

Beyond the headlines: young adults and faith

Multiply 20s–40s, The Pillar Project and The Alban Way

We have all heard the headlines about young adults and church. Many congregations are experiencing declining attendance among younger generations, alongside a growing assumption that young adults are no longer interested in Christianity or see the Church as irrelevant.

But that is not the whole story.

Across the country, churches are discovering fresh ways to welcome young adults, creating places where they can encounter the love of God in the midst of work, relationships, family life and the search for meaning.

Multiply 20s–40s, The Pillar Project and The Alban Way are encountering a growing number of young adults who are rewriting the received narrative about young adults and faith. They are responding to invitations from church communities, bringing with them questions about purpose, curiosity, honesty about where they need help, and openness to exploring Christianity. These are young adults and their families eager for change, whether personally, socially, or in the way we build our lives.

Multiply 20s–40s

In the Diocese of York's Multiply 20s–40s, hundreds of young adults have stepped through church doors, some for the first time, others returning to faith, and many with little or no previous connection to a Christian community.

This has been made possible through more than fifty new worshipping communities. Pioneer ministers, lay pioneers and volunteers have cultivated a rich variety of expressions of church, from cafés and schools work to Messy Church, community support initiatives and alternative worship gatherings.

For many young adults, church is not be the first place they look for answers, yet they are searching for places where they can build friendships, find support for their families, make a fresh start and explore life's deepest questions. Pioneering ministries create natural pathways into Christian community, making it easier for people to discover faith in their everyday needs.

This is not about replacing traditional churches or choosing the new over the old. It is about multiplying the Church's welcome. The most lasting change comes when pioneering ministries and central churches work together, offering clear and connected next steps for people growing in faith. When church leaders together model trust, partnership and shared vision, and when communication is clear and celebrates all that God is doing, Church becomes a more compelling invitation.

A simple next step: Give people permission to experiment. Make space within the life of your church, through services, small groups or regular communications, to invite the whole congregation into the journey, sharing stories and celebrating what God is doing.

The Pillar Project

If Multiply 20s–40s shows us how new pathways into church can emerge, The Pillar Project reminds us that those pathways often begin much earlier with care before conversation about faith.

For some young adults, the greatest need is simply to be seen and heard. The Pillar Project, launched in the Diocese of Winchester through St Win's Church in Totton and Lord's Hill Church in Southampton, responds to the growing mental health crisis by creating safe, welcoming spaces for 11–18-year-olds who are struggling but do not meet the threshold for specialist support.

The challenges are profound and cannot be solved overnight, and neither can trust. The Pillar has discovered that real change comes through showing up consistently, listening well and refusing to let young adults slip through the gaps. As one parent reflected, 'The Pillar are the first and ONLY service to help [my son] and to see his struggles without putting him on a long waiting list for support – you have made a big difference to his self-confidence.'

In this setting, faith cannot be forced. Instead, transformation begins with compassionate, consistent care. As trust grows, many young adults begin asking their own questions about faith. These journeys are deeply personal. Not all explore church, but some discover greater wellbeing in faith, with several taking their first steps into Christian community and following Jesus.

The success of The Pillar Project depends on the work of skilled mental health leadership, trauma-informed volunteers, and years of patient relationship-building with local services. That can make replicating the model more challenging. At the same time, the wisdom in this belongs to every church: we are at our most compelling when we respond to people where they are,

embodying the love of Jesus before speaking about it. The Pillar reminds us that care is costly, local and relational—and that through faithful presence, young adults may discover they never have to face life's hardest realities alone.

A humble next step: Continue to walk patiently alongside young adults. Take time to pray about who God has already placed among you, and invite those with professional skills, lived experience and a passion for young adults' ministry to explore together what God might be opening up.

The Alban Way

The Alban Way shows us what happens when trust grows into calling. Built on the conviction that young adults are called to lead today, this leadership development initiative helps participants deepen their relationship with God through prayer, pilgrimage, reflection and intentional community, while growing as resilient, Christ-centred leaders.

Churches across St Albans and beyond have adapted the programme for different contexts, seeing participants step into leadership roles, mentor others, grow in confidence in God's presence and calling, and go on to explore vocational pathways.

Drawing deeply from the Church's ancient practices of spiritual formation and inspired by St Alban's witness, The Alban Way reminds us that the old ways continue to transform lives today. Participants speak of having "grown closer to God". One leader reflected on watching individuals discover abilities they never knew they had, recalling how those who "were really shy at the start and would never speak" went on to "stand up and speak in front of official people."

Some of the programme's greatest challenges have also signposted its success. As participants complete the course, many request ongoing mentoring and connection with church leaders, highlighting the importance of accessible, relational leadership. In a culture full of competing voices, all saying "follow me", faithful leadership is still formed through walking alongside those who model, in everyday life, what it means to follow Jesus.

The pilgrimage component is also physically and emotionally demanding, but these shared experiences create space for deep friendships to grow. The relationships formed through The Alban Way often continue beyond the programme, becoming a lasting source of encouragement and community.

Ultimately, The Alban Way helps young adults learn not only to follow Jesus, but to seek him for themselves—to pray, listen and discern God's guidance for their lives.

A bold next step: Young adults often grow the most when someone chooses to believe in them. The Alban Way offers churches practical resources to help make that possible. Whether through this programme or by creating your own rhythms of prayer, mentoring and intentional community, consider how your church might become a place where young adults are encouraged to discover and step into God's calling.

Our Calling

What story about young adults and faith are we telling ourselves? Which convictions shape our communities and our ministry? And how can we discern more of what God is already doing?

The story of young adults and faith is not one of decline alone, but of new possibilities and fresh encounters with God, whose call continues to reach this generation.