



HEMORRHAGING FAITH

WHY & WHEN CANADIAN YOUNG ADULTS ARE
LEAVING, STAYING & RETURNING TO THE CHURCH

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A FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH DOCUMENT COMMISSIONED BY EFC YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY ROUNDTABLE

PROJECT
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The Great Commission
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The Evangelical
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INTERVARSITY

Hemorrhaging Faith: Reflecting on Why Young Adults Leave the Church

CRC Communications Webinar, May 30, 2013

What's the air like?

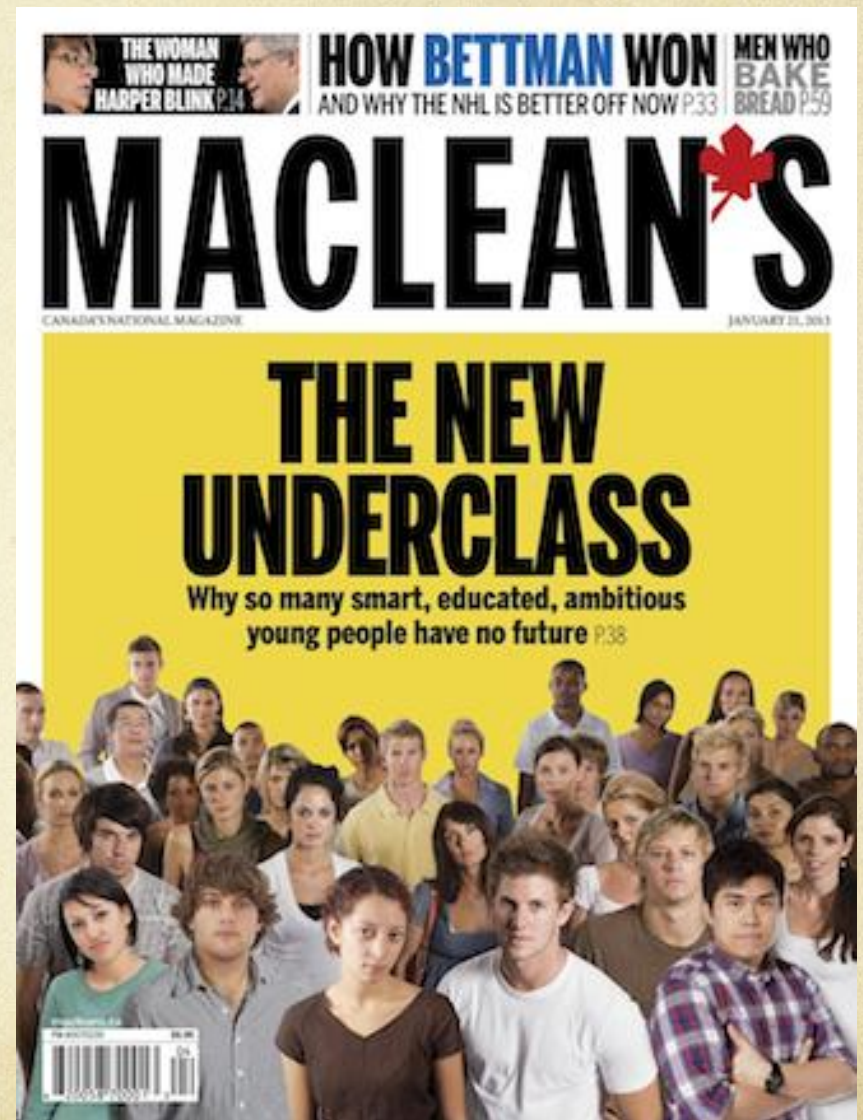
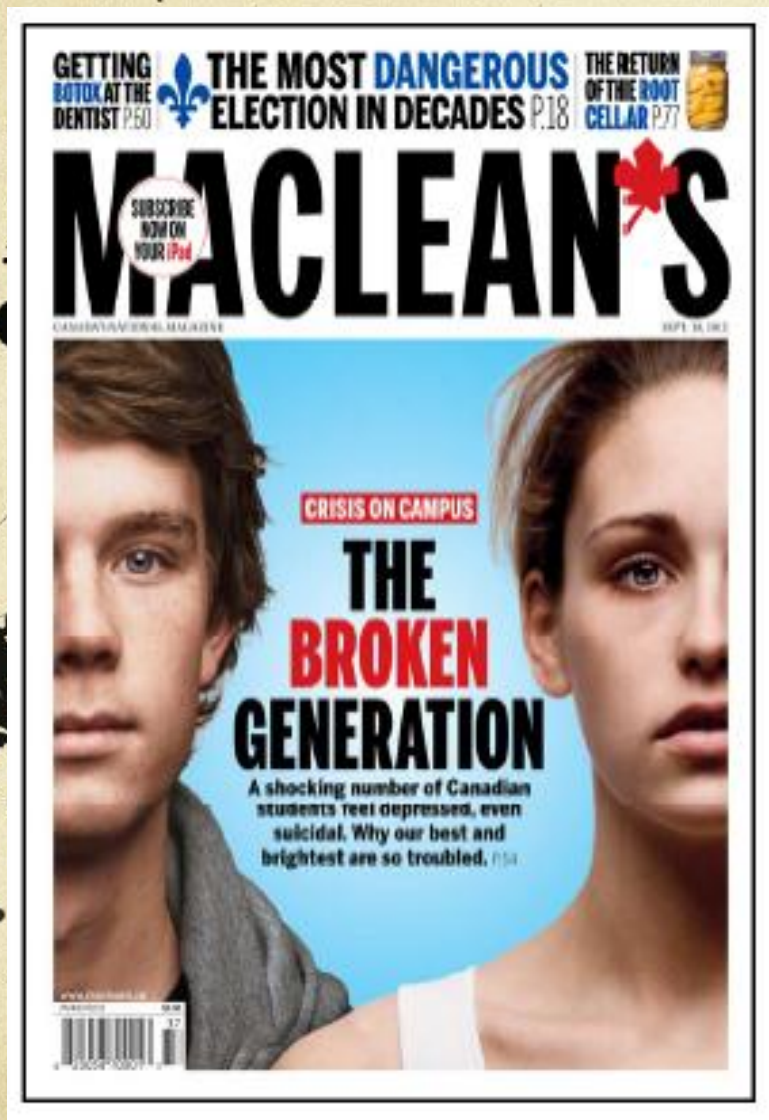
- Youth are the barometer of the church and culture as a whole. This is a story of us all, not just about youth...



Canary
in the
coal
mine...

