

changing church

Is the 'missing generation'
still missing?



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Evangelical Alliance

The Evangelical Alliance joins together hundreds of organisations, thousands of churches and tens of thousands of individuals to make Jesus known.

Representing our members since 1846, the Evangelical Alliance is the oldest and largest evangelical unity movement in the UK. United in mission and voice, we exist to serve and strengthen the work of the church in our communities and throughout society.

Highlighting the significant opportunities and challenges facing the church today, we are committed to sharing fresh ideas, celebrating best practice and catalysing innovation throughout the evangelical community and beyond.

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An introduction

Why this? Why now?

They are known as the connected generation, the snowflake generation, the generation most talked about and talked to. Throughout coronavirus they have been criticised for their lack of social distancing and commended for their compassion and creativity. They are often at the forefront of the clamour for change in society and will be amongst the most affected by recent events.

Equipping the church to reach this generation of young adults and championing intergenerational unity is vitally important. We believe the whole church is stronger, healthier and richer when filled with all ages, and we tell a powerful story to the world when we model a united church of young, old and everyone in between.

Coronavirus has changed society. It has changed the church and there have been devastating effects, frustrations and challenges. But it has also birthed extraordinary innovation and courage and has inspired many, especially in this age group, to explore faith and ask deeper questions.

As we emerge from this historical moment, we have an opportunity to reimagine our habits, cultures and practices as a church. *“Is the ‘missing generation’ still missing?”* is designed to help us reflect on this as a church, listen to the voices of young adults, and ask the right questions as we seek to create a thriving community for all generations and opportunities for significant numbers of 20s and 30s to come to faith.

What is included?

This resource pulls together in-depth analysis of research in this area of ministry and extensive conversations and interviews with hundreds of church leaders, young adults, practitioners and academics. It will cover issues from social media to racial injustice, harsh realities, good news stories and transformative innovations. We hope it provides valuable insight and sparks innovation for a new season.





“Is the ‘missing generation’ still missing?” will do three things:

1. Present and analyse several different pieces of research conducted during the pandemic to explore trends in how young adults have been engaging with church, prayer and other activities.
2. Tell stories of how 20s and 30s have become Christians during this season and share case studies of how churches in a variety of settings have responded.
3. Ask questions that enable us to learn from the season and create cultures and structures that will help young adults to belong and be reached with the good news.

It will do these three things in four key areas:

1. Church
2. Evangelism
3. Discipleship
4. Community engagement

This booklet is part of a wider resource and at various points gives the opportunity for readers to dig deeper into a subject through a series of articles and videos exploring specific topics. If you have further reflections or would like someone from the young adults team to [facilitate a bespoke conversation with your church](#), you can [drop us a line here](#).

The 'not so missing generation'?

Church attendance and prayer during coronavirus

Just over 10 years ago, the Evangelical Alliance released the [Missing Generation](#), due to the dearth of 20s and 30s in many churches of. Its findings are still the experience of many churches today. In contrast we should find the following findings from [this piece of Savanta: Comres research](#) from 2020 encouraging:

One in two

young adults have prayed regularly (online or offline) during the coronavirus pandemic.

One in two

young adults have attended services (online or offline) during the coronavirus pandemic.

(These figures are backed by further research. We have provided a more detailed analysis in the appendix)

A few headlines warrant immediate comment:

- It suggests that the coincidence of the impact of the pandemic and the increased accessibility of church services have led to these high proportions of engagement.
- It is striking and encouraging for the purposes of this resource that engagement in both prayer and church attendance has been higher for young adults than any other age group.
- It is not all good news, however; a significant proportion of this generation is engaging less than before.

When reflecting on figures like these it is important to tread the fine line between unquestioning optimism and jaded cynicism. What these figures do not signify is that there will be millions of new young adults who will be waiting outside of the doors of our churches ready to worship as we return to normal. But they do tell us that the pandemic has caused huge numbers of this generation to engage more with church and to pray for the first time. Therefore, to some extent, we should no longer refer to them as 'the missing generation'.



Here are some initial questions to consider:


- Moving church online seems to have lowered the bar of accessibility for many, and consequently huge numbers have accessed online services.
- How can we take young adults from this initial point of access to a place of belonging to our church communities?
- If our weekly church services are being viewed by 20s and 30s who have little or no experience of church, how might this affect the content and style of our weekly meetings?
- One in ten of our young adults have engaged less with church during this season. How might we prioritise reengaging them as we emerge from the pandemic and its restrictions?

