



State of Youth Spiritual Vitality in a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia: A Qualitative Analysis of Perceptions, Indicators, and Causes

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Abstract

Youth spiritual vitality is a dynamic and multidimensional expression of faith characterized by spiritual commitment, meaningful engagement in religious practices, relational connectedness, moral orientation, and a sustained sense of purpose rooted in transcendent belief. These include intentional spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, scriptural engagement, worship, and service), supportive intergenerational mentoring relationships, participatory congregational life, and opportunities for leadership and mission involvement. However, the spiritual vitality of youths in Isoka Main Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia does not fully reflect these qualities. This qualitative study, using focus groups and interviews, found that fragmented church cultures, weak adult engagement, secular peer influences, identity dissonance, and a lack of meaningful belonging negatively impacted youth spiritual vitality. The findings suggest that vibrant spiritual vitality could be cultivated within intergenerational communities that intentionally involve young people in worship, service, and decision-making within the church. The study recommends that wholistic, relational, and community-based approaches are essential for fostering resilient and lasting spiritual vitality among youth in contemporary faith contexts.

Keywords: Youth, spiritual, vitality, Perceptions, Indicators.Causes, Interventions, mentoring,Isoka, Seventh-day Adventist Church

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I. Introduction

The spiritual lives of young people in many churches are a major concern for pastors, ministry leaders, and researchers because youth vitality both reflects and shapes a church's future. Research on youth spirituality and positive growth offers conceptual frameworks and methods for measuring it, showing that spiritual development is linked to well-being, social support, and resilience (Shek, 2012; Dollahite et al., 2019). In Africa, studies highlight that lived expressions of spirituality—such as prayer, charismatic renewal, community service, and rituals—are often influenced by broader social forces (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Therefore, any assessment of vitality must consider social, cultural, and institutional factors alongside individual perceptions. In Zambia, scholars and church reports have documented rapid growth among youth, along with challenges in retention, moral development, and changing religious commitments. These local findings emphasize the need for careful, context-aware analysis of what "spiritual vitality" looks like in practice (Namitondo, 2014; Moonga, 2014).The state of youth spiritual vitality at Isoka Main Church in Zambia is concerning. Although the church has 233 youths aged 19-35 out of a total membership of 308 (Isoka Church Membership record, 2024), most youths are hesitant to participate in church ministries and leadership roles. Additionally, attendance and involvement in church services and activities are often very low, especially among youths, even though there are more young members under 35 than over 35. In 2024, only 5% of the 233 youths agreed to serve in various departmental roles. Consequently, the church struggles to carry out its mission plans fully.

The objectives of this study were to investigate the current state of the perceptions, indicators, and causes of youth spiritual vitality in the Isoka Main Seventh-day Adventist Church in Muchinga Province, Zambia. Based on the study's findings, it also suggested interventions to enhance youth spiritual vitality and

increase participation in church ministries/activities. The research objectives were addressed by the research questions (RQs) below.

- RQ 1: What are the factors hindering youth participation in the church ministries in Isoka Main SDA Church?
- RQ 2: What is the state of youth spiritual well-being in Isoka Main SDA Church?
- RQ 3: What is hindering youth spiritual growth in Isoka Church?
- RQ 4: What is the nature of the relationship between the youth and the older members of the congregation in Isoka Main SDA Church?
- RQ 5: How best can the youths be helped to realize their full potential as members of the church?

Given the prevailing situation of minimal or no youth participation in the church's plans and ministries at Isoka Main, a study was needed to assist in formulating a mentoring program for youths to enhance their spiritual growth and participation in church ministries.

II. Literature Review

I Conceptualizing Christian Youth Spiritual Vitality

Youth spiritual vitality is a complex and growing concept that encompasses connections to God, oneself, others, and the community, awareness of divine presence, and ongoing engagement in spiritual practices (Fisher, 2016; Michaelson et al., 2016). In positive youth development (PYD) frameworks, spirituality is seen as an inner strength that supports identity coherence, resilience, and moral responsibility (Benson et al., 2012; Dollahite et al., 2019). Conceptually, spiritual vitality blends mental aspects (belief clarity and worldview development), emotional elements (hope, peace, and joy), behavioural practices (prayer, Scripture study, and service), and social bonds (belonging and mentoring relationships). Studies also show that among Christian youth, spiritual vitality is experienced as sincerity and relational closeness rather than doctrinal precision alone. It is felt as closeness to God, a sense of purpose, and living out faith through daily moral choices (King & Boyatzis, 2015; Smith & Denton, 2005). However, research sometimes uncovers a paradox in which many young Christians affirm personal spirituality but distance themselves from formal church structures, complicating the measurement of vitality within the congregation (Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith et al., 2011). These results underline that spiritual health should not be equated only with participating in institutions and highlight the importance of personal and relational aspects.

