

ABSTRACT

US-BASED GHANAIAN METHODIST YOUNG PEOPLE: IMPROVING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN AND COMMITMENT TO CHURCH

by

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The church, according to Paul in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4, is a place for all; the young and the old; free and bond; Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:26-28). Specifically, Paul mentions wives, husbands, children, and servants in the afore-quoted passage. All these groups or individuals are needed in the life of the church. Ensuring all categories maintain membership is critical for the survival of the church. Church exists because it has members. Unfortunately, some young people in Ghanaian Methodist Churches in America are no fans of the church. What should be the church's responses?

The purpose of the research is to go into the complex world of Ghanaian Methodist Young people in the United States and find answers as to the diverse attitude they portray when it comes to church participation and commitment, and what the church can do. At age 16, first-generation Ghanaian young people are introduced to what society calls "sweet" sixteen, an unfamiliar territory to them. From there, they become seniors and after a couple of years, they are ready for College. A normal four-year College course may last a little longer for a typical Ghanaian young person. She/he may take about a couple more years to figure out what course she or he would finally want to settle for. Thus, many of them graduate and begin their life career by the age of twenty-five. A

little over fifty individuals participated in the research that studied the trends among young people who are either members of my parish or not.

US-BASED GHANAIAN METHODIST YOUNG PEOPLE:
IMPROVING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN AND COMMITMENT TO CHURCH

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by

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides a general overview of a research on how to improve upon the current participation in and commitment to church life of Ghanaian young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five living in the US.

The chapter begins by stating the problem being researched and explains the purpose of the project. The purpose statement raises three research questions. The chapter defines the key terms and explains the delimitations of the research. It briefly reviews the relevant literature in line with suggested themes. Research methodology is briefly discussed and it covers several areas including the type of research, participants, instrumentation, data collection, analysis and generalizability. The chapter concludes with an overview of the project.

Personal Introduction

The presence of the Ghanaian Methodists in the US is growing. Presently, Ghanaians have about forty parishes or societies in the US; and the number is still increasing. The future looks promising. These congregations need to be pastored. Therefore, upon the request of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) released me to serve a predominantly Ghanaian congregation of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Columbus, Ohio. My wife and I arrived with our three children – two girls and a boy.

The entire congregation had a hand in our coming to the church, but the voice of the young people was among the loudest of those who spoke in favor of my appointment.

Obviously, there were a lot of impediments, especially, with immigration. However, through God's faithfulness to the prayers of the church, the enemy could not shut the open-door. My family and I came with much zeal and plunged ourselves fully into the service of the church. It did not take much effort on our side to settle in, upon arrival. The young people and their parents were excited that we were coming to serve among them. We were also excited. The congregation responded well to our arrival, and enthusiastically, welcomed us amid much fanfare and expectation.

As part of my ministerial duties, I had some members or families come in to share their prayer requests with me. I took notice that many spoke of the struggles they were facing in getting their young ones to come to church. As expected of the minister, I started visiting individual families in the church when I became mobile. During these home visits, I met some family members who were not coming to church. They were, mostly, the group that could be classified as young people. Over time, a few other young people who used to be active started going down in commitment. And, as I write this paper some have stopped attending church altogether. Quite a few others have become occasional members who put in rare appearances only when a friend or a friend's family has a social function at the church such as a thanksgiving service for graduation or final funeral rites.

To add insult to injury, I saw my own son become less interested in the church after entering college. The writings were all over on the wall. The entire family became so concerned about what the implications would be, if he should leave the church. He has since left, anyway. For me, this was unthinkable as well as unimaginable, but it has happened. The church members read several meanings into my son's departure from the

local church, and his leaving contributed to some unrest in the congregation. In any case, my son left for another church. He seems to be on course as far as his spiritual growth and life are concerned. I am so happy he is still in the faith. However, the fact that he left the local church, remains problematic.

My son was born in Ghana and came to the US, as a seventeen-year-old. He is, therefore, a first-generation Ghanaian. Interestingly, this challenge cuts across such generational barriers. Some other first and second generation Ghanaian young people have fallen victim. The literature makes it clear that this problem is not unique to my church or the Ghanaian Methodist congregations alone. Colleague ministers in other Ghanaian ministries sometimes talk about it. Hopefully, this research will benefit the larger Ghanaian Methodist Community in the US and, possibly, Canada. Also, other Ghana-based non-Methodist ministries in the US may benefit from this work. This is because there are challenges peculiar to all Ghanaians worshippers in the US.

I am burdened about it. The church certainly stands the risk of having no future, if it loses the young people. Even though trends suggest it may take a while for the US-based Ghanaian Methodist Churches to get there, it will happen over time, if the situation is not investigated and properly addressed. For now, the young people do not seem to be leaving in droves, but little drops of water, certainly, make a mighty ocean. Besides, if even it is just one of them leaving the church, it saddens the heart of God (Luke 15:7). Ghanaian parents whose teens and young adult children are no longer active in church are crying for intervention before the situation becomes helpless and hopeless. These parents know the benefits of church commitment in the life of a person, in general. I believe parents also imagine the joy of having their children attend church together with them, as

families had done in the past. God will bless the young people when they remain in the church. They become more vulnerable without the church. I can testify upon the authority of scripture that it is not so safe out there. See Psalm 84:10.

I carry a burden that with the help of God and by giving the necessary attention to the problem, the good Lord will arrest the situation before it gets out of control. Since the problem is not unique to the Ghanaian young people, I hope my research will contribute to this all-important area in the life of the church. Hopefully, this unacceptable trend can be minimized for the common good of church and family.

Statement of the Problem

In Ghana, Ghanaian young people are, generally, religious and seem to love to be in church. However, this very positive trend is inconsistent among some Ghanaian young people in the US. This is especially true among second-generation Ghanaian young people. This research seeks to address these inconsistencies. In my context, the need to address the issue is dire because my parish has over one hundred children at age twelve and below who will soon enter their teenage years. The church does not want any of these children to fall victim to the possibility of leaving the church as they grow up.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to study the current levels of participation in and commitment to church among youth from the ages of sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States to determine best practices for improving levels of participation and commitment among this age group.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

In the opinion of pastors, lay leaders, youth leaders and youth in the church, what aspects of the church's ministry contribute to the levels of participation and commitment among youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five in Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

Research Question #2

In the opinion of pastors, lay leaders, youth leaders, and youth in the church, what current or missing aspects of the church's ministry contribute most to declining levels of participation and commitment among youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five in Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

Research Question #3

What are best practices and strategies moving forward to help increase the levels of participation and commitment among youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five in Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

Rationale for the Project

The Church, as a mission-based organization, exists to lead the unsaved to Christ. With the increasing world population, there is now a bigger field for the Church to work in. See John 4:35. The response of the world to the message of the Gospel has a direct impact on the numerical growth of the church. The obvious and realistic expectation of the church is to get many to respond and become part of the church (Acts 2:47).

The birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost was marked by instant phenomenal growth (Acts 2:41; 4:3). Was it indicative of the Lord's will for the

numerical growth of the Church? The numerical growth is sustained by members being disciplined to remain in the church. We are not to lose them under any circumstances. Jesus said in John 17:12, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. *None has been lost* except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.” (NIV, emphasis added) In view of that, any exit door for members to leave the church ought to be closed. All members of the church should be greatly concerned that the young people remain in the church. The church is confronted with the challenge of losing the youth it has, and the issue raises even greater concern because it is the young people, the future of the church, who are leaving or want to leave the church.

These young people have the potential to constitute the economic power and physical strength of the church as it labors to push its agenda forward. In my conference in Ghana, the young people see themselves as the ‘backbone of the church’ and it is rightly so. In my parish, the greeting of the young adult ministry is “Young Adults,” and the response is, “Future Leaders.” It is also rightly so. The world is, however, rivaling the church for the love and attention of this very ‘special’ category of members. If this group of members leaves the Church, there would be serious implications. Among others, as already indicated, the Church would have no future since the backbone and future leaders would be non-existent! Evidence abounds in many United Methodist parishes that are closing down because, as age catches up on the elderly members, the younger ones are not available to take over. There is a generational gap. Unfortunate closure of parishes are the end results.

As already indicated, the church has a mission of bringing the message of salvation to the world, and this mission ought to be sustained. Already, the laborers are few for this all-important mission or assignment (Luke 10:2), so we just cannot afford to lose any more of the few on hand. The church needs to harness all available resources to keep its mission on course. If the very institution given custody of the message of salvation loses its members, then it is possible the members themselves are not saved or are not convinced of the message of salvation. In that case, the church has nothing to offer to the world. It is often claimed one cannot give what one does not have (Acts 3:6). The church cannot give salvation when her members lack it themselves. The world is to be won and brought into the church for discipleship. However, if the church has something to offer, then why are its members leaving the church? This is a serious question which calls for a serious answer.

Parents relish the idea of doing research that seeks to address such a dire and sensitive need in the church and family. They desire to get the young people to stay or return to the church. The general parental concern demonstrates that their hearts are bleeding and a solution needs to be found, even if the church loses only one sheep out of a hundred! The young people who are active in church and pray and hope that their peers will come and join them, experience joy when those who have left return to the church. Church is a 'safe' zone for all and parents associated with the church, if even only casually, want to see their children there too.

Definition of Key Terms

Ghanaian congregations are congregations of Methodist Church in the United States of America whose members are predominantly of Ghanaian descent. Young people, youth, or young persons are the sixteen to the twenty-five year old.

Delimitations

As indicated in the research topic, the project looked at young people in Ghanaian congregations with special emphasis on my parish, Ebenezer UMC. The Ghanaian Methodist presence is growing in America and, as to be expected, the churches have many things in common, including challenges, in our congregations. Therefore, this research is relevant to many, if not all, Ghanaian congregations. Some of the Ghanaian congregations are under the UMC Conference whilst others are under the MCG Conference. Ghanaian congregations under both Conferences are pastored by Ghanaian ministers. The liturgical form of worship is similar for congregations in both conferences. Hence, the research is relevant for any Ghanaian congregation in North America.

The Ghanaian religious presence is growing in Columbus, Ohio. It is same for other States. Ghanaian churches in North America, by and large, have similar practices and challenges. Therefore, the results of this research would, generally, serve the interests of Ghanaian congregations of other denominations too.

Review of Relevant Literature

Many scholars have written about the attitudes, actions, and inactions of young people in the church and their works have contributed tremendously to this project. Books and articles on relevant issues are discussed in the literature review. My research led me to several authors who have contributed significantly to the discussion of issues

concerning young people. David P. Setran and Chris A discuss relevant issues in their book titled, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry*. Issues discussed include themes about spiritual formation, identity, detachment, vocational commitments, romantic relationship and sexuality, perceptions and authority of the church. Christian Smith as an author who has contributed much about the dynamics of young people. He co-authored with others *Lost in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. The team of authors in *Lost in Transition* discusses religious and cultural issues. Interesting cultural dynamics may contribute to the trends among the young people from Ghana in Methodist Churches in North America.

In her book entitled *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Sharon Daloz Parks writes about the need for mentoring the twenty-something years (Parks). Yet another renowned author, David Kinnaman, contributed through his work, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*. Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons coauthored *Unchristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity And Why It Matters*. These books by Kinnaman discuss spiritual and social issues which have to do with young people. Another renowned author is Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. He contributed in his book titled *Emerging Adulthood*. Greg Ogden's contribution is his book titled, *Transforming Discipleship* (Ogden). As can easily be deduced from the title, Ogden's emphasis is on discipleship, a necessary part of the whole puzzle of developing true spirituality of any individual, be it young or old. Michael J. Wilkins authored a book titled *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Wilkins). He discusses

discipleship in detail. Also, significant is George Barna's book, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Barna). He throws more light on discipleship.

Richard M. Lerner, Robert W. Roeser and Erin Phelps have also edited a book titled, *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research* (Lerner et al.). The book emphasizes the different dimensions to spirituality. These dimensions include self and identity; developmental changes; and context and culture. James L. Heft edited a book, *Passing on The Faith*. In it, he discussed, religious identity in the face of postmodern America (Heft). *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students* is the work of Richard R. Dunn. He discusses spirituality, leadership, and adolescence. Discussions about adolescence led me to consult James Dobson. He has authored a book titled, *Preparing for Adolescence*. In this work, he talks about psychological issues concerning young people. Robert C. Fuller's work titled, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* contributes to areas such as religious challenges in the modern-day era. Socio-cultural as well as spiritual needs receive attention from Eugene Nida in his book, *Customs and Culture: Anthropology for Christian Missions*.

Other prominent authors to whom many others have referred include: Timothy Keller, the author of *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, Power and the only Hope that Matters*; Richard Foster who wrote *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (Foster and Helmers); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, author of *The Cost of Discipleship*; C. S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity*; and John Piper, author of *A Hunger for God* (Piper). These are some of the books consulted during this research project.

During my research I also read about what a typical Ghanaian young person is called upon to deal with when transitioning into adulthood. Articles by Mavis Dako-Gyeke who is a Ghanaian were helpful. One of her articles is titled, “We Never Plan to Return Home: Voices of pre-migrant Ghanaian Youth”. Numerous other journal articles both by other Ghanaian writers and by non-Ghanaian writers gave useful insights.

During the research I looked at sources discussing various theological themes including: spiritual foundation, spiritual development, spiritual maturity, spiritual gifts, role of church and families, impact of God’s Word, and equipping against challenges, among others.

Research Methodology

Six Ghanaian Methodist ministers who are serving in North America were participants in the research. Four of them were ordained by MCG Conference, and the other two are ordained with UMC Conference. The two UMC-ordained ministers, together with one from those ordained by Ghana, are serving three Ghanaian congregations of UMC, as I was. These six ministers participated by answering questionnaires powered by Google Form.

However, since both clergy and laity serve as leaders in the Methodist Church, five lay leaders comprising a former lay leader and a serving lay leader in UMC, and three active stewards in MCG participated. Only two of the lay leaders had their ministers among the six. Therefore, the contribution of the lay leaders further enriched the data.

Same Questionnaires were sent out by mail to ten Diocesan and local youth leaders whose membership spans across different Ghana Methodist parishes in the US.

These same questionnaires were given to seven young people (both active and inactive) in my parish. Three of the total number of seventeen youth participants are my children.

Same questionnaire was given to four parents of young people. Parents who seem to bear a burden for young people in church were selected. Two of the parents, unlike the other two, no longer have their young people in the church. In total, fifty-five people participated. All of these selected individuals were interested in the research.

A modified version of this questionnaire with less number of questions was used for interviews and focus group discussions. There were a total of six participants for the interview; comprising three parents (adults) and three youth. One of the young people was my relative, precisely, a niece. To enhance better response from participants, questionnaires were clear and easy to understand.

This project seeks to answer the three research questions. It was a pre-intervention project about that addressed the US-based Ghanaian Methodist Churches' responses to the participation and commitment of young people among them. Questionnaires were developed and sent out in the first week of May and returned by middle of June. The analysis of the data sought to discover areas of consensus among the participants.

Type of Research

This project researches an identified problem. The problem is related to the US-based Ghanaian Methodist churches' responses to young people's interest or disinterest towards church life and how to sustain and increase their participation and commitment. It is a pre-intervention project. Data was obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. The research suggested a possible solution for subsequent intervention to keep the young people from leaving the church. Mixed (formal and informal) methods for

obtaining data were employed. Qualitative data collected by holding interviews and focus groups supplemented the qualitative data collected through the questionnaires.

Participants

The pre-determined set of participants responded to questionnaires through Google Form, participated in focus groups, and gave interviews. The participants included Ghanaian Methodists Ministers in the US (and Canada) who are ordained by either the Ghana or United Methodist Conference and are serving in Ghanaian congregations. As fulltime parish ministers, they were in an excellent position to participate in the project. Lay leaders and society stewards were also part of the pool of participants. They gave their opinions from the lay perspective.

All six of the ministers are a part of the itinerant ministry of the Methodist Church. However, the three serving under United Methodist Conference seem to serve their congregations for longer periods of time. The least number of years most of these ministers have had with their congregations is five years. Only one of them has had only two years with his congregation. However, for almost all of his church life, he has been a youth leader where he is currently serving. He was transferred from Ghana to replace a colleague who had served his term and was requested to return home to Ghana.

Leaders of young people ministries in other parishes as well as those in my parish and some of the youth (active, semi-active and non-active) participated, as the direct target group. Some parents of young people in my parish also participated.

Instrumentation

The instruments used to collect the data included questionnaires powered by Google Form software, focus groups, and interviews. The interviews were semi-formal.

Some parents who were targeted as participants preferred oral interviews, and with their consent the oral interviews were recorded.

The questionnaires were sent out in the first one-two weeks of May and collected by mid- to the latter part of June. While the participants were filling out the questionnaires, I conducted interviews with parents of young people (both active and non-active) and led focus group discussions.

Data Collection

I used email attachments to send questionnaires powered by Google Form to engage participants outside of Columbus. All six ministers received their questionnaires online, and so did the lay leaders and stewards outside of Columbus. Before and after I sent the questionnaires, I made contact with the participants by phone to explain the process and clarify any questions. With the help of two executive members (a male and a female) of the young adults ministry in my parish, we conducted focus group discussions and interviews.

The female is a banker with MBA degree and her male counterpart is in line to get his first degree in Pharmacy from Ohio State University. They were trained and made to promise anonymity to enhance reliability of data. Furthermore, they worked together to further enhance the reliability – two are better one. These two individuals in the young adults ministry are dependable and the serious-minded.

Data Analysis

This was a pre-intervention project. Data was collected by questionnaires – powered by Google Form, focus groups, and interviews with predetermined participants. They are stakeholders because they play various roles in the life of the church. The

research questions guided the content of questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires for data collection went out, responded to, and returned within six weeks. The Google Form is a software program that automatically helps in the organization of the generated data.

Verbal interviews were transcribed with the aid of my church office secretary as well secretary of the young adults' ministry of my parish and the data obtained from the interviews and focus groups augmented the data from questionnaires. Data obtained from interviews and focus groups was analyzed qualitatively. Similarities and differences and affirmations and deviations were well noted and their implications were duly analyzed.

Generalizability

The data for project was rich in diversity but limited to Ghanaian Methodist Churches in North America that were they under the umbrella of either UMC or MCG Conference. The data was collected from various sources: the clergy who are parish ministers, lay leaders and stewards in different parishes in different states and cities, leaders of young people ministries in different parishes, young people (active, semi-active, and non-active), local parish leaders, and parents of young people. The data collected from each group or individual was analyzed, and both the agreements and disagreements that the data revealed were duly noted.

The project seeks to explore the US-based Ghanaian Methodist Churches contributions and responses to the participation and commitment of young people to the church to sustain and increase their interest in the church. Ghanaian Methodist parishes, families, and individuals are affected by the lack of participation and commitment to the church by young people. It is a major source of concern for church groups and individual

members of the church. This research could have posterior effects on church because the church's future depends on the young people remaining active in the church.

Project Overview

The next chapter discusses the Biblical and theological foundations for the research and the relevant themes developed from the voices of experts. The chapter examines the works of these experts by making an extensive review of literature consulted during the project.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology for the project. It includes discussions on research questions, the ministry context, participants and instrumentation. Evidence for the project is addressed in chapter four. This looks at how participants addressed the research questions and culminates with a summary of major findings. The fifth and final chapter looks at the major findings for the project and the implications of those findings. It concludes by addressing the limitations of the study, mentioning the unexpected observations, and making recommendations for changes or future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The participation and commitment of Ghanaian young people to US-based Ghanaian Methodist Churches is the reason for this project. How should the church respond to questions that the attitudes of young people raise about church participation and commitment? This chapter discusses the Biblical and theological foundations for this concern about the sixteen to twenty-five year-old members in the life of the church. Stakeholders of the church including ministers, church leaders, young people organizational leaders, members, and parents of young people participated in the project. Their views were solicited questionnaires, interviews and focus groups and were qualitatively analyzed. Opinions that the interviewees and members of the focus group expressed were reviewed and findings were deduced from them.

The views of experts who have written about the general culture among young people in the church are considered in an extensive literature review. The review of the experts' voices are discussed under appropriate themes in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a review of the research literature and an overall summary of the literature review.

Biblical Foundations

Daniel 1:1-20 serves as the Biblical foundation for the project. In about 586 BCE, during the reign of King Jehoiakim, the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, overran Judah. God relocated the people of Judah by reason of their disobedience to His commandments (Deuteronomy 4:23-27). African leaders, like their counterparts in other

Third World countries, have failed to heed to warnings against corruption and to desist from it. Mismanagement of the economy has resulted into migration of many Africans. When Judah went into exile many young people were among those who were exiled (2 Chronicles 36:20) just as the migration of Africans and Ghanaians includes children and young people.

Prominent among the young people when Judah was exiled to Babylonian were “...of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.” (KJV Daniel 1:6-7) The Israelites found themselves in a strange land, and that brought diverse challenges and responsibilities to them from which the young people could not be exempted. The Scriptures reveal that Daniel and his three friends responded in ways that serve as the Biblical themes for the project.

Biblical Godliness

In the passage, the Hebrew young men, Daniel and his three friends, made pleasing God their primary responsibility in an ungodly environment. They had been relocated but had to continue to live, as they had been taught to do. They were commended for the continuity. At least, King Darius acknowledged it in Daniel 6:20, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve *continually*, been able to deliver you from the lions?” (Emphasis mine) They accomplished much for God with their ability to remain godly and be faithful to the faith of their fathers and mothers.

As portrayed in the Book of Daniel, Babylon was deeply infested in idol worship, but these Hebrew young men continued to exercise themselves in godliness (1 Timothy 4:7) by saying no to all forms of ungodliness (Titus 2:12).

