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Digital Faith Formation: Evaluation of Online Church Services Impact on Youth Spiritual Growth in Full Gospel Churches of Kenya Meru South District, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the impact of online church services on youth spiritual growth. The adoption of technology in religious institutions has increased significantly, especially during and after COVID-19 pandemic. This has introduced online church services as a new way of worship with varying effects on different age groups. This study focused on evaluating spiritual growth on youth participation in online church services in full gospel churches of Kenya (FGCK) in Meru South District. A descriptive research design was used, guided by Mediatization theory. Information was gathered from youths, youth leaders, youth pastors and church members. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Purposive random sampling technique was employed. The study targeted a population of 3089 with a sample size of 282 youths, 4 youth pastors, 4 youth leaders and 56 church members in FGCK Meru south District. Data was analysed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Study revealed that while online church services offer accessibility and flexibility, they also present challenges in fostering deep spiritual growth. Findings revealed that significant proportion of youth preferred hybrid worship. Thematic analysis showed that flexibility, digital literacy and access to the internet influenced spiritual growth. The study contributes to existing literature and provides practical recommendations enhancing digital discipleship. The research contributes to the ongoing discussion on technological solutions in community development and religious innovation, aligning with theme of leveraging technology for sustainable development. The findings suggest a shift in spiritual formation preferences, calling for adaptive ministry models within FGCK.

Keywords: Digital faith formation, Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, Meru South District, online church services, spiritual growth.



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INTRODUCTION

This study sought to evaluate the impact of online church services on the spiritual growth of the youth in FGCK. Digital faith formation is the process of nurturing and shaping spiritual life through digital tools and platforms. Online church services are structured worship experiences conducted over the internet. Spiritual growth is the measurable or observable development of a person's relationship with God, moral transformation and commitment to Christian living. The rapid advancement and integration of digital technology have significantly transformed faith formation and church engagement globally, particularly impacting youth participation in religious activities. The rising prominence of online church services offers an innovative platform for spiritual growth, especially among younger demographics who are increasingly digital natives with deep engagement in technology and social media (Ojo et al., 2024). Globally, digital media has transformed how faith communities communicate, worship and disciple believers. Across Africa, online worship uptake has been uneven. Nevertheless, African Pentecostal churches, known for their youth-oriented services, have shown flexibility in experimenting with digital worship to maintain youth participation (Pramono & Manuputu, 2025). This trend necessitates a closer examination of how digital discipleship shapes youth spiritual development in specific contexts, such as the FGCK Meru South District, Kenya.

Research indicates that technology enhances accessibility and engagement in church activities by providing flexible and interactive platforms for worship and faith formation, which resonate with contemporary youth preferences for online and visual spiritual experiences (Bernardy, 2023). For instance, digital tools like social media, online Bible study groups, and church apps facilitate meaningful spiritual interaction beyond traditional physical church settings (Katili, 2024). This digital engagement fosters community building and spiritual nourishment but also poses challenges such as information overload, spiritual fatigue, and theological superficiality if not properly managed (Bernardy, 2023; Katili, 2024).

Moreover, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in Christian education is becoming a transformative factor, personalising faith formation experiences and supporting individualised spiritual growth while raising concerns

about over-reliance on technology that might undermine traditional pastoral roles (Oyebanji et al., 2025). These technological interventions are reshaping how youth engage with scripture, prayer, and church activities, demanding empirical evaluation to understand their full impact. AI-powered tools such as chatbots, automated summons and personalised spiritual content are being explored by churches to enhance youth engagement (Fisher, 2023).

In the Kenyan context, particularly within church communities such as FGCK, the adoption of online church services is increasingly common to counter declining physical attendance and to engage tech-savvy youth more effectively (Ojo et al., 2024). Challenges reported in the region include internet connectivity, data costs, and distractions from other digital platforms, which influence the depth and frequency of youth participation in online worship (Ojo et al., 2024). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies that optimise digital faith formation and harness technology for sustained spiritual growth among youth.

This study responds to the growing need to evaluate the impact of online church services on youth spiritual growth within the FGCK Meru South District by investigating participation patterns, technological adoption, and perceived outcomes of digital discipleship initiatives. Findings will contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on faith formation in the digital age, guiding churches on how to effectively integrate technology to nurture spiritually resilient and engaged young believers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Church Services and Spiritual Growth

Grayson (2017), in a study at Dallas Baptist University, compared the spiritual development of online church participants with that of conventional church visitors. Grayson's research revealed that although both groups underwent spiritual growth, the profundity and community dimensions of that growth differed. Virtual participants frequently lacked the in-person camaraderie and the tangible experience of worship, which are essential elements of spiritual growth in a conventional context. Online church services enhanced accessibility and convenience, enabling persons who might not normally attend to engage in religious activities.

