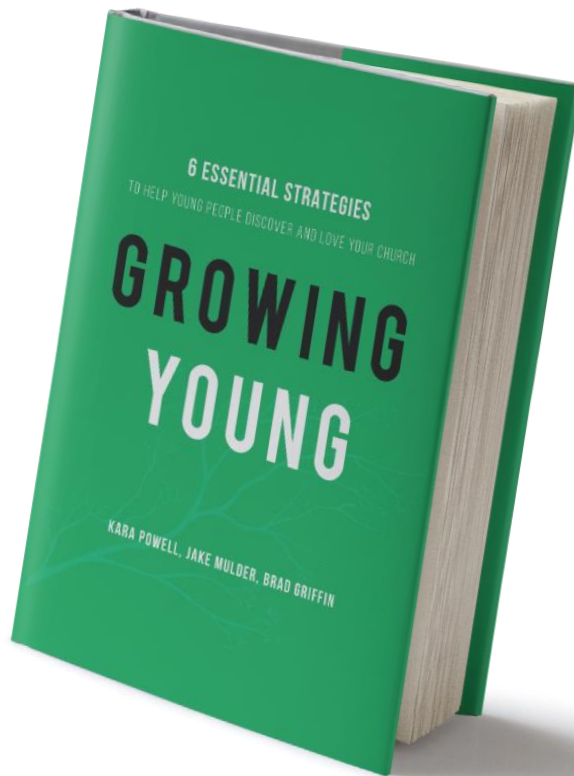


# Growing Church Young



## Leadership Team Reflection Booklet

**LCAQD**  
**Department for Ministry and Mission, 2019**

Based on concepts from  
Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, Brad Giffin, Growing Young  
Ver 1.

## Growing Church Young

*A lot of my friends don't really want to go to their church. But we want to be here, and the older people in our church can see that... so they want us to be here. Our whole church treats us like we're the church of today, not the church of the future. – Ashlee, age 17 (Growing Young p 13)*

In a recent blog, Church Health consultant, Thom S Rainer shared the following statistic; “Only 42% of Millennial Churchgoers believe church members are authentic and caring”. By implication, that suggests that nearly 60% of millennials (those aged in their 20s and 30s) either don't hold an opinion or believe that church members are inauthentic and lack the capacity to care. How tragic!

I wonder what the statistics would look like in our church? In your church? What stories could you share which would give clarity to those statistics?

In their book, Growing Young, (Baker Books, 2016) Powell, Mulder and Griffin share “6 essential strategies to help young people discover and love your church”. These were uncovered through the Churches Engaging Young People project (2012-2015). The six strategies are

**Unlocking keychain leadership:** instead of centralising authority, empower others – especially young people.

**Empathise with today's young people:** instead of judging or criticising, step into the shoes of this generation.

**Take Jesus' message seriously:** instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centred way of life.

**Fuel a warm community:** instead of focussing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

**Prioritise 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.

**Be the best neighbours:** instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbour well locally and globally.

Each of these strategies will be unpacked a little over the next six articles. Use them with church councils, leadership groups or simply as an individual to help reflect and respond to the implications from Growing Young.

If you wish to learn more, purchase the book Growing Young. It provides deeper insights as well as further reflective questions to help shape and transform your congregation.

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Ashlee. What stands out for you?

What evidence can you share within your congregation that could provide insight as to how millennials feel about your church?

Which core commitment (essential strategy) immediately stands out to you? Why?

## Unlocking keychain leadership: instead of centralising authority, empower others – especially young people.

*“Our pastor has been transformed by Jesus, and now he’s the definition of authentic. In fact, he’s the most authentic person I know. And he doesn’t treat us like we’re kids... He treats me like I’m his younger friend – Mark, age 23” (Growing Young, pg 50)*

First keys to the house.

First keys to the family car.

Getting a set of keys is a sign of trust and freedom and responsibility.

Churches that grow young understand the importance of ‘giving keys away’. But the term ‘keys’ is not simply referring to keys to a car or building. They are keys to decision-making, to entrusting and to empowering.

Sometimes we are hesitant to do just that. Not that we don’t want to. I have frequently heard people talk about ‘wanting to include younger people’ and ‘wanting more young people in leadership’. But often that inclusion comes with strong attachments; “you need to do it this way.”

Why?