Sept. 2012

Jan 2013



C. Smith, Religion and Health

Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2003

- Inverse relation to drug, alcohol, tobacco, and delinquency
- Inverse relation to thoughts of suicide, attempted and actual suicide, depression, hopelessness
- Fosters physical health: diet, exercise, sleep, hygiene, seatbelt use.
- Greater overall satisfaction with life, more effective coping, more involvement with families
- Less adolescent sex, fewer sexual partners, less pregnancy



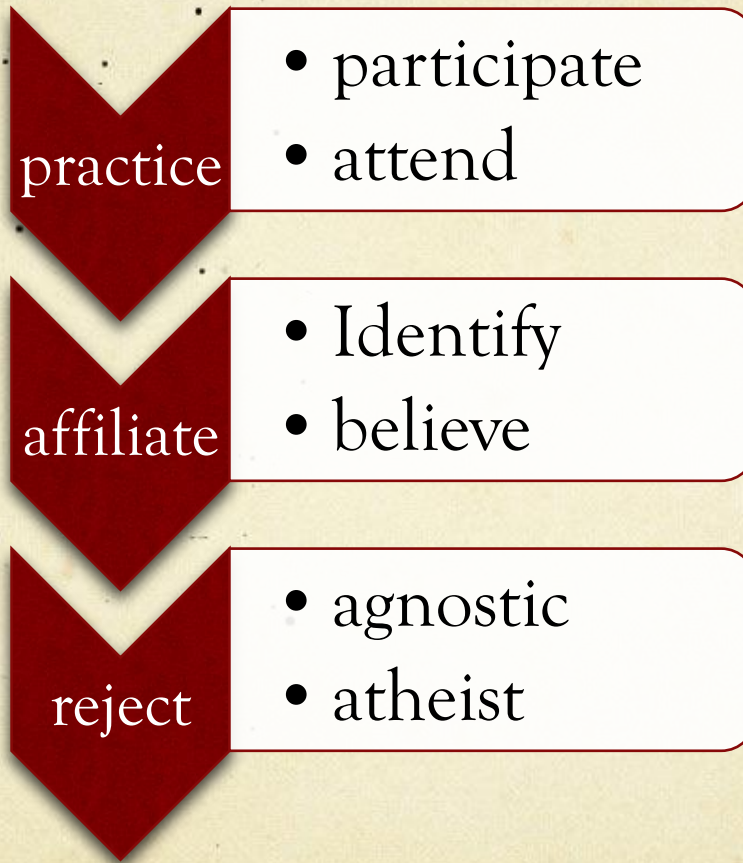
Attendance Reduces Depression

“Longitudinal Associations of Importance of Religion and Frequency of Service Attendance With Depression Risk Among Adolescents in Nova Scotia”

*Daniel Rasic, Mark Asbridge, Steve Kisely, Donald Langille
Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, May 2013.*



Sociology of Religious Identity



Pay attention
to what is
being
measured...

Stats (Bibby 2009)

MACLEAN'S

We hope you enjoy this clean reading mode:

Youth Survey: Teens lose faith in droves

Islam and atheism are on the rise while Christianity fades

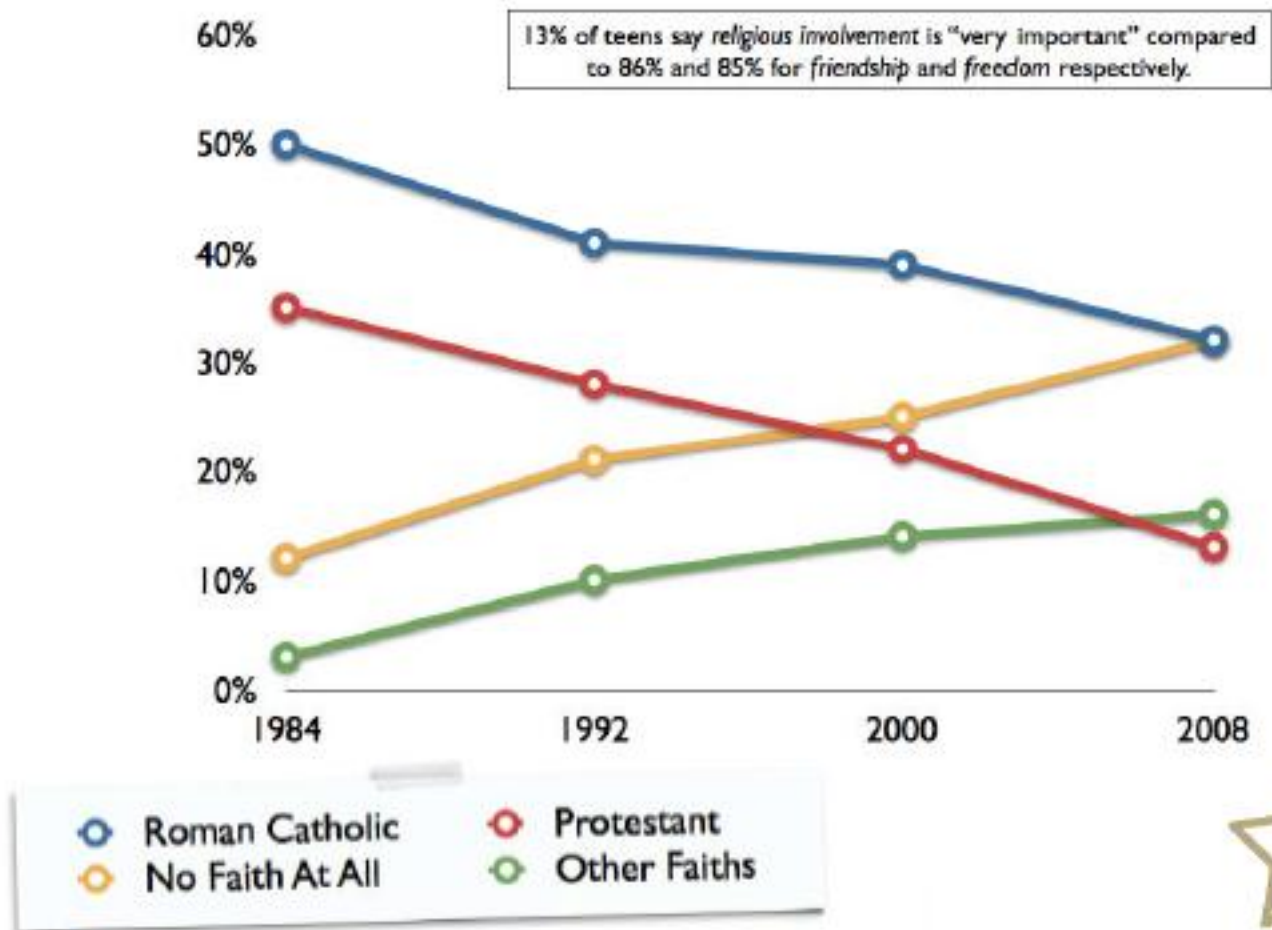
by Kate Lunau on Tuesday, April 7, 2009 2:00pm -



Every day, Mohamed Hadi wakes up before sunrise for morning prayer. The 19-year-old then boards a bus for the 90-minute ride from his home in Richmond, B.C., to the campus of Simon Fraser University, where he's

Bibby, 2009

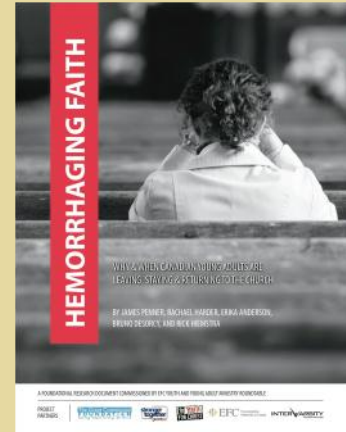
Canadian Teens (age 15-19) Who Identify With A Religious Tradition, 1984-2008



Headlines of Report

- Only one in three (33%) Canadian young adults who **attended** church weekly as a child still do so today.
- One in two (50%) of Cdn young adults continue to identify with the tradition they were raised in.
- Of the young adults who no longer attend church, 3 of 5 (60%) have also stopped *identifying* themselves with the Christian tradition in which they were raised.

By young adulthood only one in ten respondents self-identified as Catholic or Mainline reported attending church weekly compared to four in ten raised evangelical.



Hemorrhaging = abnormal, copious loss of a valuable substance

Majority Culture:

Pulls Youth Away from Faith Engagement



- Prolonged Identity formation*
- Postmodern skepticism
- Radical autonomy
- Therapeutic religion
- Discontented consumerism
- Overwhelming time pressure
- Information explosion
- Life transitions put survival first
- Life distractions fill their schedules
- Lifestyle choices make church attendance feel hypocritical

Yet there are many robust “minority cultures” that nurture faith...

