



The Open Generation

A Global Teens Study

Ireland

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A Preface from the Partners

Listening is a posture that is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition and originally modelled for us by Jesus himself. When we dig deep into the communication style of Jesus in the gospels, we find that he listened more than he talked. Jesus was interested to know what people thought and how they felt. He listened to people who agreed with him, and people who didn't. He listened to people who seemed to have things together, and to people whose lives were in pieces.

In your work with teenagers and young people today, how are you following Jesus' lead?

In 2021, Alpha, Biblica and World Vision came alongside Barna Group—as well as a collective of other organisational partners including the Association of Christian Schools International, Bible Study Fellowship, Christ In Youth and Christian Vision—to *listen* to the perspectives of young people in the emerging generation. Our desire is to help local churches, schools and youth ministries around the world love and lead young people well. Specifically, in a digital, questioning, experiential age, we want to hear how teens perceive Jesus, the Bible and social action.

This global research on teenagers shows that, overall, this generation is open and inclusive, seeking truth, authenticity and change. Interconnected and optimistic, today's teens represent and welcome different perspectives, different faiths and different cultures. They are deeply passionate about addressing injustice in our world. Given all of this,

there is a current of curiosity about both Jesus and the Bible, and how they connect to the purpose and pain of everyday people.

What does this mean for the Church, youth groups and Christian leaders?

What does this mean for *your* work?

As you know well, there are local nuances to the contexts, cultures, opportunities and obstacles that surround today's teens. Our organisations work all over the world, and we are grateful that this research is able to reach into 26 countries. This allows the voice of the open generation to be heard on a national level. We hope reports like this one, focused on the findings specific to Ireland, produce personal and practical next steps for you and your ministry.

Together, we have contributed to this study in order to serve teens and love them well. We hope *The Open Generation* equips and empowers Christian leaders to better understand teens and to facilitate deeper connections with young people. The study supports leaders across the world who want to create something not just *for* teenagers but *with* teenagers: to come alongside this generation, collaborate with them, guide and learn from them.



Meet the Open Generation

An Introduction to Barna's Global Study of Teenagers

Thanks to two major global studies in recent years, Barna Group has a compelling impression of the trajectory of young people today. We'll open this report about *The Open Generation* in Ireland with a quick overview.

In 2018 and 2019, in partnership with World Vision, we worked on a study of young adults (ages 18 to 35) in 25 countries. At the time, it was Barna's largest study and a unique international effort to understand emerging adults. It revealed that young adults in this age range (which our U.S. research typically refers to as Millennials and the leading edge of Gen Z) contend with strong currents of anxiety, loneliness and skepticism. We highlighted areas of need and opportunities for churches to better lead and support young adults.

Fast-forward to 2021 and 2022. Amid a pandemic and with the partnership of a collective of organisations including Alpha, Biblica and World Vision (as well as the support of partners at the Association of Christian Schools International, Bible Study Fellowship, Christ In Youth and Christian Vision), we have broadened the scope of our research again, this time to 25,000+ interviews, 26 countries and a slightly younger cohort: teenagers ages 13 to 17. This report presents a

summary of the findings specific to Ireland. The goal is to advance the understanding of teens globally—their identity, values and views—and to offer a picture of the global Church's relationship to a rising generation.

Along the way, we have ended up observing some remarkable differences between teenagers today and the young adults we heard from just a few years ago. Chief among these differences is teens' openness. As we have explored the profile that emerges from the aggregated data, we have used words like 'optimistic', 'engaged', 'malleable', 'curious', 'authentic', 'inclusive' and 'collaborative'. From a global vantage point, there is a lightness of being among today's teens that is less common among young adults even just a few years ahead of them. This is just one reason we're referring to them as 'the open generation'.

Granted, no matter what context a teen lives in, they are still in early stages of the development of their ideas and character. Their appealing openness is, on some level, a reflection of youth. But that fact does not diminish the reality of their overall optimism, and these qualities emerge despite this study having been conducted during a time when teens were living through a global pandemic.

What might come of their hope, their desire to make a difference and their leaning into goodness?

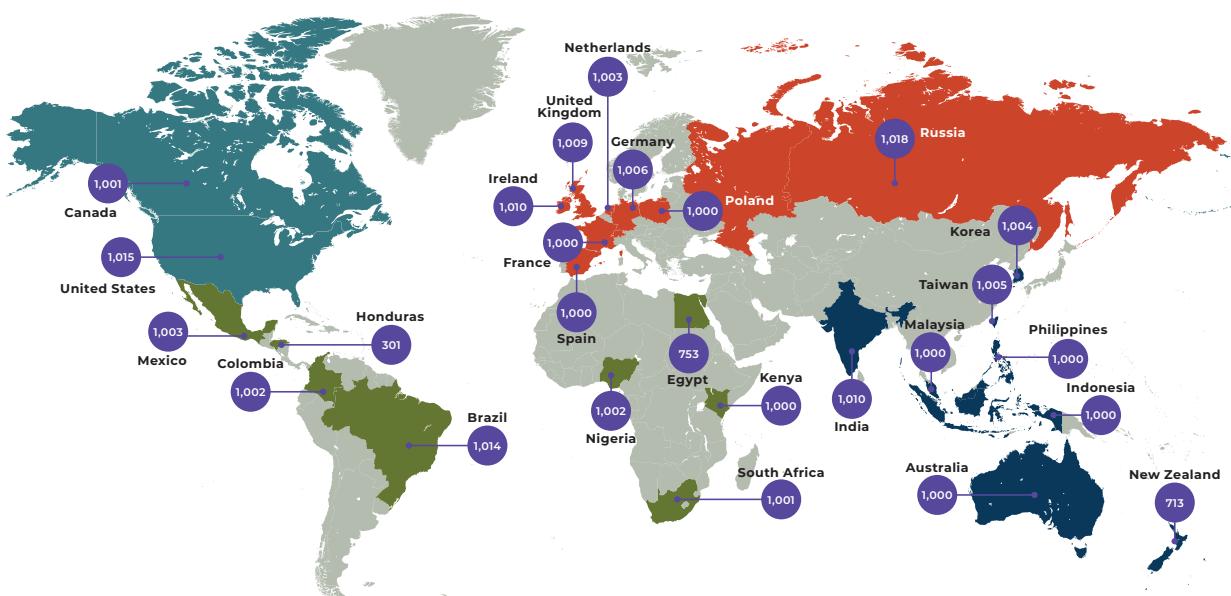
Will certain milestones, influences or experiences soon dampen their enthusiasm—presenting some of the challenges that face their not-so-much older peers?

This research offers an emotional portrait of a connected, digitally enabled generation—especially as it relates to the sacred text, central character and expression of the Christian faith. We see that teens are open to Jesus, the Bible

and **justice**. Further, their commitments to these three things are interwoven and increase together. Regardless of how ‘churched’ a nation or region may be, there is much to learn from these key elements of the Christian faith.

In more ways than one, teenagers are on the cusp. *The Open Generation* project urges that Christians around the world come alongside teenagers to help them make the most of these formative years.

This report represents a summary of the findings specific to Ireland



Sample sizes for each country included in the study.

Teens in Ireland: A Local Snapshot

Many young people now have the shared experience of a fast-paced, more-connected-than-ever, always-changing world. Despite these common threads, teens around the world also face issues that are unique to their place and position in the world.

Though *The Open Generation* does not offer a comprehensive view of teenage life in any one country—including Ireland—it points to local forces and cultural climates that influence how teens identify and interact.

Faith

As Barna Group is experienced in studying the intersection of faith and culture, and as this project aims to help leaders and educators understand the faith of teens in their context, we'll often look at the data through the lens of affiliation or practice.

During the 2016 Census, 78 percent of the country reported being Catholic, with another 5 percent of the country reporting a different Christian affiliation.¹ According to Barna's data, around three in five Irish teens (62%) are Christian. A third of teens (32%), however, are atheist, agnostic or of no faith.