Growing Young is not about churches who let people do what they like! But it IS about churches whose leadership structures see themselves as walking alongside of, coaching, encouraging and empowering young people (indeed all people) to make decisions; decisions that will affect them and the church. The term used is ‘keychain leadership’. ‘Keychain leadership’ is a leadership style that gives people permission to try something, and to either succeed or fail, but that also walks alongside those people to help them learn and grow. Keychain leaders are *“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.”* (p 85)

Management expert, Patrick Lencioni writes

*“There is just no escaping the fact that the single biggest factor in determining whether an organization is going to get healthier – or not – is the genuine commitment and active involvement of the person in charge” (p 58)*

Keychain leaders

- are mature.... in experience, not necessarily age
- are real... rather than focussing on being ‘relevant’ or ‘cool’
- are warm... not distant
- know what matters to people... not just to other leaders
- entrust and empower others... believing that others are capable
- take the long view... keep an eye on the end goal, rather than short-sighted steps

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Mark. What stands out for you?

What keys are you holding? Who are the people you can open a door for and walk alongside?

What training opportunities exist for people to develop leadership capacity?

Who is ready for their own set of keys?

## Empathise with today's young people: instead of judging or criticising, step into the shoes of this generation.

*"The number one adult who's influenced me is Brent. There was a time in the fall when I was suicidal again and he was, like, visibly upset. He said some things like, "Don't do that... we need you." And he hugged me and teared up. I think he believes in me more than anyone else. He gets me. – Allen, age 21 (p 88)*

Empathy: the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Churches that engage well with young people are those who 'dive into the deep waters of teenagers' and young adults' lives' (p 90).

It is difficult being a young person today. But it is also important to note... to empathise is not just to feel for another. It is to understand the significant struggles, frustrations and burdens, as well as the delights, joys and opportunities that the other faces.

When it comes to faith, spirituality and church what do you think are the significant struggles, frustrations and burdens a young person faces today?

Young people face three key questions. Who am I? Where do I fit? What difference do I make? Healthy churches respond to these questions through journeying with, listening to, and making time for. These questions are not unique to this generation. They are timeless questions.

One thing is certain however. While they are timeless questions, young people feel them more intensely than older generations. Their world is constantly changing ... more complex than ever before... and this leads to a loss of identity, a lack of genuine connection, and the confusion of cultural pluralism.

But the gospel does speak into that space.

The question 'who am I?', of my identity, is answered by discovering myself within God's Grace.

The question 'where do I fit?', of my belonging, is answered by knowing that God loves me.

The question 'what difference do I make?', of my purpose, is answered by being invited to partner with God on his mission.

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Allen. What stands out for you?

What do you understand are the key issues facing young people today?

Walk through your facility and worship service with the eyes of a young person. What do you notice?

How well do you know the names and the longings of the young people in your community? What could you do about it?

## Take Jesus' message seriously: instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centred way of life.

*"Yeah, I think the goal of our church is not really effectiveness with young people but serving and following Jesus. And young people like me are attracted to churches that want to do that, - Adam, age 26 (p 126)*

Good news is always good news!

I know that sounds very simple. But how many people get drawn into a religion that is nothing more than *moralistic therapeutic deism (MTD)*. Yep. That's a thing!

*Moralistic* – meaning that faith is equated with being a good, moral, nice person.

*Therapeutic* – meaning that faith becomes a means of feeling better about oneself

*Deistic* – meaning God does exist but is not involved in human affairs with any regularity (p 130)

Luther was strong on the gospel. As someone who had lived all his life wanting to know if he was good enough, when he discovered that God was for him, no matter what, that what Jesus had done on the cross was enough – and that he was made right with God through what Jesus did, it turned his life around.

The good news is never about morality. It is always about what Jesus has done.

According to Powell, Mulder and Griffin, Churches that engage with and grow young are

- less about abstract beliefs and more about Jesus
- less about heaven and more about life now



- less about dogmatic certainty and more about authentic honesty

What does this look like?

- teach creeds over formulas – even if young people are invited to rewrite them in today’s language
- tell the narrative of God
- ask young people what they believe
- model sharing the gospel without judgement
- allow faith to be a journey
- share testimonies frequently
- lean into meaningful rituals – allow young people create rituals
- embrace the exploration of doubts

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Adam. What stands out for you?

What do you understand by ‘good news’?

What words or phrases are used to talk about Jesus, the gospel and evangelism?

To what extent is Jesus spoken about in your church – in a meaningful, relevant, authentic way?

How are all people allowed to explore where faith and life intersect?

## Fuel a warm community: instead of focussing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

*I love my church. I think it is amazing. Everybody knows each other and we all care about each other. It's not, like, compartmentalised between generations or between different types of people. It is just like a big family. – Katie, age 20 (p 163)*

How would you describe the word 'warm'?

For many young people, warm is the new cool. Good music, great experiences and excellent coffee will always be done better by people outside of the church! What young people are really looking for is the feeling of connection, of being known, loved, cared for. This is their spiritual thing!

Do you think that this would hold true for older people as well?

Essentially, that is how Jesus did ministry! People flocked to him because they felt connected. They knew they were loved. They knew they had found a place to belong.

How would you define a sense of belonging?

