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Enhancing youth involvement in community development: A pragmatic strategy for local churches

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This article reports on the findings of the Christian youth ministry involvement in community development in the Mayibuye community of Tembisa, in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The article employed Richard Osmer's model of the four tasks of practical theological interpretation. These tasks have been used to understand better what is happening in youth ministry and community development contexts in the Mayibuye community by utilising documentary analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The findings divulged that the Mayibuye community faces several socio-economic challenges. Most importantly, young people are the most affected. Furthermore, the findings exposed that youth involvement is limited in community development processes within local communities. As a result, the article proposes implementing a pragmatic strategy to enhance the youth ministry's involvement in community development. Various principles of the youth ministry have been presented in the study as the essential principles that need youth leaders' attention for functional youth ministry, and to achieve developmental outcomes. The study also recommended further empirical studies on youth culture, the importance of young people's inclusion in leadership roles and the use of young people as catalysts for community transformation.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The anticipated outcomes of this research endeavour are poised to make a valuable contribution to the current corpus of knowledge in various academic domains, including Practical Theology, Youth Ministry, Theology and Development, Community Development, Congregational Studies, Missiology, Anthropology, and Sociology. This contribution suggests that adopting a pragmatic strategy is likely to yield positive outcomes for local churches, youth ministry, and community development as a whole.

Keywords: youth ministry; community development; strategy; teamwork; erratic youth culture; talent enhancement; servant leadership; parent involvement; youth theology.

Introduction

Local communities are facing several socio-economic difficulties like unemployment, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, gender-based violence (GBV), and hunger, to mention a few (Buheji & Ahmed 2017:2405). These problems are concurrent with the ongoing creation of local churches inside local communities. Churches are anticipated to assume a significant function in the process of societal transformation within local communities (Mutemwa, Hattingh-Rust & Hatting 2018:3). Similar to several other townships in South Africa, Tembisa is now confronted with the aforementioned socio-economic difficulties in the middle of the existence of various local churches. This situation is severe in almost every township if not all local townships in South Africa. For this reason, several people in Mayibuye live in poverty, in shacks, and even those who live in houses live in small, tiny houses benefiting from a government-sponsored housing project named Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The situation is worsening although several established churches within local communities exist.

Given the aforementioned circumstances, the authors acquired a keen interest in investigating the correlation between community development and youth ministry in the locality of Tembisa. Tembisa is a township located inside the City of Ekurhuleni, which was formerly known as the East Rand, situated in the Gauteng province of South Africa. It is located in close proximity to Kempton Park. This township stands as the second most populous settlement in Gauteng, surpassed only by Soweto. Tembisa was founded in 1957 within the apartheid regime, serving as a symbol of optimism for black households who were forcibly displaced from their residences.

The Tembisa community is one of the groups that underwent forced removal and relocation during the apartheid period, resulting in ongoing repercussions of uneven development (Butler 2017:34). This historical context suggests that the residents of Tembisa township have long endured with the aspiration for improved living conditions. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the population residing in this township continues to experience poverty and live in substandard housing, having received assistance under the government initiative known as the RDP (Charman 2017:3). Tembisa is home to a population of around 463,109 people. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), the population mostly comprises the younger demographic, with 48.1% being youth. Among this group, 26.3% are men and 21.8% are females. Based on the analysis conducted by Statistics South Africa (2011) about the population of Tembisa, the researcher has chosen the Mayibuye area of Tembisa as the designated study site. The Mayibuye community has allocated a specific area of land next to the Mayibuye Taxi Rank for the purpose of constructing churches. Consequently, a significant number of churches in the vicinity have been constructed, with a notable emphasis on makeshift architectural designs. The research has shown that the youth constitute a significant component of the community. Consequently, it is important to recognise the role of the youth in fostering community development.

