

THE FUTURE OF YOUTH MINISTRY

**FRONTIER
YOUTH TRUST**

SUMMER 2025

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

As we stand on the cusp of a new era, youth ministry finds itself at a crossroads. The articles in this issue speak to a shared conviction: that our calling is less about preserving familiar structures and more about courageously reimagining what it means to walk alongside young people into a future that is both here and not yet.

Gone are the days when success was measured in attendance figures and slick programmes. In a world marked by uncertainty, climate crisis, and rapid technological change, young people hunger for something deeper: authentic relationships rooted in hope, trust, and a willingness to wrestle with life's hardest questions. Ministry is moving towards presence over performance, listening over lecturing.

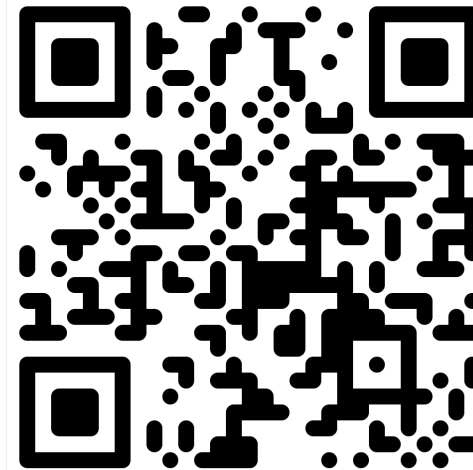
Our mock job descriptions from the future hint at a bold re-envisioning of our roles – as digital chaplains, ecological mentors, and curators of sacred space in both physical and virtual worlds. What unites these imagined futures is a commitment to being faithfully present within the shifting landscapes young people inhabit.

The future of youth ministry will not be found in our ability to predict trends, but in our willingness to journey humbly with young people wherever faith and culture collide. And in that maelstrom, offer the wisdom of the past to those navigating the future.

The Frontier Youth Trust Movement is fuelled by the creativity and courage of youth workers and ministers who journey alongside young people on the margins. This zine, like those before it, is born from the real, raw conversations we share as a community.

These conversations spark to life in our webinars, Zoom meetups, and daily chats in the WhatsApp group – spaces where we wrestle with questions, share ideas, and imagine what youth ministry could become.

If you're not yet part of this growing community, why not jump in? Scan the QR code, join the WhatsApp group, and add your voice to the mix. Let's keep exploring together what it means to engage with the future of youth ministry and shape it from the ground up.



Shepherding the Future

Rethinking Youth Ministry in Uncertain Times

Over recent weeks, a recurring question has surfaced in a variety of places where I'm involved:

What is the future of youth ministry?

This question has been raised in our own Frontier Youth Trust WhatsApp group, echoed in local church conversations, and explored at several recent conferences. Clearly, this is not just a passing thought—it's a pressing, collective concern five years on from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of course, predicting the future is never straightforward. The sweeping scientific, technological, social, and geopolitical changes since the turn of the millennium have made it even harder to foresee what lies ahead. As Soren Kierkegaard famously wrote:

“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”

Perhaps that's a helpful place to begin. Equally important are the words of Vincent J. Donovan in his classic book “Rediscovering Christianity”

“In working with young people, do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful a place as that may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you, nor they have been before.”

These words remind us that our work isn't about inviting young people to return to the past or join us in our present—it's about journeying with them into unfamiliar, emerging futures. But if we're to do that well, we must first understand where they are now.

The Current Landscape for Young People in the UK

Here are just a few of the stark realities facing children, young people, and young adults in the UK today:

4.3 million children under 18 years of age live in poverty.

Child Poverty Action Group, April 2024

1.5 million children and young people under 18 live in substandard housing.

Inside Housing, July 2024

107,000 children under 18 years are in the care system

NSPCC, November 2024

1 in 4 young people under the age of 18 has a diagnosed mental health condition.

NHS England, June 2025

Young adults (16–24) are the most likely age group to report feeling “often or always lonely”.

Maya Centre

Over 1 million food parcels were distributed to children in one year.

Trussell Trust, April 2024 – March 2025

Social mobility is declining, especially among young people.

Social Mobility Commission, October 2024

These aren't just numbers—they represent a generation facing profound and systemic challenges that will affect them well into their adult years and maybe their whole lives.

Have we hit reverse gear?

Historically, each generation hoped—and expected—that life would improve for the next. The rise of the NHS, technological advances, and global connectivity were seen as signs of progress. But today, that expectation has almost completely stalled for many people at the present moment in time.

For many young people, the idea of a “better life than their parents” is no longer a given. In fact, it feels like we’ve hit reverse gear and a concrete block in the road. The cost of living, declining mental health, lack of housing, and decreasing access to opportunities suggest a deeply troubling trend across the UK—and in many Western nations.

