Introduction

• Barna Group, in partnership with World Vision, has conducted a research study among people aged 18 to 35 years, with the purpose of understanding their perceptions of the World and spirituality.

• This study is based on an online global survey conducted with 15,369 respondents across 25 countries.

• 1,014 interviews were conducted in Australia.

• Barna Group are in the process of developing a collection of reports from this research centered on the theme of ‘The Connection Generation’. These reports are to form the basis of content to be shared with church leaders across the country.

• The purpose of this document is to present some findings from the research to act as thought provokers prior to the full research findings being released and discussed.

It is important to note that the intent of this report is to raise questions and prompt discussion with a view to facilitating the development of positive outcomes for church leaders.

Prepared by Matt Pryce and Sam Grimshaw 2019
The following list explains some of the terminology referenced in this report:

- **Christian** Someone who considers themselves to have a Christian faith

- **Practicing Christian** Self identifies as a Christian, who attends church at least once a month and where faith is very important in their life today

- **Non-Practicing Christian** Self identifies as a Christian, who attends church a few times a year or less often and where faith is not very important in their life today

- **Practicing Other Faith** Self identifies as having a faith other than Christian, who attends a place of worship at least once a month and where faith is very important in their life today

- **Non-Practicing Christian** Self identifies as having a faith other than Christian, who attends a place of worship a few times a year or less often and where faith is not very important in their life today
Key Demographics

Bracketed figures represent the demographics of Practicing Christians

- Females: 59% (52%)
  Males: 41% (48%)

- 18-26: 39% (32%)
  26-35: 60% (68%)

- Married: 29% (42%)
  De Facto: 21% (5%)
  Single: 50% (53%)
  Working Full/Part Time: 66% (79%)

- Parents of Children Under 18: 33% (42%)
It is interesting to note that while late Gen Z’s and Millennials are connecting more globally, they are conversely feeling less connected with those closest to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Globally Connected</th>
<th>Relationally Connected</th>
<th>Optimistic/Empowered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel connected to people around the world</td>
<td>Deeply cared for by those around me</td>
<td>Optimistic about the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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</table>
While feeling globally connected overall, practicing young adult Christians also feel a lack of connection with those close to them; although they feel more connected than any other cohort.
Over half of those with no faith feel anxious and uncertain about the future – correlates with an increase in global connectivity and knowledge.

- While Christians practicing their faith report a greater sense of wellbeing than those with no faith, still one in three of this cohort feel anxious – those practicing other faiths feel the least anxious.

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Of particular note and sadness is the increased sense of anxiety and uncertainty among young adult females, and even more so among those under 26 years.
Greater global connectivity has increased the knowledge young people have of the larger challenges facing the world, and likely fuels the anxiety and uncertainty this group have about the future.

The top 5 greatest problems facing the world’s future according to Late Gen Z’s and Millennials are:

- Global climate change (42%)
- Corruption (40%)
- Pollution (36%)
- Racism (36%)
- Extreme Poverty (31%)

Which of the following do you feel are the greatest problems facing the world’s future? Select top 5.
Growing Disciples – Why Christians Attend Church?

Practicing Christians

Practicing Christians primarily attend church with a view to ‘growing personally.’

- While this is understandably important, there is a far smaller proportion who attend church with a focus on helping and caring for others in their community or the broader world.…

Reasons Practicing Christians attend church:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To grow in my faith</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about God</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is how I live out my faith</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachings relevant to my life</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the right thing to do</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Be involved with my community               38%  
To care for the poor and needy               24%  
To care for the world at large               23%  
To care for my community                     22%

(Why do you participate in your community of worship? Practicing Christians)

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Growing Disciples – Why Christians Attend Church?

**Practicing Christians**

… nevertheless, many Practicing Christians believe that it’s important to help and be concerned about the needs of others.

- Many do not perceive the church as playing a significant role in helping them to better understand the needs of the poor and social justice.