II. Positive Factors and Challenges Influencing Spiritual Vitality

Mentoring has become recognized in the literature as a key relational factor supporting sustained spiritual vitality among Christian youth (Rhodes & Chan, 2008; Bomela, 2021; Knabe, 2022; Vivian, 2024). Across Christian traditions, several positive factors consistently enhance youth spiritual vitality. It has been found that adolescents who experience intentional, faith-centered mentoring relationships report stronger commitment, deeper spiritual practices, and greater resilience during faith transitions (Benson et al., 2012; King & Boyatzis, 2015).

In evangelical settings, Powell et al. (2016) suggest that intergenerational mentoring—especially relationships marked by warmth, accountability, and shared spiritual practices—significantly boosts the chances of faith persistence into emerging adulthood. Likewise, Smith and Denton (2005) show that, beyond parental influence, non-parental adult mentors within congregations play a vital role in helping adolescents internalize their faith commitments. From a Pentecostal view, Cartledge (2010) emphasizes testimony-sharing, spiritual guidance, and communal discernment as mentoring practices that cultivate experiential awareness of the Holy Spirit's work in young believers. Within Seventh-day Adventist scholarship, mentoring is widely recognized as a key way to support youth's spiritual vitality, especially in faith retention and identity development. Studies from the Valuegenesis research showed that adolescents who have strong, caring relationships with pastors, teachers, and adult church members tend to have higher levels of devotional activity, doctrinal dedication, and a desire to remain in the church (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992; Gillespie, 2004). Dudley's research also indicated that warmth in relationships and opportunities for meaningful participation—rather than doctrinal teaching alone—are critical predictors of a lasting Adventist identity into adulthood (Dudley, 2000). Across different traditions, mentoring hence functions not just as programmatic oversight but also as relational discipleship that combines belief, belonging, and embodied practice—thereby strengthening both perceived and measurable aspects of youth spiritual vitality.

Nevertheless, significant challenges weaken youth spiritual vitality. Secularization, moral relativism, and digital immersion influence adolescent identity development and often reduce institutional attachment (Smith et al., 2011). Evangelical scholarship suggests that performative religiosity or rule-focused approaches without relational authenticity may lead to increased post-adolescent disaffiliation (Powell et al., 2016).

Pentecostal communities also face difficulties when emotionally intense worship experiences are not supported by structured discipleship (Cartledge, 2010). Conclusively, it seems, intergenerational fragmentation and insufficient mentoring decrease feelings of belonging and undermine perceived vitality. Hence, there is a need for rich, deliberate, relational, and contextually sensitive interventions and communal resources to support youth spirituality.

III. Research Methodology

I. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, which focuses on idiographic knowledge rather than nomothetic knowledge derived from scientific observation. For the data collection, the researcher used two focus groups and individual interviews. The focus groups explored group dynamics and shared experiences, while individual interviews allowed for exploration of individual respondents' perspectives and personal experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

II. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The 233 baptized members of Isoka main SDA Church comprised the study population. The sample comprised two focus groups, each with six participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend a number for a focus group. The demographics of the participants are: (i) gender (8 males and 4 females) and (ii) college education and duration of membership of at least ten years to enable understanding of the culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Three older church members, two male elders, one female leader, and six youths, comprising three males and three females, were interviewed. The number of interviews meets the acceptable standard set by Morse (2015).

III. Sampling Type and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to gather the most relevant data for the study topic. It enabled the researcher to recruit informed participants (Swinton, 2011). The researcher used unstructured open-ended questions for personalized interviews and the focus group discussions. The data-gathering sessions for both the focus group and the interviews were conducted through note-taking and audio recording, which were later transcribed. The questions for the focus group and interviews were organized into the following categories/themes: (i) State of spiritual growth and experiences of the youths, (ii) Factors that hinder their spiritual growth and experiences, (iii) Factors hindering participation in local church ministries, and (iv) Possible solutions to the issues in these themes.

