

**Evangelism of and by Young Adults:
A Report to the 237th Annual Convention
of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut**

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DRAFT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The 235th Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, concerned about the persistent decline of young adults 18-39 years of age in the church, created a Task Force on Evangelism of and by Young Adults to identify successful strategies to engage and use the gifts of young adults, and to recommend policies and resources to implement those strategies. A Young Adult Task Force was organized consisting principally of lay and clergy leaders under 39 years old, reached out to young adults across ECCT, produced for the 236th Convention a video *Young Adult Voices*, then conducted intensive research within ECCT, nationally and beyond to identify the needs of young adults and successful strategies to meet those needs.

Research Findings

The research on declining numbers in the Episcopal Church (34% in the last decade in CT alone), and the aging of our congregations (modal age among Episcopalians, at 69, is the highest among all denominations), and CT's unique context (CT ranks 7th in terms of states with the fastest declining populations and 6th in terms of states with the highest average age) provide the backdrop for the large-scale exodus of young adults from the church. Key findings included:

- Given our declining numbers and aging members, the future of our church depends on the choices we make about evangelizing young adults now.
- Young adults express a desire for increased and deeper levels of spiritual formation, including but not limited to social justice action.
- Ministry leaders and young adults themselves call for more leadership opportunities among this age group.
- The Episcopal Church lacks visibility, and many young adults are unaware there is a progressive alternative to conservative evangelical Christianity or parishes with near empty pews.
- Young adults rarely experience a warm and knowledgeable welcome when trying out a new church.
- Young adults want the Episcopal Church to grapple with its identity as a white, wealthy and privileged institution, and publicly change direction.
- Churches are confused about how to engage young adults and need support to do so, but also to understand that it starts and ends with genuine relationships that honor mutual experience, wisdom and needs.
- We need to build young adult leadership capacity at all levels through a community organization model. Concrete tools and training are vital.
- Connecticut has 44 colleges and universities, yet only two campus ministry programs receive financial support from ECCT. Funding and new models beyond the one-campus / one-Chaplain model of campus ministry are needed.
- Transition is the key challenge in young adult ministry, and ministry approaches that shepherd young adults through various transitions, as well as the larger church learning from these, are essential.

The Priority of Young Adult Evangelism

In addition to demographics, the research engaged young adults across the diocese, and ministry leaders across the church who are providing innovative approaches to reaching and serving young adults. Taken together, these findings suggest the need for:

- Opportunities for deeper young adult faith formation
- A new approach to Outreach/Evangelization of, by and for young adults

- A cultural shift around who and how we welcome people into the Jesus movement
- The central need that parishes have to understand and be changed by the experience and gifts of young adults.
- Increased emphasis on and investment in young adult ministry programming, including campus ministries, intentional communities, and young adult networks across CT.
- Building young adult ministry leadership and organizing capacity and providing resources for churches and communities to successfully engage with young adults in their context.
- Increased opportunities for young adult representation on leadership bodies across the church.

A New Vision for Young Adult and the Church – Proposed ECCT Goals for 2025

1. Young adult Episcopal networks are available and accessible in every ECCT region.
2. ECCT parishes and Intentional Episcopal Communities are redesigning their evangelism, leadership development and formation ministries to be relevant and accessible to young adults, and are welcoming young adults into parish governance.
3. Chaplaincy services are available and accessible for Episcopal college students across ECCT.
4. An expanded number of intentional communities for young adults have been developed.
5. An increased number of young adults of color are supported for discerning ordination in ECCT.
6. Formation and discipleship opportunities are broadly available for young adults through the Commission on Ministry.

Moving into Action: Task Force Recommendations

Preliminary Activities (June – December 2021)

1. Present report and recommendations to ECCT to plan for budget impact (June 1)
2. Present Resolution to Convention to endorse and implement Task Force recommendations (October)
3. Create an Interim Consultant position in ECCT (15 hour per week) to begin implementation immediately after 2021 Convention (November)
4. Consultant develops a phased implementation plan for 2021 through 2024 for the approval of Bishops and the Mission Council (January)

Phase 1 Implementation (January – October 2022)

5. Expand Capacity of Parishes, Networks and Communities to Share Ministry with Young Adults
6. Use Existing Funds to Develop YAE Networks in Every Region
7. Use Existing Funds to Expand Campus Ministry across ECCT
8. Enact Policy on Minimum Representation of Young Adults in Councils of the Church (Diocesan and Regional)

Phase 2 Implementation (November 2022 – October 2025)

9. Create Senior Leadership Position within ECCT to Implement Ongoing Efforts on Behalf of Young Adult and Campus Ministries
10. Fund Training And Competency Development For Young Adult Ministry

INTRODUCTION

Concerned about the persistent decline of young adult engagement in the Episcopal Church over the last several decades, a group of students, seminarians and others between the ages of 18 and 35, decided to highlight this issue at the 235th annual convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut in October 2019. This effort took two forms: (1) petitioning for the inclusion of a “World Café” session on Young Adults and the Church at one of the topical sessions at convention; and (2) presentation of a resolution to convention¹ which read as follows:

RESOLVED, that the 235th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) recognizes young adults of post high school or college age (17-21) and older (22-39) as a crucial priority for evangelism, and as a crucial missional priority for ECCT; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this Convention responds to the crisis of young adults’ lack of representation in the church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this Convention authorizes the creation of a Task Force on Evangelism of and by Young Adults with members recruited by the co-sponsors of this resolution and approved by the Mission Council; and be it further resolved

RESOLVED, that the Task Force will identify successful strategies employed within ECCT and in the wider church, which:

- (1) provide inspiring worship, community building and engagement in social justice by and for the full diversity of young adults;*
- (2) form young adults as disciples and apostles;*
- (3) engage young adults in ministry and leadership; and*
- (4) use the gifts of young adults to further God’s mission through expanding campus ministries across ECCT, expanding young adult networks across ECCT, and other means; and be it further*

RESOLVED, that this Task Force report back to the 236th Annual Convention with specific proposals for evangelism of young adults in ECCT and the human and financial resources required to implement them.

The resolution went on to explain that, while the church has always acknowledged the need for parishes to offer ministries for children and youth (pre-school through high school age), this has not been the case for young adults after they graduate from high school. Thus, the focus of the resolution was on individuals between the ages of 18 and 35, which represent a diversity of needs and life situations including: those attending college; those who are college age, but not in college; graduate and professional students; partnered or single young adults beginning careers; and all representing a variety of races, ethnicities and gender identities. The resolution, calling for a Task Force, was approved unanimously by convention.

