

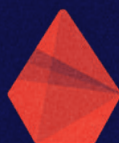


**TENx10**

Report

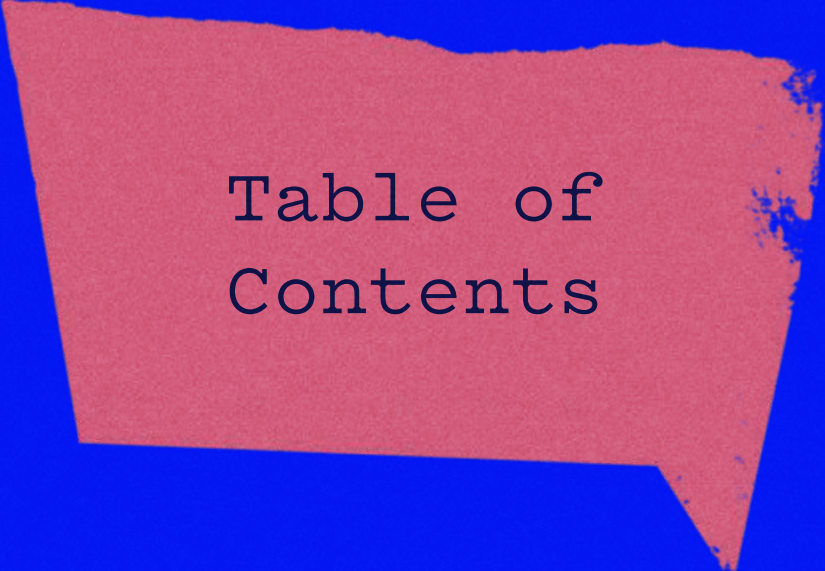
# Senior Pastors' Perspectives on Ministry with Young People

PROVIDED BY THE



Fuller Youth Institute





# Table of Contents

<u>Why This Report?</u>	Page 2
<u>Highlights and Executive Summary</u>	Page 3
<u>Key Findings</u>	Page 4
<u>About TENx10</u>	Page 18
<u>Research Methodology and Acknowledgments</u>	Page 19



# Why This Report:

From Raymond Chang,  
*Executive Director of Tenx10*

At TENx10, we seek to serve the Church by highlighting and providing insights that expand our efforts to help faith matter more to ten million young people in the next ten years. We aspire to be a trusted partner to local churches, networks, denominations, and Christian organizations that share our desire to raise youth discipleship to a top priority for US ministry leaders. Given what we know about young people walking away from church, the need is urgent to engage and support pastors on the frontlines. To do so, we must understand the motivations and behaviors of the senior leaders that have the greatest influence on priorities within the local church.

TENx10 partnered with the Fuller Youth Institute on this research to help us better understand the questions senior church leaders (anyone serving as a senior or lead pastor, rector, or priest) are asking about teenagers, their enthusiasm and concerns about youth ministry, and the types of resourcing their church needs to make forward progress. **Pastors are key to the sustainable change and long-term progress required to see young people flourish in their faith.** We hope this equips you with helpful insights into what senior pastors think about youth ministry and the significant issues they seek to address.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Raymond Chang  
*Executive Director of Tenx10*



# Highlights and Executive Summary

Commissioned by TENx10, the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) conducted the *Pastoral Perspectives on Ministry with Youth Survey* between April and June 2024, engaging over 600 senior pastors from multiple traditions and serving across the US. The goal of the survey was to better understand pastors' perspectives on youth ministry (defined as discipleship and formation for young people of middle and high school ages in the US context, roughly 12-18), focusing on the questions pastors are asking about teenagers, their enthusiasm and concerns for ministry with this age group, and the types of resources and training that would help their churches support teenagers' faith. (See [page 19](#) for research methodology).



# Key Findings

- ✘ Pastors **feel engaged with youth ministry** in their congregations. They perceive themselves as connected and involved.
- ✘ At the same time, **youth ministry is not a high priority** in a majority of churches. Only 1/3 of pastors strongly agree that youth ministry is among their top five priorities. And youth ministry funding is slim: the largest reported category of youth ministry funding (staff + programming) as a proportion of the church budget is 2-5%. The larger the church, the larger the budget, but most large churches still do not fund youth ministry at high levels. As a notable standout, nearly 20% of Black pastors report that their churches allocate 21% or more of their budgets toward youth ministry (the largest percentage of any subgroup by more than double).
- ✘ Most churches represented by pastors in this study have an average weekly attendance of 200 or less, and **most youth ministries are small** (with an average weekly attendance of less than 15 middle and high school students combined).
- ✘ Pastors' top measures of **youth ministry effectiveness** are students' faith commitments and attendance at youth ministry programming, followed by the number of young people who continue in faith beyond high school.
- ✘ Pastors' top **concerns** for youth ministry engagement include instilling faith that lasts, reaching teenagers outside the church, and doing effective intergenerational ministry.

“

“I hope there is a greater awareness of the youth ministry and the work they are doing. I want the congregation to have a purposeful investment in the youth ministry and prayerfully engage in what they are doing.”



# Key Findings (cont.)



Their top-ranked **challenges** are a lack of time to dedicate to youth and young people's seeming disinterest. However, here we saw a wide variation among racial/ethnic groups. Asian American leaders reported difficulty relating to the younger generation and a lack of time. Black leaders named a lack of alignment between young people's beliefs or practices and the Bible and leaders needing more relevant resources. Latina/o leaders reported young people's disinterest and a lack of alignment in terms of beliefs and practices. (See the chart on [page 13](#) for more details.)



