

Southern Synod Youth Exec

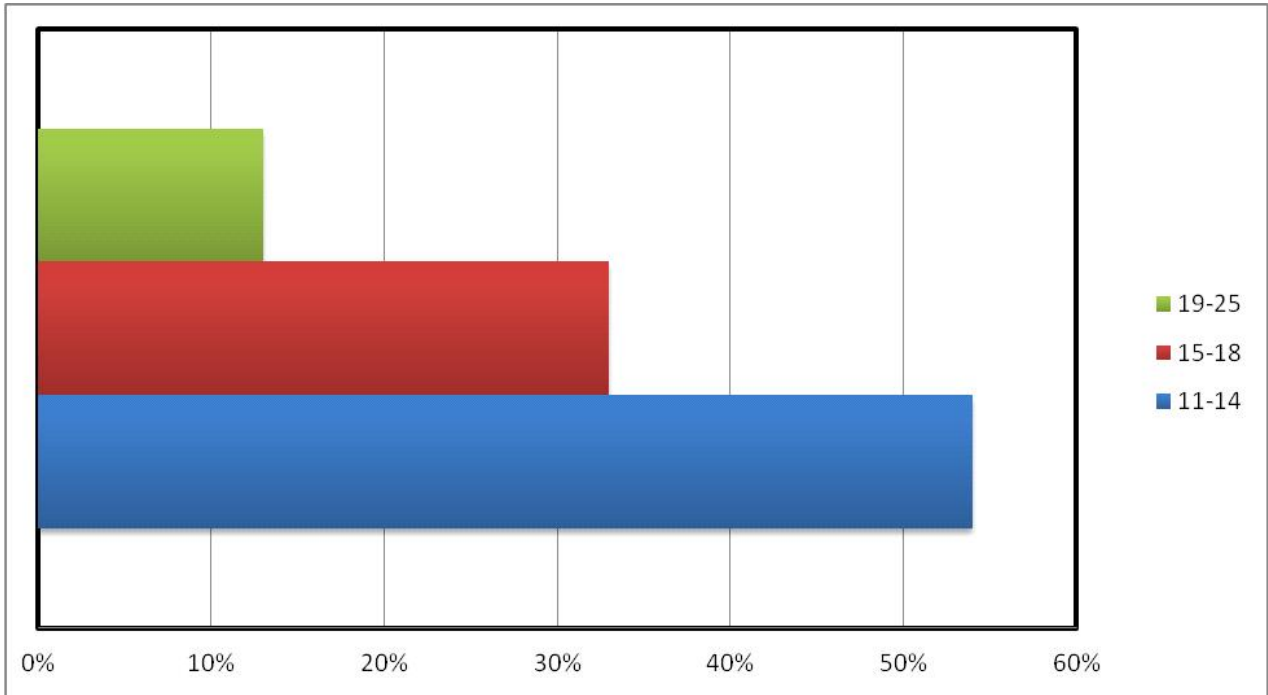
present



Here the results of an online survey about young people's experience of church life and worship are presented, key messages highlighted and practical ideas suggested by young people shared.

This project was supported by Southern Synod Children & Youth Work Committee

Who was involved in the survey?

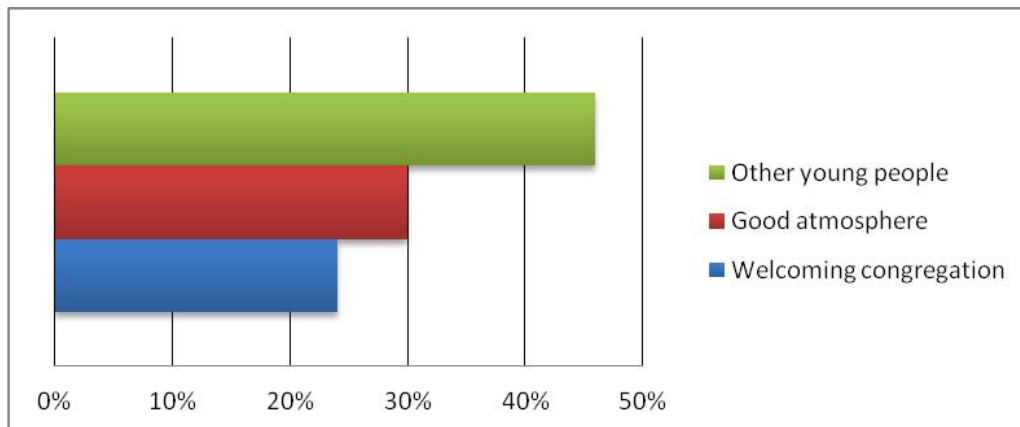


Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
11-14	26	54%
15-18	16	33%
19-25	6	13%

According to the 2013 annual church returns, there almost 500 young people aged 13-18 years worshipping with churches in Southern Synod. (There are no separate figures for 19-25 year olds worshipping.) So, the survey was completed by around 10% of young people in the Synod.

