



What Really Matters to Young People

Highlights from a 2022 Research Study

WELCOME

Oh God, enlighten our minds with truth,
Inflame our hearts with love,
Inspire our will with courage,
Enrich our lives with service,
Pardon what we have been,
Purify what we are,
Order what we shall be,
All for your glory
And our eternal salvation
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen

How will we make this time meaningful?

You will be an active participant.

How are we going to do this?

Let's Get Your Right Brain Working

HANDWRITING EXERCISE

Using your non dominant hand, write your name 3 times.



FIRST LETTER / LAST LETTER OBJECT

1. Think of an object that starts with the first letter of your first name.
 2. Think of an object that starts with the first letter of your last name.
 3. Then put them together.
- Teresa Faust might be Taco Flag.*
4. Now, draw that item.



UMC Youth Exploration Study



What are some of your questions?

Do youth desire in-person connections or is virtual sufficient?

Are youth interested in organized religion?

What is missing from their spiritual life?

How can the church build trust?

Do youth want a mentor?



Faces from the research



What did we learn?

Strong preference for in-person engagement

“I prefer it in-person. That way it feels more connected and genuine.”

“In-person because you can get into much more deeper conversation than online”.





Social Media is for Entertainment, Not Important Views

Unaffiliated youth have absolutely no interest in posting spirituality, religious views on social media. They feel social media has changed so much that the next generation will have bigger struggles.

- Invites argument
- Emboldens confirmation bias
- Social media not good for mental health, self-image
- Divisive
- Connotes disrespect of others
- Others aren't truthful so it's not a reliable platform for truth
- Social media is for entertainment, leisure, silliness

"If you wanna have a real discussion, then you shouldn't be on social media." – Shreay

"I rely on social media for mainly entertainment and kind of a way that just like escape, everything." – Chris P

"If I was 14 and on TikTok, now that would've ruined my self-esteem, it would've been really bad for me." – Bella

"I come across a lot of combative people and I just rather just not go through, you know, having to argue about what I believe." – Jada

God is omnipresent but
personal for only a few.
Most youth are omnistic.

*Omnism is not compatible with
Christianity. In a sense,
omnism is very similar to
pluralism. Pluralism teaches all
religions are acceptable and
compatible with one another.
Omnism also teaches that it is
fine to believe in all religions
because they have an element
of truth in them. –
Christianity.com*

Criticisms about Christianity/the church



"There's a lot of bad actors in religion."

– Bella

"Others use Christianity as kind of a cop out, in some ways, for their hate."

– Angela

"It doesn't make sense how you can say like, love one another and love everybody, but then not accept gay marriage and stuff like that."

– Judy

"Like, I'm not too heavy on the details, but I know missionaries, back in the 16, 17 hundreds, they would, they would definitely use violence as a way to get their point across."

– Aiden

"I feel [religion] should pay more attention to bettering people's lives instead of looking into them and trying to change them."

– Paula



Church membership = recruiting. They don't want to feel recruited.



Cynical that churches say more than they do (e.g. make the world a better place).



Disconnect between what is claimed as truth but actions, behavior are misaligned.

Churches are disconnected from, or dismissive of, current issues.

Churches distort or misinterpret God's intentions.



God and UMC

SEPARATE



"The Role of the Church was to give me a gentle guiding hand for life, and what I need to know and remember from the Bible. God has had a different role. He is someone I can look to for answers that no one else would have. He has been there for every trial I have had in my life and He will continue to be there for me forever." – Eliana B

"I think church has always been a place that I've been able to be myself and feel loved. It hasn't always been an easy journey as the UMC has become a place of hostility in some areas because of their lack of acceptance for everyone who wants to be involved with the church." – Isabel B

"I feel like the church is more of a communal where I can worship and serve God, while my relationship with God is my progress in my faith. Whether is prayer, mediation, or reading the Bible." – Clare B

"I have to wear the pretty dresses and have my nails painted and my hair down. I have to behave like a nice, straight female. That is not who I am. I am a woman who loves other women. I live in a small southern town, so I am use to hiding. But it is sad that I have to hide around people who are supposed to love everyone unconditionally." – Lexi B

"I don't often go to church because I don't feel comfortable." – Gabriela S



Appealing aspects of the church

“

“The church is a place where I can just like be myself and talk to like the old ladies who have known me since I was like a week old... But as I've moved away from home, I have struggled to kind of bridge the gap between being open to a different kind of church community.” – Angela

“Growing up one of the main things that drew me to church was just a state of calmness and just peace and quiet...But one thing [that repels] is not really being able to speak...You have to kind of just sit there and listen.” – Chris



Childhood nostalgia, warm memories of church as a child, like comfort food

Presence of long-standing relationships



Acknowledgement of the church as an important part of communities, especially for those who are impoverished or in crisis



Fundamental support for UMC's aim to make the world a better place – but feel all of Christianity, and all denominations in organized mainstream religions, should focus on making the world a better place.

