

# YOUNG ADULT PARENTS

*What happens to faith when  
“nones” have kids.*

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Comprehensive Findings Report

***March 2025***



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# Letter from the director

In a world marked by rapid change and declining trust in institutions, the enduring value of faith and spirituality offers a beacon of hope and guidance. For those who hold onto faith, it remains a source of strength. But what happens when those who identify as having no religious affiliation—commonly referred to as "Nones"—become parents? This question lies at the heart of the *Young Adult Parents Research Project*.

The findings reveal a pivotal moment of transformation. Long-standing traditions of faith transmission are encountering new challenges as the population of "nones" grows and the spiritual landscape shifts. This moment is not simply a crisis but also an invitation—a crossroads where faith communities have the opportunity to adapt, reconnect, and reimagine their role in modern society.

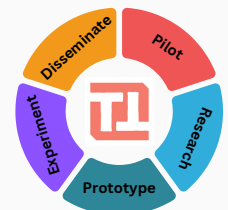
With the insights gathered from this research, we are equipped to explore how spirituality and religion can continue to enrich lives, deepen connections, and foster vibrant communities. These findings are not just data points; they are sparks for your own ministry imagination—an invitation to see this moment as filled with opportunity and possibility.

A special thank you to Iain Chester from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Nikki Collins from the Presbyterian Church (USA) for their invaluable partnership in bringing this project to life.



## The Rev. Dr. Lorenzo Lebrija

Executive Director,  
TryTank Research Institute  
an Initiative of Virginia  
Theological Seminary



# Our Path to Purpose

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We don't just provide data, we provide actionable opportunities based on that data. It's our main distinctive, and we call this process our "path to purpose."

It all begins with an idea or hypothesis.

## Step 1: PILOT.

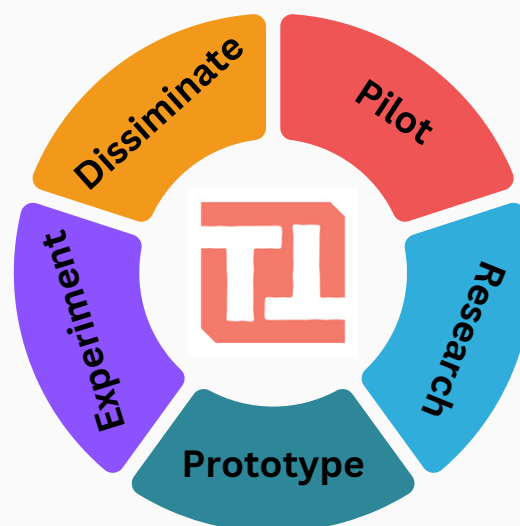
We take the idea into the real world. This might mean a few conversations in the field, or a simple pilot test in a congregation. We're looking to see if there's a "there" there. This is also an opportunity to enter into conversations with others to see what has already been done elsewhere and find possible partners in our work.

*After this step, we YIELD, or pause for a moment. We make sure this project is something worth pursuing further. We might ask about the possible systemic impact of the work, or if it's scaleable. If we determine there's an opportunity, then we proceed.*

## Step 2: RESEARCH.

This is where we make use of the social sciences to systematically investigate the idea. This might include rigorous testing and qualitative and quantitative methods of assessing evidence.

*Then, data in hand, we STOP. The difference between this stop and the previous yield is that we must make the intentional choice to continue. It is not a given. We want to make sure there's a missional case for going forward. This is also an opportunity to seek funding partners to continue. We find that the more collaborators we have, the better the work we do.*



## Step 3: PROTOTYPE.

This is where we stand out. Based on our research, we seek opportunities where interventions might cause a change, then develop a few to consider.

## Step 4: EXPERIMENT.

After settling on a prototype, we go out and try it. We're really good at this "action research." We test things in actual congregational settings to see how they work in the real world. As needed, we iterate and continue to evolve the experiment, seeking the best way to make the intervention work.

*After the action research phase, we YIELD once again to make decisions based on what the research is actually telling us and what could be next. If we choose not to proceed, we create a report on what happened and didn't happen, so in the future others can build on what we've done. If we're seeing distinct results and choose to proceed, we'll look for a partner to take over the project and continue it to completion or on an ongoing basis.*

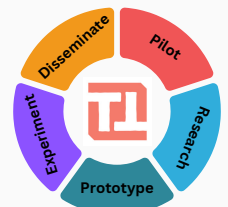
## STEP 5. DISSEMINATE.

Whether we saw the results we were hoping for (or completely different but promising ones), we want what we've done and are doing to be available to the wider world. We'll work with a partner for them to take over the now-nascent ministry and hopefully scale or replicate it.

# Abstract

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The Young Adult Parents Research Project investigates the evolving role of religion and spirituality among parents aged 25-39 in the United States, a group marked by increasing disaffiliation from organized religion. Through a mixed-methods approach—quantitative surveys with over 4,000 participants and qualitative interviews with 22 parents—this study provides insights into how religious identity and spirituality influence parenting decisions, values, and engagement with faith institutions. Key findings reveal significant shifts, including declining institutional trust, limited concern for faith transmission, and heightened life challenges during young adulthood. Despite these trends, faith communities may engage this demographic through relational strategies and innovative approaches to spiritual formation. This comprehensive report synthesizes these findings, offering both academic analysis and practical recommendations for faith communities aiming to connect with this demographic.



# Overview

By Josh Packard, PhD  
*Research Director*

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The religious landscape in the United States has undergone massive shifts in recent decades. The number of U.S. adults who now identify as “Nones” has more than doubled since 2005 and now makes up  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the population, largely driven by massive increases of young people rejecting institutional affiliations. At the same time, the number of self-identified Christians has fallen dramatically along with membership and church attendance numbers[1] while self-professed spirituality has increased[2].

This environment raises significant concerns for many current models of congregational life. Chief among the questions is what happens when Nones start having children. Historically, the church has relied on parenting as a pathway back into the faith for adults who maybe stopped attending during their late teenage years and into their twenties. This theory held for much of the 20th century, as early adulthood disengagement was often due to competing life events—such as university studies, career relocations, increased independence, and relationships—rather than outright rejection.

In fact, I’ve had lead pastors of major churches tell me that they basically don’t have anything specific for people in their twenties because, “they’re all going to come back when they have kids anyway.”

Increasingly, though, that just doesn’t seem to be the case. A generation of people who have explicitly rejected institutional forms of religious expression are very likely to raise their children differently when it comes to religious and spiritual formation, if they’re planning on raising kids at all.

As recently as 2013, Gallup reported that over 85% of older U.S. adults have had children[3]. That number appears to be headed for a steep decline. Our results show that nearly 40% of 25-39 year-olds are not planning to have children[4].

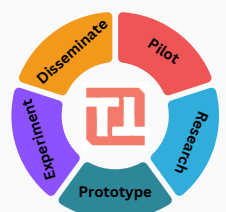
One thing that remains constant is that despite the changes in religious affiliation, attendance, and identification in recent decades, families and parents remain the single most influential predictor of faith identity for young people.

[1] Pew Research Center. “[About Three-in-Ten Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated](https://pewrsr.ch/3WZmRz5).” Available at <https://pewrsr.ch/3WZmRz5>

[2] Pew Research Center. “[More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual But Not Religious](https://pewrsr.ch/4iebYSn).” Available at: <https://pewrsr.ch/4iebYSn>

[3] Gallup. “[Desire For Children Still Norm In U.S.](https://bit.ly/42V2EOG)” Available at: <https://bit.ly/42V2EOG>

[4] These findings are in line with recent findings from Pew as well. Pew Research Center. “[More Childless U.S. Adults Now Say They Don’t Plan To Ever Have Kids](https://pewrsr.ch/4hB9CwJ).” Available at: <https://pewrsr.ch/4hB9CwJ>





But just what those parents will be influencing their children toward and how they plan on doing that influencing remains an open question.

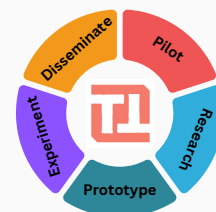
There is currently no national research and data collection focused on Young Adult Parents that is actionable and can guide the next decade of efforts to attract and retain the next generation of parents and children.

TryTank and a coalition of denominational leaders are coming together to better understand how all of these changes are impacting young adult parents (YAPs). We have undertaken a comprehensive research project consisting of:

- Phase I: Nationally representative survey of 3119 adults aged 25-39 who either have children or plan to have children conducted in October 2023[1]
- Phase 2: In-depth interviews with 22 Young Adult Parents conducted in March 2024
- Phase 3: Nationally representative survey of 1033 adults aged 25-39 who either have children or plan to have children conducted in June 2024

Each phase has built upon our previous learning while keeping a core set of questions for continuity.

[1] Centiment panels were used with weighting for gender and margin of error of +/- 3%.





This research was conducted in three phases, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to ensure a comprehensive understanding of young adult parents' (YAPs) relationships with religion and spirituality and their plans for transmitting their beliefs and values to their children. Each phase was designed to build on the findings of the previous, offering nuanced insights into this demographic's perspectives and behaviors.

## Phase I: Quantitative Survey-Round 1

The first phase involved a nationally representative survey conducted in October 2023. This survey captured responses from 3119 participants aged 25-39, who are either parents or are prospective parents by their own

declaration. The survey design included weighting for gender and ensured a margin of error of  $\pm 3\%$ , using Centiment panels to achieve balanced representation.

