-month-ceo-mark-zuckerberg-says.html.

Beaupré, Pascale, Pierre Turcotte, and Anne Milan. "Junior Comes Back Home: Trends and Predictors of Returning to the Parental Home." *Canadian Social Trends* 82 (2006): 28–34.

Bengtson, Vern L., Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris. *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Berger, Joseph. *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada, Fourth Edition*. Edited by Joseph Berger, Anne Motte, and Andrew Parkin. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009. http://www.yorku.ca/pathways/literature/Access/The%20Price%20of%20Knowledge%202009.pdf.

Bibby, Reginald. *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*. Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada Books, 2009.

Bowen, John P. *Growing Up Christian: Why Young People Stay in Church, Leave Church, and (Sometimes) Come Back to Church*. Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2010.

"Canadian Youth and Full-Time Work: A Slower Transition." Statistics Canada, May 31, 2017. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2017004-eng.htm.

"Career Decision-Making Patterns of Canadian Youth and Associated Postsecondary Educational Outcomes." Statistics Canada, January 27, 2015. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-599-x/81-599-x2015010-eng.pdf.

Clark, Warren. "Delayed Transitions of Young Adults." *Canadian Social Trends* 84, no. Winter (December 11, 2007): 13–21.

Crouch, Andy. "Steve Jobs: The Secular Prophet." *Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 2011, sec. Life and Style. https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203476804576615403028127550.

Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Dunbar, R. I. M. "Neocortex Size as a Constraint on Group Size in Primates." *Journal of Human Evolution* 22, no. 6 (June 1, 1992): 469–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2484(92)90081-J.

Ebstyne King, Pamela. "Spirituality as Fertile Ground for Positive Youth Development." In *Positive Youth Development and Spirituality: From Theory to Research*, edited by Richard M. Lerner, Robert W. Roeser, and Erin Phelps, 55–73. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008.

Erikson, Erik H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968.

"Fifty Years of Families in Canada: 1961 to 2011: Families, Households and Marital Status, 2011 Census of Population." Statistics Canada, 2012. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_1-eng.pdf.

"Figure 1 Percentage of Young Adults Aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 Living in the Parental Home, Canada, 1981 to 2011." Accessed August 2, 2017. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/2011003/fig/fig3_3-1-eng.cfm.

Ford, Leighton. "The Mentoring Community of Leighton Ford Ministries." Shelby, North Carolina: Westmoreland Printers, 2011. https://www.leightonfordministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The_Mentoring_Community_Booklet.pdf.

Galarneau, Diane, René Morissette, and Jeannine Usalcas. "What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?" Statistics Canada, July 2013. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11847-eng.pdf.

"Global Time Spent on Social Media Daily 2017." Statista. Accessed February 26, 2018. https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/.

Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted," October 31, 2017. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000501.

———. "Families, Households and Marital Status Highlight Tables." Accessed August 2, 2017. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/fam/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=32&Geo=00&SP=1&view=1&sex=1&age=1.

———. "Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada," August 29, 2016. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2016002-eng.htm.

———. "Trends in Canadian Births, 1993 to 2013," October 26, 2015. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14673-eng.htm.

———. "Youth in Transition Survey (YITS)," May 20, 2010. http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=4435.

Grenville, Andrew. "Working with river sample." *Vision Critical Blog,* September 13, 2012. https://www.visioncritical.com/working-river-sample/

Hango, Darcy. "Taking Time off between High School and Postsecondary Education: Determinants and Early Labour Market Outcomes." *Education Matters* 4, no. 5 (January 2008). http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2007005/article/10501-eng.htm.

"Health Fact Sheets: Trends in Canadian Births, 1992 to 2012." Statistics Canada, 2016. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14314-eng.htm.

Hiemstra, Rick. "Canadian Evangelicals and Short-Term Missions," Toronto: Canadian Missions Research Forum and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2017. http://files.evangelicalfellowship.ca/min/rc/CEMES/2017-01-17%20Canadian%20Evangelicals%20and%20Short-Term%20Missions.pdf

———. "Confidence, Conversation and Community: Bible Engagement in Canada, 2013." Toronto: The Canadian Bible Forum and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2014. http://www.bibleengagementstudy.ca/.

Kallas, Priit. "Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites and Apps [February 2018]." DreamGrow, February 8, 2018. https://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/.

Kane, Gerald C. "Psychosocial Stages of Symbolic Action in Social Media." Thirty Fourth International Conference on Information Systems, Milan, Italy, 2013. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7afd/4e6a10850f1d012e783db73791d1bcbccd06.pdf.

Khazan, Olga. "How to Break the Dangerous Cycle of Loneliness." CityLab, April 6, 2017. https://www.citylab.com/navigator/2017/04/how-to-break-the-dangerous-cycle-of-loneliness/522180/.

"Living Arrangements of Young Adults Aged 20 to 29: Families, Households and Marital Status, 2011 Census of Population." Statistics Canada, 2012. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_3-eng.pdf.

Madigan S., A. Ly, C. L. Rash, J. Van Ouytsel, and J. R. Temple. "Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *JAMA Pediatrics*, February 26, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.5314.

Mander, Jason. "Internet Users Have Average of 7 Social Accounts." GlobalWebIndex Blog, June 9, 2016. https://blog.globalwebindex.net/chart-of-the-day/internet-users-have-average-of-7-social-accounts/.