Faith Profile of Teens in Ireland

● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

And, as you will see in the following pages, most Christian teens in Ireland are only culturally or nominally engaged in their faith.

Emotions

In matters of emotional health and security, teens in Ireland stand out against their global peers, in both positive and negative respects. They are more likely to report feeling deeply cared for by those around them and to have someone who believes in them. At the same time, teens in Ireland are less likely to express security in their identity or to feel optimistic, confident or satisfied with their life choices. Their emotional profile is generally more doubtful than that of their global peers.

Community

On matters of their relationship to their communities, Ireland's young people are slightly less likely than global teens to report community satisfaction. They could use a boost when it comes to feeling they have positive influence in their community. Teens in Ireland also don't seem to be as embedded in or comfortable with their communities, and they are less certain that their values are shared. They may be looking for deeper connections and greater confidence to know their presence and influence matters.

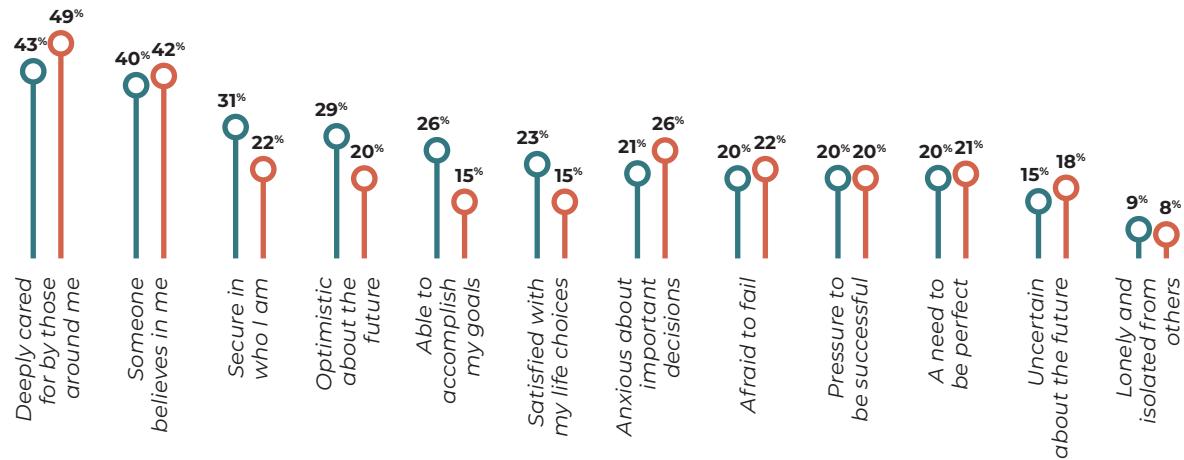
1. United States Office of International Religious Freedom, '2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ireland,' 12 May 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ireland/>

The Emotional Climate of Teens in Ireland

How often do you feel each of the following?

% 'always'

● Global ● Ireland



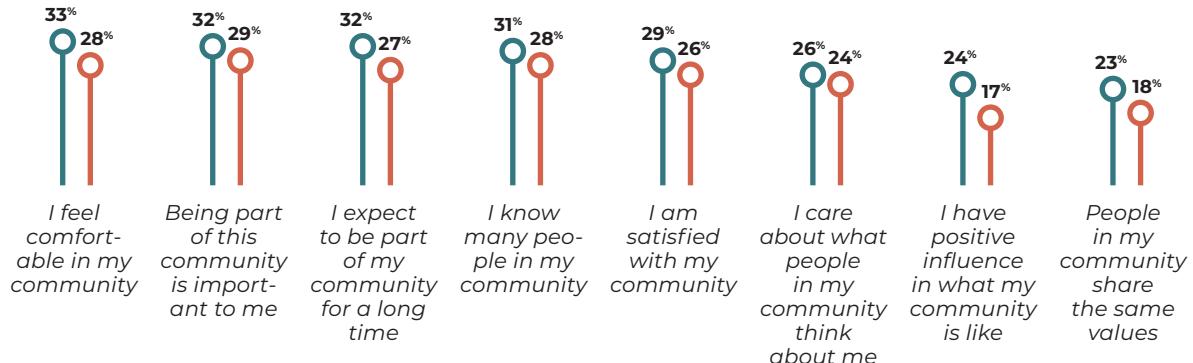
n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Community Among Teens in Ireland

Thinking about your community, how true are the following statements?

Base: teens who are part of a community; % 'very true'

● Global ● Ireland



n=994 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; n=24,449 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

1. How Teens in Ireland Relate to Jesus

‘Who Do Teens Say That I Am?’

Beliefs about Jesus vary among teens, on a global scale and at the national level.

Globally, teens believe Christ represents love, hope, care, generosity and trustworthiness. Teens in Ireland tend to align with these views and describe him in agreeable and comforting terms. Interestingly, Ireland’s teens aren’t as emphatic about Jesus’ trustworthiness, with Irish Christian teens (37%) falling 18 points behind Christian teens globally (55%) in saying he is trustworthy. Irish Christian teens also don’t associate Jesus with generosity and hope as often as their global Christian peers do.

Additionally, Christian teens in Ireland are less likely than Christian teens worldwide to believe in Jesus’ future return. They are also less inclined to say Jesus was raised from the dead, wants to have a personal relationship with people, or can be communicated with. This hints at a ‘partial gospel’ that is commonplace among teens, even Christian ones, globally.

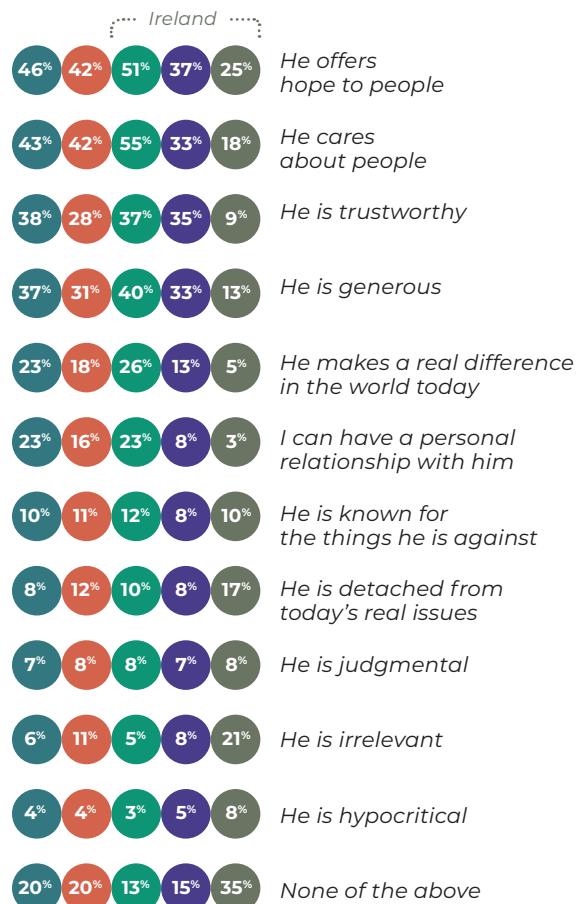
Negative ideas about Jesus are rare, and he emerges as a positive figure, even among teens of other faiths in Ireland. In fact, more than half of these teens (53%) describe Jesus as a divine prophet.

However, Irish teens of no faith tend to select ‘none of the above’ when asked what they believe about Jesus, pointing to an indifference or

Which of the following do you, personally, believe about Jesus?

Select all that apply.

