Module *Five* Envisioning and Working for a Better *World*

BRIDGE
BUILDING RELIGIOUS INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND GENERATIONAL EQUITY

Table of Contents



FatCamera from Getty Images Signature

Introduction 3

Topic One:
Dreams, Concerns, and Value Gaps 4

Topic Two :
Work, Career, and Vocation 14

Topic Three:
A Church in Mission 24

Introduction to Module *Five.*

Working for a better *world*.

Many young adults find themselves in a phase of introspection as they continue to discover their dreams and concerns and muster the courage to pursue their purpose. Yet, young people grapple with finding their place in the world, making meaningful contributions, and utilizing their talents effectively.

Young adults are often interested in the ways their dreams and concerns intersect with their work. Work often intertwines closely with identity, shaping how they see themselves and how they are perceived by others.

Consequently, young adults may require support in the process of making sense of their work experiences, integrating their activities into broader life narratives, particularly when their jobs conflict with their sense of self.

The church also has an opportunity to offer meaningful work for young adults. Young adults are longing for missional work that aligns with and supports their core values. However, young adults are keenly aware of how their dreams and values differ from the dreams and values of older adults and churches.

This module will explore how young adults envision and dream of a better world, their engagement with work and careers, and how they expect church to make the world a better place.

Topic *One*
Dreams, Concerns, and Value *Gaps*

Introduction to Topic *One*

Young adults today are increasingly driven by a vision of a better world, fueled by their dreams of creating positive change. They are not merely content with the status quo; instead, they seek to challenge and transform societal norms to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. These young visionaries are passionate about addressing global issues such as climate change, social justice, and economic inequality. Through their innovative ideas, resilience, and collaborative spirit, young adults are not just dreaming of a better world—they long to work to make it a reality.

In this discussion, we will delve into the dreams and concerns of young adults, as well as the discrepancies between the values held by churches and those of young adults.

BRIDGE Wisdom *Circles* and *Gatherings* Themes

Young adulthood is a fertile period for dreaming, where individuals become aware of their passions, recognize the world's needs, and identify where their talents align with those needs. Often, young adults are optimistic about the impact they can make on the world.

Throughout 2022 and 2023, The BRIDGE Young Adult Innovation Hub conducted its own studies through Wisdom Circles (focus groups) and Gatherings (small group listening sessions). Young adults talked about their dreams in these ways:

What do you *dream* about?

Here's how young adults in their twenties responded:

- Getting job doing something I love or getting a dream job
- Overcoming self-doubt
- Becoming confident
- Sparking a flame
- Staying determined
- Feeling enough
- Following my sense of purpose

Social Justice: Young adults were quick to comment about social injustices and the ways that their lives are intertwined with complex sets of social systems that (often) need to be challenged and changed. Some of these passions include climate and environmental justice, eradicating systemic oppression of racial groups, and political polarization

Active Churches: Many young adults expressed that they expect to be let down by the church through judgment, materialism, high expectations, and hierarchical power structures. These young adults defined benchmarks that a church must meet: a warm welcome, the potential for continued relationships, people who listen and engage in conversation, and a ***mission that contributes to the common good***.

Concerns

Jeffrey Arnett and other experts often describe emerging adulthood as a time filled with optimism and hope for the future.

However, data from Making Caring Common reveals a concerning trend: many young adults feel adrift and purposeless. Over half (51%) admitted they don't know what to do with their lives, and 58% said they felt little to no sense of purpose or meaning in the past month.

Forty-two percent (42%) reported the negative influence on their mental health of gun violence in schools, 34% cited climate change, and 30% cited worries that our political leaders are incompetent or corrupt.



Making Caring Common

BRIDGE Wisdom *Circles* and *Gatherings* Three *Themes*

Adulting is scary! There were many general concerns about becoming an adult and the instability of this phase of life. Young adults talked about navigating work and relationships, sharing worries about making ends meet, anxiety about a blind date, and longing to be able to purchase a house. As many studies confirm, young adults have fear and insecurity surrounding work and the economy.

The political and ecclesiological divides in our country. These young adults were worried about the ways that the church is being subsumed by political ideology. Focusing solely on issues might not be the only way to build community. Instead, what if a church focused on Jesus and the Scriptures and created a place where we engaged with one another through the common story of Jesus?

Social justice, climate change, racism—and a growing sense of cynicism. Young adults seeking to create change often experience a degree of cynicism due to the lack of support or assistance from institutions.

