

## THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO THE DECLINING OF HER YOUTH: THE ANGLICAN PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*In our cosmological setting, no one assumes the nomenclature “parent” without having a child or children he/she is parenting. More so, every parent is interested in the wellbeing of his/her children with the view of his/her better tomorrow. This implies that the health and wealth of a parent at the old age can be assessed by how impacting he/she is to the children. A negligent of the parental care to a child because of the child’s wrong behaviour cannot hold water because a failure in his/her (parent) primary duties will certainly be met with repercussion or adverse effect. This is not different from the church. The steady movement of our youths from our churches has been of a great concern because the future of the church is hanging on the youths and our negligence in giving it the needed attention will invariably be showing our churches their way to oblivion and extinction. Hence this work is to suggest way forward in arresting the already noted youth exodus in our churches. This work will adopt a phenomenological approach in its study and will be guided by the theory of causality (cause and effect). This is because the work discovered that the youth exodus from our churches is the effect of a cause. The work therefore recommends that in order to reduce this exodus, our churches must incorporate contemporary stratagems to the youth ministry in establishing the growth of youths. The elders have a role to be flexible and adjust to the ever changing needs of the youths through updating and matching the youth energy and vitality while avoiding old models. The youth must be involved actively and participate responsibly in the work, life and mission of the church.*

**Keywords:** Investigation, Youth, Exodus, Anglican Churches, Way forward.

## **Introduction**

The incessant occurrence of youth exodus from our churches is not new and has been of great concern to different Christian religious bodies. This is because it is not only peculiar to the Anglican church, and it will be an act of self-deceit if we overlook it as not being a serious issue or viewing it as not having a detrimental effect in our churches. It cannot be ignored that the youths are the church of tomorrow hence we often use the assertion, “youths are the leaders of tomorrow”. It will be germane to postulate that any church that casually handles the youths has her future at risk. A view at our churches today will agree with me that the youths are not up to an assumed estimation of 40percent of our population, which implies that the other 60percent is made up of our aged fathers and mothers and this invariably puts the future of the church in question. This is a problem because most of our youths often lack a first-hand faith (a faith of their own) and a relationship with Christ that matters deeply in their own personal life apart from their parent’s pressure. It is based on this premise that this work will examine likely causes of youth exodus from our churches and suggest ways of possible change in the pendulum which will be followed by the conclusion and recommendations.

## **Who is a youth?**

Traditionally, youth is considered to be a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Most of the time, people use the word teenagers when referring to the youth, even though there are no defined age boundaries, hence anyone can be a youth if he so desires. This is in agreement with Fletcher (2019) who posits that there is no universal agreement on who youths are. Some people say that youth is more of a state of mind than a time of life, like former United States Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who famously said, “This world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease.”

However, many government agencies, nonprofit programmes and media outlets define youth as a distinct period of time in life and name ages for when it begins and when it ends. In some instances, youth begins at 8 years old; in others, it starts at 16. The same ambiguity exists in ascertaining when youth ends, for some

it ends at 18, 21 or 25 years old. Legal and Political systems around the world skirt the issue by using terms like adolescent, juvenile and teenager to describe this age range. Sometimes, this is to provide a distinct boundary for when people can begin voting or serving in the military; other times, it is to allow a person to be executed or taken from their families. The age ranges of youth are generally defined in law to meet political objectives, rather than for the genuine wellbeing of young people or society at large.

The Free child Project defines youth as anyone between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. Anytime we refer to children, we are talking about anyone below 11years. When we use the phrase young people, we are including all people under the age of 18. I am not unaware of the fact that some people expand the youthful age to 40years of which is considerable. Therefore, for the purpose of this write up and in consideration of a practical awareness of the age bracket that is predominant in this exodus, I will adopt the boundary of who a youth is as anyone within the ages of 12 and 40years.

### **Understanding the Youths in our Churches**

An ignorance of the fact that we have youths in our churches that are ought to be cared for will bring about our overlooking them which will have its end point in their leaving the church. I feel like throwing light on the need for Pastors and the church to understand the youth, know what is appealing to them and device ways of making it part of the administrative strategy.