Exercising Determination

The Hebrew young men were determined not to defile themselves with the king's meat. They found favor with the king. By way of benefits from this favor, they were to eat from the king's table. They, however, said 'no' to this favor, as revealed in Daniel 1:8, "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; ..." These Hebrews young men politely took permission to stay away from the food "offered to idols". This request was the result of determination in their hearts not to defile themselves with the king's meat. The officer felt that it would be too risky for him to grant them their request since he was under royal command to get these young men well feted for them to look good and presentable before the king. They all agreed on a trial period of ten days. At the end of the trial period, the tangible results were so evident that their request was granted.

What they did was comparable to what other biblical heroes like Ruth did when she resolved and with determination to follow Naomi after the demise of her husband, one of Naomi's sons. Jesus exhibited a similar spirit of determination in His desire to die for sinful humanity. He set His face "like a flint" (Isaiah 50:7; *see also* Luke 9:51), as He journeyed to Jerusalem, the place of His execution. Obstacles abound in the journey of faith and it takes determination to overcome them, as one seeks to make progress.

Decisiveness

The Hebrew young men decided not to defile themselves with the king's dainties and delicacies. They made up their minds and nothing could convince them to do otherwise. The power of decision was evident in the lives of these Hebrew young men. Decisiveness is key for advancement in the Kingdom of God. More than one alternative was presented to them, but their ability to make a decision and stick to it made them heroes worthy of emulation. Decisiveness guards against unnecessary delays in all endeavors of life including the danger of lacking progress due to uncertainty. Decisiveness is empowering, and it is indispensable if one wants to avoid being overtaken by events.

Discipline or Exercise of Self-Denial

Circumstances forced the people of Judah into exile and as a result they became representatives of God. The office or position of a representative or an ambassador comes with training. In line with directives that God had given to the Israelites through Moses, these Hebrews young men from Judah who were still in their teens had been trained and equipped for the uncharted waters of Babylon (Deut. 6:6-7). They exercised discipline to stay on course. Effective learning calls for and goes with discipline. Apparently, the Hebrew youth had grown in discipline and were exercising in it as a way of life. Therefore, when they found themselves in a strange land where the situation required discipline, they were able to practice self-discipline. They could and did resist temptations in the face of serious enticements because they knew how to practice self-discipline.

Self is identified in the Bible, as one of the greatest enemies to the things of the Spirit. The desires of the flesh can be so strong that many can barely resist them.

However, when circumstances called upon the Hebrew youth to give in to the desires of the flesh, they resisted the temptation. Discipline comes into play when dealing with the self. See 1 Corinthians 9:27. Many Christians lack discipline and easily give in to fleshly desires. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul referred to a group of Christians as being carnal.

Prayerfulness

The Gospel writers reveal assertions by Jesus that prayer would help his followers overcome temptations (Matthew 26:41). Prayer was key to the Hebrew youth overcoming the temptations in Babylon. Later developments in the Book of Daniel affirm their prayerfulness as shown in Daniel 2, 6 and 9. Prayer was the theme of these chapters. Prayer was paramount in the lives of Daniel and these young men. In the second chapter, through prayer, God revealed the king's dream to Daniel (2:16ff.). In the sixth chapter, due to the utmost importance of prayer, Daniel preferred to be thrown into the hungry lions' den than to cease praying (6:10ff). And, how about Daniel 9:3ff.? As a representative or ambassador of his God, Daniel had to maintain links with "headquarters" through prayers.

Intimacy with God

Even though away from Judah, the Hebrew youth still sought to remain in intimate relationship with their God. The knowledge they had gained of God, informed their way of life. According to Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the *Shema*, Israel, as a nation is told, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Responding faithfully to the *Shema* would lead them into intimate relationship with God. Intimacy thrives on the insatiable appetite to know God and to obey Him. These youths dared to obey God at whatever cost, and that motivation came from the right knowledge they had of Him (Dan. 3:16-18). One benefit of intimacy with God is gaining access to divine help (Hos. 13:9b; Isa. 41:14). No wonder, God helped them to stand for Him!

Exercising Spirituality

With the determination to abstain from all forms of ungodliness, the Hebrew youth were able to maintain their spiritual lives. Their pursuit of spirituality was to live a life which was consistent with the Word of God. The Word they had been taught and exposed to was guiding them and keeping them spiritual in an idolatrous environment. (Deut. 32:45-47; John 6:63).

As young men who were spiritual, they did not want to grieve or quench the Spirit. Hence, they sought to avoid any form of defilement. They jealously guarded their spirituality. It mattered more to them than the momentary pleasures in the king's palace. They were happier with what God would see in them than what the king or systems in place would see in them. They were spiritual enough to believe God for a miracle of making them look healthy even though they were not eating the delicacies from the king's table. The call to true spirituality in an idolatrous environment came at a great cost. Threats against their lives were real, but through the power of the Spirit (Dan. 3:24ff.), they passed it all. Another indication of their deep spirituality is that the Bible records that Daniel was still fasting in his mid-eighties (Dan. 9:3ff.).

Showing Humility

As Jews serving the only true God, they could have easily fallen victim to spiritual pride. To a typical Jew, a non-Jew could only be as good as a dog (Matt. 15:26). But that was not to be with these youths. Rather, they depicted the nature of their God (Matthew 11:29) and humbly sought permission to stay away from the king's food, for a trial period of time. They factored the interest of the one appointed to oversee their welfare into their decision. Later developments showed many mighty miracles of God through them, and yet they maintained a low profile and allowed God to be God and do what He deemed fit. Their humility was not timidity. They took a bold stance for their God and made their boast in Him alone. They were following the principle expressed in Jeremiah 9:23-24 which tells people not to glory in their own wisdom, might or riches, but rejoice because they know the Lord who understands all.

Networking or Staying in Fellowship Together

The Hebrew youth stayed together in fellowship, believed together, risked their lives together, and by so doing, drew corporate strength from one another. As Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two are better than one." God has said aloneness is not good for human beings (Gen 2:18). The Bible confirms the blessedness of togetherness, and in Matthew 18:19-20 Jesus encouraged it. The Hebrews writer added his voice to this encouragement to fellowship together (Heb. 10:25). Two very splendid examples of the very opposite could be found in Elijah and John the Baptist in their responses to isolation. Loneliness nearly led to the shipwreck of their faith (1 Kings 19:14; Luke 7:18ff). No wonder fellowshiping together was a way of life for the early church (Acts 2:42, 46). As

indicated, the Hebrew youth stayed together in fellowship, drew God's presence among them, and got God to perform miracles with and for them (Dan. 2:17ff.).

Being Different: Living to Share the Truth

The Hebrew youth did not follow the crowd, but, rather, they were different (Exod. 23:2). They dared to live (for) the truth, as they knew best. The heathen kings that Daniel and his friends encountered had their form of truth, but with the daring attitude of Daniel and his friends, the real truth prevailed. The kings testified to the one true God. Thus, persisting in and standing by the truth led to vindication. As representatives of God and the Jewish faith, they lived their faith and if quizzed, could readily come to its defense. 1 Peter 3:15 advises the New Testament Christians to be ready to tell others about their faith. Living for the truth and defending it, is evangelism. After all, truth is Christ (John 14:6). The motivation to live and teach or preach truth is to present God to all humankind who are looking for God (Jesus) (Mark 1:35-37). Christ is, indeed, the "desire of all nations" (Hag. 2:7).

Exercising Inner Strength

The young Hebrew men were confronted with serious challenges. Some of the challenges were more obvious than others, but the well-developed inner strength of the Hebrew youths made them overcomers. To begin with, they found themselves in an environment that was in a direct opposition to their faith. The cultural shift in their new environment was totally godless. It was a big change but the four Hebrew youth handled it well.

In very subtle ways the enemy did come in, Daniel and his friends were wise enough to have understood the implications, and they resisted the enemy. For instance,

they would have felt favored by the king as he handpicked them for special treatment and renamed them after his gods (Dan. 1:7). Such favors could have been more than enough to break their resistance and get them to compromise but they did not yield. The endurance limit of these Hebrew youth was remarkably high.

Discerning and Resisting Temptations

The Hebrew youth were relocated as slaves. Therefore, as already indicated, it was highly unusual for slaves be favored by the king. Such favors could easily break down all resistance and destroy one's determination to stand up for one's convictions. They could have gladly embraced the falsehood that was presented to them as truth. Falsehood that comes with attractive rewards can be hard to resist. They could have explained or interpreted relocation, as God's abandonment, hence, and reasoned that they had grounds for disobedience.

For instance, Exodus 32 tells the story of Aaron and the golden calf. The Israelites caved in because they felt abandoned by God and their leader. They saw no reason to be different and compromises for survival appeared to be reasonable and appropriate.

Another example is Joseph in Egypt. He received a sumptuous and tempting offer from Potiphar's wife. Giving in to the offer would have been the easiest option for survival. It would have been a compromise before God but a gateway to favors from "Madam" Potiphar. Today, a short-sighted Christian might easily fall for similar temptations, but the Hebrew youth in their new location, stood firm against compromises of their faith.

Theological Foundations

The Biblical foundations for this research are found in Daniel and other relevant passages of Scripture. The theological foundations are found in God and his call to his people.

God's Essence Calls for Continuity

The Hebrew youth were relocated because they were citizens of a nation that God was punishing for its sins. They relocated because of national sins, but their personal faith in God was intact. Their physical location changed, but the essence of the immutable God was intact and so was His relationship with them. His immanence would suggest and demand they would continue to live in obedience to His commands (Hosea 9:12b) and to please Him despite being away from home. He was with them as the omnipresent, omniscient God who knew and took note of every sacrifice they made for His sake. He would recognize and reward their sacrifices. His omnipotence made it possible for Him to give any form of reward that He deemed fit. This power to reward was amply demonstrated in the Hebrew youth when God performed awesome and breathtaking miracles with them and in the process rewarded them with promotions which transcended all human comprehension.

The key to unleash these miracles came from the ability of the Hebrew youth to continue with worship of the only true God. Ruth 1:18 further strengthens this viewpoint that continuity of devotion to God is a key to unleash God's blessings. The continuity of Joseph's devotion to God in Egypt is yet another example of God honoring steadfastness. (see Genesis 39 and 40). It brought glory to God and earned Joseph a promotion. The Hebrew youth simply continued with their devotion to the omnipresent, omniscient and

omnipotent God, and the outcome is well documented in the Scriptures for all to read and appreciate.

As already indicated, the Hebrew youths were in Babylon because of the sins of the nation they belonged to. They were there as slaves, and yet they were promoted to occupy very high positions in a foreign land. Promotion comes from God and the environment could not stop their being promoted because the righteous God would not destroy the righteous and the unrighteous together (Gen. 18:25). The nation had sinned but they, as individuals, stood blameless before God. Their acts of righteousness gained recognition from God, and He duly rewarded them even though they were part of an exiled group of sinners. Individual acts of service to God cannot go unnoticed. God has always been the faithful rewarder of the diligent. Their promotions might have spurred them on to more acts of obedience to God.

Transcending Love of God

Even though, they had gone into exile because of their disobedience, the God of love did not abandon them. God raised and continued to raise prophets among them. These prophets were to give them God's Word and help conscientize them about their identity. They were a people in covenant relationship with God. Even though they had relocated because of their sins, God's love did not let go of them. He continued to love them (Hos. 4:16). In Isaiah 49:15-16, we read, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me."

God so valued the relationship He had with them that He forgave their sins and kept reminding them never to forget their roots that were in Jerusalem, the city of the great king David. Jeremiah 51:50 says, "...Remember the LORD from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind:" His love covered their sins (1 Peter 4:8). God, through the prophets, constantly reminded them of His love to them and called them to repentance to avoid total annihilation. Even the least effort of repentance was duly recognized by God and resulted in strengthening their relationship with God.

God, Source of Spiritual Empowerment

God, by His Spirit, indwelt them and thereby, strengthened them and enabled them to withstand all the onslaughts of ungodliness and idolatry. God made them spiritually fit and helped them not to succumb to intimidations from ungodly systems and to hold onto their desire to reveal God. The response of Esther to Mordecai in Esther 4:11-16 reveals the type of tyrannical dynasties they faced. As ambassadors of God, they required God's help to withstand these life-threatening intimidations.

In the Book of Daniel, the king threatened to behead all wisemen for their failure to reveal a dream and give its interpretation (Dan. 2:12ff.). Also, the king later ordered that an oven to be heated seven times hotter just to punish all those who had refused to heed the king's command to worship an image (Dan. 3:19). Later Daniel faced the threat of being thrown into hungry lions' den just for praying to his God (Dan. 6:7ff.). He refused to obey the king's command not to consult or pay allegiance to any god or any other person, apart from the king for a specified period of time. These are but a few of the challenges the Hebrew exiles had to grapple with.

The wise King, Solomon told us “there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). We are called, as followers of the Lord, to discern and then “hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The Church cannot run away from challenges, but it cannot allow the challenges to dictate its way of life. Jesus, in His high priestly prayer said that His followers are in the world but not of it (John 17:16). No matter, what the world throws at a believer, the Spirit of Truth in her or him enables her or him to prove equal to the challenge. By so doing, they remain true and effective representatives of the Lord and are fit to be called *CHRISTian*/ful then. Without the aid of the Spirit, no one would be fit to be called Christian because by nature, people “love darkness rather than light” (John 3:19).

Ambassadors on Mission to Nations

The fitness of the Hebrew youths to withstand threats was fully tested and they proved equal to every test. Their spiritual fitness made their stories attractive (Heb. 1:3). They became witnesses to the reality of the only true God of Heaven and the kind of power He wielded. Their witness caused the heathen to acknowledge the God of Israel, as the only God, worthy of recognition and worship. The slaves and immigrants had a highly effective witness. One’s social status is not that significant, if one can build the capacity to take a stance for God and be different.

The New Testament theology reveals to us that God’s love is there for all of humankind and He would have all humankind gain access to the Gospel and be saved. Being Spirit, He accomplishes his purposes through human vessels, as He would seek to position His servants at various strategic locations. The duty of God’s servants is to let their lights so shine before men that people around them see their good works and give

glory to God. A light is meant to give light to all. As “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13) Christians are to help maintain sanity wherever they are located. A true Christian is an ambassador of God and cannot hide. This is because” a city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14).

The Lord was among His people by His Spirit. He, therefore, worked among them. They only had to avail themselves and walk in obedience to him as His true representatives, and He took care of the rest. Daniel and his friends were living as ambassadors or representatives of God in a totally different culture from what they were used to back home, in Judah. As effective representatives of God, they knew they had a mission to reveal God to the rest of the world. John 10:10 clearly shows that the mission of the Lord is, to bring abundance of life to the dying world. Relocation should be an opportunity to reveal God to those who do not yet to know Him. Events in the book of Daniel reveal that the Hebrew immigrants excelled in this assignment, because succeeding kings confessed the God of Israel, as the only one true God worthy of worship.

The Sovereign God

The exile of Israel and Judah is comparable to the scattering of the Church among the nations. Different circumstances forced both groups to leave but God turned everything to work in His favor. He had his faithful followers engage in activities that made them serve as His witnesses. The Sovereign God used even unlikely situations to promote His mission. A typical example is what He did with these exiled Hebrew youth and their glorious story in Babylon. The Lord has the prerogative to choose the methods that he uses to accomplish His purposes. Jeremiah 32:27 says, “Behold, I am the LORD,

the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?" All He needs is availability from His servants, and He sends His Spirit to His servants to get them to be available for His purposes.

Talking about the sovereignty of God, William Cowper, the ancient poet and hymn writer, captures it so well in his idolized hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" The words of two stanzas of this great hymn capture the sovereignty of God this way,

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

The Sovereignty of God is beyond human comprehension. God wields the power and has the wherewithal to accomplish whatever He would like to do, according to His will, and he has the ability to turn every situation to suit His purpose and fit into His grand scheme. Even what might be seemingly evil is loaded with great potential to bring Him glory. Therefore, in Babylon slaves became heroes and effective witnesses. They are now immortalized by the immortal, only wise God.

Incarnational Context

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, we have a transformed identity in Christ. This new identity is only possible by receiving Christ, as Savior and Lord (John 1:12-13). This identity in Christ connects us to Abraham (Galatians 3:29). Thus, the dealings of God with Israel are being relived among us. Hebrews 13:8 emphasizes the fact that "Jesus ([God] is) the same yesterday, today and forever." The transformation is accomplished

through hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. An individual with a transformed identity should know the difference between her or his former and present states. The incomparably rich and exhilarating experience of transformation helps one to own the gift of salvation. One personally experiences the power of the good news.

The good news is about regaining our lost identity in Adam; the good news is about restoration of God's created purpose for us through Christ; the good news is about transformed identity through the acceptance of Christ's work on our behalf on the cross; and the good news is the news for all humankind. This is because all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God – the very glory we need, to survive. The created purpose of God is having an unbroken relationship with us. After experiencing it themselves, believers are enjoined to share this good news wherever and whenever they can. The Hebrew youth could not hide the good news of knowing this God and taking a stance for Him. By so doing, they revealed Him, as the only one true God, worthy of worship.

The strong stance the Hebrew youth took for God fully identified with God. They were perceived, as having God's presence with them and as being filled with the Spirit of God (Daniel 3:25; 5:11). God and His Spirit are inseparable. Therefore, to be full of His Spirit was to be full of God. To be spiritual is to be godly. Romans 8:9b says, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Therefore, being Spirit-filled is a possibility and a demand from God to the followers of Christ (Ephesians 5:18ff). Such humans are His true representatives. The disciples or followers of Christ were first called CHRIST(ians) or 'Christful' at Antioch (Acts 11:26).

The role of the Spirit in getting the young people to live up to Christ's expectation cannot be overemphasized. According to the prophecy of Zechariah, it is "not by might" neither is it "by power, but by the Spirit" (4:6). George Duffield, the hymn writer, did reveal in his hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," that we "stand in His strength alone for the arm of flesh will fail us!" Therefore, the spiritual birth we experience at conversion should be nurtured so we can grow in the Spirit.

Socio-Cultural Issues and Challenges

There are social as well as cultural issues that certainly influence the actions and inactions of the youth. These are discussed under three broad areas of migration and culture; transitioning and challenges; and basic familial, educational, and congregational characteristics.

Migration and Culture

Ghanaians, in their migration to North America, are demonstrating the fact that migration and culture are interrelated. The significance of the relationship is, hereby, discussed.

Immigrants and Church Planting

The Diversity Immigrant Visa Lottery (also known as the "Green Card Lottery," "US Visa Lottery," or the "US Immigration Lottery") is contributing to the growth of Ghanaian population in the US. Peace Mamle Tetteh writes about another pathway to growing the Ghanaian population in America. She discusses "American Babies," and she defines them as, "children born in America (with a U.S passport) by Ghanaian parents, resident in Ghana. The reference is typically to those children whose parents travel solely

to the States to have them and bring them back home to Ghana. It does not include those whose parents live in the States (Ghanaian immigrants).” (Tetteh, 148)

Tetteh talks about these “American babies” securing American passports (151) by virtue of being born here. She indicated motivations to have “American Babies” are “numerous and complex” (150) The reasons numerated by Tetteh did not indicate what I believe to be one possible major reason for having the American passports. These “American babies” grow up and return to the US to pursue education and other social benefits. Thus, they add to the number of immigrants from Ghana.

According to Alex Kumi-Yeboah and Patriann Smith “African immigrant population has been identified among the fastest growing populations in the United States.” (434) It is no gainsay the fact that the growing population of African immigrant (individuals and families) certainly include the sixteen to twenty-five year-olds. It is estimated that fewer than 10,000 Ghanaian immigrants resided in the US in 1980. However, as of 2015, an estimated 235,000 Ghanaian immigrants and their children (the first- and second-generations) live in the US, according to MPI RAD Diaspora Profile (see <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/RAD-Ghana.pdf>).

Increase in population of Ghanaians in the US has brought with it many churches and/or sects. Ghanaian churches in North America thrive on church planting efforts of members. Kofi Asimpi in a reviewed paper, has an affirmation (255-6). This view is confirmed by Edward Opoku-Dapaah with his assertion that, “religion is an essential component of the social organization of Ghanaians” (233). Building churches and sects should be no surprise when most migrants do not have plans to return home (Dako-

Gyeke, 171). Building permanent institutions like a church may be evidence that there are no plans to return to Ghana.

The motive behind such an initiative of church and/or sects planting is diverse. Opoku-Dapaah identifies “post-migration insecurities and religious factors” (233) as the two main reasons. Could it also be for economic reasons? A research into financial motivation as a reason for founding a church/sect in North America would be beneficial. Founding and running a church, especially, among the non-traditional or independent churches that Opoku-Dapaah refers to as “sects” (232), has become a “big business” in many parts of Africa, including Ghana. Since most Ghanaians travel overseas primarily for economic reasons, the financial motivation for establishing these “sects” is possible (Tetteh, 146). Income generated from these sects could serve as a buffer for the leaders and members in times of financial crisis.

A proliferation of sects and churches under a Ghanaian umbrella are in the US (Opoku-Dapaah, 232). However, in Philippians 1:18 Paul said, “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”

Foreignness of US Culture

With relocation to America, the first generation of sixteen to twenty-five year-old Ghanaians are obviously ushered or plunged into a foreign culture. According to David F. White, no one, including churches, families, and youth can ever remove oneself entirely from the dynamics of culture (63). Such dynamics come with obvious cultural differences. In his book, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*, Eugene A. Nida duly acknowledged cultural differences when he titled the first chapter

“Shocks and Surprises” (1). This chapter speaks of the significant cultural differences people experience when they find themselves in nations other than their own.

Nida states, “when some of our perfectly normal customs are transported into other parts of the world, they too appear utterly ridiculous.” (2). He further authenticates his viewpoint by asserting that, “What is regarded as natural by us may be unnatural in the eyes of others” (36). For instance, I have come to realize that in the American culture, the age sixteen is emphasized and idolized. It is referred to as “sweet” sixteen in many quarters. It is a birthday well celebrated, and the sixteen-year-old may be showered with expensive gifts like a personal car. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett corroborates (88). Thus, a sixteen-year-old can own and drive a car to school. This is unthinkable in the culture from which the first generation Ghanaian has come. In Ghana, this age comes and goes unnoticed.