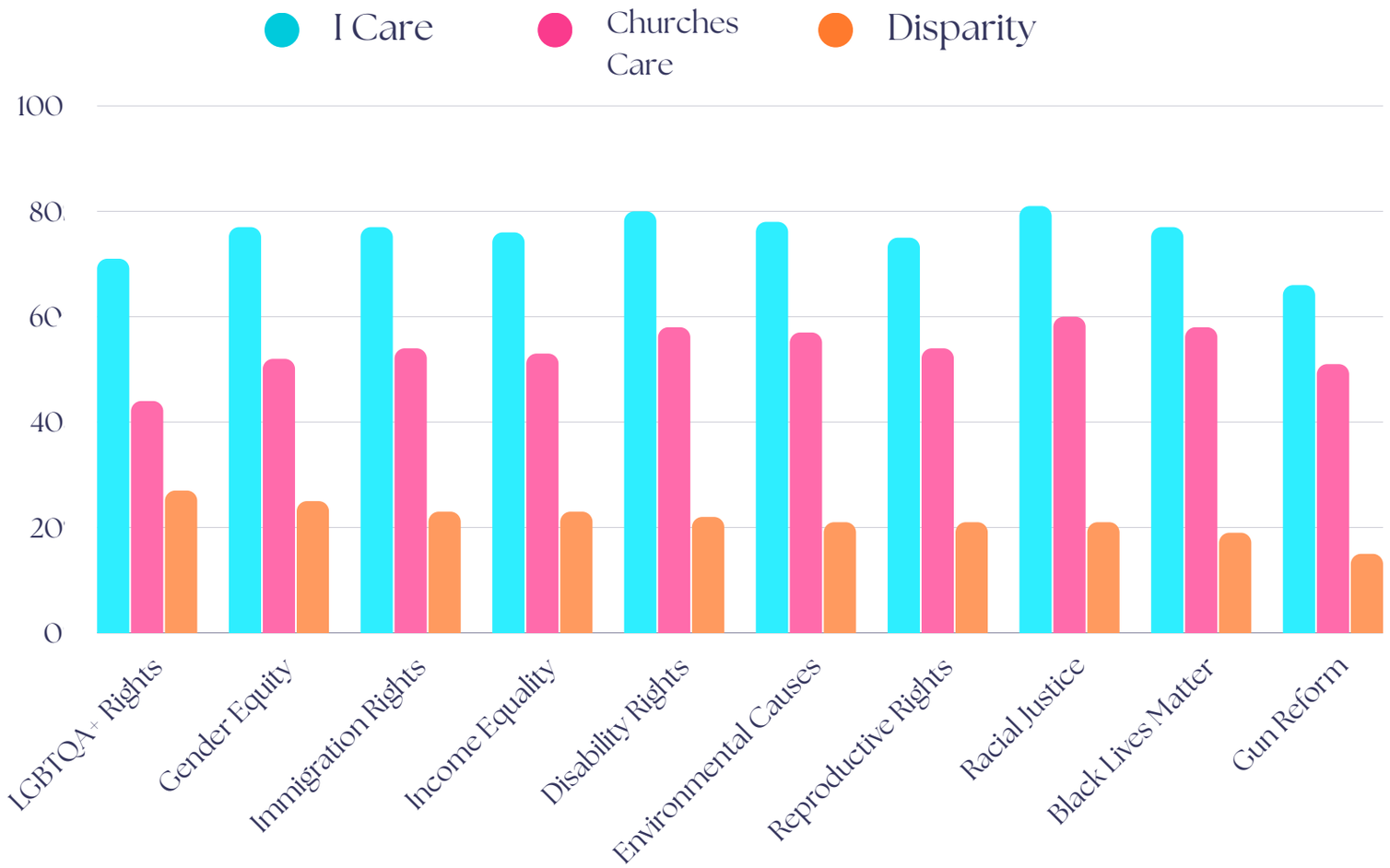
Value *Gaps*

In a 2021 report, the Springtide Research Institute found that half of the young people surveyed feel that religious institutions don't care about the issues that matter most to them.

Springtide refers to this disconnect as the "values gap"—the difference between the importance young people place on social justice issues and how much they believe religious institutions care about these same issues.

Springtide also discovered that BIPOC (black, indigenous, and other people of color) young peoples' ethnic-racial identity is more prominent than their religious identity. They desire their faith leaders and communities to recognize and celebrate their ethnic-racial identities. BIPOC young people are deeply and negatively impacted by racial justice, both spiritually and emotionally, but a healthy ethnic-racial identity, one that is meaningful and positive, can be fostered within supportive communities and significantly offset the negative impact of racial discrimination on young peoples' mental health.

