



Issue no: 1 | Vol no: 7 | May 2025: 1-16

Strategies for Retaining Church Youths for Evangelism Activities in Suneka Sub-County, South Kenya Conference

Ogora Naum Kemunto ⁽¹⁾

Kandagor Rotich ⁽²⁾

Erick Ogwora ⁽³⁾

Article History

Received: 2025-05-14

Accepted: 2025-04-15

Published: 2025-05-15

(1,2,3) Kisii University, Kenya

Email: ogorakemuntonaum@gmail.com

Cite this article in APA

Ogora, N. K., Ogwora, E., & Rotich, K. (2025). Strategies for retaining church youths for evangelism activities in Suneka Sub-County, South Kenya Conference. *Editon consortium journal of arts, humanities and social studies*, 7(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjahss.v7i1.583>

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to evaluate church youth retention strategies for evangelism activities in the Suneka District, South Kenya Conference. The main aim and the mission of the church is to spread the word of God to all nations, people in the whole world. However, this requires energetic young people. The study was informed by two theories: Community Youth Development Theory (CYDT) and Positive Youth Development Theory (PYDT). Being a qualitative study, it employed a descriptive research design. The study targeted 400 populations with a sample size of 196 respondents. Censors, simple random and purposive sampling were used in data collection. For the reliability of study instruments, a pilot study was conducted with the Catholic Church in Suneka, Kisii Diocese. Data was collected using questionnaires, in-depth interview schedules, and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). Data was analysed thematically, and narrations on specific issues of the study are contained in the study objectives. The analysed data was presented using pie charts, bar charts, tables and verbatim. The study found that skill and talent development, with 81.3 per cent, and youth management of church social media platforms, with 72.9 per cent, are the most preferred strategies. The study concluded that retaining young people in the church is crucial for sustaining the evangelism mission. The study recommended prioritisation of youth-centred evangelism events such as concerts, community service, or social gatherings with a gospel focus. The SDA church should also engage in practical application of faith and minimise spiritualism; young people need opportunities for hands-on evangelism.

Key words: Apostle, church membership, evangelism, faith-based activities, youth ministry.



This article is distributed under the license of a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). It is permitted to be used, reproduced and distributed in line with Editon Consortium Publishing guidelines.

INTRODUCTION

The main aim and the mission of the church is to spread the word of God to all nations, people in the whole world. In doing this, the work of evangelism would continue. Evangelism is thought to be carried out by the ministers of the church who are ordained, and others selected and given power to carry out some responsibilities in the church. Over time, while these ministers are working, they will always require young people to take up those responsibilities as they grow old and retire from the service in order to ensure the church stands from one generation to another. The youth, therefore, hold a special place in the church as the leaders and ministers of the future church. Their participation and involvement in the church are pivotal for preparation for their future roles in the church. However, this has not been the case. The youth in Suneka district, South Kenya Conference, have remained on the fence regarding participation in church activities, ranging from evangelism to crusades.

A youth ministry is a department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church which works for and through its youth. It is defined as that work of the church operated through this department, which is conducted for, with, and by young people. The primary focus is the salvation of youth through Jesus Christ and their acceptance and involvement in the mission of the church. The purpose of the youth ministries is to facilitate and support the ministry of the church in winning, training, holding and reclaiming its youth. The department shares the responsibility for developing a global evangelistic strategy in consultation with administration and in cooperation with other departments of the church. It is to assist the world Church in forming objectives, goals and plans. Also, to provide training that will equip the body of the church to save its youth and prepare them to take the gospel to the entire world. All of its activities are to be coordinated into a master strategy for soul-winning and soul-conservation. Church Manual pg 405.

In the United States of America, a study by Moser (2019) indicated that the number and participation of young people in the church have been declining without a possible reversal. On the same concern, the study by Barna (1993) reported a diminishing presence of young people in the activities of the

church, with only one-fifth of the young people in their 20s maintaining a level of spiritual activity. Similarly, the same research revealed that 59 per cent of youths with a Christian background reported having dropped out of attending and participating in church activities after a monotonous, unrewarding experience of regularly attending church.

According to Burke (2015), almost every major branch of Christianity in the United States has lost a significant number of members, with more than one-third declaring it does not belong to any religious faith. Additionally, a study by Vitisia (2016) indicated that in America, 70 per cent of young adults aged 24 stop attending church, while 70 per cent aged between 23-30 have completely dropped out of the church's reality calls for youth engagement since they speak the language of many who do not go to church. Dropping out of church implies not being interested in church evangelism programs, which jeopardise the church's future evangelical human resource (McNeal, 2009). This reality had earlier on been pointed out by Warren (2002) in his study, which noted that the failure of youth to participate in the evangelism activities of the church was as a result of churches not having programs proper to the youth; they do not feel identified with the existing programs and modalities of realising those programs. The programs were not youth-driven but elderly designed. A study by White (2014) explains that American church leadership is at a crossroads in finding ways to involve the youth in church ministries as a way to retain them in the church. The youth can stay in the church if the church engages them. In other words, church engagement of the youth is impactful and contingent upon the church's youth ministry.

In Europe, young people go to fellowship when their parents or grandparents press them to, which equally translates to their participation in the church as an activity that emanates from their parents and from themselves. An empirical study by David (2008) indicated that in Europe, the involvement of youths in church activities has been on an alarming decline at the rate of 70 per cent. The young people are more involved in secular activities that are good in themselves, but without the intervention of the church. For instance, in Australia, a study by Franklin (2019) indicates that although the youth

form the majority of the church membership, they do not participate in the mission of the church; this is as a result of a lack of proper mentorship in the activities of the church. Consequently, this leads to their lack of knowledge of the responsibilities they are to take in the church. This is a worrying reality that points to the fact that the church in Europe is losing influence and is being overpowered by the secular world.

