

DYNAMICS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

By

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Liberty University

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF WORSHIP STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

According to many biblical accounts, children were included in worship experiences. Despite the efforts of many churches to engage, attract, and retain youth, there is still a lack of youth participation, involvement, and interest in the local church. This not only affects youth, but also the church. Unengaged youth do not have the opportunity to become future leaders of the church. In turn, churches will experience a void in future leadership and will be prohibited from flourishing. This qualitative historical study examined reasons for youth disengagement in an effort to find strategies for effective retention and engagement to benefit youth and the church. Existing literature pertaining to youth engagement in local church ministry will be examined. Data centered on the youth's perspectives of youth leadership will be collected via surveys. The findings informed strategies that may engage youth in the local church, encourage youth leaders to grow in their relationship with the Lord, and prepare youth to serve Christ. Youth are vital for the future of the church, and Christ cares about youth. Therefore, this study may influence engagement approaches by providing opportunities for mentorship, engagement, and church leadership development.

Keywords: Youth, Youth Ministry, Youth Engagement, Mentor.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

According to many biblical accounts, children were included in worship experiences. Such occurrences describe how children should be the center of worship practices as stated in Psalms where David proclaimed, “Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power” (Ps. 145:4).¹ Jesus viewed children as individuals to be included in worship. David Csinos teaches this, and paraphrases Mark 10:14, “Whatever you do to work toward inclusion, remember: You don’t have to change everything at once. But work toward justice and love that Jesus demonstrated when he said that the kingdom of God belongs to little children, change is needed.”² Other scriptures such as Exodus 13:14, Matthew. 21:15-16, and Timothy 3:14-15 include examples of how youth are present in God’s story, worship practices, as well as receiving God’s grace. While these youth experiences are present in the Bible, it is unfortunate they are not occurring in some churches which is against God’s desire for relationship with His people.

There are many factors that contribute to and serve as justifications of why there is a lack of youth involvement in some churches. One factor is that many youth in today’s society are easily influenced by the outside world more than their local church. Philip Hughes agreed by stating, “The socialization model is not working well, largely because we live in a highly

¹Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Foundation, 2015).

² David Csinos, “A Little Child Shall Lead Them,” *Sojourners Magazine* 45, no. 5 (May 2016): 26, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1785465245?accountid=12085>.

pluralistic society and few parents can isolate their children from influences which are contrary to their own faith commitments. For people under 40 years of age, the retention rate in involvement in church from childhood is about thirty percent.”³ In some church settings, students lack engagement due to ineffective strategies for spiritual development and a lack of application pertaining to faith and spiritual doctrine in their daily lives. Hughes also states that youth, not being aware of the power of faith, fail at “exploring what faith means in personal daily living and in living in society.”⁴ In addition to being influenced by the world and ineffective teaching, many youth ministry leaders are not prepared nor put forth an effort in preparing their youth for success. Hughes agreed that organization played a huge role in why youth are not involved by stating, “Youth group had not gone well on those occasions. It was noted by parents that they appreciated youth group leaders who communicated with them as well as with their student, who were well organized ahead of time in terms of activities that they would be conducting.”⁵

Many youth are not regularly engaged in liturgical practices, in fact Clark states:

A great deal has been written in recent years regarding the number of young people who ‘leave the church’ after graduating from high school. Regardless of which study we use, the numbers are depressing at best and staggering at worst...Research is ongoing, and books, articles, blogs, seminars, websites, and the like continue to wrestle with ways in which we can enhance the likelihood that young people will remain committed to the church when they move out and head into their adult journey.⁶

This lack of engagement affects the spiritual formation of many youth and Josh McDowell agrees that, “We need a spiritual revolution because there’s little transformation in the moral

³ Philip Hughes, “Youth Leadership.” *Pointers: Bulletin of the Christian Research Association* 25, no. 4 (December 2015): 1–7, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=112072547&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 2.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 180.

behavior of kids who call themselves Christians-the majority is no different than non-Christians.”⁷ This moral behavior can be transformed through discipleship in the way youth are being led and spiritually directed. The more Christian educational experiences youth are exposed to, the more they will witness the beauty of God and worship, thus aiding their spiritual formation. Such meaningful educational experiences will enable them to understand how to walk with God, live daily for him, and teach them that, “Christianity is fundamentally a lived human endeavor.”⁸

While many youth show a lack of engagement, the church is also negatively impacted. Unengaged youth will not develop into future leaders of the church. In turn, the church will experience a future leadership void and will be prohibited from flourishing. As they fail to develop youth as leaders, the church puts their future leadership at jeopardy and neglects youth spiritual growth opportunities.⁹ Therefore, it is important to find ways to not only include and engage youth, but also equip youth leaders so they are prepared to instill time and effort towards their spiritual development.

Problem Statement

Despite the efforts of many churches to engage, attract, and retain youth, there is still a lack of youth participation, involvement, and interest in the local church. Daniel Burke agreed by stating, “Christianity in the United States hasn’t done a good job of engaging serious Christian

⁷ Josh McDowell and Ron Luce, “It’s Time for a Revolution in Youth Ministry,” Group, May 2003, 52, <http://exproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/231990550?accountid=12085>, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 215.

⁹ Shirley Adams Stanley, “Leadership Development for Youth: Insights and Discoveries for St. Peter Baptist Church” (DMin thesis, Virginia Union University, 2018), iii, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

reflection with young people, in ways that would be relevant to their lives,”¹⁰ If this lack of youth engagement continues to exist within many churches, not only will there be limited future leaders, but many churches fail to effectively grow, disciple, and develop the body of Christ. Youth are very pertinent to the growth of many churches and should be well equipped to grow spiritually, connect to Christ, as well as serve Christ.

Understanding there is little research concerning the various dynamics of youth engagement in the local church, it is evident that churches are experiencing differentiated youth involvement experiences. Churches that have various youth-centered events and classes are seeing a small amount of student participation. In a study which looked at high school youth church participation rates, an author stated, “In middle class American churches today, the success rate is sometimes quite low; many children of loyal church members depart from the faith and the church. One indicator of this is the rate of dropouts from Sunday school participation.”¹¹ Many students are not finding their teacher interesting enough to attract their attention. In reference to churches needed to adjust approaches to youth ministry, Hoge states, “Attitudes of church rejection expressed by some youth were traced largely to a dislike of past religious training and to perceptions of church leaders as unapproachable, insincere, or uncertain about expressing their own beliefs.”¹²

While the decline of youth involvement in church may be attributed to the decrease in attendance in Sunday school, there are other reasons for the lack of their engagement. Another study indicated inefficient Christian educational process, and unorganized teachers as reasons for

¹⁰ Daniel Burke, “Millennials leaving church in droves, study finds,” *CNN Religion*, May 14, 2015, accessed May 16, 2020, 1, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study/index.html>.

¹¹ Dean Hoge and Gregory H. Petrillo. "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes among High School Youth." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17, no. 4 (1978): 359-79. doi:10.2307/1385400, 359.

¹² *Ibid.*, 376.

youth disengagement.¹³ Teachers within some churches are not effective in their instructional leadership practices, and if they are not effective leaders, then they will not be successful in the training of youth to become future leaders of the church. In fact, Stanley states, “By failing to form youth as leaders within the congregation, the church is putting its own leadership future in danger and is losing a significant opportunity to pass the baton of leadership to youth.”¹⁴ Lastly, the relationship youth have with others affect their participation and engagement in the church. Parents attitudes and behaviors towards appears to significantly impact their children’s perception and engagement in church.¹⁵ Given the literature which demonstrates a decline in youth engagement in church, this study this study will address the various dynamics of youth involvement in the church, the role of youth leaders as mentors in life and ministry, and research youth worship practices.

Statement of Purpose

The article “Discipleship Ministries” highlights ten spiritual experiences and practices beneficial for youth that include paying attention, blessing, breathing, silence, creative expression, Scripture, body prayer, and sharing gifts.¹⁶ Therefore, it is imperative that youth are exposed to highly intriguing spiritual experiences that may increase their ability to know and

¹³ Thomas Spencer LeGrand, Jr., “Connecting the Dots: A Case Study Examining the Impact of Service Learning on a Youth and Young Adult Student Ministry” (EdD diss., Gardner-Webb University, 2013), 142, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

¹⁴ Stanley, “Leadership Development for Youth,” 4.

¹⁵ Hoge and Petrillo, “Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes among High School Youth,” 376.

¹⁶ Upper Room Ministries, “Ten Simple Spiritual Practice Ideas For Children & Youth: From the Editors of Pockets and Devozine Magazines, *Discipleship Ministries: The United Methodist Church*, Accessed August 11, 2020, https://gbod-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera-files/about-gbod/UR_10SimpleSpiritualPractices.pdf, 2-5.

love God. Unfortunately, many youth are not effectively equipped of spiritual success due to limitations in teaching, lacking parental support, and social distractions. Additionally, youth are not attending church events or classes such as Sunday school, Bible study, or church services, causing them to be absent in experiencing worship and being taught sound doctrine. Despite children and teens decline in engagement in church related activities, they still play a crucial role as potential future leads of the church. This qualitative historical study examines reasons for youth disengagement in an effort to find strategies for effective retention and engagement that may benefit youth and the church.

Consequently, an engaged and efficient youth ministry would help to support the spiritual growth of youth. Implications from this study influenced the development of strategies for the implementation of churches to retain youth attention in church. Additionally, this study encourages churches to get students more active and excited about coming to church. Finally, the students are encouraged to desire to become future leaders and dynamic worshippers in the church.

Significance of the Study

Churches must critically review youth ministry approaches and determine what changes are required to increase engagement, retention, biblical teaching, and spiritual development of youth. Winnie White's research brings validity to this study's purpose stating, "Many church leaders in America are looking for ways to help youth get involved in church ministries, stay in church, and continue being engaged in church."¹⁷ These findings emphasize the importance and

¹⁷ Winnie Gray White, "Christian Music Experiences in the Faith Development of Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study," Order No. 3631010, Liberty University, 2014, in PROQUESTMS Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1564233319?accountid=12085>, 35.

necessity of ministry leaders who play a fundamental role in the involvement of youth in the church. However, Cameron Cole and Jon Nielson expound on the reality involved in the enacting youth ministry while realizing the challenges in leadership stating, “Youth ministry can be a frustrating field of employment and a challenging volunteer calling. According to various studies, the normal tenure of a youth minister at a local church lasts approximately eighteen months.”¹⁸ It is important that churches instill sound doctrine within youth so that they may become future leaders for the next generation. Youth workers must have a biblical foundation in order to be effective teachers in the church. According to Clark, churches must refocus efforts to reach youth stating, “The modern youth ministry model has largely abandoned the focus of Jesus and delivers, instead, a series of competing programs. We have exchanged mission for meetings. We have separated evangelism and discipleship.”¹⁹

It is also valuable to examine perceptions of youth concerning their interests and personal feelings toward the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers. Philip Hughes supported this by stating, “The heart of youth leadership is the development of good relationships with students. What youth are looking for is interest in them as people and acceptance of them as they are. If youth feel the leaders have their best interests at heart, trust will grow.”²⁰ Further, these findings should advise churches of revealed perspectives in order to assist the local church with new ideas and methods to effectively attract youth as well as increase student involvement in worship and discipleship.

¹⁸ Cameron Cole and Jon Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 1.

¹⁹ Chap Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views (Youth, Family, and Culture)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 4.

²⁰ Hughes, “Youth Leadership,” 2.

Statement of Primary Research Questions

Many churches experience a change in youth engagement. These changes include a decline in the youth population and inconsistency in student attendance leading to an acknowledgement, or perspective, youth are uninterested in church. Jana Sundene believes this change is a result of the student's need to being spiritually or biblically nurtured, as she states, "There is little argument about the need to reach this generation of youth for Christ and that we need to reach them with the gospel."²¹ However, there are several strategies which can be implemented to see an improvement in youth engagement and participation. Research questions concerning reasons for a decline in youth involvement in the church and what factors may intrigue or interest youth in the church are:

Research Question 1: What are the dynamics within the local church that weaken youth engagement?

Research Question 2: What are the important personal characteristics of youth workers as perceived by youth?

While considerable research is available stating the lack of involvement and attendance of students in church, there is little research revealing why the local church is experiencing youth disengagement. Additionally, churches must realize needed elements to effectively attract students. Furthermore, research must be considered to incorporate necessary refinements for understanding student interest areas and concerns. The aforementioned questions should be addressed due to the needed knowledge and understanding of student interest. Churches also need to make allowances for youth voices to be heard. In order for a church to empathize with

²¹ Jana L. Sundene, "Scrutinizing Strategies: An Organizational Perspective on Youth Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (Fall, 1999): 109, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/205416278?accountid=12085>.

interests of youth or assess doctrinal understanding, church leadership must hear personally from students. Therefore, a qualitative historical study was used to attempt to develop strategies on why some children are led away from the church or youth become disengaged.

Core Concepts

According to this study, the term “youth” includes those who attend church regularly and those who choose not to attend ranging in ages from elementary grade levels through high school. In many settings, attempts are made to include the term “young adult” in conjunction with the term “youth.” Young adults refer only to youth who have recently graduated from high school. This study focuses specifically on the use of youth ministry to develop and influence the lives of youth in the church. Therefore, in this research, it is imperative to define youth ministry as church-related functions utilizing vocational student ministers as well as volunteer student workers. Jos de Kock expounds on the definition of youth ministry stating, “refers to practices in which professionals and volunteers, inspired by the Christian faith, work with children and young people to discover, learn, and practice the gospel.”²² Those who believe in educating the youth leading them towards discipleship are known as youth workers. The terms youth ministry and youth workers will find interchangeably utilization.

