

Young Adults and your Church of England church.



Recommendations for building and sustaining relationships with young adults in Church of England churches, by the Young Adults Network – a Growing Faith Foundation network.

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INTRODUCTION

All young adults are different and have their own experiences. Some churches have lots of young people, others only have a few. This resource has been created by a small group of young adults in the Church of England, to help your church engage with young adults in your local community. If you do these things, you won't automatically attract lots of young adults to your church, but we hope that it will help you reflect on your ministry with this age group. Simple is best - no need for really complex, costly ideas!

It is also important to note that this guidance is not an official response to the General Synod Private Members Motion (GS 2298A) regarding young adult participation in the CofE, but has been created in line with the wider drive within the church to engage this demographic.



Read on for some of our own experiences. We hope you will be cheered and encouraged by the times when we have been welcomed into the life of our churches; but we also really hope you will learn from the more negative experiences here, when we have felt mistrusted or excluded from our community.

OUR EXPERIENCES

I have always been involved with church as a young person, in music and in ministry. But as someone in their 20s, when I go to church without a particular responsibility or role that day, or try somewhere new, I often get asked whether I'm in church to hear my banns being read or for another occasional reason. We need to get better at trusting that young people want to come to church because they want to be there, to be part of a community, and to worship God. There isn't always a secretive, ulterior motive: trust that young people just want to come to your church.

- Will

Even though I attended a Church of England Primary school, I felt like I started exploring faith [when I was older]. I wanted to explore something deeper and more meaningful. I tried talking to other students but was quickly told the most important thing that I could do was find a church. After a week I came across the church that I would call home for the 3 years of my undergraduate degree. It was a traditional Book of Common Prayer church. After my first service there I went online and ordered myself a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer and I haven't looked back since. It meant a lot to me that the church I went to involved me in things early on. In my second week of attending, I was invited to become part of the choir, then a few weeks later I was asked to help with tea and coffee. Eventually I became part of the PCC and it helped me feel like my opinions mattered in my church community.

After a while I started to meet other young adults from similar churches in the same place and we started meeting up sometimes for evening prayer. Over time this developed into an Anglican society at our university.

I found it difficult as a young person who is new to the church. I often feel a little like Dorothy in Oz. I'm in a new world that everyone else seems to know about and that for me seems completely alien.

Things I would like churches to know about young adults:

- They can have tumultuous relationships
- They move around a lot
- They can be quite lonely
- It can be difficult for young women to go to churches on their own, particularly to services that end after dark.

- Emily

OUR EXPERIENCES

Being a young adult Christian is a joy but also a challenge. I came to faith in my penultimate term at university. At the time, I was in my college chapel community and then I joined a church for a few months. Since then, I have moved a lot, which has also necessitated many church moves and experiences of diverse traditions, worship and theology. How I relate to church has changed dependent on what I do, whether I'm there as a worshipper in the congregation or serving in a role, the most formal of which was as a pastoral assistant. It has also depended on how frequently I can get to church. Some churches I've been in have been very supportive to young adults, either as they have several in their community so have built up a specific ministry to them (hosting socials and discipleship groups for them) or as they, despite big age gaps, make a particular effort to care for their 1 or 2 young adults. This can be as easy as dropping a text to see how I am – [this] makes a tangible difference. At other points (thankfully fewer), I've felt quite isolated and misunderstood in church or only appreciated if I'm serving. At points when I've been away from church or at transition points, it is rare people get in touch to catch up or have conversations about faith, life etc. I'm thankful for the few who do though and thank God who has enabled me to deepen my spirituality, faith and discipleship in many different ways as a young adult, from church attendance to ecumenical encounters and dipping into events for young adults run by various religious communities.

- Annika

When I've visited churches, although they can be welcoming, if there is a clear emphasis on it being a 'family' church (which is great if you have children), it is off-putting. If you are a single adult, it often sends the message that you wouldn't fit in. If there aren't events and activities that are geared up for single or childless adults, then I wouldn't stay in that church. I want to be part of a community where I feel like I belong. That's the hardest thing about leaving university and being unmarried and childless. A lot of churches aren't geared up for you in the same way they are for families.

- Sarah

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

With all of this in mind, what can your church do? How can you mirror the successes of churches that have successfully supported their young adults? How can you avoid the mistakes of those who have made their young adults feel unwelcome?