¹ See Attachment 1 for full resolution

The Task Force² was formed in the winter of 2019 and consisted almost exclusively of lay and ordained leaders in the church under the age of 40. The group worked to define the scope of the problem and of its response in monthly meetings, and with a series of work groups. With the onset of the pandemic and the sever stress this placed on churches and ministry leaders, the Task Force’s work slowed, and eventually focused on presenting a video of *Young Adult Voices* as its update to the 236th annual ECCT convention in October 2020. The Task Force also requested funds at that time from ECCT to conduct in-depth research on the needs of young adults from their own perspectives, as well as promising practices to engage and support young adults in their faith across the church, and hired an exceptional researcher, Heather Burtman, who had also assisted the Diocese of Massachusetts Young Adult Task Force in a similar effort. At this stage, a Leadership Team, consisting of the Rev. John Kennedy, the Rev. Helena Martin and Whitney Batson, oversaw the research and began developing a set of formal recommendations to be presented at the 237th annual convention in October 2021.

This report is the product of the Task Force meetings from late 2019 through mid-2021, the extensive research conducted by Ms. Burtman, and the resulting recommendations developed by the Task Force.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES AND FINDINGS

In the spirit of hope, the Young Adult Task Force took time to listen to the voices of young adult ministry leaders and young adults across the country, from Texas, to Washington, to New York, and even all the way to the UK. We listened to the voices of clergy and young adults in our own state. We received two dozen survey responses from young adults across the US and Canada, sharing with us their experiences of church and their hopes and suggestions for the future. We followed up with in-depth conversations with those who expressed an interest in talking more and delved into existing research on the topic of young adult engagement with the church. Some 40 conversations later, we look forward to the future of our community, impressed by the deep wisdom we have heard and a hunger for change and continued growth within our beloved church.

² See Attachment 2 for the Task Force initial membership

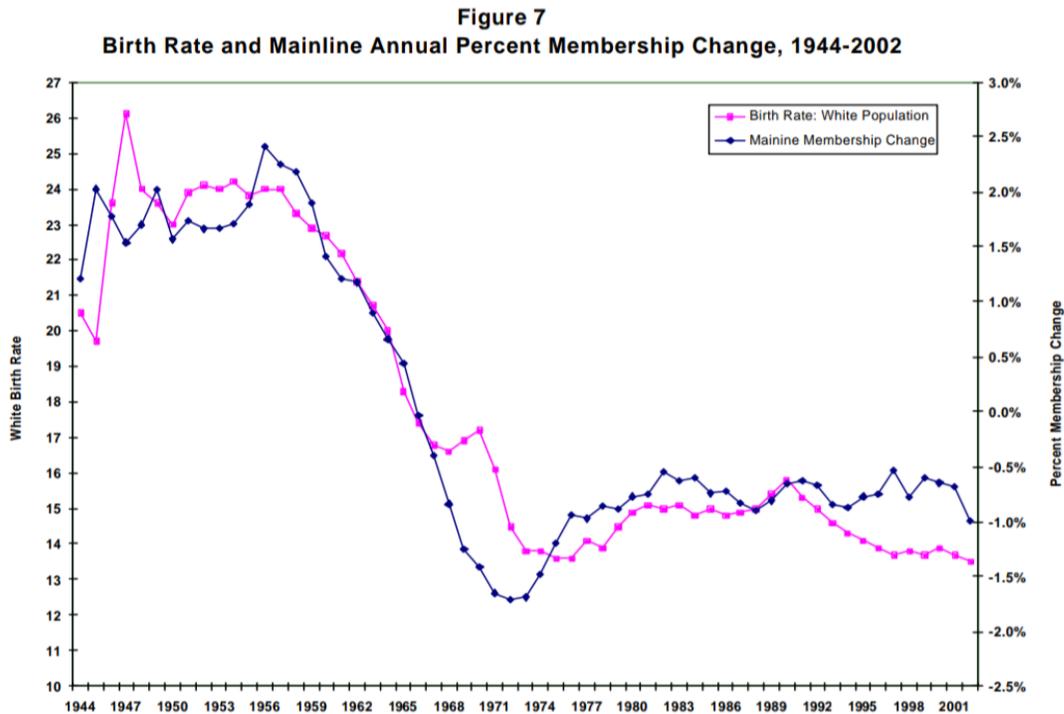
Key Findings Demonstrate Need For:

- Opportunities for deeper young adult faith formation, and resistance to seeing church as merely social, or as merely social justice action – an integration of the church’s God-centered and human-centered approaches, not one or the other.
- Reframing of and new approach to Outreach/Evangelization of, by and for young adults.
- A cultural shift around who and how we welcome, and the central need that parishes have to understand and be changed by the experience of young adults.
- Increased emphasis on and investment in young adult ministry programming, including campus ministries, intentional communities, and young adult networks across CT. This also includes “On-ramps” or transitional spaces where young adults can participate in the life of a church community beyond going to Sunday morning service.
- Building young adult ministry leadership capacity and providing resources for churches and communities to successfully engage with young adults within their localized context.
- Increased opportunities for young adult representation on leadership committees, as well as a spirit of openness and education around how church leadership works and how decisions are made.

Please find a more detailed discussion on these findings, as well as recommendations, below