IV. Ethical Consideration

The researcher obtained approval from the Adventist University of Africa, Kenya, Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee, as well as permissions from the North Zambia Field of the Seventh-day Adventists and the local church. Participants consented before focus groups and interviews. To protect confidentiality, the researcher ensured comments remained anonymous and confidential, used pseudonyms, and ensured that any data collected was used solely for research and presented fairly, informatively, and educationally.

V. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, various strategies were employed. First, the transcripts were reviewed alongside the recordings to confirm that the data captured during the sessions accurately reflected the participants' responses. Next, to minimize researcher bias and confirm the identified patterns and themes, the data were shared with my adviser for review. This peer review process improved the trustworthiness of the data collected for this research.

IV. Findings

In qualitative research, data analysis interprets participants' views, experiences, feelings, and perspectives on a phenomenon to find solutions. Anonymity was preserved with pseudonyms. Sensing (2011) stresses objectivity to avoid bias, even negative aspects. Swinton and Mowat (2016) define data analysis as

"bringing order, structure, and meaning to collected data." Data were analyzed, categorized into themes and subthemes with codes, and then linked to experiences with themes through interpretive work.

I. Presentation of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Table 1: Tabulates/Presents Research Questions (RQ) and Interview Questions (IQ) used in the gathering of Data for the study.

5 Research Questions	12 Interview Questions for 6 SDA Youths of Isoka Main Church (3 males and 3 females)	8 Interview Questions for the Focus Group (s)	11 Interview Questions for the 2 male and 1 woman older SDA Lay members
1. What is the current state of youth spiritual well-being in Isoka SDA Church? 2. What are the factors hindering youth spiritual growth in Isoka Church? 3. What is the nature of the relationship between youths and the older members of the congregation in Isoka SDA Church? 4. What are the factors hindering youth participation in the church ministries? 5. How best can the youths be helped to realize their full potential as members of the church?	1. What spiritual disciplines are you currently engaged in, and which ones do you find most helpful? 2. What are your experiences with your spiritual growth as a youth in your local church? 3. What factors hinder your personal spiritual growth? 4. In what ways does your local church assist the youths in their spiritual growth? 5. How would you describe your relationship with older members in your local church? 6. Do you feel comfortable discussing personal issues and struggles with any of them? 7. Do you feel prepared to participate in church ministries in your local church? 8. What are the factors hindering youth participation in local church ministries, as in question 6 above? 9. What are the major causes of these factors? 10. How do older members regard the role and impact of youths in the church? 11. Why do you think the church should take the mentoring of youths in the local church seriously? 12. What interventions/programs can be suggested to mentor and enhance youths' spirituality and participation in local church ministries?	1. What areas of life are youths seeking to grow or change spiritually in Isoka Main SDA Church? 2. What are the biggest spiritual challenges or areas of difficulty for youths in Isoka SDA Church? 3. How would you describe the relationship between the youths and older members in your local church? 4. Do youths in Isoka SDA Church feel supported and receive helpful guidance for their spiritual growth? 5. What specific skills have you developed/grown, or improved through spiritual mentoring in your local church? 6. What are the factors that hinder youths from participating in church ministries such as worship, prayer, witnessing (mission), and church leadership roles in your local church? 7. Why should the church seriously give attention to the mentoring of youths in the local church? 8. What interventions/programs can be suggested to mentor and enhance youths' spirituality and participation in local church ministries?	1. What are your experiences with youth spiritual growth in your local church? 2. What factors hinder their personal spiritual growth? 3. In what ways does your local church assist the youths in their spiritual growth? 4. How would you describe older members' relationship with youths in your congregation? 5. Do youths feel comfortable discussing issues about their personal struggles with you? 6. Do youths feel prepared to participate in church ministries (worship, prayer, witnessing/mission, and leadership roles) in your local church? 7. What are the factors hindering youth participation in local church ministries, as in question 6 above? 8. What are the major causes of these factors? 9. How do older members regard the role and impact of youths in the church? 10. Why do you think the church should take the mentoring of youths in the local church seriously? 11. What programs/interventions can be suggested to mentor and enhance youths' spirituality and participation in church ministries?

II. Youth Interview Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the state of youth spiritual well-being in Isoka SDA Church? Question one addressed this research question.

Four participants stated that they were engaged in *"prayer and the study of the Bible."* However, two participants indicated that "prayer and fasting" were most helpful for their spiritual growth, and only one mentioned "Prayer and meditation" as helpful. These varied responses revealed to the researcher that youths needed help understanding the importance of spiritual disciplines and encouragement to embrace them as a lifestyle. When asked to describe their experiences with spiritual growth as youths in the local church, one participant said, *"I am not sure of my spiritual growth because of not being consistent in my walk with God."* Another participant

indicated, *"My spiritual growth is very slow."* The other two participants stated that they were satisfied with their spiritual growth.

