



Where are the 20-somethings? Many churches, including Brookwood, have been asking this question with an increasing urgency. The concern isn't that we're asking the question; it's an extremely important question. The concern is that we're just now asking the question! In a 2005 Self-study at Brookwood, some survey participant's comments suggest a real problem was already surfacing: "There are no questions about the college and singles ministries." Another person interpreted that absence in this way: "The survey mentions nothing about the college and singles ministries which suggest to our college students and singles that they are not a significant part of our church." That was 16 years ago. If those kinds of comments are still being made 10-15 years from now about Brookwood, it might be too late to address them.

So, what do we do?

We are indebted to Larry McCutcheon for bringing this important resource into the discussion and for his attached summary of each chapter. "Growing Young" can help Brookwood significantly change course with our college and young adult ministries and could impact our overall growth. Implementing these important values and practices could help strengthen Brookwood and add a beautiful vitality to every aspect of our church life.

If we're serious about growing, we all have to ask some difficult questions:

1. Do we acknowledge the value of our young adults by integrating them into the life of the church? Do they help lead worship? Are they represented in lay leadership?
2. As a group, are we trying to build relationships with our young adults? With any young adults in the community?
3. Do we feel it's a staff person's responsibility to "fix this," or is this a whole church matter?

I would challenge you to prayerfully read this summary. Encourage others to read it.

How is God leading you to get involved? To pray? To connect?

With hope for a bright future,
Blake

Chapter 1

“If your church is like many, you have bare spots. Holes created by the teenagers and young adults missing from your congregation” (14). The reality is “no major Christian tradition is growing in the US today” (16). The Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) sets out in this book research the churches across the country who have vibrant ministries to young people (ages 15 to 29).

Rather than dwell on the statistical doom and gloom, FYI researched and highlighted congregations all over the nation that are “bright spots.” These churches that are “growing young” which means that: 1. Are engaging young people ages 15 to 29 and 2. They are growing—spiritually, emotionally, missionally, and sometimes numerically (19). This book is the result of researching those churches to find out what’s actually working. The book sets out the “core commitments” of those churches.

This four-year research project identified 363 vibrant congregations across 15 different denominations that was eventually narrowed to 41 churches. Then, based on responses in the initial interviews of the 41 churches, they sent teams of 2 or 3 researchers to 12 of the 41 congregations. In 3 stages of research FYI conducted a total 10,000 hours of research personnel time and interviewed 474 young people and 799 adults.

To begin, the team was surprised that there was a host of ideas they assumed mattered to churches who were growing young that ended up not being important factors. Here are the 10 qualities your church doesn’t need in order to grow young:

1. A precise size—“we saw no statistical relationship between church size and effectiveness” (25).
2. A trendy location or region—churches from urban centers, college towns, and rural areas were flourishing. “Your location does not have to be a limitation” (25-6).
3. An exact age—it was a non-factor whether your church was 5 years old or 150 (26).
4. A popular denomination... or lack of denomination—“while it’s true that some denominations are shrinking or aging faster than the average, our fear (that certain denominations or non-denominations would skew towards the top) was unfounded. No need to apologize for your tradition or the fact that you are part of a denomination at all. God is working powerfully through churches of all stripes (and plaids too)” (26).
5. An off-the-charts cool quotient—“for young people today, relational warmth is the new cool” (26).
6. A big, modern building—“feeling at home transcends any building” (26).
7. A big budget—churches growing young intentionally invest in young people, but support does not always necessitate large budgets.
8. A ‘contemporary’ worship service—“while many young people are drawn to ‘casual and contemporary’ worship, others are drawn to ‘smells and bells’ High-Church liturgy and everything in between. While the churches we visited were likely to prefer modern worship in some or all of their worship contexts, they didn’t depend on that alone as a magnet to draw young people” (27).
9. A watered-down teaching style—young people are not afraid of jumping into the deep end of the teaching of Scripture.
10. A hyper-entertaining ministry program—young people are not lacking for entertainment options. Churches don’t have to compete. “Our research highlighted that faith communities offer something different” (27)

Instead, FYI identified 6 core commitments these churches displayed in creating vibrant, “growing young” congregations. The six core commitments your church needs to Grow Young (43):

1. Unlock keychain leadership—“instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people”
2. Empathize with today’s young people—“instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation”
3. Take Jesus’ message seriously—instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life”
4. Fuel a warm community—“instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships”
5. Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere—“instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation”
6. Be the best neighbors—“instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally”

As these core commitments guide your church remember: the order of the commitments is flexible, the boundaries between each of the core commitments are permeable, the turning point is prioritizing young people, context among your church is pivotal, and the pursuit of Jesus is the overriding motivation. Is it worth all the effort? The reality is that young people add vitality, intensity, and energy to your church’s ministry. These young adults add more service, more passion, more innovation, more money (if even indirectly), and more overall health.

