



WELCOMING STUDENTS TO YOUR CHURCH

TOP TIPS TO HELP
ESTABLISH AND GROW
YOUR STUDENT MINISTRY



SCM



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SCM is a student-led movement inspired by Jesus to act for justice and show God's love in the world. As a community we come together to pray, worship and explore faith in an open and non-judgemental environment.

The British SCM is part of the Word Student Christian Federation, which brings together more than two million Christian students around the world. You can find out more about WSCF by visiting www.wscg-global.org

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Introduction

Students come from every walk of life, representing a rich tapestry of experiences, cultures, traditions and languages. Many will have questions about student life and culture, or be exploring their identity and role in the world. Many will face significant challenges, from isolation and anxiety, to financial pressures and managing relationships.

We also know that the transition to university represents a wonderful opportunity to encounter Christianity, helping people tackle difficult questions, grow in faith and discern a future vocation. Their questions and passions can add new life to the church, enriching our worship and sense of mission.

By reaching out to students, we believe a transformation can happen: a world acting more justly, a people speaking up for the poor, and a church bringing God's love to broken communities.

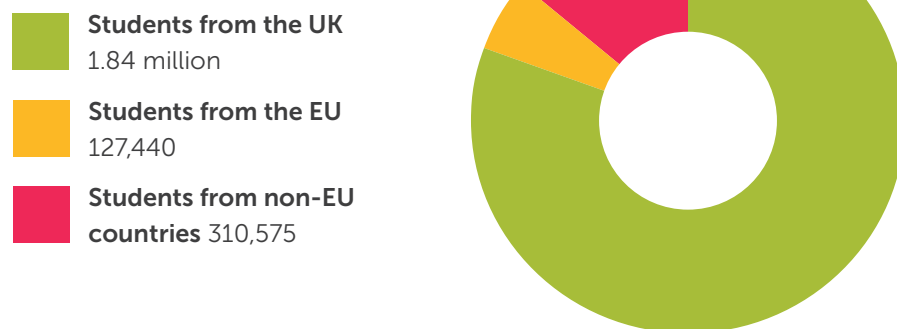
This guide is designed to help your church reach out to and support students during this crucial time. Inside you'll find the key findings of recent research into student spirituality, case studies from a range of SCM Link Churches and some practical tips for working with students.

Students today: Who are they, and what do they believe?

Student Statistics

The Student Demographic¹

In 2015–16 there were 2.28 million students studying at UK higher education institutions.



78% The growth of English pupils receiving free school meals who went to university in 2016 compared with 2006.

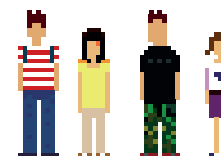
38% The rise in the number of full-time undergraduates from black and minority ethnic groups between 2007–08 and 2015–16

Student Finance²

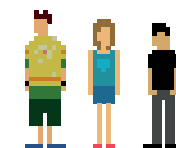
80% worry about making ends meet

52% are not confident about finding work after university

67% worry about loan repayments



1 in 4 have never budgeted



1 in 3 don't think parents give enough financial support

Health and Wellbeing

78% In a 2015 survey by the National Union of Students, eight out of 10 students said they experienced mental health issues in the last year.³

33% A third of the respondents also said they had had suicidal thoughts. Among those who did not identify as heterosexual, the figure was higher at 55%.

54% More than half of respondents who reported having experienced mental health problems said they did not seek support.

33% A third said they would not know where to get mental health support from at their college or university if they needed it, while 40% reported being nervous about the support they would receive from their institution.

Student Spirituality⁴

A survey of over 4,500 students in the UK found that among students who identify as Christian:

75% are not part of a church, cell group or student society during term time.

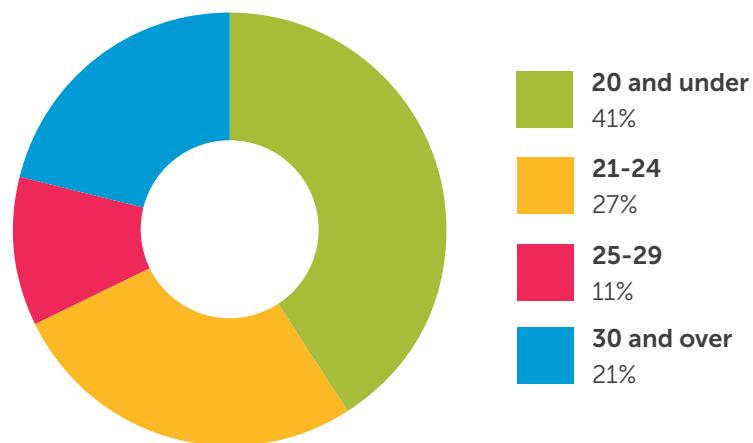
55% of students say that they are 'spiritual but not religious'.

2.7% said that they were actively involved in their university chaplaincy during term time.

Student Demographic⁵

57% In 2015-16, 57% of students were female and 43% were male.

11% were known to have a disability



Emerging Adults

In his book *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett argues that a new stage of life has been created between adolescence and young adulthood which he calls 'emerging adulthood'. This new stage is the result in a shift of societal norms and expectations which has led to young people achieving the traditional adulthood markers of marriage, becoming parents and settling into a career, at a later stage in life than previous generations.

There are several key shifts that have led to this delay. For example, as the manufacturing industry has declined and the new service and technology industries have increased, so too has the demand for skilled graduates. According to the Department for Education⁶, in 2014-15 48% of young people enrolled at a university or higher education college. This participation in formal study after the age of 16 means that young people enter the workforce later than in previous generations. They are also more likely to move jobs frequently, therefore delaying settling into a career - over half of graduates in a recent study⁷ said that they expected to leave their employer within two years.