Take it further

Read article at:

 [Getting started with social media](#)

Deeper analysis:

 Appendix: A deeper look at the research: young adults, coronavirus and the church



Finding a place to belong

Engaging young adults in online church

We have much to be proud of in the way we, as a church, have responded to the impact of coronavirus. One of the fundamental questions we have had to ask ourselves is how we adapt to not being able to meet physically. As a result, there has been much innovation and many lessons learned. These are some of the common themes that have emerged as young adults and leaders have reflected on what has worked:

All in

A key characteristic of this generation is a desire not just to consume church services but to play a part in church life. Online church has both increased and decreased levels of participation for young adults. In some settings livestreaming has meant fewer people involved and room for interaction, whilst in other places, Zoom gatherings have meant more have been able to join in.

Some of the key elements of church services have been innovatively transferred and translated into a digital space by preachers and worship leaders. 20s and 30s have particularly appreciated components where they have been invited to interact rather than passively consume and skip through the bits they don't like. Effective elements have included:

- Using the technology to interact with the preacher using live questions in an interview format or a conversational Zoom after the service.
- Encouraging kinaesthetic engagement with everyday objects, such as lighting a candle or making something, has given greater depth to worship than watching a performance.

All age

At times during the pandemic [an unhelpful narrative has emerged](#) highlighting increasing divisions between generations. Conversely, the church has represented one of the few places in society where all ages have consistently met for community. The importance of the church as intergenerational family cannot be overstated. Churches that have thrived during this season have been active in creating space for all ages at the leadership table and found ways to facilitate relationships across the generations.

All week

Restrictions on meeting in buildings have resulted in a range of interesting trends in how young adults engage with church meetings. Some have found that while Sunday online meetings have been underattended, midweek groups have thrived beyond expectations. When speaking to young adults, they have spoken of skipping through church livestreams for the most helpful content and using multiple sources of spiritual input throughout the week. These trends raise some interesting questions for our weekly rhythms and meetings.

Some questions to consider around changing church with 20s and 30s in mind:

- How interactive are your church gatherings? What might encourage people to participate more and feel they have a part to play?
- Are 20s and 30s represented on your church's leadership team? How might pathways be developed that increase involvement in this area?
- How might coronavirus enhance what we do on Sundays and encourage us to think more intentionally about moments of connection throughout the week?



Case study: The Well, Sheffield

Marjorie and Nick Allen planted the Well, a new Baptist church, at the centre of the student quarter in Sheffield in 2015. From the beginning, the Well set out to be 'church for the unchurched', with a particular heart for students and young adults. As such, prior to the pandemic, the team spent much of its time on the streets engaging with those in the local area. However, with the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown these interactions have been limited. The Well has responded by increasing its online presence through livestreams, podcasts, online small groups, setting up mentoring partners, pre-recorded morning devotions and online Alpha courses. Consequently, the Well has seen real growth, even in the midst of a pandemic.

Those who previously left any form of church have returned; others have found faith for the first time and then almost immediately joined rotas to serve their new church community; for some it has been a season of strengthening their relationship with God. Marjorie says, "A huge amount of our response has been around making connection with people because that's been the battle at a time of social distancing and isolation. The Father's heart is never that people are disconnected. The church should be the opposite spirit of that: connection with God and connection with each other."



[You can find an extended interview with Marjorie here.](#)

In their own words

– young adults share their own story:

My church has used Zoom to host Sunday services and midweek meetings, which has definitely been a new experience for everyone. At first, I was concerned that social interaction would be limited; however, I've found that a lot of people are far more comfortable interacting with people on a screen than I'd originally thought. Although physical meetings are missed, online church has meant that services are more accessible to a greater number of people, for example, my younger brother is able to attend services whilst living away at university. I'm also finding that I would be more likely to tune into an

online midweek meeting on Zoom than make the effort to go to the meeting in the church after a day's work.




For me, there are two negative consequences of online church. I'm finding myself enjoying the comfort of an online service from my living room more than attending church to enjoy in-person fellowship. Also, it is nearly impossible to have an in-depth one-on-one conversation or catch up with someone on Zoom in front of the whole church.

