



THE
EPISCOPAL
C H U R C H
LEADERSHIP
P R O J E C T

Preliminary Executive Summary

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SACRED
PLAYGROUNDS



Introduction

The Episcopal Church Leadership Project (ECLP) seeks to guide the Department of Faith Formation in developing programs and initiatives to raise up a new generation of Episcopal leaders. The project began with three waves of data collection in 2024, seeking to answer the question:

How is The Episcopal Church training young adults for leadership?

Each wave sought to capture the faith development and ministry needs of a distinct audience: current leaders in The Episcopal Church (wave 1), young adults serving at Episcopal summer camps (wave 2), and those engaged in Episcopal young adult and campus ministries in fall 2024 (wave 3). As of the publication of this preliminary report, the first two waves of data collection were complete, with wave 3 underway. This preliminary report focuses on wave 1 data.

WAVE 1

Leader Survey Overview

The Episcopal Church Leader Survey was open from June 14 through August 9, 2024. The online survey link was distributed to leaders through diocesan offices, directly to churches, and through specific leader lists (e.g. bishops and young adult ministry leaders). The survey was also promoted at the 2024 General Convention. It was distributed in both English and Spanish. There were **2,191 valid responses**, which came from all **110 dioceses** included as options in the survey, along with several partner ministries and areas of the world. The survey measured the perceived impact of multiple ministry experiences on the faith formation and call story of responding leaders. It also assessed perceptions of young adult ministries in The Episcopal Church.



Approximately half of respondents were ordained (48%), with the other half consisting of lay professionals (17%), volunteers (34%), and seminarians/postulants (1%). Of respondents, 80% self-identified as white, 52% female, and 22% LGBTQIA. The median age was 55. Among those who were ordained, the median age when they were ordained was 35, and a majority (54%) had been serving in their current position/call between 3 and 10 years, with 30% serving less than 3 years and the remaining 16% more than 10 years.



Perceptions of and Participation in Young Adult Ministries

Less than half of respondents (48%) agreed with the statement, “As a whole, The Episcopal Church is effective in developing young adults in leadership.” There was no difference in agreement level between ordained and non-ordained respondents, though bishops tended to agree the most (60%) and lay professionals the least (44%). When asked about financial investment, the difference was reversed. While 47% of responding bishops agreed, “The Episcopal Church spends too much time and money on youth and young adult specific events and ministries that could be better invested elsewhere,” only 5% of lay professionals agreed (and 9% of all respondents). Sizable majorities agreed in the value of individual ministries, including that the Episcopal Youth Event was a vital ministry of the church (65%), that their diocesan youth events were high quality and well regarded (63%), and that their congregation and local camp were effective partners in ministry (53%).

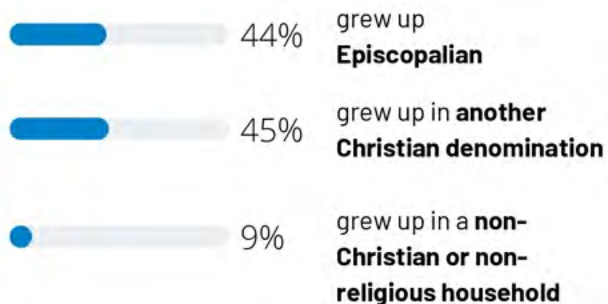
48%

agreed with the statement, “As a whole, The Episcopal Church is effective in developing young adults in leadership.”

Among ordained respondents and lay professionals, 36% indicated that their congregation participated in diocesan youth or young adult ministries at least annually. Just over half (56%) agreed that their congregation was effectively engaging young adults in its ministries, 37% agreed that their congregation was aware of and engaged with campus ministry in the area, and 36% indicated that their congregation financially sponsored children/youth to attend summer camp programs. Less than a third (30%) agreed that their congregation promoted and regularly sent young people to Episcopal ministry events, such as Vocare, New Beginnings, and Happening.

Faith Backgrounds of Episcopal Church Leaders

The faith backgrounds and vocational influences of responding leaders varied considerably. Less than half (44%) grew up Episcopalian (for even part of their childhood). Another 45% grew up in a different Christian denomination, and nearly 1 in 10 reported growing up in a non-Christian or non-religious household. There were no significant differences in these proportions when comparing ordained and non-ordained leaders.





