



NAVIGATING INJUSTICE

A Closer Look at Race,
Faith & Mental Health

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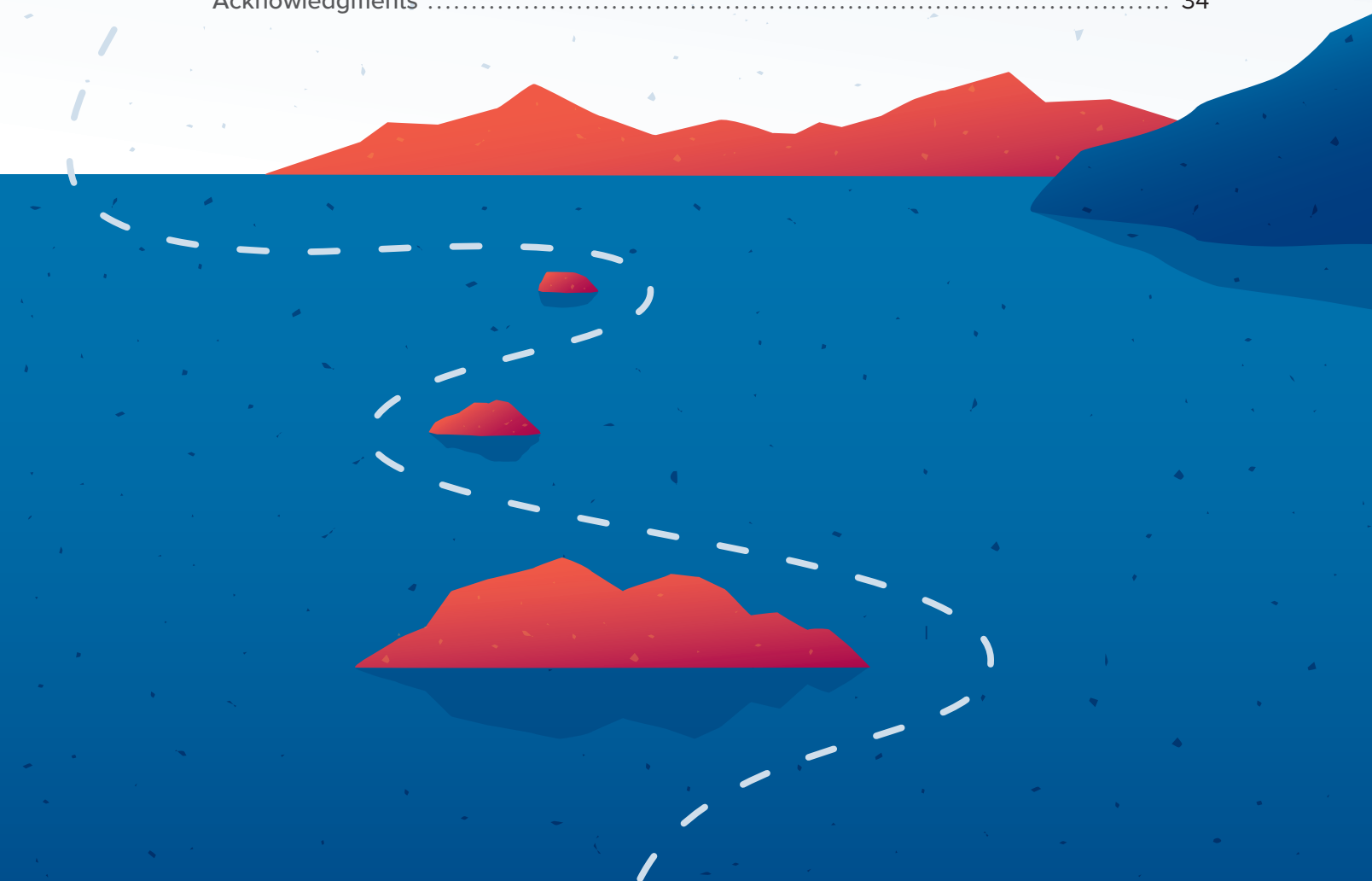
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Introduction

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children’s Hospital Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry have declared the mental-health crisis among young people in the United States a national emergency. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, national surveys showed major increases over the past decade in mental-health issues like depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among young people.¹ The latest data from Springtide Research Institute® confirm these trends. **In 2022, nearly half of young people (47%) told Springtide they were moderately or extremely depressed, 55% reported being moderately or extremely stressed, and 45% said they were moderately or extremely lonely.**²

For Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC hereafter), the mental-health crisis is compounded by experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination. Research in psychology shows that these experiences are associated with elevated levels of trauma symptoms, depression, anxiety, and suicidality.³ Despite these experiences, Springtide data reveal that young BIPOC are flourishing mentally and emotionally at rates comparable to their White peers. Further, young BIPOC report high levels of life satisfaction, agency, and self-esteem.

When asked about the kinds of things that support their mental health, over half of young BIPOC (58%) said that their faith matters. But *why* and *how* does faith matter for young BIPOC’s mental health, and what can faith leaders do to help?

The present study draws from and expands on several of Springtide’s existing studies, like *The State of Religion and Young People 2021: Navigating Uncertainty* and *The State of Religion and Young People 2022: Mental Health—What Faith Leaders Need to Know*, to address these important questions.