In South America, Marcia (2012) observed that the youths are engaged in secular activities, while not motivated to take up church activities, thereby putting into question the future of the church on the continent. For instance, in Brazil, a study by Carla Luciane Klôs Schöninger argues that young people are not always given the opportunity in the Lutheran church to fully participate or are not invited to plan church activities. Those who find themselves in church leadership roles are not enthusiastic; instead, they remain passive and nominal leaders who do not contribute meaningfully to the life of the church. Consequently, this affects the growth of the church in Brazil, which is showing signs of an ageing church without young people taking up responsibilities.

In Japan, a report by Lausanne Occasional Paper (2005) informed that many of the Japanese churches operate within very traditional styles or frameworks, which are not appealing to the young Japanese population that constitutes the majority of the church. The young people are expected to follow old religious rules and leadership. Under this, Christianity is perceived as something for old people, with no outreach programs or ministries for young people to enable them to reach out to those outside the reality of the ageing church.

In the African context, a report by Lausanne Occasional Paper (2005) indicated that the Church in Africa only marginally meets the needs of the youth, including the voice of leadership. Youth ministry and commitment minimally consists of a choir group that meets once or twice weekly to practice songs for Sunday or Sabbath morning services. Even though this may give the youth some sense of church affiliation, identity and teaching, it is insufficient to impact the life of the church from a youth perspective. Programs to reach youth outside of the

church are inadequate; the existing youth programs are at the basic level of church operations, which excludes the youth from managerial responsibilities. There is a tendency for older leaders to hold firmly to their position and see youth as a great threat instead of bringing them close for mentorship (Delbecq, 2018).

In Nigeria, for instance, a study by Ngwuoke (2008) indicated that the church is not conscious of the role of the youth in its mission. The study advises that it is necessary to take cognisance of the youth and attend to their voice, even though they form the most vocal and strongest opposition to the established order; they should be given a hearing. Any failure of church leaders to take the youth into account would be a grievous and dangerous mistake in terms of putting the future of the church in jeopardy. The local church without youth and children is extinct (Heitman, 2015); they are the ones who will take the place of those who are in leadership and engaged in evangelism to ensure the continuity of the church. For the young people to meaningfully influence church growth, there is an urgent need to train youth leaders at all levels of the church. This gives them the capacity to contribute meaningfully in decision-making for the growth of the church.

An empirical study by Gathoni and Maina (2020) indicated that 60 per cent of Kenyan Pentecostal churches the major issue that hinders the youth from attending church and taking up evangelism responsibilities in the church is mainly a generational discontent, where the youth feel left out while the old people that are influential in the church seem not to take seriously the concerns of the youth. On the same note, a report by Gospel Centres International (2017) accounts that in Nyeri County, the Pentecostal churches' design is limited by the scope of their operations to traditional church model operations, thereby putting minimal emphasis on key youth areas like mentorship programs. While a study by Ng'ang'a (2020) on the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kajiado Presbytery, indicated that the youth do not take part in Church programmes, though they attend church in large numbers. The activities of the church are left to the elderly people, including the leadership of church groups. The failure of youths to be represented in various church groups is a great threat to growing churches because it means that future

leaders are not being groomed, which can result in weak churches or even the dissolution of some congregations. The same ideas are resonated in the study by Awiti (2019), which explains that many of the youth are now inclined to business and developing themselves rather than in church activities that will build their faith in Christian values; they can spend more time searching for material things than engaging in formative church activities. These interests create a risk to the future of the church.

A study conducted by Richard Ayako (2014) on Strategies for increasing the participation of students from a Seventh Day Adventist background in spiritual activities of the church in Kisii University indicated that only about 10 per cent participate in spiritual activities, while the rest are involved in various secular activities. While Hanna (2020) in her study contends that in the Suneka region, youths, despite having a chance to take part in church evangelism, their participation is very poor; the majority feel inadequate and therefore do not have the confidence to involve themselves in church evangelical activities. Instead, they sit back and wait for the elderly people to conduct evangelism. This raises a fundamental issue, which necessitates this study: the issue of inadequacy, which points to the lack of empowerment to enable them to take up responsibilities in the church. The outlined gaps in the background of this study necessitate this study on the contribution of youth participation to the evangelism activity of the Seventh Day Adventist church in Suneka District, South Kenya Conference.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Youth Development Theory (CYDT)
Community Youth Development Theory (CYDT) underlines the importance of strengthening communities through enabling them to be practical in the nurture and support of young people in the community (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Villarruel et al., 2003; Wheeler, 2000). This is done with the purpose of empowering them so that they, in turn, contribute positively to the development of their respective communities that build them (Lerner et al., 2003). The strengthening of communities to empower the youth is the recognition of the place of long-term positive outcomes of communities in which the youth are part since they are the future of

those communities (Jarvis et al., 1997; Villarruel et al., 2003). This is realised by significantly encouraging communities to be open to the youth and involve them in participating in the activities of the community, which is for their own individual good as well as that of their communities (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Hahn & Raley, 1998; Wheeler, 2000). Thus, the CYDT tasks communities to give young people the resources needed for building and pursuing healthy communities in the future (Lerner et al., 2003). The theory is cognizant of the fact that sometimes the youth in the community are an underutilised resource, which can be tapped for the good of the local communities (Wheeler, 2000).