- Global ● Ireland ● Christian
- Other faith ● No faith



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

uncertainty towards him. Jesus is a 'mythical or fictional character' to about one in four of these teens (25%). Twenty-one percent of Irish teens of no faith

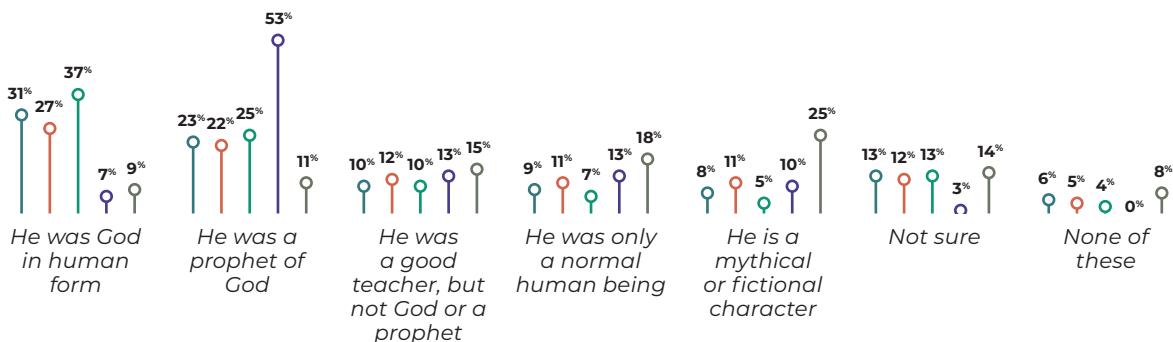
go so far as to call Jesus irrelevant. Whatever religious teens think of Jesus, teens of no faith likely are not thinking about him at all.

Which of the following best describes your understanding of who Jesus Christ is?

Select one.

● Global ● Ireland ● Christian ● Other faith ● No faith

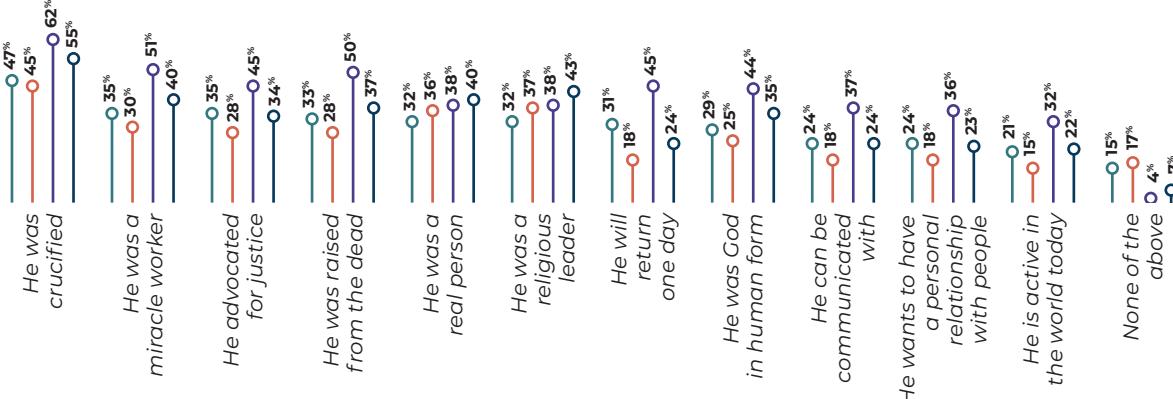
..... Ireland



Thinking about Jesus Christ, which of the following are true?

Select the statements you believe are true.

● Global ● Ireland ● Global Christians ● Irish Christians



Knowing & Growing with Jesus

Having looked at teens' perceptions of Jesus, we'll now focus on their connections to him.

When teens identify as Christian, that doesn't mean they have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus. Barna has long made the distinction between nominal Christians and practising Christians in its research, which is especially important in areas that may be culturally Christian. We can also assume that some teens are young enough that they identify with the religion of their community or upbringing without having yet made deeply personal decisions around that faith.

To sharpen our analysis of Christianity among teens, Barna developed a segmentation based on a personal commitment to follow Jesus.

Commitment to Jesus

- Committed Christians ● Nominal Christians
- All others

Global



Ireland



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

- **COMMITTED CHRISTIAN** teens self-identify as Christian and say they have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ
- **NOMINAL CHRISTIAN** teens self-identify as Christian but have not made a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ
- **ALL OTHER** teens do not identify as Christian and / or are unsure about who Jesus is

By this definition, just over one in five teens (22%) worldwide is a committed Christian. In Ireland, this number falls to 14 percent. Almost one half are nominally Christian (48%). The remaining 38 percent of Irish teens do not identify as Christian or are unsure about who Jesus is.

Committed Christian teens are a minority who often have meaningful experiences of faith. In Ireland, however, the reported benefits of this rare relationship with Jesus are not quite as pronounced.

Globally, three-quarters of committed Christian teens strongly agree that their connection to Jesus brings them joy and satisfaction. In Ireland, this same group of teens don't experience this joy as often. There is a 20-point drop in the percentage of committed Christian teens who agree strongly. Nominal Christian teens in Ireland are also less likely than nominal Christian teens globally to say the relationship they have with Jesus is satisfying.

This disparity emerges again among the committed Christian teens who find relevance in what Jesus has to say, with a 15-point gap between global and Irish teens who strongly agree. Once again, nominal Christian teens in Ireland are less likely

than their global counterparts to agree that Jesus speaks to them in a way that is relevant to their life.

Globally and within the borders of Ireland, nominal Christian teens are more likely than their committed peers to say they aren't sure whether Jesus offers them joy or relevant wisdom.

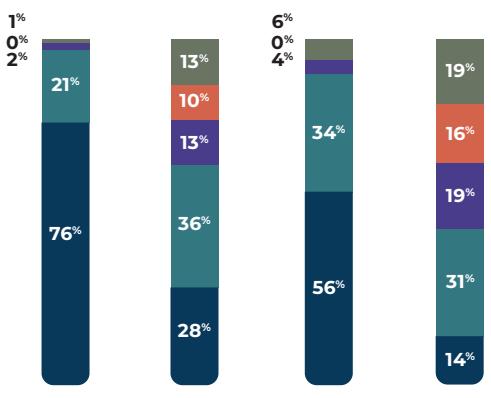
A number of discipleship opportunities present themselves in this data. Irish teens of varying levels of commitment to Jesus may be lacking instruction on how to follow Jesus or find meaning in the words of Christ and in scripture.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Base: Christians

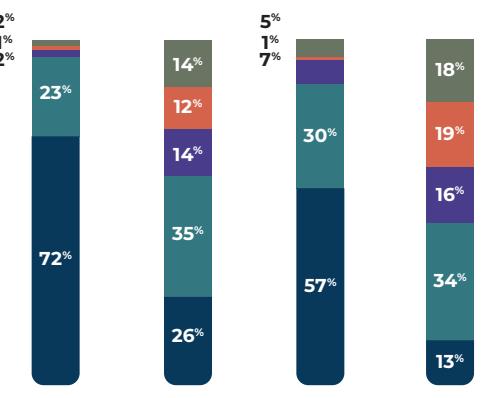
'My relationship with Jesus brings me deep joy and satisfaction'

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly ● Not sure



'Jesus speaks to me in a way that is relevant to my life'

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly ● Not sure



A Learning Journey with Jesus

Curiosity about Jesus is widespread in the open generation. Teens in Ireland, however, are less intrigued than their global peers, with 47 percent being at least somewhat motivated to keep learning about Jesus throughout their lives.

Teens' personal commitment to follow Jesus aligns with a motivation to study him. Globally, 85 percent of committed Christian teens are very motivated to continue learning about Jesus, compared to about one-third of nominal Christian teens. In Ireland, a similar gap persists between committed and nominal Christian teens, but the numbers drop overall (to 68% and 21%, respectively).

