

AN INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACH TO A SUSTAINABLE YOUTH MINISTRY (ACTS 16:1-3) IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

There have been widespread apprehensions in contemporary society about the enduring faith of young people. The observation is that adolescents are more disposed to a nominal assent to faith rather than a strong heart conviction. Faith leaders and parents have responded with anxiety, assuming that the heritage of faith may become moribund, in the face of the emergent realities of postmodernism. Some have laid the blame for this declension in the faith commitments of young people on the faith community, described in this study as the amalgam of the family and the church. The home has not provided the healthy environment expedient to the faith maturation of youth. The church's model of age-segregated rather than age-integrated youth ministry has not offered much. These issues provided the stimulus for the study of an intergenerational approach to a sustainable youth ministry in an African Context. Based on an exegetical analysis (Acts 16:1-3), the study explored the need for the faith community to respond with an intergenerational approach in transferring a sustainable legacy of faith to the next generation. Congregations must address the average level commitment of leadership to youth ministry, and an age-segregated youth ministry model that leaves room for significant improvement. The study recommends a more compelling leadership strategy for youth ministry and a culture shift to a contextual intergenerational paradigm for effective youth ministry. More adult modeling of the faith is also required both in the home and in the church.

Keywords: Faith, Faith Community, Intergenerational, Youth, Youth Ministry.

Introduction

Pundits are quite pessimistic of young people today owning the faith they inherited. Faith leaders and parents have responded with anxiety, assuming that raising youths with lasting faith is unlikely (Pew, 2009, p. 4). Almost every study on youth and millennial shows that when it comes to moral behavior, there is a very thin line between secular and Christian students.¹ The narratives around this issue may be grossly overstated; however, the truth lies somewhere between good news and bad news.

A survey reveals that there has been significant decline of youth in participation/membership in both real numbers and percent of population in Mainline Protestant churches (GSS, 2013, p. 2). In a similar study reported in Pew Research Forum by Drew Dyck (2009), a substantial percentage of young adults in the United States claim to be at least nominally Christian. Yet a third of 18 to 30-year-olds also say they are religiously unaffiliated. Sadly, most of them were once in church. Significantly, nearly all come from homes with lukewarm nominal faith (Pew Research Centre, 2010, p. 88). It is natural to react to these reports, based on the assumption that the scenarios may not be applicable to other contexts, especially to Africa. However, what must never be overlooked is that youth culture is global and cosmopolitan. Popular culture is ubiquitous. For example, young people across Africa are developing their own form of rap music, which has its origins in rap music from the USA and the UK. The explosion of the internet and the social media has hit the youth the most with seismic proportions, creating a global youth tribe.

Matters Arising

The privilege of working with and among youths for almost three decades, reinforces the writer's view that the issues raised by the reports reviewed in this study are similar to the issues that are rife among youths in the Nigerian church and resonate with the realities of young people in most parts of the world today.²

Some have laid the blame for the declension in the faith commitments of young people on youth ministry and its leaders. The observation has also been made that homes modeling lukewarm faith do not create enduring faith in children. Young people from homes where faith is practiced seriously (but not perfectly) are strongly predicted to carry that faith into adulthood. Parents abdicate their responsibilities in the spiritual maturation of their children to Sunday school teachers and Youth minister. Invariably, evolving an exemplary environment of faith for young people in the church requires that: (1) parents or wardens are committed to their own faith and the church, (2) parents are intentional about passing on their faith values to their children and (3) parents and children have a strong relationship (Dudley, 1999, p. 111).

The programs and activities churned out in local churches, to attract and endear teenagers have little or nothing to do with concepts of faith. This is pertinent in view of the highly secularized and entertaining content, which many acclaimed youth ministers and ministries are stuffing this emerging generation with. The church is also liable to the extent that "churches and para-church youth ministries alike have increasingly held to a single strategy that has become the most common characteristic of youth ministry: the isolation of teenagers from the adult world and particularly from their own parents (DeVries, 1994, p. 21). In this model, youths are auxiliary to the main life of the church. What is commonplace is that they relate to the church through the intermediary of one or two people who are the appointed youth workers or ministers. These issues provide a compelling stimulus for this study. The paper advocates an intergenerational approach to a sustainable youth ministry—that

facilitates an enabling environment that shapes, influences and invest in attitudes and behaviors that validate a fervent and enduring faith in its youth. In the words of Chuck Stecker (2006), "A true 'intergenerational' environment does not mean all generations are simply in the same building at the same time. It means that we are intentionally bringing people together for the purpose of developing intergenerational relationships (p. 92).