In the context of this study, the CYDT views the church as a wider community consisting of youth who should be empowered to take evangelism tasks in the church for the development and rejuvenation of the church. This is fundamentally because relating youth participation and church evangelism mission is necessary for the future of the church, while taking into account church factors that weaken her mission (ageing of church membership, church traditions and structures, practices, changing church circumstances, youth-church absenteeism, etc.). These are factors that call for a new spirit in the church, a spirit that can only be found among the youth. The church should be open enough to the young people and create an enabling environment within which young people could thrive, for the good of the church. They inculcate a sense of historical continuity by assisting youth in remaining connected to their church communities. Churches are challenged to commit to making youth a priority for their time and resources.

However, the theory does not directly concern itself with youth; instead, it takes the church community as key and assumes that when the community is strengthened, then the youths will automatically take up evangelism activities in the church. It is on the basis of this gap that the study takes up the second theory (Positive youth development theory (PYDT)) to directly empower the youth for the evangelism mission of the church.

Positive Youth Development Theory

Positive Youth Development Theory (PYDT) does not focus on problems experienced by youth as they grow up within a given context, nor does it look at

the larger community, as is the case with CYDT as discussed above. Instead, PYDT looks at youths' capabilities, potentials, and their increasing thriving behaviours rather than their deficiencies (Damon, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Peteru, 2008). By enforcing these traits, individual youth's assets are built and utilised, thereby enhancing the opportunity for positive developmental outcomes; it also builds the youth's resiliency in an effort to counter problems that may affect them in society (Benson, 2002; Peteru, 2008).

In essence, this theory addresses young people from a balanced and positive perspective, as it views them as resources rather than problems that need attention from the larger community (Lerner et al., 2003). PYDT conceives young people from a strength-based point by recognising that their potential is consistent with their strengths for the well-being of the larger community (Damon, 2004; Peterson, 2004; Villarruel et al., 2003). For instance, Villarruel et al. (2003) highlighted the five Ps of the PYDT:

Possibilities and preparations: The creation of all-inclusive openings (physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, and emotional) that develop the youths in every aspect of their lives (Merton & Payne, 2000). Pittman (1993) asserts that effective programs should provide opportunities for youth to develop themselves in a variety of ways of life and enable them to evade risk factors that interfere with productive results.

Participation: This aims to understand, educate and engage youth in their lives and that of the community (Damon, 2004). It is important that youths not only identify themselves with what pertains to them, but also that they should accept their responsibilities as individuals, citizens, and group members. Youth participation gives a voice to young people in shaping the course of their development through encouragement that motivates them to take part in programs that influence their lives and that of the community (South African Youth Workers Association, 2001; Peteru, 2008).

People: Those who interact with the young people daily in their programs and activities. However, Merton and Payne (2000) underline that those developing youth programs should do so from the

perspective of the youth themselves and not from the adult perspective (Merton & Payne, 2000).

Places and pluralism refer to resources available for young people, involving evaluating the resources that the youths can use to meet their needs and maximise their potential (Merton & Payne, 2000). Practically, this involves checking the accessibility of opportunities, resources and support systems necessary for the growth of young people for the good of both themselves and the community (Benson & Pittman, 2001).

Partnership: The insertion of the youths themselves as partners in the planning and implementation processes of youth programs that affect them. It is also about the involvement of youths in decision-making structures of society that directly affect them and others.

Thus, PYDT motivates young people (regardless of their problems) to maximally use their potential and also encourages them to seek and receive support from the community they belong to.

In the context of this study, PYDT directly contributes towards achievement of the identified purposes of the youth for the evangelism activity of the church, namely: identification and development of young people's capacities for evangelism mission; identification and acceptance of youths' responsibilities as important agents in the realisation of the church's mission. It also takes into account the church's context within which the youths operate for effective youth evangelism. By implementing PYDT, young people will see themselves and be perceived by the church membership from a strength and positive perspective, with capacities and potential that make meaningful contributions to the evangelism activities of the church. This resolves some of the biases they sometimes receive from the church, such as being perceived as problematic with deficit behaviours that need to be eliminated.

Church Youth Retention Strategies for Evangelism

While youth ministries have a dynamic responsibility in the lives of young people, there are concerns as to their ineffectiveness in retaining youth through their evangelism work. In order to increase youth

participation in evangelism activities of the church, churches are challenged to devise other ways to retain youth and not allow them to move to other churches or be swallowed by the secular values of society. According to Chong-Ho and Tameifuna (2014), one popular strategy is to engage or even hire youth pastors or workers, who will take up ministries, especially those that are youth-related. This is a viable strategy in churches that have an ageing adult population (including ageing pastors who do not resonate anymore with the youth aspirations), those that are faced with youth migration to either urban churches or setups, or those that just choose to abandon the church.

On the same concern, Heitman (2015) contends that long-term thinking on how to retain the youth in church involves involving them in the evangelical activities of the church, as well as ensuring that their gatherings are places where friends are welcomed and desired. They should be involved in church websites, music ministry, Sunday school teaching, and church services. However, this can only be achieved when those working with the youths are adequately prepared, listen to them, show interest in them, and have church programs that echo their voices and interests for the future of the church (Heitman, 2015). They should be allowed to manage church online platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, since such platforms are where other youths are present. An international survey reported that individuals younger than 30 years are more likely to use social media than those over 50 years or older (Pew Research Centre, 2015).