Similarly, more relaxed attitudes to sex and relationships have meant that couples tend to wait longer to get married. The invention of the contraceptive pill has removed the need for women to get married to avoid pregnancy outside of wedlock, and young people are more likely to cohabit⁸ before committing to marriage. The Office for National Statistics⁹ estimates



that the average age for marriage in 1981 was 22 for women and 24 for men, rising to 29 for women and 31 for men in 2011.

In defining this period of 'emerging adulthood', Arnett identifies five key markers:

1. **The age of identity explorations**, where young people are deciding who they are and what they want out of life and work.
2. **The age of instability**, especially in love and work, often exacerbated by frequently moving around for study or work.
3. **The age of self-focus**, taking responsibility for decision making without having to consider others.
4. **The age of feeling 'in-between'**, having more responsibility but not quite feeling like an adult.
5. **The age of possibilities and optimism**, believing that they can improve their lives and find love.

This stage of 'emerging adulthood' is one that many students can identify with. Their experience of university and the diversity of people that they encounter shapes their view of the world, their own identities and how the two fit together. It is a time of change and instability, where new relationships are formed and ideas are challenged. The transient nature of their living arrangements, moving from house to house each year, can mean that many feel that they are only 'playing' at being adults, particularly if they have to move 'home' again during the summer. But, like Arnett says, this 'emerging adulthood' is also a time of opportunity. As societal expectations change, students have arguably more freedom than ever before to be open to new experiences and to explore new possibilities.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

- How can your church support students who are shaping their own identities? Do you provide a safe space for them to ask questions?
- Emerging adulthood can be an anxious time for students. What pastoral and spiritual support can you offer to them?
- Emerging adults are looking for new experiences and are likely to try new things. How can your church help students to experience God?

Student Faith: Intentionality, identity and safety in a time of upheaval

BY REVD JENNY MORGANS

For many students, university is the first experience of living away from their families, friends and support networks, sometimes at a significant geographical distance. Even for students for whom this is not the case, beginning to study at university can be a great time of transition.

My own experience of university was one of significant growth for me. This was true both in terms of my faith, but also much more broadly. Now, I am writing a PhD exploring the faith and identities of young Christian women at university, and I am fascinated by the intense and transitional context that is higher education. Here I am going to outline some of my findings concerned with students' intentionality, identity and safety with relation to their faith.

The transition to adulthood is not necessarily linear, with questions of religious identity being a constantly negotiated phenomenon both socially reactive and adaptive. Students' religious identities are not separate from their experience of university, but instead they shape the context and lived experience of university, even when the expression of religious identity changes in response to the university experience.¹⁰ The potential impact of this upheaval on students' identities and faith practices should not be underestimated, yet it is not often given due consideration.

There are various definitions of transition that are helpful when considering the university experience. For Brammer and Abrego, transition is any change involving *personal awareness* and the assumption of *new behaviour*.¹¹ Bridges describes transition as 'the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points in the path of growth.'¹² For

Bridges, reorientation isn't possible without a necessary yet disconcerting period of disorientation, of 'endings'. Schlossberg recognises three phases of transition – *moving in*, *moving through* and *moving out* – and notes that negotiating this transition requires 'The 4 Ss': Situation, Self, Support and Strategies.¹³ The sense of either well-being or crisis in each of the 4 Ss in a student's life plays an important role in how they experience the transition, and the level to which they find themselves coping, flourishing or floundering.

Of those I interviewed in their first term at university, the women who had felt most positive before leaving home and had spent time thinking about it were better prepared, and were thus more likely to be settling in. In contrast, those whom for whatever reason had not given the move to university much prior thought, or whose university or course was their second choice, found that the 'Situation' was more negative and thus more difficult to adapt to.

In terms of 'Support', students in their first term have an ambivalent relationship to 'independence.' For so many students, this is something they look forward to (and enjoy) about university. However, the daily life management of shopping and cooking, choosing how to spend one's time and money etc, often takes more energy than expected. Research shows that while parents think their child wants to be left to explore their new world alone, what students need in this time is increased – albeit different – support from them. Parks writes that what young adults need rather than independence is 'inner-dependence' – they need to be supported or mentored in making their own decisions and trusting their own judgement.

'All I've been doing for days, is just, meeting people for like two minutes at a time moving onto the next person moving on to the next person... but yet... I don't know anyone really and no-one knows me.'

Olivia, first year student

Intentionality

Strikingly, in search for inner-dependence and 'Support,' students give a huge amount of time and energy to meeting new people, and close friends are often made very quickly. For students in my research, this was often done intentionally, involving careful planning and negotiation. It influenced decisions about what events to attend and activities to join in with, and was for some students driven by a desire to either 'fit in' or to create something akin to a 'family' for themselves in their new surroundings. For example, Alex decided to attend a church and Christian society where she didn't agree with the theological approach or enjoy some of the activities, but it was where she felt she could make friends more easily. Students were wary about exclusive 'cliques' in different groups but found themselves creating their own circles with people that they felt safe and 'at home' around.

Forming new communities is also key in students forming and trying out 'provisional selves' at university.¹⁶ Christian friendships made the university context easier to negotiate, where Christians can often feel 'different' compared to what is perceived to be the 'typical student'¹⁷ experience. Friendship with fellow sojourners contributed to a sense of belonging, helped Christian life feel more normal and acceptable and helped to break down the debilitating effects of 'imposter syndrome'¹⁸ that almost every student will feel to some extent.

