

A Journey to Discover What's Working

How Youth Ministries Effectively Connect with Young People

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Listening today. Learning for tomorrow.

We engage the power of social science to learn from and about young people ages 13 to 25.

Our empirical data amplify the voices of young people, inform those who know and serve them, and lead the way in showing what's next.

YOUR PRESENTERS



Dr. Hannah Evans
Research Associate



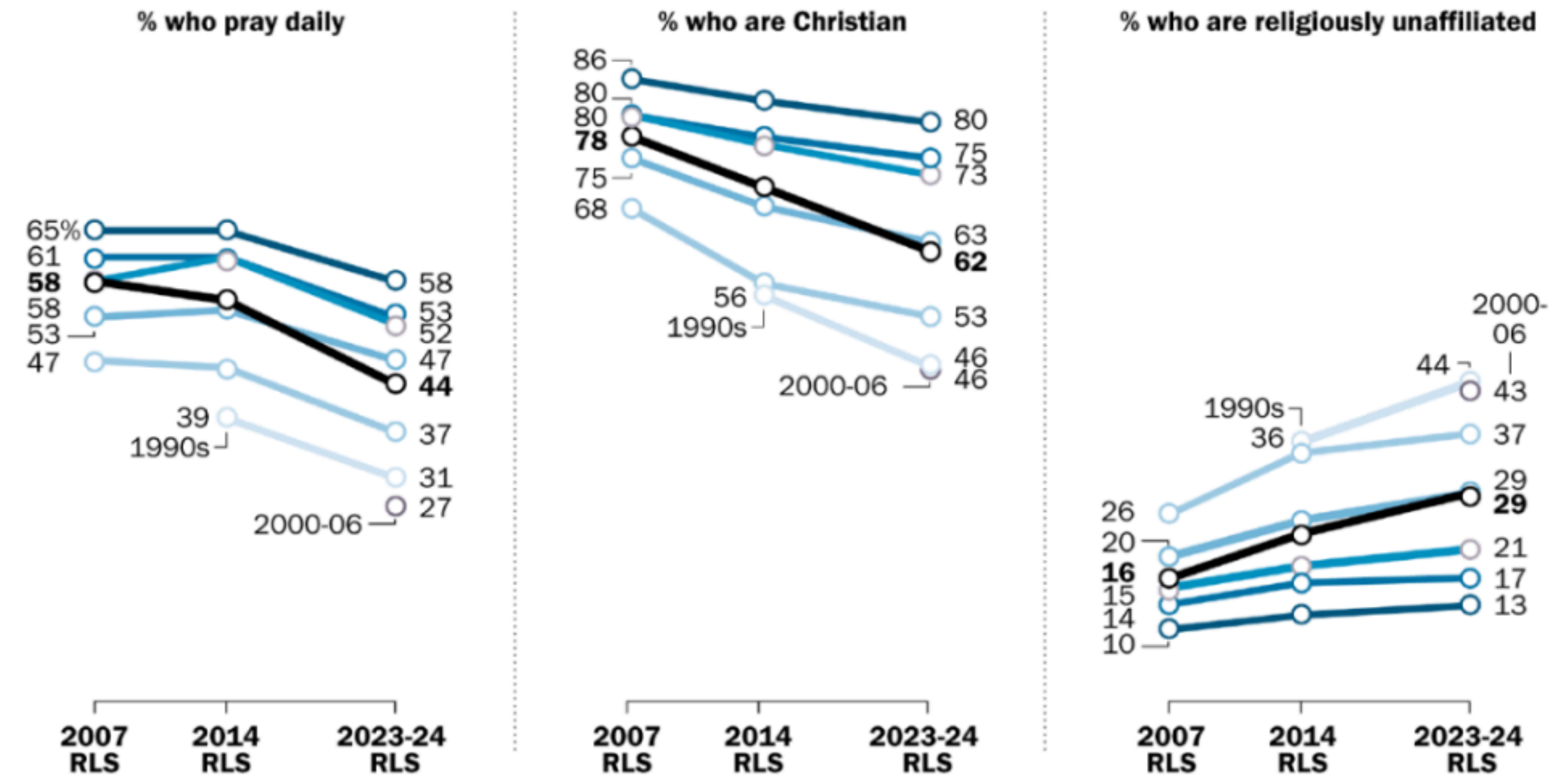
Dr. Angela Patterson
Head of Content

Fewer and fewer US residents identify as Christian.