**Because of my beliefs it is important that I…**

- Give of time to help others in need 76%  
- Am concerned about the welfare of others 66%  
- Give of my own resources to help others in need 65%  
- Stand up against injustices (individual or groups) 56%  
- Stand up against corruption 53%  

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)

**Things experienced within your church:**

- My church has helped me better understand the needs of the poor 38%  
- My church has helped me better understand social justice 35%  
- I have found a cause or issue that I’m passionate about through church 36%  

Which of the following, if any, have you personally experienced in your church, parish or faith community? Practicing Christians

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Similarly, when thinking about Christian leadership, many (59%) young adult Practicing Christians do not feel they are given real chances to contribute to their church, or have adequate support from the church to grow as leaders.

- It is important to highlight that these are ‘perceptions’ of young adults, and may not necessarily reflect what church leaders perceive to be the reality. Nevertheless, if there is a disconnect, then church leaders may consider how this gap can be addressed.

### Leadership contribution
- 41% believe they are given real chances to contribute to my church
- 36% believe they have learnt what it feels like to be part of a team at church

### Access to leadership training
- 36% believe they have access to leadership training for ministry through my church
- 19% believe they have access to leadership training for my job through my church

### Access to mentors
- 27% say they have been inspired to be a leader based on the example of someone at their church
- 14% say they have had an adult mentor at church, other than the pastor or church staff
Practicing Christians

Meanwhile, Practicing Christians are investing time growing their own spirituality. In addition to praying and reading the bible, they are using another 2 to 3 resources to aid their development. Only 10% said they didn’t use any other resources.

- **Reading books about faith other than scriptures**: 62%
- **Listening to religious speakers or teachers on podcasts or radio**: 53%
- **Sharing or reading religious teachings on social media**: 45%
- **Worship music (listen to, play)**: 52%
- **Watching religious speakers or teachers on video or TV**: 41%
**Practicing Christians**

Despite the majority of Practicing Christians believing that it's important to ‘give their time to help others in need’ (76%), many do not regularly volunteer their time formally.

- While many Practicing Christians pray and read scripture, there is less connection with others in small groups (36%), or in expressing their faith with their community or further afield.

37% of Practicing Christians have volunteered or served others locally in the past 3 years (43% global).

Do you do any of the following at least once a month or more often? Practicing Christians

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Indeed ‘lack of time’ is posed as the number one challenge to leadership development in society today. As this generation is becoming more globally and technologically connected, time is more of a premium.

- Potential catch 22 situation facing development of young church leaders – young leaders feel they lack the time and support of older leaders, while older leaders are less inclined to invest in young leaders who are too busy and distracted
- Sadly, significantly more females feel gender inequality is a key barrier to them becoming great leaders

Perceived greatest challenges to leadership in society today
Beyond leadership within the home, far fewer say they lead in an external context, e.g. at work and for Practicing Christians, at church. Over a third say they do not or have never considered themselves a leader.

- Similar to the previous page, females are significantly less likely to have ever seen themselves as a leader.

**This generates a rather important question. If young adults (including Practicing Christians) are ‘too busy’ leading their family and ‘doing life,’ do they feel they have enough time to serve others outside of their immediate family?**

**Building Leaders – Views on Personal Leadership**

**In which of the following areas, if any, do you consider yourself to be a leader?**

- **Your family**
  - Practicing Christians: 45%
  - Total: 66%

- **Your job / workplace**
  - Practicing Christians: 32%
  - Total: 34%

- **Somewhere else**
  - Practicing Christians: 14%
  - Total: 8%

- **A church or faith community**
  - Practicing Christians: 5%
  - Total: 26%

- **I have never thought of myself as a leader**
  - Practicing Christians: 18%
  - Total: 30%

- **None of these**
  - Practicing Christians: 6%
  - Total: 1%

Where do respondents say they lead

**Significantly more females have never thought of themselves as a leader**

- **Male**
  - Practicing Christians: 25%
  - Total: 26%

- **Female**
  - Practicing Christians: 33%
  - Total: 33%

*In which of the following areas, if any, do you consider yourself to be a leader?
In fact the various challenges have negatively affected perceptions of young adults towards the quality of leaders in society today.