Not many students were as intentional as Alex when it came to finding a church. While a handful of students in my research did arrive at university with clear criteria of what they were looking for in a church, most ended up at the first or second church that they tried because they made friends with students there, or attended with students that they already knew. What could be considered as key differences between churches – for example theological stances or structural differences such as denomination¹⁹ or worship style, were not considered important. In fact, most students seemed unaware of these differences at all until they were in their second year. The diversity of Christianity at university and in its surrounding churches is often completely unknown to students who believe that their home church was 'normal' and like all other churches, and who do not realise that they have scope to make decisions about what is most important to *their* faith.

Safety

For many of the women leaving behind their families, support networks and homes, faith became an obvious place of safety and comfort. This was true both for new Christians and for students who had been Christian all their lives. It was also equally true for women across the different Christian traditions. University was often alluded to as a place that could be scary, or that had many unknowns, and the women searched for things that were comfortable and nurturing. The women expressed a need for comfort, familiarity, stability, homeliness and sometimes certainty, and often Christian activities and relationships were where this steadiness could be found. While there was often a vague notion that their faith might change, there was usually little attempt to shape this, or to consider different ways to influence this happening. However, as university offered students the opportunity to negotiate emerging identities, continuity in their faith was not the same as it being static or left at home. Instead, it became fluid, flexible and 'portable' in a safe environment.

Jenny Morgans is a Deacon at the North Lambeth Parish and is a PhD candidate at The Queen's Foundation. for Ecumenical Theological Education She was Convenor of SCM's General Council from 2010-2012.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

- How do you welcome freshers over their first term, while they are moving in? Do you help put positives in place in the '4 Ss'? Do you give due attention to those students who are particularly floundering?
- How do you make students (and your wider congregation) aware of the breadth of Christianity in your area? And do you support students to make decisions for themselves about where they sit in that breadth?
- Do you encourage students to develop 'inner-dependence,' where they can trust their own journey and judgement? How could you facilitate this?
- How can you encourage students to develop their faith yet maintain their need for safety?

RESOURCE

Today's Christians – a summary of key research findings

Christianity and the University Experience

The *Christianity and the University Experience Report*²¹ is the culmination of a three-year research project studying the beliefs, values and social lives of Christian undergraduate students. It was driven by a desire to know how students live out their faith identities while at university and surveyed over 4,500 students across 13 English Universities. Some of its key findings include:

- 75% of Christian students are engaging in private faith, but are disengaged from corporate forms of worship, student societies and cell groups
- Just over 55% of students say that they are 'spiritual but not religious'
- Only 2.7% of students surveyed said that they were actively involved in their university chaplaincy during term time.

Lead author Dr Mathew Guest, of Durham University's Department of Theology and Religion, said: 'When many think of religion on university campuses two things come to mind: an intense faith affirmed by evangelical Christians and some Muslims, and an equally intense atheism, expressed by young sceptics as a protest against religion.'²²

'Moderate or liberal Christianity rarely enters the conversation, assumed to be a long spent force favoured by older generations. And yet our research found that this description reflects the values of the majority of students who identify Christianity as their religion of choice. In fact, liberal Christians outnumber evangelicals tenfold.

'With the vast majority of Christian students affirming a moderate expression of values in keeping with wider British culture, the Church faces a difficult

decision about whether to adapt to changing times or risk permanently alienating an entire generation.'

Talking Jesus

In 2015, the Church of England, the Evangelical Alliance and HOPE conducted research into perceptions of Jesus and how Christians might reach out to new believers. The key findings of the *Talking Jesus*²³ project include:

- 57% of people in England identify as Christians, and 9% are practising Christians
- 41% of practising Christians attribute their faith to growing up in a Christian home
- 72% of practising Christians feel comfortable talking to non-Christians about Jesus
- 31% of 18 to 34-year-olds felt more positive about Jesus after such a conversation
- 44% of practising Christians credit their friends for introducing them to Jesus
- 17% of practising Christians said a spiritual experience they could not explain was a key factor in them coming to faith
- 'Spiritual', 'loving' and 'peaceful' are the words most commonly used to describe Jesus
- 36% of practising Christians say talking to a Christian about Jesus was important in their coming to faith

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

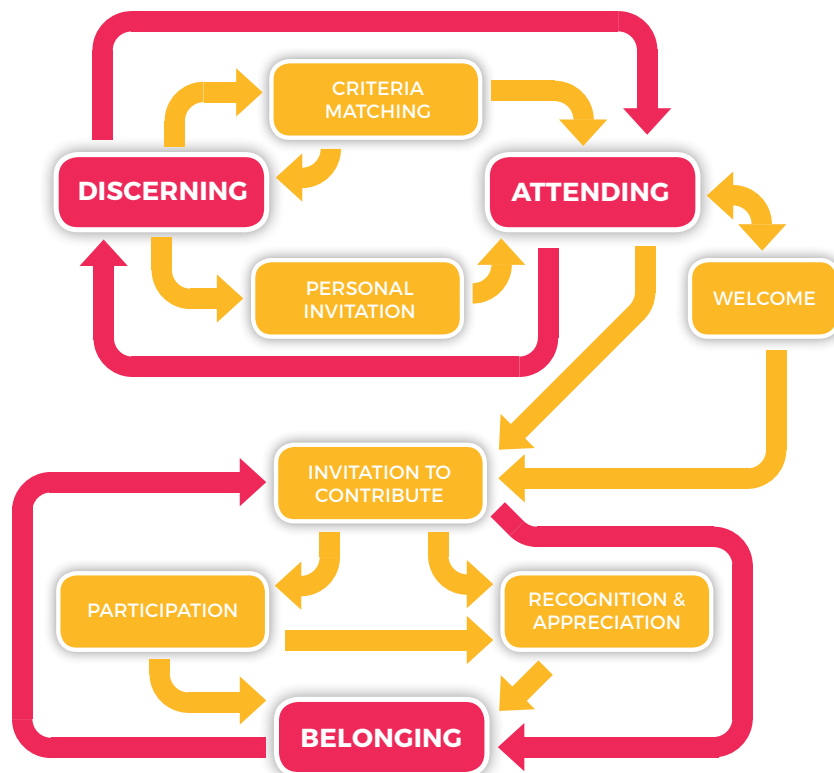
- Students are often more open to talking faith than you think. How might you engage non-religious students in your activities? How can you encourage students to talk about their faith with others?
- Students may not come to church but still practice their faith privately. How can you reach out to these students?
- Speak to students to find out what they are interested in and enthusiastic about. How can you respond to them?