As they have grown older, U.S. adults in all birth cohorts have become less likely to pray daily and less likely to identify as Christian

Among U.S. adults born in ...

1940s or earlier (now ages 74+) 1960s (ages 54-64) 1980s (ages 34-44) 2000-06 (ages 18-24)
 1950s (ages 64-74) 1970s (ages 44-54) 1990s (ages 24-34) All U.S. adults



Note: The 2023-24 survey asked respondents, "In what year were you born?" Approximate age was calculated by subtracting the respondent's year of birth from the year in which they completed the survey (2023 or 2024). The "Religiously unaffiliated" category consists of people who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular" when asked about their religion.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Younger people
are choosing
to leave
Christianity...
or never grew
up with it in the
first place.

Younger adults are more likely than older Americans to have left Christianity

% of U.S. adults who were/are ...

	Among those born in __						
	1940s or earlier (now ages 74+)	1950s (now ages 64-74)	1960s (now ages 54-64)	1970s (now ages 44-54)	1980s (now ages 34-44)	1990s (now ages 24-34)	2000-06 (now ages 18-24)
Raised Christian	89%	89%	86%	81%	76%	73%	67%
Still Christian	76	72	69	59	50	42	41
No longer Christian	13	16	17	22	26	31	26
Now identify with other religion	2	2	2	2	3	3	3
Now religiously unaffiliated	10	13	14	19	23	27	22
Refused	1	1	1	1	1	<1	1
Raised in other religion	5	4	4	6	7	7	9
Still identify with other religion	3	3	2	4	5	5	6
No longer identify with other religion	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Now Christian	<1	<1	1	<1	<1	1	<1
Now religiously unaffiliated	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Refused	<1	<1	<1	<1	0	<1	0
Raised religiously unaffiliated	5	6	9	12	16	18	23
Still religiously unaffiliated	2	3	5	8	12	15	19
No longer religiously unaffiliated	2	2	3	4	4	4	5
Now Christian	2	2	3	3	2	2	4
Now other religion	<1	<1	1	<1	1	1	1
Refused	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Refused to say how they were raised	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