Understanding the Numbers

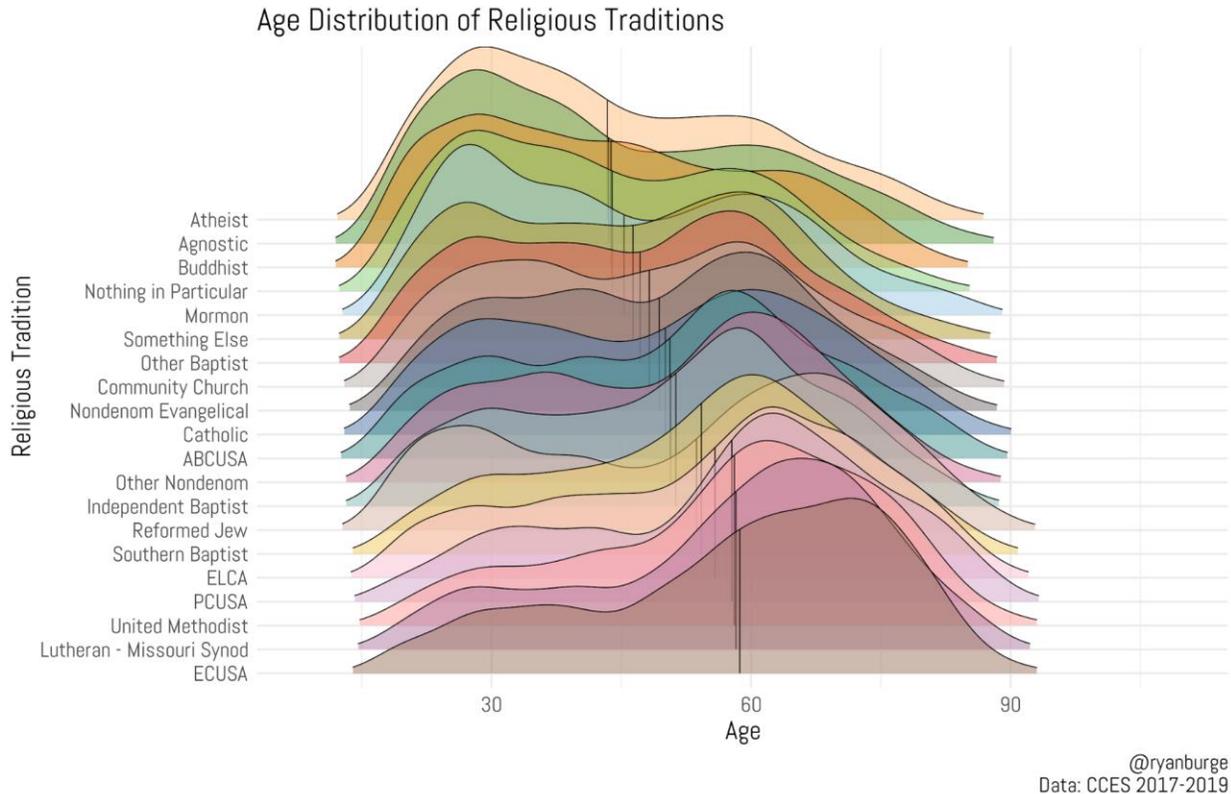
Decline in Episcopal Church membership began in the late 1960s following a period in which birth rates dropped and the church became less of a centerpiece of American culture. The Episcopal church saw a loss of retention rates among young adults, with baby boomers who had grown up in the church, choosing not to attend as adults. More recent [data](#) shows that the Episcopal Church has declined in number across every province and diocese in the US (except Nevada) between the years of 2009 and 2019. Though there are arguably many factors that contribute to a church's numerical growth or decline, one strong determinant appears to be the birth rate of the church’s membership demographic.



(figure by C. Kirk Hadaway, “Is the Episcopal Church Growing (Or Declining),” 2004 Growth Report, 14, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/03/2004GrowthReport.pdf>)

The above figure shows the way in which the annual membership changes of mainline churches (blue line) tended to mirror the birth rate of the white population (pink line) between 1944 and 2002. It’s important to note that this figure considers only white birth rates because the attendees of the Episcopal Church have statistically been largely white. It should also be noted that the members of mainline churches have tended to have more advanced college degrees, and the birth rates declined at a higher rate among those with higher levels of formal education.

Another telling figure is the average age of a religious group’s population. The higher the average age tends to be, the more unsustainable that group becomes. Of the twenty most popular religious groups in the United States between 2017 and 2019, the Episcopal Church had both the highest average age, with approximately 55% of Episcopalians age 60 or above, and the highest modal age of 69.



This figure, from sociologist Ryan P. Burge, depicts the median age distribution of religious traditions, with those with the highest median age at the bottom. You can see the Episcopal Church (ECUSA) at the very bottom. This demonstrates the reality of an Episcopal church that is rapidly aging and quickly becoming unsustainable.

The Episcopal Church in Connecticut faces a particular challenge due to its location in a Northeastern state with a relatively low birth rate and an aging population. CT ranks 7th in terms of states with the fastest declining populations and 6th in terms of states with the highest average age. CT's overall population declined by .2% between 2010 and 2019. In light of the previously discussed birth rate and membership association trend, it should come as no surprise that the general population growth of a church's location factors into the growth rate of that specific church.

There are, in fact, new Episcopal churches planted each year and, though rare, there are Episcopal churches that continue to grow in number. These tend to be in fast-growing states in the South and the West. For example, Nevada saw the second highest state growth rate in 2021, which may be one of the explanations for its outlier status as the single Episcopal Diocese in the United States that has seen growth between 2009 and 2019. Texas claims ten out of fifteen of the fastest growing cities in the US, and although their overall Episcopal church attendance is in decline, they are able to plant growing churches each year in those places where the population is booming.

Although the overall picture in CT may be one of population decline, there are outliers. In 2021 there were 7 Connecticut cities that increased in population. In order of greatest increase these cities were: Stamford, Danbury, Shelton, Norwalk, Milford, Bridgeport, and New Haven. Furthermore, this does not negate the presence of young people within our state. Between 2014 and 2018 approximately 685,158 of CT's population were between the ages of 20-35 or approximately 20% of CT's overall population. CT has 44 colleges which enroll approximately 200,00 students a year. We must find a way to meaningfully engage and welcome these young adults, who are not only the future of the church, but its present.

As sociologist C. Kirk Hadaway put it all the way back in 2004, we can no longer afford to “ride a series of cultural waves.” Neither has it ever been our call as a church to do so. The numbers alone make it clear that we will not grow passively. In 2019 ECCT saw an average Sunday church attendance of 11,751, a disconcerting 34% decrease since 2009. If we are to grow, and even continue to exist as a denomination, we will have to rise to meet the blessings and challenges of change. This is a crucial time to look forward with a spirit of hope, to embrace opportunities for innovation, and to invite young people, as community members and leaders, into our church with radical welcome.

Spiritual Vitality and Participatory Formation and Leadership

We heard a deep desire for spiritual vitality and an increased emphasis on faith formation. Young adults expressed that it was essential to “stay centered on Jesus,” and that the most important thing was “following Christ.” One young adult said that the most important factor in their decision to attend a church was “[recognizing] faith in lay members.” Young people are looking to find a place where they can talk about God, wrestle with deep questions of meaning, and find peers and mentors to walk with them in their faith lives.

As one young adult put it, it is essential to young adults to provide places “where there are mentors who understand what it is like to live as a Christian in this time.” The same young adult went on to describe what they saw as a lack of opportunity in their home church “to delve into the tough situations that we face and how our faith offers often a multi layered answer to them. It wasn't until college that I began to explore with others what my faith really said about things like peer pressure, drinking, romantic relationships, mental health and success in a career.... I think people in my church for example would certainly be open to sharing their experiences, but currently aren't aware that young adults are deeply seeking this forum.”