Grayson asserts that this inclusivity significantly contributed to spiritual development, especially for individuals with physical limitations or those residing in isolated regions. Nevertheless, the survey did not validate the disengagement of teenagers from physical church attendance in favour of online church services at FGCK. Research indicated that participation in online church services did not facilitate significant spiritual development for all youth. In his doctoral dissertation at Virginia Theological Seminary, Johnson (2023) examined the ways in which church leadership may foster community and spiritual development in the digital era. Johnson underscored the need for deliberate community-building tactics in virtual environments, contending that spiritual development in online church services is largely reliant on the connection and involvement that leaders can cultivate among participants. Johnson (2023) asserts that digital platforms can facilitate spiritual growth by fostering environments for significant connections, such as virtual small groups or online prayer gatherings, where individuals can exchange their faith experiences and provide mutual support. Nevertheless, in FGCK in Meru South, the study did not validate pastoral counsel or measures from the church to facilitate online church involvement for spiritual development.

Likewise, Wijaya et al. (2023) investigated spiritual growth within the framework of the digital church period at the International Conference on Theology, Humanities, and Christian Education 2022. Their research, undertaken across diverse Christian groups, emphasised the flexibility of worship rituals in adapting to online formats. Research indicated that virtual worship, when incorporating interactive and participatory components, can significantly aid spiritual development by maintaining a sense of continuity in religious observance despite physical distance. The researchers observed that internet services can address varied spiritual requirements, accommodating distinct preferences for worship styles and theological doctrines. The research focused on adult engagement, neglecting the potential for youth to develop spiritually through online church services. Gallagher and Newton (2009) employed a sociological perspective in their research on the definition of spiritual growth, emphasising congregations, community, and interconnectedness. Despite their research occurring before the present digital age, it provided significant insights into the

importance of community and connectedness for spiritual development. They contended that spiritual growth is intrinsically communal and is fostered through interactions within a congregation. In the realm of online church services, research indicated that cultivating a sense of community was essential for the spiritual growth of participants (Gallagher & Newton, 2009). Consequently, it is confirmed that physical assembly facilitated significant spiritual development.

Maciaszek (2018) examined the role of digital communication in the development of spiritual life and pastoral activities within the Church of England. His research indicated that the incorporation of digital platforms into pastoral activity could augment spiritual development by facilitating constant access to spiritual resources and enabling continuous pastoral care. Maciaszek underscored the necessity for churches to embrace digital communication strategies to sustain spiritual involvement and development in a more digital landscape. Despite the growing prominence of online church services, a substantial gap persists in comprehending their role in promoting spiritual growth among the youth in FGCK in Meru South District.

Hoopes (2021) conducted a study at Columbia International University that examined online students' assessments of their spiritual development and the efficacy of spiritual formation programs offered by their schools. The study indicated that although online environments may promote spiritual growth, this development is frequently contingent upon the individual's degree of involvement and the institution's capacity to provide organised spiritual formation opportunities. Hoopes determined that online spiritual development is feasible, although it takes deliberate efforts from both organisations and individuals to be effective. The study examined online church services and spiritual development in FGCK. The findings align with Hoopes (2021), indicating that increased guidance for youth church services is essential. This was not substantiated in the study.

Scholars have expressed concerns over the depth of involvement facilitated by online church services in comparison to traditional in-person worship in the context of spiritual growth. Certain individuals contend that internet platforms are deficient in the social and physical presence essential for comprehensive spiritual

encounters, which are frequently vital for youth during their developmental spiritual journeys (Campbell, 2014). The disjointed nature of online engagement may restrict opportunities for mentorship and accountability, which are essential for spiritual development. Consequently, assessing the genuine spiritual influence of these services on kids remains an unresolved inquiry, especially with FGCK in Meru South District.