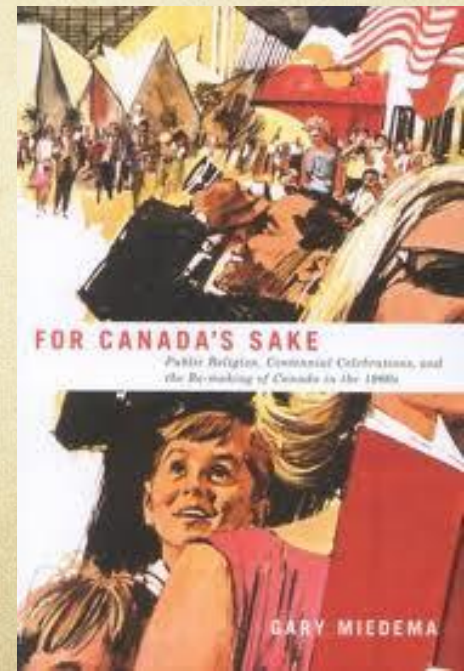
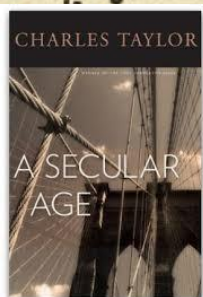
Dutch Landed Immigrants denied Canadian citizenship due to their atheism (1964)

“The things we believe in this country stand for Christianity—being honest and being kind—believing in Christ’s teachings... Not everybody follows this but that is what we try to attain in this country, the Christian way of life.”

-- Canadian Judge, 1964, cited in Gary Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s*. (McGill-Queens, 2005).

Things have changed in the dominant culture of Canada... Think of the current controversy around Trinity Western University’s new law school...

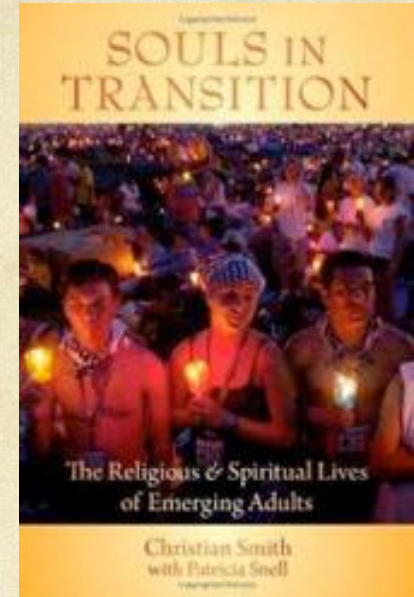
A new default position in Canada: disbelief.





Emerging Adulthood

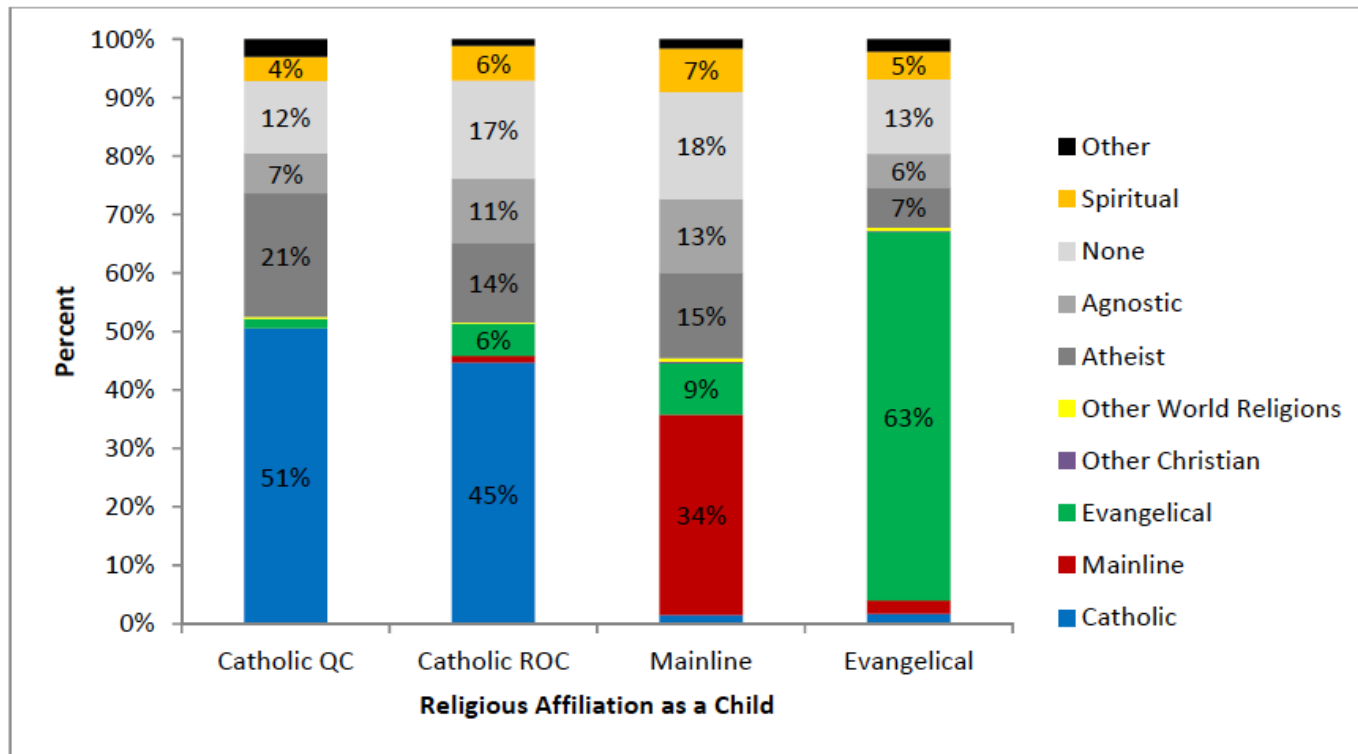
- Prolonged identity formation
- A new stage of human development
- The expanded amount of time spent in majority culture facilitates drift



“Lifestyle conflicts are being resolved by removing themselves from church communities... they felt it would be hypocritical to them to attend church.”

Affiliation: Towards Grey

Chart 2.3. Religious affiliation of young adults, by religious affiliation as a child