Concept of Youth and Youth Ministry

Youth is the time of life when one is young, but often means the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity). It is also considered as the appearance, freshness, vigor, spirit, and so forth, characteristic of one who is young. It is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence (Akinsulire, 2018, p. 177). In much of sub-Saharan Africa, the term 'youth' is associated with young people from 15 to 30 or even 35 years of age. Youth in Nigeria includes all members of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 15 to 29 (National Youth Policy, 2019, p. 9). Academics and pundits continue an ongoing debate as to the age range of youth and the exact meaning of the related terms. In this paper the terms youth, young people, adolescent and teenager are used interchangeably referring to that age group between childhood and adulthood. Historians, social theorists, and even some psychologists have argued that adolescence was the result of "our cultural transitions as we moved into a modernized and globalized world." Adolescence, they assert, is a construction of cultural change more than strict biological or psychological realities (Adelson, 1986, p. 270). Youth ministry is the purposeful and persistent quest through natural and supernatural interventions to expose, transmit, and otherwise engage young people with biblically based communication, central to the Christian faith within context of a faith community. Its ultimate end is to cultivate the transformation of youth to Christlikeness. To Senter (2010), the "church must view youth ministry not so much as a means of turning out models of Christian living in order to perpetuate existing church ministries, but as the best opportunity to launch a vital Christian witness for the next generation" (p. 117).

The Concept: Intergenerational

Intergenerational is generally understood as members of two or more different generations having some degree of mutual, influential relationship developed through cooperative interaction to achieve common goals, as opposed to multigenerational settings where several generations are in proximity with each other, but not necessarily engaged in meaningful relationships (Villar, 2007, pp. 155-117). The Bible provides a solid basis for intergenerational ministry. Biblical writers describe what positive interaction between the generations looks like and place value on both the young and the old in ways that are profound.³ House churches of the first century were places in which all generations were present. The generations remained integrated throughout much of Christian history until fairly recently.

The society today has become so fragmented that many, even in Christian families, do not have the parental guidance to provide a relational context for discipleship. The bulk of the church membership does not interact on a regular basis with the youth. While the church is

called a family, in reality its ministries are stratified by age groups or special needs. Kirk and Thome (2011) in *Missional Youth Ministry* describe the effect of the stratification of youth ministry this way: “Most teenagers’ primary church experience is a series of segregated activities, most of which bear little resemblance to the practices of the rest of the church. Consequently, when teenagers graduate from high school and youth group, they feel like their most meaningful church experiences have ended...” (p. 22).

The Importance of Intergenerational Ministry

Why the need for intergenerational ministry? The family is the ideal starting group for discipleship development. The church family comes into teens’ lives in this context and can enlarge discipleship training or may have to step-in for teens that could not experience this at home. James White (1998), a contemporary champion of intergenerational learning, defines Intergenerational Religious Education as “two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common-experience, parallel-learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive-sharing” (p. 18). This is a pertinent illustration of intergenerational discipleship training.