– **Andrew, Northern Ireland**



Take it further

Read articles at:

-  [Virtual foyers and Zoom handshakes: how young adults are finding new churches when they can't walk through the doors](#)
-  [Culture, discipleship and hope at The Well church, Sheffield](#)
-  [Is it time to review the way we worship?](#)

The connected generation

Evangelism with young adults during coronavirus

With regard to evangelism amongst 20s and 30s, there are both very real challenges and significant encouragements related to the pandemic. To begin with, it is worth noting that, compared to other age groups, belief in God is lowest amongst this age group: YouGov found that 35 per cent of 25-39 year olds believe in a god or higher power, below the national average of 43 per cent.¹

That said, it is precisely this generation that has been exploring attending church and praying more during coronavirus. There have been thousands of Alpha, Christianity Explored and other evangelistic courses run online during the pandemic, with significant numbers of guests in their 20s and 30s. As we have spoken to church leaders and evangelists across the UK, two further themes have emerged.

Firstly, a number of stories of people coming to faith without the involvement of an evangelist or a church initiative; these people have seemingly just been drawn to God and have found a church on the internet. Second, significant numbers of Christian young adults have made time for, looked out for and shared faith with friends, especially those for whom coronavirus has caused them to find life more difficult. These have been the big themes of how 20s and 30s have been becoming Christians during the pandemic; good online content and faithful friendship are having a considerable impact.

The connected generation

The mantra “hands, face, space” has meant physical distancing but not necessarily social isolation. Many

have found that whilst lockdown has meant that they spend less time with lots of people they would normally see regularly, they have instead spent more time with others. Many are working from home with housemates and have got to know neighbours better. These ‘pressure cooker’ moments and the sense of a common experience on the journey through coronavirus have meant stronger relational bonds and have led to deeper conversations and opportunities to talk about faith. Today’s young adults are the most connected generation in history. They crave authenticity and relationship. It is no surprise that these relationships have been core to people coming to faith at this time.

A lower bar

Alongside the growth in deeper relationships, the fact that church and evangelistic courses have been online has made inviting people to events and community easier. An online Alpha course, for example, is more accessible to parents of young children, people working from home or those wanting to explore a bit more anonymously. Running evangelistic courses and church online has also meant that people can join meetings from anywhere in the world, and many young adults have taken the opportunity to invite non-Christian friends to events who would not normally be able to attend as they live hundreds of miles away.

¹[How religious are British people? | YouGov](#)



Some questions to consider for the future landscape of evangelism to 20s and 30s:

- If relationships are the currency of young adults' lives, and [most people come to faith through a friend or family member](#), how might we do more to [equip and inspire this generation to share their faith with their friends](#)? How might we help [facilitate a culture that helps people be the best friends they can be](#)?
- If people encounter Jesus and search for a local church, how will they find us? What is our presence like on social media? Do our websites tell our story well and communicate to young adults that this is a place where they can belong?
- Are we running regular activities or courses that people can invite their friends to? Are we encouraging people to do so and modelling a culture of inviting others?

Case study: Issy's story

Issy is a second-year student at the University of Leicester studying physics. She became a Christian during the first coronavirus lockdown back in March 2020. Having occasionally gone to church when she was a child and then stopping for many years, Issy found herself engaging with Christian content on video-sharing social networking service Tik Tok at the beginning of lockdown. This began her journey towards faith. In her words she describes this as an introduction “to amazing videos uploaded by young adults which introduced me to Christianity in a way I hadn't seen it before and in a way I hadn't expected”. This new interest led Issy to speak to a Christian friend who invited her to go on an Alpha course. She started reading the Bible and by the end of the course had decided to become a Christian. She has since joined a church and intends to help them run their new Alpha course this year.