Owning and driving a personal car may come with the temptation to feel and act mature. The tendency to act maturely may not be a bad thing, but does the sixteen-year-old have the capacity to observe appropriate boundaries, especially, when it comes to morals? Such fears and concerns are valid, as affirmed by David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling who write that age sixteen is the average age of first intercourse (169). Some youth have intercourse as early as the age of fourteen (Arnett 88). A commonly held opinion is that intercourse is the final stage of sexual activity. This implies that many pre-intercourse activities take place even before “mystery” sixteen.

In the eighteenth year a teenager may be permitted to make decisions with minimal parental consent since she or he has “all the legal rights of adults except for the right to buy alcohol, which comes at 21” (Arnett 18). She or he can decide to leave home

and be on her or his own (Arnett 50). These landmarks of sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-one with all the liberties that come with them are foreign to a typical sixteen to twenty-five year-old first generation Ghanaian.

The trend of young ones seeking independence early from parents is “a key issue” (Arnett 70). The ease with which this can be done by the American youth is too good to be believed by the first generation Ghanaian young person. A typical sixteen to twenty-five year-old first generation Ghanaian may like to or cannot wait to explore and/or exploit such a ‘privilege’. According to Setran, exploration is part of youth culture (144). It seems natural with and mandatory for them to explore. I wonder if the pressure from such a perceived culture is same for both the religious young person and the secular.

The rights of children are strongly upheld in the American culture, and a child is encouraged to seek answers to questions. Setran refers to this American culture among its young people as “perpetual questioning,” and it can be counterproductive. To him, it is comparable to the biblical truth in 2 Timothy 3:7, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (69). This loquacious attitude has led to viewing “moral development in terms of a democratic process” (69). I am, however, still inclined to believe even in this “democratic culture,” the American youth are doing more talking than listening since it is cultural to ask questions. A typical Ghanaian child is more reserved and is not encouraged to ask questions since that could be viewed as an act of insubordination. The characteristically “timid” first generation young Ghanaian has to learn other ways and means to express her or himself.

In “Mapping American Adolescent Religious Participation” Smith et. al. reveal that the youth culture in America is plagued by “a series of high profile events” (598);

such as, multiple school shootings. I would comfortably refer to such events as problems and challenges, and these events can be foreign to a typical sixteen to twenty-five year-old first generation Ghanaian.

Christian Smith et al. comment in their book that trends in the young people's culture are of recent development. To them, "Americans ages 18-29 enjoy more options for work, marriage, and location than perhaps any previous generation." (598) I wonder how recent cultural trends among American youth are. They seem entrenched.

Probable Responses to Relevant American Culture

The first generation Ghanaian young person may differ from a similar Ghanaian young person of the second generation, in terms of exposure to the American culture and subsequent responses to them. The latter was born to Ghanaian parents into the culture have had the privilege of growing up in it. Therefore, adopting the culture, adapting to it, and ultimately responding to it should be less stressful or demanding for the second generation youth than for their first generation counterparts.

The impact cultures have on children can be tremendous. The Prophet Isaiah had this to say, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts." (28:9). Israel, under the law of Moses, was instructed to emphasize the teaching of their children in Deuteronomy 6:7-9,

And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you

shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

A first impression is indelible.

Youth culture may differ from the general social culture. The key question is how would the young ones from Ghana respond to cultural trends which are accepted, as norms in the US? Ghanaian community's responses to American culture can be varied – slow, rapid, and possibly, indifferent. As pointed out by Kumi-Yeboah, responses may depend on “sociocultural, psychological and educational background” (2) Since the sixteen to twenty-five year-old are part of the community, their responses may not be any different from the responses of the larger community. However, trends among them do not suggest that. They, largely, respond differently.

Smith and Snell acknowledge the “uncertain phrases” (*Souls in Transition* 20) and “personal opinions” (13) and expressions that characterize a typical American young person's position on morality. Setran also acknowledges the “soft” and highly subjective position on morals. He refers to sexuality among the young ones as “cultural tolerance for premarital sexuality” (3); a “hookup” culture and easiness of free sex (164-5). Outcome of a research indicates that “only 6% of 18- to 23-year-olds are currently in a dating relationship and not sexually involved.” (169) This liberal attitude is not what generally pertains to Ghanaian culture where a typical Ghanaian young person is expected to have concrete positions on moral issues. Eric Y. Tenkorang and Jones K. Adjei suggest that the lack of solid or proper stance on morals may be a reflection on one's family values in Ghana (3).

Such a liberal culture could be exploited by a Ghanaian young person. It is possible such exploitations and/or explorations would drive any out of church so as to feel 'freer' to engage in them. Setran agrees with. To him, improper or inappropriate attitude to sex has many dire consequences including withdrawals or "weakened attachment to others"(171). He also suggests there is "relational chaos" as a result of the newfound freedom (5) Meanwhile, church membership is about staying in fellowship and in relationship with others; or, being attached to a "Body".

The Church in America, especially, orthodox churches are currently losing members. Dwindling numbers in attendance among American youth is duly acknowledged by Smith and Snell (112). Robert C. Fuller supports this view by asserting that church religion is no longer a viable option for literally millions of Americans (12). Staying out of church is becoming the norm. However, the impressions one gathers from watching TBN networks suggest that staying away from church may not be the trend. Some congregations are dealing with literally thousands in attendance and with multi-services. Could such numbers still be insignificant when dealing with the larger American community? Whatever the answer to that question is, it is not hard for any young person of any cultural descent to conform (Dobson 19-20) to the habit of staying away from church when she or he comes to America. It is the current trend, and many cannot be any different. One is likely to be shaped by The culture one finds oneself in shapes the individual (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 5) It is a "normative culture" (142). Both generations of Ghanaians could blend with ease.

Some aspects of the culture in the US seem to encourage youth to accept an early call to responsibility. As one turns sixteen and receives due recognition from the

community, the youth may be deemed mature enough to be exposed to a working life. It is a norm in the American culture to work as a high school senior (Arnett 144). Many attend school and at the same time work part time on part time basis. Managing time and money can be challenging for many in the age bracket, especially, in the lower echelons of the range (sixteen to twenty-five) being considered.

Exposure to a working life make the youngster handle and manage finances at an early stage. This call to experience some aspects of a matured life should certainly have its pros and cons. It is argued that practice makes a person perfect. Therefore, some say the earlier, the better. However, exposure to a resource like money at that “tender” age may come with adverse effects, such as losing focus and experiencing imbalances in life. A Ghanaian young person is not any different when exposed to a working life at a ‘tender’ age? Timothy Keller reveals money can be idolized and take “on divine attributes, and our relationship to it then approximates worship and obeisance” (xiii). Scripture and experience have taught me many, if not all, can be vulnerable when it comes to handling of money.

Transitioning and Its Challenges

Youth is a transitional stage in the process of maturity, and it comes with its associated challenges. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

Internal Struggles

The stage of being a young person coupled with relocation can generate some internal struggles for many young people. Arnett aptly outlines and discusses the typical characteristics that mostly go with this stage of life. According to Arnett, responding to these challenges of *identity exploration, instability, self-focused, feeling in-between* and

possibilities (8) could be overwhelming to any young person. This is especially true for a sixteen to twenty-five year-old first generational Ghanaian “in a culturally, religiously, and morally pluralistic society like the United States” (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 9). Members of the age group in the project may seem to act tough but they are human and have to deal with vulnerabilities.

My interaction with the faculty (those of Ghanaian origin) of some higher educational institutions where there are Ghanaian students, affirms a view that there is “utter lack of clarity that many young people have regarding what God is asking them to do with their lives.” (Kinnaman and Hawkins 207). This notion of struggles within and even without, is well captured by Charles Wesley in his hymn, “And Are We Yet Alive?” He writes, “fightings without, and fears within” as being part of our very existence. The young person is not exempted and can even be compounded by challenges that come with this transitioning stage.

The Allurements

Relocation for a typical sixteen to twenty-five year old first generation Ghanaian might lead her or him into some peculiar temptations. As already indicated, one area of allurements could be attitudes towards money. It might be the first time that a first generation sixteen to twenty-five year-old Ghanaian has earned an income, and even more so, easy access to the “almighty” dollars. This temptation with money can open the door to all other kinds of social vices. Considering the way that society perceives money and what money can accomplish, the temptation to want and to love money is real. The Bible clearly reveals to its readers that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Many seem to be in full agreement with Solomon, the richest man ever,

“that money answers all things” (Ecclesiastes 10:19). Therefore, some consider it justifiable to spend all of their time and energy in the acquisition money.

Other temptations with this stage of life real because of the genuine transitioning challenges (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 15). Startling statistics are given on drug and alcohol abuse alcohol among young persons in America (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 113). Drugs may seem more affordable in the US than Ghana due to the higher purchasing power of the US dollar. The temptation to explore is high. In the process of exploration, when boundaries are not observed, abuses result. There is also the problem of abuse with sex. (Smith et al. *Lost in Transition* 149) There are consequences to these abuses, as far as the church membership is concerned. Staying in membership and continuing to abuse drugs cannot go together. They are likely going to leave altogether since the comfort to combine the two would not be there.

The ease with which one can leave home should also be explored. Leaving home is likely to result in leaving the family church and possibly attending no church at all. It is not easy for someone to stay in the church environment while living a life of immorality.

Age of Maturity

Responsibilities come with the perception that a young person has reached maturity. Two possible scenarios can play out concerning the perception of maturity. First others may perceive that a young person is mature when she or he is not. Second the youth may feel that he or she is mature, but no one else acknowledges his or her maturity. In the first case, the implications are that if the perception is wrong and the youth responds with what I refer to as false maturity, the young person’s responses to the demands of maturity are likely to be faulty, and society will be called upon to clean up

the mess. In the second case, if the young person responds with what I refer to as forced maturity, and even though society does not acknowledge the person's maturity and she or he lives and acts with maturity, it forces the community to accept or give recognition to the youth's maturity.

Maturity is much more than just age. Other factors such as the capacity to make decisions are equally important (I Cor. 14:20). Both age and a corresponding growth in understanding are required for a young person to be deemed matured. Maturity implies that a person can fulfill personal and societal expectations that can be quite high. Immaturity can be costly. Smith et al. contend that many young persons are easy prey to pleasure and end up devastated (*Lost in Transition* 193).

The challenge is to know when a youth has reached the age of maturity. Arnett refers to *emerging adulthood* stage as being glorious. He insists it is the "age of possibilities, the age of unvanquished hopes" (46). This could be true, but individuals involved need to be "truly" matured to realize the expected glory. Otherwise, a disappointing mess is the likeliest outcome despite the youth's potential and favorable predictions for her/his success.

Basic Familial, Educational and Congregational Characteristics

Certain characteristics from family, education, and congregation are relevant to the development of the youth. Some of these characteristics are discussed below.

Basic/Unique Family System: Ghana and America

Ghana communities thrive in familial and communal values. A large group of people with a common descent can easily refer to themselves as a family in Ghana. (Takyi and Oheneba-Sakyi 260) Ghanaian communities thrive on extended connections.

The first generation sixteen to twenty-five year-old Ghanaians are introduced to the Ghanaian communal lifestyle prior to their arrival. Since they are mostly likely to find themselves in Ghanaian communities in the US upon arrival, they can continue in it until they begin to learn something different from their new environment.

The communal system is comparable to what pertains to the Ghanaian congregations and most Christian churches. Mark D. Regnerus et al. affirm it with their assertion that religion is a social phenomenon, “typically practiced in relation to, as well as often in the company of, other persons.” (27) Hence, the first generation Ghanaian is initially more comfortable in the church environment than the second generation Ghanaian. The latter has been exposed to both the communal family system by virtue of being in the Ghanaian community and the not-too communal family system of Americans they have seen from birth.

Relevant Aspects of School Systems

The age range of sixteen to twenty-five for the research is a period when many young people are in school. The lower limit of sixteen years certainly finds most in school. The upper limit of twenty-five is an age when have completed their first degree and are beginning their fulltime career. Some may want to take a break in schoolwork and start a family before continuing with further education. Patrick Turner and Elizabeth Thompson indicate how long it takes on the average to complete University. “On average, 58% of undergraduate students in the United States complete college within a six-year period” (94).

The methodology, content, and goal of education may differ somewhat between Ghana and the US. The education system of Ghana, a Third World country, is conducted

amid several limitations. Resources are few, and competition is high so many do not complete the course. It is a different story in America where opportunities abound. The student only needs to take time to search for a suitable course among many, and then apply (Entin 15). Access to education and information is far easier for a growing child in America. Schools are available and “attending college has become a universal aspiration for young Americans” (Arnett, 139). Opportunities are more than expected (Kumi-Yeboah and Smith 441).

Generally, education in Ghana is more theoretical and oriented towards the final examination. Whereas in America, education is more practical, and oriented towards daily assignments. In some cases, one even has an assignment to submit on the first day of class. It is interesting, but a surprise to a typical Ghanaian. In brief, Kumi-Yeboah refers to education in Ghana, as teacher-centered whilst that of the US is student-centered. (2) Such an educational culture could be challenging to a first generation Ghanaian young person. The differences in methodology can be perceived as excessively demanding, and the young person may discover the he or she can meet the requirements only by sacrificing other commitments such as church membership. The instructor may tell them to stay away from church, look after their education, and complete the ‘unfamiliar’ assignments.

The US educational system of keeping a student busy and working throughout the term or semester can be too demanding for some of the young immigrants from Ghana who are used to studying for the exam that they will take place at end of the term or semester. Some have openly confessed that it is overwhelming and overburdening. The term or semester starts with reading and continues with a lot more reading to the very

end. If the purpose of all this hard work is to help one become financially independent then why should not the “short-cut” appeal to anyone? Hence, easier pathway to drop out of school and concentrate on making money. However, the decision to drop out of school would make it “harder” to earn enough money. The dropout would have to work more hours, and the working extra hours could lower one’s commitment to other areas of life such as church. Another temptation is the special offer of earning higher wages on the weekends for same amount of work required on a weekday.

Those who seek to stick to the academic route may be tempted to take time out of their church commitments to meet the academic demands while working. The situation of the first generation Ghanaian person becomes dire. The pressure further mounts when she or he has to compete with people with far greater exposure to technology. When the pressure becomes overwhelming and unbearable, one quits either school or church.

Zoe E. Taylor et al. in their article, “Transitioning From High School to College: Relations of Social Support, Ego-Resiliency, and Maladjustment During Emerging Adulthood” have drawn the conclusion that “first-generation college students tend to be of lower socioeconomic status, have a harder time transitioning to college, and report receiving less emotional and information support from their parents when compared to continuing generation college students.” (113) This raises other realistic socio-economic challenges and questions. One of such being, what percentage of first generation Ghanaians have families who are well established and grounded financially before bringing their children to America to join them? It is likely to be a minority because many immigrants in the Ghanaian community are engaged low-income jobs. The low

financial income position of a family can have a bearing on the social commitments of a young person.

In Ghana, when a student enrolls in a program, she or he sticks with it until completion. Resources and opportunities are limited, consequently, choices are restricted. A Ghanaian student's restriction to a single program throughout one's entire stay at university or college is very much unlike what occurs in the US where a student can alter her or his program anytime she or he feels any degree of discomfort. America can currently boast of over "4,000 colleges, universities, and community colleges." (Arnett, 120). The ease with which many a young person handles education here can be exploited by a first generation sixteen to twenty-five year-old Ghanaian. However, the frequent changes take a toll on the student's time on campus. A typical four-year course becomes at least, a six-year course, or the studies are never completed due to fatigue or the lack of funds. Arnett points out the instability and other transitioning challenges that go with this stage of life (3). For many young people these transitioning challenges elongate the road to adulthood.

The number of choices that both first and second generation Ghanaians face is difficult for them to handle, but it is worse for first generation. Dropping out, transferring courses, taking a break in the semester, and other actions are the norm for American students (Smith and Snell 34). Some drop out because their limited financial resources are exhausted. Dropouts are a reproach in Ghanaian community. Since the church is a direct extension of the Ghanaian community, staying away from church becomes a matter of course for Ghanaian school dropouts? It is seen as a partial solution to the reproach that they feel.

US-Based Ghanaian Methodist Congregations

Ghanaian Methodist Churches are in their formative stages so the literature about them is limited. However, US-based Ghanaian Methodist Churches can be perceived as extensions of the cultural values of Ghana. One can easily see this from the style of worship, the attitude toward time during worship, the areas of emphasis in sermons, the content of prayers and the way they are offered, the way that offerings are taken, the organizational skills, and other characteristics. Fortunately, the first generation seems to have a feel for the communal lifestyle prior to their relocation. They are more comfortable and seem to appreciate the element of continuity. In contrast, the second generation Ghanaians seem to be dealing with unfamiliar circumstances in comparison to what occurs outside the walls of the church. However, both generations experience some confusion at various degrees and on different levels. The strong voices outside the church speak to members of both generations, and the youth are likely to respond. David White appropriately notes that the young people, in general, are wired to engage with their world (23).

To ensure the growth of Ghanaian Methodist congregations, continuity of what happens back home cannot be overemphasized. As Ghanaians arrive, they should be more comfortable with a style of worship that is comparable to the style they had been used to back home. Change is always resisted by humans. Many Ghanaians literally go church shopping to find places of worship that suit their taste and are familiar to them. Hence, almost every Ghanaian Methodist congregation in the US and Canada worship just like the church in Ghana worships. The two generations are left to grapple with the effects of the mixture of Ghana and US cultures in and out church.

Religious Issues and Challenges

A church is a religious institution. Issues and challenges from religion affect all members, which of course include the youth. Relevant issues and challenges include doctrines and practices, discipleship and growth, and these are, hereby, discussed.

Doctrines and Practices

Every denomination has its own set of doctrines and practices. They inform the life of the church and these are responded to differently by various categories of members. With emphasis on the youth, I discuss the following:

Relevant (Accepted) Doctrines

With regards to Methodist doctrine, Justus Hunter contends that “Methodism does not have a formal doctrine of the church”, rather only *a* “practised ecclesiology” (14-5). I, however, believe this “practised ecclesiology” has been born out of a set of doctrines. Among others, the Methodist Church believes in the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification. In effect, we are saved, we are being saved, and we shall be saved. The process of salvation should, therefore, be sustained until individuals are called to glory or Jesus comes again. The entire process of salvation has a starting and an ending point in Jesus. One must accept the Lordship of Jesus to set the process on course and to get the foundation right (John 1:12; Psalm 11:3; 1 Corinthians 3:11). The personal assurance of salvation is needed and is key for the sustenance of one’s faith. The young people need this assurance, as the future of the church. If not, going through the rigorous nature of the Christian faith would not be an easy task.

The Methodist Church believes in priesthood of all believers. In effect, the clergy and laity both belong to the kingdom of priests. Service in the church is rendered by both

categories. The opportunity for all to serve, however, introduces a challenge. According to Romans 3:23, all humans have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. A church member is only a sinner saved by grace, maturing through the process of discipleship. There are ups and downs (risings and fallings) along the way, yet God continue to use such. The struggles with sin among, especially, the adults make it uncomfortable for the young people. As a result, they get to see many adult members differently, and think they have reason to stay away from this bunch of hypocrites who even dare to celebrate the Communion or partake of the Lord's Table with the Holy God. Kenneth Wilson points out that, "In the Eucharist we celebrate the presence of God with his people."(72) He even adds that the reference to the people refers to all humankind.

Talking about service and who is qualified to serve leads to the mention of grace which is another important area of belief among the people called Methodists. The Methodist Church believes in all forms of grace, and it is an area of priority when it comes to ordering the life of the Methodist Church. It is, simply, unmerited favor. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, proposed what he referred to as prevenient grace (PG) and defined it as grace that is extended to any individual prior to salvation. This view of Wesley is strengthened by Dale M. Coulter in his assertion that "the priority of grace is understood as the prior activity of the Spirit in bringing about conversion" (191). To Wilson, PG is at work when God allows us to share in *missio dei* even when we are yet to give personal response to the love of God through Christ (70).

How should church discipline be administered when all are sinners saved by grace? Paul asked the Romans whether they should continue sinning for grace to abound? (Romans 6:1,2) In answering, he made the church aware that grace is no license to sin.

Rather, grace should transform. However, if the “supposed” grace is not transforming the people, what should the young people do? Either they stay and prayerfully wait till people change, or they leave in search of a “better” church.

Relevant (Potentially) Divisive Doctrines

Some doctrines and practices could be referred to as divisive in the larger community of believers (church). How do the young people respond to them? Are they challenged to read and explore the more? Where can they explore church doctrines, and where could their explorations take them? The Methodist Church believes and practices infant baptism. To many Pentecostals and Charismatics, infant baptism is unbiblical. Thus, Methodist is a pedobaptist church and the Pentecostal churches are credobaptist (Heller 437). The main argument of the Pentecostals and Charismatics is related to the content of what is normally referred to as the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. Baptism should only be administered after the individual has understood and responded to the gospel. Members (including the young persons) respond to this interpretation in diverse ways. Some retain their membership in the church of their birth but submit to a second baptism elsewhere. Others discontinue with membership altogether.

The interpretation of speaking in tongues is another divisive doctrine. Some, if not many, Christians wonder if it is a gift for every believer and whether there are any implications for not having it. Believers in this gift continue to wonder whether anyone can survive as, or even be, a believer if she or he does not subscribe to this gift and would not seek/desire it. The relevance or otherwise of the unintelligibility of speaking in tongues (glossolalia) is a challenge. Some equate speaking in tongues to being filled with the Holy Spirit. These, and many other issues on the Holy Spirit are agitating the minds

of the young people. To many Methodists, the church has been overly silent about this doctrine and may be treating the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a “no-go” area. Because of this problem, some members maintain membership in more than one church, and others have left the church altogether. Holding multiple memberships is the better of the two evils, however, it may lead to lack of a serious commitment to either church.