These previous reports address topics like uncertainty and mental health broadly in order to track and understand the national trends. But research shows that mental-health challenges vary significantly across subpopulations.



For example, girls are more likely than boys to be diagnosed with anxiety.⁴ Black children are twice as likely to die by suicide than White children.⁵ For this reason, this study narrows its focus from the mental-health challenges of the total population of young people in the United States to the mental-health challenges of young BIPOC in particular. We hope that the actionable insights within this study empower faith leaders to address complex topics like mental health, ethnic-racial identity, and racial injustice from a social scientific perspective in order to create and sustain mentally healthy environments for young BIPOC.

Key Findings

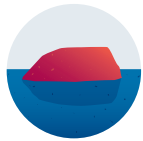
1

For most young BIPOC, ethnic-racial identity is a more salient identity than religious identity.



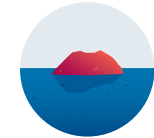
2

For children of immigrants, ethnic-racial and religious identity are closely tied.



3

Young BIPOC are deeply and negatively impacted by racial injustice, both spiritually and emotionally.



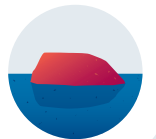
4

Positive ethnic-racial and religious identities are associated with good mental health.



5

Young BIPOC wish their faith leaders and communities would acknowledge and celebrate their ethnic-racial identity.



6

Young BIPOC wish their faith leaders would address racial injustice from a pastoral perspective.

AT A GLANCE

Mental Health, Religion & Spirituality among Young BIPOC

Mental Health



Young BIPOC are almost as anxious (74% versus 77%) and depressed (61% versus 64%) as their White peers.

Anxious



Depressed



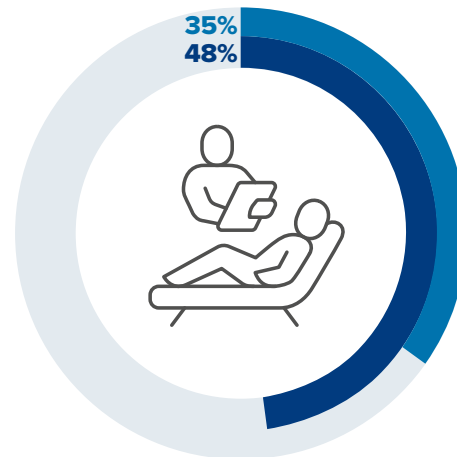
Young BIPOC say they are **flourishing** in their mental and emotional well-being at slightly higher rates than their White peers (70% versus 65%).

Young BIPOC report **similar levels of life satisfaction** (62% versus 60%), **confidence** (60% versus 56%), and **joy** (64% versus 62%) as their White peers.



A quarter of young BIPOC (25%) have been medicated or hospitalized for mental-health issues.

Young BIPOC are less likely than White young people **to see a mental-health professional**.



Two-thirds of young BIPOC (67%) **do not feel comfortable talking to the adults in their life about mental-health issues**.

Religion and Spirituality

● BIPOC ● White

Young BIPOC are **slightly more trusting of organized religion**, with 33% saying they **trust organized religion a lot or completely**, compared to 29% of White young people.



While 24% of both young BIPOC and White young people **have no doubts about the existence of a higher power**, White young people are slightly more likely than young BIPOC to **not believe in a higher power** at all (16% versus 12%).

Young BIPOC are slightly more religious than their White peers, with 37% reporting that they are **moderately or very religious** compared to 34% of White young people. **Black young people report the highest rates of religiosity**, with 46% indicating they are moderately or very religious.

Young people who pray regularly



Young people who say that their faith matters for their mental health

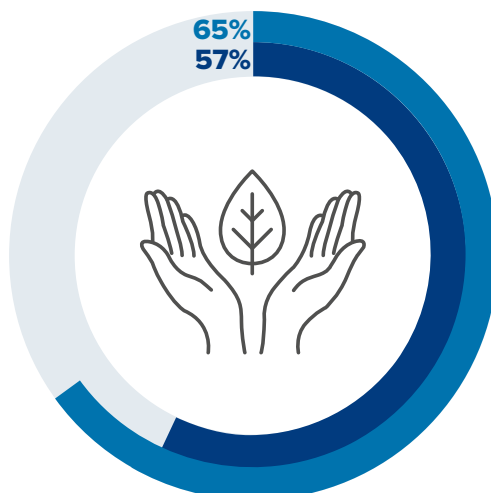


Young people who attend religious services at least once per month



Young BIPOC report higher rates of flourishing in their faith lives than their White peers.

Young people who say they are flourishing in their faith lives



While 72% of young BIPOC say that it is important that a mental-health counselor share the **same racial or ethnic background** as them,



only 47% of young BIPOC say it is important that a mental-health counselor share the **same religious or spiritual beliefs** as them.

Religious & Ethnic-Racial Identities

The construction of social identities is a normal part of the developmental process, typically beginning in childhood and increasing in complexity during adolescence. A young person's social identities are developed by a wide range of factors, including parental or peer socialization, experiences of social inclusion or exclusion, and cultural messages about the bounds of belonging within and between different social groups.⁶

While young people explore and embrace many types of identities, two are of special interest to the present study: religious identity and ethnic-racial identity (hereafter ERI).

