

The Response of The Seventh-Day Adventist Church on Management of Youth Drop-Out Rate in Nyamira County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church's response to the management of youth dropout rates in Nyamira County, Kenya. Youth disengagement from the educational system has profound implications for their social and academic outcomes. Recognizing the significance of addressing this issue, the SDA Church, as a central institution in the community, plays a vital role in providing effective solutions. Using a critical youth development lens, the study investigates how an understanding of systemic injustices and the larger societal context affects the church's strategies. To identify evidence-based practices that have been successful in reducing dropout rates and promoting positive outcomes for young people, the study employs various qualitative research methods. It also emphasizes the importance of collaboration with families, community organizations, and educational institutions to develop a comprehensive approach. To further validate its findings, the study incorporates critical youth development theory. The main topics addressed in this study include youth calendar events and scheduled activities, youth engagement outside the SDA church on Sundays, spiritual parental responsibilities, the impact of technology, the influence of church leaders, the youth's sense of belonging, the effectiveness of youth ministry, and the connection of young people to small groups. The study also discusses involving young people in volunteer work, promoting individual spiritual practices, and providing guidance to their parents.

Keywords: Collaborations, Disengagement, Drop-Out, Partnerships and Institutions, Youths

I. INTRODUCTION

Youth involvement in church ministry has the ability to dramatically improve successful evangelism and safeguard the church's future. This belief is supported by Lewis (1952), who emphasized the significance of imparting the worship principle, or veneration of the deity, in the lives of young people. Cultivating these qualities in children during their early years can result in a more powerful and long-lasting reflection of faith in the future. Despite this understanding of the critical significance of youth involvement, churches worldwide have seen a persistent fall in the active participation of young people.

Recent studies, such as one conducted by Moser and Nel (2019), have given insight on the scale of this difficulty. In North America, for example, the evangelical church is facing a crisis in its capacity to retain young people. According to studies, not only are young people abandoning the church, but they are also failing to return as they get older. This concerning trend has generated concerns about the viability and significance of religious organizations in the lives of future generations. Cole and Nielson (2016) observations emphasize crucial aspects such as a lack of family participation and the division of students from several generations within the church as reasons for youth dropouts.

In the face of dwindling young participation in religious institutions, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church has taken an important and aggressive stance. The SDA church, as a vital element of many communities, has recognized the critical need to address and reduce youth dropout rates. This comprehension reflects the gravity of the situation, and the church's commitment extends beyond the spiritual domain. To tackle the many issues that young people experience, the SDA church has established a holistic and comprehensive strategy (Cole & Nielson, 2016).

The SDA church recognizes that young people are not just spiritual creatures but also important members of the greater social fabric (Mong'are et al., 2015). This viewpoint leads the church to recognize its critical role as an organization with the capacity to have a profoundly positive impact on the lives of young people. The SDA church strives to lead children away from the path of dropout and towards a brighter and more promising future by giving

counsel and support. This approach is consistent with research findings and ideas that emphasize the necessity of encouraging youth engagement in religious organizations for the benefit of both the church and the younger generation (Kamundi, 2021). It is therefore, on this backdrop, that this study is intended to assess the response of the church to the management of youth drop-out in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Nyamira County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Shields (2008) conducted research to evaluate the claim that 70 to 90 percent of youth ministry graduates from conservative Southern Baptist churches in the US leave the church after high school. Through surveys and analysis of data from twelve Southern Baptist churches with individuals who graduated high school before 2008, Shields sought to establish a credible retention rate. The results were striking, revealing that the retention rates for all levels of youth ministry commitment were at 88 percent, with over 70 percent of respondents stating they never left the church between the ages of 18 and 22. Shields's research was instrumental in informing the present study by providing insights into the church's dropout rates.