Youth are engaged in the church if the church engages the youth. Church engagement of the youth is impactful and contingent upon the church mission and purposeful method. The church’s method of engagement influences the perceptions of church held by students. In his article, John W. McCoy stated, “Many a good lesson has fallen on deaf ears because the teacher has not taken the time to capture the imagination of his or her students at the beginning of the

²² Jos de Kock and Bård E. Hallesby Norheim, “Youth Ministry Research and the Empirical,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 22, no. 1 (June 2018): 69–83. doi:10.1515/ijpt-2016-0028, 70.

lesson. One of Jesus' methods of teaching was to intentionally get peoples' attention, either by shocking them with a statement, or using humor, enigmas, or aphorisms."²³ It was the intent of Jesus to teach with a purpose and in such a way that the content will never be forgotten. How the church approaches youth through a method of instructional practices plays a significant role in their engagement. Cole and Nielson mentioned that, "Traditionally, youth ministry methodology demonstrated a specific theology about kids' biggest problem. It suggested that kids lack both proper knowledge about moral Christian living and sufficient motivation to adhere to the standards."²⁴ Therefore, the church has to educate youth ministry with a method that leads and instills sound biblical knowledge for the youth.

The term mentorship refers to mentoring students. With youth leaders serving as mentors, they are to help youth establish a feeling of sense of belonging to the church. Mentorship helps youth establish relationships and create a close connection with others, in particular, their ministry leader. Another benefit that comes with mentorship as mentioned by John DiScala is that youth can be guided on important decisions, offered a fresh, outsider perspective and be inspired.²⁵

The importance of discipleship must be understood in the context of student ministry, "When discipleship does not exist, worship does not. Worship includes obedience to God's

²³ John W. McCoy, Ed.D., "The Teaching Methods of Jesus," *The Journal of Biblical Foundations of Faith and Learning* 1, no. 1 (2016): 10.

²⁴ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 26.

²⁵ John DiScala, "Mentor Mistakes," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 22, 2018, 3, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquestcom.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1989493727?accountid=12085>.

Word and He has commanded that worshippers disciple.”²⁶ Seeking to incorporate more meaningful discipling practices for students will be an important part to this study.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses to the research questions are:

H1: The dynamics within the local church that weaken youth engagement could include a lack of social interactions, unfavorable music, not having a sense of belonging, and not experiencing captivating biblical teaching.

Three components that lead to a decline of youth involvement and engagement in the church include: a lack of social interactions, students thriving from being sociable, and learning from and listening to others. In regards to social interactions, Thomas LeGrand made an indication that, “Youth and young adults are seeking genuine Christian community and active service towards others as a part of the formation of community.”²⁷ With the help of youth serving their community, this could potentially increase church membership, increase youth confidence, and recruit other youth to get involved in the church.

The next component, unfavorable music, is another reason for youth disengagement. Youth are really connected to music and if they are not interested in the music at the church, it could lead them to focus less on being at church. Music influences the decisions, behaviors, and relationships of youth. Winnie White supports this by stating, “Relationships are at the core of humanity and also in adolescents’ musical preferences. Children and adolescents develop

²⁶ Ossie Xzabia McKinney, “Moving from performance to missional worship: Five biblical principles and practices to infuse discipleship into worship,” (Doctor of Worship Studies thesis, Liberty University, 2018), 118.

²⁷ LeGrand, “Connecting the Dots,” 3.

musical tastes from what they hear at home, at school, church, and with peers.”²⁸ Therefore, not only can youth gain their musical interests from relationships outside the church, but also inside the church. Music is a known source and cause for keeping youth engaged in church. Jeff Neely shared, “Russ Jones, pastor of worship arts at The Crossing, said Electronic Dance Music has brought a youthful edge to its services and is helping the church reach a younger generation.”²⁹

In addition to unfavorable music, youth does not feel a sense of belonging or have someone whom they can relate to in the church. There is a lack of connection and relationship between youth and their ministry leaders. Youth should have a good mentor whose “aim is to cultivate maturing disciples of Jesus who are committed to the family of God, not simply good youth group participants,”³⁰ and who would also lead them to being more spiritually educated. In fact, one of the six models for a healthy youth ministry recommended by Antoinette Vallrie was, “Ways to become better acquainted with the youth and their world.”³¹ The youth ministry workers are encouraged to get more acclimated with the lives of youth in order to connect with what engages them in the church.

H2: The important personal characteristics of youth workers, as perceived by youth include: personal charisma, mentorship, relational connection, and method of instruction.

²⁸ White, “Christian Music Experiences,” 12-13.

²⁹ Jeff Neely, “Worship with a drop: why churches are turning to club music to elevate praise.” *Christianity Today*, July-August 2017, 50+. *World History in Context* (accessed July 20, 2019). https://link-galegroup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A503309661/WHIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=WHIC&xid=da8578ff.

³⁰ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 87.

³¹ Antoinette H. Vallrie, “Strategies for a Healthy Youth Ministry.” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 40, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 115–34. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3865984&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

The way in which many youth perceive the youth workers aligns with four characteristics. First, the youth worker's personal charisma is what draws the attention of many youth. Jesus said that true worshippers will worship Him in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23), and the deeper youth workers know about God, the more they can encourage youth to see God for who He really is. Youth workers should represent Christ in such a manner that is reflective of Him and acknowledged by others. In the book of Ephesians, the Bible instructs the believer to, "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the examples of Christ" (Eph. 5:1-2). Therefore, many youth should be surrounded by a faith-based and Christ-like youth ministry.

Mentorship is another characteristic that is conducive to the youth worker. Youth workers should aim to become mentors for youth and help them enter a space of comfortability and confidence in their spirituality. Mentorship enables students to connect more with the youth worker, the church, and most importantly with God. Youth are seeking mentors as role models and leaders. Mentors can be looked to for advice, help, and guidance on many different topics applicable to everyday life. "A mentor has been defined as 'An experienced and trusted advisor'." In this sense, there are a wide range of situations where people might be experienced and trusted advisors, or people who give advice."³² Overall, the impact mentors have on youth is great as it allows youth to have close connections and gain understanding of their spirituality.

Another characteristic necessary for youth ministry includes the ability to develop healthy relational connections with students in the church. Supporting the fact that relationships affect youth participation, Hoge reinforced that, "Relationships with church leaders are very

³² Brian Wakeman, "A Christian Perspective on Mentoring," *Transformation* 29, no. 4, (2012): 277.

important influences on overall attitudes about the church.”³³ One of the core values of a youth ministry should be the establishment of personal relationships and connections with youth in the church through humility and love. Once healthy relationships are developed, youth will be more acceptable of the worker’s teachings, sound doctrine, leadership, and discipleship. They will also be more prone to listen, follow, and grow in Christ.

The last characteristic required of effective youth workers directly relates to the ability to clearly develop lessons and teach Biblical principles. Youth workers must have an impactful way of interacting with youth and, “The impact of youth programs sponsored by the church depends greatly on the qualities of the adult leaders.”³⁴ This interaction may include that of consistently studying the Bible, singing worship songs, praying together, and offering encouragement. Many youth desire a teacher who will not only utilize an effective method of teaching but also “lead the way by inspiring, informing, inviting, and modeling for the rest of the church.”³⁵ This interaction between the youth and workers evolves into a spiritual relationship. This spiritual relationship is quite effective as it helps both acquire a healthy and truthful way of life as well as understand the main purpose for living, which is to worship God. As youth identify the characteristics of an attractive personality, mentor, spiritual relational connection, and effective methodology which reflects those of Jesus within their youth workers, they will become more equipped with knowledge and engaged.

³³ Hoge, “Determinants of Church Participation,” 376.

³⁴ Ibid., 361.

³⁵ Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 274.

Research Methods

A qualitative historical design was performed for this study to understand perceptions of youth and develop characteristics of the youth worker. According to Creswell, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem.”³⁶ Further, the historical approach is also appropriate for this study. “Historical research is a continuing dialogue, an endless exploration between generations of historians, between different interpretations of the significance of historical events, and between established opinions and challenges arising from new discoveries about the past.”³⁷

This study sought to observe previous research surveys from local churches that explain the outcome of what engage youth in their church. In addition, thematic outcome of the results from youth participants will be developed to determine what intrigues youth involvement in the local church today. This study aims to develop several strategies for incorporating youth in an exciting worship of biblical teachings.

For this research, study samples from four local churches in the heart of local Nashville, also referred to as North Nashville were considered. Consent forms were given to parents of student participants to gain permission to interview minors. Additionally, these online surveys were conducted with nineteen diverse youth individually. Detailed findings from this research are considered and reviewed in later chapters of this thesis.

³⁶ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 201).

³⁷ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Random House Inc., 1961), 35.

Research Plan

Existing literature pertaining to youth engagement in the church, the impact of youth workers or youth ministry on the youth, and the effectiveness of youth ministries will be examined. The research plan will require going through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to interview participants. The process consisted of first preparing interview/survey questions, submitting an IRB Application, obtaining IRB Approval, Consent Form, and Data collection. Data information was collected, analyzed, communicated, and synthesized.

Surveys were sent to youth participants, whose parents consented and youth assented to participation, between ages ten to eighteen who are currently serving the local Nashville church. Student participants were members of a local church. The survey process will consist of an E-mail Internet survey which allowed the participants to provide an overview of their experience in church as well as give the researcher more control over the questions. As a result of the research, a descriptive analysis of the church resources will also be determined based on graphic representations. The results of the surveys will be used to analyze the youth engagement in the local church as well as what need to be incorporated in the local church. More details about this specific design are provided in Chapter three.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study:

Youth Ministry: Youth ministry is, by definition, ministry to and for teenagers, typically middle and high school students aged eleven to eighteen, and sometimes includes college ministries.³⁸

³⁸ Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 5.

Adolescent: According to the American Psychological Association (APA), there is currently no standard definition of “adolescent.” Most of the time, when the term adolescent is used, it is referring to an age range (10-18). That is the only way of defining adolescence.³⁹

Minister of Youth: Refers to a vocational, ministerial staff person in the church whose primary responsibility is work with the youth ages 12–18 or grades 6–12.⁴⁰

Disciple: A lifelong learner who is following and growing in relationship with Jesus Christ.⁴¹

Discipleship: In the context of youth ministry is leading, teaching, and modeling to our students what it means to be a lifelong learner who is following and growing in Jesus Christ.⁴²

Mentoring: A process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé).⁴³

³⁹ White, “Christian Music Experiences,” 37.

⁴⁰ Stanley, “Leadership Development for Youth,” 10.

⁴¹ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 40.

⁴² Ibid., 42.

⁴³ Tim Sharp, *Mentoring in the Ensemble Arts: Helping Others Find their Voice*, Chicago: GIA Publications, 2011, 26.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature which pertains to various issues related to youth engagement within the local church. The literature review consists of seven main sections. In the first section, literature reviewed will examine the importance of a youth ministry and of youth engagement. This section explains why youth are vital toward the growth of the church as well as how youth ministry helps with spiritual development. In the second section, literature was reviewed that highlights historical trends of youth engagement in the church. This section provides information of how youth ministries developed and how churches engaged youth in the past. A third section identified varied theological and/or biblical positions which support student engagement in the church. This section will expand on the importance of youth inclusion from a biblical perspective. The fourth section reviewed literature that discuss youth and their use of prayer in the church. The fifth section of this literature review discussed the decline in youth involvement in churches. Various literature portrays the decline of youth engagement as a crisis. Within the sixth section, a review of the literature pertaining to various elements which contribute to declination of youth engagement, including youth ministry, culture, youth worker, parental support, music, and the church will be discussed. The concluding seventh section reports on statistical information highlighting the decline of youth involvement in the church.

Importance of Youth Ministry

Chap Clark, a longtime student ministry strategist defines youth ministry as, “Ministry to and for teenagers, typically middle and high school students aged eleven to eighteen, and

sometimes includes college ministries.”⁴⁴ Jos de Kock and Bård Norheim expound the reach of youth ministry stating, “Youth ministry refers to practices in which professionals and volunteers, inspired by the Christian faith, work with children and young people to discover, learn, and practice the gospel. Adults establish meaningful relationships with and among children and young people and may participate in different roles, like the missionary, the social worker or the pastor.”⁴⁵

Youth ministries hold valuable weight in the churches and various literature not only discuss this value but also express the effect youth ministries have on the church and why they should be included in the church. Shifting from the common assumption of youth ministry being a separate entity of the church, authors Mark H. Senter III, Wesley Black, Chap Clark, and Malan Nel stated, “Youth ministry is not about finding an extra place for yet another ministry, but about finding a place for youth within every ministry and among the people that the ministries are designed to reach and serve—the people to whom God comes by means of the ministries.”⁴⁶ Youth ministry serves a purpose and goal within the church. Senter and colleagues moved on saying, “Whatever is described and discovered in these modes of ministries is relevant to the youth as well as to the adult congregation. Every ministry in the church is relevant to the youth. Every ministry contains rich potential for youth ministry.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 5.

⁴⁵ de Kock and Hallesby Norheim, “Youth Ministry Research and the Empirical,” 69–83.