Research Question 2: What are the factors hindering youth spiritual growth in Isoka Church? Research question two was addressed by question two.

One participant said personal issues and work commitments hindered prayer and Bible study. He also noted that the church lacks youth programs. Two others mentioned little help from church leaders and older members. However, another stated that youths lack motivation due to the absence of spiritual programs, which leads many to be distracted by social media and hinders their spiritual growth. When asked further, in what ways does your local church assist the youths in their spiritual growth? Three of the six participants indicated that, given a chance, youths can grow spiritually, but the church was not doing enough to put in place programs that could help them grow.

Research Question 3: What is the nature of the relationship between youths and the older members of the congregation in Isoka SDA Church? This research question was addressed by questions three to five.

All six participants were asked to describe their relationship with older members in their local church. Five out of six stated that relationships within the church were not conducive to supporting spiritual growth among the church's youth. Furthermore, one of the six participants stated that older members were not inspiring and were cold towards the youths. Unanimously, participants expressed pessimism. The summary of their responses was, *"In the absence of trust, they found it difficult to share personal issues openly because of fear of what older members would do with the information."* However, all participants stressed that youths yearned to be brought under the wings of older members so they could grow spiritually and participate wholeheartedly in the ministries of the local church as members in good standing.

Research Question 4: What are the factors hindering youth participation in church ministries? Research question four was addressed by questions six to eight.

In response to this question, three of the six participants expressed optimism and a willingness to participate in church ministries if mentored. In contrast, three expressed pessimism, saying that youths needed more training to participate meaningfully. Regarding hindrances, one participant said, "The church lacks trained and willing mentors to help in mentoring youths." Another participant said, "Some youths do not know their spiritual gifts and their work." A different participant stated, "There was no intentionality on the part of the church to enhance youth participation in local church ministries," and yet another mentioned, "Older members magnify mistakes done by youths, ignoring the good the youths are capable of doing." Another participant pointed out that church leadership tends to involve the same few people they know, and questioned.

When participants were asked to identify the major causes of these factors hindering youth participation, one participant said, *"Lack of trained and willing spiritual mentors in the church who could mentor the youths in various ministries of the church hinders youths who are willing from participating."* One other participant stated that, *"It would not be unfair if the blame were put on older members alone, youths are equally to blame in the sense that we more often show a lack of commitment in and for church matters."* The lack of intentionality on the part of the church and its ignoring of the spiritual needs of the youths came to light during the interviews. It was also stated that older members magnify youths' mistakes, ignore the good that youths do, and end up demoralizing them. Participants also stated that when older members and leaders consider youths as not very important, lacking in experience, and unprepared for serious duties in the local church, it is a sure way to send them away from the church and help them become spiritually cold.

Research Question 5: How best can the youths be helped to realize their full potential as members of the church? Research question five was addressed by nine to twelve.

When asked why the church should take the mentoring of youths in the local church seriously, participants unanimously stated that it should, as it needs qualified spiritual mentors and leaders who will continue to mentor other spiritual leaders in fulfilling God's mission. One female participant noted that, "Spiritual mentoring is needed because youths need to build capacity to deal with personal life issues."

Concerning interventions/programs to mentor and enhance youths' spirituality and participation in local church ministries, the participants' responses identified six interventions, namely: (i) *interactive programs that bring together youths and older members to build rapport and foster a healthy environment that nurtures*

relationships and empowers youths,(ii)enhance trust, and promote a sense of belonging.(iii) guardianship program to mentor youths in various lines of ministry (iv)incorporating youths in leadership and allow senior and experienced members to mentor them (vi) departmental seminars to raise awareness of how ministry is carried out in the local church, systematic studies on the 28 fundamental beliefs to ground the youth's faith in the Bible and what the church believes.

III. Youth Focus Group Discussion

This section presents the discussion from the focus groups, aligned with the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the state of youth spiritual well-being in Isoka SDA Church? Research question one was addressed by questions one and two.

When the group was asked, "What areas of life are youths seeking to grow or change spiritually in Isoka SDA Church?" the participants said:

"Having our faith grounded in the Bible is our most urgent need now as youths as and to achieve this, the church should encourage the in-depth study of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs to deepen youths understanding of Bible truth and the Spirit of prophecy, This is necessitated by the fact that with the resurgence of mega evangelism and mass baptisms most youths and including some older members never sit in the baptism class for a year to learn those fifty-two (52) lessons before they are baptized."

