

Growing Young



Church Discussion Guide

An 8-Week Journey Toward Growing Young Together

FULLER YOUTH INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION FOR GROUP LEADERS



Why this guide? At every single team meeting focused on how to share the findings from the research behind *Growing Young*, we have kept one question at the top of our agenda: **How can we best help churches grow young?** Before the research was complete—and truly before it even began four years ago—we have kept you in mind.

Why? Because none of our research matters if it doesn't help churches reach and engage young people well. None of it matters if it doesn't inspire new vitality in congregations nationwide, or in your church specifically. So through the book, this guide, and a host of other resources we're developing, we feel compelled to help you in whatever role you play in your church: pastor, volunteer, parent, young person, board member, or any other shoes you might fill from week to week. We tried to step into your shoes as we developed this guide.

Our hope is that you will use the guide alongside the book *Growing Young* as a tool that leads your congregation deeper into the implications of the research for your own context.

Who should get this guide:

- Church leadership teams, staff, boards, volunteer leaders, family ministry teams, youth ministry teams, college/young adult ministry teams, church planters, consultants
- Sunday school classes, adult small groups, intergenerational small groups, midweek discussion groups, book studies/clubs
- Anyone who cares about teenagers, emerging adults, and the church!

How do we get started?

- Determine all of the meeting dates up front. This guide is designed for an 8-week study, but could be compressed into four weeks if you prefer to double up on chapters and discussions. Set a consistent time (one-hour gatherings are ideal) and location, and invite the appropriate participants.
- Make sure everyone has a copy of this guide—either the entire guide or weekly session handouts—ideally printed for use during the session.
- Similarly, every participant needs a copy of the book *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. For bulk orders, [click here](#).
- While you can lead this discussion group without any additional supplies, you may want to have pens, poster paper, markers, and other supplies on hand for making lists or sharing ideas in groups.
- Pray for God to use this discussion group to bring clarity and transformation to your church!



GROWING YOUNG:

What Congregations Are Doing Right

Work ahead of time

- Get a copy of the book *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*.
- Read Chapter 1: "Growing Young: What Congregations Are Doing Right," pages 13-49.
- Pray for the young people in your congregation and community, inviting God to open their hearts toward your church and to open your heart toward them. If you are a young person, pray for wisdom and courage as you participate in this group.

Gathering Activity

- Preserve some time at the beginning of the first group to ensure everyone knows one another. If not, share introductions as appropriate.
- Think of a time when someone made you feel particularly connected to a church, ideally a time when you were in the age range of 15-29 (if you're older than that now). If you're comfortable doing so, share about that time and that person.

Discussion Questions

- How are the terms "young" and "old" used and viewed in our church? Do these uses tend to be more positive or negative? How so?
- What are the "bare spots" (page 14) in terms of age groups in our church? What may have contributed to those bare spots?
- Which of the "10 things churches don't need in order to grow young" on pages 25-27 have we tended to believe in our congregation?
- Which of the core commitments briefly described on pages 42-43 seem most prevalent in our congregation? Which seem missing?
- How have young people added vitality to your life personally and/or the life of our congregation?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 2: "Unlock Keychain Leadership: Sharing Power with the Right People at the Right Time," pages 50-87.
- Meet one young person between ages 15-29 for coffee or lunch. Invite them to share their general perception of your church and the way young people are welcomed. Consider inviting them to this book study to share their input!

Closing Prayer

Invite everyone to share one thing they are hopeful for when it comes to young people and your church, offering these hopes to God together in prayer. You may want to simply pray one- or two-word phrases and designate someone to close the prayer, or invite longer prayers depending on your available time and context.

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UNLOCK KEYCHAIN LEADERSHIP

Sharing Power with the Right People at the Right Time

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 2: "Unlock Keychain Leadership: Sharing Power with the Right People at the Right Time," pages 50-87.
- Meet one young person between ages 15-29 for coffee or lunch. Invite them to share their general perception of your church and the way young people are welcomed. Consider inviting them to this book study to share their input!

Gathering Activity

- If you were able to meet with a young person in between the last meeting and today, share an insight that encouraged you and an insight that surprised you.
- If you were not able to meet with a young person, share one thing you've noticed about your church since last time that you hadn't noticed before related to how young people are—or are not—welcomed and included.