⁴⁶ Mark H. Senter, Wesley Black, Chap Clark, and Malan Nel, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church: Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional, Strategic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

The youth ministry belongs within a church and holds value in the future of youth who attend church. In an effort to show the effect of youth ministry in the church, Cole and Nielson stated, “There is a place for a youth ministry in the church! The future of our churches depends on the way we integrate our young people into the intergenerational people of God today.”⁴⁸ Youth are indeed the future of churches around the world as they will grow to take the place of the elders. What good will youth be if ministries are not currently well developed and effectively educating them spiritually?

In addition to the relevance of the youth ministry, it is recommended that, “Our understanding of youth ministry must be a theological reflection built around two questions, one of identity (Who we are?) and the other of mission (What is our task?).”⁴⁹ Chap Clark and Kara Powell share a more connected value of student ministry as, “What we used to live and breathe—we hold kid’s hands, we listen to their stories, we take them seriously, and somewhere along the way, we bring them to Jesus. That’s it. That’s youth ministry.”⁵⁰ Lastly, the youth ministry is important and holds value in the church because of what Cole and Nielson identify as, “The primary role of the youth pastor and the student ministry in the local church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”⁵¹ Cole and Nielson identify how youth ministry growth and discipleship is a life journey, and therefore require building relationships with youth. These

⁴⁸ Cole & Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 113.

⁴⁹ Kenneth A. Moser and Malan Nel, “The Connection between Youth ministry’s Division of Evangelism and Discipleship, and the Lack of Retention of Youth in North American Churches,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019), <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2327809812?accountid=12085>, 5.

⁵⁰ Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings About Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 70.

⁵¹ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 39.

contributions are imperative in the development of students in spiritual growth, biblical understanding, discipleship and worship community growth. The student must realize the importance and purpose of their involvement in the body of Christ.

Youth engagement is a result of youth ministry or the overall church demonstrating compassion and love toward them. Their involvement in church is an important factor simply because it is God's desire. Author Dean Borgman stated, "Our inclination to love a neighbor and to serve a younger generation is of God; effective ministry is letting God love and bless through us. Really caring about young people involves spending time with them and responding to their deepest needs and desires. Doing so in the name of Christ has always been the basic and essential characteristics of youth ministries."⁵² Youth ministries, if executed efficiently, will benefit and serve as an increasing factor of youth engagement.

Importance of Youth Engagement

Youth ministry is important in the local church. However, research stress the importance of equipping students to move beyond their youth ministry and engage in other areas of the church and worship at-large. David Csinos voiced the pressing news of inclusion saying, "Including children in corporate worship isn't a matter of choice or changing trends; it's a matter of justice."⁵³ The engagement of students equates to that of inclusion as well as their worship. Csinos proposed various forms of inclusion of youth in the church on a spectrum from no inclusion, nominal inclusion, moderate inclusion, and finally radical inclusion. As for the final radical inclusion, Csinos emphasizes, "Congregations at this mark are rare, for to be radically

⁵² Dean Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 3, accessed August 1, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵³ Csinos, "A Little Child Shall Lead Them," *Sojourners Magazine* 45, no. 5 (May 2016): 26.

inclusive is not only to allow children to participate in worship but to be open to having congregational worship be changed by their full presence and participation.”⁵⁴

To go along with the importance of youth participation takes precedence over mere attendance, Cole and Nielson report, “As youth pastors, we need to be intentional about equipping youth to more fully participate in and appreciate corporate worship.”⁵⁵ Student engagement in the church assists with their growth in the church and makes them more associated with the church physically and spiritually. The authors concur, “Offering students such opportunities makes them feel as if they are a contributor in the church here and now. This feeling only enhances the chances that they will continue in such a role as they enter adulthood.”⁵⁶

Historical Trends of Youth Engagement

To understand the current dynamics of youth engagement in the local church, acknowledging their interaction and involvement with churches in the past would be beneficial. Students act and respond based upon how they are taught. This section considers some historical patterns and influences of youth engagement. There are numerous influencers which set out to engage youth in the church, through acts of Christianity, as well as within the community. Most of the literature reviewed resulted in churches not able to sustain youth involvement.

In the text *Youth Ministry in Modern America*, historian and community activist author Jon Pahl explored the history of student ministry during the twentieth century movements. It is from these movements that youth engagement can be deciphered and interpreted. Pahl viewed

⁵⁴ Csinos, “A Little Child Shall Lead Them,” 2.

⁵⁵ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

the twentieth-century church as shifting away from purity-based teachings and influences over youth with focus more on practice-based teachings. He defines purity and practices as:

Purity here means primarily the effort of churches to keep youth safe and secure, especially by keeping them innocent of cultural problems and by helping them to avoid precocious ‘adult’ behaviors. Practices means the effort of churches to engage young people in active experiments and risks with adult roles and responsibilities. Over the past seventy years, youth ministries generally emphasized practices over purity in their teaching to youth.⁵⁷

In their attempts to provide youth with pure implicative methodologies and instructions for how they could practice their faith, as a pastor and theologian, Pahl discussed problems which arose within several movements. Pahl highlighted four historical movements in which organizations arose from year 1930 to the present such as Walther League’s life path of ‘Christian Knowledge, Christian Service’, Young Christian Workers (YCW), Youth for Christ (YFC), and youth in African American Christian congregations. Existing in the late twentieth centuries, African American churches supported youth involvement and did what they could to assist youth with their spiritual development. The YFC ministry encouraged many practices, among them were teaching youth to read their Bibles, pray, and the object of pure living. “In short, YFC in its early years formed individuals through Bible study and belief, and by encouraging them to belong to an Evangelical organization.”⁵⁸ It can be noted that students were involved in youth ministries as Pahl documented that, “From participation in worship to direct community involvement, congregations have provided youth with the necessary sanctuary of security, the traditional comfort of kin, rites of passage, and manifold other ministries to help them resist exploitation

⁵⁷ Jon Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America: 1930 to the Present* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 7.

⁵⁸ Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America*, 64.

and develop into mature Christians.”⁵⁹ While these organizations worked to include youth and raise their awareness of theological concepts and practices, Pahl was saddened that, “All four movements failed, to some degree, to recognize the critical abilities of youth, their intellectual gifts, and their constructive potential.”⁶⁰

In the text, *Generation Gap*, author Stan Belyshev, highlighted how much the church today replicates history as during the times of Hitler. Belyshev briefly elaborated on Hitler’s influence over youth generation and how he negatively brainwashed them to believe in aggression, hatred, and fighting just as he did. He stated, “Hitler knew that if he could influence (brainwash) the younger generation now, then in the near future, he would be able to execute his personal will and his heart’s desire through them, just as history shows us.”⁶¹ Belyshev compares Hitler’s influence to those who are in authoritative positions in today’s society and churches as being a prominent impact on youth generations and their actions. Youth are seen here in this text as a recipient of many negative influences around society such as television shows, music artists, universities, planned parenthood, to name a few.

In referencing the church as the people, *Generation Gap* spoke about the church being unstable and consistently reverting back to bad habits which effects the growth of the church. Adults within the church were seen as influences over youth through their own personal encounters and actions. Youth again are viewed as susceptible to follow adult influences. Belyshev reinforces, “Every New Year, we see the same things arise in us where we are

⁵⁹ Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America*, 90.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁶¹ Stan Belyshev, *Generation Gap: Raising the Next Generation of Leaders* (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2016), 38.

repeating the mistakes and even sins of the previous years, if not for the past decade.”⁶² Just as difficulties arise for adults which keep them from being engaged and faithful in the church, this has an effect on youth. The church is encouraged to become a role model for youth through demonstrating holiness, righteous, fear of the Lord, moral values, and sound doctrine.⁶³ Other literature suggests the main influence of youth derives solely from parents. While many may assume youth are influenced by media and culture, authors Wayne Rice and David Veerman stated, “Numerous studies have been conducted over the last few years to find out who or what influences teenagers the most, and the studies agree that parents remain the single most important influence, all the way through high school.”⁶⁴

Looking at youth engagement in the church, it can be shown historically that young people were indeed a part of youth ministry in past centuries. Senter and experts indicated that, “From its beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, youth ministry has had an inside-out and outside-in relationship to the church. Usually non-ordained Christians went out to the young people in an effort to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁵ The movements that youth ministries started out in were the Sunday school, YMCA, Youth for Christ, and Young Life movements. According to authors Moser and Nel, two of these movements, “Youth for Christ and Young Life have profoundly shaped much of our understanding, structure, and

⁶² Belyshev, *Generation Gap*, 42.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Wayne Rice and David Veerman, *Understanding Your Teenager* (Nashville: Word Publishing: 1999), 117.

⁶⁵ Senter et al., *Four Views*, x.

operation of youth ministry.”⁶⁶ These movements used the impact of the radio to engage and entertain youth culture. “In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Youth for Christ and Young Life, two prominent parachurch youth ministries, were formed that utilized entertainment as a prominent feature in their evangelistic endeavors.”⁶⁷ While youth were more attentive to culture and entertainment in the world, these organizational movements used that to their advantage to get them involved in church.

Later during the 1970s, there was a strong need amongst churches all around to engage the teens. Along with the Young Life and Youth for Christ organizations, Dave Wright mentioned, “The church imported the relational strategy of the parachurch movement. Youth pastors began to employ a more attractional model—Gatherings with food and live music could draw enormous crowds. By the 80s the emergence of MTV and a media-driven generation meant church youth ministry became more entertainment-driven than ever.”⁶⁸

Theological/Biblical Positions for Youth Engagement

The engagement of youth reverts back to the days of the Bible. For the purpose of this study, literature is reviewed that supports the importance of engaging youth in church and worship. David Csinos conveyed stated, “Scripture is filled with examples of children being present and even having primary roles in liturgies and everyday practices of faith.”⁶⁹ In the Book

⁶⁶ Kenneth Moser and Malan Nel, “The Connection between Youth Ministry’s Division of Evangelism and Discipleship, and the Lack of Retention of Youth in North American Churches,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019), 3, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2327809812?accountid=12085>, 1.

⁶⁷ Moser and Nel, “The Connection between Youth Ministry’s Division of Evangelism and Discipleship,” 1.

⁶⁸ Dave Wright, “A Brief History of Youth Ministry,” April 12, 2012, accessed May 17, 2020, thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-brief-history-of-youth-ministry/.

⁶⁹ Csinos, “A Little Child Shall Lead Them,” 26.

of Proverbs, adults are instructed to engage youth honorably, “Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it” (Prov. 22:6). This Scripture engages youth wherever they are and prepares them while they are young to worship the Lord both now and when they become adults. This act of engagement is through modeling for youth. As the people of Israel were told to leave in the book of Exodus, the Lord told them to remember the passage through what is today known as the Passover. God wanted them to include their children in this celebratory experience and to explain this act of worship to them. He said, “Remember, these instructions are a permanent law that you and your descendants must observe forever... Then your children will ask, ‘What does this ceremony mean?’” (Ex. 12: 24, 26). This act of engagement is through teaching youth while making them feel included. Senter and his coauthors also mentioned, “God involves children and young people in his coming to his people. It pleases him to use children when approaching people, for they are a special part of religious ceremonies such as the Passover meal, instruction in the Deuteronomist (Deut. 6) and at the sacrifice (1 Sam. 1:4).”⁷⁰

That moment in the Book of Matthew when Jesus cleared the temple and children were seen worshipping and Jesus replied to those leaders saying, “Having you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, ‘You have taught children and infants to give you praise’” (Matt. 21:15-16). Csinos went on to state, “In the New Testament, we see Jesus continuing to place importance on the presence and participation of children. In a context where children were often perceived to be at the same level as animals, the hugs that Jesus gives children are incredibly radical actions.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Senter et al., *Four Views*, 13.

⁷¹ Csinos, “A Little Child Shall Lead Them,” 26.

Taking from the aforementioned Scriptures, youth are to be included in and participate in worship. In addition to these instructions, we are told to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) which includes youth. In order to make disciples, we are to engage in theological reflection, a term given by Clark and Powell which means, “Making sure that what we say, do, and believe is consistent with what God has revealed to us.”⁷² Clark and Powell went on to advise that we, “Help students hear God’s voice by getting them into the Bible, prepare well, and keep ‘creative’ teaching/speaking tools secondary to your message.”⁷³ The Bible helps us to see that engagement is equivalent to worship. As youth engagement exists throughout the Bible, they are participating in an act of worship. According to Clark and Powell, “Worship is more than a ‘worship service.’ Paul reminds us that our ‘everyday, walking-around, going-to-school-and-work lives’ are by their nature created as acts of worship and living sacrifices offered to God (Rom. 12:1-2, adapted from *The Message*).”⁷⁴

The Bible reveals to us that God loved his children and wants them to be included in worship. God’s love was shown as Jesus demonstrated when he cared for them. “He maintained their rights over and against anyone who caused them to stumble (Matt. 18:1-14; 19:13-15). Only here and now in Christ is God’s love for children fully recognized.”⁷⁵ It is important to remember that while these occurrences reveal God’s love for children and are references of God interacting with youth, Senter and his colleagues remind us that, “the Bible is not a book about youth, but about God and his dealings with people—and youth are essentially a part of these

⁷² Clark & Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 72.

⁷³ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁴ Clark & Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 198.