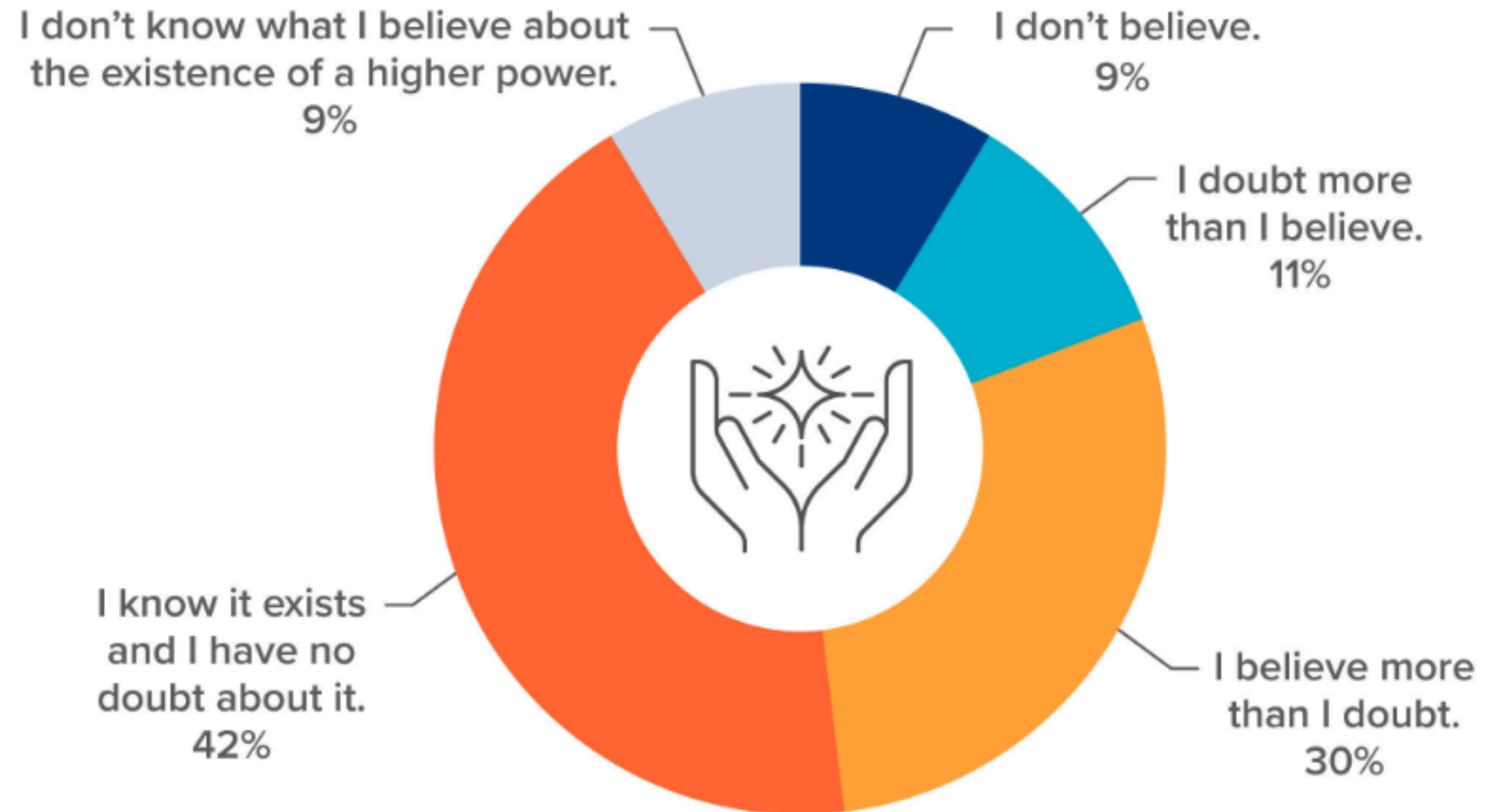
Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. The "Religiously unaffiliated" category consists of people who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular" when asked about their religion.

Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

Young people hold religious and spiritual identities and beliefs

“Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about a higher power—whether it be God, gods, or some other divine source or universal energy?”

Percentage of young people responding to the question



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

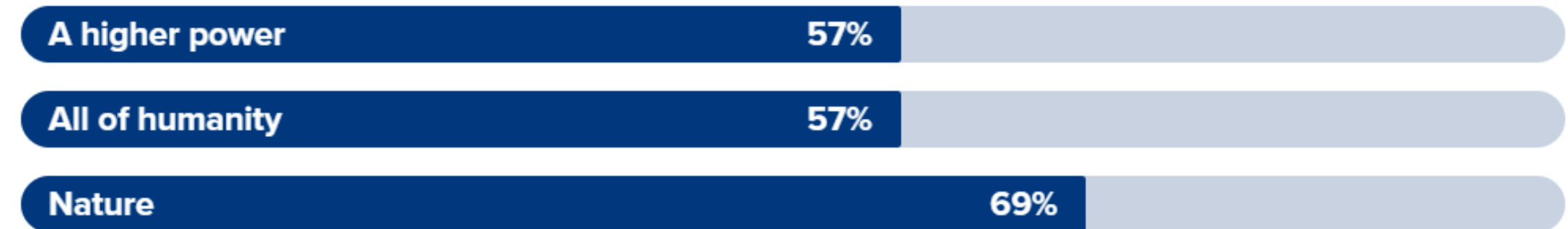
Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

Young people hold religious and spiritual identities and beliefs

More than half (57%) of young people feel connected to a higher power and humanity and almost 70% feel connected to nature.

