Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Addressing the Issue of Low Attendance in Emmanuel Church among Young Adults

A Thesis Project Submitted to

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in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
Ivett McDonald
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Mentor: Dr Michael Eiras

The purpose of the study was to address the issue of low attendance in Emmanuel Church among young adults. This topic is based on the investigator's awareness that individuals who grow up in Emmanuel discontinue attendance between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine years. The literature review revealed that many churches commonly experience this problem. Emmanuel Church is primarily made up of Jamaicans and their descendants, and no literature addressed the immediate context of Emmanuel Church. The investigator interviewed twenty young adults who were previous members of Emmanuel Church. The study revealed that young adults leave Emmanuel in record numbers. Some of the contributing factors identified include parental influences, traditionalism, weak leadership teams, insufficient community involvement, and an inability to convey a holistic approach to life. Although a few of them no longer attend any church, most young adults who no longer attend Emmanuel are actively attending other churches. This study's significance is that it analyses the context of Emmanuel and informs the church on a theological and theoretical basis for the study. The church must retain young adults to maintain Christianity both locally and globally. Christianity is sustained by impartation from one generation to the next. Without young adults, there will be a failure in the advancement of Christianity. As a result of the study, the investigator prepared several strategies to present to Emmanuel Church to increase young adults' retention.

Thesis project topic abstract length: 231 words

Key Words: church attendance, young adults, church growth

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DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

Chapter 1

Introduction

"Research is systematic and rigorous inquiry or investigation that enables people to understand the nature of problematic events or phenomena."[1] This is a qualitative study and will be addressing the specific context of Emmanuel Church. The church has existed for over twenty-five years and consists of members ranging from new-born to age ninety-nine. Even though members move away or leave the church at times, the exodus of the young adults' age group is significantly visible and has negatively impacted the church. This study will address the problem of the loss of Emmanuel's young adults, so that Emmanuel Church will gain a clearer perspective for their decline in attendance. If the problem is solved, the investigator and church leaders will notice an interruption in the process, as evidenced by higher retention of young adults. This chapter includes a discussion of the thesis project's ministry context, the project's problem statement and purpose statement, the investigator's basic assumptions regarding the study process, and the definitions, delimitations, and limitations to the thesis project, ending with the thesis statement section.

Context

It is improbable that any two churches are exactly alike. The issues that one church may face and the way problems are addressed may not be the same issues another church is experiencing or the way that church addresses its problems. Moreover, even if the problems are similar among churches, the solutions that were effective in one church may not work in another church. To address a problem, the investigator must pay attention to the ministry's context.

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[1] Ernest Stringer, *Action Research,* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 4.

"Action research seeks to engage the complex dynamics involved in any social context."[2] To honor the concept of context, this study will explore the community context as well as the ministry context.

<div align="center">Community Context</div>

Emmanuel Church is a predominantly black church located in the multi-cultural city of East Miramar of about 140,000 residents.[3] Miramar is the third-largest city in Broward County in terms of land size and the fifth-largest city in Broward in terms of population. There are eleven elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, and other charter schools and special needs schools. There are eight colleges or universities and is home to twenty-two neighborhood parks.[4] Miramar is located in Broward County, Florida, about twenty-two miles northwest of Miami and thirteen miles west of Hollywood.[5] Miramar has a distribution of ethnicities as follows: Black or African American 45.81%; White 42.04%; Asian 6.16%; and a few others.[6] The city is a melting pot of several diasporas, including Jamaicans, Hispanics, Haitians, and Trinidadians. Almost half of the residents are foreign-born Jamaicans, the largest diaspora.[7]

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[2] Stringer, *Action Research*, 1.

[3] "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Miramar City, Florida," *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, accessed March 27, 2020, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miramarcityflorida/PST045219.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Miramar, Florida Population 2020," Miramar, Florida Population 2020 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs), accessed March 28, 2020, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/miramar-fl-population/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

The median age of the residents is thirty-six years, and the median salary is around $70,000. The neighborhood has remained stable as far as residents staying in the city. Most of the residents who move from East Miramar remain in the city but move to the west Miramar, where the homes are newer, more upscale, and more modern. In 2018, the median value of homes in this city was $279,900.00. 86.6% of the households have internet, 91% of residents over the age of twenty-five have a high school diploma, and 29% have at least a Bachelor's degree.[8] These statistics show that the city is a middle-class community with a moderate level of educated professionals. The statistics also show that many residents are of the low-income category.

There are four hundred and forty-four categories of many businesses in Miramar including physicians, one hospital, realtors, florists, two malls, several shopping centers, hospice care centers, vacation rentals, wineries, gyms, funeral homes, and a host of other businesses in a plethora of categories. Residents of Miramar need not travel outside for entertainment or spiritual fulfillment. For leisure, this city boasts movie theaters, one recreation center, one hundred and twenty-three restaurants, two banquet facilities, and several other places of entertainment.[9] Miramar has over fifty churches of a variety of denominations, including Apostolic, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, and much more.[10] The presence of large numbers of churches are evidence of the Christian tendency of the residents.

<div align="center">Ministry Context</div>

Most members of Emmanuel Church are of Jamaican nationality. These include a cross-section of ages ranging from new-born to the nineties. Many of the members are naturalized

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[8] "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Miramar City, Florida."

[9] "Miramar Business List," Miramar Business List | Find Top Companies In Miramar Florida, accessed March 28, 2020, http://www.floridabusinesslist.com/city/Miramar.

[10] Ibid.

citizens of the United States. A minority of the members are from other nationalities who are related to Jamaican members through marriage or friendship. A minority of the members are not connected to a Jamaican member and have chosen to remain in a predominant Jamaican congregation.

The church started in 1993 with the founding pastor and his wife serving in that capacity until the present. Many of the members have grown with the church and have raised their children in the church. Because the members are predominantly Jamaican, they feel very comfortable and utilize the Jamaican dialect often. "Patwa is also the language most Jamaicans love, and very many, if not most, feel far more comfortable expressing themselves in Patwa than in Standard English."[11] This dialect is called patois and is a form of broken English with a mix of other West African languages. The pastors continue to remind congregants to reserve the Patois for their private gatherings. However, to avoid excluding the non-Jamaicans in the church service, they should all utilize the English language in a public gathering. Some other cultures have complained that they have a difficult time understanding some of the older speakers and church leaders. Even when the older Jamaican speaks proper English, the accent at times can be confusing to the non-Jamaican. The members frequently have events that include food. The food is usually a Jamaican style, and the leaders often remind members to be intentional in providing meals for non-Jamaicans as well.

The church has a seating capacity of 500 and is usually filled out during the Sunday morning service, which begins at 11:00 a.m. The worship service experience is a mix of traditional and contemporary music to engage the different generations who attend. Everyone

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[11] Silvia Kouwenberg, Winnie Anderson-Brown, Terri-Ann Barrett, Shyrel-Ann Dean, Tamirand De Lisser, Havenol Douglas, Marsha Forbes, et al., "Linguistics in the Caribbean: Empowerment through Creole Language Awareness," *Journal of Pidgin & Creole Languages* 26, no. 2 (2011): 389.

from age fourteen are attendants at this service. The praise team and musicians are from the young adults and older adults' groups, which include ages from twenty-one to fifties. The youth and young adults are not engaged in traditional music and songs as evidenced by observing them sitting in apparent disinterest. However, during the singing of contemporary songs, their engagement involved clapping their hands and swaying to the music.

 Sunday School begins at 10:00 a.m. and is divided by age groups: Infants to Toddlers ages newborn to two years old; Pre-School is three to five years; Primary is six to seven years; Primary is eight to ten years; Pre-teens is eleven to twelve years; Middle School, High School, Young Adult is eighteen to twenty-nine years, Adults is ages thirty to sixty-five and Seniors is all adults over sixty-five years.

The kid's classrooms are decorated with bright colors and there is media access in a few of the rooms. The students use traditional books and Bibles instead of more modern technology. The teachers utilize conventional teaching methods in their classrooms. Training and workshops are rarely done, and the teachers are usually lay members without teacher training. Sunday school uses a curriculum that goes from infants to senior adults. The Jamaican culture is not time conscious, and the majority of families show up late with their children, which causes frequent interruption and distraction in the younger classes. The child who shows up late rarely gets a full Sunday school lesson.

The church's organization has a senior pastor who oversees directors. Each director oversees groups of ministry leaders. These ministry leaders oversee a team of individuals who assist with carrying out the duties of the ministry. For example, the pastor oversees the youth director/pastor. He oversees the youth president who has a youth committee. The youth president and the committee carry out the daily affairs of the youth ministry. There is a youth group with a

youth leader and a young adult group with a leader. Youth ministry and young adults meet in small groups for Sunday morning classes from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The youth also meet every Friday evening for Youth Night, and young adults meet one night per month. The youth and young adults are given the autonomy to coordinate and participate in a weekend service one Sunday each month.

The structure of the church provides an older leader, usually over forty-five to oversee the youth and to oversee the young adults. The younger age group (those under fifteen) supports and attends their events and programs, probably because parents are responsible for getting their children to the services that are planned for them. Many of these youth begin to work from sixteen until age eighteen. The drop in attendance occurs around sixteen to eighteen years. In addition, after graduation from high school, many eighteen-year-olds and older, enroll in a college and get a job. This results in young adults working and attending college. The attendance of the age group of eighteen to twenty-nine declines significantly when compared to their presence in their earlier years.

The age distribution of church members is shown in Figure 1.1. About twenty percent of the members are between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine. About twenty percent are members under eighteen years old.[12] The male and females are about equal from childhood to school age. However, the young boys begin to be less active around age fifteen to sixteen as their single parents start to lose control over their behaviors. By eighteen, most of the young men are no longer attending. Unfortunately, some of them end up in unscrupulous situations, either ethically or legally. However, some of the young men acquire sports scholarships to colleges or

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[12] Hudell Shand, Church Administrator. Electronic Mail to Ivett McDonald, March 27, 2020.

universities that take them away from home while others are accepted into the military. Most of the young ladies sign up for college and may leave home at that time. Most of the youth under eighteen were raised in the church, but as they get past high school graduation, their numbers present in the church decrease significantly.

The dress style is one of the main things that young adults change when they are no longer under the rule of their traditional parent's expectations. This change creates some dissonance among the generations. Young people often remark that the older members are judgmental and intolerant of them expressing their individuality. Even though the pastor does not focus much on dress code and style, there are some older traditional members who are always "correcting" the behaviors of the young adults. Some of these more formal traditional members have been in the church from its inception when it was started on traditional concepts. These concepts included the wearing of hats for ladies, no unnecessary jewelry, and no pants for women. The church has since modified these rules, but many of the traditionalists have not been able to embrace the changes.

Parents, church leaders, and fellow church members are concerned about the young adults leaving the church. Church leaders blame the parents, and parents blame the church for the problem. There is a concern as to the future of the survival of the church if the church fails to address the problem.

EAC-MIRAMAR AGE GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS
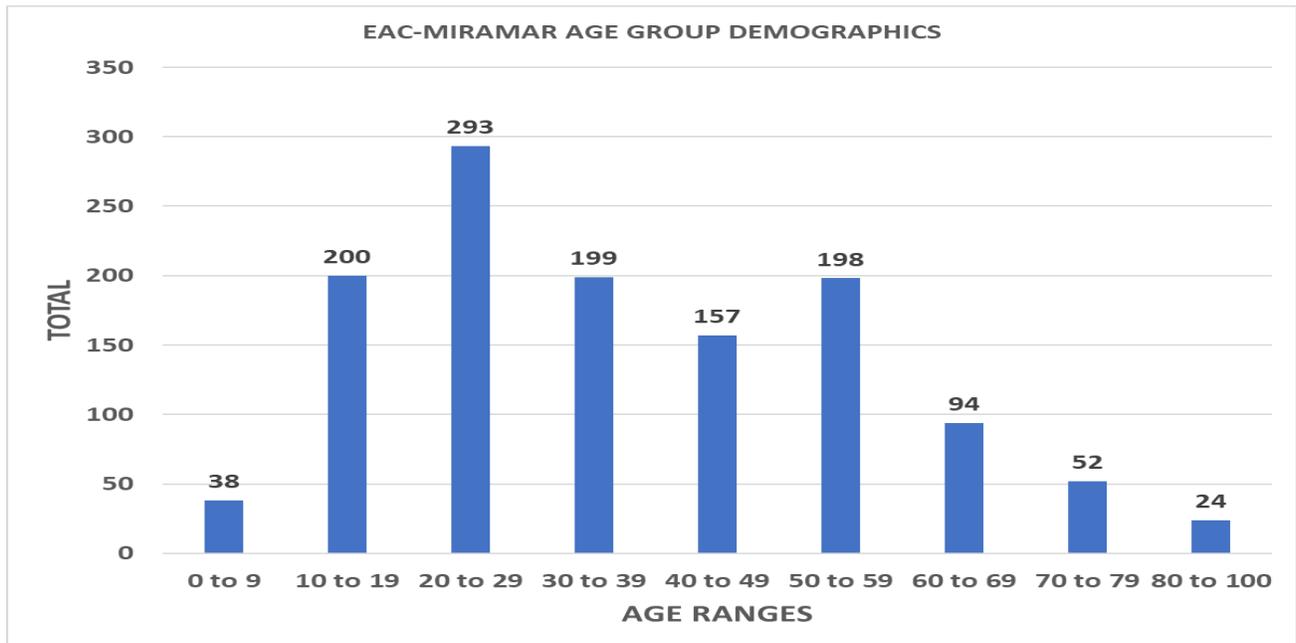
Figure 1.1 Emmanuel Church Age Group Demographics 2019-2020

Problem Presented

Emmanuel Church is experiencing a significant decline in church attendance among young adults. According to Kinnaman, young adults are individuals ages 18-29.[13] Emmanuel Church has ministered to many individuals who were raised in the church from their childhood years. This means that the parents brought their children to church and got them consistently involved in age-related activities in the church. In their teen years, these individuals are connected to the youth ministry and are involved in its activities. However, after graduating from high school, the church notices a significant decline in their attendance. The absence in the church is significant in individuals between the ages of 18 to 29-year-olds. The church is concerned and is adamant that the issue of the church's poor retention of young adults needs to be addressed.

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[13] David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 22.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN thesis project is to gain an understanding of the reasons young adults are leaving the church so that the investigator can present a strategy to Emmanuel Church to help prevent this decline in young adults' attendance. This understanding will become a valuable tool in the hands of the church leaders to plan strategies to address the problem. If the dropout rate among this age group is not addressed, the Christian movement will ultimately be severely affected.

Basic Assumptions

There are a few assumptions that the investigator has made. The first assumption is that the previous young adults of Emmanuel Church will be willing to participate in the study. For the study sample to be significant, there must be a numerically appropriate number. The investigator plans to utilize twenty young adults who no longer attend church. There are many young adults who are no longer present. If they are willing to participate in the study, the investigator will have enough participants.

The second assumption is that the young adults who no longer attend Emmanuel Church have stopped attending church. There may be young adults who, even though they no longer attend Emmanuel, may very well be ardent attendees at other churches.

The third assumption is that the participants will be honest in their answers. Participants may answer the questions in a manner to protect themselves or the feelings of the investigator. For example, if the young adult had an issue that he or she perceives may allow the investigator to view him or her in a negative way, that person may provide answers to preserve a relationship.

Definitions

Some of the terms utilized in the study are young adults, low attendance, leaders, strategies, interrupt, and exodus. *Young adults* will refer to individuals who are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years, whether male or female. *Low attendance* is defined as a twenty-five percent decrease in attendance in the weekly services, involving a young adult who was previously present at least once a week in a church service but has not attended for at least four consecutive weeks. *Leaders* are the pastor, the directors, and the ministry leaders who all have the authority to plan strategies. The definition of *strategy* will be based on Malphurs' definition: "Strategy is the vehicle that enables the church to accomplish the mission (the Great Commission) and vision. The strategy moves the congregation from wherever they are spiritually (lost or saved) to where God wants them to be (mature)."[14]

An *interrupt* is defined as the process of stopping the young adults from leaving Emmanuel Church. This is not just a temporary process, but it is implementing actions that will reconnect the young adult so that as Stanley said, they will enjoy the service so much that "he or she returns the following week."[15] Anyone familiar with the Bible should probably be acquainted with the concept of an exodus. The children of Israel were in slavery and bondage to the Egyptians for over 400 years (Genesis 15:14).[16] God sent Moses to deliver them, and they all

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[14]Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: a 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 169.

[15]Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 196.

[16] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version (New York: New York Bible Society, 1978).

engaged in a mass exodus out of Egypt (Exodus12:31-51). The word *exodus* is used in this study to represent a mass departure of the young adults from Emmanuel Church.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Limitations</h2>

According to Dr. Steve Lowe in his video lecture, "Limitation is a condition that is imposed on a study that is outside of the control of the researcher."[17] The limitation of time is a factor. This study must be completed within a specific time frame for the results to be reported and evaluated. The investigator is aware that deadlines may not necessarily create an urgency for the compliance of the participants.

In addition, the sample may be unreliable since the participants are all from the investigator's ministry context. The investigator is a pastor and has affected and influenced most of the participants for most of their lives. As a result, they may want to "help" the investigator by responding appropriately instead of honestly. This sample is a convenience sample, and therefore the results will be of most value in the ministry context but may not be able to be generalized to other populations.

The investigator has had a historical relationship with the participants. Because the participants no longer attend Emmanuel Church, the investigator assumes that they will be open and honest in their responses. The investigator recognizes this assumption of honesty as a limitation. The investigator will be the interviewer of all the participants for two reasons. First, the confidentiality of the participants must be protected as stated in the informed consent. Second, during the interview process, the investigator may need to ask for clarification based on the responses. A neutral interviewer who does not understand the dynamics of the study may not

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[17]Steve Lowe, "Definitions, Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions" (video presentation of week 2 lecture, Liberty University), accessed March 26, 2020, https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_577531_1&content_id=_38286256_1

have the awareness of the responses that require further clarification. According to Sensing, the interviewer must have awareness of the research project.[18]

Since the participants are absent from church, it may be hard or impossible to gain access to them. If the investigator is unable to contact the potential participants, the sample size may need to be reduced. "Larger samples will more accurately represent the population value, whereas smaller samples could be off the mark in either direction – towards or away from the population value."[19]

Delimitations

Dr. Steve Lowe in week two's lecture, defined delimitations as constraints that the investigator places on the study that clarifies the boundaries of the study.[20] The delimitations of this study are first, the choice of limiting the sample to only that age group of eighteen to twenty-nine years. Even though several age groups may be available for the study, since there is a specific target group, that age group limits the study. The study will be explicitly limited to the ministry at Emmanuel Church. That means even though many young adults may be available for the study, only the sample that had been members of Emmanuel will be utilized.

There are a variety of other factors that young adults have in common; however, the investigator chooses to focus only on those who were active in the ministry until they became young adults and were no longer present. The project will solely focus on young adults who are in the church community and are no longer attending church. Young adults who have moved

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[18] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: a Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 104.

[19] Chittaranjan Andrade, "Sample Size and Its Importance in Research," *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 42, no.1 (2020): 103.

[20] Lowe, "Definitions, Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions."
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away from the church community will not be admitted into the study. The results of the study will apply to the ministry at Emmanuel Church. Other churches in a similar context may also use this study to address the same issue but is limited to a similar setting. Since no two ministry contexts are exactly alike, there may still be some issues in attempting to use the results in other contexts.

Thesis Statement

In Emmanuel Church, a young adult is anyone between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years. The church has several programs and ministries specific to age groups. Emmanuel has a high level of retention of its members except for the young adult age group. Most of the young adults were raised in the church, and up until high school were actively involved in their ministries. Emmanuel has noticed that there is a significant decline in attendance in that age group. This study is seeking to address the problem of the absence of this age group. The investigator will obtain information from the missing young adults to compile ways to address the problem. The investigator will also obtain information from young adults that remain in the church. The results will help the church identify factors that influence the disappearance of this age group. This will give the church information that it can use to plan strategies to increase the retention of young adults. If the reasons for low attendance among young adults are identified, the leaders can take steps to engage Emmanuel Church in effective strategies to interrupt the exodus of young adults.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

There is a plethora of material available that focuses on the challenges that churches experience in retaining young adults. This chapter will provide a literature review that discusses a variety of information regarding young adults, their church attendance, and some factors contributing to the decline in church attendance. The investigator will also expound the effect of faith, positive development, engaging practices, and discipleship on the retention of young adults in the church. The investigator will also present the theological and theoretical foundation for the study.

Literature Review

The literature review will examine: 1) Young adults as defined by several scholars, 2) Church attendance among young adults, 3) Factors contributing to decline, 4) Faith, 5) Positive development, 6) Engaging practices, 7) Discipleship, 8) Parents, 9) Entertainment, and 10) Youth Sports.

Young Adults

Studies have shown that there is a problem in the church's retention of young adults.[21] Numerous literature has been published on this issue, and it has been demonstrated that this is not a problem that is easily solved.[22] This issue is of significant importance and must be addressed for the strengthening and survival of the Christian church. According to David Kinnaman, young adults are defined as the ages of individuals from eighteen to twenty-nine.

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[21] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 22.

[22] Michelle Caroline Van der Merwe, Anské Francina Grobler, Arien Strasheim, and Lizré Orton. "Getting Young Adults Back to Church: A Marketing Approach." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 69, no. 2 (2013), 1.

This group comprises about 59% of young people who admit that they have dropped out of attending churches.[23] Kinnaman claims that this is the age individuals admit that they have arrived at an interruption in their spiritual walk.[24]

Kenda Dean agrees that young people are leaving the church, but early in her book, posits that the church is responsible for that problem.[25] Van der Merwe also wrote about the decline in church attendance among young adults, blaming this on their busy schedules and their ability to make their own choices.[26] Bergler has a slightly different perspective. He wrote that even though young adults' attendance is declining, this is not a new phenomenon. He further insisted that the decline in this age group is predictable based on the commitment in the earlier years.[27] Kinnaman reported a study done by the BARNA group in 2011[28] that revealed results about young people regarding their faith. 59% of the young adults surveyed responded that they dropped out of the church after going regularly. 57 % said they were more active in church when they were fifteen years old. 50% admitted that they are significantly frustrated about their faith.

Clark related a story of three young men in a youth group who were passionate about church attendance and participation in the youth group at their church. After high school graduation, these young men eventually stopped attending youth groups, and ultimately as they

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[23] Van der Merwe, et al., "Getting Young Adults Back to Church," 23.

[24] Ibid., 12.

[25] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian : What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

[26] Van der Merwe, et al., "Getting Young Adults Back to Church, 1.

[27] Thomas E. Bergler, "Mapping the Missional Landscape of Emerging Adulthood," *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 15, no. 2 (2017): 68.

