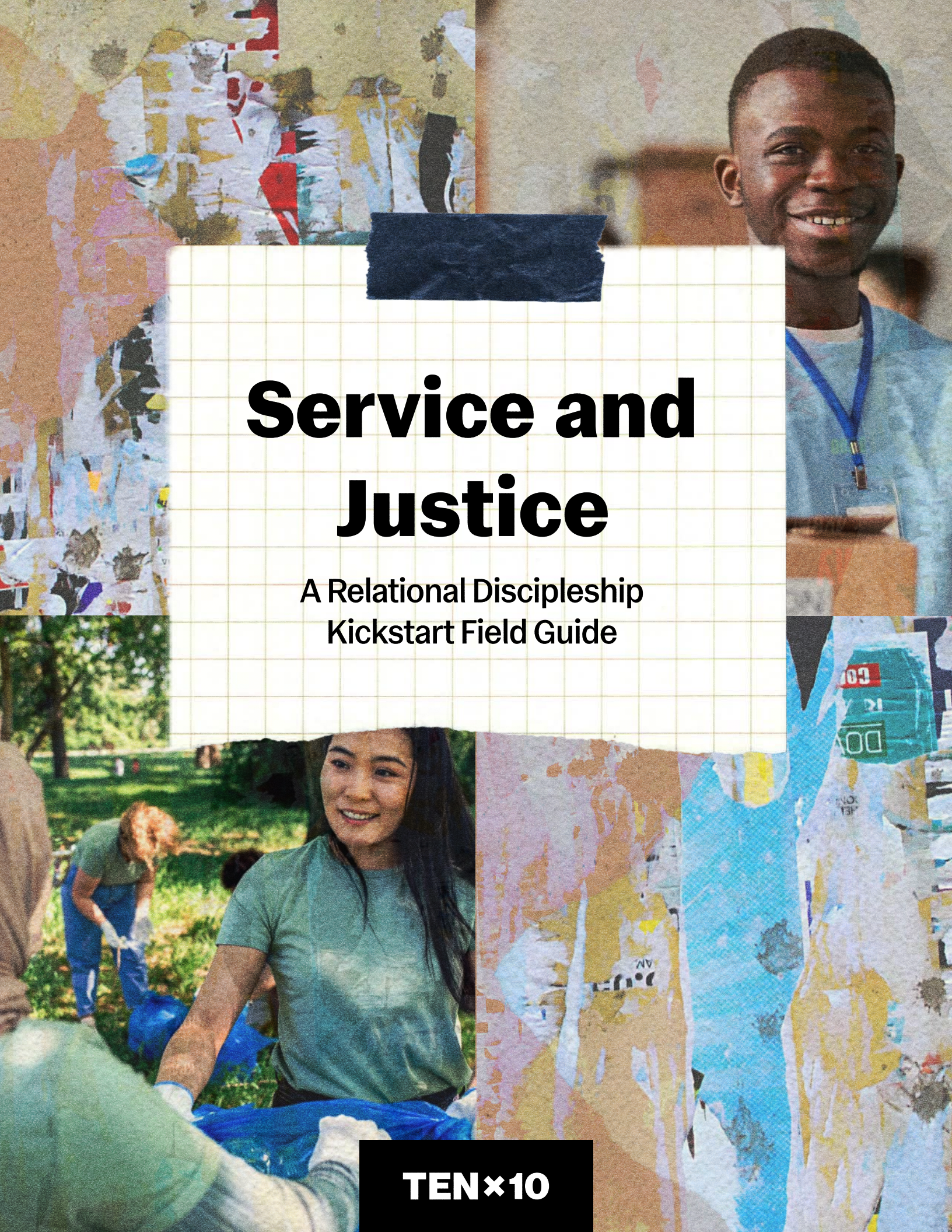




Service and Justice

A Relational Discipleship
Kickstart Field Guide

TEN×10

Goal: Young people share their faith, serve their neighbors, seek justice and take on leadership, thereby seeing God's Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.¹

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.