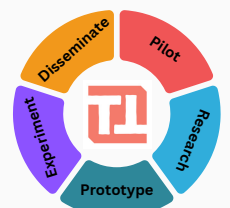
Key survey components included:

- Demographic profiling (e.g., race, gender, education level, religious affiliation).
- Questions assessing attitudes toward institutional religion, spirituality, and parenting values.
- Behavioral metrics such as participation in religious activities and sources of parenting support.
- Perceptions of challenges, barriers to religious engagement, and key life transitions over the past five years.

Survey results were analyzed to identify statistical patterns and significant differences among three primary groups: Active Affiliates, Inactive Affiliates, and Nones (those with no religious affiliation).

## Phase II: Qualitative Interviews

The second phase consisted of in-depth interviews with 22 young adult parents,





conducted in March 2024. Participants were selected to reflect the diversity of the survey sample, including variations in religious affiliation, parenting status, and geographic location. The interviews provided rich qualitative data on participants' lived experiences, parenting philosophies, and engagement (or lack thereof) with spiritual practices.

Key interview themes explored:

- Parenting motivations and values.
- Perceived role of religion and spirituality in family life.
- Experiences with religious institutions and their perceived relevance.
- Strategies for navigating major life transitions and challenges.

Interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and unique insights. These qualitative findings were triangulated with the survey data to deepen understanding and contextualize quantitative trends.

### Phase III: Quantitative Survey-Round 2

The final phase of this research was a nationally representative survey conducted in July 2024. This survey captured responses from 1033 participants aged 25-39, who are either parents or are prospective parents by their own declaration. This survey built upon the insights from the first survey and the qualitative findings to focus on what kinds of programming or offering from churches would be of interest for young adult parents with the aim of engaging

them and their children with local congregations.

Key survey components included:

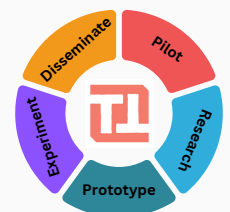
- Demographic profiling (e.g., race, gender, education level, religious affiliation).
- Questions assessing attitudes toward institutional religion, spirituality, and parenting values.
- Questions about the transmission of religious and spiritual values
- Questions designed to gather insight about virtues worth instilling in young people and how those virtues are passed from generation to generation

### Limitations

While the study offers significant insights, several limitations should be noted:

- The qualitative sample size (22 participants) limits the generalizability of those findings.
- Self-reported survey data may be subject to bias, particularly on topics related to religious identity and parenting values.
- Certain groups, such as single parents, parents from non-Christian faith traditions, and those in rural communities, may be underrepresented due to sampling constraints.

Despite these limitations, the combination of robust quantitative methods and detailed qualitative narratives provides a comprehensive picture of young adult parents' relationships with religion and spirituality.



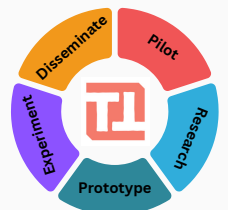
# Major Findings

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Six major findings emerged from the data in addition to the specific project objectives discussed in the next section. Internally, we have been referring to these as headlines. They are very likely not the only headlines, and I strongly encourage you to look through the data in the appendix to see what questions you have or what trends you notice that are important.

- \* Major Finding 1:  
**The faith stops here (or Nones are parenting VERY differently)**
- \* Major Finding 2:  
**Parents are worried about a lot of things...but religion is the least of their concerns**
- \* Major Finding 3:  
**Life is hard...and the church is not seen as a resource**
- \* Major Finding 4:  
**Jesus is popular...but the church isn't**
- \* Major Finding 5:  
**Parents are overwhelmingly confident in their ability to teach their kids to live meaningful lives**
- \* Major Finding 6:  
**Parents think virtues are essential for their kids...but that the church doesn't teach them.**

Each of these findings is discussed below with supporting data and detail.

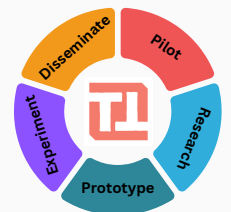
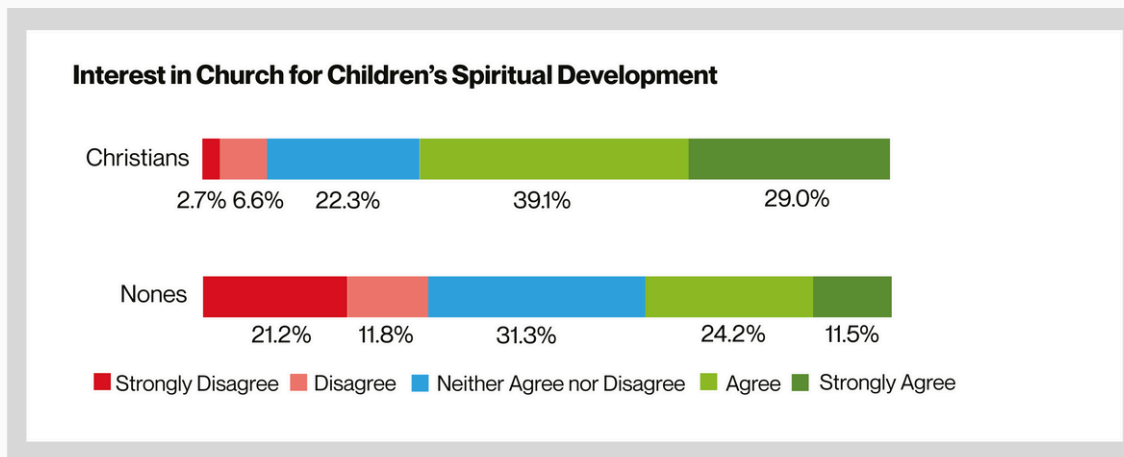


## \* Major Finding 1: The faith stops here (or Nones are parenting VERY differently)

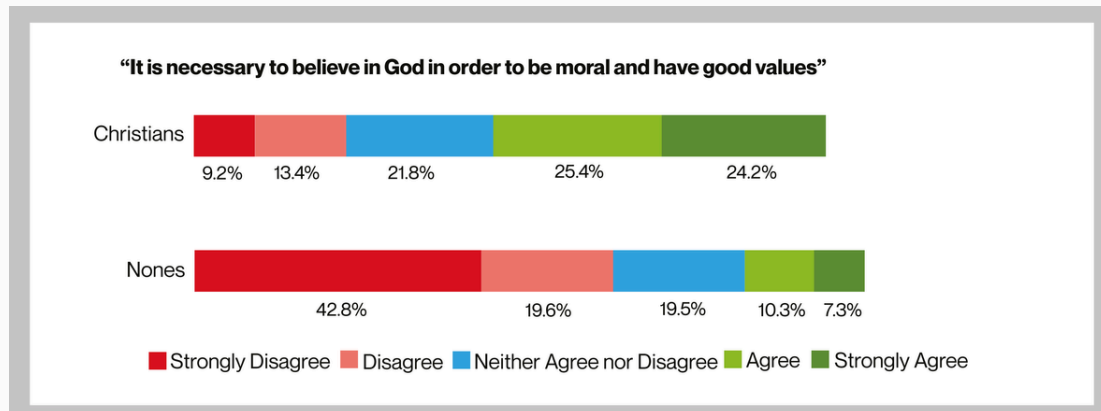
We asked a number of questions about how parents are providing or planning to provide for the spiritual and religious development of their children. The divide between those affiliated with traditional religious systems (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism) and those with no religious affiliation, the “Nones,” is significant. Across the board, a story emerges where the Nones are pretty clearly rejecting institutional forms of faith and planning on engaging them little if at all in the course of their parenting.

In every case, the Nones are nearly the exact opposite of their traditionally religious counterparts. They are statistically significantly less likely to take their kids to church, formal religious instruction, encourage them to participate in a faith tradition or engage in religious rites of passage. Nones also show significantly less concern about their children losing faith, developing spirituality, or engaging in religion.

### Parental Interest in Church Attendance for Children's Spiritual Development by Religious Affiliation



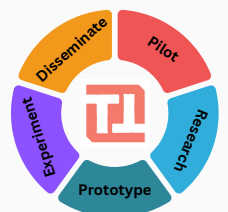
## Perceived Connection Between Religious Belief and Moral Values by Religious Affiliation