Another participant added and said, *"Spiritual growth does not take place in a vacuum, hence the need for the church to motivate and encourage youths to have the desire to attend Sabbath worship and spiritual weeks of prayer by involving them, and also encourage them to embrace prayer, meditation, fasting, and study of the word of God as Christian disciplines necessary for spiritual growth."*

Participants also noted that youths recognize that their lack of commitment and seriousness negatively affects their spiritual growth and participation in the church's spiritual life. To help mitigate this, it was stated that it is the duty of elders and the church to create an enabling environment; it is also incumbent upon youths themselves to be self-motivated and desire to grow spiritually. Youths should be encouraged to get involved in ministries such as prayer, worship, witnessing (mission), Bible study, fellowship, and singing, because it is through a willing, ready mind that spiritual growth can take place. However, participants felt that motivation to engage in spiritual disciplines should be inspired by self-awareness and knowledge of one's abilities.

One participant suggested that church leaders should take an interest in the spiritual growth of youths in the church by teaching the truth about spiritual gifts and their role in helping the church grow, rather than discouraging and condemning them when they propose innovations. The group argued that it is only when a person is aware of what they can do that they can meaningfully contribute to their own spiritual growth, the spiritual growth of others, and the spiritual growth of the church as a whole. When asked to elaborate further, one participant stated that,

"Church leadership and older members were too rigid and unwilling to accommodate innovation coming from the youth, for example, a youth has acquired a personal keyboard and knows how to play instruments to provide musical backing to congregational singing but the leadership denies such a one the opportunity, simply because leadership thinks playing the piano in church is satanic, this is very discouraging."

It is experiences like this that put the youth off and send them away from the church. From the group members' perspective, they desire to see a situation in which, before any punitive action is taken against the action, the church gives it a chance and provides guidance where possible, with the view to building confidence and capacity in the youth.

Another question discussed in depth by the group(s) under this theme of youth spiritual wellbeing: "What are the biggest spiritual challenges or areas of difficulty faced by youths in Isoka SDA Church?" In response, the participants highlighted the youths' inability to strike a balance between their personal commitments, church demands, and spiritual pursuits. One participant stated:

"Employed youths find it difficult to worship freely on Sabbath and still attend to their employers' demands to report for work on Sabbath, and this impedes the spirituality of many youths in the church. Moreover, while this is true, others are also breaking the Sabbath by the allure of overtime allowances."

The participants also mentioned peer pressure and lack of family support for those still living with families who are not Adventists and married to non-Adventists.

Another factor highlighted is the mistrust that youths experience from church leaders and older church members. One participant pointed out that, *"Older members are only quick to judge and condemn youths but fail to encourage and instill spiritual values."* When further asked how such issues could be resolved to enhance the

spirituality of youths in the church, most participants desired to see a situation where youths, as they join the church, are shown love and trust by older members and leaders. According to participants, this could only be achieved by having the church develop activity-based programs that bring together youths and older members. Secondly, the church, through the religious liberty department, should endeavor to help members whose freedom of worship and participation in church ministries is affected by work with legal representation. Setting personal priorities is another challenge highlighted by the group where youths need help. Because some find it difficult to attend mid-week prayer meetings after leaving their day's office work, participants are encouraged to form home churches or small family worship groups within their neighborhoods, as the convenience of fellowship and spiritual nurture would help mitigate time constraints.

Research Question 3: What is the nature of the relationship between youths and the older members of the congregation in Isoka SDA Church?

Research question three was addressed by questions three and four.

Following the discussion on the biggest spiritual challenges youths face in their quest to grow spiritually and to start participating in the church's ministries, the group was asked: "How would you describe the relationship between the youths and older members in your local church?" The interaction with the group revealed that, as far as relationships between youths and older members are concerned, the situation was not very encouraging and needed to be addressed quickly to help the church grow. Reflecting the opinion of the group, it could be summarized,

"Frankly speaking, the relationship between youths and older members in the church is not good or conducive enough to support and enhance youth spiritual growth and participation in church ministries. Older members expect too much from the youths; they are only quick to judge and condemn youths, but fail to encourage and instill spiritual values, and as a result, youths cannot trust older members to the point of confiding in them."