Religious identity is often overlooked in the United States, perhaps because religious disaffiliation has increased over time.⁷ However, Springtide data from 2022 show that 68% of young people ages 13 to 25 consider themselves at least slightly religious, and 77% say they are at least slightly spiritual. Further, a majority of young people today believe in the existence of a higher power—25% of young people say they believe in a higher power's existence more than they doubt it, and 27% say that they *know* a higher power exists and have no doubts about it. **This suggests that while affiliation may be down, spiritual yearning, curiosity, and identity remain prevalent today.**

When looking at variation in religious identity and beliefs across race, minor differences emerge. In general, young BIPOC are as religious as their White peers. Typically, however, Black young people report higher rates of religiosity, spirituality, and belief, as shown in Figure 1:

Percent who say they believe that a divine being has a plan for their life

Black or African American



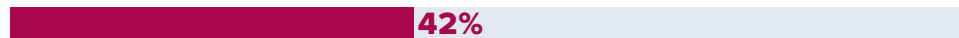
Hispanic



American Indian or Alaska Native



White



Asian



Figure 1: Springtide Research Institute survey of US young adults ages 13 to 25 conducted in 2022

However, **our data suggest that ERI is a more salient and consequential identity for young BIPOC than is religious identity.** For example, our interview respondents were immediately able to describe how their ERI shaped their lives and other identities. We asked young BIPOC, “How, if at all, has ethnic-racial identity shaped your experience with your faith community?” One young person told us:

“ I am the person who can’t leave [race] outside of a space. Being Black shapes the way I think about things in a lot of ways and what I tend to think about. Religious or spiritual places are no exception.

—May, Black / African American, 20



But when the question was inverted—“How, if at all, has your faith community shaped your ethnic-racial identity?”—most of the young people we spoke to struggled to understand the question. May, quoted above, responded, “Hmm, sorry, I’m just gonna repeat the question. . . . How’s it shaped? Like when you say, how has it shaped my racial identity, what do you mean? Like how I, what does that mean?” Rather than reflecting low involvement in her faith community (May is an active and enthusiastic member), these data suggest that the salience of ERI in May’s life, and in the lives of many other young BIPOC, surpassed that of religious identity.

ERI is such a salient identity for young people in the US for many reasons. Part of the answer lies in the United States’ long history of racism, including slavery, wage theft, Jim Crow laws, and other policies that have deliberately prevented BIPOC from living full and meaningful lives. Research shows that

despite progress made in this area, the legacy of racist policies and prejudices continues to affect BIPOC communities today.⁸ Indeed, social scientists can often predict many of a person's most important life outcomes, such as emotional and physical health, education, housing, and income, among others, simply by knowing their race.⁹ It is no wonder, then, that ERI is significant in the lives of young BIPOC.

While young BIPOC shared stories about the racial prejudice and discrimination they've experienced, **they also shared how their ERI is a great source of joy and meaning in their lives.** Darian, 25, for example, told us that his ERI gives him purpose. He shared: "When I think about what the Lord wants me to do on this earth, I think about, well, I was born half European and half Asian. Because of that, I'm able to relate to people in a deeper way and be a bridge between people. And, so, I think for me, my mixed ethnicity has been a kind of guiding light for how to serve others."

Ivar, 21, shared: "Being Latino in the US is a beautiful thing. We get to look at the world through so many different lenses, and we have the opportunity to define ourselves and who we want to be. There's a lot of positives to being Latino."

Research shows that a healthy ERI—one that is meaningful and positive—is associated with greater self-esteem and fewer depressive and somatic symptoms. Young people who take pride in their ERI are also more likely to report peer acceptance, interpersonal functioning, and belonging within their communities. Finally, a healthy ERI can be *protective*.¹⁰ Social psychologists find, for example, that ethnic and racial centrality and pride significantly offset the negative impact of racial discrimination on the mental health of young BIPOC. Isabella's experience illustrates this well:

“My faith community brought me a lot of confidence and less anxiety [regarding] who I am and where I come from. So, they influenced me in a positive way by honoring my culture, my identity. Understanding my identity just takes all the pressure off, you know? I was more proud to be Latino. I didn't feel inferior. So, yeah, I just love who I am, and I love where I come from. My faith community has given me the confidence that I belong in this community and with Christ.

—Isabella, Hispanic/Latino, 23



In contrast to Isabella's experience, other young BIPOC told us how difficult it is for them to be members of organizations or communities that do not celebrate, let alone acknowledge, their ERI:

“When churches or religious institutions fail to acknowledge that there are parts of people's identity that need to be addressed, it's just . . . you need to see them and hear their pain. It's from a place of extreme privilege for your church to never acknowledge the very real identities that are impacted by what's going on in the world today. It's not just on the news. It's real, it's in people's real lives, it's affecting them. To ignore race is almost to ask people to not bring that part of themselves into this space.

—May, Black / African American, 20

“Race is what makes you you. So, if your religion wants to separate race, if they're not making you want to embrace your ethnicity, I feel like they haven't really seen who you are.