Growing Young uses the term warmth to describe the connections that take place across all generations within a healthy church. These communities major in authenticity. Gone are the masks that people have traditionally put on when attending church. People are real. And this authenticity runs deep. It builds deep and connected relationships and deep and connected faith.

To build this sort of community, however, takes effort and commitment. It requires us to move beyond our immediate circle of friends and to fully engage with those around us. It involves imagining what it would be like to be a new comer, a young person, an older person, someone who does not have a friend, and to listen to the

language (both spoken and unspoken), to determine how accessible and warm we really are.

In short, it is to become genuinely intergenerational in our worship and our relationships.

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Katie. What stands out for you?

What do you understand by the term intergenerational?

How would you describe the warmth of your community? If you could change one thing to 'make it warmer' what would that one thing be?

How could you engage young people in your worship service planning, or sermon preparations? If you were to listen to them, of what would they be most critical? Most encouraging?

What structures hinder your churches warmth?

**Prioritise 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.**

*“Teenagers know they are important because they are involved in ministry. They are treated as full-fledged members of the church, not just kids to be entertained” – Angela, church leader (p 196)*

“How much would you and your church give up to reach young people?” (p196)

This is a confronting question. Many people would answer ‘anything’. They see their church declining, and their children and grand-children disengaging. But when push comes to shove, they are hesitant to ‘give up’ what they consider are the essentials to ‘genuine church’.

What do you think are the essentials to ‘genuine church’? Why are these essential for you?

Earlier, it was mentioned that everything is about Jesus, and that young people wanted to connect with others that take Jesus seriously. But sometimes we confuse Jesus with cultural identity, with congregational traditions, expectations and even language.

Growing Young discovered that three commitments, Empathising, Warmth and Prioritisation, while distinct, influence and reinforce one another.

*“Empathising with today’s young people means we listen for and seek to understand their developmental journey toward identity, belonging, and purpose.*

*Warmth is the way we surround them with supportive, accepting, and authentic community.*

*Prioritisation of young people everywhere represents our tangible, institutional commitment to allocate resources and attention – not only for specific youth and young adult programming but also across the life of the congregation” (p 201)*

Prioritisation is about more than focussing everything around the young person. It is about all people participating with and walking alongside each other. And it is about more than asking young people about what they want or what they can do. This language turns people into objects to ingratiate or use, rather than into people who are uniquely created in the image of God.

Finally, prioritisation does not simply happen. It requires a purposeful plan that helps to shift the congregational culture to be inclusive of all.

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Angela. What stands out for you?

What are you currently doing to prioritise young people everywhere in your congregation?

What evidence do you see that suggests that your church culture prioritises young people?

If you could change one thing which would prioritise young people, what would that one thing be?

## Be the best neighbours: instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbour well locally and globally.

*Christianity is about the restoration of how it is all supposed to be. We have been given hope, we have been redeemed, and we have been empowered by the authority of God to go out and change this world. – Isaiah, age 20. (p 234)*

What does it mean to be a good neighbour?

To hear that question, it is often very easy to think about what ‘the neighbour should be doing’ to/for you. But what about you? What five characteristics would you see within yourself that your neighbour could use to describe you? And what five characteristics could be used to describe your church?

Most young people want to make a difference. Most young people want to change the world! Churches that grow young are churches that understand this... and work toward respecting the journey that neighbours are on, as well as look for ways to neighbour well!

It is important to hear that. Churches that grow young recognise that they are involved in a dance that values both fidelity to the Scriptures as well as being gracious to the people around them. The apostle Paul modelled that dance when he spoke to the Greeks at Mars Hill.

Powell, Mulder and Griffin note,

*“Our culture is changing at what feels like an exponential rate, and it’s difficult for most of us to keep up. A quick skim of young people’s social media accounts is all it takes to reveal that their approaches to cultural issues may be a little different from, or even completely opposed to, those of older congregants... While there are no quick answers, (it is important to) view these differences through the lenses already shared about empathising*

*with today's young people and fuelling a warm community" (p 239)*

To reflect on how Jesus engaged with some of the cultural issues in his time; the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the tax collector climbing the tree, the lepers, among many others, that call to empathy and community bides well. Perhaps the question we need to ask is not 'what would Jesus do', which turns Jesus into simply a good role model, but rather 'what would Jesus have us do – in the power of His Spirit' to be involved in the work of His creation.

*To think about and discuss*

Reflect on the quote by Isaiah. What stands out for you?

What are some positive and life-giving steps your congregation is taking to be the best neighbour both locally and globally?

What five characteristics could your neighbour use to describe your church?

How might seeing others through the lens of empathy and community warmth be a reflection of the good news? Share an example.

What might help you to become more attuned to the cultural needs/expressions of your neighbours? How might grace speak into this?