What are students looking for in a Church?

Shopping, commitment and belonging.

BY REVD DR MATT WARD

Over the past few years I've been engaged in research looking at how students who'd been actively involved in churches during their time at university find new places to belong after they graduate. At the heart of a research is a two-year longitudinal study of a group of students, looking in depth at their experiences of searching for new church communities to belong to. This is the first research to look at this group of people. Analysing their experiences led to the development of a model that shows the common process of searching and finding belonging. As you can see from the model there are three major phases in the journey to finding belonging in a new church community – discerning, attending and belonging.



Discerning - shopping for church?

One of the most striking things in my research was the prevalence of consumer approaches to finding new church communities. We live in a society dominated by consumer culture, where searching for information and using trusted reviews is part of our everyday life. Approaches to finding a church are no different. For people to be able to 'shop around', churches need to take the idea of a religious marketplace seriously. This is not to say that churches should think of themselves as competing with others in the market, but rather that they need to ensure that information about the church is both accurate and readily available.

Those who were looking for churches were often unfamiliar with a new town, so clear directions as well as up-to-date information about the times of services was important. Some people also had a desire to identify a 'brand' as they looked for a new church to attend, such as the church's denomination, doctrinal position, membership of a recognised network and style of worship. This information was used as signposts to help people navigate through a complex market, and all of this information was required to help people make an initial assessment of whether they were likely to find belonging in that church community.

Why haven't I simply called this phase 'searching' or even 'shopping'? My research showed that those who approached the task of looking for a new church with a prayerful approach invariably found somewhere to attend.

Those who didn't often ended up creating ever more complex criteria for the sort of church they wanted to find, and never quite found the right one.

Attending - being committed

Young graduates have complex lifestyles that mean church attendance often competes with many other demands on their time. Irregular attendance does not necessarily mean that they lack commitment, are unable to contribute, or do not feel that they belong to their church communities. Churches need to recognise the challenging lifestyle of those who have recently left university, and that it may not be possible to gauge whether someone is committed to a church community based on how often they attend Sunday worship. Offering opportunities to connect with the church community at other times (e.g. midweek activities) may be a valuable way of helping newcomers establish themselves in the community and build a sense of belonging.

Belonging – feeling at home

My research showed that those who felt that they belonged to church communities actively contributed to shaping the life of that community, and wanted to be invited to participate in the life of the church. Importantly, some were offered such an invitation as soon as they arrived at a new church and none seemed to feel that the invitation had been offered too soon. The invitation to contribute did need to be genuine, however, and ideally take into account their skills and gifts. This suggests that churches need to be prepared to invite newcomers to contribute before they have been judged as being regular attenders, and that Churches need to invest time and energy in discovering the gifts and skills of those newcomers.

Some people did not wait for an invitation to contribute but instead took the role of the 'welcoming guest' by actively seeking an opportunity to contribute. It takes a certain confidence to issue such a self-invitation, and while some graduates have such entrepreneurial confidence in abundance, most do not. Churches need to be prepared to take seriously and respond positively to any offers made by newcomers. For many churches, both

suggestions will seem challenging - there is often uncertainty as to whether a newcomer will 'stick' with a church or whether they are the right sort of person to be involved in an area of church life. It is important to recognise, however, that the invitation they are offering is not just to participate in the life of the church community, but to join the church universal in participating in the life of the Trinity.

What next?

The findings of my research clearly offer important insights to those working with students and to students themselves. I have already been working with various groups and organisations to support their ministry in that area. I am convinced that the research is of wider value to the church. Feedback shows that, although the work was conducted with recent graduates, the key findings connect with the experiences of many people at various stages in life.

If you wish to look at the research in more detail you can find the thesis via <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11825/>. Alternatively, I am very happy to have conversations with anyone interested in exploring ways of implementing the findings in their work.

Matt Ward is the Anglican Chaplain at the Universities in Leeds Chaplaincy. The SCM office would be glad to put you in touch – email scm@movement.org.uk

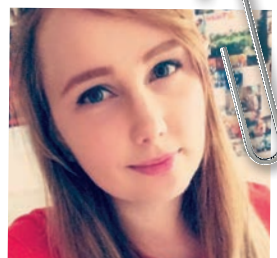
THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

- How accessible and up to date is your church website? Could it be improved in any way?
- What opportunities can you create for students to contribute to the life of your church?
- How can you foster a sense of belonging for students in your church?

CASE STUDY

All Hallows, Leeds

What are students looking for in a church? Students in Leeds tell us what attracted them to All Hallows Church, and the minister at All Hallows, Revd Heston Groenewald, shares his perspective too.