Value *Gaps*



Springtide RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Listen: Steven Argue: It's a Difficult Time to Be an Emerging Adult (43 mins)

Steven Argue is associate professor of youth, family, and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary and the applied research strategist at the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI). He researches, speaks, consults, and writes regularly on topics surrounding adolescence, emerging adulthood, faith, and spiritual struggle.

In this podcast, Dr. Argue provides an oveview of his research .



questions for *reflection*



Monkey Business Images

- What surprised you about the dreams and concerns of young adults? And what ministry innovations are stirring in your heart and mind?

- Springtide Research explores the value gaps between churches and young people. Do you think these are accurate representations? What are ways your church might start closing the gap?

Topic *Two*
Work, Career, and *Vocation*

Introduction to Topic *Two*

Young adults today are set to be the most educated generation ever. However, they also feel more anxious about finding and keeping jobs.

Research shows that many young adults are looking for jobs that match their skills and interests, but landing that dream job right out of school can be tough. They'll often try out different roles before settling.

Additionally, those who don't pursue higher education can miss out on better-paying jobs.

Overall, young adults today are figuring out how they're "reaching for more," whether it's through creative expression, supporting social causes, building relationships, or practicing spiritual disciplines. They're often open-minded, adaptable, and keen on finding opportunities to grow.

Work *Highlights*

Let's take a look at the young adult workforce based on the 2015 Survey of Young Workers in the US.

The survey shows:

- 69% of young adults (ages 18-30) are working for pay, with nearly two-thirds of them working full-time (35+ hours per week).
- About three-quarters of these workers are employed at for-profit companies, with the rest split between nonprofits (14%) and government jobs (12%).
- Among those not working, 44% are actively looking for a job, and of those not looking, 45% are in school.
- The average salary for young adults is around $38,000, with two-thirds earning between $3,500 and $73,000.
- 4% own their own business, and about 2% run their own nonprofit.

When asked about their work:

- 40% of respondents described it as "just a job."
- 33% as a "stepping stone to a career."
- 27% as a "career"

Identity Based *Work*

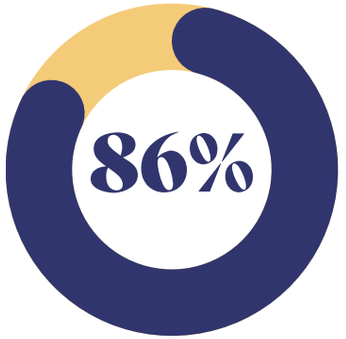
Young adults want their work to reflect and uphold their personal values. Young adults highly value "match quality," which means finding a job that aligns with their skills and interests. This indicates that young adults are seeking identity-based work—their dream job—that maximizes their talents and interests. The church could play a vital role in offering opportunities that meet these needs, helping young adults find fulfillment and purpose.

National Clark Poll

Percentage of people 21-29 who say:



"It is more important to enjoy my job than to make a lot of money."



"It is important to me to have a career that does some good in the world."

Looking for a *"Calling"*

Derek Thompson's 2019 article in **The Atlantic** discusses the evolution of how Americans perceive work, describing a progression from viewing work as a job to a career and ultimately to a calling. This shift represents a transition from seeing work as a necessity to a status symbol and finally to a source of meaning.

Unsurprisingly, young adults often hold multiple jobs early in their careers. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014, 2020), they typically average between 6.2 and 8.2 jobs from age 18 to 26.

Many young adults anticipate moving on relatively quickly in search of a fulfilling career path. For younger workers, changing jobs is often essential in seeking better pay and a more suitable role.

This exploration is common among young adults who frequently switch jobs to find the right fit. Young adults, then, often perceive their occupation as a "calling," viewing it as a role they are drawn to and see as their life's purpose or niche. This concept, initially rooted in religious contexts, now encompasses any deeply meaningful pursuit.

Those who feel called to their work, believe it serves a purpose, and contributes to the common good, tend to report higher levels of engagement.

However, only a minority of working Americans view their jobs in this profoundly fulfilling manner, with average scores suggesting moderate levels of identification with their work as a calling.

