



A Generation on the Rise:

Canadian Youth Ministry Today



The rising generation...

“are hungry for the Gospel.”

“want real, authentic
hands-on discipleship.”

“are not afraid to start things
without permission.”

“are so courageous, they just
don't know what to do with that
courage.”

“are the church. They're not the
future church.”





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Dear Friends,

The recent Gen Alpha research conducted by OneHope International, in partnership with Alpha Canada, revealed that we're at a pivotal moment in youth ministry. The landscape is changing. The rising generation is anxious, curious, and also bold! Many are searching for meaning beyond themselves; they're seeking something spiritual. Those who know and love Jesus are open about their faith and eager to share him with their peers. Churches from every part of our nation have shared stories about these courageous, faithful young leaders and the impact they are making in the lives of those they encounter. Stories that have left us in awe. They want their friends, peers, and family, old and young, to know Jesus.

We had the opportunity to hear from influential voices at the forefront of ministry across Canada, and discover what they are witnessing in their communities, churches, and ministries. The momentum and growth across denominations, contexts, and regions are remarkable. But with that growth comes new struggles and hurdles to navigate.

This research is a window into the current, and ever-changing, landscape of youth ministry in Canada. It draws a powerful picture of potential in the season ahead and outlines some key roadblocks to overcome along the way.

Canadian leaders are passionate and dedicated to seeing the rising generation lean into their potential, embrace their curiosity, leverage their boldness, and share Jesus.

My prayer is that this research will lead you to pray and leave you feeling inspired, hopeful, and eager to empower youth and each other.

You are not alone on this journey. We are here to serve.



Love,
Shaila

Who We Spoke To

We heard from 76 leaders and organizations who work in and alongside the church, who have front row seats, witnessing the boldness, bravery, confusion, and anxiety of the rising generation from across our nation. Each of them was asked the same set of questions and encouraged to answer both according to a scale and share their observations in relation to that topic. This is what we discovered:

- **Themes of Momentum:** Leaders are seeing significant momentum in student-led initiatives, prayer-centred events, and collaboration with other leaders and organizations.
- **Common Roadblocks:** Leadership development is adding to burnout, a common struggle to find and train reliable volunteers, busyness and leadership constraints that inhibit innovation and interrupt discipleship.
- **Notable Discoveries:** Leaders are navigating a mental health crisis they're not equipped for, and are encountering the multifaceted reality of social media and its impact on youth ministry.

76 Leaders from Across Canada

- 30 Organizational Leaders
- 22 Youth Pastors & Youth Leaders
- 16 Senior Pastors
- 8 Denominational Leaders

Including 6 Chinese Context Leaders, 6 Catholic Context Leaders, and 6 Network Leaders

