



WELCOMING, CONNECTING, & ENGAGING  
**YOUNG ADULTS**

EQUIPPING WORLD-CHANGING DISCIPLES [UMCdiscipleship.org](https://umcdiscipleship.org)



**DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**  
The United Methodist Church



## DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

The United Methodist Church

This pamphlet was produced by Young People's Ministries.

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For many congregations, young adults can seem like the most challenging group to engage in ministry. Perhaps you look at your congregation and see this age group missing. Or maybe you don't know how to connect with the culture of people aged eighteen to thirty. By welcoming, connecting, and engaging young adults, your community can walk with them on a journey of discipleship.



## WELCOMING

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Immersing young adults in Christian community begins and ends with how welcome they feel in a community of faith. When young adults are offered opportunities to develop authentic personal relationships with God and fellow believers, and experience their gifts and talents being affirmed as integral to life in their faith community, they can feel welcomed and supported through their season of life.

The years between eighteen and thirty are often chaotic. During those years, a young adult experiences significant change that may lead to feelings of overpowering isolation, terrifying joy, and beautiful transformation. Welcome this age group by creating opportunities for church members to engage in personal encounters through sharing common experiences. Church members should expect young adults to have complexities in life that are not apparent in superficial exchanges.

The Church must be more than a social club that helps young people cross a threshold into adulthood. Church needs to be a place that supports and recognizes spiritual maturity in addition to physical maturity. Providing support and recognition could take the form of: sending care packages to college students, offering resumè mentoring to graduates (high school or college), providing meals and offering childcare or babysitting to young parents, or meeting at a local restaurant for trivia or conversation. The intention of each encounter should reassure the young adult that he or she has a community to lean on that values them as an adult member.

Terrifying joy can come in many life events; graduation, finding a partner, moving out, first job, starting a family, leading a mission, or even discerning a call. In the midst of chaos, there are moments of beautiful transformation. Frustrating conversations over the relevance of scripture in modern times gives birth to a working knowledge of the story of God's people. Struggles over the use of social media highlight the importance of community. Open dialogue about sexuality, race, and justice fosters deeper respect for all God's children. A community of believers that welcomes young adults engages opportunities for transformation by listening with grace, knowing that God will work in ways beyond our imagining.

Supporting a young adult through isolation, joy, and transformation naturally leads to the development of authentic personal relationships. The spiritual practice of abiding is a wonderful model for welcoming others.

*“So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” 1 John 4:16*

The Church is called to offer a space where young adults can abide in the presence of God, and know that God is abiding in them. This abiding space creates a unique opportunity for hospitality. The calming truth of humanity's relationship with God can affirm young adults in chaotic situations when shared in community, “God continues to hold you while you struggle with fertility, leave your home, lose your job, question your faith, bury your loved ones, and face other hardships. “ That hospitality becomes even more powerful when personal relationships can also say, “I will continue to be present with you because God continues to be present with me”

Abiding in love requires vulnerability, honesty, trust, grace, and patience. Building relationships requires time and nurturing. We become physical manifestations of God's abiding presence through personal relationships with young adults as they struggle and celebrate. By welcoming

young adults into the life of the church we create eternal relationships in the kingdom of God.

Welcoming also means incorporating people's specific gifts into the Body of Christ. Young adults want to belong to communities where they will have significant influence on the functioning of the group. They want to be asked to lead because their gifts will help the Body flourish, which motivates them to further invest in the community. The creativity of the Holy Spirit frees the Church to innovatively incorporate young adults into leadership because of, not in spite of, their busy lives and distinctive worldview. The Christian community can offer young adults what they are craving: a group to which they belong that affirms their struggles and passions, embraces them with love and grace, and empowers them to make a difference in the world.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

- How is our church hospitable to young adults?
- How does our church provide support and recognition for young adults?
- How does our church recognize spiritual maturity?
- What instances of overpowering isolation, terrifying joy, and beautiful transformation are present in our community?



