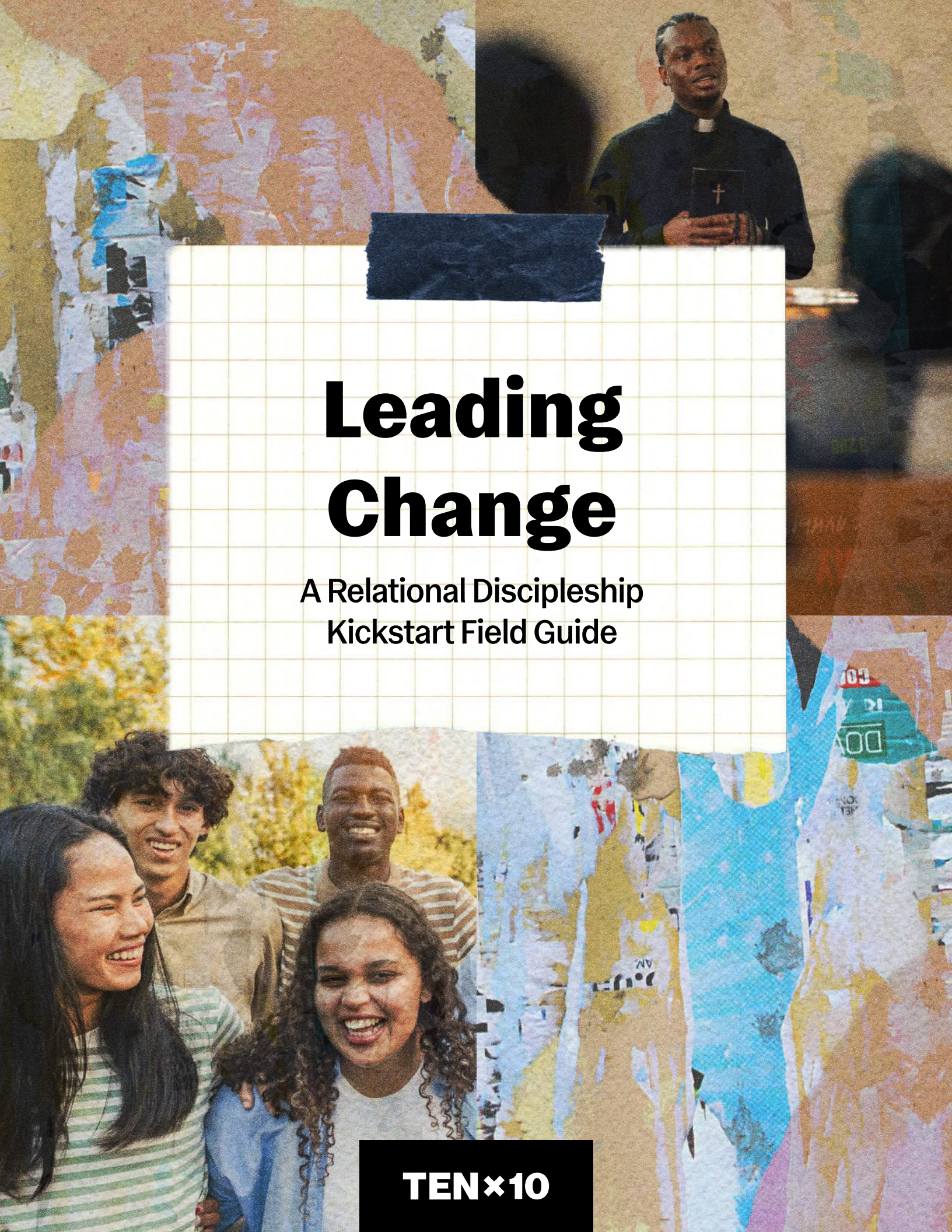




Leading Change

A Relational Discipleship
Kickstart Field Guide

TEN×10

Goal: Faith prioritized by the entire faith community and leadership through their structure, culture, and decision-making.

Faith Formation Framework



Shared
Faith *shared* by adults.

Internalized
Faith *internalized* through spiritual practices and learning.

Applied
Faith *applied* through service and justice.



Catalyzed
Faith *catalyzed* by family intimacy and intentionality.

Prioritized
Faith *prioritized* by the entire faith community and leadership.





