

# Gungahlin Uniting Church

## Growing Young Report

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### 1. Introduction

#### Purpose of the Report

This report shares the journey that a group from GUC has taken over the past year as they have engaged with the Growing Young Framework. Guided by the book's\* six core commitments, we reflected on each chapter and considered how these values are lived out in our congregation.

\* *"Growing Young: Six essential strategies to help young people discover and love your church"* – Kara Powell, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin

#### Overview of the Growing Young Journey

Throughout this time, we have sought to evaluate our current ministries, relationships, and culture – particularly in relationship to young people, families and intergenerational life. We have also listened to the congregation: observing, conversing and reflecting on shared experiences.

*"I found God in each and every step of this journey – addressing me through the book, my conversations with my daughter and discussions with others..."*

This report is offered back to the congregation not just as an update, but as an invitation – to celebrate the transformation already among us, to be encouraged by the Spirit, and to discern together how we might continue to grow into a church that is warm, inclusive, Christ-centered, and welcoming for all generations.

### 2. Values and Practices Resonating Most with GUC

Several of the core values of Growing Young are already visible in practice or are relevant to key leaders within the congregation. There is a strong foundation of warmth, intergenerational connection and a desire to honor and prioritise young people, even as the church continues to learn how best to nurture, empower, and involve them more deeply.

*"My congregation tries to involve the young members of the church and consider them as an integral part of our future."*

#### GUC's key values and practices:

- Warm community as foundation
- Prioritising young people and families
- Multicultural inclusion and intergenerational belonging
- Unlocking keychain leadership (a leadership style that fosters growth through trust, collaboration, and shared ownership)

### 3. Encouragements and Surprises

This journey has revealed a deep sense of openness within the team and wider congregation to grow, adapt, and invest in the future of young people. Small, seemingly simple acts have

had significant impact. The congregation has responded with more enthusiasm and engagement than expected. Leadership has become more collaborative, and young people are beginning to take ownership. There is growing confidence that change is possible – and already happening – through community, consistency and shared vision.

**Key encouragements and surprises:**

- Shared ownership and rising confidence in our story (communal and individuals)
- Unexpected congregational and youth engagement
- Strengthening of leadership across the church
- Renewed energy and sense of momentum

## 4. Stories That Shaped Us

The stories that have remained with the team members are those that reflect a congregation being made aware of its shared responsibility for nurturing each generation. These stories show that the community is moving to participation, an awareness of decline to engaging youthful energy, and highlighting cultural inclusion. There is a growing theological reflection on what it means to take Jesus seriously – not in terms of moralism, but grace. Together these stories reveal a church that is open, intergenerational, grace-filled and future-facing.

Listening to each other's stories and engaging with our own created space for us to understand and new levels of relationship we didn't realise were possible.

**Our stories reveal that our church is a church that:**

- courageously faces change with shared vision.
- is making space for young people, not just future leaders, but as present participants.
- is growing in cross-cultural empathy and intentionality.
- is shifting toward grace-centered discipleship, rooted in honest questions and gentle presence.

**Snapshots of our stories:**

- A shared vision for a multigenerational future
- Small participation moments are becoming identity – shaping (from dramas to baking they are telling a bigger story about who this church is becoming)
- Honouring and embracing cultural complexity
- Reframing faith as grace, not moralism

## 5. Signs of Growth and Transformation

The congregation is experiencing a quiet but profound transformation. From individuals simply attending church to becoming an interconnected, intergenerational community. Growth is showing up in small, relationship moments: A young person being known by name, a leader learning to let go, a family member belonging on their very first visit. Leadership is becoming shared, young people are feeling valued, and the church is energised by the growing sense of shared purpose.

*"On our first day attending... my daughter was approached by the lady who led the youth group, they talked with my daughter in such a calm and welcoming way. My daughter was so impressed and felt valued that she insisted us to join this church..."*

**Our signs of growth and transformation:**

- Intergenerational connection is growing
- Ownership beyond individuals – letting go has made room for shared leadership
- A ‘first welcome’ changes everything
- Inclusion and participation becoming normal
- Spiritual and cultural adaptation
- Raising the profile of young people inspires the whole church

## 6. Challenges and Resistance

While overt resistance has been minimal, several challenges and potential tensions are surfacing. These include volunteer fatigue, generational expectations, and the evolving spiritual needs of young people. Some concerns are anticipated rather than current – like resistance to changes in worship style or feeling of being overlooked by older members. What these challenges reveal is a need for balance: between innovation and inclusion, energy and sustainability, faith exploration and relational safety. A clear, inclusive communication strategy will be crucial to keep the whole congregation engaged and unified.