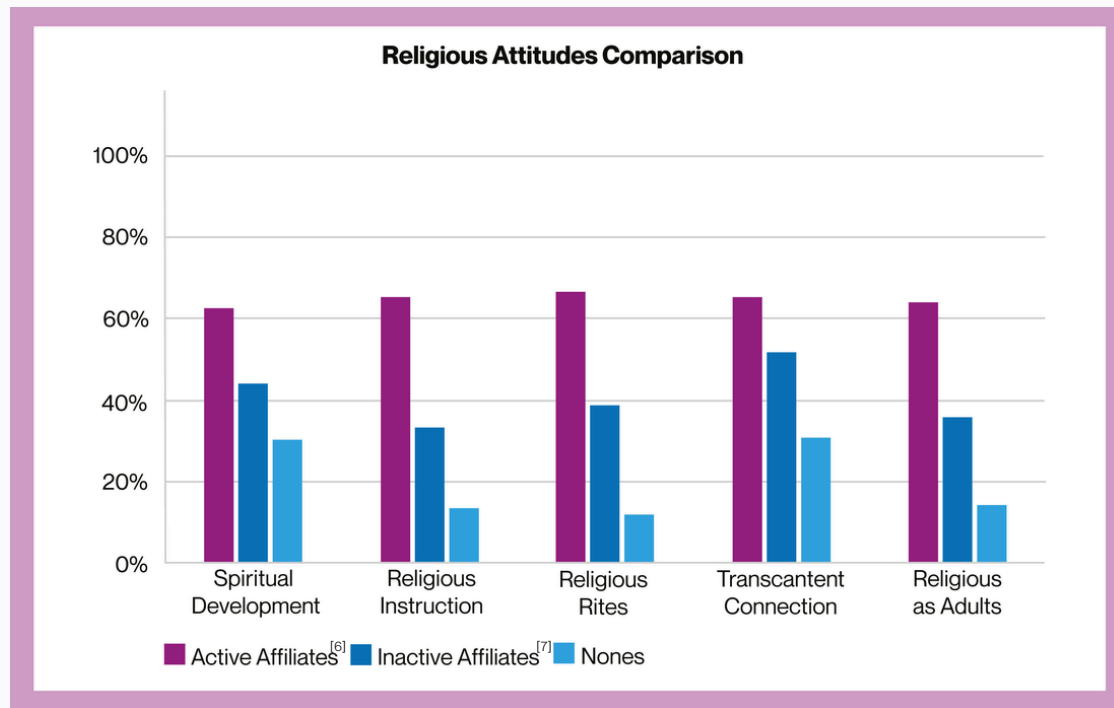
In other words, Nones as parents present a significant challenge to the church. They are simply not concerned about formal, institutional religious and spiritual formation of their children. Even when compared with inactive affiliates (those who claim a religious affiliation but do not attend), they stand out.

Inactive affiliates are open to the idea of returning to regular religious life even if just for their children with over half agreeing that they are in fact planning on it and strongly support their children engaging in some kind of religious or spiritual life.

It is worth noting that at some level more regular attendance seems to be turning people OFF of the idea of raising their kids in the faith. The "Perceived Connection" table above shows that the rate of discouragement doubles among people who have an affiliation and attend regularly. In fact, they are nearly three times as likely to discourage their kids from participating in a faith tradition than Nones are. This suggests that attendance on Sunday mornings might not be the silver bullet to re-engaging Young Adult Parents.



## Religious and Spiritual Attitudes Across Faith Groups



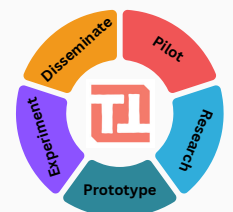
If Nones are not interested in passing on the faith through formal avenues, perhaps they are planning on less formal mechanisms for imparting religious or spiritual knowledge. In this area, we find much more of a mixed bag. 53% of Nones said they plan to let their religious/spiritual beliefs inform their parenting “Very little” or “Not at all” compared to 24% of Inactive Affiliates and just 5% of Active Affiliates. Along those same lines, only 5% of Nones say

they trust religious texts/leaders for parenting advice, compared to 21% of Inactive Affiliates and 53% of Active Affiliates,

Additionally, over half of Nones (52.3%) say it’s “Not at all important” for their kids to be faithful/religious as adults compared to just 14.8% of Inactive Affiliates and 2% of Active Affiliates, indicating that they are not planning to

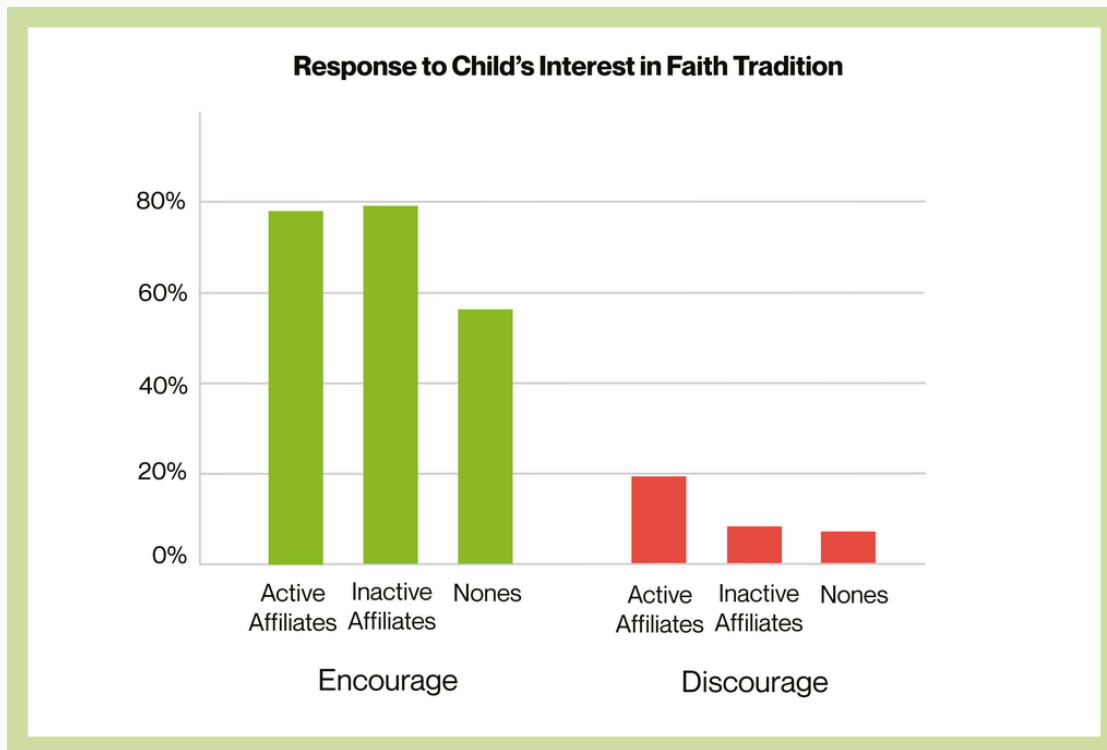
[6] People who claim a religious affiliation and attend services once per month or more.

[7] People who claim a religious affiliation and attend services “seldom” or “never.”



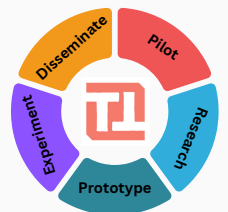


## Parental Response to Children's Religious Interest by Faith Affiliation



place much of an emphasis in this area during their parenting.

However, as we saw above, over  $\frac{1}{3}$  of Nones still desire a connection to the transcendent for their kids and 29% of Nones agreed that when things are hard their faith/belief in God sustains them and gets them through. Additionally, over 60% of Nones say they are spiritual and/or religious in some way and about 45% express trust for local congregations and religious people.

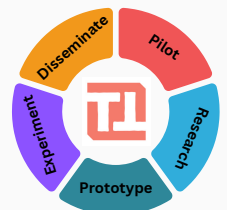
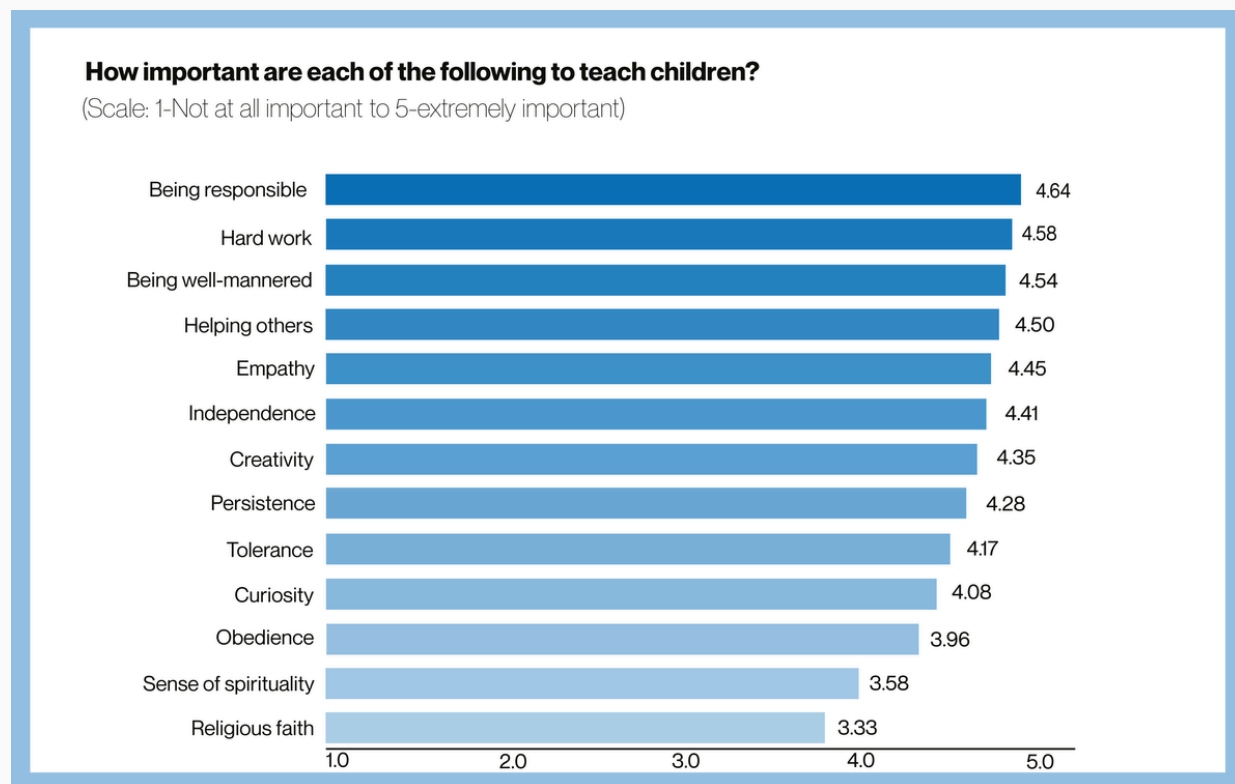


## \* Major Finding 2: Parents are worried about a lot of things...but religion is the least of their concerns

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We asked parents and likely parents about a variety of issues likely to come up with childraising including asking them to rate how important it is to teach different skills to their children and how much they worry about different scenarios. **In both cases, issues of faith and spirituality ranked last for parents.** Additionally, parents and prospective parents are not particularly concerned with passing on their faith. When we asked them about what they wanted for their children as adults, having similar religious beliefs ranked ahead of only having similar political beliefs.