Social justice is very important to young adults, but many young adults lamented what they saw as the growing secularization of a church that seemed to *only* talk about social justice. Young adults can and do find community and opportunities for deeply engaging in social justice

elsewhere. Church is uniquely relevant because of God. As one young adult put it, “God is all we have left.” Another young person shared his experience of leaving his childhood church after losing faith in God. Although he found his church community to be warm and positive, he came to church looking for an “experience of God,” and when he did not find that experience he chose to leave. As he remarked, “If you do not experience God in church then what is the point?”

It is time to consider what opportunities for spiritual growth, formation, and discipleship our campus ministries and congregations offer, not only to young people, but to everyone. Young people within TEC are hungering to grow in their faith and grow closer to God, and many of them find that attending church service on Sunday mornings is not enough. They long for more participatory experiences and “two-way learning” where they can talk to other Christians, share and listen to stories of faith, ask questions, and discern their unique calling.

Many ministry leaders and young adults called for opportunities for discernment for young adults who are not called to be priests. As one ministry leader put it, “we need to move away from the idea that the only role for a devout young adult is to become a priest.” Our Dean of Formation is currently leading a discernment group for twelve young adults who do not wish to become priests. This is a pilot group that he hopes to be able to offer to young adults across our diocese in the future.

As one campus ministry leader noted, the most important thing is to focus on discipleship and formation, not numbers. When young adults feel strong in their faith, they are excited to share their faith and invest in their faith communities. These young adults then need to be given the opportunity to step into leadership roles, whether that’s leading a small group, serving on the vestry, being a representative at convention, preaching, serving in diocesan positions, etc. Young adult and lay leaders also called for more transparency surrounding existing church leadership models. Several young adults expressed a desire to know more about how vestries work and be “invited to the table” and taken seriously in decision making processes.

Outreach / Evangelization

Many ministry leaders and young adults pointed to the Episcopal Church’s approach to outreach and evangelization as a needed area for change. As one student put it, the problem, it seems, outside of the Episcopal church is that “No one knows what Episcopalians are.” This is complicated by the fact that news coverage of Christianity skews towards “badly behaving” right wing Conservative Christians. Although it may be obvious to us that this is not a completely accurate depiction of all forms of Christianity in the United States, for many young people it is the ONLY form of Christianity they are aware of. One student described the shock of fellow students that he was Christian *and* believed in evolution and the ordination of women. Another

young adult who identifies as an atheist had never heard of the Episcopal Church and saw it as no different than any other Christian denomination.

Although within the Episcopal Church it may seem obvious to us that our message is different in significant ways, this is not the case for most young adults outside of the church. One young priest is changing the narrative through her ministry as an Instagram Influencer. With thousands of followers, she is able to use her platform to share a message of God's love to young adults and to reframe the larger cultural narrative around Christianity as being judgmental. She often has young adults write to her to say they had no idea that young women could be priests or that there were churches that were open and affirming.

Of the young adults I spoke with, several of them had come to the Episcopal church from other denominations and remarked how hard it was to find them at all. Several students described regret at not finding Episcopal campus ministries until their final years at school. One student noted that InterVarsity did a much better job at outreach because they would give pancakes to students during finals, whereas he had never so much as seen a poster up about his campus ministry. Another campus ministry leader talked about the need for progressive campus ministries to be more visible on campus because students so often are looking for alternatives to conservative campus ministries, but have no idea they exist. This is the story of many LGBTQ+ students in his current campus ministry. Campus ministries should make sure that there are multiple ways for students to discover them, whether that's flyers, word of mouth, increased participation in community life and events at school, or even stickers.

Many ministry leaders and young adults spoke about the need to "go out" to young adults, rather than expect them to come in. One ministry leader pointed out that a necessary reframing of the discussion around young adults is realizing that college students and young adults under the age of 25 are no longer millennials, but rather a part of Gen Z, who increasingly do not leave the church of their childhood, so much as never go to church to begin with. The question in this case is not one of retaining young adults, so much as how one goes about reaching out to them in the first place.

Many Episcopalians express having a complicated relationship with "Evangelization." No one wants to be "pushy" or "force their views on others." The question seems to be a matter of knowing what we are sharing and why. Why would you invite someone to your church or campus ministry in the first place? What value does it add to your own life? What are your experiences of living a life in relationship with God? If we are relevant, then why are we relevant? What is our message? We so often struggle to articulate the value of what the Episcopal Church has to offer, and without that articulation it is difficult to begin the work of outreach or know why we are doing outreach in the first place. A helpful model for churches and

campus ministries may be that of [Invite, Welcome, Connect](#), a model of evangelization whose vision is to “change the culture of the Episcopal Church to move from maintenance to mission.”

Many young adults and leaders spoke of the need for “on ramps” or places of invitation that weren’t just Sunday morning worship. Church of the Holy Spirit in West Haven is currently responding to that need by starting a community garden and giving away garden plots to young people, who display a strong interest in gardening, but often don’t have the space for it. Another young priest in Texas started a Bible Study for people who had never read the Bible before and ensured that people knew it was both “queer-affirming” and “women-affirming.” This Bible Study came in response to a young church member working in a coffee shop where several of her coworkers, who had never attended church, expressed curiosity about the Bible. Six of them ended up attending the Bible Study. These intermediary non-church spaces serve as places where young adults can begin to build relationships and take a further step into the church community if they decide to.

All Are Welcome?

The topic of “welcome” was one of those was brought up over and over again. Who and how do we welcome?

Several young adults of color described experiencing microaggressions within their own parishes. Several described being treated uncomfortably like “unicorns.” Many worried that more trainings on racism were not enough to change a larger cultural problem that upheld and applauded expressions of “white normativity.”

A 2015 study on the welcome of people in American Churches, taking into account race and ethnicity concluded that, “In this instance, we find that mainline Christians, who on surveys espouse liberal, egalitarian attitudes towards race relations, actually demonstrate the most discriminatory behavior...The egalitarian values of mainline Protestants appear to be directed at broader, societal issues than everyday interpersonal encounters.”³ This seems to be the experience of many of our young adults. If we truly want to be anti-racist, this is something we need to recognize and grapple with.

