

# INFLUENCERS

Peer evangelism amongst  
young people in the UK





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the young people who participated in this research, whether through the online community or the survey. We are also grateful to the many youth workers who took time to share their thoughts and experiences with us.

## TERMS

In this report, **peer-to-peer** refers to young people's relationships with one another. While we sometimes use the words **'friend'** or **'connection'**, peer influence extends beyond those young people would identify just as friends.

We use the word **'evangelism'** in the report, but recognise that peer influence is broader than this term often implies. Young people who grow up in church communities are in a long-term process of forming and choosing (or rejecting) Christian faith. So, peers may play a different role in this context than they do for young people who grow up in non-Christian homes. We also talk about **'sharing faith'** and **'influencing others to explore Christianity'** to acknowledge these broader ways that young people influence each other.

We use the terms **'churched'** and **'unchurched'** to describe young people who did, or did not, grow up in a Christian home. Young people were categorised as 'churched' if they told us that prior to the age of 11, 'Members of my family attended church regularly', 'I went to church regularly' or 'I was part of a church group for children'. Those who selected none of these three options were deemed to have been brought up in a non-Christian or 'unchurched' family.

Young people taking part in the survey were classified as **'active Christians'** if they told us they took part in at least 2/10 practices at least once a month (see Appendix 1 for a list of these practices).

In some questions we ask young people about inviting friends to **church**, by which we mean Sunday services. Other options are given in these questions, which could certainly be considered 'church' (e.g. youth group, Bible study), but we have assumed young people would understand church to mean a Sunday service.



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# INTRODUCTION

In 2020 and 2021, a series of national lockdowns severely disrupted the Church's relationship with young people. Youth workers are used to adapting their plans, but very few of us saw what was coming, or were prepared for how long it would be before we could gather groups of teenagers together again.

While some individuals and groups flourished in this time, many churches lost touch with the young people in and around their congregations.

But they were still talking to each other.

Beyond the watch of youth workers, parents or teachers, young people are almost constantly connected to networks of friends and wider contacts through social media and messaging apps. We already knew that young people's behaviour and attitudes are particularly influenced by their peers during adolescence. But when the existing structures of church life were shaken by COVID-19, we were reminded of just how important these relationships are.

We were also left with plenty of questions.

We know young people's peer relationships are important, but how important are they when it comes to faith journeys?

What do young people think about the idea of evangelism?

Do they share their faith with their friends, and if so, how do they do it?

What stops them?

What support do they need or want from us?

This research is an attempt to answer some of these questions, and is the result of a partnership between Alpha, Church Army, Church of England, Hope Together, Scripture Union, Youth For Christ and Youthscape. The findings are presented in three parts.

**1. The role peers play in young people becoming Christians**

**2. What we know about young Christians sharing their faith with peers**

**3. The barriers to young people sharing their faith, and how we can support them**

Each section ends with some reflections and questions that can help you think about what this might mean for your church, ministry and young people.

**Thank you for reading!**

# HEADLINES

## Youth leaders see sharing faith as a top indicator of active discipleship but only a third of young Christians said they were doing this regularly

- According to the youth leaders we surveyed, the top three 'very strong' indicators of active discipleship amongst young people are personal prayer, engaging with the Bible and sharing faith with non-Christians.
- However, only 34% of young Christians told us they share their faith regularly.

## Young people think peers had some influence on them becoming Christians, but don't think they influence their non-Christian peers very much

- 38% of Christian young people surveyed said that other Christians around their own age were 'a big influence' on them becoming a Christian, while 39% said they had 'a little influence'.
- Those from unchurched backgrounds were slightly more likely to say that Christians their own age were either a 'big' or 'little' influence on them becoming a Christian (85%), compared with those from church backgrounds (76%).<sup>1</sup>
- Most young people reported influencing their non-Christian peers to explore Christianity either 'a little' (49%) or 'not much' (30%).

## Young Christians said they influenced non-Christian peers primarily by talking to them about faith

- When asked how they thought they influenced non-Christian peers, 71% said they told them about their faith, followed by 41% reporting that they showed friends what it is to be a Christian, and 35% inviting peers to something.
- Just under a third (31%) said they share their faith on social media.
- The top ways young people reported being influenced themselves were peers helping them develop their own faith (56%), friends telling them about their faith (55%), and being invited to something (51%).

## Young people report barriers to sharing their faith but overall see peer evangelism more positively than negatively

- The top barriers to faith-sharing perceived by young people were not knowing answers to difficult questions (38%) and peers not being interested (36%).
- But just over half (51%) agreed that sharing their faith 'helps me remember why I am a Christian' and 50% agreed or agreed strongly that most of their non-Christian friends are happy to hear about their faith.
- 70% agreed or agreed strongly that they should try to encourage others to become Christians.



1. 38% of church young people said peers were a 'big' influence on them becoming a Christian, and 38% said they were a 'little' influence, while 40% of unchurched young people said peers were a 'big' influence on them becoming a Christian, and 45% said they were a 'a little' influence.

### **In contrast to youth workers' perceptions, most young Christians say they already have confidence to share their faith but would like more confidence**

- 77% of youth leaders saw lack of confidence amongst young people as a barrier to faith-sharing, but only 31% of young people identified this as a challenge.
- 65% of young Christians surveyed agreed or agreed strongly that they had the confidence to share their faith with others.
- 80% of young Christians agreed or agreed strongly that they would like to have more confidence to share faith with others.

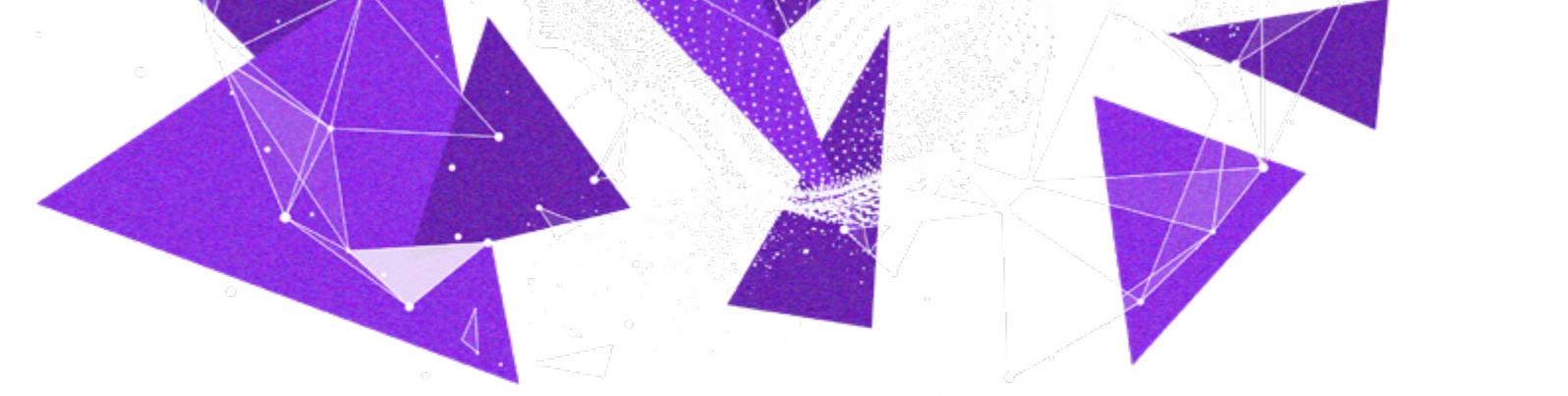
### **When it comes to evangelism, youth leaders and churches emphasise inviting friends to something, but young people are more likely to talk to friends about faith**