¹ Matthew 6:10



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Introduction and Context





Andrew bounced into the kickoff at his church's high school youth ministry during his freshman year, ready to sign up for every activity they offered. He'd been active in their middle school ministry and had a spark of faith in Jesus that just needed the right tinder to become a burning flame. He joined a high school small group, came to weekly Bible study, and went on any retreat he could. This led him to get involved in more service in the church: assisting with children's ministry, volunteering at the weekly food pantry, and singing with the music ministry on Sundays.

What truly set Andrew on fire for the Kingdom, though, was going on a mission trip to Appalachia. As he met people in the local community, learned about their culture, and engaged with local organizations to talk about the historical and social influences of the region, it motivated him to think more broadly about his purpose. **He started thinking about how his faith motivated him, not only to meet the immediate needs of others but also to make a lasting impact on the world around him.**

He began to express how he could share the love Jesus offered him with others and help further God's Kingdom on earth.

As an adult, Andrew became a therapist working with military members, dedicated especially to those with disabilities and coping with PTSD. He continues to point to his faith as a major motivation for his work and cites that mission trip as a key experience that made him think about the support systems his clients need to thrive. He sees the opportunities he had growing up to serve and lead in youth ministry as some of the biggest influences in his future career.

Andrew's story is an example of how God can transform young people when we give them opportunities to seek out their God-given purpose in our churches and the wider community.



Pause for Reflection

Is there someone in your life, like Andrew, who learned to live out their purpose as a Christian through their faith community? What factors do you think led them to where they are now?

If someone asked you why it's important for Christians to serve others, how would you respond?





The Importance of Purpose



By now, you may have already learned in previous modules about the importance of belonging and identity for young people's development. Discovering a sense of purpose is the third essential part of this trio. Young people live into their purpose when they share their faith, serve their neighbors, and seek justice, helping bring God's Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.²

When young people are grounded in knowing they are beloved children of God made in God's image, each uniquely gifted to make a difference for the Kingdom, they can uncover their various gifts and talents. They can also begin determining what God might be calling them to do, both here and now and as they become adults. Purpose is about asking and answering the question, "How am I called to make a difference?"

Before we dig deeper into that question of calling, let's start with a developmental understanding: Deep inside the question of purpose is the question of agency (or power). In other words, before young people feel compelled to join in on the restorative work of Jesus, they are all wondering (no matter what religious perspective or worldview they might have), "How do my choices matter?"

This question of agency—how their choices matter—starts showing up profoundly for most people when they are young teens because that's when they are first able to exercise their brand new third-person



² Matthew 6:10 – In order to avoid being repetitive, we haven't unpacked the TENx10 Faith Formation Framework in this particular Field Guide. But if you're wondering where Purpose fits in that model, it's uniquely tied to Faith Applied through Service and Justice (though Purpose also has some connections in Faith Internalized through Spiritual Practices and Learning). If you're unclear what this footnote is referring to, we encourage you to take a look at the TENx10 framework for understanding youth discipleship: TENx10, "Faith Formation Framework," accessed February 2025, <https://www.tenx10.org/faith-formation-framework>.

perspective (or, their ability to consider themselves from another's point of view). This agency question starts to snowball:

- “Is it possible that my choices could impact the trajectory of my own life? If so, how would that work?”
- “Is it possible that I could influence those closest to me—my friends and family?”
- “Might it even be possible that I could somehow, someday, have an influence on the whole world?”

Once they begin asking those questions, those seeds can be connected to purpose. And that's when young people really start catching a vision for making a difference.

So, back to the purpose question older teenagers begin asking: **“How am I called to make a difference?”** As Christians, we have a powerful answer to that question. In *3 Big Questions that Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections*,³ Kara Powell and Brad Griffin emphasize

³ Kara Powell and Brad M. Griffin, *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021).

the importance of helping young people understand that God believes they can make all the difference in the world. As we walk with young people, we have the privilege of helping them understand that God is inviting them to join in **the story of creation, redemption, and restoration that God has been writing since the moment time began.**

Young people are being invited to be the presence of Jesus in a world that desperately needs his love. Their purpose is not simply to make a difference, but to be active participants in God's saving work to heal and transform the world.