Discussion Questions

- Think back to a time someone gave you "keys" of access, authority, or responsibility, in ministry or elsewhere. What was significant about that for you?
- What keys of your own have you shared with others in the church, in particular to young people?
- Reflecting on the types of key leadership discovered in the research (pages 57-58), which best describes you? Which describes the leadership culture of our church? What observations have you made about the ways keys are given or held in our congregation?
- What might it look like to give young people in high school more leadership in our church? What about college-aged young adults? Twentysomethings?
- What's one area where you personally could share a key with a young person?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 3: "Empathize with Today's Young People: Why 25 Is the New 15, and 15 Is the New 25," pages 88-125.
- Put your keychain in a different place than usual this week (don't lose it!) to remind you to consider and pray about keys you might be able to share with others.

Closing Prayer

Invite everyone to hold their keys as one person prays to close the session, asking God to foster a culture of shared leadership within your congregation.

EMPATHIZE WITH TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE

Why 25 Is the New 15, and 15 Is the New 25

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 3: "Empathize with Today's Young People: Why 25 Is the New 15, and 15 Is the New 25," pages 88-125.
- Put your keychain in a different place than usual this week (don't lose it!) to remind you to consider and pray about keys you might be able to share with others.

Gathering Activity

- Invite everyone to describe a favorite article of clothing from when they were a teenager, and why they liked it (or wanted it, or went to great lengths to get it).

Discussion Questions

- Empathy can be understood a lot of ways, but in this book it is defined as "feeling with," or "sitting on the curb of a young person's life, celebrating their dreams, and grieving over their despair" (pages 91-92). What difference does it make for you when someone offers you empathy like this? Describe what it feels like.
- Which of the three big questions—Who am I? Where do I fit? What difference do I make?—surface for you most when you were a teenager or young adult? What about today?
- Who or what have been most helpful to you in walking through those questions?
- What factors do you think create the most generational differences in our church?
- How does our church empathize with young people well?
- What gets in the way of our church empathizing with teenagers and young adults?
- What shifts might we need to make in order to be a more hospitable place for young people's journey toward identity, belonging, and purpose?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 4: "Take Jesus' Message Seriously: What's Young About the Good News," pages 126-162.
- Meet a young person for coffee or a meal and ask them to help you understand what it's like to be a teenager or twentysomething today. Ask how they perceive adults misunderstand young people, and what would be helpful when it comes to how your church walks with them on the journey toward identity, belonging, and purpose.

Closing Prayer

Invite God to open up new and deeper understanding among generations in your congregation.

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TAKE JESUS' MESSAGE SERIOUSLY

What's Young about the Good News

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 4: "Take Jesus' Message Seriously: What's Young About the Good News," pages 126-162.
- Meet a young person for coffee or a meal and ask them to help you understand what it's like to be a teenager or twentysomething today. Ask how they perceive adults misunderstand young people, and what would be helpful when it comes to how your church walks with them on the journey toward identity, belonging, and purpose.

Gathering Activity

- Start by sharing any insights from discussions with young people between the last meeting and now.
- When you think about the way young people you know talk about their faith, what encourages or discourages you?

Discussion Questions

- When you read about "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (pages 130-133) and the "Golden Rule Gospel" (pages 133-135), how do you think those versions of the gospel show up in our own context? Where do you see evidence of a gospel of grace?
- Which of the three shifts in the way churches growing young talk about the message of Jesus (listed on pages 136-141) resonate most with you? What would our church resonate with, and what might cause dissonance?
- How are young people in our church invited to put their faith into action rather than simply focus on behaviors to avoid?
- How are questions, struggles, and doubts about faith handled in our church?
- In what ways are testimonies or faith journeys shared in our congregation? What could be some natural ways to share our faith with one another more, particularly in ways young people might access?

- What are the rituals that have been especially important in our church or broader tradition? How could we tap into the significance of ritual even more? What new rituals (or old rituals that are new to our community) might add deeper layers to the formation of young people beyond word-based discipleship alone?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 5: "Fuel a Warm Community: Warm Is the New Cool," pages 163-195.
- Take a few moments to list all the things (e.g., ministry programs, events, environmental factors) about your church that make you feel welcomed, at home, and part of a family. Then list specific people who especially model warmth for you.