The main perceived **obstacles to intergenerational relationships in churches** are adults being too busy to spend time with teenagers and not knowing how to have deeper conversations with them.



When it comes to **resources and support** pastors need for ministry with young people, their top two needs are partnering with parents to disciple their kids and supporting young people who are struggling with mental health needs.



The top ways pastors **learn new information and ideas about ministry** are social media, websites, and podcasts, all outranking books or any mode of training. At the same time, they do say they **want both in-person and online training** on youth discipleship for themselves and their youth ministry leaders. However, most are not looking for longer-term cohorts or church consulting. (See details on [page 15](#))



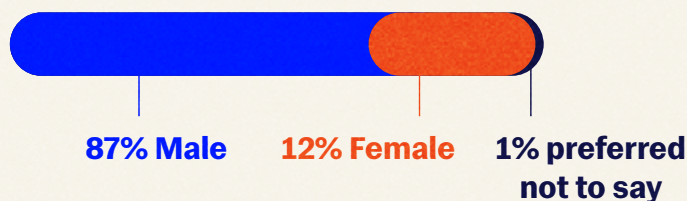
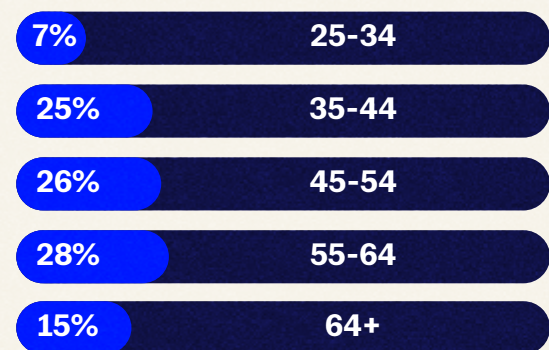
In my own perspective as a senior leader, youth ministry is the most important aspect of the church.



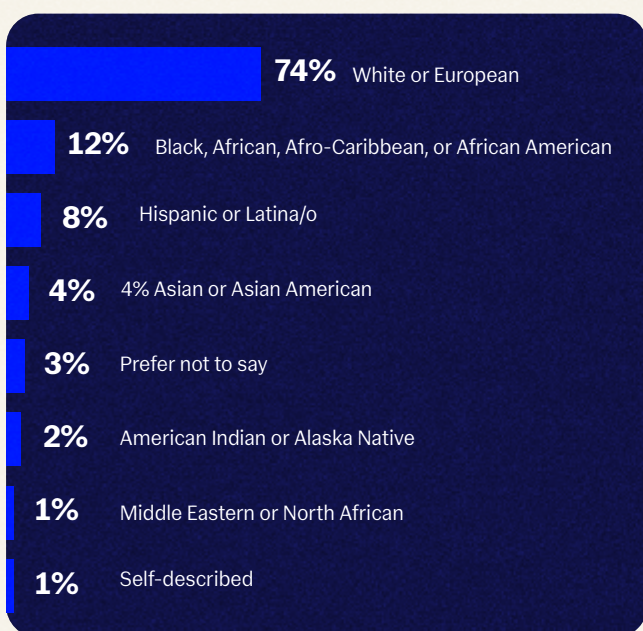
# SNAPSHOT OF SENIOR PASTORS & THEIR CHURCHES

WE INVITED ANYONE WHO SERVES AS A SENIOR PASTOR, LEAD PASTOR, RECTOR, PRIEST, OR EQUIVALENT FOR THEIR TRADITION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

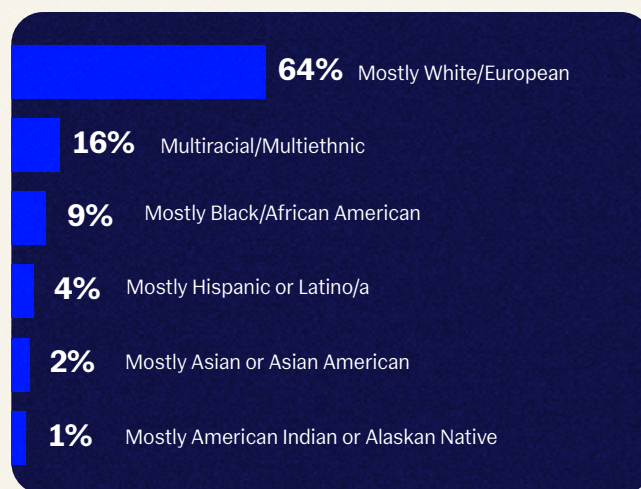
**Age:** The average age of a pastor taking this survey was 51. The majority of respondents fall between 35-64 years old.<sup>1</sup> 43% have served as a senior pastor for 13 or more years.