⁷⁵ Senter et al., *Four Views*, 13.

people. What God did and still does, he also does for, with, and through youth (as a part of his people).”⁷⁶ Cole and Nielson remind us that Scripture reveals to people ways to approach the idea of a youth ministry. They stated, “One is when God’s people gather to worship, all generations tend to be included. The other is that faith being passed from one generation to the next is the Lord’s intention. The family and the assembly of believers are all part of this process.”⁷⁷

The relationship between theology and ministry is pertinent to this study. Those who are involved in ministry understand the precept of understanding what it means to minister as well as having the knowledge of theology. The close connection of theology and ministry can be revealed by churches who understand their importance and effect on the people. Authors Root and Dean stated that, “Instinctively we know that ministry precedes theology, that the God we meet in the pages of Scripture is not a theologian, but a minister. Everything we know about who God is and what God does emerges from God’s extravagant, reckless love for and ministrations to humanity.”⁷⁸ Consistent ministry as shown by God helps to develop spiritual connectivity and effective theological methods.

Youth and Prayer in the Church

Prayer is known to be quite an affectionate expression toward God and for youth, prayer is a relationship. Aside from all other religious activities experienced by youth, prayer should be understood as most essential and it is through prayer the sacred world becomes real for

⁷⁶ Senter et al., *Four Views*, 14.

⁷⁷ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 110.

⁷⁸ Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 15, accessed July 31, 2020, Ebook Central.

believers.⁷⁹ Jeannie Oestreicher and Larry Warner co-wrote a book for youth ministries the reasons and methods for incorporating *Imaginative Prayer* into their life. They sought to provide a substantial amount of information for teaching prayer in a different format but also highlighting the important factor that prayer is a form of communication and is the way we connect with God, come into God's presence, hear from God, or speak to God. *Imaginative prayer* is connecting with and hearing from God through mental images.⁸⁰ While this form of prayer practice is provided, there is no acknowledgment and implementation of it actually being used in churches.

In a case study regarding intercessory prayer across all generations, Christina Embree, a Director of Children and Family Ministry, emphasized this form of prayer could create a sense of unity amongst all generations within the church. Research has shown that with youth not being included in all aspects of the church and worship being geared toward a particular crowd or generation will eventually lead to a segregated atmosphere and lack of spiritual connection and relationships. Embree referenced that, "In 2003, the Commission on Children at Risk released a study that, 'the U.S. social institutions that foster...connectedness for children have gotten significantly weaker'."⁸¹ One means of communication, prayer, is not sufficient amongst youth. Despite the decline in use of prayers amongst youth, the idea of prayer is given throughout the Bible as one to help build relationships. "Throughout the New Testament there are repeated exhortations to pray for one another I (James 5:16, 1Th.5:11), pray for the Church (Eph. 6:18),

⁷⁹ Michael Mason, Giuseppe Giordan, and Linda Woodhead, *For Youth, Prayer is Relationship, A Sociology of Prayer* (London: Routledge, 2015), 25.

⁸⁰ Jeannie Oestreicher and Larry Warner, *Imaginative Prayer for Youth Ministry: A Guide to Transforming Your Students' Spiritual Lives into Journey, Adventure, and Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 2006), 11, accessed August 9, 2020, Ebook Central.

⁸¹ Christina Embree, "Intercessory Prayer Across Generations: A Case Study," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring, 2017): <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1891730721%3Faccountid%3D12085>, 131.

pray for leaders (Col. 4:3-4), pray for the sick (James 5:14), pray for those in sin (I Jn 5:16, 17) and pray all mankind (I Tim. 2:1).”⁸² This addition of prayer among youth experience in the church would not only help to build relationships with others in the church and their family, but also with God. The frequency of prayer is also an important factor as it is an aiding factor that improves youth participation and attendance in participation in church.⁸³

Decline in Youth Involvement in the Church

An excerpt from *Messy Church* portrays how youth are separated from the church and thus, not being included in the entire body of Christ. Pastor Ross Parsley explained state:

Many of our churches have decided to stop having family dinners. We’ve relegated young people to the kids’ table because it’s easier that way. All the kids eating at the table with the grown-ups is messy, and it’s just too much work. It creates awkward moments. There’s always such a mess to clean up. It’s incredibly inconvenient and requires so much effort from the older and more mature members of the family. Grandma and Grandpa can only take so much noise, you know. Parents are busy with preparation and hosting. Teenagers feel more comfortable with their own kind anyway, and frankly, that relieves most parents and grandparents for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning.⁸⁴

Metaphorically speaking, this represents a larger issue at hand of how youth are not interactive with others in church and are divided. This sense of division can lead youth to lack a sense of belonging and develop other interests—which yields a decline in their engagement in the church. According to Daniel Burke, “Almost every major branch of Christianity in the United States has lost a significant number of members, Pew found, mainly because millennials are leaving the fold. More than one-third of millennials now say they are unaffiliated with any faith, up 10

⁸² Embree, “Intercessory Prayer Across Generations,” 135.

⁸³ Mason et al., *For Youth, Prayer is Relationship*, 47.

⁸⁴ Ross Parsley, *Messy Church: A Multigenerational Mission for God's Family*(Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2012), 66-67.

percentage points since 2007.”⁸⁵ In the article *Why Young People are Leaving the Church*, Philip Hughes stated, “the ages of 18-29 are the ‘black hole of church attendance’ and that this age group is ‘missing in action’. He suggests there is a 43 percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in church engagement, a figure a little lower than the figure derived from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP 2008-2009) of 54 percent for that age group.”⁸⁶ In addition to these dropouts, Hughes also shares a report on children that, “A large portion of American children, between 70 and 80 percent, have some regular involvement in a church or Sunday School. Yet close to half of them drop out of church by the end of their teenage years.”⁸⁷

This declination of youth engagement in the church occurred all over the world. According to Moser and Nel, “The evangelical church in North America is facing a crisis in its failure to retain young people. Research has shown that young people are dropping out of the church and they are not only leaving but also failing to return once they are older.”⁸⁸ This dropout rate has spread throughout youth ministries across the globe and researchers wanted answers. Cole and Nielson stated, “The second wave of research assessed why the dropout rate among young people soared precipitously. Experts identified problems, including a lack of family involvement and the segregation of students from the multiple generations of the church.”⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Daniel Burke, “Millennials leaving church in droves, study finds,” *CNN Religion*, May 14, 2015, accessed May 16, 2020, 1, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study/index.html>.

⁸⁶ Philip Hughes, “Why young people are leaving the church,” [Online] *Pointers: Bulletin of the Christian Research Association* 25, no. 1, (March 2015): 1–2, availability: <<https://search-informit-com-au.ezproxy.liberty.edu/documentSummary;dn=989774616404530;res=IELHSS>>_ISSN: 1037-3152. [cited 13 May 20], 1-2.

⁸⁷ Hughes, “Why young people are leaving the church,” 1–2.

⁸⁸ Moser and Nel, “The Connection between Youth Ministry’s Division of Evangelism and Discipleship,” 1.

⁸⁹ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel Centered Youth Ministry*,

According to the aforementioned literature, there is a declination in youth levels of participation, involvement, and their attendance in the church. While it is not evident of the ages of these youth, David Kinnaman specifies in *You Lost Me*, that the decline and ongoing trend of young adults leaving the church and simply becoming disconnected from the church. Kinnaman's research revealed, "Millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their teen years. Some never return, while others live indefinitely at the margins of the faith community, attempting to define their own spirituality."⁹⁰ Youth disengagement, lack of participation, and dropout rates are a continuing crisis that exists throughout many churches around the world. Carol E. Lytch declared that, "Studies have documented that church-reared youth start disappearing in high numbers in their junior and senior years of high school. The dropout rate accelerates further after teens graduate."⁹¹ Many churches today are struggling to keep their older teens. Some appear to have the various elements that contribute to this declination will be shared in the next section.

Elements of Youth Decline

As mentioned in the last section, youth in church were not always engaged or in attendance in the church. Various literature brought attention to the declination of youth in church and stressed a need for resolutions and/or ironing out reasons for the lack of participation. Hardie, Pearce, and Denton discovered, "Interest in the religious lives of youth has been increasing in recent years, spurred by a large body of research extolling the benefits of religious

⁹⁰ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 19, accessed May 12, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁹¹ Carol E. Lytch, *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), ix.

involvement for young people's well-being, attainment, and community involvement.”⁹² David Kinnaman sought out to find resolutions by stating, “Whether or not that conclusion is fair, it is true that the Christian community does not well understand the new and not-so-new concerns, struggles, and mindsets of young dropouts, and I hope that *You Lost Me* will help to bridge this gap.”⁹³ Seeking to help teens become interested in church, theological educator and sociologist Carol Lytch presented a text that helps churches understand youth. As the Assistant Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools, Lytch encouraged, “Passing on the faith to the next generation is challenging today in a new way. In fact, ‘passing on the faith’ is no longer the task it used to be. Teens *choose* faith instead.”⁹⁴ While the aforementioned authors attempted to rebuild student ministries and seek ways to engage youth, there are elements that contribute to youth decline in church. Something influenced and sparked a disinterest in church for many youth. The elements that have appeared in various literature that seems to carry the weight of responsible for the declination of student ministries and youth involvement include: youth worker, culture, parental support, music, and the church.

Youth Ministry/Youth Worker

Youth ministry plays a major role in the lives of young generation in the church by helping to shape, mold, and raise youth awareness of worship, Christianity, and discipleship. Senter and his co-authors describe youth ministry as an important entity that, “belongs to the church. In a sentence, youth ministry is the holistic Christian ministry of the local church under

⁹² Jessica Halliday Hardie, Lisa D. Pearce, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, “The Dynamics and Correlates of Religious Service Attendance in Adolescence,” *Youth & Society* 48, no. 2 (March 2016): 152.

⁹³ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

⁹⁴ Lytch, *Choosing Church*, 13.

its leadership to young people and those who influence their spiritual growth.”⁹⁵ While youth ministries have a dynamic responsibility in the lives of young people, there are concerns as to their ineffectiveness in retaining youth via their missional work. Some factors which contribute to the lack of participation within youth ministry are ineffective leadership, failure to establish relationships, and decisions without a purpose and process.

A Director of Youth Ministry in Columbia, South Carolina, David Olshine, has shared concerns and solutions regarding youth ministries. He addressed twelve problems within the Youth Ministry, one of them being related to the leadership involved. He stated that, “We must address the problem the body of Christ (the universal church) has in becoming impotent in attracting and keeping young people. This is related to ineffective leadership in nearly all congregations and organizations. The shepherds and leaders in the body of Christ have become too safe in reaching out to youth.”⁹⁶ A renowned worship leader, Ross Parsley, stated that, “Helping young leaders is extremely challenging because it demands accountability, it involves some risk, and it can be downright messy.”⁹⁷ Therefore, leaders of the ministry should desire and seek effective accountability. Cole and Nielson state, “According to various studies, the normal tenure of a youth minister at a local church lasts approximately eighteen months.”⁹⁸ This is a concern to which many churches undergo. The leadership within youth ministry have to be filled with leaders who are approachable and are qualified. In a study on youth church participation, authors Hoge and Petrillo stated, “The impact of youth programs sponsored by the church

⁹⁵ Senter et al., *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, 43.

⁹⁶ David Olshine, Chapter 2.

⁹⁷ Ross Parsley, *Messy Church*, 98.

⁹⁸ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 23.

depends greatly on the qualities of the adult leaders. Jarvis and Strommen both found that pastor and youth leaders, who lacked approachability and understanding, were a strong factor in their participation.”⁹⁹

The leadership within youth ministry is not the only factor that lead to declination of youth participation. Youth ministries also lack connectivity and close relationships that exist amongst those involved. Establishing relationships is important because it benefits spiritual growth of youth. Having relationships means more than simply doing fun activities together, in fact, Senter and colleagues suggested, “Youth ministry had to be more than building relationships with youth. Those who see relationships as simply entertaining youth and hoping they will somehow grow closer to God in the process is an inadequate view of youth ministry that neither builds Christian fellowship nor discipleship.”¹⁰⁰

As youth ministry aim toward building relationships with many students, they also face challenges of retaining youth attention. Clark and Powell stated that, “Once youth do show interest, they’re often more far more engaged than students 30 years ago. So, grabbing their attention may be a bit tougher now, but once they are there, great things can happen.”¹⁰¹ This attention can be attained through the efforts of youth workers. These student workers serve as the leaders within youth ministries who are also known as the driving source for creating those relationships with youth. Naomi Thompson mentioned the role of the youth worker as one who, “Often run separate groups for the purposes of discussing faith (nurture) and for providing open-

⁹⁹ Dean Hoge and Gregory H. Petrillo, “Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes among High School Youth,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17, no. 4 (1978): 361, doi:10.2307/1385400.

¹⁰⁰ Senter et al., *Four Views of Youth Ministry*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry*, 157.

access youth activities for a wider audience (outreach).”¹⁰² Youth workers provide encouragement as well as spiritual and leadership opportunities for their students. While youth workers are very influential, research revealed that they struggle with making church relevant to youth. Clark and Powell mentioned that youth workers know, “It’s their job to prompt and prod their students into considering the complex texture and depth of the gospel. But when we spend our precious few minutes of teaching trying to be relevant and funny, showing cool movie clips, we end up with so little time to delve into the Bible with any depth that we, at some level, fail our students.”¹⁰³

Student ministries that are engaged and have established a purpose are more equipped to attain growth both spiritually and physically. Those ministries who believe in solely entertaining their youth through fun recreational activities will lack substantial amount of growth. Michael Warren, an advocate for youth ministry, proposed that goals be set for the youth ministry based upon asking these questions:

The important question about youth ministry is not ‘Where are the kids?’ or ‘What should we do with them when they show up?’ but ‘What is the nature of our community?’ what are the discipleship skills appropriate to those who have moved beyond childhood, and how can a community exhibit those skills in a way that attracts the young and draws them to inspiring mentors in faith? By what criteria will people know if they have developed the religious abilities appropriate to their age?¹⁰⁴

While these questions all take time and strenuous planning, they help to mold the youth ministry and provide some sort of guide for who they need to be and where they are trying to go. Without

¹⁰² Naomi Thompson, *Young People and Church Since 1900: Engagement and Exclusion* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 99.