Please read on for our recommendations for attracting more young adults to your church, and building a strong sense of community amongst this demographic. It's a long list, but we hope it contains some really valuable and thought-provoking ideas.

- Create a **welcoming atmosphere** in the church, and welcome newcomers into the church community
- **Utilise the skills** that your existing young adults have and engage them in how the church is run: e.g. ask them to join the welcome team or PCC
- **Consider hosting** a few young adults at your home one Sunday or on an evening, or offer a meal at church for them
- Consider the **specific needs** of the young adults and **specific issues** in your local area
- Run **socials and events** around liturgical seasons, e.g. pub carols, pancake day
- Connect with the **university chaplaincy team and student faith societies** if you live near a university

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Organise events around food, but be sensitive to those who might find this difficult
- Think about the space that you already have and how young adults could be involved in maintaining it, e.g. gardening sessions
- Encourage intergenerational friendships, so that young people really feel part of the church community
- Take time to engage with the young adults in your choir or worship band if you have one
- Consider holding some **evening or weekend events** as many young adults will be working during the day, and so miss out on daytime activities. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that young adults can be very busy, and may have weekend travel commitments. Don't be disheartened if they do not turn up every week to services or meetings. Appreciate them when they are at church; don't criticise them when they're not!
- **Offer lifts** if you know that a young adult is coming from far away, (though be aware of safeguarding guidelines)
- **Don't restrict** access to voluntary or paid roles if you know of young adults who could help the church, even if they aren't a practising Christian – e.g. serving as a website developer or gardening volunteer

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take time to **get to know the young adults in your community**: take an interest in what they do and how they're doing – but don't jump on them if one enters your church! Engage with those young adults who may be connected to your church but are away studying or busy at work – you might drop them a good luck card for exams, reach out for a catch up coffee now and again, or check in on how their travels are going. Though you may not always receive a response, these things make young adults feel valued.
- **Create a space** specifically for young adults to meet and chat (e.g. start a small group, organise a trip out for a meal/drink, create a WhatsApp group, prayer triplets, or support group for young adults in specific careers)
- Remember that many young people have a passion for **social justice** - how can you embed this into your church ethos and activities?
- Ask if any members of your congregation are willing to **serve as a mentor** for young adults in church: this can be so helpful for those new to faith or at a crossroads in life, as navigating the transition to adulthood and the changes it brings can be hard. However, ensure these mentors are properly trained, listen well, are not too directive and are committed.
- Reflect on your **website and social media** - what message is it sending? Is it accessible? Is it up to date?
- **Pray for them, and let them know that you're praying!**

TO CONCLUDE

Thank you so much for reading our suggestions. We hope they've been helpful to you as you consider your interaction with the young adults already in your community, and look to engage those who are yet to arrive in your church. Hopefully it will reassure you that while young adults can sometimes require specific support, their needs are often the same as any person coming to church. Above all, young adults just want to be valued, included, and affirmed as themselves and feel part of a welcoming church community.

Here are some links to other resources on welcoming young adults and students. (Please note, we don't necessarily endorse all of their content or agree with the theological views of the organisations.)

Fusion: <https://www.fusionmovement.org/>

Evangelical Alliance: <https://www.eauk.org/great-commission/young-adults>

Inclusive church: <https://www.inclusive-church.org/other-resources/>

SCM: <https://www.movement.org.uk/resources/welcoming-students-your-church>

Thrive: <https://www.thriveym.org.uk/simple-ways-integrate-young-people/>

Fuller Institute: <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/3-ways-to-start-seeing-young-adults>

To close, it is important to remember: it is not the responsibility of the young adults already in your church to bring in other young adults. This will happen slowly if you create the **right atmosphere**, and **engage** with the existing young adults in a **meaningful** and **authentic** way.

CONTACT INFORMATION

This network was formed in 2022 for young adults connected to the Church of England. Its purpose is to help them connect with each other and the Growing Faith commitment. Although the YA demographic falls outside the 'young people' remit of the Growing Faith Foundation, this network is a peer-led response to young adults' request to join in the work this way.

If you have any questions, would like to discuss the recommendations raised here in more depth, or know of any young people who may be interested in participating in the Growing Faith Young Adults Network in the future, we warmly encourage you to contact:

growingfaith@churchofengland.org

**This guide was created by members of the
Growing Faith Foundation Young Adults' Network.**