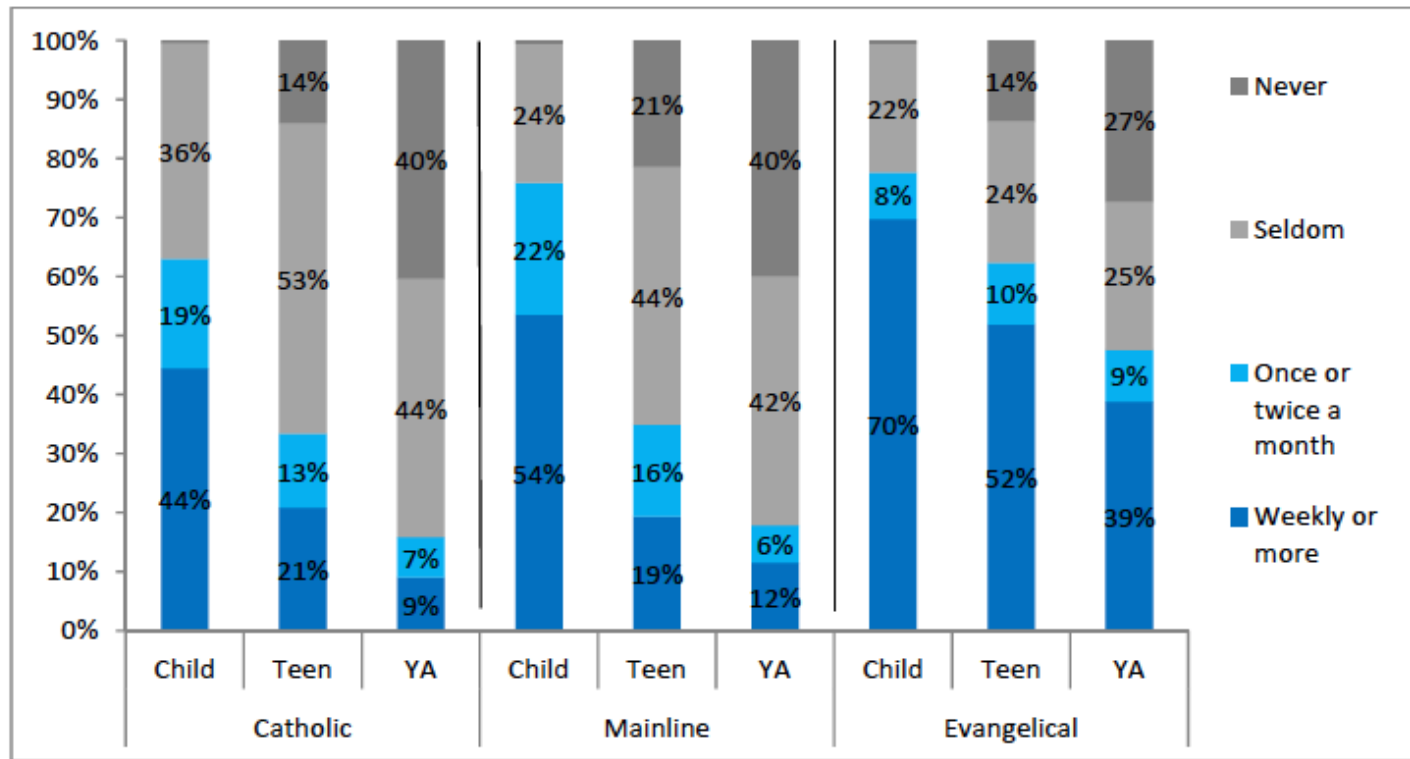


Note: Catholic QC are those who were raised Catholic in Quebec and Catholic ROC are those who were raised in the Rest Of Canada.

Males - dissociate towards agnostic/atheist.
Females: more likely to become “spiritual.”

Attending Church: Jr. High drop off

Chart 2.1. Attendance at religious services, by religious affiliation in childhood for various life stages



Evangelical pastors: #1 priority was youth retention: programs, mission trips, etc

Transitions:

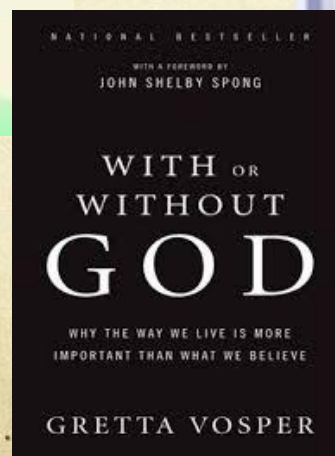
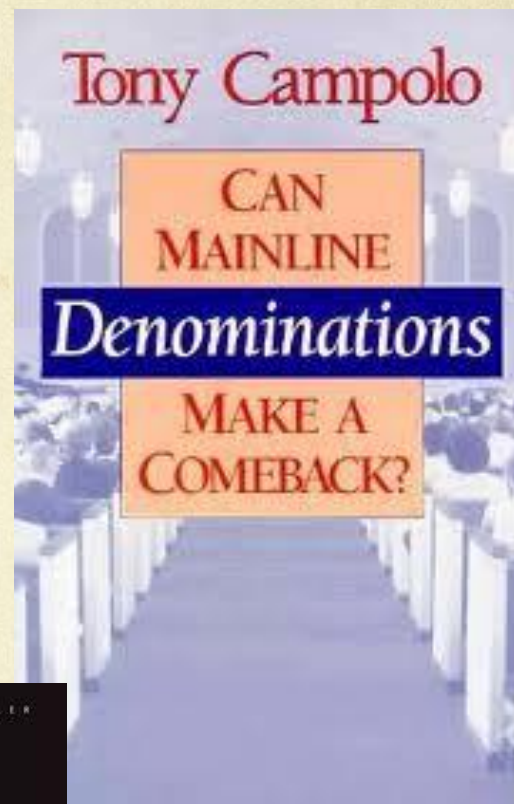
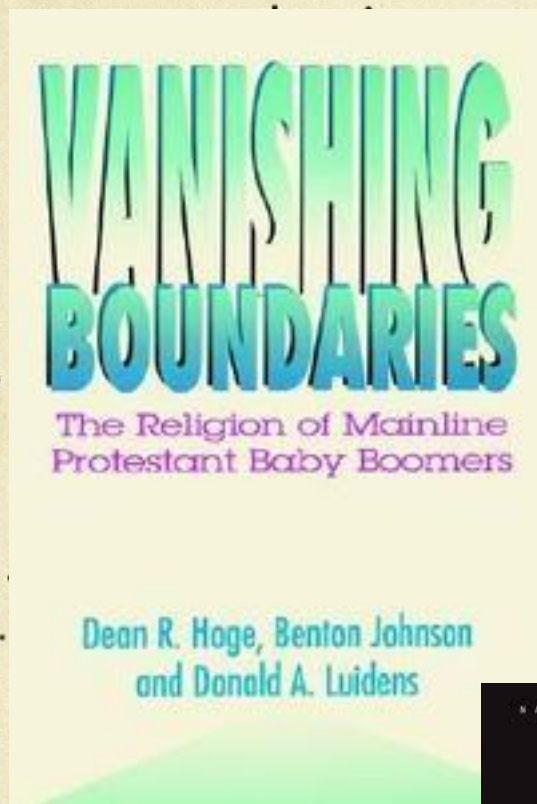
- “A transition from the parental home was the most common answer given to an open-ended question asking respondents what was happening in their lives when they stopped going to church.”



whole gospel, whole campus, whole life.

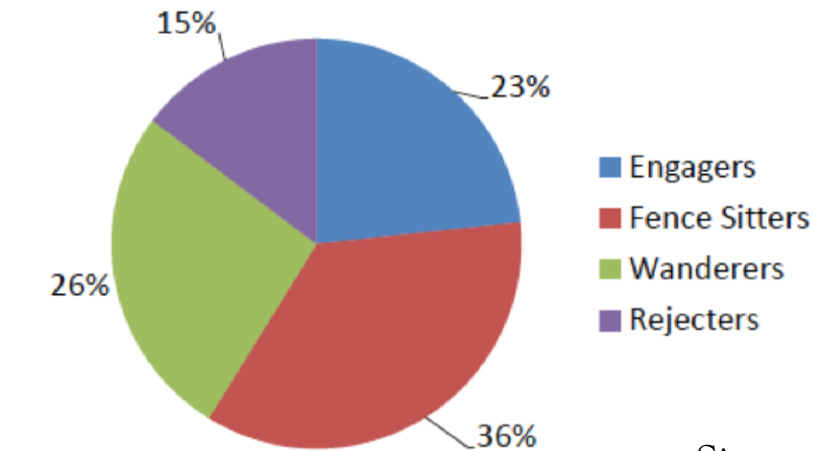


Mainline to Sideline



SPIRITUAL DIVERSITY

Four Spiritual Types



About 1 million
Canadians are Fence
Sitters

Six out of ten
engagers affiliate
with an evangelical
tradition.