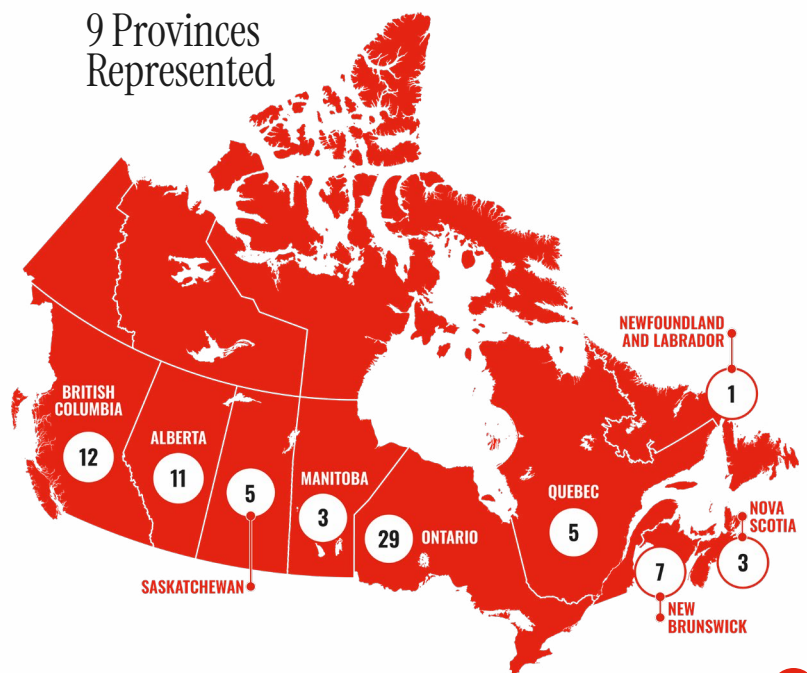
65 Churches &
Organizations

21 PARACHURCH
ORGANIZATIONS

39 CHURCHES /
DENOMINATIONS

5 OTHER
(Freelancers,
Post-Secondary, etc.)

9 Provinces
Represented



Student-Led, Prayer-Centred Authenticity

Students want authentic experiences. They are rejecting over-produced, highly programmed youth events in favour of raw, authentic connection. Traditional curriculum and teaching are taking a backseat, with only 26% of leaders citing them as key components of growth.

Today's youth don't want to be passive consumers. They want genuine opportunities to step up and participate meaningfully, and ministries that hand over the reins and let them flourish:

- 70% of interviewed leaders noted and celebrated the shift toward organic, student-led ministry.
- 54% identified engaged student leaders as the primary drivers of their ministry's growth.

At the centre of this is prayer. Rather than flashy events, 43% of leaders point to dedicated prayer gatherings as a core catalyst for momentum and sustained growth. Youth are seeking out meaningful opportunities to grow spiritually, to pray and worship together. They want spiritual and supernatural encounters more than they want a "cool" event, and they want to play a role in making it happen.

The Power of Collaborative Networks & The Cost of Their Absence

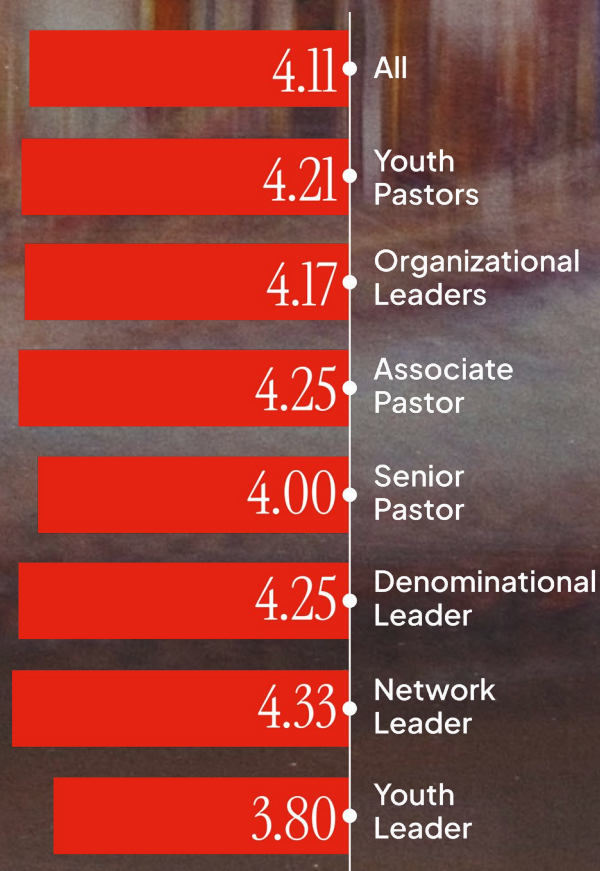
Collaboration is becoming essential to success and growth. 61% of leaders recognized the power of collaboration across youth networks and churches, acknowledging that unity creates vital opportunities to reach and involve more youth.

Conversely, the absence of collaborative opportunities comes at a noticeable cost: a real lack of support. Leaders have observed a stark divide between ministries that thrive in connected hubs and those that operate in isolated silos.

Working collaboratively strengthens individual networks and greatly broadens their reach and impact within the community.



Network leaders indicated the highest average score for sensing growth and momentum in their ministry at 4.33.