Mentorship is another important strategy for nurturing youth for the church's evangelism mission. Davie et al (2017) argue that if the Pentecostal church set up does not take charge of the youth in mentoring them, then it is likely to lose the youth, thereby putting the future of the church in jeopardy. Kidder (2008) asserted that because of a lack of mentorship, the young people in the SDA church in the US do not have an interest in the church and therefore immerse themselves in what is presented to them in the consumerist society; they do not have an interest in taking up responsibilities in the church. This indicates the failure of the SDA church to positively impact society. This resonates with Chiroma and Cloete (2015), who argue that

mentorship plays an important role in the holistic development of youth in areas such as spiritual formation, character, ministry formation, and leadership. The incorporation of mentorship programs in churches is necessary to shape the youth in terms of both their spiritual growth and skill development. However, Black et al (2011) observe that young people are invited to participate in church communities without necessarily being mentored. At the same time, McNeil (2006) and Martensen et al. (2014) mention that the lack of expertise of adults in areas of experience and mentorship for youth involvement does not make youth involvement in whichever area a meaningful one. Harms and Credé (2010) postulate that mentorship is consistent with the principles of transformational leadership that position leaders to encourage learning, achievement, and individual growth in the nurture and development of life skills.

Another important youth retention strategy is that of leadership. This is fundamentally because one of the major factors that contributes to the lack of participation within youth ministry is ineffective leadership. Church ministers are too busy with other activities and cannot reach out to the youth. The leadership within youth ministry has to be filled with leaders who are approachable and qualified. However, this greatly depends on the attitude and disposition of adults, the quality of the attitude, and the adult leaders. When youth have opportunities to take on leadership roles and share their voice in planning, problem solving, and implementing various aspects of church programs and projects, they develop, increase their intentions and motivation to actively engage them in addressing community issues (Chan et al., 2014).

Wehmeyer et al (2008) opine that youth leadership should be regarded as part of the youth development process, and the young people should be supported to develop their leadership abilities and to analyse their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to leadership through education and training. They should be helped to set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and abilities to carry them out (including the ability to establish support networks in order to fully participate in church community life that will bring effective leadership change in the church. Give

them the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviours of others, and serve as a role model.

Youth participation in the decision-making processes is a considerable strategy for youth retention in the church for the evangelism activities of the church. It is the most transformative power within the managerial task of the church. When youth are regarded as partners in decision-making and are themselves in charge of given and designed projects, their sense of ownership greatly increases the chances of their successful implementation. Taft and Gordon (2013) explicate that involving the youth in decision-making in issues that either directly or indirectly affect their lives helps to ensure they are part of the church's mission.

When youths' leadership skills are developed, they are able to utilise them in the church and encourage others to work collaboratively with them to achieve the given church goals. However, it is important to note that Christian leadership for youth ministry is much more than teaching young people about pastoral skills; it requires a lifestyle that empowers adolescents to become responsible and genuine leaders in their schools, churches, neighbourhoods, and communities. However, this can only be realised when the youth are offered platforms to realise their discipleship role; it is the realisation that the disciple-making process is not only for adults but, more importantly, for the youth who are future leaders and members of the church.

Music: This is another youth retention strategy. Music resonates much with youth ambitions and interests, and it is vital in youth evangelism ministry. Music has the content and capability of moving youth emotionally and socially inside and outside the church. White (2007) posits that music plays such an important role in a youth's development, and we need to encourage the youth and young adults to use their love for singing in a church ministry (Bednel, 2021). Music is central in Christian worship practices, and in the tradition of the church, the transmission of biblical teachings in preaching and

song was and is closely linked when people extemporaneously composed songs to emphasise and affirm aspects of sermons and the church's teachings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative approach that permits the research to produce grounded findings and knowledge in the field of study. The study employed a descriptive design in the collection and analysis of data. The descriptive design allowed the participants to share their opinions, attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge for a deeper understanding of the study concerns, as a structured questionnaire and open-ended questions were used in the interviews (Roulston, 2010). Thus, descriptive design permitted the examination and evaluation of specific indicators of the study that were discussed, analysed and presented in the study findings.

Study Area

The study was conducted in all 9 churches of the Seventh Day Adventist church in Suneka District, South Kenya Conference. The 9 churches include: Suneka Central, Suneka, South, Suneka East, Nyambunwa, Marindi, Sinkororo, Kenyoro, Nyangoge, and Nyabigege, with a total population of 400 youths. The choice of this study area was necessitated by the fact that the Suneka District has both urban and rural realities of youth participation in the church. The area is undergoing rapid urbanisation, which also influences their participation in church activities. Furthermore, despite having high church youth attendance, a few participated in evangelism activities of the SDA church compared to other districts, as reflected in its programs and youth representation in the entire South Kenya Conference.

Target Population

The study proposed to have a balanced representation of participants from all the churches that compose Suneka District, Seventh Day Adventist Church, South Kenya Conference, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Target Population

Category of Target Group	Target Population	Percentage
Pastors	6	1.5%
Church Elders	64	16.0%
Youth Leaders	50	12.5%
Youths	280	70.0%
Total	400	100%

Source: The Researcher (2023)

The general target population (with all the target groups) for the study was 400 participants, which included six pastors, 64 church elders, 50 youth leaders, and 280 youths. The target age bracket of the youths is 18 to 35 years, since they are the future evangelism human resource of the church in the district. The criteria for the choice of other study groups are based on their knowledge, ability, and experience in youth and SDA church matters in the area of evangelism; they provide a wide range of experiences in the area of youth participation in evangelism activities of the church.