—Lauren, Asian American, 15

These findings suggest that young people feel truly seen and understood only when the trusted adults in their lives acknowledge all the meaningful and positive identities that make young people who they are. Being truly seen and understood are key components of belonging.¹¹

Though most of the young BIPOC interviewed for this study showed a stronger sense of ERI than religious identity, **there was a small subset of young BIPOC for whom ethnic-racial and religious identity were tied.** For these young BIPOC, expressions of religious devotion were simultaneously expressions of race or ethnicity. **These young BIPOC were, without exception, children of immigrants.**



The intertwining of ethnic-racial and religious identities among immigrants is a well-documented phenomenon.¹² Research shows that factors such as loyalty to or longing for one's home country, hostile conditions in a new country, and the role of religious institutions in creating community within immigrant enclaves all contribute to the intertwining of ethnic-racial and religious identities. The effects of these factors are especially pronounced for children of immigrants, as parents or guardians are a major source of influence throughout the early stages of development. In this study, we found this intertwining among children of immigrants from all around the world. A Christian young person whose parents are Jamaican immigrants shared:

“ I feel like Christianity and Blackness are the same thing. I [don’t] see any difference between worshipping God as a Christian and worshipping God as a Black person. It’s the same thing to me.

—Zion, Black / African American and Jamaican, 20

And Lily, 21, whose parents are first-generation immigrants from India, told us that while she attends Hindu, Christian, and Jewish services, “Hinduism is very much tied to my national identity. Most Indian people are Hindu. And so sometimes you can get into that, ‘How much do you know about Hinduism? If you know less than I do, you’re less Indian than I am.’”

We even found the intertwinement of ethnic-racial and religious identities among those young BIPOC who did not consider themselves religious. Luz, for example, told us:

“ Even though I’m agnostic, sometimes . . . I’ll do the [sign of the] cross real quick, even though I’m not really into Catholicism anymore. I guess the motion is just comforting itself. It might mean something to more religious people. They say religion and culture are separate, but that’s kinda hard, especially with Latin communities. So sometimes some of the things we do because of religion are just cultural now.

—Luz, Hispanic/Latino, 25

These findings suggest that simply accounting for independent identities will not suffice. Rather, identifying when, why, and how identities *intersect*, and for whom, is key. Broader structural and historical forces like immigration, racial relations, and political battles influence the meaning and expression of young BIPOC’s religious identities.



MENTAL HEALTH

Concerns & Coping Mechanisms

Concerns

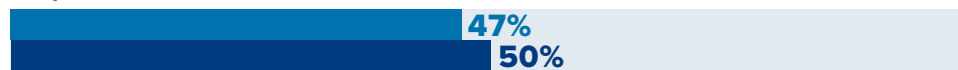
Like other young people, young BIPOC report high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

“Thinking about the last two weeks, did you feel...?”

Percent responding “Yes” to the question

● BIPOC ● White

Depressed



Worried



Unhappy



Figure 2: Springtide Research Institute survey of US young adults ages 13 to 25 conducted in 2022

Young BIPOC additionally grapple with the emotional and spiritual harm of racism at various levels: structural, historical, and interpersonal. In fact, Black young people report an average of five experiences of racial discrimination per day. Research shows that experiences with racism in childhood increase the risk of developing serious mental-health problems in adolescence, such as anxiety, depression, suicidality, and low self-esteem.¹³ Other studies find that racism has a cumulative effect that increases trauma-related symptoms, such as hypervigilance, a negative future outlook, and social avoidance. Psychologists refer to the significant psychological distress caused by racial discrimination as **racial trauma**.¹⁴ Racial trauma was a main theme in the interviews.

“**Mental health can affect anyone, regardless of ethnicity or race, differently, but when we are talking about social justice issues, People of Color are living through it. That’s completely different than seeing it or just observing it.**

—Lauren, Asian American and Jamaican, 15

“ The level of violent and nonviolent crimes against the people in our communities is extremely detrimental to our mental well-being and our health, really.

—Laura, Hispanic/Latino, 23

While respondents of all races shared stories of racial discrimination, the experience of racial trauma was especially pronounced among Black young people. When we asked about what it's like to be a BIPOC in the US today, Black young people shared the following experiences:

“ You always have to be on guard. When you see police, you kind of clench up. You're always in danger, even in the [case] of Breonna Taylor, even in your own home.

—Caleb, Black / African American, 22

“ Seeing the constant killing of Black men and women feels like nothing's going to get done about it, because the same cycle repeats over and over again. And so you kind of feel like sometimes you want to disassociate and desensitize yourself, 'cause it hurts and it happens so much. I feel like my life is not valued.

—Monique, Black / African American, 20

“ As a Black person, the things that you are stressed out about are not simply about having a lot of work. I mean, you might have that as well. But then you also have like, 'Oh, I hope I don't get pulled over and shot by police. I hope my dad isn't wrongfully incarcerated.' Just things that people that are not of your race wouldn't even have to think about.

—Zion, Black / African American, 20

These findings are consistent with research that finds that Black Americans experience higher rates of racial discrimination and racial trauma symptoms than other racial or ethnic groups.¹⁵ They offer a profound look at the kind of racial stress that Black young people experience today and underscore the need to create emotionally healthy spaces in which young BIPOC can thrive.



Coping Mechanisms

When asked what practices they engage in to help themselves navigate injustice, young BIPOC cited practicing self-care (e.g., joyful movement, nourishment, therapy, rest, or relaxation), seeking collective care and social support from others who share their ERI, participating in efforts for social change, and engaging in religious or spiritual practices.



