

A group of young people, mostly teenagers, are hugging each other in a circle outdoors. They are wearing casual clothing like hoodies and backpacks. The background shows a building with large windows. The image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay.

GROWING YOUNG

Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church

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The first job of leaders is to “define reality.”

— *Max De Pree*



The Big Picture

Reality of Congregations in America

- Growing old is our default. It happens naturally. And inevitably.
- Old isn't bad. We love old. It's just not the whole story.
- Many congregations have bare spots. Holes created by missing teenagers and young adults. These bare spots make the congregation feel incomplete.
- Every congregation needs young people. Young people also need a thriving congregation. One without the other is incomplete.

An aerial photograph of a dense, dark green forest. A winding road is visible in the lower-left quadrant. A solid green horizontal line is positioned below the text.

No major Christian
tradition is growing in
the U.S. today.

The Big Picture

Reality of Congregations in America

- Church attendance is declining.
- Congregations are aging.
- Data detailing the decline and “graying” of congregations is convincing, but it’s not the full story.
- There are congregations that are growing in involving and retaining young people.

Caring for Gen Z

In a Post Pandemic Era

- Caring for Gen Z is an overlay to this work.. (my opinion not Growing YoungER)

A person is walking across a wooden bridge over a river. They are carrying a large bundle on their back. The image has a green overlay.

Research

**10,000 hours of research personnel time,
10,000 pages of data, and interviews or surveys
with 474 young people and 799 adults.**

A man with dark, curly hair, a beard, and sunglasses stands against a light-colored tiled wall. He is wearing a white t-shirt and dark jeans. His hands are in his pockets. A shadow of him is cast on the wall to his left. The image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay.

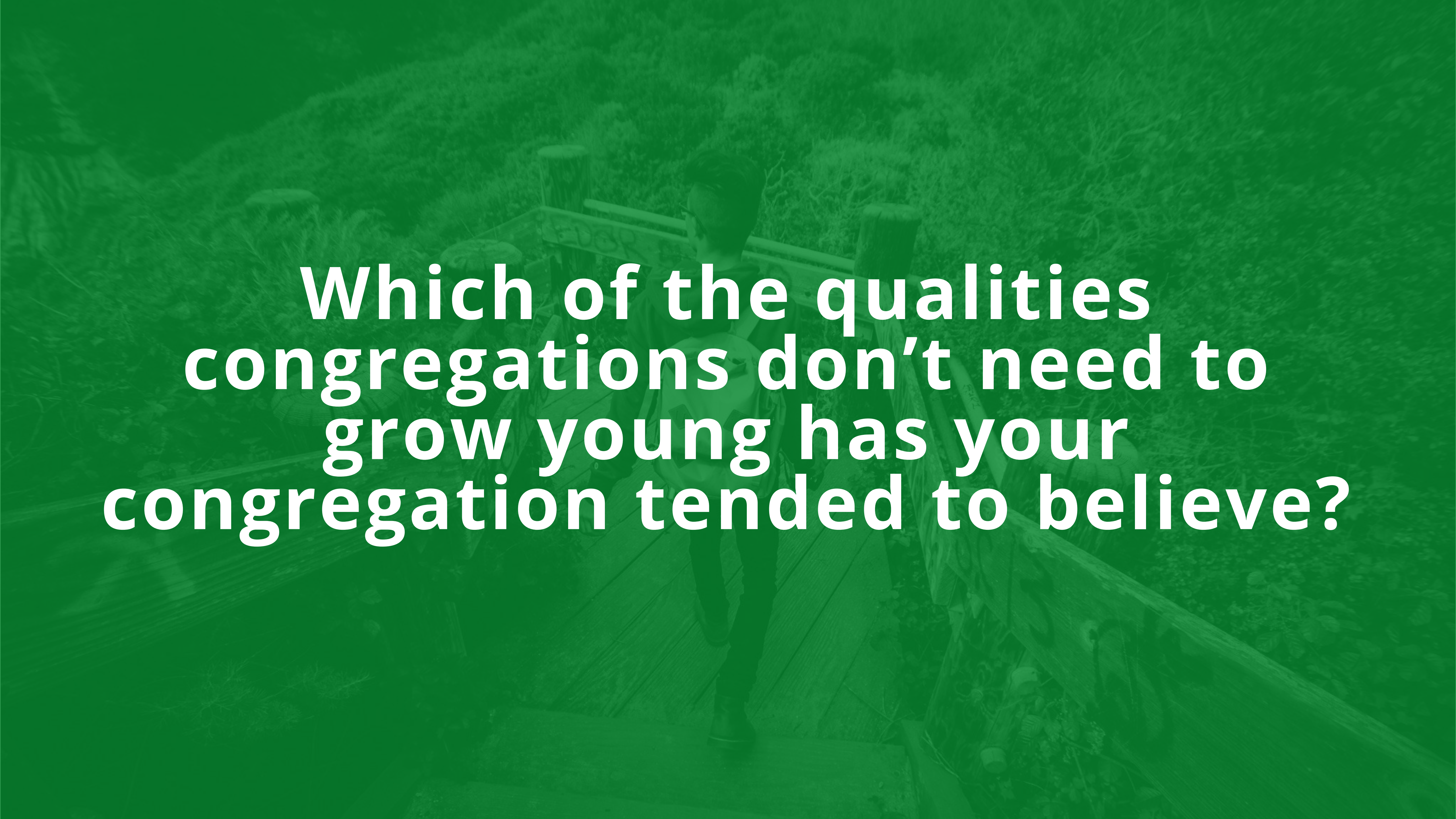
What does it take to reach
young people today?