Finally, Imbing and Pandie (2023) examined the implementation of shepherd leadership in fostering the spiritual development of Christian youth in the digital era, emphasising the distinct problems and opportunities afforded by digital platforms. Their research, centred on adolescents in the realm of digital worship, revealed that spiritual development among young individuals was profoundly impacted by the leadership and instruction they received. Shepherd leadership, defined by individualised attention and guidance, was especially successful in promoting spiritual development in online environments. The degree of young leader participation in providing direction to online church followers in FGCK was examined. The convergence of digital technology and religious practice has garnered heightened academic interest, particularly due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The transition from physical to virtual worship styles has transformed the manner in which adherents participate in spiritual practices. Lombaard and Vosloo (2022) assert that online church services became vital alternatives during lockdowns, allowing congregations to sustain spiritual continuity among public health limitations. This transition profoundly impacted the manner in which young individuals engage with their faith, especially in emerging countries such as Kenya.

Marshall (2021) observes that millennials, as digital natives, are more inclined to acclimate to online religious environments owing to their flexibility and convenience. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook have evolved into contemporary pulpits, enabling spiritual participation outside conventional physical church environments. He posits that youth are reconstructing spirituality in fluid, hybrid ways, integrating faith content which differs from that of adults, who may rely on institutional settings for discipleship. Fisher (2023) warns that although digital faith spaces are accessible, they frequently lack the depth of personal engagement and collective

accountability essential for enduring spiritual development.

Numerous scholars have emphasised the dangers and constraints of online discipleship. Pramono and Manuputy (2025) contend that although virtual services uphold doctrinal instruction and worship, they may diminish the perception of sacred space and commitment among adolescents. The lack of in-person mentoring and peer support may impede essential elements of spiritual development, including accountability, communal prayer, and individual growth. Moreover, Nagy (2024) underscores the need to amalgamate home-based religious activities with online services to enhance teenage spirituality. Hybrid methods that integrate in-person and digital discipleship may provide a more balanced methodology, ensuring both adaptability and profundity of connection. The increasing adoption of digital platforms in the faith context has brought a shift in how young people engage with spirituality. Unlike adults, youths are often digitally fluent and comfortable in online spaces for spiritual content. Nagy emphasises that this generation shift in digital engagement requires churches to rethink faith formation strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the procedures and strategies employed in conducting the study, *Digital Discipleship: Investigating Youth Participation in Online Church Services in FGCK Meru South District, Kenya*. It details the research design, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures, supported by scholarly sources.

This study utilised a descriptive research design, which is ideal for obtaining information concerning the current status of a phenomenon and for describing the existing conditions as they are (Kothari, 2004). The design enabled the researcher to systematically explore the trends, experiences, and perspectives of youth participation in online church services and their influence on digital discipleship. It further facilitated both quantitative and qualitative data collection, offering a broader understanding of the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The target population means all the respondents who are likely to be involved in the inquiry study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The target population for this study

included the entire group where data were obtained (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). In this regard, the target population for this study was the members of FGCK in Meru South District of FGCK (Appendix VI). According to statistics obtained from the FGCK headquarters in Meru, these churches have an approximate population of 3,089, which forms the target population of this study. The sample should be as representative as possible of the population it is drawn from (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013). Moreover, sampling involves selecting a smaller group to serve as a representation of the whole population (Wimmer & Dominic, 2010). A purposive random sampling technique was employed to pick 10 per cent of all congregations, a number as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013). Thus, the number of congregations considered for this study was 4 out of the 38 within Meru South District. These 4 congregations included: Nkubu, Kathera, Keria, and Mitunguu, picked from both town and rural setups to examine the prevalence of online services and youth participation in a broader perspective. From a target population of 3,089, the researcher got a sample size of 346 respondents as per Kathuri and Pals' (1993) recommendations. Among these respondents, 282 were youths, 4 youth pastors, 4 youth leaders and 56 church members. To arrive at a focused group discussion for church members, the study utilised two groups per congregation one for women and the other for men. Each group comprised 7 members, which gave a total of 56 church members from the four congregations. The youth pastors and youth leaders were purposively selected due to their leadership roles and to provide a broad perspective on online church services and youth participation.

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary data was sourced from relevant literature such as journal papers, reports, books, and magazines, among others. On the other hand, primary data was collected from respondents in FGCK through questionnaires, interviews and Focused Group Discussions.

The study employed both closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions were used to collect specific information, while Open-ended questions allowed the respondents to express their opinions. Increased freedom to the respondents offered an opportunity to yield honest and frank replies since anonymity was maintained during the completion of the questionnaires.