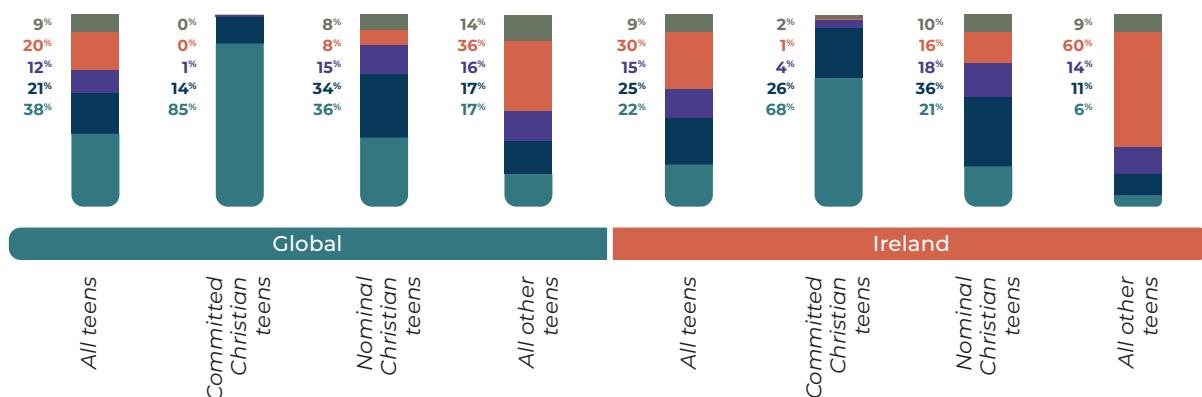
Regardless of their level of commitment to follow Jesus, Irish teens seem to place a significant amount of trust in the Bible, their households and clergy to learn about Jesus. Teens are more likely to

report looking to these sources than to the internet, social media or influencers.

Beyond the Bible, committed Christian teens in Ireland turn in high percentages to family, clergy or other church leaders and Christians with their curiosity about Jesus. Similarly, nominal Christian teens regard family, scripture, clergy, church leadership and other Christians as their top sources. Almost as frequently, however, both committed and nominal Christian teens are looking to themselves to learn about Jesus. It seems any member of a nominal Christian teen's community has a chance of speaking into their perspectives about Jesus. This suggests relational opportunities for discipleship to help Christian teens who might otherwise try to take on the task of discipleship as a solo endeavor.

Throughout the rest of your life, how motivated are you to continue learning more about Jesus Christ?

● Very motivated ● Somewhat motivated ● Somewhat unmotivated
 ● Not at all motivated ● Not sure



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Open-Ended: Takeaways & Questions to Help You Think Through the Research

Even Christian teens have some misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge of Jesus. *How can teens be encouraged that knowledge gaps are normal, especially early in life or faith? How can Christian teens be strengthened in their understanding of who Jesus is?*

RUTH GARVEY-WILLIAMS: It is vital for parents, youth leaders and older Christians to model an environment where Christian teens feel safe to voice their questions and explore matters of faith and life. In the same way that Jesus asked questions rather than gave answers, leaders can help to empower teens to dig deeper and challenge misconceptions without imposing definitive answers.

COLIN HYLANDS: Teens are going through a number of changes physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually and are moving from a faith often 'inherited or imitated' to one which is genuinely their own. Proper teaching can highlight that doubts are okay at this time, but it is also important to point those searching for answers to the correct responses.

Christian teens in Ireland are less likely than their global peers to say that their relationship with Jesus brings them deep joy and satisfaction and that it is relevant to their life. *How can teens in Ireland find a deeper joy in their relationship with Jesus?*

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: Our focus needs to be on supporting and encouraging Christian teens to encounter Jesus for themselves. ... Young people need to see that our faith has an application to all aspects of life. When Christians and churches engage actively in meeting the needs of their communities, young people can see faith in action. Discipleship happens when we invite Christian teens to journey with us.

Teens in Ireland are less intrigued than their global peers to keep learning about Jesus. *What would it take to encourage motivation among Irish teens to keep learning about Jesus throughout their life? Based on your experience, what do young people need to remain on a continual learning journey with Jesus throughout their lives?*

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: As with all aspects of discipleship, what is vital here is the place of role models—Christians who will demonstrate a living faith in Jesus and who are willing to journey alongside the young people, encouraging and supporting them to keep walking with Jesus. This is where we need to create safe spaces so when teens encounter challenges, struggles or suffering, they can find loving, non-judgemental care, practical help and prayerful support.



Ruth Garvey-Williams



Colin Hylands

Editor of VOX magazine

Youth Challenge Team
Leader at CEF Ireland

2. How Teens in Ireland View the Bible

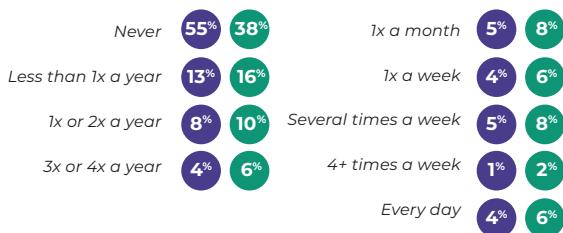
The Presence of the Bible

Overall, 51 percent of teens in Ireland—including 64 percent of Christian teens—say their household owns a Christian Bible. Though a majority of all teens in Ireland (55%) never use a Bible (which the survey defined as reading, listening, watching, praying with or using Bible text or content in any form), 22 percent of Christian teens interact with scripture at least weekly.

Teens in Ireland who are Bible users or Christians are most inclined to use the Bible by reading it in print (32%). Reading Bible content on the internet is the next most-common usage (25%), followed by hearing the Bible read in a church worship service (22%). In the past year, roughly one in seven Irish Christian teens used a Bible app or smartphone for Bible reading (16%), listened to an audio version of the Bible (15%) or searched for Bible content using a phone (14%).

Bible Use Among Teens in Ireland

● All teens ● Christian teens



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

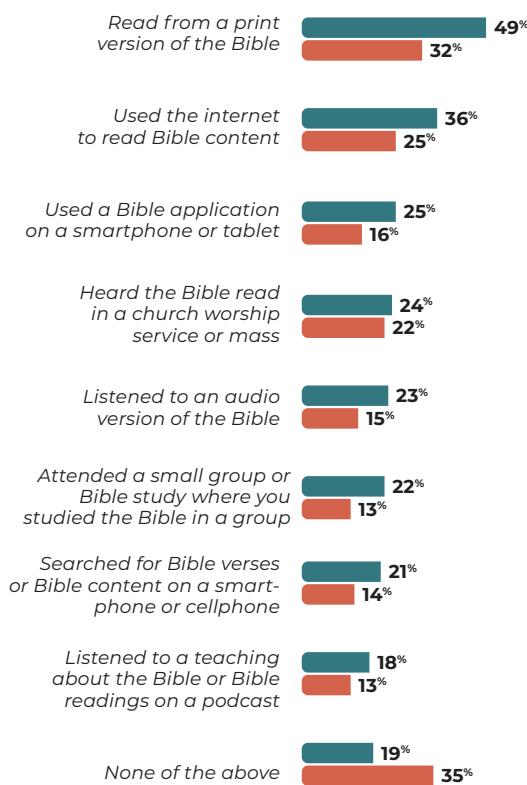
n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

These days, the Christian Bible is available and used in different formats. Have you used any of these versions in the past year?

Select all that apply.

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

● Global ● Ireland



n=766 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is seen as significant and sacred to the plurality of Irish teens. However, they are 9 percentage points less likely than teens worldwide to say the Bible is the word of God, revealing more skepticism than among teens globally. Similarly, Christian teens in Ireland are less likely than Christian teens worldwide to affirm this view of the Bible.

'The Christian Bible is ...'

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing what you believe about the Christian Bible?

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians



Like their global peers, Irish teens who use a Bible or are Christian are more open to symbolic interpretations of the text.