The rest of this Field Guide will focus on three primary practices that invite young people to find their purpose in God's Kingdom:

- Invite young people to serve and to lead within your faith community: a practice the Fuller Youth Institute call *keychain leadership*.
- Empower young people to serve the world around them
- Equip young people to share their faith with others



Invite Young People To Serve and Lead In Your Faith Community: Keychain Leadership

If we want to help young people discover their purpose, we need to practice *keychain leadership*.⁴ “What’s that?” you might be wondering. *Keychain leadership* is about identifying who holds the keys in your faith community (another term for responsibilities and authority)—and then finding ways to entrust those keys to others.

Growing Young describes it this way:

“When we refer to keys, we mean the capabilities, power, and access of leaders who carry the potential to empower young people. By keychain leaders, we mean pastoral and congregational leaders who are:

- Acutely aware of the keys on their keychain, and
- Intentional about entrusting and empowering all generations, including teenagers and emerging adults, with their own set of keys.

Beyond simply launching a student leadership team, *keychain leadership* is a spirit and commitment demonstrated by both paid and volunteer leaders that permeates every area of the church.”

⁴ We’ll unpack this term more, but it’s worth noting that the term was first used in Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin’s book *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).

Giving young people keys means giving them significant opportunities to lead in ministry, not just passing off tasks to them, but also giving them influence and voice in how things are done and when decisions are made.

This could mean joining the music ministry, greeting visitors each Sunday, creating digital media content, or working with the justice ministry. It should also mean regularly and consistently inviting young people to make decisions as leaders, giving feedback and input about ministry, and being encouraged to innovate and dream for the future. Keychain leaders equip young people for whatever role they take on and support them as they learn how to fill those roles. Giving young people keys means that we adults—from the parking team to the leadership of the church, ministry, or parish board—put in the time and effort to help young people use the keys they're given. Take Maya's story for example.

Maya could not have been more excited when she recently showed us a photo. At first, we didn't get it. The

photo was of an older man standing over a couple of seated teenage guys, pointing at something on the desk in front of them. It seemed pretty mundane—until Maya told us what it meant. This photo represents such an important shift in my church, one I've been praying for and talking about for about three years," Maya explained.

My congregation has a history of saying things like 'young people are the future of the church,' and thinking they're saying something really lovely," Maya said. "I didn't want to squash that positive intention, but I've been trying to help them understand that young people are the church of today. **I've often repeated a phrase I picked up somewhere: 'Young people are human beings, not human becomings.'** Anyhow, I've been pushing for my congregation to include teenagers on all decision-making boards and committees. And this photo represents a vision coming true. That's the chair of our finance committee explaining a budget question to the two teenage boys who just joined that committee as full voting members. It seems like a minor thing, but it represents a huge shift!"

Pause for Reflection

**Who currently holds most of the keys for your youth ministry?
Brainstorm a list that includes yourself, volunteers, student leaders,
other church or parish staff, parents, etc.**

Who currently holds most of the keys in the wider church or parish?





Two Basic Steps to Keychain Leadership



With all that in mind, how should we go about purposefully and patiently making keychain leadership a reality in our ministries?

Identify who is ready for which keys.

This implies that we know young people individually and come to understand their skills and passions, so we can discern how they might best make an impact. In Maya's story, putting two random teenagers on the finance committee could have been a failure in the making that would potentially build up skepticism for future attempts. But because Maya had already been thinking about her teenagers and their capabilities and interests, when the finance committee chair indicated he was ready to try having a couple of teenagers join them, Maya knew who would be a good fit, which increased the likelihood of a win for everyone involved. As leaders, we need to know our young people and watch for the work of the Holy Spirit in them so we can give them the right keys at the right time.

Train young people how to use the keys they've received.

As mentors, we can't just throw keys in the general direction of young people and hope for the best. It's like teaching someone how to drive a car: you'd start with short distances and lower-risk situations, teaching the rules of the road, and providing lots of supervision. The same principles apply in ministry.