- 81% of youth leaders said their church encouraged young people to invite their friends to something, followed by encouraging them to show peers what it means to be a Christian (58%) and then encouraging them to talk to peers about faith (49%).
- But young people themselves were twice as likely to have talked to a friend about their faith (71%) than to have invited a friend to something (35%).
- Youth leaders say their churches are more likely to provide events for young people to invite friends to (59%) than facilitate discussions on evangelism (36%).
- But the top choices for support chosen by young people were talking to others about sharing faith (40%) and hearing about other people's experiences of doing so (39%).

### **While young Christians are fairly positive about sharing their faith, churches are more focused on retaining church young people than reaching out to unchurched young people**

- 87% of the young people taking part in the research were from a church background, where they and/or members of their family attended church services regularly.
- Half (49%) of the youth workers we surveyed told us their churches had no 'active disciples' from a non-Christian home, and a quarter said their churches had no contact with any young people from a non-Christian background, regardless of their level of engagement.
- 39% of youth workers told us their church youth ministry was focused 'solely' or 'mainly' on retention (helping disciple young people primarily from the church community), compared with 8% whose sole or main focus was on outreach.





# THE RESEARCH

This research had two aims: to understand how young people had been influenced by peers in their journey towards becoming a Christian, and to understand how they influenced peers themselves.

## METHODOLOGY

9 Dot Research was commissioned to lead the project, which had three elements.

- 7-day online learning community - 16 young people aged 14-18
- Online survey - 480 young people aged 13-18
- Online survey - 255 youth leaders

These activities took place between December 2021 and February 2022. For a full description of the methodology, including a demographic breakdown, see Appendix 1.

### 1. Online learning community for young people

Our first step was to conduct a small piece of qualitative research with unchurched teenage Christians who had come to faith after the age of 11, to inform our thinking as we developed a larger survey. Despite extensive recruitment, only 16 young people participated, most of whom did not strictly fit our criteria. They took part in a seven-day online learning community, spending around 30 minutes a day responding to questions and conversations about their journey of faith and the role of peers. Although this report focuses on survey results, anonymised quotes from these conversations are used throughout the report.

### 2. Online survey for young people

We then developed an online survey to explore how young people share their faith and have been influenced by peers themselves. A total of 480 'active Christians' aged 13-18 took part (see Appendix 1 for how this was defined). The average age of those responding was 16½; 58% were female and 40% were male. Within the report, we compare results from the 418 young Christians who grew up in Christian homes, with the 62 young people who were part of 'unchurched' families. The survey results are not representative of all young Christians in the UK.

### 3. Online survey for youth workers

We wanted to understand why we had struggled to recruit teenage Christians from a non-Christian background for part 1 of the research. So, we developed an additional online survey for UK church-based youth leaders that would help us understand the status of church youth ministry. This also gave us the opportunity to ask youth leaders how they saw peer-to-peer evangelism and influence amongst their young people, and what they and their churches were doing to develop and encourage this. A total of 255 youth leaders took part in the survey.



**PART ONE**

**WHAT ROLE DO  
PEERS PLAY IN  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
BECOMING  
CHRISTIANS?**

## Young people from both churched and unchurched backgrounds say that peers had some influence on them becoming Christians

38% of Christian young people said that other Christians around their own age were 'a big influence' on them becoming a Christian, and a further 39% said they had 'a little influence'.

Those who didn't grow up in the church were slightly more likely to say that Christians their own age had some influence in them becoming a Christian (85%), compared with those who were part of churched families (76%).<sup>2</sup>

**'The Christians that I knew were the most open and non-judgmental people I had met, they were who I wanted to be so it was clear that I wanted to explore Christianity first.'**

(Chloe, age 18)

However, those from a Christian background were nearly three times more likely to say that three or more peers influenced them to become a Christian (27%), compared with 10% of unchurched young people. Conversely, over a quarter (28%) of young Christians from unchurched backgrounds said they had been influenced by just one Christian peer, compared with 16% of those from churched backgrounds.

## Christian young people describe their peers influencing them to become a Christian in a range of ways

Most young people we surveyed (70%), perceived their Christian peers having influenced them to become a Christian in more than one way.

**Helping: 56% said peers had helped them develop their own faith**



**Telling: - 55% recalled friends telling them about their faith**



**Inviting: - 51% had been invited to something**



**Showing: - 45% said a peer had shown them what it is to be a Christian**



**Introducing: - 35% had been introduced to another Christian by a peer**



If a young person chose any of these, they were taken to a second question which invited them to tell us more about how peers had influenced in this way.

2. 38% of churched young people said peers were a 'big' influence on them becoming a Christian, and 38% said they were a 'little' influence, while 40% of unchurched young people said peers were a 'big' influence on them becoming a Christian, and 45% said they were a 'a little' influence.

## How did they help you develop your own faith?

Total responses 205

Gave me confidence to believe: 59%



Helped me to pray: 56%



Helped me to know Jesus: 50%



Helped me to understand the Bible: 50%



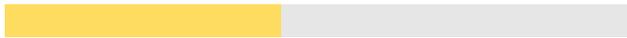
Challenged me to take faith seriously: 47%



Discussed my questions about faith: 47%



Made it more acceptable to have faith: 44%



Something else: 3%



## What did they tell you about their faith?

Total responses 201

About their relationship with God: 75%



How faith helps them in their everyday life: 67%



Why following Jesus is important to them: 58%



Why they were a Christian: 50%



Something else: 4%



'My best friend, who is also a Christian, helped me talk to my youth leader at camp which helped kickstart my faith journey.'

(Alex, age 17)

'It did help, hearing the thoughts of others my age at youth group sessions gave me more perspectives and they were usually relevant to me too.'