I heard about All Hallows during Freshers' week. I was raised Catholic so went to the Catholic Chaplaincy at first – I'd go to Catholic Mass at 9am and then run down to All Hallows to attend their service too. I attended both for a while before deciding I wanted to become an Anglican, so I committed to All Hallows.

The first few times I went All Hallows I was late! I would wait outside for a few minutes to work up the courage to go in, but there was always someone to welcome and reassure me. People were actively trying to get to know me and were interested in my life. I'm quite involved in the life of the church now – I often write intercessions and I've recently become a lay Eucharistic minister.

I like how diverse All Hallows is. There are local people, not-so-local people, people who are doing well, those who are struggling, and members of the LGBT community. We care about each other, support each other, and pray together outside of church. It's a very active and pastoral community.

Sarah Derbyshire

I first decided to attend All Hallows because it's near to my house. I'd walked past it several times and I had a friend who was involved in the Junk Food Project Café there. I decided to check out the café and loved it, so I decided to try out the Sunday Mass as well. I've been there for a year now! I first went to All Hallows because it was close, but now I've stayed involved because of the values. The church is unique – it's very welcoming and open. The worship and liberal values are important to me.



My favourite thing about All Hallows is how close they are to people. They offer support to everyone and are genuinely interested in people's lives. I sometimes would like there to be more people of my age in the church, but I also love stepping out of the student bubble. I've loved my experience at All Hallows and I hope all students can find a great church like mine.

Julia Chabasiewicz

We've been really excited to see more students getting involved in All Hallows. The good Lord provides and enables all this wonderful good news and worship and mission, and we get to follow where God's Spirit leads.

Almost half of our parish population are students, and they like our church because it isn't your typical student church, but a diverse intergenerational and inclusive community. Students don't just want to live in a student bubble. Students bring energy to the life of All Hallows. Reaching out is important and our partnership with the University of Leeds Chaplaincy and the SCM Leeds student group has helped bring students through the doors.

We run a Junk Food Café and that's appealing to lots of students. They love the social justice element – tackling food poverty and food waste, and students who don't believe in God can get involved and see that the church can be a force for good in the local community.



Revd Heston Groenewald

RESOURCE

Welcoming Students to Your Church: Top Tips

Step 1: Work out who is going to do the welcoming. If your church employs a student worker then you've already got this covered, but it's also worth thinking about ways to get other members of your congregation involved. Is there someone who might volunteer to coordinate your ministry with students? They don't need to have a youth work degree, just enthusiasm!

Step 2: Think about what you can offer to students. As well as your usual services, what else can students get involved in? While weekly bible study sessions and student meet-ups are great, think about what is already happening in your church. Are there opportunities for students to get involved in any outreach activities, or social events? You could start small by inviting students to a welcome lunch during Freshers' week and build up from there.

Step 3: Tell students about your church. A great place to start is by creating a student section on your website to list any events and activities that students can get involved in. You could also create a Facebook group and encourage

students to invite their friends to it. It's also worth checking to see if the university chaplaincy or local Churches Together has a churches list that you can sign up to, and don't forget to create your profile on SCM's online directory, SCM Connect (www.movement.org.uk/scmconnect) Lastly, you'll need to meet students where they are. Can you book a stall at the university freshers' fair? You could join up with other local churches, or ask the chaplaincy if they will give out flyers to students.

Step 4: Keep in touch. Plan some follow up activities to keep in touch with students, and make time to catch up with them regularly. You could email them details of upcoming events, and making an effort to talk to them before or after your weekly service will help them feel welcomed.

Step 5: Work with students to develop your ministry. Ask students what they would like to do or be involved in, and work with them to build up a programme of activities. You can find more ideas in the 'Student Work' section of this resource, and online at www.movement.org.uk/resources



CASE STUDY

Carrs Lane Church

How can churches connect with students locally? Revd Ruth Yorke, minister at Carrs Lane Church in Birmingham, shares their experience of reaching out to students in the city.

As our church is so near to the Aston and Birmingham City Universities, we realised that we had a great opportunity to develop a student ministry. There was a warm reception to the idea at our Church Meeting, so we did some research to see what was being offered to students in the city by other churches already. We presented our findings to the church, and in small groups considered the potential impact on the church. It was important to us that beginning this ministry was a church decision, and something that the church saw as part of our wider mission and ministry in the city we are all committed to.

The meeting was unanimously positive and we shared lots of great ideas. A small group came together as a student ministry team to prepare welcome leaflets and a banner for outside. We got some help with the flyers as we wanted to make sure they would be attractive to students and also represent the church accurately. We were grateful for a Student Work Meetup event which was not only interesting, but helped us to meet more people involved in student ministry in the area. Some of those contacts are involved in Chaplaincies and have kindly put our 'welcome' flyers in their leaflet stands. We offered free pizza for students after church services in the autumn term, which gave us an opportunity to chat and eat together with students.

Twelve students have visited occasionally, and two students have become part of the church. We have asked students what else they'd like to have happen, and they have chosen to have regular bible studies. We offered an experiential bible study, based on a Lectio Divina pattern which offers opportunity for everyone to share how a bible passage affects them, and this approach has given everyone an easy 'way in' to sharing.

The two students who come regularly have now become very much part of the church – getting to know people, enjoying the intergenerational nature of the church family, volunteering with community and social justice activities, being involved in worship by leading bible readings and sharing testimony. Along with the ministry team the students now cook pizza for the whole church every month before Church Meeting (everyone thinks better after pizza!).