Questionnaires were administered to the 282 youths. The questionnaires were designed to capture quantitative data on the level of youth participation in online church services, including the frequency of participation, the preferred online platforms, and the perceived impact of these services on their spiritual growth. The use of questionnaires allowed for the efficient collection of data from a large number of respondents.

In-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data involving the 4 youth leaders and 4 youth pastors. These interviews focused on the respondents' perspectives on the effectiveness of online church services in youth participation, the challenges faced, and the strategies employed to enhance participation. The interviews provided a deeper understanding of the qualitative aspects of youth participation, complementing the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are a valuable qualitative research tool that enables the collection of rich, in-depth data through group interaction and discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In this study, FGDs were used to explore the perceptions and experiences of selected church members regarding youth participation in online church services. In this study, the researcher discussed with two groups per congregation, one for women and the other for men. Each group comprised 7 members, giving a total of 56 members.

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analysed using SPSS Version 25 and Microsoft Excel.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and percentages) were generated to summarise youth participation patterns. Tables and charts were used to identify correlations between variables such as age, frequency of participation, and spiritual discipline practices.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analysed using thematic analysis. Recorded responses were transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes, opinions, and contradictions. The analysis was framed within the Mediatization Theory, allowing interpretation of how media reshape religious practices and participation among the youth.

An ethics approval letter was obtained from the Chuka University Ethics and Review Committee. Thereafter, an introductory letter from the Director of the Chuka University Post Graduate Studies on behalf of the applicants was received. The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) was contacted in order to get a research license. In order to maintain the credibility of the research procedure, the study was conducted in accordance with stringent ethical norms. Informed consent was sought from the participant, and they were assured that their response would be used for academic purposes only. The study was carried out in a manner that is both respectful of the participants' right to privacy and in compliance with the ethical standards that are applicable to research that involves human beings. In addition to that, the findings of the study were examined and presented in a manner

that is both clear and detailed. Additionally, the researcher conveyed gratitude to each and every individual who played a role in the accomplishment of the study. At the end of the process, the researcher ensured that all the cited literatures were included in the reference section. Also, plagiarism and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tests were done, and the final report attained the required similarity index.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Youths' Views on Online Church and Spiritual Growth

Data was collected from 267 youth through questionnaires. They responded to 5 question statements on their level of agreement. Table 1 below represents their responses.

Table 1: Youths' Views on Online Church and Spiritual Growth

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Mean	Frequency (%)
Online church services have positively impacted my spiritual growth.	114 42.7%	74 27.7%	47 17.6%	18 6.7%	14 5.3%	267		100%
Online church services enhance understanding of Faith	113 42.3%	75 28.1%	39 14.6%	26 9.7%	14 5.2%	267		100%
Youth apply the online teachings in their daily lives.	93 34.8%	61 22.8%	58 21.7%	38 14.2%	17 6.4%	267		100%
Online teaching supports emotional well-being	94 35.2%	66 24.7%	64 24%	24 9%	19 7.1%	267		100%
Online church services promote spiritual discipline	95 35.6%	70 26.2%	55 20.6%	30 11.2%	17 6.4%	267	3.79	69.8%

Key: 1 =Strongly Agree; 2 =Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 =Disagree and 5 =Strongly Disagree

The average ratings indicate robust consensus that internet services substantially enhance multiple aspects of spiritual development. Respondents specifically assessed the favourable influence of online church services on their spiritual development, demonstrating that the majority view these activities as advantageous for fostering their faith. This corresponds with the findings of Ojo et al. (2024), who say that technology-enhanced church services have augmented youth participation and fostered their spiritual development by offering accessible and pertinent spiritual content. This illustrates the veracity of Romans 10:17, "So then faith

comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," emphasising that God's Word, whether conveyed physically or digitally, possesses the potency to alter lives. Online church services offer a clearer understanding of faith. All of this suggests that digital sermons, Bible studies, and other online religious experiences effectively enhance young comprehension of theological concepts. Imbing and Pandie (2023) assert that digitalised shepherd leadership can spiritually engage the youth in addressing intricate faith-related concerns from a more pertinent viewpoint. Such advancements in the understanding of faith are crucial