However, the number of people answering from each age group reflects the age profile of young people in the URC as a whole; with many more in the 11-18 age bracket than those in the 19-25 age brackets (see graph above). The responses came from a variety of churches spanning all Synod Areas / United Areas within Southern Synod, including suburban and inner London, as well as churches in towns and rural areas.

What makes young people feel most welcome in a church?



Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
Welcoming congregation	17	24%
Good atmosphere	21	30%
Other young people	32	46%

Many young people clearly feel more welcome when other young people are already present. For some churches this is a 'catch 22' situation; however it should be noted that this response came mainly from the 11-14 age bracket. For the older age groups, more emphasis was put on a good atmosphere within church, and having a welcoming congregation. Some 15-25's emphasised that they were 'not fussed' about there being a specific youth group for them on a Sunday morning and were happy to attend the services.

KEY MESSAGE: *Existing youth groups are certainly helpful in making young people feel welcome within the church, but more important is for congregations to be welcoming to all ages, including young people. A good, friendly atmosphere within the church is vital in achieving this.*

PRACTICAL IDEAS:

- Have people allocated from your church, who can be on hand to welcome young people and make themselves available to them for any questions they may have.
- Try a different seating arrangement in church to encourage conversation in small groups as part of the service
- Start with refreshments sometimes, creating a more relaxed environment to walk into . Offer something other than the usual tea/coffee and biscuits.
- Link up older church members with a particular young person or group of young people to welcome, encourage and pray for on a regular basis.

Young People's Top 10 Bible Passages:

Christmas

Noah's Ark

Feeding the 5000

Creation

Easter

The Road to Damascus

Jonah and the Whale

Wedding at Cana

Daniel and the Lion's Den

The Good Samaritan

There seems to be a general mix of Old Testament and New Testament stories in the top 10. In addition, apart from the Good Samaritan, the rest were actual events. Most of these are classic children's stories from the Bible.

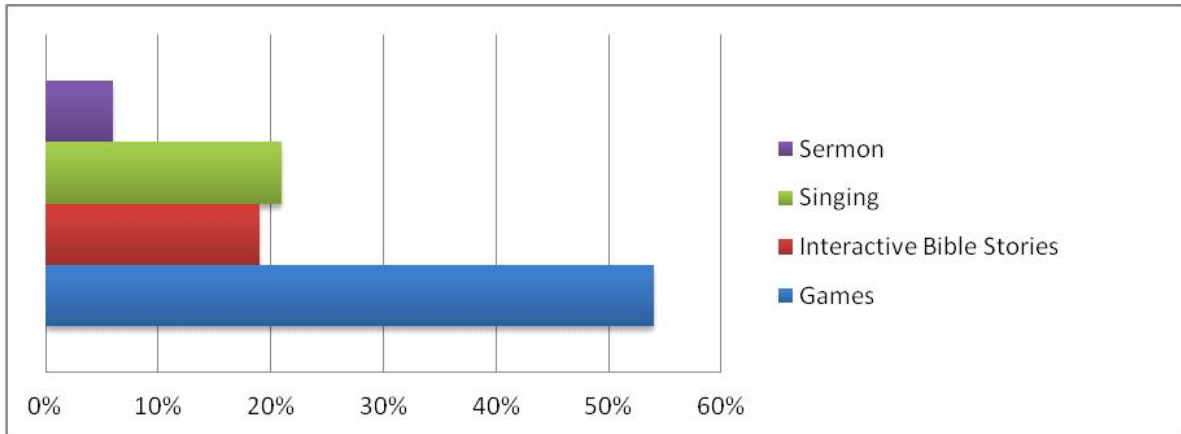
The only notable surprises were that the Easter and Creation stories were not higher up the ranking, although it should be noted that the questionnaires were completed on the run up to Christmas, which may have some bearing on the results.

