An Analysis of Youth Participation in Church Programs in Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kajiado Presbytery, Kenya

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Abstract

Although youth attend church in large numbers, there has been a major concern with regards to their participation in Church programs in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) Kajiado Presbytery. As a result, most of the church programs are being led by elderly people. Failure of youth to participate in various church programs is a great threat to growing churches because it means that the grooming of future leaders is absent in the church. As a result churches become weak without any hope for the future. The purpose of this study was to analyse youth participation in church programs from the perspective of Presbyterian Church of East Africa youth in Kajiado Presbytery. The study adopted a survey research design in which quantitative research approach was utilized. In terms of scope, the study was conducted in three of the eight parishes in Kajiado presbytery which are: Mbagathi, Eserian and Baraka. The research instrument used in the study was questionnaire. Random sampling procedure was adopted in selecting a sample size of 258 respondents from the target population. Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 and the results were summarized in tables and figures and presented using frequency and percentages. Findings from the study indicated that most of the youth do not participate in church programs due to lack of mobilization, follow up, mentorship and poor leadership. The study recommends that the Presbyterian Church should finance youth programs, mobilize youth to be active in the church as well as include youth in major decision making committees so that they can be able to air their views.

Keywords: Church youth programs, PCEA youth programs, PCEA and youth, youth church participation, PCEA youth participation, youth and mentorship programs, Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION

The Presbyterian Church is a denomination that is governed by session of elders, co-founded by John Calvin in 16th Century. This church was brought in East Africa specifically in Kenya in 1891 as a Christian mission at Kibwezi and that is why it is referred to as Presbyterian Church of
East Africa. It has several programs that youth in its presbyteries are supposed to participate (PCEA, 1998). For the purpose of this study, the term youth was restricted to the ages between 15 to 35 years as documented by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa practice and procedure manual (1998).

The Lord has appointed youth to be his helping hand who if properly directed and encouraged can achieve a lot. The youth will do something with their overflowing energies, and unless these energies are directed into right channels, they will be used by the youth in a way that will hurt their own spirituality and prove an injury to those with whom they associate. When youth give their heart to God, the church responsibility does not cease: they must be interested in the Lord’s work and led to see that he expects them to do something to advance his cause (Ellen, 2007).

According to Bailey and Reddon (2013), youth are agents of change marching forward to the future and dragging the older, less active in generation reluctantly with them. They are the helpful category for analysis broad treads and monitoring general patterns of religious change but one that must be treated carefully as young people are not a homogeneous group.

In an attempt to increase youth participation in church programs, most churches have started looking for ways to retain youth. One popular strategy has been hiring youth pastors or workers, even though using a paid youth pastor has not been easy in most of the congregations as a lot of commitment is needed. These youth coordinators or directors are expected to increase the frequency of youth participating in church programs, develop quality programs, enhance youth perception in the church and even keep them loyal to the denomination. Quality youth programs should create vibrant personal religion and a source of sacredness in youth spirituality which is equally indispensable for effective ministry. Lack of good youth programs can force them to go to other denominations since interesting and inspirational church programs are the pillar of a successful youth ministry (Chong-Ho and Tameifuna, 2014).

Different forums should be created to address issues affecting youth. Hershey (1999) lists some of the factors leading to non-participation of youth in the church programs as a result of increased affluence. These factors include: lifestyle as the main factor in determining who goes to church, increased mobility, youth looking for jobs and a desire to look for the best pleasing and accommodating church. The church attitudes regarding evangelism that reflects on how the church reaches the youth and treat them (on healthy extremes on how the youth should behave, they need freedom) defines their own self-fulfilling prophecy. This helps to retain youth in the church (Hershey, 1999).