We have contact cards and we contact students (and anyone!) to send a welcome message, offer to meet for a cuppa, and if asked, send details of events as they come up. As our students are international students, a family from church invited them for Christmas day, and they had a lovely time!

Although at present we could say, 'only two students', we think, 'great, two students!' and we are privileged that they have chosen to become part of our church family. In the future we hope that we can build a student group together that is supported but student-led. We want to develop the student ministry with the students, listening to them and to others who may come, and are committed to continuing.

How can churches support students?

Preparing young people for university

As well as welcoming students to your church, you might also have some young people in your congregation who will be leaving to head to university next September. How can you help prepare them for student life?

Pray for them. Knowing that they're being prayed for can be comforting to young people who might be feeling anxious about heading off to university, and shows them that they are cared for.

Put them in touch with a university chaplain, local church or student group. Trying to find a new Christian community can be daunting, so introducing students to a chaplain, local church or student group can help break the ice. SCM Connect is an online directory of churches, chaplaincies and student groups that students can search to connect with new communities in their university area. Find out more at www.movement.org.uk/SCMConnect. SCM also has a Facebook group which is run by students where young people can find others heading to the same university. You can find the group at www.facebook.com/groups/scmbritain.

Organise an 'Ask a Student' Q&A. If you have someone in your congregation who is already at university or has recently graduated,

ask if they'd be willing to talk about their experiences with your young people. This will give them the opportunity to ask any questions about university life and help them to prepare for what lies ahead.

Signpost them to resources. SCM has produced a Freshers' Pack of resources including a 'Going to Uni' guide for Christian students full of tips and stories from current students. Young people can request a pack via SCM Connect, and Link Churches can order copies via the SCM office.

Keep in touch. Sending an occasional text message of support will help your young people to still feel a part of the church community that they've left behind. Why not send them a postcard signed by members of your congregation, or a care package of their favourite goodies? Don't forget to invite them to key events happening in your church – they may not always be able to attend, but they will appreciate the gesture.



Student Work

What is student work?

Christian Student Work is essentially any activity that intentionally seeks to impact the faith of students. These activities enrich or encourage the Christian faith of the students, and can be recreational, educational or social.

Student work in your church will differ from the student work in other churches, and there is no one size fits all approach. A good starting point is to consider the context that your church is in. Are you near to a university? Do you have someone in your church that is employed to work with students, or do you rely on volunteers? Do you have a budget to support student ministry? Are the congregation of your church supportive?

It will also very much depend on the students too. For example, students from outside of the UK may come from cultures where religion holds quite a different significance and that may have shaped their experience in very different ways than it does in the west. Some students will feel that their faith is a large part of their identity, whereas some will have found a faith more recently.

As with any ministry it can take time to build up your student work, and it can tend to be cyclical – the transient nature of student life means that it's likely that they will move on once they graduate, and there will be new students arriving

each September. It will take time and effort to establish student work in your church, but it will enrich the life of your church and the lives of the students too.

So, where do you begin? Here are a few suggestions of activities that you can do with students in your congregation:

- **HOLD A BIBLE STUDY**

Some students will not have studied the Bible in any depth before, and new Christians may not have studied it at all. Bible study can open up the scriptures in new ways and help students get to deepen their faith through a greater understanding of what the Bible teaches. There are lots of Bible studies in the resources section of the SCM website at www.movement.org.uk/resources

- **RUN AN 'ADOPT A STUDENT' SCHEME**

Some churches run 'Adopt a Student' schemes, where someone in the congregation (usually a family) is paired up with a student to welcome them to the church and provide support during the year. The schemes help students feel more integrated into church life and create inter-generational relationships, as well as providing practical support such as lifts to church and the occasional home cooked meal.

- **CELEBRATE STUDENT SUNDAY**

Student Sunday, also known as the Universal Day of Prayer for Students, is celebrated on the third Sunday in February each year. It is coordinated by the World Student Christian Federation and has been celebrated since 1898, making it one of the oldest ecumenical days of prayer. You could invite students to lead parts of the service, or ask them to share their story of faith with your church. You can find out more and download resources for Student Sunday from www.movement.org.uk/studentsunday

- **ORGANISE SOCIAL EVENTS**

Students are more likely to go to a church where they know someone, so holding social events for them to meet others is a great way of helping them to build friendships. You could invite them to a meal, go out bowling or even just meet for coffee and cake at a local café. Be mindful that students from different countries will have different needs

and expectations – SCM has heard from student workers that while an EU student generally has no problem going to a pub to socialise, Chinese students can be warier when it comes to alcohol.

- **START A STUDENT GROUP**

If you have more than a couple of students you could try running a regular discussion group on a chosen set of topics, or a regular student service. Let the students shape this, and encourage them take ownership of the group. For more support with this you can contact SCM's Groups Worker by emailing scm@movement.org.uk

Working with others

If you only have a small number of students, or limited resources, it is worth considering joining with other churches or chaplaincies in your area to pool resources and share ideas. There may also be a local SCM group that you can signpost students to, and local groups will welcome support from churches.

SCM has seen some great examples of where this has worked well. For example, in Lancaster, local churches are invited to participate in the weekly chaplaincy service and to bring cakes to share with students afterwards. This has helped churches to get to know students in their area, and gives them the opportunity to advertise any activities that students can get involved in. In Aberystwyth, the SCM affiliated Methodist Society is supported by the local Methodist church who provide them with a space to meet, and students are also invited to church events and to participate in services.