³ Bradley R. E. Wright, Christopher M. Donnelly, Michael Wallace, Stacy Missari, Annie Scola Wisnesky, and Christine Zozula, "Religion, Race, and Discrimination: A Field Experiment of How American Churches Welcome Newcomers," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 2 (2015): 185-204. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24644336>.

Furthermore, young adults want to see the church live out its call to work alongside communities for social and economic justice. Several young adults expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of care their churches showed for their wider communities. One young adult member of a wealthy parish was frustrated that his church seemed to think volunteering in a soup kitchen once a month was an adequate fulfillment of the call to “love thy neighbor.” Especially when members of his church then became involved in a lawsuit against building affordable housing in their neighborhood.

Young adults and ministry leaders alike critiqued the history of the Episcopal church as a privileged, largely white institution which has enjoyed both wealth and social status. They emphasized a need for deep repentance and a reconsideration of the ways in which our church continues to yield money and power.

Young adults questioned whether they were welcome if they dressed, spoke, thought, or behaved outside of the norms of middle- and upper-class society. Others questioned why we weren’t putting effort into reaching young adults who don’t attend four-year colleges. What about students at community colleges? What about young adults who pursue options other than college? As one young adult wrote, “If a church wants to engage with more young people, they have to be willing to engage with people who do not look, think, or act like them. There are so many people who are spiritual and looking for a community, but if the only young people you want to connect with are ones who make you feel comfortable, you will not see growth.”

How do our churches display welcome in general? Several young adults described walking into churches for the first time and being talked to or greeted by no one. More often than not, they chose not to go back to these churches.

Several young adults came to the Episcopal Church from other denominations. As a newcomer experiencing church in a new setting, liturgy can take a while to get the hang of. Many Evangelical churches do not have as much language around liturgy. One young adult described a sense that “everyone else knew what was going on” and “it was wrong to ask questions.” How can churches make space to share the richness and meaning of their traditions with newcomers? Is there a class where you can learn about church traditions and the structure of services? Or even something as simple as a write-up that you can pick up when you walk in the door?

Focus on Building Relationships

One of the strongest, and most common, pieces of advice was to prioritize building relationships, rather than trying to find the perfect framework or program for young adult ministry. Ministry leaders suggested taking the time to be present in the wider community, outside of church and campus ministry buildings, serving on community boards (i.e., police accountability committee)

and striking up conversations at events and in coffee shops. One leader challenged priests to ask themselves if they had ever invited the young people in their church to sit down with them over a cup of coffee or a meal and gotten to know what's going on in their lives. Another pointed out that the simple act of asking young adults within your church what they actually want is all too rare. Do they really want a series on monasticism, or do they want theology on tap? Do they want specific programs where they can meet their peers or is there a hunger to be better integrated into the intergenerational community of the parish? Building authentic relationships and actually taking the time to communicate is time-consuming, but it's also one of the most effective ways of building true and lasting community.

Another campus ministry leader described starting his campus chaplaincy post at a time when only one student was participating in campus ministry. He spent months reading a book, waiting for students to show up to Evening Prayer. Eventually he realized no one was going to come, cancelled programming for a year, and instead spent time getting to know individual students by hosting a lunch group. He now has between 30 and 40 active students at any given time. One priest decided to start a "supper club" by going out into the community and getting to know young people he met at coffee shops and other events and another reached out to musicians offering to let them use their church as a practice space. As one campus minister put it, "You can't throw a party until you have friends to attend it."

Many young adults described key moments of outreach, welcome, and care from church and campus ministry leaders as the sole reason they had become involved in that particular parish or ministry. These ranged from an email inquiring into someone's well-being to a personal invitation to attend an event or get coffee or a meal. One student described going to a parish for the first time and being invited by the priest to get lunch afterwards. The priest became an important mentor to the student, recognizing their unique gifts, and ultimately inspiring the student to pursue a call to be a priest. To this day, the student wonders what would have happened if the priest hadn't invited them to lunch that first day. Would they have chosen to go back? Would they have ever become a priest? Another student credits an email from the chaplain, asking how they were doing after they returned from a study abroad, as the reason they reconnected with campus ministry.

Authentic relationships and community are much more important to young adults than worship styles or having the latest technology. Young adults want to feel invested in, welcomed, and like an important part of an intergenerational community. Several young adults noted that the last thing they are interested in is churches attempting to "be cool." One survey respondent noted that churches are actually "a respite" from pressure to "be cool" and constantly absorb technology. In fact, young adults often report being suspicious of young adult leaders who present themselves as "too hip" or trendy. This all too often comes off as inauthentic and ends up being a turn-off. While some young adults want to see more experimental styles of worship, there are also many young adults who express a deep love for traditional liturgy and music.

Building Leadership Capacity for Young Adult Ministry and The Community Organizer Model

Many leaders spoke of the need for a grassroots community organizer type model of ministry building that takes into account the specific needs and resources of each community (this is also known as [Asset-Based Community Development](#)). Many leaders noted that there was no one program that was going to work for everyone. In 2014, the Church of England put out a [report](#) that “sought to investigate the factors influencing church growth within the context of the Church of England,” by “finding areas of ministry which are showing numerical growth - and finding out why.” Data analysis was undertaken by Dr. David Voas who concluded “There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another.”

Building a young adult ministry in Stamford is going to look very different from building a young adult ministry in a rural Northeastern town. Stamford, for example, is a growing urban area close to New York City, with a significant young adult population in their South End. Churches in Stamford are currently working together to think about how they might use a chapel space in the South End to reach out to young adults there. This is something that Stanwich Church, a nondenominational church based in Greenwich did in 2014, by planting a satellite campus in a boxing ring, and hosting a service on the Harbor Point boardwalk, as well as prayer walks around the neighborhood. This is a common strategy: find the place where the population is growing and plant a church there.

According to a priest serving in Stamford, there are significant energies and openness to collaboration surrounding young adult ministry, but it feels like the point person is missing. Priests just don't have the bandwidth to harness all of that energy or take on a project management role. In order to successfully expand young adult ministry, we will first need to build leadership capacity at both diocesan and parish levels. Having key leadership in place at the diocesan level will allow for specialized support for parishes looking to grow their own young adult ministries within their particular contexts.

Campus / Student Ministry

We have 44 colleges and universities in CT, enrolling close to 200,000 students a year. This number represents around a third of all young adults below the age of 35 in our state. We have 3 campus ministries, 2 of which receive some diocesan funding.