¹⁰³ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry*, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Warren, "Christian skill set: the goal of youth ministry." *The Christian Century*, September 7, 2004, 25+. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed June 11, 2020). https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A121873093/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=8d81b104.

a solid foundational purpose and process set forth will only lead to complications, thus leading to youth lack of interest and participation. Clark and Powell stated that their, “Four-step Deep Design is incomplete if a healthy process doesn’t surround it. Many attempts at change fail not because the leaders lack ideas, but because of poor communication and process.”¹⁰⁵ They also advised that goals set be meaningful and conducive to the youth ministry.

Culture

The cultural aspects have been a known factor that influences the behaviors and decision-making of many youth. Young people are leaving the church based upon various changes in their cultural surroundings. Among several reasons for why youth are leaving the church, Philip Hughes identified cultural issues stating an argument that, “The heart of the problem is the fact that ‘our culture is discontinuously different’. The contemporary culture of young people is, he says, fluid, diverse, complex and uncertain.”

Youth are more susceptible to follow the cultural patterns around them which affects their religious beliefs and patterns. There is the issue of how youth ministry responds to the culture of the youth while also being receptive of the church culture. Senter et al. addressed this issue stating that it, “Revolves around lifestyle. Young believers bring with them the baggage of their pre-faith lives. Language, dress, tastes in entertainment, humor, relationships between the sexes, possible use of tobacco and drugs—all these wave red flags to the godly people of the church.”¹⁰⁶ Culture plays a big part in the lives of youth, in how they respond, or not respond in church. Some youth even feel as though entertainment, learning, and activities received from

¹⁰⁵ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry*, 56.

¹⁰⁶ Senter et al., *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, x.

church they can also attain from their culture, which further leads them to become disengaged in the church. Hughes noted that, “There is a strong sense in the wider culture that faith is irrelevant to politics, sexuality, science, media and technology. Young adults are more likely to consult the Internet than their pastor about religious questions, and few have sufficient understanding to evaluate responses.”¹⁰⁷

Just as culture is ever-changing, youth ministry and church have to learn to acclimate to these changes. Authors Clark and Powell discussed how church ministries should not remain stagnant throughout each year because of how an individual perception changes about culture, theology, the church, and about themselves. In particular, their researcher revealed, “A rapidly changing culture demands ministries that are able to grow and adapt.”¹⁰⁸ If they fail to change, then the ministry will not grow, thus leaving youth disengaged. In admitting that there is a need for change as well as culture playing a role as a factor, Moser and Nel mentioned, “Citing the coming changes that would impact young people, ‘continued modifications of the current system simply will not keep up with the changes in the world in which we live. There is a need for a re-culturing of youth ministry.’”¹⁰⁹

Parental Support

The importance of relationships in youth ministry expand beyond those with students to the necessity of development of relationships with parents. Profound scholars, David Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley, wrote a book about Great Commission worship. They highlighted the

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, “Why Young People are Leaving the Church,” 3.

¹⁰⁸ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Moser and Nel, “The Connection between youth ministry’s division,” 1.

fact that the Great Commission is relational, thus stating the following significance of vertical and horizontal relationships:

God made us to enjoy bright, living relationships. He is the God of relationships. In fact, life is about relationships. The relationship designed by God for communion with His people is first an upward relationship—one that reflects our worship of God and the personal relationship we have with Him. Horizontal relationships are vitally important to our spiritual development. The issues associated with relationships are grouped into four areas: (1) relationships with our families; (2) relationships with all people—believers and unbelievers; (3) relationships with those in authority; and (4) business relationships.¹¹⁰

Vertical relationships are a vital precursor to horizontal relationships. The relationship between parents and their youth is a determinant factor on youth participation in many life occurrences, events they may be involved, and church. Belyshev study disclosed, “Moms and dads hold the key to discipling their child in the truths of the Lord, but when they step away from that responsibility, then we will have additional role models such as the media, prescription medication, academia, internet, government, sports, video games, and books.”¹¹¹ As parents gain a close relationship with their child, they become more influential in their decision-making and well-being. This parent-child bond helps to ensure a spiritual impact and positivity.

Belyshev mentioned two sides of youth generations. One side is the early age when many youth desire to be just like their parents when they grow up. The other side is during the time youth start changing into an adolescent and teenager where they shift toward being rebellious toward their parents. Belyshev’s timely comment elucidates, “Somewhere in those early years, a gap occurred in the relationship between the parent and their child. This happens way too

¹¹⁰ David Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley, *Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 95, 106.

¹¹¹ Belyshev, *Generation Gap*, 68-104.

often.”¹¹² Parents are encouraged to have a close connection with their youth so that as they grow older, that rebelliousness is nonexistent.

Parental support is necessary when it comes to the youth in ministry and overall church. “Research has shown that youth workers can play a part—sometimes a vital part—in the spiritual development of teenagers. But parents play a much greater role over the long haul for the vast majority of kids. Parents and youth workers need each other.”¹¹³ Clark and Powell’s *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* provided various roles parents play in ministry. There are those parents who, while instead of supporting the ministry, they rely upon the ministry and church to do all the work when it comes to spiritually shaping their youth. In addition, some parents are disconnected from or simply not included in youth ministry works. The authors reflected on the need of youth stating, “What adolescents need, then, is the *intersection* and *partnership* of parents (or at least one parent or caretaker) available and focused on them as individuals, and adults representing the church and committed to their spiritual and life development.”¹¹⁴ Further literature expressed the need for parents and their youth to share similar or mostly all religious experiences together. Embree stated, “Within many churches today, children and parents rarely share experiences. This generational separation makes it difficult for parents to learn how to nurture their children spiritually.”¹¹⁵ While youth and parents lack religious experiences together, this also impacts their engagement in the church.

¹¹² Belyshev, *Generation Gap*, 67.

¹¹³ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry*, 135.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Embree, “Intercessory Prayer across Generations,” 132.

The ultimate goal for parental support is that which is pleasing in God's sight. Scripture tells us to, "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it" (Prov. 22:6). God wants parents to lead and guide their children, for if they do not they will possibly be led elsewhere. Kinnaman reminds us that, "God looks at how we shape our children's hearts and minds to be responsive and obedient to him."¹¹⁶ Ephesians instructs for, "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). With a lack of parental support in the child's life, a stable voice of spiritual influence will be void. This missing component of adolescence often creates a weakened desire of church participation, guidance, and spiritual influence.

In their study regarding influences on youth's church attitude and participation, Hoge and Petrillo listed family as one of the factors. Parents who are involved in the church positively affect their student's participation. Hoge and Petrillo stated that, "All researchers agree that parents' religious values are a strong influence on a student's church attitudes."¹¹⁷ Parents are more likely to instill their beliefs and core values upon their child, who will potentially follow. However, Hoge and Petrillo provides us with the reality that, "Parents may or may not try to transmit their religious values directly to their children; some may choose to let the children work out religious matters on their own, without parental supervision."¹¹⁸ Giving children a choice may lead the child away from the church as well as signifying the difference between parental support opposed to parental control. Hoge and Petrillo mentioned that, "Parental support

¹¹⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Hoge and Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth," 360.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

is clearly more important than parental control in facilitating religious commitments of children.”¹¹⁹

Music

Music greatly impacts students and is extremely important in youth ministry. Music comes in many forms and styles such as instrumental, vocal, acapella, gospel, contemporary, slow, fast, and much more. In the *Black Music Research Journal*, Associate Professor Brigitta Johnson noted that, “Music has always been central in black Christian worship practices. As early as the nineteenth-century slave period, the transmission of biblical teachings in preaching and song was closely linked when people extemporaneously composed songs to emphasize and affirm aspects of sermons, especially in the secret gatherings of the invisible church.”¹²⁰ So music was used as an enhancement or another form of expressing the word of God and expression of one’s love for God. The contemplation resides with how this form of expression affects the people, in particular, how it affects youth and their engagement.

Youth are attracted to music and have their own musical preferences. There is a close connection and effect that music has on youth. In fact, “The relationship between music and children has been researched from the educational, cultural, and physical aspects. In 2009, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy statement of just how important music, music lyrics, and music videos were to children and adolescents.”¹²¹ Music has the content and capability of moving youth emotionally and socially inside and outside the church. White stated

¹¹⁹ Hoge and Petrillo, “Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth,” 360.

¹²⁰ Birgitta J. Johnson, “Back to the Heart of Worship: Praise and Worship Music in a Los Angeles African-American Megachurch,” *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2011), 108.

¹²¹ White, “Christian Music Experiences,” 13.

also that, “Music plays such an important role in a child’s cognitive development, physical development, worldview formation, and emotional development.”¹²² If music has such a large effect on youth, what impact does church music have on their attendance and engagement?

Statistical Information of Youth Decline

Youth are absent from the church via their lack of participation and/or their attendance. They are known to start in church but eventually will drop out. Hughes shared his research findings that, “A large proportion of children who grow up attending a church in Australia, United Kingdom or the USA drop out of church attendance. According to the 2009 International Social Survey Program, the drop-out rate in Australia was 72 percent. In the United Kingdom, it was 57 percent, and in the USA it was 47 percent.” In one of their studies, Moser and Nel revealed the following information regarding youth declination amongst churches:

The Barna Group has documented diminishing attendance among youth in the churches of the United States. Their findings show that only one-fifth of the people in their 20s have maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences. Kinnaman claims that of those people who had a Christian background as a youth, 59% report that they had or have ‘dropped out of attending church, after going regularly’. Research showed that 57% of people who were active in Christian fellowship during their youth say they are less active in church today compared to when they were aged 15 years.¹²³

This crisis highlights not only evidence for the devastating factor of youth declination in the church, but also serves as a leading factor in the need for change. A change is needed within churches that will include youth more and get them more involved.

Research also reveals that the decline of adult church attendance actually started in student ministry years. Looking at specifications for adolescence, Hardie, Pearce, and Denton

¹²² White, “Christian Music Experiences,” 47.

¹²³ Moser and Nel, “The Connection between youth ministry’s division,” 2.

stated that, “One study found that 37.5% of a nationally representative sample of adults had stopped attending religious services for at least 2 years at some point, and that 40% of these ‘dropouts’ had stopped attending services in adolescence.”¹²⁴ Other studies show there to be underlying cognitive reasoning for youth wanting to leave the church or how they became uninterested in church. Hardie’s research group referred to it as a polarization trend which, “For many adolescents, developmental changes in cognition might lead to questioning their religious beliefs and either straying from or reaffirming their theological commitments.”¹²⁵

It was also known for youth to wrestle with their recognition of their religious identity opposed to their religious practice. Youth were more quickly to say they were religious while not feeling obligated to actually attend church. In response to this particular study of youth preference of identity and practice, Hardie et. al found that, “Youth religiosity, measured by ‘expression of a religious preference’, declined in adolescence before stabilizing or increasing. Religious identity is often more stable than religious practice, with the latter having the potential to be more influenced by life events and contextual circumstances.”¹²⁶ Youth were accepting the fact that they were religious but opposed to actually exercising their faith through engagement and participation in the local church.

Perhaps, youth lacked maturity in their understanding that their presence and the interactive ability meant more than a verbal declaration of being religious. Clark and Powell mentioned that the period of adolescence is, “A much longer journey and maturity, in every area, simply takes longer to develop today that it once did.”¹²⁷ Along with this lack of maturity,

¹²⁴ Hardie et. al, “The Dynamics and Correlates of Religious Service Attendance,” 153.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 153.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 154.

¹²⁷ Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry*, 71.

Kinnaman refers to youth who drop out as prodigals claiming they, “Leave their childhood or teen faith entirely. This includes those who deconvert and those who switch to another faith.”¹²⁸

Kinnaman moves on to provide statistics which reveal the loss of faith amongst youth. His research strongly indicated, “Only 11 percent of young adults say that they grew up as a Christian but have deconverted entirely or converted to another faith. A young Christian has about 1:9 odds of losing his or her faith entirely. While this is a rare outcome, it is a very high number.”¹²⁹

Summary

There is a great amount of research which encompasses the reasons for youth disengagement, what supports their involvement, as well as the importance of their relationship with youth workers in the church. Youth workers who implement spiritual connectivity, effective methodologies, and mentorship assist youth in being more engaged with church and increase their desire to attend a place of worship. However, despite the literature presented, there is still more to discover as to how churches can retain their youth in such an effective way that will increase their relationship with youth workers and most importantly, with Christ. To date, there is no research investigating personal experiences of young adolescents in local churches in how they perceive their youth workers in their current church setting. This study aimed to focus on this gap in the literature by surveying a small group of youth who are members of a local church in Nashville, Tennessee.