for nurturing young individuals in a digital era, as digital natives pursue accessible and engaging spiritual experiences, thereby fulfilling the biblical promise found in Psalm 119:130: The elucidation of your words illuminates; it conveys comprehension to the unrefined. Imbing and Pandie (2023) emphasise the significance of shepherd leadership in digital contexts, drawing on the example of Christ as the shepherd in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd," to engage with youth in a manner that is both clear and compassionate, thereby rendering complex theological topics more comprehensible. The responses derived from 'putting the lesson to life' also constituted a favourable rating aspect. Online lessons appear to enhance behavioural and decision-making skills among youth, while further improvements are needed in this domain. Pramono and Manuputy (2025) examine the issues faced by church leaders in fostering youth spiritual participation beyond mere consumption in the digital realm, highlighting the significance of promoting strategies for practical faith application outside the internet. The Apostle Paul instructs believers in Philippians 4:9 to "Practice these things which you have learnt, received, heard, and seen in me." Churches must therefore participate in deliberate discipleship beyond digital platforms, fostering individuals who can promote practical application in real life and exemplify accountability and community engagement.

Online church services contribute to emotional well-being, highlighting the comprehensive influence of digital worship, as emotional and spiritual health are intricately connected. Johnson (2023) observes that digital church communities offer emotional support and cultivate resilience in young individuals by establishing environments for sharing challenges and receiving remote pastoral care, particularly crucial during periods

of social isolation. Online ministries can exemplify the compassion of Christ, who "saw the crowds, had compassion on them, and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). The organised format of online worship programs, prayer sessions, and devotional materials promotes youth to uphold regular spiritual practices. Belvin (2024) examines the evolution of pastoral duties in the digital era, emphasising the utilisation of digital resources to instil discipline in Generation Z and Millennials, thereby encouraging their participation in regular spiritual practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and worship.

The statistics indicate that online church services significantly enhance the spiritual development of youth by improving their comprehension of faith, supporting emotional well-being, encouraging the practical application of teachings, and cultivating spiritual discipline. Nonetheless, the marginally reduced score in the implementation of lessons indicates a necessity for churches to formulate more efficacious tactics that integrate online learning with practical daily application, thereby ensuring holistic spiritual growth in the digital age.

Youth Pastors' and Leaders' Views on Online Church and Youth Spiritual Growth

Youth pastors and leaders were asked to share their views on the effectiveness of online church services in promoting spiritual growth among youth. Their responses covered themes such as accessibility, spiritual depth, engagement style, consistency, and the role of personal discipline. The results, summarised in Table 2, show both perceived benefits and challenges of the online church model.

Table 2: Youth Pastors' and Leaders' Views on Online Church and Youth Spiritual Growth

Theme/Response	Youth Pastors (n=4)	% Youth Pastors	Youth Leaders (n=4)	% Youth Leaders
Enhances accessibility and convenience	3	75%	2	50%
Lacks spiritual depth and community	2	50%	3	75%
Promotes passive rather than active engagement	3	75%	1	25%
Encourages consistency in difficult times	2	50%	1	25%
Dependent on individual discipline	4	100%	2	50%

The study findings indicate that (75%) of pastors and (50%) of youth leaders recognised that online church services improve accessibility, especially for youth who are geographically distant or face time limitations. Nevertheless, five more individuals, two pastors at (50%) and three youth leaders at (75%), underscored that online services lack the profundity and relational support present in actual church settings. Four respondents, three pastors, constituting (75%), and one youth leader, representing (25%), indicated that youth typically engage passively online, so constraining the spiritual impact. A minority (2-50% of pastors and 1-25% of youth leaders) observed that internet platforms facilitate the preservation of spiritual consistency during academic terms or COVID-related constraints. Consensus emerged that personal spiritual discipline is essential for online platforms to successfully cultivate faith, as highlighted by six respondents (four pastors and two youth leaders). Online church services have become a crucial medium for promoting spiritual development among youngsters, presenting both unique potential and

specific obstacles. The principal advantage of internet programs is their convenience and accessibility, allowing young individuals to participate in spiritual teachings irrespective of geographical location or personal schedules. This flexibility frequently results in heightened engagement and exposure to a broader array of sermons and teachings, thus enhancing their spiritual development (Ojo et al., 2024). The capacity to review recorded sermons further augments comprehension and enables adolescents to contemplate spiritual messages more profoundly (Johnson, 2023). Moreover, the capacity to replay messages facilitates profound concentration and contemplation, resonating with Psalm 1:2, which describes the fortunate individual whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.” The study involved four pastors and four youth leaders to demonstrate online church services and comprehension of faith. They addressed assertions regarding the comparison of spiritual development in online vs. in-person church attendance. Table 3 displays their opinions.