[28] David Kinnaman, and Aly Hawkins. *You Lost Me*, 24.

moved into young adulthood, they disappeared from the life of the church.[29] Moser supported

this report and wrote that a crisis in the American church is its failure to retain young people. He

also added that many of these young people who leave the church do not return as older adults.[30]

According to Kinnaman and Lyons, in their book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters,* "Most young people who were involved in a church as a teenager disengage from church life and often from Christianity at some point during early adulthood, creating a deficit of young talent, energy, and leadership in many congregations."[31]

Church Attendance

The decline in church attendance among young adults has attracted the attention of many

investigators. Van der Merwe wrote that studies in this area go as far back as the

1960s.[32] He found that decreased church attendance was affected more recently by a postmodern

worldview of society. According to Moser, Lifeway Ministry Development, BARNA group, and

Pew Research all produced a survey with similar results confirming the decline in church

attendance among young adults.[33] Patricia Smith posted results of surveys comparing data in

religiosity between the older and younger adults in America. As predicted, younger adults

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[29] Chap Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2015.

[30] 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): 1.

[31] David Kinnaman, and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), Accessed June 13, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[32] Van der Merwe, et al., "Getting Young Adults Back to Church," 1.

[33] Moser and Nel, "The Connection Between Youth Ministry's Division of Evangelism and Discipleship,"2.

reported less religiosity than older adults. Religiosity is defined in this context as daily prayer,

Bible reading, and church attendance. Surprisingly the results of the published survey did not

show that the pattern has changed significantly over the past decades.[34] This result can be

discouraging because it means that even though the problem of declining young adults in

churches has been addressed over an extended period, there seems to be no solution**.** Kimball

reminded the reader that Europe, which was once a Christian nation, now has empty cathedrals,

which are used mainly for tourist attraction instead of church services. This dilemma is echoed

by Ham who states that: "England, the country that was once a cornerstone of western

Christianity, is now, by and large, a wasteland of lost souls where the word "God" has many

different definitions, with so few these days who would even think of "God" as the Creator God

of the Bible."[35] This report is significant because what happened in England can also occur in the

United States. The US churches should take a close look at these statistics and take proactive

steps to decrease the probability of a similar occurrence in this country." As England is, so we

will be if we don't take strategic action now. "American Christianity could be on the edge of

obsolescence in less than two generations. The epidemic is continuing to spread and will do so

unless something is done."[36]

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[34] Christian Smith, and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition : The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95.

[35] Ken Ham, and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone : Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it* (Green Forest , AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2009)11-12, accessed June 12, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1867024.

[36] Ibid., 165.

If churches today in America do not find a solution to intercept the pattern of declining attendance among young people, the future for Christianity in America is dismal.[37] Kinnaman, however, verbalized a more positive outlook. He believes that there is overwhelming proof that the dropout of attendance among young adults is a problem. However, he believes that there are solutions to the problem that needs to be uncovered. In other words, there is no "one size fits all" solution.[38] Bergler posted a study done by the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) regarding themes in the lives of young adults that are factors influencing church attendance. The results revealed that young adults admit to decreased presence as a result of life transitions, interruptions, and questioning of their parents' faith.[39] 61% of today's young adults who regularly attended church are now "spiritually disengaged." They are not actively attending church, praying, or reading their Bibles.[40]

<center>Factors Affecting Decline in Attendance</center>

There is a plethora of literature written regarding the decline in church attendance among young adults. Writers like Kinnaman,[41] Kimball,[42] Bergler,[43] and Van der Merwe[44] have agreed

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[37] Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights From Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2007), 16.

[38] David Kinnaman, and Aly Hawkins. *You Lost Me,* 33.

[39] Thomas E. Bergler, "Mapping the Missional Landscape of Emerging Adulthood," *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 15, no. 2 (2017): 81.

[40] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone: Why your kids will quit church*, 24.

[41] David Kinnaman, and Aly Hawkins. *You Lost Me,* 33.

[42] Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church,* 16.

[43] Bergler, "Mapping the Missional Landscape," 65.

[44] Van der Merwe, et al., "Getting Young Adults Back to Church," 1.

that this issue exists and have proposed numerous contributing factors. Some of those factors are issues with faith, positive development, engagement in the life of the church, and discipleship.

Faith

The Christian faith is introduced to individuals many times as young children because of their parents taking them to church.[45] Many authors wrote that dependent children are usually in attendance at church. However, as these individuals become young adults, they begin to be less connected to the Christian faith. This coolness regarding their faith is evident in their absence from churches.[46] According to Kinnaman, a BARNA study (2011) revealed that most young adults who have been raised in the church admit to doubting their faith. A significant number experienced a period when they were no longer interested in their parents' faith.[47] Kopp cited research by Roland Martinson 1996, which revealed that young adults tend to remain active in the church when their families were influential practitioners of their faith.[48] Many churches have a youth ministry where they focus on caring for the youth to make a lasting impact on them as they emerge into adulthood. Scholars like Clark believes that the church youth ministry has contributed involuntarily to the decline of the young adults in their faith. He posits that the church has failed to provide a 'faith-based community' post-high school years.[49]

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[45] K. Elise Leal, "All Our Children May Be Taught of God': Sunday Schools and the Roles of Childhood and Youth in Creating Evangelical Benevolence," *Church History* 87, no. 4 (2018): 1058, accessed May 1, 2020, doi:10.1017/s0009640718002378

[46] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 18.

[47] Ibid., 18.

[48] Scott M. Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry : An Introduction*. (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 66.

[49] Chap Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 75.

Dean wrote that youth ministry is not effective in sustaining individuals into the young adult stage partly because of human-made strategies. He proposed that the most effective *approach to support one's faith over the years was telling God's story, modeling it,* and catechesis.[50] Contrary to Clark, Ham purports that attempting to influence the post-high school ages will fail to be effective unless other critical elements were in place before graduating high school. He believes that the most crucial years to focus on building long-lasting faith in the individual are the early formative years. He wrote: "We are losing many more people by middle school and many more by high school than we will ever lose in college. Many parents will fork out big bucks to send these students to Christian colleges, hoping to protect them in their faith. But the fact is, they're already gone."[51]

Ham does agree with Clark and Dean that the youth ministries are contributors to the loss of the young adults. According to Ham, the Sunday schools and youth programs appeared to be working because their numbers and participation appeared successful. However, the young adults that are disappearing were all involved in the Sunday school and youth programs. Because Ham's research focused on beliefs instead of behavior,[52] he was able to identify crucial information. The information he uncovered revealed that churches' curricula in Sunday school and youth ministries have failed to create a strong Christian foundation for the individuals. So even when they appeared to be connected as evidenced by their behaviors, their beliefs were not being significantly affected by the church.[53]

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[50] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 62.

[51] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone*, 32,

[52] Ibid., 33.

[53] Ibid., 46.

Positive Development

Scholars are still in the process of addressing the decline of young adults from the church. The more contributing factors the investigator identifies, the higher the possibility of finding solutions to interrupt the pattern. Kinnaman placed the responsibility for this problem in the church. He wrote that the heart of the problem could be traced back to the church's failure to develop the next generation adequately. The way to establish the faith of a person is through discipleship.[54] Ketchman refers to a 2006 experiment done by Rene Spencer. The results showed that successful relationships must possess reciprocity. This means that connection is two ways where both entities affect and are affected by each other.[55] Unfortunately, the church does not have that relationship. The church seeks to affect the youth but seems to be unaffected by the youth. Clark agrees that young people need positive development but seems to place much of the responsibility on the family. He believes that parents are the most influential in the lives of a young person.[56] The youth ministry that includes adults and older mentors interacting and supporting the youth is effective. The more former members cannot leave the youth to figure things out by themselves but should love the next generation and provide behaviors that send that message. Even if the parent's role is to influence the next generation, the church cannot absolve its responsibilities. A parent would not be able to influence a young person in the development of Christian faith unless the parent is also a Christian.

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[54] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 15.

[55] Sharon Galgay Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church: Becoming A Community Where Faith Flourishes Beyond High School* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018), 11.

[56] Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 198.

On the other hand, Clark wrote that to help with the problem, the youth ministry in a church is the best solution.[57] In his book *Already Gone: Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it,* Ham also places the responsibility of favorable development on parents. He cited the scriptures Deuteronomy 6:4-10 and Ephesians 6:1-4 and he states they "clearly exhort parents to teach, disciple, and train their children."[58] He encourages parents to look at the results of delegating the Christian development of their children to the church. The result is disheartening! The parents are being mandated to take responsibility for their children's training and development in the Christian worldview.[59]

Merritt blames the passivity of young adults to Christianity and church attendance on the events of the last decades in America. He referred to things like suicide bombers and other man ordained disasters. He then mentioned that the church's views on same-sex relationships and abortion are alienating the younger generation. This problem happens mainly because, according to surveys, the way the church views these issues is not per the views of young adults.[60] The church has the responsibility to provide positive development where Christianity is concerned. In Bergler's research, he found that many young people who no longer attend church do not express any negative emotions about the church. They verbalized that even though they no longer attend the church service, they still identify with the Christian worldview.[61] Bergler related that the churches that help young people have positive feelings about their faith would significantly

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[57] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 269.

[58] Ham, and Beemer, *Already Gone*, 50.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Carol Howard Merritt, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation*. Herndon, Va: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007),

[61] Bergler, "Mapping the Missional Landscape," 76.

increase the religious views of the young adult.[62] However, this does not mean that even though

the young adult feels positive about their faith, they will increase their attendance in church.

Engaging

The world has many attractive themes to which young adults are drawn. The church

tends to be protective. According to Kinnaman, this attitude of the church can be considered

overprotectiveness instead of engaging.[63] The church must plan intentionally to engage young

people in their faith. The church's strategies have not created deep faith, and as a result, there is

the risk of leaving the church.[64] Dean noted that the NSYR reported that the church does not

effectively engage the youth in the Christian faith. Powell agreed with this observation and wrote

that when the size of the congregation is assessed, there is a deficit in the number of young

people in relation to the congregation size.[65] Clark introduced a suggestion for engaging young

adults. He believes that the young person needs to be actively involved in spiritual formation,

and leading others to do the same. This means that the young person who collectively prays,

reads the Bible, attends and participates in worship services, will be engaged in their faith and as

a result, will have a lower risk of leaving the church.[66]

Smith and Snell suggested that the church needs to do a better job of engaging

individuals early in their lives. The authors believe that even when individuals get to the age of

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[62] Bergler, "Mapping the Missional Landscape," 76.

[63] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me, 75.*

[64] Ibid., 91.

[65] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 11.

[66] Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 32.

young adults, there should be something in place to help the young adult maneuver life skills.[67]

Tyler added that in his research, he discovered six things that some churches possess that engage

young people.[68] The six commitments are: "Unlock keychain leadership, empathize with today's

young people, take Jesus' message seriously, fuel a warm community, and prioritize young

people."[69] The one which seems to be most prominent to young adults is institutional warmth.

He posits that there may be a solution to engaging young people in their Christian faith. The

process of engagement will increase the chance of churches retaining young people. However,

Ham reiterated this from a different angle. He wrote that for the church to increase the

probability of keeping young adults, they must avoid hypocrisy. He further stated that when the

church is seen as not living out their faith, the younger group is negatively affected. "In our

study, hypocrisy is more important than the church being too political, irrelevant, or boring."[70]

The church leaders must teach and support sincerity among the members. Observing the church

live out its Christian faith will influence the young adults' response and respect for Christianity.

Clark placed the responsibility for the engagement of young people on the church as well

as the family. This approach was different from Kinnaman, who puts less of the blame on the

family. Clark encouraged the family and the church to be intentional in understanding the 'world'

of the younger generation.[71] The church will have a better understanding of how to effectively

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[67] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, 299.

[68] Tyler S. Greenway, Kara E. Powell, and Steven C. Argue, "Getting Warmer: What Growing Young Research on the Importance of Relational Warmth Reveals About Churches' Self-Assessment with Implications for Future Youth Ministry Practitioners," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 16, no. 3 (2018): 88.

[69] Ibid., 90.

[70] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone*, 121.

[71] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 81.

engage the youth with the Christian faith if they feel understood. Ham believes that the church

should intentionally engage the curriculum and the sermons on the Word of God. Besides, the

church should prove how the Word of God is the authority because it relates to all issues in the

world. "When the Church no longer speaks to them, it becomes less relevant; the Church

becomes like a clanging gong — making noise but offering nothing of practical value for their

lives in the real world."[72] In his book, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the*

Status Quo, Jared Wilson echoes agreement that the church must convey the practicability of the

Bible in curricula and in the sermons. He cautions that "we must never teach practical points as

the main points. The practical stuff is always connected to the proclamational stuff."[73] In his

book *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, Andy Stanley is

adamant that "practical teaching that moves people to action is one of the primary things God

uses to grow our faith."[74] According to Stanley, Christianity is tied to science and should be

presented as such. The sermons should answer the unasked questions of the natural world.[75]

Kinnaman wrote that before the 1960s there was no difference in church attendance

between individuals in their twenties and those in their sixties. During the sixties and up to

present, the disparity in church attendance between the two groups has been the norm. "The

implication is that the dynamic of church disengagement during young adulthood was crafted by

the Baby Boomers. Now their kids and their children's kids are taking a similarly circuitous

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[72] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone*, 124.

[73] Jared Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo*(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 85.

[74]Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 133.

[75] Ibid., 253.

route through faith and young adulthood."[76] The author believes that young adults' decline in church attendance is related to their parents' examples.

Discipleship

Kauffman defines discipleship as "the ongoing transformation of persons, individually and corporately, into the image of Jesus Christ as they, guided and empowered by a living relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, seek to align their identities, beliefs, behaviors, priorities, and practices with the current and future reign of God."[77] He states that discipleship is mandated in the Bible as the tool to grow the church. He added that discipleship and evangelism are connected in the Scriptures, and therefore the church should connect these actions.[78] He believes this biblical approach is the tool to improve the retention of individuals in the church.

The mission of the church is to make disciples. The retention of the youth in the church should be evaluated using the scriptures. Kinnaman blames the church for at times, failing to adequately disciple the younger generation.[79] He proposed that the churches have adopted the cultural strategies for building organizations and have failed to follow the Biblical method for discipleship. According to the author, the discipleship that Jesus exemplified and taught should be utilized in the church for every age. He believes that when Biblical discipleship is promoted and used, higher numbers of young adults will remain in the church. Kinnaman is also concerned that the church has done some things that negatively affect discipleship. These include missing

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[76] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me,* 34.

[77] Aaron M. Kauffman, "Thriving: Effective Strategies for the Evangelism and Discipleship of Emerging Adults" (DMin., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019), 8.

[78] Ibid., 29.

[79] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me,* 87.

rituals, expecting too little from young people, and emphasizing quantity over quality.[80] The

church should consider looking for ways to create events to mark the critical maturation stage in

the church. Young people should also be utilized in the church's crucial areas, and some

leadership roles should be delegated to the young. Ham offers another aspect of discipleship,

which is apologetics.[81] The proliferation of the gospel in the first century depended upon the

ability of the disciples of Christ to defend and commend their faith (1 Peter 3:15). The evidence

is seen in their willingness to suffer and even to die for their beliefs (Acts 7:59; 21:13). Ham

further wrote that the church has disconnected from the world by focusing only on spiritual

things and faith. He purports that the church needs to create a curriculum, starting from kids to

adulthood, how the Bible is connected to facts in the world. When the kids understand that their

faith is built on facts and not just some Bible stories, the church will see kids who grow up to be

able to defend their faith.[82]

Mosner agrees that discipleship is paramount to the Christian faith and gave a rationale

for the diminished Christianity among young people. He blames two organizations, Youth for

Christ and Young Life, who set the foundation decades ago that the youth ministry in the church

should be fun and exciting.[83] They both focused on attracting young people to church. However,

the dilemma was that the church was not effective in adequately providing discipleship to these

individuals. Nel also believes that the church should focus on the discipleship of young people.

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[80] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 87.

[81] Ham and Beemer, Already Gone, 112.

[82] Ibid., 114-115.

[83] Moser and Nel, "The Connection Between Youth Ministry's Division of Evangelism and Discipleship, 4.

When these young people are disciples, they, in turn, will disciple others.[84] He also agrees with

Kinnaman that discipleship should be tied to evangelism. When the church provides discipleship

to the young, they will make other disciples. This process of making disciples is evangelism.

Nel's article focuses on the questions that are directed to the church. However, the main issue

that applies to the youth ministry is: "What will we have to change in our

Christian Education (teaching and learning) for youth ministry to reform and transform local

faith communities into disciple-making movements?"[85] These authors agree that the church has a

significant role during the impressionable years in which the church has the opportunity to affect

a young life. The church must intentionally transform the paradigm of youth to the extent that

they will remain connected to the church in their young adult lives.

  Ham states that young adults who have left the church are not all anti-church. Many of

them verbalize that they still visit on special occasions, and some of them are even involved in

some form of Christian connect small group. Also, he highlighted that there is still much that the

church can do to attempt to recover at least some of the lost young adults. But the most crucial

goal is to make the necessary adjustments to affect elementary, middle, and high schoolers while

in the church's care. "We believe that a four-pronged approach is in order. Parents, Christian

educators, youth pastors, and pastors all have a role to play in the solution."[86] The church should

immediately perform a radical change of the curriculum in the Sunday school and the youth

ministries.

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[84] Malan Nel, "Imagine-Making Disciples in Youth Ministry...That Will Make Disciples," *HTS Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 2, accessed May 2, 2020, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A455782957/PPRP?u=novaseu_main&sid=zotero&xid=2c355085

[85] Ibid., 2.

[86] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone*, 143.

Parents

Ham places considerable responsibility on the parents. According to Ham, God gives the parents responsibility of raising godly children. Furthermore, parents have passed over this responsibility to the church, which has failed. When parents are authentic Christians and model Biblical characteristics, their children will most likely emulate those characteristics. Besides, parents recognize that today's kids are being raised in a post-Christian era. Parents must teach the kids how to live in a secular culture without compromising the Word of God.[87] Dean also referenced Luther's Catechism which according to Dean: "It located teaching out loud in households, not congregations, which had the effect of locating Christian formation in the intimacy of families, where children drew direct connections between religious instruction at the dinner table and the lives of people who loved them."[88] Dean's concern is that the parents cannot provide apologetics for their faith, and as a result, they could not pass it on to their children.[89] This insight provides the church with a possible strategy of developing parents with the skills they will need to affect their children with a Biblical worldview passively. As the church suffers from the loss of young adults, this approach is worth application.

In his book, *Ruth and Billy Graham: The Legacy of a Couple*, Hanspeter Nüesch wrote about the life of Billy and Ruth Graham as parents. The author wrote that both parents were Christians and raised the children with Christian principles, Billy was a preacher who frequently traveled to spread the Word of God. Both trusted in the power of prayer and that trust was evident in Billy's preaching and his wife's testimonies. She was convinced that prayer was the

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[87] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone,* 142.

[88] Dean, *Almost Christian,* 111.

[89] Ibid., 112.

key to life, and so prayed earnestly, especially for her family.[90] During their children's raising, the Grahams lived out their faith, and their children saw it. According to Nüesch, when he interviewed the children, they verbalized that their parents genuinely lived what they preached.

"Their lives radiated some of God's unconditional love, and everyone felt comfortable in their presence. Ruth and Billy privately lived what Billy publicly preached."[91] The author focused on Billy's most outstanding characteristics, which include authenticity, humility, intimacy with God, discipline, responsibility, and faith. The authors witnessed these characteristics, but they also had confirmation from others, including Billy's close friends and his family.

Another influential Christian leader is Oral Roberts. In his book *Oral Roberts: An American Life*, David Harrel presented information regarding Oral's growth and development. He wrote that Oral was raised by his parents Ellis and Claudius Roberts, who were both Christians. The author wrote that Oral's parents were leaders in their community. His father was a pastor, and both parents were in constant prayers in their home. Oral's parents believed he would be instrumental for God and frequently reminded him of this.[92]

In his book *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, Andy Stanley states that Christian parents raised him. His father, Charles Stanley, was a pastor, and

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[90] Hanspeter Nüesch, *Ruth and Billy Graham: The Legacy of a Couple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), accessed July 4, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[91] Ibid., 37.

[92] David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts, An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

during his early years, his mother was a supportive Christian wife and mother.[93] Andy was raised in the church and stated that his father Charles baptized him when he was a child.[94]

Andy verbalized that he was heavily involved in the church and enjoyed it. "As a preacher's kid, there was never a time in my life that I was not involved in church. And unlike a lot of PKs, I don't remember ever being forced to go. I liked it. Church was always the center of my social life. It's where I made lifelong friends, several of whom I'm still connected with today."[95]

Andy Stanley is the senior pastor of North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. He started this church in 1996. He has over 23,000 adults and over 14,000 children and students attending worship services in six church locations.[96] Even though his parents are now divorced, he remembers that during his formative years, his parents were married, and he observed them living out their faith.[97]

As the above examples demonstrate, it is common to see influential practitioners of their faith producing descendants that continue in the Christian faith. In addition to being influenced by the prior generation, young people are also affected by current trends, including entertainment and youth sports.

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[93] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide,* 35.

[94] Ibid., 21.

[95] Ibid.

[96] North Point Community Church, "Northpoint Ministries," Northpoint.org. Last modified 7/6/20, accessed 7/6/2020. http://northpointministries.org.

[97] Ibid., 24.

Entertainment

Entertainment is not a new phenomenon, but the current most common method of entertainment is primarily technological. The internet has put entertainment in everyone's environment either by television, the internet, or the cell phone. Young adults are not exempt from the temptations and distractions of the appeal of the worldly pleasures. "Believers are not immune to such allure and can quickly find themselves ensnared in an endless cycle of worldly gratification if they are not vigilant to avoid it."[98] Christians must pursue and participate in entertainment that glorifies God and resist those entertainments that defy the scriptures.[99] In the book *You Lost Me, Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith,* Kinnaman and Hawkins inform the reader that technology has a significant effect on young adults. He wrote that there is unlimited access to information and online entertainment. Many of these online sites are anti-Christian and bring content to the young adults that cast doubt on Christianity.[100] "Technological access allows them to experience and examine content originating from non-biblical worldviews, giving them ample reasons to question the nature of truth."[101]

Christians can participate in entertainment as a leisure activity. Young adults can enjoy entertainment. However, they must observe boundaries to keep entertainment in line with the scriptures. "The Christian has the freedom to enjoy the entertainment available in this world, but

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[98] Matthew C. Milsap, "The Twenty-First Century Believer and Entertainment: Living Radically in the Age of Distraction," *Southwestern Journal of Theology 53* (2011): 175, accessed July 6, 2020, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001834665&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[99] Ibid., 187.

[100] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me,* 28-30.