- a.) The youths are the first consumers in religious market especially girls. This is because young minds are perfect vessels for information; there is no better time to teach them about God, religion, doctrine, dogmas, and spirituality other than in the younger years. If the youths are encouraged enough to participate in the life of the church when they are younger, they will continue to do that in their adulthood.
- b.) The youths are endowed with ideas of providing fresh perspective on things. Some older people might be too stuck on outdated ideas which they will like to predominate against the fresh and new perspective. It is the goal of the youth to offer their own view on situations from which everyone can

benefit. Their views may not necessarily be the best but should be sampled in most cases.

- c.) Youths like being part of anything going on within their organization. Apart from been in control of things like planning, they should be allowed as helping hands. They can take on the cleaning duties of the church, they can help the older members of the church, they can also help other younger ones in search for God and spirituality. So they should be encouraged in doing that
- d.) Finally, youths are the future of the church; they are the ones that inform the decision of the preacher whether to continue as usual or to imbibe fresh and new approaches. If the youths are not interested in attending our churches, then the church may fall apart and as a result, their consideration should form part of our strategy.

### **Causes of youth exodus from our Churches**

Looking at this topic of discussion, the first question one will be inquisitive to have an answer to is the meaning of “youth exodus” and its causes before attempting way forward. I am aware that I have not said what it is in a recapitulated form of which is intentional. I think it pertinent here before divulging into its causes to briefly say something about it as a way of definition.

Semantically, the word exodus means “mass departure of people, it is a going out, a departure or emigration usually of a large number of people”. Hence, if there is an exodus of people from a place, it means that a lot of people have left that place at the same time. Based on the ongoing, youth exodus (from our churches) means the movement of young people within the assumed ages of 12 to 40years out of our churches in a large number. This movement is not normal and in most cases is orchestrated by some factors which are to be discussed below.

In a research carried out by Barna (2017) on which he was set to investigate reasons for youth exodus from the church, with a research project that was comprising eight national studies, including interviews with teenagers, young adults, parents, youth pastors, and senior pastors. The study of young adults focused on those who were regular churchgoers during their teen years and explored their reasons for disconnection from the church after 15years. No single

reason dominated the break-up between the church and youths, instead, a variety of reasons emerged. Overall, the research uncovered myriad significant themes why nearly three out of every five young Christians disconnected either permanently or for an extended period of time. Some of these issues are specific to us, while others are general.

**a.) Churches seem overprotective**

A few of the defining characteristics of today's youth are their unprecedented access to ideas and worldviews as well as their prodigious or abnormal consumption of popular culture (game, sports, internet, fashion, film, music). As Christians, they express the desire for their faith in Christ to connect to the world they live in. However, much of their experience of Christianity feels boiling, fear-based and risk-averse. Some of them posit that church demonizes everything outside, others perceived that the "church is ignoring the problems of the real world" and laying much emphasis on popular culture as being harmful to them, hence the option is to leave the church.

**b.) Some youths experience of Christianity is shallow**

A second reason that made some youths to leave the church is because something is lacking in their experience of church. Some see the church to be boring, others said that faith is not relevant to their career of interests or that the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough. Sadly, some who attended the church as a teenager said that God seems missing from their experience of church because they attended the church on the pressure of their parents and had no faith base in God. They lack the indoctrination that should have been done earlier by the church and their parents.