## **CONNECTING**

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Discipleship thrives when communities of deep, personal relationship enable connection. Emerging adults share every generation's desire to belong to a community. The accessibility and diversity of communities to which individuals can belong has changed in the last twenty years. Churches no longer have a monopoly on softball leagues, online gaming has created the largest international community the world has ever known, and belonging is no longer synonymous with membership.

Yet young adults, like many members of a church community, continue to desire connection. John Wesley called Christianity a “social religion,”<sup>1</sup> a faith that relies on society, conversation, fellowship, and support. *Connecting with young adults does not mean more programming or events! It does mean proactively creating a culture rich with chances for connection.* The church can intentionally make space for these connections, then must trust the creativity of the Holy Spirit for the fruit that those connections bear. Here are five suggestions to connect with young adults.

**DEVELOP MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS.** Adults between the ages of eighteen-thirty account for nearly 18% of the US population as of 2015, a percentage that will only continue to grow for the next twenty years.<sup>2</sup> This age group participates in broad social networks and the church can be a part of those far-reaching networks. The church should also be a place that encourages deep, meaningful relationships. Young adults may have a distrust of institutions or organized religion, our Church included. Church leaders can help create an atmosphere where young adults are relationally accepted and trusted as members of the body of Christ. Personal relationships guide a young adult’s faith journey. Influence is a function of trust, not volume – and relationships create the foundation for trust.

**DEMONSTRATE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING.** Adults in the US average over around eleven hours of “screen time” every day.<sup>3</sup> Media has more opportunities than ever before to push out the latest news and notifications. Young adults swim in culture. Not only do they follow trending topics, but platforms now allow them to become full participants in those topics and engage the culture they curate. Church should be a safe place, yes. Church should be a place where all are welcomed, yes. Because of that welcoming, safe nature, church should also become a place that engages culture, meaningfully.

Disciples are not called to be *counter-cultural*, standing in opposition to the culture surrounding them. Disciples are called to be *cross-cultural*, engaging any experience from

the perspective of the cross, using God's story and the life of Jesus to make sense of our daily experiences. *Culture is not the enemy; culture is an opportunity for exegesis!* Avoid overprotective impulses driven by fear. Focus on engaging culture meaningfully from a Christian (Wesleyan) perspective. Become a place where young adults can connect difficult questions and culture to their faith.

**MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES.** Mentoring should happen in both directions, from older generations to the younger, as well as from the younger to the older. Young adults are digital natives, people that can guide others through a digital labyrinth where churches and older adults feel lost. People over thirty have lived through the life stages that eighteen to thirty-year olds are currently going through and have wisdom to share from those experiences.

The Church can help people share that wisdom. Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal, and don't necessarily rely on formal curriculum. Mentoring relies on people being willing to create time for each other and share with each other. *The nature of what is shared during a mentoring connection is less important than the act of sharing itself.*

**ADOPT VOCATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP.** Many adults from eighteen to thirty are still discerning a call which creates authentic expressions of themselves through their work and life. *In the United Methodist Church, every member is also a minister.* Encouraging young adults to make that connection can help them to actively live out their faith, no matter their profession or trade. The church can help connect a person's work life with their faith, and in doing so help young adults discern their life's work and calling.

**FACILITATE CONNECTION WITH JESUS.** The church should help foster a deeper sense of intimacy with the divine, and help young adults grow in spiritual maturity. The Church does this by helping young adults seek out places where they are likely to encounter Jesus; meeting and serving those at the margins of society, participating in acts of compassion

and justice, and practicing acts of devotion and worship to connect with the life and teachings of Jesus. *Emulating an authentic Jesus will help young adults wholly integrate faith into their lives.* Spend time reflecting on Mark 8:27-33 and help others answer “Who do you say that I am?”