[101] Ibid*.,* 30.

this freedom is not to sin, rather it is geared towards enjoying God's created beauty, truth, and love."[102] Neto wrote that Christians should submit to the rules of their church and submit to Romans 14 regarding the effect Christians have on each other.[103]

Barna's research revealed that "The power of screens in the lives of teens and young adults is incalculable. Even using conservative estimates, the typical young person spends nearly 20 times more hours per year using screen-driven media than taking in spiritual content. For the typical young churchgoer, the ratio is still more than 10 times as much cultural content as spiritual intake."[104]

Kinnaman wrote that the primary way young adults communicate and access information including entertainment is using technology. Information and entertainment are prevalent by use of gadgets and using media and the internet. Young adults have unlimited unrestrained access to entertainment including porn content, movies, social media.[105] Time-consuming global entertainment contributes to the decline of young adults in the church.

Youth Sports

In his dissertation, Timothy Conrad wrote that "Youth sports' involvement without clear evaluation of the whole cost of the engagement has often crippled and compromised the stated

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[102] Emilio Garofalo Neto, "Towards a Biblical Ethics of Entertainment: An Investigation Regarding Boundaries." *Fides Reformata 21,* no.2 (2016): 143, accessed July 6, 2020, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn4070505&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[103] Ibid., 138.

[104] Barna Group, "Digital Babylon Our Accelerated Complex Culture Articles in Faith & Christianity in Millennials & Generations," Barna.com., last modified October 23, 2019, accessed July 8, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/digital-babylon/.

[105] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me,* 31.

spiritual goals of both the Christian family and the Church regarding discipleship to Jesus."[106]

Sports have been around for thousands of years. "The social importance of sport and games in the Roman Empire, from which Christianity emerged, is well documented. Grand stadiums were built as spaces for gladiatorial contests, reenactments of famous battles, and as central gathering places during Roman festivals and pagan religious events."[107] According to Meyer, sports and competition must have been common practices in New Testament times. This is evidenced by Paul alluding to this in several scriptures (2 Timothy 4:7; Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 1:27-30 and 3:12-14). Furthermore, he wrote that sports were a pagan activity and was outlawed by the Roman Christian leader. However, sports became standard practice when churches became popular in Europe.[108] In the Middle Ages, sports were commonly practiced among the middle and upper classes. The church rejected sports "as evidence of the fallen nature of man."[109]

However, by the nineteenth century, muscular Christianity challenged the church's rejection by emphasizing that the Christian has a responsibility to care for the body and the soul. "Without doubt the muscular Christian movement shaped the relationship between sport and Christianity for the twentieth century and beyond."[110] "From St. Paul to modern-day

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[106] Timothy A. Conrad, "The Effect of the American Youth Sports Culture on the Discipleship of the Family to Jesus in the 21st Century," (PhD diss., Talbot School of Theology, 2020), 4, accessed July 6, 2020, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/2395792355/64C36D1F0A94EEBPQ/6?accountid=12085

[107]Andrew R. Meyer, "Historical Relationship Between Sport and Christianity," In *Sport and Christianity: Practices for the Twenty-First Century*, by Nick J. Watson, 62, London: T&T Clark, 2020, accessed July 7, 2020, http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.5040/9780567678638.ch-006.

[108] Ibid., 63.

[109] Ibid., 64.

[110] Ibid., 66.

Christian athletes, the nature of Christianity's relationship with sport is complicated and diverse, ever-evolving, and never complete."[111]

Sports has become a significant issue in the world today. In America, many parents look forward to their child or children excelling in sports. There are a plethora of sporting events and competitions that are attractive to parents. For children to excel in sports, parents must be present at their teams' practice and activities. Nicole M. Lavoi wrote that "parents are the most critical sport socialization agents for youth, especially in childhood."[112] She informed parents that parents influence their children by supporting them, helping them prepare for games, and cheering them from the sidelines.

Youth sports contribute to the church's absence since many of the games are played on Sundays, and practice time can be on an evening when the church is in progress. If children see that their parents are willing to sacrifice church for their games, it is highly likely that church attendance may not seem imperative. Lavoi wrote that children are more influenced by what a parent says than what they do.[113]

"Organized team play for youths was virtually unheard of until the YMCA began to field teams late in the nineteenth century."[114] However, since then, millions of youth participate in a variety of sports on a team for competition. Many parents invest large sums of money and time to help their child excel in a game. Although some parents hope for their child or children to

[111] Meyer, "Historical Relationship Between Sport and Christianity, 68.

[112] Nicole M. Lavoi, *Youth Sport and Spirituality: Catholic Perspectives*, edited by Patrick Kelly (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), accessed July 7, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[113] Ibid., 200.

[114] Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 502-504, accessed July 8, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

excel, others believe that sports help them gain the lessons and discipline they will need to succeed in life.[115] Richard Davies insists that children are naturally spontaneous in their playing behaviors. Organized sports with adult supervision with their structures have replaced the spontaneity. Young people are placed on strict diets and rigorous training to excel. A few made it to the world-class level, leaving behind a large number of disappointed psychologically and physically wounded individuals.[116] "In order to achieve this pinnacle of success, parents sometimes have to neglect their daughter's education and social development."[117]

When parents are busy with things like attending to their kids' games and practices, they find little or no time for church. The neglect of the children's education and social aspects will be evident in the church as absence and non-involvement. "Youth group used to serve as a main social outlet for teens, but it is being replaced by sports."[118] This neglect of Christian education at earlier stages of the child's life will be a contributing factor in the declining young adults' group. Parents must be careful because "when sports are used as an excuse to neglect God and Lord's Day congregational worship, they are not a tool in discipleship but rather a distraction from discipleship."[119] It can be concluded then that the departure of some young adults from the church started in their earlier years when their parents chose youth sports over church attendance and engagement.

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[115] Davies, *Sports in American Life,* 502.

[116] Ibid., 505.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Barna Group, "Digital Babylon Our Accelerated Complex Culture Articles."

[119] David E. Prince*, In the Arena: The Promise of Sports for Christian Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 61, accessed July 8, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

The literature review looked at the current research of scholars on the topic of the church's ineffectiveness in retaining young adults. The review looked at sources including textbooks, eBooks, and academic journals. The ministry context of Caribbean youth does not show much activity, which is evidence of a gap in the literature for this context. The study addressing the issue of young people leaving Emmanuel Church is another voice in the conversation to help fill the gap in literature. The next section is referred to as the theological foundation and will seek to address the Biblical grounds for the study.

Theological Foundations

Scriptures are replete with God utilizing young people to accomplish His goals. The young people in the Bible who allowed themselves to be available for God's use were phenomenal in their duties. The Old Testament presents several young people who departed from their parents' teachings or leaders and received detrimental consequences. However, the young people who were obedient to their leaders or parents reaped favorable benefits. These benefits were not only for them but for God's people. Young people who leave Emmanuel Church have a significant adverse effect on God's kingdom. A theological review reveals that young people are leaving the church for several reasons. This section will explore how the departure of young people from the church may be influenced by the Fall, worldly distractions, Satan, family dysfunction, and church issues.

The Fall

In the beginning, God created humanity to be in fellowship with Him. The first humans disobeyed the instructions of God, which resulted in the Fall. In the book of Genesis, God instructed Adam to avoid eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The consequences of disobeying this commandment would be death (Gen 2:17). Satan deceived Eve, promising her

that eating the forbidden fruit would provide her with life and the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:4-5).

Both Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit. "This resulted in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden because of their sinful rebellion against God. Their descendants followed in the rebellious ways of their parents, resulting in the long story of human depravity and its terrible consequences."[120] God had already defined good and evil, and when the devil tempted Eve, he was, in essence, telling her that she will have the power to define good and evil for herself. The fruit looked tempting to be eaten and Eve was tempted with the anticipation of being wise. She disobeyed everything God and her leader had taught her and ate the fruit. According to Walton, there was nothing wrong with a desire to be wise or to be like God. God had already created man with godlike attributes. God said that everything he made was good. Walton believes that the problem was not eating of the tree, but the problem was the timing. "In this view, God has prohibited the tree because autonomy and sexuality should come only at the end of an appropriate process. Adam and Eve are not ready for it."[121] When this happened, the first couple experienced something that God did not yet intend for them to experience. This disobedience led to the Fall. Satan's deceptive scheme led to the separation of man from God (Genesis 3:9).

Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves. They showed that they had the power to take care of themselves without dependence on God. Unfortunately, the feeling of independence was short-lived. God had to find more appropriate coverage for them (Gen 3:21).

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[120] Edward E. Hindson, and Elmer L. Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey: An Introduction*, (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 38.

[121] John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2001), 172. accessed June 18, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Walton puts it this way: "Any independence we experience is fleeting as old dependencies are simply replaced with new ones."[122] God, the creator, had plans for the man that he would execute in his own time. Man's disobedience thwarted the timing of God's plan for humanity.

American society embraces the message that young adults are at a stage of independence and autonomy. "This gives them a degree of autonomy and the ability to make decisions for themselves independent of God."[123] This is seen in the problem being addressed in this study. Young adults with their new-found independence decide to leave the church.

The young people who are leaving the church were raised in the church. They attended Sunday School classes and a variety of other functions to help them in their spiritual formation. The temptation of the things that appeal to their worldly appetites created a similar attraction to Eve in the garden. The human desires the Bible mentions are the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). The Bible condemns worldly pleasures that defy the principles of God (Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 5:11-13; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10). In American society, it is common to see young adults engaging in activities that distract them from God's will. One such activity is the prevalence of sex. According to Barna research, young adults are the highest users of digital porn.[124] Most young adults view sex as something to be enjoyed by two people who love each other regardless of marital status.[125] The church does preach

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[122] Walton, *Genesis,*173-174.

[123] Ibid.,172.

[124] Barna Group, "Teens & Young Adults Use Porn More than Anyone Else," Barna.com., last modified January 28, 2016, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/teens-young-adults-use-porn-more-than-anyone-else/.

[125] Barna Group, "What Americans Believe about Sex," Barna.com., last modified January 14, 2016, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/what-americans-believe-about-sex

against sexual immorality, as stated in the scriptures (I Cor 6:18; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Thess 4:3-5). The rejection of that teaching contributes to young adults leaving Emmanuel Church.

Sex and the Young Adult

When God created Adam and Eve, He instructed them to procreate (Gen 1:28). For procreation to take place, there must be sexual awareness. When Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they attempted to cover their nakedness. God was displeased and scolded them for developing this awareness prematurely (Gen 3:11). Walton wrote that God ordained a proper timing for sexuality. Unfortunately, like Adam and Eve, sex at the wrong time can lead to severe consequences. "Our society is well aware of the problems that arise when children are given autonomy too early or become sexually active too young."[126] Some of these results are poverty, child neglect and abuse, foster care overload, gangs, crimes, and many more negative consequences.

The Bible commanded God's people in the Old Testament that engaging in sex has boundaries. He gave them strict commands regarding the rules for sexual expression (Lev 18). Sexual sins occurred in the Old Testament, which led to negative consequences. In the Bible, David participated in premarital sex with Bathsheba even though he knew it was wrong. As a result of that sexual sin, David lost his son (2 Sam 12:14-31). Reuben lost his birthright as a punishment for having forbidden sex (1 Chr 5:1). Amnon had forbidden sex with his half-sister, and as a result, his brother Absalom ordered his assassination (2 Sam 13:11-29).

In his journal article: "Beliefs about Sex and Parent-Child- Sex Communication Among Church-Based African American Youth," Moore et al, reported that black young people are the highest group who participate in premarital sex at a young age. "Although their sexual behaviors

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[126] Walton, *Genesis*, 174.

were similar to general population youth, many believed that engaging in sex before marriage was sinful."[127] Even though the church preaches against premarital sex and youth sex, young black church girls are still participating in sexual activities. When young people admit that they are aware that their sexual behaviors can bring about negative consequences, they were not deterred from that behavior.[128] This study proves that young adults who leave the church are likely to be involved in sexual activities. In the New Testament, Paul provided the rules of sexual expression to the church (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Cor 6:18; 1 Cor 7:1-7; 1 Cor 10:13; Eph 5:3; 1 Thess 4:3-5; Col 3:5; 2 Tim 2:22). Paul wrote to the churches, but a specific letter he wrote to Timothy as a young individual instructs him that it is imperative to stay away from youthful passions.

Satan's Agenda

The scriptures declare that there is a battle going on in the spiritual realm. This battle is not a physical one. It is a spiritual battle against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). Since creation, Satan has been vigilant to thwart God's plan. However, God forewarned the church that Satan will continue to work hard, looking for susceptible individuals to destroy their connection to God (1 Pet 5:8). Scriptures already predicted that the gates of hell would not overcome the church (Matt 16:18). The world has a plethora of attractions that appeal to young adults. Scriptures state that "in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:16). Satan is the ruler of the world (2 Cor 4:4) and therefore is responsible for the worldly attractions. Paul warns the church that

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[127] Erin W. Moore, Jannette Berkley-Patton, Alexandria Bohn, Starlyn Montez Hawes, and Carole Bowe-Thompson, "Beliefs About Sex and Parent–Child–Church Sex Communication Among Church-Based African American Youth," 1821, accessed June 21, 2020. doi:10.1007/s10943-014-9950-z.

[128] Ibid., 1821.

there is a constant struggle of the flesh against the Spirit (Rom 7:23). He was an apostle who was teaching Christians how to manage their spiritual journey and building churches. He was so dedicated and convinced of the cause for Christ that he was willing to die for the gospel. He also dedicated his life for the gospel (Acts 20:24; 21:13; Rom 8:35-39; 2 Cor 11:23-28). Yet, after all that devotion and passion for Christ, Paul declared that he still wrestled to make the right choice (Rom 7:21). Based on this premise, it is easy to see why young adults have a difficult time remaining committed to Christianity. If Paul, who is the epitome of Christianity as a human being, had to struggle to make the right choice, young adults will also struggle. Without the level of spiritual maturity like Paul, they will not be strong enough to win the spiritual war.

"For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit, what is contrary to the flesh. They conflict with each other so that you are not to do whatever you want" (Gal 5:17). According to George, this scripture is interpreted to mean that no matter how far along the spiritual formation journey a person is, they will never get to a place where they no longer struggle to live the Christian life. "The conflict between flesh and Spirit, and not only with reference to sexual temptations, is intense and unrelenting."[129] There is a spiritual battle that Satan wages against the Christian. The young adults are influenced by the temptation of the pleasures of the world. "Satan's weapons against God's people are deception and temptation."[130]

The devil is battling for the hearts of young adults. Scriptures warn that the devil would compete for the hearts of all men, including young adults. For that reason, Paul wrote to the

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[129] Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary, An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 348, accessed June 21, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[130] Kevin G. Smith, "Spiritual Warfare in African Pentecostalism in the Light of Ephesians," Conspectus, December 2018, 78, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiACO190228003437&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

church in Ephesus that they should arm themselves against Satan's attacks, but this must be done

with the Lord's help (Eph 6:10). This means that a young adult is no match for the devil, and

without reliance on God, they will be prone to leave the church. The scriptures remind Christians

that Satan is like a thief whose goal is to destroy the young people (John 10:10). Again, the devil

is compared to a roaring lion, looking to devour individuals, including young adults. Other

reasons that the decline of young people must be addressed include the fact that "the wages of

sin is death" (Rom 6:23); and that the pleasures that young adults are pursuing are only

temporary (Heb 11:24-25). Finally, scriptures encourage young people not to depart the Christian

faith and their relationship with God (Eccl 12:1).

<center>The Family</center>

"One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts" (Ps

145:4). Historically in the Bible, traditions, laws, and rules were passed down orally. The Lord

depended on the continuity of His Word through the mouth of people. One of the methods is

parents teaching children the ways of the Lord. "Impress them on your children. Talk about them

when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get

up" (Deut 6:7). Merrill wrote that this action of impression is likened to an engraver using a

hammer and a chisel to write a message in stone. Even though that task is painstaking, yet when

it is done, the message is permanently inscribed. To have that effect, he explained that the

process includes constant and consistent repetition of the Word by the parents to the child or

grandchild.[131] "An important demand of the covenant relationship was that it be perpetuated

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[131]Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy,* The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 142, accessed June 20, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

beyond the immediate generation of those with whom the Lord made it, for its promises and

provisions were for generations yet unborn."[132]

The parents teach their children who then grow up and guide their children. The survival

of the Word of God across generations, depends upon the communication across generations. A

lost generation would be detrimental to the propagation of Jewish laws and traditions. God

created the family environment as the place where children learn the principles of God's Word.

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn

from it" (Prov 22:6). Garrett interprets this verse to mean that a child should be instructed and

trained in whatever principles are necessary for successful adulthood. If the basic principles of

right and wrong are embedded in the child, it is a higher probability that he or she will continue

to build upon that foundation.[133]

The Bible further instructs children to be obedient and honor their parents (Exod 20:12;

Eph 6:1). According to Snodgrass, children should be in obedience to their parents as unto the

Lord. In other words, children should obey their parents with a Biblical foundation, even if it is

society's rules.[134] The young adults leaving the church where their parents are Christians are

working along with the secular society that promotes independent thinking.

Honoring and obeying parents brings great blessings. Dishonoring and disobeying

parents brings shame and curses. In the Bible narrative of Noah and his family, there is an

excellent example of honor and dishonor of kids and the ensuing results. Noah had fallen asleep

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[132] Merrill, *Deuteronomy,* 142-143.

[133] Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs:* An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993) 164, accessed June 20, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[134] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*: *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Klyne Snodgrass (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2009), accessed June 21, 2020. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1524688&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

drunken in his tent, exposing his nakedness. His youngest son Ham discovered him naked, and instead of covering him, he summoned his two older brothers Shem and Japheth. The two brothers took a sheet and walked backward and covered Noah's nakedness. When Noah became sober and understood his sons' actions, he blessed Shem and Japheth and cursed the descendants of Ham (Gen 20-27). When young adults leave the church and disobey their parents, they increase the potential of losing their blessings.

The Church

The church is God's method for building His kingdom here on earth. Jesus told Peter that He is the builder of the church (Matt 16:18). One overarching theme in the book of Acts, throughout the Pauline epistles, is that the writings of Peter and James show that the building of God's kingdom is accomplished through the church. According to scriptures, the church is critical to the functioning of the work of the Holy Spirit. The church is referred to as Christ's body (Col 1:24); the bride of Christ (Rev 21:9); the household of God (1 Tim 3:15); the flock of God (1Pet 5:2); the house of God (Heb 3:6); and the temple of the living God (2 Cor 6:16). Scripture is clear that church attendance is crucial for the people of God (Heb 10:25). Regardless of the situation that Christians face, leaving the church is forbidden. Guthrie in the *NIV Application Commentary* wrote: "The author (of Hebrews) sees their discontinuance of common fellowship and worship as fatal for preservation in the faith."[135] Guthrie explained that church attendance does not mean that a person must be in every service the church offers. What is critical is that the person is meaningfully engaged weekly in the life of the church.[136] Church

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[135] George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. George Guthrie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1998), 345, accessed June 21, 2020, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1524736&site=ehost-live&scope=site. 345

[136] Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 348.

attendance by the young adult is mandatory as instructed by scriptures. Guthrie insists that the church exists to have believers meet for encouragement with the Word, accountability, and to worship God.

Church attendance is necessary because it is in that environment that Christians learn God's Word to help with their spiritual formation. Scriptures urge the pastors and church leaders of the critical need to teach the Word of God (1 Tim 4:2, 6). It is in the church that the spiritual gifts denoted by Paul, are utilized. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:27). The church is the place where the believers come together to use their spiritual gifts. Therefore, being absent from church is detrimental to the body of Christ because that gift which the young adult possesses is not being utilized to help the church.

The Lord commanded His disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). The church has the responsibility to equip the members and send them to evangelize to make disciples for God's kingdom. The church is the vehicle through which discipleship and soul-winning take place. Young people departing from the faith will prevent the church from making them into disciples. Overtime when these young people have departed, they will not be able to make disciples. The process of evangelism has a high potential of being thwarted if the church loses young adults. The church begins the process of evangelism by providing Christian education during Sunday School to all age groups.

Sunday School

The Sunday School was not mentioned in the Bible, specifically as a curriculum to train children and youth. However, Sunday school has its theological foundation in the scriptures. The Sunday School is a Christian education setting where the curriculum is age-based. The Bible does express the critical need for educating in the word of God. The Old Testament instructs

children to be taught in the word of God consistently, morning and evening while walking and while sitting (Deut. 6:6-7). Learning the word of God was mandated by God for these children to grow up with the proper godly values. Sunday School is a great place to accomplish the teaching of the word of God. The first-century church was adamant about educating individuals in the scriptures. Luke wrote: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Teaching was a crucial part of the daily activities of the church. Fernando observed that one of the main things Jesus did when he was on earth was teaching. He taught the crowds and many occasions and was continually teaching his inner circle of disciples. The author insists that the early church modeled the teaching actions of Jesus. Fernando also believes that the early church took the instructions for teaching believers from the Lord (Matt. 28:20).[137]

Paul warned the church to expect a decline in church attendance. He predicted that close to the end of time, "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 2:6). Paul continued that people would refute the scriptural teachings and reject the commands of the Bible (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Many of those characteristics are exhibited by young adults and maybe a contributor to their absence from the church.

In the Bible, God provides a foundation to prove that his work on earth includes young people. Some of the young people that are provided as God's perspective on young people

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[137] Wilson, Jared C. The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 120.

include Samuel, Daniel, and Josiah. Finally, the biblical approach to young people who return will be explored with the example of the Prodigal Son.

According to Ham, Sunday School is not as effective as it appears. His research showed that Sunday school is "actually more likely to be detrimental to the spiritual and moral health of our children."[138] In his research, he compared young adults who had been raised in Sunday School and young adults who were not. The results showed that those who emerged from Sunday schools were less likely to believe the basic Christian doctrines and were more open to non-Christian worldviews. For example, they believe the story of evolution; they embrace homosexuality, abortion and liberal sex, evolution, errancy in the Bible, and hypocrisy in the church.[139] Ham believes Sunday School contributed to this issue because of the way the word of God was taught to these individuals. He also claims that youth ministry is also producing young adults who leave the church because of how youth ministry is being done. The church sends the message to parents that Sunday School and youth ministries are the vehicles that they can depend on to create spiritual formation in their children. The parents believe this and therefore put the responsibility on the church to educate their children.[140]

A Barna Group research reports that when church leaders were asked to cite the main ways in which they prioritized children's spiritual formation, nearly three-quarters of Protestant pastors (73%) say they address children's spiritual formation by providing Sunday school and classes for youth.[141] Furthermore, this report continues that although most of the pastors

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[138] Ham, Ken, and Beemer, Britt. Already Gone, 36.

[139] Ham, Ken, and Beemer, Britt. Already Gone, 37.

[140] Ibid 45.