Engagers: open to God and participate in church. "Church is good." 23%

Fence Sitters: have Christian affiliation but not with any organized group. Some are drawn towards and others resist. "Could I have church on my terms?" 36%

Wanderers: have "unhitched" by drifting to identify as Christian, atheist, agnostic and nones. "I've found a way to live without church." 26%

Rejectors: have left due to some scarring experience and may self-describe as atheists. "Church is bad." 15%

Metrics include reports on experience of God, doctrine/lifestyle issues, attitude towards church, and the helpfulness of church programs and leaders.

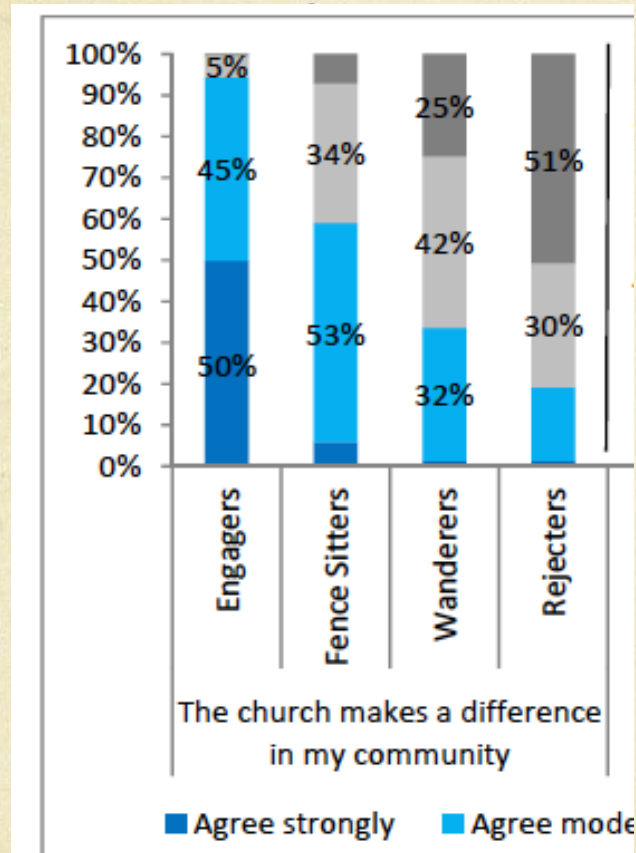
Drivers and barriers of church involvement

4 Themes

- **Community** - Functions (growth and service) and feel
– **Vibrant vs. Stagnant** (age mix, authenticity, inclusivity)
- **God** - He speaks, comforts, guides, reveals, heals...
– **Experienced vs. Un-experienced**
- **Parents** - Modeling genuine faith and instructing in daily life
– **Engaged vs. Disengaged**
- **Teaching & Beliefs** - applicable, questionable, realistic, flexible
– **Empowering vs. Restrictive**



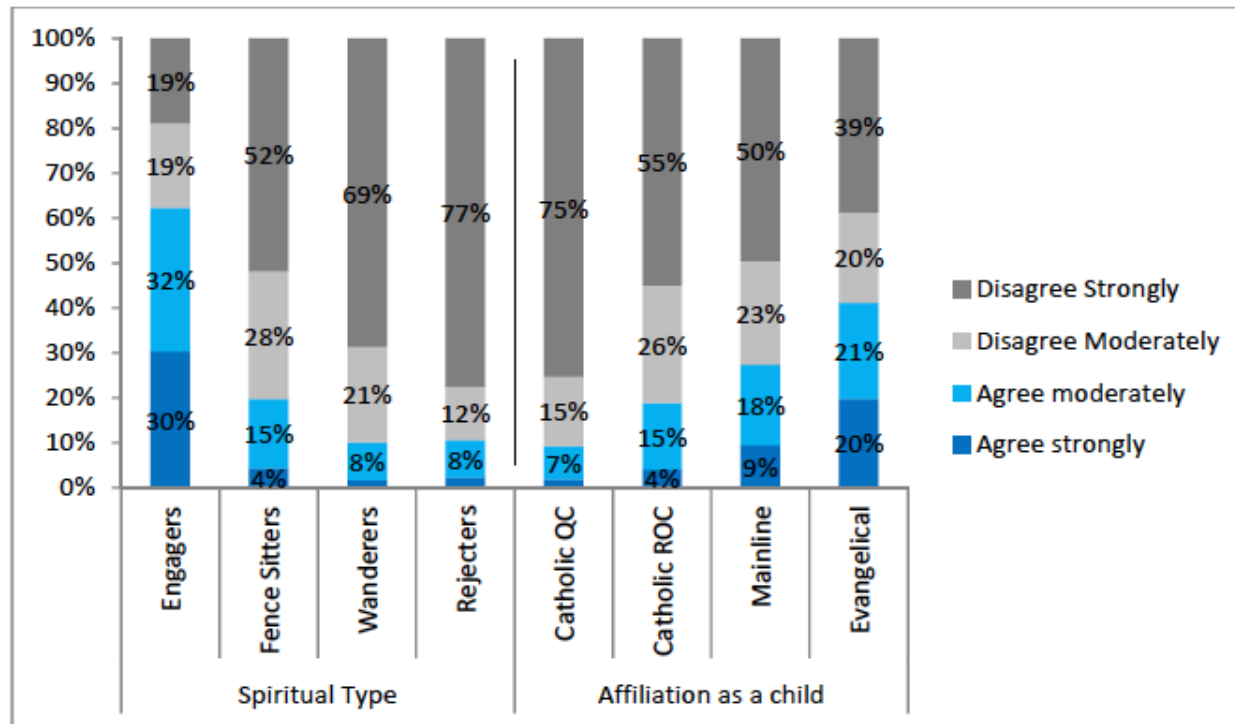
1. Community



“They actually practice their faith and I mean, they’re pretty real... You feel welcomed by those people.”

1. Community

Chart 4.12. "I have been given the opportunity to lead in church," by spiritual type and religious tradition as a child



“Acceptance is a cardinal virtue of young adults. Rejecting behaviour is interpreted as rejecting the person.” 90