Introduction and Context





Eric is a fantastic youth worker in his second year. He possesses all the best of what a great youth worker needs: an authentic faith, a genuine love for teenagers (both in general and the specific ones at his church), and a commitment to relational ministry.

Eric shared recently, through tears, that he can't figure out how to get the congregation to care about the young people in their midst. He says *they say they care*, and they're very willing to give funds to provide for an isolated youth group, out of sight, over there.

**"It's like they love them, theologically,
but they don't like them."**

It would be easy for Eric to remain the expert who understands young people and, in his case, gets to draw a salary based on running a ministry quietly dedicated to keeping the young people of the church engaged.

Eric has become desperate to see change come to this congregation he loves. He fully understands that two things are true, even though they are not currently understood at his church:

1. Young people need the church.

For decades, the American Church has copied culture and isolated young people. The culture told us young people want and need multiple years of peer bonding without much, if any, adult intervention or connection. And for many adults in America (and the American Church), there's also a weird paradox of affirming that teenagers are "the future" but not really wanting to interact with them.

Eric expressed that he's not sure which of these mindsets has taken root more at his church. He knows that all the best research about adolescent faith development - and particularly about faith that outlasts the experience of youth

ministry - calls out the essential need for young people to find an identity anchoring their faith in the congregation, not only in youth ministry.¹

2. The church needs young people.

In many churches, you'll see a whole bunch of older people, a small collection of families, and pretty much no one between high school and their mid-30s. Eric's church is no different. Eric loves his church and longs to see it thrive, but he's frustrated and saddened by what he sees as an inability to recognize that if they don't lean into change, they're likely to go through what so many churches experience: the slow fade (i.e. a congregation that slowly gets older and smaller until it may have to close its doors). Eric knows that the young people in his ministry have great gifts to offer the church: insight, passion, a willingness to take risks, a commitment to justice, and so much more.

¹ This reality has been shown over and over again. But it's a clear finding in two of the more important research studies conducted on adolescent faith development over the last couple decades: the National Study of Youth & Religion (nwy.org), with findings reported in multiple books including *Almost Christian*, by Kenda Creasy Dean (Oxford University Press, 2010), and the *Sticky Faith* research conducted by Fuller Youth Institute, with findings also reported in multiple books and articles, but most clearly in both versions of *Sticky Faith*, by Kara Powell, et al (Zondervan, 2011).

Eric feels a bit lost. He is willing to try things and experiment. He's open to ideas and input, but he feels ill-equipped to lead change.

A Reminder: The Faith Formation Framework

So, how do we break free from the gravitational pull of how we've always done things in our approaches to youth ministry? Without blowing everything up (we're not advocating for that!), how can we take meaningful steps? We trust you know your context and have a general sense of some of the resistance you are likely to encounter if you want to see your church or parish become a hotbed of relational discipleship radically focused on Jesus.

By now, you're well familiar with TENx10's Faith Formation Framework. As a reminder, this framework, backed by decades of research, practice, and scripture, reminds us that **young people are most likely to have a faith that matters when:**

1. **Faith is Shared by Adults:** Multiple trusted adults model their own faith, that matters.
2. **Faith is Internalized through Spiritual Practices and Learning:** Young people own their faith when they engage in Christian practices and beliefs, including prayer, reading Scripture, learning the key truths Christians believe, sharing testimonies, and sabbath.
3. **Faith is Applied through Service and Justice:** Young people flourish when they serve and lead.



In practice, **that model of relational discipleship is possible for all youth when:**

4. **Faith is Catalyzed by Family Intimacy and Intentionality.**
5. **Faith is Prioritized by the Entire Faith Community and Leadership** – in structure, culture, and decision making.

This Field Guide focuses on the last of those practices: **helping your entire faith community prioritize the faith formation of young people.**

At TENx10, we are passionate about seeing young people experience relational discipleship radically focused on Jesus. Our guess is that you share that passion. Like you, we've spent a bunch of time thinking about how to best accomplish that dream.

Certainly, we believe that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings transformation, both to the lives of young people and to our churches. We also know leaders play a role in that transformation and are invited to co-create with God in the restoration of all things.

We get the opportunity to lead change in our churches.



**Churches are enriched
when teenagers are
meaningfully integrated into
the life of our faith community.**

Pause for Reflection

1. What are one or two dreams you have for the young people in your faith community?

(We'd encourage you to be expansive here, and not exercise judgment on yourself—just name some longings):





Why Leading Change Is Challenging



Moving churches to prioritize youth discipleship is a tall order. Often, youth workers feel empowered to lead the ministry with young people...as long as that ministry remains somewhat isolated, or functions like a "special interest group" within the larger congregation.