[141] Barna Group, "Who Is Responsible for Children's Face Formation?" Barna.com., last modified March 19, 2019, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/children-faith-formation/.

surveyed admit that the process of the Christian upbringing of kids is the parent's responsibility. However, the pastors deny providing the tools to help and mandate parents to help their children.[142]

Ham is adamant that the ministries in the church who mentor young people need a total renovation. To begin a turnaround, the church must scrutinize who is teaching the kids and what is being taught to them. The more effective curricula must include outstanding apologetics and must be taught by qualified teachers. Also, the parents must return to their responsibility as the primary educators and influencers in their children's lives.[143] Ham's research is grounded upon the scriptures that instruct parents in their parental role as spiritual guides (Prov.22:6; Eph 6:4; Deut. 11:19). Young adults raised in the church are at risk because even though they were plugged into Sunday school and youth ministries, they may not have been supported adequately by their parents. Besides, they were not prepared adequately by the church to defend and to commend their faith. Here is a gap that may have contributed to the decline of young adults in the church.

<div align="center">Young People who Stayed with God</div>

Scriptural references to the importance of young people to the kingdom of God includes: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (Eccl 12:1); "You who are young, be happy while you are young…Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment" (Eccl 11:9); "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in

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[142] Barna Group, "Who Is Responsible for Children's Face Formation?"

[143] Ham, Ken, and Beemer, Britt. Already Gone, 46-47.

love, in faith, and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12); "I write unto you, young men because you are strong,

and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1John 2:14).

Daniel

Young people are crucial to God's plan and they can keep the statutes of their upbringing

with integrity. "When he was but an adolescent, Daniel, with other choice and promising young

men, were spirited away from Judah as part of Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation of Jews to

Babylonia."[144] As a young man who had been trained in Jewish cultures, laws, and traditions,

Daniel refused to compromise even his dietary traditions (Dan 1:8). God gave Daniel a gift of the

ability to understand visions and dreams (Dan 1:17). King Nebuchadnezzar was impressed with

Daniel's talents and wisdom and promoted him to work in the palace. Daniel was used by God to

interpret the king's dream (Dan 2:36-45). Daniel's obedience to God allowed the pagan king to

acknowledge God's omnipotence.

Daniel never rejected God or His teachings. He disobeyed the king's command not to

pray to God. He opened his window and boldly prayed to God. As a result, he was thrown into a

lion's den filled with lions. But God's miraculous deliverance of Daniel from the lions prompted

the king to embrace God with his kingdom (Daniel 6:16-23, 26). Daniel was a vessel that God

used to accomplish the task of judging the pagan nation and turning them to the true God. Daniel

kept the faith passed down to him, and his non-departure from his teaching caused God to use

him to accomplish astonishing things.

Josiah

God's use of young people is evident in the narrative of King Josiah, who started reigning

in Jerusalem until he was thirty-nine years old. That means during all his young adulthood ages,

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[144] Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2011), 409.

he ruled the kingdom according to the principles of God (2 Kgs 22:1-2). When he was twenty-six

years old, he orchestrated the repair of the temple. He was the grandson of Manasseh and the son

of Amon, who were both evil kings (2 Kgs 21:20). Even though he had poor examples, Josiah

was the opposite of both kings before him. He used King David as his example and chose to do

"what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kgs 22:2). God was displeased with the nation of

Israel as the evil kings continued to lead them in apostasy. "The disastrous state of the temple

must have taken place during the apostate reign of Manasseh. In that time, the book of the

covenant seems to have been entirely forgotten."[145] In stark contrast to his father and

grandfather, Josiah, the young king started seeking the Lord (2 Chr 34:3). When he was a young

adult of twenty years old, he started the process of tearing down all the idols, destroying the

altars of Baal, and burning all ungodly symbols. When he was twenty-six years old, he began the

purification of the land and the temple. He also proceeded to direct the repairs of the temple of

the Lord (2 Chr 38:8). During the restoration of the temple, the book of the Law was found and

read to Josiah. Josiah was distraught when he heard the contents of the book. He realized that

God was angry with the nation and had pronounced judgment on the inhabitants. "When the king

heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes" (2 Chr 34: 19). The tearing of his robes also

included humility, weeping, and praying to God (2 Chr 34:24).

Josiah called for the prophet Huldah who assured him that God was pleased with him and

his attitude and actions of repentance. However, God promised that the people would be

punished for their sins. Josiah continued to press for the nation to restore the ordinances and turn

back to God. He gathered everyone in Jerusalem together and read to them the "Book of the

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[145] August H. Konkel, and Staff Zondervan, "2 Kings" in *1 and 2 Kings,* The NIV Application Commentary
(Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2006), 3197g, accessed June 21, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central,
https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397645.

Covenant." After reading the book to the people, he made a public declaration that he would obey the laws of God, and then he instructed all the inhabitants to pledge to obey the laws of God (2 Chr 34:29-32). Josiah was a young man, yet he was instrumental in returning the people to God's ways. "As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their ancestors" (2 Chr 34:33).

Samuel

There is a precedence for young people to follow their superiors' teachings and adhere to the godly principles passed down to them. Samuel was an example of a young man that was willing to follow the instructions passed down to him by the priest. Eli the priest, was given charge of Samuel since he was a child (1 Sam 2:18-19). As Samuel grew up in the temple under Eli's teaching, he must have had significant encounters with Eli's sons. It could also be deduced that they all got the same instruction from the priest. However, Samuel respected and obeyed the commandments he received. He was obedient, as evidenced by his prompt responses to the perceived summons of Eli.

The period in which Samuel was a youth was a time of spiritual apostasy (1 Samuel 3:1). When God looked for someone to use, he was drawn to young Samuel because Samuel possessed characteristics that God could use. Even though God's Word was rare in those days, God found a young man he could entrust with His message (1 Samuel 3:11). Young people are essential to the kingdom of God, as seen in Samuel being the recipient of God's prophecy. Samuel did not leave his place but continued to be available for God to use him (1 Sam 3:19-21). "Samuel's task was not an easy one. He had to learn to wait his turn to become Israel's spiritual leader until Eli died."[146] Young adults have been in preparation for ministry and discipleship

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[146] Hindson and Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey*, 124.

from childhood. "Ultimately, only the Lord knows when we are fully prepared and equipped to serve Him."[147]

<div align="center">Young People Who Walked Away from God's Ordinances</div>

Young people have been included in the Bible from the beginning of time. Several examples of them walked away from the laws of God. The consequences metered out by God are evidence enough to prove God's intolerance of apostasy. Hebrews reminds us that the result of apostasy is judgment and fire (Heb 10:26). Paul continues to reiterate that if those who rejected Moses' laws were killed, he warns: "How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:29). There are Biblical examples of young people who walked away from God. Three cases will be addressed.

The Prodigal Son

The first example is that of the prodigal son, who left his education and upbringing to explore a free way of life. He was exposed to similar teachings and upbringing as his older brother. Yet, this younger brother was impatient and anxious for the opportunity to do things his way. He demanded his inheritance from his father and went away from home (Luke 15:11-12). He squandered all the money his dad gave him doing things that were wasteful and incongruous with the way he was raised (Luke 6:13). Eventually, when he had lost everything and was no longer able to sustain himself, he returned home destitute, requesting his father to hire him as a servant.

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[147] Hindson and Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey*, 124.

On his return, his father was thrilled to see him. He greeted him with open arms and love. According to Wilson, "The prodigal son comes running home. The father goes running to meet him. It is a beautiful picture of the repentance and forgiveness that make up reconciliation."[148] He even prepared a party with a delicious meal to celebrate his arrival and gave him a ring and a robe! This parable is an excellent example of the yearning church leaders should have when the young adults' attendance had declined. Church leaders yearn for their return. They are willing to celebrate their return to their place in the kingdom of God.

Interestingly, Kinnaman uses the term "prodigal" to describe young adults who sever all ties with their Christian upbringing. He wrote that this category of young people who leave the church cite various reasons for leaving not just the church but leaving Christianity. The reasons they cite include being gravely wounded by the church or fellow Christians, and they feel that Christianity kept them stuck in a box where they were not able to express themselves. The prodigals do not show any desire to return to Christianity.[149] The church is concerned about the young adults in this category because they are no longer attending Emmanuel Church and are disconnected from Christianity. Research shows that the prodigals struggle with sex, drugs, and alcohol.[150] The effect of these behaviors on society is undeniable.

The church must be vigilant to plan strategies to help eliminate or at least decrease the probability of wounding the youth. The church must also face the reality that many young people who no longer attend church blame the church.[151] Also, Ham encouraged the church to focus on

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[148] Wilson, The Prodigal Church, 181.

[149] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 50-52.

[150] Ibid., 51.

[151] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone,* 41.

making "radical changes" to reverse this situation.[152] He reiterated that even if this target group responded positively to an invitation and return to the church, unless they notice some noticeable change, they will continue to be absent. Therefore, he instructs the church to focus on the group "still under our care — the high school, middle school, and elementary students who are still coming in almost every Sunday."[153]

The Sons of Eli

Eli was a priest in Israel and had biological sons Hophni and Phinehas, who instead of following the laws they had been taught, they lost respect for their father and God. "Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12). "The sin of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight…" Even though the young men had lost their respect for God and their leader/father, the priest did not take the necessary steps to interrupt the negative behaviors. Scriptures declare that the leader of God's people must be vigilant to take steps to turn around ungodly practices. Turning a deaf ear and burying his head in the sand, will cause the leader and the perpetrators to reap God's consequences (Ezek 33:6).

God was displeased with the actions of the young men because of their disregard for His Word. The young men were aware that they could partake of the meat as described in the commandments. They were not satisfied with that rule and decided they would take whatever they wanted, including the part that should have been reserved for God as an offering.[154]

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[152] Ham and Beemer, *Already Gone,* 41.

[153] Ibid., 140.

[154] Bill T. Arnold, "*1 Samuel"* in *1 and 2 Samuel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: MI: Harper Collins Christian Publishing, 2003) 71, accessed July 10, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Interestingly God also held their leader responsible for not attempting to correct their behaviors (1 Sam 3:13).

According to Arnold, Eli's sons' actions were out of control and included sexual immorality and other shameful behaviors; he was unable to control their practices or did not try hard enough. The sons were adamant that they were going to steer their course of action regardless of the warned consequences (1 Sam 2:15-17, 25).

The consequences Eli and his sons reaped were deadly. They both died on the same day, and their father Eli died (1 Sam 4:10, 18). The whole generation of priests was eliminated because of the young men's sin (1 Sam 2:22). Their sins not only affected them but their family as well. Young adults are critical to the proliferation of the gospel. God is displeased with the absence of young adults from the church. He is also displeased when the leaders neglect to address the issue. This study is a strategy that is being utilized to address the decline in numbers of young adults in Emmanuel Church. This narrative is an excellent example of how the actions of young people in the kingdom can have a detrimental impact. It is on this basis that it is critical to address the decline of young adults from the church.

Cain

God asked Cain a compelling rhetorical question, "What have you done?" (Gen. 4:10). The narrator of Genesis told of Adam and Eve's first two sons. Both Cain and Abel were brought up in the same household and were exposed to similar contexts and instructions. The evidence shows that both were of an age to do chores: "Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil (Gen 4:2). Both brought an offering to the Lord (Gen 4:3-4). For some reason, God accepted Abel's

offering but rejected Cain's offering. "Whatever the cause of Cain's rejection, the text is more interested in his response to it than it is in delineating the details."[155]

Cain was angry because God rejected his sacrifice. Yet God gave him the opportunity to fix his mistake. He pleaded with Cain that if he follows the rules and does the right thing, he can still be accepted. On the other hand, if he refuses to make the right choice, he is in danger of becoming overtaken by sin (Gen. 4:6-8). Walton states that when the individual refuses to make the right choice, they are in danger of "a doorway demon waiting for its victim to cross the threshold."[156] This scripture is especially significant as young adults give up the church for the pleasures of the world. The refusal to make the right choice to remain in the church and stay faithful to God will be to their detriment, not to them only but also to their "oikos" (family).[157]

Instead of responding favorably to God's commands, Cain continued down the path of his self-will and committed the ghastly act of murdering his brother. The consequences of his actions were far-reaching. He was expelled from God's presence with a curse on him (Gen 4:11-12). His parents lost a son by murder and the other son by estrangement (Gen 4:16). Young adults who leave the church leave God in the distance. Walton warns that "distance from God is not just because we sin; it is because we enjoy sin, cherish sinful ways, even protect our right to sin and resist any attempt to harness our depravity."[158]

The section looked at a theological basis to address the decline of young adults in the church. The Bible does justify that his issue is crucial to be addressed. Young adults bridge generational gaps and create the vehicle to transmit Christian values from one generation to the

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[155] Walton, *Genesis*, 212.

[156] Ibid., 213.

[157] Ibid., 217.

[158] Ibid., 216.

next. Young adults are critical to carrying out the Great Commission of making disciples for Christ. The study identified several factors, including the Fall, Satan, the family, and the church, that relate to the loss of young adults from the church. The chapter also showed some young individuals in the Bible who stayed with God and those who walked away. Some theories impact the loss of young adults from the church. The theoretical foundations for this study will be explored in the next section.

Theoretical Foundations

There are significant psychological and cultural developments that this study will address as it relates to the issue of the decline of young adults from Emmanuel Church. Since childhood and being engaged in its ministries, young adults that have attended the church seem to disappear after high school and in their young adult years. This section will look through the lens of Erickson's Theory of Psychosocial Development, Four Views Model, Bowenian Family Model, and Postmodernism, to build a foundation to inform the issue of low attendance in the church among young adults.

Erickson's Theory

Erick Erickson's theory of psychosocial development is applicable in this study, because it focuses on individuals' expected behavior across their lifespan. Young adults begin from late adolescence. According to Erickson's theory, late adolescence ends around age eighteen, which is where young adulthood begins. An individual in this stage is working on trying to figure out who he or she is. Individuals in this stage are working on understanding their beliefs and feelings. They will successfully exit this stage with an understanding of their identity. This would mean they have achieved "internal stability, well-defined sex models, and positive

feedback."[159] The developmental stage contributes to young adults leaving the church as a process of figuring out his or her beliefs.

On the other hand, if they were unsuccessful in this stage, they would exhibit confusion of purpose, unclear feedback, and ill-defined expectations."[160] This failure to successfully manage this stage ends in a confusion of their roles. It is crucial that individuals successfully maneuverer earlier psychosocial stages to increase the chance of successfully maneuvering the current stage. According to Salkind, "Because Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is based on the epigenetic principle, it holds that development is optimally successful only when the individual successfully resolves the crisis associated with each stage in the developmental process."[161]

According to Erickson's stages of development, young adults are struggling between isolation and intimacy. "At the young adulthood stage, the focus is no longer on the individual; rather, the individual's relationships with and feelings about others take precedence."[162] Salkind wrote that up to this stage, the individual main focus was on himself or herself. All the stages before must have been successfully negotiated and fulfilled for this person to be able to achieve success as a young adult.

The young adult has made some decisions about who he or she is. Things that were taught in settings like home and church will become scrutinized as the young adult makes meaning of his or her life and attempts to form relationships. "The individual must be able to

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[159]Neil J. Salkind, "Erik Erikson's Focus on Psychosocial Development," In *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development*, 139-156. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2004), 144.

[160] Ibid., 6.

[161] Ibid., 11.

[162] Ibid., 144.

invest his or her feelings, belief systems, values, and goals in that other person. To enter into such a relationship, the individual must have a foundation that includes some degree of autonomy and basic trust as well as a clear sense of identity."[163] A young adult should, therefore, form close relationships, whether for intimacy or essential friendship. If the young adult has not developed a secure sense of identity, he or she will have trouble forming stable relationships. This failure in this stage will lead to isolation. Isolation is Erickson's view of unsuccessfully maneuvering the young adult stage. If the young adult has not maneuvered this stage successfully, he or she will begin to isolate. This isolation may be evidenced in the departure from churches and the relationships there.

"Young adulthood is also the time for another interesting change. As the individual becomes increasingly competent, they become more autonomous and secure, and thus less dependent on external agents for assistance."[164] A young adult has become more independent, and as a result, he can make individual choices. He or she decides what is essential in his or her daily life and is less likely to make decisions based on other's opinions. This stage of independence is crucial because the values and concepts of the young adult will be manifested. Even though an individual had been invested in the church's life, it is at this stage that he or she has the autonomy to decide to be present or absent. As the young adult becomes his or her authority on life's choices, this choice may be manifested in the disappearance from the church. He or she no longer must listen to his or her parents or other authority. The young adult may show his or her independence by choosing to stop attending church.

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[163]Neil J. Salkind, "Erik Erikson's Focus on Psychosocial Development, 150.

[164] Ibid., 150.

The Four Views Approach to Youth Training

Churches recognize the stages of development as critical in affecting young adults and seek to help them grow in their spiritual formation. Therefore, churches use different methods to impact the growth and development of the members at all age levels.

Senter, Nel, Black, and Clark are holders of doctoral degrees in ministry and have been involved extensively in the church's youth ministry. They developed the "Four Views Approach" to prepare young people for Christian ministries. Their foundational theory is founded on the premise that churches struggle to decide at what developmental level the church should include an individual fully in the church's life. Churches usually have specific criteria that must be met before allowing young people to participate in all aspects of the church. Their approach purports that these criteria include things like confirmation, baptism, and church membership. Unfortunately, young people are still not entirely trusted to be autonomous in the church's full affairs.[165] Young people are not treated as equal even when they have fulfilled criteria as adults. It appears the main thing exempting them from full participation in the church is their age.

The authors identified four models or approaches that churches incorporate in training youth in the church. The approaches are: The Inclusive-Congregational, The Missional, The Preparatory, and The Strategic.[166] These models are utilized based on the individual's developmental level. The individual's readiness for fellowship and mission is based on a continuum from service and participation now and in the future.[167]

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[165] Mark Senter III et al., *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church: Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional, Strategic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 21, accessed June 27, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[166] Ibid., 21-22.

[167] Ibid., 22.

The Inclusive Congregational approach has the youth completely involved in all aspects of the church. "A congregation does not consist only of adults or only of youths. The youths have to be incorporated in every line of thought and received into every part of the ministry."[168] According to Senter III et al., when churches segregate youth and avoid using them in the church's full life, the results are young people who see themselves as different and do not feel connected to the adults in the church. The authors do not see any Biblical basis for the disconnect between youth and adults in ministry. When young people feel disconnected from adults, they will seek other avenues for connecting and developing their identity with others outside their church.[169]

"The Missional approach views Christian adults as missionaries and adolescents as people to be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ."[170] According to Clark, the two churches that are leading in this approach are Willow Creek and Saddleback. This approach prepares youth to go outside of the church building to reach others and bring them in to receive salvation. These, in turn, do the same for their friends and others in their contexts. In other words, the youth in the church are prepared and are expected to be missionaries.[171] "We, therefore, need to intentionally build relational structures in youth ministry that will be discipling in a truly biblical way."[172]

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[168]   Senter III et al., Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church, 33.

[169] Ibid., 35.

[170] Chap Clark in Senter III et al., Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church, 118.

[171] Ibid., 128.

[172] Nel, "Imagine-Making Disciples in Youth Ministry," 10.

The Preparatory approach prepares younger people for doing all the functions of the church in all capacities. This model "introduces the concepts of a kind of youth ministry that expresses the church's overall mission."[173] The model has two categories, activity-based or ministry-based. The activity-based model focuses on having numbers and having fun. On the other hand, the ministry-based approach focuses on developing "mature Christians in the church, both now and for the future."[174] Wesley Black describes this approach as effective because it focuses not only on individuals but also on those in their contexts. This model trains and supports the individual through all life's cycles and will have a greater success rate of seeing an emergence of young adults who remain in the church.[175]

The Purpose Driven Youth Ministry (PDYM) is a model that, according to Fields, focuses on preparing youth for ministry. This model utilizes the preparatory approach by getting young people into ministry. The PDYM is based on applying five purposes, which are evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.[176] In accomplishing their purposes, this approach focuses on nine components: Perseverance, participating leaders, parents, planned values, process, programs, potential audience, purpose, and power of God.[177] The author emphasizes that their model concentrates on all nine components to build productive young adults in God's kingdom. The youth is taught coping and survival skills in different areas of their

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[173] Wesley Black in Senter III et al., Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church, 71.

[174] Ibid., 74.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Doug Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 37, accessed June 27, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[177] Ibid., 17.

lives. They are teamed up with influential leaders and are trained on how to lead. This model also includes the parents in the program.

According to Mark Senter, the Strategic approach "calls upon the youth ministry to be and become a holistic intergenerational church that is relevant to the world in which it lives."[178] In utilizing this approach, the youth in the church are developed into a place of maturity. Eventually, these individuals are utilized in planting new churches.[179]

<div align="center">Bowenian Theory</div>

In Family Systems Theory, the Bowenian model is a cognitive task instead of a set of actions. "The cornerstone of Bowen's theory is both an intrapsychic and an interpersonal concept."[180] Bowen's model is based on concepts including: "differentiation of self, emotional triangles, and emotional cutoff."[181]

Differentiation of Self

The differentiation of self is being able to separate thoughts from feelings, thus allowing them to be flexible and act wisely, even in the face of anxiety."[182] This means that a person will be able to choose his actions freely independent of another person. Titelman wrote that a person could successfully differentiate self when he or she uses intelligence and make wise well thought out choices. To improve differentiation, a person must be able to manage anxiety. Managing anxiety is a way to show that the person can balance thinking and feeling. Anxiety is a subtle

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[178] Senter III et al., Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church, 160.

[179] Ibid., 161.

[180] Michael P. Nichols, and Sean D. Davis, *The Essentials of Family Therapy* (Hoboken: Pearson, 2020), 77.

[181]Ibid., 77.

[182] Ibid.

emotion, and many people may not be aware that they are experiencing stress. According to Titelman, one of the things a person may do when he is anxious is to "pull away or shut down."[183]

"Ineffectively dealing with anxiety within the churches led to numerous church conflicts that eventually impacted the church decline."[184] This is crucial in the young adults' actions of being absent from church. Anxiety can be a precipitating factor in the emotional distancing experienced in declining church attendance. "Emotional fusion is the opposite of differentiation."[185] The emotionally fused person loses his sense of individuality and does not have his or her own opinion. These individuals tend not to think for themselves and as a result, are easily influenced to please others instead of themselves. According to Angella Son, in many churches, individuals do not adequately resolve conflicts. Some conflicts can be large enough to create severe damage, as evidenced by the loss of members.[186] Unresolved conflicts contribute to young adults leaving the church.

Emotional Triangles

According to Nichols, a triangle is a relationship that involves three persons. When two people have problems they cannot solve between them, one or both of them "will turn to someone else for sympathy."[187] According to Young, "The complexities and challenges of

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[183] Peter Titelman, *Differentiation of Self: Bowen Family Systems Theory Perspectives*, (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2015), 305, accessed April 5, 2020, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1883806.

[184] Angella Son, "Anxiety as a Main Cause of Church Conflicts Based on Bowen Family Systems Theory," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 73, no. 1 (2019): 9. doi:10.1177/1542305018822959.

[185] Titelman, *Differentiation of Self*, 305.

[186] Son, "Anxiety as a Main Cause of Church Conflicts," 9.