(Emily, age 15)

## What did they invite you to?

Total responses 187

Church: 77%



Christian youth group: 56%



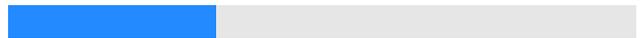
Sunday school or similar: 48%



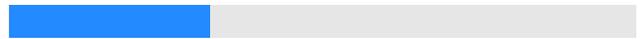
Bible or other study group: 41%



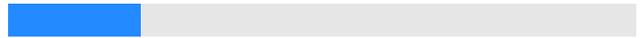
Christian festival or camp: 33%



Prayer group: 32%



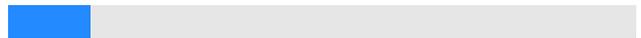
Closed messaging group e.g. WhatsApp: 21%



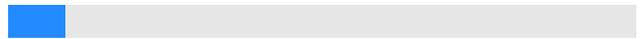
Christian group online: 20%



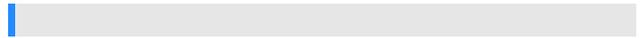
Social media with a Christian focus: 13%



Course e.g. Alpha: 9%



Something else: 1%



## How did they show you what it is to be a Christian?

Total responses 166

They showed their love for others: 66%



I could see they felt loved by God: 63%



They did things like going to church, praying or reading the Bible: 63%



They had hope and purpose: 56%



They were inspiring: 54%



Something else: 2%



## Which Christian(s) did they introduce you to?

Total responses 128

Other Christians my own age: 73%



A church leader: 52%



A youth leader: 44%



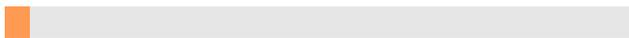
Someone who inspired me: 34%



Someone who became a mentor: 23%



Someone else: 4%



**They exhibited the traits that I wanted and at my age it made me realise that it wasn't just an age thing or a "wisdom" thing... I really loved what they were saying but anyone can say anything, it was the fact that I could see it in their characters.'**

(Chloe, age 18)

Churched young people were more than twice as likely to have been invited to an event by Christian peers (24% of unchurched young people vs 55% of churched young people) and more likely to have been influenced by peers in a range of ways, with those from an unchurched background almost twice as likely to say there had only been one type of influence (47% of unchurched young people vs 26% of churched young people).

**Despite the clear opportunities for peer influence with unchurched young people, churches are mostly focused on retaining churched young people, who comprise the majority of those they engage with**

87% of the young people taking part in the research were from a churched background, where they and/or members of their family attended church services regularly, and three-quarters (76%) considered themselves to be a Christian before the age of 11. When young people were asked about others they regularly connect with, half (49%) said that 'all' or 'most' of their friends were Christians.

Half (49%) of the youth workers we surveyed told us their churches had no 'active disciples' from a non-Christian home and 83% said that they had five or fewer. A quarter of youth workers (24%) said their churches had no contact with any young people from a non-Christian background, regardless of their level of engagement.



## Of the young people (11-18s) reached through church-based activities, about how many would you say are in each of the following groups?

This table presents the average number of young people youth workers said they engaged with (25.2) and the average breakdown across different faith categories.

	Percentage of total number	Mean number of young people
<b>Active disciples</b> ( <i>Have made some form of faith commitment and are actively investing in their faith</i> )	44%	11.1
<b>Faith explorers</b> ( <i>Asking questions about faith and open to further faith exploration e.g. Alpha</i> )	30%	7.6
<b>Fringe engagers</b> ( <i>Attend groups where faith is shared but show little engagement</i> )	19%	4.8
<b>Not engaged</b> ( <i>Those who will only attend groups where there is no faith content</i> )	7%	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25.2</b>

39% of youth workers told us their church youth ministry was focused ‘solely’ or ‘mainly’ on retention (helping disciple young people primarily from the church community), compared with 8% whose sole or main focus was on outreach.

However, when asked about the future, only 7% said they wanted their main focus to be on retention; the vast majority (85%) were seeking a more balanced engagement with churched and unchurched young people.



# SO WHAT?

## **1. Recognise the peer group as a key part of churched young people's faith journeys**

It's not surprising to hear that young people from churched backgrounds are influenced by more Christian peers, and in more ways, than unchurched young people. After all, they are part of communities where they regularly encounter these peers and practice faith together. It's a reminder that for those growing up in church, the peer group is a vital part of the ecology of faith development.

## **2. Encourage those who are 'the one Christian'**

If half of the young people in our churches say that all, or most, of their friends are Christians, this suggests there are both strong Christian peer groups out there, as well as plenty of young people who have a real mixture of friends. We know that living and growing communities of faith need to avoid being isolated, so this is something of an encouragement. These results also remind us that sometimes a young person will be the only Christian their peers know, and that introducing them to other Christian friends is all part of the journey of sharing faith.

## **3. Support those who want to re-balance youth ministry more towards outreach**

Finally, it's not a surprise that most young people in churches have grown up in Christian homes. But in addition, half of the churches had no teenagers they would consider 'active disciples' from a non-Christian home, and a quarter had no contact with any young people from a non-Christian background. This suggests some churches and youth workers need support to shift the focus of their ministry more towards outreach, as many have said they want to. Understanding the reasons youth workers find it hard to reach out to young people who aren't from a Christian home would be an important next step for shaping this support.



**PART TWO**

**WHAT DO WE KNOW  
ABOUT YOUNG  
CHRISTIANS  
SHARING THEIR  
FAITH WITH PEERS?**

## Sharing your faith with others is seen as a top indicator of active discipleship according to youth leaders, but only a third of young Christians say they do this regularly

The youth leaders we surveyed estimated that nearly half (44%) of those they reach through church-based activities are 'active disciples', which we defined as having made some form of faith commitment and actively investing in their faith.

Youth leaders were asked to tell us how important a range of activities/attitudes were as indicators that a young person is an 'active disciple'. Of a list of 19, the top three 'very strong' indicators chosen by youth workers were: 1. Personal prayer, 2. Engaging with the Bible, and 3. Sharing faith with non-Christians.

Over three-quarters (79%) of the young people we surveyed said they prayed on their own, 58% engaged with the Bible, and 34% shared their faith with others on a monthly basis.

Only half (49%) prayed and read the Bible on a monthly basis, and only 20% of the young Christians we surveyed did all three.

## Which of these do you do at least once a month?

**Pray on my own: 79%**



**Go to church: 75%**



**Engage with the Bible: 58%**



**Pray with others: 56%**



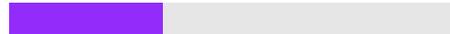
**Listen to Christian music: 48%**



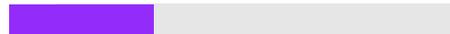
**Discuss faith with other Christians: 46%**