Since the late 1960s mainline campus ministries have been on the decline, largely replaced by a rise of Evangelical campus ministries such as CRU and InterVarsity. However, a 2007 [article](#) (there appears to be a dearth of recent scholarship on mainline campus ministry) by Dr. John Schmalzbauer noted promising signs of mainline campus ministry revitalization, including fundraising approaches such as creating endowments (often with support of the Episcopal Church Foundation) in order to increase sustainability and using congregational approaches to campus ministry.

The largest congregation-based student ministry we spoke with was at Christ Church Charlottesville, whose Sunday evening service pre-COVID drew an average of 240 attendees, most of them college students. The hallmarks of this service, as described by their College and Young Adult Education Minister, are that the service is more casual than their Sunday morning service (no vestments, and the music is in the form of bluegrass hymns) and that it features strong preaching that focuses on a message of grace and encouragement rather than individual or collective piety, including the need to do more social justice work. It also notably features a dinner afterwards and is held Sunday night because they found that college students did not come when they held the service on Sunday morning. The College Minister says their service grows largely by word of mouth, as it has done from the beginning. It was started by their rector who came to their church with a specific desire to build a student ministry at their church.

The Episcopal campus ministries we spoke with, outside of ECY, had as few as 2-3 active participants with the largest (Florida State University), which finds success through a student-lead micro-group Bible study model, having around 40. On average, the dioceses we spoke with had campus ministry presence at three colleges in their state. Campus ministries that are able to encourage their students to be active leaders, rather than just participants, tend to have significantly more success. This is a model that is used effectively by ECY with students serving in every aspect of leadership. This results in a high level of investment and organic growth. By using this a student-based leadership model, and by expanding programming from students only to young adults and seminarians, ECY was able to grow involvement from 4 individuals to almost 100 and Sunday worship attendance from 4 to almost 40 in a span of seven years. Other similar Ivy League campus ministries, like Harvard and Princeton, continue to serve fewer than a dozen students.

One of the key challenges is that a traditional one-Chaplain-one-campus model of ministry can never meet all the needs of students. Instead, it is clear that to reach significantly more college students, including community college students, new models of “campus ministry planting” across multiple campuses, perhaps regionally, will need to be invented. Multiple dioceses are creating positions for young adult and campus ministry at the diocesan level, and choosing to directly fund campus chaplains. The Diocese of New York, for example funds two chaplains – one for the north of Manhattan and one for the south – to create networks of young adults at

multiple colleges. The University of Georgia in Athens is turning to an [innovative residential model](#) of Episcopal Campus ministry, after replacing their Episcopal student center with housing for over a hundred students. The diocese envisions a space where students from Episcopal and diverse faith backgrounds can “live, study, and pray,” while also being served by a resident campus chaplain. There is an enormous opportunity for ECCT to innovate and expand campus ministries, both at 4-year colleges and community and technical colleges.

Intentional Communities and the Episcopal Service Corps

The Episcopal Service Corps (ESC) is a unique offering and wonderfully formative experience for many young adults. Several young adults on our Young Adult Task Force have served in it and found it to be a crucial part of their journey in faith and community.

There are several things to consider when asking whether or not now is a good time to start another ESC program in CT. The height of ESC growth and participation was between 2008 and 2015. As a direct result of the financial crisis, young adults often struggled to find employment and were more likely to seek out service corps experiences. Since that time applications to ESC programs have taken a significant dip. Where in 2015 there were 30 active ESC programs, there are now 16. Life Together reports a significant decline in application numbers and an applicant pool that increasingly skews Episcopalian, as opposed to the past in which they received a number of applicants from other and no faith backgrounds.

This is not to say that a new ESC program in our state could not be successful, but it is important to understand that ESC programs are cyclical in nature. New programs are started each year, while old programs die each year. According to a former service corps director, the most important factor in whether or not a program will succeed and be able to draw new members, is how specific of an identity that program has. The more specific, the more likely a program is to flourish. For example, St. Hilda’s House has a unique identity in that it is one of the few parish-based programs, with an emphasis on Christian formation and required participation in the life of Christ Church, as well as a direct relationship with Yale Divinity School. This year a new ESC program was started at [Plainsong Farm](#), a farm-based ministry focused on “small-scale regenerative agriculture” and Christian learning, was started in Michigan. This is another example of a program with a specific identity. ESC programs who appear to not have a specific or unique focus tend to lack the ability to draw enough applicants to sustain their programs.

A challenge for many ESC programs is building and maintaining relationships with the non-profits at which their members serve. Each non-profit at which a corps member is placed is generally expected to provide between 10,000 and 25,000 to the ESC program. The amount usually depends on whether or not the diocese subsidizes that cost. This can make it difficult to recruit non-profits. One way this is addressed is by forming connections with pre-existing AmeriCorp/TFA fellowships and integrating those fellowships into an ESC program. Cities such

as Stamford, Bridgeport, and Hartford tend to have more of these pre-existing fellowship opportunities. You can find information on starting an ESC program [here](#).

Building Bridges for Successful Young Adult Transitions

Transition is one of the biggest challenges for young adult ministry. Main transitions include graduating high school and leaving for a job or college, and then graduating from college, or moving for a new job. Many students do not find their way back to faith communities after these transitions.

Several young adults described being involved in campus ministry, but not finding a satisfying church home after college. Many times, this was because they didn't find a community that lived up to their campus ministry experience. One young adult described it like this: "I have grown up going to church to church with my family and when I left for college I was deeply involved with our campus ministry and Christian fellowship group on campus. I still attend weekly mass for my personal growth in faith but felt like I could discuss topics that affected me as a young adult more with those peers within my Christian fellowship club at school."

Another parent spoke of their child, who enjoyed and engaged in their home church growing up, no longer attending church after graduating college. There was no Episcopal campus ministry presence at the child's college and the student struggled to find a way to stay meaningfully involved with his faith.

Another trend affected by COVID and the resulting economic disruption has been for many young adults to move back home. One community in CT, for example, is considering reaching out to the large influx of young adults who were very active in the church until they moved away. They have now returned home either unemployed or working remotely, and are now considering how to build a peer support community with other young adults they had previously attended church with.

Young adults and ministry leaders across the country described these transition points as one of the biggest challenges for young adult ministry. Most had not found effective ways to address them. Several ministry leaders and young adults wondered how we could better form a network that would help guide students to new faith communities during these critical transition points. One diocese approaches the issue by reaching out to individual parishes and asking for the contact information of high school seniors. Young adult ministry staff then reach out to those students individually asking how they can help put them in touch with a new church or campus ministry.