KEY MESSAGE: This is a useful reminder of the importance of teaching the bible well to children as well as to older young people.

PRACTICAL IDEAS:

- Use a variety of translations including the Youth Bible, The Message, The Graphic Bible etc.
- Use the 4 main Godly Play 'wondering' questions to reflect on a passage in the Bible:
 - I wonder what you enjoyed most about that passage / story?
 - I wonder what was the most important part of that passage / story?
 - I wonder where you see yourself in that passage / story?
 - I wonder if anything could be left out without losing the meaning passage / story?
- Read a bible passage, discuss what really matters and put the key message into a "tweet" (120 characters).

What is the most enjoyable type of activity in a service?



Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
Games	34	54%
Interactive Bible Stories	12	19%
Singing	13	21%
Sermon	4	6%

Games remain a favourite for young people, as it stimulates them (as opposed to sitting and listening to sermons). All options, apart from sermons, remain popular with some young people. The key ingredient seems to be activity or interaction.

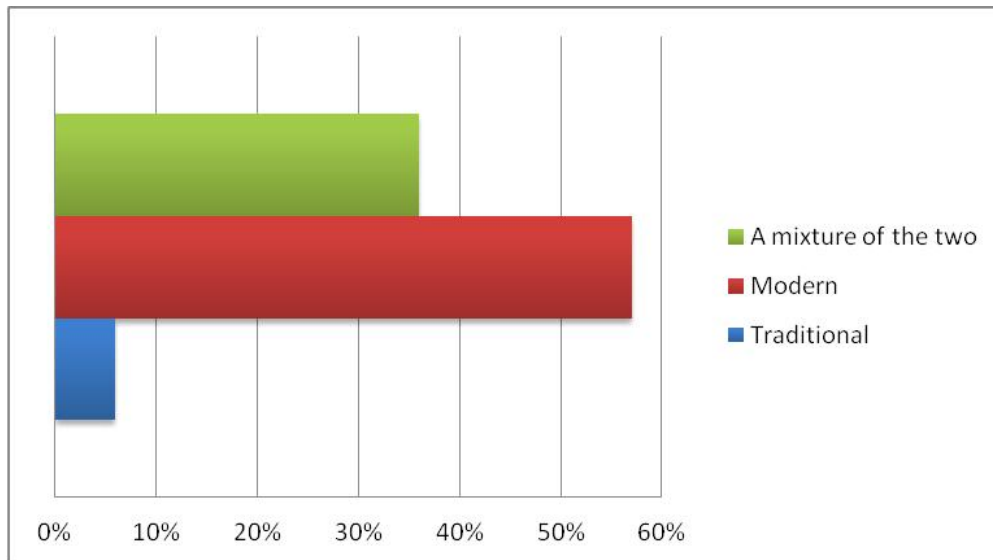
A more even distribution between games, interactive Bible stories and singing might have been expected because of the inclusion of older young people. It is interesting to note that the 4 young people who said that the sermon was the most enjoyable part of the service came from across the age range surveyed. One comment should not be forgotten... *"I enjoy a good sermon, but it has to be good!"*

KEY MESSAGE: Interaction and activity within service is appealing to more young people than simply sitting and listening.

PRACTICAL IDEAS:

- Use quizzes (e.g. based on TV game shows)
- Do responsive bible readings e.g. Actions associated with words, or phrases which are repeated in the story e.g. Assign characters from the bible story to different people who stand up and shout 'That's me!' whenever they are mentioned.
- Give out envelopes to people as they arrive, each of which includes some words to introduce part of the service or a role to play within an impromptu drama sketch.
- Questions for small groups to discuss part way through or at the end of the sermon.

Do you prefer traditional or modern style church services?



Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
Traditional	3	6%
Modern	27	57%
A mixture of the two	17	36%

It is clear that the majority of these young people prefer a more modern style of church service, with a substantial number preferring a mix of the two. Very few young people seem to prefer the more traditional church service alone. It might seem surprising that a good number like a combination of traditional and modern services.