**c.) Some youths see Churches as antagonistic to science**

One of the reasons youths are disconnected from churches or from faith is the tension they feel between Christianity and science. The most common of the perceptions in this era is "Christians are too confident they know all the answers". Three out of ten youths with a Christian background feel that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in". Another group embraced the perception that "Christianity is anti-science". And yet others said they have "been turned off by the creation versus evolution debate." Furthermore, the research shows that many science-minded young Christians are

struggling to find ways of staying faithful to their beliefs and to their professional calling in science related industries. There has always been a problem in our understanding of the synergy between religion and science which has been issues for debate but can be summarized in the assertion of Albert Einstein, thus, “science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind”

**d.) Church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, naïve and judgmental**

With unfettered and unregulated access to digital pornography and immersed in a culture that values hyper-sexuality over wholeness, some Christian youths are struggling with how to live meaningful lives in terms of sex and sexuality. One of the significant tensions for many youths is how to live up to the church’s expectations of chastity and sexual purity in this culture, especially as the age of first marriage is now commonly delayed to the late twenties. Research indicates that most Christian youths are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers, even though they are more conservative in their attitudes about sexuality. Some of the youths have made mistakes and were judged in the church and because of that, they have to go to churches that are not interested in the wholeness but in the number.”

**e.) Some youths are leaving the Church because of exclusive nature of Christianity**

Some youths have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance. Today’s youths are the most eclectic generation in terms of relationship, sexuality, religion, technological tools and sources of authority. Most youths want to find areas of common ground with each other, sometimes even if that means glossing over real differences. Some youths view the church to be too exclusive from other religious bodies in her doing, hence they hold that churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faith, which make them most times not to be comfortable with the church and the climax is for them to leave the church.

**f.) The youths are leaving because some Churches have lost their relevance**

The impact of the church in some cases is not much felt and this has made some of our youths to be moving to areas they think they can get the relevance of Christianity. Most of our churches are seeing prophecy and miracles as only acts that are stage managed and may not be true. These have often been avenues that

New Religious Movements are using to steal our members. The church should also learn how to help her youths in providing them with employment and helping them in educational endeavours. Without talking much, I think the reverse of all the things we are going to discuss as ways forward to reducing the level of this exodus are the causes of the exodus. If we will take precautions on them, there is going to be a change in the tide and the future of our churches will be made clear.

### **Possible solutions to reducing youth exodus from our Churches**

- a). **Prayer:** Prayer as an indisputable concept that has a role to play in every human endeavour be it spiritual or natural. In some occasions, we see the exodus of our youths as a devilish strategy to attack the church and reduce her voice in near future. Through prayer, God is able to keep our youths from falling and leaving the church no matter the genuineness of their reason. More so, most of the youths moving, are going because of miracles, signs and wonders. In our prayers, it will not be an aberration to hold God to spice our calling and ministry with signs and wonders. Remember Jesus noted in the Holy writ that most persons were not following Him because of the message but because of the miracles they received. That means shifting the pendulum to the side of much miracle is not new and we need God to release it in our churches so that our youths can see in our churches those things they are going to get outside.
  
- b.) **Making use of the prophetic office:** Prophecy in some of our churches is viewed with unseriousness, which is because of variegation in opinions. As a gift of the Holy Spirit, we believe that some people are gifted with that in our churches both in the ordain and the laity. The question has always been; how do we use it if we do at all? Most of our youths are moving from our churches to areas they receive prophecies, whether right or wrong that is not their concern. If you talk, they will boldly tell you that “our churches do not see road”. I know very well that not everybody has the gift and we will not because of the order of the day go beyond the boundaries of our calling but I know that some of us have the gift and the earlier we put it into work, the better we help the body of Christ. This issue of prophecy is not only leading to youth exodus but also the exodus of the entire members.