In New Haven, a group of churches formed the first (and only) Young Adult Episcopalians Network to serve those small numbers of young adults 21-35 members of local Episcopal parishes, based on the “fragility” of their connections with parishes in which they had few or no age peers. YAE has created monthly spiritually and socially focused events that have deepened the faith of these young adults and engaged them in advocacy for greater representation in parish leadership.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- The Episcopal Church has the oldest median age among the 20 most common religious traditions in the United States. We will not be healthy or sustainable unless we explicitly focus on nurturing and reaching out to young adults.
- Current young adult programming is failing to meet the needs of young adults within our diocese. The current ECT investment in campus ministry is not enough to have an impact on the majority of college students in CT, who represent a significant proportion of young adults in our state. Furthermore, many young adults across our state lack a peer community within their home parishes and are looking for ways to meaningfully engage with one another. This necessitates the expansion of innovative young adult ministries, including expanding campus ministries, intentional communities, and young adult networks across CT.
- Churches are eager to reach out to young adults, but often lack the resources, staff, and knowledge to do so. Without key leadership in place, many efforts to build young adult ministry will continue to flounder. We must build leadership capacity and opportunities for training and support at both the diocesan and parish level in order to encourage the flourishing of young adult ministry within unique, local contexts.
- Young adults are looking for meaningful and participatory ways to critically engage with their faith alongside church peers and mentors. They are looking for faith formation opportunities that dig deeper and allow them to engage with questions about God and what it means to be a Christian in today’s world. If we want to retain young adults we must meet these needs, as well as expand opportunities for engagement beyond traditional Sunday morning services, which often have high barriers for young adult attendance.
- There is a strong need for revisiting the ways young adults are included and represented at both the parish and diocesan level. We need increased opportunities for young adults to serve as leaders on vestries, leadership groups, committees, and councils. Increasing young adult leadership increases young adult involvement. In order to increase

accessibility to these roles, education around how church leadership works and how decisions are made should also be prioritized.

- Young adults call for a cultural shift around who and how we welcome. Many young adults have not felt welcomed or acknowledged by churches, and they choose not to return to these churches. Churches must reexamine the way they respond to a new person walking in and find a way to express welcome. In addition, the church must grapple with its history as a historically privileged, largely white institution and make meaningful changes.

In response to these conclusions, the Young Adult Task Force offers the following recommendations:

GOALS FOR AN EMERGING CHURCH

1. Young adult Episcopal networks are available and accessible in every ECCT region
2. ECCT parishes and Intentional Episcopal Communities are redesigning their evangelism, leadership development and formation ministries to be relevant and accessible to young adults, and are welcoming young adults into parish governance
3. Chaplaincy services are available and accessible for Episcopal college students across ECCT
4. An expanded number of intentional communities for young adults have been developed
5. An increased number of young adults of color are supported for discerning ordination in ECCT
6. Formation and discipleship opportunities are broadly available for young adults through the Commission on Ministry

MOVING INTO ACTION: TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force visualizes action on this report and recommendations as occurring in two phases:

- Phase I involves submitting this report to the Bishops and the Canon for Finance and Operations to assess its impact on current funds and on the 2022 budget to be presented to Convention in October 2021; a request that an Interim Consultant be hired at 15 hours per week to begin work after Convention, if approval is secured there. One key recommendation to be considered by Convention in 2021 will be whether to include hiring a senior leader in ECCT, to be funded in the 2023 budget to be submitted to the October 2022 Convention.
- Phase 2 involves, if Convention approves, hiring a senior ECCT leader to continue this work, eliminating any further need for the Interim Consultant.

PRELIMINARY ACTIVITIES

(June 2021 to December 2021)

1. Present report and recommendations to ECCT to plan for budget impact (June 1)
2. Present Resolution to Convention to endorse and implement Task Force recommendations (September 1)
3. Create an Interim Consultant position in ECCT (15 hour per week) to begin implementation immediately after 2021 Convention (November)
4. Consultant develops a phased implementation plan for 2021 through 2024 for the approval of Bishops and the Mission Council (January 2022)
5. Interim Consultant Leads Phase 1 Implementation of the Plan with Interested Networks and Parishes and in Collaboration with Region Missionaries

PHASE 1 IMPLEMENTATION

(January 2022 – October 2022)

6. Expand Capacity of Parishes, Networks and Communities to Share Ministry with Young Adults
 - i. Offer community organizing training for all those interested in expanding their capacities in this area
 - ii. Target 2021 unexpended funds for parish change applications and grant funds included in 2022 budget of convention to create resources to:
 - iii. Assist parishes and others to assess the feasibility of various young adult ministries, to value and attract young adult leadership, discipleship formation, social justice ministries
 - iv. Support education and planning in parishes for changes to become more relevant to young adults' needs
 - v. Develop effective young adult evangelizing and welcoming strategies
11. Use Existing Funds to Develop YAE Networks in Every Region ((\$10K Each from 2021 funds for entrepreneurial projects and / or new intentional communities)
 - a. Funds to offer speakers, formation programs, social programs, social justice activities
 - b. Incentives & publicity about grants for parishes to reimagine young adult participation, consultant help
12. Use Existing Funds to Expand Campus Ministry across ECCT
 - a. Innovation grants for new models of chaplaincy
 - b. Grants to promote parish – college collaborations
 - c. Special grants to focus on community colleges and on college-age young adults in community who are not attending colleges
13. Establish an initial standard that all region leadership groups, and diocesan committees and councils must include at least two young adults 39 years or younger in their membership by 2022, and set a three-year recommendation that each of those bodies have 25% of their membership be young adults by 2025

PHASE 2 IMPLEMENTATION

(November 2022 – October 2025)