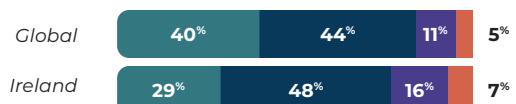
Irish teens are also more likely to be indecisive about what, exactly, the Bible is. Thirteen percent of Irish teens report not being sure what to believe about the Bible, a pattern of uncertainty that emerges in several other areas of this report and may reflect the openness that defines teens today.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

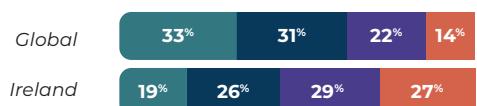
Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

- Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat
- Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly

'The Christian Bible should be understood symbolically, interpreting the text when needed'



'The Christian Bible should be understood literally, word for word'



Bible Engagement Among Teens

To better gauge the relationship today's teens have with the Bible, we categorised their thoughts and behaviors surrounding the Bible into three categories of engagement:

- **BIBLE-ENGAGED** teens hold a 'high' view of the Bible and read the Bible several times a week
 - * *A high view of the Bible refers to believing the Bible is 'the word of God', 'the inspired word of God with no errors' or 'the inspired word of God but with some errors'.*
- **BIBLE-OPEN** teens either (1) hold a high view of the Bible and read the Bible less often than Bible-engaged teens (but more than three or four times a year) or (2) have a neutral view towards the Bible, meaning they don't have a high or negative view of the Bible
- **BIBLE UNENGAGED**—All other teens

Across religious and demographic spectrums, teens are largely open to Christian scripture with three-fifths of teens globally and about half of teens in Ireland falling into this category of engagement. Whilst this openness could be celebrated for its curiosity or potential, the marginal percentage of Bible-engaged teens shouldn't be overlooked. The truth is that Bible-unengaged teens far outnumber Bible-engaged teens, globally and in Ireland.

Teens' Engagement with the Bible

- Bible engaged
- Bible open
- Bible unengaged

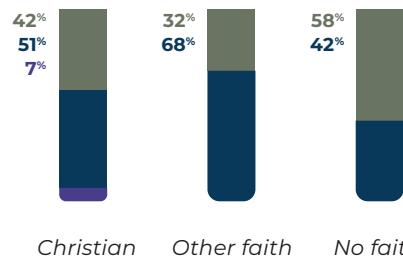
Global



Ireland



Teens' Bible Engagement Across Faith Groups in Ireland



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

How Teens Read the Bible

For the most part, teens' Bible reading is an individualised experience. Their habits especially vary across different faith segments.

Globally, about three in 10 teens who are Bible users or Christians report finding enjoyment in reading the Bible by themselves and reflecting on what they've read. In Ireland, this proportion falls to roughly one in five. In the same vein, there is a striking decrease in the percentage of teens in Ireland who report enjoying any of the other possible Bible-reading practices Barna asked about when compared to teens globally.

Two in five Bible users or Christians in Ireland—including a majority of Bible-unengaged teens—tend to not enjoy any of the Bible reading habits Barna presented in the survey. Though teens are usually reluctant to precisely name barriers to their Bible reading (the plurality selects 'none'), Bible users and Christians in Ireland sometimes point to a lack of understanding and focus as a challenge. Irish teens, however, seem to particularly struggle to care much about the Bible, sometimes far exceeding percentages of their global peers when it comes to lacking interest in reading the Bible.

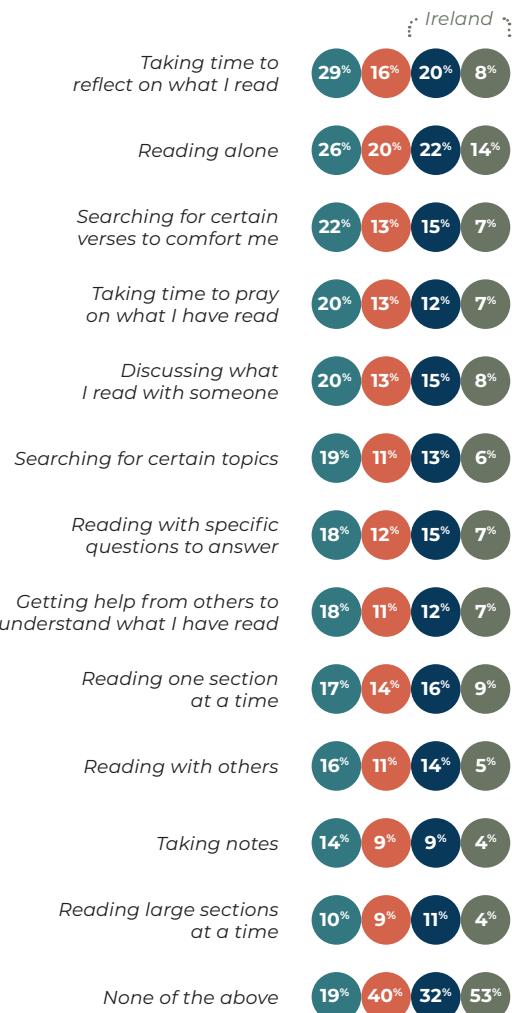
These findings illustrate a need for community and older adults to come alongside teens and coach them in the joy, relevance and practice of engaging the Bible—an endeavor that, as we'll see next, many teens in Ireland may be curious to undertake.

When you read the Bible, which of the following do you enjoy? Select all that apply.

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

● Global ● Ireland

● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=766 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Due to low sample size, Bible-engaged teens are not shown for comparison.

Mentoring Teens in Bible Engagement

When it comes to learning more about the Bible throughout their lives, almost two-thirds of Christian teens in Ireland report feeling very (30%) or somewhat motivated (30%) to do so. This sets them apart from their peers of other faith identities, though two in five Irish teens (41%) report some level of motivation to learn more about Christian scripture.

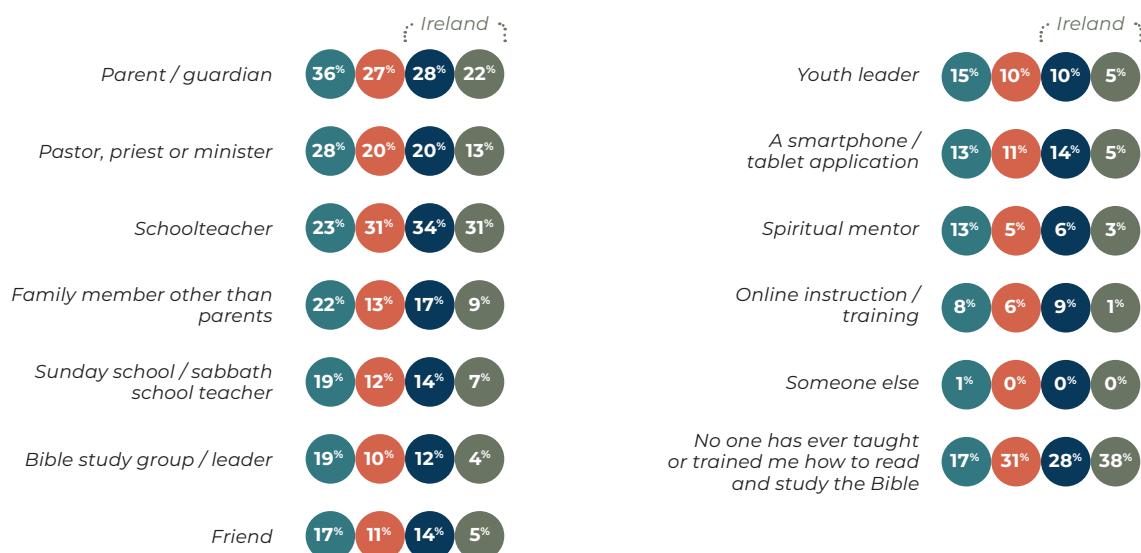
Where might this instruction come from? Unlike their global peers who name their parents or guardians as the top source of Bible instruction, Irish teens name schools as their leading source of Bible instruction. Thirty-one percent of Irish teens who are Bible users or Christians report having been taught to study the Bible by a school teacher. From all other sources, Irish youth are less likely than their global peers to report receiving any training or teaching.

Have any of the following ever taught or trained you how to read and study the Christian Bible?

Select all that apply.

Base: Bible users / owners or Christians

● Global ● Ireland ● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



n=766 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=18,118 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Due to low sample size, Bible-engaged teens are not shown for comparison.