KEY MESSAGE: A majority of young people preferred a more modern style of church service, though a mix of the new and the traditional is still appreciated by a significant minority, so don't 'throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

PRACTICAL IDEAS:

- Choose songs and hymns from a wide range of sources, including more modern songs from churches such as Soul Survivor and Hillsong which are popular with young people.
- Use video clips from contemporary films to introduce a theme or illustrate a point.
- Try setting up a church band involving young people. These are a great way of livening up and modernising some more traditional hymns, as well as introducing new ones, to give a great balance of the two.
- Ask a group of young people to plan and lead a service. This gets them involved and allows them more freedom to choose and introduce more modern elements to the church.

Young People's Top 10 Hymns / Songs:

**Shine Jesus Shine
I'm a friend of God
Our God is a Great Big God
Mighty to Save
Blessed be your Name
I the Lord of sea and sky
Jesus put this song into our hearts
Go tell it on the mountain
Great, Great, Brill, Brill
The Servant King**

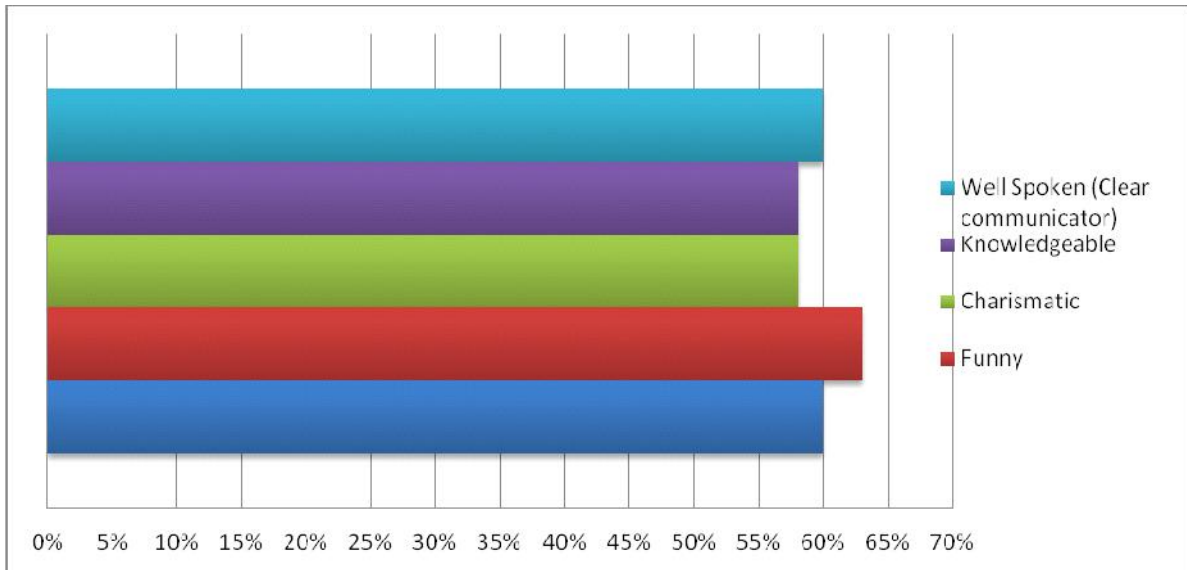
Most of the songs listed are lively and upbeat, all using contemporary language rather than thee's and thou's. Most of them are fairly modern. However, young people's choice of favourite song or hymn will be limited by the range of songs and hymns they have been exposed to. Sources of new songs mentioned by young people in the survey were Soul Survivor and Hillsong.

KEY MESSAGE: Young people generally prefer the more modern and lively songs though this does not imply that other songs are never meaningful to them.

PRACTICAL IDEAS:

- Give the young people in your church a chance to suggest any song/hymn that they like and compile a list of these. Perhaps a song/hymn could be chosen from the list every week and introduced to the congregation by the young people, if new.
- If you have a church band, allow them to choose some of the songs/hymns. This introduces a greater range of songs, and can bring traditional songs in a new, more modern style.
- If you don't have a band, try using CD backing tracks to accompany new songs. However bear in mind that some CDs can be difficult to sing along to, so choose carefully what you use as your backing track.

What is the most important quality in a worship leader?