When asked why these practices seem to positively impact their mental health, young BIPOC stated that these practices help them manage, in several ways, the many emotions caused by experiencing racism. Practicing self-care, for example, can function as a temporary distraction from a discriminatory environment or experience. Alternatively, self-care may promote **mindfulness**—a Buddhist practice based on cultivating awareness that helps to reduce the emotional intensity of suffering.¹⁶

While self-care methods of coping are typically personal and private, coping mechanisms like seeking social support and engaging in social change are relational in nature. Young BIPOC indicated that social support is a beneficial and effective coping mechanism in general, but they also indicated that it is most helpful to young BIPOC when it comes from trusted adults who share their ERI. A shared ERI allows young BIPOC to process racial experiences with someone with firsthand knowledge of those experiences.

These interactions not only allow young BIPOC to express themselves freely but also offer an opportunity in which trusted adults can validate the experiences of young BIPOC, positively affirm their ERI, and help them reestablish agency. In other words, social support is a powerful source of healing and empowerment for young BIPOC. Similarly, engaging in social change to eliminate racism via advocacy or activism is empowering for young BIPOC. It enables them to cope with racism by taking a proactive role that gives purpose, meaning, and self-efficacy. For these reasons, engaging in social change is an effective way for young BIPOC to navigate injustice.

Finally, we asked young BIPOC how their religious or spiritual practices helped them cope with injustice. The following are sample responses to this open-ended interview question:

“ I was depressed for a really long time. When I got into peer mental-health spaces, they weren’t very spiritually oriented. They told me that the way to get better is to take control—finding out what is in my control and what’s not. I got so caught up in that, [yet] my mental health got even worse. But a belief in God or a higher power lets you say: ‘You know what? It’s not all in my control. I can control a couple of things, sure. But there is this higher power, and they are going to figure things out.’

—Lily, Asian American, 21

“ I started to care about my mental health because I realized that God cares about it as well.

—Caleb,
Black / African American, 22

“ My spiritual practices, like prayer, are gratitude practices. Every night I’ll go through what and who I’m thankful for.

—Marjorie,
White and Native American, 25



“ I’ve had moments where I’ll be going through something and I’ll either just put on a gospel playlist on shuffle or put on a specific song, and the lyrics of it will be just exactly what I’m going through and when it hits it brings you to tears. I feel like I’m hearing God through music, like I’m connecting to something higher, someone so great that really cares about me and my situation right now. That has gotten me through so many times. It’s entirely different than being like, ‘Oh, your parents care about you.’ ‘Cause, you know, sometimes parents say, ‘We know what you’re going through.’ And you’re like: ‘No, you don’t. Like, no, it was different when you were growing up.’ But when it’s God, I know God really understands what’s in my heart.

—Zion, Black / African American and Jamaican, 20

“ I feel like praying really just resolves all of my problems. I just give all my problems to God, and I vent and thank Him for all He has done. It takes a huge weight off of me, and I feel relieved and restored.

—Aniyah, Black / African American, 17

“ I went on a spiritual retreat during the academic year where we would go off into the mountain somewhere and pray for a while. It was a good thing for my mental health because it gave us a break from stressing over what we were studying so much for, helping us take a step back and remember that these things are transient. Over time, the exam will be over and it’s not the big meteor that’s going to destroy our lives, even if it might feel that way at times.

—Darian, White and Asian American, 25

These responses suggest that religious or spiritual practices are effective coping strategies for several reasons. Things like praying or listening to music helped Lily, Zion, and Aniyah feel connected to a higher power who cares about them and supports them. For Darian and Marjorie, prayer helped give them perspective. It enabled them to see that although things may be bad, they too will pass, and there are still things (and people) to be grateful for. These spiritual practices allowed Darian and Marjorie to positively reframe some of the stressors in their lives.



GOING FORWARD

Three Practical Steps for Faith Leaders

1 KNOW WHAT YOU CAN'T KNOW.

In addition to the challenges posed by adolescence and young adulthood, young people today are aware of and grappling with impactful national and global events like climate change, civil unrest, racial injustice, the COVID-19 pandemic, and more. As trusted adults in young people's lives, we want to help. But there's only so much we can truly understand about what it's like to be a young BIPOC in the US today. In Zion's words:

“ [Faith leaders] need to approach situations with the knowledge that they can't really understand what it's like. I think to a great degree they can understand [some things about] being a Black young person, say like fear of police, discrimination in the workplace and in schools. They can understand that to some degree, but I feel that there's other things compounded, especially with social media, coming of age in the pandemic, turning 18 during the pandemic, all these things that have changed the entire world going forward.

—Zion, Black / African American and Jamaican, 20

The good news is that we don't have to be experts on the lived experiences of young BIPOC. Instead, we can practice leading with empathy and humility.

Rather than saying, “I was young once too, so I know how you feel, and I know what you need to do to improve your situation,” try “Though I was young once too, I don't know what it's like to be a young person today. I know it must be challenging with everything going on. I'm here to support you in any way I can.”