**Agreement with the statement...**
Our society is facing a crisis of leadership because there are not enough good leaders right now.
Core Insight to Explore

Increased technology & knowledge

External pressures on ability to serve

Increased knowledge
Greater empowerment
Increased social pressure
Two parent working families, disintegrated families

GREATER SOCIETAL PRESSURE
Lack of personal capacity to serve others??

WHAT’S THE SOLUTION?

As external societal pressures increase, less time is available to serve others outside of the family unit.

Others
Demands on time to serve others

Self
Do people have the time to spare?

Increased globalisation
Greater competition
Increased social media
Greater comparison
Core Insight to Explore

Increased technology & knowledge

My family & those close

Others

Increased knowledge

Greater empowerment

Increased social pressure

Two parent working families, disintegrated families

GREATER SOCIETAL PRESSURE
Lack of personal capacity to serve others??

WHAT’S THE SOLUTION?

External pressures on ability to serve

Increased globalisation

Greater competition

Increased social media

Greater comparison

As external societal pressures increase, less time is available to serve others outside of the family unit.
So with the increasing societal pressures and personal disconnection, it stands to reason that the thing Practicing Christians miss most from church are support groups for challenges in their life.

- This also adds to the question of who this cohort see as primarily responsible for building connections with others – themselves or the church?
- Also note how the top 5 challenges are all inward focused, while lacking opportunities to care for the poor comes in sixth place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support groups for challenges in my life</th>
<th>20% (13%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My friends attending</td>
<td>18% (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>15% (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops for strengthening relationships</td>
<td>14% (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom for how scriptures apply to me</td>
<td>10% (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to care for poor/needy</td>
<td>10% (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social gatherings outside worship space</td>
<td>9% (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership development opportunities</td>
<td>9% (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family attending</td>
<td>8% (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to fight injustice/oppression</td>
<td>8% (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>32% (21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Only one in five (19%) do not categorically believe that spiritual forces exist and are likely to reject any consideration of faith, at least in the immediate term.

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) are unsure if spiritual forces exist, but are open to the possibility.
- 72% of those with no faith said they had no faith while growing up.

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
While the majority have some openness to spirituality, those with ‘no faith’ generally have a negative perception of Christianity and the Christian Church. As a result, the majority say they find it difficult to connect with church people and would not fit in at church.

- This highlights a major challenge for church leaders. How are they to positively impact their community, when many of those with no faith view the church through such a negative lens?

**Negative perceptions of the church**

- 46% say the Christian church is harmful to people
  - (37% neutral) (42%)

- 51% say the Christian church is a detriment to society
  - (34% neutral) (46%)

- 56% say the Christian church creates conflict
  - (26% neutral) (55%)

**Negative perceptions of Christianity**

- 81% feel the word ‘judgmental’ applies to present day Christianity
  - (44% say it applies a lot) (76%)

- 80% feel the word ‘hypocritical’ applies to present day Christianity
  - (43% say it applies a lot) (77%)

- 40% feel the phrase ‘Consistently shows love for other people’ does not apply to present day Christianity (45%)

**Negative perceptions of their connection**

- 69% agree that they find it difficult to connect with church people (70%)

- 67% agree that nothing at church will help me grow as a person (65%)

- 83% agree that they do not fit in at church (83%)

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
While views of the church and Christianity are predominately negative among those with no faith, views of Christians they personally know are completely opposite - only one in five (19%) have a negative opinion of Christians they know.

- This result highlights the importance and the need for Christians to be a positive reflection of Christianity in their personal engagements with those of no faith.