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Who are ‘connectors’ in my church who could develop relationships with young adults?
- How is my congregation “cross-cultural?” How do we engage culture from the perspective of the cross?
- What questions are young adults in my context wrestling with regarding culture?
- What opportunities do young adults in my context have to engage with those from other generations?
- What knowledge, skills, or gifts do young adults in my context have that would be meaningful for older generations to learn and vice versa?
- How do we ask young adults to explore and express their call?
- How can we equip every member as a minister to ask questions of calling and vocation?
- How many opportunities does our church create to interact with Jesus?
- How do I answer Jesus’ question from Mark 8:29? “Who do you say that I am?”



## ENGAGING

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So, your church is trying to welcome and connect with some young adults. Yay you! Now what? How do young adults become engaged in the work and life of the church? This question and process can be frustrating! Coming up with fun engagements that actually work and help you connect with new people is exciting. The harder part is developing

intentional relationships that help us do the work of the church together, all week long.

It's been said earlier but bears repeating, young adults are busy. As Meg Jay says in a TED talk titled, *Why 30 is Not the New 20*<sup>4</sup>, "80% of life's most defining moments take place by age 35." From eighteen to thirty most young adults will be trying out potential careers and paths, starting said career, meeting a lifelong partner, buying a home or choosing where to live long term, having and raising children, and beginning to experience the emotional journey of aging parents. These challenges consume time and energy.

In addition to time constraints, young people of all income strata are not earning a lot of money, they often have significant debt, they don't have a lot of vacation time, work weekends or late into the night, and often can't negotiate with their employer for more time off or less work hours. Pressured to work constantly, parent perfectly, spend time with family, and see friends, young adults feel like they have less time and money to give. The Church must engage young people in the places where they need and want to spend their time, otherwise young adults are unlikely to engage in the life of a community. For example, if your congregation exclusively says "church happens only on Sunday morning in Sunday morning worship or Sunday School and that's how you are part of the community", it will be difficult to engage many young adults.

While they may be busy, there are several positive traits of this stage of life. Young adults are open to trying new things and investing in new parts of themselves. Young people need healthy and diverse communities (diversity in age is VERY important) to help them discern where they are going and accomplish what they hope to do.

There are negatives aspects to this stage of life as well. Young people will often want to try a lot of things, have a hard time committing for long periods of time, and sometimes need more help than they can give. Most of the ways the church

asks people to engage are in long-term, high capacity, and high monetary giving commitments. What young people often need are short-term, varied opportunities that don't cost a lot. It also helps if such engagements met a need in their own life.

Here's an easy engagement checklist for each opportunity you plan. For young adults, engaging time spent in worship, service, small groups, and committee/team meetings should:

- **BE EASY TO INVITE FRIENDS INTO.** Can someone they know benefit or add to this time together?
- **BE EASY TO BRING CHILDREN WITH YOU.** Young children under 5 need to be factored into any and all activities and that should include figuring out how families can stay together throughout their time with the church.
  - » Still provide childcare for those who don't want to bring children with them or when the activity really is not child-appropriate.
  - » Be something you can do for **ONLY** a couple of hours on a weeknight or weekend.
- **BE ENGAGED WITH THE CONGREGATION AND OR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.** *If a young adult doesn't make it to Sunday morning but does make it to Life Group or a service event, you should still recognize that person as a part of the community.*
- **INCLUDE A DIVERSE GROUP OF PEOPLE** who can talk about life together while they work.
- **INCLUDE FOOD** and maybe an invitation to happy hour or dinner after the event.
- **ASK SOMETHING OF THEM OTHER THAN SHOWING UP**—there should be some meaning for ME being here. Everyone should have meaningful work.
- **INVOLVE A NUMBER OF LEARNING/ENGAGEMENT STYLES** (extrovert, introvert, visual, tactile, etc).



## NOW GO

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We've explored what young adulthood looks like, some of their desires in community, and the specific difficulties of engaging people in this stage of life in authentic ministry. The most important thing to remember, however, is to listen: listen to the needs, the struggles, and deep spiritual longings of the young adults around you. This will build relationships that will bring young adults, and your entire community closer to God.