Hoge (1978) emphasized that some youths' attitudes of church rejection often resulted from disliking their prior religious education and thinking of church leaders as distant, dishonest, or unsure of how to express their own beliefs. This concept aligns with the theoretical framework of idealized influence, emphasizing that leaders can influence followers effectively when they practice what they preach and serve as role models. In light of Hoge's study, the current research delves into the causes and effects of youth dropouts and explores how model leadership, anchored in both words and actions, can positively impact the dropout rate in the church. This highlights the need for transformational leaders who embody high standards of ethical conduct and mentorship.

Another significant contribution to the understanding of youth retention in the church comes from Hoge and Petrillo (1979), who conducted a ten-year longitudinal study on youth retention in the church. Their research included interviews with 755 young adults raised in Presbyterian congregations, allowing them to investigate the relevance of specific aspects of church participation. Their findings emphasized the importance of religious beliefs and personal experiences, especially those affecting the family, in shaping an individual's level of involvement in the church. Furthermore, Hoge and Petrillo developed a two-step model, focusing on the formation of beliefs and their continuity within the church as central elements in retaining young members. Their research laid the groundwork for understanding the theological and cultural foundations and beliefs held by young people, aligning with the objectives of the current study within the Seventh-Day Adventist context in Nyamira County.

In order to understand youth retention in the church, specifically within the context of Seventh-Day Adventism, Dudley and Muthersbaugh (1996) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study in the USA and Canada. The study aimed to examine characteristics related to social connections within religious communities to uncover why some young people choose to remain in the church while others leave. A comprehensive survey involving 755 young people was conducted, including factors such as devotion to Jesus, religious beliefs, the influence of the local church, denomination, and the frequency of attendance at worship services. The research revealed that social attachment to the church was influenced by factors such as personal involvement in congregational activities, the absence of conflict within the church community, and positive early interactions with local church leaders. Through multiple regression analyses, it was determined that personal involvement and minimal conflicts within the church community were the most critical factors contributing to retention.

In the realm of Adventist education, Thayer (2008) highlighted the challenge of retaining both teachers and students within the Seventh-day Adventist school system, particularly in the United States. The issue of low student retention rates was addressed by suggesting strategies to enhance the success of the Adventist Education System. It was observed that financial difficulties contributed to dropout rates among Adventist school students, and recommendations were made to address this issue. Strategies included increasing enrollment and implementing fee increases, with the goal of ensuring that the majority of Adventist students who do not attend Adventist schools would have access to a comprehensive education. This study recognized the significance of resolving issues related to youth dropout rates, serving as a model to investigate how similar strategies could be implemented in Nyamira SDA Church to curtail youth dropouts.

High dropout rates among students and faculty members were also observed in other schools, particularly in the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC), as reported by EKUC Education Statistics in 2015. The Central Kenya Conference (CKC), controlled by EKUC between 2005 and 2015, experienced low retention rates for both teachers and students. The resolution of this issue was crucial to ensuring that students already enrolled and teachers hired could continue to have employment at the institution. This situation underscores the importance of addressing

retention and dropout issues to maintain the stability of educational institutions, a relevant consideration for the Nyamira SDA church.

Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011) identified another alarming cause of high dropout rates among youth and its implications for church involvement. The authors emphasized the societal shift in attitudes towards virginity, highlighting that preserving virginity until marriage is becoming increasingly rare. While sexual activity among Kenyan adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 remains relatively low, 36 percent of females have already given birth by the age of 19. Furthermore, pregnancies among unmarried mothers are 2.4 times more likely to be unintended compared to pregnancies in which the mother was already married. These issues are further compounded by a significant number of young women becoming mothers during their teenage years, with 17 percent of deliveries in Nairobi being conducted by mothers under the age of 21. In the greater Kisii region, which includes Nyamira, early pregnancies among adolescents are prevalent, with most women involved in these cases being unmarried. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church highly values the notion of virginity. Kostelny et al. (2014) suggested that an investigation into whether young people drop out after losing their virginity is crucial. The study sought to determine if failure to marry through church weddings within the SDA context was a contributing factor to youth dropout. This study investigates if this issue is a driving force behind young people disengaging from the church in Nyamira.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research design employed in this study is a descriptive research design, aiming to describe the current state of youth involvement in the ministry of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Nyamira County, Kenya. The study area is Nyamira County, a region in southern Nyanza, with a specific focus on the SDA Church and its youth population. The target population consists of various church stakeholders, including the youth, district youth leaders, district pastors, station youth sponsors, station pastor representatives, and the conference youth director. The study employed purposive and stratified sampling techniques to select respondents, resulting in a total sample size of 137 participants. The research instruments used included questionnaires, interview schedules for key informants, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with district youth leaders, district pastors, station pastor representatives, and youth sponsors. The collected data were analyzed descriptively and thematically. Ethical considerations were taken into account to protect participants' rights and confidentiality, and the research instruments were assessed for validity and reliability.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Calendar of Events

The majority of the respondents, particularly the pastors, emphasized that the Seventh - day Adventist (SDA) Church has implemented strategies to effectively manage its youth. These strategies include the publication of a global SDA calendar of events, which highlights specific youth-focused days throughout the year, such as youth Sabbaths. Additionally, the SDA world church has issued a manual designed to assist youth leaders in the training and education of young individuals (as discussed in the Focus Group Discussions with district pastors). Further, when the pastors were asked how the youth Sabbaths are conducted, one of them strongly observed that:

Once in a year, the youth have a special Sabbath called Global Youth Sabbath. On this Sabbath, they are given chance in their local churches to conduct and lead the programs of the day. In most cases there is an outlined sermon for the day. The youth can either decide to conduct in the local church or go out to the community or preach. Or they can choose to go and visit the less fortunate and pray with them. However, not all the churches can conduct because some churches prefer use the Sabbath for other programs like collecting funds for church development (FGDs with district pastors.)

The pastors also confirmed that the SDA church has a structural organization from the international level (that is the General Conference) to the local church where the youth department has committees at each level for purposes of managing the youth within its jurisdiction (Oral interview with a district pastor).

From the FGD with district pastors and youth leaders, it was reported that youth are faced with a common enemy right from unemployment, engaging in immoral behaviors, use of drugs, social media, and theological challenges. However, there are efforts made through activities that are conducted quarterly or annually such as youth camp meetings, workshops, retreats, youth rallies, youth congresses, seminars to enhance youth involvement as exemplified below:

During youth congresses, we are taught bible study, stewardship, dating and courtship, life skills, spiritualism, health, and self-esteem. Youth rallies empower youth to practice Christian lifestyle and we are taught on how to choose careers. Based on this understanding, the initiatives on planned meetings, retreats, youth rallies and congresses were helping to manage youth within the SDA church because of the diverse teachings presented by Christian experts from different fields. However, one youth leader emphasized that to manage youth drop-out in the churches, the youth themselves must be determined to live up to their calling as Christians and this can be achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit and surrendering to God (Oral Interview with youth).

Youth leaders reported that the pastors always encourage and motivate youth to attend planned meetings like youth camp meetings, congresses to demonstrate universality in the great commission of the church. Such programs organized regularly help the youth leaders and pastors to understand her youth in their strengths and weaknesses instead of leaving them unattended giving excuses of dropping as below:

Problems faced with the youth are unattended to by the SDA church leadership. Mentorship programs are nowhere to be seen in our local churches. Though we attend church for fellowship, we lack proper guidance on how to use our talents and gifts for spiritual nurture. The so-called leaders are not role models worthy to imitate. The elderly criticizes our small attempts thus demoralizing us for any meaningful involvement. In fact, we end up leaving the SDA church to join a friendlier congregation or even stay at home (Oral Interview with Youth).