When a follow-up question was posed to the group to find out whether youths would be free to share their personal struggles with elders and older members, most members of the group indicated that it was not easy for most youths to confide in older members because of lack of relationship that builds trust except for few who have parents and trust worthy relatives and friends in the church. It was expressed that most youths would rather die with their burdens than share them for fear of being ridiculed or betrayed and relegated. Another thing is that *"Our leaders and older members more often than not simply criticize youths' bad behavior without coming near them and providing parental guidance."* Seeing that this state of affairs cannot promote spiritual growth, group members suggested that the church organize programs such as campouts, fellowship meetings, and sporting activities to bring youths and older members together, narrowing the relational divide and enhancing trust.

Research Question 4: What are the factors hindering youth participation in church ministries?The research question was addressed by questions five and six.

When the group was asked the question, "What specific skills have you developed/grown, or improved through spiritual mentoring in your local church? One group member was quick to state that mentoring a new generation of spiritual leaders cannot be overemphasized for the sake of continuity and church growth. If church members and leaders want to outlive themselves, they should prioritize mentoring youths and newly baptized members. Highlighting the factors, the youths expressed that they have not had real spiritual mentoring to acquire the skills to participate in the growth of God's work in our local church. Group members stated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists as a movement for mission, and that God accomplishes this objective through His own people – the young and the old in the church.

Another pertinent question the group discussed was, "What are the factors that hinder youths from participating in church ministries such as worship, prayer, witnessing (mission), and church leadership roles in your local church?" Without hesitation, members responded: *"The church does not conduct departmental seminars or mentorship programs where youths are also included."* Another participant added that, *"Lack of these trainings leads the church into using the same old familiar members, leaving out youths."*

In all aspects, group participants stated that youths need to be supported and encouraged by exemplary older men and women in the church. When rebuke and correction are needed, they should be done in love so as not to discourage and push the youths away from the church. One participant came out strongly and said that, "Elders and older members should realize that many things are stressing youths, and a slight lack of sympathy and empathy towards them makes their situation precarious."

Research Question 5: How best can the youths be helped to realize their full potential as members of the church?Research question five was addressed by questions seven and eight.

The first question under this theme was, "Why should the church seriously give attention to the mentorship of youths in the local church?" In response, the participants responded:

"Youths are pillars and the very church leaders today and in the future, hence the need to mentor them so that continuity and accountability are guaranteed." Further, *"Mentorship helps to build confidence and courage in the youths to handle challenging tasks because of the knowledge gained."*

It was also added that spiritual mentorship of youths and newly baptized members helps address the scarcity of spiritual gifts, their development, and their use by those being mentored to participate in various ministries in the local church, such as evangelism, preaching, teaching, prayer, music, worship, and various leadership roles.

For most members of the group, mentorship—an initiative to help young people gain the knowledge they need to participate fully in church ministries—was encountered for the first time based on how it was presented.

Following this, the final question for the group(s) to consider was on interventions or programs that can be suggested to mentor and enhance youths' spirituality and participation in local church ministries. Unanimously, group members suggested that a youth spiritual mentorship program to enhance spiritual growth and participation in church ministries be developed and implemented at the church with urgency. The following strategies were proposed: (i) regular leadership seminars to train eligible youths in various church ministries, (ii) guardianship program that places youths under the mentorship of older spiritual members, (iii) formation of ministry bands/teams for Witnessing/Evangelism, Prayer, Worship, Fellowship, and Music, (iv) fellowship events for youths and older members to come together and build trust and form healthy relationships, (v) establishments of a special Sabbath School class to nurture youths whose conversion route bypassed the baptism class and got baptized without attending the baptismal classes where fundamental beliefs are taught.

All the participants believed that the church exists to nurture and prepare people for the coming of Jesus Christ. More importantly, they emphasized that youth are the next generation of leaders. In this light, the group suggested that the church intentionally focus on mentoring young people and fostering a spiritual environment where young people feel they belong and are safe to interact with older members without fear of reprisal.

3.3 Older Participants Interviews

This section presents the discussion from the focus groups, aligned with the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the state of youth spiritual well-being in Isoka SDA Church? Research question one was addressed by question one.

Regarding participants' experiences with youth spiritual growth in their local church, the first male participant stated, *"Youths were not growing spiritually as expected."* The third participant, a female, stated, *"Very few youths in the church were showing signs of spiritual growth."* However, all three participants recognized that there was a state of youth spiritual vitality in the local community that needed urgent attention.

Research Question 2: What are the factors hindering youth spiritual growth in Isoka Church?