Particularly of note, clergy doesn't have as much influence on teens' Bible instruction in Ireland, when compared to global numbers. Just one in five Irish teens who are Christian or use a Bible says they were taught by a pastor, priest or minister, 8 points behind global teens.

From another angle, Bible-open and Bible-unengaged teens in Ireland are prone to say 'no one' has taught them how to read the Bible—this is the top response for Bible-unengaged Irish teens at

38 percent. This dramatically underscores the need for relationships in nurturing Bible reading.

Globally and in Ireland, the sources of Bible mentorship are similar, but Irish teens are not connecting as frequently with these sources and the outcomes vary. Christian teens in Ireland are half as likely as their Christian peers around the world to say that in their church they regularly receive wisdom for how the Bible applies to their lives (21% and 42%, respectively).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

'In my church I regularly receive wisdom for how the Bible applies to my life'

Base: Christians

● Agree strongly ● Agree somewhat ● Disagree somewhat ● Disagree strongly ● Not sure

Global



Ireland



n=630 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=13,282 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Open-Ended: Takeaways & Questions to Help You Think Through the Research

Data shows community is essential to vibrant, ongoing Bible engagement, yet many Irish teens prefer to read the Bible alone. *How can teens be nudged toward a balance of personal reflection and community participation in their approach to scripture?*

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: Too often we have created a model of church where the Bible is read and sermons or homilies are 'lecture-style', often by the same person (clergyperson) or people who are seen as the 'experts'. Providing spaces where we can explore and discuss the Bible together, becoming more confident in reading and understanding the scriptures, enables a more vibrant connection to God's word.

HYLANDS: For many teens, especially in the Republic of Ireland, the lack of community participation has been due to lack of peers who live close enough and with a desire to do it. ... To encourage this there needs to be encouragement from leadership of churches but also resources and training to help teens know how to actually study together. That isn't a huge course or task, but it needs people to invest in them and inspire.

Christian teens in Ireland name their most common barriers to Bible engagement as struggling to understand scripture, getting distracted while reading or feeling disinterested. How can the seeds of deep Bible engagement be nurtured among this group? Where do they need to grow in their practice and knowledge of scripture?

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: The role of Christian youth work is vital here—how are we supporting young people to engage with scripture whether through some of the excellent apps that are available or through small group Bible study and discussion?

HYLANDS: [What's needed are] materials that are age-appropriate but that also push them deeper. Often the stuff aimed at teens is 'candy floss' but not actually helping to [nourish] them. ... There also needs to be an emphasis put on the generation above them to mentor and encourage them in this and help them learn how to grow.

Christian teens in Ireland are far less likely than their global peers to say they regularly receive relevant biblical instruction through their churches (from pastors, youth leaders, Bible studies, etc.), indicating ample room for growth in this area. What are the hallmarks of Bible teaching in churches or Christian institutions in Ireland? What's working? What isn't?

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: We have a long tradition of 'consumer' Church both in the traditional denominations and in larger evangelical churches. While these modes of biblical instruction have their place, increasing numbers of young people have disengaged with church. Churches of all denominations have seen rites of passage such as 'confirmations' as the moment when young people disengage with church. The difference is seen when there is a vibrant youth worker or parents who are actively engaged in supporting the faith of their teenagers.

3. How Teens in Ireland Can Make an Impact

Teens' Global Concerns & Convictions

Barna asked teens which global problems are of greatest concern to them and received a broad distribution of responses. Cultural, political, economical and even geographical differences cause distinct sets of concerns to rise to the top, depending on where teens live.

Globally, extreme poverty (38%), global climate change (35%), sexual abuse (33%), unemployment (33%) and political corruption (31%) are front of mind for the majority of teens. In Ireland, the list looks different, as teens feel that mental health issues are the greatest concern (52%), followed by global climate change (42%) and racial injustice (39%). More than one-third of Irish teens (35%) also points to extreme poverty as a concern, and three in ten (30%) are concerned about sexual abuse.

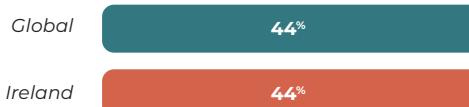
Whatever issues they are concerned about, young people in Ireland may feel unable or even

uninterested to affect them. Irish teens, including Christians, lag somewhat behind their global peers in their reported motivation to address societal injustices. This pattern varies somewhat by faith group. Irish teens who have no faith are least likely to report motivation to address injustice, whilst Irish teens of non-Christian faiths are the most likely to report being 'very motivated'.

It's important for adults and mentors who work with teens to discern whether teens lack motivation at large or whether teens personally lack what they feel is enough context or information to understand their own capacity to act against injustice. In Ireland, it may be the latter: Teens in Ireland track with teens globally in their perception of their generation's ability to make a positive impact on the world.

'My generation has the ability to make a positive and meaningful impact on the world'.

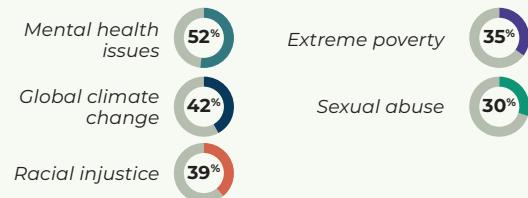
% agree strongly



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

5 Greatest Concerns of Teens in Ireland



Teens' Motivation Towards Justice

Teens may often lack agency or ability to take personal action against injustices on their own or without the involvement, resources and leadership of a parent or guardian. However, the research does allow us to distinguish them by their motivation or potential for promoting justice. The resulting spectrum of justice motivation is based on a combination of teens' Conviction + Confidence + Commitment (see chart for definitions).

As you'll see, there is a drop-off after conviction, highlighting the need to develop confidence and commitment in teens who are interested in justice.

- **JUSTICE-MOTIVATED** teens meet all three categories (Conviction + Confidence + Commitment)
- **JUSTICE-ORIENTED** teens meet one or two of the three categories
- **JUSTICE-NEUTRAL** teens meet none of the three categories

About one in five Irish teens, and a similar proportion of Christian teens specifically, are justice neutral, meaning they do not express strong conviction, confidence or commitment to address injustice. A much higher percentage falls in the middle ground, qualifying as justice oriented, exceeding the motivation of their global peers. The number of justice-motivated Irish teens, meanwhile, sits at 15 percent overall and 17 percent among Christian teens.

n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

● Global ● Ireland ● Global Christians

● Christians ● Other faith ● No faith

Ireland

Conviction: 'I believe it is important to ...'

% agree strongly



Protect the well-being of all people

Confidence: 'I am confident that I can ...'

% agree strongly



Influence others to promote fairness and equality

Commitment: 'In the future, I will ...'

% agree strongly



Work collaboratively with people in need

Teens' Motivation Towards Justice

● Motivated ● Oriented ● Neutral

Global

24% 51% 25%

Ireland

15% 64% 21%

Irish Christians

17% 63% 20%

Looking for Leaders

Who do teens feel should play a role in addressing injustice? Generally, everyone, teens worldwide and in Ireland agree.

The majority of teens, especially those who are justice motivated, has high expectations for society, major institutions and government leaders, believing all of these should play not just some role but a major one in addressing injustice.

Specifically, along with the government, schools and educational institutions come out at the top of teens' responses, with over four in five justice-motivated teens in Ireland (84%) saying they should play a major role. This could be a product of the season of life teens are in, with school being central in their routines and development.

Concerningly for Christians, the Church and its leaders aren't seen as having major roles in matters of justice, which we'll continue to explore. Roughly a quarter of Irish teens says Christian

churches as well as Christian leaders should have 'no role at all' in addressing injustice (26% and 24%, respectively). Justice-motivated teens, however, are more inclined than their oriented and neutral peers to look to these groups to champion justice.