**Perceptions of Christians Personally Known**

(Base: Those with no faith who know a Christian)

- Positive 48% (40%)
- No different than anyone else 33% (43%)
- Negative 19% (16%)

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Other than having a positive view of Christians known, those with no faith are most positive about Christianity in the following areas:

- Again, these opinions suggest that a core challenge for the wider church is how to build trust among those with no faith, given that this cohort are open in some way to considering faith, and believe there is some good in the values and principles embedded in Christianity, which can be particularly beneficial when times are tough.

- 76% feel the word ‘friendly’ applies to modern-day Christianity.
  
  *(15% say it applies a lot)*

- 72% feel Christianity has good values and principles.
  
  *(13% say it applies a lot)*

- 52% agree that faith is more relevant in the hard times of life.

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**Most Positive Aspects of Christianity Among Those with no Faith**
Among those with no faith who knows a Christian, but have not attended a Christian church, over six in ten (62%) would not consider attending church if invited by a Christian friend – on a positive note, over a third would be willing to consider attending church.

- With fewer people willing to attend a church, it becomes even more important for Christians to be proactive and positive ambassadors of their faith / ‘a light in their world.’ Online church and podcasts may continue to grow in popularity also.
- Church leaders should continue to consider how to best to empower their congregation to be effective in sharing and living out their faith in an increasingly pressurised world.

**Willingness to consider attending church**

Base: Those with no faith who know a Christian, who have not attended church

- Definitely not: 24% (34%)
- Probably not: 38% (39%)
- Probably: 36% (23%)
- Definitely: 2% (1%)

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Practicing Christians

While the majority of Practicing Christians agree on key fundamental Christian principles, it is interesting to note the variance in strength of agreement:

- With such variance, church leaders may consider occasionally revisiting some fundamental Christian teachings with their congregation, to ensure views are aligned.
- Also, only 54% strongly agree that it is their personal responsibility to tell others about their faith. This poses a challenge as to how the gospel is spread, especially considering many of those with no faith will not consider entering a church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Any Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches</td>
<td>98% (77%)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a personal responsibility to tell other people about my religious beliefs</td>
<td>86% (58%)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I die I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior</td>
<td>88% (65%)</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People can earn Heaven through good works</td>
<td>62% (39%)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Figures in brackets relate to the corresponding global result)
Concluding Thoughts

• **With a growing rise in technology, young adults are more globally connected than ever before.** Once upon a time, it was hypothesised that technology would increase convenience and make life easier. While this has proved to be true in many ways, technology has also served to widen access to information like never before, such as increasing awareness of global issues affecting the planet such as climate change. The competitive and comparative playing field has also increased significantly over the past 30 years. We now operate in a truly global economy.

• **While technology has brought its tremendous benefits, it is impossible to ignore the challenges that have tagged along, especially those relating to the lack of personal connection individuals feel.** Only one in three said they felt deeply cared for by those around them. Sadly this is not only true among those with no faith, but also of those with a faith. While more Practicing Christians felt personally connected than other cohorts, only 38% felt deeply cared for.

• **One positive to come out of the research for church leaders was that two thirds of Practicing Christians had some level of certainty about the future.** However, it would be insensitive to overlook the one in three that feel uncertain about the future, which rises alarming to nearly six in ten (59%) young adults with no faith. It is important that the church remains aware of the mental health challenges facing this generation and considers how it can be part of the solution.
Concluding Thoughts

• **So why do Practicing Christians go to church?** Unsurprisingly, the majority attend with a view to growing their faith. In fact, Practicing Christians are doing more than simply attending church to do this. Other than reading the bible, practicing young adult Christians are using 2 to 3 resources to help develop their faith, including 62% who read books on faith, 53% listen to podcasts/radio and 41% watch religious teaching on TV.

