

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Resolving the Shortage of Youth at Mount Moriah Baptist Church**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to

The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

Sharion Otey

Lynchburg, Virginia

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**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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Seth Polk, DMin, PhD  
Instructor  
Mentor

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Jason Whitehurst, DMin  
Instructor  
Reader

## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Sharion Otey

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2021

Mentor: Dr. Seth N. Polk

The purpose of this project is to examine the lack of youth at Mouth Moriah Baptist Church. The participants' perspective is crucial to understanding why youth are not returning to the church after graduating from high school. The following chapters show the need for youth in the church and the why youth are leaving the church after graduating high school.

In this project, the data will demonstrate the causes for the lack of youth. Furthermore, it will present changes that are needed to increase the number of youth in the church. Current literature provides insight into what others have done to address the problem. At risk is the next generation of youth.

The goal is to create awareness for pastors, youth workers, lay-people, parents, and the congregational members to implement ways to attract youth to the church. The overall purpose of this project is to identify the reasons for the shortage of youth at (MMBC) which will lead to solutions, so the number of youth will increase between the ages of twelve to eighteen by ten percent in one year, and also to develop a young adult ministry.

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## **Abbreviations**

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
MMBC	<i>Mount Moriah Baptist Church</i>
NSYR	<i>The National Study of Youth and Religion</i>

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This project's focus is on the shortage of youth at Mount Moriah Baptist Church (MMBC). Over the past thirty years, there has been a steady decline in youth, and the decline has increased in the past ten years. The shortage of youth in the church poses a significant problem for the church's future in reaching the next generation for Christ and training them to become servants and leaders. The following factors are considered: statistics; demographics; differences of opinions about the problem; church efforts to resolve the issue; and church resources to address the problem,

The project will address the following questions: What is the number of youth currently in the church? Why is there a shortage of youth at MMBC? What portions of youth are leaving the church? What does the literature reveal about the lack of youth in the church? How have other churches addressed the same problem? The overall aim is to double the number of youth at MMBC over a five year period.

### **Ministry Context**

In 1863, during the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, there was an effort to organize the church. However, it was not until 1870 that a more formal organization took place. Joseph Young and six men constructed the first brick church facility erected by a Negro group in

South Carolina. This congregation became the first Negro Baptist Church in Spartanburg and was known for a short time as the Colored Baptist Church, and later became MMBC.<sup>1</sup>

MMBC has been under the leadership of two pastors over the past sixty-six years. The church was under the leadership of the late Reverend Doctor J. Leon Pridgen for twenty-two years. Then, God called Reverend Benjamin D. Snoddy to lead the congregation, and he has served the church for forty-four years. The church has 3,200 members on the roll, with an active congregation of 900.

In the late 1970s, MMBC had an abundance of youth. The church congregation included many young and middle-aged couples with children. As time progressed, the congregation became older adults who brought their grandchildren to church. The number of youth steadily declined in number. There were two services each Sunday; an eight o'clock service and one at ten o'clock. Many members left when the eight o'clock service was eliminated. The present size of the congregation is 900. Today, the church is predominately African American.<sup>2</sup>

### Demographics

The demographics of Spartanburg provide context for understanding youth who potentially could be reached by the church. "Spartanburg is the most populous city in Spartanburg County, South Carolina, United States, and the 9<sup>th</sup>-largest city by population in the state. The city has a population of 37,013."<sup>3</sup> Spartanburg County has an urban population of

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<sup>1</sup>Arch Design, *Mount Moriah Baptist Church History*, Spartanburg, [http: mtmoriahbaptist.net](http://mtmoriahbaptist.net), (accessed, November 04, 2019), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Audril Jones, "Youth Ministry of Mount Moriah Baptist Church", Spartanburg, <https://mtmoriahbaptist.net>, Spartanburg, SC, *Arch Design*, 2019, p. 2, Accessed, November 07, 2019, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Spartanburg, South Carolina Demographics. [www.areavibes.com/spartanburg-sc/demographics/](http://www.areavibes.com/spartanburg-sc/demographics/) (accessed March 15, 2021).

180,786.<sup>4</sup> “The population density in Spartanburg is 1188% higher than in South Carolina overall. The median age in Spartanburg is 9% lower than in South Carolina. In Spartanburg, 47.26% of the population is White, while 48.38% of the population is Black or African American, and 1.61% of the population is Asian.”<sup>5</sup> There are sixteen elementary, middle, and high schools within a five-mile radius of MMBC. Ten of the schools are within walking distance. For the 2020 school year, there are 85 public schools in Spartanburg County, South Carolina, serving 49,578 students. Minority enrollment is 41% (majority Black), and the student to teacher ratio is 15:1.”<sup>6</sup>

Most of Spartanburg’s public schools are in Spartanburg County School District 7, the same area as MMBC. However, the westernmost part of the city is served by Spartanburg County School District 6, which has two elementary schools within city limits. The city is also home to the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind. Additionally, there is a Spartanburg Preparatory School, a K-8 public charter school that is the only brick and mortar charter school in the Upstate. The school is adjacent to MMBC.

Spartanburg Christian Academy, a K-12 private school, is in North Spartanburg, along with the Spartanburg Day School offering grades K-4 and Oakbrook Preparatory and Westgate Christian schools, both K-12 private schools. Located in Hampton Heights, the Montessori Academy of Spartanburg is a Pre K-8 private school providing a Montessori educational approach. The school is across the street from MMBC. The Meeting Street Academy in downtown Spartanburg currently offers Pre-K and Kindergarten. Carver Middle School is right

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

beside MMBC and offers grades 6-8<sup>th</sup>. Facing Carver Middle School is Mary H. Wright Elementary school, which has grades K-5<sup>th</sup>. St. Paul the Apostle Catholic School is located in downtown Spartanburg. It is affiliated with the Diocese of Charleston and is K-8, and is within walking distance to MMBC.<sup>7</sup>

### Youth Ministry Structure

The response of the church to the needs of young people is what comprises a youth ministry. Building youth up in their faith in Jesus Christ and their walk with God is the focus. The design of the structure is to draw young people into responsible participation in the church's life, mission, and ministry. Loving God and loving others are the critical elements for helping youth understand their faith.<sup>8</sup>

Christian training was provided for this writer as a youth by family members, including the writer's mother, grandmother, older sister. A neighborhood teacher introduced the writer to Jesus Christ. Observing older people in the community and the church was a learning experience of what to do or not to do. After receiving Jesus at the age of fourteen, reading God's Word, and experiencing who God is and how a child of God lives, the writer stayed connected to the church and God's path for life. Upon leaving for college, the first task was to find a church. The writer has not strayed from the faith, but has continued through trials, tribulations, and heartaches. Faith and trust in God provide confidence to endure, no matter the circumstances of life. A blessed reward awaits the faithful at the end of life's journey.

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<sup>7</sup> Spartanburg, South Carolina Demographics. [www.areavibes.com/spartanburg-sc/demographics/](http://www.areavibes.com/spartanburg-sc/demographics/) (accessed March 15, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Arch Design, *Mount Moriah Baptist Church History*, Spartanburg, [http: mtmoriahbaptist.net](http://mtmoriahbaptist.net), (accessed, November 04, 2019), 1.

The context of this project is the MMBC Youth Ministry. The youth ministry began in 1975. Reverend Walter Belton and Reverend Milferd Brock provided leadership to the ministry until called to pastor in another local church. The current youth leader is Audril Jones, who has been serving for over thirty years. Jerone Wilder is the worship leader and speaker for the teens.<sup>9</sup> After graduating from high school, 90% of youth do not return to any church. Therefore, there is a shortage of youth at MMBC.<sup>10</sup>

The MMBC Youth Ministry desires to: (A) Invest time with the youth; (B) Involve the youth in the ministry, work, and service of the church and community; (C) Support the youth in all areas of their lives; (D) Engage the youth, and; (E) Know what the youth need and require when it comes to the church. This generation of youth lives in an age of technology. Keeping up with the technology, particularly in social media, is needed to help the church engage with youth.

The Youth Ministry includes educational trips, Teen Revival, teen outreach, Youth Day celebration, Teen Church, ushering, singing in the choir, and other ministries to meet the needs of youth. The youth assist the trustees in counting the monies received in Teen Church and preparing it for delivery to the bank.<sup>11</sup> Today's youth participate in Teen Revival, Vacation Bible School, Workshop Ministry, Praise and Worship team, Greeter's Ministry, Mime Ministry, College Preparation, and a Missionary Fundraiser to provide scholarships for students who are seniors. They provide food and clothes for a soup kitchen and homeless people, as well as a back-to-school backpack giveaway.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Arch Design, *Mount Moriah Baptist Church History*, 1. Youth Ministry definition, [https://www.youthpastor.com/youth\\_ministry](https://www.youthpastor.com/youth_ministry), (accessed February 21).

<sup>10</sup> Jones, Audril, *Youth Ministry of Mount Moriah Baptist Church*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Arch Design, *Mouth Moriah Baptist Church*, 1.

Youth males participate in a ministry called Boys to Men Ministry. The ministry is for ages twelve to eighteen. In this ministry, men in the church train the young men to become Christian men. They receive instruction in personal hygiene, proper dress, speech, etiquette, service to others, and anything else of interest to the youth.

The Women United for Christ Ministry, which consists of the Christian women of the church, offers training for youth females in etiquette, personal hygiene, proper dress, hair care, and speech. The ministry takes them on educational trips, to religious movies, shopping, and various other trips that are of interest. The Women's Ministry trains the youth for missionary work, tutorial training, and how to set an example and mentor the children's group.

#### Youth Ministry Leadership

In past years there was only one person over the Youth Ministry. Youth leadership consists of a youth pastor, a coordinator, and fifteen youth advisors. The workers consist of twelve women and three men. The youth workers are people in MMBC who love God, who desire to share his love and serve as role models for young people. Many of the youth workers also hold other leadership positions in the church. Some serve as deacons, deaconesses, Sunday school teachers, and choir members.

The foundation of keeping youth in the church is love for God and giving one's life to Christ. The church has competition from the world, which attracts and engages youth through various platforms. Media, social media, music, sports, recreation, entertainment, and more draw youth's attention. Many churches utilize creative avenues, including contemporary music, dance teams, mimes, and video centers to attract youth to the church. MMBC has a youth chapel, a game room, arts and craft room, a youth pastor, a youth coordinator, and fifteen youth advisors



and youth programs. In recent years as overall membership has declined, the number of youth attending has also declined.

The youth coordinator and workers' goal is to have parents play a key role in helping the youth engage in church service, ministry, Bible study, and community involvement. The church serves as a means to help parents mentor and educate their children. MMBC always encourages parents to attend both youth and children's meetings and activities. The church desires to equip parents and students with the necessary tools to develop Christian leaders and productive citizens in the community. Parent input is an essential part of helping with the different ministries for youth.

MMBC has an after-school tutorial program to assist all children in any struggles they may have. Each day youth experience the challenges of school, peer pressure, and bullying. The youth leaders want to provide a place where youth can trust, engage, feel safe around, and believe someone is listening to the concerns and issues they face. Serving God, the church, and the community is a crucial element of youth ministry training. Leaders have the responsibility of guiding the youth as Christians, mentors, friends, and counselors. The bottom line is to model the role as a follower of God.

### Youth Worship

God created the world and gave life to man and woman. According to Genesis 3, sin entered the world. Redemption ultimately came through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Understanding the Bible and what God expects of his children does not guarantee that youth will accept the gospel. The Youth Ministry ensures that the gospel's truth is presented accurately through Bible study, Sunday School, and ministries so

youth can respond in faith. Youth are equipped in biblical studies, theology, and fellowship with others.

The youth participate in a Bible Debate at MMBC with other churches. Youth prepare by learning biblical definitions, scriptures, and stories in the Bible. The purpose is to help the youth grow in their knowledge of the Bible. Through teaching, worship involvement, and Bible debate, youth are prepared to serve and apply what they have learned. Additional training is offered through workshops to prepare the youth.

Teen Church of MMBC is a unique worship service designed to minister to teens in a relevant and meaningful way. The worship service is biblical, and the sermons deal with issues relating to contemporary youth. There are praise and worship times designed to give glory to God. There is a time for youth to provide testimonies and express concerns. There is a separate chapel for teen church, and service is two or three times per month.

The Youth Choir learns traditional and contemporary hymns. They lift their voices in praise to God. The youth also sing in revivals and other programs at the church. The youth experience the joy of the Lord through music. There is also a youth praise and worship team used for morning devotions. The Youth Choir helps the children's choir and also participates in other children's programs as needed.

The youth participate in the Prayer Ministry. The ministry's purpose is for the youth to develop an active prayer life of dependence on God. They learn to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The training provides an opportunity to pray with others in the church.

The Youth Greeter's Ministry is where youth welcome those coming to church. The greeter is the first person the congregation sees, and the first impression is everything. A friendly

welcome before the service helps the congregation encounter God in the worship service. The greeters are trained and participate in events that happen at the church.

There is a Youth Ushering Ministry at MMBC. Youth are trained to greet and seat the congregation as the service begins and ends. The youth participate in collecting the offerings, helping the trustees count, and preparing the offerings for the bank. They serve as examples for other youth.

Encouraging friends to come to church helps youth be part of the Evangelism Team. During the summer, students can participate in evangelism through tent revivals, teen revivals, and going door to door in surrounding neighborhoods. Young people get to share their faith with others while living a Christian life. The youth can enhance communication skills with people from all walks of life.

Each of these ministries is helpful for the youth to prepare, grow, and serve. The next generation must receive training. Through training the youth can see and reach their potential as children of God. Helping the youth grow in Christ during the developmental years is the key to passing down the Gospel's truth to the next generation.

### Youth Activities

Youth activities include roller skating, movies, bowling, and pizza parties. Overnight stays at the church promote fellowship and interaction with peers. Fishing, horseback riding, bounce houses, indoor rock climbing, and ice skating, promote healthy competition and team-building. Other activities include visiting theme parks, going to the beach, basketball, football, soccer, and baseball games.

The youth participate in a yearly educational trip, where they visit Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) along with Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthplace. A part of the

trip is the battle of the bands where HBCU bands compete for the best band title. The youth also learn etiquette on dressing, eating, and behaving in public through their activities.<sup>13</sup>

### Service Opportunities

Youth Outreach includes missionary work. The youth participate in visiting the sick, homebound, nursing homes, assisted living homes, and hospitals. They also help the Men's Ministry repair the homes of older adults. The Men of God Ministry in the church supports the older people in need with repair projects inside and outside of their homes. This project is called Christmas in July. The youth ministry is a part of the project and builds life skills in helping others. Yard work and beautification are also a part of this project. The Youth Ministry helps with tutoring and reading programs. In October, the Harvest Festival is one of the activities that the youth assist with, and in December, they help with the Singing Christmas Choral event.

### Special Events

Youth Day is celebrated each year. The purpose is to focus on the youth and the issues facing their generation. It consists of a guest youth pastor, a choir celebration, and a weekend of workshops and classes designed to enhance the Christian life and faith of the church's youth. Each year the church chooses a theme and a Scripture passage for Youth Day. The main focus is on the value of youth as part of God's creation.

Annually, the Youth Ministry puts on a talent show. The youth are encouraged to show off talent, gifts, and skills, which include singing, dancing, poems, and monologues. The monies collected support activities for the ministry, also goes to the church Building Fund.

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<sup>13</sup> Arch Design, *Mount Moriah Baptist Church History*, 1.

Youth Revival includes a guest speaker, visiting youth choirs, ushers, and a pizza party. Youth Revival is a five-day event. The focus is on committing everything to and depending on God. The youth get to experience worshipping God with other youth.

A Youth Retreat is held every other year at either Ridgecrest Conference Center or the Great Wolf Lodge in North Carolina. The design develops bonds and relationships with youth from different churches. The retreat provides the youth an opportunity to relax and unwind from the daily activities of school, work, and home. The youth can connect with God and one another. Many activities also allow youth to grow and participate in leadership skills. The Youth Retreat promotes social, intellectual, and discipline skills.

A Youth Debate team competes with other area students held each year. MMBC youth have won the debate for the past three years on all levels. The youth participate in a Black History Bowl with other churches at one of the local colleges. The event challenges youth on their knowledge of the history of African Americans and their events, and contributions to society. The youth must understand their cultural history.

Counseling is also available to the youth to deal with developmental stages, peer pressure, school, life, and death. It is crucial to MMBC that the youth know that others care about them and their concerns. Young people need support as they navigate developmental stages and the challenges that come along with the stages.

### **Problem Presented**

Ninety percent of MMBC are older people. The shortage of youth is apparent in the youth choir, usher ministry, and other programs planned for youth. The Youth Director, Audril Jones, states:

The reason the youth do not come back to MMBC after graduating high school is that the church does not have a Young Adult Ministry and does not try to reach the youth where they are in life. Some felt that the church did not treat all youth equally, like other ministries in the church. Also, through the years, the congregation aged and stopped having children. The pastor has aged and has led the church for forty-five years, and some feel new leadership is needed.<sup>14</sup>

There was approximately fifty youth at MMBC thirty years ago. There are just over half as many youth in the church today. The ratio of female and male youth has remained 50:50. The decline in youth attendance has been relatively gradual. Adding to the problem in recent years, the youth minister left to pastor a church full-time, and in the process, called a lot of the youth parents and asked them to bring their youth to the new church. Some of the youth left MMBC at that time.<sup>15</sup>

### **Purpose Statement**

The youth are essential for the future health of the church. Without youth to carry on and become leaders, a generation will be lost. The elders of the church train the youth to take over when they are gone. The goal is to have enough youth represented from ages twelve to eighteen in the church for ministry and leadership. Identifying the reasons for the shortage of youth at MMBC will lead to solutions so the number of youth increases. The church needs to retain youth after graduating high school and create a Young Adult Ministry at MMBC. The project's purpose is to double the amount of youth at MMBC, ages twelve to eighteen, over a five year period.

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<sup>14</sup> Jones, Audril, *Mount Moriah Youth*. Spartanburg, S.C: Mount Moriah Baptist Church, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Snoddy, *Mount Moriah Youth*. Spartanburg, S.C: Mount Moriah Baptist Church, 2019.

## Basic Assumptions

First, the reader will assume the data concerning the population, statistical test, project design, limitations, and other delimitations are accurate.<sup>16</sup> Second, not all assumptions will provide an accurate picture of those participating in the study due to demographic and church size differences. Third is the assumption that because the church does not have a Young Adult Ministry, it contributes to the problem. Fourth is the assumption there is a correlation between an overall decline in the church and the decline in the number of youth in the church. A final assumption is that many youth will stay in the area or return to the area after college and are therefore prospects for returning to and continuing in the church.

## Definitions

Current youth and young adults are Millennials or part of Generation Y, including anyone born in the period from the early 1980s to the early 2000s.<sup>17</sup> The unchurched youth fall into four categories. They include youth who were in the church from an early age that were brought by their parents and did not continue; youth who have never regularly attended church; youth who have no issues with the church but do not attend; and youth who are angry with the church because of negative past experiences.<sup>18</sup>

According to Life-Way Research:

Church dropouts are defined as those who stopped attending church regularly for at least one year. Disengagement- The term disengagement has several connotations from a military troop with-drawing from combat or a couple breaking off plans to be married.

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<sup>16</sup> Ed Stetzer, Stanley Richie, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The idea is that the dropout has become disconnected from the church body. Disengagement may indicate a disengagement from Christianity entirely. Re-entry- describes those who have been away from the church at least a year but return. Veteran youth pastor/worker-describing someone who has worked with the youth for more than five years. Church-goers-Those who still attend church after graduating from high school and remain in the church.<sup>19</sup>

Each of these groups is represented in the ministry sphere of MMBC.

### **Statement of Limitations**

The limitations could affect the outcome of the project. The limitations are the time needed to evaluate the information, duration of the project; available resources; reliability of interviewees; reliability of data; and location of the project. Each of these is a contributing factor to the reliability of the project. Presumably, these factors are reasonably constant and do not pose significant limitations in the outcomes and recommendations.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations are the questions used for the project. How many youth are in the church? What portion of the youth are leaving the church? Why is there a shortage of youth at MMBC? How long has the shortage of youth been a problem? What have other churches done about the lack of youth in their churches?

The project is affected by the size of the congregation, the number of surrounding churches, and the congregation's general composition. For perspective, there are around thirty other churches within a five-mile radius of MMBC. The following information is considered when collecting data from literature results and studies: the project's accuracy, the duration of the project, the group demographic interviewed, and the conclusions of the project.

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<sup>19</sup> Ed Stetzer, Stanley Richie, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 9-10.



## **Thesis Statement**

Identifying the reasons for the shortage of youth at MMBC will lead to solutions, so the number of youth will increase in the church, and so the church can create a Young Adult Ministry to retain youth after graduating from high school. Youth are the future generation of leaders, and lack of youth leaves a generation at risk. This project will hopefully create ways to increase the number of youth in the church and better retain youth in the church after graduating from high school.

## **Summary**

MMBC has a strong history, but the number of youth has steadily declined, and many youth have not returned to church after graduating from high school through the years. There are numerous opportunities in the church, but several factors contribute to the shortage. The congregation is aging and no longer having as many children. The church has much competition with the world in attracting youth. There is no Young Adult Ministry for the youth to transition to after high school. Also, there are other church choices in the area for youth. If solutions can be discovered, then the number of youth can grow, and more youth can be retained in the long term.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Literature Review

Numerous factors contribute to youth leaving the church and why they no longer attend church. The conceptual framework is to identify the reasons based on previous studies and writing. There is not a single reason why youth leave the church or no longer attend. Instead, there seem to be multiple reasons for the problem. The Literature Review outlines what others have written about the subject and provides valuable insight into the issues.

### Reasons for Youth Dropout

Much has been written about youth and the church. Literature shows youth have been leaving the church for over fifty years. David Kinnaman of the Barna Research Group wrote *Unchristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters*. Kinnaman notes that youth perception of the church is unfavorable. He provides a list of reasons why the youth are leaving the church and believes the new generation of youth is looking to engage in fresh experiences that motivate them.<sup>20</sup>

According to Kinnaman, one reason youth leave the church is because they believe the church is not relevant. Some attended when they were younger only because of their parents. Another reason is some youth have an unfavorable view of the church. Many had negative

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<sup>20</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2007), 35.

experiences with people in the church. Still, others do not believe the Bible. Some attended church but were never engaged.<sup>21</sup> Work and time constraints are also issues. Some never made a genuine commitment to Christ. Today's youth also say that they are spiritual but not religious.

Drew Mosser documents in his book *Ready or Not: Leaning into Life in Our Twenties* that many youth raised in the church no longer think the church is essential. They are busy with everyday life, and the church is not a priority. For those who feel like they were made to go to church growing up, when they graduate from high school, some take a break from church.<sup>22</sup>

Naomi Riley indicates in *Got Religion?: How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back*, that youth are leaving the church because of ineffective youth ministry. The youth have outside influences from the world, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and video games, with which the church is competing. The youth ministry must be engaging and focus on the Bible, Jesus Christ and the Gospel's real message.<sup>23</sup>

Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard reveal in *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*, nine reasons youth are leaving the church:

The church service is boring. There is Legalism within the church. The church leaders are hypocrites. The church is too political. Because of self-righteous and judgmental people in the church. The church is too far to go to. The church and the Bible are not relevant to personal growth. The preferred church denomination not in their area.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>22</sup> Drew Mosser and Jess Fankhauser, *Ready or Not: Leaning into Life in Our Twenties*. (Colorado: NavPress, 2018), 149.

<sup>23</sup> Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Got Religion?: How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2014), 109.

<sup>24</sup> Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop it* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2009), 29.

Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes in *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* list similar reasons that Ham did in his book. Both groups of authors note why youth are leaving the church. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes write, “In a nutshell, the church is hypocritical and irrelevant. Today’s youth are watching, and the church is not relaying an accurate and consistent message.”<sup>25</sup>

Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III in *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* consider the issue of reclaiming youth. Many youth attended church in their teens for years but left because the church was not essential after graduating from high school. Rainer’s focus is on reclaiming those who are considered dropouts from the church. The reason for the dropouts is, “The church is not relevant. A negative experience from the congregation. Location of the church. Time and work schedule is a factor.”<sup>26</sup>

J. Warner Wallace provides input on the topic: *Are Young People Really Leaving Christianity?* Wallace builds on his experience and insight as a youth pastor who has witnessed the reason why youth are leaving the church and admits shamefully being a part of the reason until changing course. Wallace indicates the “alarming numbers and statistic along should cause the church to move and change concerning the dilemma and flight of today’s young people.”<sup>27</sup> Wallace concludes, “a case be made that young Christians are leaving the Church in record numbers. Also, that many of these young people are leaving because the culture around them has

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<sup>25</sup> Stetzer, *Lost and Found*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> J. Warner Wallace, “Updated: Are Young People Really Leaving Christianity?” (Cold-Case Christianity, January 12, 2019), Accessed February 16, 2020.

impacted them deeply and caused them to question the truth claims of Christianity.” The church is not consistent. Today’s youth are questioning the accuracy of the Bible.<sup>28</sup>

Tom Bisset interviewed Christian youth in *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*. This book provides actual comments from interviewed youth, asking them when, why, and how they abandoned their faith. He identifies four prominent reasons: They left because they had troubling, unanswered questions about the faith; they left because their faith was not “working” for them; they left because they allowed other things to take priority; they left because they never personally owned their faith.<sup>29</sup>

Ham, Beemer, and Hillard indicate that church youth are “lost” in their hearts and minds in elementary, middle, and high school – not in college, as many assumed. The connection to church starts at an early age. If the message of Christianity does not take hold, it will remain unchangeable. The youth need a foundation on which to build their faith. The truth and accuracy of the Bible is that foundation.<sup>30</sup>

### Percentage of Youth Leaving the Church

Studies from Roozen, Roof, McKinney, and LifeWay provide insight into the statistical number of youth leaving the church. “It is estimated that 40% of Americans drop out of the church with the teenage years being the peak. The survey discovered that 59% of non-churchgoers were under the age of thirty-five.”<sup>31</sup> “LifeWay Research revealed that 70% of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Tom Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), 15, 215.

<sup>30</sup> Ham, *Already Gone*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Alethia J. Simmons, “Rescuing the Millennials: Four Essential Lessons Learned and Eight Key Principles to Reclaiming the Generation,” Virginia (2015) <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/1066>, pp.4.

twenty-three to thirty-year-olds dropped out of church for at least one year. However, 30% of those who indicated they dropped out of the church returned to the church.”<sup>32</sup>

Christopher Dorth found in *Best Practice for Retaining Youth Students in the Local Church Post-High* provides statistical numbers as to what percentage of youth dropout. He notes 70% of youth between the age of eighteen to twenty-two drop out of the church, but 35% return to church. Therefore, over half of the youth at some point do return to church.<sup>33</sup>

Alethia J. Simmons’ study looks at reclaiming youth in “Rescuing the Millennials: Four Essential Lessons Learned and Eight Key Principles to Reclaiming the Generation.” Simmons indicates that 59% of the Millennials who grew up in Christian churches are now leaving their faith or the church in their early twenties. Also, 52% of Millennials are churchless. These are alarming numbers. The future generation of youth in the church is at risk.<sup>34</sup>

Ham, Beemer, and Hillard show a decline in the number of youth attending church between 1998 to 2005. There was an overall decline in church attendance by 15%. The key to stopping the decline in youth is better youth ministries. If youth church attendance continues to decline, the church will lack many youth.<sup>35</sup>

Rainer and Rainer compare the dropout and stay percentage of youth in the church. They reveal two-thirds of youth dropped out of church between the age of eighteen and twenty-two.