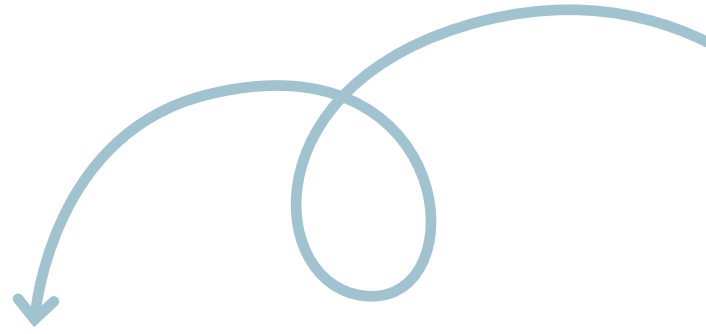


[You can see an extended interview with Issy here.](#)

In their own words – young adults share their own story:




Looking for God and for Jesus was something that I didn't plan to do, it just happened. A friend started sharing sermons from church on Sunday mornings [on social media] and I just started watching it from that and I found it really appealing. I felt that every single time the things being talked about seemed to be talking to me directly, which was powerful for me. So I started to pray, I took it one step at a time, I got myself a Bible. It got profound within myself. Since then I had a dream, and this dream was the day when I knew that I wanted to be a Christian, that my love for Jesus would be never-ending.

– Kiran, West Midlands



Take it further

Read articles at:

-  [Increasing the 'R number' of the church: equipping and inspiring young adults to share faith during coronavirus](#)
-  [Friendship during the pandemic: why our relationships really matter at this time](#)
-  [Discipling young adults for the post-COVID world](#)



Loneliness, isolation, resilience and community

Discipleship of young adults during coronavirus

With such a dramatic change to the circumstances in which we live and our ability to gather, there has been an inevitable impact on the patterns and ways in which disciples are formed. Here are a few headlines from the Savanta:Comres research:

- Some young adults are attending church more, some are attending less. For a significant number of 20s and 30s (two in ten), the pandemic has meant less engagement in church. For one in ten, there has been increased engagement.
- The stats are similar for prayer. Two in ten have prayed less, and the one in ten have prayed more.

Both these findings point to the fact that, for some, coronavirus has led to increased spiritual health and for others, their spiritual health has decreased. As a church it will be important to us to observe the cultures that have been created that have helped make disciples during this season and consider how we might re-engage those whose spiritual health has suffered. Here are some themes to consider:

Creating community

During this season of disconnection, intentional relationship has been paramount for young adults. 20s and 30s in churches have thrived where discipling relationships have been prioritised to support, encourage and pray for one another. Whilst some of these connections and groups have emerged organically, the most effective churches created culture and structures to make these possible. This meant that fewer people were left behind and relationships were more likely to be intergenerational. How people have met up has varied in terms of size (pairs, triplets, sixes etc) and context depending on government guidelines (in person, outside, on Zoom), but it has been the intentionality to make it happen and do so intergenerationally that has had a significantly positive impact on disciple making.

Discovery of disciplines

It is perhaps surprising that people are more likely to turn to God in times of disaster than abandon faith entirely.

Particularly striking has been the figure that

one in 20 adults

have started praying for the first time during the crisis.

For some Christian young adults, the pandemic also appears to have had an encouraging impact on discipleship habits. The coincidence of the enforced difference to the pace of life, the change of pattern of corporate worship and the intensity of the situation have led to deeper biblical engagement and personal prayer.

Furthermore, it has led others in this generation to organise corporate gatherings. Press In (An evening, online, live meeting) was organised by a group of young adults that wanted to gather with others from across the world to meet virtually to pray. More than 3,000 20s and 30s came together across multiple digital platforms.

Mental wellbeing matters

One of the frequently unseen effects of coronavirus has been the impact on mental wellbeing. Forty-five per cent of people feel unable to cope with the uncertainty of the pandemic. A quarter of people feel lonely as a result, and these feelings of loneliness are highest (as high as 38 per cent) amongst young adults.²

The church has begun to respond to these needs, with more churches providing mental wellbeing support for people now than at the beginning of the pandemic.³ But this is another area that could provide a helpful way of connecting with young adults.

Some questions to consider around discipleship of 20s and 30s:

- In your context, how could intentional groups be set up between young adults and others in the church? What would the best size and format be? Consider how these could be intergenerational and promote meaningful, catalytic friendships across age groups.
- How can we better equip younger generations in spiritual disciplines, especially taking account of the pressures of family and other challenges of the stage of life they are in?
- How can we as a church serve and help people in the area of mental wellbeing? How can we especially support the lonely and provide regular moments of connection?