c) **Getting the youths Involved:** In most of our churches, hardly do you see the youths being involved in both administration and the spirituality. Most of our churches see the youths as having nothing to contribute as members in the PCC and hence do not incorporate them, and those that are in the PCC may not always be allowed to say things because they are to observe and learn from the elders. It is true that what an elder sees sitting, a youth may not see it haven climbed an Iroko tree but I also believe that travelling is educative and part of learning. The adamancy of our churches in “as it was in the beginning” in her administration is not healthy to her. In the spirituality, Youths should be allowed to Cantor Services, Preach, take Prayers, be involved in evangelism and be part of the system. I have found out that when you make the youths part of the system, they will bring others close but when you make them aliens, they will run away from you. We Pastors should be cautious because most times they say “this pastor doesn’t like youths, we will not go close to him” and from there, their zeal for the church and her service will die and the next thing is exodus. Laying credence on this, Nielson (2016) posits that, it is necessary for the youth to participate greatly in the church. He went further to advice the church to acknowledge the presence of the youths today so that they may learn for the church of tomorrow. In a similar vein, Ragira, Wepukhulu and Savala (2017) opine that churches must be friendly to the youths in fostering their growth spiritually. When the youths are welcomed and allowed to serve alongside adults in the church, they develop a full-fledged member feeling and can be easily identified as members. The youths have a role to present their youthful vision and energy in the activities of the church since they have a great deal to offer as youth in the church. Through meaningful roles, the youths can express their faith hence develop a commitment spirit to the church as their home. The church therefore must tap the talents from the youths and be friendly to them through adequate response to their needs and carefully giving them audience.

d.) **Parental roles:** There were times when parents and children will move to the church together but now it is no longer so. Parents can go to church without seeing their children in the church and will do nothing about it. Sometimes, the parents will tell you after-all he is mature, please he is not mature, as far as he/she is still your child, you have every right to tell him/her what to do especially in his/her Christian life. Most times Parents do not see anything wrong in their children moving from the Anglican Church to these New Religious Movements, they will tell you “church is church”, and before you



know it, the child will lose interest in our Communion. Some of our youths are allowed to attend churches closer to their houses because the Anglican Church is far from them or upon relocation to new areas, the parents will take the children to a near-by church because of the far distance of the Anglican Church. This is never an excuse that can be listened to. Please our mothers and fathers have roles to play in reducing the mass movement of our youths. Again, some attitudes of our fathers and mothers in the church (we mean church members) do make most of these youths to leave the church. The remedy of this mass exodus is a holistic thing in the sense that, the Pastor has a role to play, the youths have roles to play and the church members have roles to play and I wish to pray that we begin it now before it is too late.

e.) **Allowing the youths for their programmes:** The church has the youth arm as a separate arm of the church and they should be allowed to be so. (although with oversight function by the church) I have found out that much infringement into the youth activities and programmes do discourage them. For instance, youths do normally have their programmes both within and without the Diocese and they often times like to attend without knowing if the church has the financial capacity to finance it or not. Always giving them negative answers do discourage them from the church and her activities. The Pastor should learn how to trade with caution in this regard, persons can be approached to help them, they can be encouraged to print an appeal card before the programme, and source the money for the programme. They can also be allowed to make request within the church service. We will try to allow the youths run their programme and possibly support them when necessary; it is a way of encouraging them and making them see the church as their home.

f.) **Providing Job opportunities and help to the youths:** One of the areas we as a church lagging behind is in creating job opportunities and employment for our members. When Paul was writing to the Galatians in chapter six verse ten, (Gal. 6:10) he encouraged them to do good to all men especially those of the same household of faith, i am not sure that he was wrong. Most of our youths are moving to new generation churches because they give them job. Sometimes they use Job opportunities as means of evangelism and our youths will have no option than to go. The church should serve as a safe place, a light at the end of the tunnel and an answer to the questions that fill their minds. It should be a home and a destination for those who are lost, confused, scared and hurt. On this

note, I want to commend the efforts of some of our churches that are trying in this regard and request that other churches and well positioned individuals should help, for in so doing, the youths will be in the church and also make their financial contributions towards the growth of the church.

**g.) Friendliness/Relationship:** We do not want to separate these two concepts because; we view them at this point to work harmoniously. The level of friendship and relationship that exist between the pastor and the youths has a positive or negative effect on the youth. We have said it earlier and we want to unequivocally say it again; most of our behaviours are invariably part of the reasons for the youth exodus. When we show them by words or action that they do not belong in the same household with us, they will look for the place they will be given room for belonging. we do not want to talk about ministerial ethics and etiquette with regards to relationship as means of keeping the flock but we wish to recommend you to these books, “ministerial ethics and etiquette by I. Parker Maxey and the Spirit of leadership by Dr Myles Munroe”. We think these books are powerful tools for cultivating attitudes that influence human actions and help in building the church. In the words of Thompson (2017), the church must show love to the youths by facilitating the youth’s activities through providing them with money and facilities that enable them to grow as disciplines. As the youths commit to the church, the church must also give back to the youths by committing to their needs.