## Racial or ethnic identification (participants could select all that apply):



## Racial or ethnic makeup of congregations

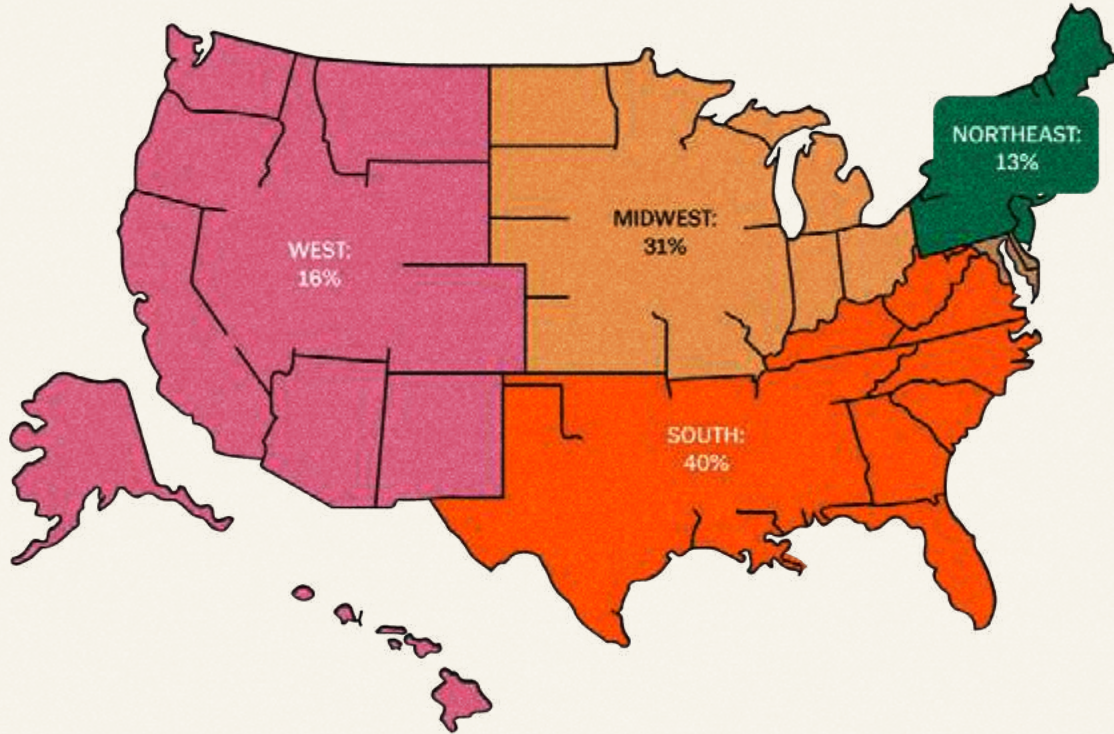


\*Less than **5%** of pastors serve majority-immigrant congregations, but about **20%** of pastors serve congregations where **11%** or more parishioners identify as a first-generation immigrant to the US.



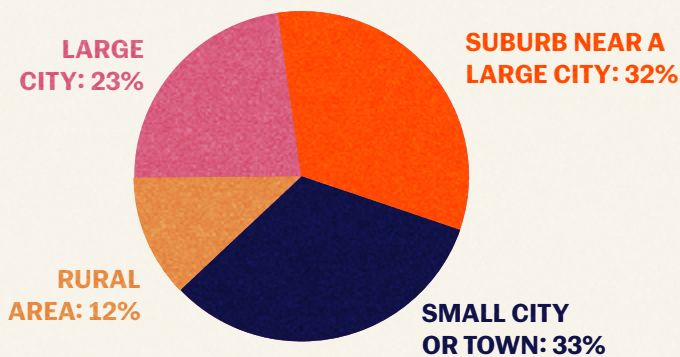
## GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION:

Pastors in this study serve across 32 states; top states included (in order) Texas, California, Florida, Michigan, and New York.

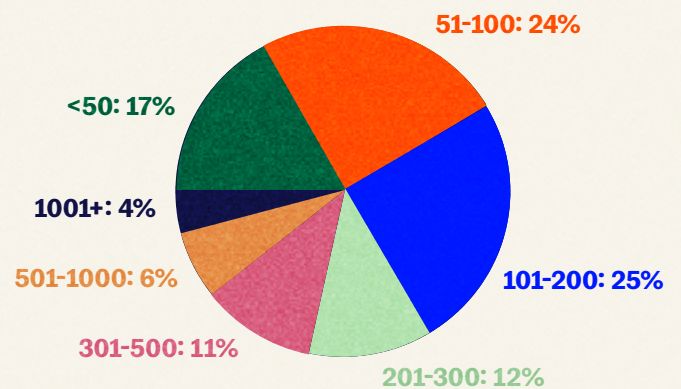


## COMMUNITY TYPE:

✘ Average weekly church attendance: Most pastors reported attendance of 200 or less; over 40% reported attendance of under 100.<sup>2</sup>



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES THE PLACE WHERE YOU NOW LIVE?



WHAT IS THE AVERAGE WEEKLY ATTENDANCE (INCLUDING ALL GENERATIONS) OF YOUR CHURCH?

“

[Our parish only has] a handful of kids from preschool through high school age, and so we're trying to think about, 'How do we do youth ministry? How do we care for them pastorally, in a way that makes sense to them at their age?'



- ✖ Average weekly youth ministry attendance: Over half of churches average under 15 middle and high school students weekly. 35% average between 16-50 students, and just 15% average over 50 students.

### TRADITION:

25% of participants serve in non-denominational churches; the rest are spread across more than 20 denominations, including Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic traditions.

### YOUTH MINISTRY FUNDING:

We asked what percentage of respondents' church budgets (including personnel costs) are allocated toward youth ministry and learned that most pastors report church funding between 2-10% of the overall budget.



- ✖ **The larger the church, the larger the youth ministry budget allocation.**  
While churches of all sizes are most likely to allocate between 2-10% of their budgets to youth ministry, churches of under 300 weekly attenders are most likely to give 5% or less, while churches over 300 are most likely to give 6-10%. Among churches with over 1,000 weekly attendees, just 13% allocate 21% or more of their budgets to youth ministry. **This allocation is the highest of any church size, suggesting that even most large churches do not significantly fund youth ministry.**

2-5%

- ✖ 2-5% was the largest budget percentage category (over 35% of responses). Just over 5% of pastors report funding youth ministry at 21%+ of the overall budget.