The local church with no youth and children is a dying church. Heitman (2015) suggests that in order to become a hero of your church, the following must be done. Youth Pastors must learn how to call their youth by names, regularly lay hands on students during prayer, and let them hear you pray especially for them by name. Additionally, pastors should show them love, care, laugh with them; talk with them and play, use illustrations in sermons that relate to them and involve youth in altar services with special prayer for them. Investment in leadership resources
and in co-operate monthly leadership training, creating strategies with church leadership to help structure a youth budget are among other steps to take to keep the youth in the church. Let the youth become involved in ushering greetings, sound and video booths, church website, music ministry, Sunday school teaching and serving. Lastly, long term thinking on how to retain the youth should involve the youth in missions, and involve them in outside ministries as well as making sure that youth gatherings are places where friends are welcomed and desired. It is also important to listen to the youth, show interest to them as well as be patient with them and with the program built for the future (Heitman, 2015). In his book, Town (2002), writes that the youth sometimes fail to participate in the church programs due to the stereotype image many adults have. Precisely, the youth are considered to be impulsive, immature, unreliable, which hence erects psychological barriers between the older generation and youth commonly referred to as generation gap. Thus, this study intended to analyse youth participation in church programs in the context of Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Kajiado Presbytery, Kenya.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a survey research design with quantitative approach to analyse youth participation in church programs. The target population comprised of the three parishes with seven hundred youth members and eighty church elders. The sampling procedure used in the study was random sampling. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of determining sample size was used to arrive at the sample size. The sample size from 950 youth was two hundred and seventy four out of whom two hundred and fifty eight responded. On the other hand, the sample size determined from eighty elders was sixty six elders out of whom forty responded.

The study used primary sources in data collection by gathering information directly from respondents through questionnaires which were well-constructed with closed-ended questions. These questionnaires were administered to the youth and the elders. The data collected from the study were analyzed statistically with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Distributions of these data involved the use of frequencies and percentages.

**RESULTS**

**Background Information**

The social demographic characteristics of participants were sought with the aim of establishing the distribution based on gender, marital status, age bracket, occupation, educational level.

Slightly more than a half (51.6%) of the youth who participated in the study were female while nearly a half (48.4%) of them were male. With regards to marital status, the vast majority (86%) of the youth were single while a few (14%) of them indicated that they were married. In relation to age, half (50%) of the youth were between 15-20 years of age while 29.1% of them were between 21-25 years of age. 21% indicated that they were 26 years and above. 64.7% of the youth indicated that they were not employed and 18.2% of them however indicated that they
were employed while 17.1% were self-employed. 41.5% of the youth had KCSE certificate as their highest level of education and another 25.2% of them indicated that they had attained a degree whereas 17.1% of them had a diploma.

In terms of gender, majority (75%) of the church elders who participated in the study were male while 25% of them were female. When asked to indicate their marital status, an overwhelming majority (95%) of the church elders were married while a few (5%) of them were widowed. In terms of age bracket, 70% of the church elders were 46 years and above. 30% of them however indicated that they were 45 years of age and below. With reference to occupation, 57% of the church elders were self-employed and 43% of them were employed. With regards to educational level, 37.5% of the church elders indicated that they had a diploma as their highest level of education, 22.5% of them indicated that they had a degree whereas 17.5% of the elders had a Masters degree.

Youth Programs and Participation in the Church

The study sought to establish whether youth were being involved in the various youth programs in the church. To answer this objective, there are a number of items that were analyzed. These included: youth membership in different programs, whether parents encourage the youth to participate in church programs, whether the church supported youth programs financially and whether there is proper mentorship program in the church.

Youth Membership in Different Church Programs

The youth were asked to indicate the programs that they were members. Programs included: evangelism, Christian education, PCMf, praise and worship team, dancing club, Sunday school teachers, brigade teachers, Bible study/ TEE, health board, football club, LCC sub-committee and choir.

Distribution of youth on the various church programs they participate in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCMf</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise and Worship Team</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing Club</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School Teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigadier Teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible study/ TEE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Board</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football club</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCC Sub-committee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No club joined</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown by the table, 60.5% of the youth indicated that they were not members of any church programs in the church. The remaining indicated that they were members of various programs which included: praise and worship team (9.7%), dancing club (7.0%), football club (7.0%), choir (3.9%) and Sunday School teachers (3.1%).

**Whether Parents Encourage Youth to Participate in Church Programs**

The youth were further asked to indicate whether their parents encouraged them to attend church programs. A vast majority (93%) of the youth indicated that their parents indeed did encourage them to participate in church programs. Only 7% of them however indicated that their parents did not encourage them to participate in church programs.

**Whether the Church Supported Youth Programs Financially**

With regards to the role played by the church in supporting youth programs, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed on whether the church supported the youth programs financially. Responses were categorized as follows: strongly agree, strongly disagree, undecided and agree with doubt.