We must listen to young BIPOC without placing the burden on them to teach us. Racial trauma can be difficult and painful to talk about. Just the act of speaking about racially traumatic incidents out loud can itself retraumatize those who have experienced it. Researching what it's like to be a young BIPOC today to form a knowledge base on which to build and reading this study are great first steps. We can then follow up with real, meaningful, and substantive support based on the concerns and needs our young people express, incorporating one or more of the coping mechanisms outlined on page 16.



While reflecting on racism in the United States, Fr. Bryan N. Massingale writes that “to create a different world, we must learn how this one came to be.”¹⁷ Throughout history, people of faith have contributed to combating racism (see, for instance, the role of the Church in the sanctuary movement), but religious institutions have also shared in the sins of the past. Take some time to research your institution’s historical and ongoing role in racism. Jot down your findings below. Then reflect on the following questions: How has your institution acknowledged this history, if at all? How can you help your institution work toward racial justice?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2 TAKE MENTAL-HEALTH CONCERNS SERIOUSLY.

For those working with young people today, the gravity of the mental-health crisis is self-evident. In *The State of Religion and Young People 2022: Mental Health & Gen Z—What Faith Leaders Need to Know*, Springtide found that nearly half of all young people say they are moderately or extremely depressed. Sociologists have long demonstrated the relationship between religiosity and well-being. In the words of Darian, 25, “What’s good for one’s spiritual health is good for one’s mental health.” But we at Springtide hear time and time again from young people about how treating mental health as an exclusively spiritual problem—one that can simply be discerned or prayed away—hurts more than it helps. A spiritual solution to mental-health problems can and must promote care that recognizes the independent reality of mental-health issues.

Consider the differences between Lana and Gamela, two Christian young BIPOC who have experiences with faith-based mental-health professionals:

“ I don’t want a Christian therapist. One Christian therapist told me, ‘God, doesn’t give you more than you can handle. Or God is testing you.’ I’m like, ‘Oh, what’s the rubric? What’s the assignment?’ You can’t test someone without telling them what they’re being tested on! You know, those are little bumper-sticker Christianity, evangelical things that really, really first drew me away, and it’s only [been] recently that I’m like, ‘Oh, not everyone is like that one therapist.’

—Lana, Asian American, 22

“ My counselor would listen and validate my feelings. He helped me think of [situations] spiritually and look at them through the example of the lives of people who were talked about in the Bible. So, he would say, ‘Oh, you’re going through a hard time. Remember so-and-so in the Bible who went through this. They were able to overcome it. It’s okay to go through what you’re going through, but always know that God is here watching. You’ve hit rock bottom, but just know that He won’t ever leave you down there. He’s going to lift you up.’

—Gamela, Black / African American, 23

The difference between Lana and Gamela’s experiences with faith-based counseling is subtle but significant. As Gamela notes, her faith-based counselor first affirmed her troubles and then offered spiritual resources to help. In comparison, Lana received the type of support she refers to as “bumper-sticker Christianity,” which dismisses troubles as “tests” from God. When young people are asked how adults and organizational leaders can help with mental health, they repeatedly say the best way is to affirm what young people are going through.



REFLECTION TO TURN THE TIDE

Historically, mental-health issues were often seen as spiritual problems for which the solution was prayer. These days, we know more about how the human brain works. We’ve learned that just like heart disease or cancer, mental-health issues are medically treatable. While religious or spiritual resources may help people cope with mental-health challenges, they are not a substitute for professional clinical care. Some religious concepts and sayings—such as “Give it to God!” or “Just have faith!”—may even prevent some people from seeking the help they need. Write down some of the statements you’ve heard about mental health and religion, or statements said to people who are struggling with their mental health. Note how these statements were helpful or harmful, and write alternative statements you could use when supporting someone who is struggling with their mental health.

3 WELCOME AND EMBRACE THE ETHNIC-RACIAL IDENTITY OF YOUNG BIPOC.

As discussed in this study, young people who take pride in their ERI are more likely to report peer acceptance, interpersonal functioning, and belonging within their communities. Young BIPOC do not leave their ERI at the door when they walk into their places of worship—and they don’t want to. Interview data suggest that faith leaders who ignore their young people’s ERI do so at the risk of great spiritual and emotional harm. Faith leaders can begin to bridge this gap by engaging in practices that ask young people, not just young BIPOC, to reflect on how their important identity or identities create meaning and purpose in their lives. These conversations should seek to empower young people, help them claim their identities with dignity and pride, and see these identities as one part of the wholeness of their personhood.



REFLECTION TO TURN THE TIDE

As mentioned in this study, the construction of social identities is a normal part of the developmental process. For young BIPOC, their ERI is a central and meaningful part of their lives. Reflect on the following questions: What are some experiences or identities that are central to who you are? Can you think of a time when those experiences or identities were acknowledged? Can you think of a time when those experiences or identities were celebrated? How did you feel? What are some small steps you could take to celebrate the important experiences or identities of the young people in your life?

[illegible]

Ending Notes from Dr. Sarah Farmer of Our Research Advisory Board

During challenging times, young people and their families often turn to faith leaders for encouragement and support. Young people desire guidance from caring adults who are willing to invest in their lives. This represents an opportunity for faith leaders to be the first to respond, before a situation turns into a crisis; to stand alongside young people and their families during a crisis; and to continue to provide a safe and nonjudgmental space after a crisis. This continuum of support also opens the door for faith leaders to gain direct access to the hearts of young people, encouraging them to name injustice, transform their emotions, fight injustice, adopt hope-filled narratives, and carve out a space to belong.