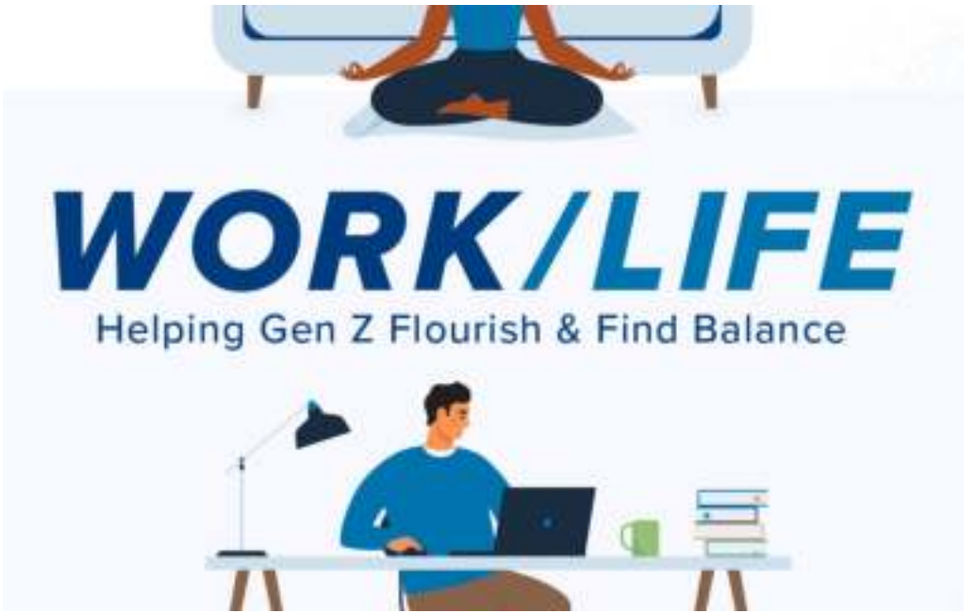
Purpose *Matters*

The Christian tradition deeply values "*vocatio*," the concept of being called by God to live purposefully. Many young adults will need companionship or guidance to discern their unique gifts and the work that ignites their passion. In this process, they are encouraged to develop and articulate a dream that is life-giving, aligns with their values, and contributes to the kingdom of God or the common good.

Often, meaning comes from being a part of a greater narrative—the story of God. Our actions are significant not because we conform to others' expectations, follow rules, or stick to scripts, but because they contribute to God's grand narrative through Jesus Christ. The Christian tradition teaches that meaning can be found in many areas—from daily tasks and careers to active engagement in our communities.

When young adults start to see their whole lives as having the full potential for meaning, they experience a greater sense of purpose, along with better mental health and overall flourishing in their lives.

Resources



Work/life balance isn't strictly about leaving the workplace at specific times, as work and life often intermingle. For Springtide, achieving balance means that both a young person's work and life outside of work contribute to their overall well-being and personal and professional growth, enabling them to do their best work and be their best selves.

Read: Work/Life *Springtide Reseach*

Meaning Making: *Eight Values* That Drive America's Newest Generations

"Meaning Making: 8 Values That Drive America's Newest Generations by Springride Research Institute explores the values embraced by young people aged 13 to 25. The study aims to uncover what drives them as they seek to find, create, and express meaningful aspects of their lives. It also examines the organizations and groups they choose to be involved with. Each chapter of the book focuses on the values identified through surveys, interviews, and various research methods.

Data was gathered in early 2020 through a survey that represented the nation, complemented by additional sources exploring practices, individuals, and organizations that strongly resonate with youth. These insights are intended to assist leaders in shaping organizations, groups, institutions, and relationships that effectively meet the needs of today's young people.

questions for *reflection*



TaManKunG from Getty Images Signature

- Which research finding from the “Work Highlights” section surprised you the most. Is your church equipped to help young adults in their struggles to find good, dependable work?
- What other theological language can we use to help young adults make meaning in their everyday lives?

Topic *Three*
A Church in *Mission*

Introduction to Topic *Three*

Many of the young adults we have encountered have been quick to comment about social injustices and the ways that their lives are intertwined with complex sets of social systems that (often) need to be challenged and changed. Some of these passions include climate and environmental justice, the eradication of systemic oppression of racial groups, and political polarization.

Moreover, they believe that the church is called to resemble the life of Jesus by envisioning and working toward a better world--the kin(g)dom of God. We've learned that young adults crave meaningful activities, not just more programs that fill their time with "busyness." They want their work, and the church's work, to reflect and uphold the values of Jesus.

Become Active in the *Community*

Churches that truly connect with their communities don't just recognize the good around them—they actively work to make things better, both locally and globally. While most leaders understand the importance of this, it's crucial for churches to be involved in service, compassion, missions, and social justice.

One study asked what makes a church effective with young people, and **nearly 60% of interview participants highlighted service, missions, or a general focus on being outward-oriented**. Additionally, when they asked church leaders about practices that show their commitment to or growth in young people, **nearly 70% mentioned young people being involved in service.**

Springtide Research surveys show that young adults believe that both businesses and nonprofits should make a positive impact on the world. In fact, **58% said it's important to them to do something beneficial for society**. Additionally, one-third of them feel that their actions are meaningless if they don't contribute to some kind of good in the world.