¹²⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 66.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 70.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In order to understand the value and much needed engagement of youth in the local church, there has to be research studied to address youth asset to the church as well as their lack of participation. Despite youth being overlooked in many aspects of the church, they hold significance in the future of the church and deserve to be spiritually educated. It is therefore important to study reasons for student disengagement in church while placing emphasis on the work ethics and efforts of youth ministries, youth workers, and the church. With the significant amount of literature on youth involvement in the church, there is little which pertains reasons why, when, and how the disassociation occurs. This chapter explains the methodology used to conduct the qualitative historical study to examine reasons for youth disengagement in an effort to find strategies for effective retention and engagement that may benefit youth and the church. The purpose is to identify the research design, list the research questions and hypotheses, identify the participants, and explain how surveys were conducted. The research method also will include the procedure used for distributing the surveys, how information was protected, and data analysis is disclosed.

Research Design

A qualitative historical design was selected for this study to investigate varied dynamics of youth engagement in the church, focusing more on youth disengagement from the church. According to Harper and McCunn, “Qualitative research is a methodological approach used in a wide range of disciplines, predominantly to investigate human behavior and the factors

influencing behavioral processes.”¹³⁰ This design approach will also bring awareness to many churches and youth ministries as it aims to offer resolutions and improvements for youth. The researcher wanted to gain perspectives from youth from varied age groups. According to Merriam and Tisdell, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.”¹³¹

Editors of the Sage Encyclopedia referred to historical methods as the “Use of primary historical data to answer a question.”¹³² The historical method is conducive to this study because it looks at numerous studies that discuss the origin and behavior of youth in the church and discusses the expectations given for youth in the Bible. For the purposes of this research, it is imperative to look in the past to bring about change for the present and future. In an article, Porra, Hirschheim, and Parks agree, “Historical research is a result of a growing recognition that we need to better understand the past as it relates to information.”¹³³ The qualitative historical design was the best approach to research a lot of information in response to the research problem and research questions while retrieving data information to support the hypotheses.

¹³⁰ Liam D. Harper and Robert McCunn, “‘Hand in Glove’: Using Qualitative Methods to Connect Research and Practice,” *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance* 12, no. 7 (August 2017): 990.

¹³¹ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 6, accessed August 4, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³² Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, 0 vols. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 2.

¹³³ Jaana Porra, Rudy Hirschheim, and Michael S. Parks, “The Historical Research Method and Information Systems Research,” *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* 15, no. 9 (09, 2014): 536-76, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1567586089%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

Research Question 1: What are the dynamics within the local church that weaken youth engagement?

Research Question 2: What are the important personal characteristics of youth workers as perceived by youth?

Hypotheses

The hypothesis for this study were:

Hypothesis 1: The dynamics within the local church that weaken youth engagement could include a lack of social interactions, unfavorable music, not having a sense of belonging, and not experiencing captivating biblical teaching.

Hypothesis 2: The important personal characteristics of the youth worker as perceived by youth include personal charisma, relational connection, and method of instruction.

Participants

Due to the global pandemic of the COVID-19, the method by which participants were chosen had to be via email and phone, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board. Out of six churches who were asked to participate, four gave approval to participate. Pastors of varied churches were contacted via phone who then sent out online surveys for the researcher on my behalf or provided the researcher with email addresses to send surveys. There were a total of 19 participants who completed the survey. The participants submitted the online survey anonymously while only revealing their age. The participants were between the ages of 10-18, resided in Nashville, TN, and were all required to be a current member of a local church.

Table 1: Sample demographics

Age	Number	Percent
10-12	16	71.4
13-15	2	14.3
16-18	3	14.3

Source: Data from online survey

Setting

Upon receiving IRB approval, the study was conducted in May 2020 by online survey forms. Each pastor who agreed for students in their church to participate received a thorough explanation regarding the study. They all wanted to know the results from the study once the thesis was completed. Out of the four pastors, three agreed to send out the surveys on the researcher's behalf while the other church provided the researcher with parent email addresses. Parents of minors were to read the consent form prior to allowing their youth to complete the survey. Parents of minors had to read the assent form to them prior to completing the survey. Minors who filled out the survey were accompanied by their parents. The consent form nor assent form needed a signature. Participants and adults were required to read the forms prior to completing the survey. Results from surveys were received automatically through the online platform, Google Forms for the researcher to review.

Instrumentation

Due to the restrictions given by the COVID-19, face- to-face interviews and/or observations with participants were unable to be conducted. Additionally, due to the ongoing pandemic, churches were not open and services were not being held to prevent members from exposure to the virus. As a result of this, the only instrumentation used to conduct the study was

online survey. The online evaluation survey consisted of 19 questions which included a mixture of open-ended and closed questions.

Procedures

An IRB approved recruitment letter was shared to several local churches within the Nashville, TN area. The goal was to receive up to 40 participants between ages 10–18. In order to participate in the study, youth had to be within the ages of 10–18 and a member of a church. Participation in this survey was totally voluntary. While no signature was required, parents of minors and participants who were age 18 were required to read over all consent/assent forms prior to completion of online evaluation survey. IRB approved the use of an honor system in regards to the consent forms. Participants were notified that once they completed their survey, they would be directed to review instructions for participating in a raffle. The raffle would consist of random drawing of 10 participants who would receive a \$5.00 gift card.

Participants voluntarily completed an evaluation survey of 19 questions. They were given the opportunity to remove themselves from the study at any time. Participants were asked prescreened questions which were: “How old are you?” and “Are you a member of your church?” prior to answering further questions. If the participant did not fit the age range 10-18 or stated they were not a member of a church, they were excluded from the survey. The questions included on the online survey were divided in categories which highlighted personal feelings about their church, activities in which they participated, and spiritual growth and connection. For a complete list of questions, see Appendix A. The duration of the survey takes approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Data results were kept confidential to only the researcher although there were few requests from two churches to provide them with results upon completion of the

study. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the researcher will mail results from the survey to all churches who participated.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study reflected personal experiences of youth within their church. Results showed frequency of youth participation and attendance within their church. The frequency of participants' attendance in church activities and classes reflected their engagement with leadership. The personal interests of youth were included to gain perspective of what attracted them and what would motivate them to attend church. The researcher focused on how often they attended educational opportunities such as Bible classes and Sunday school. To ensure morality of youth, parents were instructed to read questions and/or explain those that were confusing. After reviewing the participant's answers, there was a need for more explanation as far as youth engagement in spiritual classes as well as whether or not they gained a spiritual connection and close relationship with Christ. The benefit of an on-site observation and face-to-face interview would have created a more conducive study. However, due to the unforeseen global pandemic, this was not possible. Strategies and ideas were generated as a result of the completed surveys which would lead to an overall summary and/or further results. Results from this study will be discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to the engagement of youth in the church in an effort to find strategies and methods for their retention. The online survey (Appendix A) consisted of questions which led participants to reflect on their current experiences within their church. With these findings, the dynamics that weaken youth engagement in the local church is presented as well as how youth perceive important characteristics of youth leaders. The results from the online survey that was conducted are presented to determine answers to the research questions and accuracy of hypotheses.

Dynamics That Weaken Youth Engagement

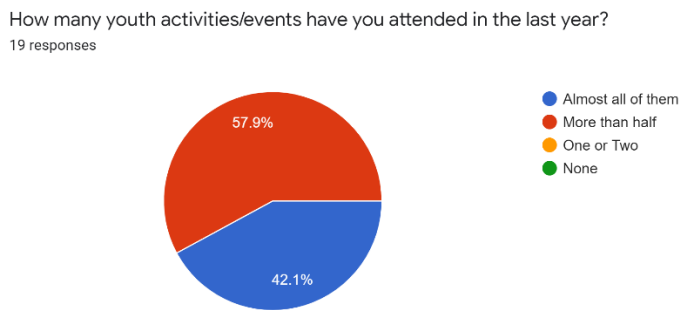
A descriptive analysis using varied graphic representations was conducted to determine the answer to the first research question: What are the dynamics within the local church that weaken youth engagement? In response to this research question, it was hypothesized that various aspects that weaken youth engagement in the church include lack of social interactions, unfavorable music, and ineffective teaching. Based on participant's responses, the researcher could not determine if these factors affected youth engagement.

Social Interactions

The participants were asked several questions in the survey regarding the frequency of their attendance to youth activities/events offered at their church in the last year. The sample consisted of 19 participants who responded. Within the study it was determined that 57.9% of the participants attended more than half of the activities/events and 42.1% attended almost all of them (see Figure 1 for event attendance percentages). While the researcher cannot determine

which events were most favorable, it can be concluded that participants were socially interactive at their church.

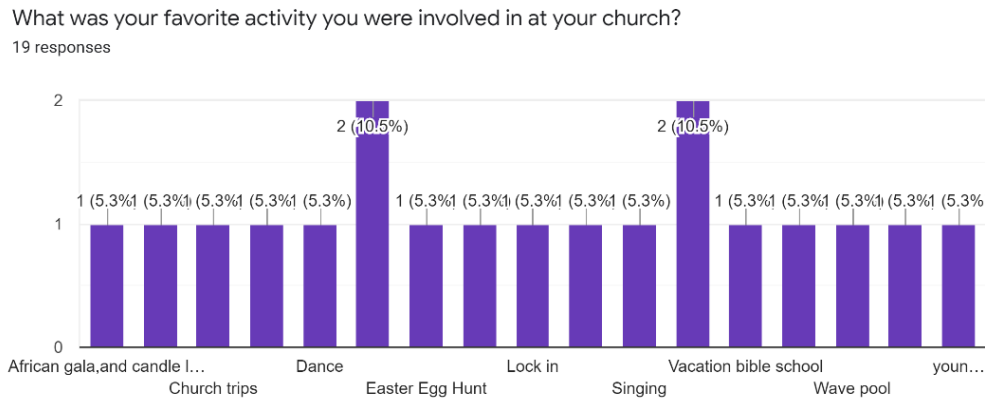
Figure 1: Event attendance



Source: Data from online survey, question number three

In order to see what specific activities youth participants were involved with at their church, the researcher allowed participants to openly respond. Findings from this particular question varied as mostly all participants responded differently. Question eleven reveals the diverse interests of many youth (see Figure 2). The bar chart illustrates a majority of individualized choices and 5.3% chose the same. It also demonstrates how important it is for churches to engage youth with a variety of social activities both inside and outside the church.

Figure 2: Participant favorite church activity



Source: Data from online survey, question number eleven

Unfavorable Music

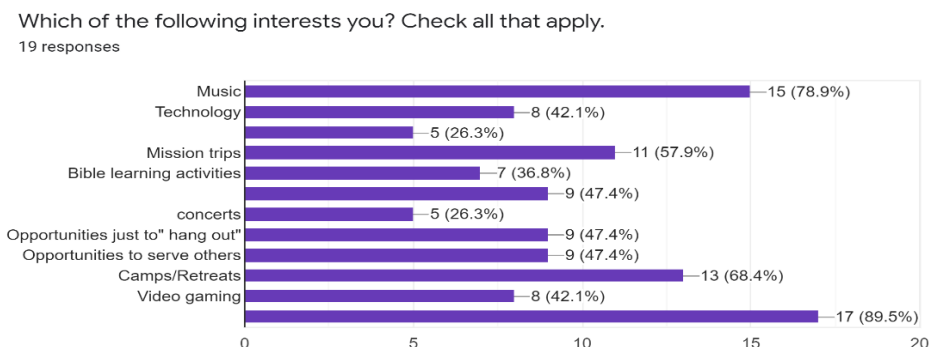
Music is an entity in worship which youth can benefit cognitively as it helps to enhance their listening skills, speaking skills, and improves how they process information.¹³⁴ Some youth attend church specifically for the music that is presented as it helps them be more expressive and connects emotionally and spiritually. In an article about youth perceptions toward music in worship, Bhekani Tshabalala and Cynthia Patel emphasized, “The ability of music in the context of youth worship to uplift and transform, to improve feelings of well-being as well as one’s relationship with God is clear from their responses.”¹³⁵ Out of many categories to choose from, participants were asked to choose all they were interested in. Out of all the categories, video games ranked highest and music was the second highest choice majority of participants chose

¹³⁴ White, "Christian Music Experiences in the Faith Development of Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study," Order No. 3631010, Liberty University, 2014, 44.