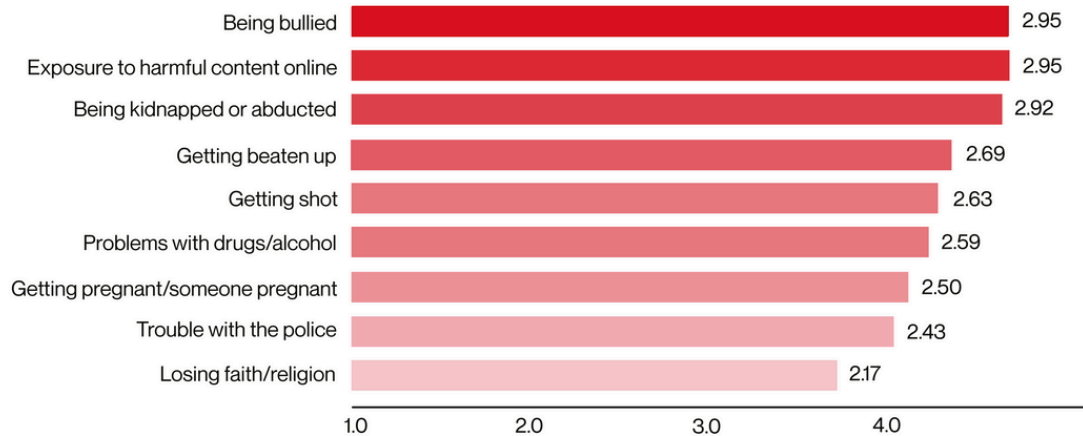
### Priority Rankings of Values and Skills in Child Development



## Parental Concerns Ranked by Level of Worry

**How worried are you about each of the following?**

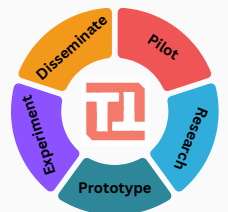
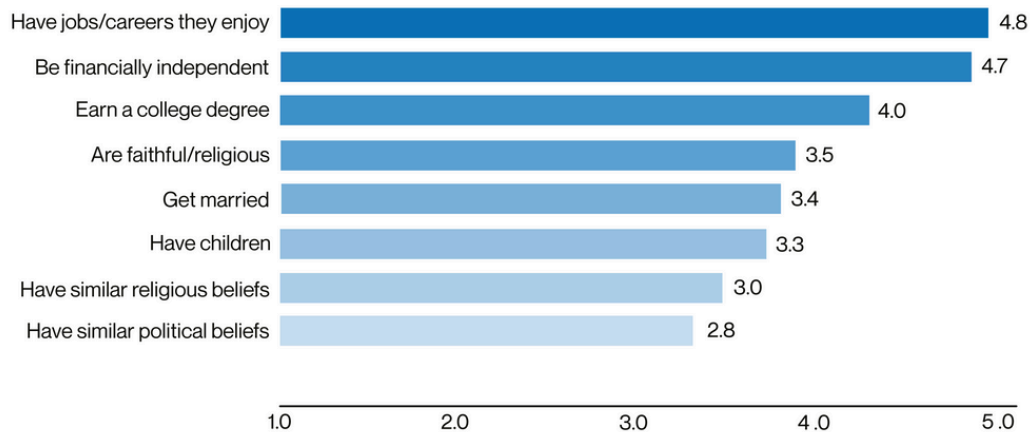
Scale: 1-Not worried at all to 4-Extremely worried



## Parents' Priorities for Children's Adult Life Outcomes

**How important is it that your children do each of the following as adults?**

Mean Important Rating: 1-Not worried at all to 5-Extremely worried.



The data suggest that for parents and prospective parents there has been a decoupling of faith/spirituality from other indicators of thriving. Parents want their kids to have good careers, be financially stable, work hard, etc. However, they don't necessarily see faith as connected to those endeavors. This suggests that the church has done a poor job of showing how a strong religious or spiritual life is intertwined with the other areas of health and happiness.

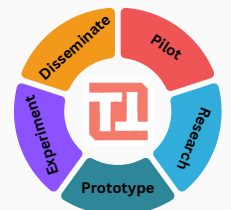
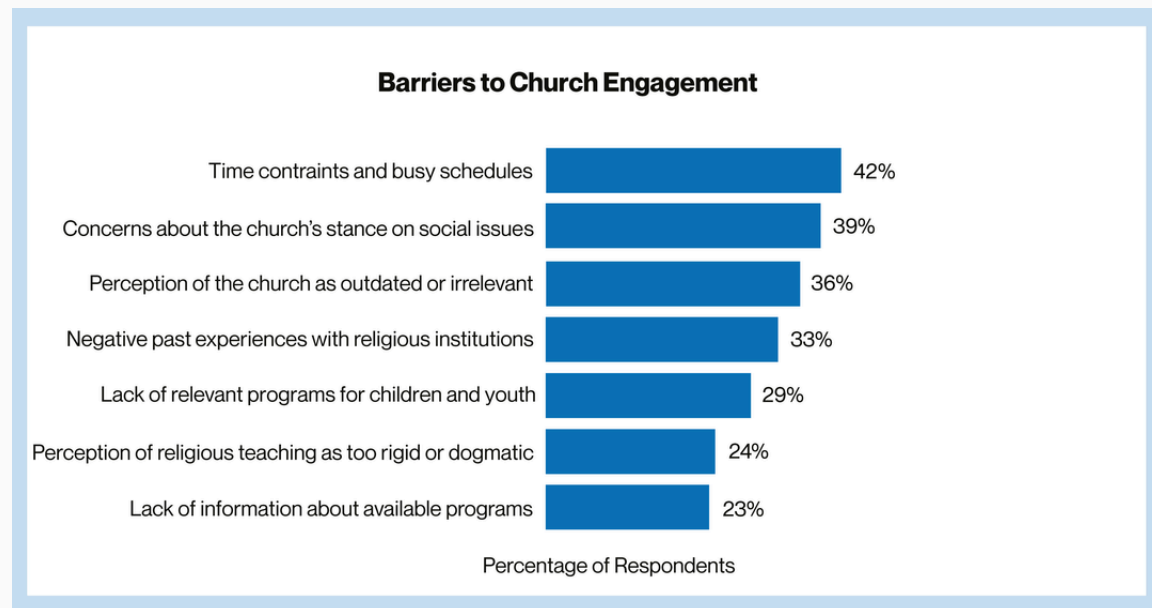
Gallup has consistently demonstrated that people who are religious experience better wellbeing[8], but that connection has not been made clear to the general public. Religious

leaders should resist boiling down their faith to a tool for health and happiness, but emphasizing the connection between a relationship with God and a life of purpose and meaning deserves more focus than it's been getting, especially for young parents.

When we asked YAPs some further questions about barriers to engaging with religious institutions for their children, they cited "time constraints and busy schedules" as the number one obstacle, indicating that religion is not out-competing other obligations for young adult parents' time.

[8] Gallup. "Religion and Spirituality: Tools for Better Wellbeing?" Available at: <https://bit.ly/4hSOkdD>

## Key Barriers to Church Engagement Among Young Parents



## \* Major Finding 3: **Life is hard...and the church is not seen as a resource**

Young adults experience unexpected challenges as they navigate dramatic changes in their religious and spiritual lives, along with other major life transitions, during their twenties and thirties.

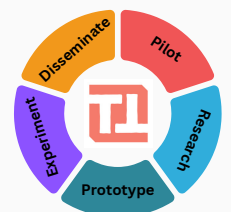
When we asked our respondents about their experiences in the last 5 years it was clear that this is a tumultuous time of life, which is not surprising. Respondents were allowed to pick all that applied from a provided list and each of the following had over 20% selected: Death of someone close (54%), Career/job change (51%), Friendship loss (45%), Moving to new town/city (33%), Childbirth (33%), Promotion at work (29%) and Marriage (20%).

Additionally, when we asked people about religion and spirituality in particular about 1/4 said that during their 20s they became more religious (28%) or less religious (25%). The same fluctuation held true for spirituality with 37% saying they became more spiritual during their 20s and 15% saying they became less spiritual.

Furthermore, when we asked them to imagine their life in 5 years and indicate whether they think they will be involved in a religious community/congregation as a member or regular participant we see a similar pattern. About 15% of those who are currently attending services monthly or more often say that in 5 years they will not be involved in a religious community while 30% of those who “seldom” or “never” attend currently indicated that they likely will be involved in 5 years.