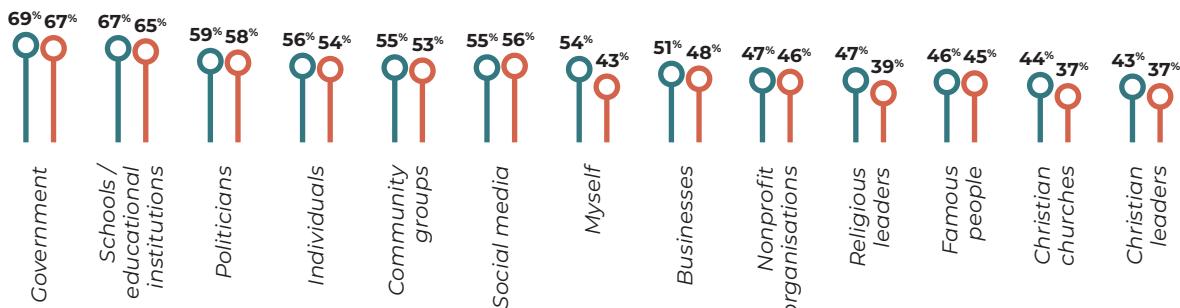
Irish teens who are justice neutral don't assign as much responsibility to any of the options Barna asked about, though almost half (48%) say the government and politicians (40%) should be at the helm of addressing injustice.

Teens' high and wide expectations may reflect their deep concerns about injustice, not their confidence in these groups; as it stands, nearly half of teens globally and more than two-fifths in Ireland, are neutral when asked whether they trust leaders today. Communities that lean into a generational longing to address injustice may, in the process, gain greater trust from today's teens.

How much of a role, if any, do you think each of the following should play in addressing injustices?

% 'major role'

● Global ● Ireland



The Role of the Church

Overall, teens globally and in Ireland aren't convinced that the Christian Church is making an impact on issues of poverty and injustice. Just one in four teens worldwide and 13 percent in Ireland say this is 'definitely' the case. Christian teens in Ireland are even less likely than Christian teens globally to affirm the Church's impact (19% vs. 30%), but the majority of Irish teens of no faith (79%) does not even 'probably' recognise the Church's impact.

As justice motivation increases, so does the certainty that Christian churches are making a difference. What might that impact look like? Justice-motivated and -oriented Irish teens who feel churches and church leaders should play a role in addressing injustice agree on two critical activities

they most want to see: advocating for meaningful change and encouraging people to address injustice. Teens of no faith align with Christian teens in wanting to see advocacy and encouragement through churches and Christian leaders. Teens of other faiths, on the other hand, would like to see churches and Christian leaders provide teaching and financial support to combat injustice.

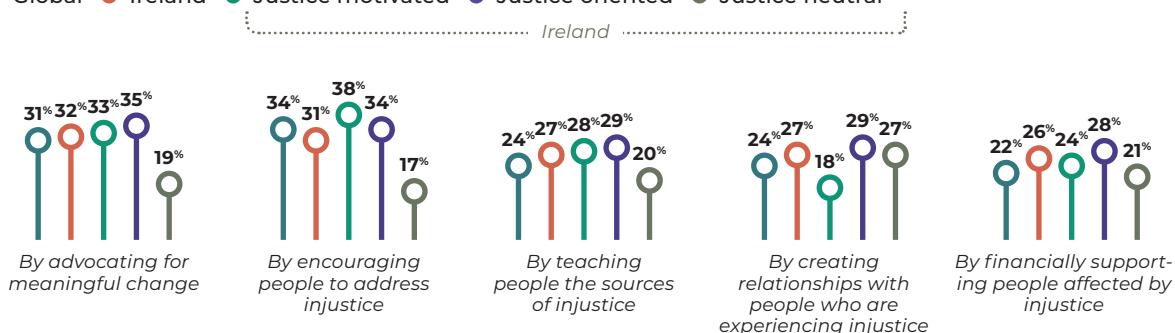
Remember, mental health is of greatest concern to teens in Ireland—so, unsurprisingly, teens want to attend churches that prioritise this issue. Teens in Ireland would also prefer to attend churches that support ending sexual abuse and ending extreme poverty.

Top Ways the Church Can Address Injustice

Which of the following are ways that Christian churches or leaders can address injustice in the world? Select your three most important.

Base: said Christian churches / leaders should play a role in addressing injustice

● Global ● Ireland ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



Supporting Teens to Make an Impact

What can one person do to address injustice?

Among teens who say individuals should play a role in addressing injustice, three general categories of possible participation emerge as top responses. Teens of differing justice motivation levels in Ireland find consensus in agreeing that individuals should be encouraging others to address injustice, advocating for meaningful change and learning about the sources of injustice.

An interesting standout among the possible roles that individuals can play: Justice-neutral teens place the highest importance on learning about the sources of injustice. This may underscore the critical role that listening and learning presently play in their own journey.

When asked what they need in order to be a part of global change themselves, the average teen, worldwide and in Ireland, mostly needs encouragement from family and friends. Irish teens differ somewhat from their global peers, however, in their other top selections. Just as important as receiving encouragement is having their generation step up as leaders. Notably, they are more eager than teens worldwide for teaching on how to address injustice. Justice-motivated teens are also looking for more people to take action to address the issues they care about.

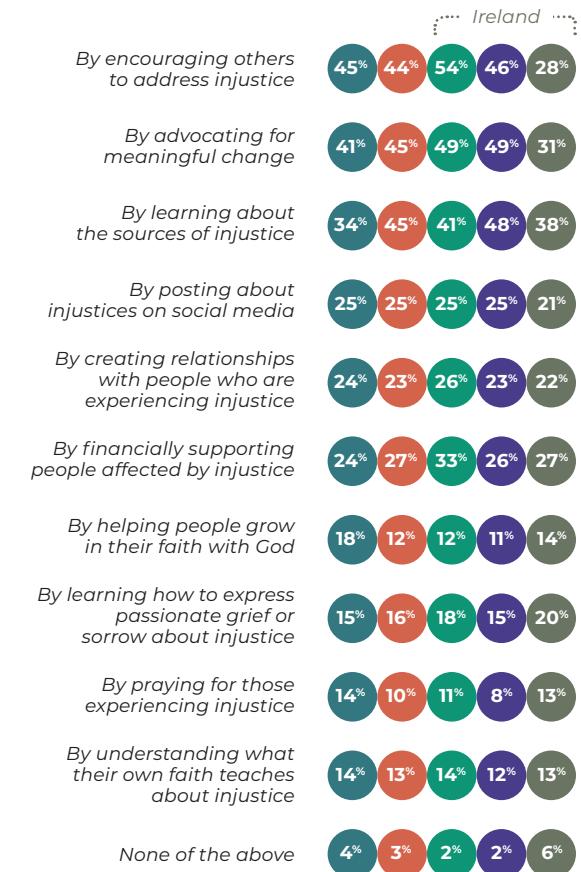
Authentic investment of peers, family members, leaders and other members of a teens' community may be a catalyst to empower teens to grow their hopes of making change in society.

Which of the following are ways that individuals can address injustice in the world?

Select your three most important.

Base: said individuals should play a role in addressing injustice

● Global ● Ireland ● Justice motivated
● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=959 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021;

n=23,488 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

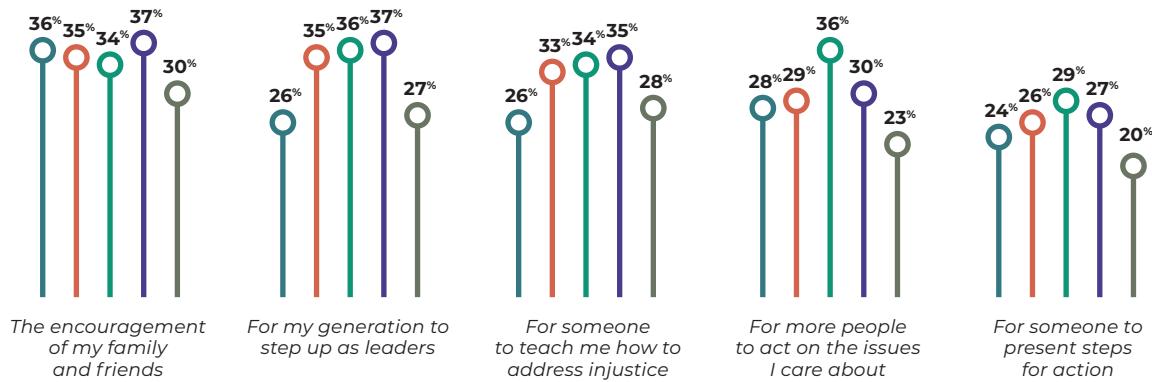
Top Things Teens Need to Make an Impact

As an individual, would any of the following be helpful to you in addressing injustice?