**Share your faith with others: 34%**



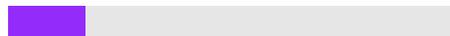
**Go to a Christian youth group: 32%**



**Share Christian content on social media: 21%**



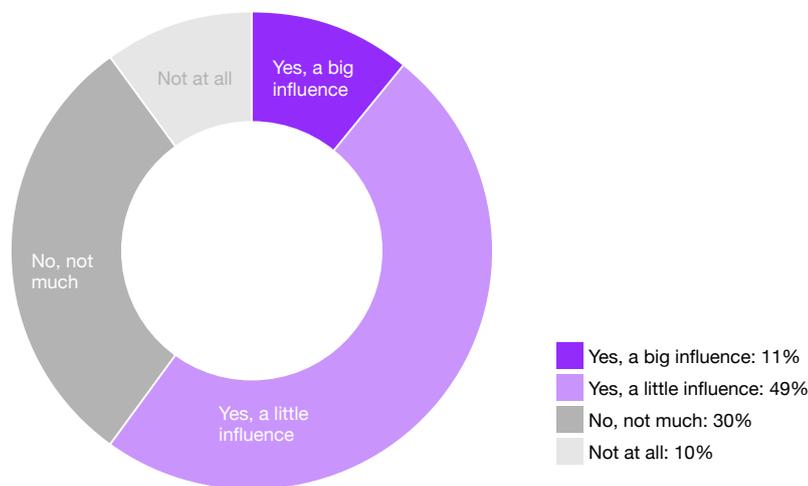
**Listen to Christian podcasts: 17%**



## Most young people see themselves as having limited influence on their non-Christian friends, and there are mixed views about how interested their peers are in faith

While 11% saw themselves as having had a big influence, the majority think they have a limited impact on their peers in terms of evangelism, with four-fifths (79%) reporting they have influenced their non-Christian peers to explore Christianity either 'a little' or 'not much'.

### Do you think you have ever influenced your non-Christian connections to explore Christianity?



Two-thirds (67%) of young Christians either agreed or agreed strongly that most young people are not interested in the Christian faith, compared with 36% who said that their peers are not interested. This suggests they see their peers as being more interested than 'young people' in general.

50% agreed or agreed strongly that most of their non-Christian friends are happy to hear about their faith.

**'I have shared my faith with some non-Christians at school, but it usually just led to them calling Christianity stupid.'**

**(Daniel, age 15)**

**'I also try to bring it up with friends whenever I get the chance and have had lots of interesting conversations and debates with different friends. I feel that conversations I've had with people have definitely enlightened them more on what being a Christian really means, but I don't feel any conversations have led to any of my friends becoming more interested in faith themselves, yet at least!'**

**(Megan, age 17)**

## Where young people are sharing faith, they are most likely to do it by talking about their faith, followed by showing peers what it is to be a Christian

**'I have [shared my faith] with my close friends, yes... I point out how God has helped me in my struggles and talk about how he can do the same in their lives. My friends now ask me to pray for them sometimes. Which is an honour for me.'**

(Lauren, age 17)

We excluded the 10% of young people who told us they felt they had not influenced peers to explore faith at all and asked the remaining 90% in which of these ways they think they may have influenced peers.

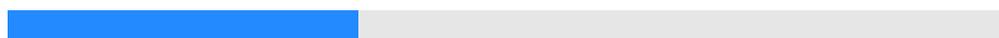
**Telling:** 71% said they told non-Christian peers about their faith



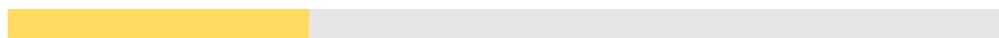
**Showing:** 41% had shown friends what it is to be a Christian



**Inviting:** 35% had invited peers to something



**Helping:** 30% had helped friends to develop their own faith



**Introducing:** 21% had introduced peers to another Christian



### What did you tell them about your faith?

Total responses 305

**Why I am a Christian: 61%**



**About my relationship with God: 55%**



**How faith helps me in my everyday life: 53%**



**Why following Jesus is important to me: 44%**



**Something else: 7%**



### How did you show them what it is to be a Christian?

Total responses 201

**By showing my love for others: 64%**



**By having hope and purpose: 59%**



**By doing things like going to church, praying and reading the Bible: 52%**



**By inspiring them: 46%**



**By making sure they can see I feel loved by God: 45%**



**Something else: 2%**



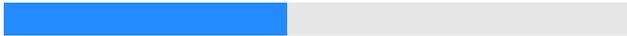
## What did you invite them to?

Total responses 149

Church: 72%



Christian youth group: 45%



Bible or other study group: 33%



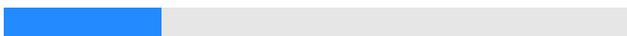
Christian festival or camp: 30%



Sunday school or similar: 27%



Prayer group: 25%



Christian group online: 15%



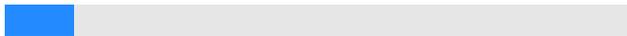
Course e.g. Alpha: 14%



Social media with a Christian focus: 12%



Closed messaging group e.g. WhatsApp: 11%



Something else: 1%



## How did you help them develop their own faith?

Total responses 129

Gave them confidence to believe: 57%



Made it more acceptable to have faith: 54%



Discussed their questions about faith: 52%



Helped them to know Jesus: 51%



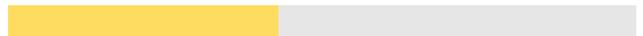
Helped them to understand the Bible: 49%



Challenged them to take faith seriously: 47%



Helped them to pray: 43%



Something else: 1%



## Which Christian(s) did you introduce them to?

Total responses 89

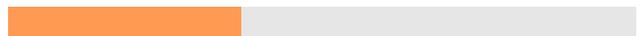
Other Christians their own age: 71%



A youth leader: 38%



Someone who inspired them: 37%



A church leader: 35%



Someone who became a mentor: 19%



Someone else: 2%



## A third of young people are sharing their faith on social media, and are most likely to share Bible quotes/reflections

'It's usually not long before people I meet know I'm a Christian because I try to share my faith on social media, and that means people do tend to ask questions which has led to conversations with various non-Christian friends.'

(Megan age 17)

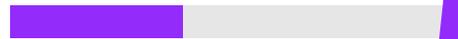
Just under a third of young people (31%) told us they share their faith on social media, and those who do are sharing faith in a variety of ways - with 67% selecting three or more ways. Of those who told us they share their faith on social media, Bible quotes/reflections are by far the most popular way to do so.

### What are you sharing on social media?

**Bible quotes or reflections: 73%**



**Other people's testimonies: 38%**



**Stories of how God is working in my life: 47%**



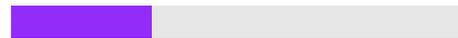
**Content about my church or youth group: 35%**



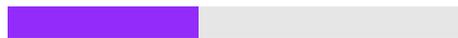
**Thoughts about God or faith: 46%**



**Content/videos created by other people: 31%**



**Prayers: 42%**



**Content/videos I've created: 16%**



Amongst this group, Instagram is the most popular platform for faith sharing (used by 77%), followed by WhatsApp (43%), Snapchat (40%), TikTok (38%), Facebook (28%), YouTube (27%) and Twitter (21%).

Of those who say they share their faith on social media, 43% have at least one separate social media account for sharing faith.

Over a third (35%) of unchurched young people said they connect with Christian peers only or mainly online, compared to just 13% from a church background, suggesting this is a particularly important context for those who didn't grow up in church.