[187] Nichols, and Davis, *The Essentials of Family,* 77.

triangles, or three-person relating, are part of the challenges of living in families or interacting in groups. Of course, this can have pathological outcomes, but it also can be a challenge to emotional growth."[188] Nichol believes that triangles can be unhealthy because one person feels less anxiety when he or she complains to another person instead of the person with whom he or she disagreed. "Triangulation lets off steam but freezes conflicts in place."[189] A conflict that is frozen is still unresolved. In Emmanuel Church, it is often rumored that young people have many issues with leaders but do not feel comfortable approaching them. Therefore, they talk among themselves but not to the leader. This triangulation may contribute to unresolved problems, which may lead to the loss of young adults.

In the traditional church model, adults are not only separated from the youth but also make the rules for them to follow. That model contributes to the youth discussing issues among themselves and not talking to the adults. "In such a case, youth and adolescents seek to meet their spiritual needs and worship elsewhere."[190] Bowens System Theory refers to this action as an emotional cutoff. "Emotional cutoff in churches thus manifests itself in the departure of members from the church and/or the splitting of a church into two or more congregation."[191]

Creech wrote that churches love the Bowenian theory because "it provides ways for clergy to think holistically about a variety of issues in the congregation. It provides a way of

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[188] Sally Young, "Two's Company, Three's a Crowd: Revisiting Triangles in Family Therapy," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 31, no. 1(2010): 92.

[189] Nichols and Davis, *The Essentials of Family,* 78.

[190] Malan Nel in Senter III et al., Four Views of Youth Ministry, 33

[191] Son, "Anxiety as a Main Cause of Church Conflicts, 13.

thinking about life in congregations and families that makes a practical difference."[192] This theory is an approach to conceptualize some of the dynamics contributing to the absence of young adults in the church.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a worldview that denies the existence of absolute truth. "Worldview is a culture's set of fundamental assumptions about the way things are."[193] "Postmodernists believe there is no underlying bedrock of truth anywhere on which to build a theory, nor can we be sure of the categories and generalizations we use to construct such edifices of thought."[194] Society today has evolved into postmodern thinking and behaving. Today's generation is influenced by a postmodernist view, where they spend most of their time. These places are schools and the media. A school educates students six to eight hours a day for five days, then the students go home with material to continue school at home (homework). The church that uses the Bible as the manual for life will not subscribe to the postmodern worldview. Unfortunately, the church only gets to have the students once or twice a week for a total of approximately four hours and some planned events. Comparatively, a student is involved at church only four hours a week, but thirty hours a week in school; it is easy to see the difficulty the church has to influence the student's paradigm.

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[192] R. Robert Creech, "Generations to Come: The Future of Bowen Family Systems Theory and Congregational Ministry," *Family and Community Ministries (Online)* 28 (2015): 73, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3828988&site=ehost-live&scope=site

[193] Paul O. Wendland, "Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 113, no. 3(2016): 210, accessed April 3, 2020, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiBCA160912000805&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[194]Ibid., 217.

"When CNN can trumpet headlines such as, 'Millennials Leaving the Church in Droves,' it's no wonder that the subject has grabbed our attention."[195] "Millennials comprise the generation that came of age in the years surrounding 2000 and so roughly were born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s."[196] The culture of the young adult determines their beliefs and behaviors. According to Wendland, postmodernists believe that "Culture is bound up in language." By this, he meant that things, words, or texts do not have a single universal meaning. Their meanings are based on a cultural understanding or personal understanding. Therefore, a person can subjectively choose his or her reality.

"Rather than place emphasis on the individual, however, most postmodernists seek to construct their own common narratives within communities of like-minded folk."[197] This means that the postmodernist's worldview encourages groups to form that share standard views. The views do not have to be based on principles of truth because they define their realities. "So far as absolute objective truth is concerned, the only thing a postmodernist can be sure of is that he's sure of nothing. Anyone who claims otherwise is being rhetorical, argumentative, strident, and arrogant."[198] This worldview defies Christianity, which is based on the scriptures. Jesus, in his prayer to the Father, declared, "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). Wendland warns that young adults are raised in a postmodern world and as a result, will default to postmodern thinking. This

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[195] Wendland, "Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview," 210.

[196] Ibid.

[197] Ibid., 219.

[198] Ibid.

thinking removes God as the Creator. "Humanity itself is thought to be simply a product of chance and natural causes. Everything is seen as a part of one vast impersonal system."[199]

Young adults are raised to be autonomous thinkers and to embrace individual subjective truth over objective truth. "Because of the Evangelicals' involvement in the political quest to reassert family values, they, too, are seen as retrograde. This has undoubtedly contributed to millennials abandoning the institutional church."[200] Thus postmodernism creates a concept in the mind of young adults that they are the authority of their lives. Unfortunately, postmodern thinking contributes to the young adults leaving the church. The church is Biblically based and has absolute truths by which Christians are required to live.

In his article "Spiritual but not Religious," Roland Martinson points out that young adults are postmodern thinkers. Their attitude, beliefs, and behaviors regarding the church are all influenced by the postmodern culture in which they are embedded. He believes that the church must develop an awareness of the postmodern movement and be useful when it understands the complexity of the problem. "This complex theological work must be multidimensional. It must be historical, descriptive, systematic, and strategic."[201] Historical means that the Biblical material must be shown to apply to the young adult's current context. Descriptive theology means that the young adult wants to see how God fits into world events. In systematic theology, the young adult is presented with a faith that responds to the hard issues of life and its deep matters. Strategic theology is going to give meaning and connect all life's problems to Jesus Christ.

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[199] L. R Bush, *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2018), 20.

[200] Wendland, "Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview," 224.

[201] Roland Martinson, "Spiritual but not Religious: Reaching an Invisible Generation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 29, no. 5 (2002): 326, accessed June 26, 2020). https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A93610956/ITOF?u=vic_liberty&sid=ITOF&xid=d7743de7.

Scott Kopp makes a compelling argument in his book *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry: An Introduction*. He informs the reader that postmodernism forces young adults to make decisions based on their experiences and not just because they are told. He states that young adults have access to an indefinite amount of information and are faced with deciding which ones to believe. As a result, they depend on their experiences. "They cannot just take your word for it, as truth is only in the one experiencing it. Without the claims of a single truth in terms of religion either, postmodern youth will want to have as many religious experiences as they can to cover all the possible truths of faith."[202] Kopp states that young people will pay more attention to someone who speaks from experience than someone who speaks from theory. The message here will prompt the church to choose the experiential teachers.

The church, therefore, recognizes the effect of post-postmodernism on a young adult. Kopp continues to reiterate that the church has to preach Christianity using beliefs and doctrines. Still, it is critical for this generation to have them experience the conversion experience and encourage the Holy Spirit's transformational power. "Rules can be instilled and followed from one case to the next, but a mature faith grounded in experience will be required."[203]

"The postmodern, then, question the stability, even independent status, of knowing subject and referent, the two components which are essential if a text, let alone a meta-narrative, is to communicate and be properly interpreted."[204] The foundation of Christianity is based on the Bible. The church uses the Bible for teaching, discipling, instructions, and training (2 Tim 3:16-

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[202] Kopp, *Postmodernism and Youth Ministry.*

[203] Ibid.

[204] William J. Larkin, "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as 'Grand Narrative' for the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Age." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (3): 407, accessed June 28, 2020, https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001275756&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

17). The church believes that the scripture is God's Word, and there is no room for bargaining or editing the Word of God. Postmodernism young people, by default, question stability.

Chap Clark wrote that one approach that engaging churches use to minister to the postmodern individuals is adoptive ministry. "The world the young now inhabit is the precarious often painful, clearly confusing, and 'abandoned' reality that middle adolescents (fourteen-to twenty-year-old) and emerging adults (twenty-to early thirty-year-old) now live in."[205] The church has to be mindful of the belief systems and worldviews of young adults. Even though the postmodern movement defies the Biblical worldview, the young adults are heavily influenced and are embedded in that system. Churches will utilize this awareness to plan strategies to reach young adults effectively.

According to Christian and Snell, during youth years, many individuals in the church are in a sheltered place and are told what to believe. At the young adult stage of life, these individuals are exposed to a plethora of worldviews, cultures, religions, and lifestyles. At this stage, they reexamine messages that have been passed down to them. As a result, they conclude that people are free to choose for themselves, and the world consists of all kinds of people. They become less judgmental and more tolerant.[206] This new attitude of young adults will cause them to question their faith and the lessons they learned from church. Without a strong foundation, these young adults are at risk of rejecting their faith and leaving the church.

This section provided an overview of theories that informs the study. Although there are numerous theories available, this study utilized Erickson, Nel, and Bowen as the voices that informed the study. The study looked at the postmodernism worldview as a grounding

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[205] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 7.

[206] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition,* 48-50.

framework. The chapter included the literature review, the theological, and the theoretical

foundation of this project. The literature review showed that young adults were indeed departing

the church and showed several possible reasons and possible solutions. The literature was limited

because the specific ministry context being studied was not shown to be prevalent.

The theological foundation showed that scripture relied on young adults to carry on the

Christian gospel and proved that there is a Biblical reason for this study. The theoretical

foundation showed that several current practices inform the topic. Therefore, the combination of

literature review, the theological, and the theoretical foundations has provided the evidence that

there is precedence to address the issue of young adults leaving Emmanuel Church.

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Chapter 3

Methodology

According to the Pew Research Center, the Christian faith is declining rapidly. The survey revealed a decline of "12 percentage points over the past decade." The same study also revealed that there is an increase in the number of Americans who describe themselves as Christians.[207] According to the Barna Group, "nearly three out of every five young Christians (59%) disconnect either permanently or for an extended period from church life after age 15."[208] Based on that research, young adults are leaving the church and the Christian faith. Christianity and its proliferation are contingent upon people spreading the gospel and thus making disciples (Matt 28:19). If each succeeding generation of young adults continues to abandon their faith, Christianity will become extinct. That would defeat the purpose of the death of Christ on the cross. It is incumbent on church leaders to identify the causes, the contributing factors, and the reasons for the problem from the perspective of the young adults.

According to Stringer, "we need to ensure that information is gained directly from the participants and is not tainted by the perspectives, biases, or experiences of research facilitators."[209] The investigator will design the intervention to focus on the perspectives of the participants in the study.

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[207] David Masci, "Why Millennials Are Less Religious than Older Americans," Pew Research Center, Last modified January 8, 2016, accessed April 22, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/08/qa-why-millennials-are-less-religious-than-older-americans/.

[208] Barna, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church."

[209] Stringer, *Action Research*, 101.

Intervention Design

Emmanuel Church has been in operation in the city of Miramar, Florida for over twenty-five years. The church consists of mainly Caribbean members with their families. Many of the young adults that are present or that have left Miramar were raised in Emmanuel Church. The problem this thesis project will address is that of the exodus of young adults from the church. The church notices that individuals from childhood to teenagers, are consistently in attendance and are consistently connected to the church. Their Sunday School classes, their children's church and events are overwhelmingly supported by that age group. However, at around eighteen years old or shortly after high school graduation, the church notices a significant decrease in their attendance or participation in the church. The ages of eighteen to twenty-nine are the years of focus for this study because this age group is significantly lowest in attendance. Many individuals in this group are absent from the church. This project is seeking to address the problem of the absence of this age group. The investigator will obtain information from the missing young adults to compile ways to address the problem. The results will help the church identify factors that influence the disappearance of this age group. This will give the church information that it can use to plan strategies to increase the retention of young adults. If the reasons for low attendance among young adults are identified, the leaders can take steps to engage Emmanuel Church in effective strategies to interrupt the exodus of young adults.

The investigator planned the intervention design to include steps that will provide clarity to future readers. "The central purpose of the methodological chapter in your thesis is to describe to readers how research was accomplished."[210] The investigator conducted the interviews of participants for three weeks beginning August 24, 2020 and ending September 12,

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[210] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 62.

2020. "This project was undertaken as a Quality Improvement initiative at Emmanuel Apostolic Church, and as such was not formally supervised by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board."[211]

Even though the investigator is one of the pastors who has access to all church members' confidential information, the investigator has already obtained the permission of the senior pastor to conduct a study on the young adults' population. The investigator will request the church's secretary to provide a list of all members between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine years who dropped out of Emmanuel Church. The secretary is told to sort the names using specific criteria. They must be young adults between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine years. They attended Emmanuel Church for at least five consecutive years between thirteen years old and twenty-nine years old. During the past year, they have not attended services at Emmanuel. They also verbalized that they have ended their membership with Emmanuel. They are not involved in any ministry in the church and do not support the church financially.

The investigator will choose twenty-five names from the list provided by the secretary. The investigator will arrange the sample using the systematic random technique. This sorting will be done by first separating males from females and placing them in alphabetical order. The investigator will then choose every other name on each list, starting with the females. In the end, there should be a sample which contains thirteen females and twelve males. Even though the investigator requires a sample size of twenty, the extra five will be utilized in case someone drops out.

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[211] Cortney Beltz, email letter to Ivett McDonald, November 12, 2020.

The Initial Phone Call

The investigator will rehearse the contents of the phone call before contacting the individual. The phone call will be the method used to invite the participant to consent to be a part of the study. All participants will be contacted first by telephone. If there is no answer, the investigator will leave a message with a greeting, an introduction, and a request for a return phone call. If phone numbers are not available or changed, the investigator will utilize other methods to contact the individuals. These methods include emails, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. The last way if all other attempts fail will be for the investigator to ask someone who is acquainted with the individual to contact the investigator by phone. When a week has passed, and the investigator has been unsuccessful in connecting with the individual, the investigator will replace that name and continue the "attempts to contact process."

During the initial phone call, the investigator will begin with a short greeting and introduction. After the investigator has confirmed that she has the correct person, she will explain to the individual the purpose for the call: Emmanuel Church has noticed that many young adults have stopped attending church and is conducting a study to address the issue. The investigator will inform the individual that his or her input will be essential to the success of the project. The investigator will clarify to the individual that this action is not a tactic to get him or her to return to church. Furthermore, all information provided will be valuable, and the contents will be revealed; but his or her identification will be kept confidential. The information that is received will be kept secure under password-protected devices. The investigator's laptop and her personal cellphone will be used for the interviews and for storing information. Both devices are password protected. The investigator will utilize code names of participants if she makes notes in a notebook. If anyone happens to accidentally see the notes, there will be identification

connecting notes to a specific participant. According to Sensing, "Assuring participants in the

project and those persons who are interviewed, respond to questionnaires, join focus groups, etc.

that what they say and report will be kept in confidence is vital for earning trust."[212]

The investigator also informs the participant that honesty is necessary, and the

investigator will take a non-judgmental stance. The participant is also notified that the survey

will be in the form of an interview. The interview means that the investigator and the participant

will meet either in person or on Zoom Video Communication if that is more convenient. This

study is being conducted in Florida, USA, while the country is experiencing COVID-19

pandemic. [213] Since everyone is being required to wear face masks and observe six feet of social

distancing, the investigator will be open to more virtual meetings like Zoom. The participants are

also notified that in addition to confidentiality, they will be asked to sign an informed consent. A

copy of the consent is provided in Appendix A. This consent is necessary because the Doctor of

Ministry program is federally funded.[214] The investigator will educate the participant that

informed consent is the method of being sure all participants understand his or her rights. The

investigator will also inform the participant that he or she can choose to pull out at any time in

the process.[215] The investigator will inform the participant that the interviews will be recorded.

The reason for recording the interviews is to allow the investigator to get through the interview

questions without been slowed down by having to take notes. The note-taking may miss crucial

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[212] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 36.

[213] "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed April 30, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

[214] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 34.

[215] Ibid., 35.

pieces of information, both verbal and non-verbal. "Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge."[216]

When the individual agrees to participate, the investigator will negotiate with the individual a time and place to meet that is convenient for the participant. "Allowing participants to designate the time and place maximizes the possibility that they will suggest contexts in which they feel comfortable."[217] To maintain professionalism, unless the participant declines this suggestion, the place for the meeting will be in the investigator's office at the church, whether in person or virtual. The criteria for the meeting place includes the ability to have privacy, comfortable temperature, and access to electricity in the event the back-up batteries on the recording devices fail.

The Meeting

The investigator will meet with the participant as planned and will begin by thanking the participant for his or her time. Sensing wrote that it is important to build rapport.[218] After a brief time of "ice-breaking" conversation, the investigator will attend to the purpose of the meeting. The investigator will review the information provided in the initial phone conversation, answer any questions, and clear up any misunderstandings. The investigator will obtain the signature on the consent form and will remind the participant that the session is being recorded and will double-check the equipment often for proper working. If the meeting is being conducted where there is no access to power, the investigator must be sure recorders are fully charged and will have back up power for at least two hours recording time. The participant is given the option of

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[216] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 79.

[217] Stringer, *Action Research*, 105.

[218] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 108.

audio or video recording. Kuhne wrote that audio and video recording is "Valuable for getting an exact record of events, one that can reveal pauses, expressions, idioms, or body language. Since recording involves the use of mechanical devices, the person operating even a simple tape recorder needs to check and double-check the equipment beforehand."[219] The investigator will also prepare her notebook with pens to make any relevant notes.

The Informed Consent

The Informed Consent will be provided in the appendix section of this project. The investigator should include in the informed consent that the participant can change his or her mind at any time, can refuse to answer any question, and the confidential nature of their answers. The Interview

"Face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires employ the same basic techniques for asking a question—techniques that involve wisdom and skill to employ."[220] The investigator will remind the participant that he or she must be open and honest with the answers. The investigator intentionally utilized the interview methods because the responses will be the participant's own words, viewpoints, and perspectives. The interview is a critical intervention and will be structure utilizing open-ended questions. Open-ended questions cannot be answered using one or two words. The structure of the questions will be taken from Sensing: "Grand Tour Questions," "Guided Tour Questions," "Descriptive Questions," "Task Questions," "Hypothetical Questions," "Quotation Questions," "Ideal Position Questions," "Knowledge

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[219] Gary William Kuhne, and B. Allan Quigley, "Understanding and Using Action Research in Practice Settings," *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, no. 73 (1997): 33. doi:10.1002/ace.7302.

[220] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 86.

Questions," "Interpretive Questions," "Behavior Questions," "Opinion Questions," "Feeling Questions," "Sensory Questions, and " Background and Demographic Questions."[221]

The investigator has prepared twenty questions to ask the participants. The questions will be provided in the Appendix section of the thesis. The questions will be semi-structured, which "involves asking more open-ended questions of several participants but allows the interviewee to go further than the precise question with opinions, thoughts, and questions."[222] The investigator will ask each participant ten questions and will allow him or her to expound on each question. The investigator must remain in charge of time and move the interview along to keep the one-hour limit. When both investigator and the participant are comfortably seated, the investigator will turn on the recorder and begin the interview process.

The Interview Process

The investigator will interview each participant and will record the results of the interviews. During the interview, the investigator must listen respectfully and non-judgmentally and will adjust non-verbal messages to encourage the participant to talk.[223] The investigator should position the participant in a way that allows eye contact between them. The interview begins with the investigator asking the first question. Based on the one-hour contract, each question and response should take no more than five minutes. The investigator makes notes with a desire to help and will review the interviews later on. Sensing also suggests, "Quick action sheets to collect items that require immediate action or attention."[224] For example, if the

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[221] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 86-88.

[222] Kuhne and Quigley, "Understanding and Using Action Research," 33.

[223] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 112.

[224] Ibid., 108.

investigator notices something that can be done differently or something that needs adjustment in the interview process, this will be noted. Sensing suggests that the investigator/interviewer utilizes listening skills like silence, encouragement, clarification, repetition, and examples.[225] The investigator has practiced these skills with friends and learned how to use these listening techniques accurately. The investigator continues the interview process until the end of the twenty questions and at the end of the interview, the investigator turns off the recording device and thanks the participant. The investigator will answer any lingering issues from the participant and then ends the session. According to Sensing, The investigator should ask, "concluding questions that wrap up the interview."[226]

Data analysis

The investigator will review each interview and will make notes from each of them. A study of the data will search for common five "themes, categories, and patterns" among the participants' responses.[227] The investigator will analyze the results of the interviews, interpret them, and will prepare a report with inclusion of graphs and charts. The report will provide to Emmanuel Church the reasons young adults are leaving the church and some steps that the church can take to increase their retention. The reason for eight weeks of study is to give the investigator time to interview twenty participants. However, the investigator will only need to meet with the participants once, for about an hour. After listening back to the recorded interviews, the investigator will decide whether any follow-up meetings are warranted.

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[225] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 110.

[226]Ibid., 108.

[227]Ibid., 198.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

This section discusses the action taken to address the problem and fulfills the purpose of the project. The problem being addressed is that of the decline in attendance of young adults in Emmanuel Church. The interview process is critical because the data collected will be carefully analyzed. The analysis results will be used to present to Emmanuel Church, strategies that they can use to help curb the decline of young adults from the church. It includes a description of the interview process, the participants, the questioning procedures, methodology approach, triangulation, and the investigator.

The Interview

The investigator met with the participant and verbalized appreciation to the participant for agreeing to participate in the project. The investigator reminded the participant of the study's purpose and assured him that no identifying information would connect him to the data. The investigator reviewed confidentiality and informed the participant that he can withdraw at any time with no consequences. The investigator assured the participant that honest responses are crucial to the results of the study. "One of the key features of successful interviews is the need for participants to feel as if they can say what they are really thinking or to express what they are really feeling."[228] The investigator was intentional in utilizing a non-judgmental and non-argumentative stance. The investigator reminded the participant that she would be recording the interview. After being assured that the participant was comfortable and understood the instructions given, the investigator turned on the audio-recorder to begin the interview. "Interviews provide opportunities for participants to describe the situation in their own terms."[229]

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[228] Stringer, Action Research, 106.

[229] Ibid., 105.

The investigator chose to interview past members of Emmanuel Church to understand the effect

of the participants' experience on their departure from the church. According to Stringer,

interviews force a self-reflective response by the participant and validates their church

experiences.[230]

The Participants

The participants for the study included twenty young adults between the ages of eighteen

to twenty-nine years. They attended Emmanuel Church for at least five consecutive years

between thirteen years old and twenty-nine years old. During the past year, they have not

attended services at Emmanuel. They also verbalized that they have ended their membership

with Emmanuel Church. They are not involved in any ministry in the church and do not support

the church financially. They all verbalized the awareness that taking part in this project is

voluntary. There were ten males and ten females. Each participant verbalized the awareness that

the session is being audio-recorded. Each participant was asked a series of twenty questions. The

interviewer requested clarification of responses when necessary. The questions are provided as

Appendix B in the appendix section of the study.

Rationale for Questioning Procedures

The investigator formatted the questions in such a way to get the responses that directly

relate to the study's topic. "What questions should be asked will, of course, depend very much

on the study's topic being investigated."[231] The suggestion by experts is that interviews utilize

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[230] Stringer, *Action Research*, 105.