The study findings highlight the importance of providing appropriate attention and support to youth. When young individuals do not receive the necessary care and guidance, they tend to become demoralized and may withdraw from active participation. Effective youth leadership is crucial, with a focus on addressing both their potential and existing challenges.

The Seventh - day Adventist (SDA) Church has established institutional mechanisms for managing activities within various departments, including those related to women, children, men, and youth. However, it was noted that these institutionalized strategies are not always enforced effectively. Each local church has empowered departmental heads to plan activities, programs, and events tailored to the specific needs of their respective groups. Such programs are approved and fully supported by the SDA church board. The youth department, in particular, benefits from having an experienced youth sponsor who provides guidance and advice.

Various initiatives, such as the formation of fellowship groups, outreach groups, singing groups, and Bible study groups, are aimed at enhancing spiritual growth, fostering commitment to church activities, and promoting participation in church programs. For instance, Nyamira South Church has successfully established a vibrant youth group. Additionally, the SDA church has a fund to support vulnerable members, including youth, especially orphans, with school fees. Respondents from this congregation expressed high satisfaction with the programs designed for youth, indicating that an empowered congregation is better equipped to manage the dropout rate among its youth.

4.2 Scheduled Activities

The respondents confirmed that various scheduled activities are conducted on a quarterly and annual basis, spanning from the conference level to local churches. These activities are aimed at continuously enhancing the capacity of youth within the church. Such events include youth camp meetings, one-day seminars, social Sundays, and picnics. This study was conducted with the goal of identifying potential solutions to address the issue of low youth involvement in church activities. When the pastor sponsor for youth were asked about the challenge of emerging issues and how they were tackled, one of them responded as stated below:

Annually, the youth are attended twice in two important programs. In the month of August, youth camp meetings are conducted across the churches either at local church level or district level though not all churches conduct it because of finances and leadership at that particular church. Also, every December, there is a youth congress conducted which runs for a whole week. Both these weeklong meetings are facilitated by experience speakers and pastors in the hope of encouraging, teaching and motivating youth. However, since the meetings require finances, not all the youth attend except a few who manage (FGDs with Youth sponsors).

The sentiments expressed by the youth sponsor suggest that the SDA churches may lack effective methods to address the issue of youth drop-out, resulting in low youth participation. The researcher observed that some churches exhibit complacency, particularly in terms of their approach to youth involvement and leadership. It appears that the limited number of annual activities and financial constraints prevent all youth from participating. Therefore, the SDA church should explore alternative methods to increase the frequency of these events, with a focus on providing opportunities at the local church or district level, particularly for financially disadvantaged youth. This approach can

contribute to better management of youth within the churches and promote active engagement in SDA church activities (Gentzler, 2018).

4.3 Managing Youth Outside the SDA church Based on SDA Standards

The following section discusses possible ways the youth can be managed while out of the church.

4.3.1 Spiritual Parental Obligation

The study further inquired whether parental guidance is given to the youth. Majority of the pastors attested that most parents have forsaken their parental obligation and surrendered it to the SDA church and the Sunday school teachers. One of the pastors had this to say:

Actually, when we do guidance and counselling for the youth, we discover a lot of challenges our youth go through. Some of their parents don't come to church because they are drunkards, some are single mothers who leave the youth under the mercies of their grandparents as caretakers, some youth come from divorced families and yet others are total orphans who are putting up with guardians. We are always forced to do visitations, study the bible and pray with them, invite the parents to church and encourage them never to give up their faith (Oral interview).

This suggests that some parents have grown disengaged from their responsibility as spiritual leaders for their children, so shifting the weight of spiritual nurture on the church and other carers other than the family. Even when dealing with difficult family dynamics, pastors and other leaders in churches are making it a point to be actively involved in the effort to close this gap and guarantee that young people receive the essential spiritual support and guidance. The church plays a vital role in the provision of a feeling of community and support for these young people, offering direction and encouragement not only to the young people themselves, but also to their parents (Devries, 1994).