Numerous scholars, including Christens and Dolan (2011:533), Udensi et al. (2013:63), as well as Buheji and Ahmed (2017:2407), posit that young individuals possess significant potential for fostering community development. This potential stems from their abundant reserves of energy, knowledge, motivation, novel ideas, creativity, experience, innovation, and critical thinking abilities. Also, according to Buheji and Ahmed (2017:2407), the young population is considered to be a valuable resource for a country. However, although this is the view of various scholars, it is not always the case on the grassroots level where the potential of young people is considered valuable for community development. In fact, in some townships, youth ministry is regarded as a tool to occupy young people for a specific hour of the week. Consequently, acknowledging the potential of youth to contribute to local development may have a significant impact on communities at the local level. According to Buheji and Ahmed (2017:2409), if provided with sufficient opportunities, young individuals have the potential to address many socio-economic deficiencies. Hence, it is important for congregations to acknowledge the role of youth ministry and young people as catalysts for transformation (within community development); however, certain strategies and principles are also needed which will be discussed later in this article.

Considering the above situation, the study needed to investigate the relationship between local churches and community development. The study examined the strategy for local churches to enhance the involvement of their youth ministry in community development. The reason being that young people comprise a significant proportion of other community segments. Therefore, if local churches could use youth as the catalyst for transformation, they might yield positive results earlier than expected.

Methodology

The content of this article is based on findings derived from the research done in the Mayibuye section of Tembisa township in Gauteng province of South Africa. The qualitative research approach was employed to describe the data collection process, sample selection, interviews, data analysis, and interpretation. The study used both document analysis and field data to determine the involvement of youth ministry in community development. Further, the study applied Richard Osmer's (2008) model of theological interpretation. The model offers four tasks of practical theology namely, descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. The descriptive-empirical task was undertaken through the collection of data, using document analysis and in-depth interviews. The concepts from humanities were used to interpret field data as part of the interpretive task. The normative task dealt with the theoretical analysis in terms of what ought to be going on in this specific context, and the pragmatic task is the output of the study. The fundamental objective of this model is to empower church leaders to systematically involve in practical theological interpretation of challenges facing them in ministry. Therefore, the model has been used to comprehend exactly what is happening in youth ministry and community development contexts.

The purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the participants. The ministers and youth leaders from various local churches in Mayibuye were selected to participate in the study. These churches were from various denominations, including pentecostal, charismatic, and mainstream churches. For this study and ethical reasons, their names and those of the people interviewed are withheld. The results of this study are likely to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in areas like business, community development, development, theology and development, and youth ministry as well as the intersection of youth and community development. Because this article is focused on the Mayibuye area and the intersection between youth and community development is regarded as a new proposal within this context and area, the importance of discussing the strategy of youth ministry becomes paramount. Hence, we will turn our attention to the brief discussion on strategy.

The importance of strategy in youth ministry

Strategic management is vital for the success of any institution. Based on this reality, the church strategy, specifically the youth ministry strategy, is the mechanism for the ministry to attain the great commission, the objective of the church (White & Acheampong 2017:5). As for these

scholars, the strategy is centred on proper planning and must be written and well communicated to everyone and young people. In this light, East (2004:5) asserts that the most excellent strategy in youth ministry is to ensure that youth is involved in all activities like prayers and teachings, to mention a few. In emphasising the value of strategy in youth ministry, Moser and Nel (2019:3) accentuate that youth leaders must adopt the strategy, and in their strategy, they should split evangelism from discipleship if they need to experience a significant impact on contemporary youth ministry. In this view, evangelism would be used as the critical element of the strategy to attract people, particularly outside the church walls. The respondents support the above statements by stating that youth evangelism attracts more young people to the churches. For them, youth evangelism should include fun, entertainment, and anything culturally relevant.

The proposed youth ministry strategy

The proposed youth ministry strategy is aimed at the Mayibuye area and the churches involved in this study. Ordinarily, the institutions should adhere to the designed organisational strategy to achieve the desired results. It is, therefore, significant for churches, specifically local churches, and their youth ministry structure, to develop youth ministry strategies that would enable them to achieve the desired goals. Further, the strategy would also assist local churches, especially youth ministries, to strengthen the efficacy of their involvement in community development. The strategy development and implementation task of the study are summarised in Figure 1. The task is summarised in five views, namely, perspective, plan, tactic, position, and pattern, as adopted by Mintzberg et al. (1998).