[231] Peter Clayton, and G. E. Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional: A Practical Handbook* (London: Facet Publishing, 2004), 129, accessed September 12, 2020, https://doi.org/10.29085/9781856047982.009

questions that are open-ended and informal.[232] The investigator is addressing the decreased

attendance of young adults at Emmanuel Church. The questions were all open-ended, meaning

that the participant is forced to form sentences instead of a merely one-word response. The

questions are formatted from the categories Sensing provided."[233]

Grand Tour questions "ask an opening question and set the stage for the interview."[234]

The interviewer asks questions in this category to build rapport and to put the participant at ease.

Guided Tour Questions "ask the participants to take you on a tour (e.g., around the office,

tour of a situation, an explanation of a task."[235] The Guided Tour Question utilized: This activity

provides the investigator with a peek into the early life and influence of the participant. The goal

is to look for any relationship between the family of origin and young adult behaviors related to

church attendance.

"Descriptive Questions ask for more information about an action, a phenomenon, or a

behavior."[236] These are critical questions because they allow the respondents to reminisce about

their past. These are sensitive questions that can cause an emotional reaction; therefore, the

interviewer made notes about non-verbal responses, avoidance, or silence periods. The

interviewer validated the participants' responses without any interruptions. The goal was to gain

as much insight into the people with whom the participant was connected.

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[232] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 86.

[233] Ibid., 86-88.

[234] Ibid., 86.

[235] Ibid., 7.

[236] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 87.

"Task Questions ask the participants to engage in an activity that will clarify the subject."[237] According to Stringer, task questions allow the participant to provide a substantial description of an activity.[238] The investigator's goal for asking this question is to have the participant describe ministry involvement. This will allow the investigator to see if there is a correlation between ministry connection and the young adults leaving the church.

"Hypothetical Questions ask what the respondent might do or what it might be like in a particular situation."[239] These questions will provide great insight into what Emmanuel either needs to do or what it needs to engage young adults.

"Quotation Questions challenge the respondent to contemplate an opposing view or consider abstract issues."[240] The investigator's goal is to give the participant permission to express their honest thoughts and opinions.

"Ideal Position Questions ask the respondent to describe an ideal situation, then ask the respondent to dream or imagine possible alternatives."[241] This line of questioning aims to hear from the participants what they believe would be some strategies that Emmanuel Church can institute to help attract young adults.

"Knowledge Questions ask for specific information possessed by the interviewee."[242] The interviewer uses this category of questions to gain crucial factual responses from the participants.

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[237] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 87.

[238] Stringer, Action Research, 108.

[239] Ibid., 87.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Stringer, Action Research, 87.

[242] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 88.

"Interpretive Questions advance tentative interpretation of what the respondent has been saying and asks for a reaction."[243] This investigator formulated this interpretive question: How did those ministries affect your spiritual growth? This question will elicit a response from the participant about whether the ministries and strategies in Emmanuel Church effectively help young people in their spiritual formation.

"Behavior Questions ask about what people have or have not done."[244] This question aims to get the participant to describe experiences of the behaviors of the people with whom they were raised. The investigator is looking for possible contributing factors to the participant's current church attendance choices.

"Opinion Questions move beyond actions and behaviors and explore why, from the interviewee's perspective."[245] This question intends to explore the aspirations that young people had in Emmanuel Church. This helps the investigator suggest useful strategies to be used in serving young people in Emmanuel Church

"Feeling Questions seek to understand how this person feels and is emotionally affected by the issue, action, or subject. The goal here is to have the participant describe any negative or positive interaction from Emmanuel Church.

"Sensory Questions ask about what is seen, touched, smelled, heard, or tasted."[246] When the person is not connected to the church, their views can be more objective and unbiased in contrast to those raised in the church and have gotten accustomed to Emmanuel's climate.

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[243] Sensing, *Qualitative Research.,* 88.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Ibid.

"Background and Demographic Questions ask about age, occupation, education, or any number of standard background questions that describe identity characteristics."[247] These are important to have the ages of participants fit with the recruitment criteria. The relationship status will be included in the results because marital status may affect results.

Overall, the investigator chose a variety of questions to increase the probability of getting excellent responses to address the issue of the low attendance of young adults in Emmanuel Church. Many of the questions contain elements of multi categories, so it was the investigator's decision which category best described the question posed.

Methodology Approach

This project utilized a qualitative approach, and the investigator collected the data using interviews. Interviews are primary sources of data collection,[248] and allows the participants to provide answers from their own perspective using their own words.[249] Gorman wrote that an interview is a great way to get the information an investigator needs for a qualitative study. The main benefits of interviews are: "immediacy, mutual exploration, investigation of causation, personal contact, and speed."[250] The immediacy aspect allows the interviewer to achieve instant answers. This can help to prevent delays in the project. The advantage of mutual exploration allowed the interviewer to quickly understand the responses from the participant's perspective by reframing responses as needed. The aspect of causation was explored by asking the participants their perspective of the reasons for the actions of Emmanuel Church. This aspect of causation is

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[247] Sensing, *Qualitative Research.*, 88.

[248] Kate. L Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* 9th ed., rev. Wayne C. Booth, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 25.

[249] Stringer, Action Research, 105.

[250] Clayton and Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional,* 125.

an advantage of interviews used in this qualitative project that Gorman and Clayton insist cannot be achieved by a quantitative approach.[251] The interviewer took advantage of the personal contact aspect of the interviews. The participants were previously known to the interviewer, and they expressed their interest in participating in the study. The unanimous response showed their willingness in helping Emmanuel Church, which many still refer to as their "home" church. They all denied any feeling of intimidation during the interview process and verbalized their honesty with their responses. The interviews were recorded and had the advantage of speed. The interviewer did not need to write down responses, nor did the participants be required to write down their responses. "Most of us can talk more quickly than we can write."[252]

The investigator utilized interviews to get the most first-hand information from young adults who were at one time members of Emmanuel Church. Their answers would be based on not what they theorized or what they heard, but on their personal experience. In the ministry context, the investigator explained that the church consists of mainly Jamaican members as the foundation. These members have offspring who have been raised in the American culture. The ministry context is unique because of cultural diversity in the church and in the families. Therefore, this project is dependent on the views of those who have left the church during their young adult ages. Authors like Kinnaman,[253] Dean,[254] Kinnaman and Lyons,[255] and Van der

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[251] Peter Clayton and G. E. Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional*, 125.

[252] Ibid., 126.

[253] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 22.

[254] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 10.

[255] Kinnaman and Lyons, Unchristian.

Merwe[256] have produced literature showing that church attendance is a problem among young adults. Also, several works done by authors, including Kinnaman,[257] Kimball,[258] Bergler[259] and Michelle,[260] suggest what churches can do to help retain young adults. No work has been done on the Emmanuel Church ministry context, and the perspective of the past members of Emmanuel has never been explored. The results of this project will help the investigator to provide Emmanuel Church with strategies for retaining young adults.

Although the utilizing of interviews can provide answers to the questions, "questioning procedures are very delicate because participants are likely to react negatively if there is an implied judgment or criticism embedded in the question."[261] Even with the knowledge of the responses' subjectivity, the advantages of using interviews in this project outweigh the disadvantages.

During the interview, the investigator is aware that the face to face interview prevents anonymity. The investigator consistently showed acceptance by verbal and non-verbal gestures to help increase the probability of honesty. Even with the precautions, the investigator knows that some of the questions that require some sensitive responses may increase the chances of dishonesty in the responses.[262] The awareness of the interview's disadvantages is the catalyst which informs the investigator's use of triangulation.

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[256] Van der Merwe et al, *Getting Young Adults Back to Church*, 1.

[257] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me, 33.*

[258] Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 16.

[259] Bergler, *Mapping the Missional Landscape of Emerging Adulthood*. 65.

[260] Van der Merwe et al., *Getting Young Adults Back to Church, 1.*

[261] Stringer, *Action Research*, 107.

[262] Clayton and Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional,* 126.

Triangulation

Sensing suggests that when an investigator uses more than one approach to collect data, it

will be more believable. Therefore, he encourages the investigator to use several methods when

collecting data. The use of several methods is called triangulation.[263] The investigator provided

all participants with the details of the project and answered all their questions honestly. The

participants expressed an understanding that the information they provided will be kept

confidential with no identification that connects them to the study. The investigator audio-

recorded all the interviews. During each interview, the investigator made field notes as

necessary. The investigator focused on the participants' non-verbal communication like tone and

body language. These observations were noted in field notes and are utilized along with the

interview responses to later analyze the data. The investigator is concerned about the reliability

of the data collected. To present a strategy to Emmanuel Church to address the departure of the

young adults' age group, the project must be perceived as valid. The reliability of the data

collected determines the validity of the findings of the project.[264] In addition to immediately

recording field notes during and immediately after each interview, the interviewer took other

steps to achieve triangulation. The interviewer performed a literature review on similar work

done on the topic of interest. "Reliability is achieved when other researches are drawn upon for

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[263] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 72.

[264] Ibid., 58.

assistance."[265] In reviewing similar work done by Alexander,[266] Dortch,[267] Van der Merwe,[268] and Frisbie,[269] the investigator correlated the similarities in the data collected. The reliability is increased as several works on the topic of interest have been addressed by other investigators. The goal for proving reliability is to have the project accepted as valid. Reliability is increased when others are studying the issue of the disappearance of young adults from the church. The collection of similar data increases the reliability of the study. Even though many voices have spoken in the literature on the topic of interest, the immediate ministry context of Emmanuel Church is a literature gap that this study will address.

The validity of the study is necessary for the increase in its acceptance. This investigator's study possesses face validity, criterion validity, and construct validity.[270] At face value, the study measures what the investigator meant for it to measure. The absence of young adults from Emmanuel Church is measured using only young adults who were former church members and have discontinued their membership with the church. To establish criterion validity and achieve triangulation, the investigator utilized one on one interviews, recorded them, and made field

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[265] Clayton and Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional*, 57.

[266] Stacia Alexander, "Examining the Retention of African American Young Adults in their Childhood Church." PhD diss., Walden University, 2017, accessed September 21, 2020, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1908595474%3Faccountid%3D12085**.**

[267] Christopher Dale Dortch, "Best Practices for Retaining Youth Group Students in the Local Church Post-High School." PhD diss., Liberty University, 2014, accessed September 21, 2020, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1545880099%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[268] Van der Merwe et al., "Getting Young Adults Back to Church."

[269] Frisbie, "A Study of Church Attendance among Young Adults," PhD. Diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016, accessed September 21, 020http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1841294618%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[270] Clayton and Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional,* 58.

notes during and immediately after the interviews. "Criterion validity may be equated with what we elsewhere term 'triangulation.'"[271] Finally, construct validity was achieved because the questions presented in the interview focused on the investigator question: addressing the issue of low attendance of young adults in Emmanuel Church. "The rich 'thick' descriptions of the study are deemed credible when they present the experiences of people in such a way that the participants would recognize them as their own."[272] The investigator utilizes a detailed description from the interview and the field notes. This action on the part of the investigator increases the trustworthiness of the study.

The Investigator

Kuhne and Quigly support the investigator. They purport that the investigator is unique because instead of just complaining about a problem, steps are taken to address the problem.[273] According to Magnusson, the interviewer has to be intentional when approaching the interview meeting. The interviewer must earn the trust of the participants. Earning their trust will increase the probability of more honest responses. For example, the interviewer must be sure nothing in the interaction deters the participant from being open and honest with the responses.[274] The investigator started with small talk and portrayed an accepting stance. The interviewer reminded each participant of the details of the purpose of the study. The interviewer observed the participant conversation style and focused on that style so that it does not distract from the

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[271] Clayton and Gorman, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional,* 59.

[272] Sensing, *Qualitative Research.,* 219.

[273] Kuhne, and Quigley, "Understanding and Using Action Research in Practice Settings," 28.

[274] Eva Magnusson, and Jeanne Marecek, *Doing Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Learner's Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 59, accessed September 12, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107449893.006

interview process. The interviewer is aware that participants may experience some anxiety about the process. "Even before the interview, participants always make inferences about who the interviewer is, what they already know, what they might want to hear or expect to hear, and whether they can be trusted with certain kinds of information."[275]

The investigator encouraged participants to be free to express their true feelings. The investigator kept the conversation going smoothly while ensuring the interview stayed within the allotted time of sixty to ninety minutes. The interviewer told the participant that there is one last question, and after the last question stated, "that is all the questions I have." The interviewer inquired if the participants had anything else to add or if they have any questions. The interviewer thanked the participants and provided them with the interviewer's private cell phone number to text their address. As promised, the investigator mailed each participant a $20.00 Visa gift card. As suggested by Magnusson, immediately after the interview, this interviewer made notes about what transpired in regards to: noteworthy features of the content, striking aspects of the interview relationship, the participant's degree of engagement or expression of emotions, and hesitations on certain issues.[276] This action is taken so that the critical non-verbal content of the interview is not forgotten. After the data is collected, the next step will be analyzing the data.

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[275] Magnusson and Marecek. *Doing Interview-Based Qualitative Research*, 59.

[276] Ibid., 60.

Data Analysis Procedure

"The systematic use of analysis, observation, and data collection procedures gives action research the potential to achieve useful answers to practice problems."[277] The investigator will analyze the data using the processes explained by Stringer and Sensing. The project analysis will provide useful results for planning strategies to help interrupt the decline of attendance among young adults in Emmanuel Church. The results of the analysis will determine how the project will be evaluated. According to Sensing, the perspective of the participant, the investigator, and of an outsider's, all will come into play when evaluating the effectiveness of the project.[278] The process of data analysis poses a challenge to the investigator. According to Sensing, the job of the investigator is to "place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine data into a holistic fashion, and to find a way to communicate the interpretation to others."[279] The data analysis procedure focuses on data review, categories and themes, and data organization.

Data Review

As recommended by Sensing, the investigator will utilize thick description.[280] The investigator will imagine what a reader will experience from the project. Therefore, the analysis will take the views of the participant, the investigator, and the third party into account. The primary purpose of the analysis is to depict and interpret the responses of the participants accurately.[281] The investigator will not only look at the words from the data, but also probe into

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[277] Kuhne and Quigley, "Understanding and Using Action Research," 23.

[278] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*., 90.

[279] Ibid., 194.

[280] Ibid., 195.

[281] Stringer, *Action Research*, 139.

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the meaning of the verbal and the non-verbal data. Therefore, she will explore the interview responses and correlate them with the investigator's field notes. Sensing suggests that the investigator includes the context in trying to interpret the data.[282] The investigator is cognitive of the fact that words can change meaning depending on their contexts. For this reason, the investigator was careful to take crucial field notes during and immediately after each interview.

Categories and Themes

Sensing instructs that the next step is to look for similarities among the data by looking for "patterns, categories, or themes"[283] Stringer agrees that one of the ways to analyze data is "a categorizing and coding procedure."[284] He also introduces another analytic process which "selects key experiences or transformational moments and unpacks them to identify the elements that compose them, thus illuminating the nature of those experiences."[285] The investigator will print out a copy of the participant's responses and the investigator's field notes and arrange all the interview responses in order of the questions asked. That means the investigator puts all the number ones together, the number two's together, and continues that pattern up to question twenty. The data will then be read several times to see if any repetitive themes emerge. By comparing the interview responses with the field notes, the investigator will also identify any hidden messages. The investigator will organize the data into themes. "Words, phrases, or events that appear to be similar can be grouped into the same category."[286] In doing this, the investigator

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[282] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 195.

[283] Ibid., 196.

[284] Ibid., 139.

[285] Stringer, *Action Research*, 139.

[286] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 203.

organizes the data looking for common themes from the participants' responses. The investigator chooses five of the themes and performs an analysis of these themes.

The investigator is familiar with most of the participants, so the potential to misinterpret the data is an issue to be aware of. Sensing suggests using someone else to read the raw data and compare his or her interpretation with that of the investigator to diminish the investigator's biases.[287] Stringer insists that the investigator stays as objective as possible. This objectivity will allow the intended meaning of the participants to be procured.[288] This objectivity increases the triangulation of the data. The investigator will not only look for similarities and differences among the data but also will compare the perspective among the participants, the investigator, and the other objective person. Another way to target the meaning of the responses is by recording responses "verbatim."[289] During the data analysis, the investigator will rely on Stringer's recommendation to organize first by themes. This is looking at where the data shows gross similarities. Second, organizing by differences, otherwise known as "slippage."[290] Third, there will be areas that are not seen in the data. This is called "silences."[291]

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[287] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 197.

[288] Stringer, *Action Research*, 139.

[289] Ibid., 140.

[290] Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 197.

[291] Ibid., 197.

Data Organization

To organize the data, the investigator will create a form with lines and columns. This will be used to input themes, slippages, and silences. Sensing suggests getting a fresh set of eyes to look at the table when this table is completed. The goal is to see whether there is a need to adjust some of the data's interpretations. The investigator may need to adjust as disagreements emerge.[292] The last step the investigator will take in the analysis stage is to create another table to quantify the findings' results.[293] This is where the investigator puts in the number of times similar themes or same subject matter occurs. In other words, the table will be a map of how many of the participants are saying the same things. The map will also show how the responses are different.

The Reporting Process

The investigator will provide a report in writing. The form that was developed in data organization will be used as the basis for the report. According to Stringer, reports should straightforwardly provide information regarding the project.[294] This means the report will avoid distracting information and should focus only on the topic with information that will keep the reader engaged. The report will be provided in writing to the leaders of Emmanuel Church. Stringer directed the report to briefly explain the project's reason, the process utilized, the information uncovered in the analysis, and a plan.[295] The report will include strategies arising from the project that Emmanuel Church can begin to help decrease young adults' incidence of

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[292] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 208.

[293] Ibid., 208.

[294] Stringer, Action Research, 210.

[295] Ibid., 211.

leaving the church. The report will include a written report and inclusion of visuals like graphs and tables to communicate key details to the leaders.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, the investigator must be able to measure the outcome. In evaluating the intervention, the investigator organizes the collected data, analyzes it, and interprets it. The evaluation will include looking to see whether the study question was answered in the intervention. The investigator will listen back to all the recorded interviews of the participants. The investigator will analyze this data by utilizing the participants' perceptions, the investigator, and a pastor from another church. According to Sensing, "the three angles I suggest are outsider, insider, and researcher (yourself)."[296] A combination of these three angles will be more reliable than an individual perspective. Sensing uses the analogy of looking through a window into a house. If three different individuals look through three different windows, there is a higher probability of getting a much larger picture of inside the house.[297]

If the intervention were successful, the investigator would present to Emmanuel Church specific issues that the church can address to help decrease the probability of the loss of young adults. The results will be presented to the senior pastor, the elders, and the young adult leaders. When the church addresses the problems identified in the intervention, the church will begin to see an increase in the number of young adults who either remain or return to Emmanuel Church.

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[296] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 75.

[297] Ibid., 5.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of the study is to address the issue of low attendance in Emmanuel Church among young adults. The data collection process began on September 1, 2020 and ended on September 14, 2020. The study started with twenty individuals with a total of ten males and ten females and ended with 100% participation. Their ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-nine years. There were no dropouts, and all the participants answered all twenty interview questions. Table 4.1 shows the age and gender distribution of the participants.

Table 4.1. Age and Gender Distribution of Participants

Ages	Male	Female
18	1	0
20	1	1
21	2	1
23	0	1
24	1	0
25	1	2
27	1	1
28	1	4
29	2	0

The investigator outlined the interview procedure in chapter three, and this chapter will discuss the results of the participants' responses. The investigator will present the results in a logical sequence in order of the interview questions. The investigator utilized QSR International's NVivo 12 software as an instrument to help organize and analyze the interview

data.[298] NVivo is a qualitative research software that helps the investigator in data analysis. First, the investigator imported all the participants' responses from the interviews into the NVivo tool. The investigator identified codes and categories that emerged and chose several of these codes based on the issue being studied. Then the NVivo tool was used to match participants' responses with these codes. From these results, the investigator was able to establish common themes for further analysis. The investigator will utilize the results from the analysis to prepare and to present strategies to Emmanuel Church to increase young adults' retention.

Data Analysis

Question 3 asks the participants about their church attendance in the last year. None of them attended Emmanuel Church for the last year. As shown in Table 4.2, only five of them deny any form of church attendance. All the other fifteen participants admitted to some church attendance on a continuum from rare to frequent. Non-attendance at Emmanuel Church does not mean non-attendance to another church. This result is critical in the project because, before age eighteen, all but one of the participants had attended church regularly. At the age where they can make independent choices, the result show that most of the participants continue to believe in the importance of church attendance. Those who continue to go to church show that they believe church attendance is necessary. However, Emmanuel Church is not their choice for church attendance.

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[298] NVivo Qualitative Research Analysis Software, QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 1.3, 2020, accessed October 1, 2020 https://www.qsrinternational.com/

Table 4.2. Church Attendance in Past Year

Church Attendance Past Year	Male	Female
None	2	3
Rare Less then Monthly	7	4
Frequent: At Least Weekly	1	3
Attendance at Emmanuel	0	0

The investigator is curious to see the difference between the group that still attends church and the group that does not attend. The one obvious factor is that all five participants who no longer attend church had no father in the home while growing up. One participant verbalizes that his father mocked the Christian faith. Others state that their fathers never attended church with them, even though they never prevented the participants from going to church. The father missing in the home is an example of the lack of positive development in the family of origin, which can contribute to the decline of young adults in the church, as recorded in chapter two.

<p align="center">Home Upbringing Influences</p>

Question 4 asks the participants to describe their church attendance before the age of eighteen. Nineteen of the participants reported attending church at least once a week during their childhood and teen years. Only one person states that she attended poorly. This single participant was raised by non-Christian parents and would attend church whenever she visited her grandparents. However, when she was a teenager, she began attending Emmanuel Church irregularly.

Questions 5 to 8 all focus on the participants' upbringing influences. According to Fields, each young person, to whom the church ministers, "is a product of a unique family system, a

system responsible for forming beliefs, values and actions."[299] Christian parents raised fifteen participants, four were raised by single Christian parents, and non-Christian parents raised only one. Table 4.3 shows the results of Question 5 which asks about the participants' family of origin.

Table 4.3. Participants Upbringing Years

Family Type	Male	Female	Total
Raised by both Christian Parents	8	7	15
Raised by Single Christian Parent	1	3	4
Raised by Non-Christian Parents	0	1	1

From its' beginning, the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave space in their lives to "keep company" with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships and experiences we know as spiritual disciplines.[300] When asked about their parents' display of spiritual disciplines at home, in questions 6, 7, and 8, meaning specifically prayer, Bible reading, and church attendance, at least eighteen participants admit seeing those behavior practiced by their parents. However, only nine report that their parents practiced regular family devotions that included the participants as children. Of the participants interviewed, eighteen report seeing their parents attending church at least weekly and were involved in the church's ministries. As depicted in Table 4.4, these results show that Christian parents exhibit Christian behaviors at home, but many did not see the need to include the children in family devotions.

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[299] Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, 251.