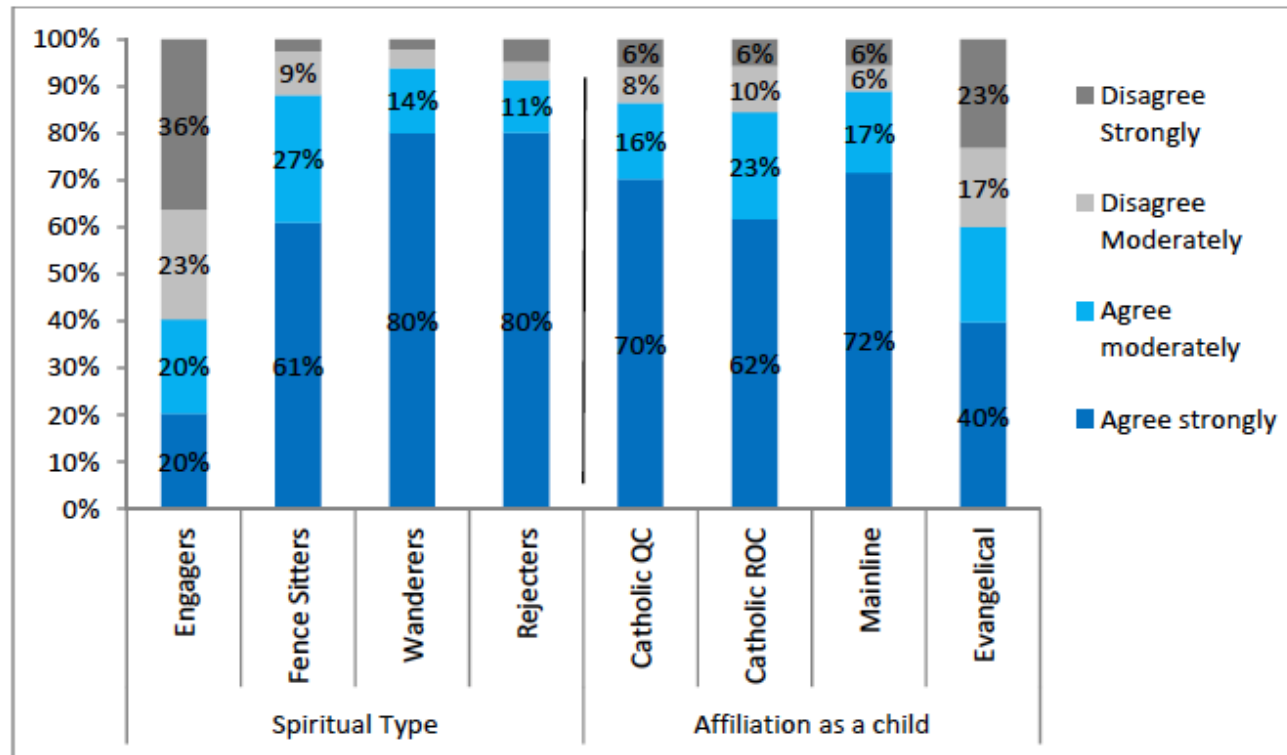
sea to sea

CYCLING TO END POVERTY



1. Community: Gay Lifestyle and Church

Chart 4.18. "Churches should allow people who are practicing a gay or lesbian lifestyle to participate fully in their ministries," by spiritual type and religious tradition as a child

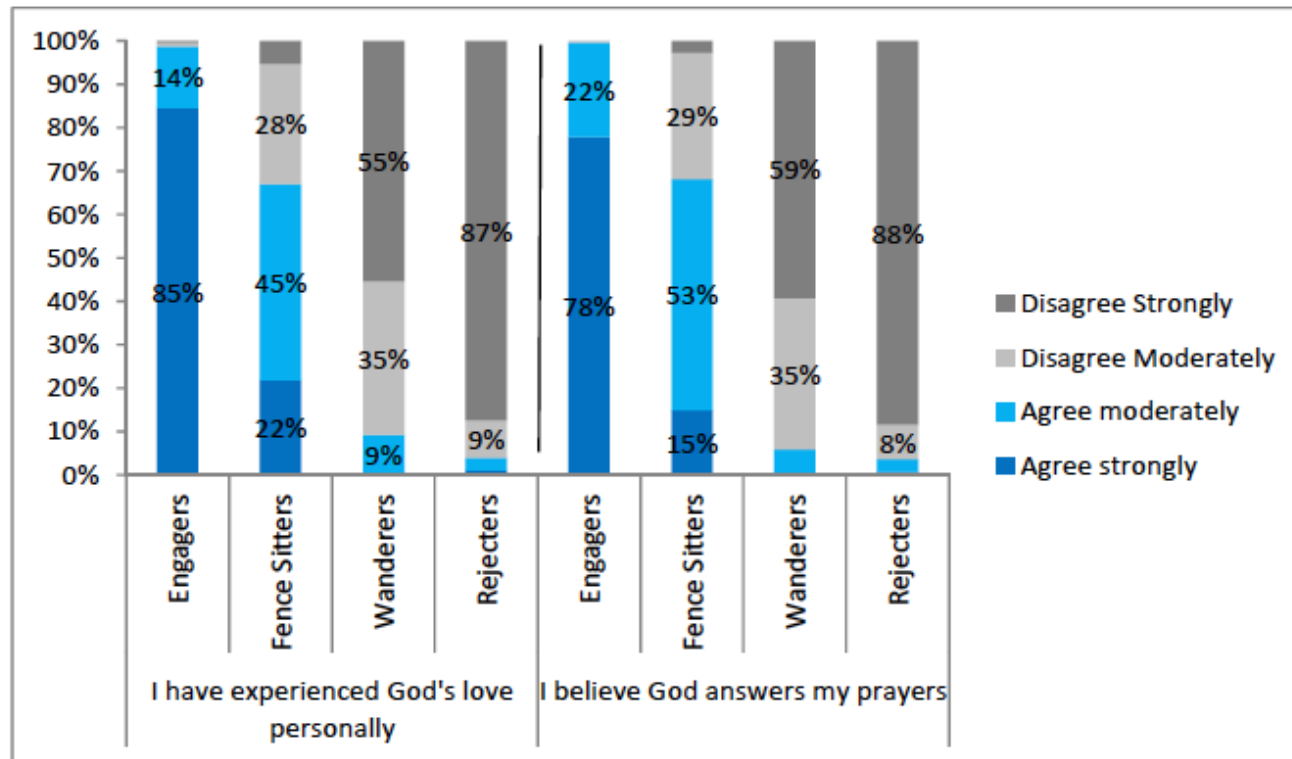


"Everyone has a right to choose... the church thinks its wrong... Well, I've prayed about it and I've thought about it. I'm surrounded by it... I don't have a problem with it."
- Jack

How do churches address the challenge posed by the cultural belief that behaviour is an extension of your being?

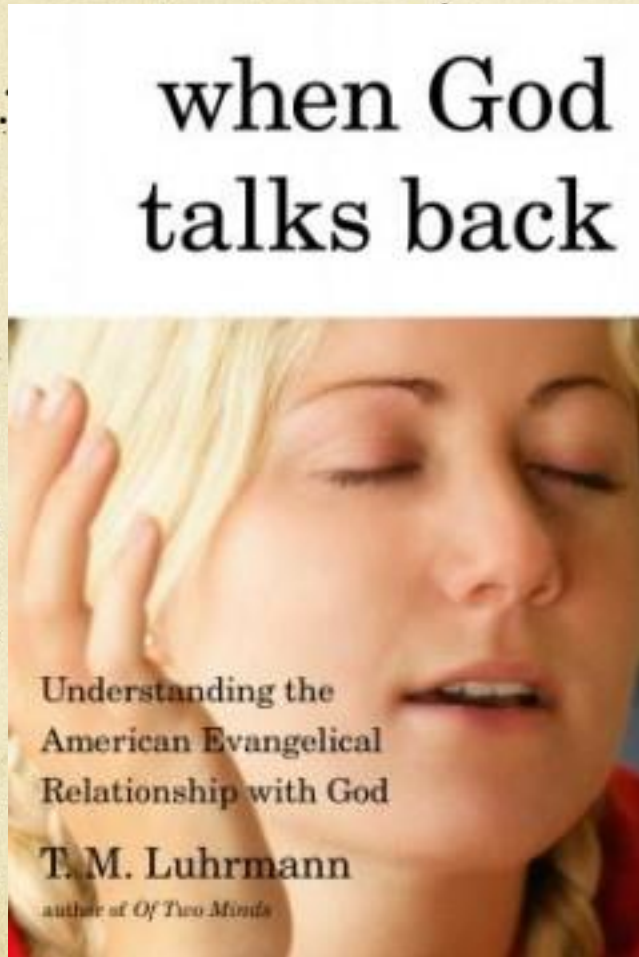
2. Experience of God

Chart 2.9. Personal experiences of God, by spiritual type



“Young adults primarily validate their world through experience. If it cannot be experienced it cannot be confirmed to be true.” 92