There is also a problem with the content of worship and the types of songs a Methodist congregation sings. According to the youth, the church sings outmoded hymns. One, however, wonders whether the problem about the hymns is related to their lyrics or the music. Some of the youth are of the view that these hymns to be replaced with contemporary worship songs. Is the church in a position to do away with its heritage just because a group of members feels it is outmoded? If not, how should these and many other questions be handled in an attempt to satisfy the group that expresses concerns? It is worrisome to learn of Robert C. Fuller revelation that a large number of Americans identify themselves as *Spiritual but Not Religious*. (5) I wonder how comfortable such individuals can be when partaking in formal worship where some supposedly divisive doctrines and practices are being promoted through practice.

Church Discipline and Authority

Setran asserts young people hold “negative perceptions of the church” (92). Furthermore, David Kinnaman and David Lyons in their book, *Unchristian*, hold the view that young people “enjoy challenging the rules.” (21). Therefore, what is the response from the young people about church discipline and authority? It takes humility to be part of a community. Kinnaman and Hawkins reveal humility as an essential ingredient lacking in youth (118). When a group the church is struggling to connect with

are expected to recognize and accept church discipline and authority, the situation becomes more challenging (201).

Some members believe the church is an environment where one should have the liberty to do, as one pleases. Those who think along those lines, root their reason in their understanding of 2 Corinthians 3:17 which says that “where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty.” They misconstrue discipline to be human-engineered suppression. The call for submission, as in Ephesians 5:21, “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” can be perceived as a threat to the “newfound independence” of this stage of life. (Setran 90)

The stance of young people on church discipline and the exercise of its authority in this era of liberal theology is worth noting. Are church discipline and authority acceptable? And, could exercising them be perceived as seeking to morally judge other people? Many young people consider such exercise to be wrong since “nobody has the right to think or tell anybody what to do” (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 23). Besides, since it is purported that the young people only mirror the adult members (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 108), I wonder if they could be blamed. Prevailing conditions in and out of the church are rendering the young people “touchable,”. One wonders whether they can be corrected when they err without losing them to the church.

Discipleship and Spiritual Growth

The church is assigned the duty of discipling converts to ensure spiritual growth. This calls for painstaking effort and time. Relevant issues on discipleship are discussed.

Identity Formation

The Church in propagating the good news has to identify those who respond to it, as converts and put a program in place to disciple them (Matthew 28:19-20). Discipleship is indispensable in the life of the church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer affirms it through his assertion that “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ” (50). In effect, discipleship is “Christ-formation” – the congregants becoming Christ-like. The church or community of believers creates space for discipleship which includes preaching. According to Matt Flemming in his article titled, “Overture Becoming Church: Preaching Role in the Transfiguration” preaching is a means for the Spirit “to work in congregants to create a new conception of themselves” (2). This affirms Christian identity formation as a work of the Spirit accomplished through the propagation of the Word. Preaching is an integral part of the worship life of a church. Availability of any individual is key to reaping the spiritual benefits of preaching.

Every Christian or member of the Body of Christ is primarily a disciple, as we endeavor to be formed in the image of Christ. Disciples are lifetime learners of Christ. Discipleship is lifelong. Dale M. Coulter asserts “the ultimate goal of salvation remains the complete transformation of the person” (191). Talking about an ultimate goal suggests a process. Allan C. Weissenbacher collaborates, “Christian conversion is a process involving normal human biological capacities characterized by a change in social-moral attitude and behavior (virtue acquisition) as facilitated by community participation” (348). The convert has a role to play in responding (mentally) to the Gospel and that experience could be instantaneous. Gradual growth is then ensured by the community of faith in which she or he grows through the process of discipleship. I

believe the Methodist Community is a rich community of faith. It is a predominantly singing community with songs rich in theology which engender matchless devotion in singers (Adamthwaite 94).

Many experts seek to suggest and affirm that young people together with all other members should be available to be discipled. Discipleship transforms. Stephen Bevans in his article titled, “Transforming Leadership” reveals the key to this transformation. To him, it is to be found in the very meaning of the word disciple and its implications for a disciple. Among others, “The disciple is one who *learns*, who *constantly sits* at the feet of the teacher (in Latin *magister* or *magistra*), who is *constantly on the journey* of wisdom and knowledge as the teacher teaches her or him” (Emphasis mine) (76). The constant exposure of a disciple to Christ would certainly bring about a transformation or identity formation, as it did for the disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Bevans aptly affirms “The disciple *accompanies* the teacher, *follows* the teacher, *imitates* the teacher, *practices* what the teacher does, *learns* from her or his mistakes as she or he slowly and sometimes with difficulty learns the teacher’s wisdom, integrity, and way of life” (Emphasis mine) (76).

This identity formation or discipleship has a starting and ending point in Christ. He calls and gets one to doggedly follow on (Mark 1:17-18; John 15:5c; Acts 26:19). The starting point in the call to discipleship is critical for any form of progress in pursuit of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” It affirms that the starting place for the identity formation is, one’s personal and authentic salvation in Christ. One has to be a disciple in order to be discipled. A personal, life-transforming encounter with Christ is what begins the process of true discipleship. Bevans and other

experts should lay appropriate emphasis on the personal salvation in Christ, as the starting point of discipleship.

The title of Bevans' paper suggests that the world is transformed through discipleship. Individuals make up the world. This raises some important questions. Will the individual who is submitting to discipleship truly be transformed? How do discipleship and transformation relate to a church's programs when some on its membership rolls are apparently living untransformed lives? Is the church engaged in discipling persons who have truly been born again? The issues that are most crucial to the youth religious culture are religious practices, experiences, beliefs, and interests. These are not widely discussed in literature. Instead the literature is more focused on external issues such as religious affiliations, service attendance, and group participation (Smith, Denton, et al., *Soul Searching* 610) which may be referred to as external issues.

Teaching Ministry

In view of the "rapidly changing" (Kinnaman and Hawkins 21) trends in the world, a teaching ministry is a very basic necessity in the life of the church. The Methodist Church has structures in place to help promote this ministry of the church. It has catechism and confirmations for children as they become teens. But as suggested by Kinnaman and Hawkins, the established trends may need renewal, "not because we need new theology" but because the "current forms" are ineffective (13). The term "forms" must be clearly defined. While the church may need to revise its methods of teaching and its approach to discipleship, it does not need a new theology.

According to Ruth Haley Barton et al. church exists primarily for the spiritual formation of its members (296). Lack of depth in knowledge can take its toll on

members. Smith and Snell point out that college is able to corrode religious faith of young people (248). Absence from home or family church is enough reason for loss of faith despite the proliferation of student-friendly, student-based evangelistic ministries on campuses.

The teaching ministry is crucial in every church. The period between the time the child is baptized to coming of age to confirm her or his faith should be filled with quality teaching, in and out of church. Arnett asserts quite a high percentage of many young people in church were given “‘high exposure’ to religious training in childhood” (174). However, if the “high exposure” is to formalities and rituals without substance it becomes problematic. Young believers need to understand the biblical insights behind their beliefs and practices.

Kinnaman and Hawkins note that the majority of American adults who “identify as Christians because they had formative experiences as a child or as a teenager that connected them to Christianity” now see it as being more related to their cultural identification than with deep faith (23). They further assert “overall, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine, and church history is poor among most Christians” (27) Kinnaman and Hawkins mean ‘Christians’ with no reference to any denomination My personal dealings with various denominations suggest the dearth of knowledge may be more critical with orthodox members than Pentecostals and Charismatics. The members of the latter group seem to be better in what I may refer to as ‘working knowledge’ of the Scriptures.

Kinnaman and Lyons reveal that less than ten percent of young adults mention faith, as their top priority (23). People, including the youth, have negative images about

the church. Some of these views include hypocrisy among members, overly focused on getting members, being anti-homosexual, being sheltered and out of touch with world around, being too political, being insensitive, being boring, claiming exclusivity in matters of faith, and being judgmental. (29-30, 34) As Kinnaman and Lyons note, these views should be of concern to the church. Startling statistics indicate that these views are popular among many youth both in and out of the church. A lot of the young people easily identify with the popular views and feel comfortable about embracing the prevalent opinions. They are views that can easily affect an individual's commitment to the church and lead the person to doubt the exclusivity of salvation through Christ (50). The negative views of the church may have some truth, but young people use the negativity as an escape route to justify their latent desire to stay out of church and rationalize their loss of confidence in the very institution of the church. Kinnaman and Hawkins acknowledge this, but they refer institutions, in general, not only the church (14).

Currently, many young people may not be able to distinguish the difference between the basis for some moral truth and the effects of living according to it. This inability to discern is pointed out by Smith et al. (*Lost in Transition* 39) The teaching ministry helps to provide the right foundation as it did for Daniel and his three friends in Babylon.

The other challenge the church grapples with is related to human resources. Probably, in the area of availability of the resources as well as their acceptance by the very members they would have to serve. A prophet is "without honor" in her or "his own country" (Mark 6:4). It is no surprise that many young persons become disillusioned with

their home church and perceive that what happens elsewhere is better and more attractive and leave their church.

Truth: Subjective or Objective?

The Lord of the Church is Truth personified, according to John 14:6. Therefore, his Church can only thrive on Truth. The most relevant question posed by Pilate to Jesus during his trial still resonates in our world. Pilate asked, (John 18:38). “What is Truth?” (John 18:38). The Bible reveals that Jesus had said in John 14:6 that He is the Truth. This assertion should settle any argument on whether truth is subjective or objective. Going by Jesus’ declaration, truth is objective. Jesus, being the Word personified (John 1:1) should imply the Word of God is Truth. It is asserted that “truth is not a concept that works but an incarnation that works.” (White 82). The relationship between the Word and the Lord, as far as Truth is concerned is affirmed by Bonhoeffer who says “only those who follow Jesus and cleave to him are living in complete truthfulness” (125). I fully subscribe to this view of exclusivity of truth in Christ despite being in a pluralistic world. To Bonhoeffer, “the commandment of complete truthfulness is really only another name for the totality of discipleship” (125). Therefore, the utmost importance of discipleship in the life of the church cannot be overemphasized. Discipleship is best accomplished through the church. First and second generation Ghanaian youth may not be ready to accept this exclusive truth.

The current cultural view of “Forget the Church, Follow Jesus” (Setran 82) among young people poses a serious challenge to discipleship. The church needs to examine its approach to discipleship and discover why the youth want to reject the church but follow Jesus. Technological access that allows youth to experience and examine

content originating from “nonbiblical world views” gives them reason to “question the nature of truth.” (Kinnaman and Hawkins 42) Kinnaman and Hawkins further assert that “the next generation is growing up in a culture in which the authority of the Christian community and obedience to Scripture are much less present in their developmental experiences” (51).

In this postmodern era, the Church itself is challenged to accept the assertion of exclusivity of salvation in Christ, and the challenge is even greater for the youth many of whom are quite shallow in the Word. Because the church lacks depth in the Word, truth is perceived as subjective (Smith and Snell 49) and the subjectivity has shaken core beliefs in the church. To a large majority of emerging young adults, “morals are relative.” (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 27) Many members are left confused and cannot endure any objectivity. According to Robert K. Martin, the sacraments are major means of grace. He especially emphasizes the Lord’s Supper which he calls “the means of grace par excellence.”(29) Many modern-day church members do not agree. In their view, the Lord’s Supper is mere ritualistic, “having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5). Such members either stay in the church but maintain outside links in search of the truth, or they leave entirely to search for the “non-existent” truth out there. The young ones are gullible. They are easy prey and many are not ready to observe any boundaries in search of what would convince them is truth.

Human Resources and Leadership

Habits are formed in communities. Fortunately, the church is never about an individual but rather a gathering of two or more (Matthew 18:20). Therefore, human

resources and leadership become relevant in the life of the church. They are discussed under community of believers, role modelling, and internal leadership.

The Community of Believers

The church, as an institution, has need of human resources to carry out its program or agenda. The human resources should involve the youth to sustain the life of the church (Timothy 1:5). The loss of the young people to the church just because they relocate could smack of apostasy. The Bible says to taste of the blessing and gift of salvation and then turn away from it, is tantamount to apostasy (Hebrews 6:4-7). However, if the Hebrew youth had denied their faith, most would have assumed that they had not tasted of the goodness of God, at all. It was possible to be an Israelite by birth but not by a personal faith in God. Similarly, a person can be a church member but have no personal faith in the Lord – a situation that can be applicable to any member, including young people.

Dedication and devotion to discipleship training by true believers in the church will turn disciples into disciplers. The training should involve developing spirituality of the members. The church is a spiritual institution and requires people of the Spirit to lead in various capacities. The experience on the Day of Pentecost is indicative of the indispensable role of the Spirit of God in the life of the Church. The disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit (Acts 1:4).

The church should consciously involve the Spirit in everything it does. The Spirit is the indispensable Resource in the life of the church. Members and leaders must be taught to depend on Him by developing a dedicated and committed prayer and study life (Acts 6:4). Learning to depend on the Spirit requires time and discipline, but for many

young people time is an essential commodity, and it is difficult to be available for spiritual development. Many of the sixteen to twenty-five year-old attend school and work at the same time, and the little time they may have at their disposal is channeled into social or academic of commitments.

Role Modelling

Proverbs 27:17 reveals, “Iron sharpens iron.” The members of the church must be there for one another, as members (Galatians 6:2). Role models are necessary “to form a concrete picture of the moral life” (Setran, 157) to the up and coming ones. Through the art of role modelling, human beings are available for others to look up to. Kinnaman and Hawkins’ assert that “disciples are handmade, one relationship at a time,” (13) and role modelling should be a vital aspect of discipleship. Role modeling requires time, availability and intentionality on the side of the role model. Members fall into various categories when it comes to faith levels of experience. All human beings ‘have sinned’ and fallen “short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Individual members respond to the good news at different times. Church membership comprises members at different levels of growth and the older members are expected to help bring up the younger in age and in faith.

For the role models not to turn themselves into “tin gods,” it must be crystal clear that the role models are not Jesus! Allen J. and Mary Elizabeth Moore seek to create that awareness in their article, “The Transforming Church: Education for a lifestyle of Discipleship.” They write, “discipleship is a lifestyle of following” (51) but they lay appropriate emphasis on the following and whom to follow (54). Being clear on this issue is critical for both the follower and the role model. It brings perspective to the follower

and frees the role model from unnecessary human-generated burdens of having to be “sinless” to justify the position of a role model.

Physical age may also come into play when dealing one with another. The young people may look up to the elderly for direction, regardless of the soundness of the latter’s faith. Young people may assume every church member is a Christian in the true sense of the word and feel “safe” looking to the older people for guidance. Guides to help in discipling, coaching, and mentoring youth but do not exist (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition* 69). A person’s physical age is no guarantee that the person has corresponding spiritual maturity. However, the young people may not see the lack of spiritual maturity. To them, every mature member of the church could be a role model. The young people in the church may perceive the church to be nothing more and nothing less than a place for “saints” who are Christ-followers.

The young people expect the elderly to live out their word with zero tolerance for any hint of hypocrisy. However, the sixteen to twenty-five year old Ghanaian are unlikely to find “perfect” people in the church, and this could lead to the conclusion that the church is an institution of “bastions of corruption and hypocrisy”. (Arnett 173) These young people may fail to realize the church is a community that “is not marked by its perfection but rather by its reconciling love, grace-laden forgiveness, and utter dependence on a Savior” (Setran 95). As Paul said, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7). The recognition that human beings are prone to failure does not exonerate the adult members from living above reproach. They should remain accountable to the young people. If they fail to live up to Biblical standards and the expectations of the youth, it is devastating.

Internal Leadership

Whether the sixteen to twenty-five year-old Ghanaians stay or leave the church could depend on leadership. “Leadership is necessary for the health and vitality of congregations,” according to Anthony B. Robinson. (31) However, this raises question about the effectiveness of leadership, the implications of poor leadership, and the type of leadership that will encourage the youth to remain in the church. In their book, *The Starfish and the Spider*, Ori Brafmann and Rod A. Beckstrom suggest, as central theme the possibility of a “leaderless environment”. This possibility of a “leaderless environment” in the life of a church must be examined in the light of Scripture. The implications are that a desire for a “leaderless environment” is not possible in any “good” church, and, the young people who demand it would be quickly disillusioned. Young people need leadership so as ensure a future for the church. Neglecting leadership will result in a “man problem in the church.” (“The Leadership of the Boys” 4). Paul John Isaak in his review of Knud Jorgensen’s book, *Equipping for Service: Christian Leadership in Church and Society* emphasizes the church’s responsibility to “equip leaders who will guide congregations” (Isaak 124). This call unto responsibility is non-debatable.

The genuine desire of adult members to see the young ones continue in the life of the church brings responsibilities and challenges to the adult members. White asserts that leaders/mentors should be “caring, experienced, and faithful” (33). Sacrifices made by the adults are worth it since a young person’s “spiritual trajectory is confirmed and clarified,”...and “faith switching is most likely to occur between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine” (Kinnaman and Hawkins 31-2).

Pressure that adult members have from other commitments such as their family and work can be so great they can barely find time for effective leadership and mentoring. In addition to the time constraints, the way of life of some adult members can be questionable, and far from faultless. In dearth of these resources, young people may look elsewhere, and that could be outside the church. If they would derive their leadership from outside the Body of Christ, it could spell doom. For instance, in the area of love and sex, Arnett asserts that many young people in America “will have a number of love partners in their late teens and early twenties before settling on someone to marry” (Arnett 73). Arnett further indicates the astronomical figures of about eighty percent of American college students engage in premarital sexual intercourse (Arnett 75). Furthermore, since 1960, virginity until marriage has ceased to exist as an ideal for most emerging adults (Arnett 85). One may contend that this is a global problem and the liberal nature of society makes it easier to fall victim to, but the church offers them no godly role models and/or leadership examples to follow.

Fellowship and Numerical Growth

Church exists for fellowship. And, as 1 John 1:3 points out the fellowship is with God and one another. We grow in fellowship to know God and ourselves. Three aspects of significance to fellowship and numerical growth are, hereby, discussed.

Fellowshipping – To Know and Make Him known

The Spirit of God descended on the day of Pentecost and gave life to the church. Fellowshipping together was a basic element of the life of the Church. The Book of Acts of the Apostles tells what things made up the life of the Church (Acts 2:42-47). In talking about fellowshipping, this book in the Bible says the Church had all things in common

and they tried to meet every member's need, in accordance with available resources (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35). The care, the concern, and the practical love in and among the members of the church were palpable, and the church grew numerically. There was addition, not subtraction (Acts 2:47). The young men among them like Stephen did not leave. He could have left. No one was forcing him to stay, but he chose not to leave. The church environment had, and should have, an inviting and welcoming atmosphere.

One basic and unique quality in such Christian fellowship is the unity of purpose. However, today the "teens and twentysomethings and the church are living in the tension of deep cultural change" (Kinnaman and Hawkins 57). The fact that the church is making an effort to express care, concern and love, but the youth in the church may not accept it as being enough.

As Ezekiel Lesmore Gibson reveals that Africans (including Ghanaians) are religious and have been even before the advent of missionaries (Gibson 160). Ghanaians desire to have the young people stay in the church when they travel overseas. They have a religio-cultural disposition to remain in church. They also respond to the Lord's command to never neglect fellowship and always be available to spread the Good News of the Gospel. The sustainability of that "spiritual" disposition is called into question when the "religious" African travels overseas and lives in an environment where an individual can barely find time for oneself.

Worship Environment

In Paul's letters to the churches, he often had cause to warn them about sins. Christians who were sinning could still be part of the church. Galatians 5:15 affirms this assertion. Biting and devouring of one another which could lead to consumption. Such

attitudes create a hostile environment for worship. Young people who look up to the older members for inspiration may not be able to stand such a toxic environment, especially, if the older members are guilty and their harsh attitudes are aimed at the young people. Gossip, judgmental spirit, dissensions, unforgiveness and the like are easily noticed, and they can offend young people and ultimately push them out of church.

Due to the humanness of members, these sins are bound to rear their ugly heads. Whatever sins members of the church commit, the young people should stay in the fellowship. According to W. P. Meroney, “religious instruction...is the fountain of all right morals” (405). Meroney’s article was published 100 years ago and society has changed a lot in the last 100 years, I, however, cannot agree more that the most needful religious instruction is taught in worship environment.

The church is needed for “identity formation development” (Setran 70) . Hence, ensuring that the youth remain in the community of believers is critical. Robert C. Fuller affirms that the “unchurched spirituality” is able to “reshape the personal faith of many who belong to mainstream religious organizations” (9). Therefore, staying out of fellowship makes them more prone to be influenced by the unchurched. The church rather than college campus should provide the group setting for identity formation of young people. Setran identifies church as one of “bulwarks of identity” (Setran 79) The church should be the most reliable among the other bulwarks of identity. The church is uniquely gifted with Christ-centered truth, and it also has other bulwarks of identity, including families, schools, and friends, incorporated in it.

Singleton et al. point out it is generally accepted that any church-based youth ministry thrives on “three essential parts” namely, “a dedicated faith development

component, service to others, and fun/interest.”(37) I concur. However, the temptation is for the commitment of the youth to lean towards fun/interest. They are more centered on “entertainment model” than a “contemplative model” to borrow these appropriate terms from Sahaya G. Selvam (“Abstracts” 5). People live in a fun-filled world. Ability to keep a more “contemplative model” than “entertainment model” should be explored to see how it can be sustained.