Figure 1 depicts crafting and implementing the strategy, and the essence of different views in strategic management. These perspectives would be indispensable for the youth ministry, as they are critical for any institution to attain the desired outcome. All the views are crucial, dependent, and interconnected and should be implemented sequentially and connected, showing the solid dependency for yielding the anticipated results.
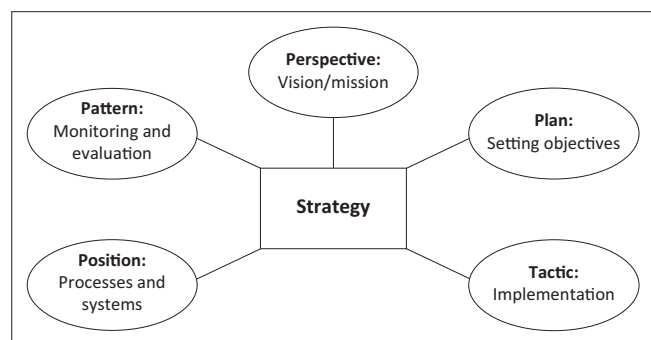
Source: Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B. & Lampel, J., 1998, *Strategy safary: A guided tour through the wilds of strategic management*, The Free Press, Los Angeles

FIGURE 1: The strategy implementation process.

Vision and mission

It is important that the churches and the youth ministries of these churches within the Mayibuye area have a vision and mission. More importantly, the vision and mission of the congregation and her youth ministry should speak to one another. Vision and mission constitute the initial crafting and execution of the strategy implementation process. This phase would give the youth ministry the strategic objective, intent, and direction. Scholars like Osmer (2008:201) understand this strategy stage as the task of transforming leadership, and further states that this task projects a vision of what the church might become. In other words, this task answers the question of 'What the church should look like if it carries out its mission in contextually appropriate ways?' According to Osmer, local churches, notably youth ministries, need to be mindful of the impact of socioeconomic conditions in the local context. Bariu (2017:302) states that youth leaders should be engaged at an early phase of the strategic management process in the forecast of the vision and mission of the church, specifically youth ministry. The participants argued that part of their vision is to see young people be more involved in leading and taking initiatives in local development activities. In this light, youth leadership, including youth ministers, need to ensure that the church's vision and mission are well merged and executed in the youth ministry structure. This process must incorporate integrating the image and mission of youth ministry (Aziz, Nel & Davis 2017:5).

Setting objectives

Setting objectives identifies the purpose of the institution and its abilities for it to attain its preferred objectives (Osmer 2008:183). Authors such as Bora, Borah and Chungyalpa (2017:4) argue that setting strategic objectives should be processed immediately when the vision and mission of the organisation are defined. Setting objectives transforms the shared vision into performance targets. In this case, Grobler, Van der Walt and De Klerk (2012:3) postulate that the objectives of youth ministry need to be aligned with the entire church's vision and mission. The respondents articulated that setting the objectives in institutions, mainly in youth ministry, allows the youth's involvement at a strategic level, like decision-making. The respondents believe local churches, including youth ministries, must translate their vision and mission into measurable objectives tailored to target the needs of their communities. Most importantly, Aziz (2019:3) states that youth leaders need to understand that the objectives of youth ministry have to assist the youth in experiencing a profound and meaningful relationship with God. For this to happen, the set objectives should rely on the theological departure points of the entire church. Eventually, youth leaders need to ensure that youth ministry's general purpose is to capacitate the youth to play the leading role in community development in their church and local communities (Osmer 2008:198).

Strategy implementation

Strategy implementation is the implementation of plans by the institution to move towards its strategic direction or achieve the desired goals (Cater & Danijel 2010:210). Similarly, Osmer (2008:176) views strategy implementation as a task of competence, as it is a process that puts the envisioned strategy into practice and leads to the institution's growth. Rani (2019:214) concurs with the scholars mentioned above. Nevertheless, she contends that for organisational success, the strategic implementation should depend on crucial strategic planning aspects like vision, mission, and values. Considering the above deliberations, resource allocation plays a vital part during the strategy implementation phase, and the involvement of young people in this stage is critical too. Participants echoed the significance of involving young people during the strategy implementation phase. They supported their views by arguing that technology has transformed the world and that youth is exceptional with technology. Therefore, youth inclusion will assist institutions, particularly local churches, to adapt quickly to changing environments. Participants further qualified their views by arguing that youth think fast and do things better and quicker than older people.