Sampling Techniques and Sampling Size

Sampling Techniques

The study used a multistage sampling technique since it enables the collection of data from participants of various clusters, thereby providing wider and in-depth data. Each cluster of informants will have a specific sampling method or technique that facilitates the collection of needed data, as represented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Sampling Method

Category	Frequency	Sampling Technique
Pastors	6	Censors
Church Elders	64	Purposive
Youth Leaders	50	Purposive
Youths	280	Simple random
Total	400	Multistage

Source: The Researcher (2023)

The study considered employing censors in the collection of data from all six church pastors in the Suneka district. The choice of purposive method for 64 church elders and 50 youth leaders was informed by (Patton, 2015), who contends that the purposive sampling method enables the study to select informed, knowledgeable and experienced participants from the population to capture their characteristics and qualities that enrich the study. Using purposive sampling facilitated the capture of

rich and diverse data from participants in the study who were most knowledgeable and experienced on youth participation in the evangelism activities of the SDA church in Suneka District, South Kenya Conference. Finally, simple random sampling was used to gather data from the youths themselves, who are the unit of analysis in the study. This was used to guarantee that an appropriate and representative sample of respondents from all the churches participating in the study. Simple sampling allowed

targeted participants to have an equal chance of being included in the study.

Sample Size

The sample size is an important determinant in field research, such that having an appropriate sample size is key. The determination for the sample size for this

study was informed by Gill (2010) and Krecie and Morgan (1970) formulae and tabulation which advises that for a study target population of 400 participants the appropriate sample size is 196 participants, giving a confidence level of 95 per cent of the study findings. Guided by these postulates, the sample size is as illustrated in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3. Sampling Method

Category	Target	Sampling Procedure	Sample Size	%
Pastors	6	Censors	6	3.1%
Church Elders	64	Purposive	40	20.4%
Youth Leaders	50	Purposive	50	25.5%
Youths	280	Simple Random	100	51.0%
Total	400		196	100%

Source: The Researcher (2023)

Table 3 above illustrates the various clusters of respondents for a multistage representation of participants in the study for the objectivity of the findings. Accordingly, the sample size for the entire study was 196 participants comprising of all the study clusters.

Data Collection Instruments

The study employed three data collection tools: questionnaires, Interview Schedules, and focus group

Discussions (FGDS). The choice of these tools was because of their complementary nature of the information collected for a comprehensive understanding of the problem under study.

Table 4. Data Collection Tools

Cluster	Tool	Frequency	Percentage
Pastors and Church Elders	Interviews	46	23.5%
Youth Leaders	FGDs	50	25.5%
Youths	Questionnaire	100	51.0%
Total		196	100%

Source: The Researcher (2023)

Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

To establish the ability of data collection instruments in giving the necessary data for the study on youth

participation in the evangelism activities of the church in Suneka District, South Kenya Conference, data collection tools were subjected to both validity and reliability tests.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Analysis and presentation of data are key since they indicate the finality of the study. The form of data analysis is determined by the kind of study undertaken. In this study, being a qualitative study, questionnaire data were analysed using a Likert Scale format of agreement and disagreement. At the same time, interview and FGDs data were thematically analysed and presented using narrations. Themes were specified in the study objectives as presented in the content of the questionnaire, the

interview schedule guide and FGDs questions (Kumar, 2014) in relation to the independent variable (youth participation) and dependent variable (evangelism activities of the SDA church).

Qualitative data obtained from the interviews and FGDs were scrutinised and presented through verbatim, triangulated with the questionnaire results. The triangulation was deemed to help in spelling out the agreements and disagreements of data for the credibility of the study outcomes.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Church Youth Retention Strategies for Evangelism Activities in Suneka District, South Kenya Conference

Table 5: Youth retention strategies for Evangelism activities of the SDA church in Suneka District

Item	A	SA	N	D	SD	Total
1. Engaging youths in the management of the church's Social media platforms	R-50 52.1%	R-20 20.8%	R-4 4.2%	R-16 16.7%	R-6 6.3%	R-96 100
2. Seminars/Workshops	R-37 38.5%	R-15 15.6%	R-3 3.1%	R-26 27.1%	R-20 20.8%	R-96 100
3. Provide opportunities for leadership and involvement	R-40 41.7%	R-10 10.4%	R-10 10.4%	R-22 22.9%	R-14 14.6%	R-96 100
4. Creation of friendly Youth Groups and Culture for belonging	R-62 64.6%	R-8 8.3%	R-2 2.1%	R-20 20.8	R-4 4.2%	R-96 100
5. Make evangelism a lifestyle and not an Event	R-48 50.0%	R-5 5.2%	R-0 0.0%	R-35 36.5%	R-8 8.3%	R-96 100
6. Focus on spiritual growth	R-31 32.3%	R-5 5.2%	R-2 2.1%	R-54 56.3%	R-4 4.2%	R-96 100
7. Mission Trips	R-17 17.7%	R-12 12.5%	R-16 16.7%	R-48 50.0%	R-3 3.1%	R-96 100
8. Skills and Talent Development Programs	R-58 60.4%	R-20 20.8%	R-3 3.1%	R-12 12.5%	R-3 3.1%	R-96 100

Source: Field Data, 2024

Key: R – Respondents, %-Percentage

Table 5 gives responses on youth retention strategies for the church's evangelism mission, which is a crucial and supportive measure. On the item of engaging youths in the management of church Social media platforms, the questionnaire field findings showed that a majority of 70 (72.9%) respondents were in support, 4 (4.2%) were undecided, while a minority of 22 (22.9%) respondents did not agree

that engaging youths in management of church social media platforms would help in retaining them in the church. In support of the postulate, a respondent in the interviews asserted:

Young people are enticed by social media communication platforms; they keep them ever engaged. However, they need to fully supported to make use of such platforms for the evangelism

mission of the church. Furthermore, today all activities are done online and young people can give much support to the church if they are fully involved in the online mission of the church. This is something that the SDA church in Suneka District should seriously take into account (KINF, 15).