To what extent do you feel connected to the following:

Percentage of young people responding “moderately” or “highly”



Note: Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024



Source: 2024 Springtide Study of Young People and Civic Life, conducted between December 18, 2023, and March 5, 2024

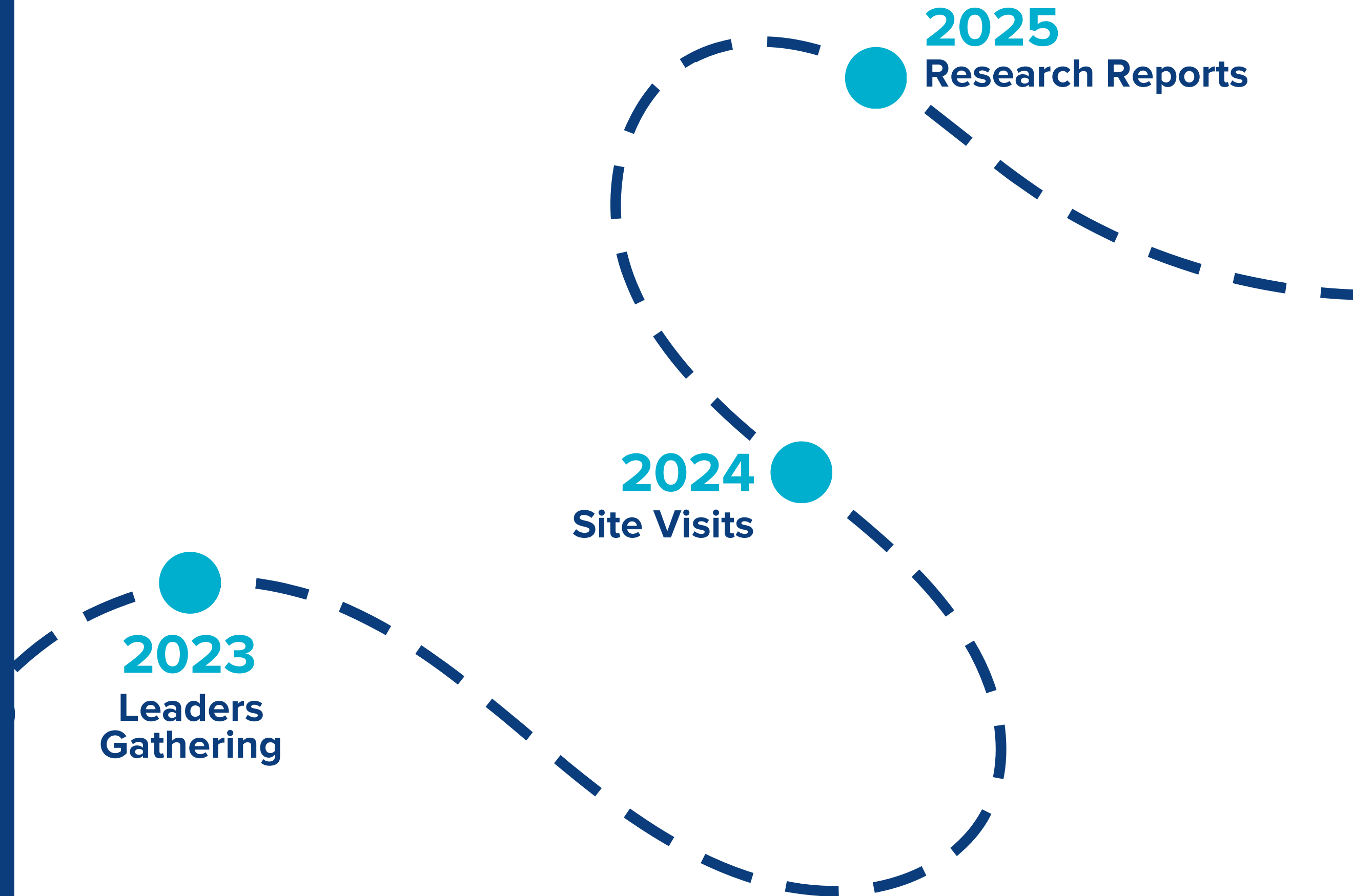
Young people identify as religious or spiritual. They believe in something larger than themselves. They want to belong.