Be Good *Neighbors*

(locally and globally)

The Fuller Youth Institute emphasizes that young adults long for a place to have conversations about difficult issues and strive to make a difference in their communities.

The message of the kin(g)dom of God is important, but it's more important to actually participate in the kin(g)dom and bring it to fruition.

Young adults are drawn to churches that practice social responsibility by actively engaging in key social issues through service, acts of compassion, mission, and social justice.

- 77% of young adults stated immigration rights were important to them,
  - but only 54% believed it was important to the church
- 76% of young adults are concerned about income equality,
  - but only 53% believe their faith communities care as well
- 81% of young adults believe that racial injustice is important,
  - but only 60% believe their churches care as much as they do.

Springtide RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Create *Meaningful* Activities and Work

“Meaningful” is 1 of 8 **Values That Drive America's Newest Generations**. In fact 50% say that work is not worth doing if it has no meaning, and more than 40% avoid activities that don’t mean anything to them.

What is meaningful?

Springtide says that any gesture that grasps for "more" is a practice of meaning making. Additionally, any impulse toward something beyond what's simply expected, easy, or at the surface can be a practice of meaning making.

- Help young adults pursue causes bigger than themselves and engaging in key social issues.
- Foster their ability to draw meaning out of mundane situations or circumstances.
- Demonstrate how the menial can be meaningful by contextualizing small tasks.
- Lean into poetry, music, technology, and ritual practices.
- Offer chances to develop new skills.
- Provide accountability in their self improvement and self discovery.

.

Tips for Becoming a Chuch in *Mission*

Take Action

- Know your neighborhood.
- Diversify your relationships.
- Create groups that regularly have difficult conversations.
- Quality rather than quantity: offer meaningful activities that challenge young adults toward greater neighborhood involvement rather than creating more programs that offer “busyness.”
- Rather than focusing on young adults, focus on a mission that is contagious.
- Don’t be afraid to ask for commitment to a mission that matters!

Be Aware of Potential Drawbacks

- Engaging directly in conversations and actions around justice and inequality may also bring pushback from members who do not agree with or are threatened by particular positions,
- Engaging in such issues within the church may create divisions.
- Some do not believe this is the role of the church.
- Taking a stand on particular issues while attracting some young people may exclude or repel others.

Working *With* Transient Young Adults

Mark DeVries and Scott Pontier

One challenge in working with young adults is their tendency to be transient. However, this does not imply that they lack commitment or a desire to belong to a greater mission.

There are ways to embrace the transient nature of young adults rather than resist it. Instead of building young adult ministries on the same foundation as those for more stable populations, churches could adapt to support young adults' fluid lifestyles. This would mean moving beyond complaints about their constant movement, and instead, create flexible and dynamic ministry opportunities.

Take these tips into *consideration*:

- The mobility and desire for new experiences among young adults make them ideal candidates for quickly engaging in service, both locally and globally.
- Their passion for making an impact and doing meaningful work offers the church valuable resources for mission. Programs like Teach for America and AmeriCorps demonstrate this generation's readiness to engage in significant work, even if it means earning less for a period.
- Young adults' strong commitment to avoiding unmeaningful activities pushes churches towards greater excellence and faithfulness.
- Even those who do not identify with the Christian faith may be enthusiastic about participating in community-impact opportunities sponsored by the church, providing an excellent chance to build new relationships.
- While many in the church may resist change and innovation, young adults embrace and thrive on it.
-Consider adopting a model similar to no-contract cell phone plans, offering short-term, intense opportunities rather than long-term commitments.

Listen: Impactful *Work* (23 minutes)



Aili points to impactful as a motivating factor for the career path she's pursuing, and discusses how this value has shaped her involvement in social justice causes in high school and college.

questions for *reflection*



FatCamera from Getty Images Signature

- What contagious mission is arising in the hearts and minds of young people in your community?
- Which action item speaks most strongly to you and your church listed in the *Tips for Becoming a Church in Mission*?
- Do you have new ideas for working with young adults who can be transient?

CONVERSATION *CARDS*

Use these conversation cards with the young people in your church to explore and discuss how each of you envisions and strives to create a better world.

How often do you think about your purpose and how does that make you feel?

Where do you want to see change in the world?

What gift are you proud of that no one notices?

How can you live your life without resentment?

What is the gift you have that you do not fully acknowledge?

What have you done in the last month that made a difference?