Important Quotes:

- “Please don’t compare the best of what we share about these churches with the worst of what you know about your own. Instead of comparing yourself to others, please remember that growing young means starting where you are” (46).
- “Your church needs young people, and they need your church. One without the other is incomplete.” (14)
- “Just as young people need a team of adults, in no ‘bright spot’ church did we find one person who was the sole spark that helped the congregation grow young. Growing young takes everyone. Always.” (23)

Chapter 2: Unlock Keychain Leadership

Chapter Highlights (pgs. 84-85):

- Churches that grow young are brimming with staff, volunteers, and parents who demonstrate keychain leadership. By keys, we mean the capabilities, power, and access of leaders that can be used to empower young people. By Keychain leaders, we mean pastoral and congregational leaders who are acutely aware of the keys on their keychain and intentional about entrusting and empowering young people with their own set of keys.
- Keychain leaders can be volunteers, senior pastors, parents, youth pastors, associate pastors, Sunday school teachers, and more. Beyond any particular role, keychain leadership is a spirit and commitment demonstrated by both paid and volunteer leaders that permeates every area of the church.
- Four types of key leadership we've discovered include:
 - Key-less leaders: often young and inexperienced, without much authority to or access, they spend their time proving they're worthy to possess keys.
 - Key-hoarding leaders: always holding keys and refusing to give others access, they run the show.
 - Key-lending leaders: Often taking keys off the keychain and letting others borrow them temporarily, they make sure the keys are returned quickly.
 - Keychain leaders: very aware of the keys they hold, they're constantly opening doors for some while training and entrusting others who are ready for their own set of keys.
- The research revealed six essentials of keychain leadership.
 - Keychain leaders:
 - Are mature; not always young;
 - Are real, not 'relevant';
 - Are warm, not distant;
 - Know what matters to people, not just other pastors;
 - Entrust and empower others; they don't try to be a "superpastor"
 - Take the long view, not shortsighted steps.

Other Key Quotes:

"Churches that grow young are brimming with staff, volunteers, and parents who demonstrate keychain leadership. Whoever holds the keys has the power to let people in or to keep people out... When we refer to keys, we mean that capabilities, power, and access of leaders carry the potential to empower young people." (53)

"No matter your role, here is what we want you to know: if you are willing to entrust your keys to young people, they will trust you with their hearts, their energy, their creativity, and even their friends." (55)

"While young people may be able to find great preaching online, many told us they're aching for more than that. They want to be in relationship with leaders who know their name and model a life of faith. These young people look to Christian leaders in their community and ask, "Are you the real deal?" and then watch closely to see the answer." (64)

Chapter 3: Empathize with Today's Young People

“Why 25 is the new 15 and 15 is the new 25”

Chapter Highlights (pgs. 122-23):

- Churches grow young by empathizing, or feeling with, this generation of young people.
- Young people wrestle with three ultimate questions: Who am I? (a question of identity), Where do I fit? (a question of belonging), and what difference do I make? (a question of purpose).
- While these questions are not unique to young people, teenagers and emerging adults generally feel them more intensely than older generations.
- Now that adolescence has been extended and young people are in a longer season of exploration, 25 feels like the new 15, and 15 often seems like the new 25. Their journey has both an earlier starting line and a later finish line.
- Young people's search for identity is made erratic by their pervasive stress and their peripheral faith.
- Teenagers' and emerging adults' quest for belonging is thwarted by omnipresent technology, sexual experimentation, and adult abandonment.
- This generation's hunger for purpose remains unsatisfied because of their jaded realism and cultural pluralism.

Chapter 4: Take Jesus' Message Seriously

“What's Young about the Good News”

Chapter Highlights (pp. 159-60):

- Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) has been identified as a pervasive religious framework of adolescents and much of the US church.¹ However, while high school-aged participants in our study exhibited signs of MTD coupled with Golden Rule Christianity, by and large churches growing young sidestep this pothole in their quest for a more robust faith.
- Taking Jesus' message seriously means churches pay attention to the life and words of Christ. Young people can then articulate a gospel that is less talk about beliefs and more talk about Jesus, less tied to formulas and more focused on redemptive narrative, and less about heaven later and more about life here and now.
- Young people want to know not only what they are saved *from* but also what they are saved *for*. They want to take action, not just hear about what they can't do. Participation and challenge are two central features of churches growing young.
- Evangelism isn't dead among young people, but it looks different than in the past century. Vital factors to help young people share faith today include building authentic relationships, listening well, and being honest about questions and doubt.

¹ It is moralistic, meaning that religious young people equate faith with being a good, moral person (generally, being nice). It is therapeutic, so faith becomes a means of feeling better about themselves. And it is deistic, meaning God exists, but this God is not involved in human affairs with any regularity. (taken from Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of America's Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162–65.)