• **While it is encouraging to note their personal responsibility to grow spiritually, it is somewhat disappointing to note the significantly lower proportion that go to church with a view to helping the poor and needy within their communities.** Only 26% said they regularly volunteer their time, and only 37% said they had volunteered their time within the past three years. What seems contradictory is that two thirds of Practicing Christians believe it is important to look after the welfare of others, and 76% believe it is important to give of their time to help others in need. There are reasons as to why there is this disconnect.

One reason may be that, while they may believe that it’s right to be concerned about the welfare of others, there will be a portion of young adults who do not feel responsible enough to follow up their belief with action. Another reason may be that while they may not necessarily go to church to help others, they may volunteer their time elsewhere. This may be true in some instances, although as previously mentioned, only a quarter of Practicing Christians regularly volunteer their time.
Concluding Thoughts

• A challenge for church leaders is the question of ‘How much responsibility should they/the church take to teach about and facilitate engagement in social justice and looking after the needs of the poor?’ The results suggest that over six in ten young Practicing Christians do not think their church has helped them better understand the needs of the poor or social justice. This is a question that can only be answered by each church leader in light of the many other priorities they have.

• It appears to go deeper still. Four in ten (41%) Practicing Christians ‘Do not believe they are given real chances to contribute to my church.’ This finding on its own has the potential to raise great debate! What constitutes ‘real chances?’ Surely the majority of young adults have the potential to welcome someone at the door, or stack some chairs? At the end of the day, it seems that a balance is needed between how the church provides opportunities for young people to participate in, together with the self responsibility young adults need to embrace in supporting their church and community.

• Some may paint a picture of young adults appearing self-centred and irresponsible. But is that fair? Maybe in some cases, but arguably not in all. The results to subsequent questions around potential challenges to leadership shed some further light for consideration. The majority of all young adults surveyed believed there was a lack of good leadership.
Concluding Thoughts

• What is interesting is that a ‘lack of time’ (busyness and distraction) was cited as the number one challenge to leadership in society today. Additionally, nearly half (45%) of all young adults and two thirds of Practicing Christians said they were leaders in their own family. If young adults are spending time leading within their family, and in many cases looking after young children, how much time do they have left over to serve others outside of the family unit?

• While there is no one answer to the correct prioritisation of time and resources, it is important to consider this question in the context of the increased pressures facing society today. For example, there are more two parent working families than ever before, and even for the single adults, there is a greater pressure to succeed, in light of the aforementioned highly competitive and comparison driven world, which are all working together to drive greater anxiety and disconnection discussed earlier. It is important for church leaders to be mindful of these societal pressure facing young adults today and contemplate how they might navigate such challenges.

• Those with no faith were asked for their opinions about Christianity and the Christian Church. Unfortunately responses were more negative than positive, which is understandable given recent bad press surrounding the Church. Half (51%) of those with no faith felt the church was a detriment to society, with a further 34% neutral. Of those who knew a Christian and had not entered a church, over six in ten would not visit if invited. These perceptions are unfortunately real in society, and church leaders need to be aware that even though the vast majority of them mean well, it doesn’t mean to say that this sentiment will be appreciated by those outside of the church.
Concluding Thoughts

• **A positive perspective meanwhile suggests that if six in ten wouldn’t visit a church, four in ten would!** One of the most pleasing things to come out of this research was the finding that among those with no faith who personally knew a Christian, nearly half (48%) said their view of that person was positive, while only 19% said that view was negative. What was also interesting is that only 19% of those with no faith totally rejected the possibility of spiritual forces existing, while 18% were certain they did exist.

• **So while those with no faith are negative overall towards the broader church and Christianity, they seem more open to consideration of spiritual matters at a personal deeper level.** These results suggest that Christians need to take greater responsibility in being proactive and positive ambassadors for their faith, especially in instances where those with no faith are totally against entering a church. For church leaders, it seems that a key focus should be on continuing to empower and equip young adults to be effective ambassadors in their everyday lives, because at the end of the day, the outside world is looking for something to hold onto amidst their uncertainty.