# SO WHAT?

## **1. Affirm and encourage the various ways young people share faith with their friends**

Nearly two-thirds of those we surveyed (64%) described their faith as 'very' or 'quite' strong, and many think their peers are open to hearing about their faith. But a minority were sharing their faith regularly with peers and they don't think they have much of an impact. Like all of us, young people need encouragement that we often make a difference even when we don't see it. By providing examples of the impact of talking, showing, inviting etc, we can help young people see that there are all sorts of ways to influence others.

## **2. Ask young people what it means to have authentic faith on social media**

Social media provides a range of ways for young people to create or share content that tells others who they are and what they value, but only a third of young Christians say they currently share their faith on these platforms. We can use this research to open discussions about what it looks like to be authentic about your faith online, however strong or weak that faith may feel. And we can create opportunities for those who do share their faith online to tell their stories, and inspire others.

## **3. Support young Christians in developing online community**

Finally, it's interesting to see that 35% of unchurched young Christians said they connect with Christian peers only or mainly online. For this generation, social networks naturally extend beyond those they meet in person. How do we support young people to connect with Christian peers safely online, as well as in their local context? And how do we support young people whose only Christian community is online?



PART THREE

# WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE SHARING THEIR FAITH, AND HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THEM?

## The majority of young people think peer evangelism is positive and say they have the confidence to share their faith - though they would like to have even more

Young people were more likely to identify the positive impacts on them of sharing their faith, than they were to identify challenges or difficulties. Just over half of young people (51%) said that sharing their faith helps them remember why they are a Christian.

### Does sharing your faith with non-Christians affect your faith in any of these ways?

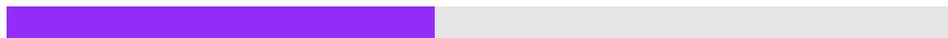
**It helps me remember why I am a Christian: 51%**



**It strengthens my faith: 47%**



**It can be inspiring: 45%**



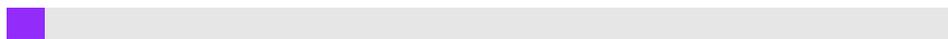
**It can cause me to have doubts: 23%**



**Any other ways: 9%**

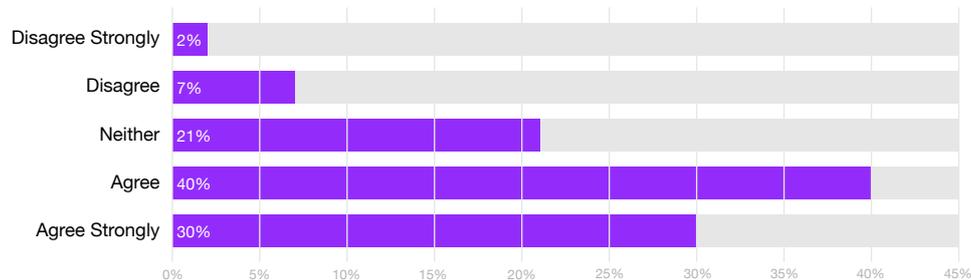


**I have not shared my faith: 4%**



In total, 70% agreed or agreed strongly that they should try to encourage others to become Christians.

### I should try to encourage others to become Christians



65% agreed or agreed strongly that they had the confidence to share their faith with others, and 80% either agreed or agreed strongly that they would like to have more confidence to share faith with others.

**'If asked and given the opportunity I would always be willing to share my faith. I love football and train 5 times a week to become more skilful, I feel given the right training in sharing my faith I could be confident.'**

(Caleb, age 15)

	I wouldn't like to have more confidence to share faith with others	Neither	I'd like to have more confidence to share faith with others	Total
I have the confidence to share my faith with others	22 (5%)	48 (10%)	242 (50%)	312 (65%)
Neither	5 (1%)	14 (3%)	79 (16%)	98 (20%)
I don't have the confidence to share my faith with others	4 (1%)	5 (1%)	61 (13%)	70 (15%)
Total	31 (6%)	67 (14%)	382 (80%)	

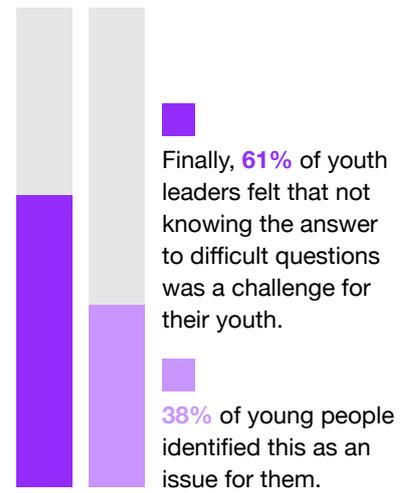
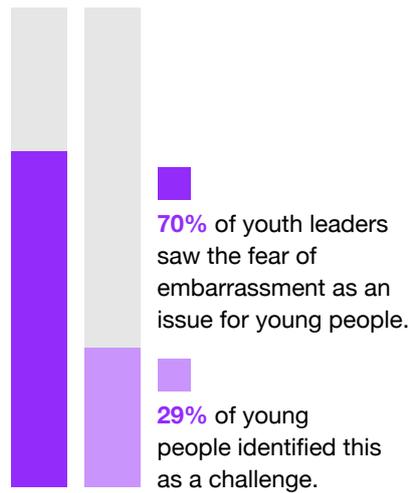
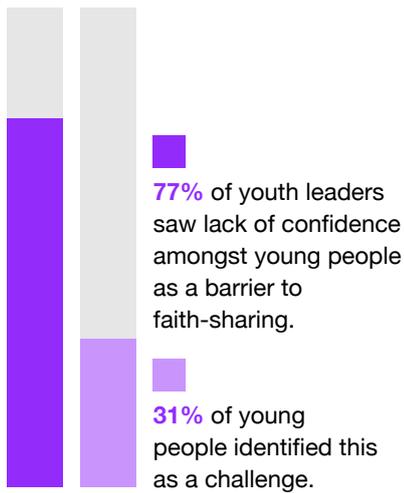
**Youth leaders and young people both identify barriers to faith sharing, though youth leaders see these as being a greater problem than young people do**

**'I find it really difficult because of the fear that they will judge you.'**

(Lauren, age 17)

**'When people ask me questions I don't know how to answer; that really worries me to share my faith because I don't want to not be able to respond and then push those people further away from Christ, so sometimes I feel it's better not to say anything.'**

(Grace, age 16)



