

A Review on Youth Ministry in the Church

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ABSTRACT: Time and again, the phrase ‘The youth are our future church has been in the air across the universe. As perceived, this is an encouragement and hope statement for the youth in churches but on honest grounds, a lot of hidden unintended consequences and hidden meaning is wrapped in the same package with this phrase. This may be interpreted to mean that the present matters less. In essence, it is not within the ability of the adolescents to envision themselves as grownups as it appears to them that that the perception of time as compared to age is two worlds apart. For illustration, a ten years old adolescent considers ten years as a lifetime and to them, a vague context is registered on the future concept which means an indefinite time length. Therefore, when church leaders say that the youths are the future, they are failing to stamp a reference point as to when the future will become a reality in the present. This therefore leaves the youths at crossroads as to what their present role is in the church which breeds the tendency of many youths walking out of the church. This is in their belief that they will come back when they are mature enough in terms of Christianity in the so-called future. This article revisits a few setbacks that surround youth in the church and a way forward to handle these setbacks in order to have the youth fully involved in the liturgy of the church.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, the present matters a lot for youths as far as spirituality is concerned. As youths, it is quite unnecessary for them to wait so as to engage in missions, assume roles in leadership, pray, study the Bible and even participate in worshipping. The reality is that the youths have a wide array of talents to offer in praising their God for their spiritual nourishment (Dortch, 2014). They have ready optimism as well as passion which are the cornerstones of any church foundation and merit encouragement in understanding that whatever they are doing and who they are at the moment is deemed crucial. It is however scaring to note that Christianity may be facing death in the near future with respect to the majority of the present congregation made up of Christians who may not be around in the next fifty years more so in the leadership docket in the church. It is scary who will be in place of the Christian missionaries, faithful deacons and deaconesses in the church (Parr & Crites, 2015). It has more to do with anxiety when we keep on referring the youths as the future as they are to ensure survival of the church as promise beacons and saviors of the church.

II. YOUTH CHALLENGES

The fear of the unknown

Rather than the fear of the unknown, it is time to let God take control of the rest as church leaders embrace the youths. Excitement and encouragement to youths in the church should be spearheaded at the possibilities lying with the youths as they are endowed with God-given dreams hence need a novel vision to be stirred up in their hearts as the church leadership’s fear to lose what they know agitate them to step in the way of the youths now and feed the future with hope. It is through such youths that the church is made to look successful upon using them as representatives of church success (Parr & Crites, 2015). There is need for the present leadership to remind youths that they are crucial to the church. Old or young, all Christians are crucial in the body of Christ and it should be worrying about the numbers of senior and young adults attending church services actively both presently and the future. Alongside adults, the youths must be equipped for not just the future but also the present Christian ministry hence prompting church leaders to survey the congregation and give youths an invitation to be the church in the present.

In most occasions, the youths have been seen walking out of the church not to come back. Apart from parents, pressure, youths in the church require first-hand faith which comes out of their relationship with Christ they have cultivated from their personal lives as opposed to pressure from parents. Statistics show that many youths drop out of church after high school. This drop out has been attributed by research to be as a result of

lack of resilient faith from one generation to another. As expected, the youth are supposed with their faith through high school; career and college stages through sticking to their robust faith (Parr & Crites, 2015).

The church is not able to reach the youths today due to two major reasons. Firstly, upon lack of intentionality, the church is failing to reach many youths through the gospel and secondly, a greater number of church leaders and even ordinary individuals have not been able to understand the youths yet. Therefore, it is prudent to better understand the youths and try to reach them through the gospel (Dortch, 2014). In trying to understand the youths, this article narrows down to three aspects as outlined under limited time to do everything, inability to tell the right from wrong and peer pressure.