How can youth ministries embrace this invitation in today's environment?

Find out what works.

Our What's Working Journey

Three-year grant from Lilly Endowment to study successful approaches to engaging Gen Z in spiritual and religious spaces



Learning from Leaders

2023 Leaders Gathering

1,699

Youth-serving adults surveyed at more than 12 Christian orgs

1,252

13-25 year-olds surveyed who are involved in at least one Christian youth-serving organization

5

Focus groups with youth-serving adults

EMERGING THEMES

Understand us.

Listen to us.

Align with us.

Top 5 qualities of a successful youth-serving organization

YOUNG PEOPLE

Accountable (50%)

Authentic (46%)

Empathetic (43%)

Fun (42%)

Adaptable (42%)

ADULTS

Authentic (48%)

Empathetic (39%)

Communal (37%)

Accountable (34%)

Adaptable (34%)

UNDERSTAND

“[I wish adults knew] how difficult it was growing up in the generation we did. So many things are different from the lives of most adults than the life that I live, and they expect us to think, work, and live in the same ways they did, and it's just impossible.”

Male, age 18-25

“[I wish adults knew] that we don't know all the answers, but we will try really hard to find them, and that we are young and not as knowledgeable on all the subjects.”

Female, age 13-17

“Sometimes I wish adults weren't so serious while working with young kids. The adults have to remember that they were once our age before. Everyone makes mistakes. It just could be more helpful if they gave them a chance before judging.”

Male, age 18-25

LISTEN

“[I wish adults knew] to be more empathetic and understanding. Many adults don't know how to communicate properly with young people, and the young people don't feel seen or heard as a result.”

Female, age 18-25

“[I wish adults knew] that we really just need someone to talk to. We don't need a devil's advocate or someone to fix our issues. Just to hear us.”

Female, age 13-17

“Adults don't have to be cringe and act goofy or cool for us to like them. Having someone always there who I can count on and talk to is better to me than someone trying to act on our level.”

Male, age 13-17

ALIGN

“It would be a mix of both fun and meaningful. It has games that correspond with today’s youth and our interests but also has a lesson to teach. It would be a place that feels like home. Where the adult leaders are understanding and loving.

Female, age 18-25

“An organization that helps everyone no matter what they believe in because people aren't going to want to switch beliefs if they're being forced to.”

Female, age 13-17

“In this youth serving organization, there is a strong and cohesive bond between both peers and leaders. In this environment, the youth learn and grow both spiritually and mentally as they continue to create lifelong friendships and relationships.”