Put yourself back in the moment you received your first set of keys for ministry (again, we're talking about authority, not literal keys!). What helped you step into leadership? What do you wish someone had told you when they handed you a key? Start with the basics and help youth understand what it means to exercise leadership.

None of us turned into leaders overnight. Young people will find themselves in unknown situations and they will make mistakes. They need our help to learn new skills and, eventually, to add new keys to their keyring, too. That means we need to be willing to devote hours, days, and years to accompanying young leaders as they discover who they are and their God-given purpose.

A few additional principles for keychain leadership

Maximize leadership opportunities in youth ministry.

One of the easiest places to invite young people to lead is in youth ministry. Look at the regular activities of your ministry and ask yourself, “What roles—up front and behind the scenes—could we hand off to a teenager?” A partial list of possibilities could include:

- Greeting
- Hosting
- Leading a game
- Reading Scripture
- Sharing a testimony
- Teaching (or even co-teaching with you or another adult)
- Co-leading a small group
- Reaching out to those who’ve missed a couple of weeks
- Leading worship
- Planning a special event (or an aspect of that event)
- Leading a service project

Brian was a seasoned youth worker passionate about developing student leaders. He'd created multiple opportunities for young people to be on teams that provided leadership in a wide variety of ways. They all started with the letter "P," which is part of why you know this story is true!: Prayer, Planning, Program, Praise, and Planet. The Planet team collected recycling from the church building and repurposed those funds to sponsor a couple of children through Compassion International. Each sub-team had a student leader serving as the point person and an adult mentor. For almost a year, Brian couldn't find an adult mentor to work with Riley, the high school junior who led the Planet team. In the meantime, as Brian continued being limited by his own thinking, Riley recruited new team members, created a video about their team to show the rest of the youth group, and went to adult leaders of other ministries in the church to verify that the Planet team could collect their recyclables. Brian had an Aha moment one day: "I kept thinking this team was sort of on hold," he said, "but it finally got through my thick head that Riley is

already totally leading this group. Riley didn't need a mentor; Riley needed me to get out of the way!"

Identify a few ministries throughout your faith community that will invest time in young people.

There's wisdom in starting small, building up some wins and stories of success. So, consider which ministries in your church or parish could invite one or two young people into normal activities. Maybe you have music ministry leaders who are great at teaching young musicians. Maybe there's a knitting group that makes hats for newborn babies. Maybe there are big annual events that would benefit from having young people on their planning team.

Once you've identified a few possibilities, talk with leaders in those areas about inviting and encouraging young people to contribute in significant ways. Identify a few adults willing to mentor young people in those roles, sharing their keys and wisdom about how to use them in their ministry.

Create ways for young people to give input.

For people of every age, increasing our input in our faith community increases our sense of ownership and involvement. Work with your youth ministry team and senior leaders in your church or parish to determine meaningful ways for youth to give input into essential aspects of your faith community. For example, could a small group of teens meet with ministry leaders at your church or parish to share ideas and thoughts on your faith community's large worship gatherings?

Here's an important caution, though: If you or your church leadership seek input from young people but then ignore it all, those young people will quickly recognize that their time and energy don't really matter. It's critical that you actually use young people's input to inform decisions.

Grady is the pastor (and only staff person) of a congregation that is, compared to many, wonderfully multigenerational. But he noticed recently that while a half dozen young people are physically in the church service every week, they mostly seem tuned out. Grady's first impulse was to dismiss this as just the way it is. But something called him to seek more input, and he ended up trying something that was both creative and fruitful. Grady enlisted the young people as "secret shoppers" who would pay attention to and evaluate all aspects of the church service. Grady invited four teenagers to meet him for lunch after church one week and asked if, over the next month, they would pay particular attention to what aspects of the service they connected with and which aspects caused them to tune out. Grady explained that he wanted them to consider everything, beginning the moment they walked into the church.



A month later, Grady hosted lunch again with the same four teenagers. Since it was obvious to the teens that Grady was genuine and humble in his request for their input, they were willing to risk being very honest, naming all sorts of things that might improve their engagement. Some areas they brought up would likely take a long time to change, but Grady was encouraged by how many of their suggestions were easy to activate immediately.