Research question two was addressed by question two.

Factors Hindering Youth Spiritual Growth: The second question focused on factors that hinder youth's personal spiritual development. In response to this question, one male participant said, "Most youths were being distracted by social media, coupled with the failure of the youth to balance commitment to their personal pursuits and church demands, and the church not involving them in programs that aid youths to grow spiritually." The older female participants pointed out that, "Youth had poor reading culture and the lack of intentionality on the part of the church has made the situation worse." The three participants stated that, more often, the church comes up with programs without involving the youths who are the beneficiaries in planning such activities. The other hindrance to youth spiritual growth cited by the older female participant was the unavailability of older members to serve as spiritual mentors to the youths, resulting in most youths lacking purpose and spiritual direction.

Research Question 3: What is the nature of the relationship between youths and the older members of the congregation in Isoka SDA Church?

This research question was addressed by questions three, four, and five. All three participants stated that church leadership had not done enough to assist the youths in growing spiritually, aside from involving them in preaching during vespers. Further, participants were asked, "How would you describe older members'?"

relationship with youths in your congregation?" Again, all three participants attested that, "More often, older members are quick to criticize youth's behavior than offering help, and as a result, there are no strong bonds between older members and youth, leading to mistrust, *especially on the part of youths.*" To follow up on the responses to the aforementioned questions, participants were again asked whether youths felt comfortable discussing their personal struggles with older members. Unanimously, participants stated that, "*Not all youths were comfortable sharing their personal struggles because of mistrust and fear of victimization, except in rare instances involving those with close family members who are also members of the same church.*"

Research Question 4: What are the factors hindering youth participation in the Local Church Ministries?

Research question four was addressed by questions six, seven, and eight. In giving their responses, all three participants responded and said that, "*The church as a whole is to blame because they have not taken a keen interest in investing in mentoring youths and providing necessary training to them in various lines of ministry, and as a result, most youths feel inadequate to render effective service to God and the church.*"

When participants were again asked, "What are the factors hindering youth participation in local church ministries, as in question 6 above?" One male participant clearly stated that, "Youths have the potential to impact the church, but they look irrelevant because they have not been equipped with skills to enable them gain courage to participate effectively." The other factors cited by the three participants were, lack of spiritual stability because of engaging in many distractions like social media, failure to strike a balance between personal pursuits and spiritual requirements like being consistent in attending worship, prayer and study of the Bible, and no meaningful rapport with older members of the church and consequently, some youths appear to be perpetual visitors because their spiritual needs are not met each time they come for worship at church. The eighth question asked of the three participants was, "What are the major causes of these factors?" The two male participants stated that, "*Church leaders and older members do not take the youths seriously and as a result fail to help them to grow spiritually.*" The female participants also cited the church's lack of intentionality in planning for the spiritual growth of youths, as it does for older members, in terms of buying study materials and scheduling Bible studies.

Research Question 5: How best can the youths be helped to realize their full potential as members of the church?

This research question was addressed by questions 9, 10, and 11. To address this research question, participants were asked to describe how older members view the role and impact of youth in the church. One participant stated that, "*The church does not take youths seriously based on some misconceptions about the youths.*" The other participants mentioned that the church considers youths to be uncommitted to God or the church because they do not help the church; they are only busy with their personal pursuits and, as a result, fail to support the church, despite being the majority. To follow up, the researcher asked participants why the church should take the mentoring of youths in the local church seriously. Unanimously, participants stated that, given the urgent need for well-equipped leaders, the church should seriously consider mentoring youths for effective service and the continuity of spiritual leadership and the gospel commission. In addition, the female participants stressed that "*The church will accomplish much with a well-mentored cadre of youths who are ready to cooperate with God and the older members.*" When participants were further asked, "What programs or interventions can be suggested to mentor and enhance youths' spirituality and participation in church ministries?" They suggested that the church implement the following initiatives to enhance youth spirituality and participation in church ministries:

1. The church considers designing programs that address youth spiritual and social needs, like youth camps, fellowship meetings, and social outings, bringing older and younger members together to build trust and rapport.
2. The church is to design the guardianship program where youths who are new are put under the care of mature spiritual members.
3. The church is to organize seminars on spiritual gifts, church leadership, departmental ministries, and other lines of ministry.
4. The church to come up with a deliberate initiative to systematically teach 28 fundamental beliefs whenever youths are gathering to ground their faith in the Bible.
5. Sabbath School classes to be organized according to age groups to meet their learning needs.