² [Wave 8: Late November 2020 | Mental Health Foundation](#)

³ <https://www.eauk.org/changing-church/autumn-survey/executive-summary>





Case study: Intergenerational discipleship pairs and triplet Tuesdays

Lighthouse International Church

Lighthouse International Church in Southampton has made the intentional decision to pair its students with families from within the life of the church so that young adults are also able to get to know people in the area outside their peer group. Riyah, who moved to Southampton to study, noted that before she started university, she didn't really know what she wanted from a new church, but what she found at Lighthouse was family. She says, "Being part of a church where there are people who have loved Jesus for most of their lives or for not so long, from all walks of life, with an array of different stories, has been one thing in all my time at university that I will never forget. It was the church that held me when life felt hard and I was drowning in lectures and assignments. It was the kindness of my new family that fed me and prayed on their knees with me. It was the church that rejoiced with me. I didn't need a student service or lots of socials. I needed a family and God was so good to provide that."

Cornerstone Church

Before the pandemic, Cornerstone Church in Swansea had small groups of around 15 mostly 17-25 year olds in each that met every week. When restrictions were put in place, the church quickly realised that, not only were these groups too big to meet in person, they were also too large for successful Zoom calls. In September, the church decided to split these groups into triplets. This meant that, when they were allowed, triplets could meet face to face as social distancing was easier, and when they couldn't do that, many found Zoom calls within their triplets to be more engaging than having a large number of people on a screen. Chloe, part of the team at the church, believes that this has meant young adults have gone deeper with one another, have been able to take more initiative and ownership over their own small group, are now happier trying out new things such as praying for or prophesying over one another, and that, importantly, everyone is taken care of and accounted for.


In their own words – young adults share their own story:

We started out in the early months of 2020 as a place of prayer, fellowship and exhortation for 25 young adults mobilised by a burden to come together and pray. We started to see God's hand move powerfully amongst us and we were emboldened to expand the audience. This has subsequently mushroomed into a movement on four continents across the world, ministering to thousands across multiple media platforms.

The major source of encouragement to me during this period has been the realisation

that God can use any situation to grow His kingdom. Necessity has truly been the mother of invention, and our shared desire to see God's kingdom established on earth has resulted in a connection forged across time zones that would not have been so in normal times. My prayer is that we continue to open up our hearts to the endless possibilities of God's power even in our present time.

– Ayo, London

 What has been great about having a prayer triplet this term is that those of us in the group have found it much easier to be vulnerable with each other. The smaller number has encouraged those in the group to be open and welcome accountability. Plus, there is almost an expectation each week that we'll freely share and discuss the deeper topics.

– Nathan, Wales

Take it further

Read articles at:

 [Laying the foundations: young adults and biblical literacy](#)



Playing our part

Young adults and social engagement during coronavirus

Coronavirus has demonstrated both the acute needs of so many people and the ability of the church to play its part in meeting those needs. Since the crisis began, almost all churches have been working to support the vulnerable in their communities,⁴ and a recent study of the Church of England alone calculated the financial value of such work at £12.4bn.⁵ This kind of activity matters to 20s and 30s. It is characteristic of this generation to want to know whether something works. One young adult during a recent seminar put it like this: “The gospel has to look like something.” Alpha founder Nicky Gumbel surmises, “[They] want to know what the church is doing about [suffering]. If the church is doing nothing and is not engaged in social action against homelessness, poverty, racial injustice, climate change or any of these issues, young people are not going to be very interested.”⁶

This generation cares about social impact. 20s and 30s are more likely to start a business that prioritises social impact than making a profit.⁷ Their desire for impact is also locally rooted; they are far more likely to give to local charities than any other.⁸ It therefore matters that church is making a difference in their

local community in a practical way that addresses the needs of that community. Moreover, in many churches it has been 20s and 30s at the forefront of the response during the pandemic. At KXC (King’s Cross Church, London), the 50 foodbank volunteers were almost entirely made up of young adults, many of whom joined in when they found themselves furloughed or couldn’t find work. At St Boniface Church, Birmingham, an intergenerational team made craft and education bags for families who were struggling to home school their children. These are a tiny fraction of countless stories of engagement, partnership and generosity; and in much of the narrative, this generation is playing its part.