Qualities Your Congregation Doesn't Need to Grow Young

- A precise size.
- A trendy location or region.
- An exact age.
- A popular denomination...or lack of denomination.
- An off-the-charts cool quotient.

Qualities Your Congregation Doesn't Need to Grow Young

- A big, modern building.
- A big budget.
- A “contemporary” worship service.
- A watered-down teaching style.
- A hyper-entertaining ministry program.

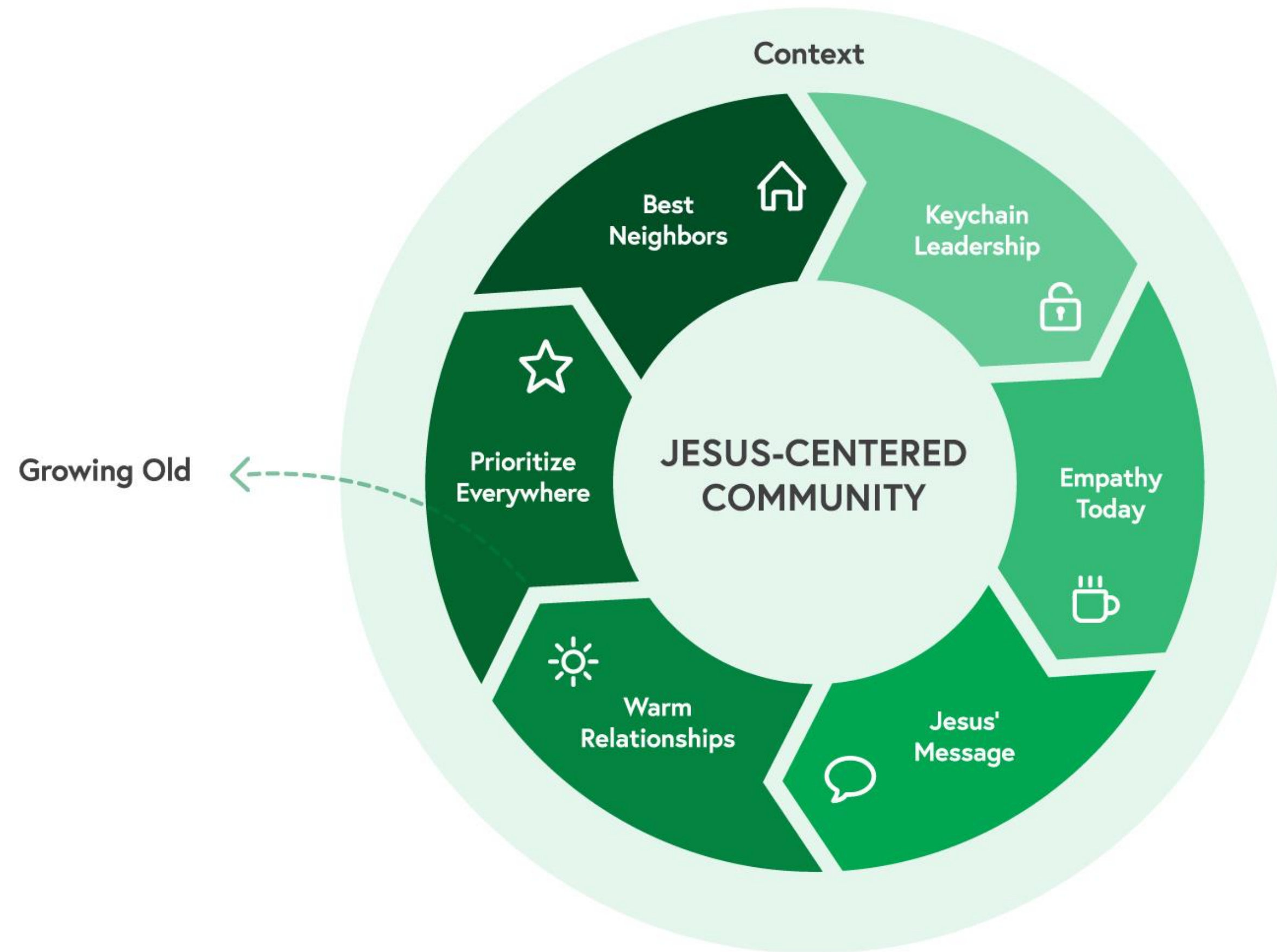
A group of young children, likely in a church sanctuary, are shown from behind, holding up their hands in prayer or praise. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, golden light emanating from the front, creating a spiritual atmosphere. The children are wearing simple clothing, and their hands are raised in a gesture of devotion. The background shows the wooden structure of the sanctuary, including pews and a pulpit.