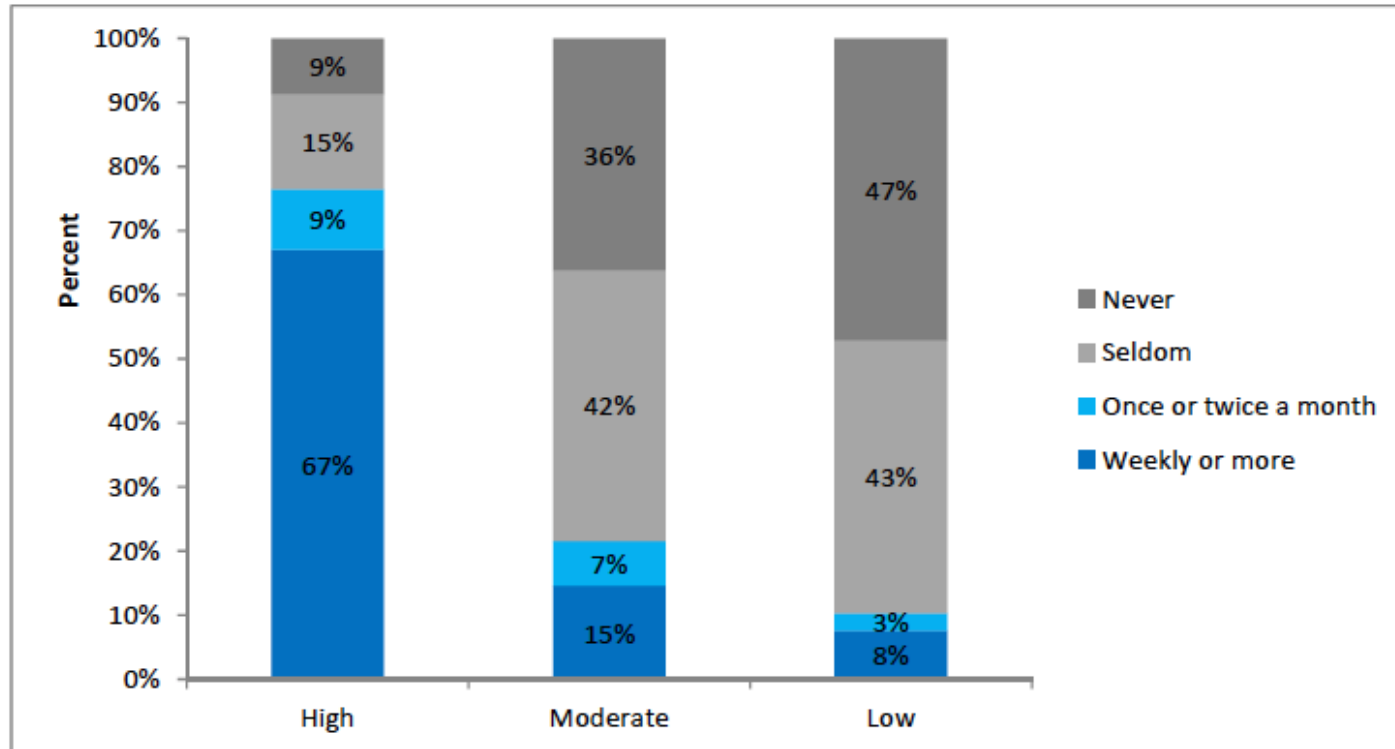
Anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann on Making God Real



- Posits an “Epistemological double register”
- How is God made “real” to people in Vineyard Churches?
- They suspend disbelief in a playful imagining of God’s presence beside them. They pretend “as if” God is right there with them, even while recognizing he is not really there in the conventional sense. And he becomes more real...

3. Parental Influence

Chart 4.2. Attendance at religious services as a young adult, by parental spiritual discipline cluster



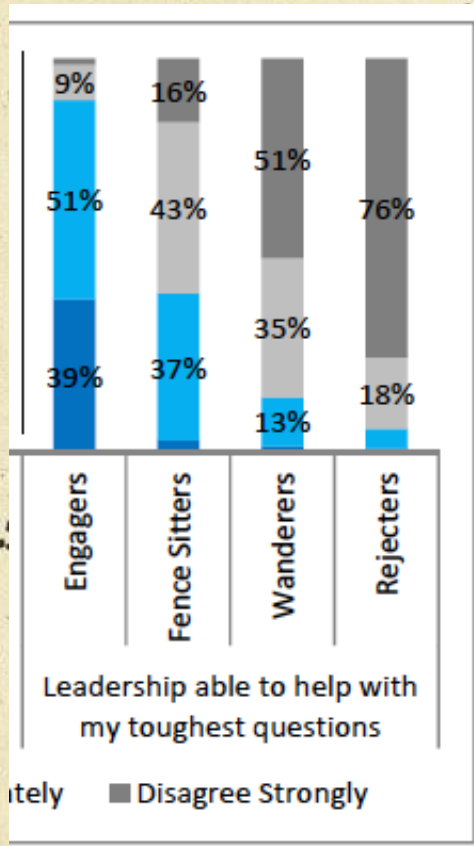
“Anyway and then we moved to a different town, my parents split up, really tumultuous, emotional time. Um, and my mom had started going to a new church. And I had a really hard time, um, trying to fit in.”

Predictors:

Parent's practice is most powerful single predictor; youth leader relationship is #2 but switches to #1 if you include a mission trip and youth programming.



4. Teaching



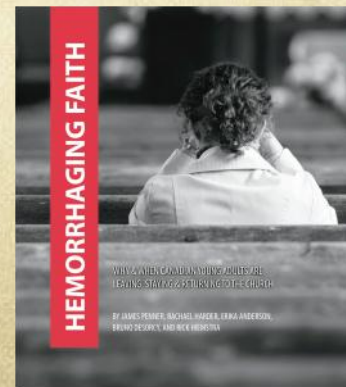
“I like the style of preaching where they don’t just preach to you, they pose questions to you, don’t just tell you how you are supposed to live your life and these are the reasons: bang, bang, bang, because it says in the Bible.”



What Have We Learned?



1. **TRANSITION:** We lose more young people during transition periods: these are stressful times that need “rites-of-passage” to give them faithful meaning.
2. **MALES:** more likely to leave and require role models and a different program.
3. **DIGITAL MEDIA:** distract from church but could also catalyze faith.
4. **NO MENTION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING EFFECTS.**





Primers to Faith

1. **Pizza and bowling**: recreation, sports, entertainment
2. **Permissiveness**: Living the questions, open-mindedness and acceptance
3. **Proof**: Apologetics, arguments
4. **Program**: youth-centred activities with peers
5. **Powerful “Red Bull” experiences**: camp, conference, mission trip
6. **Patrons**: relationships with adults, pastors, grandparents
7. **Practises**: bible reading, church attendance, prayer
8. **Parents**: who model and teach discipleship with Jesus



Transfusing Life – Practical Ideas

1. Ease transitions—of youth and youth leaders. Monitor attendance, provide rides, overlap jr. and sr. grps sometime.
2. Develop parental skills: often they buy into the myth that a need for independence requires withdrawing guidance.
3. Fence Sitters are the largest group: engage them and their questions, go to where they are (coffee shops), campus ministry and service/mission trips may reach them. Camps, retreats, music and art can facilitate an encounter with God (rather than just information *about* God).
4. Church culture: place of acceptance, vulnerability and purpose.
5. Cross-generational relations: mentors, seniors, younger kids.