4.3.2 Church Sponsored Schools

The study also sought to probe further for any other avenues of managing youth besides the SDA church programs. From the interviews conducted, a majority of the pastors confirmed to the services and programs offered in the SDA Church maintained and Church sponsored schools respectively. Most respondents pointed out that these schools provide scheduled spiritual services as reported by one of the respondents below:

The SDA world church has an education department that handles issues related to education in all educational institutions in addition to other responsibilities at every level of its hierarchy, from the General Conference to the local church. For the purpose of fostering students' spiritual development, this department organises conferences during the spiritual week of emphasis and yearly student rallies. Professionals are invited to speak on a variety of topics of concern, including the effects of drug usage, problems with the occult and the Illuminati, job aspirations, and self-esteem, among others. School rallies are held in designated locations where various student choirs and clubs, such as Christian Union (CU), assemble to sing, hear sermons, and receive instruction in bible study (Director of Conference Youth Interview).

The researcher claims that these programmes demonstrate how carefully planned programmes can increase young involvement in church issues and keep them engaged in their spiritual life. It's interesting to notice that this is limited to SDA church-sponsored and managed schools, suggesting that not all young people are reached to take advantage of these services. This is due to the fact that some SDA students attend denominational schools other than SDA and neither of the aforementioned schools (Gentzler, 2018). Therefore, it translates that their involvement in church activities should be affected to some degree because of the norms they are used to in their respective institutions of learning. Nevertheless, this warranted this to be carried out in order to identify possible ways or solutions to the youth who have no opportunity of learning in SDA sponsored and maintained schools.

4.3.3 Impact of Technology

The impact of technology was a recurring topic during the interviews and focus group discussions. One respondent mentioned, "I feel good about the relationships I can build with people because of technology."

When asked about the significant reduction in the number of young people in the church, technology was brought up by interviewees. In a focus group discussion with youth sponsors, one respondent stated that "technology has provided alternative platforms for learning the word of God in the modern days."

A district youth leader, during a focus group discussion, mentioned that "developing youth-friendly programs is better achieved by embracing technological improvements." Participants also expressed the belief that "traditional approaches should be embraced alongside modernity."

One elder noted that "modern technology has exposed our youth to ungodly sites," which is why the SDA church sometimes restricts phone use in church. Another respondent suggested that "leveraging technology as a platform to enhance youth ministry could be a better solution" for increasing youth attendance at church. These findings suggest that young people can be attracted to the church through the strategic use of technology in youth ministry, as articulated by Papp and Matulich (2011). According to a Rainer & Rainer study (2011), youth will spend one-third of their lives in front of a computer screen. This essentially means that the SDA church must speak their language—social media and technology—if it hopes to engage today's youth and make a difference in their lives (youth interview conducted orally). Given that today's youth are considered digital natives and have unprecedented access to information and knowledge through technology, it is essential for SDA ministry leaders and churches in Nyamira to harness modern technologies for sharing the gospel effectively.

4.3.4 Leadership Influence

Leadership influence was a prevalent theme in many of the interview questions. During a focus group discussion (FGD), a youth sponsor stated that "the departments are meeting their goals, although they have limitations," when asked about their opinions on the leadership in church departments and whether they were effective. It was noted that the SDA church does not have adequate representation of all age groups because youth leaders are not present in every area.

This observation was further supported by a young informant who mentioned, "We are never given the opportunity to hold any key leadership position in the SDA church" (FGD for youth sponsors). The highest level of leadership they typically attain is being choristers for the youth choir. From the local church to the conference level, youth leaders are often older individuals, and young individuals are told they are too young and inexperienced to hold leadership roles. This exclusion of young people from most church committees hinders their leadership development and often discourages their active involvement in the church.