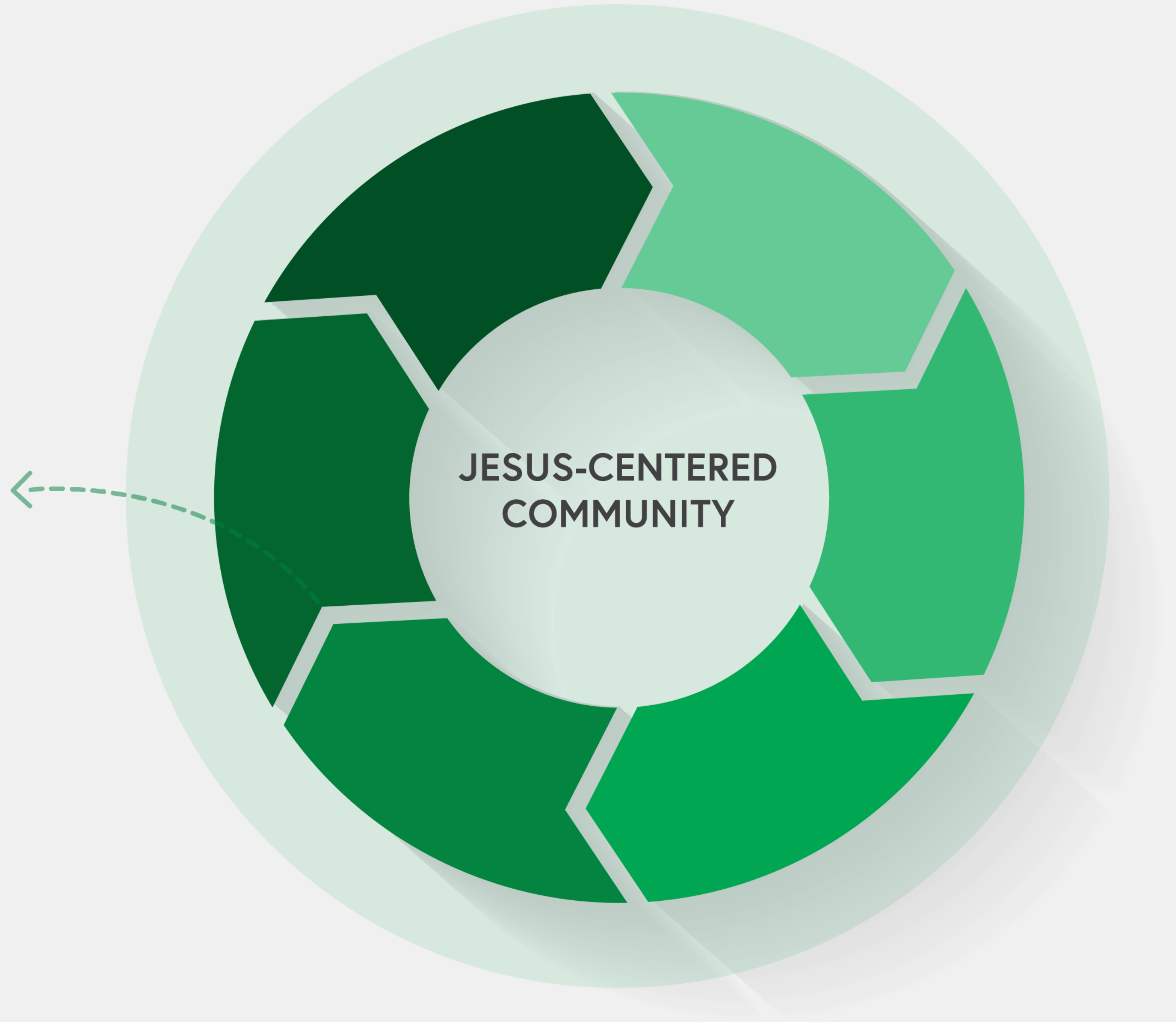
**Which of the qualities
congregations don't need to
grow young has your
congregation tended to believe?**