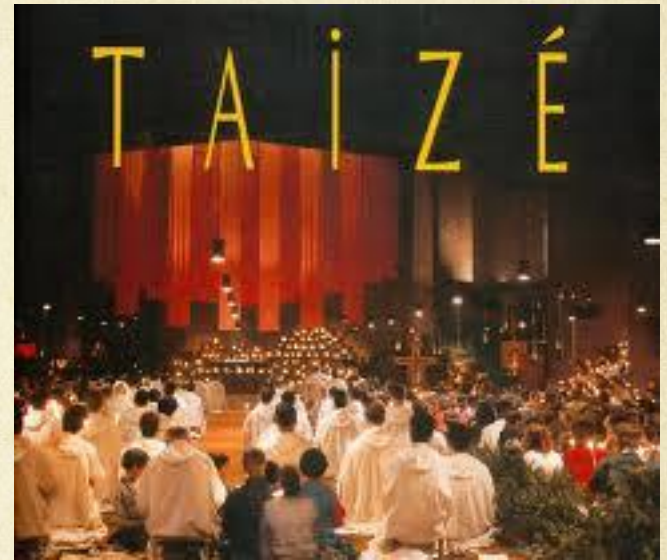
Questions for Local Church: A Taskforce Project



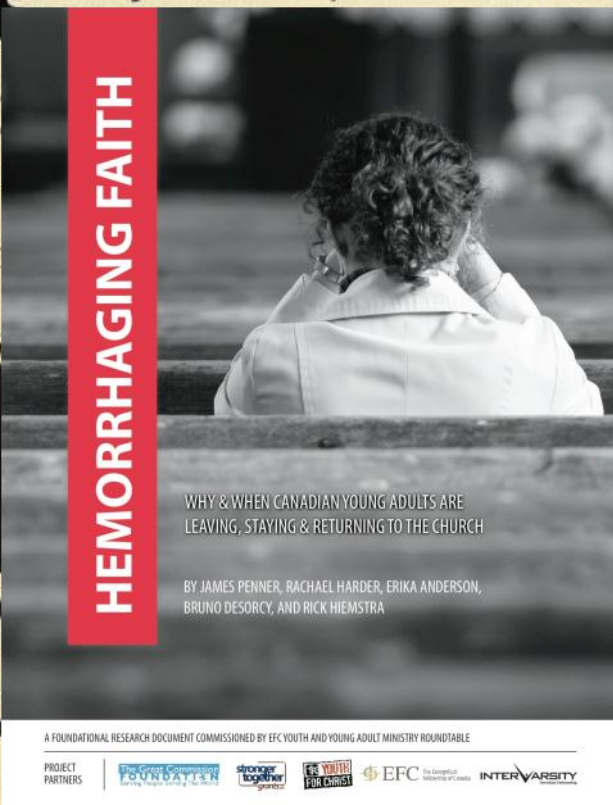
1. How many young adults raised in the church are currently engaged in church? Why do they stay/leave?
2. Name the highlights of your church in the last three years. How were the youth involved?
3. Describe your church's mission: a. discipleship practices b. age groups most engaged c. role of parents in spiritual formation of youth
4. What are the areas of concern and hopefulness? What needs to change?

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

- “Psychological shackles”
- Be the church
- Isaiah 43:16-21



Evangelical Assumptions of the Study



- Questions like “frequency of Bible reading and private prayer” may not connect with spiritual life of a Catholic
- Mission trips and summer camps questions

Hemorrhaging Faith Resources



CRC Resources

Young Adult Leadership
Taskforce (CRC)

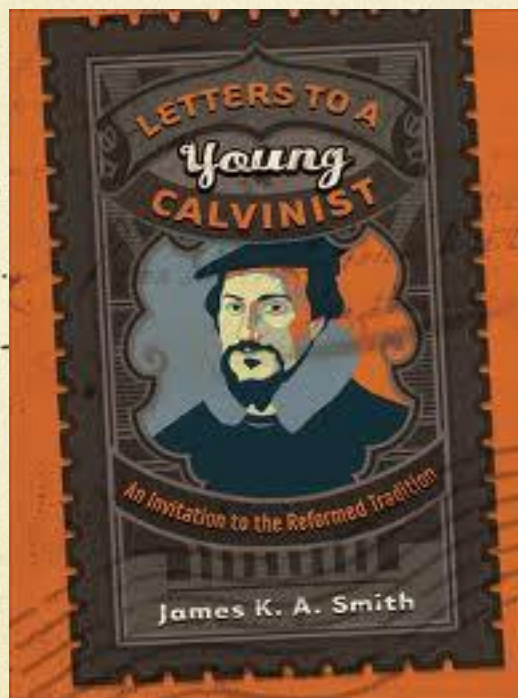


1. 2012 Webinar: **churchINcomplete: Working Toward Solving the Generational.Hole** by Rev. Mark Hilbelink
2. Shift video: Why Young Adults are Leaving the CRC:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-qJHnUiqas>
3. *Catch Me When I Fall* by Patricia Westerhof (fiction)
4. "Why I Left the CRC" by Jason Postma (blog)
5. YALT (Re-Kindle) group <http://yalt.crcna.org/resources/>.
Includes Profile Films, Momentum Blog, facebook, twitter...

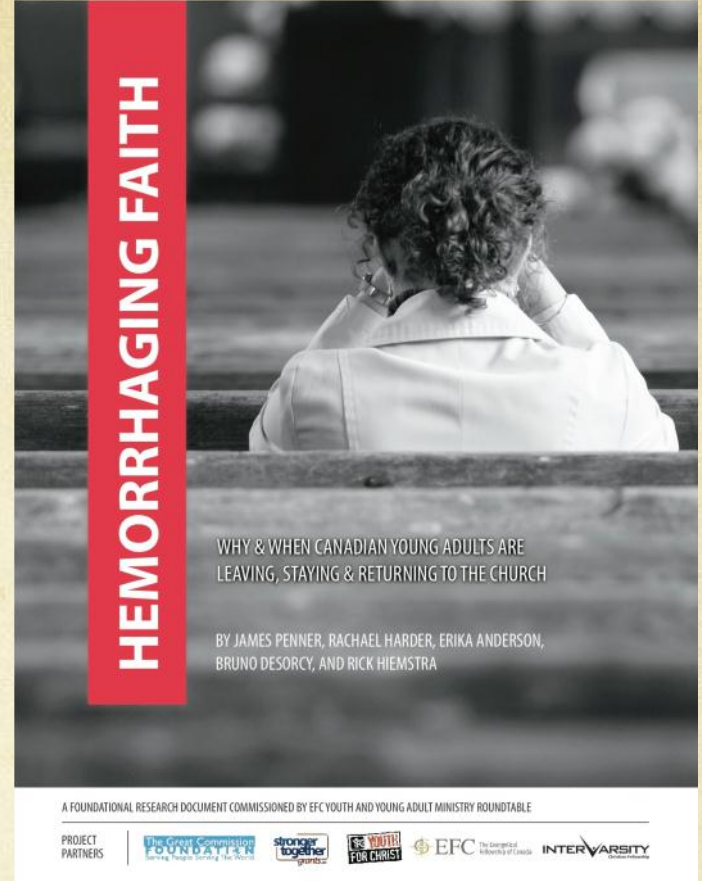


6. Youth Leaders, Campus Ministers, Teachers, Principals, etc., near you. Redeemer UC Youth Min. Program...
7. *Christian Courier*: "Are questions the answer for the CRC?" by Lloyd Rang, March 12, 2012 and "Teens and the CRC" by Bethany VanLingen, July 23, 2012
8. *The Banner*: regular "Next" columns
9. <http://inter-generation.blogspot.co.uk/> Dr. Harry VanBelle
10. Young Adult "Manifesto" developed from a roundtable in 2010: <http://www.mediafire.com/?c200vdx8vbke6>

James K. A. Smith



Questions & Answers



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