

Young Adult Book Project

Theme Descriptions

In early November, a community of fifty young adults gathered at Augsburg University in Minneapolis to identify our deepest held concerns, hopes, and dreams for God's church. We distilled those conversations down into key themes that we want the church to know as it moves from the present moment, into the future. Each of those themes will be a chapter of the book.

These themes and descriptions are a simple snapshot of an entire weekend of rich conversation. We are holding the themes and descriptions loosely, these descriptions are intended to help guide applicants in their discernment and writing process.

Below you will find a list of the themes, continue reading to find a brief description of each theme.

- Abundance and Scarcity
- Grief and Healing
- Marginalization, Inclusivity and Liberation
- Sex/Intimacy and Shame
- Power and Abuse of Power
- Beyond the Walls
- Courageous Curiosity
- Community
- Creation and Destruction
- Mental Health
- Tokenism of Young Adults

Grief and Healing

Communities of faith don't engage grief, lament, and suffering nearly enough. There is much to grieve, and yet the desire for comfort often enables us into denial and distraction. Often, when we practice grief in church, it's on an individual level, when we also need to grieve and lament on the communal level. What do we need to grieve? What could it look like if faith communities leaned into their rituals and practices we have and lead ourselves and our neighbors through grief into healing? What else could be impacted by deepening our capacity to grieve collectively?

Marginalization, Inclusivity and Liberation

The inclusion and liberation of marginalized identities (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, people living with disabilities, etc) is an absolute priority for young adults.

If everyone was able to show up in the wholeness of who they are, we'd have a bigger, brighter, more diverse representation of who God is and what God desires for our communities.

Inclusion is just the beginning. Doing the work of reckoning with our role in marginalization will reveal that all of our liberation is wrapped up together and lead to overall liberation.

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Abundance and Scarcity

The stories of God's people and God's promises have an overwhelming theme of abundance. There is enough. We are enough. God is enough. Yet we often find ourselves and our faith communities, wrestling with or defaulting back to a narrative of scarcity. We see a mindset of scarcity show up in our economics and budgeting, in our understanding of membership and church vitality, and when we find ourselves thinking that there's a limit to who God loves and what God's love looks like.

Community

One of the most resounding themes of what young adults have loved most about our experiences with church is community. Church done well includes authentic belonging, vulnerability, showing up, sharing each other's burdens, and bearing witness to God's faithfulness. Churches can sometimes make people feel like an outsider, or prioritize the comfort of the existing community over the invitation to be part of God's ever expanding vision.

Sex/Intimacy and Shame

The church has often cause harmed through sexual shame, purity culture, sexual abuse, and a lack of understanding of the expansiveness of sexuality and sexual intimacy (Asexuality to Polyamory and everything in between). What would it look like to be a faith community that dismantles purity culture, and engages in open and honest conversations about sex, and sexuality?

Power and Abuse of Power

Abuse of power includes: spiritual abuse, sexual, abuse, emotional abuse, scriptural abuse, financial abuse. It's an injustice that goes from generation to generation because there is often no accountability. The church must reckon with its complicity in and manifestation of abuse. What could a healthy and constructive understanding of power mean for the church?

Beyond the Walls

The implications of loving our neighbor are vast and expansive. It requires us to center our neighbor, and in turn decenter ourselves, our buildings, and our agendas. Loving neighbors creates mutual flourishing and relationships.

What are the ways in which the church has tried to do justice work beyond the walls and harmed people? How have mission work and charity work centered the people inside the walls of the church and caused more harm than good?

Courageous Curiosity

Curiosity can open us up to experiencing and receiving more of what's going on around us. While fear often closes us off, separates, or divides. Young adults both model and invite us into courageous curiosity. What would our faith communities look like if we turned toward wonder and mystery? What would we gain if we bravely moved through fear?

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Creation and Destruction

Death of creation is the death of created beings—all exploitation is tied up with each other. We get to know our human and other than human neighbors as places where God shows up and is continually creating.

Mental Health

Young Adults are keenly aware of the importance of mental health and desire even more education, destigmatization, and authenticity. We wish the church would be better equipped to engage in conversations, resourcing, and resiliency around mental health.

Tokenism of Young Adults

Churches can be anxious about dying, and sometimes that anxiety comes out sideways and becomes directed at young adults. We are often sought after as the “solution,” rarely without sharing any power or authority to create change or be part of any solution. Churches often tokenize us by wanting to know about young adults, wanting to know about what will get us “back to church” so then the church can be perceived as safe from death and decline. This tokenism ends up alienating young adults from the church and from real relationships that could be life giving.