14. Create Senior Leadership Position within ECCT to Implement Ongoing Efforts on Behalf of Young Adult and Campus Ministries with the Following Proposed Duties:
 - a. Create a multi-year plan with priorities for the development of young adult and campus ministries in EC
 - b. Collaborate with Region Missionaries in making young adults a priority of their ministries
 - c. Help RM's to develop YAE Networks in every region
 - d. Provide or support ongoing community organizing training for parishes, YAE Networks, and other communities
 - e. Use resources from the Entrepreneurial Fund and Intentional Communities grants and other sources, work with RM's assist parishes to apply for ECCT grants to become more relevant as communities for young adults. Examples include
 - i. Parishes planning to reinvent their ministries and governance to serve young adults
 - ii. Parishes near colleges wishing to support college student's discipleship and leadership formation
 - f. Cultivate and fund new models for chaplaincy planting (two or more colleges in a region), using seminarians, local curates, other approaches
 - g. Develop materials and training to support increased understanding of needs and preferences of young adults for use by parishes, YAE's, seminaries
 - h. Help recruit young adult leaders to participate in councils of the church
 - i. Coordinate with other YACM senior leaders across Province and TEC engaging in similar initiatives
 - j. Evaluate impact of these efforts
15. Fund Training And Competency Development For Young Adult Ministry
 - a. Working with the Commission on Ministry, create opportunities for young adult lay and ordained leaders
 - i. Provide scholarships and related support for theological education for young adults of color (BDS, Hartford Seminary, non-seminary training)
 - ii. Collaborate with Berkeley to assure that seminarians develop competencies for young adult ministry
 - iii. Develop programs to increase awareness of the needs and potential of young adults in the church, and of the opportunities young adults have for community, meaning making and service in Christian communities



Young Adults: Evangelism and God's Mission

Submitted by: The Rev. Paul J. Carling, Ph.D., The Rev. Armando Ghinaglia, Allison Gannett, The Rev. John. M. Kennedy, The Rev. Erin Flinn, The Rev. Michael Reardon, The Rev. Mary Barnett, The Rev. Tara Shipley, The Rev. Benjamin Straley, The Rev. Brett Figlewski, The Rev. Marissa S. Rohrbach, The Rev. Matthew Lindeman, The Rev. Eric Jeuland, The Rev. Jane Jeuland, The Rev. Carrie Combs, The Rev. Curtis Farr, The Rev. Alan Murchie, The Rev. Brian D. Blayer, The Rev. Robert Bergner, The Rev. Keri Aubert

RESOLVED, that the 235th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) recognizes young adults of post high school or college age (17-21) and older (22-39) as a crucial priority for evangelism, and as a crucial missional priority for ECCT; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this Convention responds to the crisis of young adults' lack of representation in the church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this Convention authorizes the creation of a Task Force on Evangelism of and by Young Adults with members recruited by the co-sponsors of this resolution and approved by the Mission Council; and be it further resolved

RESOLVED, that the Task Force will identify successful strategies employed within ECCT and in the wider church, which:

- (1) provide inspiring worship, community building and engagement in social justice by and for the full diversity of young adults;
- (2) form young adults as disciples and apostles;
- (3) engage young adults in ministry and leadership; and
- (4) use the gifts of young adults to further God's mission through expanding campus ministries across ECCT, expanding young adult networks across ECCT, and other means; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this Task Force report back to the 236th Annual Convention with specific proposals for evangelism of young adults in ECCT and the human and financial resources required to implement them.

Explanation:

In spite of declining attendance and “graying” of parishes, most see children and youth (0-16) as a core ministry focus. Young adults (17-39), however, have largely abandoned churches, which struggle with how to engage them. Of 35 colleges in Connecticut, three have Episcopal chaplains, and of about 7,300+ Episcopal college students, campus ministries serve barely 100. Only one “young adult network” exists in ECCT. TEC has no data on the representation of young adults in parishes, which simply distinguish between members under and over 16. If the church wishes young adults to be part of its future, it must act.

How does this resolution further God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation with all creation?

The dramatic disengagement of young adults from church denies them the opportunity for spiritual formation as disciples and apostles, and for development as evangelists and missional leaders, at precisely the time they are developing an adult faith, and making the most consequential decisions on their spiritual journey. This also leaves the church without their voices and leadership, both crucial for creating the emerging church of the future. If God’s mission is to reconcile and restore all people and creation to Godself, ignoring the spiritual formation of this core group compromises both the present and any imaginable future for the church.

Requirements to Implement:

There are no costs or materials, or time required to implement this resolution, other than the time contributed by members of the Task Force.

ECCT TASK FORCE ON EVANGELISM OF AND BY YOUNG ADULTS
Initial Membership December 2019

Clergy	Affiliation
The Rev. Armando Ghinaglia	Curate, Christ Church, New Haven
The Rev. Michael Riordan	Curate, St. John's, Waterbury
The Rev. John Kennedy	Asst. Chaplain, Kent School, Kent
The Rev. Benjamin Straley	Curate, St. John's, Essex
The Rev. Andrew Kryzak	Curate, Christ Church, Greenwich
The Rev. Brian Blayer	Rector, St. Mark's & UConn Chaplain, Storrs
The Rev. Mark Lingle	Rector, St. Francis, Stamford
The Rev. Erin Flinn	North Central Regional Missionary, ECCT, Middletown
The Rev. Justin Crisp	Asst. Rector, St. Marks, New Canaan
The Rev. Marcus G. Halley	Dean of Formation, ECCT & Holy Spirit, Stratford
The Rev. Gillian R. Barr	Rector, Christ Church, Stonington
The Rev. Paul J. Carling	Chaplain, Episcopal Church at Yale, Bridgeport
College Students	
Kai Shulman	Undergraduate, Yale College, New York, NY
Melia Young	Undergraduate, Yale College, San Francisco, CA
Brandon Chambers	Undergraduate, Yale College, Kingston, Jamaica
Melissa Healey	Undergraduate, Southern CT State University, Ansonia
TBD ¹	Undergraduate, Trinity College, ...
TBD	Graduate Student, Trinity College, ...
TBD	Undergraduate, UConn, ...
TBD	Graduate Student, UConn, ...
Young Adults (21-39)	
Tracy Parke	St. Mark's, Mystic
Helena Martin	Seminarian (ECCT) Yale Divinity School, Greenwich
Peter Angelica	Seminarian (Newark), Yale Divinity School, Princeton NJ
Matt Roberts	Seminarian (NW Texas), Yale Divinity School, Abilene, TX
Whitney Batson	Leader, Young Adult Episcopalians, Hamden
Allison Gannett	Digital Storyteller, ECCT & YAE Leader, Hamden
Christopher Gregorio	Episcopal Service Corps, St. Hilda's House, Villa Park, IL
Emily Carter	Episcopal Service Corps, St. Hilda's House, Sequim, WA
George Black	South Central Region Missionary, New Haven
Maggie Breen	Northeast Region Missionary, Chaplin
Erendira Jimenez	Southwest Regional Missionary, Bridgeport
Kelli Ray Gibson	Racial Justice Resource Coordinator, ECCT, Hamden

¹ Chaplains at Trinity and UConn were unable to recruit students for the Task Force, but their voices were included in the research interviews.