It is also important to acknowledge the impact of social justice and environmental issues that have arisen during the last year. The fact that this generation is more globally connected than any other before them and has an instant stream of up-to-date newsfeeds means that world events and campaigns have a greater impact than ever before. The murder of George Floyd in the US in May 2020 highlighted the critically important issue of racial injustice, and younger

⁴ <https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/changing-church>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/18/churches-tally-up-their-value-to-society-at-124bn>

⁶ <https://theconnectedgeneration.com/key-findings/>

⁷ <http://elitebusinessmagazine.co.uk/people/item/millennial-entrepreneurs-driven-by-social-cause-when-launching-a-business-instead-of-making-profit>

⁸ <https://theconnectedgeneration.com/key-findings/>



age groups were at the heart of the protests that took place throughout 2020.⁹ It has been a 22-year-old footballer who has been at the forefront of a campaign in the UK to ensure families in poverty have enough to eat during the school holidays. Because these issues are both on the radar of 20s and 30s and are close to the heart of God, we should consider as a church how much we teach on them, discuss them and speak up on them. Listening to the perspectives of young adults will be important in this conversation.

Case study: Pollok Baptist Church

A foodbank in Glasgow which is run by Pollok Baptist Church delivered to more than 100 families every week during the first lockdown. In total, the team served more than 150,000 meals to vulnerable people during the pandemic. Rev Dave Murray says that the church has “been blown away by God’s grace, protection, provision and blessing as we have built relationships with strangers, shared the message of love and acceptance, and provided food to the most vulnerable”. In this church, as in so many, young adults have been at the forefront of the initiatives.

⁹ <https://www.ft.com/content/effbfc03-61f3-4f99-910c-8befe46a6c08>

Some questions to consider around this area of social engagement and young adults:

- In responding to the needs of our communities, are we listening to the voices of 20s and 30s, inside and outside the church family, about both what the needs are and how we can best respond?
- How effective are we at telling the story of what God is doing through the church locally and nationally so that all ages feel part of all that is going on?
- When we respond to crises, how intentional are we at inviting all ages to play their part? Are there opportunities to strategically grow intergenerational relationships as people serve together on social engagement projects?
- How often do we teach on issues of justice and directly address issues of racial and social inequality?

In their own words – young adults share their own story:

The King's Cross foodbank was started in April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then many families and individuals regularly receive weekly food parcels in our local area.

Our 50 volunteers are made up almost entirely of young adults, including the foodbank manager and core team, many of whom stepped up when they couldn't find work or were furloughed.


Across our three teams – packing, delivery, referral – many volunteers have built up trusted relationships with clients with whom they regularly connect. We are now looking to expand the foodbank to address the multidimensional needs we see in our area, including digital poverty, unemployment and loneliness.