**h.) Reduction of rigidity and embracing elements of extemporaneous, otherwise called balance attendance:** we have discovered with the rising of many churches, the need to shift a beat from the rigidity of church activities to embrace extemporaneous. We often overlook the issue of attendance to church services, it is necessary that we try to balance the attendance in every facet of the church activities to carry everybody along. In accomplishing a balanced attendance, we consider the capacity of the auditorium, the make ups of the congregation and general lifestyle characteristics of the members. We have found out that being much rigid in the streamlined process of the church do affect the youth with its resultant effect in exodus. We will still understand this better in expanding worship and preaching.

**i.) Church’s worship life/ Music:** In the opinion of Gary (2004) effective worship service takes seriously the mental, spiritual, relational and emotional nature of

worshippers. Unfortunately, many worship services tend to focus primarily on the mind without seriously speaking to the whole person. We do not know where to place our worship life in the Anglican Church but frankly speaking, we are lagging behind in that aspect. Most of our youths do not attend our churches on Sundays because of our worship life. They go to churches that give them what they need. Sometimes the state of our instruments is nothing to write home about and you want the youth to come and be clapping hands. Let me bring to your awareness that some youths see and address the Anglican Church as “the church of the old people”. Sometimes you will hear people telling you that the “Anglican Church is my family church, my parents are still there, I used to attend it with them but...” We need to revitalize our worship lives; we thank the church for giving way to include some elements of extemporaneous in our church worships. We are not to throw away our canticles and hymns; they are very inspiring but let us mix them with free services. Have you not heard some of our youths saying “I don’t like this too much hymn, we don’t have time to dance and worship in our churches” and before you know it, they will move to the place they have time to dance? Please we not saying that because of what is going on in some new generation churches, we will throw away our heritage. No, it even worries me that most of our youths cannot sing the hymns and the canticle, which will invariable affect our heritage, we want to say that we should always strike a balance with consideration of our congregation and their lifestyle characteristics.

j.) **Proper indoctrination;** we will make an attempt to simply define indoctrination as the process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically and without questioning them. This is in consonance with the opinions of Funk and Wagnalis (1972) who said that indoctrination is a process of inculcating a person with ideas, attitudes, cognitive strategies or professional methodologies. They went further to observe that humans are social animal inescapably shaped by cultural context and thus some degree of indoctrination is implicit in the parent- child relationship and has an essential function in forming stable communities of shared values. Our churches have not really been doing well in indoctrination. This ought to start from the children ministry but the problem is that most of our children teachers do not have the doctrines and dogmas of the Anglican Church at the tip of their fingers, of which brings a question on how they can teach what they do not know. If our churches should pay serious attention to the children ministry and start to catch them young for Christ and the church by teaching them the word of God and the doctrine of the

church, we think it will be hard for them to leave the church. Most times I like giving example with Jehovah's witness on how they indoctrinate their members and it is hard for one to hear that they changed church, transfused blood or even married an outsider (we are not saying that their own is better neither do we bring them as an example for us to analyze them but we have learnt as a comparative religionist to allow every person his/her religious believes). The earlier we sit up in proper indoctrination from infancy, the better for our churches.