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<sup>32</sup> Alethia J. Simmons, “Rescuing the Millennials: Four Essential Lessons Learned and Eight Key Principles to Reclaiming the Generation,” Virginia (2015) <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/1066>,pp.4.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Dorth."Best Practice for Retaining Youth Students in the Local Church Post-High." PhD; Liberty University, Virginia, 2014. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest>.(accessed November 3, 2019),1-2.

<sup>34</sup> Alethia J. Simmons, “Rescuing the Millennials: Four Essential Lessons Learned and Eight Key Principles to Reclaiming the Generation,” Virginia (2015) <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/1066>,pp.4.

<sup>35</sup> Ham, *Already Gone*, 12.

Therefore, 30% stay in the church and 70% dropped out. A large percentage of youth leave the church after graduating from high school. Rainer concludes that to reclaim a generation, the dropout percentage must decrease, and the stay percentage increase.<sup>36</sup>

Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford wrote *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers*. This book provides insight to youth workers on how to nurture youth long term. It shows that 40% to 50% of youth who are not connected to a youth group when they graduate high school will fail to stick with their faith in college.<sup>37</sup>

Kenda C. Dean, in *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, indicates that there are still youth attending church and have a relationship with God, and the church. Dean wrote that 40% of teenagers interviewed said religion was necessary. One in twelve attended weekly services, participated in youth group, prayer service, and read the Bible regularly. Many felt close to God, and faith was important in their lives, according to the NSYR.<sup>38</sup> T.C. Pinkney referenced data from the Southern Baptist Convention. 70% of teenagers involved in church youth groups stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation. The data overall reveals that church is becoming less relevant to today's youth.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 20.

<sup>37</sup> Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers* (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 6.

<sup>38</sup> Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46.

<sup>39</sup> T.C. Pinkney, *Southern Baptist Convention Data* (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Publishing, 2001), 1.

A *Pew Research Study* surveyed religious youth who said they were raised as a member of a particular religion. 78% shed their religious identity in adulthood. 50% said a “lack of belief led them to move away from religion.” There were 20% that said they were in “opposition to organized religion in general.” 18% said they were “religiously unsure. About 10% said they “may hold certain religious beliefs, but they (were) not currently taking part in religious practices.<sup>40</sup>

Ed Stetzer wrote *Dropouts and Disciples: How Many Students Are Really Leaving the Church?* The article looks at those who attended church, dropouts, those who returned, and those who did not. Data shows that about 70% of young adults who indicated they attended church regularly for at least one year in high school do drop out—but do not miss the details. Of those who left, almost two-thirds return and currently attend church (in the timeframe of our study). The dropout rate is from all Protestant churches—evangelical and mainline.<sup>41</sup>

Stetzer’s study further revealed that in most cases, “teenage dropout was not intentional.”<sup>42</sup> 80% of young people who dropped out of church said they did not plan to do so during high school. Most teenagers primarily leave because they have significant disagreements with the theology of the church. For the most part, teenagers lose track of the church and stop seeing it as necessary.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship,” *Pew Research Center*, August 22, 2016, [https://www.pewresearch.org/pf\\_16-08-23\\_churchesreport\\_hp260px/%20](https://www.pewresearch.org/pf_16-08-23_churchesreport_hp260px/%20), (accessed February 16, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Ed Stetzer, “Dropouts, and Disciples: How Many Students Are Really Leaving the Church?,” May 14, 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/may/dropouts-and-disciples-how-many-students-are-really-leaving.html>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



## How Youth View the Church

Many of today's youth have a negative view and experience of the church as noted by Kinnaman, "The youth have a need for new experiences and if something does not work, they move to the next experience. The church is viewed as hypocritical and irrelevant." Therefore, a large percentage of youth are not attending church.<sup>44</sup> Mosser writes that "youth who were raised in the church no longer see it as important."<sup>45</sup> Various reasons are related to why the church is not essential to youth: it is hypocritical, too judgmental, and they have had harmful experience with members of the congregation. Mosser concludes the church does not appear prepared to minister to a new generation.<sup>46</sup>

Simmons's study shows that some "Millennials were once faithful yet still love Jesus, but are skeptical and resistant to Christianity. Many youth say they are 'spiritual but not religious.' It is a popular phrase and initialism used to self-identify a life stance of spirituality that takes issue with organized religion as the sole or most valuable means of furthering spiritual growth."<sup>47</sup>

Lillian Kwon when writing the article, "Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church", reveals youth are leaving what is known as "the traditional church." Many young people are leaving the traditional church that they may have grown up knowing and are searching for alternative worship, such as the Emerging Church. Kwon highlights that young people are not running to something but from something. The young people are running from traditional music, worship style, form, and denominational church. Kwon further states that this

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<sup>44</sup> Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Mosser, *Ready or Not*, 149.

<sup>47</sup> Simmons, "Rescuing the Millennials," 3.

generation of young people can see through the hypocrisy of the church and are looking for an authentic church.<sup>48</sup>

According to Dean in her book *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, youth have faith, but not durable faith. “American young people are okay with religious faith, but it does not concern them, and it is not durable to hold the young people after high school. Very few teenagers are committed or show openness to religion [...] If teenagers are not able to articulate their faith, it may be because the faith we show them is too spineless to merit much in the way of conversation.”<sup>49</sup>

Dean notes that young people see religion participation like music concerts and sporting events, but not as a commitment to God being an integral part of their life. Dean concludes, “Today’s young people are looking for faith and religion that they can call their own. It is the faith of their parents while growing up that becomes the basis for their faith.”<sup>2250</sup>

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* write about teenagers’ ability to talk about their faith, beliefs, and practices. The majority of teenagers cannot articulate their faith, religious beliefs and practices, and its place in their lives. The *de facto* of the U.S. contemporary religious teenager is that: a God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth; God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions; the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself; God does not

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<sup>48</sup> Lillian Kwon, “Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church,” *The Christian Post* (February 2007), <http://www.christainpost.com/news/young-people-leaving-hypocrisy-not-traditional-church-25912/>, (accessed December 27, 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

need to be mainly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem, and good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>2351</sup>

Josh McDowell's and David H. Bellis' study in *The Last Christian Generation* adds to the conversation concerning teenagers, faith, belief, and practices. 63% of teenage Christians do not think that Jesus is the Son of the one true God. 51% do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. 68% do not feel that the Holy Spirit is an actual entity. Only 33% of church youth have said that the church will play a part in their lives when they leave home.<sup>52</sup>

Larry Barnett's study, *Next Generation Project*, provides insight to barriers to youth faith. Students in the age range of thirteen to eighteen years old offer the following "barriers to faith":

I have a hard time believing that a good God would allow so much evil or suffering in the world (29%). Christians are hypocrites (23%). I believe science refutes too much of the Bible" (20%). I do not believe in fairy tales (19%). There are too many injustices in the history of Christianity (15%). I used to go to church, but it is not important to me anymore (12%). I had a bad experience at church with a Christian (6%).<sup>53</sup>

Statistically, Stetzer provides four response factors that were the most predictive in determining which teenagers stayed in the church:

Teenagers wanted the church to help in their decision-making. Having both parents attend church helped. At least one adult from church made a significant investment in teens personally and spiritually (between 15 and 18). When teenagers see an active, practiced faith in their parents and other positive examples at church, they will stop being dropouts and start being disciples.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Josh McDowell and David H. Bellis, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, FL: Green Keys Books, 2006), 34.

<sup>53</sup> Larry, Barnett, "Next Generation Project," 2016, <https://www.projectnextgen.org/author/larry-barnett> (accessed February 16, 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Stetzer, "Dropouts, and Disciples."12.

Nate Loper dismisses some of the myths about how youth view the church in *The Church—Training Ground for Truth, Battle for Kids*. He discussed three myths. The first myth is that churches that draw young people today must have a super-cool vibe, a young pastor with skinny jeans, a laser light kit in a new multimillion-dollar facility, or some other hype. The fact is that the study showed some churches are flashy and hip, and as a result, they draw lots of young people. However, this was certainly not the case for all of the congregations in our study, not even most. The second myth is that young people want a shallow or watered-down teaching style. However, the fact is that engaging today's young people does not mean refraining from talking about Jesus too much or the genuine cost of following him. The third myth is that youth believe the church is boring. The fact is, contrary to popular thinking, young people today want it easy. Many love their churches because their churches inspire them to act. The goal is to follow Jesus not from a place of superiority or power, but out of an invitation to pursue the way of Jesus together.<sup>55</sup>

### Church Involvement

Kinnaman and Lyons, look at the church and its involvement with youth. They note,

The church is not prepared to adequately minister to the spiritual needs of the Millennials. Therefore, the church needs to get active in its efforts to address the current state of the ministry. There is a need to come together, embrace a new way of being the church, and move forward to bridge the gap of generational disengagement. If not, the youth of today will not be coming to church tomorrow.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Nate Loper, "The Church—Training Ground for Truth, Battle for Kids' Mind" January 1, 2013; last featured June 2, 2015, <https://answersingenesis.org/christianity/church/the-church-training-ground-for-truth>.

<sup>56</sup> Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 142.

Pastors are looking to entrench a new church model into American neighborhoods, as found in Riley's research from *Got Religion?: How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back*. Riley concludes that a new generation is looking for a church different from the traditional church. Today's youth want a church that can relate to what is going on in their lives and one that genuinely cares about them.<sup>57</sup>

Ham, Beemer, and Hillard wrote, "Church leaders should passionately and consistently challenge church members to maximize their influence with youth and adults." The congregation must have a welcoming spirit. It is the elders in the church who will help train the youth.<sup>58</sup>

Rainer and Rainer discuss the details that fall to the responsibility of the pastor. They write, "The pastor is responsible for the sermon, and it should specifically address the youth." It is the pastor who oversees the youth programs. As the overseer, the pastor has the knowledge of the Bible to direct and guide youth.<sup>59</sup>

Dean's study reveals the responsibility of the church. The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) study shows "the underline fault of the American churches is trying to create a do-good, feel-good spirituality that has nothing to do with the triune of God. Christianity and even less to do with the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the love to follow him into this world. So today's youth are described as 'Almost Christian.'"<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Riley, *Got Religion?*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Ham, *Already Gone*, 135.

<sup>59</sup> Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

The perspective that Dean shares is “that it is up to the Christian adults and congregation to hand over the good news of Jesus Christ to the next young generation.”<sup>61</sup> In Christian tradition, faith is a matter of desire, a desire for God, and a desire to love others in Christ’s name. It is love that is the foundation of Christianity. Dean reveals that “the church has not conveyed the bases of faith to a younger generation.”<sup>62</sup>

Dean compares the church not conveying a faith foundation to the example of Jacob and Esau in the Bible. According to Genesis 25:29-34, when Esau is hungry, Jacob asks him to sell his birthright. Dean sees the church as thinking with their stomach, eating what smells good to calm the rumbling in the stomach. “Sociologists,” according to Dean, “paint the American Christian as restless people who come to church for the same reason people as going out to dinner. Looking for someone to serve us, someone who knows us, and to have a meal that tastes like home, and makes us feel loved.”<sup>63</sup>

Reggie McNeal reveals in *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* that “The current state of the church is on life support.<sup>64</sup> It is living on the works of the previous generation, and the plug will be pulled when the money runs out, the loyalist dies or both. Six tough questions are presented to the church: recapturing the spirit of Christianity; replacing “church growth” with a wider vision of kingdom growth; developing disciples instead of church members; fostering the rise of a new apostolic leadership; focusing on spiritual formation rather

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<sup>61</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 6.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2009), Introduction.

than church programs; and shifting from prediction and planning to preparation for the challenges of an uncertain world.<sup>65</sup>

In Loper's "The Church—Training Ground for Truth, Battle for Kids' Mind," experience from speaking to pastors, youth pastors, and other church leaders reveals that "many see the signs of decay but do not know the root of the problem or how to reverse it. They do not realize that significant changes may be required to retool or refocus certain areas and turn the tide of decline in our youth ministries and churches."<sup>66</sup>

Apart from considering the things the youth could do for the church, Vivian Falae adds to the conversation as to what the church should be doing when it comes to youth in, *Who is a Youth in the Church and What Is Their Role?* One should also think about the role of the Church for Christian youth. The most important thing any church can do for youth is to provide guidance and knowledge. While many young people have lovely parents/guardians/teachers, some do not have that luxury. To save them from themselves or from the situations they might be in, the church has to show them the righteous path that involves faith in the Lord.

Falae reveals that the church can be an excellent way for many young people to find meaning in their lives. With help from other church members (pastors, priests, other believers), the youth can find a place for God in their hearts and lives. They can learn from other people's experiences, share their own, and hear feedback from others.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, Falae concludes that churches should offer educational programs for young people to teach them how to be good, faithful people in the future. These programs should also

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<sup>65</sup> McNeal, *The Present Future*, Introduction.

<sup>66</sup> Loper, "The Church." 1.

<sup>67</sup> Falae, *Who is a Youth in the Church and What is Their Role?* <https://www.legit.ng/1135163-who-a-youth-church-role.html>, 3.

provide information that children cannot find at school or home. However, that is not all; the church's role in youth development should not end with just providing the necessary knowledge and guidance. It should also provide the youth with all forms of support. The support can come from anyone within the church and take on any form. It can be spiritual, financial, moral, social, or any other form of help that the youth might need. As young people are quite a vulnerable transitional group, they should have all the support they can get in their complicated journey towards adulthood.<sup>68</sup>

### The Need for Change

Kinnaman and Lyons write that if the church does not deal with youth leaving, it will fail to connect to a new generation. Their book notes the changes the church needs to make. The church will fail to connect with a new generation. Christianity has a negative problem and is failing at what God has commissioned the church to do. A new generation is waiting for the church to respond. Today's youth are watching the church.<sup>69</sup>

Ham, Beemer, and Hillard declare that "it is time for the church to wake up! A mass exodus is underway." The numbers reveal that the next generation is calling it quits on the traditional church." The traditional church can no longer adequately ministry to youth. Ham concludes that the youth are leaving the church after graduating from high school.<sup>70</sup>

In *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Re-Thinking Faith*, David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins discuss why the church needs to change. "The church is at a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>69</sup> Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 14.

<sup>70</sup> Ham, *Already Gone*, 22.



critical point when it comes to today's youth, and the church needs to rethink its efforts to make disciples."<sup>71</sup> The Bible has instructions and guidelines for the church. The church is failing at the truth of spreading the Gospel and accurately portraying Jesus. A new generation of youth is leaving the church and their faith.<sup>72</sup>

Simmons' article adds to the conversation of the church needing to change. She writes, "the church had lost its love, affection, and wholeness. The church has become unhealthy and dysfunctional." The church has lost its direction and needs to get back on track or risk losing a generation of youth and believers.<sup>73</sup>

Dean's study shows that "the solution to the lack of young people in the church is not to beef up youth programs or make the worship experience fresh, but it is in modeling the mature and passionate faith the young people need to see and have." Programs will not keep young people engaged. They are looking for a true relationship with God.<sup>74</sup>

Mark DeVries, in his book *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It*, assesses the church need to change. He writes, "the church is gambling with the lives of the next generation of youth." The hope is that the next youth minister will connect with the youth and bring them back to the church. DeVries

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<sup>71</sup> David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Re-Thinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), introduction.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Simmons, "Rescuing the Millennials," 5.

<sup>74</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

gives steps for a thriving youth ministry, but these steps are not a quick fix. According to DeVries, most churches do not have the patience to build a sustainable youth ministry.<sup>75</sup>

In “The Religiosity Cycle,” George H. Gallup Jr. notes that the Gallop Poll of 2002 revealed that teens are more religious during their early teen years and that religiosity begins to decline as teens near adulthood. Teens, in their early years, go to church with their parents. Some feel that they have no choice. As an adult, the foundation of their faith is their parents’ faith.

When asked, “How important are your religious beliefs?” 63% of 13 to 15-year-olds answered, “very important,” compared to 52% of 16 to 17-year-olds. Church attendance also drops during the teen and young adult years and begins to climb as adults age. 54% of teens aged 13 to 15 reported having attended church in the past seven days, as did 51% of 16- to 17-year-old teens. The figure drops to 32% among 18- to 29- year-olds but rises again to 44% among 50- to 64-year-olds and 60% among those aged 75 and older. 69% of 13- to 15-year-olds report being members of a church or synagogue, compared to 59% of 16- to 17-year-olds, 60% of 18- to 29-year-olds, 72% of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 80% of those aged 75 and older.<sup>76</sup>

In *5 Ways to View and Relate to Youth as Jesus Did*, Aaron Crumbly lists five thoughts for the church to reach Millennials:

1. Love them: young people today seem to crave genuine, no strings attached, healthy love from other adults, and they want it to be unconditional love through the good times of their life and the times they mess up. Moreover, they want us to love first, without qualifications added.
2. Be biblically correct: millennials do not want fluff or sugar-coating. They want an authentic, honest approach to the Bible. Whether they believe all of it yet or not, they

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<sup>75</sup> Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn’t Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* (Downers Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> George H. Gallup Jr., “The Religiosity Cycle” *Gallup*, June 4, 2002, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/6124/Religiosity-Cycle.aspx> (accessed February 16, 2020).

- want the people who teach to teach what they believe and then be willing to discuss it with them as they explore.
3. Be culturally aware and relevant.
  4. Challenge their faith. Jesus was always challenging the disciples to do what they thought was impossible. So stretch them by challenging them in their walk with God.
  5. Pray for them. They will find comfort that someone else cares about them.<sup>77</sup>

This generation is exposed to problems, challenges, and changes in the world.

Furthermore, changes are coming fast. Today's youth are more socially conscious than in years past. They want the church to be addressing the needs they see in the world around them and give them a place to plug in. They want to make a difference. Many want to be a part of the change. Some want support in their pursuits. They want to serve somewhere they believe is doing good work and make a positive impact on the world, and they may even want to help lead the effort. The youth want someone to value their ideas and input and allow Millennials to do things their way, often with technology and within groups of friends.<sup>78</sup>

Today's church tends to protect the past and turn young people away instead of creating a genuine church experience and being transparent. The overused word is authentic, but this generation wants to learn from the mistakes of those older than them. Pretending as if people in the church have always been wonderful does not help them deal with the issues they are dealing with today. They need living examples of battling life's temptations, struggles, and fears. Guide them, show love, and they will seek wisdom. They want help making life's decisions, but they want it done to help them understand wise choices but also gives them the freedom to choose

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<sup>77</sup> Aaron Crumbey, "5 Ways to View and Relate to Youth as Jesus Did," *Ministry Today Magazine*, <https://ministrytodaymag.com/life/youth/20309-5>.

<sup>78</sup> Aaron Crumbey, "5 Ways to View and Relate to Youth as Jesus Did," *Ministry Today Magazine*, accessed: June 10, 2020 you, <https://ministrytodaymag.com/life/youth/20309-5>.

their path. Young people today crave older adults who will walk with them through the obstacles they face daily; while extending love, grace, and support.<sup>79</sup>

Rainer and Rainer note the church's changes and provide a fundamental list: We must stop bemoaning the death of cultural Christianity; such whining does us no good. Natural growth is not a reality for many churches. People no longer come to a church to be accepted. It is not about people coming, but it is about going. In the Great Commission, the charge to Christians is about going and spread the Gospel throughout the world. The church cannot stay the same in these changing times.<sup>80</sup>

Rainer continues by noting, "indeed, God's truth is unchanging. However, the church must change methods, approaches, and human-made traditions. Indeed, the approach is to step outside the box and the traditional way of thinking, if the church is to make a difference in the world. The entitlement mentality must cease. Christ demanded that to follow him, one must deny himself first."<sup>2481</sup>

One must be willing to die for the sake of the Gospel. This is the opposite of the entitlement mentality. Time should not be wasted in unproductive meetings, committees, and business sessions. Jesus states, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labors are few," (Matthew 9:37). Nothing is achievable without God. Ministry, service, love, and faith, are the keys to connect young people to the church.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Rainer, *Essential Church*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Rainer, *Essential Church*, 12.

## Youth Matters

Mark Canister raised the level of dialogue in *Teenagers Matter: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church* noting concerns as to how the church thinks about, teaches, and lives out youth ministry. Therefore, it gives the foundation for making youth relevant, not just in the church but society as a whole. Cannister gives an overview of youth ministry in America. The content offers guidelines as to what a thriving youth ministry is:

Teenagers matter! When teenagers matter, the church comes alive! Teenagers bring life and vitality to nearly every sector of society when they are valued. When teenagers matter, everything changes! However, it takes boldness to make teenagers a priority in the church.<sup>82</sup>

Amid disillusionment with the church, Richard Dunn, when writing in *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students: A Guide for Youth Workers, Teachers, Pastors, and Campus Ministers* that, “the youth are looking for an authentic spiritual relationship with a living God, and if the twenty-first-century adolescents do not find that experience, idolatry is possible.”<sup>2583</sup>

Bill Nance in *6 Things Teens Want in a Church* suggests that when working with youth, they need:

1. A place with Jesus: if the teens are not meeting Jesus, then it is a waste of time. Do not just teach Jesus, help them to know Jesus.
2. A place with adults who care: teens need adults who can invest, support, guide, and mentor them.
3. A place to belong: teens yearn for belonging and what better place than the church.
4. A place to serve: teens always want to help.
5. A place to encourage (and be encouraged): teens should be encouraged and built up.

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<sup>82</sup> Mark Cannister, *Teenagers Matters: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), xii-xiii.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students: A Guide for Youth Workers, Teachers, Pastors, and Campus Ministers*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 35.

6. A place to grow: teens should know that when they come to the youth group or church, they will leave just a little bit better, a little bit changed.<sup>84</sup>

There is an expression that the church is always one generation away from extinction.

*Who is a youth in the church?* According to Falae,

Traditionally, youth is considered a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Most of the time, people use the word ‘teenagers’ when referring to the youth. Youth in the church can be and do anything they desire. For instance, some young people choose to attend a youth ministry where they can learn, communicate, and grow in a safe and faithful environment. Other youth lead and serve in youth ministry roles and other church activities for young people, where they can give back to the youth in their communities.<sup>85</sup>

Here is the thing, apart from being in control of things like planning, Falae writes,

Youth should also act as helping hands, young people can take on the cleaning duties; they can help the oldest members of the church; they can also help other youngsters in their search for God and spirituality. Most importantly, the youth is the future of any church. They are the ones who set examples for other youth and decide whether to continue preaching what their predecessors preached or to introduce something new and fresh. If the youth is not interested in going to church, then the whole institute of religion might fall apart. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage the youth to get involved with the church.<sup>86</sup>

In *Five Reasons Youth Ministry is Important to the Church*, Youth Specialties, Mark Matlock, identified five things he sees that Youth Ministry is doing for the church today. Youth ministry is vital to helping teens integrate into the broader, intergenerational community of the church. Youth ministry resists the status quo, helping the church stay relevant. Youth ministry focuses on inviting those who are not already part of the church into the deeper narrative of

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<sup>84</sup> Bill Nance, “6 Things Teens Want in a Church.” *Church Leaders*.  
<https://churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-articles/157118-6-things-teens-want-in-a-church> (accessed January 5, 2020).

<sup>85</sup> Falae, Who is a Youth in the Church and What is Their Role?” <https://www.legit.ng/1135163-who-a-youth-church-role.html>, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Falae, Who is a Youth in the Church and What is Their Role?” <https://www.legit.ng/1135163-who-a-youth-church-role.html>, 3.

God's plan. Youth ministry reminds the church that teens are not marginalized members of the body but co-creators and conspirators in the divine work of the church. Youth ministry helps the church focus on the way of Jesus, which goes beyond tradition, dogma, and work.<sup>87</sup>

Lauren Abraham notes in *The Importance of Youth Ministry in Today's Church* that investing in today's youth is necessary for growing the body of Christ. The Church and congregation can flourish when the teenagers are prepared to serve and develop their relationship with Christ. According to Abraham, young people are the future leaders and need to be prepared to take over, but also allow them to serve and contribute to the church.<sup>88</sup>

In the Bible, God often used young people to do great things. For example, God used Timothy as a pastor and lead the Ephesian church when he was a teenager. 1 Timothy 4:12 says, "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and purity."

Youth need guidance and support as they navigate through the most challenging part of their development and seek to grow in their walk with Christ. Abraham notes that Christ-like leaders are needed to serve and train young members of the congregation and help them to reach their full potential. A biblical foundation is what all youth ministry leaders need in order to communicate with young people effectively. Also, the youth leader must understand how

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<sup>87</sup> The Episcopal Church, *5 Reasons Youth Ministry is Important to the Church Today* November 7, 2013, By: Mark Matlock, <https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/youth/5-reasons-youth-ministry-important-church-today>.

<sup>88</sup> Lauren Abraham, "The Importance of Youth Ministry in Today's Church," *GCU*, May 02, 2016, <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/theology-ministry/>.

modern influences on Christianity affect youth, which allows them to identify with youth and build meaningful relationships.<sup>89</sup>

The truth of the Gospel needs to be passed down from generation to generation to grow the body of Christ. Ultimately, helping youth to grow spiritually in their formative years will equip them to make an impact for Christ both now and in the future. The spiritual training of the youth is essential to knowing who God is. God's Word must be the foundation of teaching young people along with how to apply it their everyday lives. They must be inspired to live more like Christ because he is the model (Luke 2:48-52). Training youth in what it means to be Christian leaders will equip them for the future.

### Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is important for youth. It provides stability, direction, and guidance in practical and spiritual matters. Dorth writes that,

Students who have parent involvement are more likely to remain involved in the church. The article gives insight to the important role parents play in their church faith. However, these three aspects are the highest contributing factors in retaining young people in the church: The parents are committed to church. The parents were intentional about passing on their values to their children. The parents and children have a strong relationship.<sup>90</sup>

He also describes what a healthy church looks like when he writes, "the Scriptures teach that a healthy church consists of adults who are teaching sound doctrine to a younger generation cf. Titus 2."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Lauren Abraham, "The Importance of Youth Ministry in Today's Church," *GCU*, May 02, 2016, <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/theology-ministry/>.

<sup>90</sup> Dorth, "Best Practice for Retaining Youth Students in the Local Church Post-High."

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



Ham, Beemer, and Hillard add to the value that parents play in the faith of their children. “Parents need to do as the Bible has instructed and train up a child. The study shows that parents will kick out money to try to keep the children from the ills of the work but need to reflect on biblical training. The biblical foundation is on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a need for a relationship and not money and material assets.”<sup>92</sup> Earthly resources parents provide for their children are only temporary. Spiritual resources make an eternal difference and may be passed from generation to generation.

The power of parents with the pastors and others in the church can make a big difference in the life of someone. The goal is for the parent and church to work together in guiding and influencing their child’s faith. Youth emulate what they see. Rainer and Rainer note that parents play a critical role in the assimilation of teens and college-age students.<sup>93</sup>

Dean reveals that Martin Luther saw that Christian formation began with youth ministry and that training started at home. Luther wrote, “If the church was ever to flourish again, one must begin by instructing the young.” One of Luther’s goal as a reformer was to teach children the basics of the Christian religion.<sup>94</sup> Young people are sometimes more open to spiritual matters than when they get older and have gone down alternative paths in life.

The NSYR’s concluded that “the best way for youth to be serious about religious faith was for them to emulate that of the parents.”<sup>95</sup> The role of parents’ faith is to show youth who God is and the significance of the church. Parents are very important in helping youth understand

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<sup>92</sup> Ham, *Already Gone*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 42.

<sup>94</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 111.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

the relevance of God in their lives. Youth must not feel forced to go to church but should see it as something they want to do because they see the value of it for themselves.

Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misconceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. Grandparents and other relatives, mentors, and youth workers can be very influential as well, but normally, parents are most important in forming their children's religious and spiritual lives [...] the best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives.<sup>96</sup>

Dunn's study revealed, "Pacing is the language of love and is one of the most effective parenting skills and for youth ministry." Pacing requires listening to the heart of the adolescent, and seeing beyond words and behavior. It requires time and looking beyond just conversation and requires time to engage with the youth. Pacing must be steady and consistent if it is to be effective.<sup>97</sup>

Even though the value of parents being involved with their youth spiritually is obviously beneficial, many parents still do not see its importance. Pew Research studies on *The Decline of Religion in American Family Life American Perspectives Survey (2019)*, showed that fewer Americans say that raising children in a religious home is important for providing moral guidance and instilling proper values. Fewer than half (48%) of young adults agree that raising children in a religious community is important to provide a moral foundation. A majority (53%) of young adults say this is not the case. In contrast, more than three-quarters (76%) of seniors say bringing children up in religion is crucial to instill good values.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students*, 16.

<sup>98</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religion and Public Life*, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape, October 17, 2019.

Jana Magruder and Ben Trueblood in *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*, found that parents who had successfully passed on their faith to their children, typically were involved in particular activities with their children. They noted particular activities of importance. The activities include: reading the Bible several times a week; taking part in a service project or church mission trip as a family; sharing their faith with unbelievers; encouraging teenagers to serve in church; asking forgiveness when they messed up as parents; parents encouraging their children's unique talents and interests; taking annual family vacations; attending churches with teaching that emphasized what the Bible says; and teaching their children to tithe.<sup>99</sup>

What about single parents passing on their faith? Dale Hudson writes in *How Parents Affect Their Children's Faith*:

Whether one was raised by two people who shared the same faith or by a single parent seems to have little effect on whether that person carries the religion of his or her parent or parents into adulthood. Among adults who were raised by two Catholic parents, for instance, 62% describe themselves as Catholics today, as do 58% of those raised by a single parent who was Catholic. 65% of parents attend worship service with their children at least a few times a year. 83% of evangelical parents are taking their children to church. 78% of Catholic parents are taking their children to church. 67% of mainline Protestant parents are taking their children to church. 69% of parents, who are nones, say they seldom or never take their children to church.<sup>100</sup>

Hudson emphasizes, "To look closer at these stats, and see the spiritual storyline for the next generation. If the storyline of the next generation is to be changed, then the change must take

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<sup>99</sup> Jana Magruder and Ben Trueblood, *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*, LifeWay Christian Resources, October 2, 2017, (accessed February 16, 2020), 8.

<sup>100</sup> Dale Hudson, "How Parents Affect Their Children's Faith (the Latest Findings)," December 27, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-articles/296226-parents-affect-childrens-faith-latest-findings.html>.

place in the parents. Parental involvement is the key contributing factor for the next generation.”<sup>101</sup>

Parents influence their children by speaking into their lives weekly and at critical times, such as baby dedication, graduations, and baptisms. Hudson notes that parents must equip themselves with the tools, resources, and knowledge they need to impact their children spiritually. As a whole, there should always be ways to close the gap between church and home. Parents must set an example for their children. If the children do not want to go to church, the parents should not force them to go.<sup>102</sup>

### Seven Principles Every Teenager Needs to Know

Many people in the church have spent very little time determining what students need before they graduate from high school. According to Andy Stanley in, *The Seven Checkpoints: Seven Principles Every Teenager Needs to Know*, an entertainment culture is raising today’s teenagers. “Just about every piece of information, whether relevant or irrelevant, is served to them on a platter. Teenagers want to be entertained and stimulated. If not, they are not interested.”<sup>103</sup>

The scopes of Stanley’s checkpoints are authentic faith; spiritual disciplines—seeing with God’s eyes; setting moral boundaries for youth that help pave the way for intimacy; youth need

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Andy Stanley and Stuart Hall, *The Seven Checkpoints: Seven Principles Every Teenager Needs to Know* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 2001), 2.

healthy friendships; guidance in choosing friends for life and making wise choices; and considering others before you.<sup>104</sup>

### The Gap in the Literature

The gap in the literature is that there is not enough emphasis in the discussions about whether or not youth leaving the church were ever genuinely committed to God. No matter how many programs or ministries are created to attract the youth, it is a relationship with God that is the key. The foundation of all humanity is the need to know God.

Lone Wolfforever notes in *Spirituality and Today's Youth*:

Spirituality is a process of personal transformation, either following traditional religious ideals or, increasingly, oriented on subjective experience and psychological growth independently of any specific religious context. In a more general sense, it may refer to almost any kind of meaningful activity or blissful experience. There is no single, agreed definition for the concept. No one can ever teach spirituality. The only teacher is the Holy Spirit. The person has to grow from the inside to become spiritual.<sup>105</sup>

Youth should be led in a process of discipleship that is consistent with the Bible.

### Theological Foundations

The theological foundation is on God's Word, and what he directs his disciples to do. Men inspired by God wrote the Bible. The Bible teaches about God, man, sin, salvation, life on the earth, and eternal life. Through the truth of the Word of God we learn how to know God by faith and live a life that is pleasing to him. Everything we need to know about life and eternity is found in the Scripture. The theological foundation of God's Word provides guidance on how to guide youth in how to glorify God with their lives.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> LoneWolfforever Silver, "Spirituality and Today's Youth", January 6, 2015, *Dhanbad*, [www.teenink.com/.../Spirituality-and-Today's-Youth](http://www.teenink.com/.../Spirituality-and-Today's-Youth).

## Parents Called to Train up a Child

Throughout the Bible, Scripture reveals that parents are to train, nurture, care, and feed their children. The parents provide an environment that leads to spiritual growth and a right relationship with God. Scripture exhorts parents to correct their children with instruction and discipline (Proverbs 13:24).<sup>106</sup> Children are advised to honor their parents so that a long life may be the result (Exodus 20:12).<sup>107</sup> Proverbs instructs children to follow the father's instruction and the teaching of the mother and keep these in their hearts (Proverbs 1:8-9). Youth are encouraged to set an example in love, conduct, faith, and speech. Today's youth are leaders of tomorrow (1 Timothy 4:12).

## God Calls the Elders to Train the Next Generation

The elders are to set examples for those who are younger to follow in their footsteps. In the Old Testament, Joseph was the most loved son of his father, Israel, and was given the great robe of many colors. Because of Joseph's dreams, his brothers sold him into slavery to a caravan where he was then sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph received much training and became an instrument to save his family. One of the account's most important features is that Joseph was only seventeen years of age (Genesis 37:2). He was in a strange land, a young lad separated from his people, and his center of spiritual strength was God.

As the story subsequently unfolds, we learn that Jehovah was using Joseph as a providential instrument for the preservation of the Hebrew nation. Joseph would later recognize

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<sup>106</sup> Sid S. Buzzell, "Proverbs," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 934.

<sup>107</sup> Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus, UBS Handbook Series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 478.

that “God did send me [here] to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5)<sup>108</sup> Again, at the end of his life, to his brothers, he said: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good [...] to save many lives,” (Exodus 50:20). All of this was part of the Lord’s divine plan. God trusted a teenager to accomplish such a vital role.

Joshua was trained to take Moses’ place as the leader of the Israelites. Joshua led Israel in the conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua was a military commander, a national leader, and a great man in history. God taught Joshua the knowledge needed to become a godly leader (Exodus 24 ).<sup>109</sup> Joshua’s training demonstrates how God can use life experiences to equip and prepare a person before calling them to do more significant works later in life. The leaders in the Bible trained the next generation to lead.

In the New Testament, Timothy and Titus received training from Paul to lead after Paul’s departure. Often the role of women in the Bible was to train the young women to cook, clean, take care of the house, and groom the young women on the responsibilities of marriage and children. It was Lois and Eunice, Timothy’s grandmother and mother who had a hand in Timothy’s spiritual training.<sup>110</sup>

Paul saw Timothy’s potential as a spiritual leader and invested his whole heart in helping Timothy develop into the fullness of his calling (1 Timothy 1:12-14). Paul taught Timothy about church leadership, as well as many other valuable lessons about running a church. Despite being

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<sup>108</sup> William David Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, A Handbook on Genesis, *UBS Handbook Series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 1007.

<sup>109</sup> Eugene Carpenter, Exodus, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, vol. 2, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 163.

<sup>110</sup> F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 303–304.

young, Timothy was respected by fellow believers. Well-grounded in Paul's teachings, Timothy was a reliable evangelist skilled at presenting the Gospel.<sup>111</sup> Titus was a Greek, converted as Paul preached the Gospel, and served as an example for others. Paul used Titus in the ministry on two missionary journeys to deliver letters and to serve as an instrument of God's calling. He left him to pastor the church at Crete having been trained to do so.

### God Calls All Christians to Obey the Great Commission

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave the Great Commission to all Christians to go into the world, preach the Gospel, make disciples and teach people to observe all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:16-20).<sup>112</sup> The Great Commission is the last instruction given to the disciples by Jesus. The imperative is to make disciples. It is instructions for Christians to get into action spreading the good news of Jesus to all people. The Scripture validates Jesus' authority and power in the lives of believers. The believer is to be baptized and then teach others to observe all things pertaining to Christ. There is no limitation of age regarding obedience to the Great Commission.

### What Does the Bible Say About Youth in the Church?

Youth Ministry that is age specific is common in the modern church. However, this does not appear to have been the case in the early church or throughout much of history. Instead, most church gatherings met in houses with entire families in less formal services than today.

Nevertheless, the Bible does reveal that it is important to minister to teenagers. 1 Timothy 4:12

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<sup>111</sup> John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1772-1801.

<sup>112</sup> Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14–28, vol. 33B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 889.



especially notes, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”<sup>113</sup> Teenagers are to live by example as young followers of Jesus.

Holistic ministry to youth is of vital importance. The youth have similar spiritual needs to those of adults. MMBC focuses on the needs of youth including spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual, relational, and psychological needs. The entire body is to be cared for, especially when living a life of service. Youth go through different developmental stages, and the ministry addresses these issues. The goal is to be an instrument of Christ and not the world (Romans 12:2).

The spiritual needs of teens specifically include their need to know Christ personally by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9); to grow in understanding of God’s truth (2 Timothy 3:16-17); to serve others; to enjoy friendships with other believers (Acts 2:42); and to learn how to share their faith with others.

Discipleship requires fellowship with other believers, studying the word of God, and sharing the faith with others (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Although the Bible does not show a model per se for a youth ministry, the same principles that apply to all Christians can be used to form a model. Each specific context will require variations on the model while the basic biblical principles apply to all settings. The overall goals of youth ministry should resemble and parallel those of the church. Youth should be taught how to focus on honoring God through making

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<sup>113</sup> George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 205.

disciples, how to obey the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), and how to live out the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40).<sup>114</sup>

For youth, mentoring can also play a significant role in this process. The apostle Paul provided and taught this type of training with Timothy: “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others,” (2 Timothy 2:2). Another biblical principle relevant to youth ministry is in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul compares believers in the church to different parts of a human body (1 Corinthian 12:12). Every part is essential, and no part is more important than another part. When teenagers are cared for and given ministry opportunities in the local church, they can grow as “part of the body” and feel like they are essential parts of God’s work in the local church.

Finally, 1 Timothy 5 offers instructions for various groups of people in the local church. Verses 1-2 state, “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”<sup>115</sup> Church leaders are to treat younger men as brothers and younger women as sisters. The youth of our church are our family members. They are not just another ministry but are an essential part of our church family.<sup>116</sup> Youth ministry has grown into a more developed area of service in today’s church. However, the same biblical principles apply as with any ministry area. They are to focus

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<sup>114</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 563.

<sup>115</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 114.

<sup>116</sup> *Compelling Truth*, “Does the Bible Say Anything about Youth Ministry?,” June, 01, 2020.

on making disciples; serving God and others; experiencing personal growth; living as part of the body of Christ; as acting as essential parts of the family of God.<sup>117</sup>

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Studies show that many young people are leaving traditional churches. Many churches are not able to connect with new generations and that youth say the church is not relevant to their personal growth. Some of today's youth have a negative view and experience of the church. A new generation of youth also states they are spiritual but not religious. This generation of young people can see through the hypocrisy of the church and are looking for authenticity.

New approaches are needed to move forward and bridge the gap of generational disengagement. McNeal reveals that "the current state of the church is on life support."<sup>118</sup> The pattern of biblical discipleship is the theoretical foundation of this thesis project. The Bible is available to all humanity for instruction. Scripture provides parents with instruction on how to train their children. In the African American culture, it is related that it takes a whole village to raise and train a child. This emphasizes the importance of the total community in helping to raise and train children as it supports the family and the church in doing so.

This writer has two sons who were reared in the church since birth but left the church after graduating high school. The writer's sons have the fundamentals of the Bible, and have been trained in the way to go. Even though the church is not a part of their lives currently, the Scripture teaches there is hope that the sons will eventually come back to the church (Proverbs 6:22).

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2009), Introduction.

The church must do everything possible not to put barriers in place which would hinder youth from knowing and growing in Christ. Jesus loved children, and many parents brought their children to Jesus for healing. Jesus often used children as an example of the faith adults should have. It is this humble and innocent faith like a child that will allow all to have access to salvation (Matthew 5:5). The emphasis is on trying to avoid youth leaving the church in the first place.

The theoretical foundation of MMBC youth ministry practice is that Jesus is the head of the church (Colossians 1:24). Jesus Christ is the guiding light and the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit indwells and empowers disciples to follow him. Jesus calls all to “deny self, pick up, his cross and follow him,” (Luke 9: 23).

### Primary Goals of the Youth Ministry

First, the goal of the MMBC Youth Ministry is to engage youth in life with God, which includes living by the Bible, making disciples, serving others, and acting as agents of reconciliation. The youth go through stages of spiritual growth in obedience to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. They serve as examples of what a Christian is to a dying world. Jesus became a servant; so humanity may have eternal life. The youth ministry’s purpose, vision, and goals must grow, develop and adapt in a changing world.

A commitment to God is more significant than anything else. The youth also serve as examples of reconciliation. When there is a difference in attitude and opinion, the example that Christ set is the key to restoring a relationship (Matthew 18:21-22). As the youth grow in their faith, reconciliation can be an active process.

Second, faithful engagement in Bible Study is another goal of the MMBC Youth Ministry. The understanding is that God requires a person to develop in stages (2 Timothy 2:15).

Not all youth participate in Bible Study. As the church meets youth where they are spiritually, a higher level of involvement can result. This will contribute to helping growth grow in their commitment to God.

Third, more parental involvement is a goal of the MMBC Youth Ministry. As tradition would have it, the home is the center for training today's youth in God and discipleship. As a model for others, the youth participate in faith, discipleship, service, and ministry practices. The church's motto is "Raising People to God's Standards." Youth live by the motto knowing that others are always watching. The goal is to set an example in attitude, speech, dress, caring for others, and service. The parents of the youth participate to stay abreast of changes, concerns, or other issues the youth may face. Parents like the fact that someone else is involved in the caring and spiritual development of youth. It takes both the church and parents mentoring the youth. Involvement and knowing the youth's concerns is a must for both parents and the church.

Fourth, an increase in diversity is a goal of the MMBC Youth Ministry. The ministry recognizes and highlights diversity. Intercultural activities, seminars, and workshops are part of the youth ministry. The challenge is to reach and disciple all nationalities in the world by going outside the church walls. Involvement with others outside the church is part of the mission. Three times a month, the youth worship in a chapel away from the rest of the congregation. The idea is to create an inviting environment through music, praise, and worship. Worship is led by the youth minister and a youth praise team. New converts are the desired outcome of the worship service.

#### Strengths of the Ministry

One strength of the MMBC Youth Ministry is current Bible study opportunities. The overall church values the Word of God in preaching and teaching and this is also reflected in the

Youth Ministry. The youth have Bible teaching directed toward their particular stage of life. As they engage in Bible study they can grow as disciples of Jesus.

A second strength is the wide variety of activities available for youth. The opportunities include retreats, mission trips, Bible debates, recreational outings, and more. Youth involvement strengthens interactions and bonds among youth members. When they get to know each other on a personal level friendships are strengthened and Christian fellowship is then an attraction for others who are not yet part of the Youth Ministry.

A third strength is outreach and in-reach service to others. Part of the youth outreach is attending different senior facilities. Youth interact through songs, prayers, activities, and by serving the residents and talking with them. Youth also serve as role models and examples in the Children's Ministry.

#### Weaknesses Of the Ministry

A weakness in the MMBC Youth Ministry is the need to establish stronger one-on-one relationships within the youth. If their relationships are strong they are more likely to be involved with Bible Study, activities, and outreach and in-reach. The stronger interpersonal connections are, the stronger involvement will be. The pastor has a concern that the youth retreat needs to be yearly and not every other year to strengthen relationships.

Another weakness is the need to train youth on how to lead others to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If the youth who are saved, do not have a framework for leading the youth who are lost to saving faith there is a deficit. New youth may take part in the activities but if they are not coming to faith in Jesus then the focus is not on the main priority.

Then, the MMBC Youth Ministry needs to more effectively reach out to the youth who have stopped coming to church and who has disengaged. Each youth has a testimony, and it is

this testimony that will encourage others to an seek encounter with Christ. Some youth who have dropped out have a relationship with Christ while others do not. If the church is not lovingly and purposefully reaching out to the youth who have dropped out, it cannot know the reasons why or how to try to reclaim them.

Last, a forum is needed to provide youth the opportunity to address the social problems and issues of today. There are many problems and issues that are of particular importance to the African American community. Youth get their information from the media but it is not usually from a Christian perspective. The church can provide a safe space to address the concerns and foster dialogue with the youth and the leadership of the church.

### **Summary**

This chapter includes a review of the literature and findings as to why there is a shortage of youth in churches across the United States. Studies already conducted on the reasons for church dropouts among youth after graduating high school is considered. The literature reflects previous studies on the causes for the shortage of youth in the church, and why it should prompt churches to take action. The chapter includes the theological foundation, which looks at what the Bible says about youth in the church. Also, the reasoning why and the method by which God calls the elders to train the next generation is discussed. Finally the theoretical foundation is included, which discusses the strengthens, weaknesses, and the primary goals of the MMBC Youth Ministry.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter considers the participants in the survey and the approach to the survey and questionnaires. The project's desired outcome is to determine how to increase involvement in the Youth Ministry and how to retain youth following high school graduation. The intent is to increase involvement through activities and to make disciples who will continue to follow Jesus throughout their lives.

A deficiency is evident with the current continued decline in the number of participants in the Youth Ministry at MMBC. Changes are needed to improve and strengthen the ministry. The Youth Ministry should not be isolated. Instead, it should be an integral part of training young leaders and servants.

### **Project Participants**

The size of the active congregation at MMBC is nine-hundred. The first group of project participants is the active youth. There are approximately thirty youth comprised of fifteen males and fifteen females. These numbers do not include youth who occasionally participate or who will join the Youth Ministry and or church in the future. All the participants are African American youth. The age range is from twelve to eighteen. The thirty active youth are members of MMBC and participate in various ministries. The project participants live in the surrounding areas of the church and attend schools nearby. Youth Ministry participants have a questionnaire designed for their group.

The youth parents are also members of the church. They bring the study group participants to church with them typically. Most of the parents needed to complete parental



consent forms. Twenty-six of the participants needed parental consent to be a part of the project. Four of the project youth have since graduated and do not need their parents' permission to participate in the project.

The third group is comprised of the youth workers and advisors, including the youth pastor. The questionnaire designed for Youth Ministry Leaders was to better understand their perspective on the ministry and the participants. They were asked questions based on the leadership training, involvement, and retention of youth from their roles' vantage point. Perception is not always reality, so a well-designed questionnaire can help reach the latter to better inform the overall health of leadership and ministry structure.

### **Project Design**

While the project has quantitative elements, it is primarily designed as a qualitative study. The desire is to determine why MMBC has a lack of youth in the church. Questionnaires were presented to youth, parents, and leaders. Through this project, the hope was to find out why youth are not staying after graduating from high school and how the church can add more youth to the church between the ages of twelve and eighteen. The procedure was to use questionnaires and surveys to gain understanding of their opinion of the Youth Ministry at MMBC. Also, to more clearly discern the effects of the church and programs on their lives, and if after graduating high school their plans to remain at the church, and if not why.

After collecting the data from groups polled, the writer planned to compile the answers to the questionnaires and surveys and chart the responses. The solutions would provide insight on retention of the youth after graduating high school and add more youth to the church.

The data will safely be stored for future information for the Youth Ministry, church leadership, and congregation without using the participants' names. If there is a future decline in

the church's youth, the information can show what helped correct current deficiencies if changes to the ministry are successful. The data will provide the church with some answers as to why youth are not staying in the church after graduating high school. MMBC can use the information to improve and strengthen the current Youth Ministry and also possibly provide helpful principles for other churches to implement.

### Plan for the Project

The launch of the project was to assess the current Youth Ministry. The project would reveal the strengths and weaknesses in the ministry. Prayer partners committed to pray for the church, youth, and all involved in the process. A meeting was then scheduled with the pastor, youth coordinator, and youth minister. The actual plan for the project involved setting dates for implementation. A team was assembled to help the study, and at that point, goals, and timeframes were set.

There was a meeting with the senior pastor to get feedback and approval regarding the plan. After meeting with the pastor, a meeting was scheduled with the youth coordinator and youth minister to see their assessment of the Youth Ministry. Then there was a meeting with youth, parents, and grandparents, and feedback on the shortage of youth in the church was received. Finally, a meeting with the youth occurred, and youth forum developed with questions and answers.

The IRB Board approved all documents and proposals before the project began. The study could not start without the pastor's approval, deacons, trustee board, and the congregation. After all the items received approval, the project could begin. The plan started the month after IRB approval. The pastor was notified. The youth pastor, coordinator, workers, parents, and

youth were notified via zoom conference and mail. Monitoring steps helped to keep the action plan on track and kept the participants updated on progress.

The project needed a meeting room for the teen forum, parent involvement meetings, and the study team. There was also a need for the use of the chapel for large group meetings. Also needed were resources for networking in and outside of the church. Next, there was a need for food, paper, forms, and community and congregational materials. Personal preparation included prayer for strength to conduct the project and have prayer partners pray for the entire process. Finally, time was set aside for meetings and any other issues that may arise.

Devoting time for planning the project was a must. If not, the project would have failed. Also, time was left for corrections because not everything would go as planned. Next, the writer set goals for the project. The trial period for the intervention was three months. The trial intervention gave the writer a chance to get a team together, get the conversation started, and leave time for adjustments. The trial period allowed time to set dates, strategies, investigations, people interviews, and questionnaires. There are no ethical issues related to the project.

### Relationship with the Participants

The writer's role with the youth participants is that of a minister, worship leader, and encourager. The writer rotates preaching responsibilities with twelve other ministers and pastors when the senior pastor is out. The writer has a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a Minor in Psychology a Master of Divinity in Pastoral Studies and has taught a youth church school class for ages ten to twelve for fifteen years and a seniors class age fifty-five to one hundred for fifteen years. The writer desires to continue to set an example as an instrument of God and Christian living for the congregation and youth.

## Intervention Design

Youth are essential to the church as part of the current and future generation of Christians and leaders. The goal was to formulate, through questionnaires and surveys, critical ways to retain youth in the church after graduating from high school. The questionnaires and surveys encouraged the participants to be honest about their views of the church. The respondents were to answer without prejudice or bias. For this thesis, project information was asked why participants will or will not return to church after graduating from high school. The expectation was to receive both positive and negative responses.

## Sample Size

The project includes thirty African American youth from the ages of twelve to eighteen. All the youth are members of MMBC. There are fifteen males and fifteen females.

Male Ages	Female Ages	Grade Level	Member of Youth Ministry
12 years old (4)	12 years old (4)	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade (8)	Yes
13 years old (3)	13 years old (3)	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade (6)	Yes
14 years old (2)	14 years old (2)	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade (4)	Yes
15 years old (3)	15 years old (3)	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade (6)	Yes
16 years old (1)	16 years old (1)	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade (2)	Yes
17 years old (2)	17 years old (3)	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade (5)	Yes
18 years old (0)	18 years old (0)	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade (0)	Yes

## Setting

The setting is MMBC, located at 445 South Church Street, Spartanburg, South Carolina. Spartanburg has a population of 37,013. The church is situated amid four major senior living facilities, four schools, and thirty churches within a five-mile radius. MMBC is at the heart of Main Street Spartanburg with all its shops and attractions. Due to the city's demographics, the church is well-positioned for more significant influence in the area.

## Duration of the Project

The duration of the individual elements of the project was three months in total. Three months was ample time to implement the process and work the issues out. The senior pastor approved the request to do the study at MMBC. The process included an announcement to the congregation about the project, a recruitment letter, flyers, and church announcements on the media screen. Included were parental consent forms for participants who were minors, along with participation forms. A meeting time was set up, and answering questionnaires and surveys was a part of the process. The final process was to conduct the survey, gather information and results, and assess and conclude the study.

## Questionnaire and Survey Design

The questions and surveys were designed to test the attitude of the youth in the church. There were simple answer options, such as yes and no, and also more detailed answers. Youth were given the option to elaborate on some of the questions. The selection of questions was so that the participants could feel comfortable answering the questions and provide transparent answers. Necessary information about age and gender was included in the questions.

The expectation was a variety of answers depending on the age of the participant. For some participants, their maturity level would come into effect when it came to their understanding of the questions and the church and subsequent responses.

### Data

The data was to be collected, and the writer would chart the answers from the questionnaires and surveys. Hopefully, the data would provide insight on how to retain youth after graduating from high school. The data would give information on how youth view the church and what role God and the church had in their lives. What changes are needed to increase youth in the church? What role does parental involvement have when it comes to their children's faith? The writer can use results for future problems on the youth shortage at MMBC.

### Project Problem and Purpose

The purpose and objectives address the problem of the shortage of youth at MMBC. The following implementations are to increase the number of youth in the church. The training of more youth for more leadership roles may encourage more leadership involvement. Integrating the youth with the rest of the congregation will have the youth visible and involved. Having the youth participate in the worship service can increase leadership skills and knowledge of worship. By scheduling regular talk sessions with the pastor, the youth can openly address issues and concerns.

The support of the congregation in all youth activities will encourage the youth. Having a church meeting and input on the shortage of youth will create awareness for more youth in the church. To have the youth encourage and invite friends to church may increase the number of youth in the church. Creating a parent and youth forum will start the dialog of the needs, concerns, and issues that the youth face each day.

## Resources Utilized

The writer used MMBC's office equipment and provided paper for surveys, questionnaires, agendas, meeting schedules, and project updates and guidelines. Also needed were pencils, pens, highlighters, and markers for the surveys and questionnaires. The writer provided all of the supplies. The writer had prayer partners who provided any additional supplies needed. All materials needed to be mailed to each participant.

## A Meeting Place

The church has a small chapel that served as the teen and parent meeting place. A conference room was available to conduct a meeting of up to fifty people. There was no charge, except scheduling was done by the administrative assistant to avoid conflict with other ministries in the church. No meetings were being held at the church due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so adjustments were made accordingly.

## Technology

The church has various resource tools available for studies, such as computers, video screens, slide presentations, CDs, and projectors. A library is also available for study and resources. Additional technology needed was Zoom, conference calls, passwords, and numbers to participate in virtual meetings. All youth and parents received updated information as the project progressed via mail and conference calls.

## Communication

The writer used a variety of means to contact participants in the study: flyers, permission requests, telephone, text, robocalls, social media, and email. The writer sent out the questionnaires and surveys to the participants' study group, parents, youth pastor, and youth

workers. The study group information was sent in the mail, and the writer and pastor compiled the responses and results.

### Budget

MMBC agreed to provide any funding needed for the project, and the writer was prepared to have funds available if necessary. The budget included copy paper, stamps, and envelopes. Also included in the budget was the cost to mail the study packages to the participants. Funds were available for any unexpected costs or expenses from the writer's prayer partners.