>5%

- ✖ Every racial/ethnic group was most likely to allocate between 2-10% of their budgets to youth ministry. But while nearly 20% of Black pastors and their congregations allocate 21% or more of their budgets toward youth ministry (the largest percentage of any subgroup by more than double), over half of White, Asian, and multiracial pastors and congregations allocate 5% or less of their budgets to youth ministry.

### FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> According to US pastoral demographic data as of 2022, the average age of a pastor is 51; 34% of the workforce falls between 55-69. 81% are male, 19% female. 9% identify as Hispanic; 11% Black; 5% Asian; 5% two or more races; 3% other; 76% White. (DATA USA: Clergy, <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/clergy?ethnicity-gender=genderAll&redirect=true>.) However, it's notable that in a related dataset for the ongoing EPIC study, the average senior pastor's age is 59. (Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations: Back to Normal? The Mixed Messages of Congregational Recovery Coming Out of the Pandemic (Hartford Institute for Religion, August 2023), 7).

<sup>2</sup> From the August 2023 EPIC report, median church attendance was recorded as 60 participants in person, 75 total inclusive of online worship (EPIC, 2).

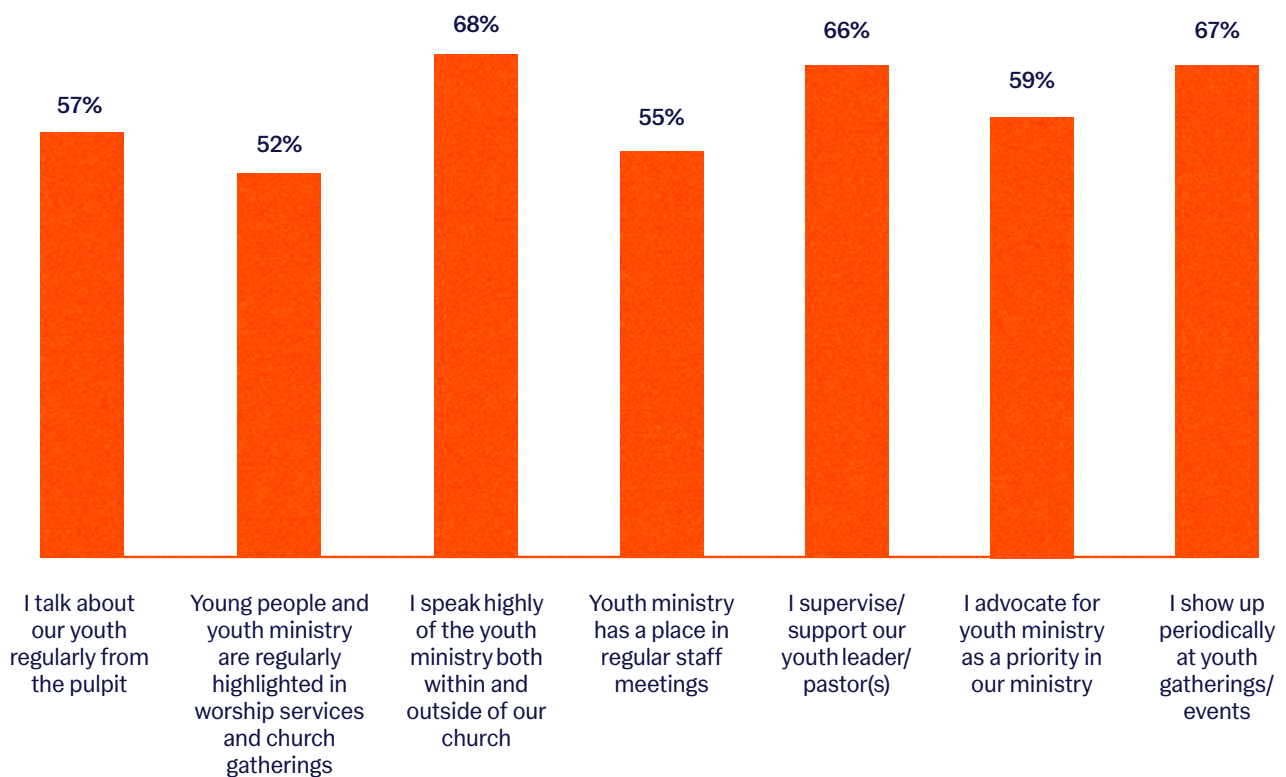


# IN-DEPTH FINDINGS

## HOW SENIOR PASTORS CONNECT WITH YOUTH MINISTRY

- ✖ 45% of pastors strongly agree that they “feel connected” to what’s going on in their youth ministry, with another 35% somewhat agreeing.

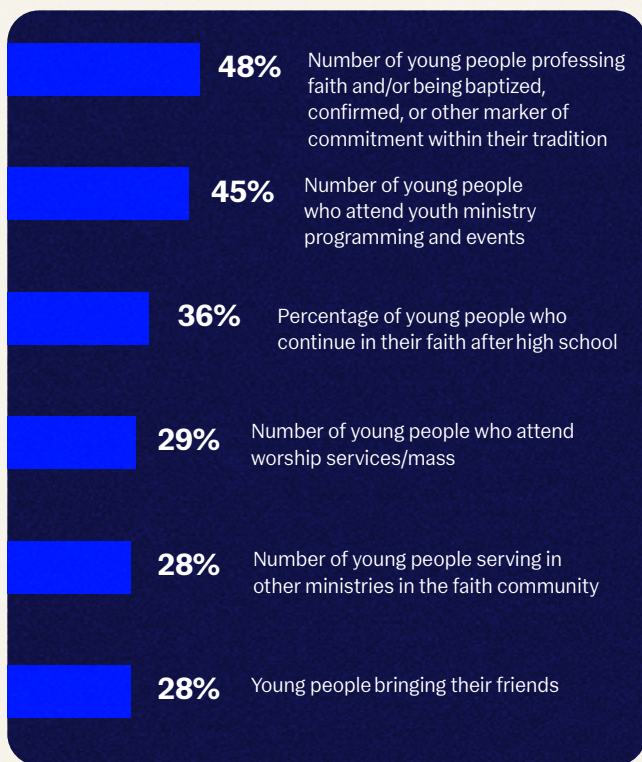
### IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU CURRENTLY SUPPORT THE YOUTH MINISTRY IN YOUR CONGREGATION? (Check all that apply)