¹³⁵ Bhekani G. Tshabalala & Cynthia J. Patel. “The role of praise and worship activities in spiritual well-being: perceptions of a Pentecostal Youth Ministry group.” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 15:1, 2010. 73-82, DOI: [10.1080/13644361003603074](https://doi.org/10.1080/13644361003603074)

(see Figure 3). Bennett stated that, “Good example yields good results. When children are mentored in music ministry many good things happen. As active participants in liturgy, they gain an appreciation for the joy that can be had in worship.”¹³⁶

Figure 3: Categorical interests



Source: Data from online survey, question number thirteen

Ineffective Teaching

Spiritual formation impacts youth in their ability to understand the reasons why worship and being engaged in church are so important. Recognizing the challenges of teaching students, Christian educators should identify the extent to which youth are spiritual or religious.¹³⁷ Churches typically facilitate teachings for adults and youth during Sunday school and Bible study throughout the week. Both are purposeful for teaching biblical knowledge and spiritually

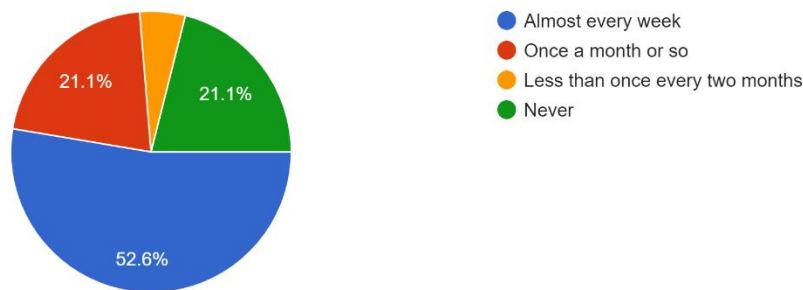
¹³⁶ Bennett John Porchiran, “Mentoring Youth into Music Ministry: First Opportunities to Mentor Children.” *Pastoral Music* 32, no. 3 (02, 2008): 19-21, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1353443%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹³⁷ Wendy Kearns Lewis, "Teacher Preparedness for Spiritually Transformational Teaching: A Case Study in One Christian High School." Order No. 3745377, Liberty University, 2015. In PROQUESTMS Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University; ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1756274836%3Faccountid%3D12085>, 64.

growing the individual. The survey asked participants how often they attended Sunday school in the last year (see Figure 4 for results). More than half replied they attend Sunday school almost every week.

Figure 4: Sunday school attendance

How often did you attend Sunday School in the last year?
19 responses

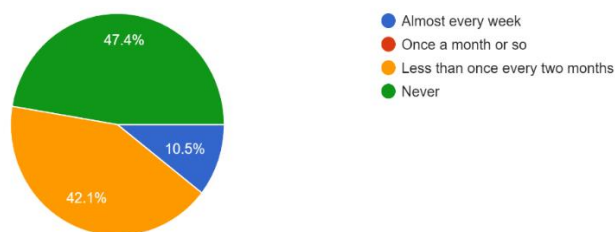


Source: Data from online survey, question number four

Participants were also asked how often they attended Bible study in the last year (see Figure 5 for results). The amount of participants who answered “never” was 47.4% and 42.1% answered “less than once every two months.” The researcher concluded that participants attended Sunday school much more frequently than Bible study.

Figure 5: Bible class attendance

How often do you attend Youth Bible Study classes in the last year?
19 responses



Source: Data from online survey, question number five

Characteristics of Youth Workers Perceived by Youth

The purpose of this study was to not only find what caused youth disengagement but to also determine the necessary characteristics of youth workers as perceived by youth. This would serve as a benefit for youth ministries and churches to ensure their youth workers are equipped to serve. In response to the second research question, it was hypothesized that the important personal characteristics of youth workers as perceived by youth include personal charisma, relational connection, mentorship, and have an effective method of instruction. Based on participant's responses, the researcher could not determine youth perceptions.

Personal Charisma

Charisma, according to the Webster's dictionary is defined as, "A personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a public figure."¹³⁸ One of the survey questions asked participants, "How satisfied are you with the Youth Ministry leaders at your church?" Results showed 63.2% were very satisfied and 36.8% were somewhat satisfied. The researcher equates satisfaction of someone's character to valuing their leadership.

Relational Connection

Relational, or social connection is vital for youth. Educators Collins and Dandelion stressed that, "The things young people considered most importantly were close relationships with friends and family, an exciting life and helping others."¹³⁹ A relational connection occurs between people when there is an experience of leveling, understanding, and peace. The survey included some questions to determine if youth participants felt a relational connection with their

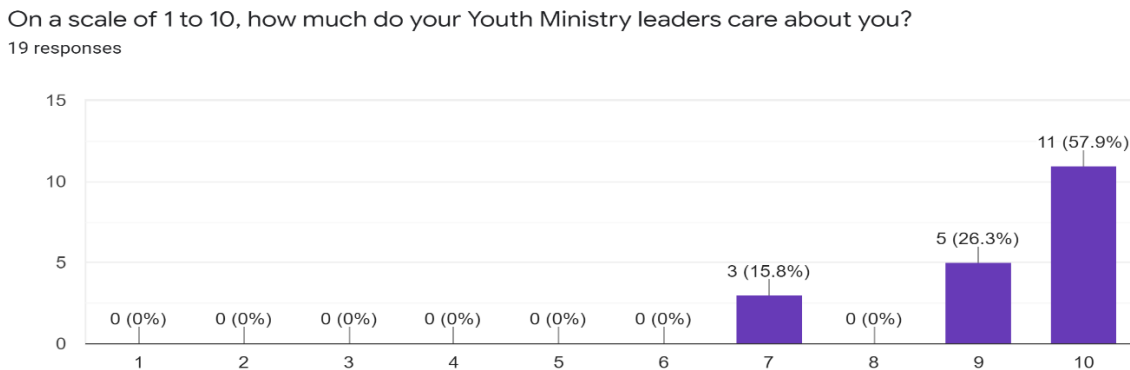
¹³⁸ *Merriam-Webster.com* Dictionary, s.v. "charisma," accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charisma>.

¹³⁹ Collins and Dandelion, *Religion and Youth*, 57.

youth worker. One of the questions asked “How well do you get along with their youth leaders?” There were 63.2% of the participants who replied “very well” and 36.8% who stated, “somewhat well”. This implies that there is an overall connection between youth leader and the participants.

The researcher felt it was also important to determine how the youth perceived how their leaders cared about them. Participants were asked to rate on a scale from 1-10 how much their leaders cared about them (See Figure 6). Results show that 3 participants rated level 7 , 5 participants rated level 9, and 11 participants rated their youth leader’s care a 10. It can also be determined from these data that youth has a relationship with their youth leaders to the extent of feeling compassion.

Figure 6: Relational Connection



Mentorship

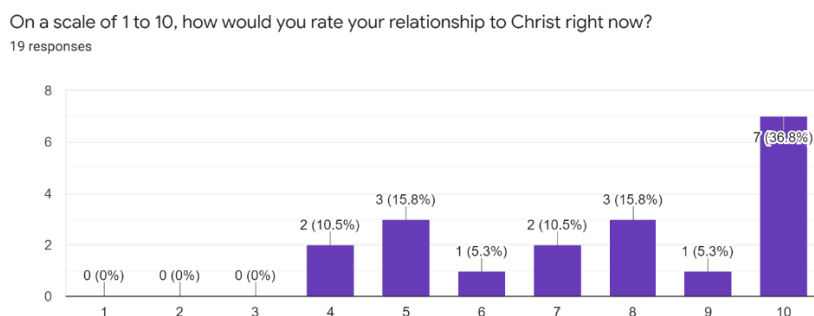
Mentorship is having the quality to mentor or teach others. It was hypothesized that youth look for their ministry leader to possess the quality of a mentor. To assess this hypothesis, the researcher asked participants if they were ever given the opportunity to lead at church. There were 14 participants who responded “yes” and 5 participants responded “no.” Due to the fact that more participants who experienced a role in leadership conveyed that churches are providing

opportunities for youth. However, this is not enough evidence that would portray whether participants valued their youth leader as a mentor.

Effective Method of Instruction

The researcher assumed that youth perceive an important characteristic of youth workers as one who can teach well. Participants were asked, “Has the Youth Ministry at your church helped to improve your relationship with Christ last year?” Results showed that 12 participants replied “yes”, 5 participants replied “maybe” and 2 participants replied “no”. It can be concluded from these data results that the majority of youth participants receive effective methods of instruction which lead to their knowing the importance of having a relationship with Christ. In addition to this question, participants were given an opportunity to explain what parts of their relationship with Christ has improved. Results revealed behavioral thematic responses that included “talking to God more”, “praying”, “reading the Bible”, and “understanding God’s protection.” From these results it can be noted the participants received an instruction that helped to improve their knowledge about Christ. Participants were also asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your relationship to Christ right now?” The results of this questions varied greatly (See Figure 7). There were more participants who have identified their relationship with Christ a level 10. Other responses were rather differently spread across the chart.

Figure 7: Relationship with Christ



Summary

This chapter discussed results of the online survey that was conducted for this study to reveal dynamics of youth engagement in the local church. Research findings did not thoroughly support Hypothesis 1 showing that lack of social interactions, unfavorable music, and lack of biblical teaching all contributed to youth disengagement in the local church. However, findings supported that social interactions, music, and biblical teaching help with youth engagement in church. In response to Hypothesis 2, it cannot be fully determined how youth perceive characteristics of their youth workers. On the other hand, those factors of personal charisma, relational connection, mentorship, and having an effective method of instruction are necessary qualities for youth workers to engage youth. Overall, the survey could be categorized into themes which reveal how engaged the youth participants were at their church. Effective themes that emerged from the survey results were youth attendance, relationship, spiritual connection and growth, and finally personal interests.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine ways in which youth can be more engaged in the local church. This research examined various dynamics for youth engagement in the church. These levels of engagement sprouted into challenges and supportive measures that affected the youth and their involvement in the church. This chapter will present a brief summary of the study, findings, limitations, and implications for practice, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Study

Although many churches and organizations have youth as a part of their membership and attendance, there are challenges which prohibit them from engaging and retaining youth. There appears to be a declination of youth participation and attendance in the church. Professor Lester agreed that, “While the drop has been seen in all ages, races, and ethnicities, millennials and youth have seen the largest change. They are less involved, less interested, and many are leaving their faith once they reach adulthood. For anyone involved with a Christian church, the decline in the quality and quantity of the next generation is obvious.”¹⁴⁰ The study revealed several reasons for youth disengagement as lack of unsuccessful methods of teaching, the church’s inefficient implemented practices, parental and worldly influences, and ineffective youth leaders. In response to youth levels of disengagement, Assistant Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools, Carol Lytch proposed three factors that attracted youth and maintained

¹⁴⁰ Professor Lester, “Declining Participation in Christian Youth,” *EN 106*, April 19, 2017, accessed August 16, 2020, https://cte.ku.edu/sites/cte.drupal.ku.edu/files/docs/CTEprograms/CHRP/Portfolios/Lester/workexample_XianYouth_Sp17-1.pdf, 1.

consistent attendance in church as having a sense of belonging, sense of meaning, and opportunity to develop competence.¹⁴¹

Research has demonstrated the impact that relationships can have on youth involvement in the church. Reverting back to the Bible, we can find and understand God's passion for relationships with Him as well as with others. Relationships is necessary within the church. Highly educated scholars, David Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley emphasized, "What the church needs are men and women who want to make a difference in the lives of people for eternity. What the church needs is men and women who live and breathe Great Commission worship. They have experienced formational, transformational, relational, missional, and reproducible worship."¹⁴² As youth ministry leaders strive to become the described worshipper who is passionate about creating and sustaining relationships with youth, there is a better chance for their retention and interest in not only church, but with God.

Challenge

One challenge within this study was the determining factor for exactly at what age does youth become disengaged and disconnected from the church. While the researcher was unable to determine this, there is evidence that supports the age youth began to develop spiritually. Dr. Lewis determined at the adolescence stage, youth begin to engage in spiritual development. She mentioned, "theologians and psychologists have identified adolescence as a period of 'spiritual awakening' characterized by an existential search for meaning, an enhanced capacity for spiritual experiences, and a process of challenging traditional religious values."¹⁴³ While the adolescent

¹⁴¹ Lytch, *Choosing Church*, 25.

¹⁴² Wheeler and Whaley, *Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 195.

¹⁴³ Lewis, "Teacher Preparedness for Spiritually Transformational Teaching: A Case Study in One Christian High School," 64.

stage is the point of grasping the attention of youth, the high school years is the point which instruction and teaching should be taken more seriously and constructively. Lewis supported this stating, “High school is one of the most crucial and effective times to influence young people to accept Christ and become knowledgeably grounded in their faith, since they are developing both an identity and a worldview which is likely to remain relatively consistent throughout their adult lives.”¹⁴⁴

Supportive Measures

According to the study, there were several measures which support youth involvement in the church. The church, pastor, and youth leaders all impact youth engagement. They provide support through their Bible teaching, mentoring, and religious practices. Pastor Frank Page and Minister of Music L. Lavon Gray shared, “Churches serious about reaching their communities commit to reshape their leadership teams to accurately reflect the people groups around them.”¹⁴⁵ In addition to these leaders within the church, the parents are the ultimate support system for youth belonging to and staying in the church. Carol Lytch emphasized, “Teens are influenced in the most lasting way by how their parents connected them (or not) to the church from a young age. Parents influence teens in what they believe and how they practice their faith by maintaining a church attendance rule even into the teen years.”¹⁴⁶ If all influential figures of parents, pastor, church, and youth leaders work together to integrate a strategic plan and effort for youth development, youth will become more engaged in church.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Page, Frank, and Lavon Gray. *Hungry for Worship: Challenges and Solutions for Today's Church*. Birmingham: New Hope, 2014, 183.

¹⁴⁶ Carol Lytch, *Choosing Church*, 187.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative historical study examined reasons for youth disengagement in an effort to find strategies for effective retention and engagement that may benefit youth and the church. The intent of the survey was to help the researcher determine whether youth participants were disengaged from their church, what were the factors which caused their disengagement, and understand what helps them become more engaged at their church. The researcher hypothesized that various dynamics that weaken youth engagement were social interactions, unfavorable music, and ineffective teaching. The researcher also hypothesized the important characteristics of youth workers as perceived by youth include personal charisma, relational connection, mentorship, and have an effective method of instruction. Due to the lack of sufficient evidence, the researcher was unable to answer the hypotheses.