Marshall, Katherine. "Youth Neither Enrolled nor Employed." *Perspectives on Labour and Income, Statistics Canada* 2012, no. Summer (May 23, 2012). http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2012002/article/11675-eng.pdf.

McLeod, Saul. "Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development." Simply Psychology, 2017. https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html/.

Milan, Anne. "Fertility: Overview, 2009 to 2011." Statistics Canada, July 2013. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-209-x/2013001/article/11784-eng.pdf.

———. "Marital Status: Overview, 2011." Statistics Canada, July 2013. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-209-x/2013001/article/11788-eng.pdf.

Milan, Anne, Mireille Vézina, and Carrie Wells. "Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006, 2006 Census." Statistics Canada, September 2007. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-553/index-eng.cfm.

Nault, François. "Twenty Years of Marriages." *Health Reports* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1996): 39–47.

Penner, James, Rachael Harder, Erika Anderson, Bruno Désorcy, and Rick Hiemstra. *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why & When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying & Returning to the Church.* Toronto, ON: The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada Youth & Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, September 7, 2012.

Powell, Kara, and Chap Clark. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011.

Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.

Reimer, Sam, and Michael Wilkinson. *A Culture of Faith: Evangelical Congregations in Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.

Roderique, Hadiya. "I Have 1,605 Facebook Friends. Why Do I Feel so Alone?" *National Post* (blog), February 14, 2018. http://nationalpost.com/feature/i-have-1605-facebook-friends-why-do-i-feel-so-alone.

"Schooling in Canada." Statistics Canada, 1984. http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/statcan/CS99-938-1981-eng.pdf.

Smith, Christian, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Smith, Christian, and Melina Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Sokol, Justin T. "Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory." *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2009). http://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1030&context=gjcp.

"#StatusOfMind: Social Media and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing." Royal Society for Public Health, 2017. https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/social-media-and-young-people-s-mental-health-and-wellbeing.html.

"Trends in Higher Education: Volume 1 – Enrolment." The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011. http://www.cais.ca/uploaded/trends-2011-vol1-enrolment-e.pdf.

Twenge, Jean M. *Generation Me – Revised and Updated: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. Revised, updated ed. New York: Atria Books, 2014.

———. "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" *The Atlantic*, August 3, 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/amp/article/534198/.

———. *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney and New Delhi: Atria Books, 2017.

Wu, Michael. "Where Is the New Dunbar Limit?" Lithium Community, October 15, 2010. https://community.lithium.com/t5/Science-of-Social-Blog/Where-is-the-New-Dunbar-Limit/ba-p/10676.

Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable. *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report*. Toronto, ON: Canada Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, 2012.

Yuen, Tanya, and Alvin Lau. "Transitions: Ensuring Faith Formation in Children and Youth." Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec Youth and Family, 2014. http://cboqyouth.ca/sdm_downloads/transitions/.

List of Tables

Table 1.1. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development 16

Table 2.1. Highest educational attainment for Canadians 15 years and over, 1986 and 2016, percent 22

Table 6.1. Young adult religious service attendance, by teen youth group attendance, percent 63

Table 6.2. Agreement with "Learning about Jesus, the Christian faith and how to live out the Christian faith was the focus of the church youth group I attended as a teenager,"[a] percent 63

Table 6.3. "During your teenage years (age 14 to 17), on average, how often did you attend a church youth group?", by tradition as a teen, percent 64

Table 7.1. Attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen, by teen tradition, percent 71

Table 7.2. Worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp, by teen tradition, percent 71

Table 7.3. Had a home church mentor, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp, percent 71

Table 7.4. Had a home church mentor, by whether young adults worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp, percent 72

Table 7.5. Took a gap year, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen,[b] percent 72

Table 7.6. Took a gap year, by whether respondent had worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp,[b] percent 72

Table 7.7. Young adult religious service attendance, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen, percent 73

Table 7.8. Young adult religious service attendance, by whether respondent had worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp as a teen, percent 73

Table 7.9. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group, by whether respondent had attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen,[b] percent 73

Table 7.10. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group, by whether respondent had worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp,[b] percent 74

Table 7.11. Connected with a different local (church/parish) after having first moved out of parents' home, by whether young adults attended a Christian[a] camp as a teen,[b] percent 74

Table 7.12. Connected with a different local (church/parish) after having first moved out of parents' home, by whether young adults worked on staff at a Christian[a] camp,[b] percent 74

Table 9.1. "Which of the following people identified your gifts and talents and encouraged you to consider a career that made use of them?", percent 95

Table 9.2. "Which of the following people identified your gifts and talents and encouraged you to consider a career that made use of them?", by encouragement cluster, percent 96

Table 9.3. Characterized teen relationship with the following as "warm," by encouragement cluster, percent 96

Table 9.4. Differences between the spheres of emerging adulthood and the "real world" 100

Table 10.1. Young adult religious affiliation, by religious affiliation as a child or teen, percent 102

Table 10.2. Attendance change from teen to young adult, by tradition and age, percent 104

Table 10.3. Agreement with "I believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of my sins", by tradition as a teen, percent 105

Table 10.4. Agreement with "In my view, Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God," by tradition as a teen, percent 105