Table 3: Comparing Spiritual Growth in Online vs. Physical Church Attendance

Observation	Youth Pastors (n=4)	%	Youth Leaders (n=4)	%
Physical attendees show stronger spiritual depth	3	75%	3	75%
Online attendees are more likely to be inconsistent	2	50%	2	50%
Some online youth exhibit discipline and growth	2	50%	1	25%
Hybrid engagement (both formats) is most balanced	4	100%	2	50%

Six of the eight respondents (three pastors and three youth leaders, each constituting (75%) noted that youth participating in in-person church services experience deeper spiritual growth, gaining advantages from interactive worship, altar calls, and direct mentorship. Four respondents (50%), pastors and (50%) youth leaders, observed that online participants frequently exhibit inconsistency, resulting in diminished spiritual development unless they receive substantial support. Three respondents (two pastors, constituting (50%), and one youth leader, representing (25%) recognised that certain disciplined youth experience spiritual growth using internet platforms, particularly when they had robust internal motivation. Six respondents (four pastors at (100%) and two youth leaders at (50%) believed that a hybrid model (incorporating both online and physical elements) provides the optimal balance, merging ease with spiritual profundity. Opinions differ regarding the spiritual growth of youth participating in online versus

in-person church services. Certain individuals contend that internet services might be comparably beneficial, provided the information is captivating and young individuals exhibit self-discipline in their spiritual endeavours (Belvin, 2024), reflecting the tenet in Philippians 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Conversely, some contend that the environment and communal responsibility of physical services more effectively foster spiritual development. This discrepancy underscores the necessity for churches to equilibrate digital and physical interactions to address varied spiritual requirements (Johnson, 2023). Notwithstanding these advantages, apprehensions remain about the constraints resulting from the lack of physical camaraderie. In-person interactions at physical church events foster a heightened sense of belonging and motivation, which many youngsters consider crucial for enhancing their spiritual experiences (Imbing & Pandie, 2023). "Do not forsake assembling together, as some

have become accustomed to doing, but rather, motivate one another" (Hebrews 10:25). The absence of collective worship may result in emotions of detachment and diminish accountability, both of which are essential for ongoing spiritual development (Pramono & Manuputy, 2025).

Extent to which Youth Apply Online Church Teachings in Daily Life

This opinion was received from 4 pastors and 4 youth leaders. They gave varied explanations on the extent to which youth apply online church service teachings in daily life. A few of them were sampled, and they include:

We have seen a mix; some youths are inspired and start prayer groups or change habits after a powerful online message. Others just watch passively and move on without reflection and accountability (Youth Leader 1, 2025, FGCK Meru South District).

The challenge with online church services is that the application of the teachings depends entirely on personal discipline. Without a physical environment to reinforce the message, many youths hear but don't put it into practice. (Pastor 01 2025, FGCK Meru South District)

Some youths are very intentional. They take notes and even share what they have learned with peers, which increases connection. Well, many struggle to apply the teachings consistently without follow-ups or group discussion. This may make some youths isolate themselves from the church. (Pastor 02, 2025, FGCK Meru South District)

The implementation of lessons acquired via online church services is a crucial element of spiritual development. A multitude of youngsters actively incorporate teachings from internet sermons into their daily lives, impacting their behaviours, relationships, and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, distractions and insufficient personal accountability can hinder certain individuals from effectively using online learning in practice (Ojo et al., 2024). Concerns exist that online church membership may foster a sense of isolation from the wider church community, consequently diminishing engagement in fellowship and church activities (Pramono & Manuputy, 2025). James 1:22 instructs: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers." Conversely, internet platforms allow novel forms of connection via interactive chats, social media groups, and virtual fellowship, which can sustain or even augment a youth's feeling of community (Belvin, 2024).