Average scores on a 5-point scale



Sustainable Development That Prevents Burnout

A major challenge across youth ministries is finding a sustainable leadership development model and gaining the support to implement it. Students are desperately seeking authentic connection and mentorship; they are looking for adults who will journey consistently through this season of life with them. Many ministries are successfully attracting eager students, but finding capable, reliable, long-term adult volunteers to walk alongside them is a persistent challenge.



"I've heard that people struggle to find volunteers. And by volunteers, I don't mean just getting a warm body. I mean, finding the right people to volunteer."

Compounding this volunteer shortage is the high rate of burnout among youth pastors. They are physically and emotionally exhausted, navigating ministry with too few volunteers, sometimes conflicting vision with senior leaders, and a lack of foundational discipleship amongst volunteers and those newer to the role. Many are seeking deeper mentorship and collaboration with senior leadership, as well as the trust to lead and serve their youth well.

For many, working beyond capacity without adequate support is ultimately stalling ministry growth and momentum.



52% explicitly cited "Capacity," and 48% cited "Volunteers" as their largest barriers to catalytic growth.

Youth leaders, who are often the front line of ministry, indicated the lowest average score (3.80 out of 5) for sensing growth and momentum in their ministry, which can contribute to low morale and burnout.

Empowering Students as Co-Labourers

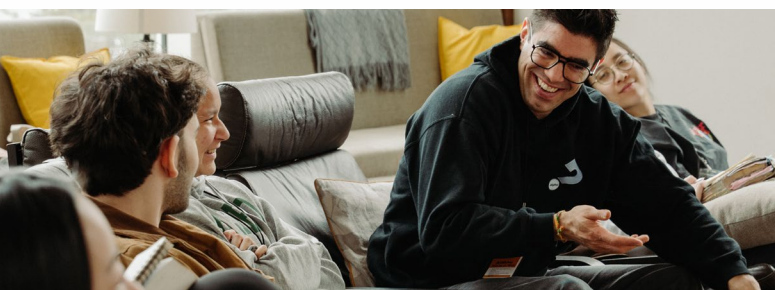
Conversely, a key area of momentum that may also lead to potential roadblocks is within ministries that treat students as co-labourers rather than passive consumers. This approach empowers students to step up and lead both youth and church-wide initiatives. Instead of merely instructing, leaders who are seeing the most growth step back to mentor, showing youth how to lead rather than telling them.

Where youth are thriving:

- Preaching
- Leading Prayer Ministry
- Sunday Takeover
- Peer Discipleship
- Digital Evangelism

Growing youth ministries aren't waiting for students to volunteer; they are actively recruiting them.

Ultimately, students and ministries thrive when youth are given the freedom to innovate, experiment, fail, and learn through supportive mentorship and church grace.



Associated Roadblock:

Volunteer Shortages and Leadership Pitfalls

The leadership crisis in Canadian youth ministry is critical. While the harvest is plentiful, many workers are exhausted, under-resourced, and lack structural support, leading to mounting frustration.

Three core issues drive this crisis:

High Turnover: Youth pastors frequently leave before building foundational relationships and thriving ministries, interrupting momentum and long-term unity.

Volunteer Shortages: Pastors are operating with dwindling volunteer teams and constantly fear burning out the few they have left.

Role Overload: Leaders are overwhelmed by the pressure to master everything from administration and mentorship to social media.

Compounding these challenges is an often fractured relationship with senior leadership. Youth pastors express a strong desire for discipleship from senior pastors and want senior pastors to walk with them.

Senior leaders carry the weight of running the entire organization. For some, that means overseeing several departments. For others, especially in smaller churches, it means carrying every ministry personally with little or no staff at all. Although often overwhelmed by their expanding responsibilities, these leaders expressed a sincere desire to empower their youth ministries and create environments where students and young adults can thrive within the congregation.

“They’re the church of today, and so what does it look like to have our kids and our youth as participants in the congregation?”

In some churches, administrative structures view youth ministry as one of many ministries rather than a vital investment, withholding necessary funding, space, and competitive salaries. In smaller congregations without dedicated staff, the same dynamic shows up differently: youth ministry ends up last in line for volunteers, time, and attention. Ultimately, a reluctance to delegate, combined with communication breakdowns, hinders innovation and leaves young leaders isolated and discouraged.