Male, age 13-17

UNDERSTAND

LISTEN

ALIGN

BELONGING

INCLUSIVITY

PURPOSE

ENGAGEMENT

ACCOUNTABILITY

ADAPTABILITY

SITE VISIT CRITERIA

**FUN
INCLUSIVITY
PURPOSE
INTEGRITY
ADAPTABILITY**

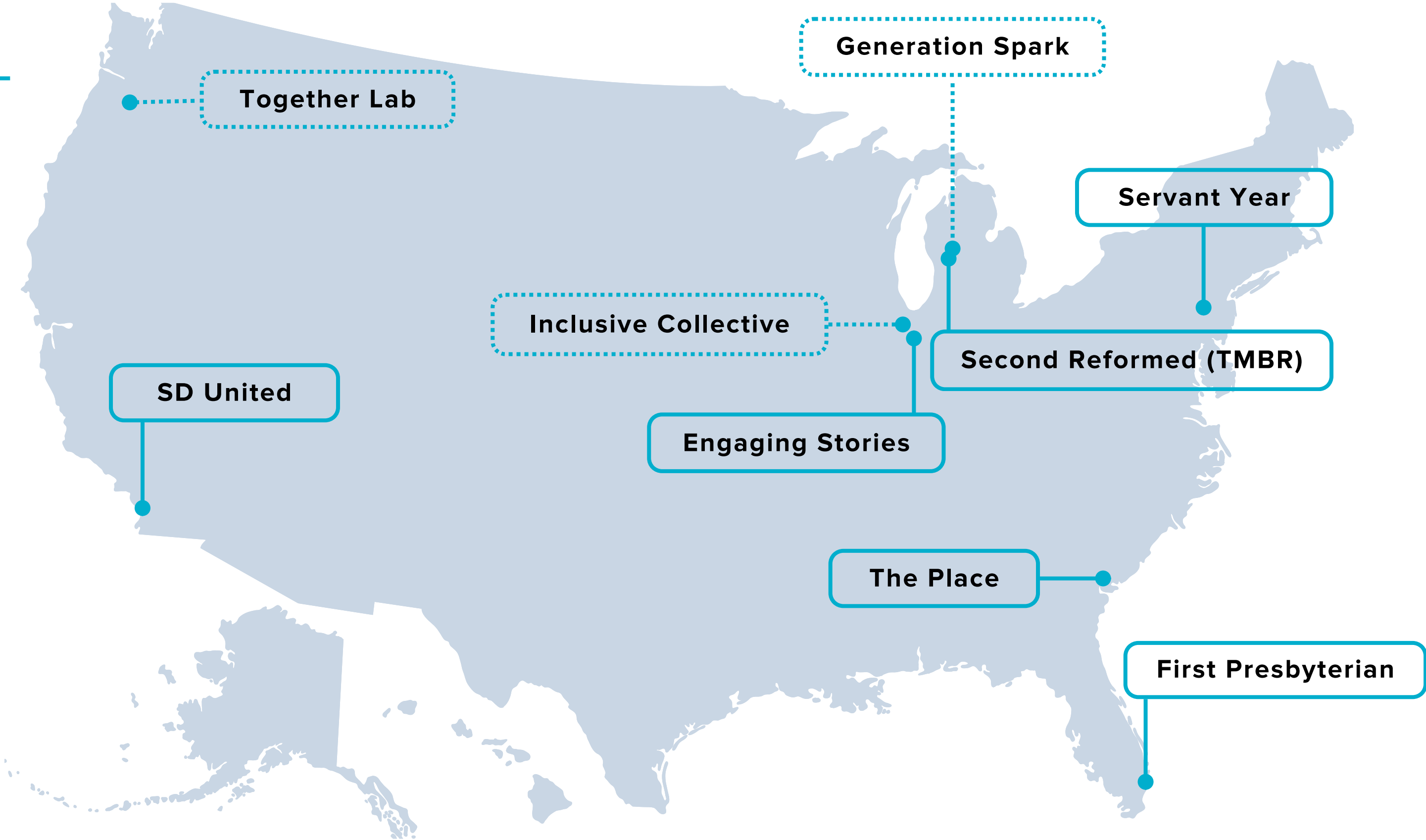
2024 Site Visits

SITE VISITS

What's Working to Engage Young People - Lilly Grant

Virtual - - - -

In-Person ———



First Presbyterian of Ft. Lauderdale

Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Community Sports Ministry

Jon Bock

Director of Young
Adult Ministries

Chandler Gelb

Director of Youth and
College Ministries



Second Reformed Church Zeeland, Michigan

Midweek morning Bible reading

Eric Barnes

Pastor