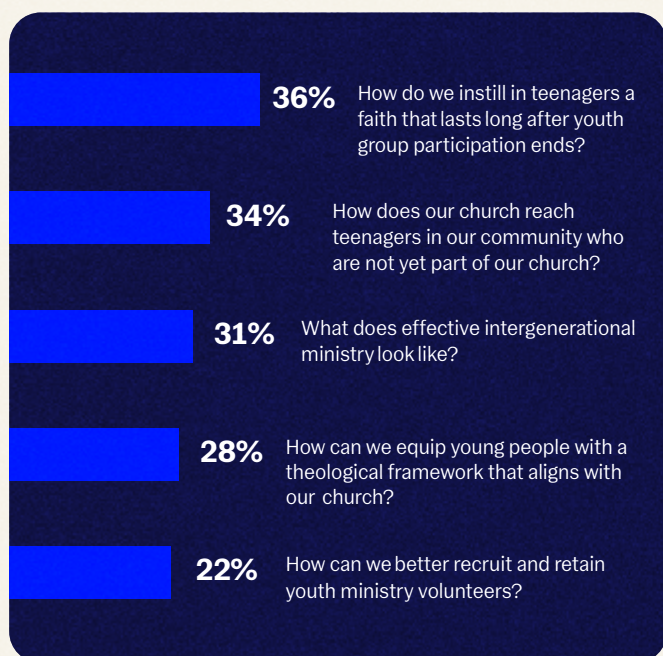
- ✖ Just over 1/3 of pastors strongly agree that youth ministry is one of their church’s top five priorities.
- ✖ Over 1/3 of pastors report attending youth programming or events 2-5 times per year; 1/4 report attending between 11-21+ times yearly. Only 12% report attending once or less per year.
- ✖ Two-thirds of pastors teach at youth ministry programs/events two or more times per year, with 10% reporting teaching 21+ times yearly.



**✖ Top measures of youth ministry effectiveness according to pastors**  
(Pastors could select up to 3 responses.)



**✖ Pastors' top concerns for youth ministry engagement** (We asked pastors to rank their top 3 concerns for youth ministry in their congregations):



**PASTORS' QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, AND ENTHUSIASMS ABOUT MINISTRY WITH YOUTH**

✖ 45% of pastors agree or strongly agree that their youth ministry has enough adult leaders (staff and volunteers), while 45% somewhat or strongly disagree.

✖ The lowest reported concern of pastors was, "How do I better partner with the youth ministry?" (10%), followed by "How can we more effectively train our youth ministry staff?" and "How can we best support families?" (both 14%).

**✖ Variations in top pastoral concerns by race/ethnicity:**

Instilling lifelong faith was the top concern of every ethnic group other than Latina/o pastors. White pastors reported the highest concern (40%), and Asian American pastors the second highest (35%). Latina/o pastors' top concern was more effectively training youth ministry staff (25%), followed by reaching teenagers who are not part of the church (20%). Outreach to unchurched teenagers was reported as one of the top concerns of every ethnic group, with 35% of White leaders ranking it a top concern. Also notable, over 25% of Asian American pastors ranked more effectively engaging families as a top concern, which was higher than any other subgroup.



# TENx10 Insights



We wonder if the survey topic (and perhaps our recruiting) contributed to the self-selection of participants who favor youth ministry and are highly involved in their congregation's youth ministry. For example, 35% of pastors report attending youth programming or events 2-5 times per year, and 25% report attending 11-21+ times yearly. This level of participation was much higher than we anticipated and higher than we hear anecdotally outside of this study (especially from youth ministry leaders' perspectives). Pastors without paid youth staff may be elevating this data.



Despite this highly reported sense of pastors' connection with and support for youth ministry, churches' prioritization of and budget allocations for youth ministry seem strikingly low, even in larger churches. We wonder if this may have looked different one to two decades ago, or even just a handful of years ago before the 2020 pandemic (which impacted church budgets and attendance in ways many congregations have not yet recovered from).



Pastors have long measured youth ministry success by attendance and formal commitments (e.g., baptism or confirmation) This survey did not counter that norm. The church is overdue for new success measurements that mark growth and lead to lifelong discipleship.



### ✖ Variations in top concerns by gender:

When we compare female and male pastors' top-ranked concerns and questions regarding youth ministry, we see a different picture of what's most on their minds.

- ✖ Female pastors:
  1. How to reach teenagers in the community (44%)
  2. How to better recruit and retain volunteers (34%, vs. only 19% of males)
  3. What effective intergenerational ministry looks like (30%)
- ✖ Male pastors:
  1. How to instill a faith that lasts (40%, vs. only 18% of females)
  2. How to reach teenagers in the community (33%)
  3. What effective intergenerational ministry looks like (32%)
- ✖ Also notable, 10% more female than male pastors wonder how to get more young people to show up for youth group (28% vs. 18%), while 12% more male than female pastors are concerned about how to equip young people with a theological framework that aligns with their church (30% vs. 18%).