Growing and Showing Evidence

The church has the responsibility to help members grow spiritually. Evidence of growth is seen in their (members) individual response to the Great Commission. Proper response certainly leads to numerical growth. A member gives birth to spiritual children when she or he shares the good news and gets people to respond. In natural life, only the matured reproduces. Believers are to “desire for the sincere milk of the Word” (1 Peter 2:2) so they can grow. Lack of growth is costly to the church. Members are prone to be blown away by any wind of doctrine since they cannot endure solid truth (Hebrews 5:12-14). Numerical strength goes down and the “labor force” is correspondingly affected.

The church should get members to grow and show evidence of growth through active evangelism. Lack of evangelism or inactivity is counter-productive. A lack of vibrant evangelism costs the commitment of members, including the young people. God has a mission, and according to Peter White and Cornelius J.P. Niemandt, “all Christians, churches and congregations are called to be” engaged in it vibrantly (242).

Church members are key for numerical growth of the church. However, when the church is confronted with exodus of its members, including young people, it is a matter of concern. The church must keep its members which constitute the “labor force” to be

able to address the plentiful harvest (Luke 10:2; John 4:35). However, most mission statements are only words that appear on the pages of documents on shelves.

Gaines S. Dobbins reveals that the efficiency of a church is established by how well it compares to the model of the church in Acts of the Apostles (377). The original church's efficiency should be upheld. The outcome of the early church's efficiency was the spiritual and numerical growth of the church (Acts 2:47). If the modern-day church is struggling to retain members, then something is not working well and must be ready to take responsibility for the trend.

Research Design Literature

As indicated by Tim Sensing, by means of “purposeful sampling”, (Sensing 83) the “stakeholders” (Berg 226) were resident ministers, church leaders, youth organizational leaders, active and non-active youth members, and the parents of the young people. The estimated maximum number of participants was sixty. This number was “flexible and emergent” at the early stages of the design (Patton and Patton 247). These diverse individuals constituted “multiple investigator triangulation” (Berg 38). They were from the same geographic area as the concentration of the project. Research was culturally specific and contextual. It was applied research. (Patton and Patton 217, 224).

The project used “maximum variation sampling” (Sensing 84) (Patton and Patton 234) in selecting participants. They came from “a broad range of perspectives” (Sensing 84), and “if divergent people share core experiences, then the discovery is of greater significance in” (Sensing 84).

To gather qualitative data this project employed multiple data-gathering techniques referred to as data triangulation (Berg 6, 38). The techniques included online questionnaires (Berg 97), semi-standardized interviews (Berg 95), and focus groups (Berg 145, 152). To ensure effective communication, better understanding of questionnaires, and clarity, participants outside of Columbus were contacted by telephone (Berg 108) before questionnaires powered by Google Form were sent to them. Collected data was inductively analyzed to reveal and interpret patterns, themes, and anomalies (Creswell 175, 183).

Summary of Literature

Selecting Daniel 1:1-20, as the passage for my biblical foundation, I looked at the research with socio-cultural and religious lenses.

From the Literature Review, Ghanaian researchers led the discussions on “Migration and Culture.” Ghanaian population in the US is growing through migration [(Tetteh) and (Kumi-Yeboah)] with a corresponding growth in churches and sects [(Asimpi), (Opoku-Dapaah), and (Dako-Gyeke)]. The motivations for migration and church founding are numerous and complex (Tetteh) but economic reasons are paramount. The foreignness of US culture to a typical first generation Ghanaian is certain and comes with various responses [(Nida), (Arnett), (Setran), (Smith et al., “Mapping”), (Smith and Snell), (Tenkorang and Adjei), (Fuller), (Dobson), and (Keller)].

Another socio-cultural issue for the age range of sixteen to twenty-five discussed in this project is “Transitioning and Its Challenges”. The young stage of life comes with many serious transitioning challenges that can be more difficult for a migrant [(Arnett), (Smith et al., “Mapping”), and (Kinnaman and Hawkins)]. Such challenges can lead to

various forms of temptations. (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*). When a youth has matured enough, she or he is better able to address the temptation he or she faces. Immaturity can spell doom for the youth and make it difficult for him or her to reach his or her potential (Arnett).

The final major area of research under the socio-cultural lens is “Familial, Educational and Congregational Characteristics.” Ghanaians thrive on deep familial and communal values (Takyi and Oheneba-Sakyi). Such values are comparable to what pertains in many congregations (Regnerus et al.). This comparison and/or continuity in values favors first generation Ghanaian young persons. If they still leave the church, then the forces at work may be more than just communal values.

Under “Religious Issues and Challenges”, my research led me to four main themes. First is “Doctrines and Practices.” The belief systems of the Methodist Church that have been working may not be based on doctrines of its own (Hunter). These belief systems could go either way in their acceptance or rejection by a modern-day worshipper. Rejection of any kind has rippling effects on other aspects of the life of the church and raises difficult questions [(Wilson), (Coulter), (Heller), (Fuller), (Setrans), (Kinnaman and Lyons), (Kinnaman and Hawkins), and (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*)].

“Discipleship and Spiritual Growth” is the next main theme. Discipleship is identity of Christ formation [(Bonhoeffer), (Flemming), and (Coulter)]. It is a community-based process [(Weissenbacher) and (Adamthwaite)] and a lifelong journey to be sustained by a teaching ministry [(Bevans), (Kinnaman and Hawkins), (Barton et al.), (Smith and Snell), and (Arnett)]. If the church is engaged in a discipleship/teaching ministry, it should be very relevant to society [(Kinnaman and Lyons), (Kinnaman and

Hawkins), and (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*)]. Transformation from discipleship is a lived experience. Church ought to make time for consistent teachings. Truth seems compromised due to its wrong understanding [(White), (Bonhoeffer), (Setran), (Kinnaman and Hawkins), (Smith and Snell), (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*), and (Martin)].

Another main theme is “Human Resources and Leadership.” The community of believers is a work-in-progress for all its members and never a finished product. The needed and expected ideal role model or leader is non-existent. Role modelling and leadership are basic necessities [(Setran), (Kinnaman and Hawkins), (Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*), (Robinson), (Isaak), (Arnett)]. Every member is a follower. The church gives no license for excesses, but it makes room for humanness. [(Moore), (Arnette), (Setran), (White), (Kinnaman and Hawkins)].

The final main theme is “Fellowship and Numerical Growth”. Christian fellowship should be engaging but if there is a disconnection between the church and a group of its members fellowship becomes difficult [(Kinnaman and Hawkins), and (White and Niemandt)]. The “naturally spiritual” disposition of the African including the Ghanaian should be an aid in the continuity in faith when there is relocation (Gibson, 2016). “Clean” worship environment is a necessity even though congregants are sinners saved by grace and growing as disciples. Faith in Christ is a lived experience for all. [(Meroney), (Setran), (Fuller), (White), (Singleton et al.) and (Dobbins)].

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter looks at the nature and purpose of the project. It is a pre-intervention project that looks at the involvement of the youth ages sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States of America, and how their involvement can be improved. The chapter further states how the research questions were addressed. It also examines with much detail the ministry context, identifies the participants, explains how and why they were chosen, and discusses the types of instrumentation used for the project. Finally, the chapter looks at the data collection and analysis in detail.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

It is a pre-intervention project in the Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the United States of America and Canada. The presence of Methodist congregations of Ghanaian descent is growing in North America and especially in the United States of America. Membership in Ghanaian congregations comprises all generations. However, members between the ages sixteen and twenty-five present some intriguing dynamics. The research explores the participation and commitment of youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five to the Ghanaian churches. Participants in the project were drawn from the church's leadership and the active and non-active members of the church. Among the participants were both clergy and laity including the parents of active and non-active youth members and several active and non-active youth members of the church.

The purpose of this project was to study the current levels of participation and commitment among youth ages sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States to determine best practices for improving levels of participation and commitment among this age group.

Research Questions

There are three Research Questions for this project. These are, hereby, restated together with details on steps taken to have them answered.

RQ #1. In the opinion of pastors, lay leaders, youth leaders and youth in the church, what aspects of the church's ministry contribute to the levels of participation and commitment among youth ages sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

To answer this question, I attached a researcher-designed questionnaire powered by Google Form to six selected resident ministers, five lay leaders, six national youth executives, eleven local youth executives and members, and five parents of active and inactive youth of Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the United States. I collected data on aspects of church ministry contributing to levels of participation and commitment among the designated group. Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20, 21 and 29 were framed to bring out answers to address RQ 1. Questions 29 and 28 were re-numbered as 2 and 5 respectively and included in the list of questions for interviews. The semi-structured interviews further explored the question and gave greater perspectives on various aspects of RQ1.

RQ #2. In the opinion of pastors, lay leaders, youth leaders and youth in the church, what current or missing aspects of the church's ministry contribute most to declining levels of participation and commitment among youth ages sixteen to

twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

To answer research question two, I attached a researcher-designed questionnaire powered by Google Form to six selected resident ministers, five lay leaders, six national youth executives, eleven local youth executives and members, and five parents of active and inactive youth of Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the United States. I collected data to help unearth missing aspects of church ministry contributing to declining levels of participation and commitment among the designated age group. Questions 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 27 were framed to answer RQ 2. Questions 18, 20, and 21 were re-numbered as 2, 3, and 4 respectively and included in the list of questions for group interviews. Focus groups further explored the questions and gave more perspectives on aspects of RQ2.

RQ #3. What are best practices and strategies moving forward to help increase the levels of participation and commitment among youth ages 16 – 25 in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

To answer this question, I attached a researcher-designed questionnaire powered by Google Form to six selected resident ministers, five lay leaders, six national youth executives, eleven local youth executives and members, and five parents of active and inactive youth of Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the United States. The data that I collected helped reveal the best practices to increase and sustain consistent levels of participation and commitment among the designated group. Questions 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, and 30 were framed to answer RQ 3. I renumbered Questions 24 and 16 as 3 and 4 respectively and included them in list of questions for semi-structured interviews. In addition, I renumbered Questions 25, 30, and 29 as questions 5, 6, and 7 respectively and

included them in the list of questions for the focus groups. This provided more perspectives on certain aspects used to address RQ 3.

Ministry Context(s)

Ghanaians are generally religious and when they migrate they tend to take their religion and/or denomination with them. Because many Ghanaians migrate to the US and Canada there is a growing presence of churches with Ghanaian descent in the United States and Canada. One of the dominant denominations is the Methodist Church. It has since its introduction in Ghana, grown by leaps and bounds and contributed greatly to the spiritual terrain of Ghana. Significant areas of contribution are in education and in the general worship life of the church in Ghana, especially, through its hymns. They have become commonplace in Ghana. Even non-Methodists know and sing most of the popular hymns privately and during corporate worship in their churches.

The congregations of Ghanaian Methodists in the US and Canada belong to either MCG or UMC Conference. The form of worship is about same for congregations from both conferences. The clergy and the laity exercise a joint leadership role over the congregation. Most of members that make up the Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US and Canada used to be members of MCG in Ghana. This explains why Ghanaian congregations under both conferences have similar forms of worship.

Each conference is autonomous, but there are slight differences in the constitutions that govern the affairs of churches under each conference. For instance, the highest decision-making body in any society (called parish in UMC) under MCG is the leaders' meeting which is under the chairmanship of the resident minister. Whereas, in UMC, the highest decision-making body for a parish is the administrative board under the chairmanship of the

board chairman who happens to be a lay person. Therefore, depending on which Conference a particular Ghanaian Methodist congregation is affiliated with, this difference in leadership comes to the fore. However, when it comes to worship, the majority of the members in all Ghanaian congregations were originally members of MCG Conference, and they worship like the church in Ghana worship. Most members are not used to the board of administration system of governance even though the Ghanaian Methodist congregations under UMC Conference use it. Possible abuses are, therefore, not far-fetched.

Many of the ministers of the Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US and Canada are trained, commissioned, and ordained under the Ghana Conference. Even the few trained, commissioned, and ordained under the UMC Conference have followed the practices in MCG prior to their arrival in the US and Canada. As a result, when Ghanaian Methodist members under UMC Conference clamor for the type of worship they were familiar with in Ghana, all ministers seem comfortable to succumb. One major difference with type of worship is related to the tunes and lyrics of hymns. Most Ghanaian Methodist congregations sing the British tunes of the hymns.

Other differences include the youth category. In MCG the youth and the young adults operate under one umbrella known as the youth fellowship. However, in UMC, the distinction is pronounced. The age groups of thirteen to approximately thirty-five operate under two distinct umbrellas. One is the youth ministry for the age groups of thirteen to eighteen, and the other is the young adult ministry for those between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five.

Each Conference has strengths and weaknesses for its system of governance. Fallible human beings put systems into practice. Sir John Dalberg-Acton's best-known remark,

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” comes to mind when looking at the rationale behind these systems. The UMC system of having a board of administration chaired by a lay person with the minister as a member of the board ensures checks and balances. This system prevents the minister from being the sole source of power. It has a laudable purpose, but problems occur when either the chairman or the minister is not in tune spiritually, but the other is. On the other hand, the MCG system could tempt the minister to exercise so much power that it becomes detrimental to the congregation.

Borrow from both conferences to exercise the leadership role of a congregation has its own challenges. The temptation to pick and choose from either of these Conferences could prevent the leaders or the parish from being properly committed to a particular system. Some may argue, “When you go to Rome, do what the Romans do”. Thus, with the relocation some form of changes may need to occur, even if it is a purely MCG congregation. However, changes come with their own challenges that stem from a partial understanding of each system’s possible abuses.

Participants

Participants were drawn from within the Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the US. Some specifics, in terms of gender, Conference membership, position, etc. are, hereby, discussed.

Criteria for Selection

The project looked at the participation and commitment of young members aged sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. The participants were selected by means of purposeful sampling (Sensing 83). Resident ministers, who are stakeholders, were selected. As resident ministers their ministries are affected by the

decision of the youths and young adults to stay in or leave the church. As shepherds with oversight responsibility over the congregation, they were interested in the research. Since the leadership responsibility of the congregation is shared by clergy and laity, lay leaders who should be equally interested in the research were also selected to participate. I selected seven of each from thriving Ghanaian Methodist congregations. For the purpose of this research, I needed at least five of each group to respond to the questionnaire.

The young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five were knowledgeable about the research topic. Within this category, a broad range of perspectives was considered. Leaders of youth organizations in societies or parishes were selected to participate. These selected leaders were knowledgeable about the subject matter and most were within the upper limits of the age range, but some were beyond it (more than twenty-five years old). Additionally, I also selected active and inactive youth members, as participants. They were also stakeholders. To broaden the perspectives, they were of mixed gender, marital status, employment, length of membership, and immigrational (Sensing 84). These participants were direct stakeholders who felt that the research was addressing their concerns.

I also selected parents of active and non-active youth members between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. The parents had some insights to offer about the involvement of this age group in the life of the church. The selected parents were active members of the church and were interested in the research. They were also concerned about the life of the church and were prepared to contribute. The key requirement for selecting the parents was that they be a parent of a youth regardless of the youth's level of education. Finally, all participants were resident in America. The scope of research was limited to Ghanaian

Methodist congregations in the US and Canada. All participants were familiar with the environment, and could contribute by bringing up relevant issues.

Description of Participants

All the ministers who participated in the research were male. No female minister has been posted from Ghana yet, and the few Ghanaian ministers who have been trained in the US under UMC are mostly male. The only female among them is serving a white congregation. One of the ministers was a young adult in his late thirties and just gotten ordained into full connection of MCG. The other was the youth coordinator for a circuit of MCG prior to his commissioning. The rest of the ministers who participated in the project were middle-aged. All the ministers had grown through the ranks of the church till they felt called into the ordained ministry. These ministers were serving the churches in Washington DC; Baltimore, Maryland; Charlotte, North Carolina; Dallas, Texas; Alexandria, Virginia; and Newark, New Jersey. There were three each of the six ministers serving MCG and UMC congregations.

The lay leadership from the diocese participating in the project comprised two females and three males. They had all been in the church all of their lives. The female participants were involved in leadership positions as organizational leader and a society steward. Two of the five participating lay leaders were serving in churches whose ministers were not participants. This allowed me to deal with broadened perspectives, and their perspectives came in as affirmations. Berg points out that multiple data-gathering techniques are “interpreted as a means of mutual confirmation of measures and validation of findings” (6).

The youth participated in the research in different capacities. Youth leaders from the young diocese of MCG in North America, called the North America Mission Diocese (NAMD) of MCG, and youth leaders from the local church were selected to participate. Six Diocesan Youth leaders participated; three each of males and females. I selected twenty-two youth from the local church to participate in the research. These included youth leaders and active and non-active members. Twelve were females, and ten were males. Three of the females were second generation Ghanaians as were two of the males. The rest (both females and males) were first generation Ghanaians. These local youth leaders and members had been in the church from infancy, and all of them had completed high school and were at various levels of college and post-graduate education. Seven were in College with one of them pursuing post-graduate studies. Eight were working after graduation. One was a PhD holder, and used to be a professor in Biochemistry at a University in Ghana.

Sixteen parents who were active members of the church participated. Some of them had offspring who were active in church, whilst some others did not. Their youth were no longer active in the church. Seven of them were females, and nine were males. of Eleven had youth who were active at church whilst the rest did not. Only two of the parents were a couple but each participated in a different tool. The husband was involved in the interview whilst the wife part of the focus group.

Ethical Considerations

The starting point for ensuring confidentiality was to omit the participants' names from the personal information they provided for the questionnaire. Furthermore, participants who responded to the questionnaire were contacted individually and were assured of confidentiality in the introductory remarks. In general, "ethical proprieties such as honesty;

openness of intent; respect for subjects; issues of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the intent of the research; and the willingness of subjects to participate voluntarily in the study” (Berg 39) were ensured through the ‘enforced’ directives of IRB.

Those who participated in the focus group co-signed with the moderators a statement of confidentiality and a consent form. Those who took part in the semi-structured interviews did the same. They were also assured of confidentiality. They received an informed consent letter (Appendix D), that officially informed them about the research and gave them option to participate in the research project or opt out of it.

Data was stored up in my personal computer under a secured password known only to me and the data will be destroyed after graduation.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires (Appendix A) which were researcher-designed, and received expert reviews were mailed to participants. The participants responded to the questionnaires by way of Google Form and returned them. The Questionnaires were answered by resident ministers, lay leaders, national youth leaders, some local church youth leaders and members, and parents. The questionnaires primarily helped answer all the three Research Questions.

Two focus groups comprised of all youth in one, and all parents in the other were organized. They discussed the focus group questions (Appendix C). Each focus group had eight members, and the same two trained moderators led the focus groups. The youth group had four males and four females just like the parents’ group. All participants for this tool were drawn from my local church. The focus groups were used to gather data to help address and gain perspectives on RQs 2 and 3. “Focus groups are an excellent tool

for collecting information from young children and teens, as well as from elderly adults” (Berg 145).

Six people were interviewed from a set of interview questions (Appendix B) to help answer and find more perspectives to RQs 1 and 3. Three were youth, and three were parents. One parent had an inactive youth (child) and one youth was an inactive member. The other two the youth were active members in the church, and the other two parents had children who remain active in the church. The combination of active and inactive helped give more perspectives.

Expert Review

A team of three experts reviewed and approved my researcher-designed assessment instruments. The instruments comprised questionnaires for individual participants, focus groups, and semi-structured Interviews. These are qualitative instruments. The three experts were faculty members of Asbury Theological Seminary, University of Kentucky, and University of Delaware.

They had three to four weeks to critically review the researcher-designed assessment instruments. The experts were specially linked to the research. The faculty member from Asbury Theological Seminary was my dissertation coach whilst the two outside faculty members were committed and dedicated members of two Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. One was a candidate undergoing training to parish ministry whilst the other was a seasoned local preacher. Neither of them was among the selected participants.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

All participants were stakeholders. The participants comprised resident ministers, lay leaders, youth leaders and members, and parents in the Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. Data triangulation was achieved by using three instruments including questionnaires, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews to collect data. “Triangulation in qualitative research can be important to issues of validity.” (Berg 162). Using triangulation was “an effort to strengthen findings and potentially enrich the eventual analysis and understandings” (Berg 227). The questions in all instruments informed the RQs.

Tools employed received expert reviews and approval from three faculty members of Asbury Theological Seminary, University of Kentucky, and University of Delaware. These experts helped make the questions adequately clear to communicate the intended meaning. This was a solution to the “most serious problem with asking questions.” (Berg 102). “In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning the participants hold about the problem or issue, not meaning that the researchers bring to the research ...” (Creswell 175). Therefore, getting participants to understand the question is critical to the reliability of the research.

Data Collection

This research was qualitative and pre-intervention. It was a study of the participation and commitment of young people ages sixteen to twenty-five in the Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. Participants comprised resident ministers, lay leaders, youth (executive and members), and parents of the youth in Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. They contributed to the research by responding to a

researcher-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire had two parts: A demographic section with ten multiple choice questions and twenty-two open-ended questions on issues related to the research questions.

By means of multiple choices, the demographic section used multiple choice questions to obtain personal information from participants. It was a broad range of information that included country of birth; gender; age; resident location; conference of congregation; office or position held; membership commitment level; number of years the society or parish has been in existence; number of years of membership; and level of education. The questionnaire's open-ended questions inquired about aspects of the church's ministry that contribute to the current participation; about missing aspects resulting in a decline in participation; and about the best practices to sustain participation and commitment.

The individuals who answered the questionnaire embodied all participants. In view of that, the questionnaire was designed to shed light on all the three RQs, especially, RQs 1 and 2. To gain more perspectives on each of the RQs, focus groups, also called group interviews, were used with emphasis on finding answers to RQs 2 and 3. There were two focus groups of eight participants each. One for the youth, and the other for the parents. I sought to employ the criterion of homogeneity in the constitution of members for the focus groups (Sensing, 120). Individuals who would not be comfortable in groups were also interviewed to get some more perspectives on RQs 1 and 3. Each RQ had two tools addressing it. RQ1 was addressed by the questionnaire and semi-structured interview; RQ2 was addressed by the questionnaire and focus groups; and RQ3 was addressed by the questionnaire, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The

questionnaires were sent by an email attachment, and the participants were given three to four weeks to respond by means of Google Tool and submit back. For the semi-structured interviews, I kept an interview guide to ensure good use of time, make the process more systematic and comprehensive, and keep me focused on the purpose of the interview (Sensing 107).