[300] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL2015), 19, accessed November 13, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Table 4.4. Parents Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Family Type	Male	Female	Total
Participants whose parents prayed often	10	9	19
Participants whose parents Read Bible regularly	10	9	19
Participants whose parents were active in Church	9	9	18
Family Devotion included participant	4	5	9

When asked to rehearse a typical week in their home, the participants reported doing routine activities at home, including T.V., homework, chores, and any church activities scheduled for their age group. All the participants reported that they had friends in church as well as school friends. Eighteen of them state that they were allowed and encouraged by their parents to participate in church activities but could not go out with non-church friends only. Only two participants admit to being allowed to go out with only non-church friends. Non-Christian parents raised one participant. From these results, it is apparent that parents who live out their faith had a tremendous effect on the young adults, as evidenced by most of them who still have some form of connection to their Christian faith.

These results also show that most young people raised by their Christian parents from Emmanuel Church, were prevented from been exposed to the secular aspect of life and its secular entertainment. None of the participants verbalized being very active in sports or worldly entertainment. Anyone who attends Emmanuel Church for at least a year will be exposed to the beliefs of the church. The church has a members' meeting at least two times a year, and, in those meetings, policies and rules are reiterated. Emmanuel Church defines worldly pleasures as recorded in the Bible (Gal 5:19-21). These worldly pleasures include but are not limited to all

forms of sexual immorality, porn, nightclubs, bars, drunkenness, illegal drug use, and others. In

Chapter two, entertainment is prevalent among young people. These include various technology

resources, media, and the internet. Participants admit to being denied unlimited access to

entertainment. Christian parents did not permit the participants to participate in what the church

referred to as worldly entertainment. Kinnaman confirmed that young people are often drawn to

"pornography or sexual experimentation, drugs and other addictive substances, extreme thrill

seeking…."[301] Even with the use of technology on computers, phones, or television, the parents

monitored the children and the teens to avoid unlimited access to entertainment.

Even though there is evidence that youth sports are a significant activity during the

upbringing years, none of the participants admit to having been significantly involved in youth

sports. The investigator is aware of many young people in the church who were involved in

sports like track and field, football, and basketball. It was a surprise to this investigator that none

of the participants reported that youth sports were a deterrent to their church attendance.

Question 9 asks the participants to verbalize how their parents' faith affect their current

choices. All twenty of them report that they believe their ability to make good life choices is

based on their parents instilling Christian values in them. Even the one participant who was not

raised by Christian parents admits that the non-Christian parent instilled Christian values in her.

Nineteen of them are convinced that Christianity is the true religion. Only one participant reports

that he is not totally convinced of the Christian worldview. Interestingly, this one participant was

raised by Christian parents.

The participants who are currently involved in another church show that their parents'

faith convinced them that church attendance is necessary. However, the investigator looks at the

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[301] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me,* 99.

responses of those who no longer attend church to understand their perspective on their parents' faith. The following verbatim responses are critical to getting an actual perspective unbiased by the investigator. "Even if I do not attend church, I still do Christian things." My mother taught me that God will forgive me if I mess up." " I have confidence that her prayers are protecting me." "I fell off for a little while, but I plan to be back in my Christian living." "My dad mocked my faith, so I sometimes question my faith."

Questions 10 – 13 require the participant to report how they were connected to Emmanuel Church ministries and individuals. Nineteen participants attended some Sunday School as a child. Nineteen participants attended the Children's Church during childhood, and all of them were involved in the Youth Ministry. Eighteen of them report choosing to be involved in a ministry. Only two of them were forced by parents to take part in a ministry. In later teen years, most of the participants were involved in the fine arts, including choir, dance, drama, and media. Eighteen of the participants admit that ministry involvement helped them stay involved but did not help with their spiritual growth.

Apparently, during childhood and teen years, involvement in ministries helped with retention in the church. Fields wrote: "True fellowship happens when students are known, cared for, held accountable, and encouraged in their spiritual journey."[302] Table 4.5 presents the results of the ministry involvement of the participants while at Emmanuel Church.

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[302] Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry,* 48.

Table 4.5. Ministry Involvement of Participants at Emmanuel Church

Ministry Involvement	Male	Female
Sunday School	10	9
Children's Church	10	9
Youth Ministry	10	10
Fine Arts Ministry	8	10

When asked about their connection to the ministry leaders and their influence on the participants: Fourteen of them admit that they developed a relationship with ministry leaders. However, six of them deny any relationship with the ministry leader. Some of the quotes included: "They did their job but did not show interest in me as a person." "They were just Ok."

When it comes to people who impacted their lives at Emmanuel Church, most of them verbalized that people impacted them through the years at the church. Nineteen of the participants reported that they had individuals from the church who connected with them. The relationships were random and by chance, but they felt those relationships positively affected them. Only one person denied having any positive impactful relationship from the church members.

In question 15, the participants were asked about any feedbacks from friends they invited to church. Research indicates that, "the more religiously serious and involved a teen is, unsurprisingly, the more their good friends seem to be."[303] The feedback from friends is recorded in Figure 4.1. The feedback from friends let the investigator know if peer acceptance was a factor

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[303] Christian Smith, and Melina Lundquist Denton, 2005. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press.2005), 116. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=138269&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

in the young adults leaving Emmanuel Church. Most of their friends loved the church. The

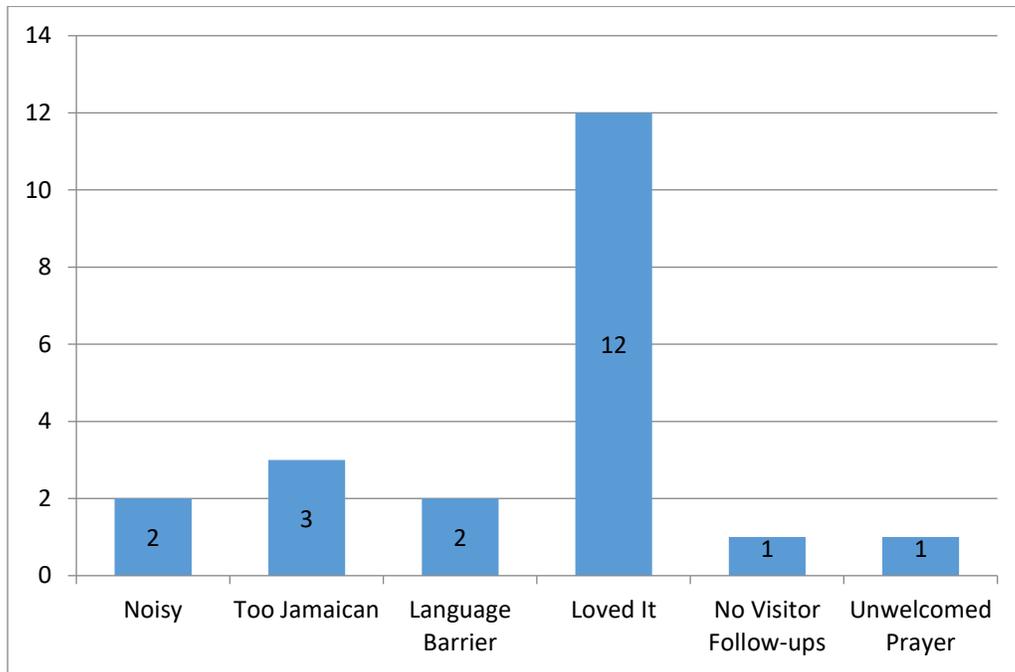negative feedback mainly cited the cultural issues of Emmanuel Church.

Figure 4.1. Feedback from Friends Invited to Emmanuel Church

Questions 14 and 18 ask the participants to tell the interviewer how Emmanuel Church

could have served them better or what was missing during their time at Emmanuel. The main

categories that emerge from these questions are demonstrated in Table 4.6. Many young adults

who no longer attend Emmanuel, are attending other churches. Not only are they attending but

some are involved in ministries in other churches. The investigator must look at the responses to

see what the participants state that Emmanuel lacks, the reason they left, and their ideal church.

What Emmanuel Church Lacked

One common theme is the failure of Emmanuel Church to include the youth in all aspects

of the ministry. Young people do not feel that they have been utilized in critical positions in the

church. Another common theme the participants verbalize is that Emmanuel needs a more

applicable teaching curriculum. They explain that the curriculum is not chosen according to individual needs. Instead, it is chosen from a lesson plan that does not always relate to them. Several participants voice that the Sunday School teachers and the youth teachers are not educated competent teachers, but are chosen based only on their availability.

Table 4.6. What Emmanuel Church Lacked

Responses	Participants
Unconditional Acceptance	2
Mentorship: Older to Younger and Bridge Between Generations	6
Investment in the Youth	3
More Practical Life Lessons Structure	2
Teaching How to Have Healthy Relationships	2
Restoration / Spiritual Focus	1
Teach Parents to Help Their Children	5
Community Involvement	2
Cultural Diversity	5
Friendliness	6
Increased Technology Use	6
Increased Autonomy of Youth	6
Competent Educated Teachers	5
Sports	5
Less Judgmental	4
Sermons relate to Current Generation	5
Shorter Services	5

Participants state that the church does not help parents raise their kids. They explain that parenting classes for all age groups would have helped parents have a more holistic view of life. The parents focus on making sure their children attend church but do not deal with other life

issues. Another theme that some participants observed was missing was the absence of practical tools for life. The investigator choses to record verbatim, principles to avoid misinterpreting the responses. Practical tools include "help people to share their faith, "teach us how to develop healthy relationships," "teach us how to date," help us as boys to change a tire or a lock on a door." Others reported that older members act "so holy like they never made a mistake." They would have liked to see more transparency among the older members, less judgmental attitude, and more restoration of fallen youth. One young participant responds, "I got pregnant, and even though I felt rejected, I continued to attend. However, when I got pregnant a second time, I could not bear the shame, so I left."

Reasons for Leaving Emmanuel Church

Question 19 is asking the participants to answer a factual question. They already responded regarding the general reasons for the absence of young adults. The results are depicted in Table 4.7. This question now focuses in on the specific reason the participant has left Emmanuel Church.

Table 4.7. Reasons Participants no longer Attend Emmanuel Church

Reasons for Leaving Emmanuel	Number of Participants
Work and School Conflicts	7
Moved Away	2
Did not Feel Connected	2
Issue with Church Member or Leader	0
Disagreed with Emmanuel Policies	0
Personal Choice	3

Not Growing in my Faith	0
Sermons were not Applicable to Me	0
Other	7

This question is crucial to helping the investigator address the study topic. Interestingly, seven of the participants state they are not in church because of work and school scheduling conflicts. The interviewer noticed that of seven participants who blamed work and school for their absence, one frequently goes to another church. The other six reported that they do attend church at least a few times a year. The results show that even when the work and school schedule allow them to attend church, they still did not attend Emmanuel Church. The investigator concludes that if the participant wanted to attend Miramar, they would have attended whenever work and school schedule allows them. But they do not attend Miramar, they admit to going to other churches when time allows.

The Ideal Church

The participants were asked about their ideal church in question 16. The responses are recorded in Table 4.8. The investigator wants to know what the participants are looking for in their church of choice. The investigator assumes that the participants who are currently involved in other churches are there by choice. They have found some things at those churches that were missing at Emmanuel Church. The investigator seeks to identify some of those missing elements.

Question 17 requires the participants to tell the interviewer their view of why young people are leaving Emmanuel Church. Thirteen of the participants stated that they felt forced to do whatever their parents want, up to age eighteen. They were not given a choice, and at age eighteen, they had the autonomy to choose their path. They denied that they had any problem with God and state that leaving the church did not mean they left God. Two of them verbalized

that they noticed parental hypocrisy and as a result, were turned off from going to church with them. When asked to explain hypocrisy, both mentioned that their parents' behavior at home did not equal their behavior at church. Five of them said they were never connected to God in their spiritual life. They went to church as directed but "Going to church is not a true picture of your faith." "Those who leave the faith are those who did not have a relationship with God. They do not have to be forced to stay if they had a relationship with God." What was attractive to the investigator was the response of a participant who stated that young people who leave the church are only physically left as young adults. However, those individuals were psychologically absent "years before."

Table 4.8. The Participants' Ideal Church

Qualities	Participants
Use of Current Technology	6
Counseling for abortion, abuse, marriage, and molestation	8
Relationship Building	11
Connection Between Age Groups	8
Non-Discrimination	8
Cultural Diversity	5
Non-Judgmental	12
Community Outreach	5
Competent Leaders and Relatable to Youth	6
Ministry Preparation Classes	2
Less "Jamaican" atmosphere	6
Improved Visitor Follow -up	4
Sports	4
Stronger Bible Teaching	7

The final question looks at how the participant would raise their children. In this question, the investigator explores whether the participants are convinced that Christianity is the true religion. The results showed that nineteen of the participants believe that Christianity is the true religion, as evidenced by their intention to raise their children in the church. In raising their children, all of the participants believe in being an example to them. They would all take them to church up to the teen years and teach them Christian principles and model them. Eight of them would give them the choice of going to church or not. Ten of them would give the children a more balanced view of life. They want the children to be aware of the spiritual aspects and natural principles. They also state that many parents' focus was primarily on the church, while the children are longing "to experience the other side." Eight of them would provide an alternative to help their children grow spiritually. This option is in case the child does not want to go to a physical church.

Summary of Major Themes

From the results of the data analysis, several themes have been identified. The investigator chose the significant categories that address the issue of young adults leaving Emmanuel Church. The themes are the parental influence, the traditional style of Emmanuel Church, the lack of cultural diversity, unqualified staff and leaders, and failure to balance spirituality and practicality.

Parental Influence

From the results, it emerges that the absence of a Christian father affects young adults' future connection to Christianity. Of the five participants who no longer attended church, four reported that their fathers were absent from the home, or was home but did not embrace Christianity. The Christian parents and the non-Christian parents instilled Christian values in the

participants. The Christian parents are involved in church and practice Christian disciplines at home like reading their Bibles and praying. The parents were adamant that the participants attend church and get involved in church-related things. However, many Christian parents do not mandate children to practice Christian disciplines at home. Many parents did not insist on having the children practice the same Christian disciplines at home. Most parents did not involve the children in a regular family devotion. However, most parents insisted that children attend church and get involved in church activities. This analysis reveals that parents have an attitude of dependence on Emmanuel Church to instill Christian principles in their children.

The Traditional Church

The participants express that Emmanuel Church is a traditional church with traditional values. Many of the responses are pieces of evidence of that belief. For example, participants report that they are not free to dress to show their individuality but must follow a strict dress code. They also report the lack of cultural diversity, cultural awareness, and lack of embracing other cultures. They report that the leaders and speakers used "too much Jamaican jargon." They claim that the church does not utilize the youth's gifts and verbalize that "only older people can be leaders" at Emmanuel. The participants report a defined separation between generations and that line needs to be removed. The report also revealed that Emmanuel does not invest enough resources in young people's practical aspects even though they focus on getting them involved in activities. Other reports from the participants include failure to utilize technology like online services and online classes. They mentioned the consistent singing of traditional songs, the use of paper Bibles, and lengthy services.

Weak Leadership and Teachers

Participants report that they were involved in Sunday School classes, children's churches, and youth classes. As older individuals, they wish that the teachers had been more competent in teaching them. The young adults surveyed stated that while in their upbringing years, they may not have articulated their current observations. However, as young adults, they realize that the teachers were not influential in their skills, as evidenced by many of the participants subjective inability to explain simple scriptures. They claim that they do not understand the doctrine that was taught to them and do not know how to commend or defend their faith. They admit that as young adults, they have little confidence in explaining biblical topics. Also, in retrospect, they do not agree with much of what was taught to them. The five participants frequently involved in other churches admit to being connected to groups, and one responded she is "learning so much." The message from the participants is that Emmanuel Church should put more effort into choosing teachers and leaders.

Community Involvement

Another category that was identified among participants' responses is that of community involvement. When asked about things they would have liked to experience at Emmanuel Church, community involvement was cited by seven participants. Other participants who did not specifically mention community involvement, mention other codes that fit the community involvement category. These responses mention church sports to include non-church members and improved visitor follow-up, which means reaching out to non-members. The participants also mention that a non-discriminatory atmosphere and cultural diversity would appeal to young adults. Eight participants responded that they would be drawn to the church that offers counsel to individuals and families. Specific issues that counseling should focus on include abortion, abuse,

molestation, and relationship problems. Other community involvement that participants suggest would make the church appealing to young adults, is taking an interest in community and current issues such as racial, political divide, and human trafficking.

Balance Spiritual and Practical Life's Issues

According to the participants, Emmanuel Church focuses on Christian disciplines like prayer, Bible reading, fasting, and church attendance. However, they verbalized that there was no balance with spiritual and practical non-spiritual issues. The church, the leaders and the parents were satisfied if the programs were supported and the classes were well attended. The frequent questions focused on church attendance. "Everyone seems to get uncomfortable when they don't see us in church but did not seem to focus on our other day to day issues." The participants verbalized that Emmanuel Church did not provide them with life skills opportunities. Men stated that they would have been more resourceful as adults if the church had helped them do things like changing car tires, changing a lock on a door, and other practical things. The females were disappointed that they were not given resources to help them choose a mate or deal with relationship issues. These issues include dating, coping skills, and even parenting classes "to prepare us to be women and mothers."

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter focused on the results of the interview by analyzing the data using codes and categories. The results' analysis reveals that many young adults who were raised in Emmanuel Church are no longer attending. The investigator's goal is to use this project to address Emmanuel's failure to retain young adults. The results in chapter four confirm the existence of the problem this project addresses. The investigator was surprised to find out that many of the young adults who left Emmanuel Church attend other churches instead of not attending church at

all. The investigator was encouraged to find those young adults raised in Emmanuel are still holding onto their faith. The church and their parents' combined efforts have contributed to the participants still holding to their faith. The investigator is encouraged that many young adults are still observing Christianity and will identify why they are not in attendance at Emmanuel. The analysis of the data identified several contributing factors. The investigator focused on five major themes recognized from the study, which will be used in the interpretation of the data. In chapter five, the investigator will interpret the data using the five themes identified and will present strategies for Emmanuel Church to increase young adults' retention.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

"While no context is identical to another, there may be enough similar experiences and phenomena between two settings for someone else to utilize."[304] Emmanuel Church ministry context is not identical to other ministry contexts, however, because it is a church, it does have some similarities to other churches. Therefore, there may be aspects of this study that other churches can use. Churches are Christian groups with the mandate to make disciples for Christ (Matt 28:19). In keeping with this mandate, the purpose of this study was to address the issue of low attendance in Emmanuel Church among young adults. The investigator must be meticulous in including details of all aspects of the study. Sensing instructs the investigator to create the study data and analysis so that the reader feels like he or she is a part of the process.[305] The investigator anticipates the questions a reader would ask and provide answers proactively in the theses. This chapter will provide an interpretation of the results of the study, and present strategies that Emmanuel can implement to retain young adults.

The literature review process revealed that young adults leaving the church is a common problem. The investigator conducted the study and found that it is a real phenomenon that young adults are leaving Emmanuel Church. However, the results revealed that although some young adults have stopped attending church altogether, many young adults who no longer attend Emmanuel participate in other churches. The investigator found out that there are several contributing factors to Emmanuel's failure to retain young adults. This section will discuss the changes Emmanuel Church needs to make to increase the retention of young adults. The

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[304] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 215.

[305] Ibid., 215.

investigator will recommend to the leaders a focus on five strategies: Parental influence, decreasing traditionalism, preparation of leaders, community involvement, and Biblical Literalism.

<p style="text-align:center">The Strategy of Parental Influence</p>

Scriptures place the responsibility of training a child on the parents (Prov 22:6). The Bible instructs the fathers to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). The free will of the human being is a constant factor as seen in Eli's sons and Samuel's narrative, whom he raised. They were all raised in the same environment, yet his sons rejected the divine ordinances while Samuel obeyed. The study revealed that of the five participants who no longer attended any church, four had no father in the home or had a father who did not embrace Christianity. All except one of the participants were mandated by their parents to attend church. Church for them included Sunday School, Children's church, Youth services, and all age-appropriate events. Parents expected that the church would provide the spiritual equipping their children needed. The parents did not see themselves as the primary teachers of spiritual disciplines to their children. This is evident in the report that parents who practice spiritual disciplines at home did not include their children in these practices. What is happening here? Parents relinquish their roles to the church because they either did not know how to help their children, or feel it is the church's responsibility.

From the results, young adults who disconnect from the church had fathers who were not involved spiritually in their children's growth and development. Some young adults reported that their fathers did not embrace their faith during their childhood and teen years. These young adults say that they do not currently attend any church. This statistic reveals that fathers are crucial in influencing the life choices of their descendants. According to Lamb: "By popular

consensus, fathers were primarily responsible for ensuring that their children grew up with an appropriate sense of values, acquired primarily from a study of the Bible and other scriptural texts."[306] In response to this information, the church's goal must include educating and equipping fathers to fulfill Christian leaders' roles in their homes. There is also a need to train male mentors in the church who can stand in the gap when there is no father in the house. These spirit-led men will be equipped to be mentors and be influential in these children's and teens' lives. This action by the church increases the probability of having young adults remain in the Christin faith. One example is narrated in 2 Kings 22:1-2. Josiah had an ungodly father and an ungodly grandfather, yet he was a godly child and continued that way throughout his life. According to Boyd, "Someone had poured time and effort into the life of this young boy, introduced him to God, and built a lasting spiritual foundation that prepared him to be a godly king."[307] This scripture illustrates the effectiveness of godly mentors, even when the fathers are disengaged.

Emmanuel Church does not have a program to equip parents to help their children at home. The church leaders' main interest is encouraging parents to be sure their children are supporting the church's programs in attendance. The numerical goal is often the focus of the meetings and the measure of success of the group. If the classes are well attended, the church feels that they have attained success. There is no class available to parents to provide them with resources to help train their kids at home. The sermons rarely impress upon parents their role as the spiritual leaders of their children. Emmanuel Church leaders must rewrite their vision to

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[306] Michael E., Lamb, ed. *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010) 3, accessed November 10, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[307] David J. Boyd, *Strong Enough to Last: Building Spiritual Depth into Our Kids* (Ashland: Gospel Publishing House, 2017), 8, accessed November 10, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

include equipping parents to provide spiritual guidance for their children. During their upbringing, parents should avoid forcing church attendance as a priority but show the children how to relate to God. Since the parents echo the church's voice that church attendance is critical, the church must shift the focus from church attendance to a personal relationship with God as the crucial goal for Christians. According to Ham, the programs offered by churches are essential, but the more important job is what the parents do at home to raise Christian children. "So, this coming Sunday, don't feel like you have absolved yourself of responsibility when you drop your child at Sunday school."[308]

The parents' paradigm must be realigned to recognize the church as a co-partner to bring up their kids with Christian values. Emmanuel Church will need to develop a program to help parents impress Christianity into their children. Dean wrote that "Parents matter most when it comes to the religious formation of their children."[309] Ham wrote: "If you are depending on these programs to properly teach and influence your children, it is just not happening."[310] Besides equipping parents, Emmanuel Church needs to analyze how the traditional environment affects the attendance of young adults.