**What does this reveal about us?**

- Change, even welcome change, requires intention and care.
- Youth engagement is more about presence and relationship rather than quick results.
- The future depends on shared ownership and clear communication
- Respect, patience, and flexibility are crucial to growing young well.

**Our key challenges and resistance:**

- Volunteer fatigue and sustainability
- Hesitation around spiritual conversations with youth
- Anticipated resistance to worship changes
- The need for clear, inclusive communication
- Patience with youth engagement and respecting young people’s pace and voice

## 7. Engagement with the Growing Young Core Commitments

The congregation has most strongly engaged with warm community, prioritising young people, and keychain leadership. These are areas where both intention and visible outcomes are emerging. There is a growing sense of ownership, participation, and intergenerational connection.

The areas least strongly engaged – or that remain aspirational – including being the best neighbors, taking Jesus’ message seriously, and empathizing with youth people. These require deeper reflection, clearer strategies, and external support to navigate effectively – especially in emerging with young people around spiritual matters and wider community impact.

The Congregation is already living out several of the growing young values. The areas needing attention aren’t due to lack of willingness, but a need for practical tools, guidance,

and sensitive engagement. Deep listening to young people, paired with courageous experimentation, will help bring the remaining commitments to life.

**Our strongest areas:**

- Warm community
- Prioritising youth
- Keychain leadership

**Our growth edges:**

- Taking Jesus' message seriously
- Empathising with young people
- Being the best neighbours

## 8. Measurable and Noticeable Changes

Over the past season, the congregation has seen meaningful growth across participation, leadership, and community life. This includes more young families attending, new groups forming, young people stepping into visible roles, and a broader base of volunteers supporting ministry. There is a renewed flexibility in worship, openness to experimentation, and a strong sense of warmth, belonging, and shared purpose.

These changes reflect a congregation moving forward with purpose – becoming more open, connected, and responsive to the needs of its people and wider community.

**Our congregational-life growth:**

- Growth in families, youth, and participation
- Confidence among young leaders
- Formation and expansion of groups
- Flexible worship and broader inclusion
- Bite-sized volunteering and shared leadership
- Warmth, belonging, and community growth

## 9. Shifts in Ministry Practice and Culture

In the past few years, there has been a significant and collective shift in how our congregation approaches young people and ministry. The shift is from passive inclusion to active prioritisation; from hesitation to energy; from isolated effort to shared ownership. There's greater openness to change, intentional celebration of youth involvement, and an emerging theology and strategy that reflect our Australian and Uniting Church context. Individuals have also personally grown — through cultural learning, theological critique, and by witnessing a vision come to life.

GUC is a church that listens, adapts and includes. This shift is not just programmatic, but cultural, theological, and communal- rooted in a shared hope and realised through practical action.

**Our changes in practice and culture:**

- From sidelined to centre: youth at the heart
- From invisible to intentional
- Embracing children in worship
- From hesitancy to hope
- Learning from cultural context and adapting ministry
- Reflecting on theological and strategic growth

## 10. What's Taking Root and What Still Needs Nurturing

GUC is experiencing real and measurable cultural renewal. Young people are no longer a hopeful addition to the margins — they are being seen, heard, and included at the centre of congregational life. Structural steps, such as pursuing a Youth and Family Minister, are beginning to match this cultural change. Relationships are forming across generations, habits of welcome and inclusion are deepening, and energy is growing around youth presence and participation.

Yet, while inclusion and presence are strengthening, faith formation and spiritual development—especially around Jesus' message and faith conversations—need more time and intentional nurturing.