Growing Young isn't about
changing youth ministry.
It's about changing
church culture.



6 Core Commitments

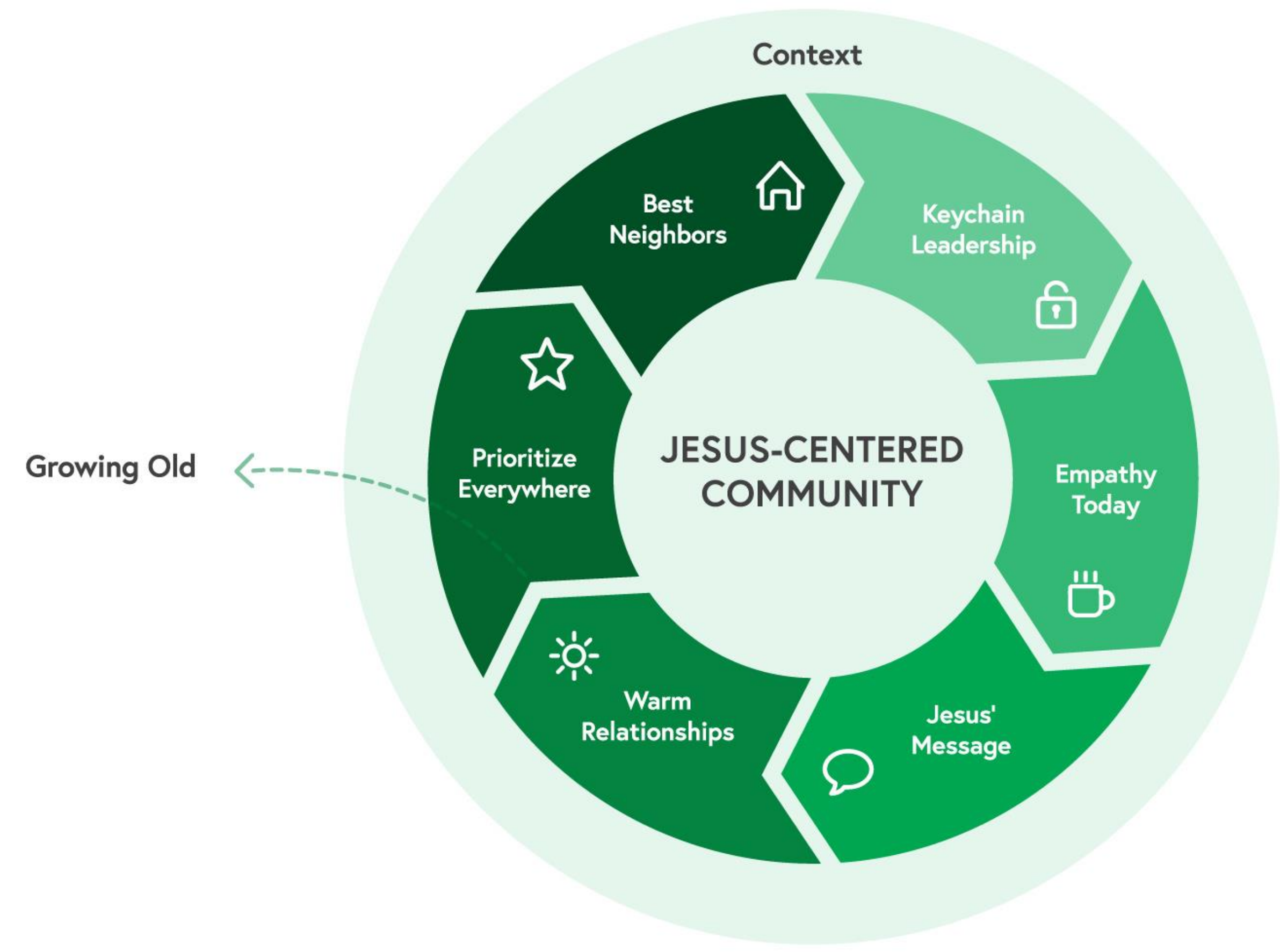




**JESUS-CENTERED
COMMUNITY**

Which of the core commitments seem most prevalent in your congregation?


Which seem least prevalent or missing?



Core Commitment:

Keychain Leadership





Keys refer to the capabilities, power, and access of leaders who carry the potential to empower young people.

Three types of Keychain Leaders

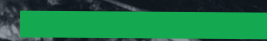
- . **Key-less** leaders
- . **Key-hoarding** leaders
- . **Keychain** leaders





IDEAS

Identify who's ready for keys





This may mean no more
“business-as-usual.”

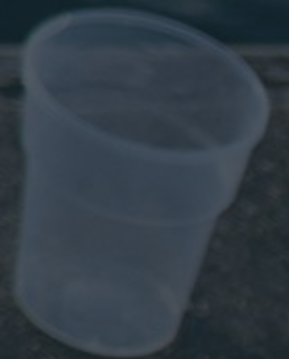
Core Commitment:

Empathize with Young People



EMPATHY

—
feeling with.
sitting on the curb.
not judging.



Adults need to sit on the curb
of young people's lives and
feel what they're feeling.



Chap Clark

“Empathy fuels connection;
sympathy drives disconnection”