Table 10.5. Agreement with "I believe the Bible to be the Word of God and is reliable and trustworthy," by tradition as a teen, percent 106

Table 12.1. Frequency of religious service attendance as a young adult, by whether respondent had taken a gap year,[a] percent 129

Table 12.2. Relationship with home church mentor, by whether respondent had taken a gap year,[a] percent 129

Table 12.3. "Thinking of when you first moved out of your parents' home, did you connect with a different local church?" by whether respondent had taken a gap year,[a] percent[b] 130

Table 13.1. "Thinking of when you first moved out of your parents' home, did you connect with a different (local church/parish)?"[a] percent 131

Table 13.2. Connected with a different (local church/parish) after first moving from parents' home, by home church connection, percent 131

Table 13.3. Connected with a (local church/parish) young adult group since high school 141

Table 13.4. Explanations for not connecting with a local church/parish young adult group since high school, by openness cluster, percent 142

Table 14.1. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group or club,[b] percent 144

Table 14.2. Explanations for not connecting with a Christian[a] campus group or club, by openness cluster, percent 147

Table 14.3. Explanations for not connecting with a Christian campus group, by connection with a local church young adult group, percent 149

Table 14.4. Explanations for not connecting with a church young adult group, by education and connection with a Christian campus group, percent 149

Table 15.1. "Who should be responsible for connecting young adults who attend university or college with Christian campus communities such as a campus group or a chaplaincy?" by ministry worker tradition, MW survey, percent 152

Table 15.2. "Who should be responsible for connecting youth or young adults who move either for school or work with a new church or parish?", MW survey, percent 154

Table 15.3. Agreement with “When a young adult leaves my ministry because of a move my responsibility for them does not end until I have connected them with another Christian ministry,” MW survey, percent 155

Table 15.4. Agreement with “My ministry organization has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities,” MW survey, percent.....157

Table 15.5. Agreement with “I intentionally cultivate relationships with youth and young adult ministry leaders in other cities so that I can make connections for young adults who leave my ministry because of a move,” MW survey, percent.....157

List of Charts

Chart 2.1. Percentage of young adults living in the parental home, Canada, age 20 to 29, 1981–2016 24

Chart 2.2. Average age at first marriage for Canadian men and women, 1971–2008 27

Chart 2.3. Canadian young adults in married and common-law unions, 1981–2016 28

Chart 2.4. Canadian mothers' age at first live birth, 1992 and 2013 29

Chart 5.1. Agreement with "It is hard to find enough mentors for the youth or young adults in my ministry who want mentors," MW survey 58

Chart 5.2. Agreement with "I do not have time to mentor youth or young adults who are no longer an active part of my ministry," MW survey 59

Chart 5.3. Agreement with "It is difficult to find the time to follow up when a ministry colleague refers a youth or young adult to me," MW survey 60

Chart 10.1. Religious affiliation as a teen and as a young adult, counts 103

Chart 10.2. Religious service attendance, teen and young adult, percent 104

Chart 12.1. "Which best describes the reason you first moved out of your parents' home?" 119

Chart 13.1. "How long was it after you first moved out of your parents' home before you connected with a different (local church/parish)?" 133

Chart 13.2. Young adults who made connections with a Christian campus group[a] or a new local church[b] 136

Chart 13.3. Connected with a local church young adult group since high school 137

Chart 13.4. Connected with a Christian[a] campus group since high school[b] 138

Chart 13.5. Connected with local church young adult group since high school and/or connected with a Christian campus group (a) for those with at least some postsecondary education, and (b) for those with no postsecondary education 139

Chart 13.6. Young adult religious service attendance, by education and connections to church young adult groups and Christian[a] campus groups 140

Chart 13.7. Explanations for not connecting with a local church/parish young adult group since high school 141

Chart 14.1. "How long was it after you first started university or college before you connected with a Christian[a] campus group or club?" 145

Chart 14.2. Explanations for not connecting with a Christian[a] campus group or club 146

Chart 15.1. Agreement with "My ministry has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities," MW survey 153

Chart 15.2. Agreement with "My ministry has a plan for connecting young adults who move to Christian ministries in their new communities," by respondent's perceived responsibility for connection, MW survey 153

Chart 15.3. Means of contacting young adults no longer active in respondent's ministry, MW survey 158

Chart 15.4. Means of contacting young adults currently active in respondent's ministry, MW survey 159

Chart 15.5. Agreement with "When youth or young adults connected to my ministry are entering university or college for the first time, I intentionally connect with them to see how they are doing spiritually,"[a] MW survey 160

Chart 15.6. Agreement with "When youth or young adults connected to my ministry start a new job, I intentionally connect with them to see how they are doing spiritually", MW survey 160

Chart A1. Distribution of ministry worker responses by region, counts 179

Chart A2. Distribution of ministry worker responses by generation, counts 179

Chart A3. Distribution of ministry worker responses by primary ministry context, counts 180

Chart A4. Distribution of ministry worker responses by sex, counts 180

Chart A5. Distribution of ministry worker responses by volunteer or paid position, counts 181

Chart A6. Distribution of ministry worker responses by full- or part-time position, counts 181

Chart A7. Distribution of ministry worker responses by seasonal or year-round position, counts 182

Chart A8. Distribution of ministry worker responses by rural or urban ministry setting, counts 182