However, to ground the argument of those who had a contrary view, a participant informed:

A lot of negative and ungodly things take place on social media. Engaging our young people so much in social media exposes them to secular values that do not correspond to the Christian message (KINF, 4).

Despite the contrary views in support of the social media platforms, the study noted that it is important to allow youth to manage church social media platforms since through platforms such as Tik Tok, You Tube, WhatsApp, and so on, churches can effectively reach and engage a broader audience while empowering young believers in ministry. The young people are well placed in understanding social media trends, strategies, and algorithms, which make them effective at creating and managing online content. This expands the reach of evangelism and attracts their peers in the creation of faith-based content. The SDA church in Suneka District has to open itself to embrace social media platforms and be keen to monitor and evangelise young people so that they can properly benefit from social media.

Furthermore, creative evangelism properly takes place those through digital media where music, drama, spoken word, memes, and podcasting can make biblical messages engaging to the followers without discrimination. Young people should be encouraged to create digital evangelism campaigns managed by youth themselves to reach their peers online. Train them to be responsible on online interactions and become digital ministers of the church.

In seminars and workshops as retention strategies for the youth for the evangelism mission, the questionnaire responses indicated that 52 (54.2%) were in support, 3 (3.1%) were neutral, and 46 (47.9%) were of the contrary opinion. Given the small margin in support and non-support responses, it cannot be denied that youth seminars and workshops are essential evangelism tools for keeping

young people engaged in the church. A participant in the FGDs informed:

I am a youth leader, and much of who I am as a leader is what I gained from youth workshops and seminars. When I became a leader, I could not even express myself in the open, I was shy to talk in public. But when I started attending youth seminars and workshops, today, I am a totally different person in my responsibility as a youth leader (FGD, 7)

The indubitable point in the field data is that seminars and workshops provide structured opportunities for learning, personal growth. Many young people hesitate to share their faith in and out of the church because they feel unprepared in terms of skill, and spiritual growth. Based on this, seminars and workshops prepare them for practical evangelism skills that build their confidence needed in evangelism activity of the church. In them, young people are taught effective evangelism strategies, team-building activities, role-playing, creative evangelism methods, and so on.

The study looked at the aspect of provide opportunities for leadership involvement, and found that those who answered the questionnaire, 50 (52.1%) were in support, 10 (10.4%) were neutral, and 36 (37.5%) were not of the view that providing the young people with leadership opportunities makes them stay in the church. A respondent in the interviews added:

When the church is led by young leaders, the youth feel identified with that church, they feel that their views about the evangelism of the church are taken into account, unlike a church led by old people, which is slowly undergoing extinction since it does not contain the spirit of young leaders. It is true that we need experienced leaders, but how can the young people get experience if they are not involved in the leadership of the church (KINF, 21).

When young people have a leadership role in the church, others are more motivated to stay and support their leaders, and those in leadership are equally motivated to work for the mission of the church they lead. The study, therefore, noted that young people should be empowered to lead, allowing them to take part in the leadership structure of the church where decisions about church matters are deliberated and decided. However, this should be

done not by individualised leadership, but through youth leadership teams that encourage a collaborative evangelism ministry.

The study further evaluated the creation of friendly youth groups and youth culture for belonging as a retention strategy. The findings in support were overwhelming, with 70 (72.9%) responses, 2 (2.1%) were neutral, while 24 (25%) did not support the thesis. However, the study noted that young people can only stay where they feel valued, heard, and appreciated. However, to foster a sense of belonging among the young people, the church should invest in social relationships among and with the young people. It should strive to build authentic relationships by offering guidance, support, and encouragement to peer groups in the church for youth fellowship through mentorship programs that help young people build lasting friendships within the church.

The SDA church in Suneka District should endeavour to create a welcoming environment where young people can freely and without fear express their doubts, struggles and life questions, celebrate their achievements and contributions to the church as a way of appreciation and acknowledgement of their contribution to the church's evangelism activity. This also acts as effective mentorship where the young people have the environment to mentor and encourage each other, paired with old members of the church.

On the theme of making evangelism a lifestyle, not an event, the field findings in Table 5 indicated the following: 53 (55.2%) respondents were in support, against 43 (44.8%) respondents who were of the contrary opinion. In support of the postulate, a participant in the FGDs opined:

The participation of the young people in the evangelism mission of the church is more restricted on the structured calendar events, where yearly we are expected to respect to a particular activity. However, this does not embed the mission as a life-giving commitment. We need to shift from this traditional understanding of mission to an incarnated mission (FGD, 46).

The sentiment in the data is that young people are more likely to stay engaged when evangelism is an

ongoing life-giving mission rather than a one-time activity. A continuous involvement in practical evangelism through training on how to constantly share their faith in everyday settings - schools, sports, workplaces, and social media. This should be accompanied by personal testimonies of their experiences of God and mission. When young people share their testimonies with their peers, they become more motivated to stay involved in the church, progressively opening themselves to the mission activity of the church. As a lifestyle, young people will be able to utilise their creative art to present evangelism in a lively manner through drama, music, social media and community service projects, thereby attracting more youth to the mission of the church.

The study further evaluated the item by focusing on the spiritual growth of the youth as a retention strategy. The field findings on this item indicated that 36 (37.5%) were in support, 2 (2.1%) were undecided, and a majority of 59 (61.5%) did not support the postulate. The sentiment from the interviews reverberated:

Young people today are not so much interested in suffocating spiritualism; spiritual development should incorporate the element of activism. Pure life of spirituality in terms of abstract bible reflection, prayer, attendance of the Sabbath without community-based activity does not speak much to the young people. Therefore, let us expect them to be contemplative as adults are (KINF, 12).