Brene Brown

HIGH SCHOOL

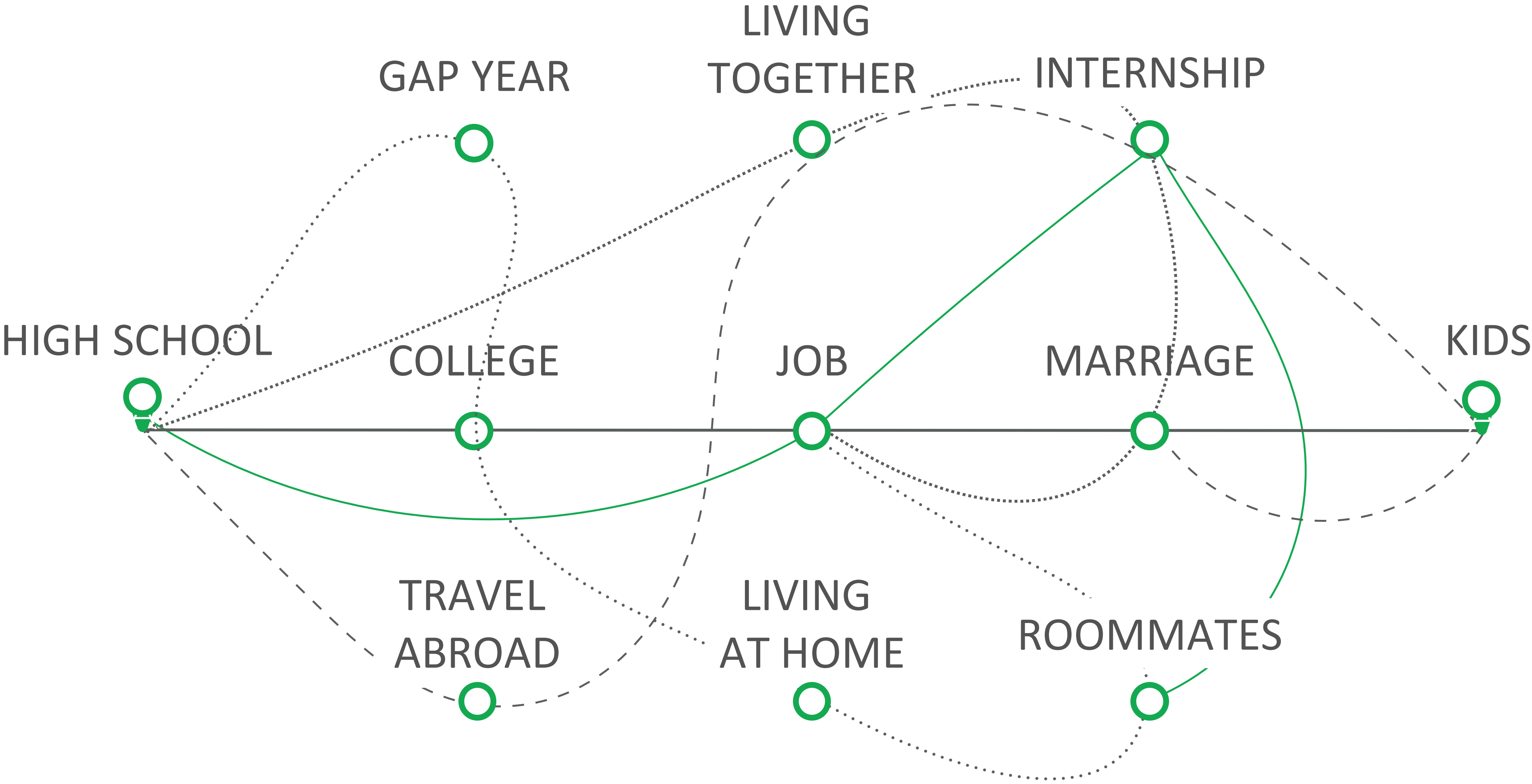
COLLEGE

JOB

MARRIAGE

KIDS






“You know, this woman at church has just continuously reached out to me. She sent me a note the other day – like a handwritten note – that said, ‘Hey, I am glad that we are getting to know each other. I am happy you are in my life, and I can’t wait to get to know you more in ministry and just as friends.’ It was very unnecessary; it was outrageous. Yet welcome.”

Core Commitment:

Take Jesus' Message Seriously



A photograph of a small glass vase containing greenery, placed on a light-colored tablecloth. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a doorway. The text is overlaid on the image.

“it’s not Christianity that
brings the good news, it’s
Jesus...”

“Our church’s message is less ‘you’re a sinner, change now,’” and more, ‘this is awesome, come be part of this.’”

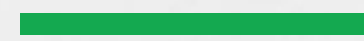


“This is a very grace based, come-as-you-are kind of place. But it’s also focused on truth. I know these people aren’t going to judge me, but they are going to tell me the truth.



“My church provides such a safe, safe place for everyone to feel welcome and to ask tough questions and to speak honestly and real. And I think the fact that they don’t use the Bible as a measuring stick is a huge thing for me. It’s not a book of judgment, it is a love story, and that is a message that really resonates for me, and I think resonates across my age group.”