**Do any of the following put you off sharing your faith with those who are not Christian?**

**Not knowing answers to difficult questions: 38%**



**Not sure how to let them know: 27%**



**My peers are not interested: 36%**



**It's my business, not theirs: 26%**



**I don't feel confident enough: 31%**



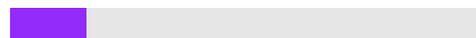
**I worry about being bullied: 18%**



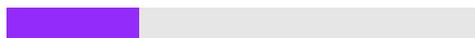
**I might feel embarrassed: 29%**



**It's caused me problems before: 16%**



**They might treat me differently: 28%**

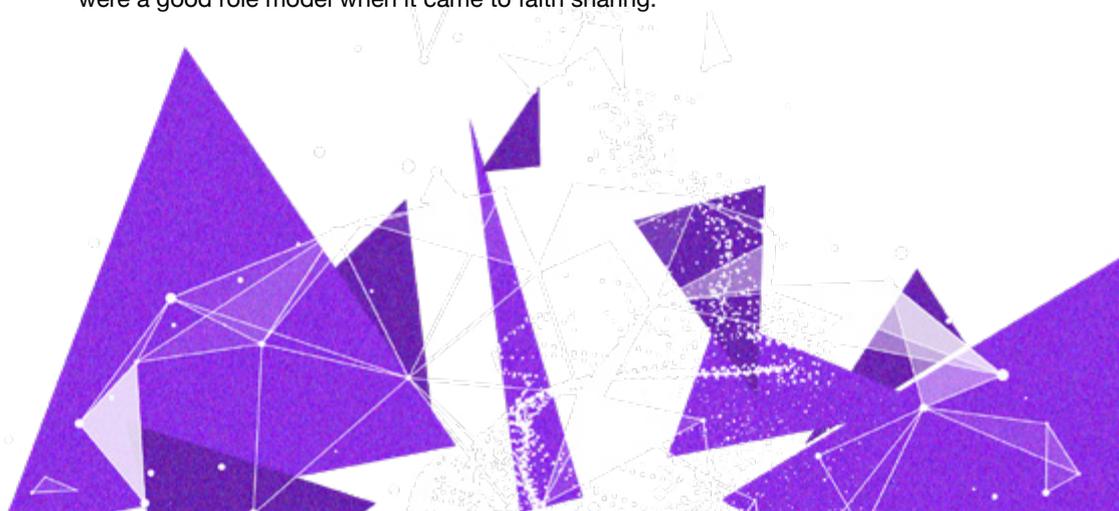


**Other reason: 3%**



Churched young people were more likely to perceive barriers than unchurched young people, with 45% of churched young people identifying 3 or more barriers, compared to just 23% of unchurched young people.

Despite 96% of youth leaders agreeing or strongly agreeing that they have the confidence to share their own faith with others, only 70% either agreed or strongly agreed that they were a good role model when it came to faith sharing.





## Youth leaders perceive making an invitation to be more significant in evangelism than young people do

We asked youth leaders how their church encourages young people to influence non-Christians to explore Christianity. The largest number said their church encouraged young people to invite their friends to something (81%), followed by encouraging them to show peers what it means to be a Christian (58%) and then encouraging them to talk to peers about faith (49%).

Youth leaders were also asked about how they perceived active Christians in their groups to have influenced peers, and were more likely to say that these young people invited friends to something than they were to say they talked to peers about faith.

However, young people themselves were twice as likely to have talked to a friend about their faith (71%) than to have invited a friend to something (35%). In fact, being invited to something was relatively low down the list of ways unchurched young people told us their Christian friends had influenced them.

### In which ways did they influence you to become a Christian?

*(unchurched young people, n=49)*

**They told me about their faith - 51%**



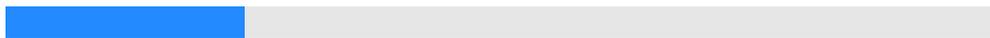
**They helped me develop my own faith - 47%**



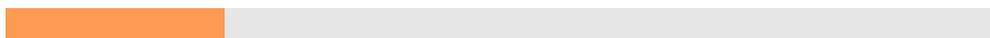
**They showed me what it is to be a Christian - 45%**



**They invited me to something - 24%**



**They introduced me to other Christians - 22%**



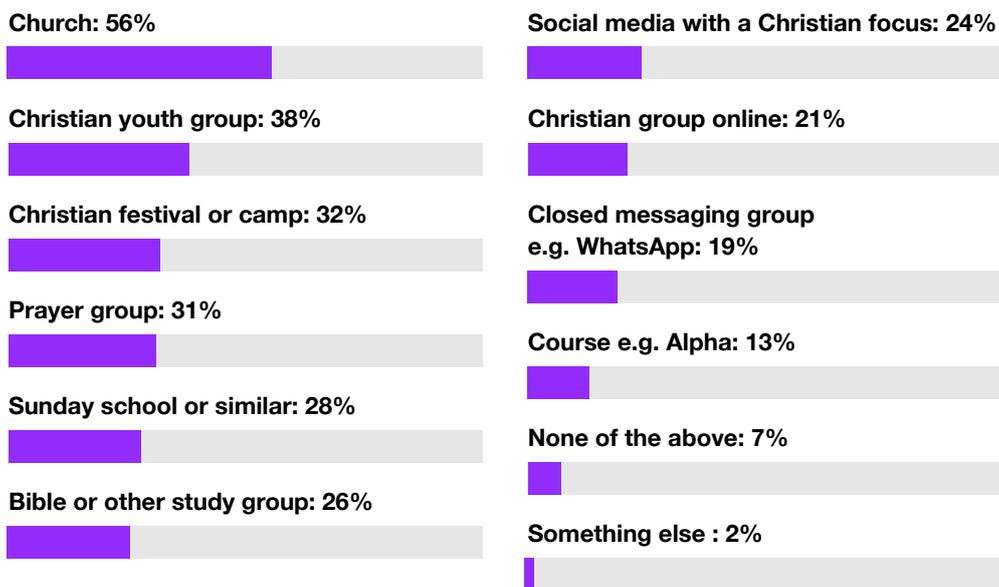
While only 35% of the young people we surveyed had ever invited a non-Christian peer to something, 93% said they would be willing to do so. However, when presented with a list of what they would invite friends to (see below), 28% selected just one thing they would feel happy inviting a non-Christian to.

## Contrary to youth leaders' perceptions, where young people do make invites, they are more likely to invite peers to church than to a youth group

When it comes to inviting non-Christian friends to something, church was, again, the most popular option (56%), with Christian youth groups coming second (38%) and Christian festivals and camps third (32%). This is in contrast to overtly evangelistic groups or courses, which were far less popular (13%).

### Which of these would you be happy to invite a non-Christian connection to?

(n=459)



This contrasts with the perceptions of youth leaders who were more likely to suggest that young people invited peers to Christian youth groups (82% of youth leaders) or Christian festivals (58%). Only 54% of youth leaders told us that young people invited their friends to church.



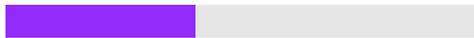
## While churches are more focused on events young people can be invited to, young people are more likely to want to talk about sharing faith

Youth leaders report that churches are far more likely to provide events for young people to invite friends to (59%) than facilitate discussions on evangelism (36%). When asked which of 12 options had been most helpful for young people's faith-sharing, providing 'open' events that friends can come to, came top of the list for youth workers.