Naming Injustice

The worst thing we can do as a faith community is to pretend that injustice doesn't exist. For a young person, that can be interpreted like they don't exist. Young people are searching for judgement-free zones where they can express their pain and trauma without repercussion. They seek to name rather than ignore the injustices done to them and their friends. Naming injustice is an important part of recognition. It counters the invisibility that often leaves people asking: "Did that really just happen to me? Am I making this up?" We cannot effectively navigate what we won't name. This is especially true in a society that promotes colorblindness and reconciliation *without* justice. Naming injustice and the emotions it invokes is one of the first steps to identifying the impact of injustice on one's identity.

Transforming Emotions

Faith leaders have the capacity to not only help young people name injustice but also invite them to express their emotions. Emotions like fear, anger, and hatred may emerge from the impact of injustice on their lives. Young people who "feel like their back is against the wall" may seek to

cope in counterproductive ways.¹⁸ Faith leaders, through modeling respect, love, and self-control, have an opportunity to help young people transform their emotions into something productive. What if hatred could be transformed to love? And despair transformed to hope? The faith community possesses a reservoir of narratives where faithful people have done just that—become agents of social change in the midst of racial terror.

Fighting Injustice

Terror takes place around the world. In a world that is hyper-individualized, it is easy for us to become preoccupied with the injustices done against us and not notice the violations that are taking place every day in other parts of the world. Faith leaders must become outward facing and provide a space for narratives of injustice across the globe to permeate the worship space. Global narratives help young people see that they are not alone and that their freedom is tied up with the freedom of others. Providing mission trips and service opportunities to places around the world where injustice is happening further empowers young people to become agents of change in the world.

Narratives That Build Hope

Faith communities often possess a host of resources that are inherent to the community. This includes hope-filled narratives of BIPOC forebears who were faith-filled agents of change. The stories of faith leaders model what it's like to be unashamed of one's ERI and unapologetic about one's faith. These stories model struggle, lament, and resilience by people who look like our young BIPOC. These narratives help restore the historical memory of our young people in a framework that demonstrates a mutual faithfulness—the faithfulness of our forebears to hold the torch in challenging times and God's faithfulness to provide the necessary courage to persevere.

Spaces to Explore

One of the most important things faith leaders can do is create spaces where young people feel safe enough to explore and discover their spiritual yearnings and curiosity. Young people's spiritual yearnings might center on identity, beliefs, or the exploration of their purpose in life. In a society where BIPOC youth feel physically and emotionally unsafe, having a space where they can bring their whole ERI with them while they ask hard questions about faith is coveted. Spaces like these are more than refuges; they become incubators where young people can be formed and affirmed within the context of a loving, faith-filled intergenerational community. Ultimately, the ministry of presence offered by faith leaders is an invaluable resource that reinforces a message that young people have a place to belong and the possibility to flourish.



Dr. Sarah Farmer,
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Dr. Sarah Farmer

is an associate director at the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. She previously served as an assistant professor of practical theology and community development in the School of Theology and Ministry at Indiana Wesleyan University and as an associate research scholar and lecturer at Yale Divinity School, where she helped direct the Adolescent Faith and Flourishing Program at Yale Center for Faith and Culture. As a practical theologian, Sarah has taught in the areas of community transformation, faith formation, youth ministry, and liberative pedagogy. She is coauthor of *Raising Hope: 4 Paths to Courageous Living for Black Youth* (United Methodist General Board of Higher Education, 2017).

Sarah received her MDiv and PhD from Emory University, where she taught as an adjunct faculty and codirected a certificate in theological studies program at a women's prison. She cofounded the Youth Arts and Peace Camp in Chester, Pennsylvania, and worked with the Youth Hope-Builders Academy at Interdenominational Theological Center.

Sarah is married and has three children. In addition to serving on the Research Advisory Board for Springtide Research Institute, she supports work in her local community, like the Isaiah Center for Justice and Reconciliation Community Development Corporation and Hope House. Sarah also loves finding adventures to do with her children, mentoring her students, watching superhero and Hallmark movies, listening to audiobooks, and doing puzzles created by BIPOC.

ONGOING GEN Z DIVERSITY RESEARCH

Capturing the Full Expression of Being Gen Z

We are committed to listening and understanding the incredible diversity of young people of all racial, gender, cultural expressions and lived experiences, by amplifying their voices in our ongoing research projects.



READ

The Cultural Bounds of Belonging: A Closer Look at Latine Young People

In connection with Dominican University, this report offers data-driven insights on how to support the flourishing of Latino young people.



LISTEN

Season 6: Latinx Voices

Listen to our special season of *The Voices of Young People Podcast*, featuring Latino young people.



WATCH

“Navigating Uncertainty: Race, Faith & Mental Health”

Watch this conversation with Dr. Kameelah Mu’Min Rashad, a 2022–2023 Research Advisory Board member who was joined by members of Springtide’s Gen Z & Diversity Research Team, including Senior Research Associate Nabil Tueme, 2022–2023 BIPOC Fellow Cassandra Ogbevire, and 2022 Summer Research Interns Hannah Turner and Anna Hartshorne.