While large majorities regularly attended Sunday school growing up (84% at least monthly) and participated in church youth group while in high school (67% at least monthly), just over three-quarters (79%) were engaged in church at least monthly all the way through grade school and barely half (52%) reported having conversations with their parents or other family members about God and faith more than once a month.



These widely varying faith backgrounds meant that experiences of youth and young adult ministries also varied. These variations impacted support. For example, a third (34%) of those who grew up regularly attending an Episcopal church attended an Episcopal Youth Retreat, such as New Beginnings or Happening, as a young person, compared with only 10% of other respondents. Those who attended one of these events as a youth were over 3 times more likely than those who had not attended to agree, “My congregation promotes and regularly sends young people to Episcopal ministry events, such as Vocare, New Beginnings, and/or Happening.” Those who worked on summer camp staff at an Episcopal summer camp (30% of those who grew up as regular Episcopalians, compared with only 12% of other respondents) were more than twice as likely to agree that their congregation financially sponsors children/youth to attend camp programs. Similar discrepancies in participation and accompanying support were evident for The Episcopal Youth Event and college campus ministries. This suggests a gap in congregational support based in part on personal experience of church leaders.

Impact on Faith Formation and Call to Ministry

The ministries that saw the greatest gaps in leader participation and support were also the ones leaders most consistently identified as important to their faith formation and call to ministry. There were 19 ministry experiences included in the survey. The ones that participants most consistently identified as “very” or “extremely important” to their faith formation were Episcopal Service Corps (69%), Episcopal Church retreats like New Beginnings and Happening (66%), Young Adult Service Corps (62%), The Episcopal Youth Event (61%), Peace Corps or AmeriCorps (58%), and serving on summer camp staff (56%). These were also the top 6 identified as most consistently important for call to ministry, though in a different order. Notably, the top four were ministries specific to The Episcopal Church (only 6 of the 19 were Episcopal-specific), and 4 of the top 6 were young adult ministries.





The ministries most consistently identified as important were also relatively rare among leaders. Less than 10% of respondents participated in at least one of Episcopal Service Corps or Young Adult Service Corps, and less than 20% participated in Episcopal youth retreats. As noted, participation rates were much higher in these ministries among those who grew up regularly engaged in an Episcopal congregation. Participation was also much higher in these ministries among younger respondents, particularly those 45 and under. Considering all respondents, the church ministry that had the highest importance on the most leaders was childhood experiences in the congregation, such as Sunday school and vacation Bible school (VBS). Just over half (52%) of those who participated in Sunday school or VBS as children said it was very or extremely important to their faith formation, accounting for 42% of the total number of respondents. This was second to only one other experience: “faith practices and conversations with family members in your home growing up,” which edged out Sunday school and VBS by a single percentage point.

While certain ministries showed evidence for substantial depth of impact, Sunday school and VBS had the greatest breadth of impact. However, **the space that showed the greatest overall impact on faith, even among respondents with such a diverse background of faith experiences, was the space that researchers consistently identify as most important for faith formation: the home.**



Implications

These findings are still preliminary, as analysis continues on the wave 1 dataset, but there are clear implications for ministry leaders. This survey has identified the ministry spaces considered most important in the faith formation and call of current leaders in The Episcopal Church, though these same leaders inconsistently value the spaces. Their valuation seems related to personal experience. Those who did not directly experience these ministry spaces, including those who did not experience supportive faith in their home growing up, may need help identifying the value in supporting and nurturing the spaces that are most important to growing leaders in the church.

What’s Next

Wave 2 of the project surveyed more than 300 young adult summer staff from 27 Episcopal camps. Like the church leaders, their backgrounds and ministry experiences varied widely, as did their regard for the Christian church (while 88% had mostly or very positive views of The Episcopal Church, only 46% said the same about Christianity, in general). Their experiences on camp staff will be considered alongside the experiences of young adults engaged in other ministries of The Episcopal Church (such as the service corps and campus ministry) in fall 2024. The perspectives of these young adults will be compiled and ready for reporting in early 2025.

WAVE 2
300
young adults
from **27**
Episcopal
camps