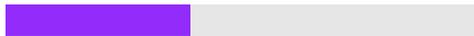
However, when we asked young people about what would help with faith-sharing, they wanted experience-based conversation, with 40% saying they want to be able to talk to others about sharing faith and 39% saying they want to hear about other people's experiences of doing so.

### Would any of these help you to share your faith with those who are not Christian? You can tick more than one.

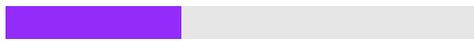
Being able to talk to others about sharing faith: 40%



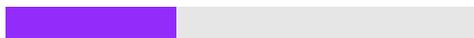
Hearing about other people's experiences: 39%



Advice on how to talk about difficult issues: 37%



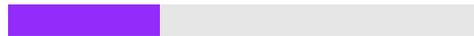
More 'open' events to invite people to: 36%



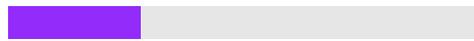
Being able to practice with other Christians first: 33%



More spaces to have open conversations about faith: 32%



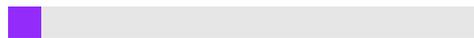
Having someone to mentor you while you try: 28%



Training on evangelism and communication: 22%



None of the above: 7%



'Find people who've shared their faith to maybe talk about it? and maybe give some tips on how to do it when you're still quite early on in your faith journey yourself :)'

'Pointing out that sharing faith can really help the person doing the sharing'

'Have open conversations with us'

'I think teaching people how to share their faith and why sharing your faith is important, and also hearing past successes is important because it shows that the effort isn't useless and that real change can be made to people's lives through sharing the word of god'.

'Teach us how to calmly debate with people who don't believe. I've had many occasions when a person has asked me a question I can't answer, making them less interested in Christianity.'



# SO WHAT?

## 1. Be encouraged that there is appetite to share faith

In a culture that is wary of evangelism, it might be surprising to hear that 70% of the young people we surveyed agreed that they should try to encourage others to become Christians. And though they largely view themselves as confident, they want to be more confident in sharing their faith. How can we encourage them further?

## 2. Reflect on our own attitudes, experiences, and beliefs about peer evangelism

These results suggest that youth leaders perceive more barriers to young people sharing faith than young people do themselves. Some young people are worried about what others will think of them, but not to the extent that youth leaders predict. In some cases, our own negative feelings about young people and peer evangelism might be holding us back from supporting them.

## 3. Expect young people to talk about their faith, not just invite peers to something

The research suggests that youth workers emphasise 'inviting' more than 'telling', which may be because we perceive it to be easier for a young person to make an invitation than talk about their faith. But young people are telling us that they do talk. So let's ask them about that, and encourage them further.

## 4. Highlight positive stories of faith-sharing young people

There are lots of ways young people would like support for faith-sharing, but at the top of their list is talking to others and hearing about their experiences. Half of those surveyed also said that sharing faith reminds them of why they are a Christian. This presents an opportunity to highlight stories of how sharing faith has positively impacted young people (as well as acknowledging challenges) and to discuss peer evangelism in environments that emphasise stories and experience.

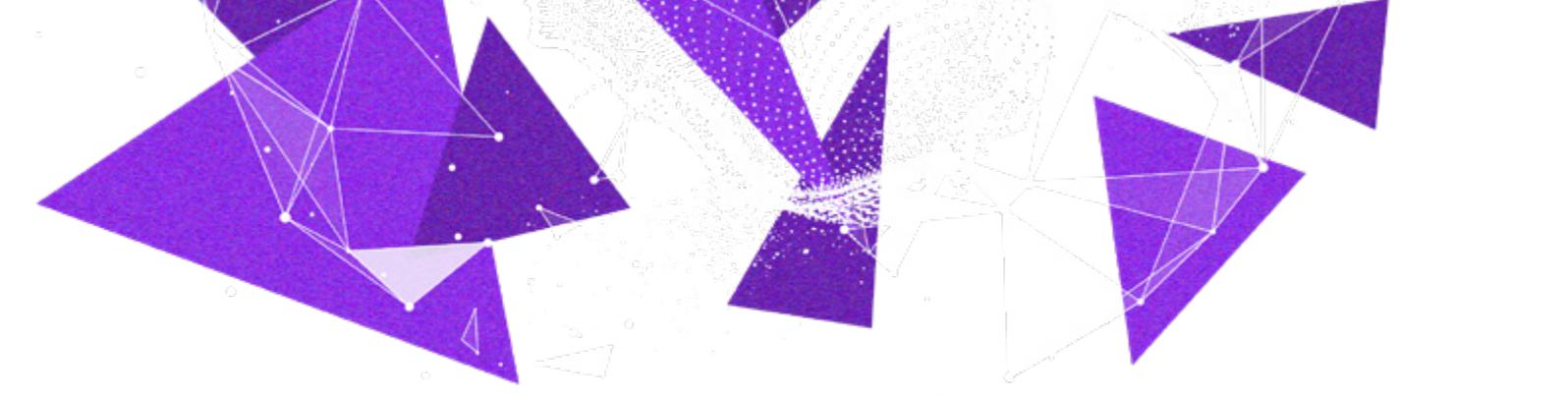


'The thing that helped me most I think is the realisation that at the end of the day, as long as it's important to you and you want to talk about it and you feel it's right to talk about it, you don't have to overly worry about what other people will say or what other people will think. Because just have faith in the fact that just like in every other moment God has got you in that conversation and will help you find the strength to just be completely open with other people...

I don't know if it's just like my personal experience, but I have found that people will say not very nice things on social media... But I have found having these conversations in person I feel as if the other person (or people) can see your vulnerability and can see passion and your love.'

(Jade, age 17)





## APPENDIX 1: **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

There were three parts to the research: a small online learning community for young people, an online survey for young people, and an online survey for youth workers.

### 1. Young people online learning community (qualitative)

In December 2021, an online learning community ran for seven days, with 16 Christians aged 14-18. We wanted to have in-depth conversations with young people from non-Christian backgrounds who had come to faith after the age of 11 and to understand the influence of peers on their faith journeys. However, despite extensive recruitment, only 16 young people participated, and of those only five clearly grew up in a non-Christian home. Nevertheless, the community yielded some rich and helpful insights into young people's faith journeys which were used to inform the development of the young people's survey. Anonymised quotes from the online community are used throughout the report.

### 2. Young people online survey (quantitative)

A 45-item questionnaire was developed in partnership with 9 Dot Research, that explored how teenage Christians felt their faith had been influenced by peers, and how they influenced their non-Christian friends. The survey was piloted and then launched in early 2022, running for a total of three weeks. Young people were recruited to the survey by the polling company Cint. Initially, 914 13-18-year-olds described themselves as Christians on the survey, of which 480 were identified as 'active Christians' and comprised the final sample. To be classified as an 'active Christian' someone had to take part in at least 2 out of a list of 10 practices, at least once a month. These were: pray on my own, go to church,

engage with the Bible, pray with others, listen to Christian music, discuss faith with other Christians, share your faith with others, go to a Christian youth group, share Christian content on social media, and listen to Christian podcasts.