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Expansion
AASN	Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual or None
Cath.	Catholic
CBES	Canadian Bible Engagement Study
CHE	Christian higher education
CHEC	Christian Higher Education Canada
DJ	Disc jockey
DK	Don't know
EFC	The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
Ev.	Evangelical
FNBA	Fear of Not Being Amazing
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
FOPM	Fear of Passionless Monotony
LDS	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
LIT	Leader in Training
ML	Mainline Protestant
MTD	Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
MW	Ministry worker
NA	Not applicable
NEET	Neither in Education, Employment nor Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Orth.	Orthodox
OWR	Other World Religions
PSIS	Postsecondary Student Information System
SLID	Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics
UGRE	Universal Gnostic Religious Ethic
VJ	Video jockey
YATR	Young Adult Transition Research
YITS	Youth in Transition Study

Appendix. Methodology and Data

The Young Adult Transition Study (YATR) looked at two populations:

1. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 who had a Christian religious affiliation as a teen (age 14 to 17) and who attended religious services at least monthly at some point during their teen years.[158]
2. Canadian Christian ministry workers working with youth and young adults.

YATR had four data collection phases:

1. Literature review
2. Ministry expert interviews
3. Young adult interviews
4. National surveys
    a. Young adult national survey
        i. A main sample of 1,998 young adults
        ii. A Christian Higher Education Canada (CHEC) sample of 767 young adults[159]
    b. National survey of 1,570 ministry workers

Literature Review

The primary literature review was conducted from September 2015 to August 2016 and continued through other data collection phases. Matthew Blackaby, Lorianne Dueck and Rick Hiemstra conducted the literature review.

The unpublished document "YATR Literature Review: A Preliminary Report to Project Partners" was presented to the YATR research partners on August 18, 2017.

Ministry Expert Interviews

Rick Hiemstra and Lorianne Dueck conducted 26 ministry expert interviews between October 28, 2016 and February 8, 2017. These experts were selected in consultation with the YATR partnership group. Quotas were used to help insure we had a representative sample of Canadian youth and youth adult ministry experts. Each interview was about one hour in length, and the total transcribed material for these 26 interviews came to more than 400 pages.

[158] Although we asked MARU/Matchbox to survey young adults between the ages of 18 and 28, when we received the dataset there were 104 observations from 29-year-olds in the main sample and 13 observations from 29-year-olds in the CHEC sample. We included these 29-year-olds' observations in our analysis.
[159] The CHEC sample was not included in this report.

Ministry experts were asked to comment on various aspects of young adults' transition from high school to the next phase in life including

- the family of origin;
- the home church and youth group;
- how young adults make decisions about the future;
- the role of friends in the transition;
- young adults' understanding of adulthood;
- the role of Christian campus groups;
- getting established in a new church;
- how social media affects the transition;
- the role of individuation;
- the role of mentoring; and
- their own spiritual formation goals for young adults they minister to.

The unpublished document "YATR Ministry Expert Interviews Report: A Preliminary Report to Project Partners" was presented to the YATR research partners on September 8, 2017.

Young Adult Interviews

Rick Hiemstra and Lorianne Dueck conducted 40 young adult interviews between April 24 and June 21, 2017. Thirty-four of the forty were recruited through the Angus Reid Forum using a set of quotas to help insure a representative sample of Canadian young adults who identified as Christians as teens and attended religious services at least monthly. The other six were recruited by our partnership group from Canadian evangelical Christian higher education institutions. Each interview was about 45 minutes in length, and the total transcribed material for these 40 interviews came to about 500 pages.

Young adults were asked to comment on various aspects of their transition from high school to the next phase in life including:

- their families of origin;
- their home churches and youth groups;
- how they made decisions about what to do post-high school;
- the role of friends in their transition;
- their understandings of adulthood;
- the role of Christian campus groups and church in their transitions;
- how social media affected their transitions;
- and the role of mentors in their lives.

All first names used in this report are pseudonyms for young adult interview subjects.

The young adult interviews were conducted in English and French.

The unpublished document "YATR Young Adult Interviews Report: A Preliminary Report to Project Partners" was presented to the YATR research partners on October 23, 2017.

National Surveys

National Young Adult Survey

The national young adult survey had two samples: a main sample and a Christian Higher Education Canada sample. Prior to conducting the young adult survey, MARU/Matchbox ran a pre-screen survey on their Angus Reid Forum research panel between November 10 and December 15, 2017 to pre-identify qualified panelists. The main sample was weighted for tradition (Catholic, Mainline Protestant, evangelical and Orthodox) according their incidence in this pre-screen).

MARU/Matchbox collected 1,998 young adult responses for the main sample between January 12 and January 30, 2018 through their Angus Reid Forum online research panel and through a river sample with their industry partners. "River sampling is a convenience sample of people attracted by and add who are willing to complete [a] survey for some type of reward."[160] Of the 1,998 completes, 565 came from the Angus Reid Forum online research panel and 1,433 from the river sample.

MARU/Matchbox collected 773 young adult responses for the CHEC sample between January 15 and February 11, 2018. These responses were recruited by 26 participating CHEC institutions. Of these 26 institutions, eight (Crandall, Acadia, Tyndale, Ambrose, Trinity Western, Redeemer, Briercrest, and Booth College) required Tri-Council ethics reviews prior to participating. The CHEC sample was weighted by region and sex. Region weights were based on regional CHEC undergraduate enrollment numbers provided by CHEC.