### Data Collection

Data was collected from the participants at the end of each meeting. The method used was questionnaires, surveys, and journal reflections. The questionnaire and survey participants received the forms by email and returned them to the writer upon completion.

### Questionnaires and Surveys

Questionnaires and surveys were methods chosen because insight from the youth would provide their opinions of the church and if they will return after graduating high school. Participants in the project had ten multiple-choice questions on the questionnaire and five questions on the survey with room for additional brief replies.

### Parental Consent

Parental consent is for those youth who are under the age of eighteen. Consent includes an invitation to take part in the study along with the reasons for the project. Expectations for participants are outlined along with any benefits (none), risks (minimal), and how their personal information will be protected in the future. The study was voluntary and participants could



withdraw at any time for any reason. The Institutional Review Board approved the project and the consent form.

### Journal

The writer kept a journal of the entire project. It would serve as a backup for information on the process, meeting, forum data, questionnaires, surveys, ideas, struggles, and any other information that needed to be recorded. The journal will be kept in a secure location as backup data.

### Youth and Parent Forum

The writer acted as the secretary for the youth and parent meetings and documented all matters about the process. The senior pastor served as the moderator for the discussion process. In the past, when problems arose with youth, the senior pastor met with them for discussions so he had a good level of familiarity with the participants and their parents. The platform was a question and answer session on the stated problem of the shortage of youth in the church. The writer compiled the data from the forum. The youth and parent meetings were held by Zoom since MMBC was still closed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

### Ethical Consideration

Each participant received a written consent and a confidentiality statement participating in the project. The youth who are under age needed a parental consent form. See Appendix B for IRB approval. The participant's rights were protected and not violated.

### Data Analysis

The writer and the senior pastor analyzed and charted the data collection for the project. The senior pastor served as an objective observer so that personal opinions and biases were not

part of the data conclusions. The data collected served as a means to develop a plan to increase the amount of youth in MMBC. It is the hope that the information can be used for future generations if the problem continues. The data can help the congregation, and appropriate committees can see the problems and how changes can take place.

Data collection for the project, utilized Survey Monkey. The survey and questionnaires were posted on Survey Monkey and completed by 24 out of 30 respondents. Survey Monkey is a user-friendly, web-based program that can universally deploy surveys and questionnaires of a study.

After all informed consent procedures, the participants then began the project with the understanding they could opt-out of the study unconditionally at any point. Questionnaire one consisted of 11 questions, questionnaire two consisted of 10 questions, and the workers and advisor survey consisted of 10 questions.

Survey Monkey was a secure site with measures to protect the participants' and the r data. The data was transferred from the Survey Monkey server directly into a database. The data was not encrypted during the transmission phase. The writer did not collect the IP address for the data, and only the outcomes were collected.

Individuals were sent an invitation via email through Survey Monkey, which included a summary of the project. One follow-up email repeating the request to participate in the survey for any participant who did not complete the survey was sent. The email contained a link to the survey site, which included an electronic informed consent. Potential participants received information that the identities of each person who participated in the study would remain confidential. Before data collection, each volunteer participant signed an informed consent explaining the project's intent, the proposed procedures, the right to withdraw participation, and

the risks involved in participating. Following the agreement to the informed consent, the participant completed the survey online. The online surveys and questionnaires should not have taken more than 20 minutes to complete for a person who reads above a seventh-grade reading level or with a parent's help.

### Recruitment

Recruitment was in the form of an announcement from the senior pastor, Reverend B.D. Snoddy of MMBC to the congregation. The pastor informed the congregation of the study. All the youth, youth workers, advisors, and parents received flyers about the project. The study was announced each Sunday on the church screen until it took place. Due to the pandemic, the pastor sent out calls weekly; therefore the recruitment form announcement was provided in the same manner.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT RESULTS**

### **What Is Working in The Youth Ministry?**

There was a need to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the ministry so the intervention team could look at what the church and youth ministry can do differently to attract more youth. First, a questionnaire was created to include the congregation's input. Next, the overall picture was evaluated to see how the shortage of youth occurred. Contributing factors were: (1) the last youth pastor left and went to another church, and many youth parents went with the youth pastor; (2) the church has an older congregation, and most of the youth are grandchildren to the seniors; the youth who graduate after high school are not returning to church; (3) the eight o'clock service was discontinued, and some members with children left and went to other churches that had an eight o'clock service.

### **What Would the Intervention Do?**

At the heart of this project was the question of the shortage of youth at MMBC and how to double the number of youth in five years. The training of youth in a congregation can build a foundation for future sustainability. The training of youth is essential to the overall growth of the church.

The project results provide evidence for the validity of why there is a shortage of youth at MMBC, which was measured by the results of the responses from the youth taking the questionnaires and surveys. The results from the youth indicated that the lack of a Young Adult Ministry was significantly related to retention in the church. Of interest is if MMBC will add a Young Adult Ministry to retain students after they graduate from high school. Follow-up

meetings discussing the progress in the intervention plan and any issues or concerns will be held. Follow-up on feedback from the team and participants will be included.

## **Results**

### **Youth Questionnaire One**

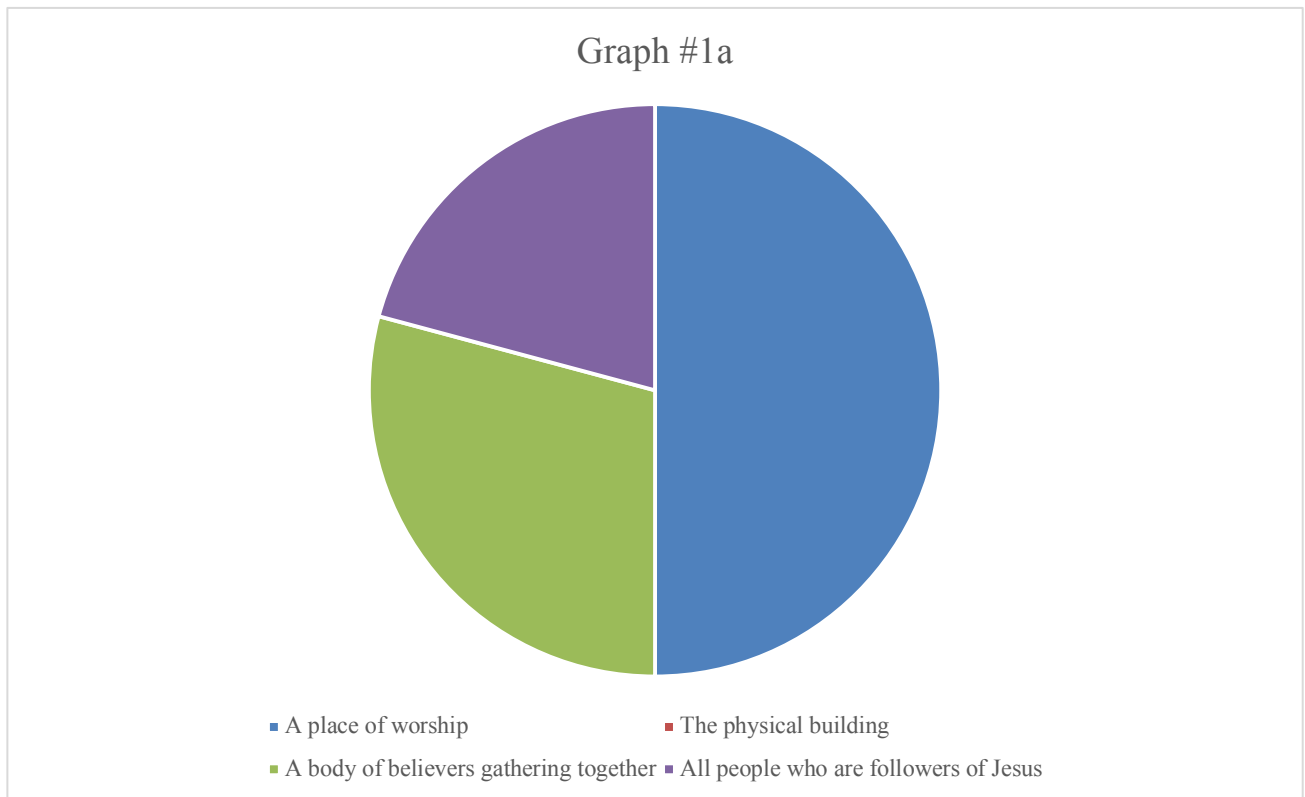
Today many churches are dealing with the decline in youth and struggle to find ways to be relevant and deal with keeping Christ essential. The church leadership and congregation must recognize the importance of retaining youth after graduating from high school and the key to training youth for the future generation of leaders and Christians. This awareness of the youth's needs will sustain future youth to return to the church. Developing and planning programs that will address the students' needs and empower them to move forward as the next generation is essential for the livelihood of the church.

Youth Questionnaire One provides insight into youth training and knowledge about the church, God, and the Bible. It reflects how much of their biblical knowledge is accurate, how often they attend church, and the relevancy of the church. Responses revealed that the number of youth at MMBC is declining each year after graduating from high school. Having received twenty-four responses from the thirty participants surveyed, an analysis was conducted to see the cause of the decline in youth at the church (MMBC) and how they viewed the church. The results show in part the root of the decline. The results address the youth's concerns and what the church needs to implement to correct youth not returning to church after graduating from high school. Hopefully, MMBC will address the youth's concerns and implement ways to involve them in the church.

## Youth Questionnaire One Results

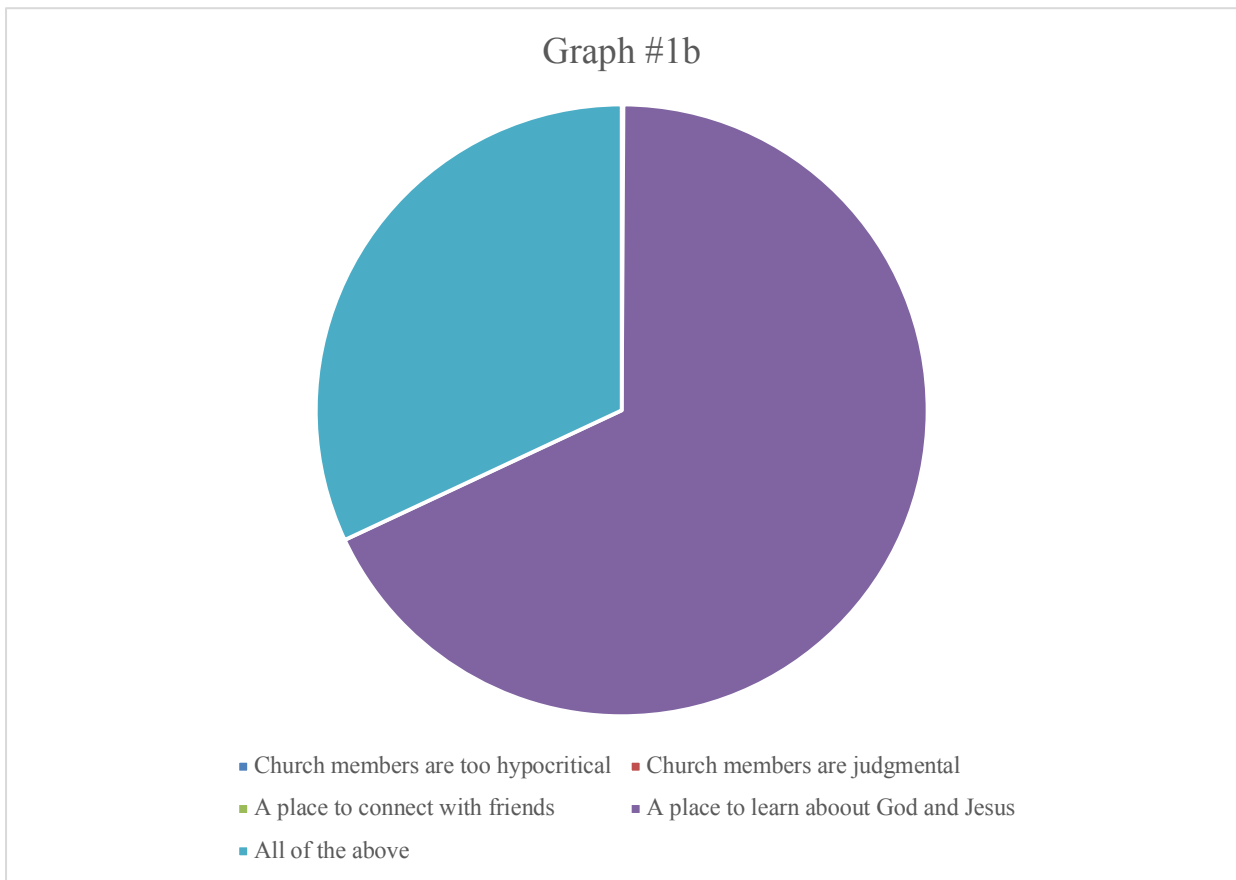
### Question 1: What is the church?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
A place of worship	50%	12
The physical building	0%	0
A body of believers gathering together	29.17%	7
All people who are followers of Jesus	20.83%	5
Total		24



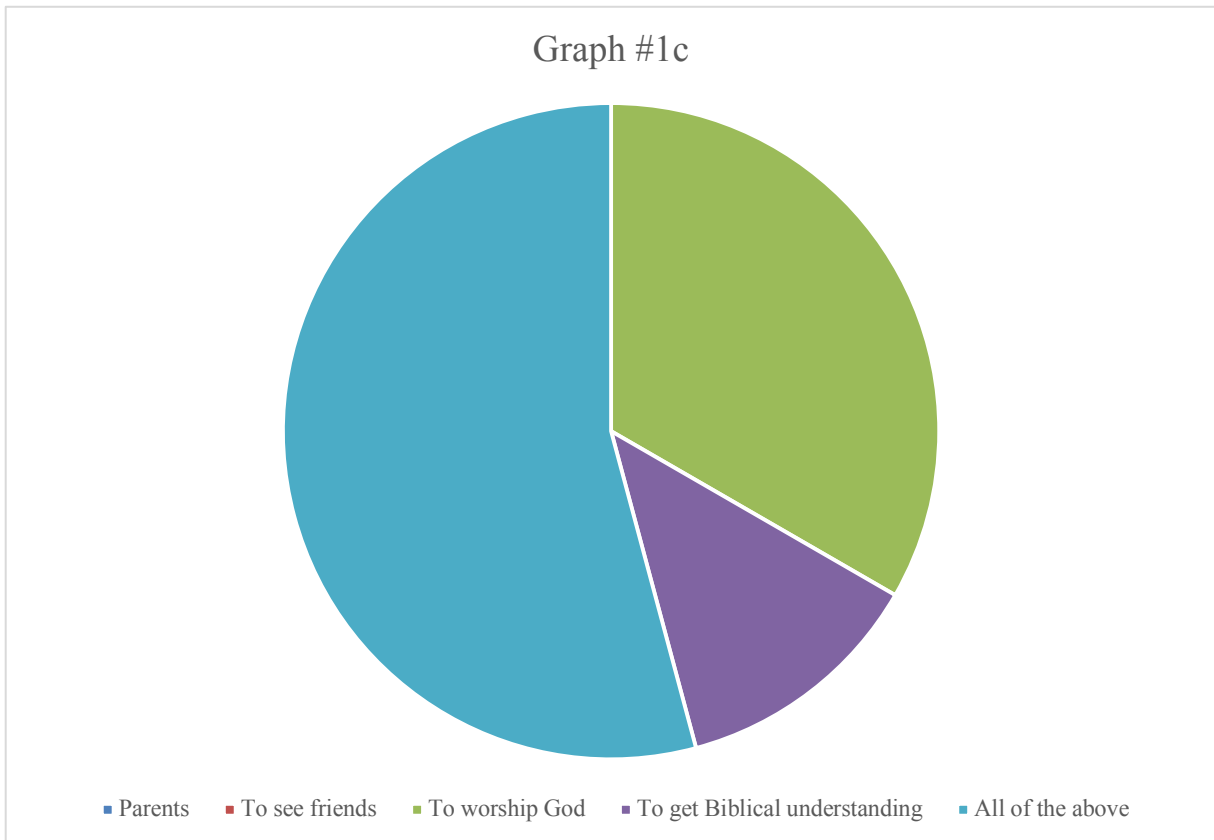
Question 2: How do you see the church?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Church members are too hypocritical	0%	0
Church members are judgmental	0%	0
A place to connect with friends	0.083%	2
A place to learn about God and Jesus	62%	15
All of the above	29.17	7
Total		24



Question 3: What is your reason for attending church?

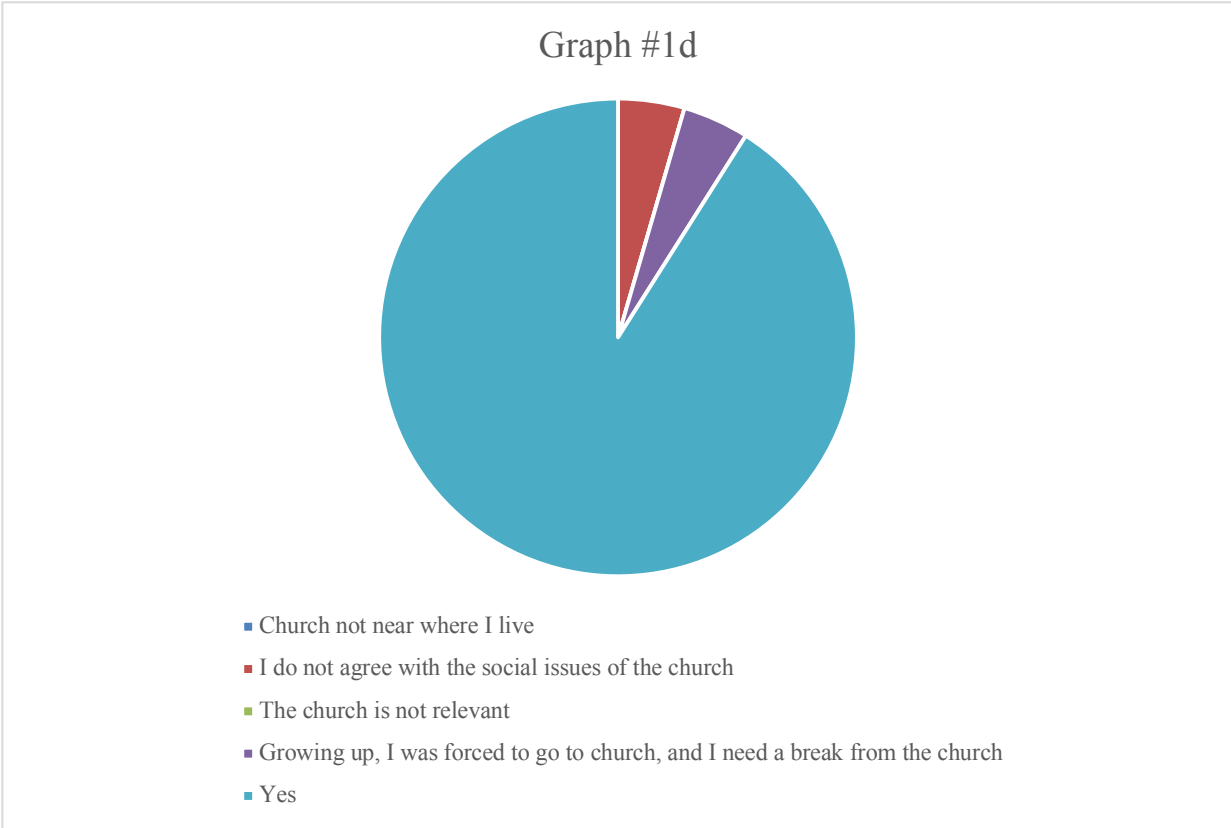
Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Parents	0%	0
To see friends	0%	0
To worship God	33.33%	8
To get Biblical understanding	12.50%	3
All of the above	54.17%	13
Total		24





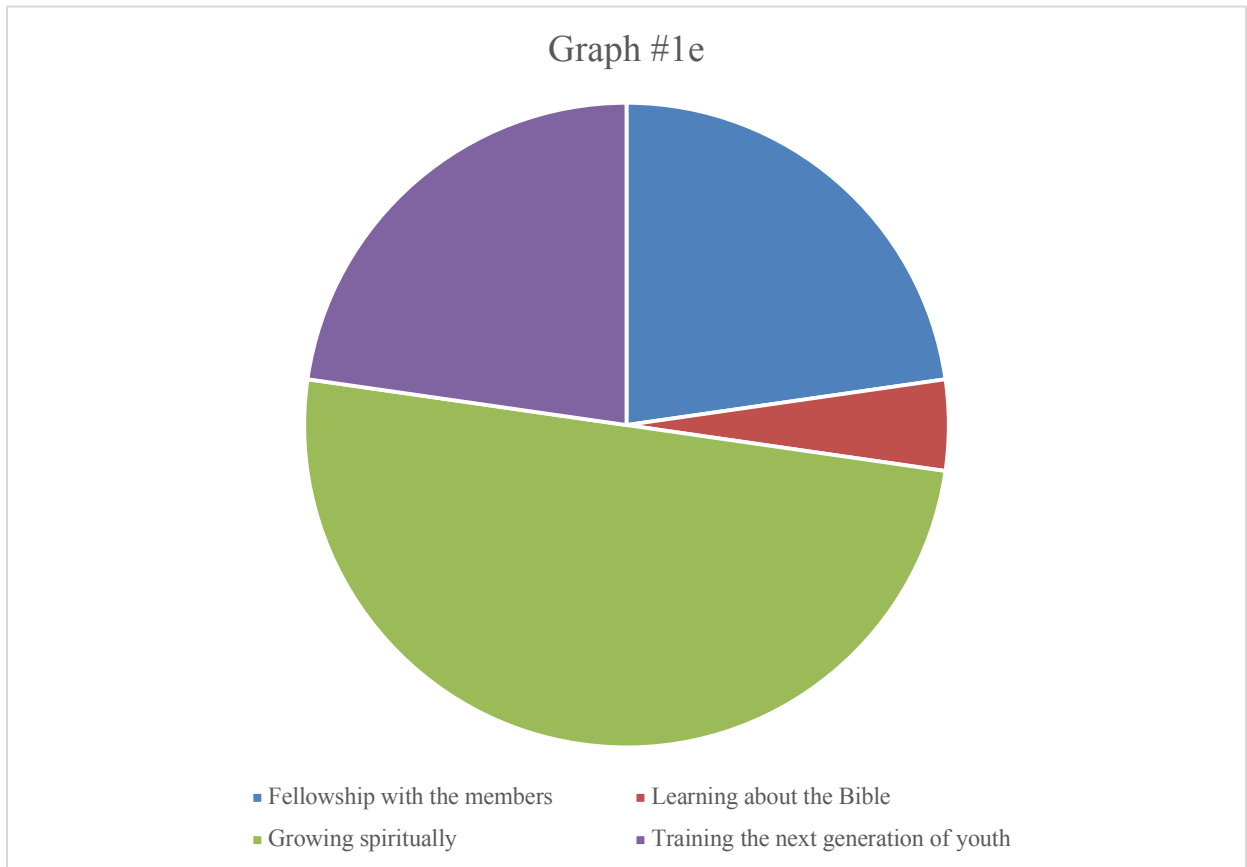
Question 4: Do you plan to continue going to church after graduating from high school?  
If not, why?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Church not near where I live	0%	0
I do not agree with the social issues of the church	4.77%	1
The church is not relevant	0%	0
Growing up, I was forced to go to church, and I need a break from church	4.77%	1
Yes	96.6%	22



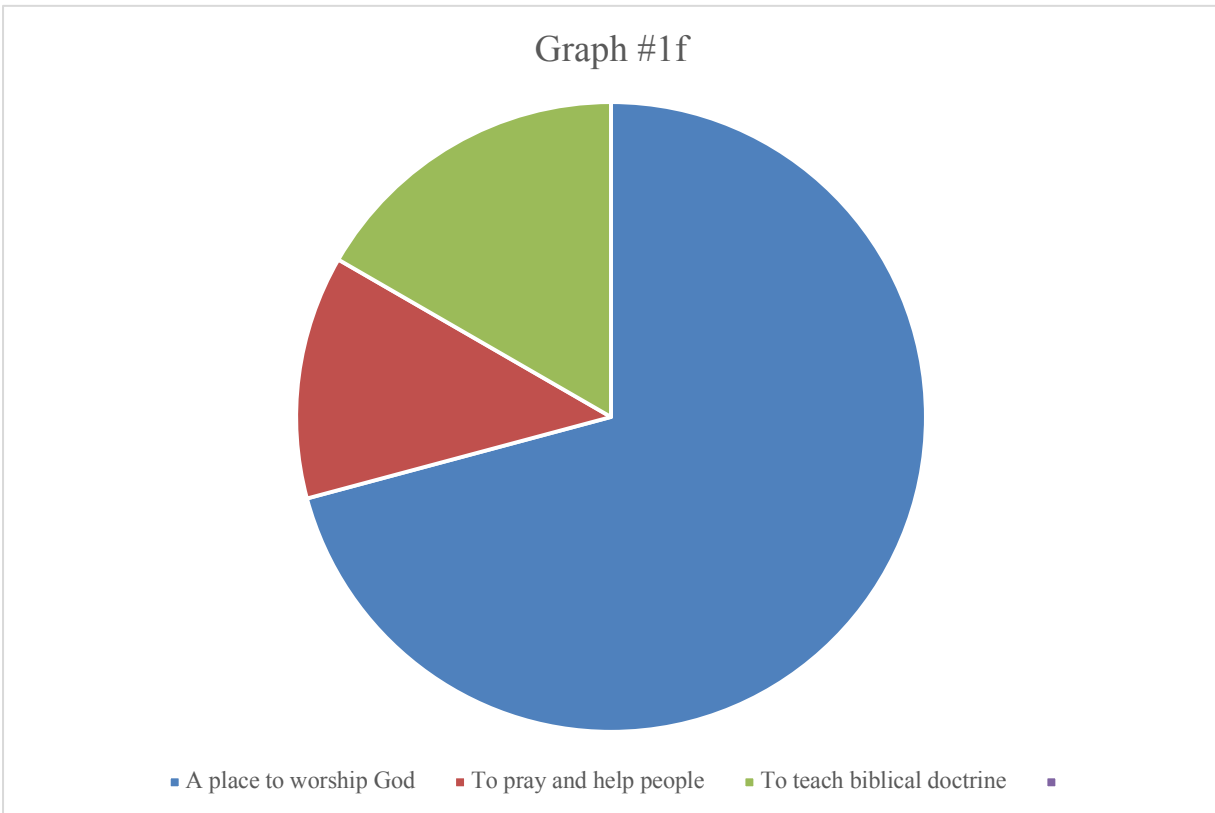
Question 5: What do you like or not like about the church?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Fellowship with the members	22.73%	5
Learning about the Bible	4.55%	1
Growing spiritually	50%	11
Training the next generation of youth	22.73%	5
Total		22