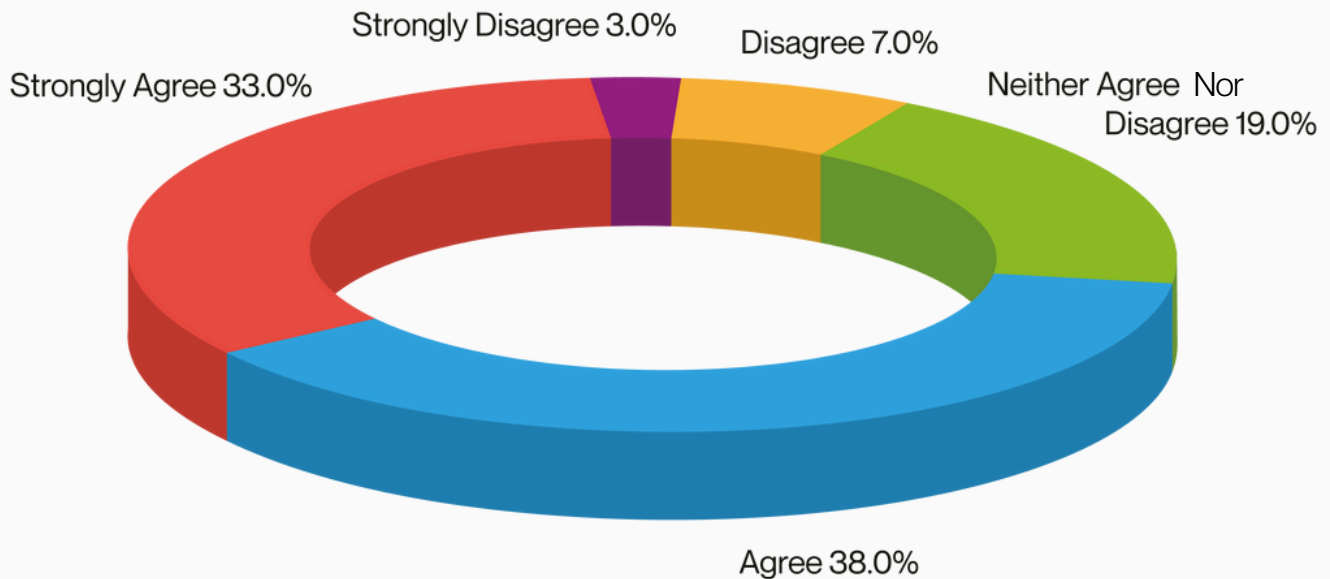
Throughout this fluctuation and change, there are strikingly few professionals or institutions our respondents turned to for help. Family (94%), friends (92%), and spouses/partners (86%) were most frequently cited as sources of help and were the most helpful for those who used them. These highly relational sources of aid proved to be more competent than trained professionals. Where family, friends, and spouses all ranked above 3 on a four-point scale (Not at all helpful-1...Extremely helpful-4), none of the professionals on the list got above a 3. Therapists (2.96), support groups (2.95), spiritual directors (2.87), mentors/teachers (2.86), caseworkers (2.70) and mediums (2.64) were all ranked lower. Although the individual differences are not big, the trend of finding help in highly relational spaces is important to note. Church communities ranked mid-range in perceived helpfulness, with a score of 2.91.

These findings become critical because people do seem to need genuine help at this stage of life. At the end of the survey we asked people about their experience of life overall. **A shocking 71% of our respondents agreed that “life is generally harder than I expected it to be at this point.”**





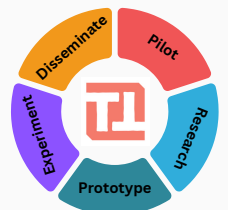
### Young Parents' Assessment of Life's Challenges



Response to the statement *"life is generally harder than I expected it to be at this point."*

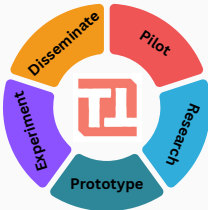
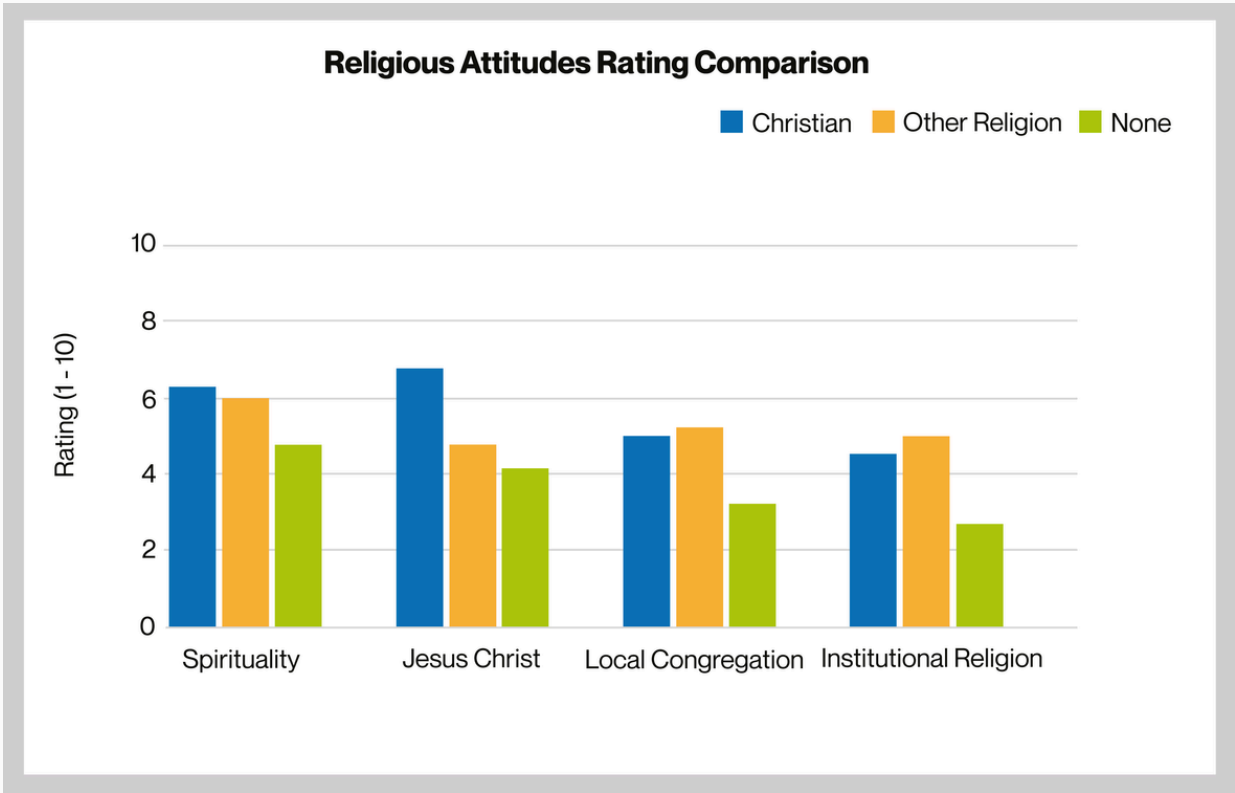
Not surprisingly, people in their twenties and thirties are times of significant change. Major life events and identity shifts add up to create a situation that is much more difficult than people were expecting. In these moments, they are turning to relationships and people they trust to help them navigate all the changes. Churches and congregations have an important role to play here, but only if they lead with truly relational strategies that recognize all of the myriad of life events that make up a person's life at this time.

The impact of all of these changes for parents and prospective parents cannot be compartmentalized. To reach people in this time, you have to not only speak to their needs as parents, but do so in a way that can fit in with all of the other changes in their lives.

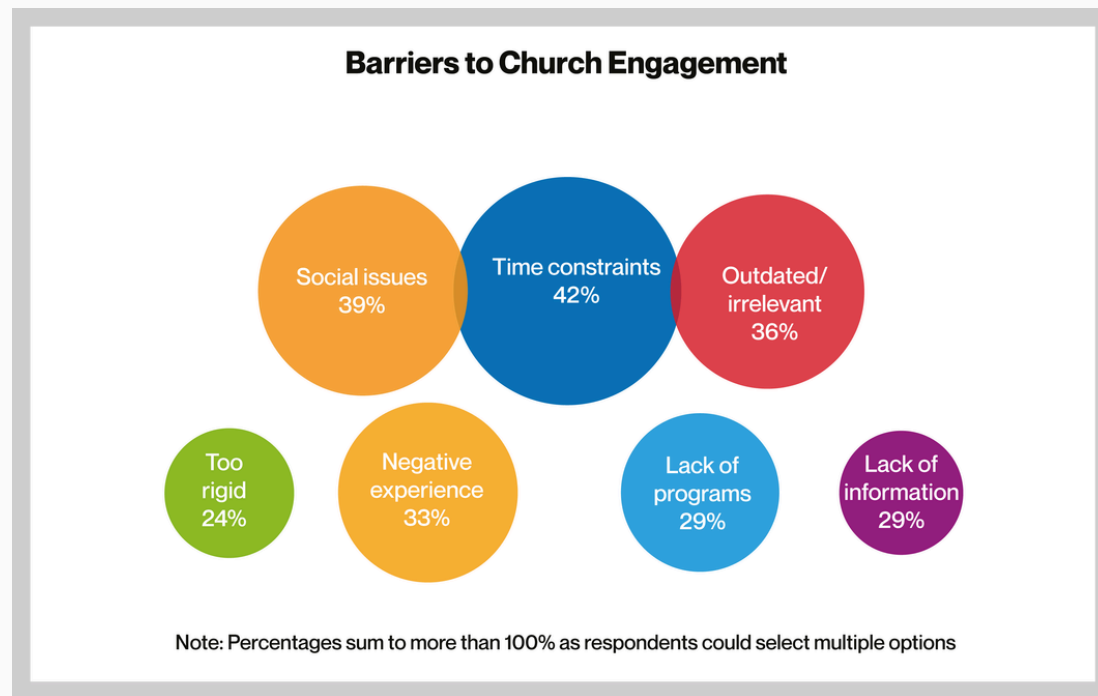


\* Major Finding 4:  
**Jesus is popular...but the church isn't**

Across all groups, Jesus is viewed much more favorably than the institutional church. In some respects, this is a branding issue. The fact that Jesus and the church are viewed as different from one another speaks volumes. However, other data confirm the story of institutional distrust among a broader movement away from social institutions of all kinds.

