



VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*Institute for Christian Formation and Leadership
Center for the Ministry of Teaching*

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Dear Bishops,

As part of your continuing education sessions, we have been invited to engage you in substantive conversation about young adults and the Church at the March meeting of the House of Bishops. We are committed to using your time well, and want to be sure your interests and the needs of your diocese/judicatory are reflected in our common work. With that in mind, we are writing to ask you to do some preparatory information gathering. We want the stories of real young adults to inform your participation.

On the enclosed page you will find two options for information gathering and **we hope you will be able to complete at least one of them before arriving at Kanuga**. Be sure to bring the raw “data” with you!

The first option is to conduct a *Young Adult Scan*. This is a chance to reflect systematically on the observed lives of young adults in your community.

The second option is a set of conversation prompts to help you engage in intentional conversations with young adults (approximately 10 minutes each). Our hope is that you will invite two to three young adults (19-35) to talk with you, at least one of whom is not known to you through the Episcopal Church.

To whet your appetite,

By some key measures, Americans ages 18 to 29 are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents' and grandparents' generations were when they were young. Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation - so called because they were born after 1980 and began to come of age around the year 2000 - are unaffiliated with any particular faith. Indeed, Millennials are significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults (13% in the late 1970s). Young adults also attend religious services less often than older Americans today. And compared with their elders today, fewer young people say that religion is very important in their lives.

(Religion Among the Millennials, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010)

Add to these statistics the rapidly changing world in which Millennials are entering adulthood – rising ethnic and racial diversity, dramatic technological innovation, economic instability, increased demand for extended education and training to enter the workforce – and all in a climate that reveres consumerism, shuns history, and rewards urgency. What is the role of religion in young adults’ lives? How can the Episcopal Church embrace these challenges as opportunities for mission? Where is the Good News?

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The three of us share passion and hope about the future of Episcopal Church and in particular about the extraordinary gifts young adults bring into our Communion. We have experienced and witnessed “success” engaging young adults in purposeful, transformative ministry and we look forward to sharing our stories with you.

Faithfully, in Christ,

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Listening to Young Adults

The goal of this exercise is to engage young adults in a brief relaxed conversation about their lives – what matters to them and what motivates them, particularly with respect to religion and spiritual practices.

Ideally you will identify 2-3 young adults from diverse contexts, and at least one of them will have no apparent connection to the Episcopal Church. It is very important to approach the potential conversations with respect and openness. They are not formal interviews or opportunities to proselytize. There are no right answers. You are there to listen to the lived experience of your conversation partner and to model the genuine hospitality of the Church.

Conversation Prompts

Possible introduction:

“Hello! I am a Bishop in the Episcopal Church and there is a lot of talk in the Church these days about what young adults want and what they need from the Church. Do you have 10 minutes to talk with me about what you care about and value?”

1. What are some of your interests?
2. What do you do with your free time?
3. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?
4. Did you grow up in a religiously observant family?
 - a. If so, what if any spiritual practices do you maintain?
5. What makes you angry?
6. Where do you find hope?
7. What advice would you give the Church today?

Thank you!

Young Adult Scan

The goal of this exercise is to heighten your awareness of young adults already in your community/diocese and to begin thinking about the assets they represent and the needs they may have.

Reflect on each of the following questions, responding where it is appropriate.

1. List the settings in your geographic area where concentrations of young adults (19-35) may be found.
2. Looking at your list, indicate which of the settings are formally tied to the Episcopal Church, which might have an informal connection, and which (to your knowledge) have no connection at all.
3. List the congregations in your diocese known for active young adult (not youth) engagement.
4. List any young adult ministry opportunities/programs you are aware of in other denominations/religious traditions.
5. List the resources you know are being committed to young adult ministry today in your diocese (people, programs, money, worship services, etc.)
6. Where in your neighborhood do young adults congregate? What time of day is that? What are they doing?
7. Read a local newspaper and/or watch the local news. How are young adults portrayed?
8. What gets in the way of young adults being engaged in the life of the Church in your community?
9. Name up to three ways in which you would like to see young adults be more active in the Church in your diocese.