Apart from the supposition that intergenerational faith formation as a valid church ministry model is scriptural, intergenerational ministry enables the whole church to benefit from each individual’s God-given gifts and enables Christians to fully live out being the body of Christ and the family of faith. Beckwith (2004) and Hall (2006) highlight some benefits for both adults and children: (1) A sense of belonging— intergenerational faith communities provide experiences that foster deep sense of belonging in children, teens and adults; all feel welcome and received. Forming relationships with [young people] is the responsibility of all members of the community, not just those who work with them in educational programs. (2) Support for troubled families— all faith communities have families who are facing severe difficulties. An intergenerational congregation can provide opportunities of bringing the generations together to uniquely benefit these families. (3) Better use of resources - both young and old have resources to share. Generational homogenization results in an overabundance of one type of resources in certain congregations. While younger leaders may have a plethora of fresh ideas and plenty of energy, they lack the experience and deep spiritual resources of more seasoned leaders who have navigated repeatedly the multifarious, often troubled waters of a rapidly growing faith community. Intergenerational faith communities bring together the young, fresh thinkers with the older, wiser veterans, creating an integrated profusion of resources. (4) Character growth— Hall believes that bringing all the generations together yields unique opportunities for character growth. He emphasized that negotiating contradictory generational priorities can breed godliness (p. 33). (5) Sharing one another’s spiritual journeys— Intergenerational Christian experiences provide a setting for adult faith development just as it will also contribute to the faith maturity of the younger generation.

Search Institute, which has been conducting global research on spiritual development for 50 years notes that one fundamental aspect of spiritual development is interconnecting, that is, “linking oneself to narratives, communities, mentors, beliefs, traditions, and/or practices that remain significant over time.” (Roehlkepartain, 2012).

It is important that the faith community initiates a positive and accommodating atmosphere for its youth. Too often, young generations avoid older folk in church because they are made to feel like secondary members, without leadership opportunities, in a place where the ministries are geared towards a different generation. At the same time, older adults' feel threatened [or slighted] when their opinions are dismissed or deeply valued traditions labeled outdated (Whitesel&Hunter, 2000, p.35). Stereotypes from all sides worsen the situation. It is commonplace to hear adults describe teenagers using adjectives such as 'rude,' 'wild,' and 'irresponsible.' On the other hand youths feel like outsiders in relation to the church family in which they have grown up. Many teenagers are convinced that older people are suspicious and judgmental of them. The old are thought of as slow, inflexible, judgmental, out-of-touch, boring, restrictive, and closed, while the young are considered irresponsible, stubborn, relativistic, and careless. This altercation of stereotypes is also a major contributor to the gap and wall between both generations.

Implementing an Intergenerational Ministry Strategy

According to a Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) report by Brad Griffin (2011), churches embracing the intergenerational paradigm are finding out that simple proximity does not equal relationships. As it seems, intergenerational youth ministry ends up being a great new catch phrase that in practice tends to be really vague to most churches. FYI advises that congregations that would want to switch back to intergenerational ministry must ask questions like, "How do we get started?" and "How do we get the rest of everyone in this?" The institute offers some insights on factors it considers most critical when initiating intergenerational ministry in existing congregations. Church leaders are to start by assessing the current conditions. Leadership needs to prayerfully and honestly assess current ministry practices and motives, including examining how deeply age-stratified ministry is valued among the leadership and membership of the congregation and how open the church will be to change (Griffin, 2011).

The institute also advises that congregations should begin with existing structures. Intergenerational ministry is context-specific and should be customized to fit a particular church's history, culture, location, staff, and vision – it is not "one size fits all" (Griffin, 2011), There is also the need to identify key influencers in the congregation who already have an intergenerational mindset and enlist their help. Key influencers will be helpful in conscripting others and creating the needed drive to get the buy-in of ever one. If it is going to be sustainable, FYI recommends the establishment of intergenerational community as a core value. The institute emphasize that becoming intergenerational is nothing short of a paradigm shift, and the whole church must value intergenerational relationships and community at a core philosophical level. This shift requires that all of the leaders of the church (not just the youth leader) buy into the value of intergenerational ministry and commit to changing the culture of the church over the long haul.

Another factor proposed by FYI is to keep intergenerational values in balance with age-specific ministry. Although this study subscribes to the basic premise that intergenerational faith experiences uniquely nurture spiritual growth and development in both adults and children, it is however important to clarify that the study is not in any way recommending

that all activities of a faith community be conducted with all ages present. There are functional, valid and important reasons to gather by age or stage or interest; spiritual growth and development can and indeed does happen when youth gather separately. This writer therefore agrees with FYI that establishing intergenerational community does not mean eradicating age-specific ministries. As important as it is to embrace intergenerational values at a core level, it is also important to keep that in balance with age-specific ministry. It should not be flagrantly dismissed that exclusively age-specific ministry may be “working” to varying degrees, but has not proven sustainable for ongoing transmission of faith among young adults who have grown up exclusively in youth ministries.