The focus group discussions with youth sponsors also emphasized the importance of youth programs in developing leadership among the youth and preparing them for future leadership roles in the SDA church. However, the respondents noted that the current state of leadership within the SDA church is unfavorable. Furthermore, during interviews with district youth leaders, it was highlighted that enhancing youth leadership is a strategy for improving youth attendance. The youth feel a sense of responsibility and commitment when given opportunities to lead various programs as part of worship. The respondents stressed that young people should be provided with opportunities to preach and grow within the youth ministry, preparing them for future leadership roles and ensuring the future of the church.

In addition, church leadership was criticized for being poor role models, which negatively influences the attitudes of young people toward church attendance. The respondents suggested that SDA church leadership should be open to new ideas, considering the constantly changing world and the impact of evolving trends on the thinking and behavior of the youth. This adaptability to change was seen as a way to engage and retain young members in the church (Papp & Matulich, 2011).

4.3.5 Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging among the youth, where they establish a connection with the SDA church from a young age, emerged as a significant theme from the thematic analysis. Respondents highlighted the role of youth programs in bringing young people together, fostering a sense of belonging within the SDA church. Youth leaders also recognized the importance of these programs.

During focus group discussions with pastors, it was noted that "without youth participation in church programs, the SDA church is dull and will not survive tomorrow." A youth leader further emphasized the significance of youth programs and their role in shaping the future of the church. One of the youth respondents echoed this sentiment by stating, "The youth in the SDA church are interested in the events and programs that are typically organized for the benefit of the Youth program study."

However, according to the majority of youth who participated in the questionnaire, they felt that the planning of these activities does not involve young people, which lead to a loss of their sense of belonging. The interview results indicated that when youth are not actively involved, they perceive the SDA church as being irrelevant in society as stated by Dollahite and Thatcher (2008).

4.3.6 Effectiveness of Youth Ministry

The findings from the youth questionnaire revealed that the SDA church in Nyamira lacks church programs dedicated to the development of young pastors, a fundamental component of youth ministry. Additionally, the responses from the youth questionnaire exposed a disconnect between the youth and the church programs. In cases where such programs do exist, the youth feel imposed upon, as they were not actively involved in their planning. One respondent even expressed their dissatisfaction by stating, "We don't enjoy participating in the programs since we weren't involved in their initial planning." During a key informant interview, the conference director indicated that SDA church leadership sometimes excludes the youth from participating in worship preparations at the local level, further contributing to the perception of the SDA church as irrelevant and dull in today's world.

The study revealed that many young people have lost interest in the church, feeling excluded and viewing church doctrine as outdated. The responses underscored the need for effective youth ministry that goes beyond mere attendance. Suggestions to increase youth church attendance and promote the growth of youth ministry included providing proper spiritual formation and nourishment, promoting genuine leadership that avoids hypocrisy, offering opportunities for youth leadership and expression of their views, providing necessary support such as counseling, encouragement, and motivation, treating youth with respect, and adopting modern approaches to preaching and ministering (Chiroma, 2008).

4.3.7 Get Them Involved in Serving

According to the findings, one of the primary objectives of youth ministry should be to guide young people towards a more profound understanding of their faith, encouraging them to not just be Bible learners but also to actively live out the message. During focus group discussions with youth sponsors, it was revealed that the SDA church offers a conducive environment for young people to begin serving others. Those who left the church as young adults had significantly lower levels of involvement compared to those who remained in the church. They were less likely to have donated money, participated in mission trips, engaged in church-sponsored projects, held leadership roles during events, or taken on regular responsibilities within the church during their teenage years (Barna, 2000).

Based on these findings, the study recommends that the SDA church in Nyamira should ensure that it provides ample opportunities for its youth to engage in such activities. The conference youth director also endorsed the idea that young people should be empowered to take the lead in outreach ministries. This includes organizing mission trips and local service projects, as well as giving them opportunities to express and practice their faith within the SDA church community. It was also stressed that nurturing faith at home is equally vital.