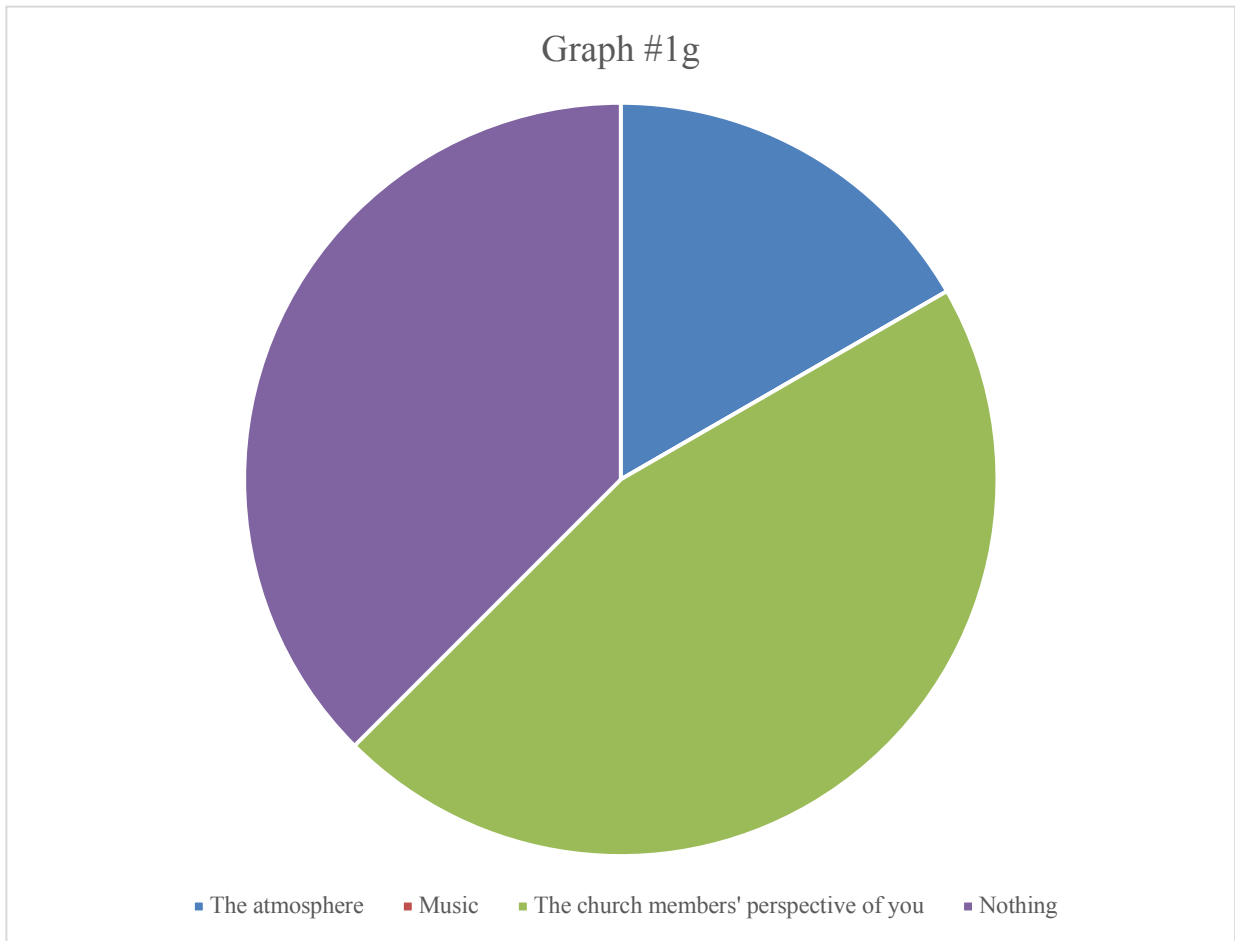
Question 6: Tell me your understanding of what is the purpose of the church?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
A place to worship God	70.83%	17
To pray and help people	12.50%	3
To teach biblical doctrine	16.67%	4
Total		24



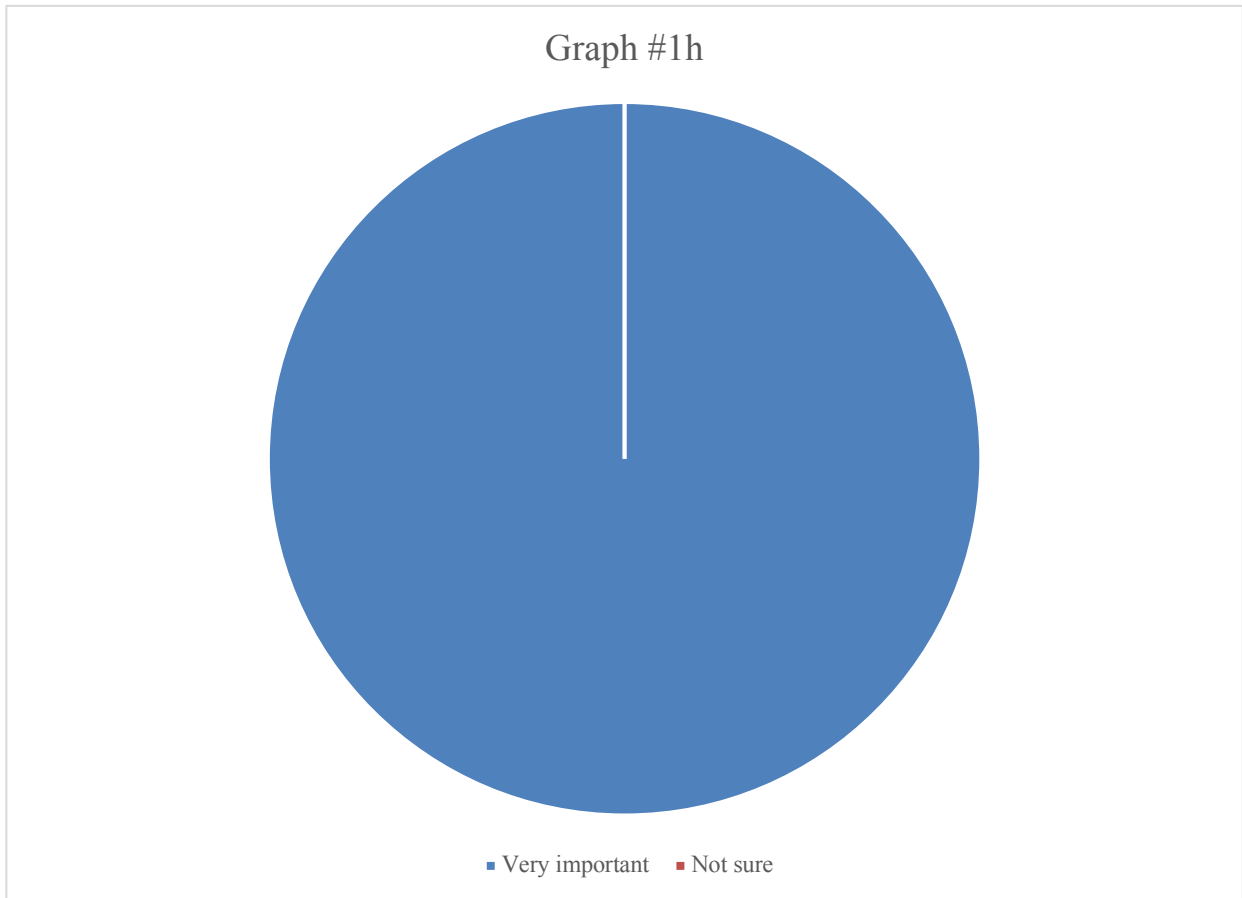
Question 7: If you could change one thing about the church, what would it be?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
The atmosphere	16.67%	4
Music	0%	0
The church members' perspective of you	45.83%	11
Nothing	37.5%	9
Total		24



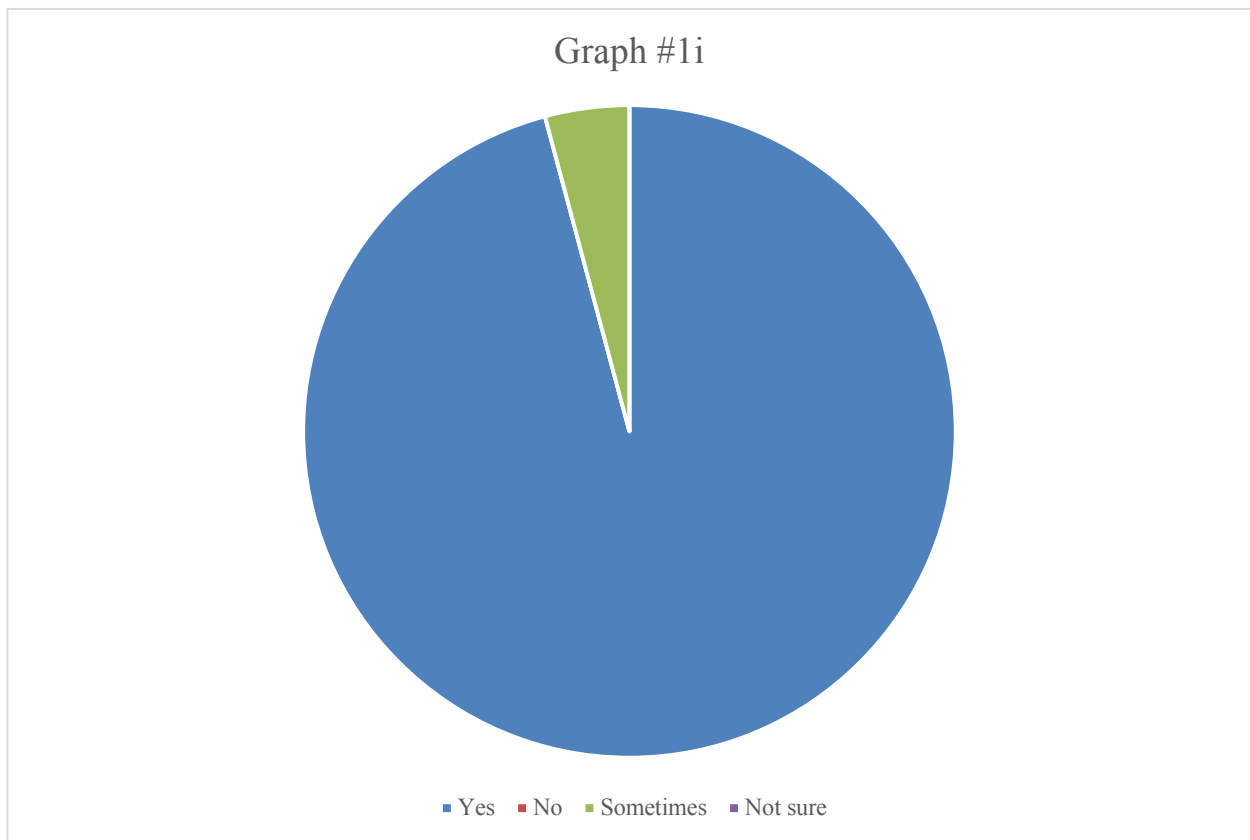
Question 8: How important is it to be a child of God?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Very important	100%	24
Not sure	0%	0
Total		24



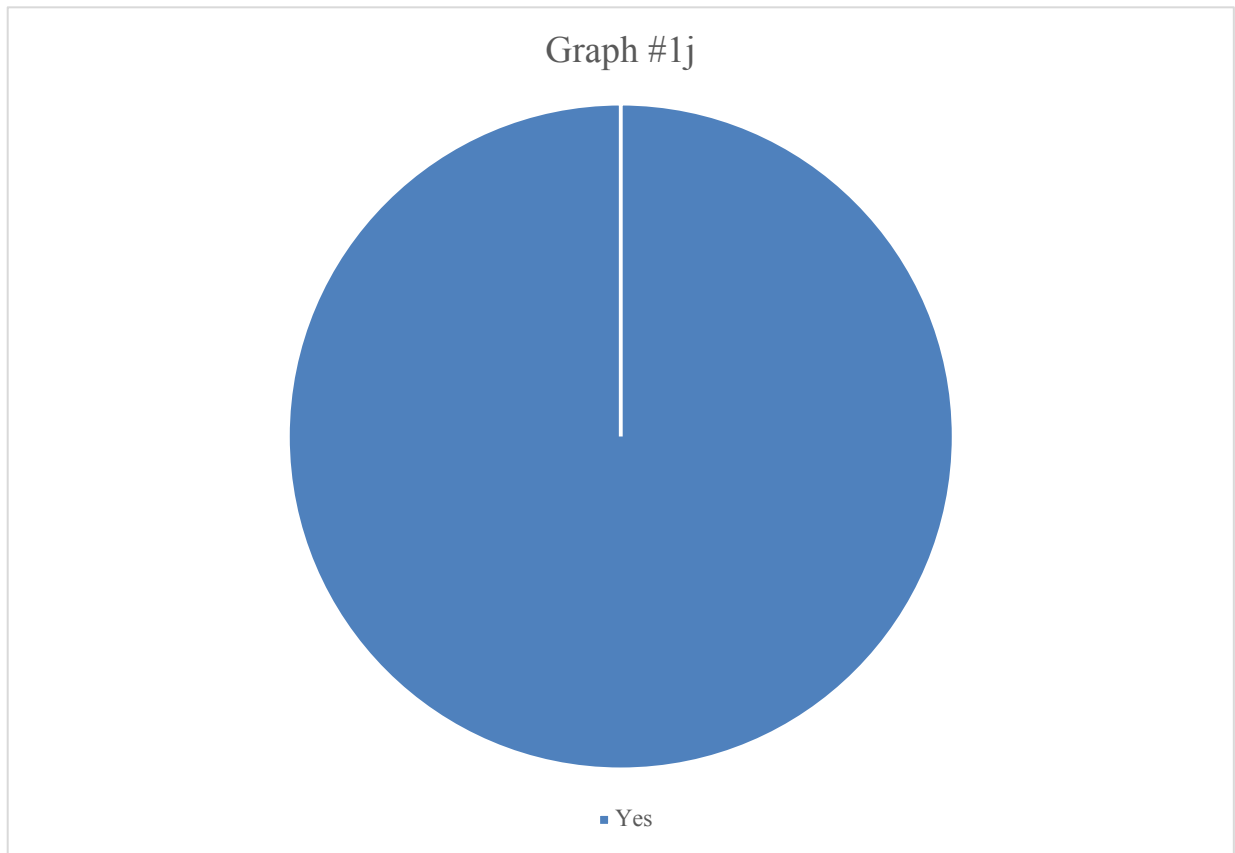
Question 9: Do you believe in God/Jesus/Holy Spirit?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	95.80%	23
No	0%	0
Sometimes	4.17%	1
Not sure	0%	0
Total		24



Question 10: Do you believe what is in the Bible?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	100%	24
Total		24



The results show that transitioning to the next generation needs more work. If the church cannot retain youth after high school graduation, how can they prepare the next generation to take over? It is the youth of today who will be the future leaders of tomorrow. Without the quality of training, the next generation will not succeed.

## Youth Questionnaire Two

Youth Questionnaire Two reflects what the youth would change about the church if they had plans to return after graduating from high school, and what will keep them coming to church. 97% percent of the youth who took the survey plan to return to MMBC after graduating high school. 3% did not plan on coming back after graduation. What would keep them from coming back to MMBC is having a foundation rooted in God and building a relationship with God, staying involved in ministries in the church, connecting with other diverse youth, and learning how to lead others to Christ. The youth felt like there should be a minister for the youth after graduating from high school to transition to being adults.

### Youth Questionnaire Two Results

Student	1.If you could change two things about the church, what would they be?	2.Do you plan to continue going to church after graduating from high school? If no, why not?	3.What things will keep you coming to church after graduating from high school?
Youth A	Incorporate newer things in the church and maybe be more open to people	I do not know yet	Just keep being active and doing what you can to help the younger generation.
Youth B	Deeper youth lessons and more teens in church	Yes I do	Nothing
Youth C	1.We work more on the two commandments Jesus gave. Love the LORD your GOD with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength. Love you neighbor as yourself.  2.Have an open thought process on all Spiritual Gifts	Yes, I am already past high school and college.	Improving my relationship with Christ and learning to bring others to Christ



Youth D	Add an option to have virtual church when we go back in teen's church	Yes	Nothing
Youth E	Add an option to have virtual church when we go back in teen's church	Yes	Nothing
Youth F	1.Church should be a house of worship, we should be versatile with worship especially in music (mixing the old and the new)  2.Much love for the older generation and newer generation	Honestly, I would discover God on my own. I can continue going to church if the environment and worship fits how I worship God.	Discovering God more for myself (knowing who I am), wanting to get active such as serving in the church with ministries, and not only just being around believers of Jesus but reaching out to the nonbelievers by going to clubs or wherever
Youth G	Nothing	Yea	For I can have a relationship with God.
Youth H	Having more teens and being more diverse	Yes	The people, the energy, the message
Youth I	Having more teens and being more diverse	Yes	The people, the energy, the message
Youth J	When things get back to normal, going on mini field trips.	Yes	Learning about God
Youth K	I don't think anything needs changing necessarily	Yes lol	The people
Youth L	Some of our activities and have some of the church relate more to what is happening in real time.	Yes	Me going on my spiritual journey
Youth M	Nothing	Yes	God
Youth N	N/A	Yes I will	Being part of a church family
Youth O	Nothing	Yes	The church family

Youth P	Have a young adult minister when we graduate. For regular not be center around just the older adults.	Yes	Not having the support and care what the Youth Ministry gives us. Not having a young adult ministry and church that could relate to us.
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**Youth Questionnaire Three**

Youth Questionnaire Three provides insight into what role the church has in the life of the youth. Is there support from the congregation? 50% of the youth responded that they were encouraged by church leaders. 30% said this was true sometimes, and 20% of youth said it occasionally. They also responded that the church encouraged the youth to participate in all aspects of the church. 50% of the youth noted that the church supported the activities and ministries. One of the church’s defining factors is staying connected to the youth, supporting all aspects of their development, concerns, questions, needs, and spiritual developments.

Are there enough mentors? The majority of the youth (97%) related that adults were available as mentors. The mentor’s role is to provide Christian examples to lead the youth in the life of a child of God and future leaders. The consensus on whether there is preparation for retaining youth after they graduate from high school is that more work in this area is needed. No Young Adult Ministry is part of why youth seem left out and cannot fit in when graduating. They are too old for the youth and not old enough for the young adult ministries.

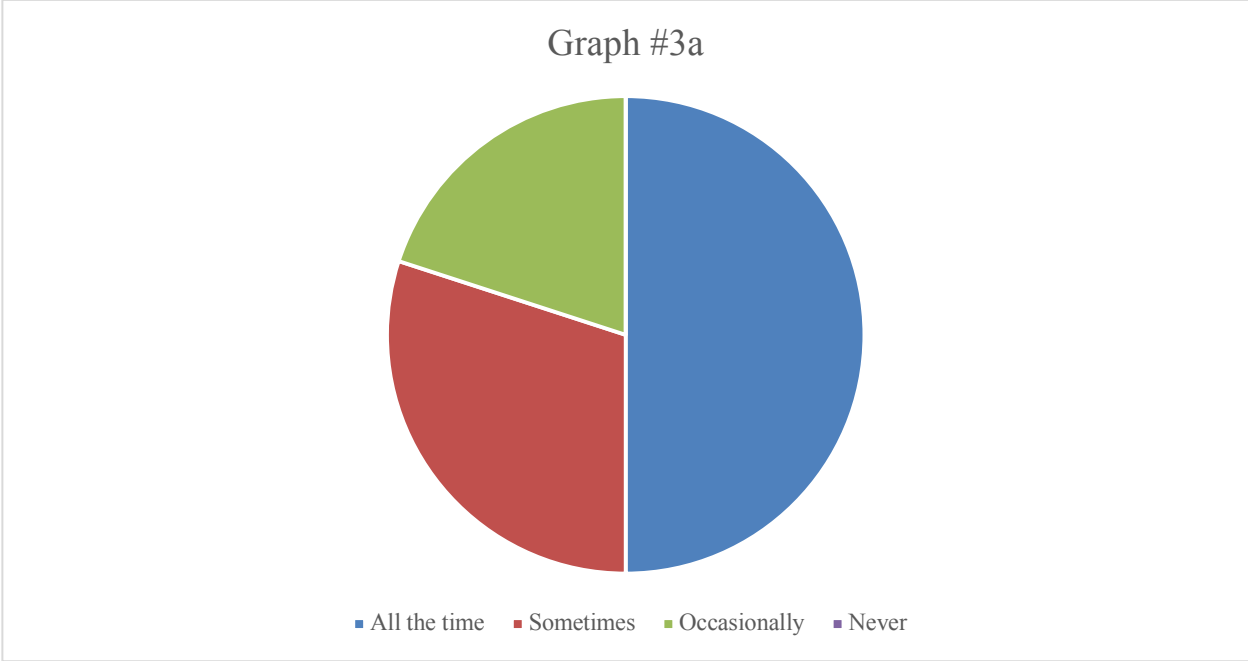
Is there community involvement? How sufficient is the leadership training and what programs are available? The youth were divided on whether the community provides leadership training for the youth. 40% responded that the church did have programs for the youth to grow spiritually through Bible study classes, Sunday School, mentoring, and educational videos. The results showed that the church (MMBC) did invest money in different youth ministries, and there

is a yearly budget for youth ministries. The church makes every effort to ensure that the youth know the church’s purpose and encourages them to participate in all church aspects.

Youth Questionnaire Three Results

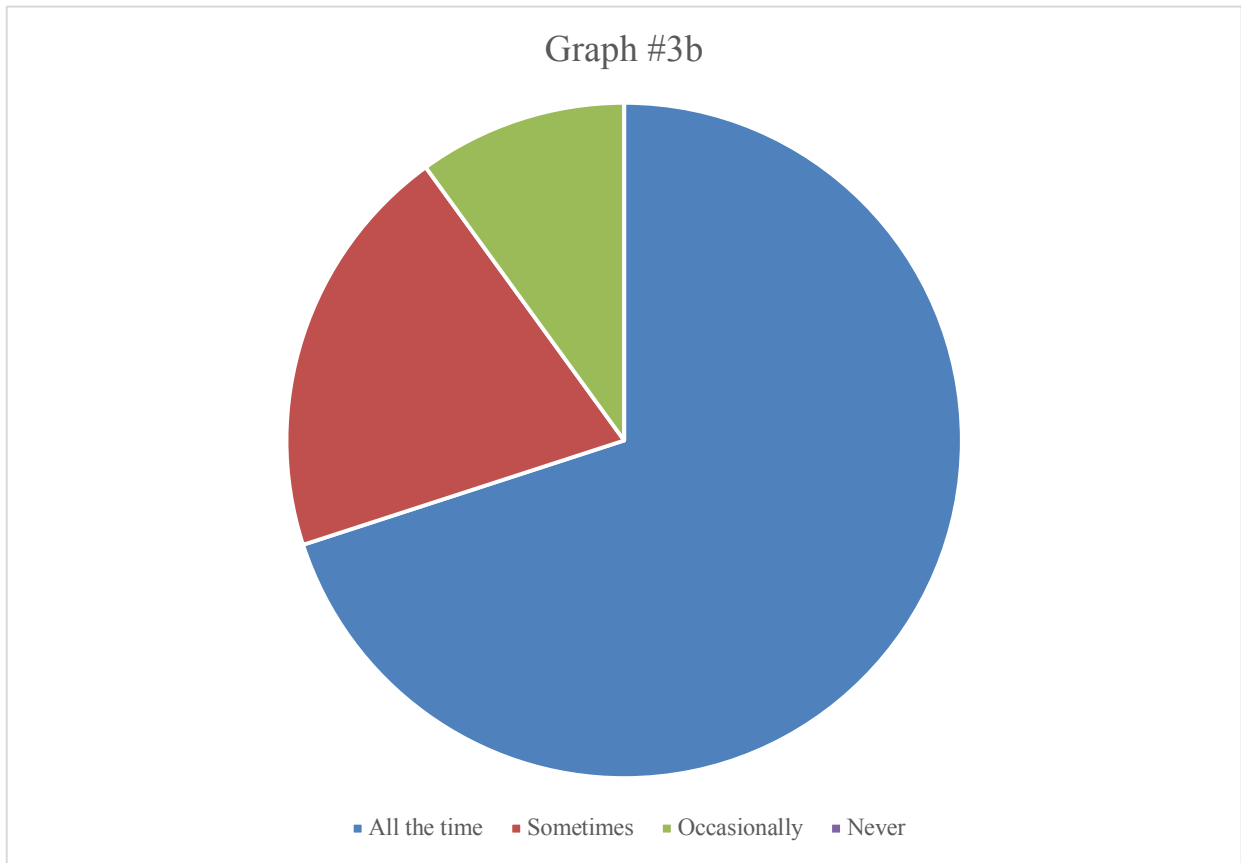
Statement 1: Youth are encouraged to be church leaders.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	50%	10
Sometimes	30%	6
Occasionally	20%	4
Never	0%	0
Total		20



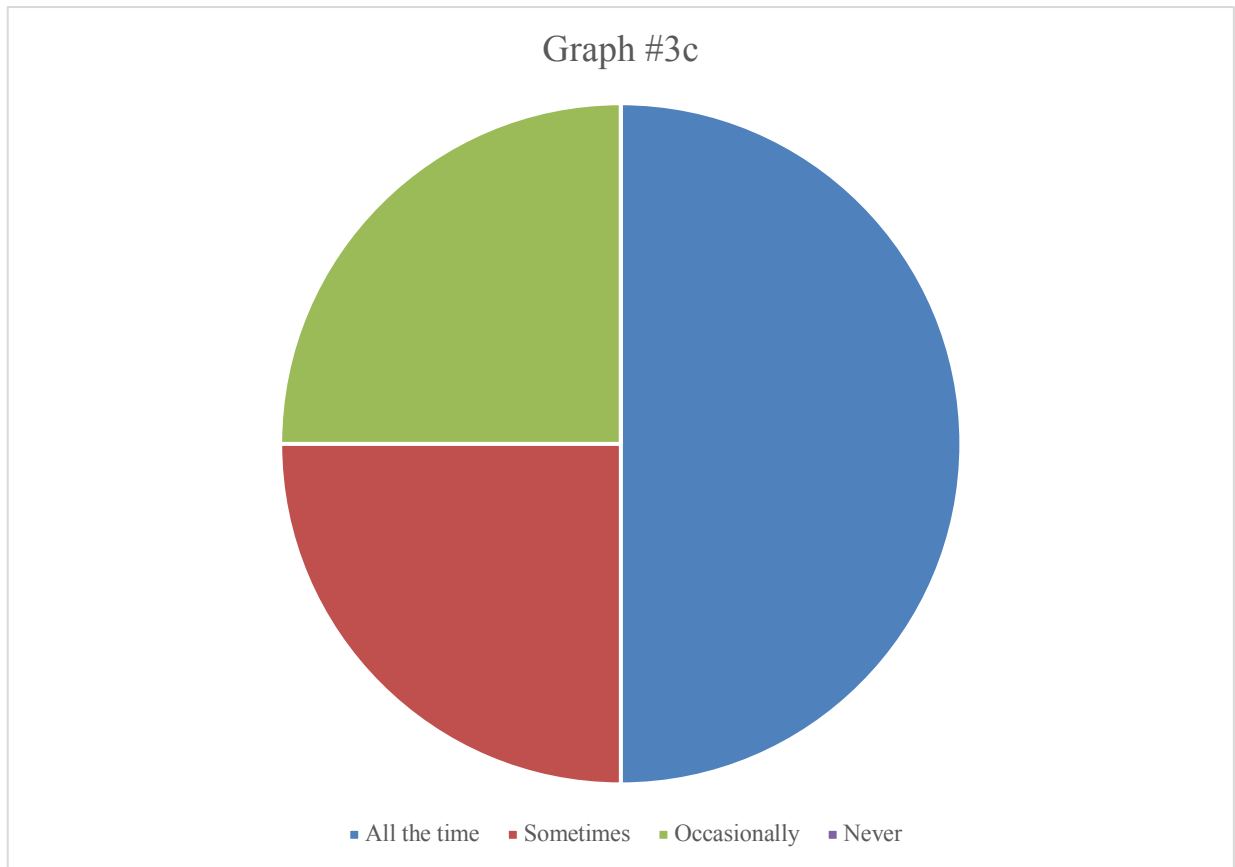
Statement 2: Youth are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the church.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	70%	14
Sometimes	20%	4
Occasionally	10%	2
Never	0%	0
Total		20