As shown by Figure 1, slightly more than half (53.1%) of the youth strongly agreed that the church did support the youth programs financially. This was however not the case among 21.3% of them who strongly disagreed with the statement, 6.6% who were undecided, and 19% who agreed with a doubt.

![Figure 1: Whether the church supported youth programs financially](image-url)
Whether There Is Proper Mentorship Program in the Church

Youth were further asked to indicate their extent of agreement on the whether there was a proper mentorship program in the church. The responses provided are as summarized by Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Whether there Is proper mentorship program in the church](image)

Results from Figure 2 indicate that nearly 45.7% of the youth strongly agreed that there was a proper mentorship program in the church. This was however not the case among 27.5% of the youth who strongly disagreed. Another 14.7% further agreed but with some doubt while 12% were undecided.

**DISCUSSION**

The results indicated that there were more female youth as compared with male. These findings concur with studies by Magee (2010) on spirituality and religious involvement of young adults in which 634 young adults were surveyed online. The studies established that 25% of the respondents were male while 75% were female.

The majority of the youth respondents were between the age brackets of 15-20. This concurs with the same study by Magee (2010) on spirituality and religious involvement of young adults in the age brackets of 29 years and younger. In the studies, it was established that 66.7% of the respondents were vibrant in their faith and actively involved in the church community. The findings also align with another study by Hershey (2008) which found out that most of the youth in this age are busy looking for jobs in different places. Therefore there is the need for the church to create alternative forms of preoccupation for them.
From the results, most of the youth indicated that they are not members of any program in the church. This aligns with a study by Rackley (2013) which established that 60% of young people will leave the church permanently or for an extended period. Additionally, a study by Vitisia (2016) among evangelical youth by Christianity today in America indicated that 70% of young adults of age 14 to 24 stop attending church regularly. The same studies identify a survey by Life Way Research where it was found that 70% of 23-30 year olds dropped out of the church (Vitisia, 2016).

A vast majority of the youth indicated that parents encouraged them to participate in church programs. These findings align with a study by Kim-Spoon, Longo and McCullough (2012) on how parents’ religiousness interfaces with mediating and moderating processes (such as adolescents’ religiousness and parent-child attachment) to influence adolescent adjustment. The studies established that religion plays a significant role in the lives of many adolescents in the U.S. referring to a survey in which approximately 84% of adolescents (13-17 years old) believed in God, 82% believed that religion was important and 56% attended religious services monthly. In the same studies, adolescents’ personal religiousness was not significantly predictive of adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptoms, while parent-adolescent attachment was found to have significant direct effects on adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Kim-Spoon et.al, 2012).

53.1% of the youth strongly agreed that the church did support the youth programs financially. This concurs with research by Priest, Wilson and Johnson (2010) on church programs initiated by mega churches and some of which involve the youth. In the studies, it was established that megachurches directly supported an average of five national Christian workers in other countries, with an average (mean) maximum support of $8,650 per worker per year (Priest et. al, 2010). Furthermore, from their survey, it was found that 78 percent of African American mega churches, act as their own sending agency for some or all of the missionaries whom they support financially (Priest et. al, 2010).

Nearly half (45.7%) of the youth strongly agreed that there was a proper mentorship program in the church. These findings concur with a study by Chiroma and Cloete (2015) that focused on a critical evaluation of mentorship programs in three Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) seminaries. From the research that was conducted in the three major denominational seminaries in Nigeria, it was established that mentorship plays an important role in the holistic development of seminary students especially in three areas, namely spiritual formation, character and ministry formation (Chiroma and Cloete, 2015). Categorically, the incorporation of mentorship programs in churches is necessary to shape the youth in terms of their spiritual growth.

**CONCLUSION**

From the key findings, the study makes a number of conclusions. In terms of youth participation in church programs, the study concluded that there are a number of issues which limit the participation of youth in church programs. The key issues included lack of motivation, interest
and time. Moreover, some youth were not aware of the roles of these programs. There is need for an awareness program to be initiated within the congregations regarding the various programs available in the church. The awareness program should be designed in a manner that it familiarizes the youth with the programs as well as informing them on some of the benefits that they may get from being members of these programs. The study recommends that the Presbyterian Church should finance youth programs, mobilize youth to be active in the church as well as include youth in major decision making committees so that they can be able to air their views.

REFERENCES