While these are some initial ideas for incorporating youth into leadership in your ministry, *keychain leadership* ultimately requires the support and investment of the whole church.

Check out the *Leading Change* Step and Field Guide for more practical recommendations on leading change within your faith community.



Pause for Reflection & Action

Who was a keychain leader in your own life? How did they mentor you and help you discover your purpose and passion?

Spend a few minutes brainstorming a keychain leadership opportunity for a few young people in your ministry you think are ready for this step.

Looking over that list you brainstormed, what specific steps could you take over the next few weeks to invite them into leadership?

What two or three ministry leaders can you talk with in the next couple of weeks about inviting young people into leadership alongside them?





Empower Young People to Serve the World Around Them



When teenagers begin wrestling with questions about their purpose, they often come to an underlying question: **“Why are things the way they are?” From there, they often find themselves asking, “Do things have to be this way?”**

Max was 13 years old when he asked his parents if he could join the group of people from his church who served sandwiches and had conversations each Friday night with the unhoused people of his city. Max’s parents called the volunteer leader of that ministry, who said, “Of course, we’d love to include Max.” This Friday night serving opportunity quickly became part of Max’s weekly commitments. A year later, Max’s dad shared with us that their family had parked in the city center and was heading to a restaurant when an unhoused woman yelled hello to Max, calling him by name. Max, at that point 14 and a freshman in high school, was happy to see her. “Oh, hi, Beanie!” he called back. “How’s your leg?” He walked over and chatted with her for a few minutes. When Max returned to his family, he sensed that his parents were wondering how the two knew each other—the woman

was a stranger to them. Max just said, casually, “That’s Beanie. She’s my friend. We talk every Friday night.”

Scripture is full of invitations to love our neighbors and to care for the least among us. The Bible teaches that serving others is a measure of our faith. Jesus himself states explicitly in Matthew 25 that loving those overlooked and dismissed by society is central to what it means to follow him. Scripture is also clear that loving others goes beyond our individual actions. It also includes addressing injustices and sinful attitudes.

As you teach and talk about these biblical truths, young people will want to do something. As we wrote in the *Spiritual Practices & Learning I* Field Guide, young people normally work out both identity and purpose through places of practice or things they say and do. This is a beautiful developmental reality—as God intended it to be. Rather than leaving this pursuit to teenagers on their own, let’s provide them opportunities to do something and dialogue with them about why we’re doing what we’re doing, and how it’s shaping our lives.

Principles for Service and Justice

Young people identify their sense of purpose as followers of Christ when they apply their faith through service. How?

Model the difference between community service and Christian service.

There are many good and meaningful ways young people serve their community outside of our churches and parishes. When they serve as part of our faith communities, we have the unique additional opportunity to ground our service in prayer, discuss the “why” behind what we are doing, and discuss how our faith in Jesus motivates us to serve. We also get to help teens connect service to the story of Jesus and have young people reflect on how they see God at work when they serve.

Teach young people about the connection between service and justice.

The more young people engage in work around justice and advocacy, the more likely they are to apply their faith to the world around them. Using Scripture and other teachings from your tradition, talk with young people about how working for the Kingdom of God involves addressing both the immediate needs of those we serve and the root causes of those needs.

For example, if you take on a service project helping older homebound people, you can also discuss issues around accessibility and healthcare. Don't worry if you don't know everything about a specific subject. You can always encourage young people to research a topic or lean on others in your community who are more engaged in that work to help guide your discussions. You don't have to be an expert on all things; you just need to start the conversation!

Use the “Before-During-After” model to help young people apply their faith to their service.

This simple model has three steps:

- **Before** serving, prepare. Discuss what to expect and your motivation; pray for those being served; and connect service to biblical truths.
- **During** serving, take moments for prayer, brief discussion, and/or personal reflection.
- **After** serving, debrief the experience. Identify where you saw God working, what God might be saying to you individually and collectively, and how the experience connects to Scripture. Most importantly, spend time praying.