Data Analysis

The information collected was raw data. The first step was to arrange the data in an ordered fashion which involved transcribing both the individual and group interviews. It was a verbatim transcription of each answer given by the focus group participants, and it also included all observer notes (Berg 162-3). The second step was to read through all the data to obtain “a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning” (Creswell 185). The final step was to use codes to make a detailed analysis of content and identify trends and patterns. To accomplish this, I examined “the text for similarly used words, themes, or answers to questions” (Berg 163).

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter seeks to report on findings from a research project to discover the reasons for commitment or the lack of commitment of the youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five to Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. The research sought to discover what the congregations were doing right that encouraged the youth to remain committed to the church or what they were doing wrong that caused a decline in the commitment of the youth to the church?

The church has come to stay. The research's purpose was to discover, what the church can do, by way of best practices, to improve upon current trends in commitment. This chapter discusses the research participants and answers each of the research questions. Finally, it gives a summary of major findings.

Participants

A total of fifty-five participants were consulted. The three research tools used to derive data were a questionnaire, focus groups, and individual interviews. The questionnaire was sent to thirty-three participants by means of Google Form. Thirty of them responded but one of the respondents officially declined the invitation to participate. The twenty-nine who participated fully comprised six ministers, five lay leaders, eight youth leaders, six youth, and four parents.

Sixteen participants took part in the two focus groups. Each focus groups had eight participants comprising four males and four females. The members of one of the focus groups were youth, and the members of the other focus groups were parents. They

met separately and interacted with same set of questions. Interactions among participants were recorded with their permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Six participants, three parents and three youths, were interviewed. Three of the interviewees were male and three were female. The same set of questions were used for all interviews. Each interview was conducted separately and recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Later the interviews were fully transcribed for analysis.

Below is the demographic data for better appreciation of each and all of these tools. Other relevant information is displayed graphically.

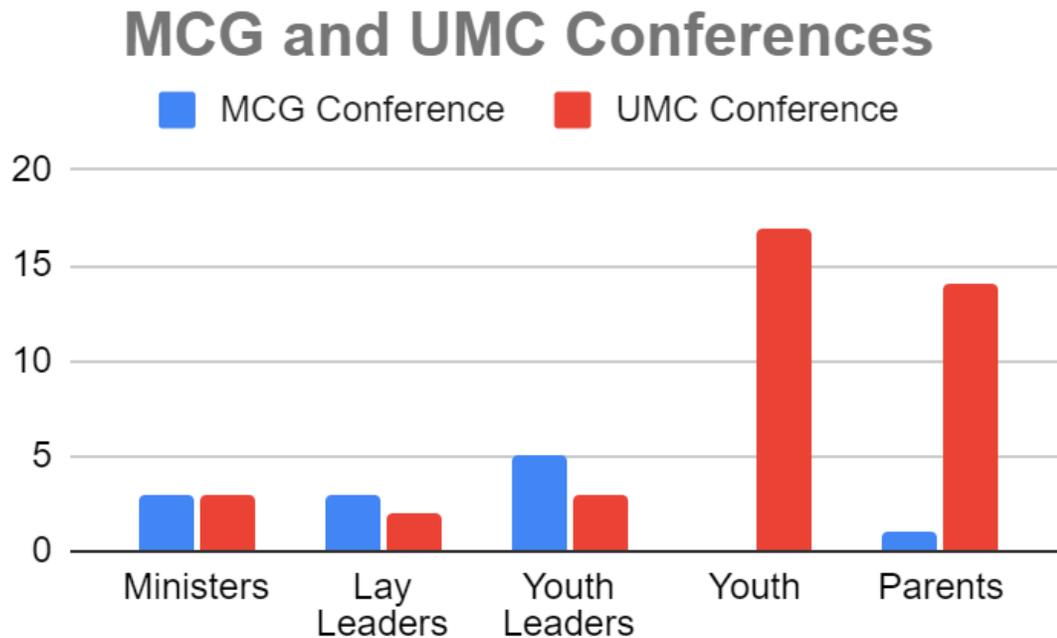


Fig. 1 Graphical description of conference membership for all participants.

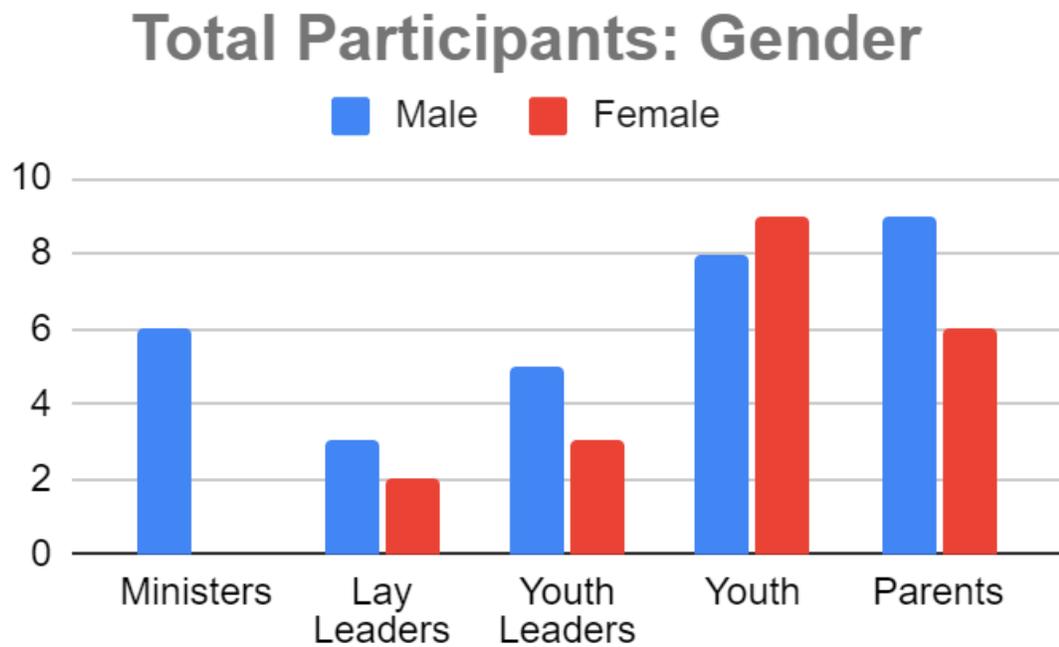


Fig. 2 Graphical description of gender for all participants.

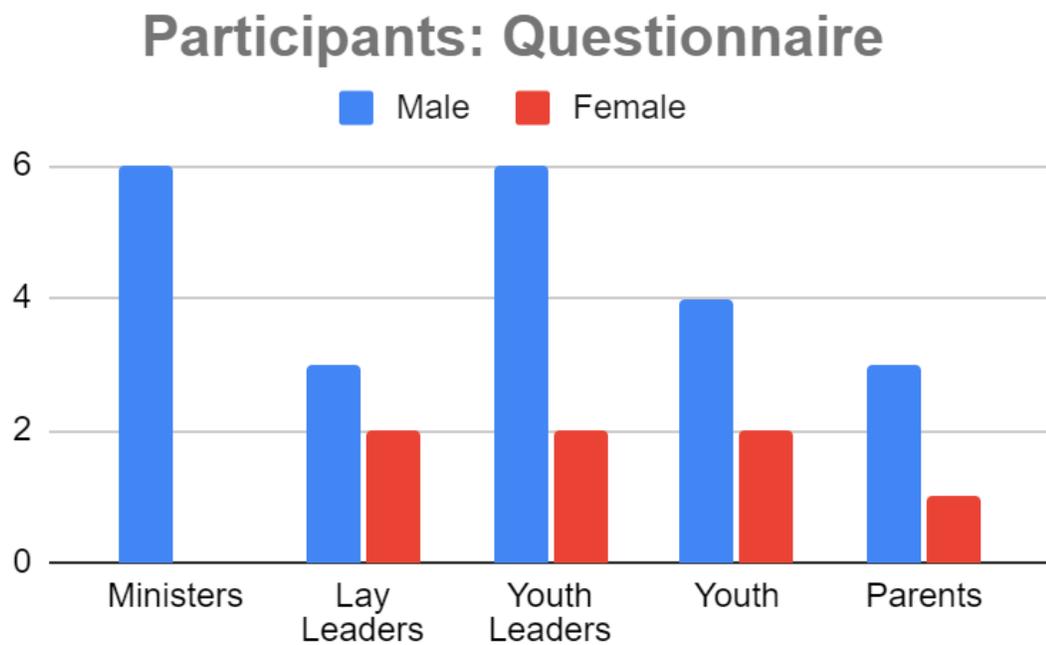


Fig. 3 Graphical expression of participants involved in the questionnaire.

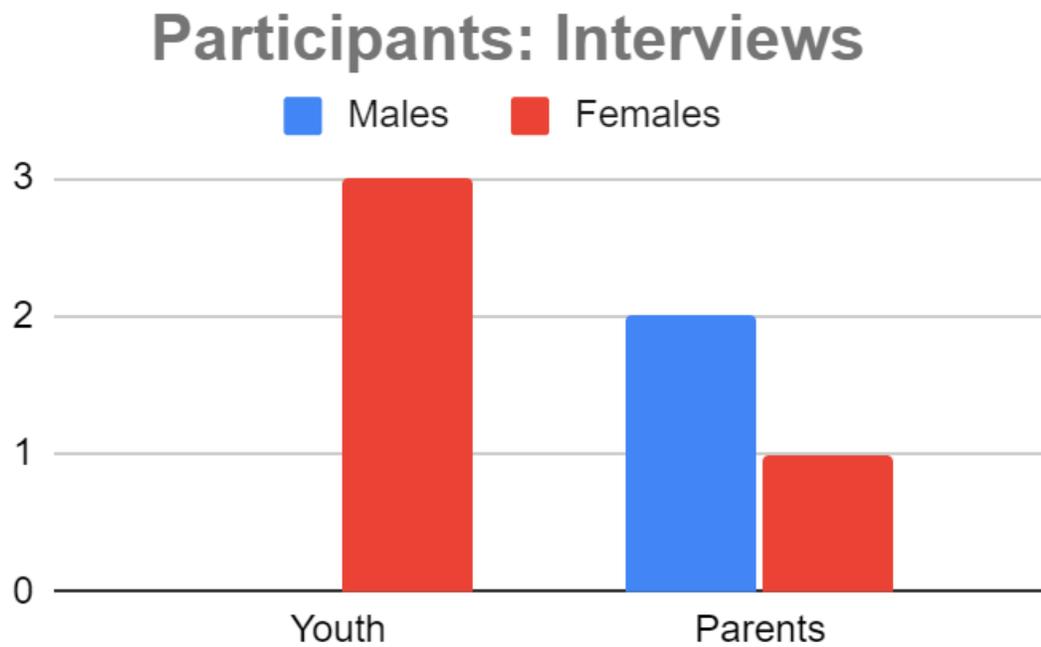


Fig. 4 Graphical expression of participants involved in the interviews.

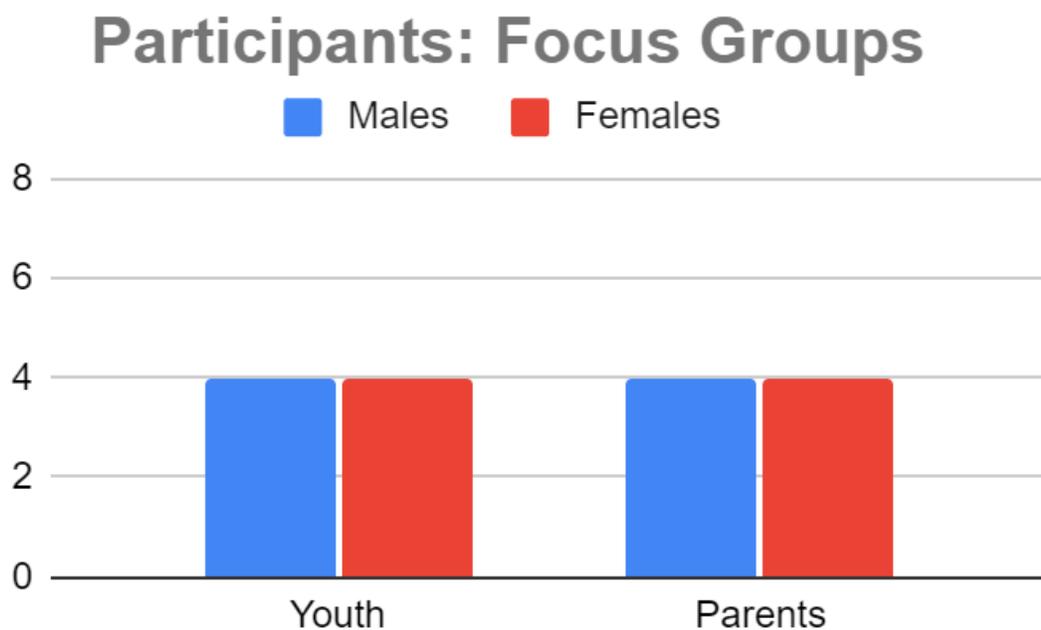


Fig. 5 Graphical expression of participants involved in the focus groups.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

RQ #1. In the opinion of pastors, lay leaders, youth leaders and youth in the church, what aspects of the church's ministry contribute to the levels of participation and commitment among youth ages sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

Questionnaires and interviews were the two tools used to answer Research Question #1. Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20, 21, 28, and 29 on the questionnaire and questions 2 and 5 from the interview addressed the first research question. Questions 29 and 28 on the questionnaire correspond to questions 2 and 5 from the interview.

In the 1st stage of the analysis, responses from the questionnaire are put together for each set of participants in a table format. The 1st of the three-column table has the questions. The 2nd column has the responses from each set of participants. By means of color coding, common and uniform themes (thoughts and ideas) among the responses are found for each set of participants. These common themes for each set of participants per question are put in the 3rd column. Table 4.1. is an excerpt of 1st stage analysis using Q.11.

In the 2nd stage of analysis, with another three-column table, questions are kept in the 1st column then subthemes from all participants per question in the 3rd column of the 1st stage of analysis are brought to the 2nd column of the table for the 2nd stage. By similar color coding, the 3rd column amalgamates the common subthemes identified by each group and lists the overall themes that grow out of subthemes in column 2. Table 4.2. is an excerpt of the second stage of analysis (using Q. 11 and 12).

Table 4.1.: Excerpt of First Stage of Analysis on Questionnaire (using Q.11)

| QUESTIONS | | RESPONSES BY INDIVIDUALS IN EACH CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANTS. | COMMON THEME(S) FOR EACH CATEGORY |
|---|---|---|--|
| Q. 11 <i>What do the 16-25-year-old like (youth) about a typical Sunday church service?</i> | i. | The Fellowship | Worship – Music: singing Fun: dancing Word: Preaching & teaching |
| | ii. | Singing and dancing | |
| | iii. | contemporary music, peer group Bible study | |
| | iv. | Music, dancing, worship and preaching | |
| | v. | Ability to worship and praise God in their own way | |
| | vi. | singing, dancing and when the service is teaching service for them to ask questions. | |
| Clergy | | | |
| Q. 11 Lay Leader | i. | Hang around, play the instruments, sing, make some argument. | Worship – Music: singing Fun: exclusive gatherings, |
| | ii. | The Songs | |
| | iii. | The youth are active in the praise and worship team and after praises, they congregate in the youth room where they have designated leaders and youth service | |
| | iv. | Mostly Association with the peers | |
| Q. 11 Youth Leaders | i. | Praise and Worship | Worship – Music: singing (Praise and worship) Fun: socialization Word: sermons |
| | ii. | The praises and worship | |
| | iii. | Praises and Adoration | |
| | iv. | Opportunities to socialize with age-mates, sermons geared towards to context of their Christian experience | |
| | v. | Unconcerned | |
| | vi. | On a typical Sunday, they seem not to like much, however fairly, when it is, discussion of bible stories or characters appear great. | |
| | vii. | Praise and Worship | |
| | viii. | Interacting with other young adults and youth member in church is a typical activity values by youth and young adult member in the church. Having the common value of learning and sharing the word is the primary goal, however. | |
| Q. 11 Youth | i. | I love the hymns and preaching oh and praises | Worship – Music: singing (praise & worship) Fun: exclusive meetings |
| | ii. | praises and worship | |
| | iii. | The music and the fellowship amongst the youth | |
| | iv. | Music | |
| Q. 11. Parents | v. | Youth Meetings | |
| | i. | Praise and worship | Worship – Music: singing Fun: Socialization |
| | ii. | The singing and socialization | |
| | iii. | Another Sunday to worship their Maker | |
| iv. | They enjoy meeting and sharing within their peers in groups | | |

Table 4.2.: Excerpt of Second Stage of Analysis on Questionnaire (using Q. 11 &12)

| QUESTIONS | SUBTHEMES FOR EACH SET OF PARTICIPANTS | THEME, IF ANY, FROM SUBTHEMES PER QUESTION |
|--|---|--|
| Q. 11 <i>What do the 16 – 25-year old like (youth) about a typical Sunday church service?</i> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Clergy</u></p> Worship – Fun: dancing Music: singing Word: Preaching & teaching | Worship – Fun: exclusive meetings Music: singing; praise & worship Word-based (generally) |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Lay Leaders</u></p> Worship – Fun: exclusive gatherings, Music: singing | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Youth Leaders</u></p> Worship – Music: singing (Praise and worship) Fun: socialization Word: sermons | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Youth</u></p> Worship – Music: singing (praise & worship) Fun: exclusive meetings Word | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Parents</u></p> Worship – Music: Fun: Socialization | |
| Q. 12 <i>Which area(s) in the church do they (youth) tend to show interests, participation, and/or commitment?</i> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Clergy</u></p> Music ministry – Praise Band Word-related programs | Worship: Music Min: Praise and worship Fun: Entertaining |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Lay Leaders</u></p> Music – Praise & Worship Fun | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Youth Leaders</u></p> Music ministry – participating & leading Youth Activities – fun | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Youth</u></p> Worship – Music ministry Fun | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Parents</u></p> Worship – Music Ministry Youth-centered fun | |

Interview Question 2: How do you see the involvement or lack thereof of the youth in the church? What should the church do to keep them active?

Interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Below are excerpts of the transcribed interviews. I draw on responses from two youth members and two parents for same question. The responses from all interviewees for each question were grouped together and analyzed together by means of color coding to establish common themes. One of the youths who is still active in the church emphasized the desire to include fun, games and competition in the youth program.

Answer 1: I think that they should make it more fun because, no offense, but sometimes it's kind of boring. I feel that they should bring things like bible games and competition because us kids we love competition so we want to be like first and also coming with incentives for those competitions. Some are involved and some are not. Some people also come because their parents say you have to come to church because it's Sunday. It will motivate them to come the next week without the parents saying you know (Yth1J).

One of the parents talked about the importance of keeping the youth involved in various activities. He/she made special mention of a leader's efforts to get people involved in the church's band ministry.

Answer 2: Yes, for here I see the involvement that is when they are being encouraged. When the chairman wanted the children to be a part of the band team and kept on announcing to encourage parents and children to be part. Now we can see we have youth part of the band ministry. Meaning they wanted to do it but

didn't know how to go about it. So that initiation of the chairman did very well in calling them out to be part and it was just beautiful (Pt.1A).

Another youth spoke of the need for the church to stimulate the interest of the youth who are easily distracted and make being away at school an excuse for staying away from church. He/she said,

Answer 3: It is almost 50/50. I got the opportunity to talk to them about peer pressure and gender. It was difficult to get their attention. They are either on their phones or talking to others. Their attention span is limited hence parent need to work on them more at home before they come of age. They need to know the essence of coming to church and staying in church. From 20-25 years, they feel they are of age and so to avoid any confrontation about going to church, they chose to go to colleges outside so no one can disturb them about going to church. .Only a few stay focused and stay at church due to their own personal interest. A lot of work needs to be done at different levels to sustain their interest. They can start doing meetings during the week and the teachers should give them continuous stimulus to whet their appetite and keep them involved (Yth1E).

The fourth respondent was a parent who talked about the necessity for punctuality and stressed the need for the church to plan programs that would appeal to the youth.

Answer 4: Majority of the youth are involved in the church. They are committed, but they are not punctual. My observation and thinking is if the church can find something that will interest the youth and probably guide and lead them in that direction, it will be very helpful. Also, if the youth can be taught on time management, it will take them a long way (Pt. 2A).

Themes from analyzing responses by interviewees under each question are tabulated for easy reference in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3.: Subthemes from the Interviews

| QUESTIONS | UNIFORM FINDINGS FROM EACH QUESTION IN THE INTERVIEW | GENERAL REMARKS, IF ANY |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| <i>1. Does the role of the youth (16-25-year-old), need that much attention? Yes, or No; and why do you say so?</i> | | Introductory / Baiting Question |
| <i>2. How do you see the involvement or lack thereof of the youth in the church? What should the church do to keep them active? (Q. 29)</i> | Involvement – lack of intentionality Worship – lack of fun to drive and sustain interests; e.g. active presence | |
| <i>5. What advice would you like to give to find solution to any exodus of the youth from church? (Q. 28)</i> | Worship – boring: lack of music (of American taste) | |
| <i>6. In your opinion, what are the Methodist Church congregations in the US / Canada doing right to sustain participation of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member?</i> | Worship: – lack of active and total involvement e.g. Youth Service – lack of healthy relationship – recognition and engagement | |
| <i>8. Do you have any other relevant comment on their current participation, and best practices, going forward their participation and commitment.</i> | Lack of – Intentionality to involve e.g. roles to play Healthy relationship – interactions, recognition, love & respect | |

Table 4.4 brings together the themes for the corresponding questions in both tools, namely, questionnaire and interviews for comparison and further analysis.