## PERCEIVED CHALLENGES RELATED TO YOUTH MINISTRY

### ✖ Pastors' top-ranked challenges when it comes to ministry with young people (ranked by top 3):

1. I don't have enough time to dedicate to youth (50%)
2. Young people seem disinterested (45%)
3. Their beliefs/practices don't align with the Bible (40%)
4. I need more relevant resources (35%)
5. It's hard to reach them (30%)

- ✖ Lack of time was the challenge ranked top overall, and the most common item ranked #1 (23%) or #2 (15%).

“

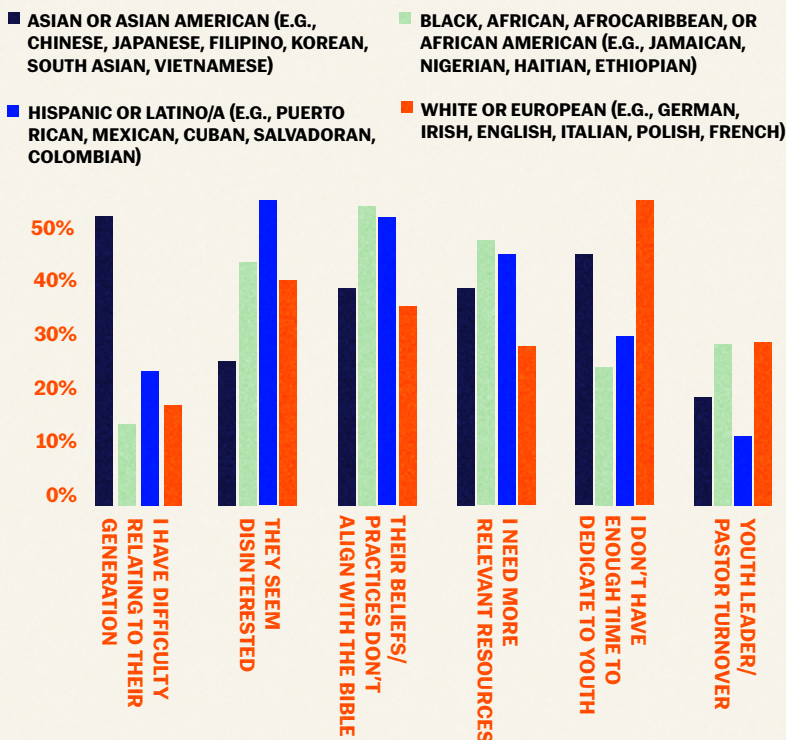
“The challenges of discipling youth in today's culture and trying to equip youth to maintain their faith or to make their faith their own—that's always on my mind. How do I disciple our youth to get them equipped to transition to young adulthood?”



## ✖ Variations in top challenges by race/ethnicity:

- ✖ Asian American leaders' top reported challenges were difficulty relating to younger generations (over 50%) and lack of time (45%).
- ✖ Black leaders' top challenges were a lack of alignment between young people's beliefs or practices and the Bible (55%) and needing more relevant resources (50%).
- ✖ Latina/o leaders' top challenges were young people seeming disinterested (55%) and lack of alignment between beliefs or practices (50%).
- ✖ White leaders' top challenges were a lack of time to dedicate to youth (55%) and young people seeming disinterested (40%).

CHALLENGES BY RACE/ETHNICITY OF PASTOR



## ✖ Variations in top challenges by gender:

We saw little variation in reported top challenges other than one standout: 14% more male than female pastors selected "their beliefs/practices don't align with the Bible" (42% vs. 28%).

“

We make time for things that we're intentional about. I'm very intentional about youth and the youth ministry in my church, and how we can raise the next generation of believers. So it's something that I create time for. I set up weekly meetings with youth so that I have personal rapport. And I'm hands-on about what's going on in their lives.”

“

“It's not that I don't have time for them. Yes, I make time. To me, every angle of the church is very important. I need to make time.”





Many pastors identify generational differences or what could be considered generationally-informed attitudes as points of conflict (for example, young peoples' beliefs and practices not aligning with the Bible). We wonder if pastors would benefit from employing active, intentional listening when faced with differences in generational understandings and values. For example, young people's desire for social justice can be a natural inroad to connecting with the biblical witness regarding God's heart for justice.



Pastors' top-ranked challenges when it comes to ministry with young people are lack of time and young people's seeming disinterest. Despite the many commitments in pastors' schedules, we wonder about the opportunity here to invite pastors to prioritize time for connection with young people. We also wonder whether that increased time and attention may lead to more interest (both perceived and real) on the part of teenagers.

**✖ Obstacles to intergenerational relationships** ("What are the primary obstacles preventing the adults in your congregation from having more meaningful, faith-centered relationships with teenagers at our church (who aren't part of their families)?" ranked by top 3.):

1. Adults are too busy to spend time with teenagers (52%)
2. Adults don't know how to have deeper conversations with teenagers (49%)
3. Adults feel like they don't know enough about contemporary culture to connect with teenagers (44%)
4. Adults are insecure about their own faith (43%)
5. Adults believe teenagers don't want to spend time with them (43%)

## PASTORS' EXPRESSED RESOURCE AND TRAINING NEEDS RELATED TO MINISTRY WITH YOUTH

**✖ How much support pastors say they need when it comes to youth ministry** ("Rate how much support you need in the following areas when it comes to ministry with young people [1 = Not at all needed, 2 = Slightly needed, 3 = Moderately needed, 4 = Very needed]"):