Processes and systems

The processes and systems phase are the task of transforming leadership in a strategy implementation process (Osmer 2008:196). Processes and systems are controlled internally although they are provoked by internal and external factors. For example, to draw more youth to the youth ministry, youth leaders might need to modify the worship service by making it less formal and using modern music. However, such alteration of processes and systems must align with the church's vision and mission, including the youth ministry. The respondents concur with the above viewpoints. For them, processes and systems in strategy implementation must significantly attract church and unchurched people, particularly youth. Even for respondents, the kind of music played in youth ministry, physical appearance, structure, and so forth should be attractive to young people. The respondents added that youth have to be weary of processes and systems implemented in the church, specifically in the youth ministry. This would include the whole process of conducting a sermon. Considering the exhortations above, Bariu (2017:305) states that youth need to be involved in this stage of strategic management. As for Bariu, institutions, including churches, need to design and implement policies that promote an environment that encourages youth to engage in a comprehensive range of processes and systems.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are vital during the strategy implementation because they illustrate the degree of the organisational direction and accomplishment of the purpose (Ragui & Weru 2013:278). Monitoring and evaluation alert the leadership if something is not going well, enabling them to identify or fix it as soon as possible. In light of the above, Grobler et al. (2012:9) articulate that churches, especially youth leaders, have to constantly monitor and assess youth ministry performance against the standards established for strategy management. Scholars like Bariu (2017:302) support the monitoring and evaluating performance for youth ministry but expatiate further by stressing that churches need to have a system that monitors and evaluates the existing programmes to ensure their relevance and focus in attaining the purpose of youth ministry. Therefore, relentless monitoring and evaluation should help determine if the strategy remains correctly aligned with the purpose and progress towards the calling of the youth ministry. The respondents stressed the significance of monitoring and evaluation in the strategic management process, and articulated that the projects assigned to youth ministry should be continually monitored and evaluated. The respondents believe monitoring and evaluation tasks would tell whether youth ministry operations align with the church's vision and mission. As a result, youth leaders would quickly identify if anticipated objectives were being met through monitoring and evaluation, and if not, what and where are the causes.

Principles of effective youth ministry strategy

The principles of youth ministry assist local churches in obtaining their desired developmental results through their youth ministry arm. Teamwork, erratic youth culture, talent enhancement, servant leadership, parent involvement, and youth theology have been identified in this study as the core principles to be considered by youth leaders to accomplish the development results.

Teamwork

Teamwork is critical for any organisation to function effectively and efficiently (Berber, Slavic & Aleksic 2020:1). Teamwork enables all people to participate in decision-making rather than being told what to do (Fapohunda 2013:10; Msebi 2022:42). In bringing the theological perspective in the matter, academics like Kgatle (2018:3) illuminate that certain Scriptures in the Bible, particularly the synoptic gospels, state that Jesus built servant leadership and teamwork to carry out a worldwide vision (Mt 20:20–28, Mk 10:45, Lk 22:25–30, Jn 13:1–17). In expatiating on the significance of teamwork in Christianity, Alawode (2020:2) notes the metaphor of the church as a body as written in the book of 1 Corinthians 12. The message in this metaphor is that people, specifically Christians, need to work as solid teams, as the body cannot function well if its parts are disconnected, dysfunctional, or not operative. The participants concur with the above realities. They added that to encourage teamwork in their churches, they ensure that the culture of teamwork is fostered in almost all church activities, specifically in youth ministries. Strong (2014:7)

discusses that youth ministry should form teamwork with all other ministries in the church's existing structures as it is not a separate entity but a church arm. For this reason, all church ministries need to be aligned and depend on the leadership of the whole church. Christofides and Meiring (2012:2) concur with the above viewpoint; these authors further argue that the abovementioned teamwork will also create trust, a significant aspect of community development. Youth ministry must use teamwork to engage and help the communities prosper (Kabongo 2019:2). Academics like Gathogo (2018:8) support Kabongo's views above but emphasise that it is essential for youth and community leaders to ascertain that teamwork becomes zero tolerant to friction and ill-treats.