There is simply SO much gravitational pull to do what we've always done (rooted in decades of assumptions about what's effective). There are entire books written about why this is the case.² Yet research tells us that approximately 1,000,000 young people leave the Christian faith each year.³

You've likely felt it in your ministry, so why aren't other people *feeling it*?

But there's a lot of hope that change can happen and you can be part of making it happen. How, you might ask? It's about being the person who is willing to go to bat for young people and work with your leaders to keep young people at the front of their minds.

Imagine that you have a big banner that says, "Remember the teenagers in your midst!" And every time your church meets, you run through the aisles waving that banner.

In short, we genuinely believe that your willingness, combined with God's heart and power, can and will bring change to your church.

² Just a handful of examples: *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* by Chap Clark (Baker Academic, 2011); *Youth Ministry 3.0: A Manifesto of Where We've Been, Where We Are & Where We Need to Go* by Mark Oestreicher (Zondervan, 2008), *The End of Youth Ministry?: Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do About It* by Andrew Root (Baker Academic, 2020), and the aforementioned *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* by Kenda Creasy Dean (Oxford University Press, 2010).

³ "The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050" (Pinetops Foundation).

Pause for Reflection

1. How well does your whole congregation or parish care about and champion young people?



2. What do I perceive to be the greatest obstacles to my church or parish becoming a hotbed of support and ownership of youth discipleship?

3. Which of the obstacles I've identified above is God incapable of bringing change to?





How Can You Lead Change?



Action Step 1: Pray Often

You knew we'd suggest prayer, right? But we have no interest in clichés or churchy platitudes. Instead, we want you to start (and continue) with prayer. Because, ultimately, we believe three things that we're guessing you also believe:

1. If your faith community is going to truly prioritize the discipleship of young people, it's going to require a **movement of God**.
2. If you're going to effectively lead up, you need to be bound to the **heart of God**.
3. If you're going to effectively lead change, you need a **team of people** praying for you and praying for change.

So, action step one, part one, is to develop a regular rhythm of prayer about this specific topic. Yes, you want and need God to move in and through you, but mostly you need a regular rhythm of prayer that reorients you, tethers you to God's desires, and simultaneously brings out more humility and boldness, compassion, and wisdom.

Action step one, part two, is to quietly recruit a small collection of people to be your prayer partners. Ask your prayer team to pray with the same intention.

You might be tempted to skip this step and get to the more active work, **but praying is truly the single most important action step of this entire booklet.**

Pause for Reflection & Action

1. Start here and now. Write out a short prayer asking God to give you what you most need as you embark on leading change.

2. Who might you invite to participate with you in a grassroots prayer team?



Action Step 2: Talk About Youth Ministry as the Most Important Work in the Church

This is not permission to be arrogant. And, we really believe what you do matters, A LOT. Young people are the current and future church, so how they understand Jesus and the world will be the legacy of faith that gets passed on to future generations. It's a big deal!

Part of your work is to remind the rest of your faith community of that truth. However, many of us, have a tendency to talk like this isn't true. The stories we tell about youth work are too often only about Nerf wars, pizza, and crisis. Your faith community primarily knows teens based on what you tell them. **Is the snapshot you're giving them of young people pursuing a genuine faith in Christ?**

When you talk about youth and the ministry you do, tell the stories of life change. Talk about students' maturity and curiosity. Talk about how they love Jesus, how they worship, how they serve, how they're making a difference. Don't only talk about how many kids at the last retreat didn't ever take a shower, or how tough it is to get parents to return signed release forms to you.

Help your church fall in love with young people because you and every adult serving youth can't stop telling them about the incredible things God is up to in and through young people!

Once you've done that, it will be much easier to have the rest of your faith community create space for and prioritize young people.



Action Step 3: Seek Senior-Level Leadership Buy-In

Moving a congregation toward a fuller embrace of relational discipleship radically focused on Jesus is a **complex dance of action, longing, courage, and God's grace**.