Attract and Engage Youth

Emphasize the familiar.

Be warm, fuzzy, embracing.

De-emphasize the unknown.

Avoid promises such as “friends for life”.

No FOMO.

Avoid portraying UMC as a place only for certain people or certain occasions.

Communicate practical knowledge.

Demonstrate God’s practical application in real life; real situations.

Attract and Engage Youth

Avoid “recruiting”.

They don’t feel they need to “sign up” to feel they belong.

Use Social Media as a calendar.

Communicate events/activities vs. deep dialogue.

Emphasize real world opportunities.

Even the unaffiliated like to know, and sometimes participate in, projects that have direct outcomes.

Celebrate the “body” as in 1 Cor 12

Emphasize how each as individuals helps to make a whole, and that the body of Christ relies on each of our gifts and strengths.

So what next?



Remember,
this is a
workshop!



What are you doing to offer more in-person engagement?

5 minutes

How can you bring practical application to young people inside and outside The UMC?

5 minutes

RESEARCH TEAM

What does it look like for youth to be more active in leadership?

5 minutes

RESEARCH TEAM

What is the UMC doing well among youth? Where can we improve?

5 minutes

Youth Discussions

Co-Create Discussion With Young People

Pressing Concerns



Hatefulness and lack of acceptance

Homelessness, food and housing insecurity

Climate change



Access to health care

Greed and resultant corruption



“Dear UMC...”

A collection of comments from affiliates



Inclusion in important matters

“Something I’ve said for years has been that Youth/the young people of the Church are the future so their needs to be more representation of younger church members when making church policy.” – Joseph N

“The one thing I think the church needs to hear is that to love your neighbor you must accept them for who they are. It does matter if they are of a different race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. If the greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself, then I urge the Methodist church to keep this in mind as they decided the future of the church.” – Clare B

Unconditional Acceptance

“I wish the church knew that everyone has different values and beliefs and that we should all learn to respect them all. We’re taught to respect and love one another and I believe that some thing we should truly do.” – Leah D

“Please listen to the voices of your youth.” – Taliyah D

Embrace Diversity

“Open the doors wide, flip the tables, and let all hearts worship. Love as they are called.” – Nate R

“Dear UMC...”

A collection of comments from unaffiliated youth

Celebrate common values

“I would want to be vulnerable with people who are understanding, like not really judgy and just acceptance accepting of me and like other people as well.” – Raylin

Immediate Acceptance

“I would want to know that like I, myself, who I am, where I come from, people that other people that look like me that don't look like me are going to be accepted.” – Mahogany

Support System

“The whole idea of having like a church home kind of like a central place, it's just really like moving to see the way people act in church. You can just tell when people are like really, really relying on this...you could tell there's something happening in their life and the way that they rely on religion to kind of get them through that...I think it's really special.” – Judy

Diverse angles

“I think it's also really important to be aware with what else is going on around the world, not just with like news and current events, but just seeing other lifestyles and other, um, other perspectives on the world and how other people live.” – Charlotte

Wrap Up

What is one way this research can fit into your work or into a project?



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Appendix

Additional Creativity Exercises

HEMMINGWAY EXERCISE

Hemmingway challenged people to write a summation of things in a 6 word statement.

Please summarize what you have seen and heard in 6 words.

**For sale,
Baby shoes,
Never worn**

~Ernest
Hemingway
(maybe)~

ALPHABET BRAINSTORM

Use the alphabet to brainstorm a topic.
For example: Why do we research? Why does it matter? Who is it for?
Then assign each letter an response. A- Analytics, B-Bring good news to people, C-...
Do this quickly. Take a picture and circulate to the group.

ABC Brainstorm

A	N
B	O
C	P
D	Q
E	R
F	S
G	T
H	U
I	V
J	W
K	X
L	Y
M	Z

Brainstorming Topic _____