Finally, leadership must be intentional and strategic in rolling out the intergenerational strategy. Just like in any typical implementation of a strategy, there is need for a judicious execution. It would be foolhardy to try to reinvent everything at once. The expedient thing to do would be to start small and avoid big sweeping program changes, particularly before there is adequate ownership.

Youth in the African Context

According to the United Nations, Africa has the largest concentration of young people in the world. 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa in 2015 representing nearly 20% of Africa’s population, making up one fifth of the world’s youth population, excluding African youth population in diaspora (UN-OSSA, n.d.). This number is expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century. Africa’s youthful population presents a powerful opportunity for accelerated economic growth and innovation just as the demographic also indicates economic and social challenges.

First, there is a generation gap between youth and older people. The adult culture which forms the mainstream culture continues to conflict with youth subculture. Many African societies are still highly patriarchal. Masculinity, or being a man, is associated with dominance, assertiveness and aggression. Violence is often used as a means of control by men over women and children or young people. Patriarchy is a form of male domination based on the powerful role of the father as head of the household and can be expressed in a multitude of ways (Sathiparsad, Taylor& Dlamini,2008, p. 5). The forms of control and subordination characteristic of patriarchal practices cut across cultural and religious boundaries. The set of values of youth are often stereotyped as deviant, while youths feel alienated, perceiving adult folks as overbearing and judgmental. In the quest for sense of belonging and identity, young people find solace in peer groups. When peer groups become a means of escape from a dysfunctional family and invariably adult supervision, youths may be lured into risk behaviors, as they seek acceptance and a sense of autonomy in groups involved in negative activities. The problems of sexual experimentations, drug abuse, cultism, cybercrimes and a host of other social vices among young people are commonly attributable to peer group influence.

Poor political leadership informs the bad governance that is Africa’s greatest barrier to social and economic development. This is a major factor that threatens the growing youth demography in the region. What is meant to be an opportunity for sustainable growth is

becoming a menace to social cohesion, as the growing youth population is becoming restive and disoriented as appropriate policies are not implemented to harness the dividend. With the rise in unemployment and poor economic policies, youth feel increasingly stifled and disempowered, responding with acts of social unrest as well as massive migration in search of opportunities in other promising climes.

Young people have developed dependency syndrome on parents, politicians and donor aid stalling youths' active and meaningful participation in societal transformation. They are denied the opportunity to live a dream of their own, their dreams and aspirations have been dashed by those who should create the leverage for their rising and well-being. Failure in leadership is not exclusive to political or socio-economic sectors. The church in Africa is not exempt from the problem of leadership. Leadership letdown in the church has resulted in lack of role modeling for young people. The instances of constant of families in the church, divorce, schism, immorality and unwholesome behavior within the ranks of clergy, materialism, and the inability of church leadership to creatively respond to the needs of youths, has led to the waning trust of young people in spiritual leadership.

An intergenerational approach to Youth ministry creates the opportunity for the church to take the youth more seriously, build bridges across the gaps and facilitate the atmosphere for a sense of identity and belonging for young people. Like Weber (2015) rightly notes, youth faith and identity formation impact how they live, the decisions and life choices they make and how they understand their faith amidst contesting faith traditions and world views. "When these are not fully understood in how we do youth ministry, young people do not 'own their faith', resulting in them not maturing in their relationship with Christ" (p. 5). In Africa, the interpersonal relationships between various generations cannot be overstated. Intergenerational sharing and dialogue encourage the conservation and transmission of values and traditions of the communities from which these youth come.

Exegetical Analysis of Intergenerational Youth Ministry in Acts 16:1-3

Rationale and Context of Text

The major reason this passage is significant to this study is because it establishes the historical setting of the intergenerational relationship between Paul and Timothy and between Timothy and his mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois). And very importantly verse 2 reinforces the emphasis on the place of the faith community in the spiritual formation of the youth. The focus of exegesis here is to show the significance of the community of faith in transmitting a sustainable faith to the next generation.