Erratic youth culture

The term 'youth culture' was introduced in the early 1940s and got recognition in the late 1990s (Genova 2019:242). Scholars like Cloete (2012:2) define youth culture as the values, choices, and beliefs in youth's lives. Cloete further illuminates that young people's culture is dynamic as it changes with time. The unpredictable youth culture challenges churches to always review hermeneutics as a different and constantly evolving world (Knoetze 2015:3). This means, for local churches to respond to such erratic changes, they need to ensure that their youth possess the necessary skills and professional knowledge of fundamental matters about young people's culture and youth development processes (Aziz et al. 2017:5). In addition to the youth culture, Aziz (2019:1) alludes that church leadership, including youth leadership, should understand the environment and culture in which they operate in the community. This understanding will give youth ministry a better opportunity to confront challenges antagonising local communities.

Scholars like Aziz et al. (2017:3) concur with the above deliberations that young people's culture is one of the critical characteristics of the community. They also acknowledge that churches, particularly local churches, need to respond to the erratic youth culture as it affects the churches' lives, youth, and community. The respondents added to this reality by articulating that churches should ensure that their development plans and programmes align with contemporary youth culture for effective response. The respondents believe youth ministry will never grow if its leadership is ignorant of the unpredictable young people's culture.

Talent enhancement

The church leadership, including youth leadership, should ensure that they unveil talent within youth in their churches (Bariu 2017:303). In acknowledging the importance of identifying and developing talents, Aziz (2020:5) postulates that church leaders should unearth and develop talent within church structures as the outcome would benefit both the church and the community. Authors like White and Acheampong (2017:6), Buys and Nogueira (2019:9),

Kwaramba and Dreyer (2019:2), Buys, Korevaar, and Stubbs (2020:4) support the idea of unearthing and developing talent inside church walls. However, they urge churches to invite the Holy Spirit to lead such processes. These academics argue that no segments (including women, youth, disabled people, people with low incomes, etc.) should be overlooked. The respondents supported the above debates, though they emphasised that local churches' role is to unveil and enhance talent among youth through youth ministry structures.

According to the respondents, youth leaders ought to ensure that youth ministry programmes are organised in a manner that exhumes talent. Most importantly, youth inclusion must include opportunities such as involvement in critical skills such as problem-solving. Such skills create chances for young people to operate at a strategic level, even at corporate institutions. Landman and Yates (2018:4) support including young people in various roles as they believe that youth have numerous talents that need appropriate management. Therefore, for these reasons, churches, mostly local churches, need to support youth talents and use them to improve the church and the community (Kgatle 2018:6). Kabongo (2019:6) agrees with Kgatle, as he believes that youth talents must be nurtured appropriately to benefit the church, youth, and the entire community.

Servant leadership

Robert Greenleaf introduced the term servant leadership in 1970 (Magezi 2015:6). As for Magezi, this term is usually used in the management literature. Nevertheless, the study centred around the Christian perspective, and therefore, biblical servant leadership has been deliberated. Biblically, Matthew 20:20–28 and Mark 10:35–45 narrate Jesus Christ as the former servant leader. Kgatle (2018:3) asserts that in the above deliberation, Jesus also talked in context about servanthood and leadership broadly. In light of the above, churches, particularly local churches, need to adopt servant leadership as their leadership style to implement changes that signify the servanthood of Jesus Christ (Osmer 2008:192). This author introduced servant leadership with the final task, namely the pragmatic task of his four tasks of theological interpretation. In this pragmatic task, Osmer emphasises crafting and executing strategies of action that produce the anticipated results (Osmer 2008:176). Considering the above, Kgatle (2018:3) agrees that if servant leadership is implemented appropriately, it is likely that the company's performance be improved. Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020:5) exhort that for the company to perform well, servant leadership needs managerial qualities that would assist the leadership in making conversant decisions when dealing with management matters such as strategic management.

Moreover, servant leadership would also need characteristics like courage, empathy, wisdom, integrity, compassion, and so forth, but they would always trust and be obedient to God.

Du Plessis and Nkambule add to the above characteristics by illuminating that the excellent significant feature of servant leadership is being able to execute a change of heart in other people. Correspondingly, the respondents alluded that they name themselves servants who work for people. In their view, servant leaders need to be God-sent, empathise and sympathise with all kinds of people, including the marginalised. Considering the above, Ottuh (2020:11) postulates that youth leaders should take note of the Scripture in John 13, as this chapter gives an excellent example of servant leadership. The Scripture outlines that the master or leader is expected to be in the forefront as the servant leader for all and lead by example. Further, the passage engrains humility and selflessness among the church leadership, including young people leadership. As for the respondents, leaders are expected to play a fundamental role in reshaping the mentality of selfishness, bossiness, arrogance, and more inside church walls and the entire community. As described, for the church and youth leaders to be servant leaders, they need to put their followers' interests first, empower them, and help them develop their full individual capacities and skills (Osmer 2008:192; Stenschke 2017:10).