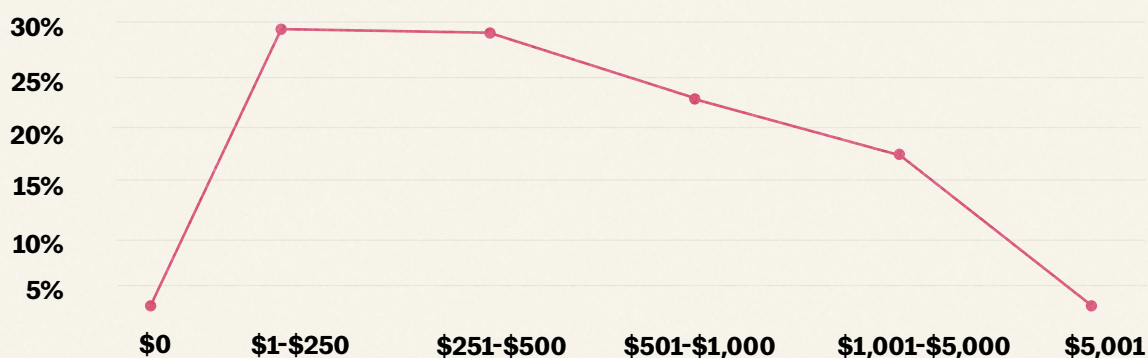
1. Partnering with parents to disciple their kids (3.0)
2. Supporting young people who are struggling with mental health needs (3.0)
3. (Tie) Discipling young people (2.8)
3. (Tie) Talking with young people who are leaving the church/faith (2.8)



**✖ Top ways pastors learn new information and ideas about ministry (ranked by top 3):**

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Social media (46%) | 4. Books (34%)                                |
| 2. Websites (41%)     | 5. (Tie) In-person training/conferences (29%) |
| 3. Podcasts (37%)     | 5. (Tie) Coworkers/other leaders (29%)        |

**✖ Pastors' typical spending on ministry resources and training for themselves in one budget year:**



- ✖ 58% of pastors in our sample spend \$500 or less per year on resources and training.**

**✖ Resources pastors want for themselves to better disciple teenagers:**

1. In-person training/conferences (40%)
2. Online courses (39%)
3. Books (30%)

- ✖ Least-desired resources included church consulting (9%) and longer-term group cohorts (6-18 months) (5%).** Notably, longer-term group cohorts were the least preferred option for pastors themselves or youth ministry leaders. This was true among nearly all groups when cross-tabulated by race/ethnicity, gender, or full-time paid vs. bivocational pastors.



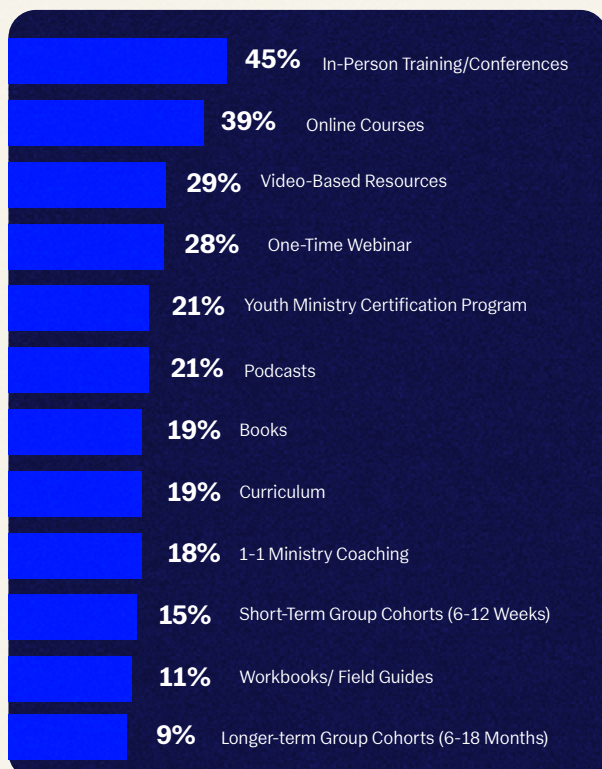
✖ **Variations in desired resourcing for pastors by full-time paid vs. bivocational:**

Bivocational pastors (part-time paid, part-time unpaid, or full-time unpaid) choose the same top two preferred resources for themselves as full-time paid pastors: online courses and in-person training/conferences. However, 48% of bivocational leaders prefer online courses vs. 37% of full-time paid leaders. The most notable variations in resourcing preferences include podcasts (14% more full-time paid leaders prefer) and books (8% more full-time paid leaders prefer).

✖ **Resources pastors want for their youth ministry leaders:**

1. In-person training/conferences (45%)
2. Online courses (39%)
3. Video-based resources (29%)

**PREFERRED RESOURCES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY LEADERS**



✖ **Variations in desired resourcing for youth ministry leaders by race/ethnicity:**

- ✖ In-person training/conferences were the top preferred mode of resourcing and training for youth ministry leaders (45-55%) for every subgroup other than Black pastors (over half prefer online courses, while 45% prefer in-person) and Middle Eastern pastors (70% prefer online).
- ✖ Other notable training and resourcing categories: 40% of Black pastors and 35% of Asian American pastors prefer a youth ministry certification program. Among subgroups, White pastors were most likely to request video-based resources (35%) and podcasts (25%). In contrast, less than 5% of Black pastors report preferring podcasts. Other resource categories showed wide variation in preference across groups.