Maybe you're one of the blessed few youth workers who are part of a faith community where the senior pastor or priest is already completely passionate about teenagers. But based on statistics, it's *more likely* that your senior leader genuinely desires young people to thrive in their faith, but wouldn't consider it one of the church's top priorities. After all, senior leaders have LOTS of really good priorities. While it's theoretically possible to move a congregation toward having their structures, culture, and decision-making prioritize the thriving of young people without the senior pastor or priest owning that intention, it's simply less likely to happen. So...

Prayerfully, humbly, kindly, but directly, invite your senior leader to join you in considering change that will be in the best interest of the entire congregation (not only the young people).

One of the striking findings of Fuller Youth Institute's *Growing Young* research⁴ was how universally the churches that prioritized young people (not merely a great youth group, but integrated young people into the community's structures, culture, and decision-making) were thriving churches. It's important to note, these weren't just thriving youth ministries. The whole church thrives when it prioritizes youth discipleship.

So, study up, do a little background reading on the [TENx10 website](https://tenx10.org), get your prayer team partnering with you, and make an appointment with your senior leader.

Do *not* attempt to manipulate (through guilt or begging). It just won't work. Your mindset and your approach should be **invitational**, even as you come armed with data about the 1,000,000 young people leaving the Christian faith every year, and what you've been learning about faith communities that are outliers to this trend.

Of course, you could also encourage your senior leader to spend time on the [Senior Leaders](#) section of the TENx10 website. Reviewing this section of the website would also be an excellent part of your prep for this invitational meeting with your senior leader. Consider what aspects of faith and discipleship are most important to your senior leader and how prioritizing youth discipleship fits into those priorities. Seek to persuade with a vision of a future based on what animates your senior leader, rather than focusing on what they *should* or *have* to do.

Now, *specifically* are you asking of your senior pastor or priest? That they would partner with you in leading an initiative to elevate the prioritization of young people, so that:

1. The faith of young people would outlast their teenage years.
2. The whole congregation would thrive as they embrace the teenagers in their midst.

⁴ <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/growingyoung>, as well as the book *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin (Baker Books, 2016).

Pause for Reflection & Action

1. What concerns do you have about approaching your senior pastor or priest to have this conversation?

2. What preparation would be helpful for you to complete before asking for this meeting?



Action Step 4: Forming and Activating a Change Team

We're now getting into some more organizational change ideas. And honestly, we know this could feel like too much, or seemingly impossible. That's ok. Read it. Consider it. And, when or if the time is right, you'll know you have the tools right here. You'll now want to bring together a **Change Team: a small group of people who will not merely act as advisors but will actively help you lead change.** It would be fantastic if your senior leader was willing to be part of this team. If not, make sure you keep them informed and consulted, and approving of every step along the way. One thing that could easily kill any attempt to shift a church's culture is if the senior pastor or priest wonders if decisions are being made behind their back.

You'll need to decide how often and with what regularity this Change Team will meet. We suggest you start with an informational gathering of those you invite to clearly lay out the problem and the vision, and articulate the role of the team. Make sure you are giving them a clear ask about the expectations, outcomes, and tasks they will be taking on in their roles. Allow people to attend that first meeting before they commit to fully dive in with you.

At the first meeting, one of your team's goals is to develop a compelling vision statement. This is similar to a mission statement, but is focused on the **change you want to see** and painting a picture of **a preferred future.**

After Mission comes Values.

One way teams sometimes misstep is by plunging right into strategy ideation. You'll get there, but the likelihood of success is higher if you first discern a small set of guiding values about how God is calling your church to love young people.

With all of that in mind, the anchor points for this change process are:

- **Compelling vision statement (or mission):** *What's our dream?*
- **Values:** *What are we called to embody in this season?*
- **Strategy:** *How will we embody our values?*
- **Goals:** *Specific, actionable plans and experiments.*