Social Interactions. There is a need for social interactions for building student ministries in the church which, in turn, could create positive spiritual formation among youth. In a 2017 article, Santi Rodriguez described one of the ways to build relationships in Youth Ministry was through socially interacting as he shares, “Get together and get connected. Use big and fun events as vehicles for personal connections with the teens in your youth ministry.”¹⁴⁷ Results showed youth participants were engaged in numerous activities and events in the past year. However, there is no evidence which supports the youth enjoyed them or they were engaged.

Unfavorable Music. With music ranking second highest of choices given, then that supports that they enjoy music and music is beneficial. If music interests youth more than other categories, then it can be generalized how unfavorable music in the church could turn away

¹⁴⁷ Santi Rodriguez, “6 ways to Build Relationships in Youth Ministry,” *Building Faith: A Ministry of Virginia Theological Seminary*, (May 2017), accessed August 13, 2020, buildfaith.org.

youth from focusing on the church or even participating in church. Churches should be persuaded to come out of their norm, traditional way of ministry and offer more intricate ways of improving youth's spiritual growth.

Ineffective Teaching. The researcher was able to gain insight with how youth were receiving their biblical instruction through Bible Study and Sunday school. With more participation occurring during Sunday school, the researcher felt it may have been convenient for parents to drop their kids to attend before worship service starts. On the other hand, Bible class typically occurs during the week and is more of a challenge as youth do not attend, or better yet, their parents are not bringing them. In addition, hypothetical reasons could be the Bible classes are not offered for youth, transportation is limited, or they are just not interested. Content that is taught in both Sunday school and Bible study is not revealed nor were participants able to express if they enjoyed it. It cannot be assumed they are engaged in either classes simply because of their presence. However, if the classes were entertaining and planned intricately, youth would want to be in attendance. The researcher wondered after looking at the responses how are the classes being taught and how effective they were.

Personal Charisma. Youth do not want to be led by people who show no effort in leading them. The closest survey question to connect this hypothesis was the one regarding youth satisfaction toward their leader. Based on the results given, youth were overall satisfied with their leaders. Students are more receptive of the spiritual teachings and thoughts of the youth worker if they are satisfied with their teachings. Researchers agreed that Youth workers are generally viewed differently than from teachers—they are 'softer' authority figures, mentors and 'critical friends'.¹⁴⁸ While this data does not validate that personal charisma is a desired

¹⁴⁸ Collins-Mayo, Sylvia, Dr, and Dandelion, Pink, Dr, eds. Religion and Youth. Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013. Accessed August 16, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central, 196.

characteristic of youth workers perceived by the youth, it does lead to youth exhibiting acceptance to their leaders. It gives partial insight of youth perception.

Relational Connection. The results from the data revealed that a majority of participants felt a connection with their youth leaders and expressed their youth leaders cared about them. However, this does not conclude the participants have an effective relational connection with their leader. Based on results, it appears that youth workers at the participating churches are showing efforts in connecting and establishing a relationship with their youth. It also demonstrates good leadership qualities exist among those youth leaders. However, the concern should now be how to reach those few who responded differently. There has to be an assessment approach given to help those few individuals feel a sense of belonging and establish a closer connection with their ministry leaders. What else could youth leaders do differently about their methodology to capture the interests of all youth and show compassion? Also, are youth leaders aware of these feelings of those under their leadership?

Mentorship. To address this theme, the researcher lacked evidence to support whether participants perceived their youth leaders as their mentors. However, participants had opportunity to lead which could determine their youth leaders instilled that mentorship quality in building their confidence. Mentorship is more than teaching but also providing support and training others to be leaders. Youth need more than a relationship but also look for role models and someone who can positively influence them. Kevin Navarro states, “The first step to being an influencer is modeling what we want our followers to become.”¹⁴⁹

Effective Method of Instruction. Majority of participants responded they had a relationship with Christ and were able to explain on what parts of their relationship improved.

¹⁴⁹ Kevin Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 123.

Due to their ability to convey their relationship with Christ, the researcher assumed that the participants valued the instruction they were given. It is possible that the participants' current expression of having a relationship with Christ is an effect of their youth leaders' instructional practices. The literature reviewed in this study emphasized the importance of effective teaching methods within the church for youth. Spiritual education equips youth to closely connect with Christ and understand the meaning of worship.

Limitations of the Study

While the intent was to conduct this study without any restrictions, the researcher acknowledges certain limitations of this study. When conclusions are being drawn regarding the research, the following limitations should be considered:

1. Due to an historical, global pandemic of Covid-19, the researcher was unable to thoroughly conduct the study. In the IRB approval, it states the researcher's intent to conduct observations. This was not possible as all states were restricted from gathering in groups and leaving their homes. Therefore, churches were closed.
2. All information obtained in response to the research questions was based perceptions. Participants were not given much room to expand on their responses, in particular, with the closed-ended questions. Therefore, the information presented or concluded is not a total representation of all youth and churches.
3. Due to Covid-19, technology was impacted because the researcher could not communicate with church pastors effectively. Recruitment efforts were very challenging and some were actually unsuccessful. Pastors declined the offer to participate because of pandemic. The other pastors could not get in touch with their

- youth ministry leaders. Youth ministry leaders could not reach their student parents effectively. Furthermore, the desired amount of 40 participants were not achieved.
4. The surveys were not all conducted on the same day. Therefore life happenings or outside events could have impacted participant responses. Some children may not have been comfortable sharing their true feelings if their parents were reading to them.

Implications for Practice

This study have implications for worship leaders who serve young people. There is a greater need for youth to be a part of the church and for worship leaders to figure out ways to engage those youth they lead as well as recruit others to their ministry. Worship leaders should consider youth perspectives and values of the church in order to keep them engaged and fulfilling their interests. Worship leaders should teach with the intent of equipping future leaders, allowing students to have a voice and create their spiritual experiences. Recognizing and valuing relationship is highly important when connecting with and engaging young population. Information from this study serves a foundational purpose for the importance of understanding and involving youth.

Recommendations for Further Study

The following recommendations for future study are made based on the findings and limitations of this study:

1. There should be an action research conducted at a local church to further investigate youth participation and involvement during a church service. Observations should be conducted along with a series of field notes over time to determine the extent of how much youth are engaged and involved in youth ministry.

2. Further study should also include personal interviews with young generation to understand their perspectives more and allow them to elaborate on their feelings about church.
3. Churches should also be interviewed to reveal their history of youth engagement, method of teaching, and youth leadership.
4. Additionally, expanding the research survey to include more numerical evidence to retrieve correlations between various categories and themes such as relationship, attendance, biblical knowledge and teaching, and engagement.
5. Conducting a study that specifically involve various methods or approaches to engage youth through a series of spiritual workshops that centers on worship and spiritual growth. This study would be geared more toward the needs and interests of the youth to find newly developed ways to interact, engage, and enjoy experiencing God.

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Appendix A: Youth Ministry Survey

Youth Ministry Evaluation Survey

Prescreened Questions:

1. How old are you?
 - ☐ 10-12
 - ☐ 13-15
 - ☐ 16-18
2. Are you a member of your church?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

About You

3. How many youth activities/events have you attended in the last year?
 - ☐ Almost all of them
 - ☐ More than half
 - ☐ One or two
 - ☐ None
4. How often did you attend Sunday School in the last year?
 - ☐ Almost every week
 - ☐ Once a month or so
 - ☐ Less than once every two months
 - ☐ Never
5. How often do you attend Youth Bible Study classes in the last year?
 - ☐ Almost every week
 - ☐ Once a month or so
 - ☐ Less than once every two months
 - ☐ Never
6. How safe do you feel at church?
 - ☐ Very safe
 - ☐ Somewhat safe
 - ☐ Not at all safe
7. How well do you get along with your Youth Ministry leader(s)?
 - ☐ Very well
 - ☐ Somewhat well
 - ☐ Not so well
8. How satisfied are you with the Youth Ministry leaders at your church?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Not so satisfied

9. Were you ever given the opportunity to lead at church?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do your Youth Ministry leaders care about you?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Activities

11. What was your favorite activity you were involved in at your church?

12. Is there an activity you would like to see happen in your church Youth Ministry in the next 1-2 years?

13. Which of the following interests you? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Music
- ☐ Technology
- ☐ Activities that incorporate other area youth groups
- ☐ Mission trips
- ☐ Bible learning activities
- ☐ Social games and activities in church
- ☐ Concerts
- ☐ Opportunities just to “hang out”
- ☐ Opportunities to serve others
- ☐ Camps/Retreats
- ☐ Video gaming
- ☐ Sports-centered events (basketball, volleyball, etc...)

Spiritual Growth and Experience

14. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your relationship to Christ right now?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

15. Has the Youth Ministry at your church helped you improve your relationship with Christ in the last year?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

16. If yes, what parts of your relationship with Christ have improved?

17. Do you enjoy worship service?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. If yes, what is your favorite part of worship? If no, tell us why you do not enjoy the service.

Other Comments

19. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience at church?

Once you have completed the survey, please send me a separate email at jhanna5@liberty.edu if you would like to enter the raffle to receive a \$5 gift card to Target.

Appendix B: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 2, 2020

Jacqueline Hanna
Jerry Newman

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-264 Dynamics of Youth Engagement in the Local Church

Dear Jacqueline Hanna, Jerry Newman:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: June 2, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix C: Westwood Baptist Church Permission



Westwood Baptist Church, University Center

2510 Albion Street • Nashville, Tennessee 37208
(615) 327-3897 church; • (615) 329-2522 fax
e-mail: westwoodbc@comcast.net • website: westwoodbcuc.org

Barton Elliott Harris, Senior Pastor

May 5, 2020

Dear Jacqueline Hanna:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Dynamics of Youth Engagement in the Local Church, we have decided to contact parents/members of our youth ministry to invite them to participate in your research study AND to conduct observations at Westwood Baptist Church – University Center.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- ☐ I/We will provide you with contact information (phone numbers and/or email addresses) for the parents and adult members of our youth ministry.
- ☒ I/We will contact parents and adult members of our youth ministry on your behalf by sending out your recruitment emails.
- ☒ I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Pastor Barton Elliott Harris
Senior Pastor

Appendix D: Mt. Nebo Missionary Baptist Church Permission



2416 Clifton Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee 37209

Telephone: 615-320-7242
Fax: 615-810-9422

May 5, 2020

Dear Jacqueline Hanna:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Dynamics of Youth Engagement in the Local Church, we have decided to contact parents/members of our youth ministry to invite them to participate in your research study AND to conduct observations at Mt. Nebo Baptist Church.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- ☐ I/We will provide you with contact information (phone numbers and/or email addresses) for the parents and adult members of our youth ministry.
- ☐ I/We will contact parents and adult members of our youth ministry on your behalf by sending out your recruitment emails.
- ☐ I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Behnke Jean Brandon
Chair, Trustee Ministry

Appendix E: Galilee Baptist Church Permission

|
Galilee Baptist Church
2021 Herman ST.
Nashville TN 37208

Pastor
William R. Harris

To: Jacqueline Hanna

From: William R. Harris

Sister Hanna, it is with great joy to be asked to participate in your program. Whatever I need to do just let me know.

Thanks
Pastor William R. Harris

Appendix F: Saint James Missionary Baptist Church Permission

May 1, 2020

George T. Brooks, Sr.,
Pastor
Saint James Missionary Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee 37209

Dear Jacqueline Hanna:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Dynamics of Youth Engagement in the Local Church, (I/we) have decided to contact parents/members of our youth ministry to invite them to participate in your research study AND to conduct observations at (name of Church).

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- ☐ I/We will provide you with contact information (phone numbers and/or email addresses) for the parents and adult members of our youth ministry.
- ☒ I/We will contact parents and adult members of our youth ministry on your behalf by sending out your recruitment emails.
- ☐ I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

George T. Brooks, Sr.,
Pastor
Saint James Missionary Baptist Church

Appendix G: Strategies for Retention

Youth ministry should develop more opportunities for their youth by increasing accountability.

The following strategies for retention for youth involvement in the church are:

1. **Prayer Schedule-** The youth ministry should develop a consistent prayer system within their ministry where individual youth are held accountable to pray each week. The ministry leader will create a monthly log with appointed students to lead prayer. It is recommended for the leader to provide courtesy calls to the family as reminder for their assigned weekly prayer. Prayers can be applied via phone using a hotline and/or video recording platform.
2. **Worship Designee-** Youth leader should appoint a student to lead worship weekly or monthly depending on the church calendar. Presenting more opportunities for youth is highly important to keep them more engaged in church.
3. **Missional Work-** Set up an annual calendar and **INCLUDE** the youth to determine their interests and how they can help the community. Write their ideas down, plan, and take action!
4. **Quarterly meetings-** Youth ministry should meet quarterly to generate ideas that could strengthen and grow the ministry. This meeting should **INCLUDE** youth and their leaders. Take notes and take action!
5. **Monthly check-in system-** Youth ministry should assign partners each month and request each partnership to communicate at least four times a month- call, text, write an encouraging note. Topics of discussion could include the Bible Scripture of the month, school, or any other positive topic of their choice.
6. **Bible Learning experiences-** Student ministries should have weekly bible learning experiences which include games and include the Bible in icebreakers and other activities. Students can also create and perform songs using Scripture for the church. Churches could also have a Bible Verse of the Month to memorize and incorporate that into a competition on who can learn it first. The winner would receive an incentive.