Parent involvement

Young people are God's gifts to parents, and parents are responsible for raising them to serve God with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength (Strong 2014:3). Furthermore, parents are expected to support evolving and transferring of the gospel-oriented faith to young people from their early life stages. Nel (2018:267) concurs with the above deliberations and further accentuates that it takes the entire church to make a Christian. Therefore, it is empirical for parents to consistently and strongly partner with youth within youth ministry structures. To emphasise the importance of partnership with parents, some respondents alluded that most young people in their churches ordinarily follow instructions and the examples from their parents, whether good or bad, in shaping their lives. The respondents further encouraged the partnership with the youth ministry as they articulated that it supports youth ministry in physical aspects like transportation, funds, equipment, and other material things that might be needed.

However, parents' support is not limited to the physical element as they join youth prayers. In other words, parents' partnership is inevitable for youth ministry to attain its goals as they also bring a wealth of experience and knowledge. For this reason, the efficiency and effectiveness of youth ministry need to stimulate a solid partnership with parents and ensure that the rest of the membership embraces it (Nel 2018:263). Several scholars (Chifeche & Dreyer 2019:3; Cloete 2014:5; Mangayi 2018:9; Molobi 2016:7) embrace the partnership with parents. These academics expand on this discussion by articulating that youth ministries must partner with other developmental role players like the government, faith based organisations, and community development organisations.

Youth theology

The term 'theology' etymology is derived from two Greek words, namely '*theos*', meaning God, and '*logos*' meaning word. Theology is the study of the word of God and the understanding of his nature, including how he reveals himself to his people (Strong 2015:3). Jackson (2016:34) coincides with the above explanations that theology is the study of God and thinking about him. However, he further expatiates the debate by enunciating that if theology is the study of God's word, youth ministry's theology should mean studying God's word and thinking about him through the lens of work with youth. In this light, Strong (2015:1) accentuates that for effective and efficient youth ministry, church leadership needs to take seriously and implant theology as the foundation. Using theology as a basis in youth ministry is fundamental as it guides young people to God's presence and imparts youth with the Word of God. For this reason, youth leaders should ascertain that youth theology is eloquently employed in youth ministry and is used to guide young people already in the church and new believers who have just arrived in the community of faith (Moser & Nel 2019:6). The respondents stressed the significance of youth theology in youth ministry. For them, youth theology forms the basis of their youth ministry structures. They use various stages in youth theology to introduce young people to the Word of God. For example, they have diverse teachings for different ages and groups that assist youth with theology to grow and mature in the Lord. In other words, the beginners' classes are different to the classes of the other youth who have been in the church for a longer period. The respondents also argued that youth is facing several difficulties in the world. Thus, they need something to uplift them spiritually and maturely. Hence, youth ministry and youth theology are profound. In this regard, Chiroma (2019:7) utters that church structures, including youth ministries, must understand youth ministry's theology.

Interface of youth ministry and community development as catalysts for transformation

A number of scholars contend that the church should actively engage with individuals experiencing various forms of adversity, such as those who are impoverished, afflicted with HIV and AIDS, vulnerable children, individuals affected by gender-related challenges, and those involved in efforts to address crime and corruption (Akanbi & Beyers 2017:1; Modise 2018a:15; Mutemwa et al. 2018:3; Van Niekerk 2014:4; Verster 2012:83). According to Van der Westhuizen and Swart (2015:731), it may be argued that the church has historically played a significant role in providing care for vulnerable individuals within communities. Similarly, it is logical that the church often attracts its members from the same community that is confronted with similar challenges. One potential strategy for the church to attain this objective would be to actively engage the younger demographic. According to Adeline and Okechukwu (2015:50), the wheel

of community development is reliant on the productivity and creativity shown by young people. Based on the aforementioned reasoning, it is recommended that churches should include young people from youth ministries to effectively interact with communities in order to tackle these difficulties.