Limited time to do everything

For instance, throughout the world the youths have been recognized to be the busiest generation and for them, life is exceedingly becoming difficult for them. According to Parr & Crites (2015), in most cases where both parents are employed the youths are busier with home responsibilities, community involvement, extracurricular activities and work and have no time for attending church. The youths are so busy because they have so many choices in their lives as far as recreation, church, sports and school are concerned. However, the youths have shown little acumen to pick from the choices as they cannot forego one activity for another and in the end it results to a burnout and frustration. Parents want their youths to get involved in a lot of school activities like prep courses in college, in the church, baby-sit and clean the house hence feel so tired at times to attend church (Dortch, 2014).

Unable to tell the right from wrong

The inability to tell right from wrong is one of the distinguishing features of youths in the church today. Surprisingly, a good number of them are aware that they do not know with sixty one percent male youths and 56 percent female youths thinking that their generation has this serious problem. In this confusion, the youths have become defensive and opposing hence the difficulty of discerning the wrong and right but also admit that these concepts are situational and elusive. One is then left wondering as a Christian what we anticipate from this youth generation in the future church. This brings to the fore the necessity to culture the youths presently for the future through various youth empowering programs in the church (Dortch, 2014).

III. PEER PRESSURE

Not only in youth but also every generation has faced pressure and challenges from individuals they have identified to be their friends. Therefore, peer pressure is not new and it takes a lot of effort to bring up a youth whose peers see them as friendly, likeable and withstands peer pressure to engage in acts that are wrong. This should be cultivated in the church so as to encourage youths stand for their virtues and avoid vices which are inherited from wrong friends. They have to stay focused and say no to such negative thoughts which may eventually make them drop out of the church (Dortch, 2014). Despite of the incredible pressure, the youths should be encouraged to be loyal to their conscience.

A study by Warren (2012), reports that approximately seventy percent of 18 to 22 years old young adults stopped from regularly attending the church for a minimum of one year. Although some of these dropouts came back to the church, majority of the swayed completely from their early faith. This draws our attention as the church on youths and calls for efforts to deeply understand the youths and nurture them presently so as they may be the future church as well.

According to Rainer (2008), approximately 97% of the youths who participated in the study stated that they had dropped out of the church due to changes in some situations as well as life. However, twenty seven percent admitted that they had dropped out of the church as they simply wanted to break from church while twenty three percent stated that their work made it hard for them to attend church. Twenty five percent stated that it was because they had moved to college and their new lives transformed them as they found new company that was reluctant to attend church services. It is worthwhile to note that about fifty-eight of the young adults stated that their dropping out of the church was as a result of their leaders or pastors who they did not like for various reasons. A further probe by another study by Parr & Crites (2015) reveals 26% of the youths stating that they dropped out of the church because members were either hypocritical or judgmental while twenty percent responded that they did not feel a connection with the members of the church they attended.

According to Rainer (2008), 15 percent of the youths interviewed reported that they drop out of the church was as a result of unwelcoming and unfriendly congregation. It therefore comes to the light that it is not the sole responsibility of church pastors and leaders to encourage youths to stay in church and worship but also the congregation must promote an amicable atmosphere for all youths.

Further, this study reports that 52% of the youths respondents stated that it was due to hostile political, religious and ethical atmosphere that left them with no option other than drop out of the church. The church is therefore required to encourage an atmosphere of being apolitical to avoid discouraging such young souls. As a

result of such divisions, Rainer (2008) asserts that most youths change their Christian views as they do not believe in what they are being taught in the church or they do not subscribe to what other church members do and believe in. according to Rainer (2008), life-long commitment and change results from firsthand faith to youths. In this study, Rainer (2008) reports that 18% of the youths interviewed were not in agreement on the stand of the church with regard to issues based on social and political aspects. In the same study, 17% of the respondents stated that their going to church was to please others while sixteen percent did not want to be identified with any religion. This shows that there is much to be done in the life of youths so as to keep them on track on what Christianity means.

