



Preparing Senior High Students for a Young Adult Faith: A Church guide.

Introduction:

The 2017 Renegotiating Faith report examined the trends of faith formation in high school graduates and found that only 25% of all churches/youth pastors had a plan for the second most important transition in a Christian's youth's life. UCM is committed to resourcing and developing a transition plan with churches in response to this challenge.

My Story:

My journey into the world of young adult transitions began when as a campus missionary I attended our provincial youth conference in 2001 and asked every youth leader I saw who they were sending to post secondary education. They had people that were going to bible school, but no one headed to university. I found this odd, but then I begin hearing about Johnny or Suzie who they had not seen at youth since October who might be going to university somewhere. It dawned on me then that the faith

transition problem might be rooted in late high school faith formation as well as the transition to university.

The Research and Reports:

In 2007 Lifeway research released their now famous stat that 6/10 youth in youth group did not continue in faith through university. This was followed by Barna's study in 2013 and many subsequent Barna releases since, and Lifeway produced more research again in 2019. Here in Canada, we had the EFC Hemorrhaging Faith report 2012 and the Renegotiating Faith report 2017. The stats are consistent we have been losing our own youth at a 60-70% rate for 20 plus years.

Hemorrhaging faith highlighted these trends among youth in Canadian Christianity.

- **Only one in three Canadian young adults who attended church weekly as a child still do so today.**
- **Of the young adults who no longer attend church, half have also stopped identifying themselves with the Christian tradition in which they were raised.**

- **There are four primary toxins that keep our young people from engaging with the church: Hypocrisy, judgement, exclusivity, failure.**

Renegotiating faith highlighted

- **Young adults are three times more likely to connect with a new church after moving out of their parents' home if someone from their home congregation tries to make a connection for them. Similarly, young adults going on to postsecondary studies are four times more likely to connect with a Christian campus group or chaplaincy if someone from their home church tries to make a connection for them. All groups are by their nature exclusive and most young adults need someone to create a way in for them through either an invitation or an introduction.**

- Roughly 4 in 5 young adults who go on to connect with either a campus group or a new church do so within the first month of starting at a new school or new location respectively. This means that making timely connections into new Christian communities is critical.
- Nearly 4 in 5 ministry workers say young adults are responsible for making connections to new Christian communities themselves. Three in five ministry workers say they share this responsibility with young adults, but fewer than 3 in 10 say they have a ministry plan for making these connections. Significantly, only about a quarter of young adults reported that someone from their home church tried to make a connection for them either to a new church or a Christian campus group.
- Some church-based ministry leaders are reluctant to connect young adults to campus ministries for fear of losing young adult leaders. Some campus ministries are finding innovative ways to partner with churches in order to create win-win young adult

Some challenges we are facing in youth retention:

Drop off from youth group from grade 11 through graduation:

We see a beginning of disengagement with youth ministry from Camp or Historymaker the summer of grade 11 through to the beginning of post secondary education.

This happens for a various reasons: doubt, differentiation, jobs, dating relationships, lack of engagement, temptation, graduating and applying for school.

Recommendations:

Senior high specific content

We need age appropriate straight talk on relevant topics (Sex, Racism, Bible issues, Hypocrisy, Church History, Science)

Examples:

Youth Alpha

Apologetics Canada <https://think.apologeticscanada.com/>

Grow Curriculum <https://growcurriculum.org/youth-ministry-curriculum/>

Open Life church <https://open.life.church/categories/267-6-12th-grade>

Youth ministry 360 <https://youthministry360.com/>

Key relationships:

- **Youth ministry:**

Youth ministry doesn't end at graduation but at spiritual maturation. What if I told you that all your 4-6 years of work in youth ministry could be undone in a critical 3 weeks. Most church youth make a permanent break with church in the first 3-4 weeks of the semester when they choose their new friend group and what experiences they want join into on campus. Youth pastor support is critical at this time. We recommend praying and commissioning your youth at the church before they go, if possible joining them on campus for a Christian ministry social in the first 3 weeks to make the hand off, or if you are far away do a digital hand-off to the local ministry. Our staff at UCM are happy to help.

- **Mentor from church**

Whether it is a Sunday School teacher, Pastor, interested Young Adult the research tells us that if a person from the youth's home church takes a genuine interest in the graduating youth in the first term of their first semester they make the transition better. Not just the youth Pastor, we need all hands on deck so to speak in supporting the transition. Care packages, notes full of prayer, phone calls all can help the transition.

- **The new Local Church:**

A key component in any plan is finding a local church for



your youth to go to. The truth is after years of church attendance, church is easy to drop in the first few weeks. It requires going to bed early on Saturday night, finding transit to church, meeting strangers, giving up 3-4 hours of sleep or study time to do an uncomfortable thing. Yet it is critical to flourishing in faith. I encourage you to find a local church close to campus, or consult a local campus minister who can let you know some options that students involved in their ministry have found work for students.

• **Campus ministry:**

Campus ministries play a vital role in helping a student retain and flourish in faith. Their goal is to continue the spiritual maturation you started. Having Christian workers and student clubs full of students who have already navigated this transition is an important part of any transition plan. I encourage your church to know who is doing what on the campus your youth is going to. **What are they doing for socials and ministry in the first 5 weeks?** Sit down and agree on a plan for participation for those first 5 weeks.

Do you have a Plan?

1. Senior high specific content and practice for grade 11-12's

Specialized Content Addressing Theological and Cultural Challenges in an interactive, safe space.

Tailored Senior High Experiences: Historymaker, Summer Camp, A Missions Trip, A Weekly/Monthly Social Justice Service

2. Moving away from home:

Commission: Pray for your youth in front of the whole church, commissioning them for the next stage of life, even the one's staying at home.

Communicate: Call/text/zoom someone from your church should genuinely check-in and pray together with the student. It can be any combo of youth pastor /mentor/ pastor

Care: Send a care package, dorm food, a gift card for groceries, notes of prayer, and encouragement. I would say you send one to arrive in week 2, week 6, week 10

3. First Year of University:

Find out what Christian Groups are doing in the first five weeks on campus and set a plan with your youth on what they can plan to attend. Follow -up with them to see if they attended and had a good experience

If possible, visit campus with your youth to connect to campus ministry partnerships. You can do this in their high school grad year and in the first weeks when a lot of socials are put on by campus ministries.

4. Church don't lose the habit

In conjunction with your network, and the local campus ministry identify 1 to 2 churches in the area for the student to check out in the first 3-4 weeks. Follow up in the first 3-4 weeks to see if they went and how was their experience.

Sample Plan

Here are my goals for each grade 11-12 student

1. Read the NT
2. Regular prayer life
3. Taken Alpha
4. Attend HM
5. Attend Camp one week
6. Been on a Mission trip or experience

Leaving home but staying connected

- Commission: Last Sunday before Grad
- Visit campus with Campus ministry partnerships or do a virtual hand -off. Follow -up with them about their attendance and experience at least twice in the first 5 weeks.
- Have someone or a couple of you Call/text/zoom check in and pray together youth pastor /mentor
- Church don't lose the habit: Identify 1-2 local churches in proximity to campus, follow up on church visit and practice in the first couple of weeks.
- Care package: Send a care package to arrive in week 3 week and week 10.