k.) **Improvement on pastor's preaching/ messages;** Here we said that the Pastor's message, sermon and preaching (no matter the nomenclature) should be active and inspiring. The Pastor's message should be relevant and address present and contemporary issues. Most times you hear youths saying "our Pastor does not know how to preach, he comes to the pulpit to read commentary, and he does not relate his messages to the happenings of the environment and others". These are heard more often from the youths than the aged ones and it is a challenge to the Pastors. These days some of our youths come to the church not only to hear the sermon but also learn other areas of life that will help them in improving and equipping their intellectual prowess and property. Most times before you call a verse of the bible, their gadgets have given them the download of the sermon and its contextual application. So we are in an era in which we must make it a point of duty to upgrade in our intellectuality and homiletics, otherwise our youths will be moving in their numbers to areas their grammar and preaching are contemporal. Someone may ask "is grammar the essence of preaching, what relationship have they"?, please my dear they may not have relationship to you but they have a serious relationship because as far as our youths are concern, the grammar matters to them and we must upgrade if we must expect them to be coming to listen to us every Sunday.

l.) **Reduction of charges by Pastors and Churches:** The rate at which some pastors charge some of our youths during occasions especially wedding is discouraging and alarming. Most times, this makes them to leave the church for other churches. It is a fact that there is no church without payment and dues during occasions but it should not be too much and abnormal. Can you imagine a youth preparing for a wedding with its demanding task and after paying all the dues and levies from the church and marriage committee, the pastor will still demand the couple to saw suit for him and give his wife powder money? The worst is that all of these are preconditions for the wedding. While in some

churches, the church helps in sponsoring youths during weddings as means of encouragement. It is a problem and has to be corrected because this and many other charges by pastors and our churches are some of the discouraging factors for our youths. I once heard of some of our churches that when a member dies, the family of the deceased will give a goat and other items to the church if the church must participate actively in the burial. We do not only see it as an irony but also view it as abnormal because in the actual sense reverse ought to be the case. What do you think that will be of a youth that is doing a burial and encounters this as a problem, do you not think that it is enough to make him leave the church? We still have much to do in this regard as ways of encouraging our youths.

### **Conclusion**

There is no gainsaying the fact that the issue of youth exodus from our churches has remained unabated, aberrative and cancerous of which is demanding for a cooperate effort to tackle. We did not intend to bore you with elaborate write ups, but we have seen this issue of “youth exodus from our churches” as a problem that has often times given me concern. We have always asked ourselves about the hope and future of the Anglican Church if we can assume the estimation of the youths in our churches to occupy 30 or 40 percent with our aged mothers and fathers occupying a higher percentage of about 50 or 60. This invariably shows one the fate of our church in near future without much spiritual or statistical consultations. We intentionally and painstakingly took time to write in an elaborate form on the causes and way forward of this menace, of which is yet neither exhaustive nor all-embracing in this write up. We will request that all hands should be on desk in changing the tide, hence we had earlier proposed that it is a joint task of the youths, parents, pastors and the church at large. It will also be necessary for us to know that the earlier we start doing something on this, the better for us otherwise we will see ourselves sitting comfortably and overlooking the future of our church (Anglican Church) going into extinction. The youths are the future of the church and we must try all within our reach to keep them in the church. We do believe that if these points noted here and more can be consciously and meticulously applied, there will be reduction in the level of exodus of our youths from our churches.

### **Recommendations**

Having examined the topic at hand with insights drawn from available sources, the researchers recommend that:

- Our churches should try to incorporate the youths in her scheme of things by allowing them have active participation in church's administrative and spiritual lives.
- Our churches should learn to help the youths in providing job opportunities for them and in helping them in their academic pursuits.
- Our churches should try to be balancing services with considerations of the make ups of her members; otherwise the youths may leave the church for the elders and the Pastor.
- Our Pastors should make use of their prophetic office (prophecy) and ask God for more confirmation of our callings through miracles, signs and wonders, which are making most of our youths to leave the church in search of them.
- Our Pastors should make their preaching more active, alive and relevant, spiced with good and mastery of grammar and communication skills.
- Our churches should not overlook the children ministry because if we miss it at that stage, we have missed it. Their motto that reads "catch them young for Christ" should also include, "catch them young for church".
- Our churches should upgrade technologically with the rise of technology in order not to be out of fashion in this technological and digital era.

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