Why not contact your local chaplaincy to see if there is anything that your church could do to offer support? You could offer to host a service, or ask members of your congregation to donate items to create welcome packs for students. SCM organises Student Work Meetups to bring together churches, chaplaincies and students to network and share ideas – you can find the details at www.movement.org.uk/events, or by emailing the office – scm@movement.org.uk



Supporting Students' Mental Health

Universities can be intense and fast-moving environments, and the student experience often has significant highs and lows. We asked Anthea Colledge, Chaplain at Sheffield University, to share her tips for supporting students with their mental health.

Some of the factors affecting the mental health of students are:

- **Finance.** Most undergraduate students now take out loans of at least £9,000 per year of their degree, and do not receive maintenance grants.
- **Pressure to succeed.** Most students (and often their parents) want to feel that they're getting value for money. They're conscious of their CV and the competitive graduate job market.
- **Relationships.** Family, friends, and romantic relationships are common sources of stress. Social media may make this worse - sometimes because of the pressure to present a 'perfect' image, sometimes because it doesn't provide the human connection that people are hoping for.
- **Rapid change.** Starting at university can be an unsettling time as students adjust to an entirely new environment. For many students, it's also a chance to explore their identity - especially around sexuality and gender.

Many students are very resilient and cope well. Others find it more difficult, often at the start of their course and during exams. Around 10% have a diagnosable mental health problem such as depression, anxiety, or psychosis.²⁴

WHAT CAN CHURCHES DO?

1. SUPPORT

Churches are an important source of social support and friendship for students. Are there ways in which you can encourage those relationships? Bear in mind that not all students enjoy the typical 'student' environments. Homesick students may especially appreciate spending time in a family environment. Contemplative spiritual practices (prayer, Scripture meditation, retreats etc.) also improve emotional wellbeing – are students introduced to these in an accessible way? Students are often very active in church, and being involved in outreach/service can be good for mental health. But it's important to bear in mind that they are also active at university and elsewhere – one way to support student mental health may include helping them learn to say 'no'!

2. SIGNPOST

Some students with diagnosable mental health problems will seek help from their church. Churches aren't mental health experts, but hopefully can respond pastorally by listening and then signposting to local sources of support. Universities commonly provide a range of support services, including counselling; if you have students in your congregation it may be worth knowing about these student-specific services as well as local NHS services and mental health charities.

3. SPEAK

Today's young adults have grown up being encouraged to think and talk about mental health. Is the same true of the church? If churches don't speak about mental health then distressed people are left on their own with their pain and their questions. Offering theological reflection is as important as offering practical support. What is your church's theology of health and healing? What about the Bible verses about demonic possession? What can you learn about faith from people with mental health problems?



Encouraging Students to Deepen their Faith

BY SIMON FOSTER

Last year I surveyed nearly 1200 Churchgoers to find out 'what helps Christians grow'? They say that everyone should have an 'elevator pitch' for their work. If I had to sum up the research in one line, it would be this: 'Ordinary Christians are far more active in their discipleship than we might imagine.'

It's an important message for lay people as well as ministers. Lay people have a way of underestimating their own faith, too.

My research, at St Peter's Saltley Trust, suggests that today's Christians generally believe that:

- God calls everyone to a particular role, time or place (80%)
- their growth is their own responsibility (95%)
- when their faith is hampered, they blame themselves more than anyone else.

In other words, they see themselves as the navigators of their own faith.

These beliefs are backed up by their practice. On average, the 1200 or so people we surveyed said they'd been helped in their journey of faith by twenty different activities or experiences. And while six of those activities were aspects of church worship, most took place away from Sunday mornings: at home, at work, and in the community. Typically, at least five were activities that required their own initiative and motivation, such as praying alone, or listening to broadcast/online Christian teaching.

We found too that most Christians have a strong sense of their faith as something which develops over time. Almost all spoke of times of growing, and times of not growing. Most felt there were times of being spiritually stuck, and many identified times of growing through difficulty, loss, and new experiences. Younger adults were even more likely to accord with any of these ideas than older adults.

So, lay people have a strong sense of their own responsibility for growth in faith, exposing themselves to a wide range of activities in order to do so. For the most part, they pray, read the Bible, are inspired by others, experience God in their own lives, and try to put their faith into practice.

Is that the story we expect to hear? Perhaps not. When I shared it with one church leader, she said with surprise, 'It doesn't feel like that! It feels like all their expectations are on my shoulders.'

She was by no means the only one to be startled by these findings. It's easy to look across the sea of faces during worship, and miss the hidden depths behind each one. Especially as, in coffee after the service, few seem to be talking about the challenges or adventures of their faith. Discipleship is happening, but ministers may feel they're not seeing the evidence.

Diagram: Four paths of discipleship

DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH:

GROUP ACTIVITY

- being part of a small group/ Bible study
- being part of my church's social life/ fellowship
- taking part in my church's outreach
- a Christian course offered by local church
- leading others in worship / small group / prayer
- going on retreat
- Christian conferences, festivals, events, pilgrimage

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- taking part in online discussion or conversations
- taking part in a social justice/ campaigning activity beyond my church
- taking part in a practical Christian service or mission project not connected with my church
- Christian education provided by college, university, denomination
- experiencing different churches/ Christian spiritualities
- conversation with others whose faith or beliefs are different from mine
- hobbies, leisure or cultural activities not connected with church

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

- listening to sermons
- praying by myself
- reading/studying the Bible by myself
- a spiritual director, mentor, soul friend
- listening to Christian teaching, discussion, talks on tape etc
- reading Christian/spiritual/ theological books
- my closest friendships or relationships
- a particular person (e.g. missionary or teacher)
- trying to put my faith into practice in daily life
- a direct call or experience I believe was from God

CHURCH WORSHIP

- attending church/worship regularly
- music in church worship
- liturgy in church worship
- participating in communion / Eucharist/ mass/ Lord's supper
- a familiar pattern of worship
- seasons and shape of the Christian year



Building on our findings with the statistical expertise of Professor Leslie Francis, we found four pathways of discipleship. While all are important, some are especially significant.