Closing Prayer

Read Paul's words about Jesus in Colossians 1:15-22 as a closing prayer of affirmation in who Jesus is, reminding everyone that all your work as a church is centered in Christ:

The Son is the image of the invisible God,
the one who is first over all creation,
Because all things were created by him:

both in the heavens and on the earth,
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.
Whether they are thrones or powers,
or rulers or authorities,
all things were created through him and for him.
He existed before all things,
and all things are held together in him.
He is the head of the body, the church,
who is the beginning,
the one who is firstborn from among the dead
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.
Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,
and he reconciled all things to himself through him—
whether things on earth or in the heavens.
He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies with him in your minds, which was shown by your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death, to present you before God as a people who are holy, faultless, and without blame.

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FUEL A WARM COMMUNITY

Warm is the New Cool

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 5: "Fuel a Warm Community: Warm Is the New Cool," pages 163-195.
- Take a few moments to list all the things (e.g., ministry programs, events, environmental factors) about your church that make you feel welcomed, at home, and part of a family. Then list specific people who especially model warmth for you.

Gathering Activity

- Open by sharing about the experience of writing characteristics and people who foster warmth within your congregation. What was it like to do this exercise? What were some of the things on your list?
- After everyone who would like to share does so, name some of the common threads you notice among lists.

Discussion Questions

- The research for *Growing Young* discovered that "like family" was the most common phrase used to describe these thriving churches. To what extent does our church feel "like family"?
- What are some of the obstacles to warmth (defined as authenticity, hospitality, caring, welcoming, accepting, belonging) in our congregation?
- What is it like for newcomers to visit our church? How easy is it for newer people to access smaller gatherings in which they might find relational connection?
- Where do you see intergenerational relationships thriving in our church? What could foster more—and deeper—connection across generations?
- How could our worship services feel more like "family room" gatherings? (See pages 183-185 for ideas.) Are there other contexts in the life of our church we'd like to warm up?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 6: "Prioritize Young People (and Families) Everywhere: From Rhetoric to Reality," pages 196-233.
- Next week, enter your church campus (or wherever your congregation meets) with the eyes of a visiting young person. What would they see, hear, smell, and experience as new guests? How would they experience warmth and hospitality? What could be changed or tweaked to be even warmer?

Closing Prayer

Given the importance to young people of belonging and being known, end in prayer by speaking names of young people—in your congregation or beyond it—who you want to experience warmth through your church.

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PRIORITIZE YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES EVERYWHERE

From Rhetoric to Reality

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 6: "Prioritize Young People (and Families) Everywhere: From Rhetoric to Reality," pages 196-233.
- This week, enter your church campus (or wherever your congregation meets) with the eyes of a visiting young person. What would they see, hear, smell, and experience as new guests? How would they experience warmth and hospitality? What could be changed or tweaked to be even warmer?

Gathering Activity

- Share a few insights from your experiment of entering our church with the eyes of a visiting young person. What surprised you? What concerned you? What one idea do you have for increasing warmth for newcomers?

Discussion Questions

- What evidence do you see that our congregation makes prioritizing young people everywhere a reality?
- In what ways are young people given "load-bearing roles" (pages 208-209) in our church? What could we do to inspire more of a sense that our church needs the gifts young people uniquely bring?
- How supported do parents and caregivers feel in our congregation? What might it look like to increase that support?
- The research found that when it comes to practices that support our congregation growing young, our intentionality trumps what we say is important, and our actual participation trumps both importance and intentionality (pages 215-217). What are the ways we put prioritization of young people into action? What are the areas where we may talk about the importance of young people, but often fail to act?

- Review the Ideas for Action section of the chapter on pages 221-230. What one or two ideas seem particularly relevant to our context, or look like something we may want to try?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 7: "Be the Best Neighbors: Loving and Shaping Our World Well," pages 234-270.
- Catch up on the reading if you're behind, or look back over prior sections of the book that have been especially meaningful. We are nearly at the end of the series!