The field findings point to the fact that a focus on pure spiritual growth of the young people is not a revered tool among the youth. Desired spirituality is that which is constitutive of some activity, active, community-based spirituality. This is where the SDA church in Suneka District should invest and find youth-desired modalities for their spiritual development. However, the notable point in the data is that young people do not mean that spiritual development is not important, but rather is an indispensable aspect of evangelism.

A strong spiritual foundation helps young people study and form discipleship groups, which help them to grow in their faith. Therefore, in an integrative way, the SDA church in Suneka District should devise ways to encourage daily devotion and prayer

in personal time for intimacy with God. Conduct regular Bible studies and discipleship classes, as well as youth spiritual retreats, to involve them in organising and leading worship, prayers, and creative presentations as forms of evangelism.

On the theme of mission Trips as a youth retention strategy for evangelism activity, the field findings showed that 29 (30.2%) were in support of this tool, 16 (16.7%) were undecided, while a majority of 51 (53.1%) were of the contrary opinion. The position of the majority with a contrary opinion was echoed in the FGDs, where a participant asserted:

We have held mission trips, but the participation is quite poor; such trips are not given the seriousness they are meant for. Those who participate in those trips have other ulterior motives that do not serve purposes of the church. In other words, mission trips are abused and therefore fail to address the evangelism mission of the church (FGD, 49).

Mission trips are important in the evangelism mission of the church. When I was a youth, I came to admire the mission of the church through mission trips that were well animated. We used to do many activities - bible study, visit to the christian community, do sports, church music, and so on (KINF, 16).

The sentiment in the field data was that mission trips, despite being important for the evangelism activity of the church, are not fully accorded the value they should have. Instead, they are being used for other non-evangelism reasons. Despite the abuses, the field data indicated that mission trips provide hands-on experiences as they allow young people to apply their biblical teachings in real-life situations. In mission trips, young people learn to share their faith confidently through youth evangelism, testimonies, and outreach activities. They are platforms where young people spend time together and build strong Christian friendships with long-term involvement in the church. After experiencing the joy of mission work, those who participate in the theme remain engaged in church programs, and they continue to serve in church ministries like outreach, discipleship, and worship teams.

Finally, the study evaluated the theme of skills and talent development programs as a youth retention

strategy for the evangelism activity of the church. The questionnaire field findings showed an overwhelming majority of 78 (81.3%) respondents in support of the theme, 3 (3.1%) were neutral, while a minority of 15 (15.6%) respondents did not support it. The position of the majority who supported the theme was echoed by participants in the interviews: Skill and talent development are a requirement for effective evangelism of the SDA church in Suneka District. Young people should be given not just skills and talents about the church operations, but more importantly, should be given those skills and develop those talents that serve the youth in various aspects of life that later indirectly or directly serve the interests of the church (KINF, 29).

The SDA church in Suneka District has not been keen to have programs that develop the skills and talents of young church members. In fact, there are no programs directly intended to serve that purpose (FGD, 5).

Despite the agreement that skills and talent development programs are an important youth retention tool for the evangelism mission of the church, the SDA church in Suneka District does not have formidable programs. As the verbatim data explains, skills and talent development programs retain the youth in the church while equipping them for personal growth and ministry. Such programs offer workshops for creative skills such as public speaking, sports, concerts, music, and media production that can be used for evangelism. When young people develop and use their skills and talents, they feel prepared for the mission of the church; it gives them a sense of purpose and responsibility within the church; such skills prepare them for leadership roles in the church, especially in communication.

Moreover, skills like speaking, entrepreneurship, graphic design, or video editing provide practical benefits for life and career. Their provision by the church shows that the church cares about the holistic development of young people, not just their spiritual growth. Skills and talent development programs address real-life issues of the young people - mental health, relationships, peer pressure, and career choice from a faith-based perspective, issues that are vital

for the evangelism mission of the SDA church in Suneka District.

The strategies for church youth retention strategies for evangelism activities included engaging youths in the management of church Social media platforms, seminars and workshops, involvement in leadership, creation of friendly youth groups and culture for belonging, making evangelism a lifestyle and not an event, focus on spiritual growth, mission trips, and skills and talent development. The study underlined their vital role in the evangelism mission and life of the SDA church in Suneka District.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concluded that retaining young people in the church is crucial for sustaining the evangelism mission. This is because young

people are the future of the church mission; they bring energy, passion and innovation necessary for evangelism mission. Young people, when empowered have the ability to address contemporary issues affecting the church than old and traditional members of the church.

Recommendations: The study recommended that the SDA church in Suneka District prioritise youth-centred evangelism events such as concerts, community service, or social gatherings with a gospel focus. Community Service and Mission Projects, group activities, discussions, and interactive sessions that foster friendship among youth, thereby creating a sense of belonging. The SDA church should also engage in practical application of faith and minimise spiritualism; young people need opportunities for hands-on evangelism.