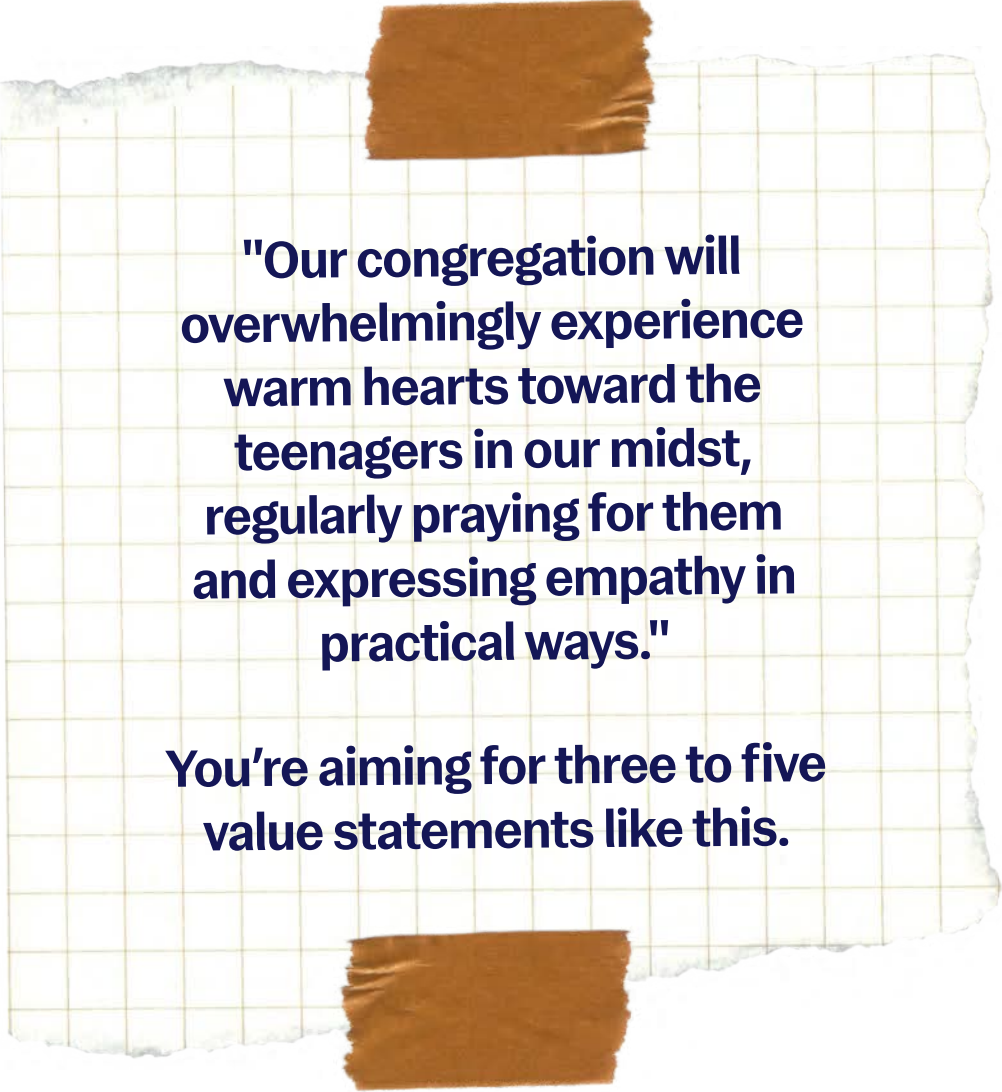
For the value statements:

- Have the team prayerfully propose words, phrases, and partial sentences in response to that very specific question above—*What are we called to embody in this season?*
- Write down every thought (ideally, on a whiteboard or flipchart so they can all be seen). Don't debate individual ideas at this point; just list as many thoughts as possible.
- Once you feel this step has been exhausted, move into the collaborative work of identifying which three to five ideas are most important. Then, craft those ideas into complete sentences.

You'll know you're on track if some of these values feel quite aspirational: in other words, your team feels called to see your church embody your value statements, but they're a bit distant from the current reality.



Let's consider an example. Maybe during the process of generating words and phrases for values, one person mentions that they long for the congregation to regularly pray for young people. Someone else adds that they'd love to see the adults in the church have warm hearts toward teenagers. You share that the word empathy keeps coming to your mind. Those three concepts, then, could be crafted into one value statement, along the lines of:



**"Our congregation will
overwhelmingly experience
warm hearts toward the
teenagers in our midst,
regularly praying for them
and expressing empathy in
practical ways."**

**You're aiming for three to five
value statements like this.**

After Values comes Strategy.

Once your team has finalized a list (and you've run it past your senior leader if she or he isn't an active member of your Change Team), it's time to work on your strategy! Remember, we've defined this strategy step as *How will we embody our values?* Focus on one value at a time, and come up with as many ideas for action as possible—big and small, experimental, risky, and less-risky—that would move the needle on that value becoming significantly true and experienced. As with the previous process, don't debate the ideas as they're being brainstormed. Wait until you have a big ol' list of ideas, and then have a conversation about which two or three ideas will result in the most change. You can't do everything all at once and you can always come back to ideas later!