Leadership Constraints Limit Innovation and Growth

Youth pastors with a clear vision drive momentum, yet 45% report their greatest hurdle is gaining buy-in from senior leadership. Rather than a shared vision, many youth pastors feel as if they face resistance and may not feel heard. Senior leadership and the ministries they oversee need to work together to prevent and overcome this potential divide.

Leadership constraints are preventing innovation and fostering deep dissatisfaction among young leaders. This results in highly engaged young leaders leaving the traditional church to start their own parachurch movements or leaving ministry entirely.

The health of a youth ministry is directly linked to the senior pastor's posture and the receptivity of youth pastors. Where momentum is highest, senior leaders are championing, resourcing, and mentoring their youth teams, and youth leaders are willing to listen and learn.

Busyness Disrupting Discipleship

Parents and families are increasingly prioritizing extra-curriculars, sports, and academics over their children's spiritual growth and church commitment. This results in inconsistent attendance, which stalls ministry momentum and makes long-term discipleship nearly impossible.

Consequently, youth pastors are forced to compete for youth attention, creating a conflict between the students and the youth pastors' desires. Many feel pressured to host high-budget, entertainment-driven events to get students in the door; however, this is counter to the type of authentic and natural events and ministry that students are looking for.

Ultimately, the competing demands on students' time, paired with a lack of parental commitment, disrupts essential discipleship rhythms and leaves ministries struggling to cultivate deep, lasting faith amongst their youth.



Navigating The Mental Health Crisis

The youth mental health crisis has profoundly impacted ministry. Today's students battle unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, placing a heavy burden on youth pastors and creating an urgent need to equip volunteers with specialized training.

"We have students in our church right now that haven't gone to school this year because of anxiety. We're walking with the parents and realizing this is more normal than it is not."

It is this need for mental health support and an escape from the stress and anxiety of their lives that is noted as the catalyst for the move towards organic programming that gives youth a safe space to be open.

Unexpectedly, this struggle has increased spiritual openness among youth. Many students now view mental health and spiritual formation as the same. Believers find their ultimate hope in Jesus, while non-believers are seeking something more and realize it cannot be found in the world. Students crave truth and genuine community. When churches step up to create these safe, caring spaces, youth respond with an exceptional openness to faith and evangelism.



The Role of Social Media

Ultimately, what youth seem to be seeking above all is authenticity.

Though the rising generation is the most digitally savvy in history, their most profound growth occurs in face-to-face moments. They live online, yet actively crave meaningful offline connections.

However, the digital world remains a powerful and influential space. Youth are taking the lead as "keyboard missionaries," using social media platforms to answer peers' questions and share their faith. Leaders highlighted an emerging need to actively mentor these students in navigating online spiritual conversations with wisdom.

"Socials have actually been huge this year. Dozens of Alpha registrations are coming through Social Media. It helps boost personal invitation."

Ministries see the most significant growth when they stop treating social media like a static bulletin board and start leveraging it as a dynamic tool for direct discipleship and evangelism. Surprisingly, leaders noted that rather than being a purely negative force, social media, when used correctly, acts as a powerful catalyst for ministry momentum.

Closing Invitation

Reflecting on the conversations I've shared in gathering this information, with old and new friends and colleagues in ministry, I could see an important story being written.

Compiling these voices has offered us a profound snapshot in time.

This moment. Right now. The context in which God has entrusted us to serve and love students, as we play our role in helping them find their joy and purpose in a life lived for Jesus.

To be very clear, these findings are challenging. They are meant to unsettle us all, while inviting us to consider what we can do to help clear the path for the rising generations.

Nothing shared here can be fully solved or strategized away by any one individual, church, or organization. It's going to take unity and a commitment to listen to and learn from each other. We will need to listen to the Holy Spirit and seek wisdom and guidance. But perhaps there are places in our own contexts where we could begin the work even now...

At the core of this is hope, and I hope you can see it.

I pray that you will join in prayer for his Kingdom to come here in Canada as it is in heaven.

This is just the beginning of an even greater conversation.



Come Holy Spirit.



Tim Teakle
Alpha Youth Director





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