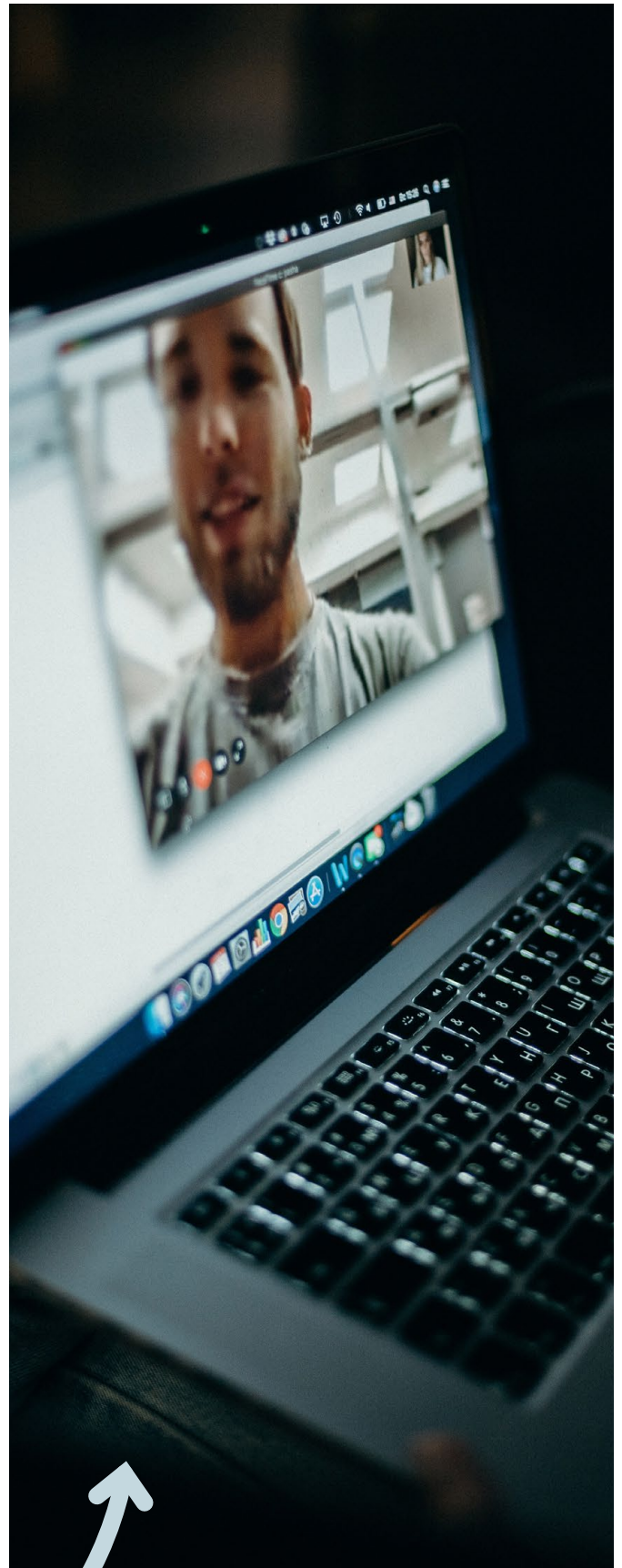
– Emma, London

Take it further

Read articles at:

 [Stories of hope](#)

 [Hearts for justice: why young adults want missional churches](#)



Looking forward

A new church for a new normal


When having walked through a season of adversity, challenge and change, you are never quite the same. Eventually, the calm will come after the coronavirus storm and we will have a moment to look back on lessons learned, wounds received and victories won. We will look forward to uncovered faces, singing voices and warm embraces. As we do, we must reflect on what is important, what is effective and what must change for the season ahead. Throughout the centuries, the church at its best has continually held fast to the unchanging message of the gospel and has simultaneously changed its methods and postures to reach a world that so desperately needs it.


- What have we missed from pre-pandemic times that we will treasure, welcome back and be more grateful for because of its absence?
- What did we do that we have learned is no longer necessary or helpful?
- What has this season taught us about the culture we are living in? What innovations and creative responses do we need to hold on to?
- Who are the people we have connected with that we might not have otherwise encountered?
- What relationships need to be re-established?
- What has God been teaching us as a church about our posture and mission to the community He has placed us in? How is He leading us forward?


We hope that this resource has given you some insight and helped you answer some of these questions with relation to young adults. We hope that you have been encouraged by stories of hope, inspired by some of the innovations and challenged by some of the questions.

As the Evangelical Alliance we are so grateful for all you are doing and have been praying for you and cheering you on throughout this season. If we can be of further help in this vital area of ministry, please do not hesitate to get in touch at info@eauk.org.

Take it further

 This booklet is supplemented by an ongoing series of blogs, interviews and articles. [Please find the complete collection here.](#)

 *Is the 'missing generation' still missing?* is part of Changing Church, a wider suite of resources and research from the Evangelical Alliance, which aims to equip and inform the church throughout and beyond the coronavirus pandemic. [You can find the full range of media in this area here.](#)

 *Is the 'missing generation' still missing?* is a precursor to a wider resource that will be released in July 2021. [You can sign up for updates on the release of this publication and more from the Evangelical Alliance in this area of ministry here.](#)

Appendix

A deeper look at the research: young adults, coronavirus and the church

Overall, reports around young adult faith during the coronavirus pandemic are promising. *Changing Church: Is the 'missing generation' still missing?* draws largely on the results of research from Tearfund and, most recently, Durham University.

Tearfund's prayer survey

In May 2020, a Tearfund survey revealed that one in three 18 to 34 year olds had watched or listened to a religious service since UK lockdown began at the end of March. Similarly, one in three were praying regularly.

Durham University's survey on 'digital church'

In July 2020, Durham University surveyed 4,306 adults aged 18+ from all walks of life to explore their religious activities during July. Participants were asked about a range of offline and online faith-related activities, and 1,210 of those surveyed were young adults in the 18-34 category. Analysis of the data showed the following headlines:

- One in two young adults have prayed regularly (online or offline) during the coronavirus pandemic.
- One in two young adults have attended a service (online or offline) during the coronavirus pandemic.