And after Strategy comes Goals.

Once your team has stacked hands on a very short list of strategy ideas for each value, have a tactical conversation about goals. The "what" of the goal is implicit in the idea already, but you'll need to agree on "who," "when," and "how." These goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART!).

- **Specific** - What will be accomplished? What actions will you take?
- **Measurable** - What data will measure the goal? (How much? How well?)
- **Achievable** - Is the goal possible? Do you have the necessary skills and resources?
- **Relevant** - How does the goal align with the broader vision? Why is the result important?
- **Time-bound** - What is the time frame for accomplishing the goal?

Pause for Reflection & Planning

1. That was a lot to take in! What aspects of this process get you excited? What aspects feel intimidating?

2. Who are some of the people you will ask to be a part of your Change Team?

3. When do you intend for this Change Team to have its first meeting?



Action Step 5: Continue to Help Young People Be Seen and Heard

If you stopped reading this little booklet right here and actively pursued the ground we've covered so far, you would be well on your way to Leading Change in your context. But we want to provide you with a handful of additional thoughts to turn up the volume. This section (and the one that follows) *could* end up being embedded in the values and strategy you and your Change Team create, or they could be additional initiatives you and your team work on concurrently.

One of the most influential steps we can take in leading our churches toward *faith prioritized by the entire faith community and leadership—through their structure, culture, and decision-making*—is to ramp up **young people being seen.**



Seeing young people is about more than merely having young people sitting in your main worship services (though that's certainly important). **This is about desiring to have young people as active participants in every aspect of the church's life**, like:

- **Providing leadership in worship services** (tech, singing, prayer, or scripture reading)
- **Serving alongside adults in other ministries of the church** (children's ministry, justice and missions work, special event prep)
- **Serving on committees and other decision-making bodies** (after all, teenage brains are naturally wired for cross-current thinking, not merely perpetuating "the ways we have always done this")

We know of one youth worker who was interviewing at two different churches. Both churches had teenagers on the search committees that were conducting the interviews. But at one church, the teenagers were seen as "honorary members" who didn't have a vote and whose input was minimized. At the other church, the young people on the search team were full voting members whose input was elevated and prized by the rest of the team. You can probably guess which church this youth worker went to: the one that already possessed a desire to have young people involved in every aspect of the community's life.



Pause for Reflection & Planning

1. Rate your church or parish on how well young people are seen and heard currently:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not seen at all Highly visible

2. What are some natural areas where you could encourage your church to include young people in their efforts?

3. Who will you contact to have a conversation about ramping up the involvement of young people in your context?



Action Step 6: Create and Curate Shared Experiences

Our culture often pushes us toward homogeneity, only spending time with people who are exactly like us. As a result, when we spend time in spaces where people are different from us (in belief, life experience, age or gender, and/or interests), it's common to feel awkward. It's just as normal that a teenager would say "I have nothing in common with them" about the older people in your church as an older person in your church saying "I have nothing in common with them" about teenagers!

But what we've noticed time and time again is that there are three experiential contexts in which our differences are commonly forgotten or minimized:

- **When we're worshipping together**
- **When we're serving together**
- **When we're having fun together**



Remember, it's not always easy to make massive changes overnight (in fact, it's normally downright impossible). So, take small steps to change the trajectory. One youth worker we know became convinced that the annual mission trip, which was a deeply held tradition only for teenagers, was an area where she could take steps toward intergenerational integration. She knew the adults in her church would be unlikely to join in as they had been enculturated to see the mission trip as a "youth thing." So she made a series of small changes over a few years.

In year one, she initiated a new mission trip only for middle schoolers (which had not been previously offered), but set up the expectation that every kid needed a parent to also attend. There wasn't a huge turnout, but it was a very positive experience. Year two: She made it optional for parents to come with their kids on the high school trip, not as chaperones, but as full participants. Year three: She partnered with the church missions committee to transition the trip to a church-wide intergenerational option (and she worked behind the scenes to get a few older people on board early on). That third year met some resistance, but the experience was fantastic for everyone.

And now, several years later, that church cannot imagine doing anything other than church-wide intergenerational mission trips.