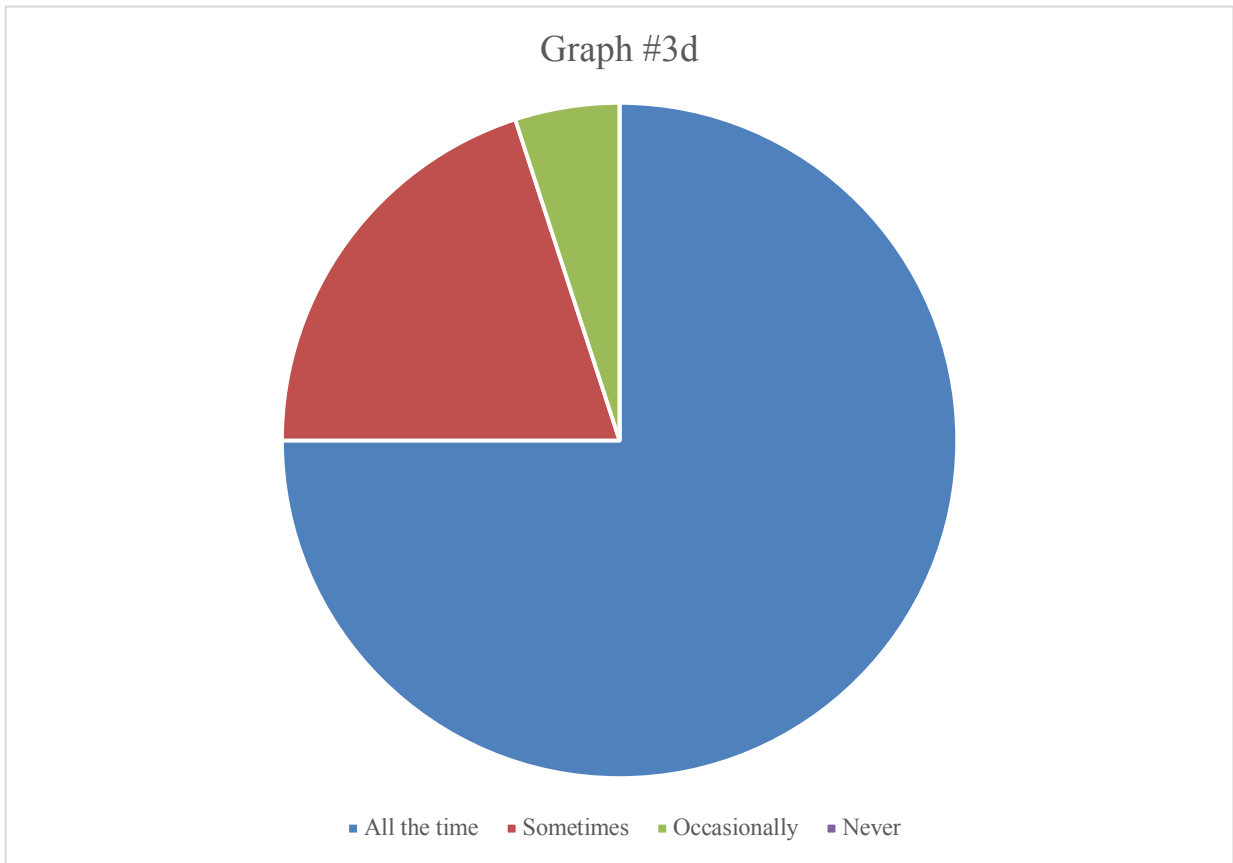
Statement 3: The church congregation supports all youth activities and programs.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	50%	10
Sometimes	25%	5
Occasionally	25%	5
Never	0%	0
Total		20



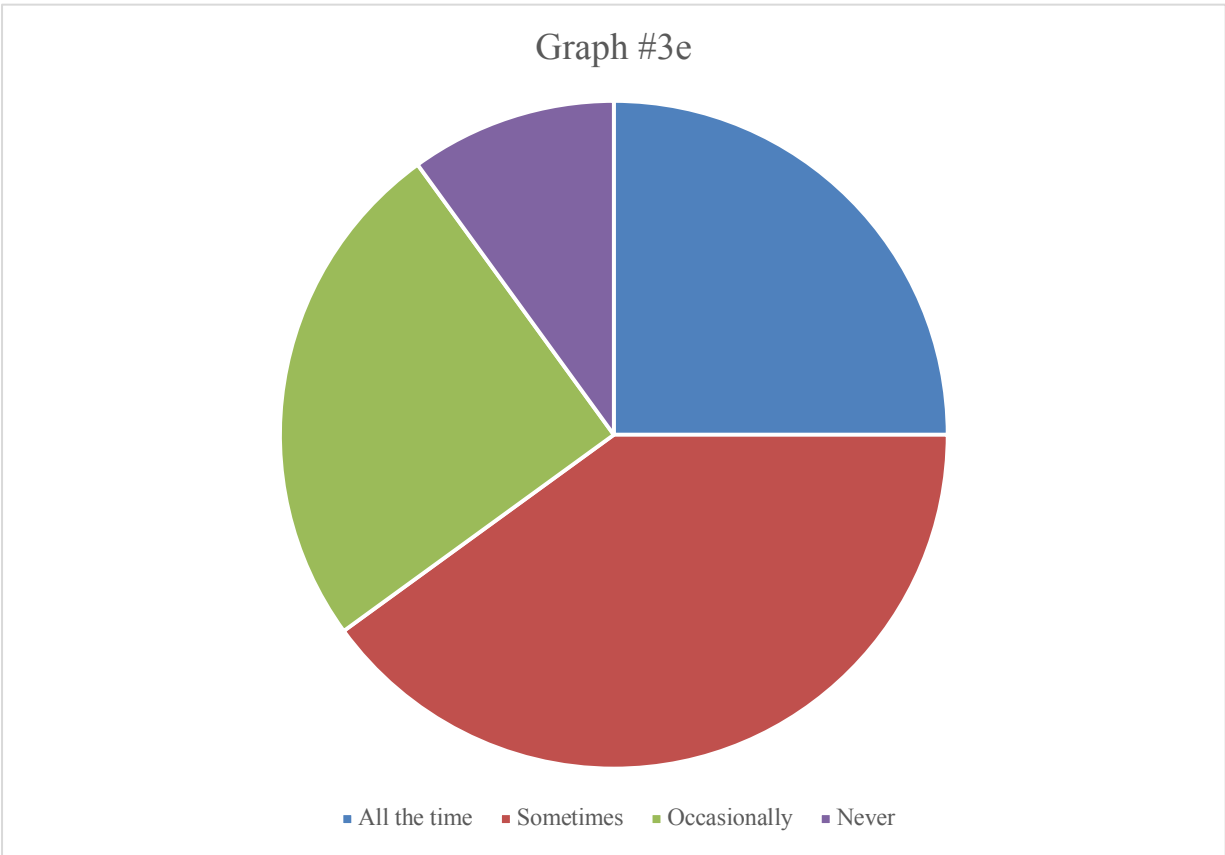
Statement 4: Adults serve as mentors to the youth.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	75%	15
Sometimes	20%	4
Occasionally	5%	1
Never	0%	0
Total		20



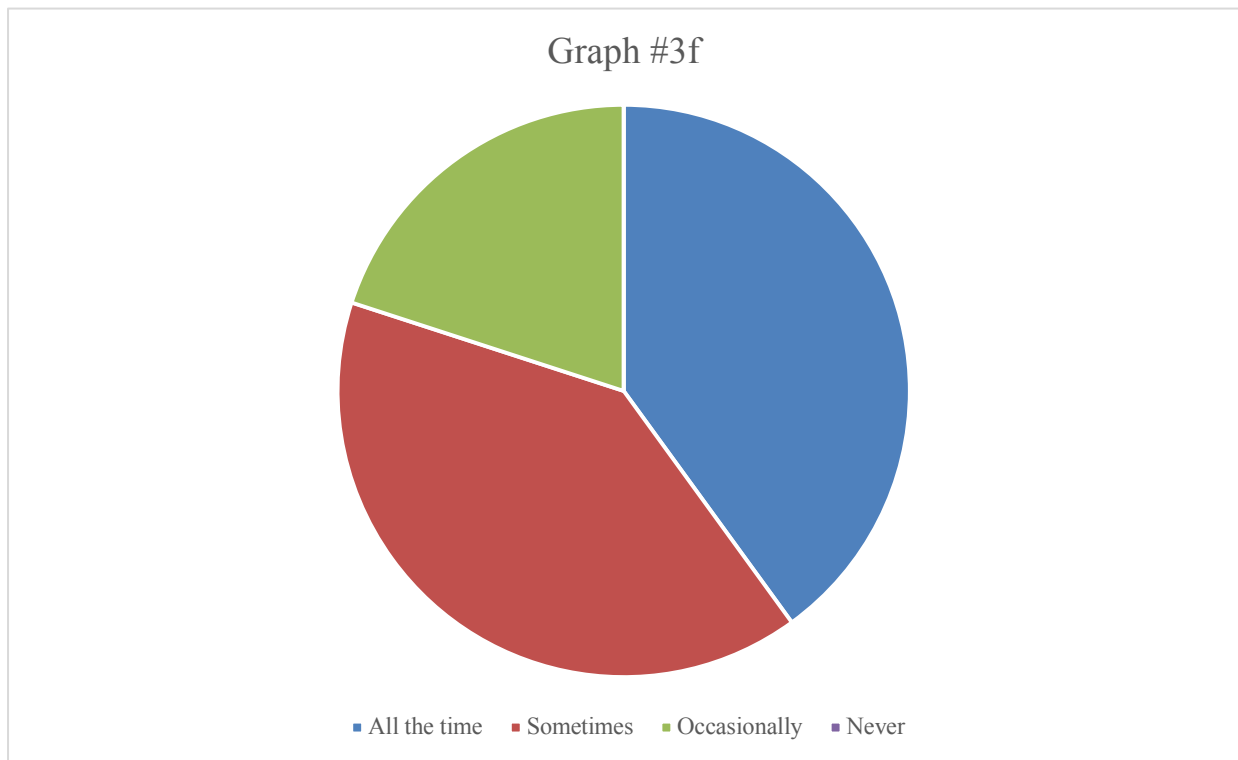
Statement 5: Is there any preparation to retaining young people in the church after graduating from high school?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	25%	5
Sometimes	40%	8
Occasionally	25%	5
Never	10%	2
Total		20



Statement 6: The community provides leadership training for young people.

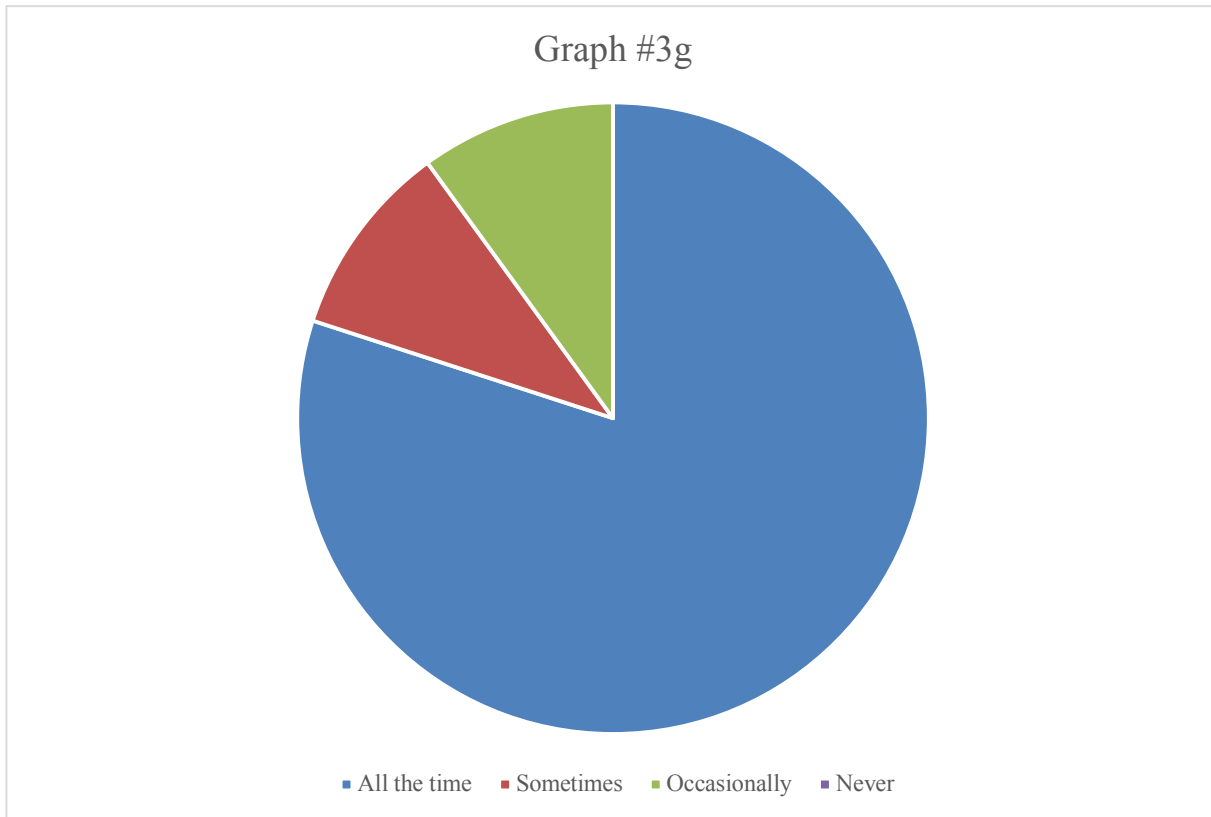
Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	40%	8
Sometimes	40%	8
Occasionally	20%	4
Never	0%	0
Total		20





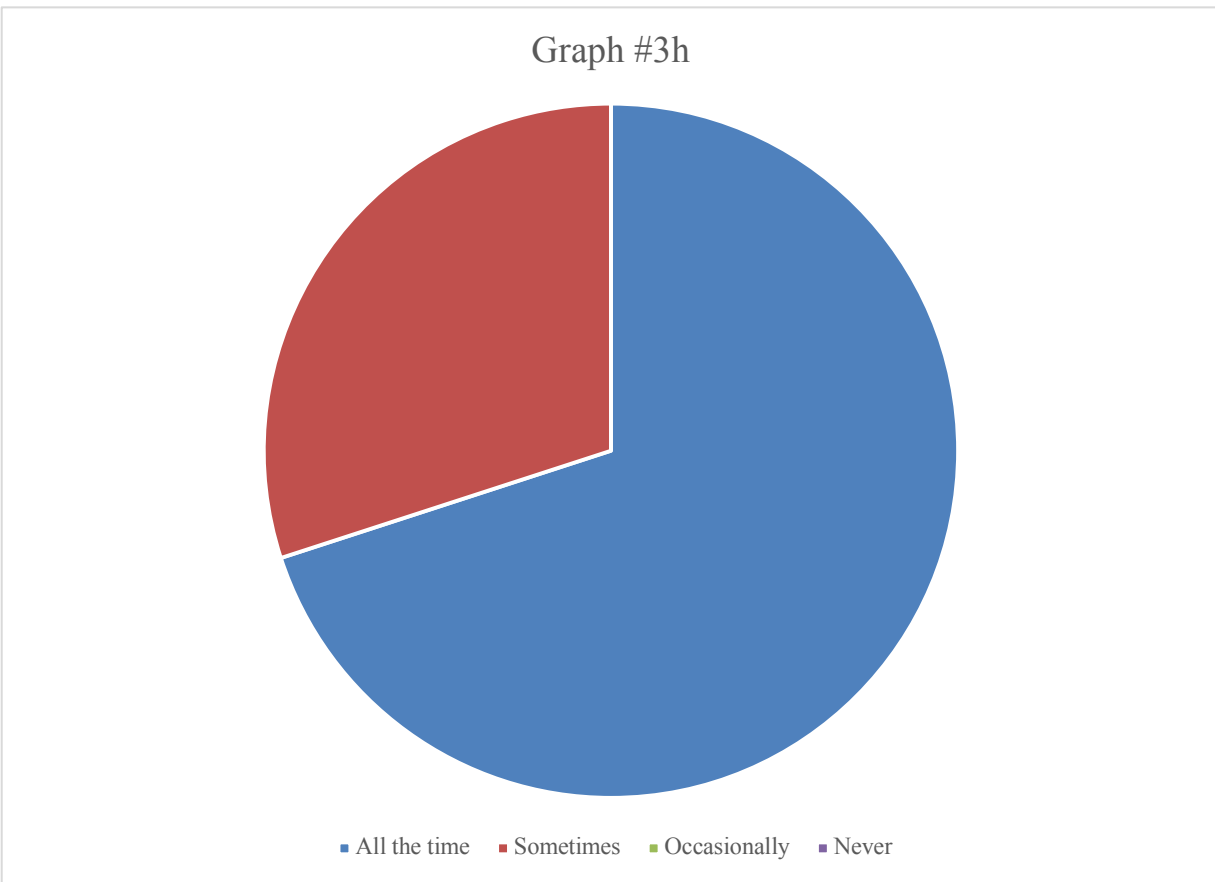
Statement 7: The church has programs designed to grow young people spiritually.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	80%	16
Sometimes	10%	2
Occasionally	10%	2
Never	0%	0
Total		20



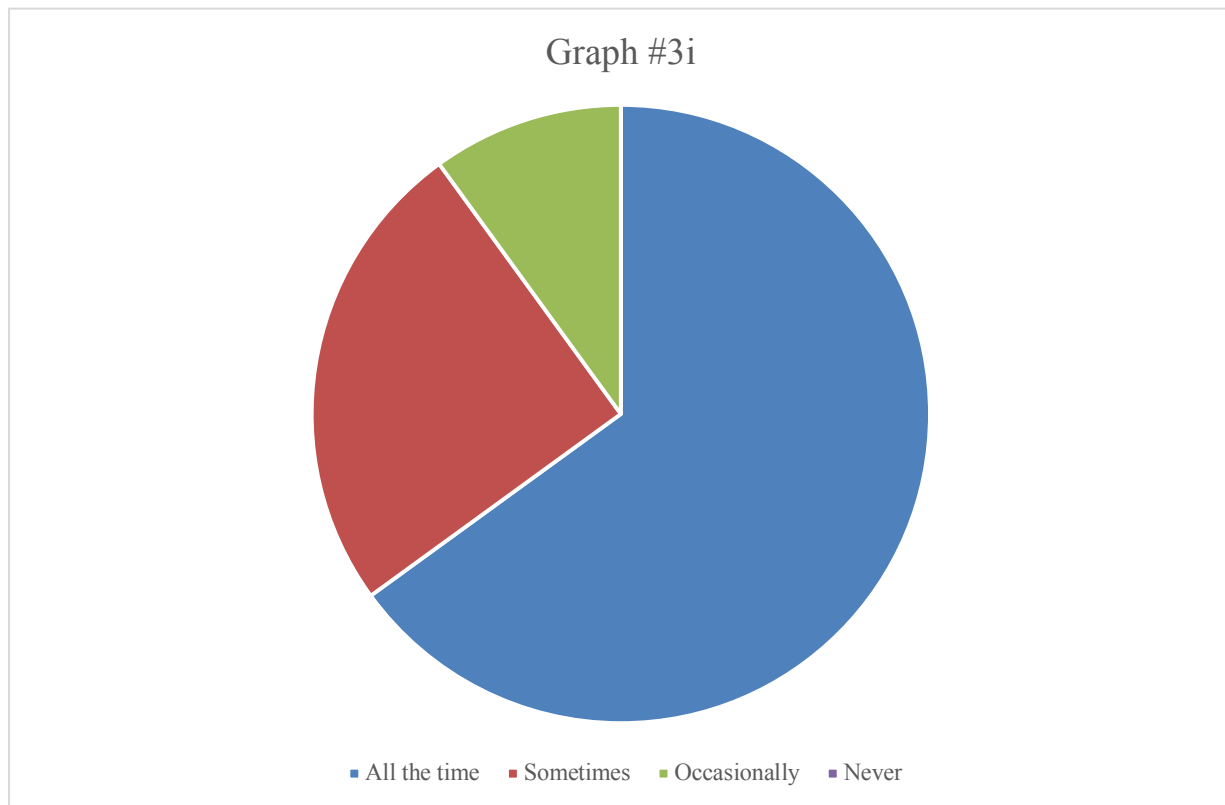
Statement 8: Young people are taught the purpose of the church.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	70%	14
Sometimes	30%	6
Occasionally	0%	0
Never	0%	0
Total		20



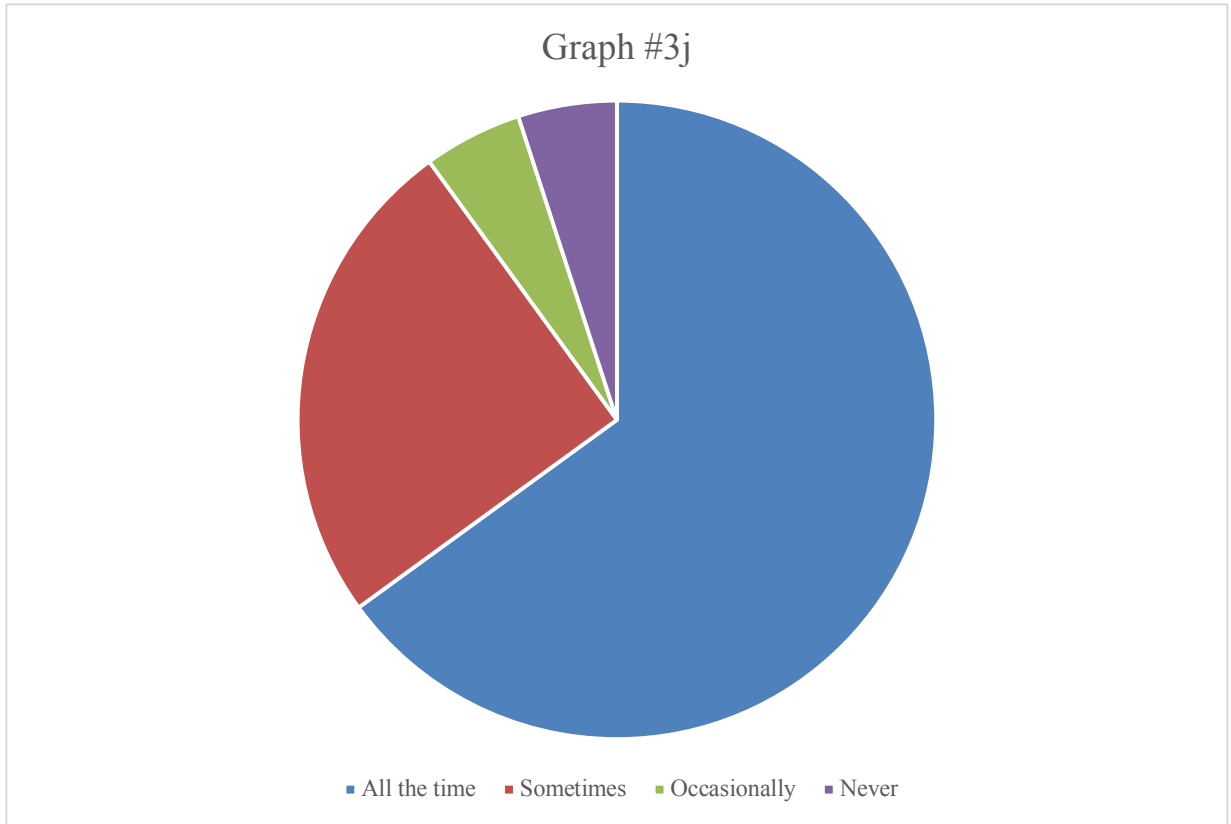
Statement 9: Our church invests money in youth programs.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	65%	13
Sometimes	25%	5
Occasionally	10%	2
Never	0%	0
Total		20



Statement 10: A pattern is set for the transition for the next generation to succeed.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
All the time	65%	13
Sometimes	25%	5
Occasionally	5%	1
Never	5%	1
Total		20



## **Youth Workers' and Advisors' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire for the youth pastor, workers, and advisors gives insight into the trends about youth attitudes of the church: if they are involved in the church, how the workers/advisors interact/provide training with the youth, the number returning after graduating high school and those not returning. 100% of the youth workers and advisors agreed on the number of youth graduating and those who stay after graduating from high school. 75% percent of the workers and advisors believe there are programs for the youth after they graduate from high school, and 25% percent believe there are no plans to keep the youth active after high. This is one of the reasons they do not return.

The survey reveals that the majority, 75% of youth, attended church with their parents and 25% came on their own, with friends or someone else. Some leadership training is available to youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen, but not enough to guide the youth to be the next generation of leaders. All the advisors and youth workers agreed on the youth motto: "Raising Youth to God's Standards."

All of the surveys agreed the youth concerns are: biblical understanding, spiritual development, and support from the church. It is imperative that the adults of the church support ministries and youth development and concerns. If the church is to retain youth after graduating high school, staying connected is the key. The youth concerns are expressed through discussions and meetings with the pastors, parents, youth workers, and advisors. The family and the church must work hand-in-hand when it comes to the development, training, growth, and youth concerns.

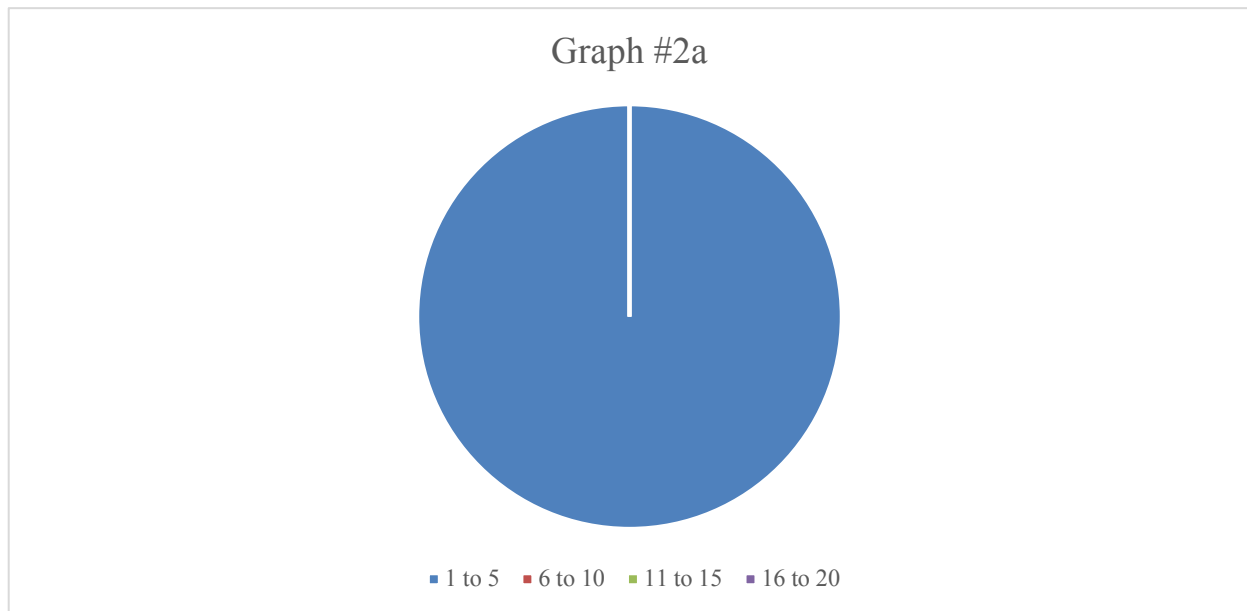
Everyone taking the survey agreed that the youth could express themselves in various ways, including discussions, activities, interacting with other youth, participating in ministry, and

activities. Those surveyed agree that the Bible, worship, and being a disciple of Christ keep the youth connected to God. One of the critical elements of a good youth ministry is good leaders and examples for the youth to follow.