✖ **Variations in desired resourcing for youth ministry leaders by gender:**

Female pastors were twice as likely to prefer youth ministry certification programs (40% vs. 19%) and almost 10% more likely to prefer curriculum. Male pastors were 11% more likely to prefer podcasts and 10% more likely to prefer both books and coaching.

✖ **Pastors' preferred resources to support parents and families:**

- ✖ Web-based resources parents can access on their own (56%)
- ✖ Parent small group curriculum (53%)
- ✖ Guest speaker or special event at our church (51%)
- ✖ Pastors are less interested in podcasts, books, or webinars for supporting parents (25% or less each)



# TENx10 Insights



We were surprised and somewhat concerned that pastors' top reported way of learning new information and ideas about ministry is through social media. These platforms certainly capture a lot of time and attention today, but misinformation abounds and clever quips dominate over depth.



We observed some misalignment among pastors' reported measures of youth ministry effectiveness, top concerns, top challenges, and top resourcing needs. For example, "How can we best support families?" was one of the lowest-ranked concerns (14%), but the highest areas of support needed included "Partnering with parents to disciple their kids."



Online courses, in-person training, and conferences are generally pastors' top preferred modes of training for themselves and their youth ministry leaders. However, longer-term group cohorts (6-18 months) were nearly universally the least preferred option. This stands out for two reasons: 1. Longer-term cohort models appeared to be more desirable pre-pandemic but do not seem to have rebounded in desirability, and 2. We believe longer-term group experiences provide unique transformational contexts for ministry leaders.



We also have seen that congregational change requires longer-term investment from pastors (and those pastors often need ongoing support to keep leading change).



It should be noted that these findings are based on pastors' self-report and not compared with any outside purchasing or participation data from training or resource providers. Similarly, none of the findings in this report have been compared with any objective data on ministry success (by any measure of success).



# About TEnx10

Young people are walking away from their faith at an alarming rate. We know there is good work happening all around the country, and yet, it's not enough. At TEnx10, we're calling all parts of the Church in the US to work together to help faith matter more to ten million young people over the next ten years. As a collaborative organization, we believe the only way to turn the tide is to work together across ethnic, denominational, and cultural lines. We're committed to working together with churches, denominations, and Christian organizations to create a healthier Christian ecosystem where young people's faith can thrive. Thanks for joining us in this critical, complex, and inspiring work.

To learn more about the movement and how you can partner with [TEnx10](#), please fill out the [Partner Interest Form](#) and a member of our team will follow up with you.

## FREE RESOURCE!

TEnx10 and Barna Group came together to create a team workshop experience called [Engaging Gen Z](#) that equips leaders with practical strategies to effectively engage and disciple Gen Z. Detailed how-to instructions give you everything you need to lead your church's staff and key volunteers through interactive dialogue that will equip them to better understand and serve the next generation.





# Research Methodology

The **Fuller Youth Institute (FYI)** conducted the Pastoral Perspectives on Ministry with Youth Survey between April and June 2024 with 619 senior/lead pastors from across the United States. The goal of the survey was to better understand pastors' perspectives on ministry with teenagers,<sup>3</sup> focusing on the questions pastors are asking about teenagers, their enthusiasm and concerns for ministry with this age group, and the types of resources and training that would help their churches support teenagers' faith.

The survey, developed in coordination with TENx10 and the Fuller Youth Institute, included various question types such as multiple choice, ranked order, and open-ended items. Participants were recruited through TENx10 and partners as well as Parable Digital, a California-based marketing firm utilizing a nationally representative sample, resulting in 619 valid survey responses. The sample was not weighted prior to analysis, but roughly approximates available national sample datasets of pastors. Analyses encompassed both quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative assessments conducted by our research team and data analysts. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest 5 in most cases in this report.

Follow-up focus groups were conducted with six of the survey respondents who indicated a willingness to participate in a one-hour group interview. These groups aimed to explore key themes identified in the survey data and were organized based on primary variables such as the race/ethnicity of the pastor and the tradition and size of the congregation they serve.

Additional quantitative participant descriptive data:

- ✦ 75% of respondents serve in paid full-time roles; 15% are paid part-time, and the other 10% are unpaid.
- ✦ More than half of pastors served as youth pastors at some point before becoming a pastor. 35% worked outside of vocational ministry before becoming a pastor.
- ✦ 70% of the sample have completed a master's or doctoral degree; 25% hold a bachelor's or associate's degree.
- ✦ Length of time serving as a senior pastor (in current as well as previous churches): 12% less than 2 years, 23% 3-6 years, 22% 7-12 years, 17% 13-20 years, 25% 21 or more years.

---

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the survey and this report, we used the term "youth ministry." Instructions noted for the survey should be considered in the report as well: Your church may use terms like "teen ministry," "student ministry," "ministry with youth," or other labels to describe discipleship and formation for young people of middle and high school ages in the US context (roughly 12-18; in this survey, we refer to them as "young people" or "teenagers"). Please reply with your particular context in mind, using "youth ministry" interchangeably with your preferred terms.

## Acknowledgments

Report coauthored by LaTasha Nesbitt, FYI Research Director, and Brad M. Griffin, Senior Director of Content and Research. We are grateful for the contributions of the research team and consultants on this project: Tyler Greenway, Levi Price, Roslyn Hernández, Caleb Roose, Jake Mulder, and FYI Executive Director Kara Powell. Special thanks to Rachel Dodd, Kate Amaya, Shannon Schmidt, Macy Davis, John Kwok, Chelsea Scott, and Lisette Fraser for report editing, preparation, and design.

Citation: Fuller Youth Institute, *TENx10 Report on Senior Pastors' Perspectives on Ministry with Young People* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2024).