The selected text (Act 16:1-3) is set in a broader context of the beginning of Paul's second missionary. Paul and Barnabas were set to go on a return mission to strengthen the churches they had planted in Cyprus and Asia Minor in their first journey. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark but Paul disagreed with this suggestion because Mark had deserted them earlier in Pamphylia (cf. 13:13). The argument became such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

Paul and Silas, traveling west, probably crossed the Taurus Mountains at a pass called the Cilician Gates (Lawrence, 2006, p. 26). They proceeded on into Lycaonian Galatia, first to Derbe and then to Lystra. At Lystra Paul is acquainted with a young believer named Timothy. He was of mixed parentage; his mother was Jewish and his father was a Greek. Mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles were more common outside Palestine than within it (Bruce, 1981, p. 322).

Probably Timothy had been converted under Paul's ministry during the apostle's first visit to Lystra (cf. 1 Tim 1:2). Some suggest he had been led to the Lord by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5). Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were both sincere Jews, and had instructed Timothy in the Hebrew Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). At any rate, he became Paul's protégé. This young man now filled the place that John Mark had occupied on the first journey, before Mark deserted the team. Timothy was to become one of Paul's closest friends and most faithful fellow workers (cf. 20:4). "He [Paul] was always well aware of the necessity of training a new generation for the work and for the days that lay ahead (Barclay, 1962, p. 129). Timothy at a very young age had a glowing reputation of piety and virtue among the community of believers in Iconium and Lystra. He had been religiously educated and was carefully trained in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and was therefore positioned and well prepared for the work to which God now called him.

Text and Translation

Acts 16:1-3

1 Κατήντησεν δὲ καὶ εἰς Δέρβην καὶ εἰς Λύστραν. καὶ ἰδὼν μαθητὴς τῶν ἐκεῖ ὀνόματι Τιμόθεος, υἱὸς γυναικὸς Ἰουδαίας πιστῆς, πατρὸς δὲ Ἑλλήνος,
2 ὃς ἐμαρτυρεῖτο ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Λύστροις καὶ Ἰκονίᾳ ἀδελφῶν·
3 τοῦτον ἠθέλησεν ὁ Παῦλος σὺν αὐτῷ ἐξελθεῖν, καὶ λαβὼν περιέτεμεν αὐτὸν διὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἐκείνοις, ἥδεισαν γὰρ ὅτι Ἕλλην ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ὕπηρχεν.

Selected English Version (NIV)

1 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Outline of Text

The distinctives of an Intergenerational youth ministry

1. Conversion of Youth into the Life of Faith
2. Cultivation of Youth for the Life of Faith
3. Commendation of Youth by the Community of Faith
4. Commissioning of Youth for the Work of Faith

Verse-by-Verse Analysis

Verse 1: He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek.

In Derbe Paul had great success on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:20-21). In Lystra, a crowd had tried to deify Paul and Barnabas as pagan gods (Acts 14:8-20) and then they stoned him (Acts 14:19) following the dissension stirred by some unbelieving Jews. Paul returns on a mission to confirm the work and consolidate the churches in cities evangelized in the previous journey. There he met a “certain disciple”. Μαθητῆς *matheetēs* disciple (from μαθάνω *manthano*, meaning: to learn—intentional learning by inquiry and observation) is a person who learns from another by instruction, whether formal or informal. A disciple is an adherent who accepts instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct.