### Youth Workers' and Advisors' Questionnaire Results

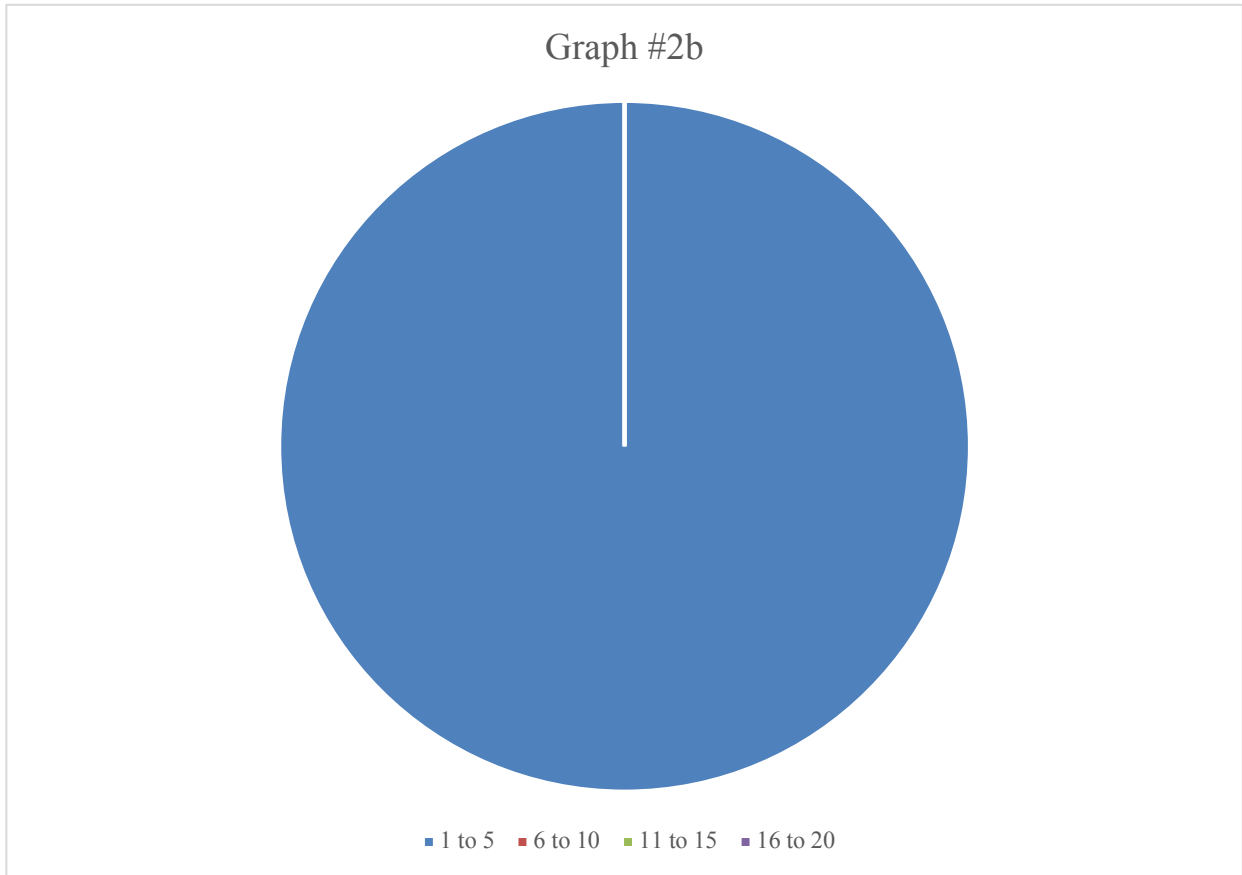
Question 1: On average, how many high school students graduate from your youth ministry each year?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
1 to 5	100%	26
6 to 10	0%	0
11 to 15	0%	0
16 to 20	0%	0
Total		26



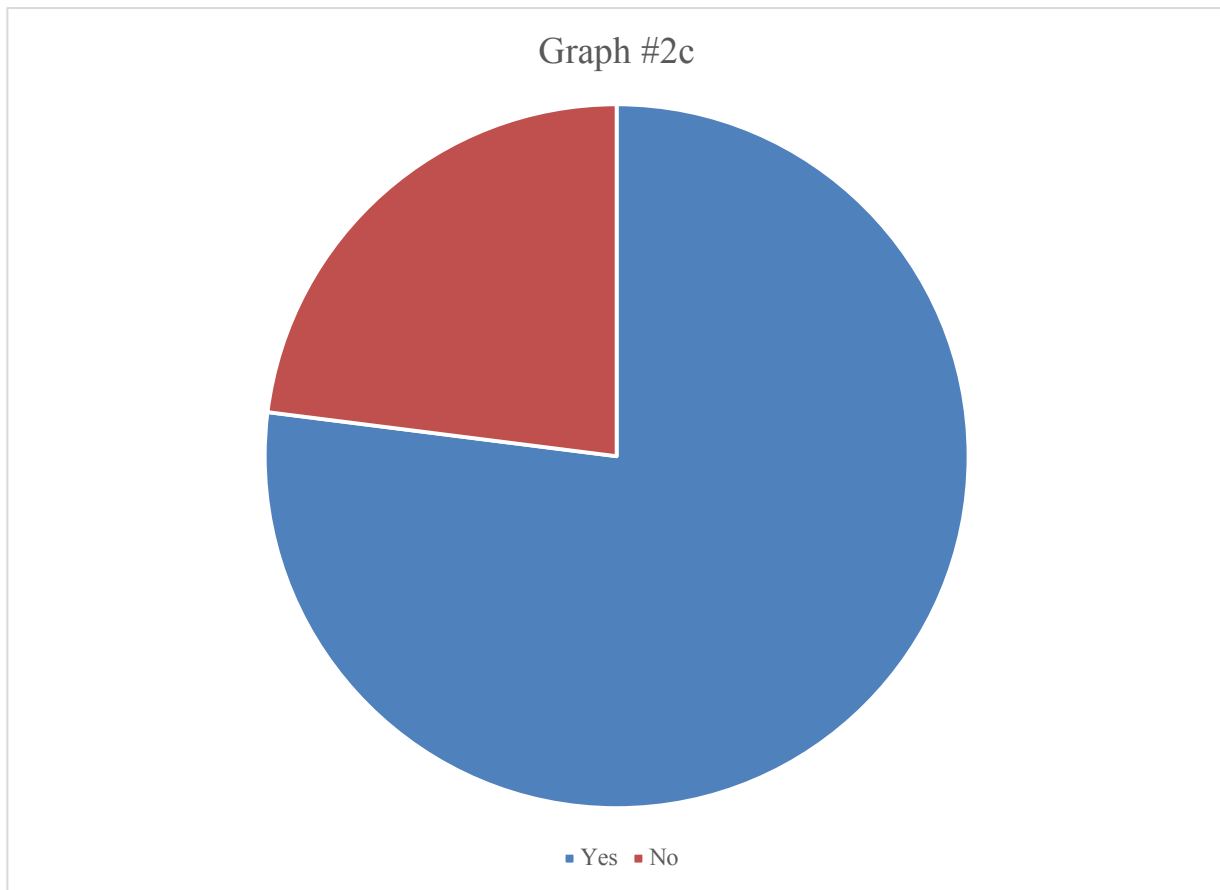
Question 2: How many graduating youth remain active in the church post-high school?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
1 to 5	100%	26
6 to 10	0%	0
11 to 15	0%	0
16 to 20	0%	0
Total		26



Question 3: Is there a plan in place for high school graduates to remain involved in the church after graduation?

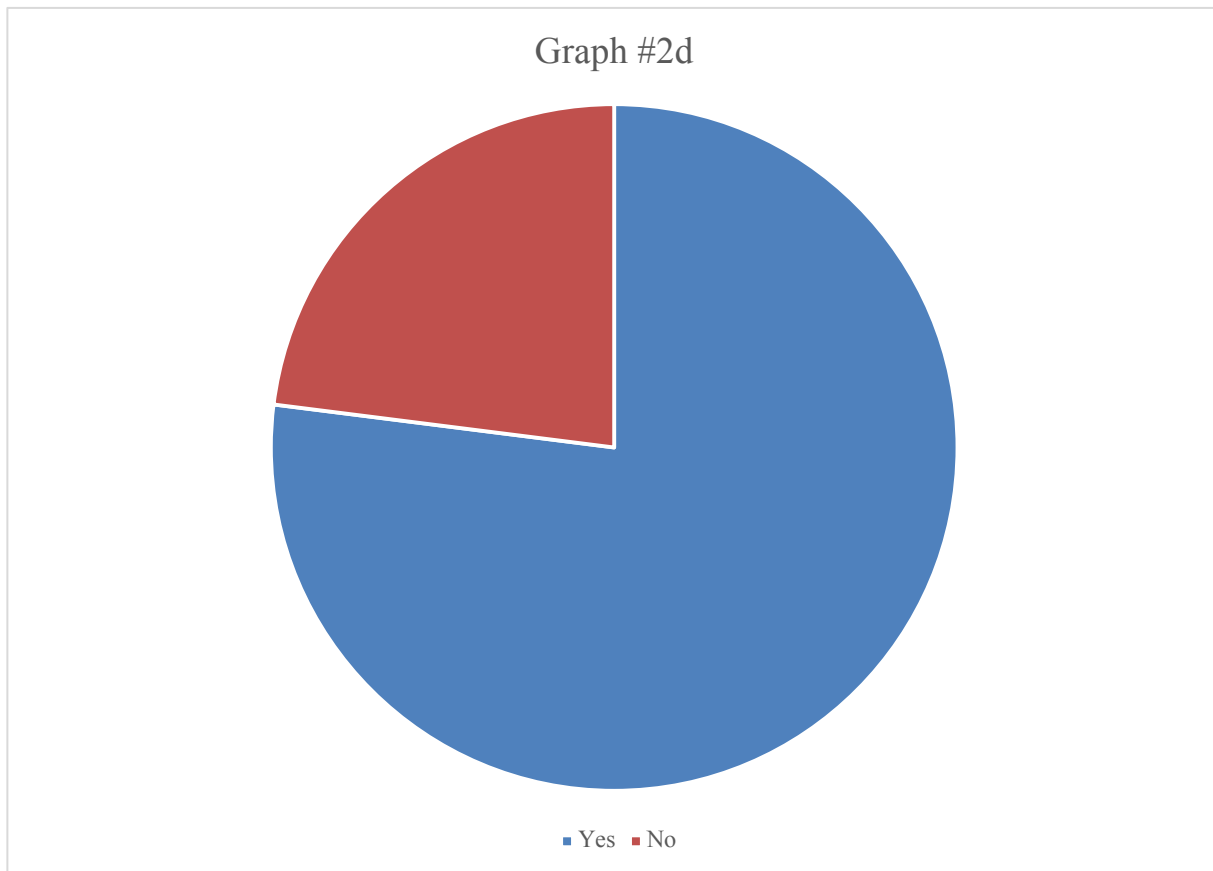
Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	77%	20
No	23%	6
Total		26





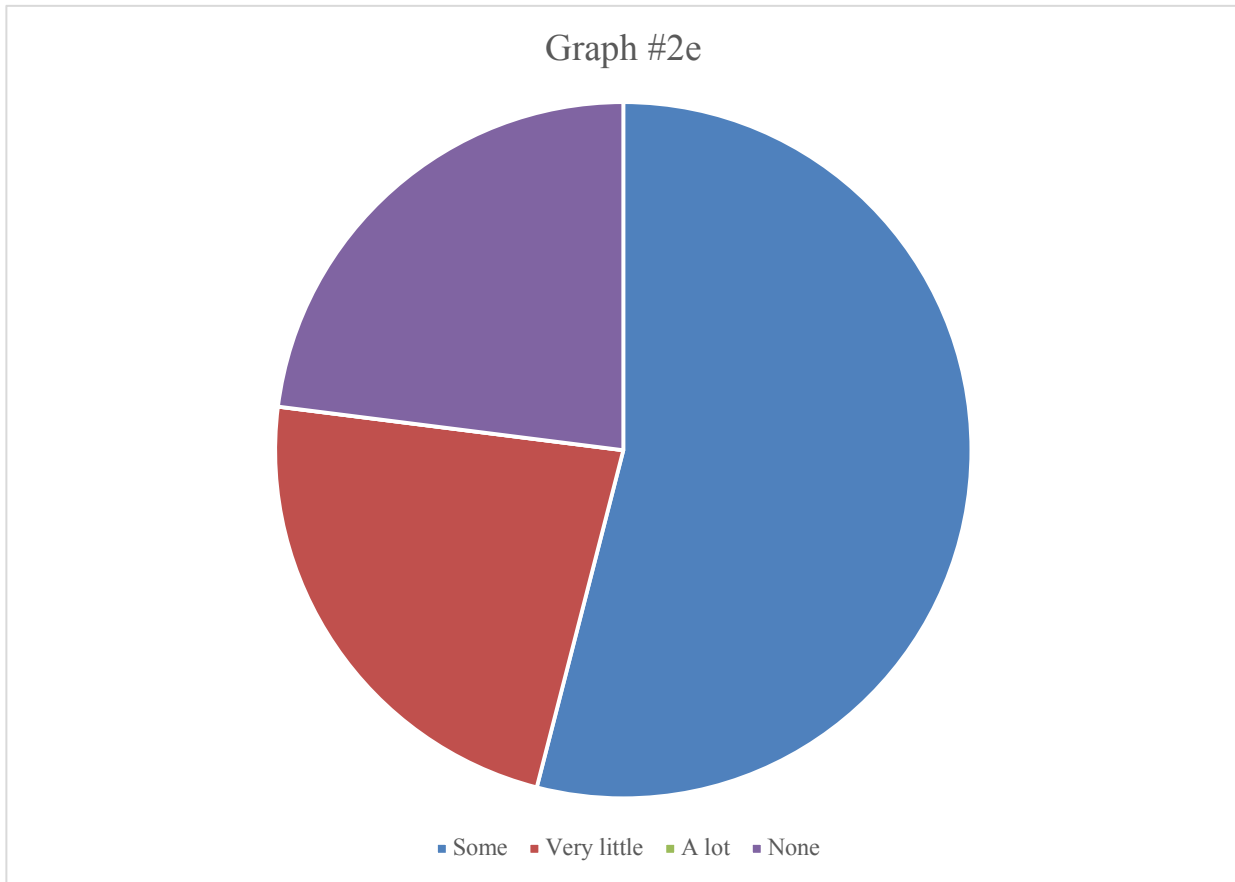
Question 4: Do the youth in the church, between the ages of 12 and 18, attend church with their parents?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	77%	20
No	23%	6
Total		26



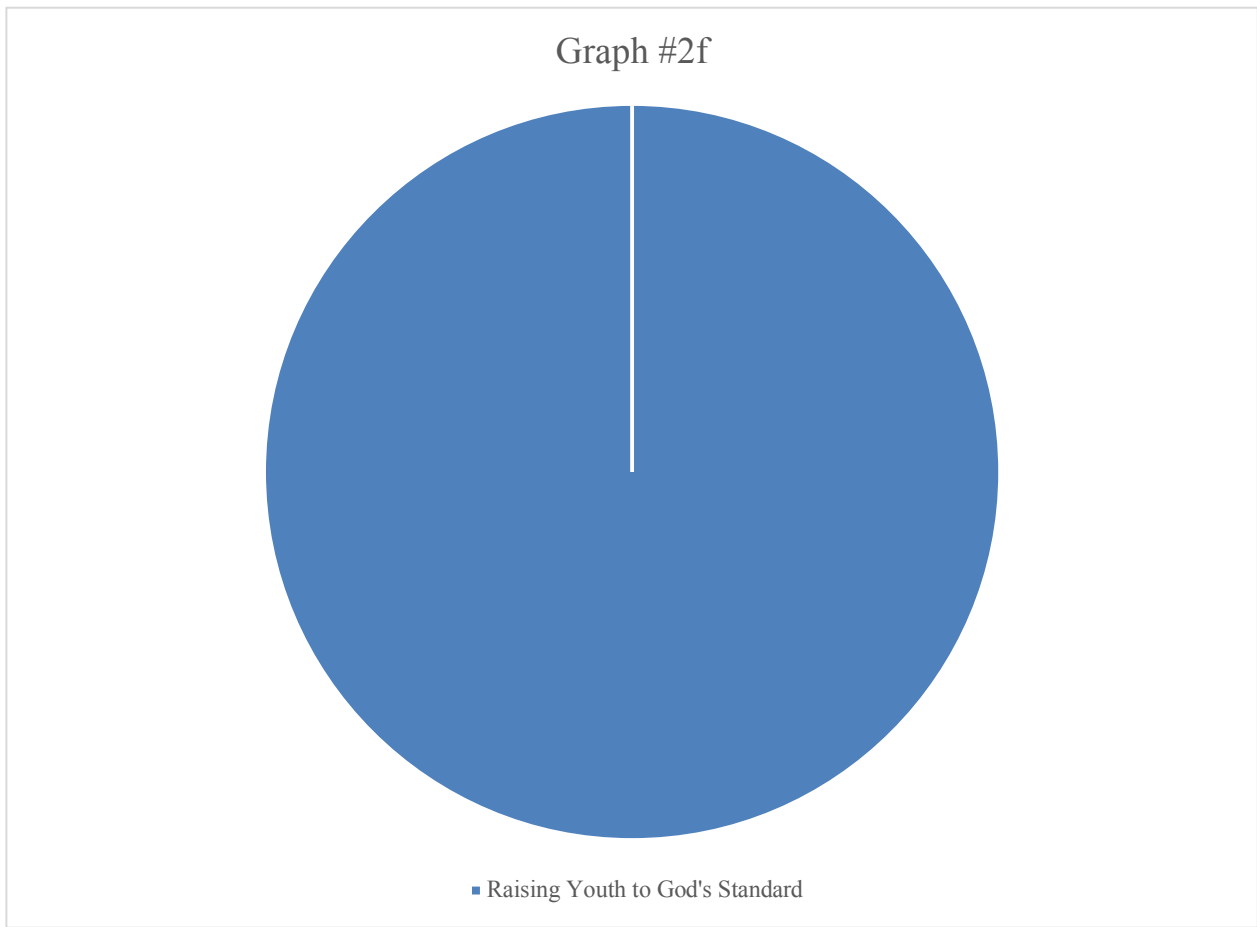
Question 5: Is leadership training available for the youth ages 12 to 18?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Some	54%	14
Very little	23%	6
A lot	0%	0
None	23%	6
Total		26



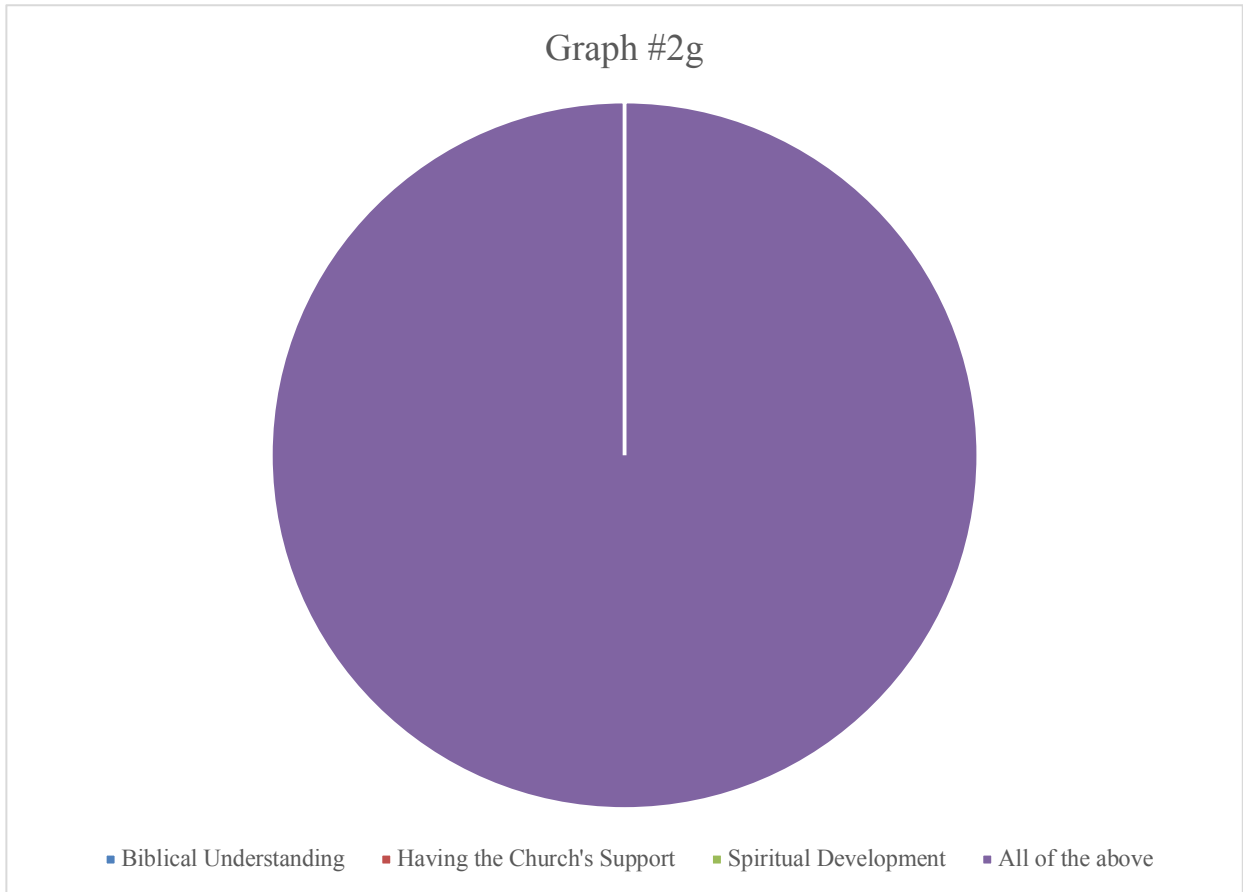
Question 6: What is the youth ministry motto?

Answer Choices	Response	Number
Raising Youth to God's Standard	100%	26
Total		26



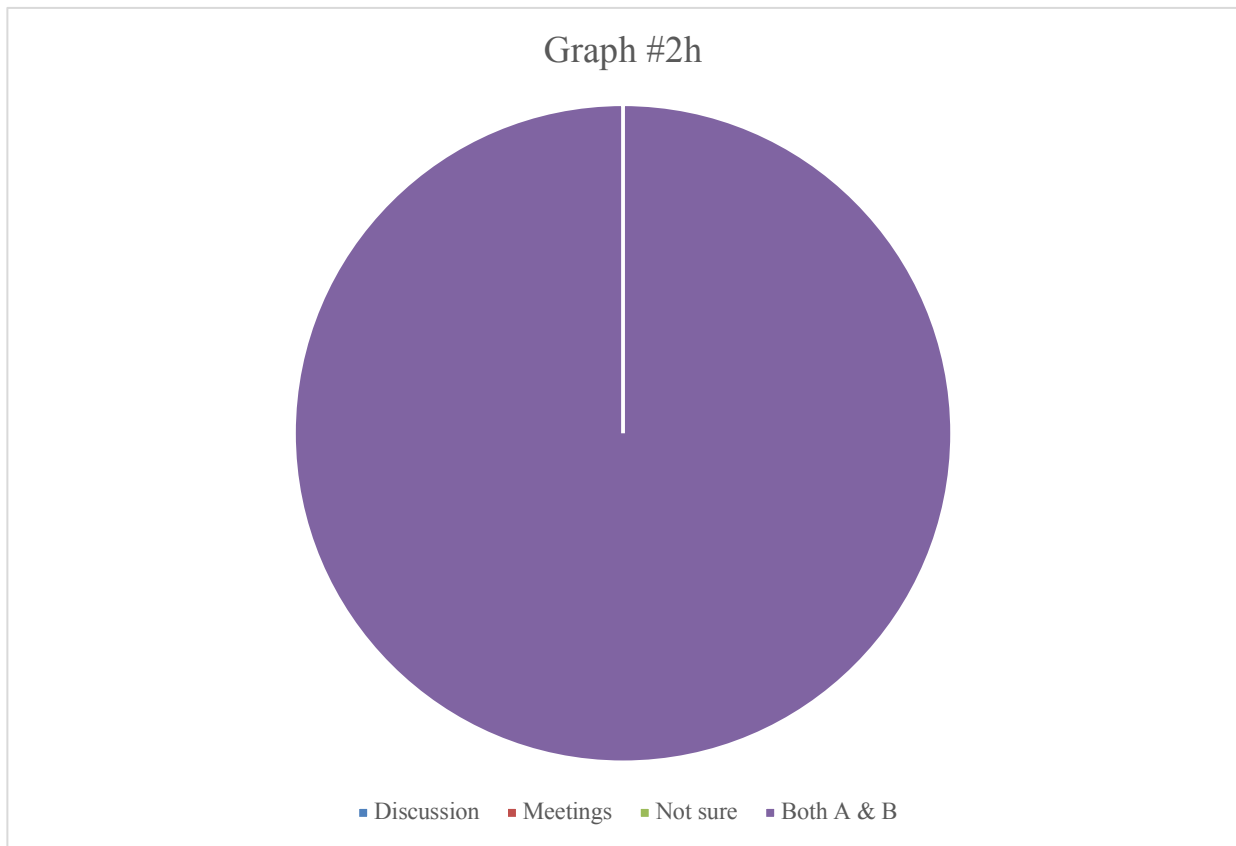
Question 7: What is the church's concern for the youth?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Biblical Understanding	0%	0
Having the Church's Support	0%	0
Spiritual Development	0%	0
All of the above	100%	26
Total		26