Table 4.4.: Themes from Corresponding Questions from Two Tools

| QUESTIONS | THEMES FROM CORRESPONDING QUESTION IN THE INTERVIEW | THEMES FROM CORRESPONDING QUESTION IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE | COMMON THEMES, IF ANY |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>How do you see the involvement or lack thereof of the youth in the church? What should the church do to keep them active?</i> | Q. 2 Involvement – lack of intentionality Worship – lack of fun to drive and sustain interests; e.g. active presence | Q. 29 Uniform but not so strong (at least a participant from each group indicated lack of involvement) | Worship – content and activity! |
| <i>What advice would you like to give to find solution to any exodus of the youth from church?</i> | Q. 5 Worship – boring: lack of music (of American taste) | Q. 28 Uniform but not so strong (at least a participant from each group indicated lack of involvement) | Worship – content and activity! |

A quote from one youth member in the interview supported a significant view on worship, “Give them (the youth) the chance to express themselves by embracing the American gospel music to the Christian new song they listen to.” Additionally, another youth had this to say, “on first Sundays of every month, they (youth) join the congregation in service.” This latter view seeks to emphasize the place of regular worship in sustaining the youth. A parent had this to say, “They want to be part of what we do and if there is a way, we can modify to meet their need.” Yet another parent intimated through the interview, “Now we can see we have youth part of the band ministry.” This is affirming an area of interest among the youth.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

RQ #2. In the opinion of pastors, lay leaders, youth leaders and youth in the church, what current or missing aspects of the church’s ministry contribute most to declining levels of participation and commitment among youth ages sixteen to

twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

Questionnaires and focus groups were the two tools used to answer this research question. Questions 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 27 on the questionnaire and questions 2, 3, and 4 from focus groups addressed research question two. Questions 18, 20 and 21 on the questionnaire corresponded to questions 2, 3, and 4 in focus groups respectively.

In the 1st stage of the analysis, similar procedure was followed as in RQ1. Responses were put together for each set of participants. The first of the three-column table has the questions. The second column has the responses from each set of participants. The third column identifies the common subthemes among the responses from each set of participants. An excerpt of the 1st stage of analysis is shown in Table 4.5. (using responses to Q.15 from clergy and lay leaders). This table is so large that it requires more than one page. Precisely, three pages. Hence, an excerpt.

Table 4.5: Excerpt on First Stage of Analysis on Questionnaire (using part of Q. 15)

| QUESTIONS | RESPONSES BY INDIVIDUALS IN EACH CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANTS. | COMMON THEME(S) FOR EACH CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANTS |
|---|---|---|
| 15. <i>Do their interests, participation, and/or commitment decrease from age 16 to 25? If yes, what could be the reason?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Yes, and the reason is that they get spread out to different colleges after high school. ii. Yes. Work and being with their families iii. Yes iv. No v. Yes. Seemingly after they go on to College. vi. No | College commitments |
| Clergy | | |
| Q. 15. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Yes. At this age many of whom who may not have left as a result of the absence of their interest will become the embodiment of the Church. Some of them may be occupying positions and they may have understood why things are being done the way they do. ii. Yes, to pursue other interest both in the church and outside iii. Yes, due to school and social media education iv. On occasion, they relocate, get married to someone of a different denomination, attain other affiliations during college and drift away v. yes, mostly during their college age and also due to college peer pressure | Commitment to higher education |
| Lay Leaders | | |

In the 2nd Stage of analysis, by means of a table, I sought to discover the common and uniform themes in each question from all participants. I accomplished this by analyzing together the findings for each set of participants for each question. The outcome (an excerpt) of the second stage of analysis is as in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6.: Second Stage of Analysis on Questionnaire (using Questions 15 and 17)

| QUESTIONS | SUBTHEMES FOR EACH SET OF PARTICIPANTS | THEME, IF ANY, FROM SUBTHEMES PER QUESTION |
|---|--|--|
| 15. <i>Do their interests, participation, and/or commitment decrease from age 16 to 25? If yes, what could be the reason?</i> | <p><u>Clergy</u> College commitments</p> <p><u>Lay Leaders</u> Commitment to higher education</p> <p><u>Youth Leaders</u> Commitment to higher education</p> <p><u>Youth</u> Partly, a commitment to higher education</p> <p><u>Parents</u> Commitment to higher education</p> | Commitment to College or Higher Education. |
| 17. <i>Which area(s) of church life do they seek to avoid? And, what could be the reason?</i> | <p><u>Clergy</u> Prayer meetings & Preaching, in general.</p> <p><u>Lay Leaders</u> Prayer meetings & Preaching (lengthiness), in general.</p> <p><u>Youth Leaders</u> Prayer meetings & Preaching (irrelevant), in general.</p> <p><u>Youth</u> Sermon (time) and Prayer meetings (boring), in general</p> <p><u>Parents</u> Preaching (irrelevant); prayer (boring).</p> | Worship – Prayer Meetings – Boring Sermons – Irrelevant, lengthy |

The first column in the above table (4.6.) has the questions. The second column has the common subthemes that each set of participants identified for each question. The third column amalgamates the common subthemes identified by each group and lists the overall themes that grew out of subthemes in column two.

Focus group interactions were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Below are excerpts of the transcribed interactions for question 2. I include interactions from both focus groups that each had eight participants. They are put together per question and analyzed by means of color-coding common subthemes.

The first comment comes from one of the youths who mentioned social media, their reluctance to speak out in some situation because of their cultural background, and the impact that their cross-cultural experiences have on them.

I think some of the challenges facing the youth today comes from all over. Like social media, everything out there, everything comes faster and we are all taking a lot of information so much throughout the day. Not just that, sometimes with us having African parents, our expectations are really high; how we are supposed to act, how we are supposed to be. Sometimes that might come into conflict with what you want to do or maybe you want to take your time and look into things a little more. Sometimes the pressure can build on you and sometimes you may need to talk to someone outside about your problems or talk to them a little more.

I do believe our culture plays a big role in our youth's life a lot when it comes to the church as a body. For example, most African parents raise their kids in a such way that they are not opinionated, or they cannot share their opinion, especially if something is bothering them. For example, if there is something going on in the church and the youth has an idea about to just make everything becomes successful, because of the way he is raised, you see that he keeps quiet or just ignore what is going on in the church. So, most of the time you don't have the free will to express yourself because of where and how you were raised. Most

African kids would just be like, “yes, no, move on”, because they believe that the older folks have better decision making so you just cannot make a decision when it comes to the church and stuff like that.....(FG/Q.2 Yth)

The second response comes from the adult focus group, and it centers on the cultural and social differences between Ghanaian and American settings and the difficulties of trying to integrate the two cultures.

Then the second question says ahh...What are the challenges facing the youth in our congregation in terms of religious challenges, social challenges, cultural, any...anywhere you want to start it from. Religious, social and cultural challenges that may be facing the youth in the church. (Repeats sentence).

2/ Let me discuss social,

Please I will speak a little bit about the moral aspect. Is it moral or...(all respond cultural). Focus group: Cultural, religious and social. Okay...culture. Nowadays, it looks we Ghanaian immigrants, we have our own culture. When we speak, we do not use our left hand in speaking, when you find yourself anywhere, an adult should not be standing while a child sits, a lot of things that shows respect. However over here, there is something like rights (giggles). Me, why are you telling me that, when I arrived here and found myself a seat and because an adult arrived, I should give them my seat. I also have a right to sit. So things make the youth, as Daddy first said, “they are confused”. This is why they really need us parents to draw their attention and teach them to understand to live their lives. Amen. (all respond, Amen).

Erm... I will say a little bit about the cultural aspect. Cultural aspect, I think sometimes, we as Ghanaian parents we focus more on our Ghanaian culture but we are forgetting they are not in Ghana. They are in America and we need to learn to integrate the two cultures. What is good in our culture we teach them, what is good in the American culture we teach, so we can integrate, because most of the time our kids go out and they become like, isolated in a way...because some kids, for example, I mean some parents won't even buy McDonalds' for their kids. All they do is cook at home. (FG/Q.2 Adt/)

The common themes identified from the responses to each of the focus group questions are tabulated in Table 4.7. for easy reference and analysis.

Table 4.7.: Subthemes from the Focus Groups

| QUESTIONS | SUB THEMES FROM EACH QUESTION | GENERAL REMARKS, IF ANY |
|---|---|---|
| <i>1.Does the youth (aged 16 – 25-year-old) require more attention from us? Yes, or No; and why do you say so?</i> | | Introductory / Baiting Question |
| <i>2.What are the challenges facing the youth in our congregation in terms of religious, social, cultural? (Q. 18)</i> | Adults' Attitude: Suppression of freedom of expression Hypocrisy among adults No Christian upbringing – Youth Multi-cultural practices – Adults | Quite uniform with each group giving different details. |
| <i>3.In what way does Ghanaian culture come to the fore in the life of the church? And, how could it be affecting the youth? (20)</i> | Demands for cultural practices – respect for the elderly, use of local dialect, dress code, use of right hand, Literally, critical of everything – Adults | Quite uniform with more details from adults. |
| <i>4.In what way does American culture come to the fore in the life of the church? And, how could it be affecting the youth? (21)</i> | All days are equal so special recognition for Sunday does not resonate with youth Use of left hand; care-free attitude; dress-code, strict time-management are unacceptable to the adults' members | Quite uniform with more details from adults. |
| <i>8.In your opinion, what is the Ghanaian Methodist congregations doing to cause a decline of participation of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member?</i> | Youth Lack of serious involvement, innovation, diversity Adults Insistence on culture | Non-Uniform Views between youth and adults! |
| <i>10.Any other relevant comment on declining levels of participation, and best practices, going forward for their participation and commitment.</i> | | Introductory / Baiting Question |

Corresponding questions in both the questionnaire and focus groups are brought together in Table 4.8. for comparison and further analysis.

Table 4.8.: Themes from corresponding Questions from Questionnaire and Focus Groups

| QUESTIONS | SUBTHEMES FROM CORRESPONDING QUESTION IN FOCUS GROUPS | SUBTHEMES FROM CORRESPONDING QUESTION ON QUESTIONNAIRE | GENERAL REMARKS, IF ANY |
|--|---|--|--|
| <i>What are the challenges facing the youth in our congregation in terms of religious, social, cultural?</i> | <p>Q. 2 Adults' Attitude: Suppression of freedom of expression Hypocrisy among adults</p> <p>No Christian upbringing – Youth Multi-cultural practices – Adults</p> | <p>Q. 18 Adults' Attitude: Not listening, controls/ill-treatment, denials,</p> | Adults' Attitude! |
| <i>In what way does Ghanaian culture come to the fore in the life of the church? And, how could it be affecting the youth?</i> | <p>Q. 3 Demands for cultural practices – respect for the elderly, use of local dialect, dress code, use of right hand,</p> <p>Literally, critical of everything – Adults</p> | <p>Q. 20 Adults' Attitude: Disrespect</p> <p>Worship: Medium of Communication</p> | Adults' attitude! |
| <i>In what way does American culture come to the fore in the life of the church? And, how could it be affecting the youth?</i> | <p>Q. 4 All days are equal so special recognition for Sunday does not resonate with them</p> <p>Use of left hand; care-free attitude; dress-code, strict time-management are unacceptable to the adults' members</p> | <p>Q. 21 Expression of type of freedom (contrarily to Ghanaian culture)</p> | Lack of serious recognition to American Culture! |

The following quotes lend credibility to the findings. A youth member said, “Yes because most move away due to school and when they come back they don't feel very welcome.” Another youth leader had this to say, “Once they go to college - 19-25 - they

get to taste other style of worship which usually appear more modern to their taste.” A parent affirmatively revealed, “Things are very traditional and could be more modern to adjust to today’s changing world.” “Yes,” according to another parent, “once they enter college, they may find new home churches and associate with friends with other interests.”

Another parent had this to say during the focus group discussions, “Adults’ negative comments on their dressing, their tone of language are being characterized as rude.” In a similar discussion by the youth, one of them said, “It’s like when you’re young, you just have to keep quiet; you don’t have a say in anything.” And one other parent said in the focus group, “we as Ghanaian parents, we focus more on our Ghanaian culture but we are forgetting they are not in Ghana”. Finally, one parent member said, “I see my boys some Sundays, they won’t come to church because they both go to school, fulltime and work. So, Sundays is more like resting for them.”

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

RQ #3. What are best practices and strategies moving forward to help increase the levels of participation and commitment among youth ages sixteen to twenty-five in Ghanaian Congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States?

Questionnaires, interviews, and focus group are the tools that were used to answer this Research Question. Questions 24, 25, 26, 28, 29 and 30 on the questionnaire; questions 5, 6 and 7 from focus groups; and questions 3 and 4 from interviews are used to address research question three. Questions 25, 30, and 29 from the questionnaire corresponded to questions 5, 6, and 7 from the focus group. Questions 24 and 16 on the

questionnaire corresponded to questions 3 and 4 from the interviews. The use of all three tools suggests the emphasis given to the future involvement of the young people in the church.

In the first stage of the analysis, responses were put together for each set of participants in a table format. In Table 4.9., the first of the three-column table has the questions. The second column has the responses from each set of participants. The third column lists the common and uniform themes among the responses given by each group of participants. Using responses from only clergy, as excerpt in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9.: Excerpt on First Stage of Analysis on Questionnaire (using part of Q. 24)

| QUESTIONS | RESPONSES BY INDIVIDUALS IN EACH SET OF PARTICIPANTS. | SUMMARY OF VIEW(S) FOR EACH SET |
|---|---|--|
| <p>24. <i>How should church and family recognize the age 16, knowing well that the American culture gives special recognition to it?</i></p> <p>Clergy</p> | <p>i. The church family should embrace it and use it in a Godly way. It is a time of setting the stage to live responsibly and faithfully.</p> <p>ii. That they are young adults and their interests is important and must be taken into consideration</p> <p>iii. Recognize it in appropriate ways</p> <p>iv. Sweet 16 is the American equivalent of celebrating womanhood; the church can recognize this through confirmation and other Ghana cultural puberty ceremonies that are in keeping with the Bible. The Jews have ceremonies to prepare the boys and girls for adulthood, and so should the Christian church</p> <p>v. It should be an intentional approach to understand the culture here and also see how best to combine both cultures to help the youth understand how important they are in both cultures.</p> <p>vi. I think we need to accept it and take advantage to educate them when they are celebrating sweet 16. We can educate them to avoid the bad aspect of the sweet 16.</p> | <p>Embrace Show interests Recognize it Accept it</p> |

At the second stage of analysis, I sought possible common and uniform themes for each question by analyzing together the findings for each set of participants for all three tools, namely, questionnaire, interview, and focus group.

Table 4.10.: Excerpt of Second Stage of Analysis on Questionnaire (using Q 16 & 24)

| QUESTIONS | UNIFORM FINDINGS BY EACH SET OF PARTICIPANTS | UNIFORM FINDINGS BY PARTICIPANTS |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| <i>16. How should the church prepare them or contribute to their interests, participation, and/or commitment in church before age 16? How about after 16?</i> | <p><u>Clergy</u> Recognize and engage (them)</p> <p><u>Lay Leaders</u> Offering Engaging programs</p> <p><u>Youth Leaders</u> Recognize & engage/involve them – listen to them, deserve attention</p> <p><u>Parents</u> Recognize and invest – programs</p> | Recognize and engage/involve |
| <i>24. How should church and family recognize the age 16, knowing well that the American culture gives special recognition to it?</i> | <p><u>Clergy</u> Embrace Show interests Recognize it Accept it</p> <p><u>Lay Leader</u> Accommodate concerns Teach them (3)</p> <p><u>Youth Leader</u> Recognize Acknowledge Hold service Teach Regard Understand</p> <p><u>Youth</u> Be given more responsibilities Recognize Celebrate</p> <p><u>Parents</u> Celebrate Recognize Recognize and give greater responsibilities</p> | Recognition of the age 16! |

The outcomes are illustrated in Table 4.10. (above), and Tables 4.11., and 4.12. (below) for questionnaire, interview, and focus group participants. In brief, for the 2nd stage for each of the tools, the 1st column has the questions. The 2nd column has the common subthemes that each group of participants identified for each question during the 1st stage. The third column amalgamates the common subthemes identified by each group and lists the overall themes that grow out of subthemes in column 2. The outcome of the second stage of analysis is tabulated, as in Tables 4.10., 4.11., and 4.12.

Table 4.11.: Second Stage of analysis on Participants' Responses from Interviews

| QUESTIONS | FINDINGS (UNIFORM) FROM EACH QUESTION | GENERAL REMARKS, IF ANY |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| <i>1. Does the role of the youth (16 – 25-year old), need that much attention? Yes, or No; and why do you say so?</i> | | Introductory / Baiting Question |
| <i>3. How should church and family recognize the age 16, knowing well that the American culture gives special recognition to it?</i> | Recognition and Involvement. | As indicated by an individual Youth. |
| <i>4. How should the church prepare them, or contribute to their interests, participation, and/or commitment in church before age 16? How about after 16?</i> | Acceptance and Involvement agreed upon by Youth. Individual Youth indicated Fun and Recognition. | Youth observations |
| <i>7. In your opinion, what should be the best practices by the Ghanaian Methodist Church congregations to increase participation and commitment of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member?</i> | Involvement, involvement, involvement by both youth and parents. Fun and Recognition by Youth only. | Youth had little more to give. |
| <i>8. Do you have any other relevant comment on their current participation, and best practices, going forward their participation and commitment.</i> | Involvement. Lack of – Intentionality to involve e.g. roles to play Healthy relationship – interactions, recognition, love & respect | As agreed upon by both. |

Table 4.12.: Second Stage of Analysis on Participants' Responses from Focus Groups

| QUESTIONS | UNIFORM FINDINGS FROM EACH QUESTION | GENERAL REMARKS, IF ANY |
|---|--|---|
| <i>1. Does the youth (aged 16 – 25-year-old) require more attention from us? Yes, or No; and why do you say so?</i> | | Introductory / Baiting Question |
| <i>5. In what way should the church collaborate the efforts of family to handle a child at 16, and beyond with due cognizance of the fact that it is an age of significance in America?</i> | Recognize and celebrate, formally (invest) | Views from both groups |
| <i>6. If there is one change you would like to recommend and see in the church, what would that be? It could be a change to enhance the involvement of the young ones, or something that militates against their interests in the church.</i> | Involvement | Views from both groups. |
| <i>7. If asked to advise leaders of the church on what can be done for the youth to love coming to church, what would it be? Is it all the responsibility of the leadership or the youth to also take responsibility? How sensitive, or otherwise, is it to ask them to take responsibility for their own spirituality? (Q. 29)</i> | Involvement in programs (Youth) Involvement in their lives (Parents). | Involvement by both groups but with different areas of emphasis |
| <i>9. In your opinion, what should be the best practices by the Methodist congregations to increase participation and commitment of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member?</i> | | |
| <i>10. Any other relevant comment on declining levels of participation, and best practices, going forward for their participation and commitment.</i> | Involvement in church and in their lives | Adults' view |

Common themes generated for each tool per question are tabulated in a four-column table (Table 4.13.) for easy reference and analysis. The 1st column has the questions. Each of the three columns has the generated themes for each tool. Corresponding questions are analyzed for overall themes. Table 4.13. is on themes generated from each of the three tools.

Table 4.13.: Comparison of Findings from all Three Tools

| QUESTIONS | THEMES AMONG PARTICIPANTS: INTERVIEW | THEMES AMONG PARTICIPANTS: QUESTIONNAIRE | THEME AMONG PARTICIPANTS: FOCUS GROUPS |
|---|---|---|--|
| <i>16. How should the church prepare them or contribute to their interests, participation, and/or commitment in church before age 16? How about after 16?</i> | Acceptance and involvement (by the Youth). Fun and recognition (by an individual youth) Diverse views (among adults)! | Recognize and engage/involve | |
| <i>24. How should church and family recognize the age 16, knowing well that the American culture gives special recognition to it?</i> | Involvement and recognition (from the Youth). Not so from the parents. | Recognition of the age 16! | |
| <i>25. In what way should the church collaborate the efforts of the family to handle a child at 16, and beyond?</i> | | Recognize and Invest (spiritually, emotionally, financially)! | Recognize and celebrate, formally (invest) |
| <i>29. If asked to advise leaders of the church on what should be done for the youth to love coming to church, what would it be?</i> | | Recognize and involve | Involvement in programs (Youth) Involvement in their lives (Parents). |
| <i>30. If there is one change you would like to recommend and see in the church related to participation, and/or commitment of youth age 16-25, what would that be?</i> | | Involvement | Involvement |

A minister who responded to the questionnaire said, “Special occasions on church calendar can be allotted for the celebration of the sixteenth year.” Another minister said, “Each church makes it priority.” A youth leader said, “The adults must first develop an

understanding for the youth in order to adequately guide them.” An adult in the focus group also intimated, affirmatively, “The church can *celebrate them*, ...when they’re walking in, we can just all *stand up and clap*. Like, *acknowledge them* because it’s a big step, 16 is a big thing to them. The church can do that or maybe *just give them a little gift*.” (emphasis mine) On and on, it goes.