National Ministry Worker Survey

The national youth and young adult ministry worker survey (MW) was conducted from January 8 to February 16, 2018 using the online survey platform Research.net. Respondents were recruited through the YATR partnership's ministry networks and included more than 50 denominations and several youth and young adult ministry networks. Of the 1,885 responses we collected, 1,570 were complete and from MWs who were Canadian residents. These 1,570 complete Canadian responses form the dataset that we used in our analysis.

[160] Grenville, "Working with river sample."

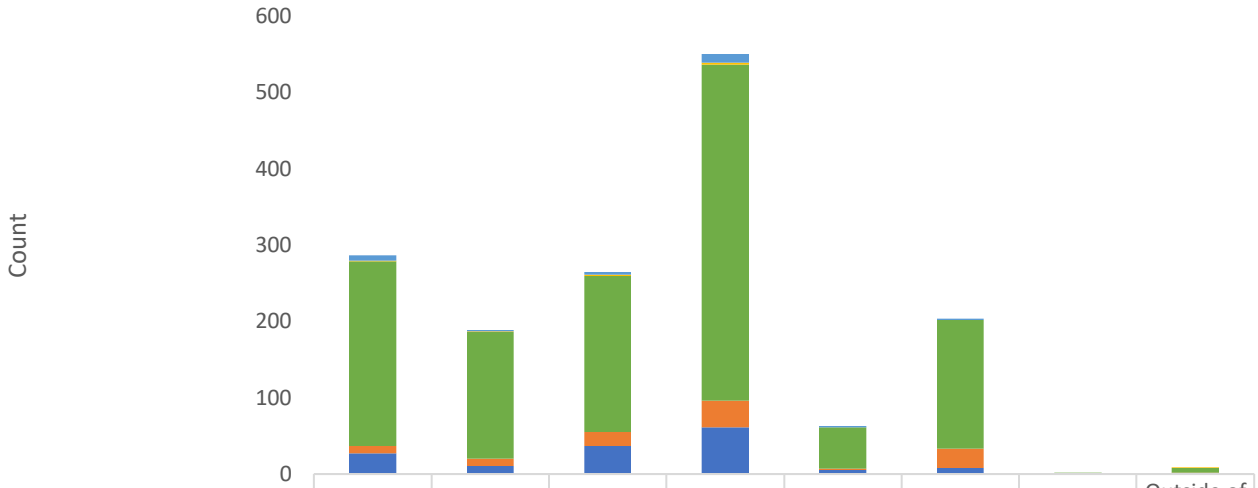
The MW survey was conducted in English and French; however, only 30 complete French responses were collected.

Although we made efforts to recruit Catholic, Mainline Protestant and Orthodox respondents, the majority belonged to evangelical traditions. Charts A1–A8 below show distribution of MW responses in different ways. The MW data was not weighted.

Cluster Analysis

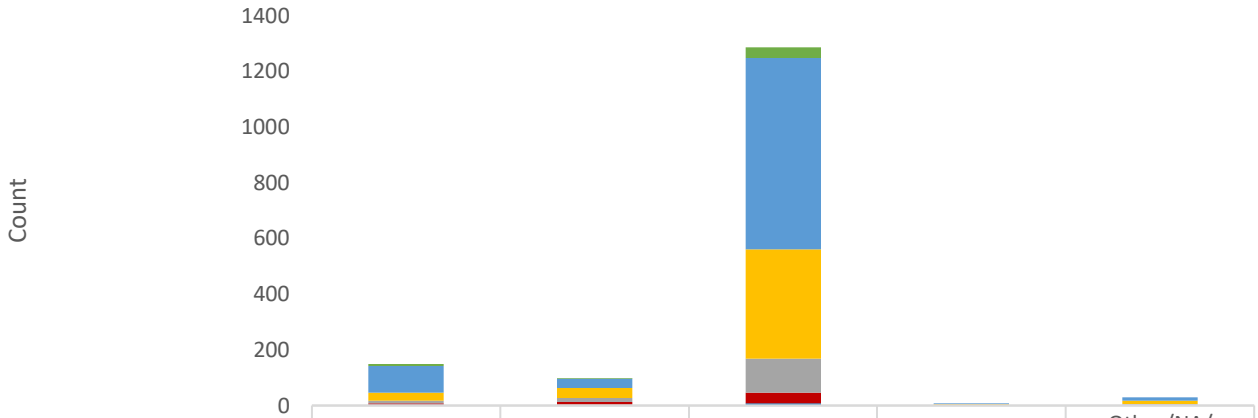
Cluster analysis is a statistical method that groups data by minimizing the distance between data points within groups while maximizing the distance between groups. Distance can be calculated in different ways depending on the type of cluster analysis that is used. The clusters referenced in this report were generated using k-means clustering.