According to Baron (2017:4), it is posited that the involvement of young people in community development activities might provide advantages for both the church and the wider community. According to Jones (2003:13), there has been a significant shift in the perception of youth ministry, transitioning from a peripheral activity to an essential component for churches aiming to exert influence within their communities. Youth ministry serves as a platform that effectively engages individuals, especially the younger demographic, to actively participate in church activities by offering them an opportunity to showcase their unique abilities and aptitudes. The abilities mentioned include many activities such as spreading religious teachings, engaging in evangelism, worshipping within a religious setting, participating in community service, and providing encouragement to others (Aziz 2017:4). The level of youth engagement aligns with the assertion made by Moser and Nel (2019:2) that youth ministry should foster lasting impact in the lives of Christian children and young people, and serve as a method to attract young people, both inside and outside the church, to participate in youth-oriented activities.

Furthermore, according to Magezi (2019b:5), community mobilisation is characterised as a systematic procedure that seeks to raise awareness within the church about its responsibilities and duties within the community. The church is required to collaborate with the community in order to address the many needs of individuals, including physical, spiritual, economic, psychological, and social aspects. Local churches should engage together with local communities in addressing their own needs by utilising their own resources and indigenous knowledge (Scott et al. 2014:2). For these scholars, this method serves to foster and empower individuals in envisioning and shaping their future by using the few resources that are accessible within their communities. During the course of this process, the community is equipped with the necessary resources to effectively address the needs of its members, while taking into consideration the constraints imposed by the restricted availability of resources. Therefore, this method facilitates the enhancement of the capabilities of local churches and communities in promoting community development. The process of church and community mobilisation serves to awaken and foster the church's comprehension of its biblical responsibility for comprehensive service (Magezi 2019a:6).

People have an inherent right to lead a life characterised by dignity, whereas religious institutions, namely churches, have the responsibility of actively promoting and

safeguarding human rights. According to Chiroma and Muriithi (2019:6), it is said that young people have the capacity and ability to actively participate in advocating for social justice and driving societal reform. Hence, there are high expectations placed upon the younger generation; nonetheless, they seem to exhibit disengagement or are being excluded from participating in communal endeavours. According to Costanza-Chock (2012:1), there is a prevailing perception that young people play a significant role in dynamic social movements that have the power to alter the trajectory of human history. One such example is that in October 2015, a student-led campaign known as the '#Fees Must Fall' initiative was organised. The aforementioned campaign led to favourable outcomes, as South African colleges had difficulties in raising tuition costs for the academic year of 2016. This exemplifies the importance of including the perspectives of young individuals within the community. This aligns with the argument made by Beukes and Van der Westhuizen (2016:1) that it is crucial to give voice to the perspectives of young people, particularly within the context of the church. The younger generation has the capacity to embrace the task of promoting social justice and facilitating societal reform. According to Chiroma and Muriithi (2019:6), one of the key objectives of youth ministry is to provide young people with the necessary tools and knowledge to promote social change and justice. In light of this, it is imperative for youth ministry to actively promote the cultivation of a secure environment and the enhancement of communities. The engagement of young individuals in social movements has the potential to provide valuable perspectives and understandings. Subsequently, the church is compelled to engage in the ongoing processes of societal development occurring within the community. Engaging in other courses of action would have adverse consequences for the church's global mission, ultimately resulting in the church losing its relevance as an institution. In order to maintain its relevance within the community, it is imperative for the church to actively engage in the processes of social cohesion and social transformation. This is particularly significant in the context of South Africa, where the nation is currently undergoing a transformative period. Consequently, the church has a unique opportunity to play a pivotal role in shaping the community (Van Wyk 2017:9).

Social action is a collaborative process in which individuals come together with the aim of effecting transformative change in their lives. Social action refers to collective efforts that prioritise learning and change, emphasising collaboration rather than individual achievements. According to Pillay (2017:1), it is argued that churches, as agents of transformation, should actively participate in activities pertaining to social change. According to Baron (2017:5), it is argued that churches should not just function as self-contained organisations, but rather actively engage with societal concerns that hinder progress within local communities. However, it is essential that young people actively participate in conjunction with their religious institutions in order to tackle the societal challenges that afflict communities.