This season marks a move from intention to incarnation – GUC is not just talking about being a church for all ages: it's becoming one. The structural and cultural shifts are aligning, and while more theological and spiritual depth is needed, GUC is laying strong foundations for growth that is relational, sustainable and Spirit-led.

### Strengths and opportunities:

- Cultural shifts: intergenerational belonging, celebration of young people's presence
- Structural changes: strategic hiring, communication and evaluation practices
- Knowing names, making connections
- Warmth is becoming a culture not just a value
- Areas for further nurture: faith formation, discipleship across ages, social justice and relevance

## 11. Key Priorities for the Next 6–12 Months

The next phase for GUC is about deepening what's already begun: shifting from inclusion to integration, from program to relationship, and from short-term momentum to sustainable ministry. Priorities include building cross-generational relationships, clarifying the message of Jesus in relevant ways, resourcing ministry with staff and volunteers, and co-designing ministry with young people — not just for them.

### Key priorities:

- Fully integrate young people into whole-of-church life
- Strengthen intergenerational relationships
- Engage young people in co-design
- Clarify and embody Jesus' message
- Recruit and support Ministry Leadership
- Develop Programs for Gaps (Preschool, Year 11- 12, 18–22) - collaborate with other UC's where possible.
- Encourage social justice involvement

## 12. Support Needed to Continue the Work

To continue the momentum of Growing Young, GUC needs a mix of expertise, collaboration, coordination, and intentional faith formation support. This is not a solo journey — it requires strategic partnerships across the Presbytery, skilled leadership support, and internal structures that promote communication and shared ownership across all groups. Moving from good beginnings to sustainable transformation will involve both professional mentoring and practical, context-sensitive program development.

What's needed now is skilled guidance, shared leadership and strategic collaboration — supported by structures for learning, evaluating and growing together.

**What support is required?**

- Skilled leadership and mentoring (training and then implementation)
- Presbytery and Pulse collaboration
- Internal integration and shared learning
- Ongoing evaluation and customisation (adaptive planning)
- Resources for new program development

### **13. Who Needs to Be Involved in the Next Chapter**

To truly grow young as a whole church, GUC needs full intergenerational representation and intentional inclusion. While leadership and ministry teams have done significant groundwork, the next chapter requires drawing in those who haven't yet had a voice — especially young people, older members, and the wider congregation. If this journey is to continue with integrity and impact, it must become a shared journey, not just a strategic one.

This next chapter calls for a wider table — one where every age, experience, and voice is honoured, especially:

- Young people — not just involved, but co-leading.
- Elders — not just remembered, but listened to.
- The whole congregation — not just informed, but invited.

**Who needs to be involved?**

- The whole congregation
- Young people and families
- Older members as story-keepers and mentors
- Wider church partners

### **14. God's Invitation to GUC**

God's invitation to GUC is not into busyness, but into courage, depth, and connection. Through this Growing Young journey, the Spirit seems to be calling your congregation to grow in courage, compassion, and collaboration — not just for the sake of church growth, but for the sake of community transformation and deeper intergenerational faith. God's invitation is both inward — to form a more Christ-centred, listening church — and outward — to serve creatively, share generously, and welcome boldly.

God is not only inviting GUC to grow young, but to grow deep, wide, and whole — a church of courage, connection and Christ shaped community.

**We are called:**

- To be courageous — to listen and change
- To collaborate and share
- To serve the wider community with creativity, collaboration and service
- To grow through relationship

## 15. Prayer and Spiritual Practice Going Forward

Prayer can be one of the most powerful tools in your church's journey of growing young — not just a quiet support in the background, but a shared spiritual practice that involves the whole congregation. God is inviting GUC to pray with greater intentionality, inclusiveness, and alignment with mission. This means praying not only for young people, but with them — building a spiritual culture where they are supported, uplifted, and spiritually included as core members of the Body of Christ.

To pray more intentionally is to declare, together: “Young people matter — not just in strategy, but in spirit.”

Let prayer become both a foundation and a flame — grounding our mission and igniting compassion, courage, and connection.

### **We will:**

- Establish a prayer group for young people and family ministries.
- Extend prayer invitations to the whole church:
- Involve young people in prayer and worship
- Ground prayer in real stories and outcomes
- Pray for wisdom, belonging, and growth