Chart A1. Distribution of ministry worker responses by region, counts



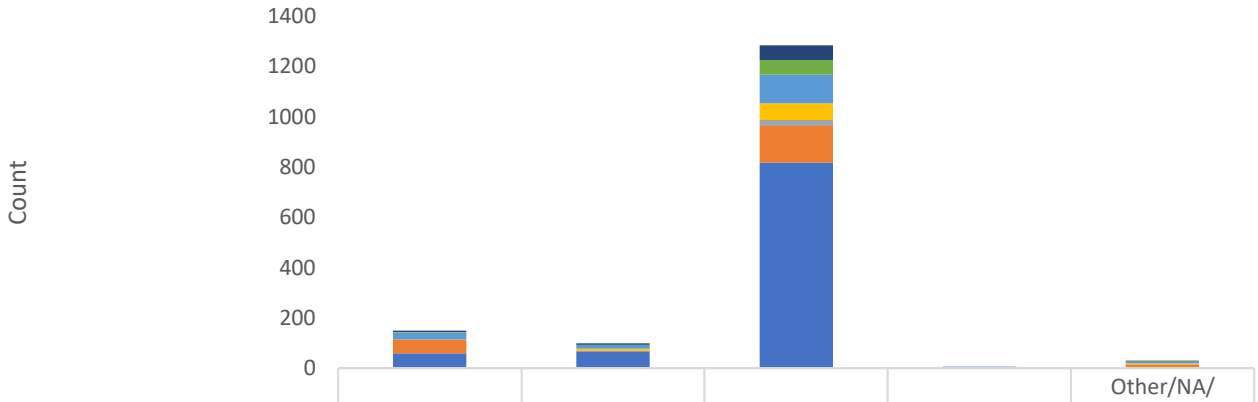
	BC	AB	SK / MB	ON	QC	ATL	Terr.	Outside of Canada
Other/NA/Prefer not to say	7	2	4	12	2	2	0	0
Orth.	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1
Ev.	242	166	205	441	54	169	2	6
ML	10	9	18	35	2	25	0	1
Cath.	27	11	37	61	5	8	0	1

Chart A2. Distribution of ministry worker responses by generation, counts



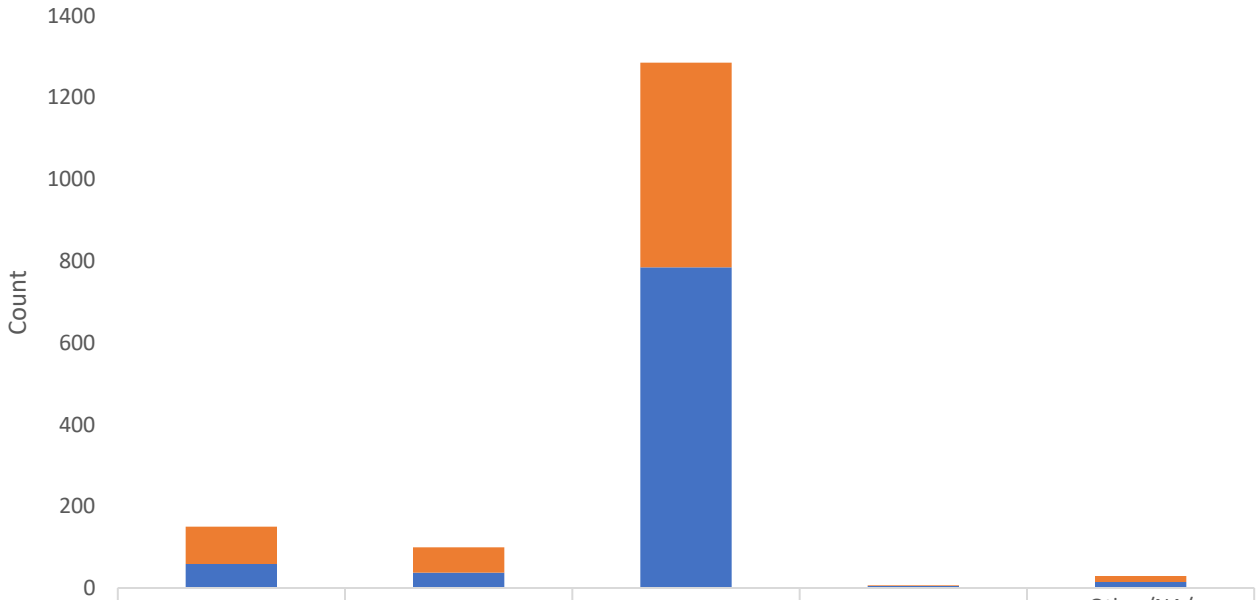
	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/ Prefer not to say
Gen-Z (1997-)	8	3	37	0	0
Gen-Y (1982-1996)	95	35	687	1	12
Gen-X (1965-1981)	30	35	393	3	11
Late Boomers (1956-1964)	10	15	123	1	4
Early Boomers (1946-1954)	4	10	37	1	2
Silent (1925-1945)	3	2	8	0	0

Chart A3. Distribution of ministry worker responses by primary ministry context, counts