Table 4: Risk of Disconnection Due to Online Church Services

Opinion	Youth Pastors (n=4)	%	Youth Leaders (n=4)	%
Yes, online increases the risk of disconnection	3	75%	3	75%
Not necessarily, if engagement is interactive	1	25%	1	25%
Disconnection happens when there's no follow-up	2	50%	2	50%
Can be mitigated through hybrid or small groups	4	100%	2	50%

This study evaluated whether online church services make youth feel disconnected from the church community. A clear majority, 6 respondents (3-75% pastors and 3-75% youth leaders), felt that online formats increase the risk of spiritual and social disconnection, particularly when services are passive or lack engagement. However, 2 -50 per cent of respondents (1-25% pastors and 1-25% youth leaders) felt that if online services are interactive, include discussion or live prayer sessions, the sense of community can be preserved. Four respondents (2-50% pastors and 2-50% youth leaders) linked disconnection to the lack of structured follow-up, showing that pastoral

care and engagement are crucial in digital settings. 6 respondents (4-100% pastors and 2-50% youth leaders) believed that a hybrid approach or youth small groups can address isolation by maintaining both virtual and physical connections.

Influence of Online Church on Spiritual Discipline

Pastors and youth leaders in the interview sessions gave varied responses, and a few of them were sampled. Examples of some of these responses include:

Online church services have made it easier for youths to access worship and teachings anytime. All in all, many youths struggle to maintain



daily prayer and Bible reading without physical church structures (Youth Leader 02 2025, FGCK Meru South District)

While online platforms offer great reach, they lack the personal touch needed to guide youths in spiritual discipline, and mentorship and accountability remain essential for growth. (Pastor 03, 2025, FGCK Meru South District)

Online church services have made it easier for the youths to access sermons and worship, but their spiritual discipline varies. Some follow along faithfully, but others get distracted. Few take time for personal prayer or Bible reading outside the service, and giving is often forgotten unless reminded. (Pastor 04, 2025, FGCK Meru South District)

From the opinion, it is clear that online church services influence spiritual discipline in multifaceted ways. For many young people, these services provide structured opportunities to engage in prayer, Bible study, worship, and giving, encouraging consistency in spiritual practices (Imbing & Pandie, 2023). Nonetheless, without the communal reinforcement and routine that physical attendance offers, some youth struggle to sustain these

disciplines over time (Johnson, 2023). The effectiveness of online church services in fostering spiritual growth, therefore, often hinges on individual commitment and the church's ability to build supportive and interactive virtual communities. Acts 2:42–47 reminds us that early believers were “devoted to fellowship... and shared everything in common.” In the Spirit, these sacred bonds can extend beyond physical walls even into digital spaces when nurtured with intentionality.

Online church services present a valuable, though complex, avenue for spiritual growth among youth. Their positive impact is evident in increased accessibility, flexible engagement, and diverse content, yet challenges related to community connection, accountability, and sustained discipline remain. Churches must continue innovating to harness the benefits of digital platforms while addressing these challenges to nurture holistic spiritual development in the digital age.

Church Members’ Views on Online Church and Youth Spiritual Growth

To get a deeper understanding of how the youth participate in online church services and their spiritual growth, the study engaged 56 church members. Table 5 shows their responses.

Table 5: Youth Participation in Online Church Services in FGCK

Mode of Youth Participation	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Attending live services via social media (Facebook/ YouTube)	22	39.3%
Participating in online praise & worship sessions	15	26.8%
Sharing and commenting on sermons	8	14.3%
Involvement in hosting/moderating online services	6	10.7%
Leading prayer or devotion online	3	5.4%
Minimal or no participation	2	3.5%
Total	56	100%

The study indicated that a significant number (39.3%) of church members noted that youth predominantly participate in online church services via platforms such as Facebook or YouTube. This indicates that young individuals feel at ease engaging with church information via digital platforms. 26.8 per cent indicated that youth actively engage in online praise and worship sessions, participating through singing, dancing, or playing instruments during service broadcasts. 14.3 per cent indicated that youths participate by commenting, sharing sermons, or enjoying content, demonstrating

interactive involvement beyond mere passive consumption. A minority group (10.7%) noted that certain youngsters engage in moderating or hosting services that facilitate technical operations, oversee live discussions, or coordinate event progression. Merely 5.4 per cent of respondents indicated that youth conduct prayer or devotions online, highlighting a restricted number of young individuals assuming spiritual leadership responsibilities in the digital realm. 3.5 per cent perceived youth engagement as little or absent, indicating that internet services alone may not

adequately engage all sectors of the youth demographic. Online church services at Full Gospel Churches of Kenya (FGCK Meru South District) have significantly influenced the spiritual development of youth by offering accessible and flexible platforms that overcome geographical and temporal limitations. These digital programs facilitate active engagement of youth with scripture, liturgy, and ecclesiastical teachings via live sermons, recorded messages, and interactive sessions, thereby enhancing their comprehension of faith and promoting the practical implementation of biblical

concepts in everyday life. This reflects the principle articulated in Romans 10:17: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The provision of varied content designed to meet distinct spiritual needs promotes comprehensive growth, cultivating multiple facets of youth spirituality (Ojo, Adelaja, Adio, & Afolaranmi, 2024). Data was gathered from 56 church members regarding the impact of online church services at FGCK in Meru South District on spiritual growth. Participants provide answers as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: Do Online Church Services in FGCK Promote Spiritual Growth