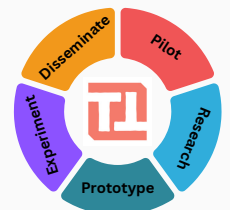
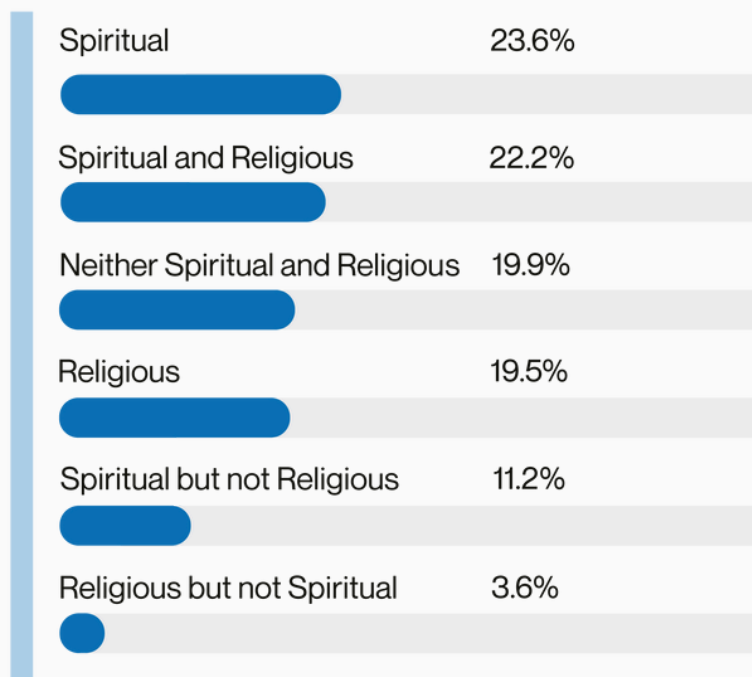


## Key Barriers to Church Engagement Among Young Parents



On a personal note, only 45% of Young Adult Parents identified as religious in any way when given the opportunity to couple their identity with spirituality. Again, this both suggests a move away from institutional affinity and opens up an opportunity for church leaders to put Jesus more front and center as Jesus is viewed differently and more favorably than the institution.

## Self-described Spirituality and Religiosity



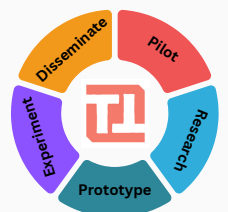
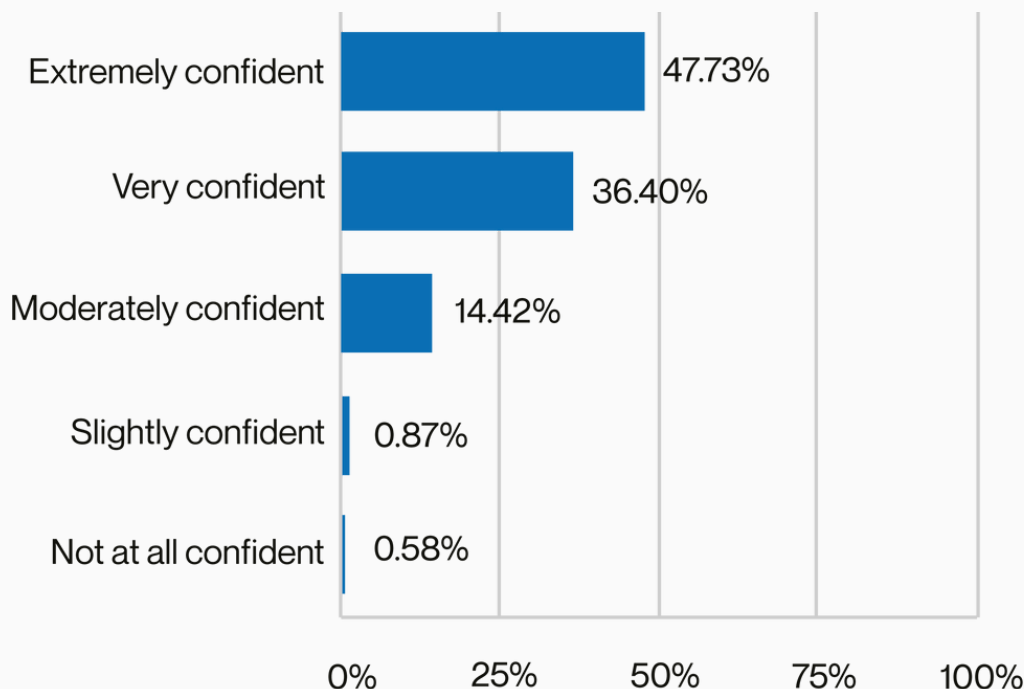
**Major Finding 5:**  
**Parents are overwhelmingly confident in their ability to teach their kids to live meaningful lives**

84.13% of parents reported being "Extremely" or "Very Confident" in their ability to guide their children towards a life of meaning and purpose. One of the most striking findings of this study is the confidence Young Adult Parents express in their ability to provide their children with a life filled with meaning and purpose. While parents acknowledge the importance of values and moral development, they overwhelmingly see themselves and their family as the primary drivers of this process—diminishing the

perceived role of the church or other institutions.

When asked directly about their ability to teach their children the skills needed for a meaningful life, an overwhelming 84.13% of parents rated themselves as "Extremely" or "Very Confident." This strong self-assurance stands in contrast to the relatively low percentages of parents who turn to institutions, such as churches, for guidance in this area.

**How confident are you in your ability to teach your children the skills needed to lead a life filled with meaning and purpose?**



This confidence extends to moral education:

- 56% of parents stated their children would learn about morality primarily at home.
- 65% pointed to extended family as an additional source.
- Only 26% mentioned the church as a key resource for moral instruction.

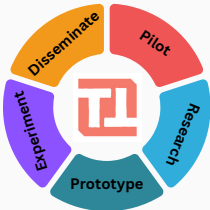
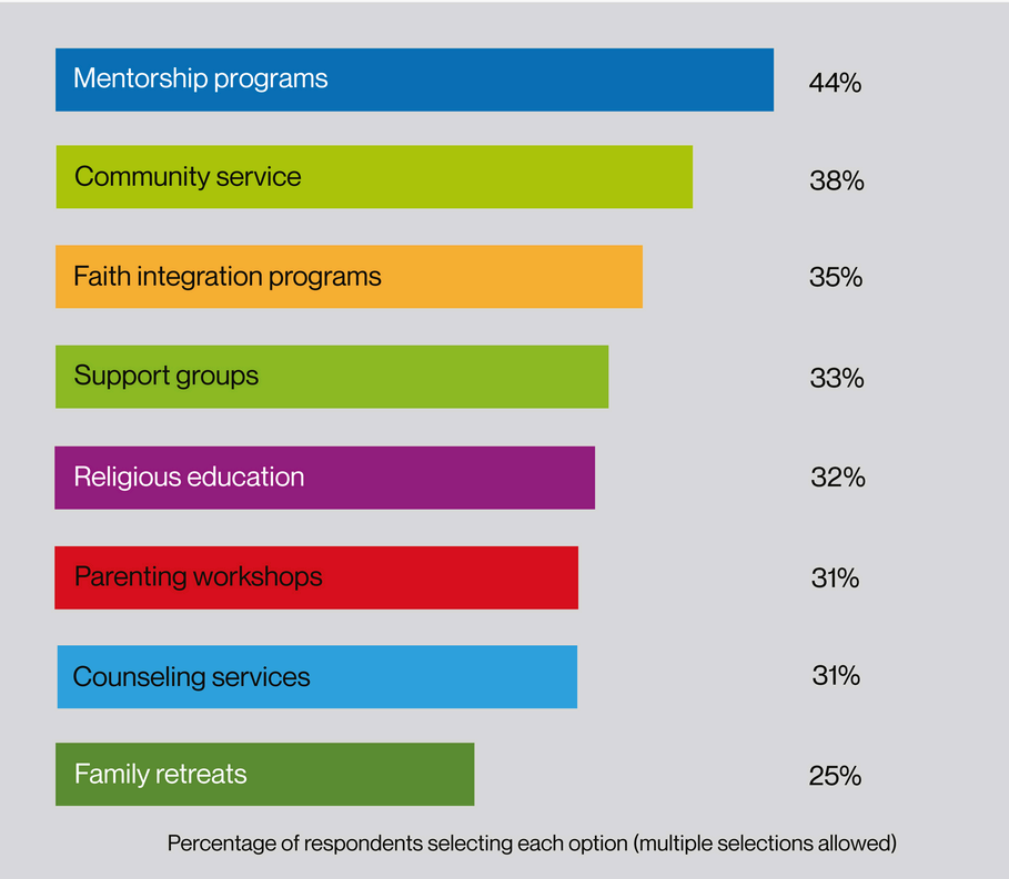
While parents value the role of virtues in their children’s lives, their interest in receiving institutional support from churches is notably

low. When asked about the kinds of support they would find most helpful:

- Only 31% selected "Parenting workshops or classes."
- Mentorship programs for children and teens ranked higher at 44%.
- Community service opportunities for families came in at 38%.