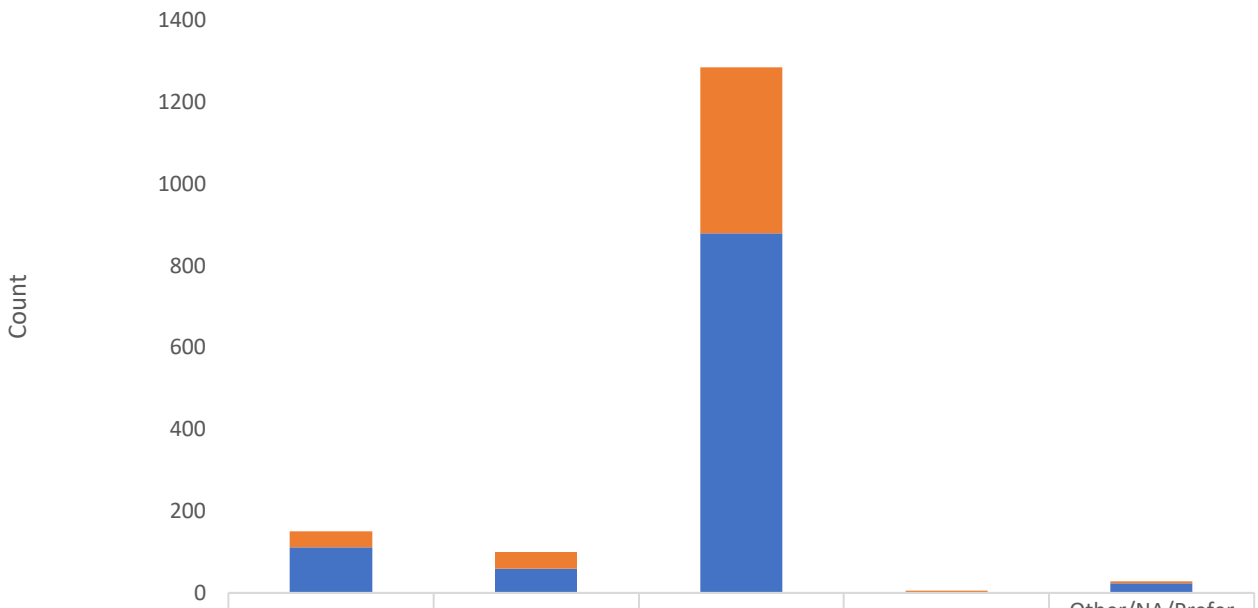
	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/ Prefer not to say
NA / Other	7	6	58	0	1
Camp Context	2	1	59	0	4
National / Leadership Context	26	15	115	0	4
Community Context	1	8	65	0	6
High school context	3	0	24	0	1
Campus Context	52	4	147	0	9
Church / Parish Context	59	66	817	6	4

Chart A4. Distribution of ministry worker responses by sex, counts



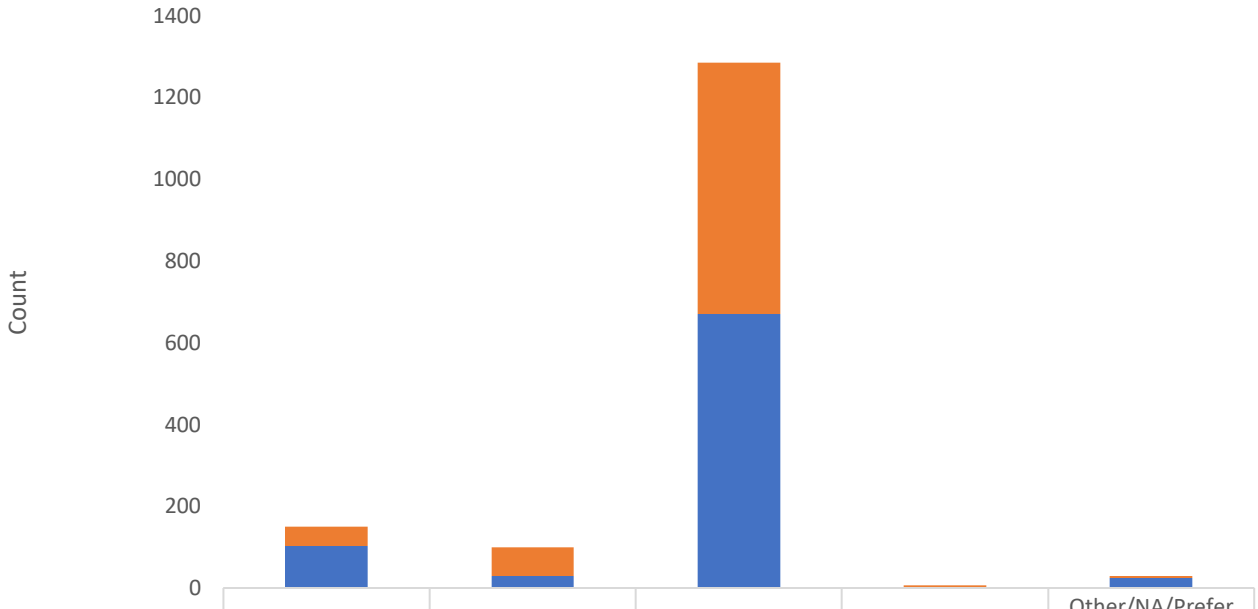
	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/ Prefer not to say
Female	91	62	501	1	14
Male	59	38	784	5	15

Chart A5. Distribution of ministry worker responses by volunteer or paid position, counts