So what does this mean for youth ministry and our churches today?

Our Call to Respond

I find myself returning often to the words of Jesus in John 10:10

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

In the face of the statistics above, this promise takes on new urgency. Youth ministry must be part of the restorative, life-giving work of Christ in a broken world. It’s not an optional extra. It’s core to the mission of the Church.

Perhaps John 10 also gives us a metaphor for ministry that can help shape our response—the shepherd. A figure of care, guidance, courage, and presence.

Here’s what it might mean to take up the role of shepherds in our youth work practice:

Shepherding: A Framework for the Future

S – Space and Seeing

Create safe, open spaces where young people are seen, valued, and heard. Be their advocate. Believe in their potential—even when others don’t.

H – Heart and Hope

Lead with compassion. Keep hope alive—even in despair. Be a presence of kindness and belief.

E – Evangelise and Encourage

Be ready to share good news in a world overwhelmed by bad news. Speak life. Nurture dreams—even fragile ones.

P – Pioneer and Patience

Dare to try new things. Walk with young people into unknown futures. Accept that growth takes time.

H – Home and Hospitality

Make your ministry a place of belonging. Let every young person feel they’ve found a home.

E – Embrace and Equip

Walk alongside young people. Equip them with practical tools and spiritual resources to meet life’s challenges.

R – Reach and Respond

Be active in reaching out to those on the margins. Let your ministry be a compassionate, responsive presence.

D – Dedication and Development

Stay committed to your calling. Keep growing—develop your skills, your leadership, and the potential of those around you.

I – Include and Inspire

Work to ensure no one is left out. Be radically inclusive. Inspire young people with a vision for a better future.

N – Nurture and Needs

Care for young people holistically. Understand and respond to their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

G – Gather and Group

Gather in churches, cafes, parks, online—anywhere connection happens. Create spaces for young people to belong to each other and to a wider story.

We are not in the business of preserving what was, but about building what could be. We are not called to return young people to former versions of church or society, but to journey with them into bold, unknown futures, rooted in Christ’s call to life in all its fullness.

Whatever the future holds, let us go there together, young people and youth workers alike, with the courage to shepherd, the creativity to pioneer, and the hope to believe that transformation is still possible.

Simon Skidmore

Children’s Youth Development
Worker

Bolton Methodist Circuit

A photograph of a stone archway, likely part of an old castle or fortification. The arch is made of dark, rough-hewn stone. Through the arch, a bright, green landscape is visible. In the foreground, there's a small body of water, possibly a river or a pond, surrounded by lush green trees and bushes. In the background, rolling green hills are visible under a clear sky. The text "A WORLD BEYOND" is superimposed over the center of the archway in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font.

A WORLD BEYOND

The Kingdom is here and yet to come,
We are both citizens and immigrants

Open our eyes
So that we may see your Kingdom here,
feel your presence,
hear your call,
the call to each other, to a world beyond

There is never a right time or place.
We will always be too young, too old,
Too something or other.

Call us,
From here, to there,
From cosy, to uncomfortable,
From the centre, to the edge,
From ourselves, to others.

It's not too late, honest.
Let's get out of the boat,
We can jump together.

The Kingdom is here,
around the corner,
already in the neighbourhood.

Youth Ministry of the Future

A wormhole has been discovered at the back of the youth storage cupboard. Apparently, that mountain of mess isn't just ours, it's a cosmic dumping ground for future clutter! Among the outdated leaflets and broken hockey sticks, we found something unusual: a page of youth work job listings... from the future.

Time to update your CV—these roles might be closer than you think!

JOB OPPORTUNITY

Digital Soul Curator

at St Matilda's New Leeds

To monitor young people's digital footprints, helping them build an ethical, Christ-centred online identity.

- Part-time 15hrs per week
- Must submit to an behavioural algorithm check
- Work from virtual space

Join St Hildegard's of Bingen Town as

Climate Resilience Youth Pastor

We need a spiritually grounded guide for young people facing the emotional, ethical, and theological challenges of life in a climate-impacted world. They will respond to eco-anxiety not with shallow platitudes, but with rooted hope, practical action, and theological imagination.

"In a burning world, we plant, we pray, we persist. Hope is our resistance. Community is our shelter."

St Paul's Bradfield City are seeking a

ETHICS + EMPATHY ALGORITHM TUNER

We are looking for an experienced youth minister to develop and guide our AI-run youth projects to stay rooted in compassion, justice, and Gospel values.

- Full time
- 8.329 BTC per solar year
- Excellent support package

Could YOU be our next FAITH MEMORY ARCHIVIST

You will guide young people in uncovering, reconstructing, and reinterpreting the spiritual stories of their ancestors and communities.