Hence, it is imperative for young leaders to encourage active engagement of church youth in social action initiatives via the platform of youth ministry. The involvement of young people in community-transforming activities is vital. This assertion is made based on the observation that a significant proportion of issues within the community are often identified by those belonging to the younger demographic. One viewpoint that was highlighted, is the importance of youth to be actively involved and engage with others. Failure to do so may result in missing out on significant information or opportunities. Important information emerged indicating that a significant number of young individuals within their church are actively involved in the Mayibuye neighbourhood. Consequently, it is imperative that they be included in social initiatives. It is crucial to bear in mind that particular individuals may be directly impacted by certain difficulties, thereby emphasising the need for their involvement. According to Weber (2017:5), it is important for youth ministry to ensure that its programming is aligned with the methods of resolving societal difficulties that young people encounter in conjunction with their process of faith development. Hence, it is of utmost importance that youth ministry places significant emphasis on addressing social issues, namely those pertaining to young people. In due course, the implementation of social action is expected to invigorate the youth population, as it arises from the dissemination of the teachings of God, the propagation of the gospel, and the facilitation of young individuals' connection with the divine existence (Woodbridge & Joynt 2019:4).

According to Idike and Eme (2015:59), it is posited that the involvement of young individuals in developmental activities is crucial, as their contributions seem to play a pivotal role in various community-building processes. The youth demographic has a significant numerical advantage within communities, therefore making it imperative for communities to use this factor as a means to actively include them in community development initiatives. In light of the aforementioned viewpoint, it is evident that the youth have the ability to expedite economic progress and have a substantial influence on the social advancement of their communities (Udensi et al. 2013:61). According to Udensi et al. (2013:65), the participation of young people in community development endeavours should have a double purpose. This entails equipping them with knowledge and skills, while concurrently effecting positive transformations within the communities themselves. Hence, we also believe that it is important to include young people in decision-making and implementation processes at significant levels. This approach is crucial for the long-term sustainability of youth development initiatives and community development programmes.

Similarly, according to Iwuchukwu, Ogbonna and Agboti (2015:41), it is essential to provide young people with the opportunity to participate in community transformation endeavours. The authors believe that the provision of such chances would cultivate and equip young people with the necessary skills and attributes to effectively and responsibly contribute to their communities. According to Baron (2017:5), he aligns with the aforementioned viewpoint and also elaborates on the discussion by asserting that churches have to engage young people in endeavours that bring about transformative effects on the lives of community members. In addition, it is essential for churches to cultivate young people engagement in initiatives aimed at effecting social change within their communities. The youth ministry needs to prioritise the conscientious consideration of young people's social needs within its initiatives. Youth programming should include youth culture as a crucial aspect to effectively address the everyday difficulties and experiences encountered by young people (Weber 2017:5). It is said that the involvement of young individuals in leadership roles within various groups, such as churches and local communities, is crucial for the purpose of effecting positive transformation and development (Ragira, Wepukhulu & Angeline 2017:49).

Recommendations

The findings of this study lead to the following recommendations:

- Churches should develop a youth culture that will enable young people to take initiative in community development.
- Churches, particularly local churches, should include young people in leadership roles.
- Churches need to use young people as transformational catalysts within communities.
- The researchers of this study argue that the study is not conclusive and therefore recommend similar studies to be conducted in other fields and/or provinces.

Conclusion

The study gave a synopsis of youth ministry, particularly Christian youth ministry involvement in community development in the Mayibuye area of Tembisa Township in Gauteng province, South Africa. The article is based on findings from qualitative research that applied Richard Osmer's theory of theological interpretation. In this model, the researchers used the descriptive-empirical task to collect and analyse data from the theory, and theories of arts and sciences were also used in interpreting the data. The perspectives, principles, and critical factors in strategic management have assisted in formulating the strategy to strengthen youth ministry involvement in community development. The study determined gaps and recommended further empirical studies on youth ministry and community development among local churches. The researchers believe that the study is not conclusive, hence they recommend further similar empirical studies in other fields or provinces. Also, the researchers believe that the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in areas like business, community development, development, theology and development, and youth ministry.

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Authors' contributions

M.M. did the conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, and writing of the original draft for this article. J.W.B. was involved in analysis and conceptualisation as well as project administration. J.B. provided supervision, writing review and editing of the article.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Theology and Religions and ethics consent was received on 5 August 2020. The ethics approval number is T046/20.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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