Engaging Stories

Chicago, IL

Week-long summer camp for theological formation of Latino/a teens

Juan Escarfuller

Executive Director,
Instituto Fe y Vida



SD United San Diego, CA

Multi-church collaborative youth group

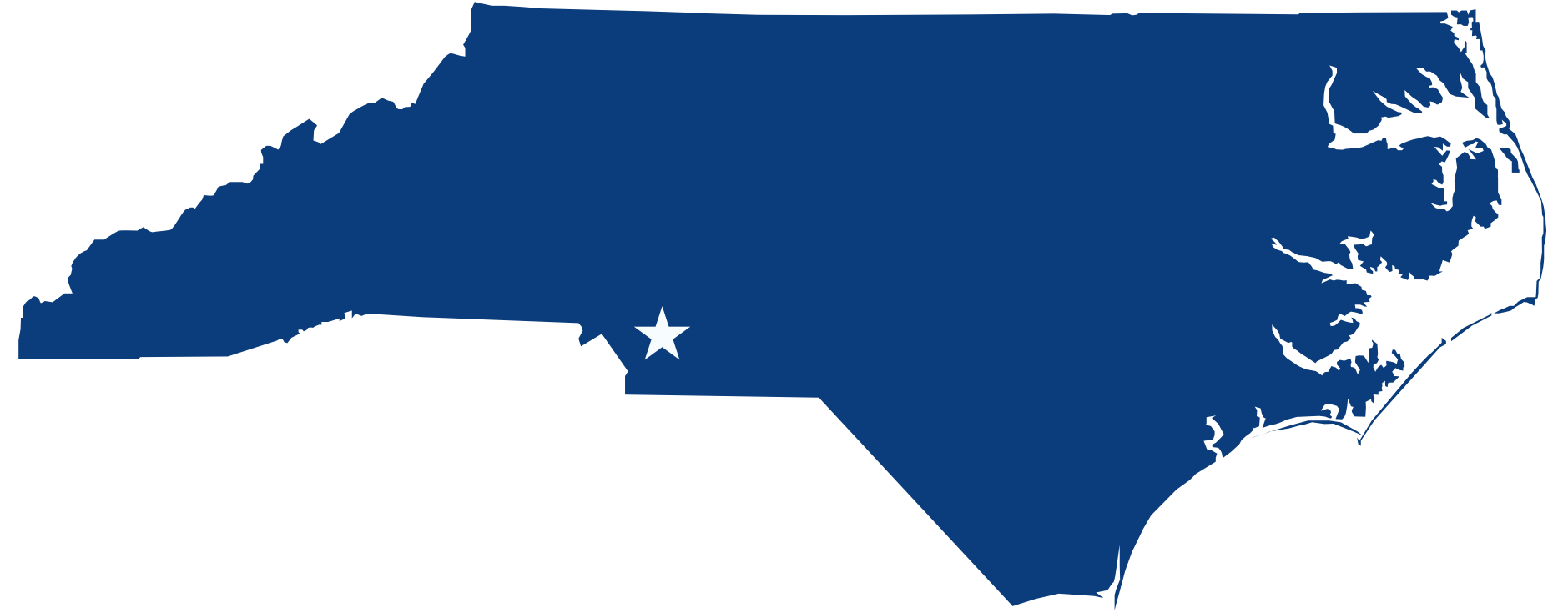
**Melissa Tucker
& Marshela
Solorio-Salgado**
Co-Leaders



The Place Charlotte, NC

Monthly gathering of Black young adults

Trevor Beauford
Founder and Co-Leader



Servant Year Philadelphia, PA

Year-long commitment to service
and discernment for young adults

Fr. Andrew Kellner
Director



What we observed

Leaders build relationships with young people that make room for high levels of honesty and transparency.