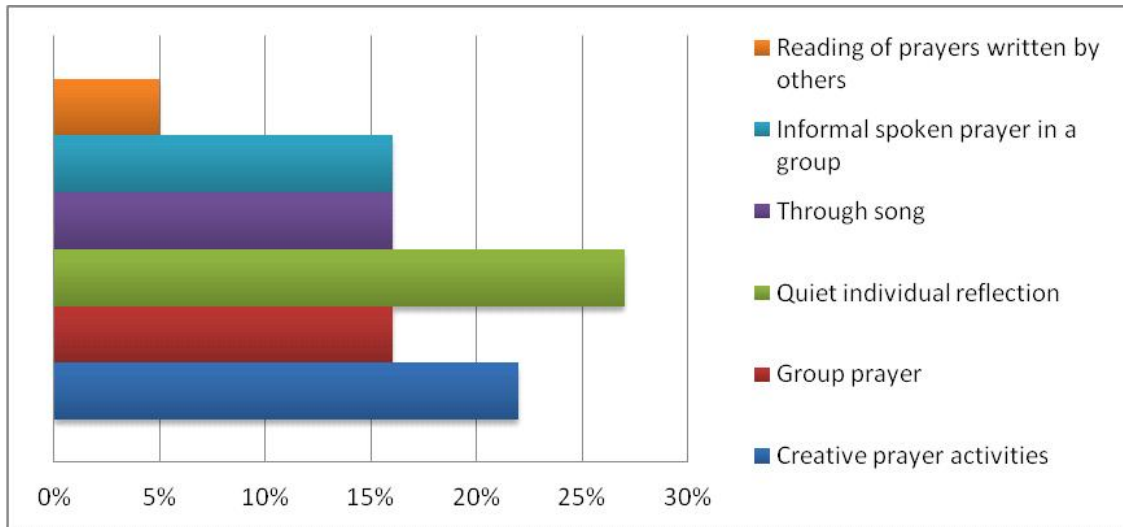


Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
Interesting	29	60%
Funny	30	63%
Charismatic	28	58%
Knowledgeable	28	58%
Well Spoken (Clear communicator)	29	60%

There was no single quality that young people valued much more than any others. It is clear that each of these qualities needs to be apparent when leading a service. It should be noted that amongst the comments is that a church leader must be challenging and that this young person feels that there is no point in going if there is no impact. It should also be noted the in the accompanying video, reference is made that when passion shines through during the leading of a service, then young people are more likely to switch on and engage !

KEY MESSAGE: It is passion and humour (as well as content and interaction) that communicates most to many young people.

What is your favourite way to pray?



Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
Creative prayer activities	18	22%
Group prayer	13	16%
Quiet individual reflection	22	27%
Through song	13	16%
Informal spoken prayer in a group	13	16%
Reading of prayers written by others	4	5%

In the young people's opinion, the most commonly preferred ways to pray are quiet, individual reflection and creative prayer activities. Prayer through song, informal spoken prayer and group prayer all attained the same popularity percentage. Prayers written by others were unpopular, with only 5% of people liking it.

The fact that quiet, individual reflection is favoured by more than a quarter of those surveyed could be considered a surprise, as it goes to show that not all young people want 'loud and lively' worship all of the time.

KEY MESSAGE:

A significant number of young people value times of quiet reflection particularly within the context of a more active and interactive service.

PRACTICAL IDEAS:

- Sometimes include a choice of creative prayer activities around the church in the place of spoken prayers of intercessions (see resource books in list of further reading)
- Explore contemplative prayer activities with young people (see 'Tune in Chill Out' and 'Contemplative Youth Ministry' in the list of further reading)

FURTHER READING

General

Sylvie Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo and Sally Nash, *The Faith of Generation Y*, (Church House Publishing, 2010)

Sara Savage, Sylvie Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo with Graham Cray. *Making Sense of Generation Y*, (Church House Publishing, 2011)

Welcome and Belonging

Danny Brierley. *Growing Community: Making Groups Work with Young People* (Authentic, 2003)

Exploring the Bible with children & young people

Terry Clutterham, *The Adventure Begins* (Scripture Union, 1996)

Worship and music

Sue Wallace, *Multi-sensory Worship*, (Scripture Union, 2009)

Hillsong - visit <https://hillsong.com/en>

Soul Survivor - visit <http://soulsurvivor.com>

Taize worship - visit http://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique12.html

Prayer

Judith Merrell, *Ultimate Creative Prayer* (Scripture Union, 2008)

Sue Wallace, *Multi-sensory Prayer*, (Scripture Union, 2004)

Jenny Baker and Moya Ratnayake, *Tune in Chill out* (Christian Education, 2004)

Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (SPCK, 2006)