Select your three most important.

● Global ● Ireland ● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral

Ireland



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021; *n*=24,870 teens ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Open-Ended: Takeaways & Questions to Help You Think Through the Research

While Irish teens feel a deep sense of conviction to address injustice, they sometimes lack the confidence and commitment to see this through. *How can teens be empowered, encouraged and equipped to address injustices in society?*

HYLANDS: Teens need to be taught that justice is deeply biblical. It's not just about empowering and encouraging them; it's helping them to do so from a biblical foundation and with biblical convictions. Otherwise, it's no different to any other movement that begins and dies out in society. It's establishing the heart of God in it and that will also help maintain the direction of any action.

Teens in Ireland are greatly concerned about mental health and hope to be in churches that prioritize this issue. *What are the factors that cause this topic to be so central to teens in your context? How is your local Christian community engaging with these mental health concerns and needs?*

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: All evidence points to a mental health crisis with Irish teens. This was definitely heightened by the pandemic, with many teens struggling to re-engage with school and life after lockdowns. The recent death of a local 13-year-old by suicide was a stark reminder of the insidious challenge of cyber-bullying. Our Christian community is at the forefront of suicide prevention and mental health promotion, but this is extremely rare in

Ireland. Christians may raise funds for mental health, but there is still a reluctance to address these issues in churches.

HYLANDS: Young people lost more than most [during COVID-19] and are behind on development as a result, which has caused many issues. Even now there is an uncertainty because they have seen so much can be taken away so quickly. ... An emphasis needs to be made on the hope of the gospel and on the purpose / plan for us. For those Christian teens, there needs to be a focus on identity and teaching on who we are as part of God's big picture with him at the centre, not us.

General categories of participation, such as advocacy and encouraging people to address injustice, are some of the top ways teens hope to see churches and individuals make an impact. *Get specific and practical: What could this encouragement or advocacy look like in your context? Your community? Your church? How can teens be engaged?*

GARVEY-WILLIAMS: We need to see more churches and Christian communities that are fully embedded into their local context and willing to address the needs of society. When this happens, we can invite young people to journey with us in putting boots on their faith. Young people need to see evidence of the kingdom of God at work challenging the root causes of injustice and demonstrating compassion.

The Way, the Truth, the Life.

As Barna Group and our partners have set out to learn about how teens view Jesus, the Bible and justice, the data has consistently shown that these aspects of the Christian faith are interwoven and increase together. Using the custom categories introduced through this study, **here's how teens in Ireland experience an overlap in their commitment to follow Jesus, their engagement with scripture and their motivation to make an impact.**

In Ireland



of committed Christian teens are Bible engaged



of committed Christian teens are justice motivated



of justice-motivated teens are committed Christians

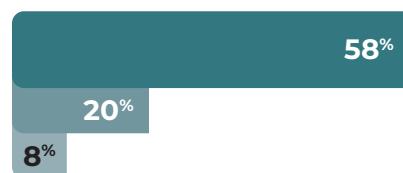


of justice-motivated teens are Bible engaged

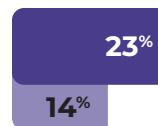
The Bible draws teens to Jesus ...

*'I believe that the Christian Bible provides a way for people to know Jesus personally'
% 'very true'*

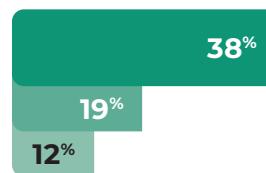
● Committed Christians ● Nominal Christians ● All others



● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



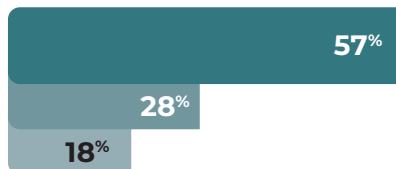
● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



Jesus offers a model for justice ...

'Jesus advocated for justice'

● Committed Christians ● Nominal Christians ● All others



Justice is a biblical matter ...

'I believe that the Christian Bible addresses injustice'

% 'very true'

● Bible open ● Bible unengaged



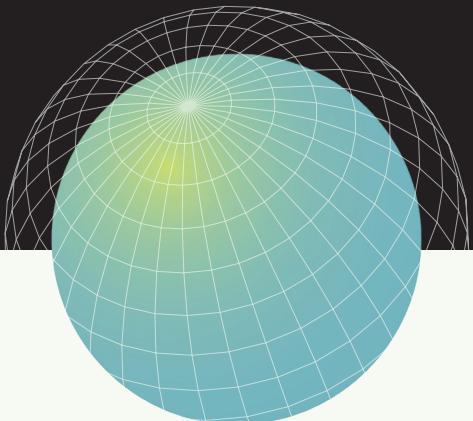
● Justice motivated ● Justice oriented ● Justice neutral



n=1,010 teens in Ireland ages 13 to 17, 21 July–24 August 2021.

Due to low sample size, Bible-engaged teens are not shown for comparison.

An Open Door to *The Open Generation*



There is more to learn about teens around the world—and more insights and tools to help you make use of this research in your context.

Find information about resources, get content from the research partners and sign up for updates at **barna.com/the-open-generation**.

- Vol. 1—*How Teens Around the World Relate to Jesus*
- Vol. 2—*How Teens Around the World View the Bible*
- Vol. 3—*How Teens Around the World Can Make an Impact*
- Regional & Country Reports Featuring Local Data
- Webcasts & Interviews
- E-course

The Open Generation project continues through 2022 and 2023.

Methodology

This study is based on online, representative public opinion surveys conducted by Barna Group. Teens were recruited to participate in the quantitative survey through their parents. Parents answered seven screening questions about their teens, which included demographics such as age, gender and ethnicity. A total of 24,557 respondents ages 13 to 17 across 26 countries were surveyed between 21 July 2021, and 24 August 2021. An additional 313 responses were collected in February of 2022 in New Zealand. (See page 7 for sample distribution by country.) The margin of error for each individual country is assumed to be +/- 2.1%.

Acknowledgments

Barna Group is incredibly grateful to the all-star collective of partners who have made this project possible.

Our findings about the open generation have been strengthened by the grounded recommendations of ministers, activists, scholars and other experts spanning the globe. For this volume, we want to especially thank: Ruth Garvey-Williams and Colin Hylands.

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About the Partners



Barna Group is a research firm helping Christian leaders understand the times and know what to do. In its 38-year history, Barna Group has conducted more than two million interviews over the course of thousands of studies.



Biblica produces relevant and reliable scripture translations and innovative resources that power the Bible ministry of hundreds of global mission organisations and invite millions to discover the love of Jesus Christ.



World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.



Alpha supports the Church with resources and tools that help create a space where people are excited to bring their friends for a conversation about Jesus.



Christian Vision works in partnership with local churches across the globe to introduce people to Jesus, mobilise Christians to evangelise and resource the Church with free digital content and knowledge.



Bible Study Fellowship provides global, in-depth Bible studies producing passionate commitment to Christ, his word and his Church, magnifying God and maturing his people.



The Association of Christian Schools International is an international organisation that promotes Christian education and provides training and resources to Christian schools and Christian educators.



Christ In Youth partners with the local church to create moments and conversations that call young people to follow Jesus and into lives of Kingdom work.