<center>The Strategy of Shifting Traditionalism</center>

Emmanuel Church is a traditional church. Most of the leaders are over fifty and have been raised in traditional church culture. Some of the traditions include the singing of hymns and the "modest" dress code. The older female members like to wear what is referred to as their "Sunday Best." That means men wearing a suit and tie, while ladies wear dresses or skirts. A

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[308] Ham and Beemer, Already Gone, 47.

[309] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 18.

[310] Ham, and Beemer, Already Gone, 41.

young person who comes to church looking "too worldly" is instantly approached by some older

person who rebuke them for their seemingly immodest dressing. Some things that young people

have been condemned for include extra-long decorated nails, too brightly colored hair, too much

jewelry, and too tight pants or skirts. The scripture cautions against traditions and its power to

invalidate the Word of God (Mark 7:14). Paul narrated the danger of traditions by rebuking the

leaders who tried to mandate circumcision as a salvation criterion (Acts 15:1-11). The scripture

states that God is more interested in the heart's condition than what a person wears. Clothing is

cultural, seasonal, contextual, and generational. People should not be forced to abide by a

particular dress code that fits another person's taste. God did not call the leaders to strip others of

their individuality. He calls individuals to be disciples who are transformed and to continue

working on their spiritual formation. Kinnaman wrote that there is increased societal secularism

because of the advanced cultural influences, which creates a more massive divide between

generations. He added that to reach the younger age group, the church must adjust its methods

without surrendering the biblical truth.[311]

Emmanuel Church must begin a series of teaching in small groups and the weekend

sermons on cultural diversity and the danger of traditionalism. The members believe they are

speaking for the church and God when they badger the young people to conform to a particular

look. When the church cannot accept diverse cultures and diverse expressions of a person's

individuality, it will continue to lose the young adults. If the goal is to increase the retention of

the young adults, the leaders must take intentional steps to transform the church's culture in ways

that will be more accepting and less judgmental of others who do not conform to the traditional

"look." According to Malphurs, if the church is going to reach the younger generation, it must

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[311] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 35.

change how it does things and not be afraid to resist the "status quo."[312] One example of defying

traditionalism's status quo with great results is the use of unique non- Christian songs. Andy

Stanley, the pastor of Northpoint, states that at times in his weekend service, he uses non-

Christian music on purpose to elicit a particular emotional response in the attenders.[313]

To reach the new generation the church "must understand how the new generations

think."[314] Social media as a sign of relevance to young adults is a necessary shift by Emmanuel

Church if there will be any improvement in young adults' retention. In today's culture, the use of

technology is a tool that is ingrained in society's fabric.[315] Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube

are a part of the language of the younger generation. Churches like Emmanuel, who is behind in

embracing the technology as a tool to reach young adults, will diminish their probability of

retaining that population. Emmanuel Church must choose to be aware of the culture and utilize

their awareness for success with the target population. Research shows that the survival of the

church today will depend on the church's online presence.[316] In the Bible, the Apostle Paul was

wise in using the culture's current elements as a tool for evangelism. Paul wrote that to be

effective with the highest probability of it being accepted, he had to be intentional in his

strategies. Therefore, he did not focus on his comfort, but used what was working in that context.

Even though he was a Jew and a Christian, he used Jewish methods to win some individuals. He

also used non-Jewish methods in the non-Jewish context. He even joined those whom he

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[312] Michael Malphurs, and Aubrey Malphurs, *Church Next: Using the Internet to Maximize Your Ministry* *(*Grand Rapids. MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 44.

[313] Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 219.

[314] Ibid., 44.

[315] Ibid., 103.

[316] Malphurs and Malphurs, *Church Next,* 107.

considered weak, even though he was healthy. Paul utilized those strategies to be relevant to the context he was trying to impact for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:19-23). Malphurs wrote about online presence: "God had provided His people with such a versatile and effective tool, but many have chosen not to use it."[317] Emmanuel Church must increase its online presence by frequently updating and improving its website, streaming, and social media sites.

For Emmanuel Church, transforming traditions would also mean training the younger groups and placing them in leadership roles. The spiritual culture of Emmanuel is gleaned from the members' contextual background. The things that shape the church's culture are members' family of origin, members' upbringing, members' nationality, and the traditional Pentecostal doctrine and concepts. Most of the leaders are older and have been accustomed to doing the same things all their lives. The plethora of advances in science, medicine, technology, and access to information, have contributed to the changes seen in young adults. The Bible declares that old wine cannot effectively mix with new wine without catastrophic results (Matt 9:14-17). What worked in the early years of Emmanuel Church twenty-seven years ago is not currently working with this younger crowd. This is partly because Emmanuel's older leaders intend to get the younger generation to conform to the traditional ways of doing things. The most significant change must take place in the heart. Therefore, the focus must be on providing teaching and resources for young people to grow from the inside and not to believe that the outside adorning is a mark of a transformed heart. The absence of leaders from the generation being led has a great effect on the ministry. When an older member is placed in charge of young adults, and that leader refuses to embrace the young adult's needs, he will continue to force the traditions held. The solution, according to Kinnaman is to utilize younger leaders. "Young leaders who speak the

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[317] Malphurs and Malphurs, *Church Next,* 107.

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language of their peers are sorely needed because today's twentysomethings are not just slightly or incrementally different from previous generation."[318]

Young adults are crucial to the kingdom of God. Paul was aware of the need to place the younger generation in positions of leadership. He mandated Timothy to accept leadership responsibility in the church and held him to a high Christian example (1Tim 4:12). This investigator has been at Emmanuel Church since its inception in 1993. The church multiplied, attracting many young adults. It was rare in those early years to see the mass exodus of young adults that the church sees today.

The leaders must be willing to attend classes and read material to help them develop an awareness of leading the younger population. The church must also train and equip young adults and place them in positions of leadership with accountability. When young adults have someone from their peer group leading them, they will feel more understood and accepted. This strategy will increase the probability of retention of young adults at Emmanuel.

<div align="center">Strategy of Preparing Leaders and Teachers</div>

The study reveals that the leaders and teachers at Emmanuel Church are not skilled in their art. Emmanuel's whole climate is built upon the Pentecostal foundation from early leaders who only needed to be qualified by the Holy Spirit. Fields wrote that for young people to thrive spiritually, their leaders and teachers must be adequately prepared.[319] During this investigator's upbringing, it was not unusual for pastors and leaders in the church to be illiterate. Even though many of them did not finish grade school, they were passionate about the things of God. They felt that the validation of the Holy Spirit was sufficient to lead God's people. They were

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[318] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 35.

[319] Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry,* 49.

instrumental in preaching and teaching, but in retrospect, their exegetical process had many errors. The preacher's effectiveness was based on how that person shouts, dances, speaks in tongues, and preaches. The more vibrant preacher has everyone standing and cheering him or her on. There is an old saying in the Pentecostal church that attenders at a service would judge the sermon, not on its content, but its effectiveness in getting the crowd excited. When that happens, the consensus by the attenders is "we had church!"

The shift has been taking place from where the younger crowd was interested in a "feel good" message to the sermon's content and delivery. Over time, Pentecostal kids, have moved from being a grade school graduate to university graduates with higher education. These newer Pentecostals are not impressed with the shout, as they are interested in relevance and applicability. The children in Sunday school and Children's church are asking more questions and are comparing the teaching with google results. Therefore, there is no place in this generation for unlearned, untrained leaders and teachers. Scriptures declare that a student will eventually become like his teacher (Luke 6:40). Therefore, teachers must be educated and prepared because they are placed in a position of influence. Ham agrees: "Churches need to appraise the teachers teaching Sunday School and ensure they know how to answer the skeptical questions and know how to teach apologetics — and know how to teach the age group being entrusted to them."[320] Emmanuel Church must be ready to begin vigorously preparing its leaders and teachers. Presently the recruiting process for teachers and leaders is mostly based on availability, willingness, and dependability. The preparation of leaders must begin at the lowest level, which is Sunday School. The revision must include recruiting teachers with the pre-determined qualifications, academically, experientially, and personally.

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[320] Ham and Beemer, Already Gone, 45.

The Strategy of Impacting the Community

The community is the first place that the Lord instructed His disciples to reach with the gospel. After His resurrection, He taught his disciples to reach their community with the gospel (Acts 1:9). Emmanuel Church's immediate community consists of multicultural nationalities, including Hispanics, Haitians, Jamaicans, African Americans, Whites, and a mix of other nationalities. In chapter one of this thesis, it is noted that there are many families, which means there are many young adults. The church membership is unbalanced and does not reflect the multicultural nature of the community. Most members are Jamaicans, and most of the leaders are also Jamaicans. "From Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, I would argue that today's local churches have a geographical community or "footprint" and have been tasked specifically to reach out to and minister to that community, including its different ethnicities."[321] Our recent history and study reveals that Emmanuel Church has failed to reach its immediate community with the gospel. Most programs that Emmanuel gets involved in are those the church organizes or those of other churches' invitation. The study shows that Emmanuel Church is aloof to the community and society's issues. Malphurs suggest explicitly that the influential community-oriented church should include: "Adopt a school, a fire or police station, or a military family or another family in need; do an on-campus sports ministry, a health fair, or on-and off-campus ESL classes; host a neighborhood crime watch; and many others."[322]

The church must be vigilant to work on its connection to the community. "A huge key to success in reaching out to your city is having a grasp on local pressure points."[323] It must form

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[321] Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 178.

[322] Ibid., 192.

[323] Steve Sjogren, Conspiracy of Kindness: Revised and Updated a Unique Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2008) 92, accessed November 5, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

teams to get involved in everyday things like human trafficking, and prison ministry. Even

though the church and state may be different entities, Emmanuel Church must pay attention to

what is happening in its community and find ways to address them. The church has historically

avoided politics; however, Emmanuel needs to increase its interest in community officials

through voting and encouraging the congregants to vote. Malphurs writes about an example of

the disconnect of the church with society. He noted that after the 9/11 attacks, many people ran

to the church, but "the church wasn't ready for this tragic event."[324] He stated that the church was

not prepared to deal with these types of tragedies, and as a result, many left to seek help from

other groups.[325] The church must develop strategies to deal with spiritual things and all things

that affect individuals' lives.

<center>The Strategy of Biblical Literalism</center>

Ken Ham wrote that man has allowed the scientific explanation of creation over the

years to undermine the creation explanation as recorded in Genesis. He went on to say that when

the evolutionists and the scientists posit an earth that is millions of years old instead of

thousands, it was widely accepted. The church switched from focusing on evolution and science

to focus on spiritual things. When that happened, it caused a disconnect between the real world

and the church. Over time, the school became the place where students learn about the natural

world, and the church was the place where they know Bible stories.[326] This is a severe dilemma

because Christians live in the world and must defend the Bible from both a natural and a spiritual

standpoint; otherwise, the Bible will seem irrelevant. "Yes, we go to church, but only to get our

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[324] Malphurs and Aubrey Malphurs. *Church Next,* 37.

[325] Ibid., 37.

[326] Ham and Beemer, Already Gone, 77.

emotional and spiritual needs met. Then we walk out the doors and face a pagan world where we have to live by a whole different set of assumptions."[327] Emmanuel Church must include curricula to focus on everyday life issues and questions. There must be a balance between both areas. Commending and defending the faith must consist of evolution and creation, young earth versus old earth, and any other contradictory topic. The church cannot assent to the world's secular teaching that undermines the Bible. The church must understand that if young people believe that the creation narrative in the Bible is false, they will be hesitant to believe that the Bible is without error. According to Ham, most people do not believe in the evolutionist theory but believe in the earth being millions of years old. "In the 18th century, it was the age of the earth that caused the church to begin to compromise the Word of God."[328] With this insight, Emmanuel Church must include in the sermons and the teaching curriculum regarding the creation narrative as correct and that the earth is thousands, not millions of years old. In addition to the sermon selections, the leaders must also attend to the young adults' natural and corporeal needs.

From the survey, young adults verbalized that they did not feel Emmanuel Church was in touch with their natural needs. They mentioned that they would have liked to learn about things like dating, parenting, making life's choices, and doing some practical things like changing a tire, as an example. Kinnaman agrees: "too often, we have not provided practical coaching on marriage, parenting, vocation and calling, and all the smaller choices emerging adults must make along the road to maturity."[329]

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[327] Ibid., 78.

[328] Ibid., 83.

[329] Kinnaman and Hawkins. *You Lost Me*, 100.

The investigator also looked at the website of growing churches and discovered that these churches are doing what these young adults are craving at Emmanuel Church. North Point Community Church is a megachurch in Alpharetta, Ga. They have financial mentoring, pre-marital mentoring, life mentoring, divorce recovery, grief mentoring, parent connect group, career assistance, and recovery groups.[330] These ministries show that North Point focuses not only on the spiritual aspect but also on a person's life issues. Another growing megachurch is Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Il. Their website shows that they also are attending to a person's everyday natural needs. Their ministries include prison ministry, marriage, divorce, financial counseling help, grief help, recovery from unhealthy habits, relationship building, and sickness support.[331] The investigator is not positing that Emmanuel Church does all the things the megachurch does, but merely states that there are successful churches currently doing the things that the young adults have observed missing from Emmanuel.

The investigator will need to do follow up studies to assess the churches that the young adults that left Emmanuel Church are now attending. Are the things that they have stated are missing being provided at other churches? Even though there may not be a definite way to prove that those non-spiritual habits increase young adults' retention, focusing on the everyday life issues will help people cope and feel valued. Emmanuel should work on improving the focus on the natural needs of the members, both young and old.

At Emmanuel Church, the messages by the preachers are Biblically based. They encourage members to live Godly lives and to avoid worldly pleasures. Church attendance and

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[330] North Point Community Church, "Northpoint Ministries."

[331]Willow Creek Community Church, "Willow Creek," Willowcreek.org. Last modified accessed 11/6/20, https://www.willowcreek.org.

participation are the marks that Emmanuel Church uses to identify a growing healthy Christian. The leaders are often aware of members going through a difficult time. If that member attends church, especially if they continue in their service area, the leaders are satisfied that the member is coping well. However, this study results reveal that many young people attend church only out of duty and practice.

Limitations

This study focused on the issue of young adults leaving Emmanuel Church. The study results concur with the investigator's question for the study that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Young adults are indeed leaving the church. The literature review showed that churches' failure to retain young adults is a common problem in churches. Emmanuel context is very traditional; and was able to retain more young adults during the nineties and early twenties. The church began twenty-seven years ago with two young, vibrant pastors in their late twenties. They attracted a similar crowd, and the church multiplied in those years. However, the earlier members became older, and their children are among the younger generation. These younger ones are leaving the church in which they were raised. The investigator hypothesizes that young adults are more likely to respond to a pastor or leader like their age group. Therefore, even when the church implements more of what the young adults report are missing, it is not a guaranteed strategy that will reduce the number of those who leave.

Elements of Surprise

What surprised this investigator was that most of the young adults who leave Emmanuel Church are attending churches elsewhere. At the beginning of the study, the investigator assumed that the young adults who no longer attended Emmanuel were backslidden from the faith. The investigator compared the findings from this study to other churches by utilizing the

literature review. The literature review focused on young adults who no longer attend church anywhere; therefore, the findings were different because most of the participants in this study still attend church. Without doing this study, the investigator would have incorrectly assumed the young adults have disconnected from the church as in Kendra Dean's *Almost Gone, and* David Kinnaman's *You Lost Me*. The results were encouraging to the investigator that many of those who were raised in Emmanuel Church have not denied the faith. However, it is somewhat discouraging that they have switched churches. This study brought awareness to the investigator that the church cannot continue to be passive but must be intentional in its activities and strategies to stay relevant to the culture and the current generation. Without this continual assessing action and evaluation, the church will continue to lose young adults. As the older population cannot carry the load of the ministry or they retire or die, there will be no group left to carry on the gospel and the church will eventually die. When the church fails, the Christian worldview will suffer a loss, and the gospel message will diminish. The retention of young adults is critical to the preservation of Christianity.

This is the first time anyone has done a study on Emmanuel Church. The investigator will not guarantee that these strategies will retain young adults, but it is a start. If the strategies suggested are implemented and the retention of young adults is not improved, the investigator will continue more studies, eliminating confounding variables along the way. This process will be ongoing because as generations and communities change, leaders will need to continue studies to stay relevant. The primary goal is to keep Christianity going, and the secondary goal is to keep Emmanuel Church going to serve generations until the end of time.

Recommendations

The investigator will present the results to stakeholders. According to Malphurs, "The leadership team, consisting of the pastor, the staff, a board if the church has one, and the development teams (DTs), is responsible for implementation."[332] The investigator will initially meet with the senior pastor and provide him with a copy of the study, discuss the results with the pastor, and then meet with the board of elders. The investigator will request the church secretary to organize a meeting of the church leaders to include the children, youth, young adult leaders, and all the elders and senior pastor. The purpose of the conference is to provide the church with results of the study, addressing reasons for the decline in the attendance of young adults. The meeting will be utilized to discuss the results and to decide whether to execute the new approaches that emerged from the study. The results of the survey will be presented, and the investigator will discuss the results while providing a rationale for the suggested strategies. The group will be asked to decide on a timeline for executing the recommended strategies in order of priority. Malphurs suggestion is to: "Ask yourselves which goals should be done first, second, third, and so on. The highest priorities are those most important things that need to be done right away."[333] The specific groups will be responsible for launching and implementing the strategies. The investigator will be responsible for following up in six months and then one year, to see if the approaches have been successful and will continue to monitor the progress of the strategies implemented.

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[332] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning,* 288.

[333] Ibid.*,* 290.

Future Studies

The investigator will continue to study further, looking for other contributing factors not reported by the participants. There are several other factors that the investigator hypothesizes as contributing to the low retention of young adults. The young adults were all raised at Emmanuel Church and are familiar with the same environment and routine most of their lives. It would be interesting to investigate if the younger adults are bored with the same pattern and are looking for new areas of excitement in their lives. The same pastor has led the young adults all their lives; it would be interesting to discover if the older pastor is too far disconnected from the young adults to be relevant in other life's non-spiritual issues. This investigator will continue to work with Emmanuel Church leaders and congregation until the church becomes a place where young adults love to come and return with a friend the next service.[334] The apostle Paul instructs that "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (Colossians 3:23).

Conclusion

The investigator undertook this study to address the issue of low attendance at Emmanuel Church among young adults. The investigator interviewed young adults who previously attended Emmanuel. According to the literature, the investigator was aware that Emmanuel Church has failed to retain young adults, as is common in most North American churches. Therefore, before the study, the investigator believed that the young adults who left Emmanuel Church had backslidden from their faith. However, the study revealed that most young adults who quit attending Emmanuel are attending other churches, contrary to the investigator's belief and

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[334] Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide, 197.*

literature review. It is encouraging to know that young people raised in Emmanuel Church are

still holding on to their faith. The discouraging aspect stems from the realization that Emmanuel

lacked the strategies necessary to retain young adults. From the data analysis, several concepts

emerged that helped the investigator better understand why young adults are leaving Emmanuel.

Based on these concepts, the investigator proposed several strategies to Emmanuel to help with

the retention of young adults. If Emmanuel Church embraces a paradigm shift and manages the

plan introduced, retaining young adults will be increased over time. When young adults remain

in the church, there will be generation after generation who will infinitely make disciples as

commissioned by the Lord Jesus: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and

Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

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Consent

Title of the Project: Addressing the Issue of Low Attendance in Emmanuel Church among Young Adults.
Principal Investigator: Ivett McDonald, DMin Candidate, Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Study

You are invited to participate in a study. In order to participate, you must be at least eighteen years old and no older than twenty-nine years and must have attended Emmanuel Church for at least four consecutive years during your childhood to teen years. During the past year, you have either been absent every Sunday or have attended only for special services, which are the Church's Anniversary, Easter and Christmas. You are not involved in any ministry in the church and do not support the church financially. Taking part in this study project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the reasons young adults are leaving Emmanuel, so that the investigator can present a strategy to Emmanuel to help prevent this decline in young adults' attendance.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Meet with the investigator and answer twenty questions. The interview session will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes.
2. Allow the interviewer to make notes of your answers as well as audio-record the session.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

You are assisting Emmanuel with information to improve attendance of young adults.
Young adults remaining in church will learn and hopefully practice Christian principles which will lead to a better society.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Study records will be stored securely, and only the investigator will have access to the records.

- Participants' responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may not be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the investigator will have access to these recordings.
- All your data will be kept confidential.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. However, all participants will be given a $25.00 Visa gift card.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Emmanuel. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question, or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the investigator at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The investigator conducting this study is Ivett McDonald of Emmanuel Church. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 7542041507 or mcdonaldivett@gmail.com. You may also contact the investigator's faculty sponsor, Dr. Michael Eiras at mkeiras@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the study, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the investigator/study team using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The investigator will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions

about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The investigator has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix B

Thesis Project Questions

1. Please state your name and your age.
2. What is your relationship status?
3. Describe your church attendance in the past year (frequency, location, etc.).
4. How often did you attend church before the age of 18?
5. Please tell me about your family of origin. (Please include where you were raised and by whom were you raised.)
6. During your upbringing years, how often did you see your parents/guardians attend church?
7. How did your parents/guardians live out their faith while you were being raised?
8. Describe a typical week in the home in which you were being raised.
9. How have your parents' faith influenced your choices today?
10. Can you recall the ministries you were involved in during your time at Emmanuel?
11. How did those ministries affect your spiritual growth?
12. Describe your relationship with the ministry leader.
13. Describe three people from Emmanuel who impacted your life.
14. What are three things you would have liked to see at Emmanuel Church?
15. What feedback did you receive from the friends you invited to church?
16. What do you picture as the church you would enjoy attending?
17. Some people would say that teenagers are counting down the days to be eighteen so they can leave the church. What would you say to those people?
18. How do you feel Emmanuel could have served you better?
19. Reasons you stopped attending Emmanuel. Please choose from the following options. I am going to ask you to provide an explanation of your choice(s).

    ___Moved away
    ___Work and school
    ___I did not feel connected.
    ___Issue with church member or leader.
    ___Disagreed with church policies.
    ___I chose to stop.
    ___I was not growing in my faith.
    ___The sermons were not applicable to me.
    ___Other.

19. Provide an explanation of two individuals from your childhood and youth years that have had the most effect on your spiritual life?
20. If you choose to have family, how would you help them in their faith?

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 13, 2020

Ivett McDonald
Michael Eiras

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY19-20-418 Addressing the Issue of Low Attendance in Emmanuel
Church among
Young Adults

Dear Ivett McDonald, Michael Eiras:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may
begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study does not classify as human subjects research because:

(2) Quality improvement activities are not considered "research" according to 45 CFR 46.102(d).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of
continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a
modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at

irb@liberty.edu. Sincerely,

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