Closing Prayer

Pray for groups in your church—young people or otherwise—who may feel alienated, overlooked, or undervalued. Pray that as you prioritize young people in your congregation, it would not be to the exclusion of others, but that it would be a catalyst for vitality and health across the church.



BE THE BEST NEIGHBORS

Loving and Shaping Our World Well

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 7: "Be the Best Neighbors: Loving and Shaping Our World Well," pages 234-270.
- Catch up on the reading if you're behind, or look back over prior sections of the book that have been especially meaningful. We are nearly at the end of the series!

Gathering Activity

- As a group, make a list of all of the ways your church serves and engages both locally and globally—whether through organized group efforts, personally-motivated service or advocacy, or congregational/denominational initiatives. Think of as many areas of service, mission, advocacy for justice, and community engagement as you can.
- When you look at this list, what themes do you see? What encourages you? What questions does this raise?

Discussion Questions

- How do we answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" here at our church? (See pages 238-240.) How does that shape our engagement with the community and world?
- If our church moved out of this neighborhood, for what would we be missed? Who would miss us most? What does this tell us?
- What kind of posture do we tend to take in our church toward heated cultural issues? What influences that posture? How do young people respond to our conversations (or lack of conversations) about these issues?
- What do ethnic and socioeconomic diversity look like at our church? How do we feel about that reality? What are we doing to build bridges toward greater diversity in our context?

- In what ways does our congregation support young people in their pursuit of calling and vocational discovery? What could strengthen that support?

Work for next time

- Read Chapter 8: "Growing Young in Our Context: Creating Our Own Plan for Change," pages 271-303.
- Take a 45-minute walking tour of the neighborhood around your church property with a journal or note-taking app on your phone at the ready. Who are your neighbors? What seems to be important to them? How might your church better connect with them?

Closing Prayer

Consider reading the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, listening prayerfully to Jesus' story-based definition of who our neighbors are, what it means to love them, and how this is an extension of loving God.

GROWING YOUNG IN OUR CONTEXT

Creating Our Own Plan for Change

***NOTE: Leadership teams may want to substitute this last discussion with the set of questions found at the end of Chapter 8 on pages 301-303. Alternatively, you may want to start with this discussion and let it lead into that work*

Work ahead of time

- Read Chapter 8: "Growing Young in Our Context: Creating Our Own Plan for Change," pages 271-303.
- Take a 45-minute walking tour of the neighborhood around your church property with a journal or note-taking app on your phone at the ready. Who are your neighbors? What seems to be important to them? How might your church better connect with them?

Gathering Activity

- Share any insights from walking around your church neighborhood and considering local neighbors, as well as any new insights since your last gathering about how your church engages global neighbors.

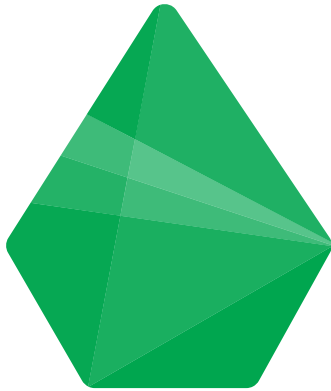
Discussion Questions

- As you read the stories of St. John the Evangelist (pages 271-275) and Volga Christian Reformed (pages 296-300), what especially stood out to you? What similarities did you notice between their stories and our church's story?
- When it comes to change, which of the myths on pages 279-280 do we tend to believe in our church? Why?
- The book suggests that any change process begins with listening well. Through the course of this study, we have been listening to research, to each other, and hopefully listening to young people outside this group. To whom else may we need to listen, and how can we make a plan to do so? (See pages 283-285 for ideas.)
- What are a couple of stories we can already think of that seem to capture the vision of our church, in particular when it comes to young people?

- Looking at the list of challenges related to engaging young people on page 291, which most resonate with our context? Over which obstacles do we have the most influence or potential to change?
- If you were to pick just one core commitment of the six to address first in our congregation, what would it be? What ideas do you have for a next step when it comes to increasing that commitment? (Try to identify a next step YOU can take, as opposed to a next step that hands off responsibility to others.)
- What has been the most insightful aspect of this discussion group? What has been most encouraging?

Closing Prayer

If time allows, invite anyone in the group who would like to pray during this closing prayer to do so, designating someone to open the prayer and someone to close it.



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