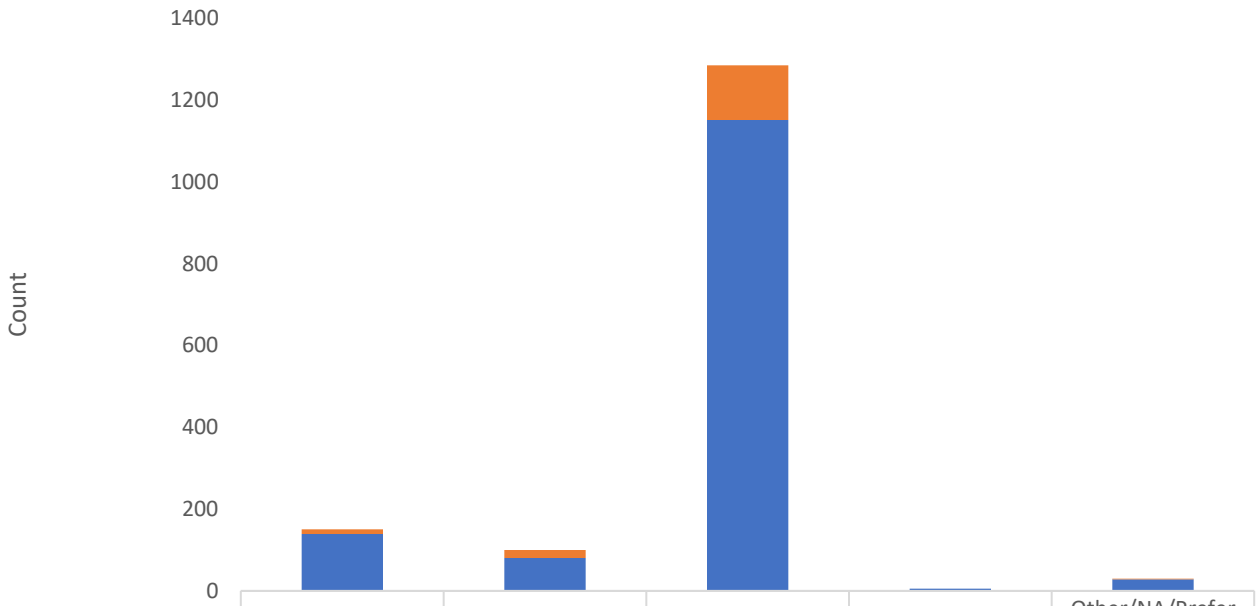
	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/Prefer not to say
Volunteer position	39	40	406	4	5
Paid position	111	60	879	2	24

Chart A6. Distribution of ministry worker responses by full- or part-time position, counts



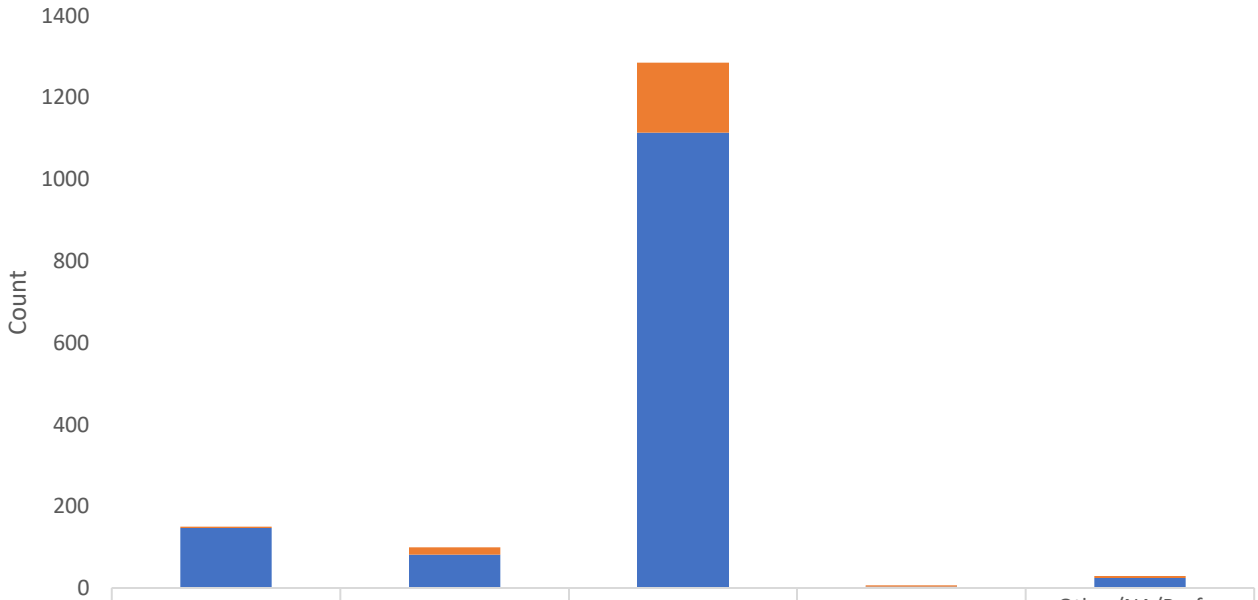
	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/Prefer not to say
Part-time position	47	70	615	4	5
Full-time position	103	30	670	2	24

Chart A7. Distribution of ministry worker responses by seasonal or year-round position, counts



	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/Prefer not to say
Seasonal position	11	19	133	0	1
Year-round position	139	81	1152	6	28

Chart A8. Distribution of ministry worker responses by rural or urban ministry setting, counts



	Cath.	ML	Ev.	Orth.	Other/NA/Prefer not to say
Rural	4	18	172	2	5
Urban	146	82	1113	4	24