Timothy and his mother were probably converts of Paul from his previous missionary trip to Derbe and Lystra. The phrase introducing Timothy’s mother “a Jewess and a believer” or and “believed” suggest a slightly different meaning from the Greek rendering. Whereas one may deduce that the passage meant that Timothy’s mother was a Jewess and a believer or a Christian or better still a Jewish Christian, the word πιστῆς *pisteēs* is the feminine genitive of the adjective πιστός *pistos*, meaning trustworthy, trustful or faithful (KJV). A direct translation would therefore read like this: Ἰουδαίας πιστῆς, a Jewess faithful, Jewish faithful or a faithful Jew. At any rate, whether she was a faithful Jew or a faithful Christian, it suffice to say that Timothy was product of an environment of religious faith— a factor that may have been preparatory to his acceptance of the Christian faith. Vincent gives a nice summary of the meaning of *pistos*, writing that “it is used (1) of one who shows Himself faithful in the discharge of a duty or the administration of a trust (Matt 24:45). Hence, trustworthy of things that can be relied upon. (2) Confiding; trusting; a believer” (Gal 3:9; 2Cor 6:15; 1Tim 5:16) (Vincent, 1985). The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* seems to capture the concept of ‘faithful’ more succinctly and suitably: firm in adherence to whatever one owes allegiance and implies unswerving adherence to a person or thing or to the oath or promise by which a tie was contracted (“Faithful,” 2021).

Verse 2: The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

Timothy was well spoken of by the Christians in Lystra and Iconium. Well-spoken of (ἐμαρτυρεῖτο *emartureito* from μαρτυρέω *martureō*, meaning: to bear witness, to testify, to bear record) refers to a human declaration of ascertainable facts based on firsthand knowledge or experience and in the present context refers to a good report or having a good reputation. This verb is used of Jesus in Luke: “And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’” (Luke 4:22). He was esteemed highly as a young man of piety and promise. As Bruce puts it, “[he] had made promising progress in the Christian life in the interval [between Paul’s previous visit and his return]” (Bruce, 322). It is quite natural that Timothy was commended by the Christians in Lystra and Iconium rather than those in Lystra and Derbe. Lystra was nearer to Iconium than it was to Derbe. Timothy’s excellent reputation among the brethren may have endeared him to Paul. A good reputation of this kind was an indispensable qualification for Christian leadership. It was as if Paul was head-hunting for suitable hands

who will perpetuate his missionary endeavors in the future. Hence, in Timothy he found a worthy companion and assistant.

Verse 3: Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Jews were not supposed to marry Gentiles, but as it appears the rule may not have been stringent with Jews in Diaspora. As a son of a mixed marriage, Timothy had an anomalous position. Although Jews were forbidden from marrying Gentiles, if it did happen, the children were regarded as Jewish and therefore required to be circumcised. This had not been done for Timothy. Paul's mission was bound to bring him (Timothy) in contact with Jews and that omission whether deliberate or by oversight could jeopardize their apostolic campaign. It was common knowledge among the Jews in the area that Timothy was uncircumcised and of Greek paternity. Hence, Paul had to take the step of circumcising him. Περιτομή (circumcision), the noun of the verb, περιτέμνω, which literally means, literally means to "cut around" was the religious rite of cutting off the foreskin of the male genital organ, signified consecration as well as ethnic identification (Mounce, 2006, p.111). Paul's action has stirred up considerable criticisms. It would be recalled that the Jerusalem Council, (of which Paul was a major protagonist) had determined circumcision was not necessary for salvation (Acts 15:10-11, 19). Elsewhere, he had asserted that circumcision was of no value and positively forbade Gentiles to submit to a rite which could be regarded as means of salvation by works (Gal 5:3) and even opposed the circumcision of Titus another of his protégé (Gal. 2:3-4). This concession in the case of Timothy has been seen by some to be unprincipled and inconsistent with his theology on freedom from works. However, Paul did not circumcise Timothy in order that he be saved. It was an act of expediency for the sake of winning the Jews, and was in accordance with Paul's avowed principle of conduct (1 Cor. 9:20). In the case of Gentile Titus, Paul insisted that he not be circumcised because the Judaizers insisted on circumcision as necessary for salvation, a false doctrine to which Paul would not acquiesce (Stott, 1998, p. 257).

Implication of an Intergenerational Model in Act 16:1-3 for a Sustainable Youth Ministry

The text of study provides key distinctives of an intergenerational model that are vital to a sustainable youth ministry in any faith context.