APPENDIX

Research Design & Promise

Quantitative Data

To create a data set that could speak to the lives and spiritual needs of young BIPOC, data was pulled from two previous surveys conducted for Springtide’s annual *State of Religion and Young People* reports in 2021 and 2022. The sample was weighted for age, gender, race, and region to match the demographics of the country, producing a margin of error of +/- 3%. The age, gender, and racial demographics of this sample are indicated in the tables below. In total, the pooled data set included responses from 5,951 young people ages 13 to 25, 3,159 of which were BIPOC.

Age	Percentage
13–17	30%
18–25	70%
Total	100%

Gender	Percentage
Girl/Woman or Transgender Girl/Woman	55%
Boy/Man or Transgender Boy/Man	40%
Nonbinary	5%

Race	Percent
White	53%
Hispanic or Latino	22%
Black or African American	17%
Asian	5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%
Other	2%

Qualitative Data

We conducted 19 in-depth, semi-structured interviews via telephone and video call with young people ages 13 to 25 who live in the United States and self-identify as BIPOC. The interviews focused on understanding how young BIPOC regard and experience their ethnic-racial and religious identities in their life, especially as those identities relate to mental health. A team of four researchers conducted, coded, and analyzed the interviews. The table below presents some of the demographic data we collected from participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Religious Affiliation
Aniyah	17	Woman/Girl	Black / African American	Just Christian
Caleb	22	Man/Boy	Black / African American	Just Christian
Camren	23	Man/Boy	Hispanic/Latino and White	Roman Catholic
Darian	25	Man/Boy	Asian American and White	Roman Catholic
David	23	Man/Boy	Hispanic/Latino	Nothing in Particular
Gamela	23	Woman/Girl	Black / African American	Roman Catholic
Hayley	17	Woman/Girl	Black / African American	Spiritual but Not Religious
Isabella	23	Woman/Girl	Hispanic/Latino	Just Christian
Ivar	21	Man/Boy	Hispanic/Latino	Roman Catholic
Kate	21	Woman/Girl	Hispanic/Latino and Asian American	Just Christian
Lana	22	Woman/Girl	Asian American	Just Christian
Laura	23	Woman/Girl	Hispanic/Latino	Roman Catholic
Lily	21	Woman/Girl	Asian American	Nothing in Particular
Luz	25	Woman/Girl	Hispanic/Latino	Agnostic
Marjorie	25	Nonbinary	White and Native American	Native Lifeway
May	20	Woman/Girl	Black / African American	Just Christian
Monique	20	Woman/Girl	Black / African American	Roman Catholic
Valeria	25	Woman/Girl	Hispanic/Latino	Agnostic
Zion	20	Woman/Girl	Black / African American	Just Christian

At Springtide, we are committed to using the terms that reflect young people's values or that they themselves prefer. This means that while Springtide uses standardized terms when it comes to collecting demographic information, we defer to young people's self-identified naming preferences when relaying their experiences.

Our Research Promise

At Springtide Research Institute, we are committed to a Data with Heart™ approach. Our approach is rooted in deep systematic listening to young people and the things they care about. It is founded on values, commitments, and beliefs that ground why we do our research, in addition to employing a variety of rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods. Our philosophy and approach are dynamic—informed by varying ways of listening to young people through our Springtide Ambassadors Program (SAP), Writer in Residence, *The Voices of Young People Podcast*, interns, and BIPOC fellows.



This series of commitments is ever-evolving, just like the diversity and context of the young people we are committed to. We commit to reassessing this philosophy in an ongoing capacity to reflect and embody our promise to be culturally informed and inclusive.

- 1 We are committed to listening to young people.
- 2 We believe that the voices of young people should shape what we study.
- 3 We bring our whole selves into our conversations with young people to build trust by owning our biases, being vulnerable about our own lives, and demonstrating that we are accountable for what we do and do not know.
- 4 We strive to deepen our understanding of young people, rather than impose our expectations on them.
- 5 We encourage young people to share their stories and creative expressions because we recognize that knowledge and truth are culturally bound and that young people actively shape our world.
- 6 We understand the value of numbers and that they are enriched by the words shared with us by young people.
- 7 We know that the questions are just as important as the answers and that our inquiry itself is a statement of our values.
- 8 We seek to break down the boxes that research often puts people into by exploring and understanding the highly variable lived experiences of young people.
- 9 We foster diverse ways of understanding the nuance and complexity of young people and social phenomena and are constantly expanding our methodologies to reflect what we have learned.
- 10 We resolve to produce knowledge that is actionable, useful, and valuable to the communities and organizations we serve.

Note: Numerals above are for reference only and not an indication of priority.

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OUR MISSION

Compelled by the urgent desire to listen and attend to the lives of young people (ages 13 to 25), Springtide Research Institute® is committed to understanding the distinct ways new generations experience and express community, identity, and meaning.

We exist at the intersection of religious and human experience in the lives of young people. And we're here to listen.

We combine quantitative and qualitative research to reflect and amplify the lived realities of young people as they navigate shifting social, cultural, and religious landscapes. Delivering fresh data and actionable insights, we equip those who care about young people to care better.

Navigating Injustice: A Closer Look at Race, Faith & Mental Health

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