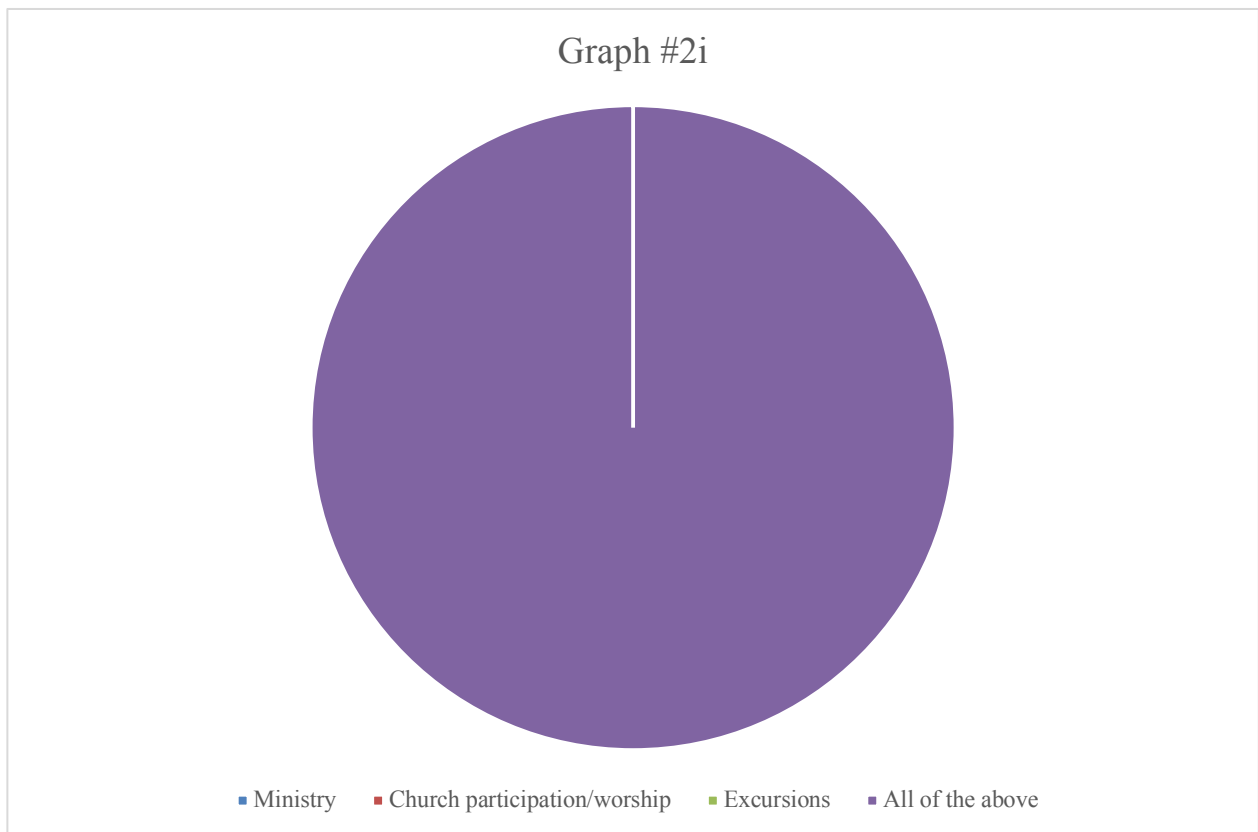
Question 8: How are youth concerns dealt with in the church?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Discussion	0%	0
Meetings	0%	0
Not sure	0%	0
Both A & B	100%	26
Total		26



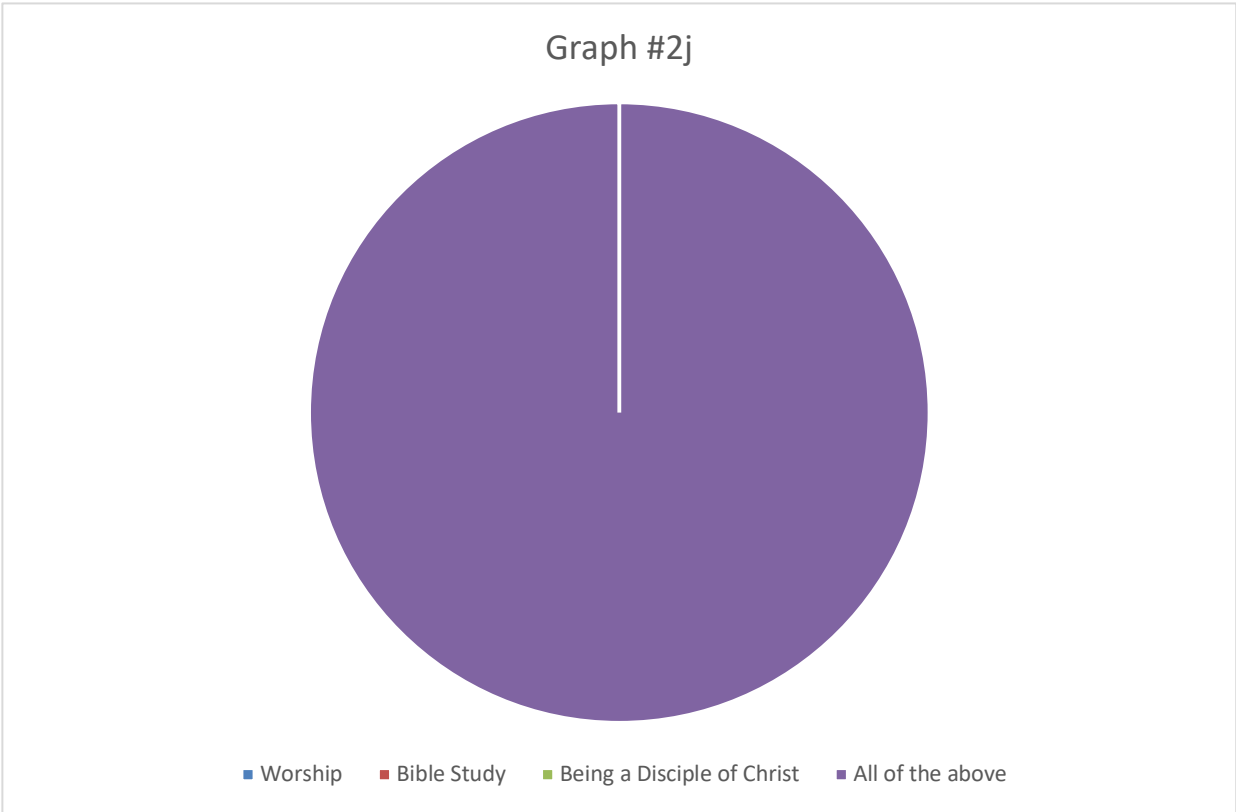
Question 9: How are youth able to express themselves?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Ministry	0%	0
Church participation/worship	0%	0
Excursions	0%	0
All of the above	100%	26
Total		26



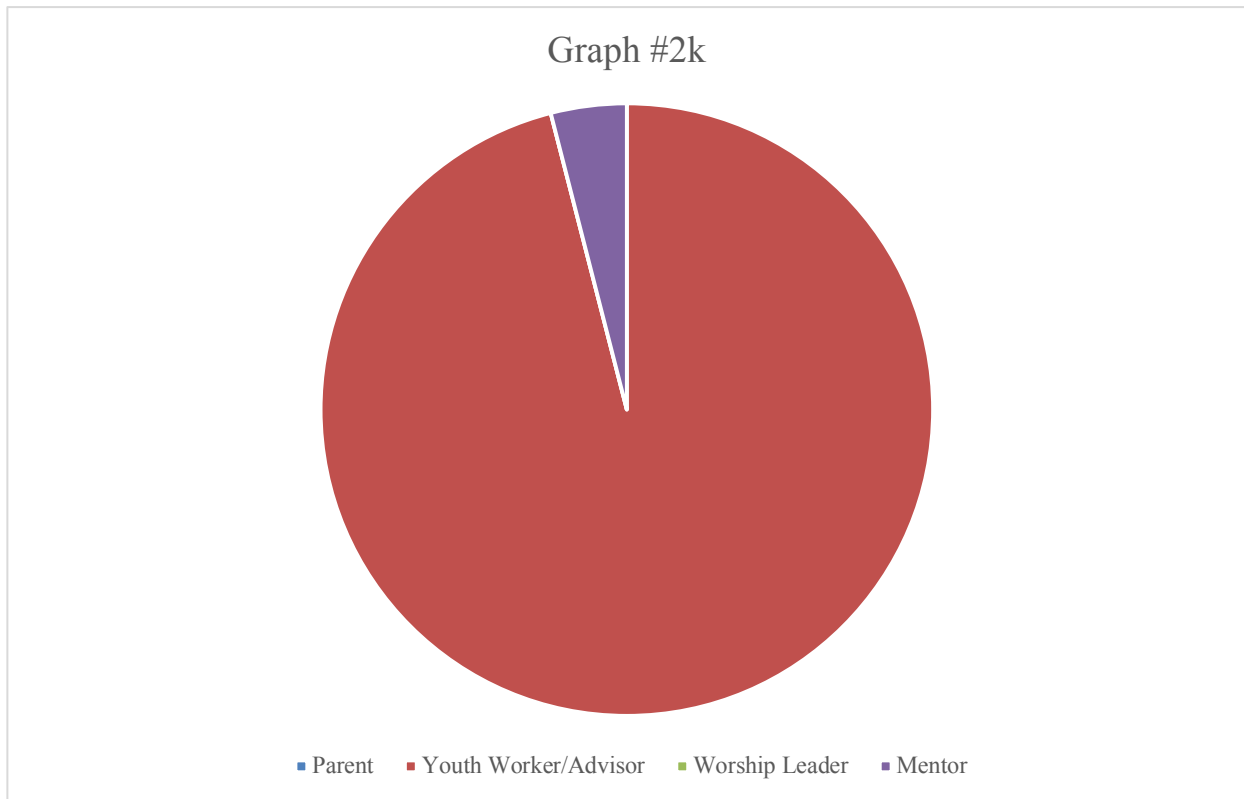
Question 10: What keeps the youth connected to God?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Worship	0%	0
Bible Study	0%	0
Being a Disciple of Christ	0%	0
All of the above	100%	26
Total		26



Question 11: What is your role with the youth of the church?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Parent	0%	0
Youth Worker/Advisor	96%	25
Worship Leader	0.038%	1
Mentor	0%	0
Total		26





## Summary Lessons

Youth Questionnaire One reflects that youth at MMBC have a healthy understanding of what the church is and the church's purpose. They viewed the church from a positive perspective and communicated the right reasons for attending. The youth also plan to stay in the church beyond high school and seem to be well anchored in their biblical beliefs.

Youth Questionnaire Two indicates the youth who plan to continue in church see the value of growing in their faith. The desire is to own their faith for themselves. They also indicate the importance of having a Young Adult Ministry to help them transition from being a youth to becoming an adult.

Youth Questionnaire Three communicates the majority of youth believe they are encouraged to be leaders by the church. Opportunities are provided for them to grow as leaders. Additionally, they feel encouraged to participate in the overall life of the church. The youth feel supported when they do participate in the ministry of the church.

The Youth Workers and Advisors Questionnaire shows that the leaders are aware of the challenges in attracting and keeping youth. However, they may not fully understand the steps needed to meet the challenges. Most of the leaders believe there is already a plan in place, and it will be important to help them see adjustments that may be helpful.

Why is there a shortage of youth at MMBC? The results revealed that MMBC does not have a Young Adult Ministry Bible for after the youth graduate from high school. The youth shortage presents a problem because the youth are too old for high school programs but not old enough for the young adult programs. College programs are needed if the youth are to return. The key is in helping them develop a long-lasting relationship with Christ into adulthood.

Some will go to college or stay at home and work after high school. If they attend college, some will attend a church near the college, and some will not. The African American church has struggled for years to increase the attendance of youth who have grown up in the church once they returned from college or attended local colleges.<sup>119</sup> MMBC has set aside an annual youth budget, but no funds are available for a Young Adult Ministry. Some local college students attend but do not stay long due to the lack of any Bible Study or ministries.

The church environment is steadily changing. The church is not prepared for today's youth and must change their methods or risk losing the next generation.<sup>120</sup> Kinnaman notes that today's youth seek church experiences that differ from those that have traditionally been offered within the church, causing the church to fall short in reaching out to this group.<sup>121</sup> Kinnaman revealed that the church is not prepared to minister to today's youth and risk reaching the next generation.

As church members age and die out, there must be those who can train the next generation of youth. The church leadership must effectively address the issue that young adults need to be active members of the church. The lack of college ministries and programs is part of the reason youth are not returning after graduating from high school. The youth want to be active members of the congregation.

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<sup>119</sup> Wesley Black, "Stopping the Dropouts: Guiding Adolescents Toward a Lasting Faith Following High School Graduation," *Christian Education Journal*, 5 (1) (2008), 28. Retrieved from <http://journals.biola.edu>.

<sup>120</sup> Ronald L. Taylor, *African American Youth: their Social and Economic Status in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 4.

<sup>121</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity....And Why It matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2007), 35.

Ben Trueblood concluded that “Young adults are not walking away from church because they are bitter at the church or have lost their faith. Instead, things come up—work, school projects, extracurricular activities—and many young adults fall out of the habit of going to church.”<sup>122</sup> MMBC has to come up with ways to attract young adults to the church. They are looking for a new experience that brings an authentic relationship with God. The church's old traditional methods are not working, and young adults are looking for new music and platforms that address the issues they are dealing with daily.

### **How to Use the Results**

The results will be provided to the pastor of MMBC and discussed in full detail. He will discuss the results with the youth coordinator, youth pastor, and youth workers. After discussing with these groups, Rev. Snoddy will have a meeting with the Deacons and Trustees and discuss what the church needs to do to solve the church's shortage and retain youth after they graduate from high school. The prayer is that once MMBC starts back meeting in person, the church can start implementing some of the results needed to retain youth.

Dean’s study shows that “the solution to the lack of young people in the church is not to beef up youth programs or make the worship experience fresh, but it is in modeling the mature and passionate faith the young people need to see and have.” Programs will not keep young people engaged. They are looking for a true relationship with God.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ben Trueblood, “Within Reach: The Power of Small Changes In Keeping Students Connected”, *LifeWay Student Ministry*, January 15, 2019.

<sup>123</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

## Parents and the Church Working Together

Parents and the church working together toward solutions is important also. Kara Powell in *Sticky Faith* writes, “It is vital for adults and youth to interact. Adults must participate in events, programs, and ministries youth are involved. There should be a genuine connection with the youth. Adults should know students by name know, their parents, where they live and be a strong Christian example.”<sup>124</sup> Proverbs 22:6 reminds believers to “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The church should support parents, and parents should support the church as they work together for the youth's well-being.

## Youth Involvement

Youth must be involved in the planning and implementation of solutions to take ownership of the process as well. MMBC can encourage youth to continue their involvement through ministry and missions. It is always a fantastic privilege to join God in his work.

Matthew 28:18-20 reads, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age: Amen.” All Christians are given the mandate to spread the gospel, and that includes the youth.

When students are engaged in the Great Commission, they take ownership of the personal responsibility to be disciples of Jesus who make disciples of others. Rather than being casual

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<sup>124</sup> Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers* (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 6.

observers in the mission of God, they are integral participants. Integral participants are more likely to stay involved for the long-term and make a difference in the kingdom of God with their lives.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

The conclusion provides a summary of the thesis project. Hopefully, the summary will catalyze the church, congregation, youth pastor, workers, parents, and advisors to take action steps to add more youth to the congregation. It will also promote retaining more youth after they graduate from high school. These actions will be in the form of resourcing students for developing specific spiritual disciplines that will produce lifelong followers of Christ.

The project was purposed to provide MMBC with information that may help identify what would increase the youth return rate to the church once they graduate from high school. The future of the church depends on the next generations. The result of the project shows that MMBC needs to make improvements, to grow in the number of youth, and the retention of young adults.

### **Recommendations for MMBC**

There are specific recommendations for MMBC based on the project, which may prove helpful in increasing the current number of youth and retaining them after high school. There is no single solution for the challenges, but collectively these adjustments could bear fruit for the church now and in the future.

#### **Recommendation 1. Prioritize Developing Disciples**

First, helping the youth grow as disciples who learn about God and faithfully worship him should remain a high priority and emphasis in the church. The youth indicated a priority for their involvement is “to worship God” (33.33%) and “to get Biblical understanding” (12.50%). They also indicated a healthy understanding of what the purpose of a church is as “a place of

worship” (50%), “a body of believers gathering together” (29.17%), and “people who are followers of Jesus” (20.83%). All youth responding indicated they believe it is “very important to be a child of God” (100%). Also, all respondents indicated they believe what is in the Bible (100%). A current strength of the church is that it has a solid biblical foundation. This is a great testimony to the faithfulness of the church to maintain a biblical witness.

The Bible provides various biblical and theological resources to help in teaching, preaching, and kingdom work. The church must teach the Christian life accurately based on the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that God inspired the writing of the Bible through men. Biblical teaching starts at an early age, and once the individual gives his or her life to Christ, they continue to grow by studying God’s word and learning how to live the Christian life.

#### Recommendation 2. Increase Parental Involvement

Second, parental involvement is vital. The majority of the youth presently involved in the church come with their parent(s). The youth model their parents’ faithfulness. The church should continue to help parents grow as disciples of Jesus and provide opportunities for them to be strengthened. As parents grow and are strengthened, this will help youth also.

Rainer and Rainer note that parents play a critical role in the assimilation of teens and college-age students. The goal is for the parent and church in partnership to guide and influence the faith of the children. Youth emulate what they see.<sup>125</sup> Parental involvement with the church’s youth is the key to establishing the foundation, faith, and church participation. The church can enhance and further what the parents initiate. If forced to go to church, rather than wanting to go

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<sup>125</sup> Rainer, *Essential Church*, 42.

to church, some youth revealed they would take a break from church once they were on their own.

The participants' summary indicated that they go to church with their parents since most of the participants are under the age of eighteen. They reveal that they follow the faith of their parents. Parental involvement helps guide the youth in the church. The key is the church and parents working together.

### Recommendation 3. Build Healthy Relationships

Third, youth responded one of the things they like about the church is “fellowship with the members” (22.73%) and “training the next generation of youth” (22.73%). Nearly half noted the importance of gathering with others in the church and then being trained as leaders. The church should continue to build fellowship and relationships among the youth. Healthy relationships among youth participating can serve to attract new youth to the ministry. If the church increases its training of youth as leaders, it may be able to attract more youth as well. Half agreed that “Youth are encouraged to be church leaders” (50%). There is a hunger for leadership training and development. This can include holistic training of the youth as leaders concerning the various aspects of life in which it may be helpful.

MMBC must consider two healthy types of relationships among those youth in the Church. First, youth must develop healthy relationships among their peers. Proverbs 27:17-19 declares, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Second, mature adult Christians within the Church must invest in younger generations. Titus 2 encourages the older men and women in the Church to be godly examples in their lifestyle and teach the younger generations sound doctrine. MMBC must encourage older members of the congregation to train, mentor, and support the church’s youth. Unfortunately, there is a



disconnection among high school graduates and the older adults within the church. The number one reason given for disengagement within is that church members perceive being judgmental or even hypocritical. The relationship must be genuine and not superficial. The older generation can lead, guide, and train the youth as future Christian leaders. The youth need to know that someone cares about their concerns and can seek help and support from that older generation

#### Recommendation 4. Facilitate Active Ministry Engagement

Fourth, youth indicated they “are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the church” (70%, all the time, 20% sometimes). If the church encourages youth to participate, they must also continue to provide avenues for them to participate. Recruiting youth to engage in the various aspects of the ministry can help them learn how to contribute to the church and also help them stay in the church as adults.

It is essential to involve the youth with the Church’s missions, especially the missionary group, which is also relational. The mission group that does home visits, hospital visits, outreach ministries, and world mission travels to teach people about Jesus Christ and His great commandment to love God and love others. This ensures that their actions fulfill a need after they have left the community. Many missionaries focus on the needs of the communities they are serving and integrate those needs with evangelism. Investing in the youth of MMBC is one key element of retaining them after they graduate from high school. The church must consider more strategically involving the youth in ministry, mission and help them identify and use their spiritual gifts.

#### Recommendation 5. Continue to Provide Sufficient Support

Fifth, only half replied that they believe “the church congregation supports all activities and programs” (50%). Conversely, the other half does not believe this as strongly. The youth

want the church's support. The youth needs to know that the church is there to guide them through the process if any problems arise. Respondents do believe the church "has programs designed to grow young people spiritually" (80%) and "invests money in youth programs" (65%). Perhaps there is somewhat of a disconnect between the younger and older generations relationally. The church can continue to encourage mentoring relationships and fellowship between the younger and older generations, so the youth feel they are a valuable part of the church. The church can pair youth and mentors after youth join the church. This enables youth to connect with others their age and with adults in the church who can lead and guide them.

#### Recommendation 6. Develop a Young Adult Ministry

Sixth, a high number of youth indicate they intend to continue going to church after graduating from high school (96.6%). Although the number of youth is not significant compared to the size of the congregation, it reflects a high level of quality in the Youth Ministry overall and the type of youth involved. If, in fact, 96.6% desire to stay in church after they graduate from high school, it is vital that the church do everything it can to create an environment where it is possible for them to do so.

The data indicated that 100% of youth and youth workers identified a common reason students do not stay after graduating from high school: the MMBC does not provide a Young Adult Ministry. Paul Worcester referenced the sad reality that most college campuses are filled with thousands of lost young people who are broken and searching for direction, with only a handful of under-resourced college ministries seeking to impact the campus.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Paul Worcester, "5 REASONS CHURCHES STRUGGLE TO REACH COLLEGE STUDENTS," Facts & Trends July 04, 2018, January 23, 2020, accessed January 11, 2020.

MMBC must do better in meeting students where they are. This pertains to issues of life development, changes, circumstances, and relational issues. It also includes concerns about the church, God, Jesus, how to live as Christians, and how to remain connected with the church. The students have to feel relevant and a part of the church and congregation.

When asked, “Is there any preparation to retaining young people in the church after graduating from high school?” a low number indicated “all the time” (25%). At the same time, youth leaders were asked, “Is there a plan in place for high school graduates to remain involved in the church after graduation?” Leaders replied predominantly, yes there is (77%). A disparity exists between the perception of youth and youth leaders. The church could begin a high-quality Young Adult Ministry to retain students who desire to continue in church, and also attract new people. Part of this could include interaction with youth once they go to college through letters, cards, and care packages, and involve them while they are home on breaks also if they do not remain in the area.

#### Recommendation 7. Grow in Diversity

Last, in the qualitative responses youth communicated the importance of growing diversity, being versatile in ministry, and changing things as needed. The current generation is experiencing rapid change and advancements in nearly every area of their lives. The church's foundational principles do not need to change, but often, methodologies and approaches do need to be adjusted for maximum effectiveness.

#### **Summary**

In summary, the core of the Youth Ministry at MMBC is strong, but participation needs to increase. If strategic adjustments are made, the number of youth could double in five years which

is a stated goal of the project. Additionally, a Young Adult Ministry can be started, so the youth who intend to continue in the church will have a place to transition from Youth Ministry to Adult Ministry effectively, The hope is to reverse the decline in the number of youth which the church has experienced over the decades and more so in recent years.

## Appendix A

### Youth Questionnaire One

1. What is the church?
  - a. A place of worship
  - b. The physical building
  - c. A body of believers gathering together
  - d. All people who are followers of Jesus
2. How do you see the Church?
  - a. Church members are too hypocritical
  - b. Church members judgmental
  - c. A place to connect with friends
  - d. A place to learn about God and Jesus
  - e. All the above
3. What is your reason for attending church?
  - a. Parents
  - b. To see friends
  - c. To worship God
  - d. To get Biblical understanding
  - e. All the above
4. Do you plan to continue going to church after graduating from high school?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

5. If not, why?
  - a. Church not near where I live
  - b. I do not agree with the social issues of the church
  - c. The church is not relevant
  - d. Growing up I was forced to go to church, and I need a break from church
6. What do like or not like about the church?
  - a. Fellowship with the members
  - b. Learning about the Bible
  - c. Growing spiritually
  - d. Training the generation of youth
7. Tell me your understanding of what is the purpose of the church?
  - a. Not sure
  - b. A place to worship God
  - c. To pray and help people
  - d. To teach biblical doctrine
8. If you could change one thing about the church, what would it be?
  - a. The atmosphere
  - b. Music
  - c. The church members perspective of youth
  - d. Nothing
9. How important is it to be a child of God?
  - a. Very important
  - b. Not important

c. Irrelevant

d. Not sure

10. Do you believe in God/Jesus/Holy Spirit?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Sometimes

d. Not sure

11. Do you believe what is in the Bible?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Sometimes

d. Seldom

## Appendix B

### Youth Questionnaire Two

1. If you could change four things about the church, what would it be?

1.

2.

3.

4.

2. Do you plan to continue going to church after graduating from high school, if not why?

1.

2.

3.

4.

3. What will keep you coming to church after graduating from high school?

1.

2.

3.

4.



## Appendix C

### Youth Questionnaire Three

1. Youth are encouraged to be church leaders.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
2. Youth are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the church.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
3. The church congregation support all youth activities and programs.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
4. Adults serve as mentors to the youth.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never

5. Is there any preparation to retaining young people in the church after graduating from high school?
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
6. The community provides leadership training for young people.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
7. The church has programs designed to grow young people spiritually.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
8. Young people are taught the purpose of the church.
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Never
9. Our church invests money in youth programs.
  - a. All the time

b. Sometimes

c. Occasionally

d. Never

10. A pattern is set for the transition for the next generation to succeed.

a. All the time

b. Sometimes

c. Occasionally

d. Never

## Appendix D

### Youth Workers and Advisors Questionnaire

1. On average, how many high school students graduate from your youth ministry each year?
  - a. 1-5
  - b. 6-10
  - c. 11-15
  - d. 16-20
  
2. How many youth graduating remain active in the church post-high school?
  - a. 1-5
  - b. 6-10
  - c. 11-15
  - d. 16-20
  
3. Is there a plan in place for high school graduates to remain involved in the church after graduation?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Do the youth in the church between 12-18 attend church with their parents? Will you quantify? Once a week, monthly, or often?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. Is leadership training available for the youth ages 12 to 18?
  - a. Some

- b. Very little
  - c. A lot
  - d. None
6. What is the youth ministry motto?
7. What are the church's concerns of your youth?
- a. Biblical understanding
  - b. Having the church support
  - c. Spiritual development
  - d. All of the above
8. How are youth concerns dealt with in the church?
- a. Discussions
  - b. Meetings
  - c. Not sure
9. How are the youth able to express themselves?
- a. Ministry
  - b. Church participation/worship
  - c. Excursions
10. What keeps the youth connected to God?
- a. Worship
  - b. Bible study
  - c. Being a disciple of Christ
  - e. All of the above

11. What is your role with the youth of the church?

a. Parent

b. Youth Worker/Advisor

c. Worship leader

## Appendix E

### Parental Consent

Parental consent is for those youth who are under the age of eighteen. Below is a sample copy of the parent consent form.

**Title of the Project:** Shortage of Youth at Mount Moriah Baptist Church

**Principal Investigator:** Sharion Otey, DMin Candidate, Liberty University

**Co-investigator(s):** Name(s), credentials, institutional affiliation

#### Invitation to be Part of a Study

Your child/student is invited to participate in a study. Participants must be 12-18 and a member of Mount Moriah Baptist Church. Taking part in this project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child/student to take part in this project.

#### What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to increase the amount of youth at Mount Moriah Baptist Church.

#### What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your child/student to be in this study, I will ask him/her/him or her to do the following things:

1. Set a one hour meeting date
2. Establish focus group

3. Answer questionnaires/surveys

**How could participants or others benefit from this study?**

**[Option 2: No Direct Benefits]** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the training of future Christians and leaders.

**What risks might participants experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study include [minimal].

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Records will be stored securely, and only the evaluator(s) will have access to the records. Data collected as part of this study may be shared for use in future studies. If data collected from the participants is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- A statement describing procedures taken to protect the privacy of the participant(s) and the confidentiality of their data: participant responses will be anonymous, participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of [pseudonyms/codes], interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not be able to easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.



- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**How will participants be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child/student to participate will not affect your or his/her current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child/student to participate, he/she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?**

**[Option 2: All Other Data]** If you choose to withdraw your child/student from the study/your child/student chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the evaluator at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw him/her or should your child/student choose to withdraw, data collected from your child/student, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your child's/student's contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw him/her, your child/student chooses to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The student conducting this study is, Sharion Otey. The participants may ask any questions they have. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact [her/him/them] at [864-431-9221, Sotey1@liberty.edu].

**Who do you contact if you have questions about rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

**Your Consent**

Before agreeing to be part of the study, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. [You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records]. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your [child/student] to be in this study.

Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The student will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child/student to participate in the study.*

Printed Child's/Student's Name

---

Parent's Signature

Date

---

Minor's Signature

Date

## **Institutional Review Board Approval**

March 1, 2021

Sharion Otey

IRB Approval 120Y.11Z611: The Shortage of Youth at Mount Moriah Baptist Church

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