4.3.8 Encourage Personal Spiritual Disciplines

The study also investigated whether the youth had prayer programs in their churches. A majority of the youth indicated that their churches had established "prayer bands" or prayer groups specifically for the youth. These groups typically meet once a month, although some convene once every three months. When inquired about the proceedings of these prayer bands, one of the respondents provided the following insight:

In our church, we meet every last Sunday of the month for our prayer band. Basically, we study a lot of things. Sometimes we have a guest who addresses us on emerging issues amongst youth like Christian lifestyles, marriage and courtship, choosing of careers among many. Then, we are preached to also on a chosen topic. We also conduct a session of prayer where we give our requests to our leaders who guide us on how to pray together. This has helped us build our relationships especially as peers. Many youth love prayer bands because the atmosphere is friendly and we share freely (Oral Interview with youth).

The findings suggest that many churches have established prayer groups, referred to as "prayer bands," specifically tailored for young people. These groups play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and spiritual growth among the youth. The monthly or quarterly meetings serve as opportunities for the youth to engage in meaningful discussions, listen to guest speakers who address various topics relevant to their lives, and receive sermons that are tailored to their age group. The prayer sessions are a significant part of these gatherings, where the youth can express their prayer requests and join in collective prayer led by experienced leaders. Barna (2000) affirms that including prayer into youth ministry experiences within the SDA church can foster the development of relationships not only with God but also with other members of the church and their families. The frequency of prayer is also an important factor as it is an aiding factor that improves youth participation and attendance in participation in church

4.3.9 Disciple their Parents

The study revealed that when parents actively participated in church and provided spiritual guidance during their children's teenage years; it had a positive influence on whether the youth remained engaged with religion as young adults. Conversely, among those who eventually disengaged from religious involvement, the majority had parents who were not regular attendees or did not offer spiritual instruction during their adolescent years. This underscores the importance of creating a supportive environment for parents within the church community to help them grow in their faith and become effective spiritual mentors to their children. By focusing on the spiritual well-being of young people both in the church and at home, churches can significantly reduce the rate of youth disengagement from congregations (Papp & Matulich, 2011).

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study investigated the strategies that the SDA Church in Nyamira County implemented to tackle the issue of youth disengagement. In particular, the research focused on how the church appointed youth department heads at different tiers of the church hierarchy for the purposes of planning and coordination.

According to the findings of the study, the SDA Church has established youth department directors at various levels of the church hierarchy in order to take actions aimed at controlling the youth dropout rate. These efforts were taken in order to control the youth dropout rate. These directors are in charge of making plans and organizing events that are designed to keep young people interested and involved. Some examples of these activities are youth camp meetings, seminars, workshops, retreats, rallies, and conferences. The purpose of these events is to encourage the development of participants' spirituality, to help them feel more connected to their community, and to address some of the contemporary difficulties that young people confront.

Nevertheless, the research revealed a number of difficulties as well as opportunities for advancement. It was pointed out that a lack of available funds prevents certain young people from participating actively and that there is an opportunity to increase the number of youth-oriented activities as well as their accessibility. In addition, the research pointed out that there should be a greater involvement of young people in the preparation and execution of these events in order to make certain that they are both relevant and effective.

The importance of the supervision and support of parents was also emphasized throughout the course of the research. Even though the church plays an important role, the most important persons in the spiritual formation of children and teenagers are their parents. It is possible to contribute to the youth embarking on a faith journey that is more long-lasting by encouraging parents to take an active role in church activities and to provide spiritual advice to their children.

5.2 Recommendations

To address financial constraints, the church should explore avenues for financial assistance or scholarships. This will increase access to enriching experiences. The church should diversify youth activities by introducing a variety of programs, such as sports, arts, culture, and community service initiatives. This approach attracts a broader range of young participants. Involving young people in planning and executing events is essential to ensuring their relevance and effectiveness. Encouraging active participation empowers them and results in more tailored events, boosting engagement and satisfaction.

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