Those who are honest
about struggles
tend to read the Bible more.



Core Commitment:

Fuel a Warm Community



—
Imagine running into a young person in your neighborhood who is excited about their church.

You ask them what they love most.

—
What do you think they say?



“Like family.”

GRIT SALT



“Like family.”

“This is life. It’s not just church life, it’s life-life. It’s hard, it’s busy, but we’re in it together. We’re like a family.”

WARM

welcoming

accepting

belonging

authentic

hospitable

caring



A photograph of three young adults (two men and one woman) jumping joyfully in a snowy parking lot. They are all smiling and have their arms raised. The woman on the left is wearing a brown jacket and blue jeans. The man in the middle is wearing a blue jacket and a black cap. The man on the right is wearing a black t-shirt and black pants. The background shows a snowy parking lot with a brick building and trees. A sign on the right reads "Caution! Cross Traffic Does NOT Stop for Pedestrians".

Why involved? Not programs.
45% point to relationships.

Caution!
Cross Traffic
Does NOT
Stop for
Pedestrians

A photograph of two skateboarders riding down a paved road. The skateboarder in the foreground is wearing a red and white plaid shirt, grey shorts, a dark cap, and sunglasses. The skateboarder behind is wearing a white t-shirt, dark shorts, and a patterned cap. The scene is set against a backdrop of mountains and a clear sky. The text "Warm is the new cool." is overlaid on the image.

Warm is the new cool.

[Young people] aren't looking for a hipper Christianity ... we're looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity ...

No coffee shops or fog machines required.



RACHEL HELD EVANS



IDEAS

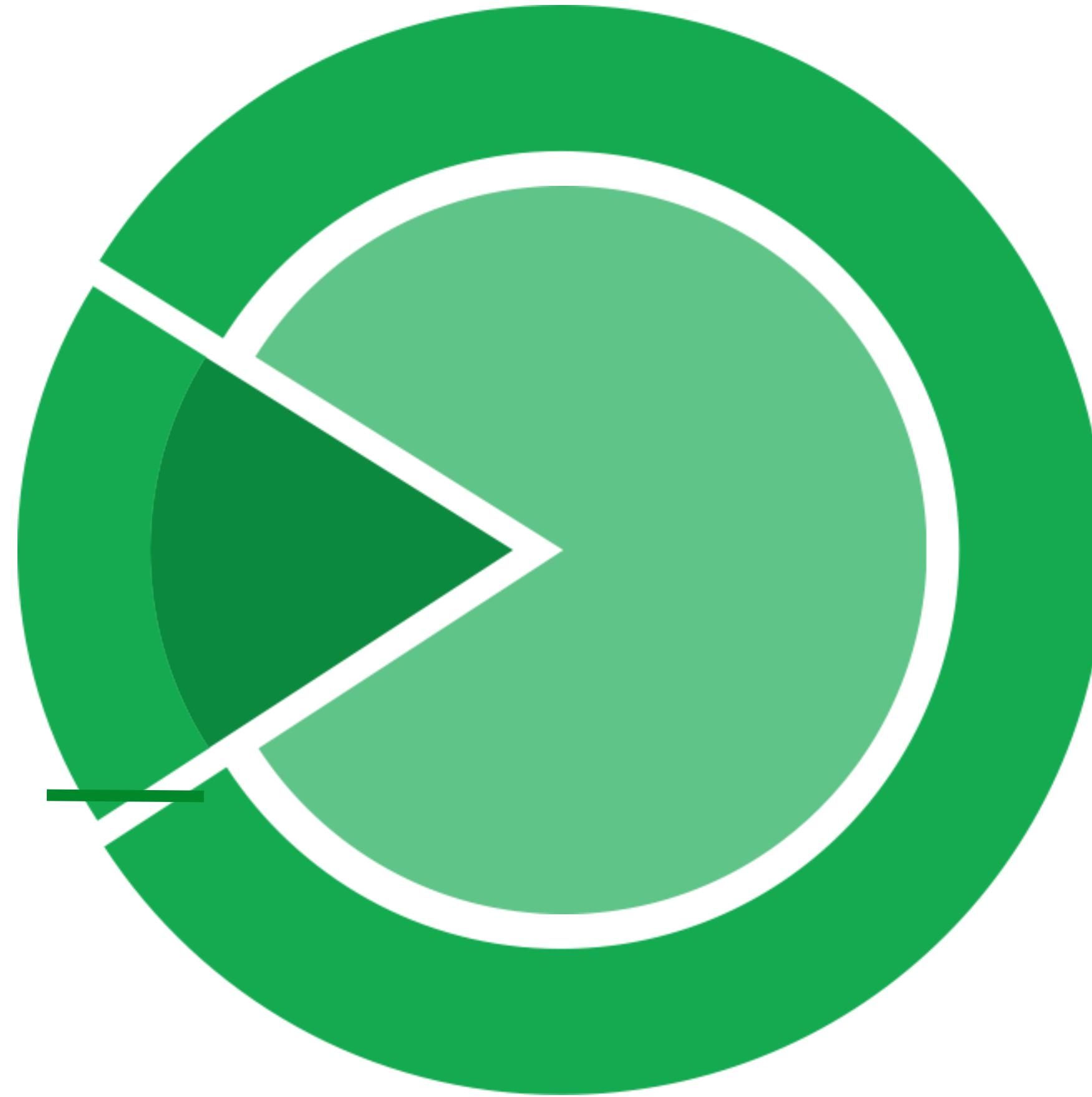
Develop a new 5:1 ratio.