Chapter 5: Fuel a Warm Community

“warm is the new cool”

Chapter Highlights (p. 193):

- Structure is necessary for growing young, but it’s not enough. Churches that grow young sometimes actually program less in order to free up more space for relational connection.
- Warm is the new cool. More than flashy worship, young people want authenticity and connection. When they talk about their churches, they talk about people and warmth. Regardless of whether you meet in an auditorium or a house, consider how your worship service can feel more like a family room.
- Churches grow young by weaving warmth into their DNA. The most common phrase people used to describe their churches was “like family.” Other words describing warmth included *welcoming*, *accepting*, *belonging*, *authentic*, *hospitable*, and *caring*.
- Honest relationships and the ability to be real or authentic are not only preferences for young people; they also build stronger churches.
- Intergenerational relationships grow everyone young by helping them break out of the silos of age- and stage-based ministry and create connections across generations. Two of the most common ways churches invest in intergenerational relationships are through mentoring and corporate worship.
- Fueling warmth helps us live out good *ecclesiology*, our theology of church. The relationships of the Trinity and the metaphor of the body of Christ remind us that we belong to one another.

Chapter 6: Prioritize Young People and [and families] Everywhere

“from rhetoric to reality”

Chapter highlights (231):

- Churches that grow young are willing to make young people a priority not just in rhetoric but also in daily reality. These churches don’t assume it will happen automatically; they emphasize young people in their overall philosophy, worship gatherings, staffing, and budget.
- Prioritizing young people means prioritizing families. Parents are the strongest spiritual influences in their kids’ lives, but they need the support and partnership of the church.
- Young people need load-bearing roles in the community, meaning they contribute through serving and using their gifts.
- Good leaders and programs do not automatically lead to prioritization, nor are good intentions enough. Prioritizing young people everywhere often requires a congregational culture shift.
- Jesus invites us to grow young as we both welcome and become like children, who are exemplars in receiving the kingdom of God.

Chapter 7: Be the Best Neighbors

“Loving and Shaping Your World Well”

Chapter Highlights (267-68):

- Churches that grow young strive to be the best neighbors both locally and globally. They recognize the careful dance that values both fidelity to Scripture’s commands for holiness and knowing and graciously loving their neighbors.
- Offering teenagers and emerging adults a thoughtful path to neighbor well is not easy—36 percent of churches in our study named challenges navigating culture as one of their biggest barriers in ministering to young people. In the midst of this gap and confusion, we discovered several common postures of churches that aim to be the best neighbors.
- Being the best neighbors means congregations reflect mercy toward the people outside their walls by adhering to the example set by Jesus in Matt 22:34-40 and Luke 10:25-37.
- Churches that grow young neighbor well by honoring what’s good, making their world better, and respecting the journey as much as the destination. These congregations show a neighbor love that is greater than differences in ethnicity and socioeconomic status.
- Right at the crux of young people’s vocational exploration, churches are uniquely positioned to provide mentoring communities that help teenagers and emerging adults discover their calling and become good neighbors.

Chapter 8: Growing Young in Your Context

“How to create a plan for change”

Chapter Highlights (300-303):

- Any church can change to grow young. Nearly 1 in 3 research participants noted their church had undergone significant shifts to become more effective with young people.
- Churches do not change to grow young by pursuing a silver bullet, relying on their size or large budget, or hiring staff to solve their problems.
- A crucial step in a congregation’s journey toward growing young is to understand its unique context through careful and systematic listening to all generations.
- By sharing stories of future hope, congregations can both develop and communicate their vision for growing young.
- Changes toward growing young are made easier by beginning where you have the most influence, constructing a holding environment, experimenting on the margins, and maintaining disciplined attention.

Strategic questions to help your church develop its own plan to grow young

Your church now

1. Who are the key people from your church who should be part of the leadership team or guiding coalition to help your church grow young?
2. To whom does your leadership team need to listen? Make a list of individuals or groups, noting the names of those from your leadership team who will do that listening.
3. What are the four or six major themes that stand out?

Your Church Growing Young

1. What is one surprising story your team heard during your listening?
2. Imagine and write a shared story of future hope that focuses on your hopes or dreams for one young person in your congregation.
3. Imagine and write a shared story of future hope that focuses on your hopes or dreams for your congregation overall.
4. Given the stories you've discovered and developed, how can you share them with your congregation in such a way that inspires the church to want to grow young? With whom can you share stories, and when?

Your Plan for Change

1. After identifying your core commitments (the themes of chs. 2-7), identify two that are the most pressing. What two or three steps could your team take in order to make progress? Who needs to be involved in those steps, and when will they take place?
2. What potential areas of conflict or roadblocks might you encounter? What is your plan to move past those road blocks?
3. What are small markers along the journey that your church can pay attention to and celebrate? How will you celebrate them?