Pause for Reflection & Planning

1. Rate your church or parish on how well and how regularly people of different generations (including young people) WORSHIP together currently:

[illegible]

2. Rate your church or parish on how well and how regularly people of different generations (including young people) SERVE together currently:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Never All the time

3. Rate your church or parish on how well and how regularly people of different generations (including young people) HAVE FUN together currently:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never									All the time

4. Considering which of the above you rated lowest, what's an experiment you'd like to try?



Final Thoughts and an Encouragement



We'd be remiss if we didn't make two final suggestions.

Don't be afraid to make changes where you can.

Leading change is HARD. It is often two steps forward, one and a half steps back.

Don't be afraid to start small. Make change where you can. Is your faith community not ready to incorporate young people into leadership throughout the church? Find one ministry and ministry leader who is open to inviting young people into leadership, and celebrate that.

Have you been able to recruit some additional adult mentors for young people, but not all? That's still a huge win. Celebrate that!

Name, celebrate, and tell stories about wins.

Storytelling is more likely to shape the culture of your church than logic and rational thought. Always be on the lookout for stories of wins, particularly wins that embody the vision and values developed by your Change Team. Communicating stories of wins (in newsletters, on social media, in meetings, in conversations) will move hearts and gently shift people's thinking from pessimism to hope.

Or take it one step further: Experiment with curating spaces where young people and those of other generations tell each other (and listen to each other tell) stories.

**In short, start where you can
and where you see God opening
doors and hearts.**

As Mark Yaconelli wrote:

This is how stories can save us. We step into the reality of another person's existence and instead of judgment feel kinship. When we say, "Tell me your story," we're really asking, "Can I relive your experience with you? Can I try and see as you have seen, feel as you have felt, know the world as you have known it?" The honest listening and telling of personal experiences naturally endears us to one another. The illusion of separateness dissipates, and we see ourselves in one another's story. When that happens, we are no longer able to demonize, ridicule, oppress, or neglect the other. This is not rocket science. This capacity is a natural, hardwired, human inclination that anyone can engage. And when we do, we can heal our families, our world, ourselves.⁵

Finally, we want to leave you with a word of encouragement. We acknowledged early in this Field Guide that very few churches fully embrace the vision of relational discipleship, because it isn't easy for a faith community that's been operating on a different set of assumptions about young people for years. But there are SO many reasons for hope: hope that you are capable of leading change, hope that the young people in your church will be seen and valued like never before, hope that Jesus wants to partner with you in this work, and hope that God will do a new thing.⁶

"... but I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." - Jesus, in John 10:10b (NIV)

⁵ Yaconelli, Mark, *Between the Listening and the Telling*, p.10 (Broadleaf Books, 2022).

⁶ Isaiah 43:19

Pause for Reflection & Action

List the first three action steps you're going to take this week:

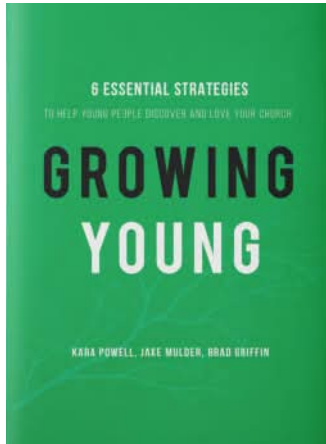
Who can you ask to hold you accountable to those steps?

What goals are you setting for yourself to lead change?

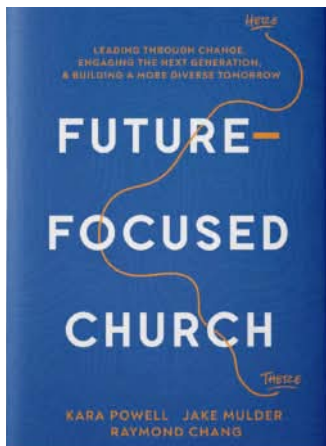


Appendix:

Guides for Leading Change



Want to go deeper in helping your entire church prioritize the thriving of young people: [Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church](#), by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad M. Griffin is a great resource for doing just that. Growing Young is for youth workers and pastors who want more in-depth guidance and wisdom for how to help their entire faith community invite young people to “follow me as I follow Christ.”



Want to go even deeper in how to lead change? Check out [Future-Focused Church: Leading through Change, Engaging the Next Generation, and Building a More Diverse Tomorrow](#), by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Raymond Chang. This newly-released book offers a clear roadmap to faithfully and effectively navigate change so you can help revitalize your faith community.



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