***Written by the staff of Young People's Ministries with special thanks to Audrey Wilder.***

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<sup>1</sup> [HTTP://WESLEY.NNU.EDU/JOHN-WESLEY/THE-SERMONS-OF-JOHN-WESLEY-1872-EDITION/SERMON-24-UPON-OUR-LORDS-SERMON-ON-THE-MOUNT-DISCOURSE-FOUR/](http://WESLEY.NNU.EDU/JOHN-WESLEY/THE-SERMONS-OF-JOHN-WESLEY-1872-EDITION/SERMON-24-UPON-OUR-LORDS-SERMON-ON-THE-MOUNT-DISCOURSE-FOUR/)

<sup>2</sup> [HTTP://WWW.MARKETINGCHARTS.COM/TRADITIONAL/SO-HOW-MANY-MILLENNIALS-ARE-THERE-IN-THE-US-ANYWAY-30401/](http://WWW.MARKETINGCHARTS.COM/TRADITIONAL/SO-HOW-MANY-MILLENNIALS-ARE-THERE-IN-THE-US-ANYWAY-30401/)

<sup>3</sup> [HTTP://WWW.GEEKWIRE.COM/2015/NIELSEN-REPORTS-THAT-THE-AVERAGE-AMERICAN-ADULT-SPENDS-11-HOURS-PER-DAY-ON-GADGETS/](http://WWW.GEEKWIRE.COM/2015/NIELSEN-REPORTS-THAT-THE-AVERAGE-AMERICAN-ADULT-SPENDS-11-HOURS-PER-DAY-ON-GADGETS/)

<sup>4</sup> [HTTPS://WWW.TED.COM/TALKS/MEG\\_JAY\\_WHY\\_30\\_IS\\_NOT\\_THE\\_NEW\\_20?LANGUAGE=EN](https://WWW.TED.COM/TALKS/MEG_JAY_WHY_30_IS_NOT_THE_NEW_20?LANGUAGE=EN)



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINISTRIES

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**YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINISTRIES** (YPM), part of **DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**, is a global organization that supports youth, young adults, and those who invest in the lives of young people. We create and sustain relationships that help make young disciples. We do this to integrate young people into the life of the UMC and help them live out their faith in the world.

YPM program staff are available as consultants, speakers, and leaders as part of their ministry role.

## EVENTS

**Young Leaders Summits** | Annually, in the Philippines and African Central Conferences.

**General Conference** | Supporting young delegates and attendees, and coordinating the Young People's Address.

**Global Convocation** | Every four years, young people selected from around the globe learn from each other and participate in legislation.

**YOUTH Event** | The national event for United Methodist Youth in the United States, every four years.

## MISSIONS

**UMYouthMissions.org** | Map of youth-friendly, UM-related sites. Browse, explore, and connect.

**RevGo.org** | Crowdfunding tool for young people and missional engagement ministries.

## RESOURCES

**FieldGuideUMC.org** | Free, online coaching from experienced ministry leaders.

**UMConnector.org** | Connect to all the opportunities for young people available from United Methodist Agencies.

**YouthServiceFund.org** | By youth/for youth grant program accepts applications until June 1 for funding to begin the following year.

**Scholarship.UMC.org** | Find funding for higher education or for a ministry.

**Devotions** | Check out GlobalYoungPeople.org for devotions by and for young adults, youth, and leaders of young people's ministries.

**Blog** | Every week, new entries and thoughts from around the connection.

**Grants for Ministries with Young People** | Available at GlobalYoungPeople.org

### **Downloads & Books**

- **Sex: A Christian Perspective on Our Bodies, Decisions, & Relationships** | 4 core sessions on human sexuality, along with additional modules for purchase at **YPMFaithAndSex.org**
- **Everyday Disciples** | Covenant Discipleship with Youth – An encouraging start-up resource adapting covenant discipleship practices for youth. Part of an intergenerational 3-part series.
- **Building Spiritual Muscle** | A 6-week video-based Bible study designed to introduce spiritual exercises into the lives of Youth.
- **Leadership Lab for 6-8 Grade and 9-12 Grade Youth** | 4 and 7 sessions on leadership development, direct PDF download, customizable for your context

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