Summary of Major Findings

Fifty-five people participated in the research project through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. The research resulted in a number of significant findings. The summary of major findings is as follows:

1. Ghanaian Methodist congregations use regular worship with elements of music and youth-centered activities that may bring fun to the youth and help retain youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five in the church.
2. The abrasive attitude of Ghanaian Methodist adult members towards the youth due to the adults’ demand that the young people follow certain Ghanaian cultural practices is a major cause for dwindling numbers among youth members.
3. Failure on the part of Ghanaian Methodist congregations to adapt to certain American cultural values and practices leads to a decline in interest among the youth.
4. Recognition and involvement of the youth in the Ghanaian Methodist congregations ought to be intentional, consistent and a priority.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Ghanaian Methodist congregations in North America are faced with an important problem. They need to find a solution to the problem before it ruins the entire future of the Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. The problem is how to keep the young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five in the church, as they mature. In Ghana, Ghanaian young people are, generally, religious and seem to love to be in church. However, this supposedly positive trend is inconsistent among Ghanaians of the same age group in the US. The research seeks to address this mishap. The Lord is blessing many Ghanaian Methodist congregations with children, and these children must be counted on for the future of the church.

The purpose of this project was to study the current levels of participation and commitment among this age group in Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the United States to determine the best practices for improving levels of participation and commitment among them. I look at the four major findings, through three lenses including my personal observation, the literature review, and Biblical/theological framework for this project.

Major Findings

First Finding: Music and Youth-Centered Activities in Ghanaian Worship

The first major finding is Ghanaian Methodist congregations use regular worship with elements of music and youth-centered activities that may bring fun to the youth and help retain youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five in the church.

Prior to the project, the Ghanaian Methodist congregations met regularly for in-person worship and they identified the lingering problem of getting youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five to consistently participate in church activities. Those in the lower echelons of this age group were relatively better in commitment to worship services attendance. Many in this lower age bracket were still under parental control unlike their older counterparts. They may have had no other choice than do their parents' bidding.

A very significant event occurred during the research. In-person worship services were suspended due to the global pandemic. It was significant because the findings from this project emphasize the use of regular worship, preferably, in-person to sustain the members in this age group. Thankfully, over time, the churches overcame the initial challenges by holding virtual services. But one cannot tell how many of this age group will be back after the dust (of COVID-19) settles.

Additionally, before the pandemic but during the project, my previous board chairman identified the love for music-related events among this age group and officially announced for those interested to register and come for rehearsals. The outcome was quite impressive. The youth swiftly responded in registration and subsequent participation. This led to an enhanced attendance in church worship services for some of them. They might have seen it as opportunity to come try their hands on available instruments or to "perform" albeit amateurishly. The love of music among them became quite evident.

Another event worth mentioning happened towards the end of the project. On January 31, the church inaugurated a new worship experience for this age group. The

special worship service is for this age group and it goes by the name Methodist International Worship Center. One significant deviation of the youth-inaugurated way of worship from the traditional one is the type and amount of music. During the inaugural ceremony, the sermon hymn was conspicuously replaced by a solo performance of a gospel tune. One could easily feel the excitement among them.

Approaching the end of the project has made me more conscious of this finding among this age group. In my informal discussions with some of members of this age group, they are always affirm that worship should be fun, and music should feature strongly.

The literature review for this project is, largely, silent on this finding. Either, I did not foresee the strength of this finding and so did not research into it; or, it is not a significant cause of participation among the youth in the church in the Western Hemisphere. Hence a dearth of literature exists. As seen from the literature review, I consulted quite a number of sources but none had much to say about music and fun appealing to this age group. It may be a finding unique to the context of Ghanaian Methodist congregations. I did discuss the place of music in worship in the literature review under “Doctrines and Practices”. I looked at it under “Relevant (Potentially) Divisive Doctrines” (p. 52). We are a singing congregation, and we sing a lot, already. It is heartening to learn that our commitment to some form of singing has contributed to getting the young people to stay. However, some of the youth continue to leave the church and so other factors also contribute to the exodus.

Biblically, I cite the great example of the Psalmist of Israel who excelled in music in his youthful days. 1 Samuel 17 mentions David as a boy of seventeen years going

before Goliath, and later serving in the palace of King Saul, as a musician. Music appealed to the youth even in Bible days. Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 13:11, says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" may suggest that among other things "fun" could be associated with "childishness", and maturity is an antidote to it. Therefore, the finding is of relevance among the young people.

Second Finding: Demand for Cultural Practices in Ghanaian Churches

The second major finding is that the abrasive attitude of Ghanaian Methodist adult members towards the youth due to the adults' demand that the young people follow certain Ghanaian cultural practices is a major cause for dwindling numbers among youth members.

As was indicated in the literature review, Ghanaians are prone to a communal lifestyle. We exist and thrive in communities. Even though Ghanaians have migrated to the US, lots of social functions bring them together. In view of that, our individual and collective attitudes become easily noticeable. Prior to the project, I observed attitudes exhibited by youthful members of the Ghanaian communities included avoiding social gatherings. Their absence or aloofness became quite obvious. A short time before I started the research project, I was invited to a graduation party for an inactive youth member by her active mum. I honored the invitation and went and met several other church members in attendance. When given the chance to say a word or two, I used the opportunity to encourage her to follow her mother's example in the area of commitment to the church. She smiled for the cameras but has since not participated in church activities.

The research gave me an opportunity to interact with some of the inactive youth members. They came in as participants, and the few that responded enriched the research by offering some much-needed information on “culturally-accepted” oppressive attitudes by adults.

As I was approaching the end of the project, I relocated from Columbus to Atlanta. It was a move that involved a change of conference. I moved from a United Methodist Conference parish back to a Ghana Conference society. During a committee on ministries meeting in my present Conference, a youth leader contributed to discussions about why we are struggling to retain the youth in the church. He was so emphatic in his submission. To him, the major reason, not even one of many reasons, that Ghanaian churches are losing the youth is the disrespect the youth are made to endure from the adults. Even though it came as an affirmation of my findings, it set me thinking. I wondered how authentic his assertion could be. As a result of the research project I knew that the feeling of being disrespected by the adults is one reason the youth are leaving the church, but after hearing the youth leader’s assertion, I wonder if it is actually the major cause.

The literature review appropriately touched on cultural issues. The literature highlighted the trend of young people seeking independence early from parents as “a key issue” (Arnett 70) as well as the easiness with which this could be done (46). I wondered in my submission if such a “privilege” would not be exploited (46). During the research project, on one of my usual pastoral visits, I was in the home of one of the committed members of the church. During the conversation, I felt led to encourage an inactive daughter of hers to come to church. I was told that I was part of her problem. According

to her, I had once asked her to add prayers to her fasting. I did that by asking her to join the church for prayers when we (the church) were in a fast together, and she was partaking in it. She felt that I was not respecting her views and was instructing her. “Was I trying to tell her fasting was not acceptable to God because she was not coming to church to pray?” She quizzed. Although I see the attitude of the adults towards the youth being a major "red flag" for the church, I am also wondering if some of the youth are becoming "volatile" and "untouchable elements" in the church society.

When I wrote about the “Theological Foundations,” the story of Daniel and his Hebrew friends formed the basis. As was indicated, the Hebrew youths shone and excelled through hardships. Their faith, like gold went through the mill to be pure. It is said, “Pressure produces”. I wonder about the truth of this assertion, when applied to our “volatile” youth. A call for endurance and discipline could easily be misinterpreted, and the outcome could prove disastrous.

As I seem to have intimated, does the current batch of youth lack inner fortitude? Demands from adults often could be unreasonable, but one may also not lose sight that much of it may border on a call for discipline. Times have changed and our world has come a long way since the days of Daniel. Therefore, all should endeavor to change or adjust to change. However, adults should initiate or better handle necessary change since they have greater maturity and understanding (1 Cor. 14:20) on their side.

Adults who change in their attitudes will by word and deed gradually convince the youth to do likewise. At various points during the research project the young people held the adults accountable for their actions. Adults cannot preach virtue and practice vice.

Third Finding: Adaption to the American Culture

The third finding is: Failure on the part of Ghanaian Methodist congregations to adapt to certain American cultural values and practices leads to a decline in interest among the youth.

Prior to the project certain behaviors by the youth had always been of much concern to adult members. Some, if not most, of these behaviors were considered to be accepted norms as far as the American society or culture was concerned. Prominent among them are the practice of addressing individuals without their titles; non strict observance of dress codes for social functions; non-use of the right hand, as a sign of respect; and not responding to an elder. I remember vividly what I was confronted with during a ministerial visit to my current parish. As a visiting preacher some years ago, some adults in the congregation wanted my view on a male member of the praise team who had earrings on. One could easily sense the level of discomfort among the congregants.

During this research project, I had the assistant leader to the youth ministry, a male by gender, change the natural look of his hairstyle and begin wearing dreadlocks. His immediate reaction was to stay away from church. He reappeared after quite a long absence only to meet the reaction that he was expecting from the congregation. Some adult members felt he was not fit to lead the group again. Their reason was that he would not be able to serve as a “good” role model for his peers. As a pastor, I sensed he was no longer comfortable among fellow congregants. I reached out to him and, jovially, wanted to find out from him, the rationale behind his decision to “look different”. He only smiled, kept the dreadlocks, and remained a truant member.

As I approached the end of the research project, I noticed that some of the high schoolers were no longer attending church frequently as they used to. When I asked some parents, I learnt they had started working over weekends. Probably, Ghanaian congregations are yet to learn that in the American culture, all days may count as being “same or equal” in the job world. That being the case, the church may want to guard against overloading Sundays with literally all church activities, and rather spread these activities out to enhance the possible better participation from the “newly” employed and other employees. After all, members of the Ghanaian Community are here, in the US, as economic migrants.

As, generally, indicated in the literature review, youth culture may differ from general social culture. The key question I posed was “How would the young ones from Ghana respond to cultural trends which are accepted, as norms?” More important questions include the following: How would the adult members of the Ghanaian community be ready to accept these variations in culture and respond appropriately? Who should be bothered about these cultural variations—the young ones or the adults? Are the adults ready to accept the popular adage or slogan attributed to Saint Ambrose that “when in Rome, do as the Romans do”. The young people may be saying to themselves, “we are here because you wanted us here, so why all the restrictions?”.

The literature review reveals the varied responses Ghanaian adult immigrants have to American culture as a result of the type and level of exposure they have experienced socio-culturally, psychologically, and educationally (Kumi-Yeboah, 2). The youth might be assuring themselves that they are in a liberal society, so their liberties should be protected and enjoyed while they last.

The people of Israel found themselves in exile in Babylon. They had been forewarned by God through Moses to guard against mixing with Gentiles. However, when they found themselves in Babylon, their disappointments and regrets might have triggered a decision not to have anything to do with the culture of the Babylonians. God, through Jeremiah reminded them to settle in, “saying, ‘This *captivity is long*; build houses and dwell *in them*, and plant gardens and eat their fruit.’” (Jeremiah 29:28). Those practices universally accepted on moral grounds could be allowed for them. However, many were still bent on having nothing to do the Babylonians; saying, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4).

Adult members of Ghanaian communities should be able to discern and know which customs in their foreign land should be adopted and practiced, especially, by the young people. They should recognize the customs which should not give cause for concern or should not attract the “wrath of adults:.. As indicated in the literature review, with wisdom and tact, the Hebrew youths, who were even given Babylonian names, could influence their generation for God.

The Bible says in Daniel 1:6-7, “...Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego” (NKJV). With love, these young people should be guided (by adults) to set limits and draw boundaries for enculturation. The Word of God did that for these Hebrews youths. The infallible Word of God can do the same if planted, with the help of the Spirit, in these young people.

Fourth Finding: Recognition and Involvement of the Youth in Ghanaian Congregations

The fourth finding is: Recognition and involvement of the youth in the Ghanaian Methodist congregations ought to be intentional, consistent and a priority.

Prior to this research project, the young people were involved in the life of the church. They led programs and they were given opportunities to express themselves, and yet they were leaving. The intentionality and consistency of their part in the church life was not intense enough, and their recognition and involvement had not been a priority at all. Opportunities just trickled in. No strong intentionality and proper coordination drew them back into the church. Like *Oliver Twist*, they were calling for more, but they could only be given so much.

During the project, the youth who were involved, especially, in the interviews and focus groups were unanimous in their assertion and conviction that they were not given enough recognition and involvement. Even when they were given those rare opportunities to “express” themselves, some among the adults showed low levels of excitement. Some of the youth perceived visible signs of discomfort among some of the adult members. It was as if, the adults were struggling to make meaning of whatever performance the young people put up.

These signs of discomfort were affirmed somewhat when an adult member passed a derogatory comment during our last quarterly meeting on February 13th. In effect, it was an experience related to do with the near completion stage of the research project. This member of the quarterly meeting was seeking clarification on the newly inaugurated worship experience for the youth, Methodist International Worship Center (MIWC). He

wanted to know where from this wholly “strange” idea originated. As I heard him ask the question, and noted the manner in which it was asked, I whispered to myself these young people are being vindicated in their assertion that some adult members are not so enthused on anything youth.

The literature review did not have much to say about the intentionality of involvement and recognition of the youth as well as prioritization of youth affairs in the church. In the absence of much information from the literature review, it is heartening to know that there was a rich vein of diversity of responses from the research participants. As I analyzed these responses from RQ3, I found a rare point of intersection. This speaks to the complex nature of what the church is dealing with and how diverse views can be when dealing with people.

It was David who asserted in Psalm 139:14, “I will praise You, for I am *fearfully and wonderfully made*; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.” (emphasis mine) Therefore, the complexity of the needs of the youth should not be a surprise. Key to this problem is prayer; the means to consult on regular basis, their Maker, for directives and His most needed help.

Prayerfulness featured prominently under “Biblical Foundation Themes” but with a slight difference in emphasis. The literature review deals with prayer, as a necessary tool to help avoid or overcome temptation. In this analysis, the emphasis is also on prayer as a means to help but it also emphasizes the importance of understanding the physiological and psychological make of the young people. Prayer is work! The call for “the work” of prayer indicates the seriousness of the desire to want to help. The emphasis

of this finding is on intentionality, consistency, and prioritization, and only a commitment to prayer will speak to its content.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The use of these findings starts with a burden and a desire to respond to the obvious problem of exodus of many young members from the Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in America. The research identified practices that help keep the youth involved in the church. These best practices should be deliberately maintained, but practices that lead to decline should be avoided. Looking into the future with optimism calls for intentionality, consistency, and prioritization of matters concerning the young people.

Limitations of the Study

The research involved a wide range of participants, and most of the expectations concerning participants were met. However, one particular group of participants, the second generation youth members, were not well represented in the research. It would have been interesting to have more of their perspectives included in the research. Another limitation is no ministers were interviewed, and none participated in the focus groups. Participation of some ministers in the interviews and focus groups would have broadened the scope of discussions and interactions.

All participants were drawn from Ghanaian Methodist congregations in the US. Thus, the findings are more applicable to the US-based Ghanaian Methodist congregations than other congregations. Additionally, no participants came from Canada which is also a growing hub for MCG in North America. However, MCG congregations

in both countries, USA and Canada, have similar sets of conditions. Hence, to all extents, findings should be applicable and relevant to MCG congregations in Canada too.

Unexpected Observations

By the tradition of the church, regular worship has always been part of what we stand for yet these young people were still leaving. The first finding is, therefore, a surprise. That, regular worship prevents them from leaving.

It also came out the young people abhor the prayer meetings. Now, if the prayer meetings organized by the church are perceived as one cause (possibly, major) for their leaving, then one wonders, if the young people are rooting for a prayerless church, as their comfort zone. Since prayer is indispensable in life of a church, I would like to safely assume, possibly, it is the style of prayer that they find abhorrent rather than prayer itself.

Recommendations

As already indicated, further research should involve more of the second generation young people as participants in the research. Additionally, participants should come from Canada to make findings more applicable to MCG congregations in both countries.

As a senior minister in MCG in the US, these findings will be made available to the leaders' meeting, quarterly meeting, and the Synod in North America to help guide the church's operations and dealings with the young member of the church aged sixteen to twenty-five.

Postscript

This research or project has been worth undertaking. It presented appropriate challenges during each step. Some, looked unsurmountable, initially, but with proper guidance and encouragement, it is now a finished product.

In view of the anticipated benefits, every effort has been worth the sacrifice. I enjoyed maximum cooperation from the DMin faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky. Much of this most needed support came through my advisor, Milton Lowe. To each of them, I owe a debt of gratitude. My prayer is that our combined efforts should bring the expected benefits to the Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in America, and other Ghanaian congregations struggling with the retention of the young people in the church in this part of the world.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help Ghanaian congregations of the Methodist Church in the US (and Canada) to look critically at the current and future participation of its young members, ages 16–25, in the life of the church. Henceforth, this age range is defined as ‘youth’. At age 16, first-generation Ghanaian young people are introduced to what society calls ‘sweet’ sixteen (16), an unfamiliar territory to them. From there, they become seniors after a couple of years, ready for College. A normal four-year College course may last a little longer for a typical Ghanaian young person. She/he may take about a couple more years to figure out what course she or he would finally want to settle for. Thus, many of them should be graduates and be tasting full career/job life by twenty-five (25).

The purpose of the research is to go into the ‘complex’ world of Ghanaian Methodist Young people, be they 1st or 2nd Generation, in the US (and Canada) and find answers as to the diverse attitude they portray when it comes to church participation and commitment, and what the church can do.

Please, take a few minutes to respond to these questions. In some cases, you can just mark (X) the response that fits you best or fill in a brief answer. Where you are asked for your belief or opinion, I really want to know what you think. There are no right or wrong answers. When you really cannot answer, just skip on to the next item. I guarantee that your individual answers would be anonymous and held in the strictest confidence. Upon completion, please, email back to me. Thank you for your assistance in helping us better understand ourselves, as a congregation.

Section A: Introduction & Background Information (if applicable)

1. Country of birth: Ghana USA
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Age: Below 16 16 – 25 26 – 40 41 – 60 60+
4. Locations: Canada USA
5. Conference: MCG UMC
6. Office / Position: Clergy Lay Leader Youth Leader
 Parent Youth
7. Membership: Active Inactive

23. In what way do you think Church Discipline contributes to their interests, or lack thereof? 2
24. How should church and family recognize the age 16, knowing well that the American culture gives special recognition to it? 3
25. In what way should the church collaborate the efforts of the family to handle a child at 16, and beyond? 3
26. How can we continue to sustain the interests, participation, and/or commitment of the youth who are in College in the church? 3
27. What could be the most likely reason(s) to stop or prevent them from coming to church? 2
28. What recommendation(s) would you give to address the exodus of the youth from the church? 3
29. If asked to advise leaders of the church on what should be done for the youth to love coming to church, what would it be? 1 / 3
30. If there is one change you would like to recommend and see in the church related to participation, and/or commitment of youth age 16-25, what would that be? 3
31. Any other relevant comment you would like to make on the participation and commitment of the youth, especially, 16 – 25-year old in the church?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. Does the role of the youth (16 – 25-year old), need that much attention? Yes, or No; and why do you say so?
2. How do you see the involvement or lack thereof of the youth in the church? What should the church do to keep them active? 1
3. How should church and family recognize the age 16, knowing well that the American culture gives special recognition to it? **3**
4. How should the church prepare them, or contribute to their interests, participation, and/or commitment in church before age 16? How about after 16? **3**
5. What advice would you like to give to find solution to any exodus of the youth from church? 1
6. In your opinion, what are the Methodist Church congregations in the US / Canada doing right to sustain participation of 16 to 25-year- olds Ghanaian member? 1
7. In your opinion, what should be the best practices by the Ghanaian Methodist Church congregations to increase participation and commitment of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member? **3**
8. Do you have any other relevant comment on their current participation, and best practices, going forward their participation and commitment?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

1. Does the youth (aged 16 – 25-year old) require more attention from us? Yes, or No; and why do you say so?
2. What are the challenges facing the youth in our congregation in terms of religious, social, cultural? 2
3. In what way does Ghanaian culture come to the fore in the life of the church? And, how could it be affecting the youth? 2
4. In what way does American culture come to the fore in the life of the church? And, how could it be affecting the youth? 2
5. In what way should the church collaborate the efforts of family to handle a child at 16, and beyond with due cognizance of the fact that it is an age of significance in America? 3
6. If there is one change you would like to recommend and see in the church, what would that be? It could be a change to enhance the involvement of the young ones, or something that militates against their interests in the church. 3
7. If asked to advise leaders of the church on what can be done for the youth to love coming to church, what would it be? Is it all the responsibility of the leadership or the youth to also take responsibility? How sensitive, or otherwise, is it to ask them to take responsibility for their own spirituality? 3
8. In your opinion, what is the Ghanaian Methodist congregations doing to cause a decline of participation of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member? 2
9. In your opinion, what should be the best practices by the Methodist congregations to increase participation and commitment of 16 to 25-year-old Ghanaian member? 3
10. Any other relevant comment on declining levels of participation, and best practices, going forward for their participation and commitment.

APPENDIX D:

Informed Consent Letter

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INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

**STUDY TITLE: *US-BASED GHANAIAN METHODIST YOUNG PEOPLE
Improving Their Participation and Commitment in Church***

You are invited to be in a research study being done by **Rev. Samuel Osam-Duodu** from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a

- Resident Minister;
- Lay Leader;
- Youth Executive;
- Youth; or
- Parent

in a Ghanaian congregation of the Methodist Church in the US/Canada.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to

- respond to a set of questions on a Questionnaire; or
- be part of a Focus Group discussion of a set of questions; or
- be prepared to grant an interview;

and, they are all related to the above title. Some more specific guidelines detailing procedures will accompany your assigned area of participation. There is no payment involved.

You are assured of confidentiality. However, if something makes you feel bad while you are in the study, please let me know by email or phone call on 614 377 4630. If you may prefer someone else to discuss some aspects of your participation with, you can contact Sister Hannah Amponsem on 614 446 1309. Or, Brother Lord Asare on 614 596 2542.

You can ask me questions any time about anything in this study. You can also ask Sister Hannah or Brother Lord any questions you might have about this study.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Finally, you pledge to keep confidential, all matters discussed, and vow not to use anything said, or heard, from another participant against him or her.

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

Date Signed

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