Conversion of Youth into the Life of Faith

Timothy was introduced to the Christian faith from youth. His first interaction with the Christian faith was with his mother Eunice, who may have been influenced by his grandmother Lois. Timothy's family provided a saintly home that primed him for his own salvation. Youth who grow up in devoted (with reference to nominal) Christian homes are more likely to accept the Christian faith and become convinced of the truth as they grow. This is very instructive for Christian parents and wardens, who must make it an imperative to evolve an enabling environment for their youths to be consecrated to God and be converted to the Christian faith. Youth outreaches, mentoring and counseling schemes should be targeted at reaching out with the Gospel to youths whose parents are not saved.

Cultivation of Youth for the Life of Faith

The passage indicates that Timothy was a disciple, denoting he was being tutored and trained in the way of truth. The influences of cultivation in his life were that of his mother, grandmother and his mentor Paul the apostle. Timothy was cultivated by instruction in the scriptures and by watching and emulating the lives of his forebears. Christian adults, parents, counselors, ministers should be committed to the spiritual upbringing of youths, by providing interventions that expose them to the truth and endear them to engage the truth more meaningfully. They should be first be the model of their message to the young generation. They must first represent before they can present the truth to them. The family and the church must collaborate as a community of faith to evolve creative and relevant mechanisms for aiding the spiritual growth, as well as other significant area of growth of the youth. The community of should be concerned about what legacy of faith they are creating for the emerging generation.

Commendation of Youth by the Community of Faith

Timothy's progress in his Christian walk was acknowledged and commended by other Christians in the faith community in which he grew. The community was part of his growth process, and their approbation or admonition helped gauging and goading Timothy's faith formation. Youths are seekers of approval. As they grow in their faith and make positive choices about their life and faith, they want to be acknowledged, appreciated and affirmed. The community of faith should facilitate an empathetic and non-judgmental atmosphere expedient to the spiritual progress of the youth.

Commissioning of Youth for the Work of Faith

Paul took interest in Timothy and included him in his ministry team even as a youth. Paul recognized the need of new and young blood, and demonstrated it in commissioning Timothy for the missionary task to the Aegean shores. The church must be deliberate and strategic in creating opportunities to integrate youth into the life and purpose of the church. The church should be intentional in offering opportunities that will equip the youth for service within and outside the church. There should also be a deliberate priming and prepping of youth to evolve as future leaders.

Summary and Conclusion

The disturbing narratives around the waning faith commitments of young people in church and the interactions of this writer with Christian youths in various church and para-church contexts, in relation to these narratives, provided the stimulus for this paper. Generally, the paper reveals that there is a declension in the faith commitments of youths in the church. Young people are bereft of the synoptic vision that would make them hold on to their truth claims in the face a critical and pluralistic popular culture. The foundations that should foster convictions in them are frothy and fraught with platitudes of morality, performance based existence and in many instances entertainment driven activities. There is much remaining to be done on part of the family and family of faith to transmit and transfer a sustainable legacy of faith to the next generation. The model of youth ministry practiced by many congregations hitherto has alienated the youth from the life of the church. There is a huge culture gap and wall of worldview between the older and younger generations. Both generations are critical

and antipathetic to each other's lifestyles and worldviews. Rather than engaging the youth culture, the approach of the church has been more of a dogmatic attempt to impose the dominant adult culture with religious undertones, or a laissez-faire tactic indulgent of the immodesty of youth.

It is apparent that the lack of a compelling leadership strategy to forge the youth ministry in many congregations, in view of the emergent realities of the twenty first century may have been contributory to the waning impact of youth ministry. There is a recurring indication that the faith community has a significant role in modeling, molding and bequeathing a dynamic and sustainable faith to the younger generation.

Footnotes

¹ The researcher reviewed a number of surveys on youth and their faith carried out by Pew and Barna.

²This writer has served at various levels of Youth ministry in and outside the Foursquare Church in Nigeria, from being a small group peer leader to a Youth Pastor and ministry leader at a national level for close to 30 years.

¹ The young have an important role to play in the church community (1 John 2:12-13) and should not be despised (1 Tim. 4:12) but live out their faith as an example to all. At the same time, old men and women should receive honor (Lev. 19:32). Gray hair is their beauty, just as the glory of young men is strength (Prov. 20:29). It is a crown of glory, provided they have walked in the way of righteousness (Prov. 16:31).

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