While we don't need to do every one of those steps every time, framing service experiences this way helps invite God into the work and allows young people to reflect on how their faith connect to the work they are doing.





**Here are a
few ideas...**

Do a “ride-along.”

Bring a few young people along for the ride the next time you serve the broader community. Share with them why you choose to volunteer this way and how your faith motivates you to serve. Encourage them to engage in conversations with members of the community to get to know more about the people they’re encountering.

Involve other adults.

Think of other adults in your parish or church who lead by example, even if they aren’t involved in youth ministry. Ask them to invite young people to join them in service and act as “everyday mentors” in faith, service, and justice in the community outside of your church.

Pause for Reflection & Action

How does your relationship with Jesus motivate you to serve others?

Where is your faith community already pursuing service to the world around you? What practical ways could you invite young people to participate in that work?

Who are some adults in your faith community actively involved in service to the world around them? Which two or three could you pursue to invite young people to serve with them?





Equip Young People to Share Their Faith



Jesus calls us, his followers, to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20) so that everyone will share in the coming Kingdom of God. As young people discover their place in God's grand love story, they will also uncover this calling. As youth leaders, we can help them grow not only in understanding the importance of sharing their faith but also to become more comfortable in sharing their faith as they grow.

We can look at Andrew's story from the beginning of this Field Guide to see an example of how young people can learn to share their faith. As Andrew grew in his love for Jesus, he wanted to tell others about him so they could experience his love for themselves. Recognizing this, his youth leaders started giving him opportunities to share his faith: first with his peers as he led a small group on their high school retreats, then with other generations by helping teach kids at Vacation Bible School and by sharing his personal testimony on the parish's annual adult retreats. Andrew learned how to share his faith regularly as part of his leadership in the church. Eventually, this practice made him more comfortable talking about his faith with friends and family in his everyday life.



Sharing Faith Is a Journey

What do you think of when you imagine sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others? Maybe you think of:

- a preacher in the pulpit
- missionaries knocking on doors
- a well-meaning (or pushy) person stopping people on the street to talk about Jesus

What young people need practice with is different from any of those stereotypical examples. We want to help and empower young people to share the story of their faith in the places and contexts where they already spend time: in their friendships, with family, and in unexpected settings where they find themselves. We want to help young people learn to listen to other people's stories with active curiosity and share their own experiences of following Jesus and how he has impacted their lives.

The goal of sharing one's faith is ultimately to help others have their

own encounter with Christ and experience his mercy and grace, too. We need to help young people learn not only how to express their faith in words, but how to live in a way that demonstrates that Jesus has changed them. This is a lifelong process.

And because this is a lifelong process, we need to be patient and compassionate with young people all along the way. Sometimes they will say the wrong things. They won't always have perfect theology. They will make poor choices and do things that don't align with the gospel. And sometimes it will be hard for us to watch this journey unfold. But the bumps in the road are a necessary part of the process. When young people experiment and learn as they go, making mistakes and discovering what resonates along the way, it's all part of putting purpose into practice. As leaders, we have the privilege and responsibility of creating spaces for them to figure it all out.

Principles for Equipping Young People to Share Their Faith

Sharing faith does not come naturally to many people. We have to give young people opportunities to practice sharing their stories with others. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Share your own story.

Share stories about how you came to know Jesus and how God is active in your life (using appropriate boundaries, of course). Look for natural moments when a story about God's work in your life would fit into a conversation or a youth ministry activity – this can be in short asides, longer sharing opportunities, and everything in between. We can model faith and talk about faith in many ways, large and small, momentous and everyday. Take care, though, not to make it all about you. We want to find moments when our story will add to what God is doing for young people, which requires both humility and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit.

Connect young people with everyday mentors willing to talk about faith.

Every young person needs adults in their life who will mentor them. Mentors can be people in your church or parish. Mentors can also include family members, caregivers, teachers, or coaches. The main thing is that these mentors are willing to talk about faith, doubt, questions, and everyday life with young people, listening well and sharing their own imperfect stories. Whoever those adults are, invite them to share their experiences with the young people they mentor. If they feel uneasy about sharing, give them resources (like our [Simple Mentoring Toolkit](#))⁵ to help them feel more comfortable having faith conversations. (See lots more on this in our *Mentoring Field Guide*.)