REFERENCES

- Awiti, A. (2019). Whole Youth Development in Kenya: Survey of Employers and Employees in the Formal and Informal Sectors to Determine Entry-Level Skills among Youth (18- 30 years) in Employment in Kenya.
- Ayako, R. O. (2014). Strategies for Increasing the Participation of Students from a Seventh-day Adventist Background in Spiritual Activities at Kisii University.
- Barna, G. (1993). *Turn-around churches: How to overcome barriers to growth and bring new life to an established church*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Benson, P. L. & Pittman, J. K. (2001). *Trends in youth development: Visions, Realities and Challenges*. Academic Publishers.
- Benson, P. L. (2002). Adolescent development in social and community context. *A program of research. New Directions for Youth Development*, 95, 123–147.
- Black, R., Walsh, L., & Taylor, F. (2011). Young people on the margins: What works in youth participation. *Youth Studies Australia*, 30(1), 42–48.
- Burke, D. (2015). “Millennials leaving church in droves, study finds,” CNN Religion, May 14, 2015, accessed May 16, 2022, 1. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study/index.html>
- Carla Luciane Klôs Schöninger. Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil.
- Chan, W. Y., Ou, S. R., & Reynolds, A. J. (2014). Adolescent civic engagement and adult outcomes: An examination among urban racial minorities. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 43(11), 1829-1843.
- Chiroma, N. H., & Cloete, A. (2015). Mentoring as a supportive pedagogy in theological training. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 71(3).
- Cloete, A. (2015). *Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection*. HTS Theological Studies.
- Damon, W. (2004). What is positive youth development. *The Annals of American Academy of Political Science*, 59, 13–24.
- David, P. (2008). Young people and fellowship in Europe. *Basin Research*, 20(3) 377–395.
- Davie, G., Heelas, P., & Woodhead. (2017). *Predicting religion: Christian, secular and alternative futures*. Routledge.
- Delbecq, A. L. (2018). Identity and catholic healthcare: The Challenge of leadership formation: A Call to Action. *Critical Conversation*, 30-31.

- Franklin, W. F. (2019). Youth activities in Australia. *Australian Journal of Physiology-Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 316(1), 106–120.
- Gathoni, I. G., & Maina K. D. (2020). Influence of servant leadership style on management of church youth development in selected Pentecostal Churches in Nyeri town sub county, Kenya. *Global Scientific Journal*, 8(11), 218-227.
- Gospel Centres International. (2017). *Church membership course manual*. Nairobi, Kenya: Gospel Centres International.
- Hanna, M. K. (2020). Recurrent chordee in young adult's involve in church. *Journal of Church Domain*, 16(2), 162-ei.
- Harms, P. D., & Credé, M. (2010). Emotional intelligence and transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 17(1), 5-17, doi:10.1177/1548051809350894
- Heitman, R. (2015). Youth program from Ministry Enrichment. Retrieved from *Journal a.g.rg* 20010/012010101024 pastor driven. cfm.
- Ho-Chong & Tameifuna, T. (2014). *Youth Attitudes toward the Church*. Lassierra University.
- Kumar, R. (2014). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 4th ed. SAGE.
- Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) No. 52: *Forum for World Evangelisation*. David Claydon.
- Lerner, R. M., Dowling, E. M., & Anderson, P. M. (2003). Positive youth development: Thriving as the basis of personhood and civil society. *Applied Development Science*, 7(3), 172-180.
- Marcia, J. E. (2012). Between integrity and despair. Toward construct validation of Erickson's eight stages. *Journal of Adult Development*, 19(1), 1–20.
- Martensen, J., Lichty, L., Foster-Fishman, P., Harfst, S., Hockin, S., & Warsinske, K. (2014). Leadership through a youth lens. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(4), 447-462.
- McNeal, R. (2009). The present future: Six tough questions for the church (vol.47). John Wiley & Sons.
- Merton, B. & Payne, M. (2000). *Louder than words: Youth work and Learning for sustainable development*. Youth Work Press.
- Moser, K. A. (2019). The connection between the youth ministry's division of evangelism and discipleship and the lack of youth retention in North American churches. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 46(1).
- Ngwuoke, B. I. (2008). *Youths in adult church: What are they doing*. In G.A. Ojo (Ed.). *25 years of the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria*. CLCN.
- Njoroge, R. (2019). Effectiveness and Challenges in Evangelisation of youth in the Catholic Church in Kenya. *South Asian Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(2), 173–178.
- Peterson, C. (2004). *Positive development: Realising the potential of youth*. National Press Club.
- Peterson, C. (2004). Positive Social Science. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 186–201.
- Peterson, D. K. (2004). Benefits of participation in corporate volunteer programs: Employees' perceptions. *Personnel Review*, 33, 615-627.
- Peteru, P. S. (2008). Youth development: A pacific context. *Commonwealth Youth and Development*, 6 (1): 23–35.
- Pew Research Centre. (2015). *America's changing religious landscape*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>
- Pittman, K. (1993). *Stronger staff, stronger youth conference*. Centre for Youth Development and Policy Research.
- Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- South African Youth Workers Association. (2001). *Youth Work Policy*. South Africa: [sn].
- Taft, J. K., & Gordon, H. R. (2013). Youth activists, youth councils, and constrained democracy. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 8(1), 87–100.
- Villarruel, F. A., Perkins, D. F., Borden, L. M., & Keith, J. G. (2003). *Community Youth Development: Practice, Policy, and Research*. SAGE.

Edison Consortium Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies

- Vitisa, V. (2016). *Influence of Modernisation on Youth Church Attendance: A Comparative Study*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Pan Africa Christian University.
- Warren, M. R. (2002). Community organising in United States Political Engagement of Faith-Based social capital. *City and Community*, 8, 99-127.
- Wehmeyer, F. J., Agran, B. M., & Hughes, W. M. (2008). On becoming the youth church in contemporary world. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 43(4).
- White, E. G. (2007). Steps to Christ Youth Edition Review and Herald Pub Assoc.
- White, E. G. (2014). *Christian Music Experiences in the Faith Development of Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study*, Order No. 3631010, Liberty University. In PROQUESTMS Dissertations & Theses at Liberty University.