The survey was not representative of young Christians in the UK, because there is no accurate demographic data on the whole population of teenage Christians and because we were not able to recruit a large enough number of participants to then create weighted sub-samples. This means the findings can't be generalised to all young Christians in the UK.

### Demographic information

Of the 480 active Christian young people who participated in the survey

- 40% were male, 58% were female, 1% were other and 1% preferred not to answer.
- 34% were from London, 11% from the South East, 9% from the West Midlands, 8% from the East Midlands, 8% from the North West, 6% from the East of England, 5% from Yorkshire and Humber, 4% from Northern Ireland, 4% from the South West, 3% from Wales, 3% from the North East, 2% from Scotland, 2% said they had no idea and 1% said they would prefer not to answer.
- 42% were from a city, 42% from a town, 10% from a rural area, 1% from another area, 4% were unsure and 1% preferred not to answer.
- 76% were in full-time education, 10% in part-time education, 5% in full-time work, 16% in part-time work, 3% not in education or work, 1% selected other and 3% preferred not to answer. Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could choose more than one option.

- 29% identified as Church of England, 18% as Roman Catholic, 16% as Baptist, 14% as another group, 12% as Assemblies of God, 8% as Methodist, 4% as Elim, 4% as New Testament Church of God, 3% as Church in Wales, 3% as Church of Scotland, 3% as Salvation Army, 2% as New Frontiers, 2% as Pentecostal, 2% as Vineyard, 1% as United Reformed Church, 1% as Presbyterian, 1% as Redeemed Christian Church of God, while 13% said they didn't know and 6% said they couldn't remember. Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could choose more than one option.

### Information about church attendance, faith practices and conversion

- 56% attended a church service at least weekly, 24% attended a church service at least monthly, 8% attended a church service 4-6 times a year, 5% attended a church service 2-3 times a year, 6% hardly ever attended a church service and 1% never attended a church service.
- When asked which activities they do at least once a month, 79% pray on their own, 75% go to church, 58% engage with the Bible, 56% pray with others, 48% listen to Christian music, 46% discuss faith with other Christians, 34% share their faith with others, 32% go to a Christian youth group, 21% share Christian content on social media and 17% listen to Christian podcasts.
- 25% said they attended a church with a congregation of fewer than 50, 54% a congregation between 50 and 250, 13% a congregation of more than 250 and 8% had no idea.
- When asked about their faith, 63% said 'I have always known I was a Christian', 45% said 'I am still growing as a Christian', 17% said 'Becoming a Christian was a gradual journey' and 12% said 'I know the moment I became a Christian' (note that 28% of respondents selected more than one answer to this question).
- When asked what age they first considered themselves a Christian, 43% were under 5, 33% were aged 6-10, 16% were 11-14, 5% were 15-18 and 4% had no idea.
- When asked 'Have you done any of these since the age of 11?', 60% said they had 'Invited Jesus into my life', 43% had 'Been baptised', 36% had 'Been confirmed' and 13% said 'None of these'.
- 19% described their faith at the moment as 'Very strong', 45% as 'Quite strong', 26% as 'OK', 9% as 'A little rocky' and 1% as 'Very rocky'.

### Unchurched and church family analysis

The whole sample of 480 young people was also divided into two groups, those who were from an 'unchurched' family (i.e., those who did not attend church with their families - 62 young people) and those who were from a 'churched' family (418 young people).

Respondents were categorised as having been brought up in a churched family if they told us that prior to the age of 11, 'Members of my family attended church regularly', 'I went to church regularly' or 'I was part of a church group for children'. Those who selected none of these three options were deemed to have been brought up in a non-Christian or 'unchurched' family.

There are some important limitations to this analysis. First, it is likely that some respondents may have been incorrectly categorised, and secondly, the sub-sample of unchurched young people (62) is relatively small. Recruitment for the online community and the findings from the youth leader survey suggest that active Christians from a non-Christian background are a small group, and so it is probable that large-scale recruitment of this group would be challenging, if not unachievable.

### 3. Youth leader online survey (quantitative)

In response to our struggles recruiting young people from a non-Christian background to the online community (part 1 of the research), an additional survey was commissioned with UK church-based youth leaders in February 2022. The aim was to understand the status of church youth ministry (average numbers, spiritual development and youth leaders' perceptions of who was from Christian/non-Christian backgrounds). Additionally, this offered the opportunity to ask youth leaders how they saw peer-to-peer evangelism being outworked amongst their young people, as well as what they and their church were doing to develop and encourage this.

255 youth leaders were recruited by the partner organisations using an online survey link.

- 41% identified as Church of England, 14% as Independent, 11% as Baptist, 9% as New Testament Church of God, 5% as New Frontiers, 5% as Other 'network', 4% as Vineyard, 3% as Assemblies of God, 3% as Church of Scotland, 3% as Methodist, 2% as Elim, 1% as Redeemed Christian Church of God, 1% as United Reformed Church and fewer than 1% as Church in Wales, Congregational Church, Roman Catholic or Salvation Army).



- 19% worshipped in churches with fewer than 50, 31% in churches with 50-100, 19% in churches with 100-150, 18% in churches with 150-250, 12% in churches with over 250 and 1% didn't know.
- 26% were from the South East, 15% from the North West, 14% from London, 11% from the South West, 10% from the West Midlands, 6% from the East of England, 6% from the East Midlands, 5% from Scotland, 4% from the North East, 4% from Yorkshire and Humber, 1% from Wales, 1% from Northern Ireland and less than 1% either didn't know or preferred not to answer. A small number of respondents reported that their church was in more than one area.
- 55% were from a town, 32% from a city, 11% from a rural area, 5% from another area and 1% weren't sure.
- 98% of respondents worked with 11-18s as part of their role with 77%, saying this was the main group they worked with. 28% covered more than one age group, and 42% covered 3 or more age groups.
- 40% were full-time employed workers, 21% were part-time employed workers, 36% were volunteers, 2% were Licensed/Recognised/Authorised lay ministers, 8% were Clergy or Church leaders and 2% had other roles.

## Limitations

There are some limitations to what we can learn from this data, because of the research design First, we did not compare the impact of different influences on young people's faith development. This means we can't make judgements about the relative importance of peers compared to family members or youth workers, for example. Second, we asked young people and youth workers about their perceptions of influencing others but have not been able to verify these perceptions by talking to peers themselves. In these cases, there is a risk that we conflate action and impact, for example assuming that a young person talking to peers about faith is the same as influencing them. Third, our comparisons between young people from churched and unchurched backgrounds are based on a small sample of unchurched young people, and would benefit from being explored with a much larger group.