Empower young people to share.

Young people have wisdom, ideas, questions, and stories to share with their peers and other generations. Look for opportunities in your youth gatherings and in the wider church or parish where they can tell their stories, share things they are learning, and be part of asking questions and wondering together. The possibilities are endless: youth group gatherings, Sunday worship services, small groups, informal hang-outs, one-on-one conversations. Regardless of the setting, the more often young people practice talking about Jesus and their own beliefs and questions, the more comfortable they'll become with it—which will deepen their connections with others and help them grow in their own sense of identity. (See *Spiritual Practices & Learning I Field Guide* for more on this.)

⁵ <https://www.simplémentoring.org>

Pause for Reflection & Action

Whether you were a disciple or not, was there someone who shared their faith with you as a young person? What was particularly impactful about what they shared (positively or negatively)?

Think of two or three young people in your youth ministry for whom you'll create an opportunity to share a testimony within the youth program. Write out the plan here:

What are two or three practical opportunities in your faith community (outside of your youth programming) where you could invite young people to share their story of following Jesus? What next steps would you need to take to make that happen?





What Calvin Can Teach Us



No, we're not talking about John Calvin, the Reformation theologian. This is the true story of a high school student named Calvin. Calvin seemed like a stereotypical church kid—always around, involved in many ways, and the youth ministry was his primary friendship group. Throughout his teenage years, Calvin assumed he would become an engineer. Still, his youth leaders started giving Calvin more and more opportunities to lead, in both formal and informal ways. Calvin was the student leader of his congregation's youth choir. He occasionally taught or shared a story about his faith during youth programs. Calvin was invited to sing a solo at a main church gathering. He was a student leader on service trips with younger teens. And he was regularly asked to provide input to the youth workers - and even once to the lead pastor.

Early in Calvin's senior year of high school, while he was waiting for acceptance into a college engineering program, he had a moment of clarity. It started with an overdue realization that he did not enjoy math and that engineering was likely not a great fit for him. But as Calvin tells it, a split second later, he realized that God had been preparing him to be a youth worker all along.

Calvin says, "It was a whole series of experiences, mentors, leadership opportunities, encouragement, and challenges that got me to that point. And suddenly, a sense of clarity about calling—something I only barely understood at the time—became so obvious to me."

Calvin is now a 30-something youth director with plans to continue in youth ministry.

As cool as Calvin's story is, we hesitated to share it with you because the point of this Field Guide is not to help you get more young people committed to future ministry careers. But Calvin's story reflects many of the points we've talked about on these pages:

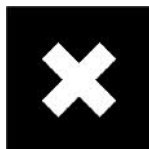
- Calvin had a meaningful and safe place of belonging to try on leading and speaking about his faith.
- He was given many opportunities to serve and, eventually, lead others in serving.
- Calvin was given select "keys," roles for which he had meaningful responsibility.
- He increasingly saw aspects of his identity being shaped as a person of faith and a leader.
- He had a variety of mentors who engaged him in honest dialogue, helping him process his questions, victories, and failures.
- This process for Calvin was gradual, full of stops and starts, and things didn't click for him until he was approaching high school graduation and only had a few months left in youth ministry.
- Ultimately, Calvin developed a strong sense of purpose that connected how he saw himself with the work of God's Kingdom.

Proverbs 20:5 says, "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out (NIV)." This nugget of wisdom speaks so clearly to the work you do with young people. Teenagers are going through a dramatic season of change, growing in what they believe and who they perceive themselves to be. Those are deep waters! But you, amazing youth worker, have the infinite wisdom of God to draw on and your calling is to lovingly accompany young people to discover a sense of purpose connected to Jesus.



Pause for Reflection & Action

What are 2-3 practical ways you could invite young people to engage in leadership, service, justice, or sharing their faith?



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