Participants who were regularly praying/attending services were then asked whether they had been doing this activity more, less or the same amount since the pandemic hit the UK. The subsequent survey results are best described using the following illustration:

Imagine you are standing in a room with 10 young adults. On average, five of those young adults will have prayed/attended service regularly.

Of that five, two will have prayed or attended the *same* amount as before, two will have prayed or attended *less* than before, and one will have prayed or attended *more* than before.

These figures show an incredible missional opportunity for the church but also reflect the difficulties around discipleship at this time as some young adults who previously attended church before the pandemic have dropped off.

Feedback from those in ministry

Many church leaders, student workers and other professionals working with young adults have told the Evangelical Alliance's young adults team that they have witnessed an increased spiritual hunger among 20s and 30s. This is mirrored by Durham University's research that one in 10 young adults who prayed or attended church in July had done so more than before the pandemic; and this figure will include those who have found faith for the first time during this time. It's also reassuring that two in 10 young adults have chosen to dig deep and stay connected, through prayer and church attendance, and have done so consistently despite the struggles of the pandemic that could have led people away from faith.

We cannot, however, ignore the two in 10 who have prayed and attended less than before, and who may well have drifted in their faith. Whatever the reason for this shift, we are seeking to begin a conversation around how the church can increase engagement among young adults who are engaging less than before.

Additional research

While *Changing Church: Is the 'missing generation' still missing?* draws largely on these two surveys, there are other pieces of research, all published in the last year, that have influenced the report and the contributors' blogs.

Changing Church survey

Through the Evangelical Alliance's ongoing Changing Church research which surveyed nearly 900 churches and organisations in October 2020 we were able to attain from 18 to 35 year olds up-to-date responses on how the pandemic has affected different aspects of their Christian life. Participants were asked a range of questions around the areas we have addressed in this report such as mission, discipleship and social engagement.

Most notable findings for young adults include:

- 48 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds have contributed to social needs through volunteering their time during the pandemic.
- 50 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds said that a barrier to sharing their faith is a lack of significant relationships with people who aren't Christian.
- 67 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds have attended a church other than the one they attended before the pandemic.

YouGov: "How religious are British people?"

This research from YouGov, released in December 2020, provides a less positive outlook on young adult faith amongst millennials during the pandemic. YouGov found that 35 per cent of 25 to 39 year olds believe in a god or a higher power, below the national average of 43 per cent.

Whilst the results of YouGov's survey were published during the pandemic, the questions were asked pre-pandemic. This might go some way to explain the discrepancy between this survey and the data from Durham University.

The Times: "Teenagers turn to God during the pandemic"

In December 2020, *The Times* reported that Generation Z (late teens and early 20s) are more likely than millennials (late 20s and early 30s) to believe in God. Interestingly, this article was based on the aforementioned YouGov survey.

[*You will find this referenced in the interview with Marjorie here.*](#)

The GRA:CE project report

Published in November 2020 this report is based on three years of research commissioned by the Church Urban Fund and carried out by Theos Think Tank. It explores the relationship between social action, discipleship and church growth. While not specifically a report about young adults, there are many references to this age group and their engagement with social action. Church leaders who are looking at ways to engage with both activist-minded young adults and their wider community as a whole are encouraged to read this report.

[*You will find this referenced in Alianore's blog on social engagement here.*](#)

Stories of Hope (Scotland)

Stories are key to the Evangelical Alliance's work, so during the pandemic the unity movement gathered a range of different stories from across the UK.

Changing Church: Is the 'missing generation' still missing? is inspired by and draws upon many of these stories of hope.

Christian Today: "Reading the Bible has given Christians hope during the pandemic"

In a poll carried out by Christian Research on behalf of the Bible Society in December 2020 47 per cent of 24 to 34 year olds credited the Bible with increasing their mental wellbeing. Additionally, a third of 16 to 24 year olds said that reading the Bible had helped them feel less lonely. This is an encouraging piece of research on the Bible giving people, regardless of age, hope.

A catalyst for deeper engagement

On the whole, the research is uplifting and reassuring, but it can only show part of the story. Our hope, though, is that *Changing Church: Is the 'missing generation' still missing?* has helped you to explore the wider narrative of young adults' faith during the coronavirus pandemic and acts as a catalyst for deeper engagement with this generation.



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