These results suggest a shift in focus from traditional church programming to more action-oriented or family-centered activities.

Preferred Types of Church Support Programs

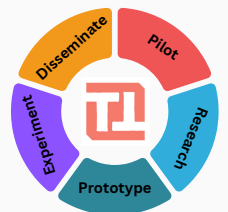
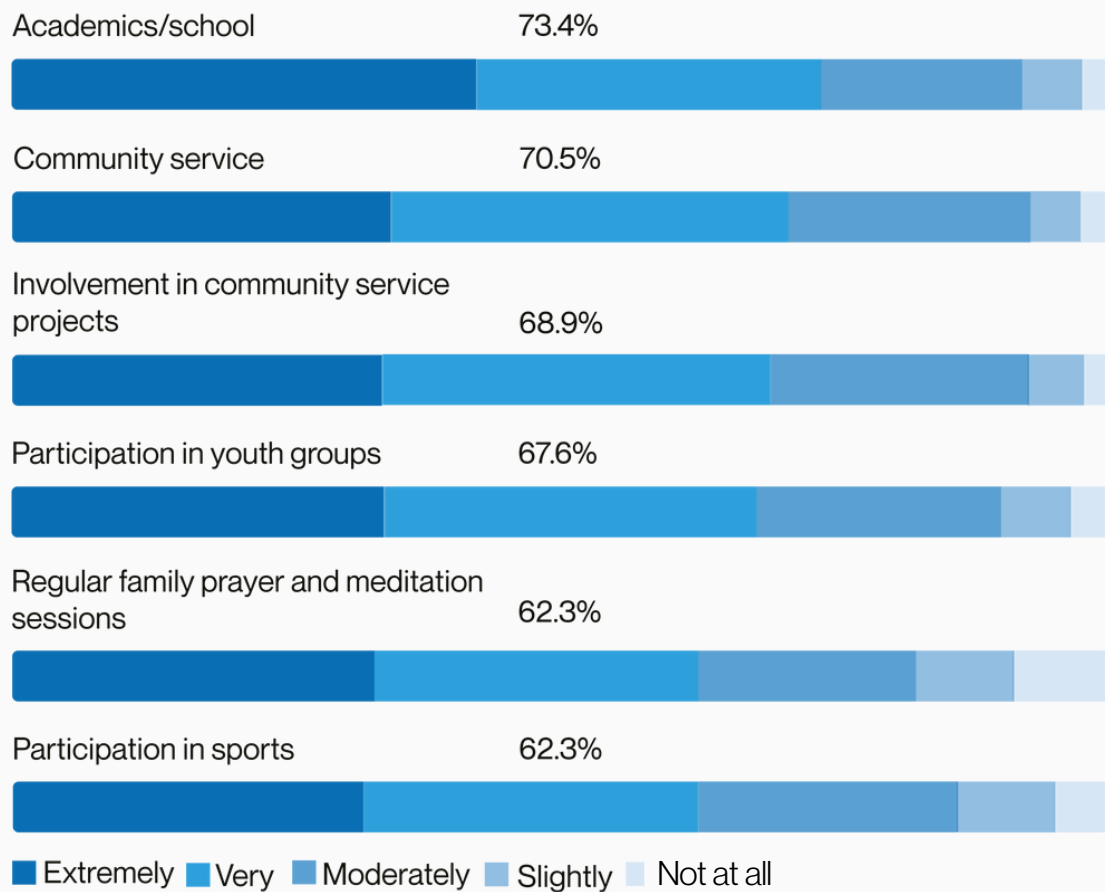




When evaluating the effectiveness of different activities in instilling meaning and purpose in children's lives, parents rated academics and community service highest:

- 42.1% of parents rated academics as "Extremely Effective."
- Community service followed closely at 34.3%.
- Religious activities, such as youth groups (33.9%) and religious education classes (25.7%), were ranked significantly lower.

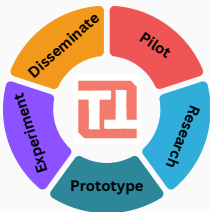
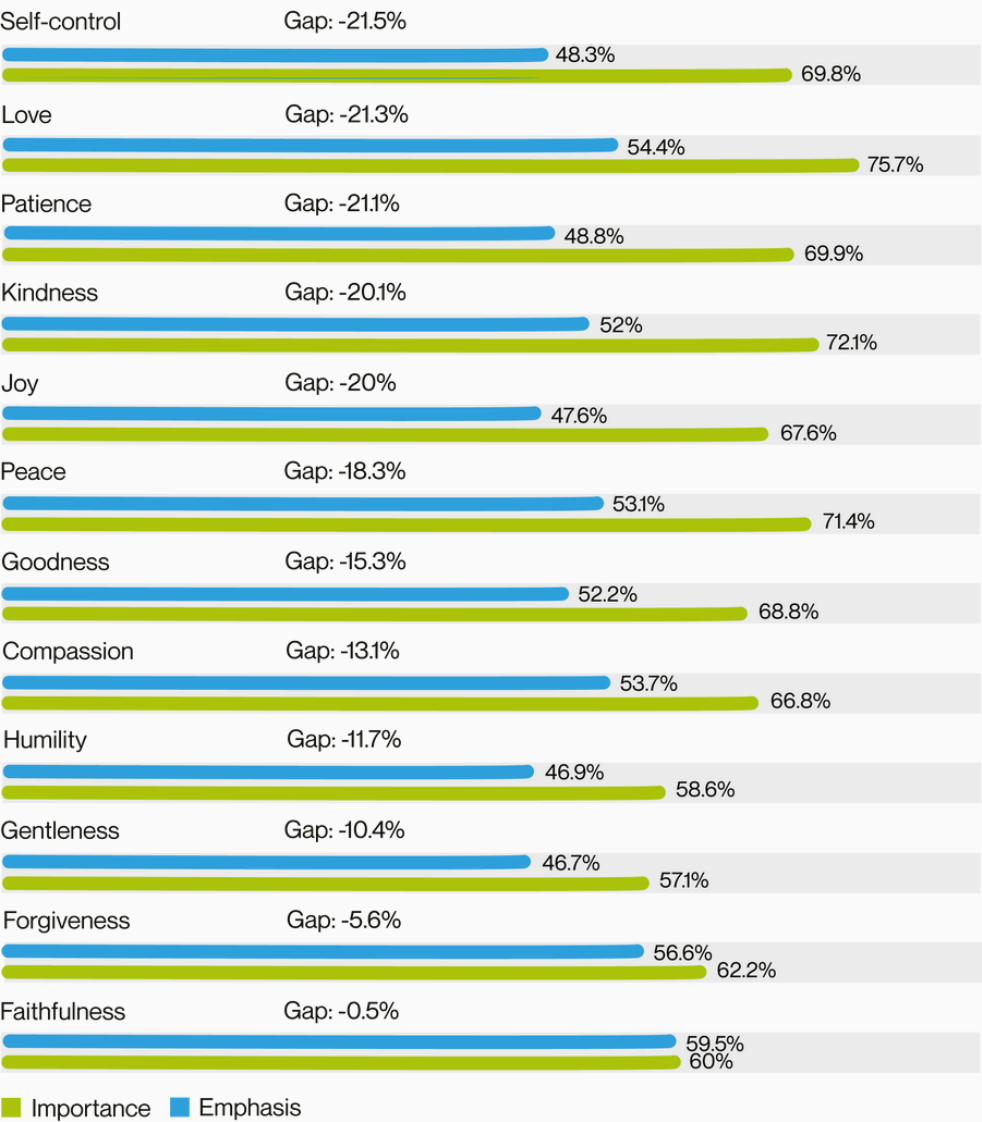
### Effectiveness Ratings of Activities for Building Purpose and Meaning



**\* Major Finding 6:**  
**Parents think virtues are essential for their kids...but that the church doesn't teach them.**

For centuries, religious teachings have emphasized virtues as a foundation for moral and spiritual growth. This aligns well with the views of today’s YAPs, who overwhelmingly agree that these values are crucial for their children to learn. However, a gap exists between how important parents find these virtues and how well they think the church incorporates them into its teachings and activities.

**Gap Analysis: Perceived Importance vs. Church Emphasis on Values**



When parents were asked about the importance of various virtues for their children, over 85% rated each as either “Extremely Important” or “Very Important.” The highest-rated virtues include:

- Love (75.7%)
- Peace (71.4%)
- Kindness (72.1%)
- Self-control (69.8%)

This demonstrates that parents place a premium on teaching values like compassion, humility, and forgiveness as essential tools for building meaningful lives.

While parents agree on the importance of these virtues, they are less confident that the church adequately emphasizes them. Significant gaps exist between the perceived importance of virtues and how well they are reflected in church teachings:

- Love: A 21.3% gap between importance and church emphasis.

- Self-control: A 21.5% gap.
- Patience: A 21.1% gap.