In particular, a range of activities that grouped together under 'individual experience' were strongly associated with a sense of calling, and a depth of discipleship practice. These were activities like reading the bible alone, praying alone, listening to broadcast or recorded teaching, and listening to sermons. It also included close relationships, role models, and 'a direct call or experience from God'. Of course, it's not easy to know which way around these things come. Does finding reading the bible and praying alone helpful make you more committed to your faith? Or are these things the fruit of a committed faith? There's probably something of a 'virtuous circle' there, meaning that they feed into each other.

A personal pattern of bible reading and prayer has been advocated for centuries. This research suggests it may be that other similar reflective activities such as listening to online teaching, or reading theology, suggest that it's actually the discipline of engaging and taking faith seriously for yourself that is what really matters.

What does our research mean for those of whose job it is to encourage and help students to deepen their faith? First of all, it looks as if any Christian benefits from a balance of the four factors: collective worship; a Christian community they can share with; time for individual experience of faith, and the opportunity to test it out in practice. How a student gets the opportunity to do these may be different for students than for more settled populations, and how those opportunities are offered may vary, of course. Serious reflection on where students get the opportunity to engage in each of the four pathways is worth considering. Students' own experiences and reflections would be worth hearing.

Secondly, students, like all Christians, are charting their own journey through faith. While we may make all kinds of resources and opportunities available, we need to remember that it's their journey in their time. Like us, they are embarked on a lifelong journey of which we only see a small part. University years can be amongst the richest of all, but they are still only a fragment. Hearing students as they explore and reflect on their calling and their journey may be amongst the best gifts we can offer. By doing so we can 'normalise' those distinctive individual experiences such as bible reading that can make a young Christian feel so different from those around them, and help them hear that call more clearly.

Read the findings of St Peter's Saltley Trust What Helps Disciples Grow research at www.saltleytrust.org.uk/whdg

Simon Foster is a Project Researcher at St Peter's Saltley Trust.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...

- How can we affirm the 'four pathways' of discipleship in students' lives?
- Does your practice as an encourager and enabler respect the fact that students are on their own journey?
- How do we help students reflect on or discern their calling?



CASE STUDY

The Junction

Want to start a service for students? Revd Dr Cat Harland tells us about how The Junction has engaged and supported students in Sheffield.

We started The Junction because young adults asked for a separate service which they would find more relevant and would also attract students. Involving students in the morning service hadn't worked well – we found that many students went home for the weekend, or liked to spend their Sundays writing assignments. During this time of exploration, two local Methodist churches also expressed an interest in engaging in joint student ministry, as they only had two or three students attending their services. So, I brought together these students, we wrote a programme and decided to give it a go.

The Junction has brought more students into church – a mixture of dechurched, unchurched and Methodist students. Our format includes a worship service one week alternated with a discussion group the next. We focus on themes rather than the liturgical year and we've used a mixture of prayer stations, liturgy, Taizé chanting, singing and praying for one another.

Students say they prefer discussion-based sessions, but the individual services with activities have been really moving and have worked well. One of our most popular sessions at the start of term helped students explore themes of exile, travel and journey. I made prayer stations including a map-based prayer station, where they could put a *Monopoly* house on a map of the UK or the world and pray for where they'd come from, and a map of Sheffield to pray for where they were now.

Once a fortnight I invite students back to the manse for cake. This acts as a feeder for the service, as some students will invite their friends for cake and then they might attend the service when they feel part of the community. We make a big push during Freshers' week and use flyers, but most find us through word of mouth. We use a Facebook group to organise ourselves and a website as the more public facing element. Students also organise their own socials, including meals, crazy golf and trips to the cinema.

You can find out more about The Junction by visiting their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/BeaconJunction

Further Resources available from SCM

The SCM website

WWW.MOVEMENT.ORG.UK

The resources section of the website has lots of workshop outlines, bible studies and prayer activity ideas that can be downloaded for use at your church, as well as in depth case studies from churches and chaplaincies. In the blog section, you can read stories from students about their experience of university, finding a church and what it is like being an international student in the UK.

SCM Connect

WWW.MOVEMENT.ORG.UK/SCMCONNECT

The online directory of SCM groups, affiliated chaplaincies and Link Churches. You can sign up your church as a Link Church for free via SCM Connect which includes a profile on the directory and resources throughout the year.

Effective Student Work Training

SCM's annual training event for church leaders, student workers and volunteers is held each September, and includes sessions on welcoming students, effective outreach, supporting student leadership and practical advice on using social media and marketing. SCM Link Churches receive a discounted place at the training. You can find the details of upcoming courses at www.movement.org.uk/events

Student Work Meetups

These meetings bring together churches, chaplaincies and student groups to network and share ideas for working with students. They are free to attend, and are held throughout the year. To find a Student Work Meetup event near you visit www.movement.org.uk/events

The SCM staff are also happy to support you in working with students. You can contact us by emailing scm@movement.org.uk.

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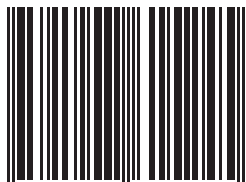


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Student Christian Movement
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