What we observed

**Young people pay attention.
They're thoughtful and insightful
— and they want to contribute.**



What we observed

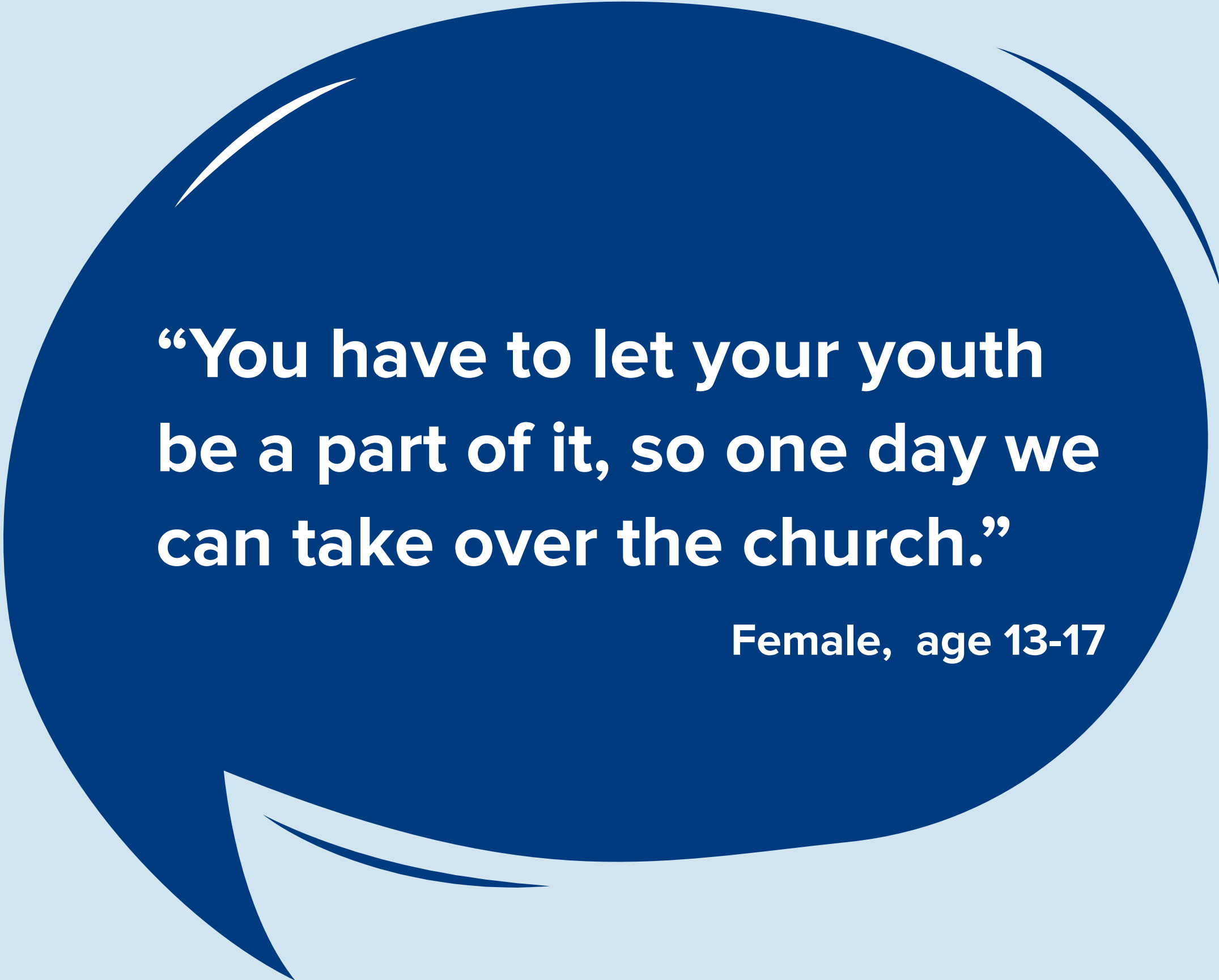
Inclusion matters.



What we observed

Leaders create environments that equip young people to not only develop strong faith lives, but also to lead in faith-based spaces.





**“You have to let your youth
be a part of it, so one day we
can take over the church.”**

Female, age 13-17