You will be:

- Recovering Lost Narratives
- Remixing Rituals
- Decentralising Storykeeping
- Developing Cultural Reconnection

Closing date 33rd Hextober

Job Vacancy with the Youth Justice League

Faith-Based Resistance Mentor

Walk alongside young people as they explore activism not just as political action, but as **sacred calling**. In a world grappling with ecological collapse, injustice, and systemic oppression, this role as mentor nurtures protest as a spiritual practice—grounded in lament, prayer, hope, and bold prophetic courage.

Contact @JLactivism

JOB OPPORTUNITY with Hull Youth Project

YOUTH CONSPIRATOR

We don't just dream of another world. We scheme for it. And we never plot alone

We are looking for spiritual co-dreamer, strategic troublemaker, and underground organiser who plots alongside young people to create a better world from beneath the surface of broken systems.

This role whispers the ancient truth: *another world is possible—and we can build it together, quietly, creatively, and boldly.*

Ask for GeorgeAH on the underground network

Reality Layer Discernment Coach

In a world where reality is not singular but layered - physical, digital, augmented, and virtual - the **Reality Layer Discernment Coach** walks with young people to help them navigate these spaces with integrity, purpose, and spiritual depth.

Part spiritual director, part tech ethicist, and part cultural decoder, this role ensures that faith remains a living, breathing compass—even when the map keeps shifting.

Navigate to the augmented **Church of the Good Shepherd**, Glasgow-on-sea

Take some time to reflect on these roles and questions.

What might be the youth ministry of the future?

- As the church continues to slip from the centre of public life, what roles will carry faith into the margins?
- How might youth ministry evolve to engage with hybrid and digital realities, not just as tools, but as sacred spaces?
- What might youth ministry look like if we prioritised healing, protest, imagination, or ecology as core spiritual practices?

We need a POST-DENOMINATIONAL RITUAL DESIGNER

We are looking for someone who collaborates with young people to co-create sacred practices that transcend traditional denominational borders, giving shape to their lived, hybrid spiritual identities. In a world where faith is often fluid, plural, and deeply personal.

You will serve as both **guide and co-conspirator** helping youth discover and design rituals that reflect who they are and who they are becoming.

Find more info at **St Malo's Westonina**

THE FUTURE OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Towards Authentic Contextual Presence

As youth workers and ministers committed to young people on the margins, we find ourselves standing at a cultural crossroads. The cultural water our young people swim in is shifting faster than ever, shaped by global connectivity, deepening inequalities, and relentless change. If youth ministry is to remain relevant, and more importantly, transformative, we no longer be a lifeguard that sits on the sidelines looking to 'rescue and pull out' those who have gone too deep. Instead, we must lower ourselves into the waters and learn together how to float, dive and swim in these everchanging waters. As many have said before, youth ministry must be reimagined as a prophetic, contextual and courageous practice.

BEYOND "GENERATIONS": THE COMPLEX SOCIAL FABRIC OF YOUTH

The temptation to define young people through sweeping generational narratives is strong. Yet research consistently warns us of its limitations. As social scientists such as Roberts & France (2021) and Threadgold (2020) argue, labels like "Gen Alpha" risk flattening rich diversity into marketing soundbites.

Sarah Pickard (2019) reminds us that "youth" itself is not a static category but a fluid, socially constructed space, shaped by class, race, gender, geography and more.

A young person growing up in rural Wales faces different pressures than their counterpart in inner-city Glasgow. The British Youth Council (2021) emphasises this local complexity, highlighting how young people's concerns—from housing to mental health—are deeply rooted in their immediate contexts. For those of us in youth ministry, this challenges us to resist ready-made narratives and off-the-shelf solutions, and instead listen deeply to the local realities of the young people we serve.

HYPERGLOBAL, HYPERLOCAL: LIVING IN BOTH WORLDS

As the pace technological breakthrough presses on, we are witnessing young people growing up with new opportunities and challenges that even their own siblings haven't engaged with. Young people are more globally connected than any previous generation. The Young Foundation (2023) describes a "hyper-connected" generation engaged in transnational conversations about identity, justice and belonging. Yet

this connectivity is not equally distributed. Digital access and algorithmic curation are not the same across the wealth divide. The cultural ecosystem young people inhabit is both borderless and divided.

What emerges is a paradox: young people inhabit both hyperlocal communities, shaped by local deprivation or opportunity, and hyperglobal networks, participating in movements like Black Lives Matter or MeToo. For youth ministry, this duality demands a shift: from programmes aimed solely at generic positive engagement to spaces where global and local questions intersect.

FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES IN LIQUID TIMES

Young people today rarely form a singular, stable identity. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" (2004) captures this well: identity is continually reshaped in response to shifting cultural currents. In digital spaces, this fragmentation becomes more pronounced, as young people curate multiple selves tailored to different audiences (Boyd, 2014).

Research into superdiverse contexts (Clegg & Phillimore, 2023) shows that young people navigate religious, ethnic and cultural boundaries, actively constructing dignified identities that make sense of their complex worlds. The result isn't rootlessness, but a more fluid and often precarious journey of self-discovery.

This reality poses a deep challenge for youth ministry: if faith becomes just another identity "outfit" to be worn in certain contexts and discarded in others, then traditional discipleship models, often shaped to produce "good churchgoers", risk irrelevance. When the session ends, is a young person's faith left behind alongside the half-eaten doughnut?

THE CULTURE WE SWIM WITH OR AGAINST

As youth workers, we know that young people's worldviews are shaped by more than family or school. With growing isolation, the online world has become the loudest cultural voice. Influencers like Andrew Tate, and alike, command alarming levels of attention, promoting narrow versions of masculinity and self-reliance that speak powerfully into the void left by absent fathers or ineffective institutions (Machado, 2022). On the flip side, creators who champion inclusivity, authenticity, and activism offer alternative visions of identity and community (Stewart, 2023).

Youth-led movements are another major force. Campaigns like Teach the Future show that young people are not passive consumers of culture—they're active producers of it. They want to change the world, not just survive it. Youth ministry must stop pretending that the most important question is how many attend the next event. The real question is: are we helping young people see themselves as agents of justice, compassion and reconciliation?

YOUTH MINISTRY AT A CROSSROADS

Here lies the challenge. Much of what has passed for youth ministry in recent decades has been pragmatic and programmatic, focused on retention rather than transformation. As Andrew Root (2007) laments, discipleship has been hollowed out to a strategy for making good churchgoers. Kenda Creasy Dean (2010) goes further, suggesting that youth ministry risks becoming mere “religious socialisation” if it fails to engage young people with the theological depth and moral ambition of the Christian story.

While churches excel at belonging, many have lost the language of sacrifice and moral ambition. If our vision of discipleship is confined to Sunday attendance or church volunteering, we fail to meet young people’s desire for lives that matter beyond themselves.

If Christian identity is to be more than a temporary role, it must speak to the whole of life including the parts young people are most afraid or ashamed of. That means being willing to enter the mess of fragmented identity with them, to resist monocultural instincts, and to model an authentic faith that doesn’t just tell them to belong but calls them to become.

TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC, CULTURALLY ENGAGED MINISTRY

Young people today don’t need slicker programmes. They need a church that is real, responsive, and rooted in their world. They need communities that ask difficult questions, not dodge them. As Youthscape’s Losing Heart report shows, most churches avoid topics like same-sex attraction, mental health, and other religious issues that young people deeply care about. They also want to see their faith connect with activism. Tearfund found that while 90% of Christian young people are concerned about climate change, only 10% think the church is doing enough about it.

So where next? Young people need a church that embodies authenticity and activism, not one that offers belonging without challenge or relevance without risk. We need to create spaces where young people can wrestle honestly their multiple identities, contexts, doubts and questions. A ministry shaped not by communicating the broad tents of faith, but by theological depth and authentic engagement with young peoples local and global contexts.

A CALL TO HOPEFUL IMAGINATION

The research reminds us that their world is complex, unequal and often overwhelming—but also filled with creativity, activism and hope. The future of youth ministry lies not in reclaiming lost ground but in walking new paths. It demands less control and more presence. It means refusing to reduce youth work to managing behaviour or filling pews, and instead committing to the slow, sacred work of walking with young people in all their complexity.

If youth ministry is to flourish, it must rediscover its prophetic edge: not merely offering belonging within church walls, but inviting young people into a faith that dares to transform the world.

The future of youth ministry will not be built on generational labels, but on local listening, global awareness and the courage to engage the whole of young people’s lives—including the messy, shifting and beautiful parts that don’t fit neatly into “Christian youth culture.”

That’s not easy. But for those of us on the margins, it’s exactly what we’ve always done. And it might just be where the Spirit is leading the rest of the church next.

Dylan Barker

Movement Enabler
Frontier Youth Trust

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LIFE IS A JOURNEY OF WINDING PATHS

Reflect on the journey so far.

Release at the start of your journey - letting go, loosening, unbinding, detoxing, cleansing

Receiving at the centre - accept gifts offered, new lessons, old lessons, revelations, discoveries

Return at the end - hopes for the future, aims, dreams, plans, desires

Life is a journey of winding paths not just a straight line. Repeat.



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