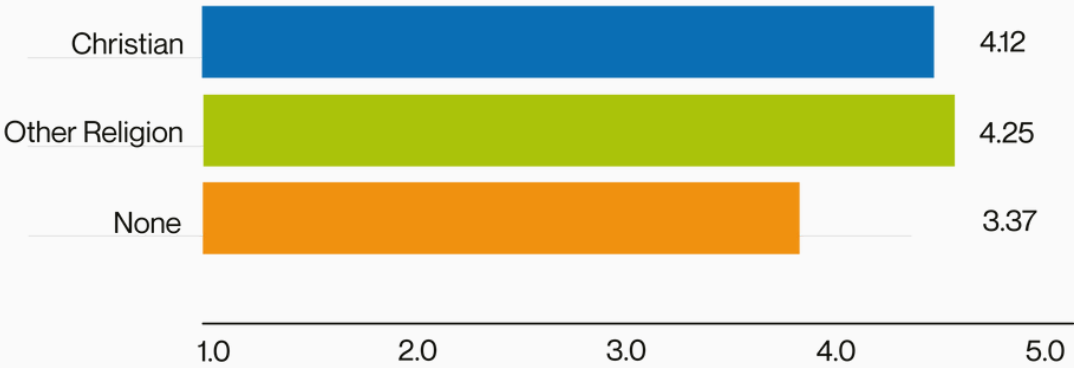
Even for virtues like forgiveness, where the gap is smaller, it remains evident that parents feel the church could do more to reflect these values in its teachings.

Mixed Views on the Church’s Effectiveness

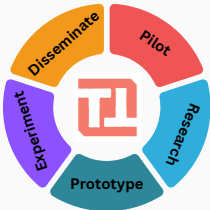
When asked to rate the church’s overall effectiveness in helping youth develop virtues and life skills, opinions were mixed. Responses varied significantly depending on religious affiliation:

- Christians rated the church at a mean of 4.12 (on a 1–5 scale).
- Other Religions gave a slightly higher rating of 4.25.
- Nones offered a much lower mean score of 3.37.

Church Effectiveness in Youth Value Development by Religious Affiliation  
(Scale: 1-Terrible to 5-Excellent)



Mean rating shown for each group



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# Conclusion

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## Summary of Findings

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of how young adult parents (YAPs) perceive and engage with religion and spirituality. The findings reveal a significant shift away from institutional religion, driven by logistical barriers, cultural disconnects, and a growing preference for individualized and action-oriented approaches to moral and spiritual development.

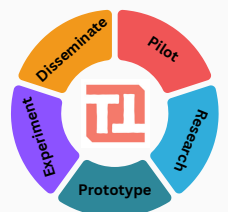
Key takeaways include:

1. **None's are real:** A substantial proportion of YAPs are disengaged from institutional religion, yet many still express a desire for spiritual connection and meaning.
2. **Shifting Priorities:** Parents prioritize values like empathy, responsibility, and tolerance over traditional religious instruction, reflecting a broader cultural move toward practical, inclusive virtues.
3. **Barriers to Engagement:** Time constraints, perceptions that the church is outdated, and negative past experiences hinder YAPs' participation in traditional faith communities.
4. **Opportunities for Innovation:** Relational strategies, service-oriented programming, and flexible, inclusive spiritual practices offer pathways for re-engagement.

## Implications for Faith Communities

To remain relevant and impactful, churches must adopt a more adaptive and innovative approach. This includes:

- **Prioritizing Relationships:** Building trust through small, relationally focused groups and mentorship opportunities.
- **Reframe Spirituality:** Framing faith as an inclusive and action-oriented journey aligned with contemporary values like social justice and compassion.
- **Enhancing Accessibility:** Offering flexible formats, such as digital worship options or family-oriented service projects, to accommodate YAPs' busy schedules.
- **Healing Historical Wounds:** Addressing past exclusionary or judgmental practices with humility and intentionality, fostering safe spaces for dialogue and growth.



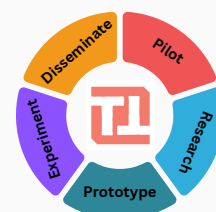
## Future Research Directions

While this study provides critical insights, additional research is needed to deepen understanding and guide actionable strategies:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Examining how YAPs' spiritual engagement evolves over time, particularly as their children grow.
2. **Interfaith Perspectives:** Exploring how YAPs from diverse religious backgrounds navigate these dynamics.
3. **Impact Assessments:** Measuring the effectiveness of innovative church programs designed to address the identified barriers and opportunities.

## Final Thoughts

The findings of this study underscore a pivotal moment for faith communities. The primary challenge is adapting to the evolving needs and values of young adult parents while maintaining the core principles of faith and spirituality. By embracing change and prioritizing relational, flexible, and inclusive approaches, churches have the opportunity to re-establish themselves as meaningful and relevant to this demographic.





# Action Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following detailed recommendations provide actionable strategies for churches seeking to engage young adult parents (YAPs):

## 1. Relational Engagement: Moving from Institution to Community

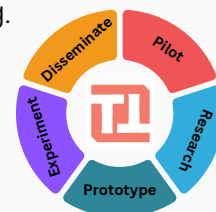
- **Small Groups:** Foster authentic relationships through interest-based groups such as parenting circles, book clubs, or activity-based meetups.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Pair young parents with experienced parents or faith leaders who can provide guidance without judgment.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Create spaces where parents can connect with others facing similar life challenges, emphasizing mutual support over formal instruction.

## 2. Service-Oriented Programming: Faith in Action

- **Family Service Opportunities:** Organize community service projects where parents and children can participate together, such as food drives, environmental cleanups, or assisting the homeless.
- **Justice and Advocacy Programs:** Engage parents in social justice initiatives that align with their values, such as racial equity, climate justice, or community reform.
- **Highlight Outcomes:** Showcase the tangible impact of service projects to reinforce the connection between faith and action.

## 3. Flexible Worship and Programming: Meeting Parents Where They Are

- **Alternative Worship Formats:** Offer shorter, family-friendly services, outdoor gatherings, or midweek options to accommodate busy schedules.
- **Digital and Hybrid Models:** Provide livestreams, recorded sermons, and online discussion forums for parents who cannot attend in person.
- **Pop-Up Events:** Host community gatherings in accessible locations, such as parks, libraries, or community centers, rather than expecting parents to come to a church building.



#### 4. Inclusive Spirituality: Broadening the Church's Appeal

- **Focus on Shared Values:** Emphasize virtues like compassion, empathy, and justice that resonate universally, even among those skeptical of institutional religion.
- **Welcoming Language and Practices:** Use inclusive language that avoids rigid dogma and respects diverse family structures and beliefs.
- **Interfaith and Ecumenical Efforts:** Partner with other faith traditions to host joint events, fostering inclusivity and collaboration.

#### 5. Rebuilding Trust: Healing Historical Wounds

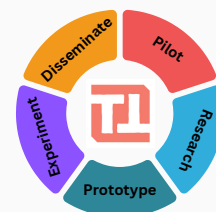
- **Acknowledge Past Mistakes:** Openly address exclusionary practices or social stances that have alienated people, using listening sessions or public statements.
- **Create Non-Judgmental Spaces:** Ensure all parents feel welcomed, regardless of past religious involvement or current beliefs.
- **Focus on Relationships Over Rules:** Shift the narrative from compliance with church doctrine to building a supportive, grace-filled community.

#### 6. Programs to Support Parenting

- **Practical Workshops:** Offer sessions on parenting challenges such as managing technology, fostering resilience in children, and navigating work-life balance.
- **Resources for Moral Education:** Develop guides and tools that help parents teach virtues organically in daily life.
- **Child and Teen Mentorship:** Create programs where children and teens are paired with mentors who reflect the church's values of inclusivity and compassion.

#### 7. Modernizing Communication and Outreach

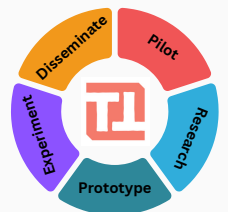
- **Leverage Social Media:** Use platforms like Instagram, Bluesky, and Facebook to share uplifting messages, promote events, and engage with parents.
- **Localized Messaging:** Tailor outreach efforts to the specific needs and demographics of the local community.
- **Storytelling:** Share authentic stories of transformation, service, and relational success to illustrate the church's relevance in today's world.



## 8. Metrics and Adaptability: A Data-Driven Approach

- **Feedback Loops:** Regularly survey parents to understand their evolving needs and assess the effectiveness of programs.
- **Pilots and Iterations:** Start with small-scale initiatives, gather insights, and refine based on real-world outcomes.
- **Measure Impact:** Track participation rates, satisfaction levels, and community outcomes to ensure programs meet their intended goals.

By implementing these strategies, churches can position themselves as trusted, relevant, and impactful in the lives of young adult parents, fostering a renewed connection to faith and community.



# The Ecumenical Partners

This research was made possible by the following ecumenical partners.



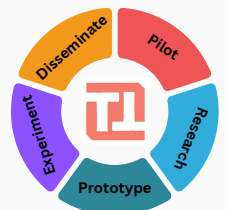
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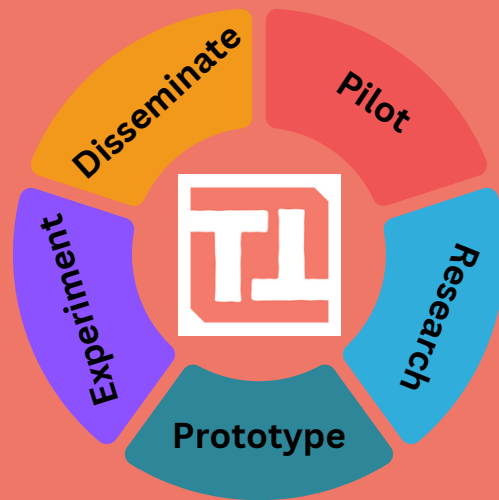
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