Core Commitment:
**Prioritize
Young People
Everywhere**



Everyone rises when we focus on young people.





It's not about spoiling young
people, but about giving
them scaffolding



Young people must play a
load-bearing role..

but don't just use them as
cheap labor

Core Commitment:

Be the Best
Neighbors





The best neighbors ask,
“Who is my neighbor?”

A grayscale photograph of a person in a white shirt serving spaghetti into a clear plastic container. The person's hands are visible, one holding a wooden spoon and the other holding the container. The background shows other people and food service equipment, all in a muted, desaturated tone. The text "Hospitable neighbors look for ways to neighbor well." is overlaid in the center, with "Hospitable" in green and the rest in white. A short green horizontal line is positioned below the text.

Hospitable neighbors look for
ways to neighbor well.

Courageous neighbors
embrace ethnic and
socioeconomic diversity.





What are the *differences*
between the pictures of your
church and the pictures of your
neighborhood?



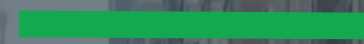
IDEAS

Ask: How do we become the best church
FOR the community?



IDEAS

Think and act both locally
and globally.





Growing Young in Your Context

Creating a plan for change

The first job of leaders is to “define reality.”

— *Max De Pree*



Growing Young isn't about
changing youth ministry.
It's about changing
church culture.



“Leadership begins with listening.”
— Scott Cormode



The power of shared vision



“Vision is a shared story of future hope.”



“Vision is a **shared story of future hope.**”



People support what
they create



$$5 \times m \times mC \times X$$

$$X = \frac{-p \pm \sqrt{p^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$
$$X = \frac{-1 \pm \sqrt{1 - 15}}{2}$$

$$X = \frac{-1 + \sqrt{1 - 15}}{2}$$
$$X = \frac{-1 + \sqrt{-14}}{2}$$

$$\left(\frac{X_1 + X_2}{2}, \frac{Y_1 + Y_2}{2} \right)$$


$$X = \frac{-p \pm \sqrt{p^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

$$X = \frac{-1 \pm \sqrt{1 - 15}}{2}$$

$$X = \frac{-1 + \sqrt{1 - 15}}{2}$$

Experiment on the margins



A dark, monochromatic photograph of a stone doorway. The door is a double door with ornate, dark ironwork on each panel. The doorway is set within a stone wall, flanked by two narrow, arched windows. The floor is tiled with a grid pattern. The text is overlaid in white, centered over the door.

“Walking through the
doors on Sunday
morning is the *best*.”

Growing Young

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