Perception of Spiritual Growth through Online Services	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes, they promote spiritual growth	35	62.5%
Somewhat – depends on individual discipline	11	19.6%
No, they are not as spiritually effective	6	10.7%
Uncertain / No clear opinion	4	7.1%
Total	56	100%

Sixty-two-point five per cent of church members firmly assert that online church services significantly enhance youth spiritual development, emphasising the accessibility, relevance, and spiritual enrichment of sermons, worship, and teachings. 19.6 per cent indicated conditional support, asserting that the efficacy of online church services is contingent upon the youth's personal discipline and spiritual commitment. In the absence of accountability, internet services may lack efficacy. 10.7 per cent expressed disagreement, asserting that online church services lack the depth and sanctity present in physical gatherings, frequently attributed to distractions, diminished reverence, or decreased engagement. 7.1 per cent were uncertain or failed to articulate a definitive judgement, either owing to insufficient exposure to online church services or an inability to evaluate their effects.

Findings support that the adaptability of online church services facilitates ongoing interaction, essential for sustained spiritual development among young (Imbing & Pandie, 2023). This corresponds with the notion of shepherd leadership modified for the digital era. Therefore, church leaders offer direction and support via online platforms. This fosters spiritual growth and emotional health despite the lack of physical presence. The efficacy of online church services in promoting spiritual growth mostly hinges on the individual youth's dedication to engagement and intentionality. Also, the

church's capacity to cultivate a feeling of belonging and accountability within virtual communities (Johnson, 2023). Pramono and Manuputy (2025) contend that the digital revolution has compelled church leaders to innovatively tackle the fall in youth spirituality by improving digital engagement tactics that align with young people's lives. The Bible emphasises the significance of communal assembly in Hebrews 10:25: "Let us not forsake meeting together... but encouraging one another." Belvin (2024) underscores the pastoral function of properly employing digital platforms to foster the spiritual growth of Generation Z and Millennials. Thus, there is a necessity for deliberate community-building and discipleship in virtual settings. Online church services function as an essential adjunct to conventional worship, fostering spiritual development by providing youth with diverse possibilities to engage with their faith. The extent of influence is dependent on the church's ability to utilise technology to promote significant interactions and enduring spiritual practices among adolescents (Ojo et al., 2024; Johnson, 2023; Belvin, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The respondent reinforces that the opportunity to attend online church isn't a complete replacement for fellowship in person, but a significant reach-forward from the established church. They are helping youth to understand faith, to grow in emotional

toughness, to receive spiritual training and to some extent live out practical obedience to follow Jesus. As Isaiah 55:11 promises, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire."

But the observation that the score on the application of truth is a little lower should again challenge pastors to be more pastoral with the creation of young people who walk, not just hear, the Word. This is a moment for the church to leverage the pandemic to embrace a hybrid model and reach fewer youth more deeply and ultimately disciple them to God's glory and the advancement of His Kingdom.

Virtual church services are one of God's means of grace in the church's task to make disciples of children and young people. They offer accessibility, flexibility, and a variety of subject matter that enable youth to develop in their faith. But these platforms, to be most effective, need to be combined with intentional community forming, pastoral shepherding, and channels for serving.

As Proverbs 22:6 commands: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The discipline of this generation of youth must include their internet worlds, using their terms, but without desecrating the gospel. May youth pastors and their movement leaders remain wise shepherds, using digital tools and yet tethering young believers to the embodied truth of Christ, who invites His followers to not merely listen, but to walk with Him daily, both online and off.

Recommendations: To deepen understanding and inform future ecclesial practice, the following areas are recommended for further theological and empirical investigation:

1. Comparative study on spiritual growth outcomes between youths attending physical church versus those engaging primarily through online platforms.
2. The role of hybrid church models in post-COVID ecclesiology and their theological validity.
3. Impact of digital discipleship on long-term Christian commitment and leadership development among youth.

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