IV. Emerging Themes Discussed

From the qualitative findings obtained through interviews, observations, and interactions with focus group members throughout, and from the coding and analysis of these findings, two major themes emerged.

5.1. Poor Spiritual State of the Youths

One may conclude that the youths had performative religiosity and the church adopted rule-focused approaches without relational authenticity. This has led to increased disaffiliation or disengagement from church activities and ministries. This poor state of spiritual vitality is evidenced by weak youth involvement in church activities and reluctance to participate in leadership. This attitude is supported by the research of Powell et al. (2016). Both the youth and adult participants felt that the church was not doing enough to nurture and support the youth's spiritual growth. More often, the youth participants observed that leaders and older members were oblivious to the challenges youths faced and instead resorted to blaming and condemning their character. The participants hoped that the church would do more to lovingly care for them and provide a conducive environment that enables youths to grow spiritually and enhance their vitality.

5.2. Mitigating Factors for Positive Spiritual Vitality

Factors hindering youths' spiritual growth and experiences were another notable theme that emerged. Here, participants considered the challenges most youths face in striking a healthy balance between personal demands and spiritual pursuits, as well as their experiences in interactions with older members of the church. In all these, more often than not, youths without long ties to the church, and older members in particular, are left to figure out for themselves how to find their feet in the church and, later on, how best to be involved in church ministries. Here, participants also delved into the importance of instilling values in youths, such as self-discipline, self-control, respect, hard work, and godliness, as bedrock for spiritual stability. Secularization, moral relativism, and digital immersion, identified as factors influencing adolescent identity development, align with previous research (Smith et al., 2011).

Another mitigating factor is a weak relationship between the youth and the older members of the church. Participants stated in their submissions that the situation does not fully promote spiritual growth for several reasons. Nonetheless, if the situation were handled well by both the youth and the older members, it would help narrow and bridge the generational divide and promote intergenerational coexistence in the church. Notwithstanding this, participants acknowledged that older members were taking steps to promote unity of purpose and mutual trust between them and the youths. As far as participants were concerned, older members with the wealth of knowledge and experience had the responsibility to bring the youth closer to them, understand their needs, and create opportunities for them to be involved in the life of the church. According to participants, church growth requires everyone to be involved for the church to be effective in the community where it exists. However, intergenerational fragmentation and insufficient mentoring decrease feelings of belonging and undermine perceived vitality. Thus, mentoring, as noted in earlier studies, is necessary for spiritual vitality (Bomela, 2021; Knabe, 2022; Vivian, 2024)

V. Conclusion And Recommendations

This qualitative research explored perceptions and indicators of youth spiritual vitality within Isoka Main Seventh-day Adventist Church and investigated practical ways to increase young people's engagement in church ministries. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study aimed to understand how youth and selected church leaders interpret spiritual vitality, recognize its visible signs, and evaluate the current level of youth participation in the church's activities. Results indicated that many participants viewed youth spiritual vitality as relatively weak. Signs of this included inconsistent attendance at prayer meetings and Bible study groups, limited involvement in evangelistic outreach, declining enthusiasm for church programs, and a general sense of spiritual indifference among some young members. Several barriers to growth were identified, such as insufficient mentorship, limited youth involvement in decision-making, generational misunderstandings, perceived judgmental attitudes from older members, and ministry strategies that do not fully address young people's needs. Social pressures, work responsibilities, and digital distractions also emerged as significant external factors affecting spiritual development.

A notable concern was the strained relationship between youth and older church members. Many young participants described interactions with senior members as distant, corrective rather than supportive, and lacking open dialogue. Conversely, some church leaders expressed concern about a perceived decline in commitment and reverence among youth. This relational gap contributed to reduced trust, minimal collaboration, and a weakened sense of belonging among young congregants.

In light of these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, the church should intentionally establish structured mentoring programs that pair spiritually mature adults with youth to foster discipleship, accountability, and intergenerational understanding. Second, leadership should create inclusive platforms that enable young people to participate in planning and leading church ministries meaningfully. Third, regular intergenerational forums and dialogue sessions should be organized to address misconceptions, build mutual

respect, and strengthen unity within the congregation. Finally, youth-centered spiritual formation initiatives—such as small group ministries, contextualized worship experiences, and leadership training workshops—should be developed to nurture deeper personal devotion and active ministry engagement. Through these strategic interventions, the church can cultivate a more vibrant, participatory, and spiritually resilient youth community.

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