IV. SOLUTIONS

First-hand faith

It is clear now that many youths attending the church stop doing so when they graduate from high school among other factors. Collectively, this shows that the faith of these youths was not meaningful to them personally. Lack of first-hand faith is a key factor as they did not make the church in their lives as valuable and valued expression so as to impact their growth and relationship with others. It is the leaders in the church and the congregation's failed role that made the youths take the church as something they were pressurized by parents to do. The pressure from peers and parents made them grow up in the church rather than being thought to make it their first-hand faith to read the scripture in live by the word of God (Parr & Crites, 2015).

It is almost impossible for the concerned stakeholders to be rigid and force the youths in school and at the church to uphold what does not originate from within them. As an alternative, young adults need to be prepared for spiritual challenges that they may face in life and in answering faith questions in their lives. This will in turn culture first-hand faith and consequently life-long commitment and change. It is both disappointing and shocking how busy youths can be in other spheres of life like education. Importance and success are equivalent of busyness in biblical concepts of stillness, Sabbath whereas retreats are impossible and difficult to relay (Warren, 2012). It is almost impossible for youths to practice reflection and contemplative prayer while still tied up to numerous commitments and responsibilities in their lives.

The youths are the present and the future church

The glimpse of the future church is reflected in the youths today as opposed to the tenet that the youths are the future of the church which means that they are yet the church. It should be put clear that youths are encountering trending issues which will determine their culture once they become mature adults in the future church. Like a barometer, the youths have a bigger role in future issues in the church hence there is danger in the future church if the youths drop out of the church presently (Parr & Crites, 2015). Therefore, it is a requirement for the youth ministers in the church to extend their service beyond the church walls and meet students and other youths in their coffee area, games and other places whereby they can be engaged in meaningful interactions. It is this time that the youth ministers will get it with the overcommitted youths so as to encourage them to attend corporate worship as senior pastors interact with them face-to-face. This program may include linking the youths to mega-churches that offer a wide variety of activities, events and places which accommodate their full timetable as opposed to smaller and intimate congregations (Warren, 2012). The future church relies on the way the youths react to their present culture as well as the response from their youth ministers.

Understanding the youth and their circumstances

As stakeholders, the youth, parents and pastors have a lot of expectations and demands on the church youth ministry. Therefore, the effectiveness of the church youth ministry will determine the stay of the youths in the church hence the future of the church as a whole. The present youth generation is interesting as they are desperately looking for a grand story to color the world around them. They are seeking true hope and want meaning to many life aspects that affect them. This calls for those who are ministering them to be keen in understanding the youths before they start any action. However, in this world, hope is an elusive target with many parents for the youths in the church putting their hope in military strength, politics and the economy. For the youths, the future is not seemingly rosy as they see political unrest, an economy that is failing and threats from terrorists (Dortch, 2014). In essence, it the youths seem not to see the hope in the future, they turn to the moment where happiness is the king hence the youth ministry must give youths hope in the future and make them serve and thrive their happiness in the church.

If the youths are left alone to pursue worldly happiness in social media, alcoholism, entertainment and sex among other, the very endeavor is undermined. The pleasure they indulge in is fleeting while surface deep relationships collapse and get messy as long satisfaction becomes a mirage (Parr & Crites, 2015). It is the work of the youth leaders and the church as a whole to make youths understand that worldly happiness is temporally and encourage them seek everlasting happiness by serving God in the church.

V. CONCLUSION

While the youths are jaded, restless and desperately looking for a solution for suffering outside the church, they should be reminded that all the answers they are looking for are in God. It is however discouraging that the church in many instances has proved to offer mere worldly vaporous teachings. Youth groups should be made meaningful other than mere entertainment and teachings that are shallow. It is not worth telling youths how life on earth is messy and encouraging them that when they die one day they will enjoy in heaven. This can be pointless in as much as the faith of our youths is concerned. To tell youths shallowly that the world is a temporary place may reinforce their belief in life meaninglessness and they will drop out of the church. The youths of today badly need the gospel of Jesus Christ in whom God's fullness is obtained and the youths are filled in Him (Colossians 2:9-10). They should be made to understand that God gives meaning to this life and it is only through fellowship in the church and reading scripture this can be enhanced.

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